

Some reflections on Mycenaean ritual

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TO WHAT EXTENT religious beliefs can be inferred from the archaeological material is a question to which no clear answer can be given. It is, on the other hand, generally accepted that ritual activity can to a certain extent, dependent on the availability and nature of relevant data, be reconstructed with a fair degree of certainty from the material remains.¹

Mycenaean ritual activity has been discussed recently by Robin Hägg who concludes that animal sacrifice, libations, bloodless offerings, and communal feasting comprised the most important Mycenaean rituals.² The importance of animal sacrifice in Mycenaean ritual is generally accepted and has been deduced from the finds of animal bones in well-defined ritual contexts as well as from the evidence of the Linear B tablets from Pylos and the nodules inscribed with Linear B from Thebes which list animals intended for sacrifice and consumption at religious festivals.³ Animal sacrifice can be defined as the ritual killing of an animal in a cultic setting. Sacrifice is often understood either as an offering to the gods or as a form of communication with the supernatural through the sacrificial meal. Through sacrifice the proper relationship between the human and divine is affirmed.⁴ In many cases, the purpose of animal sacrifice is understood by participants as an act through which the gods are provided with nourishment.

Scenes associated with sacrifice have been identified on seals found on the Mainland. Several seals depict an animal victim lying on what can be identified as a sacrificial table.⁵ Seals which show an animal being led towards a small structure may also allude to sacrifice.⁶ It might be objected that the seals showing

1 Cf. Peatfield 1994:152.

2 Hägg 1998:99–113.

3 Killen 1994:67–8, Piteros *et al.* 1990:103–184.

4 For a clear and concise discussion of theories of sacrifice see Valeri 1985:62–70.

5 *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel* I, 80; Marinatos 1986:13, fig. 1.

6 *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel* I, 119.

sacrifice are likely to have been Minoan imports and therefore do not necessarily provide information about Mycenaean ritual. However, an analysis of the gold rings found on the Mainland has demonstrated that the Mycenaean were selective with regard to what they took over from Minoan religious iconography.⁷ This suggests that seals with depictions of sacrifice found on the Mainland were accepted as meaningful by the Mycenaean, even if they were Minoan in origin, and they can therefore be regarded as relevant to the reconstruction of Mycenaean ritual practice. Furthermore, a sacrificial scene is most likely to be identified on a wall painting from the vestibule of the palace at Pylos which shows a processional scene with male and female participants on two levels accompanying a bull. The bull is depicted as oversized, presumably in order to stress its ritual importance and the participants are carrying various objects, offerings or perhaps more likely the equipment and utensils needed for the ceremony.⁸ There is no reason to doubt the centrality of animal sacrifice in Mycenaean ritual, but many questions remain concerning the actual practice of sacrifice and the concepts associated by the Mycenaean with the immolation of an animal victim.

The Linear B tablets and nodules provide evidence for the existence of sacrifice on a large scale in connection with ritual banquets, which were presided over by the *wanax*, the Mycenaean ruler. The animals mentioned are sheep, goats, pigs, and cattle, and from the numbers of animals listed, it has been estimated that about a thousand people could have participated and been fed at these ceremonies.⁹ It seems very likely that sacrificial ceremonies involving a large number of people was the central act of public ritual activity. One of the most fundamental problems in the study of Mycenaean religion is the establishment of links between the information in the Linear B tablets and the archaeological remains of cult activity, and regrettably, it has not been possible to connect the information on religious ritual in the Linear B tablets with actual archaeological remains. Consequently, nothing is known about the locality of these rituals. The Linear B tablets from Pylos mention sacrificial ceremonies at a place called *Pakijana* which, it seems clear, must have been an important outlying sanctuary associated with the palace of Pylos.¹⁰ Most likely therefore Mycenaean sacrificial activity took place in as yet unidentified or unidentifiable open-air sanctuaries or perhaps they did not necessarily or always take place within a well-defined ritual space, but any suitable open area could be taken in use.

