

Practicing and Performing Sacrifice

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The studies of sacrifice on the north coast of Peru presented in this book expand our knowledge of the region, particularly as to how the bodies of sacrificed humans and animals were treated. This has provided a clear picture of those practices and thus has great potential to clarify how sacrificial acts were integrated into other areas of domestic, political, and social life. Through these studies, we gain a sense of how rituals of sacrifice could create, reinforce, or challenge particular social and gender norms, roles, and hierarchies, among other facets of society. Indeed, that is one of the strengths of this contextualized approach, wherein the detailed analyses of skeletal remains are used to reconstruct ritual processes and interpret how those practices are connected to other facets of an individual's life and society at large. The analytical strength of archaeology and bioarchaeology is the focus on the material and the spatial, which gives us a closer and more clarifying view of people's practices and minimizes the obsession with getting in the minds of the skeletons we study.

This volume does much to show those strengths through detailed studies of sacrificial victims (humans but also animals and objects), the places where the events occurred, and the associated practices that together constituted a sacrifice. That is, although many of the authors

did not explicitly discuss it this way, their empirical studies of the physical transformations made during sacrifices bring us closer to realizing an "archaeology of sacrifice/ritual/religion"¹ that focuses on practices, not a hand-wringing about the inaccessibility of beliefs among a people that are long dead. I see this as evidence of maturation in our discipline and an analytical tack that is sometimes in line with a practice theory approach, in which we describe the actions of people and evaluate how those actions may have been influenced by personal experiences (e.g., evidence of previous violent encounters), historical contingency (e.g., long-term conflicts with neighboring regions), and larger social forces (e.g., norms or unspoken rules about what young men or old women should or should not do). In this context of trying to use archaeology to get at practice, I agree with Campbell (2012:308) when he says it is a misunderstanding that archaeology is not well suited for studying ritual/religion due to the "Protestant-inflicted notion of Modern intellectualist scholars of religion that religion is about belief rather than practice."

This volume on sacrifice has aided in clarifying three key issues, certainly within the setting of pre-Hispanic north coast Peru and, perhaps, more broadly in other spatial and temporal contexts: (1) definitions of sacrifice and the near-consensus that it should be conceived as part of religious practice, or what many of the authors view as a means for communing with deities and ancestors; (2) the theoretical framing of sacrifice and the common division between the sacred and profane (mundane) to identify and distinguish sacrificial acts from other activities (despite some longstanding criticisms in anthropology that challenge this Western dualistic approach); and (3) theoretical approaches that evaluate the structuring effects of sacrifice. That is, how does sacrifice affect the social and political realms, particularly as it relates to social and gender roles, hierarchies, and the organization of society more generally? And simultaneously, how does a society itself structure the practices of sacrifice? This volume aids in identifying concrete examples that clarify how sacrifice structured, and was structured by, society. For example, we have an exploration of how Moche gender roles affected who was selected for sacrifice and who participated in the ritual acts (Verano and Phillips, chapter 9); a discussion about how conceptions of personhood and group identity shape how a group might select and ultimately process the sacrificial victims (Klaus and Shimada, chapter 5); and a stimulating argument about how the ritual destruction of ceramic objects shaped the ongoing practice

of ritual sacrifices (in all its forms), which were meant to foment and continue relations with the supernatural (Millaire, chapter 13).

What Is Sacrifice?

In this book, humans, animals, and objects are all given analytical treatment in the discussion of sacrifice in northern coastal Peru. This strikes me as an intellectually stimulating approach, and I will not delve into the long-standing debates about the animacy and agency of animals and inanimate objects, something others have discussed elsewhere (Ingold 2007; Latour 2005; Tung 2014; Williams 2004). Further, because the authors who discuss the sacrifice of animals (Gaither et al., chapter 6; Szpak et al., chapter 12) and objects (Millaire, chapter 13) explain how they are part of the larger Andean practice of offering meant to nurture relationships between humans and the divine, I prefer to focus on the definition(s) of sacrifice (or lack thereof) within the volume to highlight the parallels and distinctions in how sacrifice was identified, described, and analyzed.

