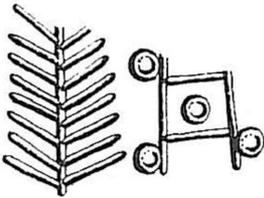


## INTRODUCTION

# The Value and Power of Sacrifice



*Carrie Ann Murray*

### ISSUES OF SACRIFICE IN SCHOLARSHIP

An experience that affects all of the senses—the impetuses and consequences of sacrificial practices relate to more than purely religious considerations. The continuous presence of sacrifice, in widely varying forms, from ancient to contemporary contexts is testament to its perceived long-term significance. Its relevance applies to the community, family, and individual. Evidence from archaeology, epigraphy, ethnography, history, and literature provides a wealth of insights into a multitude of sacrificial practices from across a wide spectrum of contexts. There is an abundance of scholarship informing our understanding of sacrifice in its different guises. Publications often explore the significance of sacrifice within the confines of separate contexts: ancient, contemporary, pagan, Christian, and others. The isolated perspectives often reach little consensus regarding what seems so neatly packaged as a single term, “sacrifice,” in our parlance, but what is a complex and varied transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon.

To begin, let us consider how “sacrifice” can be defined. Sacrifice in the ancient world has been defined as a “central act of Greek and Roman religious ritual, an offering to the gods, heroes, or the dead” (Stafford 2006:775). Here, as elsewhere, the emphasis is placed on a means of gift giving from humans to the supernatural and the otherworldly. The recipients of sacrifice—deities and the deceased—are very different in nature, but are combined in definitions of sacrifice to distinguish these practices from purely mundane and secular actions. Discussions of other aspects of sacrifice, such as scale, types of offerings, and procedures are subsumed within these descriptions. These variables can diverge wildly without affecting what is seen as the essence of sacrifice, allowing us to categorize different types of sacrifice, for instance: blood, bloodless, animal, human, civic, private, etc. Typologies of sacrifice, as

with most attempts to rationalize and compartmentalize social action, come with benefits and limitations. Identifying different contexts and purposes has been fundamental. Yet, such fine-grained distinctions between sacrificial rites of different contexts can also obscure aspects of sacrifice that present continuities rather than oppositions.

With so much discussion at present, this will be a (re)formative period for the study of sacrifice in its many guises. For instance, in Knust and Vrhelyi's edited volume (2011), central themes include questioning the centrality of animal sacrifice over bloodless in the ancient world, the meaning of "sacrifice," and our categorization of it. In addition, in Faraone and Naiden's edited volume (2012) some contributors also question the centrality of animal sacrifice in the ancient world. Perhaps in direct contrast, Naiden in his own monograph (2013) explores an innovative perspective emphasizing the role of the gods for Greek sacrificial practices and the repercussions that potential divine rejection of prayers and offerings had on the development of regulations and priestly roles, as well as confronting contexts of consumption of nonsacrificial meat. Clearly, rather than reaching a consensus, these studies enable us to question our investigative frameworks and create new avenues to explore.

### THEMES IN SCHOLARSHIP

Several themes recurrent in sacrifice-related scholarship have formed the structure of many key texts on the subject. Two of the core issues have been the role of violence and the role of meat in sacrifice.

#### THE ROLE OF VIOLENCE

The question of violence has formed a long-standing debate, where sacrifice can be described as a transformed form of hunting (Burkert 1972:16–22, 1985:58; Detienne 1989:5; Meuli 1975:999) and a ritualized type of killing (for animal sacrifice see Girard 1977, 1986, 1987; Hubert, Mauss 1964:67–70; Smith 1987:197; for human sacrifice see Green 2001 esp. 163–176; Burkert 1985:63), or as an act not necessarily related to hunting or perceived of as violent in specific contexts (see Bremmer 2010:141; Vernant 1989:85–86).

Many studies of sacrifice attempt to explain how sacrifice serves society in functional terms. Bremmer agrees that sacrifice is ritual slaughter, does constitute a community, and is killing for eating, as advanced by Meuli, Burkert, and Vernant respectively, but argues that these represent "secular" reductionist explanations that lack insight into the aims of the participants, in this case ancient Greeks (Bremmer 2010:144). Reason and meaning can vary as to the individual even when a social practice is organized at a community level. Scholarship sometimes struggles to evaluate social action within sacrifice by questioning the appropriateness of emic and etic perspectives of analysis and interpreting potentially culturally specific views.

