

of *προμανρεία* for their gift. In the case of altars to other gods than the one to whom the precinct belonged, inscriptions would be useful, but were by no means universal. They would be required also on altars in public places; e.g. the inscribed altar in the Dipylon gateway at Athens, dedicated to Zeus Herkeios, Hermes, and Acamas. Where the object of an altar was commemorative rather than for practical use, the inscription would of course be essential. But ritual ordinances as to sacrifices were usually inscribed, not on the altar itself, but on a stela or slab set up beside it, or on some other convenient place in its immediate vicinity.

For the ritual of sacrifice, and the manner in which altars were used in connexion with it, see SACRIFICE. But it should be added here that an altar was usually dedicated to the service of a particular god, and was not used for offerings to any other. A good example of this is seen in the sixty-nine altars of Olympia, each of which had its proper destination, and was visited in its proper turn in the monthly order of sacrifices. This rule did not, however, preclude a common dedication to several gods of one altar (*σύνθετοι, ὁμοθύμιοι θεοί*). There existed altars of all the gods, or of the twelve gods; an interesting example, probably to ensure the worship of some powers that might otherwise be overlooked, is offered by the altar of 'the unknown gods' at Olympia. The example of this title quoted by St. Paul at Athens (Ac 17²³) was, however, in the singular. Frequently two gods were worshipped at the same altar; a classical instance is provided by the six twin altars mentioned by Pindar in *OL.* v. 12 (see Schol. *ad loc.*). In Athens, Poseidon and Erechtheus shared a common altar in the Erechtheum, and in the Amphiaræum at Oropus the altar has been enlarged so as to accommodate several deities (*Πρακτικά Ἀρχ.* 'Er. 1804, p. 91).

In addition to their use for the ritual of sacrifice, altars were also sought by *suppliants*, who often sat upon the steps, and especially by those seeking *sanctuary*. The altar in a house, whether the *hestia* or that of Zeus Herkeios, often served this purpose; and in a temple a suppliant would naturally place himself under the protection of the god either by clasping his image or by seating himself on the altar or beside it. It does not, however, appear that in Greek religion there was any peculiar power in this connexion that belonged to the altar more than to any other part of a temple or precinct. The right of sanctuary usually had clearly defined limits within which it was inviolable. It is worthy of note that when Cylon's followers had to go outside these limits, it was to the early image, not to the altar, that they attached the rope to which they trusted for protection.

LITERATURE.—See end of art. ALTAR (Roman).

ERNEST A. GARDNER.

ALTAR (Hindu).—Altars, or raised platforms, play an important part in the Hindu ceremonial. The Sanskrit for a Hindu altar is *vedi*, which is defined as 'an altar or raised place made of Kuśa grass, or strewed with it, and prepared for an oblation, for placing the vessels used at a sacrifice, a place or ground prepared for sacrifice' (Monier Williams, *s.v.*). The original *vedi* was a trench of varied shape, in which the sacrificial fires were kept, dug in the sacrificial ground. In early times in India, when the gods were worshipped by each man at his own fireplace, it was a duty incumbent on every householder to keep the sacred fire in the altar, from the very day on which the ceremony of the Agnyādāna, or the setting up of sacrificial fires, had been performed. On that important occasion the sacrificer chose his four priests, and erected sheds or fire-houses for the

Gārhapatya and the Ahavaniya fires respectively. A circle was marked for the Gārhapatya fire, and a square for the Ahavaniya fire; a semicircular area for the Dakṣiṇāgni or southern fire, if that also was required. The *adhvaryu* or officiating priest then procured a temporary fire, either producing it by friction, or obtaining it from the village, and, after the usual fivefold lustration of the Gārhapatya fireplace, he laid down the fire thereon, and in the evening handed two pieces of wood, called *arani*, to the sacrificer and his wife, for the purpose of producing by attrition the Ahavaniya fire the next morning.

