

2 Animal to Edible

The Ritualization of Animals in Early China

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In early China, animals featured as spirit media and as symbols and metaphors in a highly anthropomorphized literary and philosophical tradition.¹ Yet it is their role as victims in sacrificial rituals – blood and meat to be consumed by spirits and ritual participants – that stands out in the sources.² Information on animal physiology, ethology, ecology and the daily management of animals (such as feeding, herding, welfare, etc.) is often included in descriptions of their role in ritual sacrifices. While no Warring States or early imperial text deals exclusively with the fate of animals as they transit from stable to sacrificial stand, it is possible to reconstruct parts of this process from various sources.

In this chapter I examine the successive stages of transition from animal to victim. Who was in charge of looking after the animals destined for ritual slaughter? How and on what basis were animals identified as suitable victims and set apart from the rest of the herds? Evidence suggests that the early Chinese developed a sophisticated system of animal management, while ritual criteria offered a specific vocabulary for the classification and analysis of animals.

The ritual transformation and killing of animals extracted from their natural or domesticated environment has been the subject of an extensive theoretical literature. My analysis does not adhere to any particular theoretical framework. As I have argued elsewhere, cross-cultural theories may not provide the most productive way of understanding the role of (animal) sacrifice in early Chinese religious practice. The semantics of what sacrifice means are best understood from *within* a particular tradition or society, as they are intimately contingent on the socio-political, economic and physical conditions of communities in a time

¹ For detailed studies see Sterckx (2002); Liang Liling (2010) and Chen Huaiyu (2012).

² For a comparative view of ritualized blood slaughter in Chinese and other early religions, see Kleeman (1994).

and place. Disregarding culturally specific vocabulary and context risks resulting in evidence being collated in order to fit a theoretical model, rather than allowing theorizing reflection to shape it from within.³ Anthropological approaches to sacrifice have largely ignored the wealth of data that can be sourced from Chinese texts and material culture, and historians of religion have mostly limited their analysis to Mediterranean antiquity, or biblical or Vedic traditions. As Fritz Graf reiterates in a recent essay, the era of grand theories of sacrifice may have passed. The influential negative anthropologies of sacrifice proposed by René Girard and Walter Burkert in the 1970s have not led to any new theoretical reflections that command consensus among classicists and historians of religion. Most research today appears to (re)contract upon single regions, cultures or historical periods.⁴

This is not to suggest that conceptual similarities in other civilizations cannot, or should not, inspire our reading of Chinese sources. My study of Chinese sacrificial culture has led me to work by two French scholars. The first is Jean-Pierre Vernant (1914–2007) and his collaborators, who obstinately refused to draw on grand theories and emphasized that, for the Greeks, sacrifice in essence meant cuisine and the animal was a medium of communication with the spirit world. Over and above being used to obtain a response from the spirits, it was vital that the victim tasted good in the banquet for the ritual participants that followed the kill.⁵ The second is Noëlie Vialles' study of abattoirs in the Adour region in southwestern France, from which this chapter borrows part of its title. Vialles describes an abattoir as 'the place that is no-place' and depicts the step-by-step process by which animals are de-animalized and de-animated into anonymous flesh for consumption.⁶ Vialles' analysis helps us conceive of the ritualization of animals as a metamorphic process that operates at various levels. First, the biological and moral properties of animals are transformed and commodified into a world of carcass and flesh. This process is conducted via rules and rituals mediated by the figure of the butcher or ritual officiant. Like the abattoir suppliers, the sacrificial officiant is engaged in a process of feeding in order to be fed; the priest feeds the gods via ritual mediation, the farmer offers up his livestock via the liminal transit zone that is the slaughterhouse. What passes from meadow to sacrificial altar mirrors the transit from animal to edible.⁷ Thus, slaughter entails a process of 'distancing' between the point of origin where animals are bred and kept, and the point

³ Sterckx (2011), 6–9. ⁴ Graf (2012).

⁵ Detienne and Vernant (1989). Recently John Scheid has argued that Roman sacrifice consisted essentially of offering a meal to the gods, following the formal sequence of the Roman banquet. See Scheid (2012), 84–95.

⁶ Vialles (1994).

⁷ Maurice Bloch (1992), 3, describes this radical transition in a discussion of cattle sacrifice among the Dinka in southern Sudan, where meat transits from a stage of representing the animal to one in which it becomes a substance 'alien' to humans and therefore consumable by those present.

of consumption – a notion that remains engrained in the political economy of meat consumption today.⁸

In all of this the ultimate aim is consumption, whether in the form of clinically butchered and vacuum-packed lamb chops, or as consummate offerings for the spirits. This principle is behind the recurring insistence in early Chinese texts that slaughter without consumption, de-animating without de-animalizing, or killing animals for no reason (*wu gu* 無故) should be taboo. As the ‘Royal Regulations’ (‘Wang zhi’ 王制) in the *Liji* 禮記 (Book of Rites) command: ‘Feudal lords do not kill oxen without a reason, grandees do not kill sheep without a reason, a gentleman-knight does not kill dogs and pigs without reason, commoners do not eat exotic products without reason.’⁹

The link between an animal’s edibility and its suitability for sacrifice has been noticed by Western zoologists and agronomists, although their unfamiliarity with the Chinese textual canon has left room for imagination. For instance, in his account of a 1963 tour of China to describe livestock, Hellmut Epstein notes that:

The eating of dog meat in China is an old custom traceable to the sacred and profane consumption of the flesh of the wolf in ancient times. The puppies are fattened on rice, and killed when they are about nine months old. After removing the hair by scalding, the carcass is cut into six or eight pieces, boiled for about one hour, and then fired in oil. The meat is cut into small pieces and cooked with dry mushrooms, preserved bean cake, native onion, a little ginger, and water-chestnuts.¹⁰

While Epstein’s link between dog meat consumption and the ‘sacred’ or ‘profane’ consumption of wolves in ancient China is tenuous – if ‘wolf’ here refers to *Canis lupus* (*lang* 狼) – his inference (drawn from Eduard Erkes) that spirits prefer to consume the meats that humans deem edible is in line with technical literature of the period.¹¹ Dogs were kept as either guard dogs, hunting dogs or food dogs.¹² Dog slaughter scenes are not uncommon in Han

⁸ Novek (2012).

⁹ *Liji jijie* 禮記集解, 13.354 (‘Wang zhi’). For the idea that the ancients never killed and cooked animals without adequate reason, see also *Yantie lun jiaozhu* 鹽鐵論校注, 6.202 (‘San bu zu’ 散不足).

¹⁰ Epstein (1969), 126. Epstein draws on V.W.F. Collier’s *Dogs of China & Japan in Nature and Art* (1921) and Erkes (1943).