7 Niemeier 1990:165–170.

8 Lang 1969:pls. 119–120.

9 Piteros *et al.* 1990, Hägg 1995:390, 1998:103.

10 *E.g.* Un 2; Tn 316; *cf.* Chadwick 1976:84–101.

The sacrifice of a large quantity of animals followed by a ritual meal in which perhaps the entire population of an area took part has an obvious sociological dimension in that it promotes social cohesiveness. The organisation of sacrifice and ceremonial banquets on a large scale involves considerable expenditure and can be seen as evidence that public ritual was closely intertwined with the Mycenaean social and political system and, it is likely that this was an event which had significant social and political dimensions in providing sanctification for the prevailing social system. By conducting rites of sacrifice, the *wanax* could periodically reinforce his authority both by appearing in his role as religious mediator and by exhibiting his generosity through the distribution of sacrificial meat.¹¹ One of the Linear B tablets from Pylos speaks of the ceremony taking place at *Pakijana* on the occasion of the initiation of the *wanax*.¹² The nature of this initiation is obscure and it may have had definite political overtones as well as religious. One might further speculate that large-scale sacrificial rituals, sponsored by the ruler were particularly associated with political events as was the case in the Mesoamerican world.¹³ The depiction of sacrifice on palatial frescoes and on prestige artefacts such as seals underscores the sociological function of sacrificial activity. It has been suggested by Klaus Kilian that the oversize figure on the Pylos fresco may represent the *wanax*.¹⁴

Architectural remains of cult buildings have been discovered at Mycenae, Tiryns, Methana, and Phylakopi.¹⁵ At Mycenae several buildings were found associated comprising a Cult Centre while at Phylakopi there were two cult buildings, the West and East shrines sharing the same courtyard. The Mycenaean cult buildings are small structures and their most prominent feature are platforms, usually situated along the short wall at the further end from the entrance.

Fragments of wall paintings which have been recovered from the area of the Cult Centre at Mycenae suggest that processions with offerings comprised the most important ritual activity associated with Mycenaean cult buildings. Furthermore, animal bones were found in connection with the cult buildings at Phylakopi, the Cult Centre at Mycenae, Tiryns, and Methana, suggesting that animal sacrifice was also part of the ritual connected with Mycenaean cult buildings. The bone material corresponds to finds of bones from domestic contexts and consists predominantly of sheep and goats, but the bones of cattle and pigs were also

11 Cf. Killen 1994:70.

12 *pa-ki-ja-si mu-jo-me-no e-pi wa-na-ka-te* (Un 2).

13 Feinman 1988:74; cf. Killen 1994:72, Palaima 1995:131–132, Stavrianopoulou 1996:429–430.

14 Kilian 1988:300 n. 1.

15 French 1981; Kilian 1981, Konsolaki 1995, 1996, Renfrew 1985; see also Albers 1994 and Whitaker 1997 with further references.

represented at Phylakopi and Tiryns, and the bones of very young pigs were found in the main sanctuary room at Methana. The variety of bones from the Mycenaean cult buildings can also be seen to correspond to the animal species listed for sacrifice in the Linear B tablets. The occurrence of cooking ware and bowls in cultic contexts further suggests that the immolation of the animal was followed by a meal in which the sacrificial meat was consumed, while finds of drinking vessels, in particular kylikes and rhyta would seem to indicate the importance of drinking rituals and libations in association with ritual meals.¹⁶ If it is the case that the occurrence of animal bones in connection with Mycenaean cult buildings in fact does reflect the importance of animal sacrifice in the ritual activity associated with them, animal sacrifice followed by a ritual meal also took place when participation must have been restricted in some way to a small group of people.

