

SESSION TITLE: Animal Ritual Killing and Burial: European Perspectives**ORGANISER:** Aleks Pluskowski (UK)**CO-ORGANISER:** Krish Seetah (UK)**SESSION PROPOSAL:**

The killing and burial of animals in ritualistic contexts is encountered across Europe from Prehistory through to the historical period. The term 'ritualistic' is an ambiguous and controversial one, but in this context refers to the slaughter of animals as part of religious practice. Archaeologically, such animals are most frequently encountered in funerary contexts, often in association with human remains, where they are typically interpreted as sacrifices. Written sources from historical periods indicate incredible diversity in the form and function of animal sacrifice, from basic slaughter through to burning and living burial. Deeper in the Past, where we rely almost exclusively on interpreting deposited animal remains and (where available) zoomorphic iconography, the range of treatments of the ritually slaughtered and deposited animals is equally diverse.

The aim of this session is to assess the state of research across Europe, to ascertain whether comparable interpretative frameworks are used, especially between archaeologists working with prehistoric and historical societies. How easy is it to identify ritually killed animals in the archaeological record? Can we tell if an animal has been killed specifically for such a purpose? Is it possible to reconstruct the rites associated with their deposition? Is it possible to reconstruct or re-contextualise the value of ritually killed animals? What insights can be gained about the religious paradigms and ritual systems of the societies engaged in animal sacrifice? How specifically can we understand the cultic praxis behind the sacrificial killing of animals? Why are some species used in sacrificial contexts and not others? What can this tell us about human-animal relations in the past? How much similarity is there across European societies in the treatment of animals 'made sacred'? How long were specific rites in use and why? Although animal sacrifices are typically interpreted as substitutes for humans, how does the ritualistic treatment of animal bodies compare to similar treatments of humans? This is a topic which is widely encountered in the study of past European societies, and one which would benefit from a comparison of techniques, interpretations, theoretical frameworks and critiques.

We welcome papers on any aspect of the ritual killing and deposition of animals, from any part of Europe and from any time period. We ask that papers move beyond individual case studies to consider broader questions (as suggested in, but not restricted to, the above list) aimed at furthering our understanding of the topic. We aim to publish the papers from this session as a book.

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