

The Sacrifice of Eumaios the Pig Herder

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SEVERAL FAMOUS SCENES of animal sacrifice are found in the Homeric poems. At *Il.* 1.447–74 the Achaean nobles propitiate Apollo with the offering of a hecatomb. At *Il.* 2.402–31 Agamemnon sacrifices an ox to Zeus. And at *Od.* 3.417–72 Nestor slaughters a cow in honor of Athena. These scenes have been carefully examined by several scholars and form the basis for the descriptions of animal sacrifice found in general works on the subject.¹ There are, however, a few descriptions of seemingly anomalous offerings which are often passed over too cursorily by scholars dealing with Homeric sacrifice. I propose in this paper to examine one such sacrifice, the offering made by Eumaios the pig herder at *Od.* 14.414–56. It will become quite clear that Eumaios' offering is different in several important ways from the sacrifices just cited.

In order to honor his guest, the beggar who is in reality the disguised Odysseus, Eumaios sacrifices a fat five-year-old pig. Eumaios himself describes the pig as his best. The men bring in the pig and stand it near the hearth. Eumaios does not forget the immortals, for he has a noble spirit. He removes some hairs from the animal's forehead, tosses them into the fire, and prays to all the gods for Odysseus' return. The cutting of the hair is characterized with the word *ἀπαρχόμενος* (422). Eumaios then knocks the beast unconscious with a piece of wood he had left lying by. They slit the pig's throat, singe off its bristles, and cut it into joints. The swineherd places pieces of raw meat into fat, taking a bit from every limb of the pig (*πάντων ἀρχόμενος μελέων*, 428), and throws them into the fire while sprinkling ground barley over it all. The rest of the meat is cut up, spitted, and roasted. It is then removed from the spits and tossed onto a table. Eumaios divides the meat into seven portions, for he knows what is proper. He places a portion aside, with a prayer, for Hermes and the nymphs, and then gives each man his due portion. Odysseus gets the chine, a choice piece. He thanks Eumaios, who

¹ Paul Stengel, *Die griechischen Kultusaltertümer*³ (Munich 1920) 108–15; Jean Rudhardt, *Notions fondamentales de la pensée religieuse et actes constitutifs du culte dans la Grèce classique* (Geneva 1958) 253–57.

answers that everything is in the hands of god. Eumaios then sacrifices the ἄργματα, whatever they might be, to the immortal gods and, having poured a libation, passes the wine to Odysseus. Everyone eats and finally retires to bed with hunger and thirst assuaged.

There are a few points in this description that require closer examination. Eumaios dedicates the hairs of the victim and prays for Odysseus' return to all the gods (πᾶσι θεοῖσι, 423). He sacrifices the ἄργματα to the immortal gods (θεοῖς αἰελεγνέτησι, 446). Yet he sets a special portion of the cooked meat aside for the nymphs and Hermes (435). The first question, then, is: to whom is this sacrifice dedicated, Hermes and the nymphs or the gods in general? But before this question can be answered, the exact meaning of three words must be determined: ἄργματα and θύσε in 446, σπείσας in 447.

The word ἄργματα derives from ἄρχω and is generally equated with ἀπάργματα and ἀπαρχαί and translated as 'firstlings' or 'first fruits'.² This is all very well, but it does not tell us with any precision what the ἄργματα are in this passage. At first glance it might seem best to identify them either with the hairs of the victim, because their removal is described with the similar word ἀπαρχόμενος (422), or with the raw meat enveloped in fat which is also associated with a similar word ἀρχόμενος (428). But neither identification is possible. The hairs are burned at line 422 and the meat at line 429. Yet line 446 clearly states that the ἄργματα are sacrificed after the conversation between Eumaios and Odysseus and therefore much after the burning of those other 'firstlings'.

Modern commentators have not been very helpful in elucidating this passage. Stengel mentions it several times, but in a rather confusing way. In his *Opferbräuche*, for example, he argues at several points that ἀπαρχαί and ἀπάργματα are first fruit offerings without referring to ἄργματα or the Eumaios passage.³ Twice (64f, 179) he discusses our passage, but in neither place does he consider the ἄργματα or what was done with them. In the third edition of his *Kultus-Altertümer* he defines the ἄργματα as the pieces of the victim reserved for the deity and seems to equate them with both the raw pieces of meat wrapped in fat *and* the portion set aside for the nymphs and Hermes.⁴ As I have just argued, the ἄργματα could not include the already burned pieces of meat wrapped in fat.