Characteristic of all identified Mycenaean cult buildings is that they were not monumental structures, and only a limited number of people could have participated in the activities which took place within them. Although, open areas or courtyards were found in connection with the sanctuaries at Phylakopi, Mycenae, and Tiryns, these courtyards are of relatively small size and could not have been used for large gatherings, and it seems clear that Mycenaean cult buildings were not places of assembly for public worship. The Linear B tablets confirm the existence of a class of priests and priestesses.¹⁷ Since Mycenaean cult buildings have been discovered at major palatial centres, it seems most likely that they are to be regarded as part of official cult even if this cannot be definitely asserted in every case. It therefore seems a not unreasonable conclusion that only religious officials and perhaps important state officials were allowed to enter the Mycenaean cult buildings and participate in worship. It would accordingly seem very possible that if the ritual activity associated with Mycenaean cult buildings included animal sacrifice, both the process of the ritual itself and its conceptual content may have differed considerably from the sacrifices performed in connection with large public festivals.

It is, however, difficult to reconstruct from the material remains of the Mycenaean cult buildings the actual process of sacrifice. Particular installations where the animals could have been slaughtered have not been identified. This is the case at Phylakopi, Tiryns, and Methana. In the Cult Centre at Mycenae, a stone slab found in Tsountas' House Shrine was identified by George Mylonas as a slaughtering table, but this interpretation is very far from certain. In the courtyard in front of the Temple there was a round platform or altar with faint traces of fire. As animal bones were found in a pit nearby, it may have had some connection with

16 Cf. Moore 1999:84.

17 Hooker 1990.

sacrificial ritual, but the precise function of the platform is unclear. A seal from Mycenae which depicts a goat with a knife in its neck suggests that daggers or knives were the usual sacrificial instruments, as was the case in later Greek sacrifice.¹⁸ However, no such knives or other possible sacrificial instruments have been found in any of the Mycenaean cult buildings. Mace-heads in stone which may have been used in order to stun the animal victim before killing it have been found in cultic contexts on Crete.¹⁹ Examples of such mace-heads have been found on the Mainland, and a mace-head was reported among the finds from the Room with the Fresco Complex at Mycenae.

On the other hand, there is a good deal of evidence that food preparation took place within the sanctuaries. At Methana, there was a hearth in the south/east corner of the main room of the cult building; cooking ware and animal bones were found in association with it. Cooking ware and other household pottery were found in the vicinity of another hearth, located in an adjoining room. At Phylakopi, cooking ware was found in both the West and East Shrines. No hearth was found at Phylakopi, although it is possible that there was a hearth in the West Shrine underneath a later blocking-wall which was not removed. In the Cult Centre at Mycenae, there was a hearth in the Room with the Fresco Complex, in the vicinity of which a cooking pot was found. There was also a hearth in the Megaron which was found covered in thick ash mixed with animal bones. At Tiryns there was a hearth in the courtyard of both Room 117 and Room 110a. Moreover, stone tools which could have been used in connection with the preparation of food were found in several of the cult buildings. At Methana mortars and grinding stones were found in one of the rooms of the cult building. Mortars were found in both the Temple and House with the Fresco Complex at Mycenae. At Phylakopi querns and mortars were found primarily in the Courtyard of the sanctuary. The evidence would seem to show that the grinding of most likely some type of grain and the boiling of food, either of grainmeal into some sort of porridge or of meat, were regular activities of Mycenaean cult buildings.

However, it may be questioned whether the presence of animal bones in association with the cult buildings or the evidence for the preparation of food necessarily implies that animal sacrifice was part of the ritual activity connected with these buildings. Robin Hägg has emphasised the ambiguity of animal bones as evidence for sacrifice, as their presence may equally well derive from ritual meals rather than from sacrifice.²⁰ Colin Renfrew has suggested that although the animal bones and evidence for food preparation found at Phylakopi may represent prep-

18 Kilian-Dirlmeier 1990:158.

19 Hägg 1998:102, Mante-Platonos 1981:74–83.

20 Hägg 1998.

arations for cult offerings, the possibility that they are the remains of the domestic activities of the people who looked after the sanctuary should also be kept in mind.²¹

It will here be suggested that the evidence would also seem compatible with the ritual provision of food and drink for the deities worshipped in the cult buildings, and that the animal bones represent the remains of food offerings which had been brought into the sanctuaries. The evidence for the preparation of food would indicate that in some cases, if not necessarily at all times, the food was also prepared within the sanctuary, presumably by priests, before being presented to the deity.