#### THE ROLE OF MEAT IN ANIMAL SACRIFICE

Categorizing Greek and Roman sacrificial practices is not a simple matter. Greek sacrificial practices are often described as the normative core, and Roman sacrificial practices taken as

largely replicating these Greek practices. Our comparison of these cultures' customs requires care. The modern lens used to compare and contrast these cultures must tread a careful path. Does emphasizing similarity or difference between aspects of Greek and Roman sacrificial practices privilege or undermine the importance of separate belief systems or interaction between cultures? These issues are not easily resolved, but must be confronted.

For instance, comparing the role of meat in animal sacrifice of Greek and Roman practices illustrates how limiting it can be to draw conclusions within a narrow dichotomy to describe the two cultures. Animal sacrifice in ancient Greek contexts in particular, has received attention as a primary source for meat in the diet (Bloch 1992:24–45; Detienne 1989:esp. 3; Detienne, Vernant 1989). The consumption of the meat through animal sacrifice enables collective participation within precise social structures. Apart from dietary benefits, animal sacrifice is also connected to all levels of politics within a Greek city, ranging from the collective meals of prisoners to the founding of a colony (Detienne 1989:3–4). Even the Pythagoreans' abstinence from particular types of meat invites a political-religious interpretation, according to Detienne (1989:5ff). The distribution of types and portions of meat and other substances from animal sacrifice also creates a hierarchy among the participants and those excluded (for instance Sælid Gilhus 2006:116).

A growing dialogue acknowledging the consumption of animal meat outside of sanctuary space, even apart from hunting contexts (especially Ekroth 2007; Parker 2010), has improved our means of understanding the complicated relationships between sacred and secular acts in Greek and Roman societies. For a time, there was a notion that the quintessential difference between Greek and Roman animal sacrifice was the inviolability of meat consumption outside of a sacred setting for the Greeks and the potential to sell meat in the marketplace in Roman society (for the view of meat in the Greek world having sacrificial origins see Lietzmann 1949; for the sale of meat and Roman markets see Holleran 2012:160–180; an interesting instance is debated in McDonough 2004:74–75; Scheid 2003:90–91).

The particular contexts of meat consumption in both cultures are more complex. Given the numerous lararia and altars from domestic settings preserved in Campania (Boyce 1937; Giocobella 2008), and information concerning sacred rituals performed in conjunction with the consumption of meat in Roman domestic settings, a more nuanced analysis is required to understand the relationship between public and private Roman religion and how animal sacrifice and the consumption of meat related to each other in the Roman world.

The Greek world too, however, has produced literary and epigraphic evidence that refutes the notion that sacrifice was compulsory for the consumption of meat of any sort. Examples of meat being consumed outside of sanctuary settings indicate that commercial and practical concerns were involved at least sometimes (Naiden 2013:232–275; Parker 2010:140–144). Literary evidence affords evidence of meat of some description being sold in the marketplace via Theophrastus's Shameless Man (*Characters* 9.4). Other accounts indicate the sale of sacrificial meat in the market, including a description of Aesop purchasing the tongues of sacrificed pigs in the market (G and W *Vita Aesopi*; see Isenberg 1975:272–273), and ravenous kites on Elis refraining from eating the flesh of sacred victims, but getting scraps of the meat as it is carried through the market (Aristotle *De mirabilibus*

*auscultationibus* 123, 842a34–842b2). A description of historical unrest during the rule of Dionysius I at Syracuse indicates that animals appropriate for sacrifice were not always dealt with in such a way when the citizens slaughtered and sold their herd animals in protest to imposed taxes, and when the tyrant imposed a limit to the number of animals that could be slaughtered daily, the citizens began to sacrifice the animals (Aristotle *Oeconomica* 1349b 11–14). A piece of epigraphic evidence suggests that meat from a sacrifice related to the Lesser Panathenaia was distributed in two settings, some immediately on the Acropolis and some later to each deme elsewhere, possibly in the Kerameikos (IG II 334.10–16, see Ekroth 2008:277; Rhodes and Osborne 2003, no.81). Some of these instances of meat consumption outside of sanctuaries mention the inclusion of nonsacrificial meat, which can include animal species not appropriate for sacrifice and animals that died of natural causes (Naiden 2013:232–275; Parker 2010:140–144). One vivid example is the case Naiden makes for the consumption of pork in the messes of Sparta (2013:250–258). The Greek world, just as the Roman world, requires further thought as to the role of sacrificial meat across public and private settings.

