

The Chagga scapegoat purification ritual and another re-reading of the goat of *Azazel* in Leviticus 16.

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Introduction

The Chagga people of Tanzania live “in the shadow of one of Earth’s most magnificent structures” (Dundas 1924:5). The structure being referred to here is none other than the great Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa. When Johannes Rebmann, one of the pioneer European missionaries and explorers to set foot in the interior of East Africa in the recent period, sent reports back to his home of a snow-capped mountain in East Africa on the Equator which he had witnessed on November 10, 1848, his report was dismissed by one **William Desborough Cooley** in the *Athenium*, a scientific publication of 1852 in Europe as a “most

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delightful mental recognition, only not supported by the evidence of his senses” (see Dundas 1924:11). Cooley had concluded: “I deny altogether the existence of snow on Mount Kilimanjaro. It rests entirely on the testimony of Mr Rebmann.... And he ascertained it, not with his eyes, but by inference and the visions of his imagination” (see also John Reader, *Kilimanjaro*, 1982:9). So easily was Rebmann dismissed in the name of science.

The Chagga have a special affection and attraction to Kibo, the higher of the two peaks of Mt. Kilimanjaro. Dundas has noted that to the Chagga people Kibo is:

the embodiment of all that is beautiful, eternal and strengthening ... the Chagga man has a great love of his country and is more possessed of a sense of nationality than any other Africans known to me. In truth one cannot but expect this, for not only is the magnificence of the mountain such as must compel attachment, but as soon as the mountain dwellers leave it, life becomes intolerable for them. Kibo is the great landmark and focus of the Chagga people” (1924:39).

Moreover,

the dead are buried with face towards Kibo; the side of the village facing Kibo is the honourable side, where the house master is buried....He who comes from above – by which is meant from the direction of Kibo – must give greeting first because he comes from the fortune bringing side. Filial affection requires that a son should face Kibo whilst washing, lest it be said that he thrusts his father into the plain. When meeting a superior on the road it is customary to pass on the lower side of the road, giving him the more honourable side towards Kibo” (Dundas 1924:39).

Due to shortage of land and the very high density of population in Chaggaland, many Chagga have migrated as businessmen of all kinds, artisans and technicians, professionals and migrant labour to all parts of Tanzania. Indeed the Chagga are to be found in almost all the major cities of East Africa trying to make an honest living. It is sometimes said that the Chagga in diaspora have more or less taken over the role of the Indian dukawallah in Tanzania, and indeed in most of the major towns of East Africa. Nonetheless, throughout Tanzania there is a common saying that a Chagga never forgets his origin in Kilimanjaro. Every year during Christmas and other major feast days, long processions of crowded buses and other means of

travel bring the sons and daughters of Kilimanjaro in uncountable numbers back to their native land from the four winds carrying back to the land of the ancestors whatever gifts and riches fortune has granted them in their sojourning. Some jokingly refer to it as a Chagga's annual *hajj*. The Jew's "next year in Jerusalem" is somewhat like the Chagga's "this year in Kilimanjaro".

Like a number of invented communities in the long and on-going process of ethnic, national and social formation in East Africa who exemplify the dynamic process of the extinction and formation of new ethnic identities such as the Meru of Kenya, the Wagogo of central Tanganyika or the Abaluyia of western Kenya, the Waswahili of the East African coast, inter alia, the peoples who now form the Chagga ethnic group are of diverse origins and speak a cluster of closely related dialects forming a linguistic chain or continuum. The Honourable Charles Dundas, OBE, an anthropologist and senior colonial official in the former Tanganyika Territory, now Tanzania, observed in his *Asili na Habari za Wachagga* (1932:7) that "Tangu asili Wachagga si watu wa kabila moja, wala asili yao haitoki Kilimanjaro ... Wazee hao wote wa zamani waliotangulia kuhamia huko walikuwa karibu wote Wakamba, Wataita, Wapare, Washambala, Wamasai, na Wandorobo". [*i.e. From the beginning the Chagga were not from a single ethnic group, neither are they originally from the Kilimanjaro area... All those original inhabitants who migrated there were nearly all from the Wataita, Wapare, Washambala, Wamasai and the Wandorobo ethnic groups*"]. Earlier on Dundas wrote in his now classic *Kilimanjaro and Its People* (1924:32) that:

There is no common name for the inhabitants of this mountain for they originate from various tribes, and even from different races. And having settled in communities whose limits were in the main naturally demarcated by the deep river valleys of the mountain, they know themselves only as the people of this and that ridge, as for instance Wamashame, Wamoshi and so forth.

Dundas notes that although to this people "the tribal name Chagga has been applied, the origin thereof is not known to me, and to all intents and purposes the people themselves have by now adopted this generic name" (Dundas 1924:32). Writing some years earlier, Johannes Raum, the German Lutheran missionary and Bible translator had observed that:

Der Name Wadschagga stammt von den Swahilileuten. Die Nachbarn der

Kilimandjarobevölkerung nennen diese auch: Wakirima Bergleute (kirima Berg). Die Kae und Pareleute nennen das Dchaggaland auch: Waha. Alle diese Namen finden sich hier nicht. Wenn die Dchaggaleute von sich sprechen, nennen sie sich: wandu wa mnden = Leute, die in den Pflanzung wohnen (Raum 1909.1964:1).

(English translation: *The name Wachagga is of Swahili origin. Kilimanjaro people are called Wakirima by their neighbours, which means people from the mountain (kirima-mountain). Chaggaland is called Waha by the Kae and Pare people. But these names are not to be found among the Chagga themselves. When referring to themselves the Chagga people call themselves – Wandu wa mnden – which means the people who live in the [banana] plantations.)*

He adds: “Von einem Dschaggavolk im strengen Sinn kann man nicht sprechen”, i.e. in a strict sense, one cannot speak of a Chagga people (see Johannes Raum’s *Versuch einer Grammatik der Dschaggasprache: Moschi-Dialekt*, 1909. 1964:1). The people to whom this term Chagga is now given are said to have migrated to the mountain from the neighbouring territories and communities. The roots of the Chagga are to be traced to the Kamba, Dabida, Taveta, Maasai, Pare, Shambaa, Kahe, Meru, Dorobo, Pokomo, Gikuyu, among other ethnic groups. Johannes Raum puts it as follows:

Über die Besiedlung, welche die jetzige Verteilung der Landschaften zum Resultat hatte, besteht die Überlieferung: Ein Teil der Einwohner kam von der Steppe, ein Teil vom Urwald. Die letzten Einwanderer trafen also schon Urbewohner am Berge an. Die Ureinwohner des Berges waren wohl reine Bantu, nächste Verwandte der Wateita, Wakamba, Waschambaa und Wapare, mit diesen zu den «jüngeren» Bantu gehörig und aus dem Norden eingewandert ... So sind die Einwohner der Landschaft Mbokomu (westlich von Moschi) eingewandert aus Pokomo am Tana ... Mit den ursprünglichen Besiedlern, den Bantu, haben dann Mischungen nicht nur mit hamitischem, sondern auch semitischem Blut stattgefunden ... Zusammenfassend können wir sagen: Die Dschagga bilden keine ethnische Einheit. Der Grundstock der Bevölkerung sind die Bantus; es ist aber ein starker Zusatz nicht nur von hamitischem (Masai), sondern auch von semitischem (Wakilindi) Blut zu konstatieren. Der reine Bantu macht sich kenntlich durch kürzere, plumpere Gestalt (starker Prognathismus und

wulstige Lippen) and dunklere Farbe (Raum 1909. 1964: 2–3).

(English translation: *There is a tradition concerning the settlement of the land which has resulted in the present division of the area: Some of the migrants came from the plains while others came from the forest areas. So when the last group of settlers arrived, they found people who were already living there on the mountain. The first people who lived on the mountain were probably of pure Bantu stock, close relatives of the Wateita, Wakamba, Washambaa and Wapare people. Together with these groups they belong to the more recent Bantu people who moved in from the North.... For example the inhabitants of the Mbokomu area, west of Moshi, migrated from the Tana river... The original migrants of Bantu background have intermarried with people of Hamitic as well as Semitic origin.... We can thus conclude as follows: The Chagga people do not constitute ethnic homogeneity (unity). The ethnic foundation of this people is Bantu, although there is a strong element of Hamitic (Maasai) as well as Semitic (Wakilindi) origin. The pure Bantu man has a short and heavy stature (strong prognathism and protruding lips) and is of dark colour.*)

Raum's claim of a Semitic element among the Chagga is of course far-fetched. It derives most likely from prevailing classifications of African peoples and languages at the time. The Maasai are now classified as Nilotic and not Hamitic. What Raum calls Wakilindi refers to the Mbugu or Maa of Lushoto in the Usambara mountains whose language is currently classified as Cushitic. He writes: "Die herrschenden Sippen, d.h. also Wakilindi aus Usambara, demnach ursprünglich semitischer Herkunft, ein Produkt der arabischen Invasion. Daher der schlanke, hellfarbige Typus dieser Sippen" (Raum 1909.1964:3) [i.e. "*The ruling clans, i.e. the Wakilindi from the Usambara mountains are originally of semitic origin, and are a result of the Arab invasion. Hence the tall, light skinned human type of these clans*"]. Their language is however not Semitic and has never been classified as such. It is clearly Cushitic. Cushitic is what usually went under the discredited term Hamitic, with its associated racist Hamitic myth. Here Raum was probably operating under the influence of this Hamitic myth whereby all evidence of "civilization" or "development" in sub-Saharan Africa is associated with lighter skinned intruders from the "civilized" north. Happily no-one seriously propounds this myth any longer.

The diversity of the Chagga is easily noticeable in their distinct and differing physical features as in their distinct and differing dialects. A clear example of this

diversity can be seen, for instance, in the word for water in various Chagga localities – *muha* in Shira (or Kibongoto), *murra* in Machame, *mudha* in Kibosho, *mringa* in Moshi and Marangu, *mota* in Ngasseni, etc (see for example Dundas 1924:48). The following dialect groups are recognised – Siha, Masama, Machame and Kibosho in Hai or Western Chagga, Uru, Old Moshi, Vunjo, Kilema Vunjo, Marangu and Mwika in Central Chaggaland and Kimashati and Usseri in Rombo or eastern Chaggaland (see Edgar Polome and C.P. Hill, eds. *Language in Tanzania*, 1980:15). Yet in this diversity, a unity can be discerned. It is discernible in the closeness of their dialects which share varying degrees of mutual intelligibility according to their position in the Chagga dialect cluster or continuum. It is also clearly discernible in their cultural and religious practices which are commonly shared. Both Raum and Dundas presuppose this common cultural and religious unity of the Chagga. Thus for example Dundas writes: “That there are marked variations of custom and dialect is not surprising, seeing that the tribe has no common origin; rather one may be astonished that, in general, common principles of custom and a more or less common language have been evolved” (Dundas 1924:48).

In general the Chagga people reinforce this perception of ethnic unity and homogeneity at the level of traditional religious and cultural belief and practice. Hence an outsider can hardly tell the difference between a Chagga from Machame, Kibosho, Moshi, Kirua, Kilema, Marangu, Mamba, Mkuu or Usseri. Even the Chagga themselves have this problem, unless they use the dialects they speak as a basis for making the distinction. This is compounded by the fact that Swahili is so widely spoken and used by the Chagga, even when speaking among themselves. Some younger generation urban Chagga no longer speak any of the Chagga dialects. It is not surprising then that some Chagga openly question the usefulness of having a translation of the Bible in any of their dialects. They fear that their language is threatened with extinction in the not too distant future, and is progressively and fast being replaced by Swahili, the main *lingua franca* in the area. This fear does not however have a firm or reasonable linguistic justification. Hence the current involvement of the local Chagga churches and the Bible Society of Tanzania in the three on-going projects to translate the Bible in the Machame, Mochi and Vunjo dialects.