The feeding of the gods as a ritual action is widely attested in ethnographic and archaeological literature. Ample textual documentation from the second millennium and in particular from the first half of the first millennium BC demonstrates that in ancient Mesopotamia, the gods were fed on a regular basis. Twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, meals on trays were placed on stands in front of statues of the gods within the temples.²² In present-day Bali food offerings which have often been prepared at home are carried to the temple where they are dedicated by a priest.²³ In India food offerings presented to cult image of the god are an essential part of the ritual activity in Hindu temples.²⁴

The presentation of food offerings to deities is also attested for later Greek cult practice. In the Greek practice of food offerings distinctions were made between those offerings which included the offering of meat from domestic animals and those which did not and were probably completely vegetarian in nature. Regarding the latter, it was customary for visitors at a sanctuary to present various types of food offerings to the gods. Tables within the temples, usually placed before the statue of the god displayed the food offered to the gods.²⁵ Food donations could be presented to deities at any time and consisted of such food as would have normally been consumed by the population. Meat from domestic animals, on the other hand, could only have been offered in association with the performance of a sacrifice in the sanctuary.

In Balinese practice, there is no particular emphasis on the slaughter of animals, and food offerings would also include vegetable and grain foods in addition to meat. In Mesopotamia, food offerings varied according to what was seasonably available. Although the ritual slaughter of animals did exist, meat was considered

21 Renfrew 1985:388.

22 Lambert 1993:191–201.

23 van Baal 1976:162.

24 Fuller 1988:52.

25 Burkert 1988:33, Gill 1974:119–120, Jameson 1988:966–967.

particularly appropriate only because it was expensive, and efforts were made to provide the best and most luxurious food for the gods. There is no particular word for meat offerings.²⁶

Among the objects found in Mycenaean cult buildings are small tripod portable tables. Several were found in the Temple in the Cult Centre at Mycenae, while fragments of a possible tripod table were found within the West Shrine at Phylakopi. These small portable tables have been interpreted as having served as receptacles for the liquid poured from a libation vessel, since they have sometimes been found associated with rhyta.²⁷ But they could equally well be interpreted as cult tables on which the food offerings or trays with food offerings were laid out.²⁸ In Mesopotamia, offerings of drink were made through libations. There is good evidence for the importance of libations in the Mycenaean cult buildings. Rhyta were found in Room 117 and Room 110 at Tiryns, in Room Alpha at Methana, and at Phylakopi. Rhyta were also found within the area of the Cult Centre at Mycenae, although from late and unspecifiable contexts; it seems likely, however, that their original contexts were from within the cult buildings. Triton shells found at Phylakopi and at Methana were most likely also used as libation vessels. It seems possible that the evidence for libations in the Mycenaean cult buildings should be associated with the practice of food offerings to the gods.

One might speculate that the provision of meals for the deities on a regular or daily basis by the priests attached to a sanctuary was a feature of Mycenaean cult. The evidence for food preparation associated with the cult buildings could suggest that this may have been the case. Several of the Linear B tablets from Pylos record various items of food delivered to sanctuaries or gods which could indicate that food was provided for use at sanctuaries by the palaces on occasions other than those of sacrificial banquets.²⁹ Accordingly an analogy with Mesopotamian practice where the ruler as well as the people through taxation made donations of food and drink to the temples could be hypothesised.

Moreover, on the analogy of later Greek cult practice, a connection between public sacrificial ceremonies and the presentation of food offerings to a deity within the Mycenaean cult buildings can also be suggested.

