

SACRIFICE: FROM MOSES TO THE MODERN ERA

(HBRJD-UA 949: TOPICS IN BIBLE AND THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST)

Liane Feldman

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Office Hours: W 3:30–5:30pm and by appointment

M/W 11:00am–12:15pm

Location: GCASL 388

My Office: KJCC 107

Course Description and Objectives

When we think of sacrifice, we tend to think of someone giving (of) themselves for the sake of a larger entity, such as family or country. This understanding of sacrifice has had an enormous influence on history and religion. Yet, sacrifice used to mean something very different. For thousands of years before the common era (also known as B.C.), sacrifice often took place at temples and shrines, and involved the offering of animals, produce, and precious metals to the gods. The origins of sacrifice are difficult to trace, but that did not stop writers and thinkers in the ancient world from trying to explain where this practice came from and why it was necessary in the first place.

At the heart of this course is an exploration of the idea of sacrifice—where it came from, how it was practiced and by whom, what it meant, and when and why this concept began to change into something resembling what we think of as sacrifice today. This course is designed to be an interdisciplinary introduction to the idea of sacrifice in the ancient world, and will examine the idea of sacrifice in literature, history, archaeology, and theology. While the majority of this course will focus on ancient Israelite material, it will also address ancient Near Eastern and Greek material from the second and first millennia BCE, as well as early Christian and Jewish materials from the first centuries of the Common Era. At the end of the course, we will look at sacrifice in the modern world, and trace the ways in which these expressions of the idea of sacrifice relate to the practice of sacrifice in the ancient world.

Course Expectations

This class is structured as a conversation: a conversation amongst ourselves and a conversation between us and the materials we will be analyzing. The class depends on your preparation: you will be asked to read the assigned texts for every class and to be prepared to engage in a discussion about them. This means not just understanding the content and arguments of the texts we read, but also considering the worldviews that underlie them.

This class will also require you to visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art on 5th Avenue. There are a number of artifacts related to sacrifice and temples in the ancient Near Eastern collection, as well as an entire Egyptian temple (Dendur) in the Met's collection. These artifacts provide a tangible connection to the concept of sacrifice in the ancient world, and are an important element of the course.

Course Requirements

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

You are expected to attend all classes and actively participate in the discussion. Active participation in discussion can take many forms. You can answer questions posed to the whole class, you can ask questions about the readings, you can propose connections between the readings or between readings and other class discussions, you can respond to comments made by other students, etc. Each student is allowed two unexcused absences in the quarter. Each additional absence will result in a lower participation grade.

Note about Jewish holidays: A number of Jewish holidays fall on Mondays and Wednesdays this fall. I will be canceling class for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, but will hold class on Sukkot. If it is your observance to abstain from work on Sukkot, please inform me via email before the holiday and your absence will be excused.

READING RESPONSE PAPERS

Throughout the semester, you will be asked to write 5 short (1–2 page) response papers to an assigned reading. These responses should contain a short summary of the main points of the article (one paragraph), and a one or two paragraph discussion of the reading. Your discussion can address (but is not limited to) some of the following questions: if the reading made an argument, do you find that argument convincing? Why or why not? What, if any, connections can you see between this reading and what we've talked about in class? What questions do you have about the reading? You can write a reading response on any reading marked with [RR] in the syllabus. Your response is due *before* the class in which the reading will be discussed. Each of the five papers will be worth 4% of your final grade.

TOUR OF THE MET'S ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN COLLECTION

All students will be required to attend a guided tour of the ancient Near Eastern gallery at the Met during the sixth week of the semester. This tour will provide a basic overview of the geography and history of the ancient Near East, with a particular focus on artifacts related to sacrifice and artistic depictions of sacrifice in literature. The tour will last approximately one and a half hours.

ARTIFACT PAPER (3–5 PAGES) [DUE ON NOVEMBER 5, 2018](#)

For this assignment, you will visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art and select one artifact that is related to sacrifice in some way. It could be an incense altar, a statue of a god, a home offering stand, a cultic statue, a piece of artwork depicting a sacrificial scene, an architectural element of a temple complex (such as a relief, etc.). Your paper will describe the object, provide context about its geographical origin and time period, and describe the possible function of the object in its original context. If you choose a piece of artwork depicting a sacrificial scene in the bible or other ancient literature, you should read that story and compare it with the artist's depiction of it. I will provide more information at the tour of the Met. Students will be required to give a 5–10 minute presentation on their artifact or piece of artwork for the class on [November 12, 2018](#).

RESEARCH PAPER PROPOSAL (1 PAGE) [DUE ON NOVEMBER 26, 2018](#)

Your proposal should be emailed as a PDF to lmfeldman@nyu.edu. You will select one topic or question related to any of the issues covered in this course and write a research paper about that topic. You will submit a one-page proposal of your topic during the twelfth week of the semester, which outlines the topic to be covered, the question(s) you are asking about that topic, and a preliminary bibliography.

RESEARCH PAPER (10–12 PAGES) [DUE ON DECEMBER 21, 2018](#)

Your final paper should be emailed as a PDF to lmfeldman@nyu.edu. Further details about the formatting and requirements for this paper will be provided in November. I have assigned this paper the latest possible due date this semester, and because of that will not accept any late papers.