¹¹ The wolf appears as one of few species that people could hunt in imperial parks without punishment. Qin statutes on ‘forbidden parks’ (*jin yuan* 禁苑) recovered from tomb no. 6 at Longgang 龍崗 (Yunmeng 云夢 district, Hubei; 221–207 BCE; excavated 1989), mention the dhole (*Canis hodophylax*) and the wolf (*chai lang* 豺狼) alongside rabbits, pheasants and foxes, as species that were considered vermin. See *Longgang Qin jian* 龍崗秦簡, 85 (slip 32), 86 (slip 34). According to the Qin statutes found at Shuihudi 睡虎地 tomb no. 11 (Hubei), the flesh of dogs killed by park wardens could be eaten but the skins had to be handed over to the authorities. See *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian* 睡虎地秦墓竹簡, 20 (slip 7); Hulswé (1985), 22 (A2).

¹² *Liji jijie*, 35.939 (‘Shao yi’ 少儀); Kei (2005), 52–78, 167–208, 218–28.

murals¹³ and dogs (*quan* 犬) destined for sacrifice were accorded a special name, ‘the stew offering’ (*geng xian* 羹獻).¹⁴ But what made an animal suitable for sacrifice, and how much do we know about the management of animals used for ritual consumption? What were the stages that marked the transmutation from an ordinary domesticated animal into a select symbol to be offered up in sacrifice?

Breeding

This transition from animal into ritually significant medium began at the breeding stage. There is clear evidence that as early as Shang times (c. the twelfth century BCE onwards), the Shang king appointed special officials to supervise the herding and supply of animals for sacrificial purposes. Oracle bone inscriptions list the types of animals used (mainly pigs, sheep, cattle and dogs), specify their colour,¹⁵ and include a rich vocabulary of technical terms denoting various sacrifices and slaughtering methods (burning, drowning, splitting, etc.).

In oracle bone script, the graph *mu* 牧 (**mjuwk*) (which occurs in variants containing the *niu* 牛 ‘ox’ and *yang* 羊 ‘sheep’ significs) refers both to a pastor or shepherd in charge of raising animals for sacrificial purposes, as well as to the land or area where these animals were kept. Several such named *mu* areas are mentioned. So, in addition to requisitioning animals for sacrifice through tributes from aristocratic clansmen, the Shang royal house set up breeding grounds on fertile and safe lands within its own domain and on the periphery. *Mu* ‘herdsmen’ were officials of considerable status, possibly even related to the royal clan. Their knowledge of local terrain also made them useful as guides in military campaigns. In contrast, those called *chu* 芻 (**tsrhju*) ‘feeders’, who included captives taken from Qiang 羌 enemy tribes, were of lower status and in charge of gathering fodder. The victims that were delivered by *mu* herdsmen to the royal court for sacrifice could include humans. Occasionally, the *mu* also supplied turtle carapaces for use in divination.¹⁶ Thus, the management of livestock for ritual purposes was the province of professional specialists from early times, and the early Chinese pastoral economy was punctuated with ritual obligation.

Designated officials in charge of animals destined for ritual purposes were documented throughout the Zhou period and into early imperial times. Zhou bronze inscriptions include the titles of officials managing animals, including *mu*, although it is not certain that the latter were directly descended from the

¹³ For examples, see Xia Henglian (1996), 114 (C4), 116 (C6), 118–19 (C8, C9).

¹⁴ *Liji jijie*, 6.154 (‘Qu li, xia’ 曲禮下). ¹⁵ Wang Tao (2007a), (2007b).

¹⁶ Cai Zhemao (2009); Chang Tsung-Tung (1970), 65–73.

Shang officials described above.¹⁷ This reliance on special ‘officials for breeding animals’ (*yang shou zhi guan* 養獸之官) and their ability to select the best animals for sacrifice is identified in the *Liji* as one of the hallmarks of the ancients and is considered the ultimate demonstration of reverence (*jing zhi zhi* 敬之至).¹⁸ The idealized royal state of Zhou described in the *Zhouli* 周禮 (Rites of Zhou) contains task descriptions of several officials involved with managing sacrificial animals at the breeding stage. Again, these include a *mu ren* 牧人 ‘breeder’, whose duties included supplying victims for various state ceremonies. The ‘breeder’ was said to be in charge of the welfare of six types of sacrificial animals (*liu sheng* 六牲), understood by commentators to mean cattle, horses, sheep, pigs, dogs and chickens. His duty was to select ‘pure and complete’ (*quan* 純) specimens, which he did by distinguishing certain animals from the herds according to the quality and colour of their hide (*mao zhi* 毛之).¹⁹ While these breeders were not exclusively tasked with raising animals for sacrificial slaughter, they were nevertheless conferred status for this. For instance, their title appears as a name for a tutelary spirit for horses, First Herdsman (*Xian mu* 先牧).²⁰ It is also possible that the frequently recurring political image of the monarch or ruler as a shepherd who is ‘herding his people’ (*mu min* 牧民) derives from the status enjoyed by these early *mu* officials.²¹

‘Fatteners’ (*chong ren* 充人), ‘houndsmen’ (*quan ren* 犬人) and cowherds (*niu ren* 牛人) worked alongside these officials on varied tasks including preventing damage to the horns of prized oxen and sorting and inspecting victims for seasonal ritual requirements. Hunting officials supplied live and dead animals for sacrifices, while physiognomists, healers and veterinarians assessed the health of livestock and animals kept in parks.²² Lakes in the

¹⁷ *Mu* is described in the ‘*Mian fu*’ 免簠, dating to the mid-Western Zhou, noting that Mian was appointed supervisor of the land, responsible for forests, hunting and animal breeding in the suburbs of the city of Zheng 鄭. See Zhang Yachu and Liu Yu (1986), 10–11 (no. 5); Li Feng (2008), 223–4. Other officials depicted in bronze inscriptions include a *zouma* 走馬 ‘horse walker’, a *sichu* 司芻 ‘hay supervisor’, and a *quan* 犬 who was possibly a houndsmen or breeder of sacrificial dogs. See Zhang Yachu and Liu Yu (1986), 20–2 (no. 16), 26 (no. 5), 54 (no. 16).

¹⁸ *Liji jijie*, 46.1222 (‘*Ji yi*’ 祭義).

¹⁹ *Zhouli zhengyi* 周禮正義, 23.914–23 (‘*Mu ren*’). Zheng Sinong 鄭司農 (Eastern Han) defines *quan* as *chun* 純 ‘unmixed’.

²⁰ The spirit appears in an incantation to a horse fertility deity among the Qin daybooks recovered at Shuihudi. A similar deity receives offerings in summer by officials in charge of the royal stud. See *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 227–8; Sterckx (1996); *Zhouli zhengyi*, 62.2615 (‘*Xiao ren*’).

