

# Greek ὀλολύζω and Hittite *palwai-*: Exultation in the Ritual Slaughter of Animals

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GREEK<sup>1</sup> ὀλολύζω and its cognates<sup>2</sup> are typically an expression of jubilation. The old nurse, Euryycleia, cries out for joy at the death of the suitors in the *Odyssey* and is scolded by Odysseus for the inappropriateness of such an expression of joy: (a) “But as she viewed the corpses and also the unspeakable bloodshed, she made ready at once to cry out when she beheld the great deed,” to which Odysseus responds, “rejoice in your heart, old woman, and yet hold back and do not cry out loud. It is not appropriate to exult over slain men.”<sup>3</sup>

Eteocles, in Aeschylus’ *Seven against Thebes*, beseeches the Theban women to accompany his vow with the ὀλολυγή, reflecting a wartime rite to bolster the morale of the combatants: (b) “And, after hearing our vow, then sing you in triumph the sacred, favorable cry, the Greek custom of the sacrificial shout, encouragement to (our) friends, and (thus) remove the terror of battle.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations: *CHD*=*The Hittite Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* Vol. P/1 (Chicago 1994); *HN*=W. Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, tr. P. Bing (Berkeley 1983); *IBoT II*=*Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzelerinde Bulunan Boghazköy Tabletler II* (Istanbul 1947); *KBo*=*Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi* (Berlin 1923–); *KUB*=*Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi* (Berlin 1921–).

<sup>2</sup> LSJ s.vv. ὀλολυγή, ὀλολυγμός, ὀλολύζω, and ὀλολύγμα.

<sup>3</sup> *Od.* 22.407f, 411f:

ἦ δ' ὡς οὖν νέκυάς τε καὶ ἄσπετον εἶσιδεν αἶμα,  
ἴθυσέν ῥ' ὀλολύξει ἐπεὶ μέγα εἶσιδεν ἔργον....  
“ἐν θυμῷ γρηῦ, χαῖρε καὶ ἴσχεο μὴδ' ὀλόλυζε·  
οὐχ ὅσῃ κταμένοισιν ἐπ' ἀνδράσιν εὐχετάσθαι.”

<sup>4</sup> *Sept.* 267–70:

κάμῶν ἀκούσασ' εὐγμάτων, ἔπειτα σὺ  
ὀλολυγμὸν ἱερὸν εὐμενῆ παιώνισον,  
Ἑλληνικὸν νόμισμα θυσιάδος βοῆς,  
θάρσος φίλοις, λύουσα πολέμων φόβον.

In Aristophanes' *Pax* (96f), Trygaeus asks for support on his would-be journey to the gods on a winged beetle: (c) "It is necessary to keep a holy silence and not to grunt out any foolish thing, but rather to cheer" (εὐφημεῖν χρῆ καὶ μὴ φλαῦρον μηδὲν γρύζειν, ἀλλ' ὀλολύζειν).

But historians of Greek religion, most notably Burkert, have suggested that in ritual contexts this word also expresses sadness or horror at the sacrificial act. Passages commonly cited as typical examples of Greek sacrifice include *Od.* 4.759–67, where Penelope raises the cry to accompany a prayer to Athena:

(d) After bathing and taking clean clothes on her body, (Penelope) went with her women attendants to the upper chamber, (where) she placed barley grains in a basket and prayed to Athena, "Hear me, O Unwearied One, child of aegis-bearing Zeus. If ever Odysseus of many counsels burned to you in these halls the fatty thighs of a heifer or a sheep, recall those offerings now and save my beloved son. Ward off the wickedly arrogant suitors." Having spoken thus, she *raised the cry*, and the goddess heard her prayer.<sup>5</sup>

Earlier, at *Od.* 3.447–52, the women raise a cry as the men strike the preliminary blow to the animal victim of a sacrificial rite:

(e) Now when they had prayed, and had tossed the barley grains, at once the high-spirited son of Nestor, Thrasymedes stood near and struck, and the axe cut through the tendons of the neck, and loosened the strength of the heifer. Then the women *raised the cry*, the daughters and daughters-in-law and also the revered wife of Nestor, Eurydice, the eldest of the daughters of Clymeneus.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> ἢ δ' ὕδρηναμένη, καθαρὰ χροὶ εἴμαθ' ἔλοῦσα  
εἰς ὑπερῶ' ἀνέβαινε σὺν ἀμφικόλοισι γυναιξίν,  
ἐν δ' ἔθετ' οὐλοχύτας κανέω, ἥρατο δ' Ἀθήνη·  
"Κλῦθί μεν, αἰγιόχοιο Διὸς τέκος, ἀτρυτώνη,  
εἴ ποτέ τοι πολύμητις ἐνὶ μεγάροισιν Ὀδυσσεὺς  
ἦ βοὸς ἦ ὄϊος κατὰ πίονα μηρί' ἔκηε,  
τῶν νῦν μοι μνήσαι, καὶ μοι φίλον νῆα σάωσον,  
μνηστήρας δ' ἀπάλαλκε κακῶς ὑπερηνορέοντας."  
"Ὡς εἰποῦσ' ὀλόλυξε, θεὰ δέ οἱ ἔκλυεν ἀρής.