Religious and Cultural Background

The Chagga are generally thought to be monotheistic in their conception of God in traditional religious practice. This is however a debatable point. The Chagga

name for God is *Ruwa* or *Iruva*. It is held by some that for the Chagga, *Ruwa* also referred to the Sun (see Dundas, Mbiti, Urrio and others). Whether these two are identical is also not clear. At the present time the Machame-Chagga use the term *Nkyeere* to refer to the sun while the Vunjo-Chagga use the term *Mnengeri* to refer to the same. Evidently in the pre-Christian period, the term used to refer to the sun and to God was one and the same, i.e. *Ruwa*. Indeed *ruwa* (or its variants) is a term commonly used by a number of Bantu languages to refer to the sun (See for example Harjula 1969 where the idea of God and the sun in the thought of a number of East African Bantu communities such as the Meru, Kuria, the Mbugwe, Sonjo, Pare, Issanju, Iramba, Gogo, Pimbwe, among others is discussed). Those who hold that *Ruwa* may be identical with the sun complicate the picture by citing traditions which suggest that perhaps the moon is *Ruwa's* consort. This tradition is however not given much weight or taken seriously. It would appear that according to Chagga belief, *Ruwa* did not create the universe *ex nihilo*. Thus Dundas writes: "If asked who made the Sun and Earth, the Mchagga says that they always existed, but of the stars it is sometimes said that they are *Ruwa's* children" (Dundas 1924:107). Or that "*Ruwa* was not really the Creator of mankind, he merely liberated the first human beings from some mysterious vessel by bursting it. On this account he is known as *Ruwa mopara wandu*, i.e. "God who burst out men" (Dundas 1924:108). But *Ruwa* is also referred to as *Mombona*, (i.e. the one who gave birth to me), *Kilemi* (i.e. the one who is impossible), *Matetera* or *Matengera* (i.e. the one who sustains and preserves all things, *Fumvu lya Mku* (i.e. the most ancient of mountains or Rock of ages), *Molunga soka na mndo* (i.e. the one who gives the power of reproduction to all living things, and is the source of life), among other titles. In any case *Ruwa* is at the apex of the Chagga hierarchy or chain of beings. He is the highest being or the supreme being, *Ruwa Kishamba*. He certainly has no competitors. *Ruwa* is distant from the affairs of everyday life and for the most part is rarely approached. Hence Chagga religious life is dominated more by spirits than by *Ruwa*. These are spirits believed to be intermediaries between humans and *Ruwa*.

The spirits are next in the hierarchy to *Ruwa*. There are two categories of spirits – the nature spirits and the human spirits. Nature spirits are those usually associated with natural objects and forces. Human spirits are those of dead ancestors (members of the community who inhabit the world of the dead but were once living). The dead whose memory in the land of the living is recent and whose power can be related to their names in real life, are sometimes referred to as the living dead. These are believed to be still a part of their families and therefore live close to

their former homes. The spirits are an important category and a chief object of numerous sacrifices. John Mlay and Godson Maanga (translators of the Chagga-Vunjo Bible who assisted me in the research for this paper) write that:

“It is believed by the Chagga that between God and human beings there are other beings known as spirits. These are agents acting on God’s instructions. These are sent anywhere God wishes. They live among people and are more concerned with the day to day life of family than Ruwa himself. These are highly respected and feared by the people. They normally make demands on the living. Demands are made by inflicting the community in one way or another or by causing a misfortune or disease, until the required demand is fulfilled by offering of sacrifices. The offering of such sacrifices constitutes the practice of spirit worship among the Chagga” (memo, October 1997).

In the human community of the living, the hierarchy starts with the *Mangyi* or chief at the top, followed by religious specialists, *wachilyi* (or the *Mangyi* representatives), the elders, the adults, the initiated youth, uninitiated youth and finally children and infants. Animals, plants and inanimate life complete the chain. Degree and extent of power depends on position in this hierarchy of being. Thus the Chagga are not unlike other African communities studied and described by such scholars of African religion and life as Placide Tempels (*Bantu Philosophy*, 1959), John Mbiti (*African Religions and Philosophy*, 1969), Ernst Wendland (“Traditional Central African Religion” in Philip C. Stine & Ernst R. Wendland eds. *Bridging the Gap – African Traditional Religion and Bible Translation*, 1990), and many others.

Dundas talks of spirit worship among the Chagga (see Dundas 1924:125) which consists of the practice of making sacrifices to the spirits in order to appease or placate them. Worship of spirits is probably not the *mot juste* to describe this situation. The practices giving rise to this impression of worship constitute the sacrificial system of the Chagga. One of the keys to understanding the rationale and essence of these practices or the sacrificial system itself is to ask oneself what the object or function of these practices is in the entire system of the Chagga life world. It would appear that these sacrifices cannot be understood solely in terms of spirits – clan, ancestral or any other category of spirits. The sacrifices to appease or placate the spirits are in a sense intended to restore harmony and balance in the entire Chagga world system. The sacrifices

are intended to bring about reconciliation, peace, well being, restoration of relations among all aggrieved parties – human and non-human, living or dead, physical or spiritual, human and non-human, etc. As long as this balance is maintained there is peace, *Ufoo*, *Uforo*, harmony, happiness, prosperity, health and life. The converse holds whenever this delicate balance is upset. It is no wonder that sacrifices abound in the Chagga life world. As Dundas somewhat exaggeratively and dramatically put it:

The sacrifices here described are not all that are demanded by the various spirits worshipped. Whatever happens, wherever a man goes, what he dreams, the good and evil omens he encounters, all are occasions for sacrifices. And so the luckless Mchagga suffers a constant depletion of his small and large stock in vain endeavour to live in peace and to ward off evil by appeasing greedy spirits. Of all his animals there seems to be but one which is not useful for sacrifice, namely a castrated ram, and this is specially reserved for a present to the Chief. Those who imagine that the African leads a carefree life may gain some idea from these pages of the constant worry and consternation that afflicts him, more particularly as in most cases of concrete distress, such as sickness, it is hardly likely to be disposed of by a single sacrifice, and because so long as there is the fear of an unappeased spirit there is a haunting dread of woes untold yet to come (Dundas 1924: 149–150).