Although exceptions can be found such as the Epikourean conception of traditional religious ritual, the objective of most ritual activity is some form of communication with the supernatural and the establishment of links between the

26 Leichly 1993:237–242.

27 Hägg 1990:183.

28 As has been suggested for the one found in the megaron at Pylos by Gill 1974:135. See also Mylonas 1966:163.

29 Cf. Hägg 1998.

living worshippers and the divine sphere. With regard to Mycenaean sacrifice, it may be questioned whether the ritual focus was on the killing of the animal as an offering or on the communal meal in which the deity would have been believed to participate in some way. The iconographical evidence, although admittedly limited, would seem to emphasise the primary importance of the sacrificial act rather than of the meal. The Linear B tablets speak of giving to a deity indicating that the concept of offering was central to Mycenaean sacrifice.³⁰ It is possible that the essential meaning of Mycenaean sacrifice was communication with the other world through the death of the victim as was the case in Roman state sacrifice.³¹ Partaking of a meal consisting of an animal which had been consecrated to a deity will also have been regarded as a means of bringing the participants into contact with the divine.

On the other hand, the belief that the god more directly shares in the meal with his worshippers is common and is often marked through a particular ritual act when a portion of the sacrificed animal is reserved as the god's portion. For instance, this was the case with Hittite sacrifice where cuts of meat, bread, and various types of alcoholic beverages are set on an offering table in front of the cult statue of the deity.³²

In later Greek practice, burnt offering was the central feature of sacrifice. The god's portion consisted of the smoke and odorous fumes from the burning of an offering of the inedible parts of the animal on the altar. An analogous practice has at times been assumed without further argument also for the Bronze Age. However, Birgitta Bergquist has argued that burnt animal sacrifice as known from Greece in the historical period does not seem to have existed in the Mycenaean period. Her examination of the evidence for sacrifice in prehistoric Greece has demonstrated that no raised altar structures suitable for displaying and burning the god's portion, not to mention altars where the entire animal could be burnt can be identified.³³ On present evidence then the concepts which underlay Mycenaean sacrifice must have differed to some extent from those underlying later Greek animal sacrifice.

It has been suggested by Robin Hägg and Robert Laffineur that libations of the blood from the sacrificed animal were an important part of Mycenaean sacrificial practice.³⁴ Robert Laffineur has argued that the *Ayia Triadha* sarcophagus should be considered a Mycenaean work and consequently that the scenes painted on it

30 Brelich 1967:927–928.

31 Gordon 1990:204, Beard *et al.* 1998:36–37.

32 Collins 1995:77–92.

33 Bergquist 1988:21–34; *cf.* Burkert 1983:17.

34 Hägg 1990:183–184, Laffineur 1994:132–134.

refer to Mycenaean ritual. The painting shows on one of the long sides the sacrifice of a bull. The bull which is lying on a table has been killed. Below the table, a conical rhyton has been set into the ground and blood from the neck of the animal is dripping into it. On the other long side, several women are pouring some kind of liquid into a large two-handled jar. It has been suggested that this liquid is blood from the sacrificed animal.³⁵ If this is correct it would seem that some of the blood was allowed to pass directly into the ground while the rest was collected and was presumably used at a later stage in the ritual.

Robert Laffineur associates blood libations specifically with animal sacrifice in the context of funerary cult, but it is possible that it was a feature of Mycenaean sacrifice in general and the hypothesis that the draining of the blood of the sacrificed animal into the ground was the central symbolic feature of Mycenaean sacrifice and that the blood of the animal comprised the god's portion can be accepted at least as a plausible hypothesis.