²¹ For analogies comparing the herding of animals with ruling people, see *Guanzi jiaozhu* 管子校注, 1:1, 1–2 (‘*Mu min*’); 1:3, 51 (‘*Quan xiu*’ 權修). The metaphor is reminiscent of Michel Foucault’s concept of ‘pastoral power’: government modelled on the figurative relationship between a shepherd and his flock. Cf. Golder (2007); Pandian (2012), 83–8. Yet, unlike in the pre-Christian and Christian East, the ideal of registered sedentary communities in static territories prevailed in early China.

²² It is hard to assess the social status of veterinarians. A statement in the *Xunzi* 荀子 implies that they were not highly regarded; cf. *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解, 4: 8.124–5 (‘*Ru xiao*’ 儒效). However,

Shanglin 上林 park, which occupied an area of around 100 square kilometres south and southwest of Han Chang'an, supplied fish and tortoises for sacrifice. These parks also functioned as breeding and hunting grounds for animals to be used in sacrificial rituals.²³

With breeders in charge of supplying the animals, a host of other officials were tasked with procuring the victims and getting them ready for their respective ceremonies. As the following description of the work of a *yang ren* 羊人 'sheep keeper' suggests, this could mean being inventive and purchasing animals elsewhere if the local herds did not produce a sufficient number or quality of victims required:

[The 'sheepkeeper'] is in charge of the sacrificial sheep. In all cases of a sacrificial event, he decorates the lambs. At the sacrifice he cuts the sacrificial sheep and holds up the head. In all cases of a blood consecration he supplies the sacrificial sheep. At the hosting of guests he supplies the appropriate sheep. In all cases of a drowning sacrifice, expulsion sacrifice, blood consecration or fumigation sacrifice, he supplies its sacrificial sheep. When the *mu ren* 'breeder' has no victims (of the appropriate standard), [the 'sheep keeper'] receives cash from the supervising marshal and sends his purchasers to buy victims which he then supplies (for sacrifice).²⁴

There is little evidence of the existence of any special breeding programmes for animals to be used in rituals. At the Palace of Sweet Springs (Ganquan 甘泉), a cult site 100 kilometres north of Chang'an, eave tiles have been recovered with inscriptions requesting the fertility of the six domestic animals (*liu chu xing wang* 六畜興旺, *liu chu fan xi* 六畜蕃息). These suggest the existence of stables and enclosures (examples of which survive in the form of terracotta burial figurines known as *ming qi* 明器 'spirit objects'). But we have no way of knowing whether these comprised buildings or breeding crates exclusively reserved for sacrificial animals.²⁵ It is more likely that breeders and relevant officials were expected to distinguish suitable animals from the common herd and, when required, fatten them up and prepare them ahead of the sacrificial event. Prized oxen could be kept in a cleansed stable to be fattened for three months before being offered up.²⁶ According to one account, a bull could be on a fattening regime over a five-year period to reach a weight of over 700 kilograms for an event as important as a sacrifice to Heaven.²⁷

some clearly did well, *pace* Sima Qian 司馬遷 (?145–?86 BCE): 'To be a horse doctor is a shallow profession (*qian fang* 淺方), yet it enabled Zhang Li 張里 [to own a mansion large enough] to have to strike a bell [to summon all his servants].' See *Shiji* 史記, 129.3282. A modest income and poor family background is suggested in the case of an Eastern Han official, Huang Xian 黃憲 (first century CE), whose father was an ox doctor (*niu yi* 牛醫). See *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書, 53.1744.

²³ See Wei Hong's 衛宏 (first century CE) *Han jiu yi* 漢舊儀, B.5a–b.

²⁴ *Zhouli zhengyi*, 57.2393–5. ²⁵ See Fu Jiayi (2002), nos. 732–4; and He Kewei (2009).

²⁶ *Liji jijie*, 25.694 ('Jiao te sheng' 郊特牲). ²⁷ *Hanshu* 漢書, 25A.1231 (note 5).

The politics of pasturage was complex. It is abundantly clear from legal documents that livestock herding was subject to strict rules of accountancy and management, with severe consequences for those in charge if they were not adhered to. The legal statutes found at Zhangjiashan 張家山 (Hubei; dating from 186 BCE) indicate that convict labourers could be put in charge of herding government-owned livestock (horses, oxen, sheep, boar or sows). For being lax and allowing their herds to nibble at other people's crops, these convict herdsmen could be punished with one hundred lashes from a bamboo cane, compensation would have to be paid to the owner of the damaged grain crops and the convicts would be forbidden from herding livestock again. Reparations were also due in the case of any loss, killing or injuring of government livestock or when animals died from sickness while in the care of herdsmen.²⁸ We know that Qin law was harsh on those who failed to breed oxen and horses to the desired standards, but it is not clear whether different rules and punishments applied to negligence in the case of animals destined for ritual ceremonies, as opposed to those used in agriculture, transport or the military.²⁹ In Qin and Han legal documents uncovered so far, a lack of animal care appears to be formulated in general terms, but an article in the later Tang code (653 CE) leaves no doubt about the implications of delivering sub-standard sacrificial victims.

All cases where sacrificial animals offered for the great sacrifice are not cared for and fed according to the rules so that they become emaciated or injured are punished by sixty blows with a heavy stick for the first animal, increased one degree for each further animal, with a maximum punishment of one hundred blows with a heavy stick. If they die as a result of lack of care and feeding, the punishment is increased one degree.³⁰

It is difficult to quantify with confidence the numbers of victims that were requisitioned for ritual purposes.³¹ These varied, depending on time and occasion, with events using up to several thousand animals being recorded. According to one source, the conquest of the Shang was celebrated with the offering of over five hundred oxen to Heaven and Houji 后稷 (Lord Millet), while other spirits were treated to nearly three thousand sheep and boar.³² Duke De 德 of Qin 秦 (r. 677–676 BCE) sacrificed three hundred sets of animals at

²⁸ *Er nian lüling yu Zouyan shu* 二年律令與奏讞書, 192 (slips 253–4), 255 (slip 433); Barbieri-Low and Yates (2015), 701 (no.11), 925 (no.9). Note that the term *mu* 牧 is also used in the Zhangjiashan materials to refer to a shepherd (as it did in oracle bones). See *Er nian lüling yu Zouyan shu*, 305 (slip 490); Barbieri-Low and Yates (2015), 1123 (no. 1). Diseased animals in the herds or among the courier horses had to be reported. See Zhang Junmin (2012), 220–3.

²⁹ *Shuihudi Qin mu zhujian*, 24 (slips 16–20); Hulsewé (1985), 27 (A9).

³⁰ Johnson (1979–97), vol. 2, 185–6 (art. 200).

³¹ On the link between sacrificial obligation and economic activity, see Sterckx (2011), chapter 4.