H. Adolphi and Johannes Schanz, German Lutheran missionaries in Chaggaland, writing at the turn of the 20th Century in a book published in 1902 (revised and updated edition, 1912), give credence to this view in their claim that during that period Mangyi Marealle of Marangu fell sick for a long time, in the course of which he sacrificed nearly one hundred head of cattle to appease the spirits. “Mangi Marealle wa Marangu wakati mmoja alipokuwa mgonjwa kwa muda mrefu, karibu ng’ombe dume 100 walichinjwa kama kafara. Wachagga wengi wakati wa maradhhi ya muda mrefu nyumbani iliwabidi wawachinje wanyama wote walioko nyumbani kwa kafara” (See Marealle II, T.L.M, transl. 1997:18–19) [*i.e. When Mangi or Chief Marealle of Marangu was at one time sick for a long time, nearly 100 male cattle were slaughtered for sacrifice. Whenever sickness of long duration befell a Chagga, it was thought necessary to slaughter all the cattle in the home*].

Two categories of sacrifices may be distinguished; namely those offered on behalf of the entire community or country and those offered on behalf of particular families, clans or individuals. Public sacrifices were usually offered in order to appease the ancestral spirits of the ruling *Mangyi* or chief and in some cases the ancestral spirits of former chiefs, in times of widespread communal or social calamities, famine, epidemics, drought, floods, etc. Private sacrifices on the other hand are given to appease clan spirits or those of the living dead for various misfortunes within the clan or family, sickness, failure, etc. These include both paternal and maternal spirits i.e those of the right hand and those of left hand, respectively. Generally on the maternal side spirits are recognised up to the great-grandfather's uncle while on the paternal side they are recognised up to great-great-grandfather's father. Beyond these they are generally known as the forgotten ones i.e *Warimu wangyundukyia* (or *Warimu wangiinduka*). Those spirits still even farther than the forgotten ones are referred to as the disintegrated ones i.e *Walenge*. The *Walenge* usually receive no sacrifice except in cases where they are recognised as clan founders, or of the chief's family, or the first to settle in the land (See Dundas 1924:125–129). Male and female spirits of both the right and left hand are revered and offered sacrifices. In both cases bulls, sheep or goats of various characteristics or peculiarities are assigned to various spirits and slaughtered following the laid down rules and procedures at the *Shinjonyi* (or *Kishanjionyi*) usually in the banana groves, with the animal tied to a tree called a *Mfifina*. Further the way in which the various parts of a sacrificed animal are labelled and shared follows specific rules and procedure. As Dundas has it: "the carcass of an animal slaughtered is cut up into specific portions, each of which has a name and is an appropriate portion of particular person. Among the spirits likewise a corresponding distribution is observed.." (Dundas 1924:184).

Some sacrifices are of a purificatory nature and are usually performed in cases where individuals have broken various taboos or violated some custom or law, or undergone an experience considered to make one unclean. For example, if a woman strikes her husband with a cooking pot, or bites a man. Or if anyone greets another by the name of a dead person, or if a man is wounded by a leopard, or if a man pronounces a curse, etc. These and other violations make one unclean and call for the offender to be cleansed or purified ritually. All sacrifices including purification rites have clearly defined and laid down rules or procedures governing their performance.

Clan and family elders as well as traditional experts are called upon to administer

the purification rites. Among these are diviners and various medicine men who may assist to identify the causes as well as the spirits to be appeased. Diviners are especially important and central actors in this process. Some diviners are also recognised as great dreamers. Truthful dreamers are greatly respected but impostors and false dreamers, the *weonguo shisuku* (or *wegamba shishuka*) are looked down upon.

In a certain sense all sacrifice is a form of scapegoatism. René Girard has vigorously argued this point. Richard Kearney succinctly summarised it as follows:

human communities are based on the ritual sacrifice of an innocent victim. The consensus required for social coexistence between competitive humans is made possible by a collective act of projection whereby some victimized outsider becomes the carrier of all the violence, guilt and aggression which is setting one neighbour against another. The victimization of this scapegoat serves to engender a sense of solidarity in the tribe now reunited in a common act of persecution. Once the sacrifice is completed and harmony restored, communities often forget their hatred for the scapegoat and actually come to revere or deify the initial victim. It was after all the same victim's ritual oblation that saved them from their own internecine rivalry. The scapegoat thus becomes, in retrospect, a founding symbol for the community in question (see Richard Kearney 1995:1)

Girard has identified four essential characteristics basic to scapegoatism, namely: a social or cultural crisis, a crime which is considered to be the cause of this crisis, a culprit accused not because of his or her direct involvement in the crime but because of some affinity or association with it, and finally a violence frequently attributed a sacred character (see Richard Kearney's summary 1995:3). As Kearney neatly puts it : "The basic aim of persecution texts is to attribute responsibility for the social crisis to a culprit/victim and then to restore social order (differentiation) by destroying or expelling this alleged culprit from the body politic he/she has been polluting" (Kearney 1995:3).

The bulls, sheep and goats that were frequently offered as sacrifices and as ritual oblations in Chagga society, as in many other African communities, are in a real sense the means of salvation, of escape and of restoring peace and harmony in the society. These unfortunate innocents are substituted for the real culprits. They are victimised in the place of the humans responsible for creating the **crisis situation**

with the ultimate or even unconscious aim of “restoring the force of life” (Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion*, 1997:193–243). Magesa writes: “The sacrifices, offerings, and attitudinal and behavioral changes mandated by divination are intended to re-establish harmony and equilibrium in life” (p. 234).

The Chagga scapegoat purification ritual and the goat of Azazel/azazel in Lev 16 compared

Some Chagga scapegoats are of special interest in the light of Leviticus 16,5–22. According to a leading chronicler of Chagga customs and ritual, Mangyi Petro Itosi Marealle, Mwtitori wa Vunjo, MBE in his now classic text *Maisha ya Mchagga hapa Duniani na Ahera* (1947), some forms of sacrifice involved the animal of sacrifice being led to some lonely place without human habitation and there let loose to disappear or get lost in the forest or wilderness. Such an animal was usually a sacrifice to take away sin or some serious violation of a taboo, or some serious disease or calamity in the family or community. This was usually done in accordance with specific instructions or directions from a diviner or dreamer. Thus he writes there as follows:

Tambiko jingine ni kumtolea Ruwa mafahali wawili wa ng’ombe walio hai waachiwe waende porini wakupotelea huko. Katika tambiko hili la wanyama walio hai, husemwa kuwa iwapo kwa bahati mtu amempata mmojawapo wa hao wanyama huko porini, atakuwa tajiri sana kwa kupata wanyama wengi nyumbani, lakini ikijulikana kwamba huyu mtu amempata mnyama hai aliyetolewa tambiko kwa Ruwa, akamfuga kwa siri, huadhibiwa kufa, kwani husemwa kuwa atarudisha baa nchini (Marealle 1947:66–67).