In Greek sacrifice, commensality with the deity was effected principally through the burnt offering, even if, as pointed out by Jean-Pierre Vernant, the separation between men and gods was also emphasised by the rules regulating which parts of the animal were to be offered to the god and which parts could be eaten by the participants in the sacrifice.³⁶ It is clear, however, from both literary and epigraphical evidence that, in addition, at times considerable portions of meat from the sacrificed animal as well as of other food consumed at the sacrificial banquet were placed on the cult tables within the temple in front of the cult statue.³⁷ This type of food donations to the gods seems to have been a common, if not a completely regular, feature of Greek sacrificial practice, but it was evidently of very minor symbolic significance in comparison with the burnt offering.

On the afore-mentioned fresco from the vestibule of the palace at Pylos, one of the participants is carrying what can be identified as a tripod offering table on his shoulder. It therefore seems possible to suggest that in connection with Mycenaean public sacrifice, some of the meat was placed on the offering table, most likely on some form of wooden platter or in a pottery container, and presented to the deity as an offering within a cult building. Other items of food, such as barley and olives which are mentioned in the Linear B tablets, would also be included and the presentation would be accompanied by wine libations.

A seal from Naxos found in a tomb with pottery of the thirteenth and twelfth centuries can perhaps be seen as reflecting Mycenaean sacrificial ritual.³⁸ On the

35 Cf. Marinatos 1986:25–27.

36 Vernant 1979:47.

37 Gill 1974:124.

38 *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel* V, 608.

seal, a knife, a conical rhyton, a jug and a two-handled jar as well as a small portable table are shown. These objects can be interpreted as equipment which can be associated with sacrifice, and each item can be seen to represent an important element of Mycenaean sacrificial ritual. The knife refers to the act of killing, while the conical rhyton, jug, and two-handled jar refer to libations which were an essential part of the ritual. If one accepts the depiction of sacrifice on the Ayia Triadha sarcophagus as evidence for Mycenaean sacrificial practice, one can see the two-handled jar and the conical rhyton as reflecting blood libations, while the jug and the portable offering table can be taken to refer to the god's portion of the sacrificial banquet. The figure with the spear can most probably be identified with the person of authority who presides over the sacrifice.

After the ritual presentation of food offerings to a god, the food may be disposed of in several ways. It may be left for the mice, but a very common procedure is that the food was later consumed by priests attached to the sanctuary. In Mesopotamia some texts show that attempts were made to maintain the claim that the gods themselves actually ate the food which was set before them. Other texts, however, indicate that in fact the food was consumed by humans, both priests and others. Regarding later Greek cult, it is clear from both literary and epigraphical evidence that the food offerings left for the gods were eaten by priests.

The Mesopotamian texts which refer to the god eating the food he is offered indicate an identification between the god and his cult statue. C.J. Fuller, in discussing Hindu ritual, has argued that there was a clear distinction between a deity and its image and that the purpose of food offerings in front of a cult statue is not to provide for the needs of deities, since they have none, but to act as if they did as a means of expressing devotion.³⁹ Providing deities with material needs of food and drink is a concrete way of showing respect and devotion. The same point has also been made by Walter Burkert with regard to Greek religion.⁴⁰

In the Hindu, Greek, Hittite, and Mesopotamian instances, the practice of food offerings is ordinarily intimately associated with the existence of a cult statue as the focus of ritual activity. However, an association between a cult statue and food offerings is not always the case. In many African religious practices, meat from the sacrificed animal is offered to a god or spirit in shrines which do not contain any cult statue.⁴¹ It has been suggested that the provision of food and drink for a divine being can be seen as a means of personifying the deity or as a means of entreating him to visit his shrine and accept worship.

