

## CHAPTER 1

## Cattle Habits

The greatest and most moral homage we can pay to certain animals on certain occasions is to kill them. . . .

—Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Hunting*

## ANIMAL RIGHTS

The epigraph above is an example of what Michael Pollan has recently called “hunter porn,” an overblown style of writing that assumes “that the hunt represents some sort of primordial encounter between two kinds of animals, one of which is [the writer].”<sup>1</sup> Men face danger, men kill, men provide meat, men rule. Actual hunter-gatherer societies are more likely to survive on the staple supply of grains provided by women, but the symbolic capital vested in the hunt is not based on the scientific measurement of where calories come from in the diet. Understandably, then, with the rise of both feminist critiques and the articulation of animal rights, we are now witnessing the emergence of many more critical approaches to the issue of meat production.<sup>2</sup> Animal rights activists assert that animals have the same inalienable rights as humans, or, following a strand in Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarianism, that because they are sentient, can feel pain and pleasure, they have interests that deserve to be taken into consideration, investing them with rights.<sup>3</sup> The growth of the deep-ecology movement and dismay over how animals are raised in modern factory-farm conditions have also fueled debates about how we treat our animals, and whether humane butchery is possible, or a hideous contradiction in terms. A widely seen exhibition sponsored by PETA juxtaposing images of the Holocaust with the abuse of factory-farm animals is the latest and most graphic illustration of the assault on the older, Cartesian notion that animals are mere mechanisms to be used for our pleasure and consumption.

It is unlikely that any such debate ever took place in the Greek world.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, Porphyry argued against eating animals and Empedokles asserted that it was a universal law not to kill living things, but Aristotle was closer to the mood of ordinary people when he asserted that Nature had made animals for mankind, “both for his service and his food.”<sup>5</sup> For Aristotle, the separation between humans and animals was simply too

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great for animal behavior even to be judged by human standards. Discussing vice and virtue, he notes,

There is no such thing as virtue in the case of a god, any more than there is vice or virtue in the case of a beast: divine goodness is something more exalted than virtue, and bestial badness is different in kind from vice. (Aristotle, *EN* 7.1.2 1145a 15, trans. Rackham)<sup>6</sup>

The extremes for humans are a type of goodness that cannot match the goodness of the gods, and a type of badness that rarely reaches the bestiality of animals. In fact, for Aristotle the goal of a life lived properly is to rise above our animal natures, which are equated with our appetites, and to exercise our moral and intellectual abilities so as to be better humans. In such a scheme, animals are subservient to the needs of humans, their inability to communicate clearly with us rendering moot the question of their needs or wants.<sup>7</sup> It was also not a difficult step to see uncivilized people as brutes and to equate them with animals, as Strabo does in commenting on the behavior of Corsican mountaineers brought to Rome: looking at them, he says, you could “see and marvel at the degree to which the nature of wild beasts and grazing cattle is manifested in them.”<sup>8</sup>

### THE BOVINE IDIOM

Strabo and Aristotle reflect a common paradox in the human interaction with other large mammals: the tendency to insist on the utter difference between us and them, and an equally powerful tendency to see a deep affinity between our species. The former impulse makes possible the scientific study of animals based on empirical observation. Aristotle, for example, was well informed about cows, commenting on the relationship between pasture and milk production, preferred types of feed, and techniques for increasing animal size. He correctly notes that cattle suffer from both ticks and lice, and observes that they are susceptible to diseases of the hoof and lungs. He describes the techniques for castrating calves, and was familiar with both Epirote cattle and Paionian bison, which he describes in close detail.<sup>9</sup> Aristotle’s empirical observations represent one approach to investigating the position of cattle in the Greek world. One may ask, like Aristotle, where the cattle were raised, under what conditions, and how the market in meat operated. In answering these questions one can learn a great deal about changes in society. Between 1965 and 1993, for example, cattle numbers in Greece plummeted from well over 1,100,000 head to 608,000.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the growth of cattle markets may indicate enormous social change. Between 1867 and 1868, for example, Abilene, Texas, went from a smattering of log huts to a railhead capable

of handling 1,000 railcars of cattle per month—transformed by the railway and, in the process, transforming the regional geographies of the United States as profoundly as the Civil War.<sup>11</sup>

There is, however, another way of exploring the cattle system of ancient Greece. Empirical matters of the sort explored by Aristotle were of little interest to Homer, for whom cattle were a fixture of heroic society. Instead, cattle in epic function as measures of wealth and status, to be fought over, raided, paid as dowry, and perhaps most importantly, sacrificed to earn the favor of the gods. We glimpse the profound complexity of the web of values and associations surrounding cattle in the Greek imagination in the episode from which this study takes its title: the story of the cattle of the Sun. Immediately before the slaughter of the suitors, Odysseus is interviewed by Penelope and tells her, in his guise as Aetion the Cretan, of her husband's long travails. Explaining Odysseus' absence he says,

. . . As he was sailing out  
From the island of Thrinacia, Zeus and Helios  
Hit him hard because his companions had killed  
The cattle of the Sun. His men went under,  
But he rode his ship's keel until the waves  
Washed him ashore in the land of the Phaeacians,  
Whose race is closely akin to the gods.

