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CHANGING PATTERNS OF VIOLENCE AT QUSTUL AND BALLANA IN THE POST-MEROITIC PERIOD PART TWO: THE ANIMALS

INTRODUCTION

The essay in the previous edition of this journal, discussed the human remains from the royal cemeteries at Qustul and Ballana. This paper turns to an analysis of the animal remains from the sites. The animal remains are considered to be crucial aspects of the royal burials, with their number and character changing through time. This study integrates information on the animal pits at Qustul, which were excavated by the Oriental Institute prior to the flooding of the sites (Williams, 1991). More especially, this study problematizes the differences within the manner of animal sacrifice, and the differences between the manner of human and animal sacrifice at the sites. I argue that the nature of the wider significance of both human and animal sacrifice can be considered from a position which sees the sacrificial acts as embedded in, and perhaps representative of, broader social processes.

ANIMAL SACRIFICE: THE EVIDENCE

Amongst the scholars who have discussed animal sacrifice in Lower Nubia, Lenoble (1994) and Flores (1996) have put forward the most recent and thorough interpretations. Lenoble emphasised the importance of sacrifice as an overt demonstration of royal power. His ideas place emphasis on the interpretation of animal sacrifices as a royal prerogative, and therefore partially constructive of kingship and royal rule. As animal sacrifices occurred at Meroe and at el-Kurru, Lenoble emphasised the role of animal sacrifice within a longer-term Kushite tradition, which at Qustul and Ballana maintained a connection to the royal burials at Meroe (Lenoble 1994, 121-122). Indeed, at Qustul the tradition of animal sacrifice extends back to the period of the A-Group cemetery, where burials of decapitated cattle were discovered in pits (Williams 1986, 16). Flores (1996, 35), has also highlighted the high-status nature

of animal sacrifice in Kushite practice, and suggests that it is this diachronic factor that provides the only real common link in the practice. In this sense, she suggests that continuity in the nature and meaning of animal sacrifice has been over-exaggerated (Flores 1996, 36-37).

Other X-Group period sites reveal evidence of animal sacrifice, including Gammal (Bates 1927, 84; 89), Firka (Kirwan 1939, pl XIII, 1 and 2) and Kalabsha (Strouhal 1984, 263-264). Although these deposits are very small in number when compared with the remains at Qustul and Ballana, they are nevertheless evidence that animal sacrifice was not exclusive to the royal X-Group cemeteries. It was occasionally performed at other cemetery sites, perhaps as the temporary bestowal of an ostensibly royal prerogative.

The practice then, is well represented in the X-Group period, particularly at Qustul, and it is interesting to note that none of the Classical authors who discuss Nubia and the tribal groups that they believed lived there, makes any reference to the practice of animal sacrifice.

Animals appear in various quantities at Qustul, and a number of species are in evidence including dogs, cattle, donkeys, camels and horses. Within the tombs themselves one or two dog skeletons discovered at the top of the ramps of certain tumuli, may have represented guard dogs to oversee and protect the entrance to the tomb. The discovery of a cow skeleton with an associated *qadus* has been interpreted by Kirwan (1938a, 391) as the inclusion in the grave of the draught animal that drove the *saqia* in order that it might resume this important role in the afterlife. However, the animal deposits within the tombs are not wholly uniform. Room 1 of Tomb 3 at Qustul for example was found to contain over forty dogs, yet such a deposit was not found in any of the other tombs. The inclusion of the animals themselves within the burial rituals is obviously significant. The actual execution of the animals was particularly violent, as the majority of them showed signs that



their skulls had been smashed in. In a particularly striking example, horse C in tomb QT02 was found with a large hole in the skull, into which the blade of an axe from the same tomb fitted perfectly (el-Batrawi 1935, 138; plate 5 figure 7).

Further animal burials at Qustul were discovered during the excavations conducted by the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition (hereafter, OINE) which revealed a new aspect in the practice of animal sacrifice, in which the animals were found in pits in association with a number of tumuli. These pits were found to the west of tumuli QT03, QT04, QT10, QT26, QT36, QT54 and QT60. The pits contained the assorted remains of various animals. For example, Pit Q5 associated with mound QT03 contained the dismembered remains of three camels that were only represented by their heads, and 58 horses' hooves, nine donkey hooves and nine other hooves. Goods within this pit included ceramics, bronze vessels, a knife, pendant, textiles, silver studs and wooden saddles (Williams 1991, 225). The remains in the other pits do not necessarily follow this pattern: Pit Q265, part of the QT36 complex, contained five complete horses. At Gammai, two pits were discovered under mound J (an early tomb) containing dismembered horses and bronze bells, an apparent similarity with Qustul, although the location of the pits under the mound is an obvious difference. No such animal pits were discovered at Ballana, but the OINE did not conduct large scale open-area excavations at the site.

