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Original Scientific Paper
UDC 821.143.09 Порфирије
821.143.09 Теофраст
Received: September 01, 2024
Revised: October 31, 2024
Accepted: November 15, 2024



WHODUNIT? A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BUPHONIA

Abstract

The Athenian custom of Buphonia stands out as a complex, amusing, and at times unpredictable example of religious practice in ancient Greece. It is documented by several ancient authors, whose primary focus was explaining the ritual's aetiology. An integral part of the festival of Zeus Polieus, this ritual involves a series of practices centered around the sacrificial offering of bulls or oxen. While accounts of Buphonia vary among ancient writers, they predominantly emphasize the ritual transgression of the first sacrificial animal, followed by its punishment in the form of the first murder, interpreted as the first sacrifice. This aetiological model is not uncommon among the texts describing ancient Greek rituals, serving as a prevalent method for transferring guilt from the sacrificers to the sacrificial animal. In the second book of his work *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, drawing extensively from Theophrastos' treatise *On Piety*, Porphyry of Tyre records a somewhat different and a much more detailed description of the aetiology and course of each ritual aspect connected to Athenian Buphonia. Porphyry portrays this custom as a multi-level ritual mechanism aimed at absolving the participants of guilt. The protagonist of Porphyry's account is an Athenian metic who, in a fit of rage provoked by the animal's cult transgression, slaughters an ox. This incident sets off a series of interconnected events, beginning with the metic's escape from Athens, divine retribution in a form of a natural disaster, a pursuit of the fugitive, the fugitive's plan to cheat the Athenians, and ultimately, an attempt at redemption and guilt diffusion through a complex chain ritual with interdependent elements. Since Karl Meuli's influential 1946 paper on Greek sacrifice, Porphyry's narrative of Buphonia has been labeled as *Unschuldskomödie* or comedy of innocence. This interpretation highlights the ritual's symbolic complexity and underscores the absurdity of transferring guilt to an animal or an inanimate object. In this paper, we aim to offer a comprehensive analysis of Porphyry's account, dissecting various aspects of Buphonia to emphasize the individual methods employed to cope with guilt in sacrificial acts. Through comparisons with similar rites in Greek and other cultural traditions, particularly those featuring chain narratives with interdependent elements, we seek to illuminate the relevance of Buphonia and similar customs in the study of ancient religious practices. Additionally, we aim to explore the connections between Buphonia and concepts such as guilt, responsibility, and morality, shedding light on its role in both ritual and judicial contexts.

Keywords: animal sacrifice · aetiology · Buphonia · *Unschuldskomödie* · chain story

In the second book of his treatise *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, Porphyry of Tyre offers an in-depth discussion on the origin and evolution of sacrificial rituals, particularly the choice of offerings, as well as the beginnings of animal sacrifice. His intent is, for the most part, to disprove the notions of superiority and anteriority of animal sacrifice when compared to bloodless offerings. One of Porphyry's main points is that animal sacrifices were not a part of ancestral religious practices and represent an innovation in this regard. To illustrate his arguments, Porphyry gives multiple examples from various traditions, and bases a significant portion of his inquiry on Theophrastus' treatise *On Piety*, which contained a theoretical model of the development of sacrificial rites.

Porphyry first refers to Theophrastus in *Abst.* 2.5.1, marking the beginning of a long exposition on the history of ancestral sacrificial customs.¹ The last mention of Theophrastus is found in *Abst.* 2.32.3, where Porphyry notes that the examples discussed in previous paragraphs originate from Aristotle's successor. He also adds that he himself included some digressions among the quotations from Theophrastus' text.² In this paper, we will examine the excerpts from Theophrastus' *On Piety* which concern the origins of animal offerings, looking into how they portray the act of transferring or eliminating the guilt of the sacrificers. We will particularly focus on the stories of Athenian Buphonia, a complex set of rites centered around an offering of an ox.