In chapter 1, the editors note that this book speaks to the challenges surrounding archaeological definitions of sacrifice, and they present a nice summary of the various ways that previous scholars have defined sacrifice. The editors do not set forth a definition that the contributors had to follow. Instead, each author approaches the topic independently, some clearly articulating how sacrifice should be defined, understood, and studied; others marched on with the assumption that there was agreement as to what constituted sacrifice and what role it played in ancient pre-Hispanic societies.

Should sacrifice be placed squarely within the realm of religion (Schwartz 2012) because, as some argue, it is about communing with the supernatural and “affecting the suprahuman realm of immaterial entities” (Klaus and Toyne, chapter 1 citing Tatlock [2006])? Or, as Klaus and Toyne suggest, might that be too limiting because it excludes ritualized executions on the more secular end of the spectrum, as in the cases of ritually executed war prisoners (Verano 1986a). Does that thus require a distinction—ritual sacrifice versus secular sacrifice—or are those categories more reflective of our post-Enlightenment “intellectualist reification of ‘religion’ as a unique and independent sphere of practice and (especially) belief” (Campbell 2012:306), combined with an

intellectual embodiment of the US Constitution's First Amendment (at least for American scholars)?

As Campbell (2012) argues, sacrifice should not be distinguished and embedded in "the sacred" or in "religion" because in many ancient and modern societies religion is inextricably linked to politics and to the social. Building on Asad (1993), he notes that the modern West has come to view "religion" as a perspective and, thus, as an analytical category into which the study of sacrifice is placed. For Campbell, using the etymology of the word *sacrifice* (to make sacred/holy) as a starting point essentially privileges the Western conception, and he posits that this etymology is a "historically positioned construction that may carry unwanted baggage into translocal comparison" (2012:306). He continues by noting that the division of the sacred and profane, so favored in Western intellectual discourse, "has even motivate[d] some theories of sacrifice," such as Hubert and Mauss (1964 [1898]), that are commonly used to explain a wide variety of sacrificial practices.

While I am sympathetic to that view and recognize that our scholarly insights can grow from appreciating such a non-dualistic perspective, we cannot assume that pre-Hispanic populations in the Andes were one way or the other. Was religion or ritual inextricably intertwined with all other aspects of community and individual life, such that we cannot identify and describe distinct ritual acts? Or was "religion" somewhat demarcated from other social spheres such that practices could be experienced and perceived as ritual or not? As the data accumulate, and as this book does much to bring a vast array of empirical datasets together, we can describe and evaluate how practices of sacrifice are demarcated from or intertwined with other areas of activity while simultaneously exploring how they affect and are affected by other aspects of domestic, political, and social life.

Defining Sacrifice

Four authors explicitly define or discuss definitions of sacrifice in their chapters. Chicoine (chapter 4) highlights the "preprogrammed repetitive action" of sacrifice (citing Benson and Cook [2001]) and the requirement that something important be given up "for a reason perceived to be of greater importance in some manner than what is to be sacrificed" (Chicoine, citing Green [2001:19]). This is relevant in his discussion of strangulations in the southern sphere of the Moche realm, in which humans

are ritually strangled perhaps to control the “supernatural, natural, or even sociohistorical forces” (Chicoine, chapter 4), in a manner distinct from the ostentatious sacrifices of bloodletting and dismemberment that may have metaphorical ties to feline predators. Indeed, he argues that ritual strangulation may represent an inversion of the “sacrificial values of spectacle,” revealing a more “restrained, controlled, and quiet form of killing” that might have metaphorical connections to the constricting killing methods of some snakes. Nonetheless, it is still unclear how preprogrammed and repetitive these strangulation sacrifices were, something acknowledged by Chicoine and to be clarified with additional studies at Pañamarca and other southern Moche sites.