The appearance of such a variety of animals within the tumuli at both Qustul and Ballana is a striking feature of both the cemetery and of the rituals that were enacted at the site. They should not be considered as just another form of grave goods (Flores 2004, 733). The purpose and significance of the pit burials discovered by the OINE is unclear but it is certain that 'their role was as significant as that of the cavalcade within the tomb' (Rose 1992, 90). A number of features make it clear that the animal sacrifices can be divided into at least two distinct groups: the first group are those animals buried within the tomb, and who were, as far as it is possible to tell, pole-axed, the second group of animals are those that were buried outside of the tombs in separate pits, and who were often dismembered.

PROBLEMS WITH THE DATA

Although palaeopathological studies of Nubian human populations are quite well represented (see for example Alvrus 1999; Judd 1999; 2001),

studies of faunal remains, which sometimes formed an important part of Meroitic and X-Group burial practice, are seriously under-represented. Discussions concerning animal burials have centred upon the extent to which their appearance in Nubian graves may or may not demonstrate continuity in burial practice from the Napatan through to the X-Group period (Trigger 1969, 122; Török 1987a, 216-217; Lenoble 1994 and 1996; Flores 2004).

The location of both the human and the animal remains from the first excavations at the royal cemeteries are now unknown (see Dann 2007), and so any study which makes reference to the animal remains must do so using the original site reports from the cemeteries, and the analyses of el-Batrawi (1935). Some of the animal remains from Qustul were investigated by el-Batrawi, even though he was a Professor of human anatomy. Consequently, his observations, and the data which he chose to record, are rather curious. Rather than documenting information such as the sex of the animal, its age, or possible breed, el-Batrawi records details such as the length of the animal when measured from the tip of the nose to the tip of the tail. Again, the osteological data is of limited value.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The animal remains differ from the human remains in that the majority of animal remains were found in the ramps of the tombs, rather than within the burial chambers. The evidence concerning animal remains from the two cemeteries cannot be considered on an equal basis as the remains from Qustul far outnumber those from Ballana (figure 1). More animals of each species were found at Qustul, except for the small number of cows/bulls, where the number at Qustul and Ballana was equal.

In a number of their plans within the site report, Emery and Kirwan simply labelled the ramps at Ballana with the term 'animal burials', but went no further in describing the finds. In fact, the extent to which the ramps themselves were excavated remains unclear. As the excavators found themselves under increasing time pressures, they may not have fully excavated the ramps at Ballana, perhaps in the belief that they would contain artefacts and animal remains that would be largely similar to those already uncovered at Qustul. However, as the easiest way to enter the tombs was via the entrance at the bottom of the ramp, the ramps may have been cleared. The animal remains that may have been recovered were rarely recorded in any detail, and no finds from the