1. Setting the stage for Buphonia

Two versions of the Buphonia legend take a prominent place in Porphyry's account of Theophrastus' writings. Prior to these, there are three relatively brief mentions of the earliest animal killings in ancient Attica (*Abst.* 2.9.2–2.10.1). These instances are quite similar, and they concern the initial killings of pigs, lambs, and goats. The stories themselves do not always explicitly refer to these early acts of killing as sacrifices. However, they clearly represent aetiological legends explaining how the people of Attica came to kill animals and make animal offerings. Additionally, these legends share the theme of absolving or transferring the guilt from the killer to the victim — a concept that becomes the focal point of both versions of Buphonia. Unlike the legend of Buphonia, these short stories do not feature complex methods of absolving the guilt —

1 Several Theophrastean scholars have written about Porphyry's use of Theophrastus' material, attempting to reconstruct the original order of paragraphs and subjects in *On Piety*, and identify possible differences between Porphyry's quotations and the source material. A concise systematization of the history of this question can be found in Schorn 2022. One of the greatest issues in this research direction is that, to get optimal results, the researcher has to be well acquainted with Porphyry and his use of sources, perhaps even more than with Theophrastus.

2 For example, the story attributed to Theopompus, about a wealthy Magnesian and the futility of his lavish offerings (*Abst.* 2.16).

the first pig-killing is depicted as a consequence of an accident, sanctioned by Apollo and later generally accepted; the first lamb was sacrificed because its behavior was interpreted as consent (*Abst* 2.9.3), while the first goat was killed as punishment for browsing a sacred vine (*Abst* 2.10.1).³ These methods of either justifying the killings or depicting them as something entirely different are not uncommon in different sacrificial traditions (Doniger & Smith 1989: 190). Among the many intriguing elements in the legend of Buphonia, we can identify several previously mentioned guilt-absolving devices, as well as some additional ones, interwoven in a complex chain of events.

Before proceeding with the analysis of the two versions of Buphonia legend in *On Abstinence*, it is important to give a short explanation of the term. Buphonia is a term used to denote a particular element of the Athenian festival of Diipoleia, celebration dedicated to Zeus Polieus, the protector of the city. The word *Buphonia* carries a straightforward meaning — ox-slaughter. However, it does not refer only to the act of sacrificing an ox, but to the set of rites which surround the sacrifice. Several ancient authors mention this ritual, transmitting the legend of the first ox-slaying, and recounting the customs connected to Diipoleia in classical Athens and in the later times. The manner in which the authors describe the ceremony give us reason to believe that Buphonia and associated rituals were considered unusual and heritage of great antiquity (Parke 1977: 165; Simon 1983: 11; Burkert 1997: 155).⁴ Some authors separate their accounts of Diipoleia from the aetiological myth of Buphonia, while others do not. Athenian historian Androtion writes that the Diipoleia are an ancient festival. During this celebration an ox ate some of the sacred meal prepared as an offering. For this transgression, a certain Thaulon slauthered him with an axe (Androt. *DFHG* F13).⁵ Androtion's report is later quoted in the *Suda* lexicon (*Suda*, beta 474). Pausanias the Geographer writes separately about Buphonia and the festival of Diipoleia, without explicitly connecting them. He first describes Buphonia — offerings selected to Zeus Polieus are left on the altar unguarded; when an ox, kept especially for this occasion, wanders to the altar and partakes of the offerings. One of the priests, called the ox-slayer, kills the animal as punishment. He then throws away the weapon and flees from the scene, leaving the others to sentence the weapon for the crime (Paus. 1.24.4).⁶ Not long after this passage, Pausanias recounts how, during the reign of Erechtheus, an ox-slayer killed

3 For the story of the goat and the vine, see also Eratosth. *Erig*. F4 Rosokoki and Rozokoki 2017: 952–954.

4 For example, Ar. *Nub*. 984–985.

5 Βουφόνια ἑορτὴ Ἀθηναίων πάνυ ἀρχαία· ἐν γὰρ τοῖς Διιπολίοις φασὶ βοῦν τὸ πόπανον καταφαγεῖν τὸ παρεσκευασμένον πρὸς τὴν θυσίαν· Θαύλωνα δὲ τινα ὡς εἶχε πελέκει ἀποκτεῖναι τὸν βοῦν, καθὰ καὶ Ἀνδροτίων μέμνηται διὰ τῆς τετάρτης.