Tomasto et al. (chapter 11) tackle the definition head-on, accepting the key point that sacrifice involves communion “with the realm of the sacred,” but offerings of sacred objects (e.g., isolated bones; ceramic pots [Millaire, chapter 13]) are not sufficient; something or someone must be destroyed or killed. And the majority of the chapters hint at or explicitly acknowledge in some way that destruction or violence against the entity being offered was a requisite for constituting sacrifice. Indeed, “Sacrificial slaughter involves violence” (Aldhouse-Green 2001), and this dramatic transformation from a whole to a fractured pot, or from a living entity to a lifeless sacrifice, often entails mutilation, fierce beatings, and other physical acts far beyond that required to destroy the ceramic vessel or kill the person (Klaus and Shimada, chapter 5; but see Chicoine, chapter 4). It is a form of “overkill” that can be detected by researchers as they examine cut marks and perimortem fractures on intact skeletons or pieces of bone or impact scars and breakage patterns on smashed pottery (Millaire, chapter 13). Thus, in the pre-Hispanic north coast of Peru, some form of corporeal modification or outright destruction was a very common component of sacrifice rituals.

Szpak et al. (chapter 12) remind us that animal sacrifice and the “*kill- ing* of an animal under ‘ordinary’ circumstances” can be highly ritually charged, and for some cultural groups all animal kills are considered sacrifices. Yet they advance their study by clearly articulating that they identify “animal sacrifices” as those in which animals are slaughtered in “highly ritualized contexts” in which the ritual is “not incidental but is foregrounded.” Drawing from Ingold (1987), among others, they further note that “*sacrifice* (rather than simply *offering*) implies the giving of something that is owned by the donor,” as in the herder-animal relationship as opposed to the hunter-hunted relationship (Ingold 1994).

However, one could argue that the immense time, skill, and energy required to hunt down an animal that is subsequently sacrificed may warrant consideration not just as an offering but as a sacrifice. Szpak et al. (chapter 12) cogently argue that the human-animal relationship significantly differs for those engaged in animal husbandry versus those who hunt, including for those who do both. Domesticated animals may be more overtly recognized as stand-ins for humans, and people would have certainly known some of those domesticated animals quite well.

Gaither et al. (chapter 6) discuss the practice of sacrifice in terms of its intended functions or desired outcomes. Drawing on Bourdillon's (1980) ideas about sacrifice, they note that "calculated sacrifices" may be a form of gift-giving to create lines of communication and reciprocity between the living and the supernatural or the ancestors. This framework is often cited in contexts of environmental stress, other natural disasters, or requests from "nature." For example, periods of extended drought or torrential floods, earthquakes, or poor harvests may require human and animal sacrifices to obtain "goodwill from the gods" (Gaither et al., chapter 6). But more to the point, this acknowledges that sacrifice is about communing with the supernatural, often to receive benefits, a perspective that Aldhouse-Green (2001) expands upon, arguing that sacrifice is not an end in itself but a means to fulfill a request. While Aldhouse-Green's perspective may be accurate in some cases, I think that it fails to recognize the practice of sacrifice itself and how it transforms not only the one who is sacrificed but also those who produce it and observe it. Those transformations may thus be related to what Bourdillon (1980, as cited by Gaither et al.) notes as "calculated sacrifices" (discussed above), "prestige sacrifices" that aggrandize the status of those responsible for the sacrifice, and sacrifices for "sociopolitical cohesion," though none of those are mutually exclusive.

Theoretical Framing of Sacrifice

"Sacrifice is a religious act that can only be carried out in a religious atmosphere and by means of essentially religious agents. But, in general, before the ceremony neither sacrificer nor sacrificer, nor place, instruments, or victim, possess this characteristic to a suitable degree. The first phase of the sacrifice is intended to impart it to them. They are profane; their condition must be changed. To do this, rites are necessary to introduce them into the sacred world and involve them in it" (Hubert and Mauss 1964 [1898]:19).