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION

Class attendance and participation	10%
Reading Response Papers	20%
Tour of the Met	10%
Artifact paper (3-5 pages)	15%
Artifact paper presentation (5–10 min)	10%
Research Paper Proposal (1 page)	5%
Final Research Paper (10-12 pages)	30%

Required Texts

All assigned texts will be available in PDF form on the course website.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the guidelines for academic honesty found on the university website. Plagiarism or cheating of any kind will be reported to the proper authorities including, but not limited to, the department chair and the student's advisor. It will result in a grade of F on the assignment and, depending on the severity of the offense, failure of the entire course. NYU's academic integrity policy can be found [here](https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html). (<https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html>)

Student Support

LEARNING DISABILITY OR DIFFERENCE

If you are a student with a documented disability at NYU, I will be happy to work with you to adapt the course material and assignments to your needs. Please provide me with documentation of your learning needs as soon as possible because accommodations cannot be provided retroactively. If you have any questions about documentation, please contact the [Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities](#) online or at (212)-998-4980.

COURSE CONTENT

We will be reading texts from the ancient world, which may include content that we may find reprehensible today. The focus of this course is sacrifice, and as such many of the readings will contain descriptions or discussions of violence against animals and humans. In addition, secondary scholarship likewise often reflects a variety of biases. I encourage you to evaluate and critique in class and in your written work. Please feel free to approach me with any questions or concerns you have about the course content.

FORMS OF ADDRESS

You are welcome to share your preferred name and/or pronoun at any point in the semester. We will address you respectfully in accordance with your preference.

Course Schedule

WEEK 1: DEFINING AND DESCRIBING THE ANCIENT WORLD

Sept 5: Introduction to the Ancient Near East

Readings Due: None

WEEK 2: WHAT IS SACRIFICE?

Sept 10: NO CLASS (Rosh Hashanah)

Sept 12: Theories of Sacrifice

Readings Due: 1) Weddle, "[Theories of Sacrifice](#)," in *Sacrifice in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, pp. 25–46.

WEEK 3: SACRIFICE AND MYTHOLOGY

Sept 17: Mesopotamian Myths of Sacrifice

Readings Due: 1) [Atrahasis](#) (pp. 450–452 in *Context of Scripture*).
2) Lambert & Millard, [Atra-ḥasīs: The Babylonian Story of the Flood](#), (1–24).

Sept 19: NO CLASS (Yom Kippur)

WEEK 4: SACRIFICE AND MYTHOLOGY (CONTINUED)

Sept 24: Greek Myths of Sacrifice

Readings Due: 1) Vernant, "[At Man's Table: Hesiod's Foundation Myth of Sacrifice](#)," in *The Cuisine of Sacrifice Among the Greeks*, 21–86. [RR]

Sept 26: Biblical Myths of Sacrifice

Readings Due: 1) [Selections from biblical Priestly Sinai Narrative](#)
2) Stackert, "[Political Allegory in the Priestly Source](#)," pp. 212–214 (excerpt describing the priestly source).
3) Gilders, "[Sacrifice Before Sinai in the Priestly Narrative](#)," 57–72.

WEEK 5: DIVINE PRESENCE IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Oct 1: Gods and Humans

- Readings Due:*
- 1) [Gen 1; Selections from Exod 16; Exod 29:38–46](#)
 - 2) M. S. Smith, “[Like Deities, Like Temples \(Like People\)](#),” in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel*, 3–27. [RR]

Oct 3: Divine Presence and Absence

- Readings Due:*
- 1) [1 Sam 4:1–6:16](#)
 - 2) [The Marduk Prophecy](#)
 - 3) Finn, “[Much Ado about Marduk](#),” 37–41.
 - 4) Hundley, “[Divine Presence in Ancient Near Eastern Temples](#),” 203–215. [RR]

WEEK 6: THE BUSINESS OF ANTIQUITY; TOURS OF THE MET

Oct 8: NO CLASS (Columbus Day)

Oct 10: Artifacts, Antiquities, and the Museum

- Readings Due:*
- 1) Brodie, “[Introduction](#),” in *Archeology, Cultural Heritage, and the Antiquities Trade*, pp. 1–24. [RR]
 - 2) Mendelsohn, “[How the Met Convinced the U.S. Government](#) that the Temple of Dendur Belonged in New York,” *Artsy*, April 26, 2017.

Oct 9–12: Tours of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Ancient Near Eastern Gallery

There will be one or two tour times set up during this week. I will send out a sign-up form for these tours at least a week before. Students are required to attend one tour.

WEEK 7: THE PLACES OF SACRIFICE: TEMPLE AND HOME

Oct 15: Temples and High Places

- Readings Due:*
- 1) [1 Kings 6–8](#)
 - 2) King and Stager, “[Religious Institutions](#),” in *Life in Biblical Israel*, 319–353 [includes many photos].