[English translation: Another ritual, was the offering to Ruwa (God) of two live cattle, who were then left to wander into the wilderness and to disappear there. In this type of ritual where two live animals are offered to Ruwa, it is believed that in case anyone came across such animals which had been offered to Ruwa such a person is blessed with many cattle. But if such a person knew that the animal or animals are an offering to Ruwa and secretly keeps them, he is sentenced to die for he brings calamity or disaster befalls to the land.]

Writing on this type of sacrifice among the Chagga, Dr Leonidas Kalugila a

professor of the Old Testament at the Lutheran Makumira Theological Seminary in Arusha in the neighbourhood of the Kilimanjaro area, and who was married to a Chagga from the Vunjo area, in the course of his investigation on this subject, confirms:

“Na inajulikana kati ya Wachagga kuwa ikiwa fulani alikuwa mgonjwa sana mbuzi fulani alitafutwa na mzee wa ukoo ambaye alikuwa kama kuhani alitemea huyo mbuzi mate na kuomba Ruwa ili mgonjwa apone halafu huyo mbuzi aliachiliwa apotee porini” (Kalugila, *Vitabu vya Agano la Kale*, 1979:45–46, see also his *Utangulizi wa Theologia ya Agano la Kale*, 1991:78).

[English translation: *It is well known among the Chagga that whenever someone was seriously sick, a goat was offered and a clan elder who played the role of priest would spit saliva on that goat, while offering prayers to Ruwa to heal the sick person. Thereafter the goat was left to wander into the wilderness and there to disappear.*]

On a recent trip to the Kilimanjaro area, I suggested to Mr Seth Kitange, General Secretary of the powerful and influential Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, that Mangyi Petro Itosi Marealle MBE, Kalugila and others probably took over the similar Leviticus custom and ritual mistakenly and falsely understanding it to be a Chagga custom. Kitange emphatically argued that this custom is uniquely of Chagga origin and has no connection whatsoever to the Leviticus story in terms of origin. He pointed out that he himself had independently heard this custom and ritual narrated to him by his own father, who passed away not long ago aged about a hundred years or more. Moreover his father did not receive it from Mangyi Petro Marealle but from the *wasahuye*, the community elders. He reminded me moreover, that until now the Chagga do not possess the complete Bible in their own tongue. The New Testament exists only in one dialect – the Kimochi, having been translated by the German missionary Bruno Gutmann and published in 1939.

No book of the Old Testament has ever been translated and published to this day in any of the Chagga dialects. It is only now that Chagga Bible translators are beginning to deal with translation issues of the Old Testament in their own tongue! The missionaries who arrived in Chaggaland in the 1890s were more concerned with propagating the Gospel message of the New Testament. It appears that **not**

much emphasis was given to the Old Testament. Of course many of the important stories of the Old Testament must have been retold, but not such details such as those of the Leviticus scapegoat at issue here. Kitange further pointed out that claiming something from Leviticus or from the Bible as Chagga would have served no purpose whatsoever, especially if everyone knew that not to be the case. Moreover, someone like Mangyi Petro Itosi Marealle, MBE, who was a respected chief and custodian of the integrity and purity of tribal customs and values would have had nothing to gain in claiming for the Chagga a custom everyone knew to be non-Chagga. The fact that there is independent confirmation of this Chagga scapegoat tradition from other diverse sources among the Chagga is evidence of its independent origination among the Chagga. It has been suggested that this particular ritual is local and originates as with most Chagga rituals with one of the particular founding clans who inhabited the mountain.

This Chagga scapegoat ritual involving the goat or cow of sacrifice being let loose to disappear in the desert or wilderness was intended to take away the particular problem of the person or persons making the offering. However, should those who had given such an animal as an offering thereafter ever come in contact with it again knowingly, it thereby became a curse and a source of worse trouble, calamity or disaster. If however a stranger or someone with no link to those who gave it as an offering found it, such an animal was supposed to bring abundant blessings and wealth.

For the Chagga the question of the scapegoat going to the devil or to the evil one does not arise. Neither does the scapegoat carry the burden/problem of the one offering it to an evil being. As Mangyi Itori Marealle has written, the Chagga did not recognize the existence of such an evil being, evil spirits or even angels. Thus he writes: "Wachaga hawakumjua Shetani, wala pepo wala malaika" (Marealle 1947:68), [*i.e. The Chagga did not have any concept or knowledge of Satan, evil spirits or angels*"].

It is worth mentioning here in passing another scapegoat ritual which according to some witnesses is still practised to this day by some non-Christians, for example among the Mbokomu Chagga. According to Pastor Boarnege Moshi, one of the translators of the Bible in the Kimochi – Chagga dialect – there is a certain deep well in the Mbokomu area referred to as Mrambo in the area of the Kimambo clan. Previously whenever there was a severe drought in the area and water became scarce, a young teenage girl, a virgin of about 18 years or so would be thrown alive in the well as an offering to the spirits. As the well was so deep she would normally sink to the bottom never to be seen

or heard of again. This was believed to bring about a positive change in the availability of water as well as an end to the drought condition. Later on in the place of a live teenage virgin girl, a live female lamb of about 6–12 months, also presumed virgin who had never given birth, was substituted. This ritual is expected to rectify the problem afflicting the community. An elder or elders from the Kimambo clan assumed the task of performing this ritual on behalf of the community. Pastor Moshi writing on this says: “Katika siku hizi bado desturi hii huendelea na kuna watu wachache ambao sio wakristo wanaoendelea kudumisha utoaji huo. Utoaji huo hufanyika kuondoa hasira ya ‘warumu’ (dead ancestors or spirits) ili wasilete adhabu kwa watu wa eneo hilo” (memo, June 1998). *[This custom is still alive and is practised by a few people who are not Christian, i.e traditionalists. They continue to offer this sacrifice in order to appease the dead ancestors or spirits and to avert disaster or calamity on the people.]*

Azuwo Onibere of Ile-ife, Nigeria, observed in an excellent paper presented to the IOSOT Congress held in Jerusalem in 1986 that: “The scapegoat concept in Lev 16 finds an admirable parallel in African tradition” (Onibere 1986:196). He offers some interesting examples from southern Nigeria – such as the Edi ceremony from Ugbo tradition where a human scapegoat was used to bear the sins of the people but has now been replaced by a substitute goat; or the Urhobo people of Bendel State, Nigeria who use a white cock for the same purpose. “The offender, without the assistance of a priest, takes a white cock to a flowing stream. He transfers his sins to the scapegoat by confession, cleansing his body with the cock and circling the cock over his head three times. After the third circle, the offender throws the live cock into the fast flowing stream. While the cock carries his sins to the abode of the supernatural, he returns home relieved of his burden” (Onibere 1986:198).

