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Canis lupus in the text? A wolf sacrifice in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, 2.2.9*

Abstract. The subject of this article is an enigmatic and thus highly intriguing passage in Book 2 of Xenophon's *Anabasis*, where the author succinctly describes an alliance between Greek mercenaries and the Persian commander Ariaeus. Both sides pledged under oath to help each other, not to use trickery or treachery. This military pact was preceded by an animal sacrifice, after which the Greeks dipped sword blades and the Persians spearheads in the blood poured on a shield. The domestic animals killed in this rite were a bull and a ram, while the wild ones were a boar and a wolf. However, in the last case there is a controversy: some medieval manuscripts of the *Anabasis* do not mention the predatory animal, whereas others do. In the paper I argue that MSS lesson with the noun 'wolf', should be retained, which in turn prompts one to ask about the religious context in which wolf was might be killed in sacrifice and by whom.

Keywords: wolf, sacrifice, bloody rites, Greece, Persia, *Anabasis*.

When performing θυσία, the most important ritual of their religious practices,[1] the ancient Greeks did not slaughter wild animals, so the modern narrative runs.[2] This is especially evident when regarding hunting, perhaps the most spectacular case which would provide an example of it. Naturally, the pastime remained under 'the watchful eye' and protection of the vengeful Artemis (Marinatos, 1998;

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[1] On this topic the literature is vast, to cite here only a summary by Hermary et al., 2004, pp. 61–62.

[2] The fact that it was mainly domestic animals that were sacrificed, was already stressed out by Smith, 1987, pp. 191ff.

Icard & Linand de Bellefonds, 2011, esp. pp. 361–362; cf. Scruton, 2010), yet the trapping, the pursuing, the killing of a beast hardly was perceived as an act of religious sacrifice (Ekroth, 2007, p. 269; also 2008, pp. 259–290; cf. Parker, 2010, p. 137; Burliga, 2011, 95–96). Such impression is evident, among others, in the suggestive passage in Dio of Prusa's famous Euboean speech (*or*. 7. von Arnim), when a family living from hunting wants to buy a piglet to make it an offering and to celebrate its daughter's marriage. What is here especially striking is that nobody of its members even suggests that hunting in itself might be understood as a sacrificial ritual.[3] There was also, as Arrian of Nicomedia (2nd century AD) proves in his small treatise *On Hunting* (Κυνηγετικός), a huntsman's custom to offer a gift to deity *after* (my italics – B.B.) pursuing the game (also Arrian, *Anab.* 7.20.4). Thus the proper offering to the goddess was to make it from some part of an animal (the famous ἀπαρχή) already killed in the chase (Rouse, 1902; van Straten, 1982, pp. 83–88, 92; Naiden, 2015).[4] What obvious, the wild prey was not, most often, bloodthirsty carnivore but freely living herbivore: deer (on which see Larson, 2017), gazele and hare; eventually boar.[5]

This being so, it is of course all too obvious that just there are no rules without exceptions. Worshiping their gods, the ancient Greeks killed various animals,[6] so there were certainly also the cases when wild carnivores could be (and were, indeed) offered. This is where archaeology comes to invaluable aid. Discoveries by archaeologists have revealed that wild game was also sometimes sacrificed. In the preserved osteological material, where sacrificial rituals took place, not only bones of undomesticated herbivores (red deer and fallow deer), but also skeletal remains of lions, foxes, bears, vultures have been found (MacKinnon, 2007, p. 473; Ekroth, 2007, 2013, 2014, 2017; Scullion, 2013). What important, among the latter, the remains of wolves have also been identified (cf. Ekroth, 2017, p. 37, on wolf bones found in the territory of Messene).

One of the strangest and unusual examples of sacrifice of this predatory victim appears in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, that famous military diary. However, before being tempted to discuss this particular instance, a few necessary words must be devoted to the very crucial question of extant copies of the literary source itself. This is a *sine qua-non*-procedure since the noun 'wolf' appears only in some of manuscripts of the *Anabasis*.

1. The *Anabasis* MSS

The episode in Xenophon concerns an oath made by the Greek army on retreat from Babylon and the assisting Persian troops under the command of the Ariaeus

[3] Which stresses out 'a civilizing' character of sacrifice and meat that came from it, in a sharp contrast to 'wild' mode of life; cf. Corbier, 1989, p. 223; for the Middle Ages see Pluskowski, 2006, pp. 56–60.