<sup>6</sup> Αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ ῥ' εὗξαντο καὶ οὐλοχύτας προβάλοντο,  
αὐτίκα Νέστορος υἱὸς ὑπέρθυμος Θρασυμήδης  
ἤλασεν ἄγχι στάς· πέλεκυς δ' ἀπέκοψε τένοντας  
ἀνχενίους, λῦσεν δὲ βοὸς μένος. αἰ δ' ὀλόλυξαν  
θυγατέρες τε νυοὶ τε καὶ αἰδοίη παράκοιτις  
Νέστορος, Εὐρυδική, πρέσβα Κλυμένοιο θυγατρῶν.

In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra remembers the sacrifices that were made at the news of Troy's fall: (f) "Still, they sacrificed; even in the manner of a woman they rang out the *ritual cry* from place to place throughout the city, shouting triumphantly in the sanctuaries of the gods, (and) lulling the fragrant flame as it consumed the offering."<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, in descriptions of sacrificial scenes, such as passages (d) and (e), we have no insight into the demeanor of those who cry out, although in (f) the ritual cry is associated with an attitude of triumph. Burkert persistently presents this action as a shrill (*i.e.*, unpleasant) and highly emotional act,<sup>8</sup> which then fits into his characterization of Greek sacrifice as guilt ridden and cathartic of unpleasant emotions and tensions. He refers (*HN* 12) to the sacrificial act as "a central action clearly marked as the emotional climax by a piercing scream, the 'Ololygḗ.'" For him the ὀλολυγή becomes the emotional climax of a "terrifying midpoint." But elsewhere (*HN* 5) Burkert concedes the semantic conflict: "Women raise a piercing cry, whether in fear or in triumph or both at once."<sup>9</sup>

Although Bremmer is not content with Burkert's interpretations of the guilt attached to sacrifice, he, with Vernant, stops short of denying the existence of any discomfort associated with the act: "Killing for sacrifice, then, did not generate fear and *Angst*, but certainly generated feelings of unease."<sup>10</sup> "Unease," however, is still incompatible with the joy presupposed by the expected meaning of ὀλολυγή. Jameson, on the other hand, subtly questions Burkert's analysis altogether, suggesting instead that the cry was a summoning of the gods.<sup>11</sup> In support of this idea, he cites Eur. fr. 351, which explicitly orders women

<sup>7</sup> Ag. 594-97:

ὄμως δ' ἔθνον, καὶ ξυναικείῳ νόμῳ  
ὀλολυγμὸν ἄλλος ἄλλοθεν κατὰ πτόλιν  
ἔλασκον εὐφημοῦντες ἐν θεῶν ἔδραις  
θυηράγον κοιμῶντες εὐάδη φλόγα.

<sup>8</sup> See *e.g.* W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, tr. J. Raffan (Cambridge [Mass.] 1985) 56: "As the fatal blow falls, the women must cry out in high, shrill tones: the Greek custom of the sacrificial cry marks the emotional climax. Life screams over death."

<sup>9</sup> See also his discussion of Eur. *Heracl.* 770-83 in *CAH* V<sup>2</sup> (1982) 256.

<sup>10</sup> J. Bremmer, *Greek Religion* (= *Greece & Rome. New Surveys in the Classics* 24 [Oxford 1994]) 43.

<sup>11</sup> M. Jameson, "Sacrifice and Ritual: Greece," in M. Grant and R. Kitinger, ed., *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean: Greece and Rome II* (New York 1988) 970.

to cry out in order that Athena might come as a helper to the city: (g) "Cry, O women, so that the Goddess, holding the golden Gorgon, may come as a helper to the city" (ὄλολύζετε, ὦ γυναῖκες, ὡς ἔλθη θεὰ χρυσοῖν ἔχουσα Γοργόν' ἐπίκουρος πόλει). Jameson further contends that "other demonstrative acts in the procedure, including the lifting up of the animals" were intended along these same lines.