³² *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu* 逸周書彙校集注, 4.470 ('Shi fu' 世俘).

the Altar of Fu 酈.³³ During the reign of Yuandi 元帝 (49–33 BCE) over twelve thousand specialists oversaw sacrifices at hundreds of shrines in the capital and the provinces. Ban Gu 班固 (32–92 CE) insists that this number did not include those in charge of breeding and feeding the animal victims.³⁴ By the end of the Wang Mang 王莽 interregnum (9–23 CE), cults that required animals for slaughter proliferated at over 1,700 locations. Wang requisitioned three thousand victim sets and different kinds of birds and beasts. When the cost proved exorbitant, he used chickens instead of ducks and geese, and dogs as substitutes for deer.³⁵ These examples suggest that certain sacrifices required the butchery of animals on a massive scale. Overseeing the slaughter required for state sacrifices in Western Han times was the Director of the Grand Butchers (*Taizai ling* 太宰令), whose officials, butchers and meat-trimmers were in charge of all the meat offered up at temples and imperial shrines, as well as the vessels required for it.³⁶ The numbers cited in the sources are no doubt subject to a degree of inflation or hyperbole in order to demonstrate the grandeur and importance of events, to highlight the piety of the instigators, or to condemn them for extravagant expenditure. Equally, though, these numbers could be underplayed or the officials might be accused of displaying a lack of ritual propriety and sense of duty.

It is difficult to ascertain the economic costs of breeding and maintaining animals in relation to household income for the Warring States and Han periods. Ding Bangyou has tabulated some possible developments in the price of horses, cattle, sheep, dogs and chickens based on (late) Western Han documents recovered at Juyan and Xuanquan (near Dunhuang). The price of an ox in this region ranged between 2,500 and 3,500 cash, that of a sheep between 250 and 1,000 cash, a dog between 150 to 600 cash and a chicken around 40 cash. These documents sometimes identify animals using functional terms such as *si ma* 死馬 ‘dead horse’, *yong niu* 用牛 ‘usable/edible? ox’, *fu niu* 服牛 ‘draught oxen’, *da mu yang* 大母羊 ‘large female sheep’, or *hu gou* 胡狗 ‘barbarian/Hu dog’. There does not appear to be a term designating animals as specifically destined for sacrificial ceremonies, but we can assume that similar costs also applied to victims used in sacrifice (and whose meat would be distributed and consumed afterwards).³⁷

In terms of the revenue landowners in Western Han could generate from supplying livestock, Sima Qian notes that someone who owned pasture lands that produced fifty horses, one hundred head of cattle, or five hundred sheep or marshland pigs would be able to live as well as a marquis enfeoffed with the

³³ *Shiji*, 5.184. ³⁴ *Hanshu*, 73.3116. ³⁵ *Hanshu*, 25B.1270.

³⁶ *Hanshu*, 19A.726; Bielenstein (1980), 18.

³⁷ See Ding Bangyou (2009), 236–49. Yu Kunqi (2012), 141–2, points out that oxen were dearer (as was land) during the Eastern Han, reflecting (higher demand due to) the wider spread of ox-drawn ploughing.

income of one thousand households. Being able to bring one thousand slaughtered cattle, sheep and swine to market within a year would permit a lifestyle equivalent to that of an estate owner of one thousand chariots.³⁸ Taxation and ritual obligation were often intricately linked to each other. The *Liji* speaks of a 'victim tax' (*xi fu* 犧賦), suggesting that sacrificial victims were counted among the revenue requisitioned by courts or local officials.³⁹ A chapter on fiscal control, dating to the early Han and preserved in the *Guanzi* 管子, proposed that a ruler could draw economic profit from waste lands unsuitable for agriculture by setting up a government monopoly on the procurement and sale of sacrificial sheep and cattle bred on those lands.⁴⁰

It is evident that demands to breed and raise animals for sacrifice could pose a significant burden on households and local communities. Critics labelled the excessive expenditure on sacrificial events as a form of negligence of the people's welfare: the work in raising sacrificial victims was labour lost to breeding cattle and horses for other purposes (*xisheng bu lao ze niu ma yu* 犧牲不勞則牛馬育).⁴¹ In contrast, exemplary officials were praised for their ability to balance the management of natural resources against demands for cultic expenditure. For instance, during his tenure as governor at Yingchuan 潁川, Huang Ba 黃霸 (d. 51 BCE) built up a reputation for alleviating poverty by promoting agriculture. He marked out which trees could be used for coffins and what piglets were to be used for sacrifice, so that officials would feed the people before feeding the spirits.⁴² Di Wulun 第五論 was dispatched (c. 52 CE) as governor to the Kuaiji 會稽 commandery to stop the excessive cattle sacrifices that had drained local resources.⁴³ Another recurring theme is the disapproval of animal sacrifices and, concurrently, meat consumption during hard times such as famines or natural disasters. These echo the criticism of several Warring States masters of philosophy who condemned those who feed animals before humans in times of crisis.⁴⁴

Not everyone was able to breed animals, let alone entitled to offer them up. Generally, only elites could afford the costs of rituals and their preparations. Ritual texts also suggest that there was a link between breeding and licences to offer up animals. Only those commoners who were engaged in livestock farming or raising domestic animals themselves could be entitled to use animals in sacrifices (*shu min bu xu zhe, ji wu sheng* 庶民不畜者，祭無牲).⁴⁵

³⁸ *Shiji*, 129.3272–4. ³⁹ *Liji jijie*, 5.116 ('Qu li, xia').

⁴⁰ *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 22: 76.1346 ('Shan zhi shu' 山至數).

⁴¹ *Guanzi jiaozhu*, 8.20: 402 ('Xiao kuang' 小匡). ⁴² *Hanshu*, 89.3629–30.

⁴³ *Hou Hanshu*, 41.1397; *Fengsu tongyi jiaoshi*, 9.339 ('Guai shen' 怪神).

⁴⁴ Sterckx (2011), 80–2. ⁴⁵ *Zhouli zhengyi*, 25.978 ('Lü shi' 閭師).