(Homer, *Od.* 19.302–7, trans. Lombardo)<sup>12</sup>

The long wanderings of Odysseus, then, are the result of divine punishment, the explanation for which takes us straight into a world of gods and heroes who, somewhat prosaically, act very much like humans. They sail the seas and tend their herds. This is hardly surprising. Greek gods feel jealousy, lust, and rage as passionately as the humans whose lives they dominate, if not more so. Their attachment to cattle, however, is more complex than a mere extrapolation of human activity into the realm of the divine. Hermes may rustle the cattle of Apollo like a common thief, but humans cannot transform themselves at will, like Zeus, into a fine white bull as a way of seducing Europa. Only gods can inflict a transformation into the form of a cow, as Hera does to Io (Hera herself having some totemic relationship with cattle, as her epithet “cow-eyed” suggests). In the Greek imagination, cattle hold a special place. They can be the objects of veneration, as in the bull cult celebrated on Crete, and their sacrifice, particularly a hecatomb, constitutes the greatest and most sumptuous offering humans may make to the gods. Zeus is well-disposed toward the Trojans precisely because his altars have never lacked for sacrificial offerings, and Poseidon is indignant that the Achaians should build

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a wall at Troy without offering a hecatomb.<sup>13</sup> Cattle are the preferred medium for exchange between us and the divine.<sup>14</sup>

The relationship between the empirical and the symbolic resists easy analysis, in part because each is constantly in flux and carries the past with it. Take, for example, the particulars of stockraising. These underwent constant change from the Neolithic to the age of Pericles. What began with the domestication of the auroch would culminate in the Panathenaic procession as hundreds of head of cattle were led to the Acropolis, slaughtered to make an Athenian holiday. In the course of these changes cattle assumed a central position in the imaginations of people in the eastern Mediterranean. In part this is because herding is a livelihood unlike any other, yet it is also because cattle lead us down so many interesting paths. They facilitate trade by giving us valuables to barter; they incline us to sacrifice, so as to render their murder more palatable; they foster social stratification by giving us a commodity to control, exchange, or share. If hunting favored the growth of the hominid brain, then herding favored the growth of human culture.<sup>15</sup> Edward Evans-Pritchard coined the term “the bovine idiom” to suggest that under certain conditions the phenomenon of herding might serve as a controlling metaphor for the way a society understood itself.<sup>16</sup> He employed the expression to suggest that the relationship between the Maasai and their cattle was so intimate that it shaped profoundly the Maasai understanding of the world. More recently Bruce Lincoln has noted that among the Nuer, “just as the social idiom is an idiom of cattle, the religious idiom is one of cattle too.”<sup>17</sup> The Maasai lived by herding and lived off the products of their cattle—meat, milk, and blood—and their very cosmology was shaped by the cattle experience: the first men, for example, entered the universe having slid down from heaven on a bull’s pizzle.<sup>18</sup>

While Classical Greece was not a society of transhumant pastoralists, neither did it ever entirely abandon the herder’s habits of mind. Perhaps if not a bovine idiom, then what the Greeks retained was a bovine register. It is important to stress this since we are going to explore not only how and under what conditions stock breeding was practiced, but also the place of cattle in the Greek *imaginaire*. There, thanks to the operations of metaphor and metonymy, cattle took the blue ribbon. I am not proposing that the cow is simply a symbol of something else (Hera, wealth, docility, the object of desire) but that the accumulation of experience between humans and cattle—hunted, tamed, bred, nurtured, yoked, milked, killed, eaten, worshipped—fixes them firmly within the *habitus* of the Greeks. Since this is not a matter of deliberate intent on the part of the Greeks, I should explain exactly what I mean by this. In a postface to the 1967 edition of Erwin Panofsky’s *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism*, Pierre Bourdieu wrote as follows:

. . . culture is not just a common code, or even a common repertoire of answers to common problems, or a set of particular and particularized forms of thought, but rather a whole set of particular and particularized forms of thought, a whole body of fundamental schemes, assimilated beforehand, that generate, according to an art of invention similar to that of musical writing, an infinite number of particular schemes, directly applied to particular situations. This *habitus* could be defined, by an analogy with Noam Chomsky's 'generative grammar,' as a system of internalized schemes that have the capacity to generate all thoughts, perceptions, and actions characteristic of a culture, and nothing else.<sup>19</sup>

This approach to culture reserves a space for human agency within a recursive system, whereby humans are equipped by their society's values and prevailing epistemology to act, and in acting so themselves become full participants within their culture, agents of change within their society, in ways that make sense to them. This is a theoretical approach, then, that allows space for historical contingency, that is, for the values, ideas, decisions, and actions that occur within a cultural matrix that informs an individual's conscious and unconscious choices.

The importance of this for our evaluation of cattle systems is twofold. First, herding foregrounds particular practices and experiences that end up dominating entire cultural fields: institutions from marriage to war, concepts of prestige and value, modes of social interaction, negotiation of social hierarchies, all end up being refracted through the prism of herding. Second, because *habitus* is neither fixed nor inflexible, it can continue to reflect notions, values, and experiences that inform the individual's perceptions and the culture's shared grammar of symbols and ideas long after the empirical circumstances that gave rise to any part of it are changed or lost. Put differently, it is possible to speak of the Greeks as both a pastoral and post-pastoral society, practicing farming, manufacturing, and trade, yet still wedded to cattle because of their rich accumulation of significance. Such incongruities are not uncommon. Referring to the Gogo people of southern Africa, whom he describes as semi-pastoral, Peter Rigby notes that "the basis of subsistence in Ugogo is primarily agriculture."<sup>20</sup> Yet the society he goes on to describe is one in which cattle underpin cosmology, residence patterns, property, inheritance, marriage, clan structure—everything, in fact, that falls under that difficult term, culture.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, describing the importance of cattle to the pastoral Fulani of Nigeria, Akanmu Adebayo has recently observed, "It is difficult for a non-pastoralist to understand what cattle mean to the Fulani. Everything begins and ends with cattle. The life of their men and women revolve around cattle. All activities, all conversations, and all thoughts center on cattle."<sup>22</sup> The bovine idiom is not as intense in Greek culture as in the case

of these African societies, but it remains ubiquitous. The comparison with contemporary pastoral and semi-pastoral societies may help to show how the Greeks continued to live in the shadow of the bull, and so I pursue some such comparisons in the next chapter.