6 τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Πολιέως κριθὰς καταθέντες ἐπὶ τὸν βωμὸν μεμιγμένας πυροῖς οὐδεμίαν ἔχουσι φυλακὴν· ὁ βοῦς δέ, ὃν ἐς τὴν θυσίαν ἐτοιμάσαντες φυλάσσουσιν, ἄπτεται τῶν σπερμάτων φοιτῶν ἐπὶ τὸν βωμόν. καλοῦσι δὲ τινα τῶν ἱερέων βουφόνον, ὃς κτείνας τὸν

the first ox, subsequently fleeing from the country. To deal with the guilt and pollution, the Athenians organized a trial and condemned the axe which was used for the killing (Paus. 1.28.10).⁷ Finally, Aelian gives an account of Buphonia similar to one of versions preserved by Porphyry. In his *Various histories*, Aelian writes that, after the ox-killing, each of participants in the ritual takes part of the blame for the crime, and in the end they condemn the knife (Ael. *VH* 8.3).⁸

2. Porphyry, Theophrastos, and Buphonia: the short story.

The story of Buphonia can be seen as a sort of culmination within Porphyry's chain of aetiologies. Porphyry first mentions the Athenian Buphonia in *Abst.* 2.10.2, just after the story of the goat-killing. This version is quite short and similar to the previously mentioned examples.

Βοῦν δὲ Δίομος ἔσφαξε πρῶτος, ἱερεὺς ὦν τοῦ Πολιέως Διός, ὅτι τῶν Διιπολίων ἀγομένων καὶ παρεσκευασμένων κατὰ τὸ πάλαι ἔθος τῶν καρπῶν ὁ βοῦς προσελθὼν ἀπεγεύσατο τοῦ ἱεροῦ πελάνου· συνεργοὺς γὰρ λαβὼν τοὺς ἄλλους ὅσοι παρῆσαν, ἀπέκτεινε τοῦτον.⁹

An ox was first slaughtered by Diomos, while he was a priest of Zeus Polieus, because it came near and took a taste of the sacred meal during the festival of Diipoleia, when the fruits are prepared according to the ancient custom; having taken all the other attendants as helpers, Diomos killed the ox.

This version of the legend directly connects the custom of killing an ox with the festival of Diipoleia. Each part of this short text explains a certain element of Diipoleia, but not all of the elements of this festival — there are no mentions of those aspects that cannot be connected with a seemingly realistic event and have a rational explanation.¹⁰ The beginning gives a simple reason why the Athenian Buphonia took place during the festival of Diipoleia, and not separately or within another celebration — the first mythical killing took place during that holiday, and the first killer was a priest of Zeus Polieus.

βοῦν καὶ ταύτη τὸν πέλεκυν ρίψας—οὕτω γὰρ ἐστὶν οἱ νόμος—οἴχεται φεύγων· οἱ δὲ ἄτε τὸν ἄνδρα ὃς ἔδρασε τὸ ἔργον οὐκ εἰδότες, ἐς δίκην ὑπάγουσι τὸν πέλεκυν.

7 Ἀθηναίων βασιλεύοντος Ἑρεχθέως, τότε πρῶτον βοῦν ἔκτεινεν ὁ βουφόνος ἐπὶ τοῦ βωμοῦ τοῦ Πολιέως Διός· καὶ ὁ μὲν ἀπολιπὼν ταύτη τὸν πέλεκυν ἀπῆλθεν ἐκ τῆς χώρας φεύγων, ὁ δὲ πέλεκυς παραυτίκα ἀφείθη κριθεὶς καὶ ἐς τὸδε ἀνὰ πᾶν ἔτος κρίνεται.

8 ὅτι Ἀττικὸν τοῦτο τὸ ἔθος, ὅταν ὁ βοῦς ἀποσφαγῇ, τῶν μὲν ἄλλων ἀποψηφίζονται, κρίνοντες ἕκαστον ἐν τῷ μέρει φόνου· καταγινώσκουσι δὲ τῆς μαχαίρας, καὶ λέγουσι ταύτην ἀποκτεῖναι αὐτόν. καὶ ἐν ἡ ταῦτα ἡμέρα δρώσι, Διιπόλια τὴν ἑορτὴν καλοῦσι καὶ Βουφόνια.

9 Passages from *On Abstinence* are cited according to edition Girgenti & Sodano 2005.

10 Which are the main component of the second version of this story, as we will soon discover.

His name in this version is Diomos, which does not appear in other versions of the story, nor in the names of the families associated with the offering of sacrifices at Diipoleia.¹¹ It is possible to assume that the priest in this legend does not have a name but the one marking him as a priest of Zeus. That is, however, just a presumption with no backing evidence. Just as in the story of the first goat-killing, it is emphasized that the violence was a consequence of the victim's sacrilegious behavior. The participation of several citizens in Athenian Buphonia finds its explanation in the attendants who aided Diomos.

