

From snout to tail

Exploring the Greek sacrificial animal from the literary, epigraphical, iconographical, archaeological and zooarchaeological evidence

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Abstracts

BARTEK BEDNAREK (University of Krakow): *Μέχρι σπλάγχνων: When is that?*

In the Homeric epics, the process of animal sacrifice is often epitomised as an act of burning the thighbones for the gods and sharing the *splanchna* (offal) between the human participants in the ritual. This indicates the special position which ritual practice assigned to the internal organs of animals. It is further confirmed by Plutarch who reports that even Pythagoreans, notorious for their vegetarianism, would take their share of the *splanchna*. Even though from the point of view of twentieth century scholarship, which consisted in explaining religious phenomena by their social function and/or origins, the act of collective consumption of *splanchna* seemed to fit perfectly virtually all theoretical frameworks and to confirm their validity, its details in fact remain obscure. Even the full list of organs belonging to the category of *splanchna* is far from obvious, and the exact procedure for their roasting, division and consumption, however frequently mentioned in texts and depicted on vases, is nowhere described in detail. In my contribution, I would like to reassess some of the sources in order to ask (and possibly partially answer) the question of how much may actually be said about *splanchna*.

JAN-MATHIEU CARBON (Saxo Institute, Copenhagen): *Little ribs and triple ribs, sides and other bits...*

The paper will look at two occasionally neglected kinds of priestly portions in the textual evidence: the ribs and the “side of hip” from the hind leg. In the case of the ribs, an elucidation of the typical portion granted to officials will be proposed: this was a sagittal cut that consisted of the meat overlying and including the first three ribs counting down from the clavicle (usually called *tripleuron*). A less frequent, alternative portion (perhaps cut in a similar fashion) seems to have been the so-called “little rib(cage)”, which ought properly to designate meat around the last rib—the “false” or “floating rib”—which remained unattached to the sternum. These two portions thus belong to the opposite ends of the ribcage, one near the foreleg; the other, close to the abdomen. What was the significance of giving them? Moving from essentially philological work, some deeper questions will accordingly be raised. In the first case, it must be observed that the “triple-rib” was immediately adjacent to the shoulder of the foreleg, which often formed a part of the divine or priestly portion extracted from the animal. In

the case of the “side of hip”, it can be seen that this portion—again presumably half of the hip—mirrored the typical portion of ribs, not only through its designation, but more importantly through its connection with the hind leg and the tail/sacrum. By looking at how these portions from the ribcage and the hip were interrelated with other fundamental parts in the carcass, we can further affirm how the divine and priestly portions of Greek sacrifice formed intricately articulated anatomical and conceptual pairings.

FLINT DIBBLE (University of Cincinnati): *From carcasses to cuts of meat: A zooarchaeological assessment of hind-quarter processing in ancient Greece*

Zooarchaeological evidence for ritual sacrifice and butchery is presented from settlement contexts at Archaic period Azoria on Crete and the Late Archaic and Classical period area of the Athenian Agora. These assemblages are situated within the larger Greek dataset for sacrifice: zooarchaeological, textual, and iconographic evidence. At Azoria, there is evidence for burnt sacrificial ritual of sheep and goats, with the lower legs offered in both civic and domestic contexts. However, the carcasses are processed with cleavers in civic contexts and with knives in domestic contexts. Cleavers were used most commonly to chop through the hip joint, dividing the hind-leg from the carcass. Civic butchers/priests adopted more efficient tools and methods to deal with large-scale civic sacrifice. At the Athenian Agora, there is evidence for both burnt sheep, goat, and cattle femora in altar contexts and burnt lower legs in domestic pyre contexts. Intensive cleaver-butchery was the norm as these heavy tools were efficiently used to break down carcasses of all species. A lack of cutmarks extant on most parts of bovid femora indicate that cattle thighbones were treated with special care after chopping through the hip joint. On the other hand, sheep, goat, and pig specimens display cutmarks from both knives and cleavers distributed across the femur. This difference in butchery styles likely differentiates civic sacrifice of cattle from domestic or commercial butchery of smaller animals. At both Azoria and Athens, there is an effort to distinguish ritual meals in civic or communal dining contexts from those in domestic contexts through butchery style relating to the processing of the hind-leg.