Another feature of Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* that makes it a useful interpretive tool is that it opens up a space for the operation of memory. Through memory we participate in reformulating our *habitus* individually and collectively in a covert collusion with a past both imagined and real. Is there any past that is not, at some level, imagined? Like notions of chivalry or courtly love, aspects of our imagined past are woven into the values and imaginings of the present. In fact, the conscious version of this sensation, the feeling that some part of what we were is lost, nostalgia, can be one of the most powerful elements of our *habitus*. The Greeks of the Archaic and Classical periods were especially prone to experiencing the world this way, not merely because their Bronze Age past was physically manifest around them in Mycenaean citadels or tholos tombs, but also because the unifying cultural product of the Classical world—epic—was an imagining of the heroic past. That heroic past has a stratigraphy as rich and distinctive as the layers of the tel at Hissarlik, and one of those layers, buried deep in the Greek *imaginaire*, was the cattle stratum.

Closely related to this feature of *habitus* is the problem facing any diachronic study of the Greeks, namely, the risk of anachronism. One might fairly object that Homer's poems are no guide to fifth-century polis religion. Some feel they aren't even a guide to Greece in the eighth or seventh centuries. But the charge of anachronism is too easily used as an excuse not to look for the threads of culture that bind the practices of one age to another, and to impose sterile boundaries between different times. Certainly Homer's Achaians are not identical to Pericles' Athenians, but neither are they unrelated. In a recent essay on meaning in history, Eelco Runia has called attention to the difficulties created for historians by such elements of the human experience as memory, *lieux de mémoire*, and trauma, none of which fit neatly with the concern for narrative and emplotment that have dominated history (or at least discussions of the philosophy of history) since the publication of Hayden White's *Metahistory* in 1973. Runia argues that a way forward is to recognize the existence of "presence" in history, which he defines as "the unrepresented way the past is present in the present."<sup>23</sup> Runia's suggestion may help us to understand the continuing hold of the cattle complex on the imagination of the Greeks. Quite simply, the pastoral experience was ever present, even if pastoralism was only one, very specific and limited aspect of the economic life of the Greeks. Consider, for example, the simple fact that cattle need a good deal of water. It was therefore desirable to pasture them near marshland, a practice that helps to explain the artistic convention of

showing cattle with wading birds such as egrets.<sup>24</sup> The same observation has recently helped Thomas Tartaron to identify a Mycenaean industry of processing animal hides on the shores of Glykys Limin in Epiros. Here the large quantities of flint flakes found by the shore are consistent with scraping hides, while the landscape, characterized by what Tartaron calls “flat, swampy terrain,” was well suited to grazing cattle and satisfying their enormous need for water.<sup>25</sup> Homer, too, often associates cattle with coastal areas. On the Shield of Achilles, cattle are being released from their byres and graze on reed beds. Similarly, when Telemachos arrives at Pylos he witnesses Nestor’s sacrifice of nine times nine black bulls on the shore. Later, Pausanias would note that only cows were allowed to graze by the magical waters of the Milichos River, near Patrai, since the waters caused any animals grazing there to bear only male offspring. Similarly, Aristotle comments on the pernicious effects of the waters of the Sybaris River on cattle, while Pausanias tells the story of the bull of Kerkyra, which wandered close to the seashore trying to alert the locals to the great schools of fish nearby.<sup>26</sup> It is not the veracity of any of the separate stories that matters, so much as the perpetual repetition of the association of cattle and water in folklore and myth. Accordingly, when set against these persistent associations, Zeus’ appearance in the form of a bull emerging from the sea as Europa plays by the shore becomes, in one sense, unremarkable.

Yet even if there was a perennial cattle presence in Greek culture, it is the tension between the actual conditions of pastoralism and the symbolic importance of cattle that offers us a fuller understanding of the Greeks. That is to say, the concern for cattle, the desire for meat, the need to sacrifice, the religious valuation of cattle—these were not passive because they were ever present. These are active elements in Greek culture that are subject to change, yet also shape change. Accordingly, the chapters that follow will attempt to flesh out our understanding of the importance of cattle to the Greeks in a variety of settings and at different times, where the bovine idiom worked actively in different ways. In chapter 2 I deal in the broadest possible terms with the changing relationship between humans and cattle that arise from the symbiotic process of domestication. This involves examining the role of large animals in shaping the emergence of human consciousness in prehistoric times from its previous embeddedness within the natural world. This process left a complex legacy in which aurochs were both potentially dangerous yet uniquely important to us as sources of protein and of draft power (after domestication), and symbolically as the focus of newly developing religious and political systems. I employ ethnographic parallels in order to show that pastoralism produces a highly distinctive set of social practices that can be seen to operate in the Greek world. This may strike some readers as either simplis-

tic or so general as to be banal, but I am not trying to argue that all pastoral societies are the same, nor that every aspect of Greek culture arises simply from their taste for red meat. Rather, I wish to show how deep-seated patterns of thought, feeling, and symbolism that arise from the interaction between humans and cattle continue to crop up across the spectrum of cultural production, in plastic arts, in myth, and in performance, as well as in specific institutions from marriage to imperial pageants. Cattle raiding, bride price, and the close association of cattle with sacrifice and feasting are all signs of Greece's status as a cattle culture, if we take this to mean a culture in which the relationship between humans and cattle remains a defining feature, even long after the society may have ceased to be nomadic or pastoral.

