

BOOK REVIEW

Greek and Roman Animal Sacrifice: Ancient Victims, Modern Observers. Edited by CHRISTOPHER A. FARAONE and F. S. NAIDEN. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp.xiv + 209. Hardcover, £55.00/\$95.00. ISBN 978-1-107-01112-0.

Is animal sacrifice the central act in Greek and Roman religion, or is this a modern construct borne out of Christian criticism of pagan practices? So the editors begin their reassessment of the theoretical interpretations of ancient Greek and Roman sacrifice predominant in the 20th century. The emphasis on sacrifice as the center of Greek religious practice in the models of Walter Burkert and the scholars working with Jean-Pierre Vernant in Paris is the main issue addressed by the eight papers in this collection. The papers are organized into pairs in four topical sections, concluding with a brief “Afterword” by Clifford Ando. This volume joins a series of edited collections on this topic; like those edited by Pirenne-Delforge and Prescendi (*Kernos* 2011) and Knust and Várhelyi (Oxford University Press, 2011), the papers cover both Greek and Roman sacrifice. Indeed, one of the criticisms often levied at the prevailing theories of Burkert and Vernant is the exclusive focus on Classical Greek culture; this volume has a much wider scope anchored within an overview of the history of scholarship on the topic.

Part I, “Modern Historiography,” establishes the limits of theoretical objectivity through a penetrating look at the social contexts in which the great theories of sacrifice were developed. Bruce Lincoln locates early interpretations of sacrifice as part of sectarian French discourse between the French revolution and the end of the second world war (“From Bergaigne to Meuli: How Animal Sacrifice Became a Hot Topic”). Lincoln points to the French political milieu in which Hubert and Mauss wrote their study on sacrifice, which they intended as a “political intervention” (15), situated by Lincoln in the development of the “Aryan” and “Semite” opposition that colored much of the contemporary scholarship in religious studies. Fritz Graf picks up the thread with a discussion of the wave of new theories in the wake of the second world war (“One Generation after Burkert and Girard: Where are the Great Theories?”). Graf illustrates how J. Z.

Smith's interpretation of sacrifice as a "meditation on the domestication of animals" (44) is a sensible theory with much to offer the discipline, but without the following of the more sensational approaches of Burkert, Girard and Vernant. Although Jaś Elsner's chapter on "Sacrifice in Late Roman Art" comes in Part III of the volume, his richly illustrated test of the application of grand theories to the wide variations in visual representations of sacrifice in third-century art echoes many of the points raised by Lincoln and Graf. Based on the virtual disappearance of animal sacrifice in the decoration of public monuments throughout the empire, with some notable exceptions in North Africa and in Jewish iconography, Elsner concludes that the centrality of animal sacrifice in theoretical interpretations of ancient Roman practice reflects the importance of sacrifice to Christian polemicists rather than historical fact. All three contributions raise the importance of perspective, both ancient and modern, an aspect commented on by Ando: "virtually all reflections on cult surviving from the Greek and Roman worlds have the status of interpretation" (197).

Part II, "Greek and Roman Practice," moves from hierarchies of scholarship to the hierarchies of participation in public sacrifices. Naiden gives a functionalist critique of the evidence for sacrificial feasts as a method of food distribution in Greek cities ("Blessèd are the parasites"). He outlines the varying modes of meat distribution, emphasizing the social hierarchy expressed by honorary portions of meat reserved for special participants, often pieces set aside for gods which were then appropriated by priests. While Naiden focuses on the dynamics of human participation in Greek sacrifice, the divine portion is outlined in John Scheid's chapter, "Roman Animal Sacrifice and the System of Being." Drawing on the inscribed records of the *fratres arvales* and evidence for libations without sacrifice, Scheid shows the theological hierarchy implicit in the Roman offering system. Variations in scale of offering reflect differentiation of divine status, such as between the Olympian gods and the smaller offerings given to deified emperors by the Arvals. Libations without animal sacrifice may fall on the small side of the offering scale, but still reflect the importance of ceremonial sharing with gods in recognition of their superior status. These papers make a nice pair, although Scheid's presentation of evidence seems abbreviated in comparison with the voluminous case put forward by Naiden for the varying distribution of meat to human participants. In this way, even within a framework explicitly designed to criticize and analyze the sociological trend in twentieth century scholarship, the theological arguments still take a back seat.

Part III covers “Visual Representation” and Part IV “Literary representation.” These papers mostly address the much-discussed notion that sacrifice is central because it is violent. With reference to Athenian sculpture, Richard Neer (“Sacrificing Stones: On Some Sculpture, Mostly Athenian”) questions the centrality of sacrifice *per se*, proposing that manipulations of sacrifice as image, such as the “Procne and Itys” statue group from the Acropolis, suggest the centrality stems rather from “everything that went on around sacrifice” (119). A compelling aspect of his argument is the relative marginalization of sacrifice in comparison to sacred buildings and decorations, which are demonstrations of immortal and mortal relationships on a scale which completely overshadows the theoretical centrality of sacrifice. In Part IV, the violence of sacrifice leads to the pleasure of eating in Redfield’s discussion, “Animal Sacrifice in Comedy: an Alternative Point of View.” Redfield revives Vernant’s thesis that sacrifice is a prelude to meat-eating in the context of New Comedy, which generally depicts social harmony through feasting. He critically applies Vernant’s structural interpretation of sacrifice as expressive of the cosmic order to the motif in Old Comedy, which is as transgressive as New Comedy is affirming. Most notable in Redfield’s essay is his comparison of Hesiod’s aetiology of sacrifice in the *Theogony* with the book of *Genesis*; whereas the Hebrew narrative illustrates divine sanction of meat eating through sacrifice, the relative silence of Hesiod on the link between sacrifice, meat eating and divine will opens the doors for the problematization of sacrifice as “murder.” In the final chapter, “Animal Sacrifice in Greek Tragedy: Ritual, Metaphor, Problematizations,” Albert Henrichs pulls together the relevant descriptions in tragedy and the schools of interpretation to which they gave rise, concluding that, although corrupted or failed sacrifices are frequent signposts of disorder in tragedy, the distinction between sacrifice and murder is carefully maintained. He points out the popularity of tragic representations in theories on the topic, without consideration of the context.

The editors have gathered together essays by senior scholars with long experience in the discipline and the result is mature and concise, particularly their coverage of the history of scholarship on the topic. The individual essays are highly polished and extremely well written, providing a sophisticated valediction to the prevailing theories of the 20th century.

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