² H. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* I (Heidelberg 1960) s.v. ἄρχω; E. Schwyzer, *Griechische Grammatik* I (Munich 1953) s.v. ἄργμα.

³ P. Stengel, *Opferbräuche der Griechen* (Leipzig/Berlin 1910) 26, 44 with n.2, 46 n.4, 57-58.

⁴ *Supra* n.1: 113 with n.4, 114.

Nilsson's comments are also ambiguous (*GGR* I³ 146): "Teile des Fleisches werden in der Fetthaut, einige mit Mehl bestreut ins Feuer gelegt, andere auf Spiessen gebraten. Darauf wird alles auf den Tisch gebreitet . . ." If he means to say that all the meat, that from the spits and that rolled in fat and placed on the fire, was laid on the table, he is clearly wrong. The words that Homer uses to describe the meat wrapped in fat (*ῶμοθετέιτο, πάντων ἀρχόμενος μελέων*) clearly refer to sacrifice, not to cooking.⁵ The only meat put on the table was that which had been cooked on spits. Beyond this, Nilsson says nothing about *ἄργματα*.

Walter Arend has taken the *ἄργματα* to be the portion of meat set aside for Hermes and the nymphs.⁶ He also, however, remarks on the singularity of making two offerings during one sacrifice, especially since one offering comprises cooked meat. I would further remark on the singularity of burning to the immortal gods as a group the portion previously reserved only for the nymphs and Hermes.

If these singularities should lead us to doubt the identification of the *ἄργματα* with this portion of cooked meat, what else could the *ἄργματα* be? Before I suggest a new possibility, we must examine the verb at line 446, *θύσε*.

According to LSJ *s.v.*, *θύω*, in Homer, denotes the offering, by burning, of some food product to the gods. A further refinement is added to this definition by Jean Casabona in his study of words relating to sacrifice:⁷ "Chez Homère, *θύω* . . . s'agit toujours de nourriture solide, apte à combustion, mais de toute nature: viande, fromage, farine, etc." My only argument with this definition is its limiting of objects of *θύω* to *solid* food. It seems to me that in book fifteen of the *Odyssey*, for example, *θύω* is used with a liquid offering.

Homer is describing the first meeting between Telemachos and Theoklymenos. Theoklymenos comes upon the son of Odysseus as he is praying and sacrificing to Athena. The sacrifice is characterized by Homer with the verb *θύω*. Thus at 15.222 we read: *ἦ τοι ὁ μὲν τὰ πονεῖτο καὶ εὔχετο, θύε δ' Ἀθήνη*. At 260 the same verb is used again: *ὦ φίλ', ἐπεὶ σε θύοντα κιχάνω τῷδ' ἐνὶ χῶρῳ*. At 258, however, a different verb is used to define Telemachos' action: *σπένδοντ' εὐχόμενόν τε θεῶν παρὰ νηὶ μελαίνῃ*. Homer here uses *σπένδω* for the action described with *θύω* in the two other lines. In the

⁵ Stengel (*supra* n.3) 74–75 (*ῶμοθετέιτο*), 57–58 (*ἀρχόμενος*).

⁶ W. Arend, *Die typischen Szenen bei Homer* (Problemata 7 [1933]) 67; his reference in n.2 should read *KA*, not *Opferbr*.

⁷ J. Casabona, *Recherches sur le vocabulaire des sacrifices en grec* (Aix-en-Provence 1966) 72.

whole description of this scene there is nothing to make one think that Telemachos is making a sacrifice of solid food. It is true that *σπένδω* is very rarely used by Homer to refer to libations poured over burning animal parts,⁸ but he almost always reserves *σπένδω* to refer to independent libations.⁹ As Casabona himself says of the verb, “dans la pratique, il concerne la plupart du temps une offrande indépendante.”¹⁰ There is therefore no reason to envision an offering of solid food here, and no reason to limit the verb *θύω* to the burning of solid food.¹¹