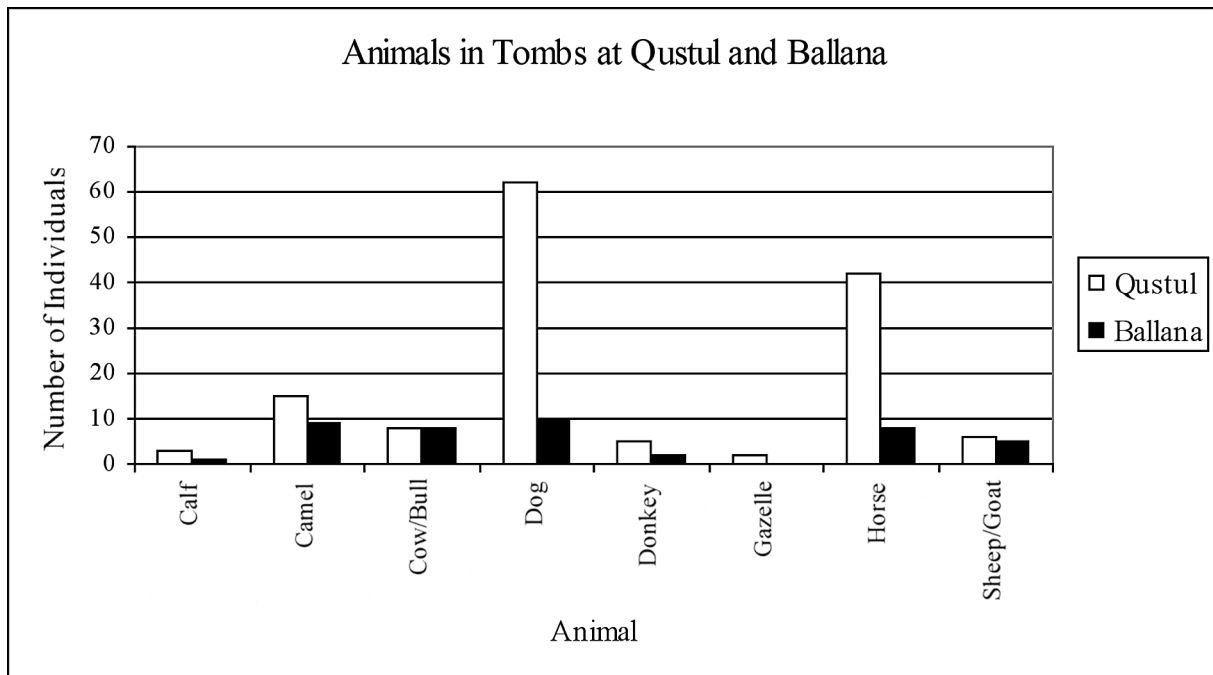


Figure 1.

ramps were recorded. If the excavators had found animal trappings of silver and bronze, it would be unlikely that they would have failed to include them in the excavation reports. Even if they lacked enough time to plan and draw the finds, they would surely have included the items in their find lists for each tomb, particularly because a classificatory system for the trappings and bells had been previously developed for the finds from Qustul. It therefore

seems reasonable to presume that, apart from the occasional recorded find, no animal trappings were recovered from Ballana. The discrepancy between the two sites is very unfortunate, as it prevents any truly comparison of the animal remains. However, for the sake of completeness, the figures from Ballana have been included here.

There is a marked trend towards burial of animals on the right side at Qustul. Almost equal numbers

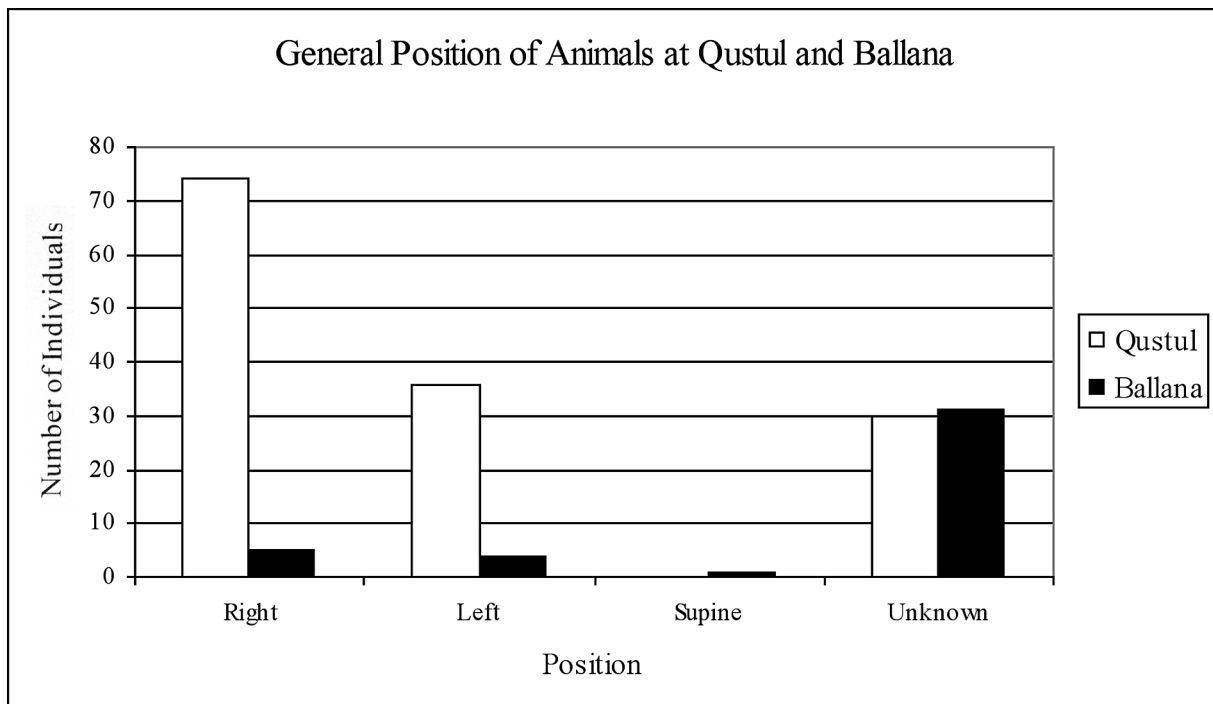


Figure 2.

