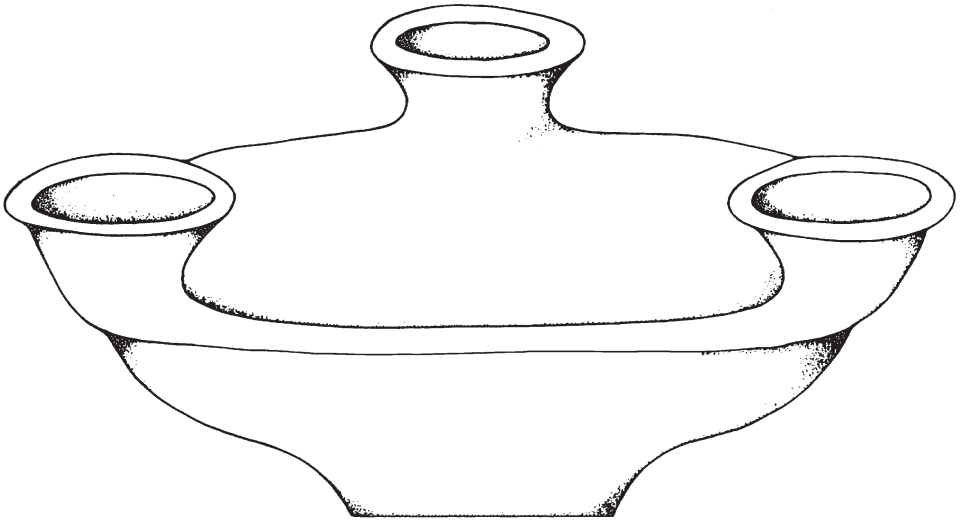


KERNOS

Revue internationale et pluridisciplinaire de religion grecque antique
Διεθνής και διεπιστημονική επιθεώρηση της αρχαίας ελληνικής θρησκείας



26 (2013)

Centre international d'étude de la religion grecque antique



Presses Universitaires de Liège

Table des matières

Éditorial, par André MOTTE et Vinciane PIRENNE-DELFORGE 7

Manteia. Pratiques et imaginaire de la divination grecque antique. Actes du XIII^e colloque international du CIERGA (Paris, octobre 2011)

André MOTTE, *Qu'entendait-on par prophètes dans la Grèce classique ?* 9

Yulia USTINOVA, *Modes of Prophecy, or Modern Arguments in Support of the Ancient Approach* 25

Georges ROUGEMONT, *L'oracle de Delphes : quelques mises au point* 45

Louise BRUIT ZAIDMAN, *Xénophon, l'oracle de Delphes et la divination* 59

Pierre BONNECHERE, *Oracles et mentalités grecques : la confirmation d'un oracle par une seconde consultation au même sanctuaire* 73

Renaud GAGNÉ, *Poétiques de la chrèsmodie : l'oracle de Glaukos (Hérodote, VI, 86)* 95

Véronique DASEN, Jérôme WILGAUX, *De la palmomantique à l'éternuement, lectures divinatoires des mouvements du corps* 111

Elias KOULAKIOTIS, *Aspects de la divination dans la monarchie macédonienne* 123

Giulia SFAMENI GASPARRO, *Oracoli e teologia: praxis oracolare e riflessioni teologiche nella tarda antichità* 139

Emilio SUÁREZ DE LA TORRE, *Divination et magie. Remarques sur les papyrus grecs de l'Égypte gréco-romaine* 157

Athanassia ZOGRAFOU, *Un oracle homérique de l'Antiquité tardive : un livre-miniature à usage oraculaire* 173

Pierre SINEUX, *L'incubation dans L'Histoire de la divination dans l'Antiquité d'Auguste Bouché-Leclercq* 191

Varia

Emma STAFFORD, *'The People to the goddess Livia': Attic Nemesis and the Roman imperial cult* 205

Chronique des activités scientifiques

<i>Epigraphic Bulletin 2010</i> , by Angelos Chaniotis	241
Chronique archéologique	303
Revue des Livres	381

1. Article critique

<i>Ritual Problems: Offering and Sacrificing</i> , par Jan-Mathieu CARBON	381
---	-----