Ritual texts from Hittite Anatolia may shed new light on this debate. Indeed, parallels from Hittite sacrificial rituals indicate that the Greek use of ὄλολυγή is consistent and that in the context of sacrifice the Greeks were in fact expressing jubilation over the gift being dedicated to the god, perhaps in the hope of inducing the god to receive it with equal joy and delight. Moreover, the Hittite evidence supports Jameson's contention that the cry was a summoning or capturing of the deity's attention.

Burkert has demonstrated beyond doubt the bond that exists between Greek and Anatolian religious practices.<sup>12</sup> The pouring of libations and their use as symbolic markers, scapegoat rites, the cult of Kubaba/Cybele, and the mythological motif of the missing deity are only a few of the subjects that he discusses at length. The similarities between the two regions should come as no surprise, for the two cultures were in increasingly persistent contact with each other in western Anatolia from the onset of the Mycenaean period onward. Sacrificial ritual is a subject long overdue for comparative study, but as Hittite sacrifice is only now beginning to receive the systematic attention from Hittitologists that it deserves, similarities have remained unexamined on both sides of the academic fence. As the Hittite material slowly becomes more accessible and Hittite ritual observances gradually become better understood, commonalities with their western neighbors become increasingly apparent. One such commonality, I would suggest, can be seen in attitudes toward ritual killing.

The Hittite verb *palwai-* was long thought to refer to a kind of ritual clapping or the like. The *CHD* (P/1 83) has, however, recently revised this interpretation, applying instead the following range of meanings to this word: "to cry out, shout for joy, cheer; to make a long, sustained utterance (probably in a loud

<sup>12</sup> See in particular his *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Berkeley 1979), and *The Orientalizing Revolution*, trr. M. E. Pindar and W. Burkert (Cambridge [Mass.] 1992).

voice), declaim (?).” That it denotes a joyful crying out is clear from contexts cited by the *CHD*.<sup>13</sup> One Hittite festival included a mock wrestling match in which one wrestler represented Hatti and the other wrestler the enemy country. Here *palwai-* indicates cheering for the home team: (1) “When he attacks and [takes] down (the wrestler) of the enemy, our army and everyone *cheers*. [He who] won bows again to the king.” And a few lines later: “[They be]gin again to wrestle. When our (man) takes him down, th[ey c]heer, and that one (*i.e.*, the loser) bows to the deity. Our man crouches.”<sup>14</sup>

In another festival a ritual practitioner shouts out his prayer for the king and queen:

(2) (Someone) fills two rhyta: [one for the Stormgod of M]anuzziya, and one [f]or Lilluri. They place one rhyton for (the war god) ZABABA and (s)he (*sc.* the practitioner) *cries out/declaims*: ‘Lelluri has achieved her heart’s desire (literally, “that of her heart”). May the Stormgod of Manuzziya and Lelluri bring the king and queen (to the fulfillment) of (their) wish. Let them put his enemies under his feet’.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> P/1 82: “*p.* is an audible manifestation of joy and acclaim, also performed in rituals, often accompanied by music and dancing.” Additional passages are also given here.

<sup>14</sup> Festival, *KBo* 23.55 i 5’-7’, 20’-23’:

*nu mahhan walhzi nu=kan ŠA LUKÚR katta [aknuzi]  
nu anzel ÉRIN.MEŠ hūmanzašš=a palwāizz[i nu kuiš]  
tarhta namma LUGAL hin<k>zi ...  
... nu namma=at  
KITPULU ti[anzi] n=an=kan mahhan anzel  
laknuzi [n=at pa] twānzi apāšš=a ANA DINGIR-LIM  
UŠKEN nu an [z]el paršanāizzi*

<sup>15</sup> Hišuwāš festival, *KBo* 24.76:1’-11’:

[...] 2 BI[BRI]  
[1-EN ANA dIM M]anuzi 1-EN=ma  
[A]NA dLellūriš šunnai  
1-EN BIBRU=ma ANA dZA.BA<sub>4</sub>.BA<sub>4</sub>  
tianza nu palwāizzi  
dLellūriš=wa=kan ŠA-aš=šaš  
āš dIM Manuziya=ma=wa=kan  
dLellūriš LUGAL-un  
MUNUS.LUGAL-an ZI-aš arnuwandu  
nu=wa=šši LÚ.MEŠ KÚR GÌR-aš kattan  
tiandu

In a myth of the Kumarbi cycle, Ea instructs Tašmišu, the vizier and brother of the stormgod, Teššub, to rouse the gods to assembly for the final battle against the supplanter, Ullikummi: (3) "Tašmišu [he]ard (Ea's words) and began to rejoice. He *shouted* three times, and the gods in [hea]ven heard (him); he *shouted* twice, and Teššub, the valiant king of Kummiya, heard him; and they came to the place of assembly."<sup>16</sup>