In chapter 3 I look at the Bronze Age through the lens of cattle culture. Following the dominant trends in Aegean Bronze Age archaeology, I focus on the palatial system on Crete, both before and after the arrival of the Mycenaeans from the mainland. What emerges when we concentrate on the rich evidence for the bull in Bronze Age cultures is a reading of the Minoan and Mycenaean societies in which the prestige of cattle made them an item of unique value in the reciprocal economy. Both the control of breeding and the distribution of cattle, either for sacrifice or as working animals, reinforced the position of palaces at the heart of Bronze Age culture, a position also strengthened by the ceremonial use of cattle in cult and especially bull-leaping ritual. Cattle became the most potent embodiment of power and social rank. Subsequently I deal with the symbolic significance of the bull, a more complete survival, in certain respects, of the Bronze Age than any other institution of the time, and one that would have more lasting effect on the Greek society that developed from the ninth to the seventh century. The associations of cattle with power and status were critical to the emergence of a distinctive notion of the hero. This can be traced in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the subjects of chapter 4, but also in the many stories that involve Herakles' cattle adventures, which are treated separately in chapter 5. In both chapters the study of myth cycles and epic stories focused on cattle demonstrate that the cattle idiom allowed the Greeks to do cultural work—that is, to tell stories that actively made sense of the changing world of Archaic Greece. This was especially true of their encounter with non-Greeks and the indigenous peoples of the western Mediterranean. The continuing presence of cattle in the imagination and experience of the Greeks supplied them with the means of expressing power, authority, and status in a way that was meaningful and historically rooted in the world of heroes, which is to say, the past. I develop the notion of cattle breeding as a distinctive practice that inflects an entire range of values and beliefs in chapter 6, which deals with the emergence of the Greek pantheon. Here I argue that, although there

is evidence for a variety of responses to the emergence of the gods familiar in Homer and Hesiod, Archaic Greece witnessed the development of a standardized form of religious practice centered on sacrifice and communal feasting. This Panhellenic system was laid over a more disparate scheme of local heroes and deities. I examine the cattle associations of major gods of the pantheon, such as Zeus, Hera, and Poseidon, in order to show that the universal (for the Greeks) symbolic significance of cattle—prestige, power, status—bolstered the emergence of a Panhellenic, “Olympian” system. I then further investigate the development of a Panhellenic system through the articulation of a distinctive Panhellenic space expressed in the Homeric Hymns. In particular these hymns explore the themes of the gods’ birth, wanderings, and arrival at his or her sanctuary as tropes connected to the assertion of control of sanctuary space by the Olympian gods, and in the creation of a coherent, identifiably Greek space. Throughout these stories the gods interact with each other and with humans through cattle: stealing them, eating them, sacrificing them in endless variations, all of which reflect and reinforce the centrality of cattle to the imaginative life of the Greeks.

Throughout these chapters we find patterns relating both to the use of cattle in the economic life of the Greeks and in the *imaginaire* as well. It is, however, a mistake to equate origin with explanation. Societies change, the economics of husbandry change, and the significance of a symbol changes, so our examination of cattle in Greek history is an attempt not to reduce cattle to a single, fixed place, but to understand the ways in which cattle came to have so peculiar and so distinctive a place in the world of the Greeks. It would be foolish and reductive to assert that cattle rearing dominated either the economic or religious experience of the Greeks. Indeed, I am not arguing that Greece was primarily a pastoral society or that livestock were the principal commodity around which the Greek rural economy was based, as has recently been argued, for example, by Hans Derks.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the bovine idiom, to borrow Evans-Pritchard’s phrase, is an undeniably important aspect of Greek society and curiously understudied, especially in the sphere of economic studies. Rather than review the entire span of a century’s scholarship on the ancient economy, let me note some recent works to illustrate my point. Thomas Gallant’s 1991 study, *Risk and Survival in Ancient Greece*, is a stimulating exploration of the rural domestic economy of ancient Greece. Gallant explores the strategies used by subsistence farmers to minimize risk both seasonally and over the course of the life cycle of the household.<sup>28</sup> In the course of his painstaking analysis of the ancient data his comments on the position of cattle touch on livestock prices, the preferability of plow oxen to hoeing, the ability of larger holdings to sustain greater numbers of livestock, and the use of strontium/zinc ratios in calcu-

lating the amount of meat in the diet of classical Athenians. Gallant also uses modern data to tease out his picture of the precarious subsistence farmer, but at every step his data, his models, and his conclusions are firmly focused on the farmer as cultivator. Herding is pictured as either literally peripheral, pushed to the extremes of cultivated territory as more land is cultivated, or confined to those holdings large enough to support fallow land and pasture. This is not to say that Gallant is wrong. His analysis is compelling, but one wonders: where and how did this world of small farmers produce the vast quantities of meat needed to supply Delphi, Olympia, and Isthmia, or Thebes and Athens?

The question is not posed to be disingenuous, but to suggest, rather, that our reconstructions of the Greek countryside tend to be skewed, concentrating on agriculture and ignoring the impact of a large-scale cattle industry. Consider the case of Jason of Pherai. In 370 BC he intended to celebrate the Pythian Games with special magnificence and sent orders to Thessaly for cattle and other sacrificial animals to be collected. Xenophon reports that more than one thousand head of cattle and ten thousand other livestock were assembled from Jason's allies throughout Thessaly, with a gold crown awarded to the city that raised the finest bull to lead the herd to Delphi.<sup>29</sup> Are we to imagine that herds of livestock of this size could be brought to Delphi without there being an apparatus for collecting and driving these animals well over one hundred kilometers? In early English law the term *agistment* was used to describe the arrangements made for pasturing animals on someone else's land, a practice still common in Australia both in times of drought, when the cattle may be moved to less vulnerable areas, or immediately prior to market, when animals are moved to rich lands to be fattened. Is this what is meant by *epinomia*, a term frequently used in regulations promulgated by sanctuaries in relation to the use of sacred lands? This question leads us to the second half of this study. Having examined the movement of cattle breeding into the religious sphere in the myths and cult practice of the Archaic period, I focus in chapter 7 on sanctuaries as central places in the emergence of a sacred economy. The breeding and supply of cattle to market were largely regulated by sanctuaries. In terms of supply and demand, then, sanctuaries were the force that drove the cattle industry. In practice this was structured in a variety of ways, from direct breeding and control of sacred lands to leasing. By examining various arrangements, especially from Delphi, Delos, and Eleusis, we see that no single system existed, but that the sacralization of the cattle economy was also a response to a more mundane development: the bringing of increasing amounts of land under direct cultivation. Sanctuaries mediated more than elite competition. They also reconciled competing pressures on how to exploit land. Since cities occupied the land in a very different way from the great Panhellenic and

international sanctuaries, their handling of meat from production to consumption was somewhat different, and in chapter 8 I focus on how a commercial meat industry developed in an urban setting. The distinction between religion and economics becomes even more blurred here, and results in unusual developments in both spheres.