2. Comptes rendus et notices bibliographiques

M. HORSTER, A. KLÖCKNER, <i>Civic Priests</i> (St. Paul)	389
A.C. SMITH, <i>Polis and Personification in Classical Athenian Art</i> (J. Mylonopoulos)	391
A. BIERL, <i>Ritual and Performativity</i> (E. Gotti)	396
F. GERCHANOCH, <i>L'oikos en fête</i> (A. Grand-Clément)	398
J.R. BRANDT, J.W. IDDENG, <i>Greek and Roman Festivals</i> (V. Pirenne)	401
S. DUBEL, A. MONTANDON, <i>Mythes sacrificiels et ragoûts d'enfants</i> (S. Ribichini)	402
N. DESHOURS, <i>L'été indien de la religion civique</i> (St. Paul)	406
P. IOSSIF <i>et al.</i> , <i>More than Men, Less than God</i> (J. Mylonopoulos)	410
B. DIGNAS, R.R.R. SMITH, <i>Historical & Religious Memory in the Ancient World</i> (St. Caneva)	415
J. GOEKEN, <i>Aelius Aristide et la rhétorique de l'hymne en prose</i> (Br. Rochette)	419
St. GEORGOUDI <i>et al.</i> , <i>La Raison des signes</i> (P. Bonnechere)	422
Fr. QUANTIN, <i>Archéologie des religions antiques</i> (Th. Morard)	425
Th. PETTIT, <i>Œdipe et le Chérubin</i> (A.-F. Jaccottet)	431
M. MALAISE, <i>À la découverte d'Harpostrate</i> (R. Veymiers)	435
A. MASTROCINQUE, C. GIUFFRÈ SCIBONA, <i>Demeter, Isis, Vesta and Cybele</i> (L. Puccio)	437
L. BRICAULT, R. VEYMERS, <i>Bibliotheca Isiaca II</i> (J. Masselis)	440
Chr. BOCHERENS, <i>Nani in festa</i> (Fr. Van Haeperen)	442

3. Actes de colloques, ouvrages collectifs et anthologies 443

4. Ouvrages reçus à la rédaction..... 448

Revue des Revues , par Stéphanie PAUL	451
--	-----

Le prochain supplément de <i>Kernos</i>	461
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Revue des Livres

1. Article critique

*Ritual Problems: Offering and Sacrificing**

by Jan-Mathieu Carbon

Much like many other ancient phenomena, the rituals of the Greeks continue to both vex and intrigue through their diverse particularities and their often elusive meanings. The title of the first work under review, *Offrir en Grèce ancienne*, reflects a misleading definitiveness in that regard: this is not a comprehensive treatise on the notion of ‘offering’ in ancient Greece.¹ Rather, it is the subtitle that should probably retain one’s attention: *gestes et contextes*. Herein lies one of the (underplayed) strengths of the book: the idea of ‘offering’—be it donation, dedication or gift-giving—as a gesture, and the careful study of the context surrounding this ritual act.

Patera’s purpose is to revisit and deconstruct various theoretical perspectives on this notion of ‘offering’ in a sacred context. Her introduction affirms, with good reason, a wish to steer clear of an overarching theory of the ‘gift’. Instead, she argues that one must attempt to assemble a wide body of evidence from various sources in order to achieve an overview of the subject.² Yet while P. shows an acute awareness of terminological quagmires, she never really pauses to ask the question whether “offrir” or “offrandes” are themselves problematic terms. “Are these useful categories of thought?”, one periodically feels compelled to ask.

It seems that the author’s desire is only to cautiously elucidate the complex and sometimes contradictory realities that underlie the notion of ‘offering’. But, inevitably, she often runs the risk of falling into the traps that she has just exposed. For instance, she early on claims to leave deliberately aside “les œuvres monumentales qui ponctuent les grands sanctuaires selon des règles propres” in order to examine the “piété quotidienne” of the Greeks through “offrandes ordinaires” (p. 11). But we immediately find out that her data set will include inscriptions (usually expensive), which when written on dedications “montre[nt] le soin pris à exposer la

* The following new works are reviewed here: I. PATERA, *Offrir en Grèce ancienne : gestes et contextes*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012 (*Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge*, 41), 292 pages, ISBN: 9783515101882, and F.S. NAIDEN, *Smoke signals for the gods: ancient Greek sacrifice from the Archaic through Roman periods*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2013, xiii + 421 pages. ISBN: 9780199916405.

¹ As Patera notes, there has not been a good synopsis of the topic since W.H.D. ROUSE’s *Greek Votive Offerings*, Cambridge, 1902.

² Cf. her brief discussion of the classic work of M. MAUSS, *Essai sur le don* (1924), on p. 11-12; and p. 10 for her plan of action: “Il est donc nécessaire, pour mener à bien une enquête sur les offrandes, de confronter tous les types de sources, qu’elles soient littéraires, épigraphiques ou archéologiques, afin d’aboutir à une compréhension aussi détaillée que possible [...] une vision d’ensemble.”

richesse d'une offrande aux yeux de tous" (p. 12).¹ The concept of an 'ordinary offering' is a value judgement which is open to criticism.