[4] Cf. Sophocles, *Aias*, 177–178; Xenophon, Cyr. 5.3.9; *Schol. Aristoph. Plut*. 943: ἔθος ἦν τοὺς θηρῶντάς τινα ἄγραν μέρος τι τοῦ θηρωμένου, ἢ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἢ πόδα, προσηλοῦν πασσάλῳ ἐπί τινος δένδρου εἰς αὐτὴν τὴν ὕλην, πρὸς τιμὴν τῆς ᾽Αρτέμιδος (Dübner, 1877).

[5] The boar is an omnivore, in fact, but it is evident that because of its stature and strength, the Greeks treated it most often as a prey animal, one of the main objects of chase, as evidenced in many narratives, to name the almost archetypal Caledonian hunting myth (Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 1.66–73), one of Heracles' labours (Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 2.83), or the scar of Odysseus.

[6] See Liston, Rotroff, Snyder, 2018, p. 54; cf Osborne, 2016, p. 248.

(on him see Głombiowski, 1993, pp. 85–86; recently Thomas, 2021, p. 455), who intitially supported Cyrus the Younger and the Greek case. The passage in question, if you use the edition prepared by E. C. Marchant (Oxford Classical Texts) runs as follows (*Anab*. 2.2.8-9):

> καὶ ὤμοσαν οἵ τε Ἕλληνες καὶ ὁ Ἀριαῖος καὶ τῶν σὺν αὐτῷ οἱ κράτιστοι μήτε προδώσειν ἀλλήλους σύμμαχοί τε ἔσεσθαι· οἱ δὲ βάρβαροι προσώμοσαν καὶ ἡγήσεσθαι ἀδόλως. ταῦτα δ' ὤμοσαν, σφάξαντες ταῦρον καὶ κάπρον καὶ κριὸν εἰς ἀσπίδα, οἱ μὲν Ἕλληνες βάπτοντες ξίφος, οἱ δὲ βάρβαροι λόγχην.

As we see, perhaps surprisingly, in the last sentence there is no 'wolf' named among the animal victims at all. Why? Marchant has accepted the lesson found in the best (as some editors assume) MS of the work, dated as late as AD 1320, the so called C Parisinus 1640.[7] His reading was adopted, in turn, by C. L. Brownson in the Loeb translation of the work (1968, p. 119).[8] As Brownson argues (1968, p. xv), „C is far the best of all the MSS." (see also Rehdantz, 1865, p. 16).[9] Although it was written down in the 14th century, there is evidence that it is a copy of a lost prototype dating back to the early 9th century (e*x codice inter annum 870–911 scripto*: Hude, Peters, 1972, p. III), once „presented to the Byzantine Emperor Leo VI (886–912)" (so Thomas, 2021, p. 492; cf. Huitink & Rood, 2019, p. 39).

However, matter is more complicated as this MS is preserved with additions. Modern editors, depending on whether the additions or supplements appeared earlier or later in it, distinguish between the so-called C_1 (i. e., supplemented with 'the earlier hand') and C_2 ('the later hand') which is why we are dealing, *de facto*, with two versions (so Brownson, 1968, p. xv; but cf. Hug, 1866, p. V.). The *recensio* C_1 is called by a modern scholar 'the original version", whereas C_2 'the altered version'.[10]

As to the passage in question in the *Anabasis* text (2.2.9), in the MS version C_1 after the noun ταῦρον, there is 'the wolf' named (καὶ λύκον – 'and wolf').[11] Thus this longer MS lesson was accepted by Ludwig Dindorf (Ludovicus Dindorfius) in his *editio secunda auctior et emendatior* of the *Anabasis* (1855, p. 81), although in the *apparatus criticus* he adds an explanation that *Lupi mentio me offendit* („mention of the wolf worries me").[12] On the other hand, the noun figures without any mark of doubt in Dübner's edition (1838, p. 212), where we read his Latin translation of the passage: *haec autem sic jurarunt, ut apro, tauro,* ***lupo*** [bold mine – B.B.], *ariete in scutum mactatis, Graeci gladium, barbari hastam ibi intingerent*". Such a reading

[7] His depiction is in Hude, Peters, 1972, p. III; cf. especially Masqueray, 1992, pp. 29–40.