An unintended yet profound consequence of the formation of this cattle nexus, founded on sanctuaries and the sacred economy, was that sanctuaries were also driven to promulgate laws and regulations for the administration of the complex cult activities that they sponsored. Since they controlled rich land and often land that lay in contentious regions, sanctuaries were implicated in the business of legislation: who could use sacred land, who could visit sanctuaries, how sacrifices were to be conducted and when. An entire body of sacred law evolved that had nothing to do with doctrine but everything to do with ritual. These sacred laws regulated actions within the sanctuaries of the gods and in wider society, defining taboos, imposing restrictions, and guiding activities within the sphere of the sacred. The impact of this was profound because, as Kurt Latte recognized eighty years ago, the emergence of a body of law, even though procedural rather than statute law, supported by the authority of the gods provided a model for the evolution of law in a secular setting. Accordingly, the status of sanctuaries, reinforced by their role at the heart of the cattle system, in turn made them engines of change in areas well beyond the sphere of religion. The distinctive shape of Greek legal culture was shaped by the sanctuary/cattle nexus. This is the subject of chapter 9. In the final chapter I develop the argument that the authority of sanctuaries also provided the basis for the development of a fiduciary economy. As cattle and cattle production increasingly came within the orbit of the sacred business of sanctuaries, as the supreme commodity of value for exchange, dedication or consumption, they embodied value and wealth. The fiduciary economy was made possible, as Aristotle understood, by a monetized economy that in turn depended on a highly developed sense of value, measured, as we shall see, by the Greeks in cattle.

From the Bronze Age, and even earlier, the Greeks were heirs to a tradition in which cattle were much more than objects, whether of veneration, trade, or consumption. So complex and so embedded was the relationship between human and bovine societies that cattle unwittingly became the means of doing cultural work for the Greeks. How to understand slavery? Analogize the slave to the beast of burden. How to understand insemination? The woman is the field plowed by the male. How to understand demagoguery? Imagine a glutton stuffing his stomach with sausage to the point of bursting. Communities are bound by many ties, and for the Greeks the consumption of meat was one of the most fundamental. The cattle of the Sun were mythical beasts located on the periphery of the

Greek world, and yet also symbols of what was present at the heart of every Greek sacrifice: the flesh whose consumption defined our relationship to the gods and each other.

#### TASTE AND GLUTTONY

The symbolic value of cattle helped shape some of the most distinctive practices and habits of the Greeks, reinforcing the importance of sanctuaries and framing notions of the divine, of heroic action, of elite performance, even making possible the emergence of a monetized economy. These associations were leitmotifs running through the mentality of the Greeks and were instantiated in daily life in the nexus of sacrifice, feast, and distribution that was a recurrent feature of Greek life. This is reflected in official documents, such as these early-fourth-century regulations for the cult of Asklepios:

Decision of the People. Athenodoros proposed: Concerning the things that the priest of Asklepios Euthydemos says, the People vote thus: In order that the preliminary sacrifices that Euthydemos, the priest of Asklepios, has specified may be carried out and in order that the other sacrifice may occur on behalf of the Athenian people, the People decree that the Commissioners of Asklepios are to conduct the preliminary sacrifice that Euthydemos has specified using the money from the Surgical Revenues . . . and they are to deposit the remaining funds inside the treasury within the temple. And so that the Athenians may be able to distribute as much meat as possible, the sacrificial officers who are in office are to see to the holding of a public festival. They are to distribute the meat from the leading ox to the *prytaneis* and the nine archons, and to the sacrificial officers and those who participate in the procession, while they are to apportion the rest of the meat to the Athenians . . . (IG II<sup>2</sup> 47.23–35)

Meat is a medium for a complex set of exchanges: between the human community and its gods, between the community and its officials, and between the community and the individuals who constitute it. The circulation of the meat, first on the hoof, then on the altar, then in butchered pieces, facilitates the expression of a social order. Beginning with the procession and continuing with sacrifice and distribution, the entire system is strictly controlled by an apparatus that fuses civil and religious authorities into a single, coherent expression of power. The players, the relationships, and circulation of the commodity conform neatly to Bourdieu's definition of social capital: "the ensemble of actual or potential resources that are tied to the possession of a durable web of relationships, more or less

institutionalized, of inter-acquaintance and inter-acknowledgement.”<sup>30</sup> The degree to which this “cattle complex” was embedded in Greek culture is signified by the fact that no political revolution ever questioned it or subverted it. No change of constitution at Athens, no choice of oligarchy over democracy, no lurch toward tyranny ever undermined the constant repetition of religious performances based on sacrifice. Quite the opposite, in fact. An institution associated in the Homeric world with kings and heroes can become a central institution of the Athenian democracy. As Peter Rhodes has shown, the *boule* received a report on the status of public sacrifices, and Folkert van Straten’s iconographic study of sacrifice demonstrates that the Greeks never tired of seeing representations of themselves leading animals to the altar and roasting the god’s portion.<sup>31</sup> Iconographically, what Bronze Age object resembles its Classical descendant as closely as the *Ayia Triada* sarcophagus, whose depiction of a sacrificial procession anticipates the Panathenaic frieze? Nor did the utopias imagined by Plato and Aristotle ever advocate an alternative to the model of the city as a community bound by sacrificial obligations. With the possible exception of the Pythagorean community, not even the most fantastic ideal city, eugenically engineered and elite dominated, could be imagined by a Greek thinker without utterly conventional performances of piety, expressed through sacrifice. In this respect, the Asklepios regulations cited above may be more “typical” evidence of Greek culture than any passage from Sophocles, Plato, or Thucydides, since it represents neither a poet’s nor a philosopher’s reading of the culture but is a direct expression of the Athenian community.