Physical Markers

The next stage in the ritualization of animals was to select animals which had certain desirable physical features. While titles and fragments of a technical literature dealing with the physiognomy and treatment of animals have survived, none of these appears to contain instructions specifically for animals destined for sacrifice. However, information on the most important markers to use in identifying suitable victims is scattered across various sources. We may also assume that texts on physiognomy and animal health were relevant to the selection of optimal victims for sacrifice.⁴⁶

What made a perfect victim? The *Mozi* 墨子 notes that the sage kings of antiquity chose victims on the basis of their fatness and the perfection and colour of their hide.⁴⁷ Most comments relate to early China's most prominent sacrificial victim, the ox or bull.⁴⁸ Factors taken into account include an ox's age, size, the colour and purity of its hide (whether monochrome or spotted), and the condition of its horns. Some of these criteria go back to the Shang and early Zhou period. As several examples in Schwartz's chapter in this book illustrate, oracle bone inscriptions contain a detailed vocabulary of colour. Later texts suggest that red, reddish and black oxen were much prized, although the purity of the hide seems to be more important than colour alone.⁴⁹ Claims by ritualists that the Xia preferred black victims, the Shang favoured white animals and the Zhou red are hard to corroborate and may be largely theoretical.⁵⁰ Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 BCE–18 CE) states that, as long as the victims' hides were pure and unmixed (*sui* 粹), they were suitable for the temple – whether black, reddish or white.⁵¹ Different degrees of perfection were required, depending on who was going to perform the sacrifice and which spirits would be addressed. The *Liji* notes that, if there was anything infelicitous (*bu ji* 不吉) about the ox destined for sacrifice to the high spirit Di 帝, such as wounds, it could be degraded and offered to the spirit of the grain instead. The length of the fattening period also depended on the importance of the occasion.⁵² Old animals should be avoided. The *Zuozhuan* 左傳 (Zuo Commentary) notes how those who tasted the sacrificial meat on behalf of the ancestors would object: 'The ancients had a saying that no one likes to act as the representative of the dead (*shi* 尸) during a sacrifice at the slaying of an

⁴⁶ On technical literature, see Sterckx (2002), 25–7.

⁴⁷ *Mozi jiangou* 墨子間詁, 8:31.236 ('Ming gui, xia' 明鬼下). Several of the criteria that made up the perfect offering, such as age and colour, were also important in Greek and Roman sacrifice. See Ekroth (2014).

⁴⁸ On the use of bulls as offerings, see Bodde (1975), 201–9; Bilsky (1975), 117–18, 137, 140, 268–9; Armstrong (1945); Goossaert (2005a), (2005b).

⁴⁹ For a rare mention of the use of a white horse as offering in a covenant, see *Xinshu jiaozhu* 新書校注, 7.270 ('Er bi' 耳痹).

⁵⁰ *Liji jijie*, 7.173 ('Tangong, shang' 檀弓上).

⁵¹ *Yangzi Fayan*, 12.6; as in Nylan (2013), 210–11. ⁵² *Liji jijie*, 25.694 ('Jiao te sheng').

old ox, how much less at the slaying of a ruler!’⁵³ Likewise, offering up a calf (*du* 犢) was interpreted as a mark of sincerity (*cheng* 誠).⁵⁴

The horns of the sacrificial bull were another important factor. They had to be even in size and small horns were considered beautiful.⁵⁵ The most valuable oxen were those with short and pristine horns.⁵⁶ The technical term is *jianli* 繭栗 ‘cocoon-like and chestnut-shaped’, which refers to the budding horns of a sacrificial calf.⁵⁷ Several incidents record a bull being dismissed because of injuries to its horns. In some cases, reference is made to rodents that threaten the potency of a bull by nibbling away at its horns. As a rule, sick or injured animals were not used. If an animal’s physical condition was considered inadequate, sacrifices could be cancelled or modified. When divinations about a pending sacrifice were unfavourable, the victim could be released.⁵⁸

The fact that sacrificial animals stood out from the common herd transpires in numerous analogies and tales, in which philosophers and moralists comment on their physical perfection to make a wider argument. In the *Lunyu* 論語 (Analects) Confucius uses this analogy to suggest that low-born individuals should still be valued for their talents and virtues: ‘If the off-spring of a ploughing ox is red and evenly horned (*xing qie jiao* 騂且角), even if people think it unsuitable, would the spirits of mountains and rivers reject it?’⁵⁹ The *Huainanzi* 淮南子 offers a similar comment, asking if the river spirit He Bo 河伯 would refuse the offer of a sacrificial calf that was born from a spotted, hornless and tailless working-ox?⁶⁰ Outward appearance is also the subject of an exchange by Yang Xiong:

Someone asked me, ‘What’s the difference between the hide of the plough ox and that of a pure black or red ox, once the hides are shorn?’

‘They are the same.’

‘But if that is so, why is the one not used in ploughing?’

⁵³ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu* 春秋左傳注, 903 (Lord Cheng, year 17).

⁵⁴ *Liji jijie*, 25.689 (‘Jiao te sheng’).

⁵⁵ A Zhou bronze inscription on a basin known as the ‘Shi Qiang *pan*’ 史牆盤, composed shortly before 900 BCE, praises the sacrificial animals as ‘even-horned and redly gleaming’. See Shaughnessy (1991), 1–4, 190.

⁵⁶ *Guoyu* 國語, 18.564–71 (‘Chu yu, xia’ 楚語下); *Liji jijie*, 13.354 (‘Wang zhi’); *Han jiu yi*, 2.2a.

⁵⁷ *Guoyu*, 18.565; *Chunqiu fanlu yi zheng* 春秋繁露義證, 7:23.194; *Hanshu*, 22.1052, 25B.1266; *Shiji*, 12.461, 28.1389. According to the *Shi ming* 釋名 (Explaining Names), calves and lambs that had not yet sprouted horns were known as *tong* 童 ‘youthful’. See *Shi ming*, 10.94 (no. 9).

⁵⁸ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 667 (Lord Xuan, year 3), 831 (Lord Cheng, year 7), 950 (Lord Xiang, year 7), where the bull is released after three failed divinations; 1598 (Lord Ding, year 15), 1604 (Lord Ai, year 1), 486 (Lord Xi, year 31), where the victim is set free after four trials.

⁵⁹ *Lunyu yi zhu* 論語譯注, 57 (VI.6).

⁶⁰ *Huainan honglie jijie* 淮南鴻烈集解, 16.543 (‘Shui shan’ 說山), noting elsewhere (17.575 [‘Shui lin’ 說林]) that a piebald horse does not qualify as a sacrificial animal.