The addition of Christianity to these contexts adds another interesting level of concern over the source of meat for sale in markets. For example, we may explore the complexity of the relationship between sacrificial practices in the Greek and Roman worlds through Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 10:25–29; see also Isenberg 1975:271). This text reveals interpretations of sacrificial practices varying according to time and location. In this case, Corinth, as a Greek city that, in the Roman period, particularly in the mid-first century C.E., was rife with cultural interactions, including a number of Christian residents who found themselves navigating their way through a complex set of circumstances concerning religious belief and diet. Paul gives advice whether or not to purchase meat from the market or partake in a meal if in either case the Christian does not know if the meat was sacrificed in honor of a pagan god. This indicates that meat at a market or at a home in Corinth then could have been from (pagan) animal sacrifice or from a nonsacrificial slaughter.

Opening the discussion to consider unexpected dynamics of sacrificial practices both within and beyond the Greek and Roman worlds allows for new insights. The conference allowed scholars working in different periods and locations across the Mediterranean and Europe to voice their own understandings of central issues related to different forms of sacrificial practices.

#### FRAMEWORK OF THE CONFERENCE

The occasion of the conference was held as the annual symposium for the Institute for European and Mediterranean Archaeology (IEMA) at the University at Buffalo, SUNY. It was organized as an opportunity to explore the rite of sacrifice from multiple perspectives across an array of contexts. The scholars involved represent a broad gamut of disciplines that tackle the concept and practice of sacrifice, including: anthropology, archaeology, epigraphy, literature, and theology. In the end, the participants' work spans ancient to contemporary contexts across the Mediterranean and much of Europe, exploring case studies from a

variety of contexts: prehistoric, protohistoric, Egyptian, Near Eastern, Greek, Punic, Iberian, Etruscan, Roman, Christian, and post-domestic. There was general recognition that the seeming ubiquitous existence of offering-based practices that might be described as sacrifice was an exciting common ground for discussing disparate contexts and different issues. There was no searching for universal truths, but rather a collaborative exploration of the rich variety of sacrificial practices and experiences.

As editor I suggested various areas for the participants to explore as they saw fit. The overt functions of sacrifice set in a specifically religious sphere often involve many other levels; sacrifice joins sacred and secular elements in part to serve social needs. As described below, these areas included such questions as the importance of actors, substances, time, space, and regulations.

Sacrifice is a powerful means of transformation; individual actors can gain specialized social roles, and objects, places, and actions can take on additional meanings. This rite offers a means of communication with a deity, which could have profound effects on the lives of the participants. The substances involved in sacrifice act as physical links between the mundane and the holy. Blood and wine, smoke and incense can travel into the earth or to the heavens carrying with them the sacrificers' vows and requests. The presence of these substances led to the confinement of many sacrificial practices within special physical places, protected from impure actions and persons. The necessity of purification for people, animals, objects, and spaces involved in sacrifice helps restrict and heighten the process. Part of the powerful meanings involved in sacrifice involves the concept of tradition through time and space. Repetition and the sense of inheritance of a practice begun before one's lifetime give importance, continuance, and respect to a social and religious practice at the individual and social scales. Also, because sacrifice is present in public and private contexts, this helps demonstrate how the functions of sacrifice can be meaningful on levels from the personal to the communal, for an individual's health, a family's well-being, an army's victory, or a city's protection. In particular, it is interesting to consider how sacrifice offers an effective means of communicating with a deity. The importance placed on sacrifice is also seen in the detail. Many cultures take great care in following formulae and procedures during a sacrifice. In many contexts incorrect utterances or actions can nullify the entire process. There is a strict means of communicating with deities in order to successfully have a request fulfilled or an offering of thanks accepted.

### THEMES EXPLORED IN THE VOLUME

The essays here are not divided into strict disciplinary or chronological groupings. Regions, types of offerings, and other criteria are intermingled to highlight less obvious connections among the scholars. During the IEMA conference, three other presentations were made, but are not included in this volume; Philip Kiernan discussed the use of sacrificial knives in Roman western provinces; Tom Palaima discussed the potential political significance of sacrifice in Mycenaean culture, with particular analysis of Linear B tablets from Pylos; Andrew Reynolds questioned the meaning of non-funerary weapon deposition in Anglo-Saxon Britain.

## PART I: DEFINING AND REDEFINING THE BOUNDARIES OF SACRIFICE

The essays in this section include views on the theory of sacrifice, questions of universality, and explorations of the significance of sacrifice in the landscape from different disciplinary backgrounds, while trying to understand the sacrificial practices from the perspectives of the participants.