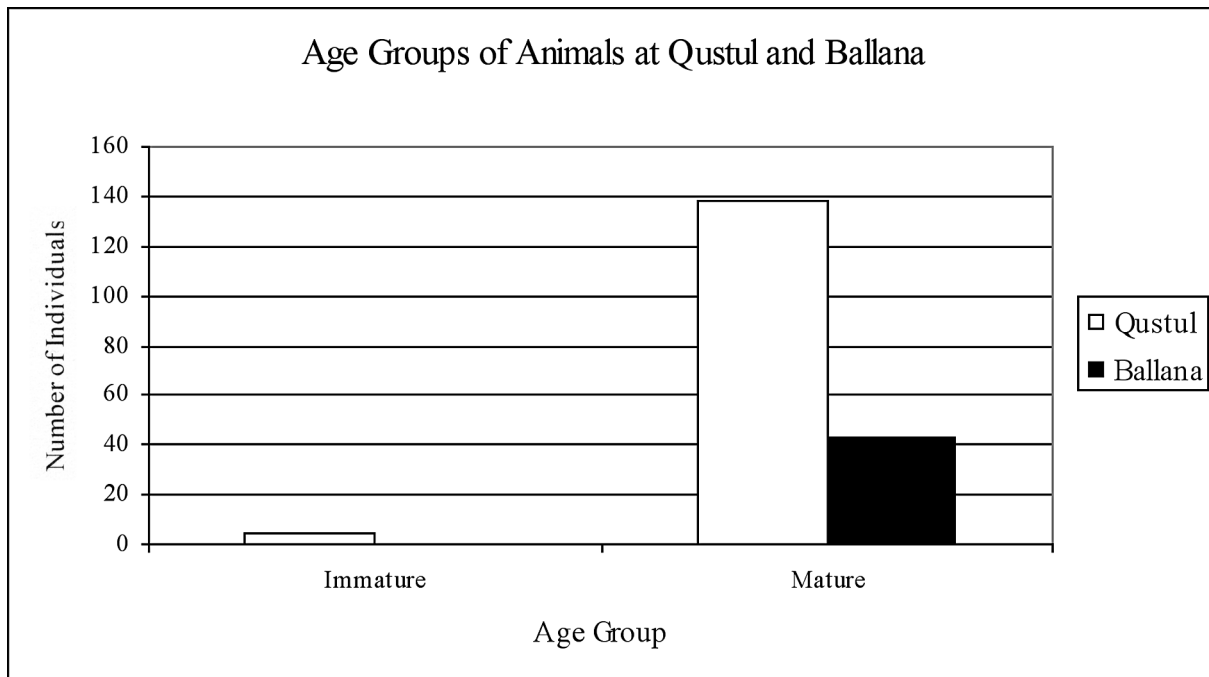


Figure 3.

of animal interments on the right and left sides were recorded at Ballana. There are almost equal numbers of animals in an unknown position from the two sites. This trend was also found in the positioning of the human remains.

The animal remains were not the subject of any detailed osteological investigation, and were not sexed or aged in any methodical way. Therefore, the animals have only been classified into two broad divisions – immature and mature. A small number of

immature animals (five) were included in the graves at Qustul. There were no immature animals found at Ballana

The quantities of animal remains found in the pits that were excavated by the OINE are illustrated in figure 4. Three animal species were identified, and two unknown animal body parts were also recovered. Horses were the most well-represented species, and were present in the graves via large quantities of hooves. The minimum number of individuals (M.