In the traditions of the Emure-Ile of Owo-Yorubaland, both a dog and a goat are used as scapegoats. The dog is believed to take away the sins of the family or community and is after the ritual ceremonies “thrown into *Igboro-oro* (a dangerous forest) never to be seen again” (Onibere 1986:199). Similarly in this community a goat which has been substituted for a human sacrifice is also used. The members of the family or community confess their sins and those of their families and lay them onto the head of the goat. The goat is thereafter “driven to the four corners of the town before its final destination in the forest of no return” (Onibere 1986:199).

Central to the Chagga scapegoat ritual or its various African variants is **the role** played by various traditional experts, diviners, mediums, medicinemen, or elders

at various levels – family, clan or entire community in administering the purification rituals or ceremonies. It is they who link the individual, the family or the community to the spirits or the living dead. They control the performance of the ritual and ensure that it is performed in accordance with the rules and procedures inherited and accepted by the ancients. The presence of a priest is therefore not a requirement. In fact in Chagga tradition as in other African communities, there are no professional priests. It is heads of families, clans or communities who play the role of priest, usually assisted by various experts according to need. As John Mlay and Godson Maanga state: “the private sacrifice was conducted by the head of the family who was considered a priest. This head of the family, apart from bearing full responsibility for his respective family, also had to assume the religious responsibilities of his family. Consequently, he presided over all rites of giving offerings and sacrifices concerning the family”.

It seems clear in the case of the animals driven away into the wilderness or forest, away from human habitation, carrying away sins, that immolation or blood letting is not involved. What is central here is the substitution, the process of scapegoating and the taking away from human habitation the offender or his scapegoat. In some serious cases of violation of social taboo, the offender is actually physically removed or expelled from the community, permanently excommunicated from the community never to be seen again. Here the offender is himself or herself the scapegoat, there being no possibility for substitution. Further, the process of cleansing, purifying, expulsion, removal from human space and community is important. It is a removing and a carrying away into the unknown, into forgetfulness, into a non-human space or sphere by means of the scapegoat or the offender himself. It is presumably a taking to the domain of evil or of nothingness, of non-being, but not necessarily a taking to a demon or to the devil!

The expected final result is usually *uforo*, harmony, peace, reconciliation, a return to the normal order, a balance of forces.

We will now take a look at some aspects of the much discussed Leviticus 16 scapegoat ritual which was performed on the day of Purgation (Milgrom) or of Atonement (*Yôm Kippûr*). As James L. Mays (1963:53) clearly puts it:

The purpose of the rite was to effect a general atonement – for the place of worship (sanctuary, tabernacle, altar), for the priest, and for the people. The regular round of confession and sacrifice initiated by individuals would

leave a whole area of sin unresolved. So seriously had Israel come to view sin through the theology of holiness that she felt the land and the people and the very shrine itself to be impure and therefore in danger of being unacceptable to God. The Day of Atonement was God's gracious ordinance to cleanse the whole, that is, to make all eligible for dealings with the present Holy One. Once in the year it was to be done.

Our main focus here is on the two goats which were for the sin-offering. "And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering" (Lev 16,5). One goat is a sin offering for the people and the second goat "carries all their sins away and loses both itself and the sin in the wilderness" [N.H. Snaith, *Leviticus & Numbers (The Century Bible, 1967:112)*]. Snaith observes: "This appears to involve two distinct sin-rites, but both combine to ensure a complete de-sinning rite" (ibid.) as is evident in the Leviticus 16 text under discussion :

v6 And Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. v7 Then he shall take the two goats, and set them before the LORD at the door of the tent of meeting; v8 And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel. v9 And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD, and offer it as a sin offering; v10 But the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel. v11 Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house; he shall kill the bull as a sin offering for himself (Lev 16,6–11, RSV).

At Lev 16,21–22, the final part is described as follows:

v21 And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and send him away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. v22 The goat shall bear all their iniquities upon him to a solitary land; and he shall let the goat go in the wilderness (Lev 16,21–22, RSV).

Snaith citing the Mishnah tract *Yoma* and the Talmud *b. Yoma* adds that the goat

for Azazel “was taken away by a man detailed for this task, and finally pushed backwards over the cliff ‘and it went rolling down, and before it had reached half-way down the hill it was broken in pieces’ (*Yoma*, vi.6)” (Snaith 1967:113). Snaith reminds us that: “the term ‘scapegoat’ first appears in Tyndale, and has become the technical term in the study of comparative religion for such de-sinners, though in popular thought it means one who takes the blame, and to some extent at least innocently suffers for others” (ibid.). Snaith concludes interestingly that “The meaning of the Hebrew word could be simply ‘the goat has gone away’” (ibid.).

Most modern commentators argue that “Azazel” is the proper name of an evil being or demon. Thus Jacob Milgrom (1991:1021) espouses the view that “the most plausible explanation is that Azazel is the name of a demon.” Mays (1963:54) notes that “Azazel is surely regarded here as a personal being. He may have originally been a pagan god or demon to whom unorthodox Israelites made sacrifice. When a goat for Azazel was included in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, the pagan practice was neutralized by joining it to the worship of the Lord, and Azazel was marked off as evil, the source of sin, and hence the place whither impurity which had no place in the congregation, could be returned. Azazel appears in later Jewish angelology as one of the minions of Satan.”