Despite the fact that the system of sacrifice, consumption, and distribution was at the heart of the polis-sanctuary complex, there are signs of resistance to its viselike hold on the imagination of the community, or at least signs that subversive voices were to be heard on occasion. One sign of disquiet is the persistent association of meat eating with gluttony, often focused on the figure of Herakles, and the other was through the expression of religious and philosophical schemes that rejected meat. The equating of meat eating with gluttony, in particular, seems to have arisen in the milieu of popular attitudes.<sup>32</sup> It is reflected, for example, in popular expressions such as “He is carrying an ox in his jaws,” applied, according to the *Suda*, to gluttons.<sup>33</sup> Aristophanes takes this association one step further as part of his satire on contemporary politics. He uses gluttony as a metaphor for the assembly’s unquenchable appetite for endless speeches, and plays on the state’s role as sponsor of sacrifices to make the Athenians laugh at themselves. The chorus in *Knights*, for example, criticizes Demos (the People) for facing every clever politician with a gaping maw, feeding on their speeches, to which Demos replies, picking up the metaphor, that he likes to fatten politicians only to lead them to the

slaughter, thereby keeping control of politics and satisfying his own gluttony.<sup>34</sup> If Demos is eager to consume politicians and their speeches, the most demagogic politician is guilty of the same flaw: Kleon is described as a “yawning gulf, a devouring Charybdis,” by the chorus. In a similar vein, the Sausage Seller, an everyman figure who challenges the voracity of Kleon, boasts,

“And I, when I have bolted the tripe of an ox together with a sow’s belly and swallowed the broth as well, I am fit, though slobbering with grease, to bellow louder than all the orators and to terrify Nicias.” (Aristophanes, *Eq.* 356–58)<sup>35</sup>

This sets the stage for an exchange of insults of epic proportions between the antagonists. Like two barkers in the marketplace they abuse each other in increasingly graphic language, threatening to gut, stuff, slice, and otherwise butcher each other.<sup>36</sup> The poet employs the violence and the voracity implicit in episodes of sacrifice, butchery, and feasting to tap into the more brutal side of consumption hidden behind the official treatment of sacrifice as a sacred matter. Our meat eating is evidence of our carnal selves. The blood running off the altar may be holy, but the grease dribbling down your chin is not.

The Greeks are constantly reminding themselves of the prosaic side of meat eating by channeling it into myth, in particular into the figure of Herakles the glutton. Karl Galinsky has warned, correctly, that Herakles’ roles are so varied that no “all-embracing exegesis” can sum him up, but tales of his gargantuan appetite were very popular.<sup>37</sup> This aspect of Herakles is attested as early as Pindar and a host of playwrights whom Athenaios quotes on the subject of Herakles’ gluttony, including Astydamos, Epicharmos, and Ion of Chios.<sup>38</sup> He participated in an eating contest with Lepreus, a story incorporated into a panegyric to Herakles composed by the brother of Theopompos the historian.<sup>39</sup> The theme of his gluttony becomes a mainstay of Attic comedy, but as Nicole Loraux has observed, the identification of Herakles with his belly works in ambiguous ways.<sup>40</sup> His appetite is at once hypermasculine, and equates his eating with a voracious sexual appetite, while at the same time his belly is like a woman’s, especially that of a pregnant woman. The hero is even given a *peplos*, a woman’s garment, by Athena. Some of Herakles’ enormous popularity resides in the fact that this model of masculinity also has something faintly ludicrous about him. He is closer to his appetites than the Olympian gods, retaining part of his humanity in his excesses, his appetites, and his silliness.<sup>41</sup>

If the picture of Herakles devouring an entire animal plays with the deep identification of masculine power with the bull, there is second aspect of the age-old symbolic identification that is also mildly subversive:

the predictable metonymy of the bull's castration and cuckoldry. The symbolic and metonymic layers here are wonderfully rich. Like the castrated bull, the cuckold has been emasculated. In the case of the bull the emasculation is physical, in the case of the cuckold, metaphorical. But the reference to the cuckold as a man with horns derives from something else. A steer still has horns. Viewed head on, the animal still gives the appearance of virility. Thus the horns represent an ambiguity surrounding the cuckold's state. To outward appearances he appears the same man, just as the steer has the horns of the bull. On the other hand, the cuckold has horns but (metaphorically) no testicles. This play of symbols can traced back to at least as early as the fourth century, in the riddle of Euboulides entitled "The Horned Man": "What you have not lost you still have. But you have not lost your horns. So you still have horns."<sup>42</sup> Just as the ox still has its horns (but not its testicles), so too the cuckold has the appearance but not the substance of virility.