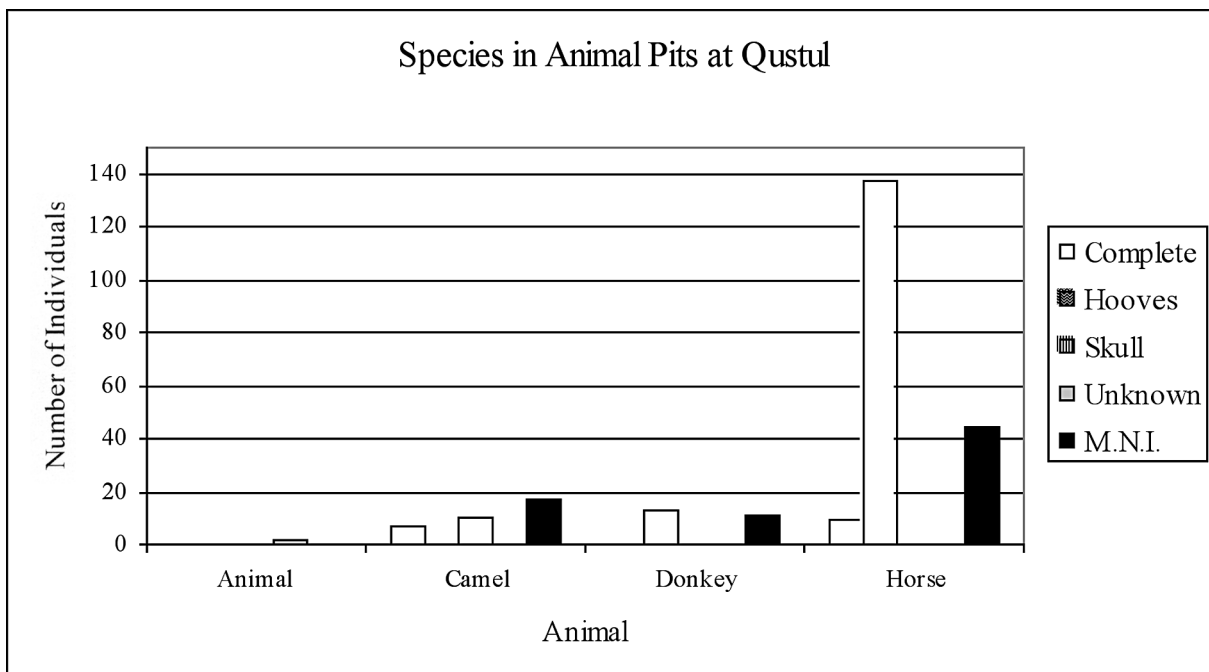


Figure 4.

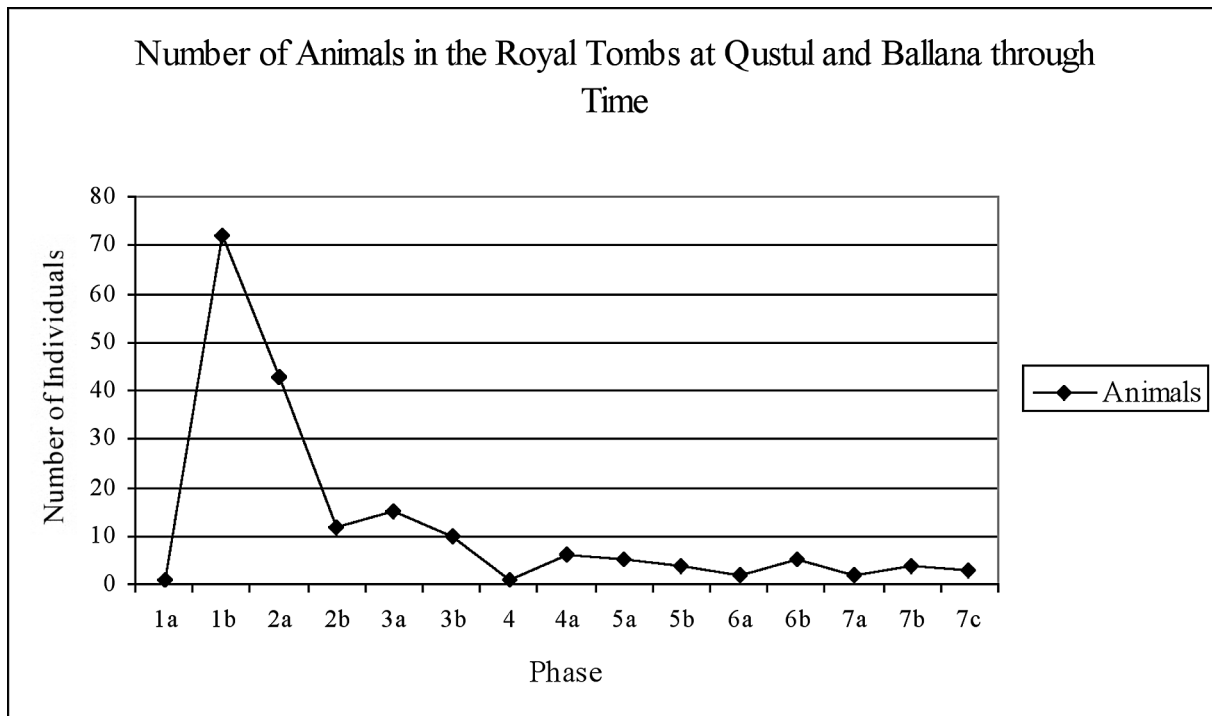


Figure 5.

N. I) of each species was calculated by counting the number of complete bodies, plus the number of skulls, plus the number of hooves. It is clear that the species encountered in the grave pits differs from those found inside the tombs, and was restricted. The pit burials only contain horses, donkeys and camels. Horses and donkeys were only evident as complete skeletons or from their hooves, whilst camels were only interred as complete specimens, or were only represented by their skulls.