Most chapters in this volume either implicitly or explicitly use Hubert and Mauss's theoretical framework in which distinct spheres of religious and secular activities are recognized and sacrifice is perceived to be within the realm of religion. Many of the studies evoke explanations of communing with the supernatural, often in an effort to bring about some desired outcome as it relates to the natural world. Whether a group was sacrificing a human, an animal, or an object, all of these could be conceptualized as "ritual tribute" to the deities and ancestors (Cook 2001:139). One of the chapters that challenged that approach, or at least viewed the ritual killings as distinct from being a religious act, is the one in which "captive executions" were distinguished from blood sacrifices involving "the offering of human lives for religious purposes" (Verano and Phillips, chapter 9).

The broader anthropological debates about notions of religion and secularity are brought forth in these archaeological studies of ritual killings. The detailed descriptions of how the sacrificial acts were conducted, the life histories of those who were sacrificed, and the larger environmental and sociopolitical circumstances that ritual killings occurred within provide the empirical framework to theorize about sacrifice and its relationship to religious organization (e.g., did only a specific class of ritual specialists carry out the sacrifices, resulting in a highly standardized method of ritual execution?), community organization (were there markedly distinct social classes that had distinct roles?), social structure (were gender roles clearly demarcated and differentiated?), and political structure (was military prowess a means for political authority?), among other aspects. In Moche times, gender roles may have been a powerful structuring force in determining who could be captured, ritually executed, and dumped in the plazas of *huacas*; in this case, male identity was an integral factor in their selection as victims (Verano and Phillips, chapter 9). Further, their apparent social role as warriors further marked them as ideal for this kind of ritual execution; it may have been that not just any man (for example, elderly men are not a part of this executed group), but the identity of "male warrior" is what marked one as appropriate for being captured and ritually executed.

If we take Hubert and Mauss's (1964 [1898]) and Aldhouse-Green's (2001) definitions and expectations of what constitutes sacrifice, then the ritual killing of war captives may not be sacrifices *per se*; those ritual killings may be an end in themselves and represent the culmination of a war campaign, revenge killing, or some other event. That is not to say that the ritual killing had no broader implications for society; to the

contrary, the ritual killing and the attendant ceremonies may all serve to maintain social roles and hierarchies or to challenge existing ones. More specifically, as with those ritually executed at Huaca de la Luna, Pacatnamú, and Punto Lobos (Verano and Phillips, chapter 9), those acts may be more directly tied to military and territorial expansion. Communion with the divine may or may not have been sought.

Structuring Effects of Sacrifice and Other Violence

The detailed descriptions of the ritual killings—from cut mark patterning, to skeletal element representation, to descriptions of ante- and perimortem trauma, to the dietary reconstructions of the animal and people prior to their deaths—provide us with a rich understanding of how the actual sacrifices were conducted. Beyond that, several of the chapters also examined how those sacrificial acts shaped and were shaped by other social and political forces. In comparing these sacrifices on the north coast of Peru to other areas of the Andes—the Wari in particular—it appears that there were some shared processes and effects in the Moche and Wari societies. For example, Wari society was quite similar to Moche society as it related to the ritual killing of war captives, but it diverges in that the Wari subsequently transformed their executed dead into trophy heads (though there is evidence that the Moche did this on occasion) (Verano 1995). These particular practices structured Wari social and political organization in profound ways. For example, the capture and sacrifice of war captives likely aided in establishing and enhancing the Wari military apparatus and notions of military supremacy while also providing a path to power for certain groups of men (those who engaged in the military excursions and captured victims) (Tung 2012). The Wari trophy heads were eventually deposited in unique ritual structures (D-shaped buildings), a practice that reveals the inextricability of Wari ritual and military activities and how they mutually constituted each other. The act of sacrificing war captives, ritually transforming them from living humans into trophy objects, and artistically representing those acts on polychrome ceramics and textiles, also required the skill and knowledge of various specialists. In short, these ritual killings and the attendant ceremonies served to create and maintain new social roles: military specialists tasked with obtaining captives (Tung 2012), ritual specialists who created trophy heads (Tung 2008), and master artisans who produced the wares with the pictographs of bound prisoners,

warriors with weaponry, and human trophy heads (Ochatoma and Cabrera 2002) were all involved in the process. With each new prisoner captured, each new trophy head made, and each new ceramic vessel produced, those social roles were reinforced, showing how many different aspects of Wari life were deeply interwoven and constantly reinforcing each other. It appears that the Moche also had these similarly structuring connections between military and ritual life, though perhaps certain ritual killings should not be perceived purely as religious in nature.