The first chapter (p. 17-51) offers a brief overview of terms which are usually associated with 'permanently' dedicated objects, such as *ἀνάθημα*, *δῶρον*, *ἄγαλμα*, *ἀπαρχή*, etc. The treatment is necessarily brief, but P. does succeed in convincingly demonstrating how these expressions were sometimes interchangeable and almost always more flexible than one might suppose in terms of their points of reference: *ἄγαλμα* is usually a cult statue, but more widely an 'adornment'; *ἀπαρχή* is an 'initial' or 'first fruit' offering in a general or specific sense. Yet *ἀνάθημα* is so widespread and generic that it perhaps does approach something like a rubric, our 'dedication' or 'offering'. The lexicographical selection made by P. warrants further systematisation than she wishes.² Other terms she invokes like *δεικτική* and *μνήμα* do have much more precise connotations, though she correctly affirms that *εὐχή* is the proper term for a 'votive offering' and that one should accordingly be cautious about claiming that other offerings were in reality 'votive'.

P.'s second chapter complements this introduction with a survey of scholarly approaches to 'offerings': reciprocal, contractual, ethical and utilitarian theories for conceptualising human and divine relationships, and so on. P. finds many of these models only partly satisfactory, and probably rightly so. She nevertheless has a tendency to minimise the extent to which competitive emulation within sanctuaries may have been a stimulating factor in dedicatory habits, even with regard to smaller dedications; moreover, this is not helped by mixing in the anthropological conundrum of the *potlach*.³ Both of these chapters also offer a rather *déconseillée* discussion on potentially problematic notions like the purported phenomenon of 'desacralisation' and the 'inalienability' of sacred dedications, which P. confronts with the now acknowledged fact that metal objects, for example, could sometimes be melted down for political purposes.⁴ In this respect, one would have hoped for a more thorough discussion of the modalities by which objects might be consecrated or even brought away from the altar.⁵

¹ She is also prone to equivocal statements or self-contradictions, e.g. p. 18: "Ces objets sans valeur marchande [i.e. "des petites offrandes"] font, dans certains cas, partie de l'économie du sanctuaire, dans le sens où ils peuvent y être produits, vendus et offerts"; or p. 71: "La terminologie utilisée pour qualifier les échanges entre hommes et dieux est identique à celle qui désigne les rapports entre humains"; she properly means the terminology of reciprocity, such as *τίμη*, *γέρας* and *χάρις*, whereas her Chapter 1 shows exactly the opposite, viz. that two humans might exchange a *δῶρον* but not make an *ἀνάθημα* for one another.

² Would it not be useful to compare *ἄγαλμα* to *ἀνδριάντας* for example? Was the former really as "polysémique" as Patera alleges (p. 29)? And what about words perhaps as utilitarian as *ἀνάθημα*, such as *ξόανον*? This is not to mention other terms which one might wish to see here, such as *χαριστήριον*, etc.

³ Cf. p. 74 and 96-97. In many cases, it seems evident that dedicants will have vied to set up the most beautiful offering, and some inscriptions reinforce this idea with ample comparatives or superlatives, e.g. *IG* II² 839 (ca. 221/0), lines 33-34: [ἡ]ρασιασευάσσοισι τῶι θεῶι ἀνάθημα ὡς | ἂν δόνονται κάλλιστον... Beyond this, competitive emulation of course occurred on a larger scale at 'panhellenic' sanctuaries like Delphi and Olympia.

⁴ Cf. p. 40-47 (with a brief revisiting of the *ἱερός* vs. *ἕσιος* 'distinction', among other matters) and 94-96, (notably with a discussion of *LSCG* 41-42). But one wonders to what extent these 'exceptions' may not, in fact, demonstrate a general principle or mindset concerning the difficulty of modifying the sacrality of these objects. Cf. also e.g. the inscription from Iasos concerning Zeus Megistos (*LSAM* 59), which assumes clear rules for broken or otherwise useless sacred objects (alluded to on P.'s p. 121, but whose discussion instead belongs here).

⁵ Cf. now e.g. *SEG* 57, 2026, a graffito from Cyrene incised on a cup bearing the enigmatic inscription: [-]ΑΠΟΒΟΜΙΟ[-]. This might refer to a category of object as *ἀποβώμιος*, 'removed from the altar' perhaps to an adjacent pit. It was not strictly 'desacralised' as one might agree with Patera, but still different from other consecrated objects found at the altar or next to it. Cp. the figurine of Artemis which has been removed from the altar in some Delian inventories, *ID* 1417 II 59 and 1443 C.II 13-14: ἀρτεμισίον τὸ μετενεχθὲν ἀπὸ τοῦ βωμοῦ, ἀνάθημα Ἀσκληπιάδου.

Chapter 3, and those that follow it, expound a refreshingly careful and meticulously contextual method for the interpretation of archaeological data. P. is acutely aware of how ancient and modern terminology can be misleadingly applied to inherently ambiguous excavation finds.¹ Her discussion in Chapters 3-5 offers a series of very useful case-studies, and will benefit those who consult it, whether from an epigraphic or an archaeological standpoint. Yet, surprisingly, these later parts of P.'s book shift substantially away from the tangible 'offerings' discussed in the first two chapters, to a discussion of sacrificial rituals involving animal and vegetal perishables, which were not introduced beforehand. Topics discussed include various loci for 'offerings' of this sort: cult tables and couches, statues, altars, pyres, and pits. Much of the discussion concerning pits, for example, consists of an admirable evacuation of over-hasty labels and 'chthonian' interpretations. But isn't a pit sometimes just a βόθρος and vice versa?