When the quantity of animal remains (deposited in both pits and tombs) associated with the burials is quantified through time, it is clear that the trend decreases through time, i.e. it lessens from Qustul to Ballana. The spike of animal remains that occurs during phase 1b at Qustul, c. 380-390 AD (Török 1987, 154), is largely caused by the deposition of the forty dogs in tomb QT03, and a number of animal pits associated with the tumulus. At Ballana, the number of animal sacrifices in any given period never exceeds 10, and after the initial phase (3b, c. 420-430 AD), the activity diminished.

CHANGING PATTERNS OF VIOLENCE AT QUSTUL AND BALLANA

In investigating the body positions of the animals it is interesting to note that the majority of animals were buried on their right side. This is the case

at both sites and across the various breeds. This trend also corresponds with that found in the human remains (Dann 2006), and it is clear that right-sided burial was the predominant and preferred mode of interment for both animals and humans. The animal labelled as BT95: Cow J from Ballana is of particular interest. This cow skeleton represents the only supine animal burial of any species at the cemeteries, and represents a highly unusual burial both due to its breed and its bodily position. Other factors also make this interment stand out from that of other animals. The vast majority of the animals were buried in the shafts and forecourts of the tombs, at Qustul and Ballana. However, the burial of Cow J in Room 2 of tomb BT95, was buried in association with three humans. Two of these human individuals were both wearing silver crowns, and would seem to be royal individuals. The treatment of this cow is particularly significant given the small number of animals interred at Ballana, and it may be considered as a favourite pet, a particularly beautiful animal, or a sacred animal.

Almost all of the animals from Qustul, and every animal from Ballana were mature in age. It would be instructive to know the sex of the animals that were killed, as this information may have yielded some interpretations concerning slaughter patterns in relation to husbandry and herding. Such information may have lent credence to the details given by certain classical authors concerning X-Group subsistence



patterns (Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, XIV. 4. 3-7) – an area of life which remains little understood. Nevertheless, the criteria surrounding the sacrifice of animals in the funerary context may have been governed by other concerns.

It is probable that certain animals were selected from the wider group as animals suitable for inclusion in the graves. The criteria for this is not known (comprehensive faunal analysis may have provided an insight into selection), but a number of suggestions can be made. It may be the case that the differential inclusion of animals in the burials was partly constrained by the strength and health of the herd or pack at the time of the burial. Personal choice may have also been very significant. The vast majority of the cattle, horses and camels were mature animals when they were killed, indicating that, at a practical level, the younger animals were spared as they were potentially more productive beasts. Certain animals may have been the personal steeds of individuals placed in the tomb for use in the afterlife, or as personal belongings. Other qualities that the animals had may have made them particularly suitable (and others unsuitable) for inclusion such as the particular markings on the animals that made them appear to be particularly beautiful. Certain Nilotic tribes hold their cattle in very high esteem from an aesthetic perspective, and have elaborate means of classifying them (Coote 1992). Such qualities, now unfortunately lost to us, may have been instrumental in the selection of certain animals for certain jobs, and for their inclusion in the funerary rituals at Qustul.

Beyond the evidence for the sacrifice of the animals within the grave structures at Qustul and Ballana, the animals discovered in the pits outside certain Qustul tombs present a puzzling picture. It is not the case that the parts of the animals that were interred simply had no use value (i.e. hooves cannot be consumed), their disposal in a particular burial structure, and accompanied by grave goods is compelling evidence that their value lay in an area that was only obliquely linked to practicalities.

Some animals were complete, but others were broken down into constituent parts and then partially re-fitted. Yet often, the body parts could not be re-assembled to form complete bodies. Parts were missing. This breaking down of the bodies was a deliberate act and was not due to taphonomic processes, as other parts of animals in the same burial environment survived. Certain body parts may be missing as they were used for food or as ritual offerings, and work on the faunal remains could have supported this butchery hypothesis. The

deliberate dismembering and selection of body parts for inclusion shows some broad patterning, as the body parts present were mostly skulls or hooves. This pattern could support the hypothesis that the missing parts were consumed, as the parts not included in the pits were the meatier parts of the bodies.

In the incorporation of body parts from different species, these animals perhaps became hybrid animals. These animals may have represented something beyond the boundaries of themselves. There may have been a magical power in assembling particular body parts of different species and in mystically creating a new animal with the forbearance of the donkey (present in hooves), and the speed and stamina of the camel (present in the skull). These are modern attributes that are often applied to these animals, and the attributes given to them may have been different in the past, but the principle of creating a 'hyper-animal' is still plausible. The restricted selection of species for the pit burials, was undoubtedly of some significance too. The combination of particular animal species for sacrifice was important in Shang period China, where particular combinations of species were appropriate for making sacrifices to particular phenomenon such as the wind or clouds (Jing and Flad 2005, 254). A similar symbolic cultic aspect may be hypothesised for the animal remains in the pits.