[8] His translation runs: „And the two parties – the Greek officers, and Ariaeus together with the highest in rank of his followers – made oath that they would not betray each other and that they would be allies, while the barbarians took an additional pledge to lead the way without treachery. These oaths they sealed by sacrificing a bull, a boar, and a ram over a shield, the Greek dipping a sword in the blood and the barbarians a lance". Earlier on, this reading was adopted by Hug, 1886, p. 46, with a an explanation at p. 19: „item omisi cum C. pr."; see Cobet, 1869, p. 52, and Rehdantz & Carnuth, 1886, p. 125.

[9] Accordingly, there is also no mention of 'a wolf' in the notes by Cawkwell, 1972, p. 109, to R. Warner's Penguin translation. The same is true in the Budé edition by Masqueray, 1992, p. 98; cf. also Rissanen, 2014, p. 138.

[10] Thomas, 2021, p. 492. He includes the noun in his translation for *The Landmark Xenophon's Anabasis* , p. 56.

[11] See Hug, 1886, p. 19: „καὶ λύκον addidit C_1 post ταῦρον cum ceteris". A similar reasoning was that of the acknowledged German editor and lexicographer Wilhelm Gemoll, 1899, p. 56: „post ταῦρον C_1 add. καὶ λύκον".

[12] Dindorf notes that if 'the wolf' is omitted, the sacrifice of other animals would resemble the Roman suovetaurilia.; also Krüger, 1826, p. 100.

appeared already also in Krüger (1826, p. 100). Among other authorities we can name Ludwig Breitenbach who accepted the version with 'the wolf' as genuine (also see Hude, 1866, p. 54; Hude, Peters, 1972, p. 54; Dillery, 1998, pp. 36, 161).[13] Finally, so does recently Professor Parker (2004, p. 137, n. 17), arguing that „The wolf is omitted by the important MS C in its *uncorrected state*" (italics mine – B.B.). The problem is also muddled by the fact, as Parker observes, that „the addition of the wolf by a scribe has no obvious motive". If I understand this argument properly, it is unclear or difficult to explain, at least, on which grounds an unknown copyist, working in the 14th century, would add (i. e., 'invent') 'the wolf' in this sentence. In turn, this would allow one to cautiously infer that most probably 'καὶ λύκον' was already just in the Byzantine prototype, known to Leo the Wise.[14]

After Parker (2004, p. 137, noting that the version without the noun 'wolf' is in the MS 'in its uncorrected state') and Thomas (2021, p. 492, that C_1 is 'the original version'), I also should argue that there was 'the wolf' in the text. Marchant's decision (followed by Brownson in Loeb, but not by Dillery in the same series) as well as others, was based, in all likehood, on an assumption that the version without 'the wolf' gives „a more normal number of victims" (Parker's remark, 2004, p. 137, n. 17). This would be true in the case of Greek sacrificial ritual, when domestic animals (usually but not always, see n. 6, above), were used to be slaughtered (Graf, 2012, 2021). All the editors' doubts notwithstanding, there are valid reasons to argue that in hallowing this military oath,[15] very near Babylon,[16] a Persian sacrificial ritual was used, too. Therefore, one can venture to say that at 2.2.9 it is a kind of 'mixed' sacrifice that was related by Xenophon; in other words – what we are dealing with is a combination of Greek and Persian bloody rites (so rightly, I think, Torrance, 2014, p. 140). Another thing is that all this bloody ceremony and the dipping of swords and spears in the blood of the victims (Lendle, 1995, pp. 89–99, aptly cites here a similar and suggestive scene from Aeschylus, *Sept*. 43–49) was of little use and came to nothing, because Ariaeus quickly went over to the side of Tissaphernes and the Great King, thus leaving the Ten Thousand of the Greek mercenaries completely isolated, in the midst of the hostile Achaemenid territory.

[13] Breitenbach, 1865, p. 62 (in his edition 'für den Schulgebrauch'); see also an earlier edition 'für den Schulgebrauch', that by Vollbrecht (1857, p. 111).