The epigraphic evidence, which the present reviewer can better evaluate, is unevenly treated. For instance, P.'s discussion of cult tables and statues (p. 113-121) is helpful but sometimes overly cautious about the value of the textual sources. A few misunderstandings occur here and there.² P.'s reconstruction (109-110) of the practicalities involved in the offering of meats on cult statues misses the mark. The relevant Chian inscriptions which mention this subject clearly imply that entrails are used as offerings; whether the cult statues in question were seated or not determined to some degree the placement of these portions, on the hands or on the knees, or both.³ If anything, P.'s survey reveals how a new and more detailed treatment of these subjects might be warranted.

Overall, there is much treading of fairly well-beaten paths. P.'s book sometimes takes on the guise of a compendium, since many of the chapters aim to build a coherent picture through the accretion of examples rather than a deeper study of these instances. This is only partly successful: an impression is perhaps formed but the limitations of this approach are also patent. If it were meant as a detailed handbook, then the book could have been better organised.⁴ As a monograph, it is a bit of a hodge-podge, which leaves one unsatisfied and wishing for more.

And as healthy as the exploration of these phenomena and the deconstruction of labels or theories are, one wonders what the fruits of these investigations truly are.⁵ One avenue of

¹ Cf. p. 105, though she is not always true to these principles: "nous adoptons... une terminologie descriptive de préférence à l'utilisation de termes antiques [...] Cette démarche nous évite le piège de faire de l'objet archéologique une illustration des textes".

² Pace P. (p. 114 n. 98), the βουθρία at *LSAM* 67A line 3 surely did not involve the deposition of a whole ox on the cult table (furthermore, καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖσιν ἐπιπέτραισιν is completely restored)! Similarly, at *LSJ* 41, 21-23: the goat is "for the table", i.e. very likely not placed whole upon it (cf. also G. ROUGEMONT, *CID* I 13, p. 129). The expression is instead a synecdoche for a meal to be placed on the table after sacrifice and butchery. Cf. also P.'s p. 117, where with n. 118, raw ('fireless') deposition on the altar appears to reflect another misconception; it is unclear which parts of this list are actually envisaged as ἐπὶ τὸν βόθρον, perhaps only the oil or the last three or four items (cf. p. 155 n. 1).

³ Mention of the work of F. GRAF, *Nordionische Kulte*, Rome, 1985, p. 40-41, would have been appropriate here. All of the inscriptions show that the entrails are thus qualified, not "d'un côté les σπλάγγνα de l'animal et de l'autre les parts déposées dans les mains et sur les genoux", as P. has it. The usual phrase, with small variants, is σπλάγγνα τὰ ἐς γόνατα καὶ ἐς χεῖρας, which clearly forms a unit in lists of perquisites. Cf. Graf, I. Ch. 4 (but without the comma at line 4), I. Ch.5 (but without the comma at line 8; this is a syndetic list which demonstrates that the phrase is in fact a unit), I. Ch. 6 (line 6), I. Ch. 7, etc.

⁴ The table of contents is brief but helpful; the sections of the book could have been more segmented and detailed. There is a Greek index as well as a general one; the latter seems useful albeit not completely exhaustive.

⁵ *In fine*, on p. 254, she seems to suggest that we must move beyond the notion of 'offering', to something like "moyens variés et appropriés pour se mettre en communication avec les dieux". This is prudent, but also impractical.

interpretation which occurs to me runs completely counter to P.'s proposition: would not an effort to establish a better and more precise correlation between philological and archaeological data be a great desideratum? Still, one sympathises with the author, since it is indeed a daunting task to attempt to write a synopsis of Greek offering practices and sacrifice, requiring among other things a consummate knowledge of archaeology and art history, philology and epigraphy, and the skill to navigate between the different islands of evidence. Few people, if any, are capable of that.

*

Naiden's *Smoke Signals for the Gods* is another peculiar monograph on Greek sacrifice. From its Preface onward, it takes up a startlingly polemical stance against two books that N. apparently perceives as having led scholarship astray: W. Burkert's *Homo Necans* (1972), and M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant's *La Cuisine du sacrifice en pays grec* (1979). N. reproaches these works of having ignored the fundamental place of the Greek gods as the honorees of sacrifice and the "religious feelings of the ancient Greek worshipper", concentrating instead on "violent feelings" of killing and guilt in Burkert's case, and on "sociable feelings" for Detienne and Vernant (ix).¹

It deserves to be said right away that N.'s critique of Detienne and Vernant, in particular, is hard to corroborate. Their book was not the manifesto N. makes it out to be, but instead a collection of essays with a wide perspective. Many of the contributors never sought to deny the primordial role of the gods in Greek sacrifice, far from it.² Vernant's celebrated discussion of the myth of Prometheus in Hesiod kept a constant eye on the relationship between humans and their gods, since his point was precisely that sacrifice was a symbolic recreation of a Golden Age of commensality with the gods, now lost and only partially achieved: "[l]e rite alimentaire qui met les hommes en contact avec le divin souligne du même coup l'écart qui les en sépare".³ While it is true that *La Cuisine du sacrifice* did put a special emphasis on the feasts shared by human sacrificers, this was primarily intended as a corrective to what was perceived to be an earlier, largely Christianising view of sacrifice as a 'communion' with the gods.