In a broad sense, the presence of the animal sacrifices at Qustul, and to a lesser extent at Ballana, are the continuation of an animal based ritual which had a long history in the Sudan. The practice of sacrificing horses in the later periods has been discussed by Lenoble (1994, 1996) as an aspect of continuity with Kushite practice. The sacrifice of animals begins to decline in the later X-Group period, as is evidenced by the decline in the animal remains from Qustul to Ballana (see figure 5). With the official arrival of Christianity in Nubia in the mid sixth century, and the attendant change in burial rites, including the almost total disappearance of grave goods, it is not surprising that the interment of sacrificial animals also goes out of style. However, it is entirely possible that animals were still sacrificed on the occasion of a funeral, perhaps for a feast, and for which we have no evidence. It is therefore the function of sacrifice which is central to any issue concerning grounds for objecting to the practice, not the actual act itself.

If the human and animal sacrifices at the royal X-Group cemeteries represents a zenith in enthusiasm for sacrifice in Nubia, why was it the case at Qustul, why did it change at Ballana, and why were the practices so different?



THE NATURE OF SACRIFICE AT QUSTUL
AND BALLANA

In the discussion above, and in previous writings (Dann 2007; Flores 1996; Lenoble 1994 and 1996; Reisner 1923) the human and animal sacrifices at Qustul and Ballana in the X-Group period, and at various other Nubian sites in a variety of periods has been discussed. In general, these writings have weighed the evidence for and against the very veracity of interpreting the remains as sacrifices, they have quantified the evidence for sacrifice, they have considered the act as a marker of continuity or development in a diachronic perspective, and they have discussed the action as a part of funerary rituals ostensibly concerned with the exercise of power. However, the consideration of the very act of sacrifice itself and what it might enact beyond a relatively one dimensional interpretation (the sacrifice of prisoners) has largely been un-remarked upon.

An interpretation which views sacrificial acts within a sacred tradition might be more inclined to see the living body (either animal or human) as consecrated to becoming an offering via the sacrificial act, which forms a material link between the gods and society (Hill 2000, 318). Both the materiality of the body and its transformation via sacrifice are important here. Furthermore, the sacrificial body acquires meaning as a liminal body, passing through life stages (Van Gennep 1960), occupying a different 'space'. More than this, the sacrificial body and the sacrificial act itself performs a manoeuvre for the larger group, and this manoeuvre is beneficial.

The very 'bodiliness' of the sacrificial act needs to be reconsidered in the interpretation of the remains from Qustul and Ballana.

As I have pointed out above, the animals in the pits were treated differently to those animals in the tombs, which were in turn treated differently to the human remains in terms of their mode of death and the treatment of their bodies. Whilst animals in the pits were broken into pieces, this was never the case for the animals within the tombs, and it was never the case for the humans. The animals and humans in the tombs, whilst not actually dismembered, were broken in other ways. Many of the animals had been pole-axed, as evidenced by the large cracks and holes in their skulls. The cause of death for the humans is more difficult to establish firmly, but the human sacrifices were probably killed by a soft tissue injury, perhaps slitting of the throat, and again this is a kind of breaking into and opening up of the body, but of a different kind than that which was performed on

the animals. The different methods of dealing with the bodies enacted a cutting or breaking into, or a carving up of a once whole body.

At Qustul it is difficult to decipher institutional power displayed in a manner that is archaeologically recoverable, by for example, the differentiation between the many different human remains in the tombs either artefactually (by their association with items of clothing or other grave goods) or spatially (by laying out of the bodies in a deliberate fashion, placing the bodies in pits or on beds, or placing them in particular parts of the tombs). In this sense, any attempt to identify a ruler or rulers in a Qustul tomb is very difficult. The suggestion provided by the evidence is that differentiating between, or marking differences between the individuals was not a matter of priority at the site. The human sacrificial victim was not marked out as 'other' at Qustul, on the contrary, differences were erased.

It is with the animal remains at Qustul that differentiation is more noticeable. The animals were differentiated artefactually by the items that they wore, and the material from which those items were made. They were spatially differentiated by almost always being buried in the outer parts of the tombs (pits, ramps, forecourts). Their bodies were also ritually differentiated, either being broken into, or chopped up.