Phillips Stevens Jr. offers a broad and thorough discussion of anthropological scholarship on the topic of sacrifice. The importance of ethnographic fieldwork is suggested to be a vibrant pool from which classicists and other scholars can share in the building of understandings of humanity through the variegated, but universal presence of sacrificial practices around the world. He stresses the importance of considering multiple perspectives for the functions and reasons behind sacrifice and to appreciate its different elements and forms.

Turning to archaeology, Åsa Berggren questions the appropriateness of viewing sacrifice as a universal concept. She is primarily concerned with problematizing the journey from theoretical perspectives to archaeological interpretation, and the categorization of “sacred” and “sacrificial” in these two arenas. Berggren’s case study is set in the fens of southern Sweden with long-term development from the Late Mesolithic to the Early Bronze Age and is used as a means of testing practice theory. She questions if the wetland deposition of varied materials should be viewed as ritualization of practice, whose meaning can be investigated by understanding what relationships were created through the practice at Hindbygården fen. The role of memory, as seen through long-term, physical action in the landscape plays a key role.

Understanding the functions of material deposits is also central for Christoph Huth’s essay. Here he discusses deliberate depositions of metalwork during the Bronze and Iron Ages in several locations across Europe. Huth argues for the importance of conceptualizing mythic functions of precious weapons and vessels. Contemporary iconography of weapons and vessels are employed to demonstrate the importance of these items within nonutilitarian and divine spheres, and so are gifts from the gods that are offered back to them via permanent deposition.

In a very different arena, Samantha Hurn explores through extensive ethnographic fieldwork the recent circumstances of foxhunting in the United Kingdom as a form of sacrifice. In particular, the concept of a population divided over different relationships with animals, landscapes, and agriculture is seen at the core of divergent perceptions of this practice. Many “post-domestic” non-agriculturalists view foxhunting as a violent and unnecessary sport, while many others involved in foxhunting, particularly farmers, express different views, including the need to protect flocks of sheep. Hurn argues that seeing the hunt as a form of sacrifice in a secularized society with industrialized food production produces a new understanding of the relationship between humans and animals, as well as violence and food consumption.

## PART II: SACRIFICE ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

The essays of the second section span a cross-section of classical contexts (Egyptian, Carthaginian, Greek, and Etruscan) by focusing on myth and iconography held within material culture and human remains involved in sacrifice.

Mary-Ann Pouls Wegner investigates the importance reflected in the material culture of sacrifice for all levels of society in extramural ritual landscapes of ancient Egypt. She particularly highlights contexts of sacrifices to the god Osiris in Abydos. Pouls Wegner demonstrates how the presence of the *weskhet*-dishes supports the textual and iconographic evidence indicating that the ritual processions and donations act to reaffirm social hierarchies.

The flames of the ongoing debate concerning child sacrifice at Carthage are stoked here with Jeffrey H. Schwartz's detailed examination of the osteological evidence. Schwartz argues that interpretations based on noncontemporary written sources, as well as enigmatic inscriptions and iconography, neglect the physical evidence of neonatal and perinatal remains. Several recently contentious issues are addressed, including: potential tooth crown shrinkage, visibility of neonatal-lines, the sex of the individuals, and the type of wood fuel in the cremations.

Tyler Jo Smith addresses the consummate form of evidence for Greek sacrifice, Attic vases. Here, Smith uses Folkert van Straten's influential work as a foundation on which to build. She examines the visual language of sacrifice in specific painted vases in relation to contexts of production, use, and deposition. The concepts of performance and gaze inform the social actions within the choices made by the vase painters and the viewers' engagement with the vessels.

The Etruscans are brought to the fore with Nancy T. de Grummond's investigation into human sacrifice by elucidating the intriguing archaeological evidence of long-term ritual action from the Pian di Civita, Tarquinia. De Grummond details the ten depositions of human remains from the site and argues for different sacred practices at work, including: an honorable burial of an epileptic child who may have been deemed as having oracular powers, donative offerings of infants, and sacrifice or ritual killing of a potential prisoner of war. She stresses the importance of the myth of Tages, and iconography of human sacrifice in Etruscan art for better understanding the role of children in Etruscan religious belief.

### PART III: EXPLORING EXCEPTIONAL CASES OF SACRIFICE

The essays in this section question the notions of violence and resolution in sacrifice through discoveries from the archaeological record, focusing on human and animal remains.