Though N. periodically returns to these scholarly bêtes noires, he also claims to be providing a highly original study of Greek sacrifice when compared to recent scholarship. Readers of *Kernos* will be surprised to hear, for example, that "Just as the most important gap in recent views of sacrifice is the absence of the gods, the most important gap in recent use of the evidence for sacrifice is neglect of the effect of art and literature, and likewise public documents, on every account of the rite" (p. 37). People working on Greek religion have almost always been looking at the gods, perhaps never more so than today, and very much through these forms of documentation. Indeed, N.'s stance appears to ignore a wide variety of recent scholarship on Greek religion.⁴

¹ Cp. p. 4: "Burkert and the French scholars wrote the gods out of sacrifice."

² The introduction to *La Cuisine du sacrifice* ("Pratiques culinaires et esprit de sacrifice"), by M. DETIENNE, states in its third sentence (p. 7) that: "les Grecs n'ont pas cessé d'entretenir des relations avec les puissances divines en procédant à la mise à mort strictement ritualisée de victimes animales dont ils consommaient les chairs collectivement et selon des règles précises". This was surely meant as a global statement.

³ J.-P. VERNANT, "À la table des hommes, Mythe de fondation du sacrifice chez Hésiode", p. 37-132; here: 44, and cf. 44-46 for the "smoke" which was occulted, so N. claims. Cp. also DETIENNE's *Apollon le couteau à la main*, Paris, 1998, which certainly places the god at the forefront, with esp. p. 69-72 on *νόσος* or "fumet odorant".

⁴ There is an unexpectedly large amount of recent scholarship missing from N.'s discussion and bibliography. Among several notable volumes, beyond more specific articles, one might cite the following iconographic studies: K. PATTON, *Religion of the Gods*, Oxford, 2009, and A. THOMSEN, *Die Wirkung der Götter*, Berlin, 2011. And how does the work of e.g. J. GEBAUER, *Pompe and Thysia*, Münster, 2002, and S. BETTINETTI, *La statua di culto nella pratica rituale greca*, Bari, 2001, both cited by N. in his bibliography, factor into his

There is thus a substantial degree to which this book seeks to reinvent the wheel. But the plan is hardly evident, and neither well organised or executed.¹ The first chapter is entitled “The Invention of a Ritual”, in order, as it only later becomes clear, to suggest that the idea of sacrifice qua ritual was invented by scholars. N. argues that sacrifice represents only an episode in a human being’s longstanding relationship with a divinity (using mostly examples from the Homeric poems). N. is of course right that for an individual, sacrifice will often have been only a part of his or her habitual rituals, only an element of his or her relationship with a god or group of gods. He or she burned daily incense, for example, but also partook in larger civic rituals. The chapter is concerned with a medley of actions which surrounded and complemented animal sacrifice, or could, so N. argues, potentially replace it: prayer, vegetal and burnt offerings, etc. Yet some elements of N.’s study, here and elsewhere, fall well short of being compelling.² And can’t sacrifice both be a traditional ritual—and an absolutely fundamental one—as well as an episodic event? Surely these are not mutually exclusive concepts.

Chapter 2, “Venues and Offerings”, attempts to deal with a wide variety of topics related to the presence of the deity at the sacrifice: cult statues and divine manifestations such as epiphanies and oracles, but also the desire to please gods with attractive offerings. The treatment is cursory and unsatisfactory compared to other recent studies: it does not do justice to the wealth of available material.³ N. is later at pains to deny the importance of animal sacrifices by enlisting Greek drama and comedy as representative of a high proportion of cakes and vegetal offerings in common practice. That question must remain open. He also makes some doubtful inferences. For example, in a brief discussion of *τραπεζώματα* (portions reserved for the gods on cult tables, but often eaten by priests and other participants) and *θεοξενία* (divine ‘hostings’), N. finds the earliest instance of this first type of ritual in Eumaeus’ sacrifice (H. *Od.* 14.434-437). Here, after a burning of hairs and raw pieces of flesh sprinkled with barley, various portions of swine are divided and shared, one being qualified as: *τὴν μὲν ἴαν Νύμφησι καὶ Ἑρμῆι, Μαιάδος δὲ, | ὅθῳ κεν ἐπευξάμενος*. N. writes counterfactually that “The portion for the nymphs and Hermes is not the gods’ portion”. It *is* exactly that: a divine portion, perhaps not the whole of it since some was burned, but one that is set aside with a special prayer.⁴ A more evocative view of this form of ritual would have involved relating it to Vernant’s vivid account of divine and human commensality.⁵