Herakles casts a long shadow. For example, Theophrastos describes the ancient version of a bodybuilder as follows: "If he is invited to a shrine of Herakles somewhere, you can be sure he will throw off his cloak and try to lift the bull to twist its neck."<sup>43</sup> Even Herakles' feat of eating an entire ox, the draft animal he took from Theiodamas, was emulated by strongmen, like Milo of Kroton, who replicated the feat at Olympia after carrying the beast up and down the stadium on his shoulders.<sup>44</sup> Pankratiasts loved to model themselves on Herakles, but sometimes emerged looking as foolish as the hero. Polydamas of Skotoussa, for example, was remembered, according the *Suda*, for launching himself "into a herd of cattle and seizing the biggest and fiercest bull by one of its hind legs. He held fast the hoof and did not let go; the bull escaped, and Polydamas was left holding the hoof."<sup>45</sup> Euripides' dismissive comments regarding athletes as incapable of learning to live well because they were slaves to their jaws and appetite also reflects the identification of great, beef-eating jocks such as Theagenes of Thasos, who ate an ox on his own, with the comic figure of Herakles.<sup>46</sup> A darker side of this comic vision also existed: how better to suggest the utter despair of Ajax at being robbed of the *aristeia* for the finest fighter at Troy than to have him slaughter all the Greeks' cattle and the cowherds too. Such profligate waste and such a violation of the strict code of slaughter!<sup>47</sup>

The inverse of the meat-eating glutton was the vegetarian ascetic. The followers of Orpheus, for example, were famed for avoiding eating anything once animate.<sup>48</sup> Aside from this religious group, some individuals gained notoriety for their vegetarian habits. Atheniaos devotes a number of pages to men who existed on liquid diets, such as Philinos, who survived on milk alone for his entire life, and a host of others such as Anchimolos and Moschos, a pair of sophists from Elis who were known as

“water drinkers” and who ate only figs. They were, notes Athenaios with some surprise, as healthy and vigorous as anyone else, although their body odor was so offensive that everyone avoided them at the baths.<sup>49</sup> Many of the people who cultivated a meat-free diet are labeled philosophers or sophists and the tradition of avoiding the consumption of meat was unambiguously linked to the common philosophical posture of setting oneself at odds with the norms of the community. This meatless diet could raise the ire of more conventional folk, as when Theseus berates Hippolytos, characterizing him, in the words of Albert Henrichs, as “a radical fanatic who practices vegetarianism”:

Go, boast that you eat no meat, that you have Orpheus  
 For your king. Read until you are demented  
 Your great thick books whose substance is as smoke.  
 (Euripides, *Hipp.* 952–54, trans. Grene)<sup>50</sup>

The supreme example of this philosophy was, of course, Pythagoras, whose followers renounced all meat as part of an ascetic regime, the so-called *bios Pythagoreios*, that incorporated strict vegetarianism with drinking only water, avoiding humor, wearing a single garment, and cultivating alarming habits of personal hygiene.<sup>51</sup> The list of ancient philosophers who either advocated or at least gave serious consideration to vegetarianism is impressive and sometimes overlooked, but it would be wrong to conclude that the renunciation of meat was either widespread or frequent. In fact, it is its very marginality that allows vegetarianism to serve as a marker of the philosopher’s disdain for convention.<sup>52</sup> It could hardly fail to be so since eating meat was so conventional. In fact, in Plato’s discussion of evolutionary change in Book 6 of the *Laws*, cannibalism and vegetarianism are both cited as examples of earlier dietary regimes that still existed among some people, but which were clearly not common practice among the Greeks.

If vegetarians renounced meat on the grounds that a suffering animal might have the reincarnated soul of a human, this metaphysical position challenged the orthodox views of life and death that generally held sway. For most, the souls of the dead were in the Underworld, not in the dog whose yelp convinced Pythagoras it was the voice of his dead friend.<sup>53</sup> If their renunciation was based on an appreciation of an animal’s capacity to feel, and the assertion that it possessed a soul, extraordinarily modern-sounding arguments that are nevertheless clearly expressed in both Plutarch’s *On the Eating of Flesh* and Porphyry’s *De abstinentia*, such observations were drowned out by the drums, trumpets, and songs that marked the ritual killing of animals at sacrifice. The very same Plutarch who could ask indignantly, “Who were the first people to claim that we owe no justice to dumb animals?” was equally capable of waxing lyrical about the

ritual of sacrifice. Of his time as a priest of Apollo serving at Delphi he writes: “You know I’ve served Apollo for many years, but you won’t hear me say, ‘Plutarch, you have had enough sacrifices, enough processions, enough choirs.’”<sup>54</sup>

A recognition that animals suffered for what Plutarch calls our “better fare,” meaning gourmet cooking rather than staples, was part of a more general disquiet regarding luxury and indulgence, but the religious associations of meat trumped such anxieties. A similar tension can be seen in the story of Empedokles: he is said to have sacrificed an ox at Olympia after making it from spices, an act that was taken as proof that he approved the teachings of Pythagoras—but the story also shows that he was not prepared to abandon conventional piety.<sup>55</sup> Pythagoras resolved the same problem by sacrificing at the altar of Apollo Patroos at Delos, because, as Diogenes Laertius reports, “wheat and barley, and cheesecakes, are the only offerings laid upon it, as it is not dressed by fire; and no victim is ever slain there.”<sup>56</sup> Some may have advocated the meat-free diet as healthier, but even in antiquity it was noted that Homer’s heroes are only ever seen consuming grilled and roasted meat, so that eating meat already had heroic status for Greeks in the Archaic period.<sup>57</sup> Renouncing meat as unhealthy defied conventional wisdom. When the Hippocratic writers investigated questions of diet, they imagined that in the earliest times humans, like cattle, had grazed on raw cereals, but this is seen as too harsh a diet, rather than beneficial. In the treatise *On Ancient Medicine* Hippokrates writes,

I hold that not even the mode of living and nourishment enjoyed at the present time by men in health would have been discovered, had a man been satisfied with the same food and drink as satisfy an ox, a horse, and every animal save man . . . For many and terrible were the sufferings of men from strong and brutish living when they partook of crude foods, uncompounded and possessing great powers—the same in fact as men would suffer at the present day, falling into violent pains and diseases quickly followed by death. (Hippokrates, *On Ancient Medicine* 3, trans. Jones)<sup>58</sup>

