

Elaboration, presentation and consumption of slaughtered meat in the Arab World

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In the Arab world we find that the meat is a very important element of the diet. A lot of meals are prepared with it and most celebrations are carried out with meals in which the meat is, undoubtedly, the queen.

One of the best known festivities, in which the meat plays the main paper, is the lamb's festivity ('*ayd al-hawli*), also called the great festivity ('*ayd al-kabir*) or the festivity of the slaughter ('*ayd l-adha*).

It is the second in the rank of the official Moslem festivities after the '*ayd s-saghir* (little festivity or festivity of the fasting's rupture) which takes place on the 10th day of the month of *dhu-l-hijja*, the last month of the hegira's year, commemoration of Ibrahim's sacrifice whom God exempted from sacrificing his son Ismael, ordering him to slaughter a sheep, in return. This commemoration marks the last ritual stage of the peregrination to La Mecca.

This is a religious ceremony and, at the same time, a great festivity of family and social implication. Family implication because the head of the family makes the sacrifice in his name and in the name of all his family; and, social implication because, at the same moment, it is implemented by the entire community of Moslem believers. The social and community dimension of the '*ayd al-kabir* is strengthened in Morocco as Brisebarre (1997, 94) remarks: *par l'accomplissement solennel du sacrifice par le roi, à la fois chef religieux et politique: un sacrifice revendiqué comme la continuité de l'acte de soumission d'Ibrâhîm, commémoré par le Prophète*

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lors du Pèlerinage de l'Adieu qui l'a ainsi inscrit dans les pratiques recommandées, sunna". The same author adds, in note "la pratique du sacrifice assurée par le monarque comme prémices de l'ayd al-kabîr semble dater de Mawlay Isma'il (dynastie 'Alawi) et aurait été rapportée pour la première fois en 1695.

It is a question of a recommended act, not a compulsory one.

It happens at the beginning of the morning when the slaughter of the victim takes place. It is an act of *sunna*² which every family has to carry out if they have the means to do it. The cost of the lamb will vary depending on the rains fallen during the year. If it rained, the price will be reasonable, but if there has been no rain the prices will increase excessively.

The victim of the slaughter is a yearling male sheep, but for the very poor it can be a goat, or even a four years old camel.

Only a healthy animal is allowed to be slaughtered. Therefore one-eyed, crippled, defective or ill animals are excluded. Also are excluded weak or thin animals.

The best offering is a horned sheep with black speckles around his eyes and on his legs.

The sacrifice must be carried out in the morning of the day *'ayd* after the prayer ; it must not be done before the prayer. In fact, it could be carried out before, but if it is done after it, the slaughter is a genuine ritual sacrifice in conformity with the sacrifice which is made by the Moslem. The Moslem who cannot carry out the sacrifice on the first day of the festivity, may delay the offering up to the second or to the third day.

At the right time, the Moslem has to position the animal facing the Kaaba and has to say : *Bismillah ! Allahu Akbar* (In the name of God ! God is the greatest). To say those words is compulsory. In this sense the Koran indicates that the meat over which the name of God has not been pronounced must not be touched.

The slaughter has to be made by a Moslem, usually the father of the family. If he could not do it, he is allowed to delegate in someone close to the family, but it must, always, be a man. If this is not possible, a slaughterman is required.

Thus, the man in charge of making the sacrifice has to unfaste the sheep, take it by the back and the front legs and has to position it in the direction towards La Mecca, then he has to cut, in a quick and deep manner, the

² Cod of customs which constitute the Moslem prophetic tradition.

jugular and the glottis so that the death is instantaneous and swift. The blood must be let running over the floor avoiding that the jumps of the animal might stain the wool which will be used afterwards³.

The people who live in the town and have economic resources make the sacrifice in the country; those who cannot do it in the country, make it in the terrace roof of their home, either alone or together with the other neighbours.

The sacrifice has to be made without the presence of other sheep to avoid their suffering at the sight of the slaughter.

As soon as the animal remains lying down in the floor, its carving proceeds. It must be divided in three parts: the first shall be the one to be consumed by the family, the second shall be distributed as alms and, the third offered to close friend and relatives. The Moslem could actually offer, as alms, the whole of the sacrificed meat, as well as to give nothing. Only one offering is enough for the whole family, whichever it is the number of its members.

The Moslem who has the intention to sacrifice the day of 'ayd must not shave his barb neither cut his nails while this day lasts, the 11th, 12th and 13th of the *dhu-l-hijja* until the day of the sacrifice.

Although the act of the sacrifice corresponds to the man, must not be forgotten the tasks that the woman has to perform so that everything is all right. Her tasks are at home. The victim is taken to the house a few days, weeks or months before. During this time, the woman has to pay attention to its nourishment and cares in such an extent that the sheep becomes like another member of the family. In this sense Brisebarre points out (1997, 102): *la plupart des auteurs qui décrivent la fête de l'ayd al-kabîr au Maghreb... insistent sur cette familiarisation du mouton... Dès l'arrivée de ce nouveau membre de la famille, les femmes lui attribuent "une identité nominale"*.

