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Dirt and pollution in Roman professions: victimarii in the Roman world

One of the most frequently depicted figures from the field of Roman religion is the *victimarius*, the attendant who accompanied and controlled the sacrificial animals (typically sheep, pigs and oxen) during their procession to the altar, and then had the task of dispatching the animal swiftly and cleanly, and, where necessary, dissecting the animal for the reading of its entrails. It was essential that they perform their role with care and precision, and so they were trained experts who were integral to sacrificial proceedings. However, *victimarii* were often disparaged or dismissed in Latin literature, and the group often has been ignored in classical scholarship: this despite the crucial role they played, and despite the fact that we are blessed with a wealth of literary, epigraphic and artistic evidence for the profession.

This project has focused specifically on the conflicting nature of the various sources. It has sought to demonstrate that, while the *victimarii* were to a large extent despised by the Roman élite, they were nevertheless vital to all religious occasions involving animal sacrifice. Moreover, on the basis of the epigraphic evidence commemorating known *victimarii* from both the city of Rome and the Empire as a whole, it appears that the profession was both hierarchical and a source of pride for those who practised it. Within the Roman army the *victimarii* were recognized as a specialist group. Outside the military they performed their duties at the most prominent state sacrifices, but at the same time catered to the sacrificial needs of those at the lower end of the social spectrum. While the artistic representations of *victimarii* consistently depict them as adult men, evidence suggests that children and potentially women as well were able to serve within the trade. Much of the evidence has been considered insufficiently in the sphere of Roman religion and sacrifice, despite the fact that these subjects have continued to thrive.

By combining the various strands of evidence connected to the sacrificial attendants, this project has worked to demonstrate the significance of the *victimarii* and the wide range of evidence that survives, as well as the extent to which this essential group was marginalized by the élite of Roman society. This was achieved through a number of methods, including their frequent relegation to the background or sidelines of sacrificial scenes in Roman art and their frequently diminished stature next to the priests who dedicated the offerings from a safe distance. The project has shed light on an important profession, albeit one that has been underappreciated both in antiquity and in modern studies of Roman religion.

JACK LENNON (2013–14)
 (Department of Classics, University of Nottingham)
jack.lennon@nottingham.ac.uk

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Beyond sacrifice: re-evaluating the ritual use and deposition of animals in Etruscan and early Roman Italy

Animal sacrifice is one of the most evocative aspects of ancient religious practice. Despite paying much attention to the subject, scholars of protohistoric Italy largely have neglected

the remains of the victims themselves. Instead, researchers often reference textual or iconographic evidence from other cultures, overlooking contradictory evidence in the Italian archaeological record. This situation leads to overly simplistic, if not problematic, explanations of these deposits, and it clouds our understanding of a central aspect of Etruscan culture. Through an extensive reinvestigation and compilation of cultic/ritual animal bones from central Italy, the project seeks to develop a methodological framework for approaching the symbolic use of animals and to present a zooarchaeologically-based interpretation of the role of animals in ritual activity. However, the scope of this research extends beyond the choice of victim and act of sacrifice, to consider the treatment of animal remains post-mortem. This bone-based study will be supplemented by the creation of an online database that encompasses animal remains from sanctuaries, tombs and isolated contexts. By addressing the subject of sacrifice through the remains of the victims, this research seeks to open a new line of enquiry into Etruscan and early Roman ritual practice, and the open-access appendix will ensure that this type of evidence (often buried in specialist reports) is easier to access in the future. As it places the sacrifices themselves at the centre of the discussion, this project offers a new means of exploring cultural change during a millennium of shifting political and economic pressures.

At the BSR between January and March 2014, I focused on undertaking a broad literature review and laying the groundwork for subsequent data collection/recording. This research investigated not only the zooarchaeological evidence for Etruscan and Roman ritual activity, but also similar zooarchaeological studies of Greek, British and central European material. This review produced a list of relevant sites, separating reports with useful quantitative information from those without numeric data (for example where bones were mentioned in the text, but not individually listed). I was able to finalize and start entering data into a database, a document that must combine numerous different types of information from faunal reports. Early in my Rome Award, I applied for and was awarded the Etruscan Foundation's Research Fellowship. This funding has allowed me to expand the project, and it will support data collection during the summer of 2014. While resident at the BSR, I was able to coordinate access to a new and important animal bone assemblage from the recent Caere excavations directed by Fabio Colivicchi (Queen's University, Canada). This material, which derives from the area surrounding the 'hypogeum of Clepsina', a religious compound in the centre of the city, will enhance the project through a new chronological investigation of ritual animal use and discussion of local husbandry practices.

As a result of my time at the BSR, I now enter into the next, data collection, phase of the project with a thorough literature review, growing site list, confirmed access to material, and a database ready for further recording. After this strong start, data collection in both the field and library will occupy most of the summer, leading to subsequent analysis and the results of the project later this year. My time in Rome has been incredibly rewarding, and I would like to thank my fellow award-holders and all the BSR's staff for this experience.

ANGELA TRENTACOSTE (2013–14)
(*Department of Archaeology, University of Sheffield*)
a.trentacoste@gmail.com