The animal bodies were not only penetrated and opened (as, indeed, were the human bodies, if we are to believe that the human sacrifices were killed by throat slitting), they were chopped into pieces. As such, their bodily treatment represents in kind a potent metaphor of the disruption and breaking of socio-political boundaries. Such a time of flux might ensue in the difficult period following the death of a ruler, with a potential period of instability as social relationships were re-negotiated (ibid). This was played out with particular violence on the bodies of the animals. These highly violent and bloody actions were perhaps played out, as the spatial deposition of the animal remains implies, for public consumption. Prior to the acts of sacrifice, the animals were frequently dressed in full regalia. Animal sacrifice was therefore marked as highly differentiated, and highly visible, in relative contrast to that of the sacrifice of humans.

In these contrastive acts and contrastive bodily treatments, I suggest that the visibility and differentiation in the animal sacrifices acted as a deliberate contrast to the undifferentiated sacrifice of humans to accompany an undifferentiated ruler, in a masquerade concerning the social reality of centralised and unequal power relations that existed



at the time (*cf* Shanks and Tilley 1982). The sacrifices acted as a necessary part of this mystification by obscuring unequal social relationships via physically representing (and burying) certain humans in an equal way.

Perhaps the situation can be read in another manner. The undifferentiated human bodies were created as images of disempowered bodies, all treated in the same manner. Instead, the animals became the displaced focus of socio-political tensions concerning the holding of and the transmission of socio-political and magico-religious power, which could be scapegoated and punished. Tensions which were intrinsically about human relationships were abducted to the animals, and dealt with via their bodily sacrifice. This association between particular animals and the exercise of human power is best exemplified by the fact that the animals most commonly richly adorned in bronze and silver prior to sacrifice, and which were commonly found in both the pits and in the tombs proper, were the high status horses and camels, which (in any number, such as we find them in the graves) were probably the prerogative of the powerful in society.

At Ballana, as the number of animal and human sacrifices diminished, we are able to perceive archaeologically, individuals who might be identified as rulers. They were singled out for individuated treatment in terms of the items which they wore or were associated with (and this is the case even though the Ballana cemetery was subjected to the doubly harmful vicissitudes of plundering and being located in the floodplain), and by the manner of their burial, being often placed in pits, on beds, and in the spatially deepest locations within the tombs. The necessity of sacrifice gradually diminished, as society became more stable, and as the express demonstration of socio-political and magico-ritual power was more markedly demonstrated (see Dann 2006). The small numbers of sacrifices that did continue to appear in the tombs may have done so as a deep link to a cultural past.

CONCLUSION

Burials are the product of the social body which performs the burial, rather than a simple reflection of the interests and wishes of the individual(s) that are buried. As such, there is much scope for seeing funerary remains from a socially embedded perspective. The necessity of such a perspective is perhaps underscored when we are confronted with archaeological evidence which implies past actions

that were monumental in their nature, multiple in their involvement of individual actors (human and animal) and theatrical in their enaction.

At Qustul and Ballana, both the humans and animals were conscripted by social institutions as participants in ritual acts of sacrifice that were socially sanctioned, but for the animals that conscription was ultimately more spectacular. The performance of ritualised sacrificial acts which were different in the nature of their performance depending upon whom they were performed on, may have provided a means for the direction of violence via proper, sanctioned channels, which if left unchecked, may have threatened the social group more fundamentally (Girard 1977, 10). The bodies of those to be sacrificed took on and embodied tensions in the social group, which could be dispersed via the sometimes highly visible sacrificial act at Qustul.

At Ballana, the number of sacrifices, both human and animal, diminished. This fundamental change in the character of ritual practice at the royal cemeteries tracked broader alterations in the nature and expression of royal power, which can be seen in associated changes in the material record.

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Artikel setzt die Studien zum Verständnis und der Praxis von Opfergaben in den königlichen Gräbern der X-Gruppe in Qustul und Ballana fort (siehe Dann 2007) und konzentriert sich auf die Tierfunde. Anders als in früheren Untersuchungen sind hier die Gruben mit Tieren, die von OINE in Qustul entdeckt wurden, mit berücksichtigt. Vorgegangene Interpretationsversuche haben die Opfergaben (sowohl menschliche als auch tierische) in der nach-meriotischen Periode stets relativ eingengt nur unter dem Aspekt der Kontinuität mit älteren Perioden betrachtet. Mögliche Unterschiede in der Opferpraxis und ihre jeweilige Bedeutung wurden nicht ausreichend untersucht. Hier wird nun vorgeschlagen, dass eine nähere Beschäftigung mit der tatsächlichen Körperlichkeit dieser Vorgänge instruktiv sein könnte. Die Veränderungen in der Opferpraxis im königlichen Friedhof können dann als sowohl eingebettet in die größeren sozialen Zusammenhänge/Prozesse als auch als Ausdruck derselben betrachtet werden.