When the moment approaches, the women prepare everything they are going to need: buckets of water, containers, knives, grills, spikes and so on. Once the sheep has been slaughtered and carved, they do the cleaning and preparation for its later consumption.

The consumption of the sacrificial meat is ruled by the custom (Abu-Shams, 1998, 345-6).

³ For a more detailed description of a sacrifice carried out in Fez, Montejaño-Marquina M., 2000, pp. 164-5.

In Morocco, for example, the first day they prepare liver skewers and, mainly, the famous *bu-lfa⁴*, which are eaten, in line with the families, immediately after the sacrifice or as an entree of a copious meal prepared at noon and in which the meat of the sheep is still absent.

This is because the pluck gets spoiled quicker than the rest of the sheep. This is the reason why it is consumed first (Dinia, 1990, 135).

The second day, the head of the sheep is prepared boiled with chickpeas, onion, raisins and served with couscous (*kesksu bi-r-ras*) for breakfast. It is, more than anything, a family custom. As only one head would not be enough for a big family, the couscous is added. Therefore, we could say that this is an economic question more than a religious factor.

The upper quarters (joints of the forelegs and ribs) are eaten for noon and evening meals, beginning with the right side. The legs are left for the third day. It is, also, a custom to reserve a part of the sacrificed animal for the '*ashura*' which used to be, most of the times, the tail (*liyya*) or a variety of (salamy-type) sausage, called *bubanita*⁵.

It is expected, with this practice, to transmit the *baraka* of the victim to the new year. This portion is consumed in the evening of the 9th day of *muharram* together with a good couscous (Jouin, 1957, 316). For this couscous (*kesksu bi-l-liyya*), the tail of the sheep is flavoured and preserved and, as sometimes it is insufficient, chunks of *geddid* (canned and salted strips of meat) are added.

The reasons why the tail of the sheep is reserved could be numerous. Some people think that the tail is rich in proteins and fat and for that reason cannot be kept long time, thus it should be consumed between the '*ayd al-kabir* and the '*ashura*. Other people say that it is simply a memento of the sacrifice. Some families don't pay attention to it and simply prepare a couscous with seven green vegetables.

Other specialities reserved for these days are:

- *le-m'essel*: sheep meat (exactly the meat of the sacrificed sheep) cooked in honey with almonds, cinnamon, cloves, saffron, pepper and onions. In other places it is called *mruziyya*.

- *geddid* variant *geddid*: canned meat cut in strips and salted. It is eaten alone or it is kept canned.

⁴ Small pieces of sheep's liver flavoured, wrapped in fat, spiced in skewers and roasted.

⁵ First festival of the year. Celebration which lasts 10 days and which culminates the 10th day of *muharram*, first month of the Moslem calendar.

⁶ This variety of sausage is made with lamb's gut and stuffed with small chunks of meat (*kabab*) or minced meat (*kefta*), well spiced and salted. It is tied in both ends and left to dry in the open air and then it is boiled to be consumed.

- *mesrana*: sausages made with minced meat.

This exposition cannot be finished without mentioning another festivity in which the sacrifice is present: the *sbu*⁷, ceremonials of the naming of a newborn baby which include the sacrifice of an animal, usually a lamb, on the 7th day after the birth. It is also an act of *sunna* as far as the possibilities may allow it.

In this celebration it is usual to eat certain parts of the lamb. Such as Jouin points out (1957, 308): *le foie de la victime est l'objet d'une consommation rituelle. On le fait cuire à l'eau bouillante légèrement salée, puis on le partage entre tous les membres de la famille dans le but de faire naître dans les coeurs une tendre affection à l'égard de l'enfant. Besides, she adds que dans la civilisation marocaine, le foie l-kebda est figuré comme le siège de l'amour maternel.*

Some families prepare a good couscous with the head of the sacrificed lamb in the belief that the baby will have, for it, a good intelligence and will be respected by the others.

Finally we want to point out the custom of sacrificing an animal just in the moment of the birth of a baby. If it is a boy, a hen is sacrificed, and in the case of a girl the victim is a cock⁸.

Meat is a very important element in the Arab world. It is the protagonist in the festivities of the lamb's feast (*'ayd al-hawli*) or the slaughter feast (*'ayd al-adha*) and in the ceremony to give a name to a newborn. They all are religious ceremonies and, at the same time, great festivities of family and social implications.

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⁷ Also called *'aqiqa*, see Aubaile-Sallenave F., 1999, 134 sq.

⁸ See also Aubaile-Sallenave, 1998, p. 108.

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Résumé

Elaboration, présentation et consommation de la viande de sacrifice dans le Monde Arabe

L'Islam intervient dans le domaine de l'alimentation soit au moment de l'acquisition de la nourriture, soit au moment de la consommation, par les sacrifices d'animaux avec la distinction entre aliments licites et illicites et les règles d'abattage de l'animal. La viande est un produit très important au sein de l'alimentation dans le monde arabe. C'est le grand protagoniste durant les fêtes qui sont tout à la fois un acte religieux et une grande fête familiale et sociale. Ce sont les célébrations de "la fête de l'agneau", également appelée "la grande fête" ou "la fête du sacrifice", et la cérémonie d'imposition du nom au nouveau né.