‘To show the utmost filial reverence when serving the spirits, in sacrifices one does not dare to use the plough ox. But who cares whether the animals are brindled or not, if one is killing sheep and stabbing suckling pigs to entertain guests or to honour the troops’ exertions with a feast?’⁶¹

Another frequent theme is the knowledge that being selected and decorated as a perfect animal will lead to certain death. The *Zuozhuan* uses the image of a cock plucking its own tail feathers to avoid being selected.⁶² Zhuangzi 莊子 compares being bred and fed in luxury to the lot of a hog which ends up on a sacrificial altar, suggesting that serving in office is the equivalent of being offered up.⁶³ Yi Yi 夷逸 (seventh century BCE) rejects the prospect of becoming an official and compares himself to ‘an ox that would sooner submit to a yoke in order to plough the fields rather than wear embroidery, enter a court, and become a sacrificial victim’.⁶⁴ To authors and orators at the time, sacrificial animals, set apart from the common herd and selected on the basis of their perfect physique and beauty, exemplified the inevitability of failure and demise, despite the temporary trappings of luxury and status:

The ox reserved for the suburban sacrifice is fed and nourished throughout a whole year, before being bedecked in patterned embroidery and led into the temple hall. Then the Grand Steward takes his belled knife to lay open its hair. At that moment, even if the ox wanted to be panting up a steep hillside under a heavy load, it would not get its wish.⁶⁵

The process of breeding and selecting sacrificial animals was inscribed in the seasonal calendar. Texts known as Monthly Ordinances (*yueling* 月令) provide an overview of what the annual cycle leading up to the point of slaughter may have looked like.⁶⁶ The ritual year began in the first month of spring, when the ruler had sacrificial guidelines drawn up. During the season of growth, female animals were not allowed to be sacrificed, since they were essential for propagating the herds. The use of live animals in sacrifice remained taboo throughout the second month so that, by late spring, calves and foals that were marked for sacrifice could be selected and their numbers written down. Next, these animals were kept in pens or let out to pasture, to grow and gain weight. By late summer the court issued levies of hay and fodder (known as *chu gao* 芻藁) from its subjects to feed the victims required for state and ancestral sacrifices. In mid-autumn there was an annual inspection of the sacrificial victims (also known as *chu huan* 芻豢 ‘grass and grain-fed

⁶¹ *Yangzi Fayán*, 3.18; as in Nylan (2013), 47–9.

⁶² *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 1434 (Lord Zhao, year 22); *Guoyu*, 3.142–3 (‘Zhou yu, xia’).

⁶³ *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋, 19.648, 32.1062.

⁶⁴ *Shizi* 尸子, as in Fischer (2012), 140, fragment 64.

⁶⁵ *Yantie lun jiaozhu*, 18.231 (‘Hui xue’ 毀學).

⁶⁶ On the Monthly Ordinances, their different versions, and the information they contain, see Zheng’s Chapter 11 in this volume (especially footnote 1).

animals'). Priests and slaughter officials made their rounds to examine the animals' physical condition, fodder and colouration, and to measure their size and weight.⁶⁷ By late autumn, the animal stocks destined for sacrifice should be mature and ready for collection along with the regular tax and tribute duties. At the end of the year, the ruler ordered his officials to rank all feudal lords with obligations, and list which animals should be levied from them for the sacrifices to Heaven, Shangdi, and the altars of soil and grain. States or dependencies sharing the ruler's surname had to supply fodder for the animals to be slaughtered to lineage ancestors. Again, registers were drawn up and all landowners counted – from ministers and grandees down to the common people – so that animals could be levied from them for offerings to mountains, forests and important rivers.⁶⁸ Meticulous accountancy went into recording, counting and demanding victim animals. The agricultural cycle of the calendar was punctuated by tasks which aimed to supply animals for the rituals that marked the passage of the seasons and the year. While we have no way of knowing how rigorously this schedule was adhered to in reality, the maintenance of a smoothly running ritual economy clearly underpinned the rationale for establishing these calendrical rules and regulations. It also reveals a world in which ritual obligation was embedded as part of the normal management of the natural world and its agricultural resources. Rather than a separate and dedicated industry with the purpose of supplying the altars and ancestral halls with creatures, animals were levied as an excise on the harvest of ordinary livestock.

Between Animal and Edible

Once animals were identified for sacrifice, they entered a liminal zone. This was a period during which, *pace* Vialles, they were de-animalized but not yet de-animated – neither animal nor meat. Separated from the ordinary herd, the ritualized animal was now accorded special status. For instance, a ruler had to descend from his chariot when passing a ritually cleansed sacrificial ox.⁶⁹ Animals destined for sacrifice, as well as ritual implements, could not be sold at the market alongside ordinary animals,⁷⁰ while the names of victim animals could not be given to a child.⁷¹

⁶⁷ The *Liji* version of the *yueling* refers to the colour of animals, using the term *wu se* 物色, which is also mentioned in documents in the Qin local archive of Qianling 遷陵 county (discovered in 2002 at Liye 里耶, Hunan), where it refers to the colour of fish. See *Liye Qin jian du jiaoshi*, 8–85 recto (59), 8–769 recto (222).

⁶⁸ *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi* 呂氏春秋校釋, 1.2, 2.64, 3.122, 4.186, 5.241, 6.311; see also *Guoyu*, 18.567 ('Chu yu, xia'); *Da Dai Liji jiegu* 大戴禮記解詁, 5.102 ('Zengzi tian yuan' 曾子天圓); and Okamura (2003), 1–80, esp. 3–17.

⁶⁹ *Liji jijie*, 4.102 ('Qu li, shang'). ⁷⁰ *Liji jijie*, 14.374 ('Wang zhi'); *Kongzi jiayu*, 7.6a.

⁷¹ *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 116 (Lord Huan, year 6).

Other taboos and rules were used to transform an animal from a biological creature into a ritual medium. A special nomenclature replaced the common names used to refer to the animals. Terms such as *xi* 犧 and *sheng* 牲 referred to sacrificial animals generally. According to the *Zuozhuan*, an ox could only be called a *sheng* ‘victim’ after divinations had taken place to determine its selection and fix the day of slaughter. Once a suitable day had been identified, the Jin dynasty commentator Du Yu 杜預 (222–284 CE) notes, ‘the name of the ox is changed into *sheng*’.⁷² Sacrificial animals could be referred to by their ‘victim appellation’ (*shenghao* 牲號). It is not clear how widespread the use of this ritual vocabulary was, or how the practice of using special names and titles applied to other objects, implements and entities used or addressed during ritual prayer and sacrifice.⁷³ The *Liji* specifies some of these titles for animal offerings, and some are also mentioned in other texts. A sacrificial ox was known as ‘the one [mysterious?] creature with the large footprint’ (*yi yuan da wu* 一元大武; following definitions by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄). Sacrificial pigs and sucking-pigs were called ‘hard bristles’ (*ganglie* 剛鬣) and ‘fatlings’ (*dun/tun fei* 豚/豚肥) respectively.⁷⁴ Sheep used in ancestral sacrifices were called ‘soft hair’ (*roumao* 柔毛), dogs were known as a ‘stew offering’ (as previously mentioned). ‘Red shriek’ (*hanyin* 翰音) was the name for a sacrificial cockerel and ‘gap-toe’ (*shuzhi* 疏趾) referred to pheasants or fowl. A sacrificial hare was called ‘the clairvoyant’ (*mingshi* 明視), and the list continues with special names for dried and fresh fish, water, ale, grains, jades, etc. These ritual titles reflected the desire for sacrificial animals to be fat and glossy when offered up: a well-fed ox leaves large footprints; fat pigs grow hard hair and whiskers; fat sheep grow soft and fine wool; a fat cockerel has a powerful call. The distance between a pheasant’s toes showed how well it was nourished. Dogs grow fat on human leftovers, which in turn made them a perfect treat in a stew for ghosts and spirits. Rabbits’ eyes were believed to open wider when they became fat. Zheng Xuan notes that these special names were used to distinguish victim animals from animals for human use.⁷⁵ Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133–192 CE) points out that such ritual nomenclatures were also a mark of respect for the spirits as well as differentiators of animals and other ingredients consumed by people.⁷⁶

Special terms also denoted sets or combinations of animals destined for sacrifice. The term *lao* 牢, referring to groups of animals of two or more,

⁷² *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zhu*, 486 (Lord Xi, year 31).