Andrea Zeeb-Lanz and her colleagues present the fascinating results from Herxheim, a Neolithic site in Germany. Belonging to the Linear Bandkeramik Culture, Herxheim is unique not only because of the remains of human sacrifice of more than 500 individuals, but also because of the evidence of cannibalism. The physical remains of the sacrifice are sewn into the fabric of the landscape by their deposition in a ditch system surrounding the settlement. Zeeb-Lanz et al. question how the definitions of "sacrifice" can be used within archaeological interpretation. They also propose a need for a better understanding of the relationships between levels of violence and human sacrifice in a society.

Enriqueta Pons and her two colleagues present their findings from a site dating from the fifth to second century B.C.E., Mas Castellar de Pontós, Spain. The site holds an interesting key to examining animal sacrifice, in this case dog sacrifice, within a context where the animal is seen to perform sacred and secular roles by the varying forms of deposition. The

canine remains at Mas Castellar are found in the use and reuse of pits for votive deposits and the collection of food waste, as well as in the remains of structures that combine domestic and ritual activities. Considering the different methods of treatment, their disposal, and their association with other animal remains presents new questions regarding the varying relationships between humans and dogs.

Guinevere Granite explores the enigmatic array of evidence of bog bodies in northwestern Europe. She presents the early stages of her research on bog bodies by considering the multiple theories currently used to interpret them. Granite argues that while some of the individuals might have been sacrificed as part of religious rituals, there are alternate plausible circumstances for others. The individual bog bodies must be examined individually and contextually, rather than supporting one general explanation for all.

#### PART IV: FORMULARIZING AND REGULARIZING SACRIFICE

In this section, the essays explore issues of meaning and transformation of sacrifice through language and symbols. Roger D. Woodard explores the power of words and signs in religious ritual in the forms of speech, writing, and sacred offering as recorded in a unique passage in the Hebrew Bible, concerning the Sotah. At the core of this ritual, a wife suspected of adultery undergoes a rite, whereby a prayer to Yahweh and an offering to Him via the woman's body are used to discern the truth, which will be made manifest through the woman's potential reproductive morbidity. The offering consists of water, tabernacle dust, and the dissolved alphabetic signs of the priest's request. Woodard demonstrates that the alphabetic signs themselves, written and dissolved into the potion to be drunk, are a powerful sacrificial offering, that is, something that is ultimately a gift from God that is returned to Him.

The importance of language continues with Michael Gagarin's investigation of the Greek laws on public sacrifice. He uses a number of public inscriptions concerning sacrifices in association with sacred spaces. Chief among this type of inscription concerning sacrifice is the sacred calendar, usually delineating the date or frequency, the divine recipient of the sacrifice, and the type of animal offering. Gagarin argues that these inscriptions of Greek laws function on both legal and religious levels. The cost of the events needed to be mandated to ensure that both civic duty was fulfilled and the gods were honored.

S. Mark Heim discusses one of the most influential areas of study in Western scholarship for understanding sacrifice, the death of Christ. Here, he questions the concept and terminology of describing the death of Christ as a "sacrifice." By contrasting early Christian texts and iconography, Heim highlights how the circumstances surrounding the death of Christ, before and after, make for what could be seen as an unlikely example of the quintessential sacrifice for Christians. Heim explores the development of the cross as a central Christian icon, not adopted before the fifth century C.E., which initially related more to execution in a secular sense, rather than sacrifice within a sacred sphere. In particular, Heim counters René Girard's anti-sacrificial reading of the death of Christ in terms of the scapegoat effect.

## CONSIDERATIONS RAISED THROUGH DISCUSSION

### ESTIMATING VALUE

Strict categorizations were avoided here; the aspects of compartmentalization are largely artificial for practical reasons of organizing text into a traditional format. In reality, various issues are woven throughout many of the essays regardless of context or disciplinary framework. The shared common ground and unexpected divergences testify to the relevance of investigating sacrificial practices as a theme in an interdisciplinary forum to foster new ideas and question old ones. Unanticipated areas that came into focus for this volume, as the editor sees it, concern the estimation of the value of sacrificial offerings, the effects of social power for participants of sacrificial practices, and the importance of setting.