astonishingly negative evaluation? It also goes almost without saying that ‘French’ scholarship has much progressed on this topic since Detienne and Vernant. None of the work of P. Brulé, F. Lissarague or V. Pirenne-Delforge, to cite only a few, apparently warrants inclusion in N.’s bibliography. A recent collective volume which would have made clear how much of N.’s criticism has already been anticipated, or even superseded, is F. PRESCENDI, V. PIRENNE-DELFORGE (eds.), *Nourrir les dieux ?*, Liège, 2011 (*Kernos*, suppl. 26).

¹ The book has not been very carefully edited and cross-referenced. For example, many epigraphic citations are misleading or incorrect. Note e.g. the Aphrodisias inscriptions of McCABE 1991 (Abbreviations, p. xii), but not the online corpus of *LApb*. And one wonders what “*Halikarnassos*” is supposed to be (Index locorum, p. 395) when no such corpus actually exists (McCABE again?).

² Note e.g. how N. cites (p. 61-62 with n. 143) an example of a song constituting a sufficient offering in and of itself, but this comes from an oracle of Didyma of the late third century AD. His polemics can be perplexing: on p. 19, Burkert is quoted as saying that “rituals seldom lack a prayer”, but almost immediately accused failing to affirm that rituals “always included a prayer”!

³ Cf. the excellent recent work of V. PLATT on the subject: *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion*, Cambridge, 2011.

⁴ This meaty portion is likely analogous to (or contiguous with) the *ἑρῶ μοῖρα* or *θευμοῖρα* that one later finds in epigraphic evidence: cf. for now N. DIMITROVA, “Priestly Prerogatives and *Hiera Moira*”, in A.P. MATTHAIΟΥ, I. POLINSKAYA (eds.), *Μισθός Ἱεροπνίμων. Μελέτες εἰς μνήμην Michael H. Jameson*, Athens, 2008, p. 251-257.

⁵ For N., these forms of sacrifice are merely an “enticement”, and “aberrant” (p. 58, with p. 59: “for poorer gods”).

The third chapter, “Prayers and Answers”, revisits a variety of notions regarded as hackneyed by N., one of which is “The Supposedly Willing Victim”. Here, N. reprises one of his own articles discounting Burkert’s idea (among others) that guilt over bloodshed was assuaged by ensuring that the ‘victim’ agreed to be sacrificed.¹ N. shows well how animals did not normally “nod assent”. But compliance of a sort was surely desirable and part of a successful sacrifice, as notably demonstrated by the calm images of sacrificial processions frequently found on vases. Miraculous stories (cited by N.) were told of animals presenting themselves for sacrifice, and more mundanely, of animals made to eat at the altar, to shake or tremble. The selection of the right animal was sometimes extremely elaborate, as in a famous but often misunderstood inscription from Cos.² All of these ingredients were good omens and divine signs, elements of divine communication which N. could have discussed more fairly. As elsewhere in his work, he so wishes to eliminate *idées reçues* that he treats e.g. (p. 109-115) the (often oracular) term *καλλιτερεῖν* and its correlates as fundamentally defined by the sacrificial smoke, rather than by a nexus of positive omens and responses: the beautiful animal, the curving of the sacrum bone and tail on the altar fire, the examination of the entrails, etc. The divine element overshadows any human interpretation of the rituals, whether in the form of divination or otherwise.³ Much the same could be said of N.’s next chapter, “A God Says No”, where he discusses so-called negative divine responses to sacrifice and extispicy (these are catalogued in the two appendices to the book, A and B respectively). The absolute majority of these cases derive from literary sources.⁴ While one can agree with N. that negative outcomes would not regularly be recorded in inscriptions, it nonetheless seems probable that sacrificial rejection did not occur on a day-to-day basis; more importantly, *it was seldom interpreted as such*. N. similarly gives rather short shrift to essential notions like impiety (*ἀσεβεία*), sacrilege, and the authority of the *polis* to render sacrifices invalid (a “bureaucratic periphrasis” according to N.).⁵ The elements of divine and human justice involved here deserve a more thorough treatment.

¹ F.S. NAIDEN, “The Fallacy of the Willing Victim”, *JHS* 127 (2007), p. 61-73. The discussion had also been reopened in S. GEORGOUDI, “Le consentement de la victime sacrificielle : une question ouverte”, in V. MEHL, P. BRULÉ (eds.), *Le sacrifice antique, Vestiges, procédures et stratégies*, Rennes, 2008, p. 139-153, as well as in a 2005 article cited by N. In light of this critique, it is surprising that several scholars, including N., continue to speak of ‘victims’ rather than of ‘sacrificial animals’.