GUNNEL EKROTH (Uppsala University): *To burn it all. Reflections on holocausts of sacrificial animals in practice and theory*

Holocaustic sacrifices, rituals at which the entire animal was put into the fire and no meat was left for the worshippers to consume, are the least studied of Greek sacrificial practices. This paper will first of all explore how such rituals were performed in practice; the species and age of the animals chosen, whether they were skinned, gutted and sectioned before burnt and what kind of installation is needed for such a process of extensive burning to be carried out. Secondly, the role of holocausts within the larger landscape of Greek sacrifice will be considered, especially the (in)frequency of such a handling of the sacrificial victim. Holocausts of entire animals need to be related to the burning of offerings in Greek religion at large, in particular the burning of the god’s share at *thysia* sacrifice, but also to other rituals at which the body was destroyed or discarded by other means than fire and at which no meat was consumed. Finally, the evaluation of our extant sources for holocausts will be touched upon and

in particular the question how we at all can show that they were performed. As a part of such a source critical evaluation, the paper will present some results of an experimental cremation performed at Uppsala in 2014.

GERHARD FORSTENPOINTNER (Veterinärmedizinische Universität, Vienna), collaborative paper with G. E. WEISSENGRUBER and A. GALIK: *On goats and their horns: Archaeozoological considerations on the ritual exploitation of caprines*

Goats being a main component of Mediterranean livestock since the beginnings of domestication, along with various forms of economical exploitation the species also played a major role within ritual traditions of worship and sacrifice. Two main aspects of ritual exploitation are discernible: Goats as victims of animal sacrifice and goat's horns as votive offerings or in emblematic function. Goats haven't always been suitable for sacrifice, relevant restrictions are known for the cults of Asclepius and Hera/Juno. On the other hand the species provided the main sacrificial victim for the Letoides, Apollon preferring bucks and his sister Artemis mainly focused on female goats that also used to accompany the goddess in her capacity as "pótnia theron". Also for Pan/Faunus and Dionysos/Bacchus the blood of tragi was a welcome offer. The osteologic record from Geometric layers of the Artemision at Ephesos impressively proves the predominance of female goats as basic resource of sacrificial meals. Goat's horns provided the construction material for the famous Delian "bomos kerátinos" that had been built by Apollon, utilizing the horns of wild goats that had been preyed by Artemis on Kythnos, and also the Ephesian Artemision was mentioned to house a notable horn-altar. Again, this literary reference finds more than satisfying validation by large amounts of horn-bearing cranial vaults, recovered from Geometric layers of the sanctuary. Goats are a common "topos" of Eastern Mediterranean, in particular Cretan-Minoan iconography, depicted either independently or accompanying other structures or entities. Due to morphological characteristics primordial relationships between Minoan "horns of consecration" and goat's horns appear worth discussing.

STELLA GEORGOUDI (EPHE, Paris): *Heads, tongues and the rest: The kephalê and its parts in the sacrificial practices*

The paper offers a reflection, based on literary and epigraphical evidence, on the vocabulary denoting the head and its parts – especially the tongues – of the sacrificial animal. Not only terms such as *kephalê*, *hêmikraira* or *glôssa* will be taken in account, but also words such as *koruphaia*, *kephalaion* (the meaning of which is not clear), *egkephalos* ("brain"), *rugchos* or *runchos* ("snout"), *ôta* or *ouata* ("ears") and even *siagones* ("jawbones"). An effort will be made to clarify these terms and to understand how these parts are distributed and to whom. Concurrently, it will also be useful to tackle the following topics en route towards a more general discussion: to verify the presence or the absence of these terms in Aristotle's works on animals; to examine the possible nuances of words found both in literary and epigraphical sources (for example, the term *hêmikraira*, in Aristophanes or in Athenaeus, but also in the sacrificial

regulations of the Phrearrhioi in Attica); and, finally, to explore the sense of certain particular terms in a sacrificial context, such as *oulokarêna* cited by the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*.

SANDRINE HUBER (Université de Lorraine): *The forgotten sacrificial cuts: Bones, tendons, and fat*

Division, distribution and sharing were major actions at Greek sacrifice: the sharing of the animal first between mortals and gods and secondly between humans. Studies on Greek sacrificial animals usually focus on the parts awarded to gods and humans, or the refuse from butchery and the remains of eating the meat (that is to say, the disposal of the non-consumable leftovers at the time of cooking or after consumption). But what about all the parts of the animal which were collected and kept for other uses, whether it was for food to be consumed outside sanctuary contexts, for craft or for other practical purposes? This paper will address the processing and use of the carcasses from sacrifices in a wider perspective. What can we say about the bones that did not belong to the god's portion, or which were not leftovers from meals or butchery-refuse—to what uses could such bones be put? Also, tendons, fat, blood and other parts of the animal's body, like the skins, are often forgotten in this context. The question is not relevant when a single animal of a medium sized species (sheep and goats) or a small number of animals were sacrificed, but becomes important when larger animals, like cattle, are involved. Large-scale public sacrifices, whether hecatombs in the strict sense or not, assured cities not only of a supply of meat but also of other products operating both in the food chain and in craft production. When studying the Greek sacrificial animal, besides the meat which has been the preoccupation of scholars, we should also include other elements of the carcass, like tendons, fat, bones neither linked to gods nor men, blood, and of course the skins.