If we now accept the possibility that *θύω* can be used in reference to liquid offerings, I think we have the answer to the identity of the *ἄργματα* in the Eumaios episode. They are the ‘firstlings’ of the wine, the libation which Eumaios pours after the solid sacrifice has been made and the supper portions distributed, but before the wine is passed around the table. As Homer clearly says (446–48):

ἦ ῥα, καὶ ἄργματα θῦσε θεοῖσ' αἰειγενέτησι,
σπείσας δ' αἶθοπα οἶνον Ὀδυσσῆϊ πτολιπόρθω
ἐν χεῖρεσσιν ἔθηκεν.

I would translate this: “He spoke and poured the first fruits into the fire in honor of the immortal gods. Then, having poured this libation, he placed the gleaming wine into the hands of Odysseus, sacker of cities.”¹² There are several parallels for this construction in Homer, where an aorist participle followed by *δέ* at the beginning of a line summarizes the preceding line or lines. Thus, for example, at *Il.* 23.256f we read: . . . *εἶθαρ δὲ χυτῆν ἐπὶ γαῖαν ἔχευαν, χεύαντες δὲ τὸ σῆμα πάλιν κίον* . . . Similarly, in the *Odyssey*, we have a description at 2.422–26 of the companions of Telemachos raising the mast pole, making it fast, and pulling up the sails. Four lines later, after he has

⁸ *Il.* 11.775, *Od.* 12.363. It is not clear whether the libations at *Od.* 3.334, 342, are poured over the burning tongues or not.

⁹ *Il.* 6.259; 9.177, 657, 712; 16.227, 253; 23.196; 24.287. *Od.* 3.45, 47, 394, 395; 7.164, 181, 184, 228; 8.89; 13.39, 55; 18.151, 419, 427; 21.264, 273. This list does not include any examples that are so vague that it is not clear whether the libation is an independent offering or not. Such vague uses of *σπένδω* are *Od.* 4.591; 7.137, 138; 8.432.

¹⁰ Casabona (*supra* n.7) 236.

¹¹ Apart from the passages we are discussing, *θύω* appears only two times in the epics, at *Il.* 9.219 and *Od.* 9.231. These two occurrences seem to describe the offering of solid food, but they do not at all require that the word be limited to such a use. It should also be pointed out that LSJ (*s.v.* *θύω* A.1) regard both the *ἄργματα* and this offering of Telemachos as drink offerings.

¹² *σπένδω* is always used in Homer with religious connotations and means ‘to pour a libation’; *cf.* Casabona (*supra* n.7) 236. Thus the translation ‘to pour wine’, used here by Lattimore, is wrong.

described how the ship flies through the water, Homer says (2.430): *δησάμενοι δ' ἄρα ὄπλα θοήν ἀνὰ νῆα μέλαιναν*. Here again the participle summarizes what has happened in the preceding lines. These examples, and others like them,¹³ show that this construction was common in epic poetry. Therefore the *ἄργματα* in our passage are the first fruits of the wine, a *σπονδή*. Eumaios thus makes three first fruits offerings during his sacrifice: forehead hairs (*ἀπαρχόμενος*), bits of raw meat from all the limbs (*ἀρχόμενος*), and wine (*ἄργματα*).

Now we are better prepared to answer our original question. Who are the recipients of Eumaios' sacrifice, Hermes and the nymphs or the gods in general? The forehead hairs of the victim are burned to the gods, thus dedicating the whole animal to them. Likewise the first drops of wine are offered to all the gods. It seems quite clear that Eumaios makes this sacrifice to the gods as a group. Others have pointed out before that heroes sacrifice and pray to specific deities, but that the common people tend to send their requests and offerings simply to the gods. The special portion of cooked meat set aside for Hermes and the nymphs makes no part of this sacrifice; it is never burned.

This portion of food will be used to make a very different offering. Gill was on the right track when he mentioned the Eumaios episode in his paper on *τραπεζώματα*.¹⁴ This offering of cooked meat to Hermes and the nymphs is similar to the classical custom of depositing meat, in addition to that burned on the altar, on a table in a god's sanctuary. But Gill makes no suggestion about what Eumaios did with the portion of meat he set aside. I would like to suggest a possibility.