When it comes to the aetiological aspects, it is possible to conclude that this short version covers some of the most important elements of Buphonia and Diipoleia — it explains the concurrence of the festival and the ox-slaying, connecting it with the priest responsible for the sacrifice; it also reflects the participation of several people in the ritual. Regarding the mechanisms for absolving the guilt, this version gives its participants two outlets. First, the guilt is transferred to the ox, and the violence comes as punishment; second, the guilt is distributed between many people who came to Diomos' aid. Both of these devices are prominent in the longer version of Buphonia legend.

3. Porphyry, Theophrastos, and Buphonia: the long story.

The longer account of the Buphonia begins in *Abst.* 2.29, and differs significantly from the previously cited version.¹² In general terms, it is important to note that the two stories have different aetiological objectives — the story of Diomos, for the most part, explains the connection between Buphonia and Diipoleia, while the longer legend focuses on the origin of the rites associated with Buphonia, giving little emphasis to the festival of Zeus. Those aspects of both legends that deal with absolving or transferring guilt are essentially very similar. The longer version, naturally, features a more detailed and intricate methods for absolving guilt. The contrast in other elements will become apparent after citing the relevant passages. To analyze this legend, we will divide the text into four sections. Our analysis will primarily focus on the numerous instances of guilt-absolving devices and, secondarily, on the aetiological purposes of the narrative.

Τὸ γὰρ παλαιόν, ὡς καὶ πρόσθεν ἐλέγομεν, καρποὺς τοῖς θεοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων θύοντων, ζῶα δὲ οὐ, οὐδὲ εἰς τὴν ἰδίαν τροφήν καταχρωμένων, λέγεται κοινῆς θυσίας οὔσης Ἀθήνησιν Δίομον ἢ Σώπατρόν τινα, τῷ γένει οὐκ ἐγχώριον, γεοοργοῦντα δὲ κατὰ τὴν Ἀττικὴν, ἐπεὶ πελάνου τὲ καὶ τῶν θυλημάτων ἐπὶ τῆς τραπέζης ἐναργῶς

11 Those are, most notably, the Thaulonids, named after the ox-slayer mentioned by Androton; other families are also named in the second version of this story preserved in *On Abstinence* (2.29–30).

12 Its relation to the shorter legend has long been a subject of discussion among classical scholars. A summary of relevant literature can be found in Schorn 2022.

κειμένων, ἵνα τοῖς θεοῖς ταῦτα θύοι, τῶν βοῶν τις εἰσιὼν ἀπ' ἔργου τὰ μὲν κατέφαγεν τὰ δὲ συνεπάτησεν, αὐτὸν δ' ὑπεραγανακτήσαντα τῷ συμβάντι, πελέκεως τίνος πλησίον ἀκονωμένου, τοῦτον ἀρπάξαντα, πατάξαι τὸν βοῦν (*Abst.* 2.29.1).

In ancient times, as we said before, people sacrificed fruits to the gods, and not the animals, not even using them for their own food. As the story goes, during a public sacrifice in Athens, a certain Diomos or Sopater, not Athenian by birth, but working the land in Attica, had layed out openly on a table sacrificial meal and cakes, to offer them to the gods; coming from work, one of the oxen devoured a part of the offerings, trampling down the rest. Enraged by this incident, Sopater seized an axe that was being sharpened nearby, and slaughtered the ox.

In the very beginning, we see that Porphyry refers to the protagonist of this legend as Diomos *or* Sopater. In the rest of the passage, the ox-slayer is consistently named Sopater. There are several explanations for this discrepancy. One possible solution is that the phrase *a certain Diomos or Sopater* does not originate from Theophrastus, but from Porphyry, and represents his way of connecting this legend with the story of Diomos' ox-killing. In other words, it could be suggested that the protagonist of the longer story was Sopater, and that Porphyry attempted to reconcile the difference in the names of the two ox-slayers.¹³

From the story's start, it is emphasized that Sopater was not Athenian by birth. This detail remains prominent throughout the legend. The mention of Sopater's descent is more than just an interesting backdrop — it is the first of several devices for transferring the guilt featured in this version of Buphonia. The emphasis on the perpetrator's foreign background acts as a form of isolation from the community and an effort to disconnect the Athenians from the bloodshed. We can also see that the guilt is ascribed to the victim as well — just as in the stories about Diomos and the first goat-killing, the victim is blamed for committing a ritual transgression. When it comes to the aetiological aspect of this section, it is clear that it reflects the custom of sacrificing an ox, explaining the circumstances in which this occurred for the first time in the mythical past. The motive for the killing in this legend does not differ from other aetiological myths; in this case, however, it is emphasized that the perpetrator committed the crime in anger, seizing the first weapon close at hand. This is a great example of one of the most important characteristics of Theophrastus' story — an event usually presented as a simple fact, here receives a literary treatment and describes everything, including the mental state of the protagonist before and after the killing, and the explanation concerning where the weapon came from.

