

What is the difference between blooded and bloodless sacrifices?

In ancient Greek religion, sacrifice was the most important action one could perform¹. It is therefore unsurprising that sacrifice as an action could take many forms, though it could generally be grouped into two main subsections- blooded and bloodless². Within these sections however, there are clear distinctions which separate the two, such as schedule, method and significance. Finding the differences between the two is made possible due to the huge array of sources depicting sacrifice, though can be hindered slightly with the normative focus on the blooded type³. There are clear differences between blooded and bloodless sacrifices, and the distinctions between the two are what will be further discussed going forward.

In the broadest sense, the main difference between a blooded and bloodless sacrifice was whether an animal had to die for the ritual to be accomplished⁴. Blooded sacrifice was seen as significant due to the act of killing an animal and as such, were to be reserved for scheduled, festive occasions⁵. Though, that idea despite being mostly true, is still a generalization as blooded sacrifice was still seen outside of festive periods. Blooded sacrifice is once more separated from the bloodless due to its significance to both war and peace, as demonstrated in a number of ancient sources, including Aristophanes' Peace⁶. It was used as a tool to encourage a god's favor to their cause and as such played a significant part in both life and as a plot point in fiction⁷. It brings to focus the significance that the ancient Greeks held towards the preciousness of blood and what it represented⁸.

Because of this, blooded sacrifice of the animal kind headlined the majority of religious gatherings⁹ with the idea of human sacrifice remaining only in their myths¹⁰. Within this type of sacrifice, there too is two main subsections of actions that tended to be followed depending on the ritual in question, and that distinction rested on how much of the animal was burnt¹¹. This separates blooded sacrifice even further from that of bloodless due to the intricacies involved with such an act being greater than that of bloodless. In fact, one of the main sources available denoting the methods of blooded sacrifice come from Homer and the scenes he depicts within his works, wherein he writes about both the burning and libation aspects of ritual sacrifice¹². However, though his sources are thorough in depicting the sacrifice itself, due to his status as a late source it is not as representative of the time period as others may be- even if the older sources are less detailed¹³. But it is still useful as such sources do corroborate the information as being largely the same in a general sense, with many of the actions such as bloodying the altar remaining consistent throughout¹⁴.

¹ Parker, 2012

² Graf, 2012

³ Bremmer, 2006; Kearns, 2012a

⁴ Cambridge University Press, 1987, p.110

⁵ Cambridge University Press, 1987, p.69

⁶ Aristoph. Pax. 945; Lloyd-Jones, 2011, p.461

⁷ Aristoph. Pax. 945; Hom. Il. 1,459; Bacchyl. 11,111

⁸ Rives, 2011, p.189

⁹ Burkert, 1979, p.55

¹⁰ Parker, 2012

¹¹ Cambridge University Press, 1987, p.108

¹² Hom. Il. 1,459

¹³ Willcock, 2012

¹⁴ Bacchyl. 11,111; Bremmer, 2006

On the other hand, bloodless sacrifice tended to occur either in conjunction with the main blooded sacrifice¹⁵ or as an unscheduled offering to the gods¹⁶. It was viewed as a more day-to-day action and due to an important animal not needing to be lost, the sacrifice itself could be more spontaneous¹⁷. It allowed the common person a way to demonstrate respect and appreciation for the gods without having to try to gather a large range of specialist items which were considered essential for the practice of the time¹⁸. A common product used for bloodless sacrifice were cakes, though any vegetarian food could be (and was) used¹⁹. A further type of bloodless sacrifice was libation²⁰. This, again, was often used in addition to the blooded animal sacrifice, but was also a very common action that accompanied a number of other things such as banquets and contract agreements²¹. Libation was such a common and important aspect of worship that even ancient texts which focused on the more blooded sides of sacrifice demonstrated how this bloodless aspect tied in with the whole ritual²². This further demonstrates a difference between the two sacrifice types as it once more is an example of how bloodless sacrifice was often an addition whereas blooded often was the main event²³.

It is therefore clear that despite the commonality between the two in terms of it being both a way to appease and respect the gods, blooded and bloodless sacrifices were seen as two different things. In fact, this is further shown with how both were often performed side-by-side during rituals and as such provided different elements to the experience²⁴. The fact that when this occurred, the blooded was often viewed as the 'main' sacrifice also demonstrates the huge significance killing an animal invoked²⁵. Eating meat was an irregular occurrence due to the inability to store meat for periods of time and as such an animal was often more useful for the long-term products which they produced, such as milk²⁶. Due to this, sacrifices and festivals were for many the only time meat was consumed and for this reason, blooded sacrifice would have been heralded as a much greater event for what it represented for not only religion, but the people themselves²⁷.