René Péter-Contesse and John Ellington’s statement may be taken to be representative of the position of many modern exegetes. They write, “It may be considered the proper name of a demon inhabiting the desert (that is Azazel). That is the meaning accepted by RSV, TEV, NAB, AT, Bible de la Pleiade, NJV, Segond, TOB, and Mft. *This is not only the most popular interpretation but it is also the most likely*” (my emphasis) (See *A Translators’ Handbook on Leviticus*, 1990:246). In the French edition of the same handbook Peter-Contesse had written concerning Azazel: “ce nom est probablement celui d’un démon hantant le lieux arides...” (Peter-Contesse 1985:181), [i.e. *This name is probably that of a demon that haunts arid or desert places.*] The move from probably, to most plausible, to most likely, to most popular seems to be a common move with respect to this problem. Yet everyone knows that – most probable, or most plausible, or most likely or even most popular does not make this assertion or belief true.

The argument that seems to have led to the “demonological” detour is the feeling that since one goat was for Yahweh and the other for A/azazel, this is a case of “a true parallelism, which demands that the second name, like the first, should be the name of a person” (Roland de Vaux 1961:509). This assumption of a true parallelism

leads de Vaux (1961:509) to argue that: "It is more probable, therefore, that Azazel is the name of a supernatural being, a devil..." That this is "how it is interpreted by the Syriac version, the Targum and even the Book of Enoch, which makes Azazel the prince of the devils, banished to the desert. (We may recall that the Israelites looked on desert places as the dwellings of devils: Is 13,21; 34,11-14; cf. Tob 8,3 and Mt 12,13)" (de Vaux, *ibid.*) seems to validate de Vaux's position.

Such eminent scholars as Jacob Milgrom and David P. Wright lend force to de Vaux's argument by merely reiterating it. They remind us of the four main interpretations of this term namely: a) it is the name of a demon, this being "the dominant view in midrashic literature, dating back to the early postbiblical period" (Milgrom 1991:1020); b) it is a place name meaning something like "precipitous place", "a rough and difficult place", "a rough and rocky terrain", "rugged cliff", "rough ground", referring to the goat's destination (Driver); c) it is an abstract noun meaning "destruction" or "entire removal" (e.g., BDB 736); d) it is made up of the terms 'ez 'ozel "goat that goes (away)" and is a description of the dispatched goat. It is this which has given rise to the common term "scapegoat" following the Septuagint's *apompaiw* 'for the one carrying away the evil' (v.8) or *ton chimaron ton diestaltenon eis afesin* 'the goat determined for dismissal' (v.26), the Vulgate with its *caper emissarius* (the goat that departs). (See Wright 1992:536 and Milgrom 1991:1020). The connection to the bird liberated to symbolize the leper's purification in Leviticus 14,7 is relevant and certainly of interest.

Both Wright and Milgrom as other eminent modern commentators favour the first view, namely that Azazel is the name of a demon. In his *Harper's Bible Dictionary* article (1985:81-82) dealing with this term, D.P. Wright simply dismisses the traditional interpretation, and declares that "in the light of modern research both this interpretation (i.e the LXX one) and those that understand it as a place name are incorrect". He asserts in conclusion that "The word is a proper name and means something like 'angry god' ". In support of this view, Milgrom summarizes the main standard arguments (also reiterated in Wright *op. cit.* above) as follows:

- (1) the parallel syntactic structures of this verse by which one goat is designated "for the Lord" the other "for Azazel" which imply that Azazel is the personal name of a divine being.
- (2) The wilderness to which the goat is dispatched (Lev 16,10 & 22) is the habitation of demons (e.g., Isa 13,21; 34,14; Bar 4,35; Tob 8,3; Matt 12,34; Luke 11,24; Rev 18,2).
- (3) 1 *Enoch* 10,4-5 relates that the angel Raphael is commanded to bind the

rebellious demon ‘Azazel hand and foot and banish him to a wilderness called Dudel...and cover him with sharp rocks (reminiscent of the cliff from which the goat is thrown, according to *m. Yoma* 6,6; cf. v 22). The reference to Azazel is obvious.

To blunt the demonological argument and its obvious problems, Milgrom and others who take this position argue that the goat is not an offering to Azazel or a sacrifice to be slaughtered for propitiation or expiation. Bearing impurities disqualifies the goat as an acceptable offering to God or to a demon. Milgrom (1991:1021) adds that “the goat is not the vicarious substitute for Israel (Hoffmann 1953) because there is no indication that it was punished (e.g., put to death) or demonically attached in Israel’s place. Instead of being an offering or a substitute, the goat is simply the vehicle to dispatch Israel’s impurities and sins to the wilderness/netherworld ...”

Nevertheless Milgrom’s (1991:1021) conclusion that “Azazel himself is deprived of any active role: he neither receives the goat nor attacks it” or that “regardless of his origins – in pre-Israelite practice he surely was a true demon, perhaps a satyr...who ruled in the wilderness – in the Priestly ritual he is no longer a personality but just a name, designating the place to which impurities and sins are banished” or that Azazel has, following Gaster, survived as a figure of speech, his mention being no indication of automatic belief in him, does undercut his argument. How can the scapegoat be for a mere name, or for just a figure of speech, in other words for a non-entity?

For Milgrom then Azazel means in this context not a real demon but just a name designating the place to which the goat is dispatched though not necessarily “the Precipice” as suggested by the NEB. In the Harper Collins NRSV Study Bible (1993:177) Milgrom expresses precisely this view. He notes at Lev 16,8 of the above Study Bible that: “Azazel is probably the name of a demon who has been stripped of his alleged powers by the priestly legists. No longer a personality but just a name, he designates the place to which Israel’s impurities and sins are banished”. The natural question here is as follows: Is Azazel the name of a place or the name of a demon? Or the name of a place, but the name originally belonged to a demon? If it is primarily the name of a place – i.e. “no longer a personality but just a name..” why the preoccupation with the demonological argument? Could it be that this proper name is shared by both the place and the demon and that the link is entirely fortuitous? If not why was there a delinking of personality and place name? The questions are endless.