Oct 17: Home

- Readings Due:*
- 1) [Gen 31:19–35](#)
 - 2) Meyers: “[Feast Days and Food Ways: Religious Dimensions of Household Life](#)” in *Family and Household Religion*, 225–250. [RR]

WEEK 8: THE PLACES OF SACRIFICE: WILDERNESS; AGENTS OF SACRIFICE

Oct 22: Wilderness

- Readings Due:*
- 1) [Leviticus 16](#)
 - 2) Milgrom, "[Azazel and Elimination Rites in the Ancient Near East](#)," in *Leviticus 1–16*, 1071–1079.
 - 3) Gorman, *The Ideology of Ritual*, 55–57; 95–100.

Oct 24: Cultic Personnel and Consecration

- Readings Due:*
- 1) [Leviticus 8–9](#)
 - 2) Grabbe, "[Priests](#)," in *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-Historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel*, 41–65. [RR]

WEEK 9: REASONS FOR SACRIFICE: PURITY AND PURIFICATION

Oct 29: Purity

- Readings Due:*
- 1) [Leviticus 12–14](#)
 - 2) Klawans, "[Concepts of Purity in the Bible](#)," in *The Jewish Study Bible*, 2041–2045.
 - 3) Douglas, "[Secular Defilement](#)," in *Purity and Danger*, pp. 36–50. [RR]

Oct 31: Purification

- Readings Due:*
- 1) [Leviticus 4; Numbers 19](#)
 - 2) Frymer-Kensky, "[Pollution, Purification, and Purgation](#) in Biblical Israel," 399–413. [RR]

WEEK 10: REASONS FOR SACRIFICE: FOOD AND FESTIVALS

Nov 5: Food

- Readings Due:*
- 1) [Bel and the Dragon](#)
 - 2) Lambert, "[Donations of Food and Drink to the Gods](#) in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East*, 191–201. [RR]

Nov 7: Festivals

- Readings Due:*
- 1) [Leviticus 23](#)
 - 2) Haran, "[XVI: Pilgrim-Feasts and Family Festivals](#)," in *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel*, 289–316.

WEEK 11: ARTIFACT PRESENTATIONS; THE END OF SACRIFICE?

Nov 12: Student Artifact Presentations

Readings Due: None

Nov 14: The Destruction of the Temple and Rabbinic Responses

Readings Due: 1) [Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 56b](#) (selection)
2) Fishbane, "[Substitutions for Sacrifice](#)," in *The Exegetical Imagination*, 123–135. [RR]

WEEK 12: NO CLASS – CONFERENCE AND THANKSGIVING

Use this week to work on your research paper proposals. **They are due on November 26!**

WEEK 13: THE END OF SACRIFICE?

Nov 26: From Sacrifice to Slaughterhouse; Guest Lecture — Prof. Annette Yoshiko Reed

Readings Due: 1) Reed, "[From Sacrifice to the Slaughterhouse: Ancient and Modern Approaches to Meat, Animals, and Civilization](#)," 1–44. [RR]

Nov 28: The Samaritans

Readings Due: 1) [Exodus 12](#)
2) Isser, "[The Samaritans and their Sects](#)," in *Cambridge History of Judaism III*, 569–595.
3) Esensten, "[Samaritans Make Annual Sacrifice](#) – and Preserve a Way of Life," *Haaretz*, April 24, 2013.

WEEK 14: MODERN RECONSTRUCTIONS OF THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE

Dec 3: Modern Reconstructions: Templo de Salomão, Brazil; Holy Land Theme Park, Orlando, FL; The Temple Institute, Jerusalem

Readings Due: 1) Peruse the [website of the Temple of Solomon in Sao Paolo](#) (it's in Portuguese, but look at the photos)
2) Romero, "[Temple in Brazil Appeals to a Surge of Evangelicals](#)," *New York Times*, July 24, 2014.
3) Branham, "[The Temple that won't Quit: Constructing Sacred Space in Orlando's Holy Land Experience Theme Park](#)," 358–382. [RR]

Dec 5: The Temple Institute, Jerusalem

- Readings Due:*
- 1) Look at the slides at the “[A Day in the Holy Temple](#)” slides on the Temple Institute website and pay attention to what is highlighted and how animal sacrifice is presented.
 - 2) Marx, “[The Missing Temple: The Status of the Temple in Jewish Culture following its Destruction](#),” pp. 61–78. [RR]

WEEK 15: ANCIENT MEETS MODERN: HUMAN SACRIFICE AND MARTYRDOM

Dec 10: Martyrdom

- Readings Due:*
- 1) Moss, “[Introduction](#),” in *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom*, 1–21.
 - 2) King, “They Who Burned Themselves for Peace: Quaker and Buddhist Self-Immolators during the Vietnam War,” pp. 127–150. [RR]

Dec 12: Human Sacrifice

- Readings Due:*
- 1) King and Stager: “[Human Sacrifice](#),” in *Life in Biblical Israel*, 359–362.

Choose one of the following:

- 2a) Levenson, “[Child Sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible: Deviation or Norm?](#)” in *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity*, 3–17. [RR]
- 2b) Smith, “[Capital Punishment and Human Sacrifice](#),” pp. 3–25. [RR]