39 Fuller 1988:52.

40 Burkert 1988:33.

41 Ray 1976:78–89.

Terracotta figures are a feature of several of the Mycenaean cult buildings, but it has not been possible to positively identify any of them conclusively as a cult image. In several cases the terracotta figures were found *in situ* and it is clear that they were placed on the platforms within the cult buildings. They can be typologically differentiated. One group consists of large figures which are monochrome. These have as yet only been found at Mycenae. Most of the other figures are smaller and have painted decoration. The figures found at Phylakopi and Tiryns can be said to belong to this group. Definitely male figures have been found only at Phylakopi. Andrew Moore has argued that the large monochrome figures from Mycenae are to be interpreted as cult celebrants and that their function is to be seen as the continuous representation of cult activity.⁴² This interpretation is supported by the fact that one of the figures in the Temple at Mycenae was found embedded in the plaster covering of the platform, and clearly constituted a permanent feature of the room. Since the find contexts of all types of figures within the Mycenaean cult buildings are similar, it should follow that they should be interpreted in the same way and that the function of the Mycenaean terracotta figures found in the cult buildings was to represent a permanent scene of offering and worship. It seems possible, however, that if these figures were used to create ritual scenes, certain of the figures may represent deities accepting worship. It would also seem possible that rather than being used for the perpetual enactment of offering and worship, the arrangement of these figures into ritual scenes was part of the regular ritual activity of the cult buildings. In the Temple at Mycenae, many fragments of terracotta figures were found in the small room on the upper floor. It is possible that the figures may have ordinarily been stored in this room and only have been taken out at those times when ritual activity took place. In the West Shrine at Phylakopi, two rooms behind the main sanctuary room may in a similar manner have functioned as storerooms for ritual objects when not in use. It can be suggested that the figures were arranged to form ritual scenes, perhaps in conjunction with other ritual activity such as processions and the presentation of offerings. This would also be compatible with the suggestion that some of the Mycenaean cult figures were carried in processions.

Andrew Moore has argued that some of the large monochrome figures from Mycenae carried hammer-axes and that they can perhaps be interpreted as cult officiants involved in some form of sacrificial activity.⁴³ If this interpretation is correct, animal sacrifice was symbolically represented in the Temple at Mycenae. From this, it is perhaps possible to draw the general conclusion that sacrifice did not actually take place in connection with the Mycenaean cult buildings, but rather

42 Moore 1988:219–228, Moore and Tylour 1999:93–102.

43 Moore 1988:221, Moore and Tylour 1999:79.

that its importance in Mycenaean cult activity was reflected through symbolic representation and the presentation of food offerings and libations.

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DISCUSSION

R. Palmer: Thank you very much for the pulling together of many aspects of the archaeological and the tablet information. I just wanted to mention that at Pylos also you have one set of tablets which list food offerings or food given to officials that are connected with cult. At Knossos you have the olive oil offering tablets which intersperse cult officials with gods and sanctuaries in the same list. So there may have been more of a smooth transition between giving to personnel and giving to gods for certain items, not meat.

D. Handelman: If you will permit me to intrude from another discipline and offer one other possibility. I think you have touched on an extremely important issue in symbolic anthropology by arguing that perhaps what was involved in Mycenaean sacrifice was a process of symbolic representation. There is the other position that sacrifice indeed is intended to act upon the world or act on the deities in very profound ways. That is, that destruction through violence is also the fount of creation, and that this may generate links between human beings and deities. In that respect it is interesting to me—simply as an extrapolation—that in the second transparency the size of the sacrificial bull might indicate how the sacrifice fills space and time in the relationship between human beings and deities. You've put your finger on the more implicit distinction between symbolic representation as expression and a ritual act that is intended to create new conditions, a momentarily different kind of relationship between human beings and deities. In that respect—extrapolating a bit further—the ritual meal then might involve indeed a transformation of the quality of the food itself. This is certainly the case in Hindu ritual.

N. Marinatos: Thank you for bringing so much together. You made a very nice synthesis. Each culture projects those elements that it considers important in relation to sacrifice. There is no question—and you have brought this out very lucidly—that we have a lot of evidence which relates the official structures of the Mycenaean world with common meals. We have it in the palaces, we have it in the tablets as Ruth Palmer said, where enormous quantities of food are sent away to the sanctuaries. Obviously these common meals are a way of binding the community together. You also pointed out that we have extreme difficulties with the Mycenaean world to identify what we think of as altars. Here we need to discuss a lot among ourselves what is an altar. For the Greeks an altar is a hearth. It is not the place where you slaughter the animal. It is where you cook parts of the animal. It is doubtful whether you have this kind of altar in the Mycenaean world. You have hearths. I have looked at them very carefully and I am not sure I understand how they function. They must have boiled something.