There were different *vedis* for different kinds of offering, as, e.g., the large Soma altar (*mahāvedi*) and the *pāśukī vedi*, used for animal sacrifice, which resembled the *uttarā vedi*, or 'northern altar'; the latter was an altar raised with earth excavated in forming what is called a *chātvala*, or hole. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa compares the shape of an altar to that of a woman: 'The altar should be broad on the western side, contracted in the middle, and broad again on the eastern side; for thus shaped they praise a woman.' The shape of sacrificial altars was considered a matter of so much importance that there were special manuals in Sanskrit, called *Sulbasūtras*, which form part of the ancient Śrautasūtras, and give the measurements necessary for the construction of the altars. The different shapes in which brick altars might be constructed are mentioned as early as in the Taittiriya Saṃhitā. Thus there is a falcon-shaped altar built of square bricks, or an altar of the shape of a falcon with curved wings and outspread tail; a heron-shaped altar with two feet; one of the shape of the forepart of the poles of a chariot, an equilateral triangle; another of the form of two such triangles joined at their bases; several wheel-shaped or circular altars, tortoise-shaped, etc. The area of the earliest species of altars was to be $7\frac{1}{2}$ square *puruṣas*, the term *puruṣa* denoting the height of a man with uplifted arms. The area remained the same when a different shape of altar was required. This and other changes could not be effected without a considerable knowledge of geometry. As stated by Thibaut, 'squares had to be found which would be equal to two or more given squares, or equal to the difference of two given squares; oblongs had to be turned into squares and squares into oblongs . . .; the last task, and not the least, was that of finding a circle the area of which might equal as closely as possible that of a given square.' The result of these operations was the compilation of a series of geometrical rules which are contained in the above-mentioned *Sulbasūtras*.

A lively controversy has been going on as to whether these geometrical rules are of Indian growth, or due to Greek influence, the numerous coincidences between the Sanskrit texts and the writings of Heron favouring the latter view, whereas the apparent antiquity of the *Sulbasūtras*, and their close connexion with the ancient sacrificial rites of the Brāhmins, would seem to render their native origin the more probable alternative.

Though offerings in the ancient Vedic fashion have become very rare in India, various kinds of altars continue in common use for religious purposes. Thus the present writer saw a square *vedi* made of earth or clay, on which an open fire for oblations of butter had been kindled, at the consecration of a public tank near Calcutta. Hindu altars are also erected at some of the Saṃskāras or family celebrations of the Brāhmins. Thus among the Deshasth Brāhmins in Dharwar, it is customary, a few days before the ceremony of thread-girding, to raise a porch in front of the house, on the western side of which an altar is set up facing east. On the day of the ceremony the boy is bathed and is seated on a low wooden

stool which is placed upon the altar, and his father and mother sit on either side. The chief priest kindles on the altar a sacred fire, into which he throws offerings. On the occasion of a marriage in the same caste, an altar about six feet square and one foot high is raised. The bride and bridegroom are led to the marriage altar, and two men hold a cloth between them. At the lucky moment the cloth is drawn aside, and each for the first time sees the other's face. Afterwards the priest kindles a sacred fire on the altar, and clarified butter and parched grain are thrown in. The married couple walk thrice round the fire. Seven heaps of rice are made on the altar, and a betelnut is placed on each of the heaps. The bridegroom lifting the bride's right foot places it on each of the seven heaps successively. Among the Deshasth Brāhmins of Bijāpur, boys on their initiation are led to an altar called *bahule*, where the priest girds them with the sacred thread, to which a small piece of deerskin is tied.

LITERATURE.—Eggeling's transl. of the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa in *SBE*, vols. xii. xxvi. (1882, 1886, with plan of sacrificial ground with *vedi*); R. C. Dutt, *History of Civilization in Ancient India*, 3 vols., Calcutta, 1889-1890; J. Thibaut, 'On the Śulvasūtras' in *JRASB*, vol. xlv., 'Astronomie, Astrologie, und Mathematik' in *GLAP*, Strassburg, 1899; A. Hillebrandt, 'Ritualliteratur,' *ib.*, Strassburg, 1897; A. Bürk, 'Das Apastamba-Sulba-Sūtra' in *ZDMG*, vols. lv. lvi., 1901, 1902; *BG*, vol. xxii. Dharwar, and vol. xxiii. Bijāpur; Monier Williams, *Brahmanism and Hinduism* 4, London, 1891, p. 308.

J. JOLLY.

ALTAR (Japanese).—In Japan little distinction is made between the table and the altar. No special sanctity attaches to the latter. In Buddhist temples there is a stand on which incense is burnt, called *kōdan* or *kōdzukurye* ('incense-table'). Shinto offerings are placed on small tables of unpainted wood. The old ritual prescribed that in the case of Greater Shrines the offerings should be placed on tables (or altars); in the case of Lesser Shrines, on mats spread on the earth.

Each house may have its Buddhist domestic altar, or rather shrine (*butsudan*)—a miniature cupboard or shelf where an image of a Buddha is deposited, or a Shinto altar (*kamidana*) where Shinto tokens, pictures, or other objects of devotion are kept.