[14] As Huitink and Rood, 2019, p. 40, observe (quoting with approval Persson, 1915), MS C_1 "represents a Byzantine edition of the text". The complicated problem of the extant *Anabasis* MSS is well demonstrated, *exempli causa*, by the fact that ancient version of the book that in the 3rd century AD read Diogenes Laertius (2.6.57) contained prefaces to each book, although, as the biographer adds, there was no general preface to the entire whole, see Thomas, 2021, pp. 491–493.

[15] Surprisingly, Pritchett, 1979, omits the passage in the chapter on 'Military Vows' (pp. 230-239); there are two excellent studies by Berti, 2006 and Torrance, 2014: regarding Xenophon, the latter (p. 139) does refer to 2.2.9, accepting Parker's suggestion that a scribe had no reason to add 'wolf'.

[16] This was one of the reasons that editors deleted the noun, as wolves are not encountered in that area nowadays – so Thomas, 2021, p. 56, who adds that things may have been different in antiquity. This is possible, as is his plausible suggestion that 'wolf' also could refer to jackal, and that these carnivores are found in Mesopotamia. On the term itself see Diggle 2021, p. 882.

2. Whose Wolf Sacrifice?

As predator that was a considerable threat, mostly for herdsmen and their livestock, the wolf always fascinated ancient Greeks (De Block, 1877, pp. 145–158 and 217–234; Richter, 1978; Mainoldi, 1984; Marcinkowski, 2001, pp. 1–26; Calder, 2011, pp. 67–69; Kitchell Jr., 2014, pp. 199–201). The *Iliad's* Book 10, narrating the suggestive tale of Dolon disguised under wolfskin (cf. Steiner, 2015; cf. also *Il.* 16.156–166) already attests to this emphatically. Strong emotions like fascination and dread were certainly shared by the participants of the old religious festival of the Arcadian Λύκαια (Lykaia) in the Peloponnese on which Pausanias the Periegete (8.38.6–7; cf. 2.19.3–4), among others, has reported in the 2nd century AD (see Meuli, 1946, pp. 278–279; Burkert 1983, 84–92).

Also Xenophon, as a commited hunter and keen observer of natural environment, knew well how wolves attack lone prey. For example, in his *Cavalry Commander* (4.18–19) he paints a vivid picture of how these predators behave fighting a hunting dog (Detienne & Svenbro, 1989, p. 149). In the extant sources here is a lot of suggestive passages on how the Greeks perceived wolves (Buxton, 2013) – again, a mixture of fascination, awe and fear. The testimonia are collected by Richter (1978, cols. 960–987) and recently by Louise Calder (2011, pp. 67–69). Among others, she cites Aristophanes (*Av*. 369–370; *Vesp*. 953–955; *Nub*. 351–352), Aristotle (HA, 1.1), Plutarch's Life of Solon (23.4), and the epigrams from Greek Anthology. Cristiana Franco (2014, pp. 28–28, 49–53) gives examples how important are wolves in Aesop's fables. Additionally, Calder (2011, nos. 164–177, cf. pp. 183–185,) has a priceless list of iconographic representations of this carnivore.

So, it can be said the Greek experience of λύκοι was intense and it shed a great deal of light on 'wolfish' imaginery they have created which – otherwise – is also the case of other cultures in the later centuries (Lurker, 1969; McCone, 1987; Pluskowski, 2006). This being so, the case of the religious-military ceremony close to Babylon Xenophon has witnessed (and took the part in) may nevertheless be regarded as a somewhat different feast so far.

Above I have mentioned that the explanation for the sacrifice of a wolf (to be precise, a wolf pup, rather) should be sought in the Persian Achaemenid ritual and Zaratustrian beliefs. However, I must admit that I originally associated Xenophon's example of the killing of wolf in sacrifice with another case of a (terrifying) offering of this predator. This latter case is not so much identical, of course, yet it is relevant because it constitutes, again, irrefutable proof that the Greeks killed wild (predatory) animals, including wolves, as an offering to the deities. Here I am thinking of the famous burning of wild animals in the Peloponnesian Patrae, in a sacrifice to the goddess Artemis. Information on how this sacrificial holiday (called τὰ Λάφρια) was going consequently challenges our optimistic notion of ancient Greek culture as a familiar field (revealing instead as anything else the truth of a well known parlance of the past as 'a foreign country') – it simply remains horrifying to today's sensibilities. Gruesome as it certainly was, the feast, fortunately, was described emotionlessly by the reliable Pausanias, when traveling through Greece in the middle of the second

century AD.[17] Here we are told that in the cruel and terrifying spectacle of animal suffering also a wolf was killed - next to a living baby bear it was tied to some pole and set on fire.