⁷³ The *Zhouli* for instance refers to ‘six appellations’ (*liu hao* 六號) which include the names of spirits, demons, mystical emanations, sacrificial animals, sacrificial grains and jades. See *Zhouli zhengyi*, 49.1997 (‘Da zhu’ 大祝).

⁷⁴ The term *xi jia* 犧豕 is used to describe an unblemished sacrificial pig in *Lüshi chunqiu jiaoshi*, 24.1592 (‘Zan neng’ 贊能). *Zhuangzi*, 22.750 (‘Zhi bei you’ 知北遊) mentions a market supervisor sinking his heels into his hogs to measure how fat they were.

⁷⁵ *Liji jijie*, 6.154–5 (‘Qu li, xia’). ⁷⁶ *Duduan* 獨斷, 1.15a–b.

suggests that sacrificial animals were kept and fed in separate pens. As the previous chapter showed, Shang oracle bones contain a distinct vocabulary for penned animals – but it is uncertain how far these relate to later terms which represented a particular set of animals. Xu Shen 許慎 (c. 55–149 CE) defines *lao* as an ‘enclosure’ (*xian* 閑), specifically an enclosure for oxen and horses. If sacrificial animals were usually tied up and fattened in a pen, then *lao* may have become used as a word to describe them.⁷⁷ The term *te niu* 特牛 refers to a single bullock offering.⁷⁸ A *tai lao* 太牢 (or *da lao* 大牢) ‘greater lot’ denoted the combination of a bull, a sheep and a pig that was used at the high(er) end of ritual occasions and by people of high status, whereas a *shao lao* 少牢 ‘lesser lot’ consisted of just a sheep and a pig and had less ritual gravitas. However, it is important to note that this ritual nomenclature was by no means fixed, and commentaries include various explanations for these terms.⁷⁹ Zooarchaeology – a field still in its infancy for China’s early historical period – will no doubt enhance our understanding of this in the future. Zooarchaeological evidence can alter the static picture of animal sacrifice derived from inscriptional evidence and texts.⁸⁰ It will permit judgements on frequency, combination and size of victim animals which are difficult to extract from text-based sources. But, while technical terminology may have been in flux, it is clear that attempts to refer to animals with epithets and titles that distinguish them from secular usage symbolically contributed to their transformation from animal to offering.

The Kill

Sacrificial animals were washed, cleansed and decorated prior to being slaughtered and offered up.⁸¹ In the case of an ox offered up in the suburban sacrifices, this ritual cleansing stage could run to a quarantine of three months.⁸² By that stage, the preparatory cycle had run its course (identification and selection,

⁷⁷ *Shuowen jiezi*, 2A.8a.

⁷⁸ See *Guoyu*, 2.286 note 2, where Wei Zhao 韋昭 (d. 273 CE) adds that two victims make a *lao*. See also *Shiji*, 12.469.

⁷⁹ *Liji jijie*, 13.352 (‘Wang zhi’). Sanft confirms the fluid meaning of these terms against examples in recent palaeographic texts. See Sanft (2014), 340–4.

⁸⁰ Yuan and Flad (2005), for example, compared remains from four different Shang sites. They conclude that royal sacrifices changed substantially, from solitary pigs and dogs in early Shang, to an increasing share of cattle and, eventually, horses in the later periods. The Warring States and early imperial periods are receiving growing attention by historians with an interest in climate and environment. The complex dynamics between environment, species and landscape as geo-physical fact and ideological construct is a fascinating area of inquiry. Yet, many basic heuristic hurdles remain to be scaled, not least how statistics derived from literary and (court-based) historical sources should be used.

⁸¹ See e.g. *Mao shi zhengyi* 毛詩正義, 13B.7b; *Mu Tianzi zhuan* 穆天子傳, 2.1b; *Liji jijie*, 46.1222 (‘Ji yi’); *Han jiu yi*, 2.3b–4a.

⁸² Zhang Hequan (1993), 202–4.

fattening, cleansing, decorating) and had transformed the animal into an ideal subject, ready for ceremonial slaughter. Judging by the rich vocabulary used to describe the killing, cutting, drowning, burning and offering up of animals, there were multiple ways in which animals met their end. It is not certain whether the instructions preserved in ritual texts reflect practice at all times and in all places, but descriptions of the sacrificial kill – some dating back to the earliest odes in the *Shijing* 詩經 (Odes) – suggest that there were some standard procedures. A knife with rattling bells (*luan* 鸞) recurs as the tool used to stab and bleed the creature. To verify the degree of the animal's purity, the ritual officiant would first open up its hair layers.⁸³ The *Liji* notes that, once the animal was led forward and fastened to a pillar (at the entrance to a temple in this case), officials bared their arms to inspect its hair, paying particular attention to the growth around its ears. Following this, the animal was killed and cut.⁸⁴

The role of blood was central. It was not only used as an offering to the spirits, but also smeared on objects such as ritual bells and vessels to consecrate them, or libated to mark out a ritual space. In pre-Qin times, blood was also used to seal covenants.⁸⁵ In early China, blood was as likely to be perceived as a substance associated with ritual culture (and the battlefield) as understood in the context of medical or physiological theory, as shown by the *Shuowen jiezi*'s 說文解字 (Explaining Graphs and Analysing Characters) definition of the graph *xue* 血, for instance. Rather than linking blood to *qi* or animated life, Xu Shen defines the graph as 'the blood of animals offered during a sacrifice (*ji suo jian shengxue ye* 祭所薦牲血也)'.⁸⁶ Hair and blood were signs of the creature's interior and exterior purity. Blood-shedding and plucking hair is explained in the *Guoyu* 國語 (Discourses of the States) as follows: 'The hair [or 'hairing'] of an animal serves to demonstrate its colour (*mao yi shi wu* 毛以示物); blood [or 'bleeding'] serves to announce the act of killing (*xue yi gao sha* 血以告殺). One receives the spirits in trust by pulling out the hair and collecting the blood in order to offer it up together, [thereby turning] purity into a form of respect.'⁸⁷ To imagine the final moments in the life of those creatures whose fate was determined through the various ritualization and sacrifice

⁸³ *Mao shi zhengyi*, 13B.20b ('Xin nan shan' 信南山; Mao 210, stanza 5); *Zhouli zhengyi*, 36.1440 ('Xiao zongbo' 小宗伯); *Liji jijie*, 24.657 ('Li qi' 禮器), 26.702 ('Jiao te sheng'), 46.1222 ('Ji yi'), 47.1240 ('Ji tong' 祭統).