W. G. ASTON.

ALTAR (Persian).—**I.** In none of the ancient Persian records, whether literary or inscriptional, do we find a generic term for 'altar.*' Nevertheless, to infer from the absence of such a term in the extant records that no kind of altar was employed in the Zoroastrian ritual during the period represented by the Inscriptions and the Avesta, would be to press the argument from negative evidence too far. Moreover, if the limited vocabulary of the Inscriptions contains no word for 'altar,' yet the royal sculptor has left an unequivocal witness of the existence of altars in the Mazdaism of the early Achæmenians, in the representation of the altar itself in bas-relief over the entrance of the tomb of Darius Hystaspis on the rocks at Naksh i Rostam.†

The statements of Greek and Roman authors as to the absence of altars, and of temples and images, in early Persian worship, would seem, on the first view, more difficult of a satisfactory explanation.‡ Herodotus, claiming to speak from personal observation and research, states (i. 131 ff.) that the Persians 'think it unlawful to build temples or altars, imputing folly to those who do so.' Therefore, 'when about to sacrifice, they neither erect

* The *dāitya gātu* of the Avesta (*Vendidad*, viii. 81, 85; xiii. 17) forms no real exception; for, etymologically, it means no more than 'legal or consecrated place,' and is synonymous rather with *temple* than with *altar*. See, however, Jackson, *Grundr. iran. Phil.*, ii. 701; *Persia, Past and Present*, p. 308, by the same author.

† See Dieulafoy, *L'Acropole de Suse*, p. 392.

‡ See art. **TEMPLES**.

altars nor kindle fire.' Strabo (born c. 60 B.C.), writing some four hundred and fifty years later, reiterates (xv. iii. 13) the testimony of Herodotus, though, in regard to the phenomena of his own time, he afterwards modifies its application (see *loc. cit.* §§ 14-15).

It is generally agreed, however, by this time, that the kind of altar with which Herodotus, as a Greek, was familiar—a raised platform in masonry, with steps to ascend, erected in front of the temple and under the shadow of the sculptured statue of the deity to whom the temple was dedicated, and upon which animal sacrifices were immolated—was quite unknown amongst the Persians for a long period after Herodotus wrote his *History*. This is not intended to imply that animal sacrifices as well were foreign to the Persian worship of the 5th cent. B.C. For, in the same passage, Herodotus describes the customs observed in such sacrifices: 'If any intends to sacrifice to a god, he leads the animal to a consecrated place.' 'Then dividing the victim into parts, he boils the flesh, and lays it upon the most tender herbs, especially trefoil.' The herbs must certainly be regarded as serving the purpose of an altar, upon which the flesh is presented for the acceptance of the deity; for while it lies there, the *Magus*, we are told, performs the religious service (cf., in some respects, the use of the altar of peace-offering amongst the Hebrews).

The same custom was observed in the cult of certain Persian divinities even in Strabo's time. 'They sacrifice to water by going to a lake, river, or fountain; having dug a trench, they slaughter the victim over it . . .; then they lay the flesh in order upon myrtle or laurel branches' (*loc. cit.* § 14). Here we meet with an Iranian substitute for the Greek βωμός, or raised altar for immolating the victim, namely, the *trench*, which, indeed, is highly suggestive of the antiquity of the method of sacrificing to some of these natural divinities. We have before us what is, probably, a relic of an ancient method of sacrificing which goes back to the Indo-Iranian period, the trench being the Zoroastrian counterpart of the *vedi* of the Vedic ritual.*

There is another fact in connexion with ancient Persian substitutes for altars mentioned by Herodotus, which is interesting, and not, it would appear, without its significance. 'The consecrated places' in the open air whither the victims for some of their sacrifices were led for slaughter, were on the tops of the highest mountains.† Remembering this and the fact that the chief god of the Persians was a sky-god, do we not here perceive their true reason, or, at least, an additional reason on their part for reproaching with folly, as they did, those who erected artificial platforms for sacrificing? In these mountains the pious Zoroastrians saw the altars which their God had provided, which dwarfed and rendered superfluous all other altars, and upon which He seemed ever to dwell as they gazed upon them from their distant homes.

On the other hand, the bas-relief sculpture over the royal tomb at Naksh i Rostam does not represent a sacrificial altar, or indicate any substitute whatsoever for the Greek βωμός, such as the trench was. Its purpose and significance are entirely different. If we wish to find amongst another people anything like a parallel to it, we must turn, not to the Greeks, but to the ancient Hebrews. Like the Ark of the Covenant amongst the Israelites, it was not an instrument for presenting anything to the deity, but the resting-place of the most perfect

* See 'Das Apastamba-Sulba-Sūtra: Übersetzung von Bürk; Die altindischen Altäre und das geometrische Wissen welches ihre Konstruktion voraussetzt,' *ZDMG*, vol. lv. p. 543 ff., vol. lvi. p. 327 ff.

† Compare the use of 'high places' (*bāmōth*) amongst the Hebrews (1 K 34, 2 K 1711. See also Gn 2214).