² *IG* XII 4, 278 (ca. 350 BC), the sacrificial calendar for the month of Batromios. After an elaborate competition between different suppliers of oxen for the sacrifice to Zeus Polieus, when one is finally selected (probably because of its appearance but others factors were likely involved), the remaining oxen are then driven into agora anew (lines 19-20: *ἔπειτα ἐπελᾶντι[ι ἀδ] | τις κατὰ ταύτά*). We are then introduced to a further conditional requirement, line 20: *θύεται δέ, αἰ μέγ κα ὑποκῶψει, τῶ Ἰστίαι*. This represents a hypothetical sacrifice, which is both supplementary and immediate. One might envisage such an ox as having bowed down to Hestia herself, whether to the hearth or to a cult-statue in the agora. The verb *ὑποκῶψει* probably referred to a spontaneous or coerced bending down of the head (*X. Anab.* 4.5.32, of a drinking animal), or to stooping down on the forefeet (cp. *Arist. Mir.* 831a25, for sitting on hind legs).

³ Nor is N. exempt from his own terminological quandaries. At p. 122-128 he briefly deals with “substitutes” for sacrifice, by which he means objects and dedications in the shape of animals, found in various sanctuaries. One wonders if that is what they really were, and N. tergiversates between this term and the idea of “commemoration” embodied or symbolised by these objects.

⁴ The one inscription included by N. in his Appendix A, *IG* IV², 1 122 XXV, is hardly probative: a woman called Sostrata of Pherai visited Epidauros and presumably sacrificed before incubation; she did not receive a vision immediately while in the sanctuary, but eventually did get one: the god miraculously appeared during her return home. The sacrifice therefore worked, and supplementary offerings needed to be sent to Epidauros after the cure.

⁵ In addition to the example of sacrifices being declared *ἄθυστα*, “non-performed” or “invalid”, cited by N. (p. 137: now *IG* XII 4, 304, lines 38-39), add *IG* XII 4, 297 (also from Cos). Tellingly, this adjective recurs later in ‘confession’ stelae from Asia Minor which deprecate the eating of unsacrificed meat: *JHS* 8 (1887),

Further chapters of the book seek to diminish the importance of animal sacrifice in other ways. Chapter 5, “Rules, Rewards and Experts”, is not really about these matters. A large section is devoted to the formula whereby one sacrifices *ὑπὲρ τινος*, “on behalf of” someone or a group (p. 185-201). N. interprets this as tantamount to a “delegation of responsibility”, which implied “fewer of the communal feasts important to Detienne and Vernant” (193), whereas it is precisely the opposite: a ritual which takes on responsibility, with an additional focus for its prayers, while still honouring the gods.¹ A brief discussion of priests here leaves much to be desired.²

Chapter 6, “Markets and Messes”, makes perhaps the most interesting and sustained argument of any part of N.’s book.³ Following recent work by G. Ekroth on the subject, he makes a reasonable argument that sacrificed meat probably accounted for a limited part of the Greek diet, whether of meat or otherwise (the opposition here is mostly to Detienne). The demonstration is based on estimates and figures (e.g. of the weight of meat in cattle, or of the frequency of sacrifices) which are far from completely reliable: the margin for error is massive, given that we are talking about Athens and Sparta. Readers will have to judge some of this for themselves: for example, did the large Spartan ‘messes’ routinely serve pig meat that was unsacrificed or was it slaughtered in a sacred site and with a small prayer beforehand? And might the evidence for citywide *χερνομίαι* in the Hellenistic period, admittedly for smaller settlements, not suggest that scarcity of sacrificed meat at Athens, if actually correct, was an understandable exception due to a large population?⁴

Regrettably, the continual harping about Burkert, Detienne and Vernant, as well as about other alleged scholarly shortcomings, persists into the final two chapters.⁵ Overall, it greatly mars this otherwise thought-provoking book. N. also takes exception to modern conceptions of sacrifice that he views as “ritualistic”, preferring what he calls a “theistic” approach centered on the Greek gods. His argument is that we need to take up W.F. Otto’s challenge to “take the gods seriously, as gods” (315-316). In the same vein, N. often speaks of “communion”,

p. 387 no. 17 (Apollo Lairbenos); *SBWien* 265 (1969) 58-63 no.15 (Akçaavlu in Mysia); cp. also *I. Smyrna* 728, line 11.

¹ For the correct interpretation, see R. PARKER, *Polytheism and Society*, Oxford, 2005, chp. 2 “Those With Whom I Sacrifice”; cf. also its use in ruler cult: P. IOSSIF, “La dimension publique des dédicaces ‘privées’ du culte royal ptolémaïque”, in V. DASEN, M. PIÉRART (eds.), *Idia kai demosia*, Liège, 2005 (*Kernos*, suppl. 15), p. 235-257.