13 An error in transmission deriving from a glossa is also a tempting solution. However, this type of conclusion requires consulting the manuscript tradition, which is not feasible at present. A radically different and possibly even malicious conclusion can be found in Schorn 2022: 102, who believes that Porphyry *sloppily summarized his source*.

Τελευτήσαντος δὲ τοῦ βοός, ὡς ἔξω τῆς ὀργῆς καταστάς συνεφρόνησεν οἷον ἔργον ἦν εἰργασμένος, τὸν μὲν βοῦν θάπτει, φυγὴν δὲ ἐκούσιον ἀράμενος ὡς ἡσεβηκώς, ἔφυγεν εἰς Κρήτην. Αὐχμῶν δὲ κατεχόντων καὶ δεινῆς ἀκαρπίας γενομένης, ἐπερωτῶσι κοινῇ τὸν θεὸν ἀνεῖλεν ἡ Πυθία τὸν ἐν Κρήτῃ φυγάδα ταῦτα λύσειν, τὸν τε φονέα τιμωρησαμένων καὶ τὸν τεθνεῶτα ἀναστησάντων ἐν ἧπερ ἀπέθανε θυσία λῶον ἔσεσθαι γευσαμένοις τε τοῦ τεθνεῶτος καὶ μὴ κατασχοῦσιν (*Abst.* 2.29.2–3).

When the ox had died, Sopater came to his senses and realized what crime he had committed. He buried the ox and, as someone who had committed sacrilege, voluntarily fled into exile in Crete. When the droughts seized the land and left it completely barren, the Athenians sent a public delegation to consult the oracle. Pythia responded that the Cretan fugitive would solve the issue and that, when they punish the murderer and raise the victim in the sacrifice in which he was killed, it will be better for those who partook of the dead and did not hold back.

Sopater's voluntary exile is commonly interpreted as an example of ritual flight for the purpose of isolation from the community after spilling blood (Burkert 1997: 157), while other views consider this element of the Buphonia legend a form of atonement for the crime (Meuli 1946: 276). The former interpretation is more suited to similar customs from the Mediterranean region in antiquity. Greek authors mention three instances of this practice. A prominent example is an element of Tenedian ritual, dedicated to Dyonisos the Man-crusher (Ἀνθρωπορραίστης), depicted by Aelian in his *Nature of Animals*. During this ceremony, the participant who slaughtered the sacrificial calf flees towards the sea, while the other attendants throw stones at him (Ael. NA 12.34).¹⁴ Diodor of Sicily gives an account of a very similar custom in Egypt. During the preparations for embalming a dead man's body, an official makes an incision on it at a specific spot; afterwards he flees, while the other attendants throw stones at him (Diod. Sic. 1.91.4). Plutarch recounts another similar custom in Orchomenus, in connection with a yearly festival of Dyonisos (Plut. *Quaest. Graec.* 299f–300a). He names it the ceremony of *flight and pursuit* (φυγὴ καὶ δίωξις).¹⁵ In a fragment of Greek philosopher Chamaeleon preserved by Athenaeus, the servant of Dyonisos is named βούτυπος, *the ox-slayer* (Chamael. 34F *ap.* Ath. 456c). A thorough study of similar customs in near-eastern, especially jewish cultural context, was written by Marilyn A. Katz in 1992. The author interprets these rituals as expiatory devices, also focusing on trial of inanimate objects, which will be of great importance in the later parts of this legend.

14 Τενέδιοι δὲ τῷ ἀνθρωπορραίστῃ Διονύσῳ τρέφουσι κύουσιν βοῦν, τεκοῦσαν δὲ ἄρα αὐτὴν οἶα δῆπου λεχὼν θεραπεύουσι. τὸ δὲ ἀρτιγενὲς βρέφος καταθύουσιν ὑποδήσαντες κοθόρνους, ὃ γε μὴν πατάξας αὐτὸ τῷ πελέκει λίθοις βάλλεται δημοσίᾳ, καὶ ἔστε ἐπὶ τὴν θάλατταν φεύγει.