This whole demonological discussion concerning the meaning of Azazel seems

to rest more in the realm of probability and speculation than hard fact. Hence Mays (1963:53) talks of “ ‘Azazel’ who is mentioned in the Old Testament only in this chapter and about whose precise identity there is no certainty”. D.P. Wright (1992:536) writes that the meaning of this term “is not entirely clear” although he describes it as “the destination or goal to or for which the scapegoat is sent on the Day of Atonement” (ibid.) and elsewhere dismisses alternative interpretations as incorrect preferring his own solution – “The word is a proper name and means something like ‘angry god’” (see his HBD article cited above, 1985:81–82).

Azazel interpreted from a Chagga perspective

From a Chagga perspective (as also in other African communities) the idea of one of the goats being sent to the wilderness certainly rings a bell. This ritual has much in common with a similar Chagga ritual recorded by Mangyi Petro Itosi Marealle and Leonidas Kalugila, cited above. However the idea of the goat being sent to a demon or being designated for a demon called Azazel does not make sense to the Chagga religio-cultural mind, seen within the perspective of his/her world view. There is no logical inconsistency here of course. The Chagga can well imagine or accept that others can or do send their personal or communal sins to an evil spirit being. Or that the ancient Hebrews did send their sins via a goat to an evil being called Azazel. The problem is that even the Biblical experts are not agreed that this is what the ancient Hebrews actually did. The facts of the matter are shrouded in mystery, in speculation, in uncertainty and indeterminacy. No one can claim that they know for sure. One is therefore left to decide between the traditional ancient interpretation espoused by the LXX, the Vulgate, the King James Version, the NIV, the NCV among others, on the one hand and some of the modern translations such as the NRSV, the NJPSV, the TOB, NJB, NAB, GNB, among others, on the other hand. In the final analysis it boils down to what makes sense given one’s religio-cultural presuppositions and values. It could also be argued that it appears inconsistent with Biblical Hebraic mind set. Hence the contradictions inherent in the attempts to justify the demonological interpretation. Interestingly there is no further mention of this demon in the canonical Hebrew Scriptures, apart from those at Leviticus 16. Given the centrality of this Leviticus 16 ritual, and its transmutation into the national Jewish Yom Kippur rituals, one would have expected the mention of this demon again. This is not however the case.

Could it be that those elder Jewish translators of the Septuagint working on African soil some 3 or 2 centuries BCE actually knew more than their modern

counterparts are willing to grant them? They certainly knew more Biblical Hebrew as actually used by the ancient speakers than their modern heirs are ever likely to know. Taking into account the fact that Jerome did not hold the LXX in very high regard, preferring rather what he called *Hebraica Veritas* (see Müller 1996:83–89), the fact that his position on this matter coincided with that of the LXX is interesting in itself. Jerome working in Bethlehem from 386 C.E. onward, on his Vulgate translation, or the revered translators of the King James Bible (KJV) of 1611 are to be assumed to have made an informed and considered decision in rejecting the demonological interpretation. It should be noted in passing that a number of early translations of the Old Testament based on the MT such as those of Tyndale, Coverdale, Jerome, or the KJV agree with the LXX on this point. In taking a line consistent and in harmony with that of the historic and authoritative LXX, and it should be also consistent and in harmony with the thought and spirit of the canonical Hebrew Scriptures, it would appear that Jerome, the eminent King James scholars and the others, were taking a widely held position by students of the Bible of their time. The same could be said of the elder Bible translators of Alexandria, Africa. Their views and thinking are to be assumed to have reflected those of Hebrew speaking as well as Greek speaking Jews both in Palestine and in the Diaspora at the time. It is not therefore surprising that such ancient authors like Aquila, Theodotion, Ibn Ezra, Hieronymus and others took this line (see Hartley 1992:237). Or that the Septuagint event inspired the pen and the imagination of such Jewish writers as Aristaeas, Aristobulus, Philo, Josephus and others who held it in very regard (see Müller 1996:46–67).

At this point it is worth noting that text critical issues have some relevance in this matter even though this is not the place for them. Even then it is worth pondering Müller's observation (1996:114) that:

It cannot now be said that a Greek translation is secondary in relation to the Hebrew *Ur-text*, for thanks to its indubitable age it may even in some places be used as a valuable text witness in textual critical reconstructions of the original Hebrew text. The Septuagint is more than an uneven, awkward, often paraphrastic or interpretative Greek translation of the Hebrew text. It is primarily the translation of the sacred books which the Greek-speaking Diaspora Jews, not versed in Hebrew, relied on. At that, it may even reflect another Hebrew text than the Masoretic.

It is interesting to note that the leading Jewish scholar Emanuel Tov who in his

paper "The Textual Basis of Modern Bible Translations", read at the UBS TTW meeting in Merida, Mexico in May 1997, opts for a non-eclectic translation which consistently takes the MT, or the LXX or the Vulgate, but indicates in his final statement as follows: "I should say in conclusion that I do not have any special preference for MT. In fact, in individual instances I probably prefer the LXX to MT" (1997:17).

Whatever the case, it is important to bear in mind that usually in resolving puzzles where data and factual information is scanty, uncertain or speculative, one's prior presuppositions, prejudices, ideology and faith commitment or orientation has always played a role, and the interpretation of the meaning of azazel is no exception. It is therefore not an accident that such conservative or evangelical Christian translations such as the New International Version, La Bible du Semeur, the New Century Version, the New American Standard Bible or the New Living Translation among others follow the LXX and the Vulgate in consistently rendering azazel as scapegoat or goat of removal. Contemporary evangelical Christian hermeneutics have certainly supported and promoted this reading. Could it be that in turning to post-biblical and extra-biblical sources (see Lester Grabbe, 152–167) and in defending the demonological interpretation, those modern exegetes and commentators who take this route are thereby distancing themselves from, as well as rejecting any typological, Christian messianic, or christological reading of this text?

In conclusion, it could be said that for the Chagga reader looking at the current state of this discussion and the available evidence, the interpretation taken by the ancient translators of Alexandria and by Jerome in Bethlehem resonates more with his or her sensitivities and makes better sense given the Chagga cultural and traditional religious background as well as contemporary concerns here to contextualize or inculturate any reading of the Scriptures. The main point here however is that in matters where there is no consensus or common agreement among scholars, there is no compelling reason to stray away from positions which are in harmony with one's cultural moorings. The more so when the presuppositions of one's culture square well with long held positions or the interpretation favoured by the ancients and the opposing position is still shaky, indeterminate and speculative.

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