When, therefore, *palwai-* is used within the context of ritual sacrifice, one expects a similar connotation of joy, acclaim, or jubilation. In passage (4) the singer, who is a regular attendee at sacrificial ceremonies and in Hittite rituals in general, calls out (*halzai-*) just prior to the slaughter of a sacrificial victim and then shouts or cheers (*palwai-*) at the moment that the animal is killed: (4) "Further she [the queen] goes into the forest and dedicates one sheep and one goat to the praised ZABABA. The singer cries "*aḫa*" and they kill them at the *ḫuwaši*. The singer *cheers/shouts*."<sup>17</sup>

In a cult inventory text the exclamation of the *palwatalla-* ("crier/shouter"), here a woman, is accompanied by the blast of "thunderhorn":<sup>18</sup> (5) "He presents one sheep to the deity Hilašši. They kill the *annalli-*(sheep) on the altar. The men of the

<sup>16</sup> Myth of Ullikummi, *KBo* 26.65 iv 15'-18':

... <sup>d</sup>Tašmišuš  
[iše]amašta n=as=za duškiškiwan dāiš nu 3-SU palwait nu=ššan šarā  
[AN-]ši DINGIR.MES-muš ištama[š]šer 2 -anki palwait nu <sup>d</sup>U-aš  
<sup>URU</sup>Kummiyaš  
UR.SAG-[i]š [L]UGAL-uš ištamašta n=at duliyaš pidi anda eri

<sup>17</sup> Cult of Ḫuwaššanna, *KBo* 20.72 iii 15'-18':

nu namma INA <sup>GIŠ</sup>TIR paizzi  
našta 1 UDU U 1 MĀS.GAL šarlanti ANA <sup>d</sup>ZA.BA<sub>4</sub>.BA<sub>4</sub>  
šipanti <sup>LUNAR</sup>aḫā ḫalzāi n=uš <sup>NA'</sup>ḫūwašiya  
ḫukanzi <sup>LUNAR</sup>palwaizzi

<sup>18</sup> The act of *palwai-* is characteristic of, although not exclusive to, the ritual participants called *palwatalla-*. These were one of a number of professional ritual participants and could be either men or women (and even sometimes children), although the sex was probably not chosen at random but was predetermined. See F. Pecchioli Daddi, *Mestieri, professioni e dignità nell'Anatolia itita (=Incunabula Graeca 79 (Rome 1982))* 246-52, 394ff.

Regarding Greek sacrifice, J. Bremmer, "Communication with the Divine: Sacrifice" (forthcoming), has asked why the cry was raised by women, suggesting that the reason may be that the men were already busy with the sacrifice. I suggest rather that women were suited to this task, at least in part, because of the pitch of their voices. Note that in Hittite passage (5) the "crier" is a woman.

thunderhorn blow. The (female) crier *cheers/shouts*. They set (out) the meat."<sup>19</sup> Based on the language of this text alone and the loose construction of the sentence, it is difficult to know for certain exactly how closely each act followed upon the previous one, or, indeed, if they were simultaneous. But there is no reason to doubt a direct connection between the kill and the cry.

As example (3) indicates, and as the *CHD* points out, the action of *palwai-* is audible at a great distance and could be used to summon gods to assembly. Thus, when the meat is set out for the god after (or while?) the *palwatalla*-woman raises the cry in passage (5), it seems reasonable to suppose that the sound was meant to attract the attention of the deity to the fact of the sacrifice and the meal being offered him.

The above examples suggest that the vocalization accompanying sacrifice was for both Greeks and Hittites a jubilant cry, not one of mourning, horror, or guilt. Within the context of sacrifice, it appears to have had two functions: first, as a cry of joy or triumph, not at the destruction of the animal *per se*, but rather at the honor that this offering brought the deity and in anticipation of the pleasure that it was expected to give him; its other purpose was to capture the attention of the deity and to summon him to the joyful and sacred event of the shared ritual meal.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Cult inventory, *IBoT* II 103 iv 11–14:

1 UDU <sup>d</sup>Hilass̄i BAL-anti annališ (sic) INA GIŠ<sup>z</sup>ZAG.GAR[.RA]  
hūkanzi LÜ<.MEŠ> SI!.KA×IM paprianzi  
MUNUS<sup>z</sup>palwatallaš palwaizzi šuppa  
tianzi

<sup>20</sup> I wish to thank Christopher Faraone, Michael Jameson, Harry Hoffner, and Thomas Dousa for reading this manuscript and offering valuable comments. I am also grateful to Jan Bremmer, who not only read the manuscript, but made his forthcoming article (*supra* n.18) available to me.