15 Καὶ γίγνεται παρ' ἐνιαυτὸν ἐν τοῖς Ἀγριωνίοις φυγὴ καὶ δίωξις αὐτῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ ἱερέως τοῦ Διονύσου ξίφος ἔχοντος.

After the droughts and hunger seize Attica and a delegation arrives at Delphi, the story contains several aetiologies for the elements of the later Athenian ceremony — the oracle clarifies some of the more unusual aspects of the festival, most notably, the ritual revival of the sacrificed ox. The Pythic response has a similar function to the benevolent voice of Apollo in the story of the first pig-killing — it allows the use of meat in offerings and its consumption. In this way, this section of the text reflects the aetiology of the first god-approved sacrifice of pigs.¹⁶

When it comes to the participants in the the first ox-killing, we can observe a great difference between this and the other versions. According to the legend of Diomos, everybody took part in the killing; in the customs attributed to the Egyptians or Tenedians, only one officiant commits the killing, in the presence of others, who then simulate the punishment. In the story of Sopater, due to the Delphic part of the plot, it is clear that the perpetrator was alone when the killing took place and that the Athenians knew nothing of it (*cf.* Stengel 1893: 492). The drought triggers the continuation of the plot and, by proxy, produce additional aetiological elements; in the stories involving witnesses, such devices would be superfluous, seeing that everybody already knows what happened.

Ὅθεν ζητήσεως γενομένης καὶ τοῦ μεταίτιου τῆς πράξεως ἀνευρεθέντος, Σώπατρος νομίσας τῆς περὶ αὐτὸν δυσκολίας ἀπαλλαγῆσεσθαι ὡς ἑναγοῦς ὄντος, εἰ κοινῇ τοῦτο πράξειαν πάντες, ἔφη πρὸς τοὺς αὐτὸν μετελθόντας, δεῖν κατακοπῆναι βοῦν ὑπὸ τῆς πόλεως. Ἀπορούντων δὲ τίς ὁ πατάξων ἔσται, παρασχεῖν αὐτοῖς τοῦτο, εἰ πολίτην αὐτὸν ποιησάμενοι [καὶ] κοινωνήσουσι τοῦ φόνου. Συγχωρηθέντων οὖν τούτων, ὡς ἐπανῆλθον ἐπὶ τὴν πόλιν, συνέταξαν οὕτω τὴν πράξιν, ἥπερ καὶ νῦν διαμένει παρ' αὐτοῖς (*Abst.* 2.29.4–5).

After the search was conducted and the perpetrator was found, Sopater thought he would be free of the rage against himself, being polluted by blood, if everyone took part in the deed. He told those sent after him that the whole city had to take part in the slaying of the ox. Since they did not know who would strike the blow, he offered them to do it, if they make him a citizen and join him in the killing. They agreed, and when they returned to the city they established the custom in this manner, as it remains among them to this day.

This short section is important as the beginning of the murderer's reintegration into the community and the start of the division of guilt, which will be detailed in the following section. Sopater's encounter with his pursuers represents both the fulfillment of the prophecy and the aetiology of the communal

16 According to the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, the first ox-sacrifice was made by Hermes, not long after his birth (*Hom. Hymn Herm.* 115–120). The sacrificial animals were the oxen Hermes had stolen from Apollo (*Hom. Hymn Herm.* 20–25), prior to the reconciliation of the two deities before their father, Zeus.

character of Buphonia. The protagonist is here attributed certain features of trickster-like characters and cultural heroes — he essentially manipulates the Athenians, whom he had previously wronged, understanding that they desperately need his help; by doing so, he creates a tradition for the ages. The Pythian prophecy mentions only the consumption of the victim's flesh. Sopater's ploy introduces the communal killing, reflecting the later custom of guilt division among the participants and the complexity of Buphonia.

Ὑδροφόρους παρθένους κατέλεξαν· αἱ δ' ὕδωρ κομίζουσιν, ὅπως τὸν πέλεκυν καὶ τὴν μάχαιραν ἀκονήσουσιν. Ἀκονησάντων δὲ ἐπέδωκεν μὲν τὸν πέλεκυν ἕτερος, ὁ δ' ἐπάταξε τὸν βοῦν, ἄλλος δ' ἔσφαξεν· τῶν δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα δειράντων, ἐγεύσαντο τοῦ βοὸς πάντες. Τούτων δὲπραχθέντων τὴν μὲν δορὰν τοῦ βοὸς ράψαντες καὶ χόρτω ἀπογκώσαντες ἐξανέστησαν, ἔχοντα ταῦτὸν ὅπερ καὶ ζῶν ἔσχε σχῆμα, καὶ προσέξευξαν ἄροτρον ὡς ἐργαζομένῳ. Κρίσιν δὲ ποιοῦμενοι τοῦ φόνου πάντας ἐκάλουν εἰς ἀπολογίαὺς τοὺς τῆς πράξεως κοινωνήσαντας.