JENNIFER LARSON (Kent State University): *Blood, purity and ritual killing: Exploring intuitive models*

In this paper I will explore some examples of Greek *sphagia* ("blood victims"), a category of ritual killing which emphasizes the shedding of blood. I will attempt to identify the conceptual models that allow practitioners of *sphagia* to infer that their methods are efficacious. I am applying a cognitive approach, according to which many ritual techniques are predicated on a substrate of intuitive beliefs which recur across cultures. Although the details of the techniques themselves must be learned and vary by culture, the underlying beliefs are surprisingly consistent and do not depend on cultural transmission. Agentive and mechanistic models of causation are generated separately in the mind, using different cognitive tools. I apply this distinction to blood use in Greek rituals, exploring which uses facilitate interaction/reciprocity with an intentional agent, and which uses achieve a result mechanistically (i.e. through the Frazerian Laws of Similarity and Contact). Under the first category I discuss offerings to gods, heroes, rivers, and other superhuman beings, as well as divination. Under the second category I discuss blood as an instrument of purification/aversion, and performative bloodshed, such as battle-line *sphagia* and oath rituals. Performative rituals are especially interesting,

because they draw at different times upon both models, depending on the practitioners and the context.

FRANÇOIS LISSARRAGUE (EHESS, Paris): *Hooves and legs, above and under the table*

In this paper, I will discuss images showing a leg of meat carried by an attendant to sacrifice, as well as dogs and other animals gnawing pieces of meat down below tables. In both cases, the presence of the hoof is a signal which makes the meat recognisable as such. The actual animal is still visible next to the shapeless piece of edible flesh. I will try to explore the implications of such a graphic choice, functioning as a sign (pointing to the nature of the object) and as a marker (connoting sacrifice).

MICHAEL MACKINNON (University of Winnipeg): *Animal heads and feet in ritual contexts: Their relationship between sacred and profane*

Traditional divisions ascribing zooarchaeological remains recovered from ancient Greek ritual contexts into categories linked with (i) altar offerings (i.e., often the materials burnt for the gods); (ii) consumption debris (i.e., materials correlated with ritual dining and feasting at such events), and (iii) butchery refuse (i.e., materials associated with the initial preparation of the animal carcasses for offering and consumption) help provide a broad basis for understanding the wider process and operational sequence of animal sacrifice. Nevertheless, as Gunnel Ekroth notes, the reality within such sacrifices does not always fit neatly into generalized patterns expected. Evidence for sacrifice of animal parts, such as the thigh and tail, registers fairly concretely among several sites. Correlations these parts share with recovered zooarchaeological remains such as the femur, pelvis and caudal vertebrae have similarly been explored. The situation with faunal remains associated with the head and feet of sacrificed animals, however, remains less securely investigated, given these components may cross-cut various categories above (i.e., altar offerings, consumption debris, butchery refuse) depending on circumstances. For instance, one might expect these elements to be charred on the altar in the case of a *holocaust* sacrifice, but is such an assumption always justified? Similarly, when might butchery and/or consumption debris incorporate elements from heads and feet, and when might this not the case? This paper re-examines the representation of heads and feet among zooarchaeological data for Greek ritual sites in light of the cultural and natural biases that can affect these assemblages and their subsequent interpretation. Attention focuses upon aspects including (i) taphonomic factors shaping assemblage formation; (ii) variations in bone density among skeletal elements, which influence their survival and representation; (iii) the association of heads and feet with an animal's hide, and, in turn, the role of the hide in ritual operations; (iv) the relationship between *holocaust* sacrifice and the expected representation of heads and feet in faunal assemblages; (v) consumption of materials associated with head and feet in ritual feasting; (vi) symbolism (whether expressed or not) that might surround the use, display or role of animal heads and feet in antiquity. Where possible, comparisons will be made with the evidence for heads and feet among non-ritual zooarchaeological assemblages in Greek

antiquity to provide a wider context for their distribution among ritual sites and to explore further the relationship between sacred and profane, in this respect.