Along country roads throughout ancient Greece a traveler found rustic markers or heaps of stones, called *ἔρματα*. Hermes, the god who protected wayfarers, was associated with these markers. Any windfall which a traveler might find was called a *ἔρμαιον*, a gift from Hermes. It was common practice among the rustic population to leave bits of food at these markers. Any wanderer who found these offerings would indeed look upon them as a gift from Hermes.¹⁵ A red-figured skyphos shows the famous hunter Kephalos making just such

¹³ Cf. *Il.* 2.269; 8.85; 14.223; 20.62; 24.801; *Od.* 4.585; 8.6, 422; 9.218, 312; 16.408; 21.248.

¹⁴ D. Gill, "Trapezomata: A Neglected Aspect of Greek Sacrifice," *HThR* 67 (1974) 134.

¹⁵ M. P. Nilsson, *GGR* I³ 505 with n.4, and *Greek Folk Religion* (New York 1940) 8; Hesych. s.v. *σῦκον ἐφ' Ἐρμῆ*; Eustathius 1572.57 on *Od.* 7.116.

an offering before a herm.¹⁶ And there is another, similar scene which shows that this custom is actually much older than Homer. Two fragments of a stone rhyton, dated to MM III or LM I, show a man laying down an offering before a temple.¹⁷ No herm is shown here, but that hardly matters: we see the deposition of an offering out under the sky, where any wanderer might find it. Surely Eumaios preserves one portion of food for this same purpose. He might be planning to leave it at a herm close to the nearby cave of the nymphs, described so beautifully at 13.102–12, or at the altar of the nymphs (17.210–11, 240–46) where “all wayfarers made sacrifice.” At any rate, the portion set aside for Hermes and the nymphs is a separate offering destined for some such deposition and does not constitute part of the sacrifice made to the gods.

Thus the sacrifice made by Eumaios differs from the normal heroic offering in several ways. There is a decided lack of fanfare. Instead of a formal, public ceremony honoring the gods, we see a pious rustic herder sharing his simple meal with his gods. Eumaios burns a few hairs from the pig’s forehead. This is a simple, uncomplicated way to dedicate the victim to the gods. Homer describes this action with the word *ἀπαρχόμενος*, ‘making a first offering’. Next come the purely practical matters of stunning, slaughtering, singeing, and butchering the animal. Then the actual sacrifice is made by placing pieces of raw meat from all the limbs into fat and burning these on the hearth. Again Homer characterizes these ritual actions with the word *ἀρχόμενος*, ‘making an offering of first fruits’. But now Eumaios does something unusual. He sprinkles ground barley over the burning offerings. In a more formal sacrifice, unground barley kernels are used in a preliminary act of the ritual.¹⁸ Eumaios, however, treats the offering to the gods just like a portion of food destined for human consumption; roasted meat was commonly cooked and served to mortals, sprinkled with ground barley (*Il.* 18.560, *Od.* 14.77). Then the rest of the meat is cooked and served up to the guests. Before Eumaios serves the wine to accompany the meal, he pours the *ἄργματα* into the fire. If the interpretation offered here is correct, these *ἄργματα* are the first fruits, the gods’ portion of the wine, without which no meal could be complete.

In addition to sharing the first fruits of his meal with the gods, Eumaios makes another offering which has no intrinsic relation to the

¹⁶ Tübingen 1347: *GGR* I³ pl. 33.1, Nilsson (*supra* n.15) pl. 4.

¹⁷ HM 2397: S. Alexiou, *KretChron* 13 (1959) 346–52, pll. 34–35; P. Warren, *Minoan Stone Vases* (Cambridge 1969) 85, P476.

¹⁸ See Stengel (*supra* n.3) 13–16.

first. He sets aside a portion of cooked food to honor Hermes and the nymphs, the companions and protectors of country travelers. This second, more rustic offering, together with the emphasis on sharing the sacrificial meal with the gods, is absent from the more formal offerings made by the nobles. But Eumaios' offering is a real sacrifice¹⁹ and deserves a more central place in considerations of the meanings and origins of Homeric sacrifice than it has previously received.

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¹⁹ *Pace* Rudhardt (*supra* n.1) 255.