H. Whittaker: Yes, there are the cooking pots at Mycenae. They may have boiled some of the meat, or the grain to make some kind of porridge. This connects with the later Greeks for whom we have evidence of a porridge being boiled from grain and served along with the sacrificial meat.

N. Marinatos: So in the Mycenaean—and the Minoan—world we don't have this monumental altar, which of course the Greeks monumentalized because they deliberately wanted to make this the focus of the attention. It is an attention-focusing device. I want also to make some comments on the iconography which continue on that line. In Greek sacrificial ritual you very rarely have the killing of the animal depicted—there are a few exceptions, one in a Dionysiac context, another on a krater from Ruovo. What you normally have is the leading of the sacrificial animal to the altar. In the Minoan-Mycenaean world the animal is shown being stabbed and bled. Keeping in mind that the seals are amulets, which means another dimension of meaning has to enter into the discussion, one begins to speculate what the bleeding of the animal signifies—if the animal is considered a force to be overcome.

H. Whittaker: I am not sure they are amulets in every case. I would think that they are prestige objects connected with a particular status.

N. Marinatos: They are always amulets in the Near East and Egypt so I would tend to think that it is not too different here.

G. Albers: I just want to add to what Nannó Marinatos said. You mentioned that the Mycenaean altars aren't really altars in the sense that we would expect them to be. On the other hand, I also think that the Mycenaean sanctuaries are not really "temples" in the sense we would expect them to be. So the monumentalization of altars should go together with the monumentalization of the cult buildings towards the later Greek development. It seems to be a development within the Greek period. The installations in the Mycenaean sanctuaries, the courtyards in the sanctuaries, are somehow structures for display, and some sort of bringing in procession and burning of organic substances connected with the cult. We don't know how these altars functioned, but we should keep in mind that there may have been wooden structures on top. We must also keep in mind the suggestion that the slaughter of the offering did not actually take place at the altar but was done somewhere else, and that a second process was going on at the altar. If so, then the remains would suffice. But the conditions of excavation and the observations are not always very detailed. There are animal bones connected with those altars, not in large quantities. Very often they are unburnt. In Mycenae that would be an indication not of slaughter and burning of the animal but of portions of food including meat. This is just a modification of the interpretation, but I think that these installations are connected with the offering of food.

M. Jameson: One small elaboration on what you said: I am about 40 years out of date on this subject, but I studied it at one time quite intensively, when I was struck by the emphasis in Minoan art, including the Agia Triada sarcophagus, which I am quite happy to see largely Mycenaean in interest, on deposition as opposed to burning and destruction. It seems to me that the sacrifices use different means to convert or sacralize, to draw attention and emphasis to, the objects that are being treated. The burning, as you say, is characteristically historical Greek, whereas looking at the prehistoric art and the prehistoric furniture, the tables that you draw attention to, are prominent, you showed an animal trussed and lying on a table. I think this is not just an image but also an indication that by being deposited in a special place, in a special way, something is done to the animal. Of course this continues in historical times with the treatment of cakes and foodstuffs, and even in part with animal offerings.

N. Marinatos: Just a brief comment on what Michael Jameson said. Exactly right: the animal is displayed on a wooden table, and the wooden table means it is not a permanent fixture. It can be moved around at will. I have written about this but it is some time ago (Marinatos 1986). It

is very important to emphasize that the animal is being bled alive, and this holds true for both pictures shown here. On the Agia Triada sarcophagus the animal is bound, there is a bucket underneath which collects the blood. The goat we saw in the other image has a knife stuck in its throat. There are very good Near Eastern parallels for this.