But this rite, however, cannot be the case of the *Anab.* 2.2.9. To put it briefly, in Xenophon the wolf sacrifice is performed under the particular circumstances and, most probably, on the initiative of the Persian commanders and Ariaeus; it was, I would tentatively argue, not a Greek idea. Above all, there is preserved an independent testimony to make such a claim.

Such a possibility was already suggested, rightly, in the 19th century by C. Rehdantz (Rehdantz, Carnuth, 1888, p. 125) who wrote that if wolf was really sacrified, „ihn müßte Ariaios mit sich geführt haben". Such a scenario is also taken into account by Robert Parker (2004, p. 173), who – following the suggestion of Christopher Tuplin – reminds an old Persian rite, during which they sacrifice to the Achaemenid deity Ariman, a demon of darkness. On this episode Rehdantz gave a brief commentary: „Der Wolf galt den Persern als ein Geschöpf des Angramain (Angra Manyiu – Ariman vel Ahriman – B. B.), welcher den Devas, den bösen Geisteren der Finsternis, gebietet". The basis for these claims is a highly fascinating information recorded by Plutarch of Chaeronea. The very dark rite is described by him in the essay *De Iside et Osiride*, §46 (= *Mor*. 369e-f). He has written that Zoroaster:

> ἐδίδαξε <δὲ> τῷ μὲν εὐκταῖα θύειν καὶ χαριστήρια, τῷ δ' ἀποτρόπαια καὶ σκυθρωπά. πόαν γάρ τινα κόπτοντες ὄμωμι καλουμένην ἐν ὅλμῳ τὸν Ἅιδην ἀνακαλοῦνται καὶ τὸν σκότον, εἶτα μίξαντες αἵματι λύκου σφαγέντος εἰς τόπον ἀνήλιον ἐκφέρουσι καὶ ῥίπτουσι. καὶ γὰρ τῶν φυτῶν νομίζουσι τὰ μὲν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ θεοῦ, τὰ δὲ τοῦ κακοῦ δαίμονος εἶναι, καὶ τῶν ζῴων ὥσπερ κύνας καὶ ὄρνιθας καὶ χερσαίους ἐχίνους τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, τοῦ [δὲ] φαύλου μῦς ἐνύδρους εἶναι·
>
> Zoroaster has also taught that men should make votive offerings and thank-offerings to Oromazes, and averting and mourning offerings to Areimanius. They pound up in a mortar a certain plant called omomi at the same time invoking Hades and Darkness; then they mix it with the blood of a wolf that has been sacrificed, and carry it out and cast it into a place where the sun never shines. In fact, they believe that some of the plants belong to the good god and others to the evil daemon; so also of the animals they think that dogs, fowls, and hedgehogs, for example, belong to the good god, but that water-rats belong to the evil one. (tr. F. C. Babbitt, Loeb)

This passus in Plutarch has sparked a debate among modern experts on Achaemenid religion. For there is a controversy over whether the mention of a blood sacrifice to an evil deity implies that Plutarch is describing Zervanism (as advocated by Benveniste but disapproved by Zaehner). The discussion was summarized by Gwyn Griffiths in his thorough commentary on Plutarch's essay (1970, pp. 474–475), although he does not address, unfortunately, the very fact of the Zoroastrian wolf sacrifice itself and why exactly this carnivore, as well as how, possibly, the ancient Persians may have understood wolf's blood in this ritual (cf. recently Moazami, 2015). In any case, to

[17] 7.18.11–13; see especially the two fundamental studies by Piccaluga, 1982, pp. 243–277, and Pirenne-Delforge, 2006, pp. 111–129; also Lane Fox 1989, pp. 90–91. So is with the abhorring Roman festival of killing pregnant cows, described by Varro.

return to Xenophon, it seems more than likely that the sacrifice at Babylon, as described in *Anabasis*, 2.2.9, would be a ritual of Persian origin, a Persian 'contribution' to this sacrifice and oath. At the gates of Babylon it was then not the greedy Greek mercenary band of the Ten Thousand but Ariaeus and his military staff who had a wolf pup with them, taken for the very purpose of sacrificing it and thus sanctioning the military pact. It seems most likely that the Persians kept wolves in confinement and used the cubs for such or similar occasions.