The critical change, then, was when humans learned to prepare food, particularly by cooking it. In fact Hippokrates has little to say about the consumption of meat, suggesting that it was not a major feature of the common diet under investigation. He discusses the theory that it was beneficial to give raw meat to those with a weak constitution (an idea he dismisses), but he was clearly more concerned with the properties of raw versus cooked rather than one food group compared to another. The Hippocratic ideal was a moderate diet that avoided food in its most brutal state, and it is this notion of moderation as the characteristic feature of

the civilized Greek male that made *omophagia*, the ritual destruction of animals and the devouring of their raw flesh practiced by the female followers of Dionysos, so potent a symbol of the destructive power of the gods. Sacrificial meat was thus a medium for expressing piety within proper bounds.<sup>59</sup> To avoid it altogether was to turn one's back on the community, while to eat meat raw was to surrender to divine madness that reduced us to savagery.<sup>60</sup> As groups emerged wanting to resist assimilation into the mainstream, avoiding sacrificial meat was an easy, dramatic, and symbolically powerful way of advertising their desire to stand apart. Accordingly, St. Paul offers this casuistical advice to his followers:

If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go, whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that showed it, and for conscience sake. (1 Corinthians 10:27–28)

#### PRESENCE

It is clear that cattle remained a powerful presence in Greek culture, affecting institutions, practices, and values in every corner of Greek life. It is also apparent that there were sufficient disruptions between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age to make continuity of most social practices and institutions impossible. So one cannot simply say that the raising of cattle for sacrifice was important because it had always been so. On the other hand, the breakdown once imagined to be so complete in Greek history, exaggerated by our reliance on studying history in discrete epochs, is now a matter treated with more nuance. It is the subtle continuity of some ideas, some values and some practices, serving new ends and representing new social realities that constitute the strange presence of the past in the present. Put another way, the lords of Knossos may have banqueted on sacrificial cattle, as did the princes in Homer, and the chiefs at Lefkandi, as did the people of Classical Athens. No group is the same as the other, nor are they entirely different.

The present carries the past within it, either hidden or in plain view, changing established patterns to serve new ends, yet also replicating those patterns when no change is forced upon it. This can be illustrated with phenomena from two very different data sets. One is linguistic: the term *boukoloι*. Not only does it mean “cowboys” (and is the title, in fact, of a comedy by Kratinos), but in the Hellenistic age it was also the word for bandits, while in Attic Greek the related verb *boukoleo* was synonymous with theft.<sup>61</sup> Behind its use in that sense stands the figure of Hermes the

cattle rustler. Yet at the same time, the *boukolos* and *archiboukolos* were also priests of Dionysos, and the *boukoleion* was the residence of the Archon Basileus at Athens.<sup>62</sup> Here the religious association is pronounced, but not the connotation of theft. A different god looms. The second example is coroplastic: the figure of the bull in Cypriot art from the Early Bronze Age to the Archaic period. For much of this time bull imagery was ubiquitous in Cypriot art: as protomes added to bowls, as figurines, as masks, and in two remarkable instances as parts of sanctuary models depicting the performance of religious rituals.<sup>63</sup> Yet this bull imagery oscillates between two poles, one of continuous presence and the other of continuously changing meaning, depending upon contingent circumstances: a dedication at a sanctuary differs from a votive deposit in a grave in every way, from its creation to its function.

In one way, then, the Greeks were as much a people of cattle as the Maasai or the Dafla, in that their religion and mythology employed the human relationship with cattle as a touchstone to which they constantly returned. Accordingly, when Demosthenes wanted to stress how Athens' response to the rise of Philip exemplified the city's righteousness, he measured this in the city's public proclamation of sacrifices in time of crisis.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, when Theokritos composes *Idyll* 17 in honor of Ptolemy II, it is the king's sacrifices that serve to mark his legitimacy and piety.<sup>65</sup> And yet at the same time, the Greeks were not people of cattle in the same way as the Maasai, since they also farmed, traded, sailed, colonized, served as mercenaries, and so forth. (Some would say that, as people of cattle, not even the Maasai are Maasai, since some of their constituent tribes also farm, or do not speak Maasai, or do not employ Maasai institutions such as age classes.<sup>66</sup>) It is in this paradox, in this exploration of the slip between what is said and what is done, the difference between what the Greeks were once and what they became, that we see how the past continues to be a part of the present. The bovine orientation of sanctuaries both drives the formulation of a critical set of institutions—sacrifice, dedication, feasting—and is driven by those same institutions. In some cases the development takes place primarily at a sanctuary within the polis, such as in the case of the Acropolis at Athens; at other times and places, it takes place primarily in a sanctuary outside the polis, such as at Olympia, and on occasion the sanctuary is outside but tied to the polis, as in the case of Eleusis.

These multiple trajectories might lead one to abandon any attempt to categorize and classify sanctuaries, yet there are common features that unite them and arise from broadly shared features of Greek culture. The religious authority located at sanctuaries was a critical agent, we shall see, in at least three areas of Greek life. It counterbalanced the weakness of the early state, it provided the basis for the articulation of law, and it

made possible the emergence of a monetized economy. In fact, it was only through the recursive relationship that existed between polis and sanctuary that the *poleis* of Classical Greece were truly able to achieve the complexity of developed states. In this process, cattle existed as mediums for exchange, measurements of value, and conveyors of status. They were constant companions, providers of traction, milk, meat and hides, and their symbolic value was as crucial to the formation of Greek culture as was their material importance. Remove the ox, and one contemplates a society with nothing to put on its coins and no reason to have coins. The story of the Greeks and their cattle began with hunting and domestication, that is to say, before there were Greeks or Greece. It is perhaps fitting that millennia after the Greeks stopped sacrificing cattle to the Olympian gods, who have fled or are not listening, that we should recognize the symbiosis between humans and cattle that was a constant presence in Greek culture.