

# The «Sacrifice of the Sacred King».

## Myth, ritual and meaning.

### The Christian myth archaic origins

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The sacrificial and violent death of the Sacred King (the queen's son or Neolithic goddess's son) was the foremost part of an archaic ritual that, periodically pursued the propitiatory influence of Earth Goddess 's invisible forces and energies on cosmos renewal and the tribe's impurities and sins expiation. It was one of the primitive cultures and world's protohistory's most characteristic «religious» events which marked the thereafter man's relationships with the «sacred» realm.

This ancient and complex ritual phenomenon was typified by James G. Frazer in «The Golden Bough: A study in Magic and Religion» (1890-1922), [1] as the «Sacrifice of the Sacred King»; which alluded to the dramatic fate of a young «monarch» who, first under the tutelage and rule of the crown queen, then as sovereign king, and finally as king's surrogate, was meant to cover the earth with his blood and die after a year, after eight years, twelve years or the cyclical period prescribed in the ritual. The purpose was about injecting the energies and power of his youth both into a cosmos in decline and at risk of disappearing, as well as the very institution of royalty, so as to survive (the world and royal sovereignty) another new cycle and reissue, once again, the pre-established functions in the cosmogonic myth: death and resurrection of the cosmos and human institutions through the royal murder ritual that was repeated cyclically. Because the death of the king, according to the myth, also implied his resurrection (a «new creation» in the language of Mircea Eliade) [2] that was solidary and manifested itself in the different images of the phases of the moon, in the rebirth of plant nature and in the prosperity of the cultivated fields and the crops generated with the first rains that fall after winter and the arrival of spring.

All of which underwent important transformations over time, as the sacrifice was already being executed in historical times on what Frazer described as «temporary kings»: [3] figures who accessed the royalty privileges with the sole purpose of becoming a sacrifice and ritual death object. These were «periodic fixed-term regicides», [4] according to another of this author's formulas, depending on the ritual period of celebration or how advanced the civilization was or factors such as the dependence on the solar cycle, Venus synodic cycles [5] or other mythical-temporary considerations.

Be that as it may, the truth is that the king, or his substitute (his first-born son, a volunteer or a convict chosen for the occasion), was sacrificed within a ritual of cosmic regeneration and/or expiation of illnesses, impurities and sins, to resurrect in spring. In such a way that the return to life (resurrection) of the Sacred King assassinated that year was represented in the rite and in the liturgy through the prior choice of an alternative victim, who had to be sacrificed at the end of the year or at the end of the following cycle.

#### Robert Graves's evocative images

Although emerged without a doubt at the Neolithic matriarchy time (and perhaps before), in my book «Sacrifice and drama of the Sacred King», I placed the Sacred King ritual's magnificent moment shortly before the matriarchal tribes invasions by the shepherds and warriors hordes: «It was in the male's revaluing role context as life

generator through carnal union, along with the first agricultural manifestations and their annual sun cycles dependence, where the Sacred King's figure and his magical-ritual sacrifice must be placed in a perfectly outlined and defined way. The Sacred King was a fertility agent identified with the sun, guarantor of material abundance and, ultimately, of cosmic annual survival and regeneration». [6] In such a way that «on earth as it is in heaven», his figure undoubtedly offered (before the sacrifice and after the resurrection) «a hieros gamos or sacred marriage between the King (the Mother Goddess's son, first, and, later, Uranus's son and incarnation) and the queen or priestess of the Goddess; a sacred union that was presented as the terrestrial transposition of the cosmic hieros gamos of Earth Goddess and the celestial god Uranus, who «now» irrigated the goddess with the fertilizing rain seminal flows». [7]

Robert Graves comments, in this sense that «the tribal queen annually chose a lover among her entourage of young men, a king who had to be sacrificed at the end of the year, making of him a fertility symbol rather than an erotic pleasure object. His blood, once dead, was spread over the field so the trees, crops and flocks would bear fruit. His flesh was torn (after some had also been scattered over the fields) and eaten raw by the queen's fellow-nymphs, priestesses wearing animal masks». [8] The sacrifice constituted (as I fully explained in my book) an authentic fertility ritual that generally ended in a cannibalistic Eucharist, after having scattered a part of the sacrificed body so that the earth, irrigated with his blood and regenerated with his youthful vigor, produced bountiful crops and domesticated animals multiplied.

In a similar way, Osiris was quartered and his body fragments were scattered through the Valley of the Nile; similarly, Dionysus was also torn to pieces by the Titans, and with identical rites the bacchantes took communion. As consequence, and as a goddess son or lover's resurrection sign, «plants sprouted and edible fruits germinated; Violets sprouted from Attis's blood; from the blood of Adonis, the roses and the anemones, and from Osiris's body the wheat, the maat plant and all kinds of medicinal and beneficial herbs for men». [9]

### **The Sacred King and the Christian myth**

As I have explained in detail in my work («Sacrifice and drama of the Sacred King»), which starts from Frazer's initial theses about the Sacrifice of the Sacred King and addresses its implications in the Christian myth (through a diachronic succession that encompasses vegetation cults, mystery cults, Indo-Iranian savior mythology, Gnostic myth, and Church myth of Christianity), «the neolithic and protohistoric sacrificial ritual periodically regenerated cosmic forces through new creation and made possible the resurrection of crops and the proliferation of cattle. Alike the seed and the cereal plant, the Sacred King had to die in order to be resurrected: just like the seed of the grain died under the ground in winter to be resurrected in spring under the breath of water and sunlight. It was about two solidary phenomena that appeared inextricably involved and in permanent functional symbiosis; for if the cereal's destiny inspired the cyclical destiny of the death and the Sacred King's resurrection, his death in ritual sacrifice encouraged and made possible the cereal germination and that of the entire cosmos in general». [10]

So much so that we can ensure that, in those Neolithic and Bronze Age societies, there was neither plant nature rebirth nor resurrection or hope for the cosmos continuity (including the cyclical destiny, after death, of men and animals) without the Sacred King's sacrificial death. It is the same if it came incarnated as the child-god (son-lover of the goddess), through the Sacred King (husband-son of the queen or the priestess or son of Uranus), through the sovereign first-born son or through the «seasonal kings» (the monarch's surrogates destined for the annual sacrifice). Of course, it was neither a rite for nature worship, nor a mere contribution to the power of the earth, but a sacrificial rite of creative magic (the fruit of analogical thinking) that

could be considered as a propitiatory sign with which to activate and regenerate, by means of the victim's blood, the exhausted cosmic forces and energies that came from the unmanifested universe of the earth (initially, from the Mother Goddess).

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- [1] James G. Frazer. «*The golden bough. Magic and religion*». Madrid-Ciudad de México, 2014.
  - [2] Mircea Eliade. «*Tratado de historia de las religiones. Morfología y dialéctica de lo sagrado*». Barcelona, 1990. p. 387.
  - [3] J. G. Frazer. Op. Cit. 196.
  - [4] Op. Cit. 190.
  - [5] The planet Venus needs eight years to return to the same place in the zodiac when it is at its maximum brightness.
  - [6] Eliseo Ferrer. «*Sacrificio y drama del Rey Sagrado (Genealogía, antropología e historia del mito de Cristo)*». Madrid, 2021. pp. 43-80.
  - [7] Op. Cit. 55.
  - [8] Robert Graves. «*The greek myths*». Barcelona, 2009. p. 23.
  - [9] M. Eliade. «*Tratado...*». 363.
  - [10] E. Ferrer. «*Sacrificio...*». 52.
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