Plutarch's essay remains instructive, for two reasons. First, because it demonstrates a fascination of imperial-era intellectuals with 'exotic' religions. (Here, usually, Mithra, comes into mind.) That was an obvious phenomenon in the Roman Empire. Second, because it provides a very plausible explanation for why a wolf also appears in Xenophon when narrating the Greco-Persian military pact and oath, sanctioned by slaughtering animals. As we saw above, the Greeks occasionally slaughtered wolves in sacrifice, so it was no surprise to the mercenary hoplites (unlike later scribes and readers of the *Anabasis*, who were surprised by this) that a wolf was among the victims. We can infer this also from the way Xenophon – witness and participant himself – described the episode, in one breath (one would like to say) listing the carnivore alongside the traditional victims.

A great span of the time that had passed since the expedition of the Ten Thousand made that later readers and copyists of the *Anabasis* text may have found the noun 'wolf' incomprehensible. Small wonder. They were no longer familiar with historical realities and the Achaemenid religious context, so it was assumed by them (logically) that 'wolf' seemed to be the result of an error by someone working on a manuscript. Today's approach is more nuanced and current critical editions of the text (Hude & Peters, 1972; Dillery, 1998) do not treat the noun as a marginal gloss (γλώσσα), but keep it in the text without even including it in square brackets.

3. Fazit

In antiquity bestiaries were not written, at least of the kind that were popular later, in the Middle Ages, well, unless one considers the late antique *Physiologus* (literally: *A Treatise on Nature*) as being a prototype of a medieval bestiary compilations. If there was such a compendium, however, the wolf would certainly have taken a prominent place in it, for this animal, as Detienne and Svenbro (1989, p. 148) wrote, enjoyed 'the high esteem' with the Greeks. Yet, unabashed admiration, however, is very often not far to admiration lined with apprehension. Apprehension (or awe, as you wish), must have accompanied the Greek mercenaries at the ceremony, I suppose. If not his companions, Xenophon certainly knew quite a bit about Persian rituals, as his epic *Cyropaedia* proves (e.g., 7.5.53, on Mithra; also see *Oec*. 4.24). Thus Ariaeus' adding a wolf to the traditional list of Greek sacrificial animals, was not, most probably, for Xenophon a strange idea; in all likehood, he also must have known that in the Achaemenid beliefs the wolf was connected with Ahriman. Modern students convincingly stress out this fact, so, for example, in his excellent

contribution Moazami (2015) writes that „Predators such as felines and wolves were also creatures of Evil Spirit"; it is also well known that in Zaratustrian beliefs wolves belonged to 'The *xrafstra*-category' (de Jong, 2002, p. 134).

The oath sanctified by the killing of the wolf pup was supposed to be a guarantee that the Persians would lead the armies of the Greeks safely through the unknown Mesopotamian wilderness – neither using cunning stratagems nor resorting to treachery. As it turned out, nothing came of it, and someone might ironically say that the poor pup died in vain. But to say so would mean, of course, to adopt our perspective, today. Be that as it may, however, it does not change my strong conviction that the unfortunate young wolf, bred (most likely) in captivity, was really then brought by Ariaeus and his men to share the fate of the rest of animals that were led in the rear of the army of the Cyreaneans.

So, to close this small contribution: the wild animal was included in Xenophon's text not because of a scribal error; it was included because the old weteran from Cunaxa, when writing down his memoirs (that's, *Anabasis*) – most probably in Scillous near Olympia – has kept in memory that suggestive moment when once he himself had really dipped his sword (ξίφος) in the carnivore's blood. Behind the wolf in the text once was the real animal.

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