In conclusion, as well as the obvious lack of blood separating a bloodless sacrifice from a blooded one, there were many other differences that separated the two religious actions. Overall, both did hold extreme importance to the people of the time, but it is clear that blooded sacrifice did hold a bit more significance due to the actions involved and the resources taken being a bit more of a 'sacrifice' to accomplish²⁸.

¹⁵ Schmitt-Pantel, 2006

¹⁶ Kearns, 2012a

¹⁷ Kearns, 2012a

¹⁸ Bacchyl. 11,111

¹⁹ Kearns, 2012b

²⁰ Aesch. Supp. 981

²¹ Haase, 2006

²² Graf, 2012

²³ Burkert, 1979, p.55

²⁴ Graf, 2012

²⁵ Lloyd-Jones, 2011, p.462

²⁶ Webster, 1973, Kearns, 2012a

²⁷ Dillon, 2003, p.236; Lloyd-Jones, 2011, p.462

²⁸ Burkert, 1979, p.56

Bibliography

Aeschylus. *Persians. Seven against Thebes. Suppliants. Prometheus Bound*. A. Sommerstein. (trans.). 2009. Loeb Classical Library 145. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Aristophanes. *Clouds. Wasps. Peace*. J. Henderson. (trans.). 1998. Loeb Classical Library 488. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Bacchylides, Corinna. *Greek Lyric, Volume IV: Bacchylides, Corinna, and Others*. D. Campbell. (trans.). 1992. Loeb Classical Library 461. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Bendlin, Andreas (Erfurt), Renger, Johannes (Berlin), Quack, Joachim (Berlin), Haas, Volkert (Berlin), Podella, Thomas (Lübeck), Bremmer, Jan N. (Groningen), Phillips, C. Robert III. (Bethlehem, Pennsylvania) and Wick, Peter (Basle), "Sacrifice", in: Brill's New Pauly, Antiquity volumes edited by: Hubert Cancik and , Helmuth Schneider, English Edition by: Christine F. Salazar, Classical Tradition volumes edited by: Manfred Landfester, English Edition by: Francis G. Gentry. Consulted online on 11 October 2019 <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e831660>

First published online: 2006

First print edition: 9789004122598, 20110510

Berkert, W. (1979) *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*. Berkeley: University of California Press

Cambridge University Press. (1987) *The World of Athens. An introduction to classical Athenian culture*. Australia: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge

Dillon, M. (2003) *Girls and Women in Classical Greek Religion*. London: Routledge

Graf, F. (2012) 'Ritual' *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Homer. *Iliad, Volume I: Books 1-12*, A. T. Murray (trans.). 1924. Loeb Classical Library 170. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kearns, E. (2012a) 'Religion, Greek' *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Kearns, E. (2012b) 'cakes' *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Lloyd-Jones, H. (2011) 'Ancient Greek Religion.' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*. 145/4. pp. 456-464.

Parker, R. (2012) 'sacrifice, Greek' *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Renger, Johannes (Berlin) and Haase, Mareile (Toronto), "Libation", in: Brill's New Pauly, Antiquity volumes edited by: Hubert Cancik and , Helmuth Schneider, English Edition by: Christine F. Salazar, Classical Tradition volumes edited by: Manfred Landfester, English Edition by: Francis G. Gentry. Consulted online on 13 October 2019 <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e1218770>

First published online: 2006

First print edition: 9789004122598, 20110510

Rives, J. (2011) 'The Theology of Animal Sacrifice in the Ancient Greek World, in Knust, J. and Varhelyi, Z. (ed.) *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice*.

Schmitt-Pantel, Pauline (Paris), "Food offerings", in: Brill's New Pauly, Antiquity volumes edited by: Hubert Cancik and , Helmuth Schneider, English Edition by: Christine F. Salazar, Classical Tradition volumes edited by: Manfred Landfester, English Edition by: Francis G. Gentry. Consulted online on 13 October 2019 <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e1118870>

First published online: 2006

First print edition: 9789004122598, 20110510

Webster, T. (1973) *Athenian Culture and Society*. London: Batsford

Willcock, M. (2012) 'Homer' *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press