

Jan Dietrich

Kollektive Schuld und Haftung

Religions- und rechtsgeschichtliche Studien zum Sündenkuhritus des Deuteronomiums und zu verwandten Texten

[Collective Guilt and Liability. Studies of the 'Scapecow' Ritual in Deuteronomy and Related Texts from the Perspective of the History of Religion and the History of Law.]

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The 'scapecow' ritual in Deuteronomy 21:1–9 is a central but almost unknown type of scapegoat ritual of the Hebrew Bible. In the case of a homicide caused by an unknown perpetrator, the parallels from ancient Near Eastern legal texts demand collective legal liability, while in the Deuteronomy passage a young cow is ritually killed as a substitute for the liability of the community. This is, according to Girard's and Burkert's perspectives, the genuine form of a scapegoat ritual, since the heifer is ritually killed, not merely sent into the wilderness. Thus the question arises: Is the violence of this ritual meant to resolve the violence of the homicide to unburden Israel from the demands of its collective guilt? To answer this question, the author provides a comprehensive history and analysis of this text, comparing it to its religious and judicial parallels from both the ancient Near East and the Bible, using historical methods from exegesis, cultural anthropology and comparative law.

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