Discerning the relative “value” of sacrificial offerings necessitates appreciating the context-specific circumstances in each case. Our assumptions based on modern, Western perspectives, for instance, of the value of human life versus (nonhuman) animal life and inanimate objects, must be examined. The offering of human life is often presumed to be the highest, most costly, powerful, or meaningful type of offering to lose through sacrifice. If the life in question, however, is from outside of the community, as discussed by Andrea Zeeb-Lanz et al. and Nancy de Grummond (potentially, in one instance), or is part of a ritual execution of a criminal as discussed by Guinevere Granite or even S. Mark Heim’s essay, then how does that affect the value of the offering as perceived by the sacrificer(s) and the rest of the participants? For communities that lose members to the human sacrifices held elsewhere, the sense of loss and gain brought about through this ritual is felt even more widely, which could be considered abstractly in such cases as described by Andrea Zeeb-Lanz et al. or very clearly in the case of Christians as described by S. Mark Heim. If the infant remains at Carthage represent funerary—rather than sacrificial—ritual, as Jeffrey Schwartz suggests, then human life at this early stage could have garnered value in a very different sense in the Carthaginian culture from other contemporary, ancient cultures, which lack high concentrations of infant burials.

### THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL POWER

“Power,” too, must be examined within its particular contexts to consider the individuals involved in social dynamics surrounding a sacrifice, and the consequences both at and beyond the altar. Social power is at stake in issues of inclusion in and exclusion from sacrificial practices. A unique type of sacrificial rite can even include a powerful threat of curse over an individual’s life as described by Roger D. Woodard, which potentially affected the behavior of others in the community. As Christoph Huth describes, the deposits of exemplary weapons and vessels could have been used to lay socially powerful claims of connections between mortal and divine through the bearing and returning of gifts from the gods.

The social power and relevancy of sacrifice also relates to the functions it provides, as explained by Phillips Stevens Jr. Sacrifice need not relate purely to sacred functions. If, in

ancient Greece, animal sacrifice served as a primary source of meat in the diet, then secular and practical aspects of sacrifice must be acknowledged elsewhere. The sacrifice in Enriqueta Pons et al.'s piece demonstrated that some of the dogs were butchered, presumably for consumption. Samantha Hurn described how foxhunting provided a sense of community in several ways, always including a communal meal, but of lamb, rather than fox meat. Equally, Michael Gagarin demonstrated how the Greek inscriptions describing sacrificial practices involved practical concerns to ensure the correct execution of the rites.

#### IMPORTANCE OF SETTING

The scale and breadth of social power for the participants of sacrifice can also be dependent upon the physical settings of public or private locations and the political contexts of either conformity or subversion. A community's long-term development of a defined landscape through sacrificial practices is revealed in Åsa Berggren's discussion. Similarly, political power seems to be expressed publicly through the human depositions in direct association with monumental architecture in the case described by Nancy T. de Grummond, and the vast amounts of human remains used to encircle an entire village in Andrea Zeeb-Lanz et al.'s essay. Pouls-Wegner asserts the importance of the perceived marginal, extramural ritual deposits to Osiris as important contexts for negotiating a wide range of social statuses. The clandestine circumstances of locations and participation lay at the heart of Samantha Hurn's essay to subvert the larger, dominant community in order to maintain a smaller community. The choices made in the depiction of space and participation in Greek vase sacrificial imagery can also illuminate a deeper understanding of these ritual practices, as Tyler Jo Smith argues.

#### FINAL THOUGHTS

This volume explores how sacrifice plays a key role in the overlapping sacred and secular spheres for a number of societies in the past and present. Members of several disciplines have contributed their perspectives on disparate examples that share issues and themes that are beneficially considered in combination. The unique strengths of this project involve the incorporation of theory, material culture, and textual evidence at a number of case studies spanning a wide variety of contexts across the Mediterranean region and Europe.

The importance of sacrifice as a phenomenon with widespread social implications cannot be overstated. Insight into the sacrificial practices can illuminate the immediate context-specific circumstances, as well as the often long-term traditions surrounding their origins and transformations in a given society. Eschewing universal and reductive explanations, this collection instead considers new and divergent data from past and present case studies that can help broaden our field of vision while raising new questions and drawing new conclusions.

There is still more room to investigate cross-cultural and interdisciplinary similarities and dissimilarities of sacrificial practices for insights into the social contexts of sacrifice. Such potential approaches include complicating the presumed dichotomies between public

and private worship, and practical and spiritual functions of worship. In so many cases, one can see that sacrificial practices are not just isolated acts within a temple precinct, but actions that relate to other areas of social life. A simple explanation will not help explore an area so vast and changing. How religious beliefs and practices can be integral parts of life on individual and community levels is of fundamental importance to understanding the past and present.

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