⁸⁴ *Liji jijie*, 46.1215 ('Ji yi').

⁸⁵ For a detailed survey of blood usage in pre-Qin ritual, see Yang Hua (2012a), (2012b). For a blood consecration of a drum, see *Chunqiu Zuo zhuan zhu*, 1271 (Lord Zhao, year 5). The *Mencius* contains the well-known story of King Xuan 宣 of Qi 齊 (fourth century BCE), who cancelled the slaughter of a bull for the blood consecration of a bell because he had seen the animal alive. Moved by pity for the animal, he ordered the bull to be replaced by a sheep. See *Mengzi zhengyi*, 3.80–3 (1A.7).

⁸⁶ *Shuowen jiezi*, 5A.50b. ⁸⁷ *Guoyu*, 18.564–71 ('Chu yu, xia').

stages described in this chapter, the following scene offers an example of what may have been a common sight to those who gathered around temples, altars and shrines.

The butcher swipes clean (*shi* 拭) the sheep, the priest chants a prayer (to bless the animal) and the cook, while facing north, takes the animal and places it to the south of the stone pillar (*bei* 碑), the highest officiant standing to the east. Then the butcher lifts up the sheep and climbs onto the roof at the middle-point between east and west. In the centre of the roof and facing south, he stabs the sheep and lets the blood run down in front of him. Then he descends. At the gate of the temple and at each of the two side rooms a chicken is used, first at the gate and then at the side rooms. The hairs and feathers around the ears are pulled out under the roof (before the killing). When the chickens are cut, at the temple gates and the rooms on each side of it, officers stand opposite the respective gate and room and face north. When the ritual is done, the priest announces that it is over. After that everyone retires. A message is then returned to the ruler announcing: ‘The blood consecration of such-and-such a temple has now been completed.’⁸⁸

Thus, the blood shedding marked the end of the animal, whose meat and carcass would then take on new meanings. We have reached the stage at which the animal, bled of its life force, had been fully transformed into a substance that was edible for both humans and spirits. Animals and their meat then became a central ingredient in a complex web of signifiers that marked social and political relationships. They featured as real and symbolical capital in gift exchanges, became the subject of meticulous banqueting and dietary conventions, and acted as symbolic nourishment for the spirit world.⁸⁹

Conclusion

Our understanding of how animals influenced human life in early China and how people shaped the fate of the livestock, domesticated and wild animals that surrounded them has been significantly guided by textual sources that are replete with information. Yet texts can only present a partial picture, even when they are studied with anthropological curiosity. We have yet to appreciate fully the need for advances in zooarchaeology and the study of visual culture that must be made in order to question and complement our reading of texts. In many ways, historians of China have yet to visit, rather than revisit, the pangolin, to paraphrase Mary Douglas. The management of livestock, hunting, farming and the consumption of animals is also depicted in early Chinese visual culture. However, scholars have barely touched the surface of this body of visual evidence, while studies of animal iconography remain largely

⁸⁸ *Liji jijie*, 42.1120–3 (‘Za ji, xia’ 雜記下). The technical term for the blood consecration described here is *xin* 鬻.

⁸⁹ For detailed studies of the significance of meat in those contexts, see Sterckx (2011), 26–34, 49–59; and Boileau (2013), chapter 4.

descriptive. To be sure, early China's visual vocabulary may contain less information on animal sacrifice when compared, for instance, to ancient Greece.⁹⁰ Perhaps the notion that ritual aimed to transform the zoomorph/animal into an entity that was a-morph/edible may partly account for this. Nevertheless, the visual evidence raises intriguing questions about the ritualization of animals which have not yet been considered. For example, are hunting and agricultural scenes in funerary art related to the ritual context of a tomb, and if so, in what ways? What should we make of the terracotta replicas of animal pens, stables, ponds and farmsteads that are so prominent in Han period tombs? Can these materials be interpreted as part of a ritual vocabulary?

As revealing as our analysis of animal references is for studying the mechanics of ritual, an equally important question must be: through what domains or spheres of daily existence did animals impact on the lives of humans in early China? Focusing on the cycle of ritualization itself may lead to a belief that the early Chinese ritual economy created a sphere of activity through its handling of animals that was distinctively removed from the use of animals in daily life. However, this is clearly not the case. While the management of animals destined for ritual purposes was certainly subject to professionalization, people and officials handled the supply of sacrificial animals alongside their wider duties as breeders, hunters, shepherds, butchers, cooks, etc. In terms of agency, the ritual and non-ritual use of animals was often conflated. After all, meat was shared out and consumed as part of a sacrifice. Therefore, I contend that sacrificial ritual was simply one of several filters or domains through which the animal world was presented to human communities in early China, alongside other experiences with animals resulting from their use in agriculture, locomotion, human diet, medicine, etc. Just like domesticating animals, 'ritualizing' animals for sacrifice was an integral part of what many in early China saw as the origin narrative of human civilization.⁹¹ Therefore, it may make sense after all that the legendary Fu Xi 伏羲, who was apocryphally credited with domesticating and subduing (*fū* 伏) animals, was also known by his variant name, Pao Xi 庖犧, the 'butcher of sacrificial victims'.⁹²

⁹⁰ On the discrepancy between textual and visual depictions of animal sacrifice, see Sterckx (2012); excellent collections of Greek examples include van Straten (1995) and Gebauer (2002).

⁹¹ For more on these narratives, see Sterckx (2002), 94–6.

⁹² While the variant 庖犧 is used in several Eastern Han sources, to my knowledge Huangfu Mi's 皇甫謐 (215–282 CE) 'Di wang shi ji' 帝王世紀 (Record of Emperor and Kings) is the first source to credit Paoxi Shi 庖犧氏 with 'taking sacrificial animals in order to supply the kitchens' (取犧牲以充庖廚, 故號庖犧氏). See *Di wang shi ji jicun* 帝王世紀輯存, 1.3. Sima Zhen's 司馬貞 (679–732 CE) 'San Huang ben ji' 三皇本紀 contains a similar statement. See *Hou Hanshu*, 40B.1362 (note 9). Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–86) credits Fu Xi with animal domestication in his *Tongjian ji gu lu* 通鑑稽古錄 (Record of the *Comprehensive Mirror's* Examination into the Past). See *Ji gu lu*, 1.2.