Another example of how ritual practices might reflect and create particular sociopolitical formations can be seen in the discussion of ritual strangulation. Chicoine (chapter 4) argues that the “nonspectacle” aspect of ritual strangulations, practiced in the southern Moche sphere, may have been a means for performing and maintaining the sociopolitical and religious differences between the northern and southern regions of the Moche world. The selection of particular individuals as “retainer sacrifices” may reveal insights into gender roles and the role of kinship in ancient societies. For example, the greater frequency of female retainer burials during and after Moche times (Bentley and Klaus, chapter 10) is an important data point that may allow us to better comprehend how women were perceived and what their social expectations were. In that same chapter, the authors also conducted biodistance analyses to explore how kinship may have structured who was selected for retainer sacrifices. Although some of this work is still in its early stages, it is an exciting line of inquiry because it recognizes the strong force that biological kinship might have in shaping social identity and thus stipulating who might be appropriate for sacrifice. As those norms are incorporated into society and then shape who gets selected for retainer sacrifice, it has the cyclical effect of reinforcing the importance (or lack thereof) of biological kinship ties, particularly as it relates to performing “proper” burial rites and communing with the ancestors in that process.

Conclusion: Ritual Violence and Violence

While sacrifice and ritual violence may have broader implications for the social and political, there are forms of violence that are not necessarily linked to the ritual. For example, in Wari settings (Tung 2012), Tiwanaku-affiliated sites (Torres-Rouff 2011), Colonial Arequipa (Chambers 1999), modern Bolivia (Van Vleet 2002), and other contexts (Counts et al. 1999), the broken noses and other trauma on females

may have more to do with social and gender norms that see physical abuse of women as an acceptable practice. In these particular contexts, the intra-household violence—whether perpetrated by male partners or other “superiors”—may be disconnected from ritual violence. But these forms of physical violence may be partially created and sustained by a larger milieu of violence in the community—ritual killings, for example.

Recognizing the various cultural practices, from the mundane to the sacred, that serve to perpetuate violence in all its forms is an analytical task that has been approached by a variety of researchers. Thus, although Klaus and Toyne (chapter 1) note (citing Klaus [2014b]) that on the Peruvian north coast there is “a relative absence of widespread evidence associated with interpersonal or sociopolitically sanctioned violence,” I note that in other places and times there are correlations between ritual violence, the material propagation of that violence (e.g., iconography or architectural spaces that condone and celebrate the violence), militaristic violence, and violence in other contexts (e.g., intra-community violence in which men, women, and/or children are physically beaten [Gaither and Murphy 2012]). How is it that in some societies violence is both so mundane and so highly ritualized, as in Wari society in which we see female victims of sublethal domestic or community abuse, and men and children with fatal trauma, mutilation, and eventual transformation into trophy heads (Tung 2012)? Others might even argue that this is the case in contemporary US society, where there are highly trained soldiers engaged in routinized violence that often bleeds into the mundane sphere of domestic life (Lutz 2007; Nordstrom 1998). In contrast, there are other settings—the Moche world, perhaps—where sacrifice and ritual violence are highly circumscribed, both in space and victim profile. Granted, additional archaeological samples are still needed from Moche contexts to evaluate how pervasive violence really was, but books such as this one raise important questions beyond that of sacrifice and implore us to examine violence in all of its manifestations.

NOTE

1. I have grouped together these terms because all but one of the authors in this volume discussed sacrifice within the context of ritual and religion (or at least communion with the deities or other supernatural forces).



Ritual Violence *in the Ancient Andes*

RECONSTRUCTING SACRIFICE
ON THE NORTH COAST OF PERU



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