Ὦν δὴ αἱ μὲν ὕδροφόροι τοὺς ἀκονήσαντας αὐτῶν ἡτιῶντο μάλλον, οἱ δὲ ἀκονήσαντες τὸν ἐπιδιδόντα τὸν πέλεκυν, οὗτος δὲ τὸν ἐπισφάζοντα, καὶ ὁ τοῦτο δράσας τὴν μάχαιραν, καθ' ἧς οὐσῆς ἀφώνου τὸν φόνον κατέγνωσαν (*Abst.* 2.30.1–3).

They selected young girls as water-carriers — their task is to bring water for sharpening the axe and the knife. After the sharpening, one person passed on the axe, another struck the ox, and a third slaughtered it. Then others flayed the ox, and everyone took part in eating it. When that was done, they stitched up the flayed skin, stuffed it with hay and propped it up, looking like it did while it was alive, and yoked a plough to it, as though it were working. Then they held a murder trial and summoned everyone who took part in the crime to defend themselves. The water-carriers claimed those who sharpened the weapons were more culpable than them; those who sharpened the weapons blamed the man who passed on the axe, and he accused the one who slaughtered the ox; he blamed the knife, but since the knife was mute they found it guilty for murder.

After concluding the tale of the ritual, the story briefly mentions the legacy of the first Buphonia, depicting the later Buphonia in a manner similar to other accounts – oxen are allowed to roam free near the altar with sacrificial meal and cakes; the one who partakes of the food is selected to be cut down. It is possible to claim that the description of the chain of preparation for the ox-killing is the greatest difference between this version of the story and all others; together with the mock trial, it is also the most intriguing part, from the perspective of this study and its comparative aims. It is a very complex method of absolving the individual of culpability and here it is present twice. The process of absolution begins with the distribution of roles

in the preparation and execution of the violence. Each participant becomes responsible for as small a part of the deed as possible. Summoned before the court, the participants renounce their fragments of responsibility, passing them on to the next citizen in line and, ultimately, to the weapon. In Karl Meuli's influential study on Greek sacrifice, as well as in the later literature, these chains of action and culpability have been characterized as *comedy of innocence* (*Unschuldskomödie*), due to their supposed absurdity (Meuli 1946: 276). However, this type of chain of culpability is not an uncommon folk motif in cultures very distant from ancient Greece, and it is categorized as a chain with interdependent elements (*TMI* Z.49.11) — actions of each link in the chain depend on the previous link, and are, in fact, enabled by the previous link.

Among folktales of Uttarakhand there is a story beginning with a goat killed by a poorly built wall. When the king attempted to punish the owner of the wall, the owner blamed the builder; the builder accused the apprentice who had prepared the mortar, the apprentice blamed the water-carrier who had poured in too much water, diluting the mixture, and the water-carrier accused a policeman who had startled him, causing him to slip in too much liquid. After a complex series of twists and turns, the king himself was blamed and punished for the fall of the wall (Upreti 1894: 155). A collection of humorous folktales from India contains a similar chain story about a building that collapsed and killed several men. The chain of culpability includes the owner of the building, the builder, the mortar makers, the brickmakers, woodcutters and royal horsemen, and the final culprits are found to be some beautiful women who distracted the horsemen (Shankar 1924: 155–157).

Athenian approach to this type of chain motif includes the judicial proceedings and condemning the inanimate culprit. This detail is important for the Athenian judicial system, reflecting the trials of inanimate objects which had caused death in the court of the prytaneion. Apart from the division of blame, this section features the revival of the sacrificial animal. It is represented as the fulfillment of the oracle, but serves as atonement for the violence and a means of liberation from the divine punishment, the drought. In that sense, it can be viewed as the purpose of the set of actions taking place from the beginning of the ceremony. Some researchers consider this to be the most important part of the whole festival, which, according to many interpreters, relates to the end of the harvest and the beginning of the new year.

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