JAKE MORTON (University of Pennsylvania): *From the butcher's knife to the gods' ears: The leg and tail in Greek sacrifice*

This paper argues that, throughout the process of Greek sacrifice, the leg and tail formed a single integrated unit that was both practical and deeply religious. It has long been accepted that thighs and tails were burned on altars in ancient Greece and that this act was where communication with the gods took place - thus forming one of, if not the, most important elements of ancient Greek sacrifice. However, up to this point the leg and tail have not been treated as elements of a single holistic unit. Through reinterpretation of textual and iconographic evidence, combined with my study of butchery and an extensive experimental archaeological project involving the burning of thighs and tails, the thigh and tail are shown to form a single sacrificial unit from the butchering of the sacrificial animal, through being burnt on the altar, until they conveyed communication with the divine.

VINCIANE PIRENNE-DELFORGE (Université de Liège): *Animals as medium, food, or honours? Greek ways of communicating with the divine*

Sacrifice is an appealing topic, which has been addressed with various interpretive frameworks for more than a century. Since the time of the so-called “Cambridge ritualists”, such as Robertson Smith or Jane Harrison, many works of scholarship have focused on the sacrificial community and its response to violence, or its self-definition. Twentieth-century scholarship of Greek religion has reflected these various trends of research, notably in the important work of scholars as Walter Burkert or Jean-Pierre Vernant. In recent decades, sacrificial animals have become an issue that is more and more precisely addressed, thanks to the growing interest in zooarchaeology and the huge amount of information provided by the close analysis of bones. Animals are evidently “good to think with”, because the way of dealing with them in Greek sacrificial contexts can give us a lot of practical information about food and butchery, but also important clues for reconstituting ancient conceptions of the gods who are recipients of sacrifice. The connexion of sacrificial actions with representations of the divine world is a crucial part of our understanding of what we call “ancient Greek religion”, whose “theology” was not inscribed in sacred texts but in rituals.

TYLER JO SMITH (University of Virginia): *Taking the bull by the horns: Animal heads in scenes of sacrifice on Greek vases*

Many scenes of animal sacrifice on Greek vases portray horned animals as victims. As is the case with animals in scenes of sacrifice more generally, the position, treatment, and behaviour of animals have not been thoroughly explored. This paper takes a close look at the horned animals in these scenes with particular attention to their types, their function in the scenes, and their interactions with human figures. The iconographic evidence will be drawn from the black- and red-figure vases of Athens, as

well as some examples from other regions of Greece, such as Corinth and Boeotia. It will be observed that vase-painters who highlight the ‘pre-kill’ phases of sacrifice quite deliberately use certain visual mechanisms to draw attention to the horns and heads of the victims. An animal’s horns not only serve to help identify its species, but also may exaggerate its importance and size from the viewer’s perspective; both head and horns are used as essential points of visual contact, encouraging the viewer to focus on the specific places and moments being shown; and, finally, the position and directional facing of the animal’s head and/or horns may show it to be a resistant, willing, or controlled victim.

VASSO ZACHARI (EHESS, Paris): *On the stylized bucranium and its close relationship with the altar*

The term ‘stylized bucranium’, in the title of the present communication, is borrowed by a dialogue among Agatha Christie, her husband, the archaeologist Max Mallowan, and two assistants working with them during excavations in Syria and Iraq in the 1930s. It was the final phrase, the verdict given by the archeologist in a heated conversation over the nomenclature of findings, objects to be labeled and classified. “Boukranion” (Greek, βουκράνιον, βούκρανο), which literary signifies the ox’s head, is a general term used more frequently to designate an architectural motif, an ornament made up of a scraggy bull’s head with horns, adorned with garlands and flowers. It is used for decoration on temples, as well as on other buildings, and more abundantly on marble cylindrical altars, alternating with other objects such as phialae, rosettes or other cultic and/or decorative motifs, dating from the third century BC and on. The boukranion appears either as a skull with no flesh, or as a head with meat, hair, eyes, ears etc. But how did these two elements, the altar and the ox’s head, settle down together? The relation between the altar and the boukranion is long dated and the answer is provided by iconographic evidence on the Attic red-figure vases depicting ritual practices. The altar – the most important construction for cultic purposes – is often depicted on vase painting in scenes of procession and sacrifice, even if that was not the unique use of the altar. Animals were prepared and beautified with adornments before arriving at the altar. But once the animal was killed and slaughtered, what happened to its head? How was it treated? What was the importance of this part of the animal in the sacrifice? Was it offered to the gods or was it destined to the mortals? Images on vases with altars often depict boukrania, as a whole head or as a skull, and pairs of horns on the background of the scene. Some of them are more naturalistic, other less well groomed, or more abstract but explicitly dissociated from altars, contrary to the archaeological *realia*. On some examples the altar is absent, which may question their close association. By studying the context and the role of the boukranion on Attic vases, this communication will attempt to approach these points in order to explore the Greek sacrificial animal, and more precisely the use of its head from an iconographical point of view.

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