

F. S. Naiden, *Smoke Signals for the Gods: Ancient Greek Sacrifice from the Archaic through Roman Periods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 442 pp., \$82 (cloth).

The ancient Greek practice of sacrifice has been something of an obsession with scholars and theologians since the dawn of the Christian era. It has been interpreted as anything from vain to feeding and abetting demons. Yet for the ancients the act of sacrifice was the locus of the sacred, the place where they met the gods. Fred S. Naiden, in *Smoke Signals for the Gods*, has produced the next benchmark work on sacrifice in the Ancient Greek world. He recollects the original context of this fascinating religious phenomenon and asks of the foregoing scholarship, "Where are the gods?"

Much thought on sacrifice has been structured around either or both of two ideas: that sacrifice as a rite was to expiate the guilt of killing dinner before consuming it, and that the community experienced and cultivated solidarity through the act and especially the meal following. Walter Burkert championed the former while Jean-Pierre Vernant and Marcel Detienne the latter in their respective seminal works *Homo Necans* and *Cuisine of Sacrifice*. But Naiden finds that the writing of the Greeks about animals does not show guilt at their killing. When a sufficient sample of recorded sacrifices is examined, on many occasions there is no meal. That was only one kind of way to end the rite and distribute the meat.

Naiden has disabused us of some long-held notions about the Greek practice of sacrifice and its place in society. The Greeks did not eat only sacrificed meat. That should show up as some form of dietary prescription (like *halal* or *kosher*), for which there is no evidence. Greeks ate many kinds of meat, only some of which were sacrificed, and at times consumed both sacrificed and unsacrificed meat together. Along with the lack of guilt as mentioned above, the animal did not necessarily signal consent in its approach to the altar, nor did the Greeks think it needed to. Being lively and beautiful were more important. In representational art, Naiden shows, the animals are often seen roped and sometimes rearing up.

The first chapter reviewed the foregoing scholarship and then the overall pattern of the sacrificial rite. In it Naiden exposes the glaring weakness of the previous arguments: the gods are ignored.

Naiden shifts attention to the prayer that dedicates the sacrifice and the smoke that is the gift, then focuses on the response of the Deity, which he asserts was crucial to the participants. They expected an answer: yes or no.

The second chapter deals with the venues of sacrifice and how the Deity is present in them, either invisibly or in the form of an icon or other sacred object. The variety of the offerings (animal, vegetal, fumigant, or manufactured) is explored along with the dressing of the altar. The comportment of the participants, including dancing is also considered. Here Naiden begins developing the theme of *ho kalistein*, that the criteria for the presentation of sacrifice was its beauty; the animal, the prayers, the dress and behavior of the worshippers should all be handsome to please the gods. Elegance, dignity, ornament, and other displays are vital, balanced by the Greek sensibility for moderation. This notion undergirds much of the rest of Naiden's argument regarding the organizing drive of ritual sacrifice among the ancient Greeks.

Next, in Chapter 3, the various forms of accepting offerings and in Chapter 4, the rejections of those offerings, by the deity as found in the record is commonly shown through the participants' responses: joyous *communitas* indicating success and dejection displaying the failure of the sacrifice. Negative extispicy (inspection of the entrails) or other omens and oracles might also convey the unfortunate response; the god rejects the offering and denies the prayerful request. In contrast to Christianity, the worshippers expected a response to their rite as a part of the ritual.

The fifth chapter sets sacrifice in its social context. The rules that govern the practice for individual and city are parsed noting the claims each had on each other, governing and funding the event and determining the bounds of innovation. Experts played a significant role in sacrifice. They ranged from mere butchers to high priestesses yet were unnecessary except in specific cults as every Greek could make valid sacrifice. But when they were present the experts were often rewarded with predetermined shares of the meat and other offerings.

Alimentary sacrifice resulting in a communal meal was central to Vernant and Detienne's model and so necessary for Naiden to dispel in Chapter 6 by following the meat resulting from sacrifice and looking at all the other ways the Greeks consumed flesh. With a big enough sample, it becomes clear that while a meal was common and welcome, it was not an inherent or necessary part of sacrifice.

Sometimes the meat is distributed, sometimes burned entirely. Further (and in detail about the Spartan messes) the general Greek way meat was sourced, distributed and consumed is shown to be only partly connected with sacrifice. There was a lot more meat being eaten than was sacrificed.

The last two chapters turn to the interpretations of sacrifice both in the ancient world and in history and particularly how the latter understandings framed and distorted conceptions of the ancient rite. Having powerfully removed those errors, Naiden returns to his central idea that if we are to understand the ancients' view of sacrifice we must remember that it is there they met the gods and any theory that excludes them does violence to that understanding. Naiden concludes by bracketing the word 'sacrifice' as misleading to moderns due to its contemporary associations and proposes 'offering' as a better term.

One particularly useful contribution is his exploration of the language and terminology of sacrifice in the ancient Greek world. The index of words (Latin) gives access but a glossary would be even more helpful to build a contemporary language for operational practitioners.

It is not always clear how well Naiden understands ritual as such. There are times when he seems to be uncertain if an action is "ritual" or not, but the range of detail harvested about variations in the rite of sacrifice is precious and far exceeds most scholarship. Earlier works appeared to view the ritual and its details as incidental to the blood-letting, the corpse, and the meal. While not always realizing how other actions also constitute prayer, Naiden nonetheless gives the communication from the human to Deity its necessary primacy. A libation without dedication is just a spilled drink. It need not always be spoken, but dedication must accompany the offering for it to be received.

Naiden marvels over the lack of theoretical and analytical material on sacrifice among the ancient Greeks while cataloging the limited resources. Finally, although his timeline sweeps into the Christian Era, he entirely neglects Iamblichus (ca. 300 CE) whose *De Mysteriis* includes an entire chapter on the theory and practice of sacrifice embedded in a work dedicated to philosophically justifying traditional worship, sacrifice, and its effects. I would very much like to see Naiden's interpretation of the fifth book of Iamblichus' opus.

The book itself is nicely structured; it is supported by several indices and two appendices. It has indices *locorum*, *verborum*, *nominum*,

and *rerum* to aid the student, as well as appendices that comprehensively collect references to rejected offerings and times when extispicy indicated the denial by the Deity. The typesetting is clean and comfortable but the binding was losing a few pages as I read. If sacrifice in theory or in practice is part of your ambit, *Smoke Signals for the Gods* needs to be on your shelf.

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