² Once again, N. fails to cite some of the recent scholarship, like J.B. CONNELLY, *Portrait of a Priestess*, Princeton, 2007, or M. HORSTER, A. KLÖCKNER (eds.), *Civic Priests: Cult Personnel in Athens from the Hellenistic Period to Late Antiquity*, Berlin, 2011. As an example of his tendentious argumentation, one might point to the following: he invokes (p. 203) *LSAM* 36 as proof of how “unauthorized celebrants sacrificed in a way that is ‘ignorant’ or ‘unexperienced’”. This inscription from Priene is not very relevant here, as it concerns the cult of Egyptian gods in the city, and assigns an expert Egyptian to help the newly appointed priest. In fact, other inscriptions concerning Greek cult practice make it clear that, when a priest was absent, individuals could normally take rituals into their own hands: cf. e.g. *LSS* 129, lines 7-11 (Chios, 5th c. BC).

³ Multiple errors or inaccuracies here too, cf. e.g. 249 n. 97: the passage in *LSAM* 72 (not 73) concerns the sale of fleeces, not meat; n. 98: *LSAM* 52, lines 5-6, does not concern the sale of meat but of a priesthood; n. 99: *LSAM* 54 shows that snouts and other extremities were sold at Didyma, as well as the heads of sheep (only)—this appears to be the major sort of meat (nice morsels but hardly prime cuts) that ended up in the agoranomic regulations from the Piraeus (cited by N., p. 241 with n. 44).

⁴ Cf. e.g. *LSAM* 39, lines 25-26 (Thebes on the Mykale and citizens of Priene who happened to be present); *SEG* 45 1508A, lines 9-13 (Bargylia).

⁵ A good summary of his critique can be found at p. 320: Burkert, Detienne and Vernant “assume that sacrifice is a ritual, but the worshipper conceived it as an episode in a relation with a god [...] they pay no heed to esthetic or moral factors, but the worshipper did pay heed to them [...] they also assume that sacrifices were efficacious [...] The worshipper knew that the rite might fail for other reasons [...] they say that sacrifice is a communal ritual, but Greek practice shows that it may be communal, familial, or personal”.

preferring this sacrificial outcome to the commensality of Detienne and Vernant.¹ According to N., the current modern conception of sacrifice reflects a Christian bias, but communion, however one defines it, will undoubtedly cause headaches.

After deconstructing the importance of animal sacrifice, then, it turns out that the question underlying this book was all along one of “belief” (cf. p. 330).² But such an important topic deserves a careful approach, and one could easily imagine a sounder and richer account of the “gods of sacrifice” than this one. Taking the Greek gods seriously ought not to mean adopting a Homeric or mythical perspective for a discussion of Greek history or trying to envisage matters primarily from a divine perspective: this was a human religion after all.³ *Smoke Signals for the Gods* is an excessive and unnecessary counter-corrective: it skews the perspective of sacrifice overly towards the gods. What we need is a more nuanced and balanced treatment, which a category like ‘ritual communication’ might afford us.

On a more practical level, is “smoke signals” a better image for describing sacrifice? Though N. is right to stress that the Greek verb *θύειν* does have the primary sense of “making smoke”, how far did the perception of this extend? We do not really know, but classical Greeks probably already used *θύειν* in a quite generic way, not always with an eye towards its etymology. In various ancient cultures, signaling through the use of fire and smoke was an effectual means of two-way communication. As N. well recognises, Greek gods usually did not respond through smoke, whether positively or “saying no”; they were spectators who were expected or thought to become manifest (cf. also his Chapter 8). Yet for N., the haze obscures the fullness and complexity of this religion.

On the last page lurks a final surprise (p. 330): N. suggests replacing the “ritual of sacrifice” with the term “offering”. Patera’s book amply demonstrates why this will not do. Offering is vague and just as Latinate. Sacrifice, literally making something sacred, was a ritual that the Greeks manifestly did do: an efficacious ceremony, involving a series of traditional actions, which was regularly or periodically performed. Religious attitudes or intentions, though always aimed at the gods, varied just as much as the particular details.

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¹ Cf. p. 118: “solidarity [mutual enjoyment among participants] is not the whole story. The rest is communion”; though here the sense he gives to this ‘communion’ (117-118) is a weak and appropriate one, viz. an “impression” of the deity or a sense of joint participation in a celebration.

² For this ‘hot topic’, see now J. KINDT, *Rethinking Greek Religion*, Oxford, 2012.

³ Despite his commitment to an ‘emic’ perspective, it surely cannot be the case that N. himself believes in Greek gods. Yet one is forced to note how oddly some of his statements are formulated, e.g. p. 16-17 “For the god, *aparchai* and prayer merge in a single attempt to gain his or her attention”; or p. 149: “God wants propriety...”