



**The Archaeological Institute of America  
Western Illinois Society,  
and the Department of Classics**



present

## **Hammers, Axes, Bulls, and Blood: Practical Aspects of Roman Animal Sacrifice**



Sacrifice of a bull. (Temple of Vespasian, Pompeii)

Animal sacrifice was a central component of ancient Roman religion, but scholars have tended to focus almost entirely on the symbolic aspects of these rituals, while glossing over the actual moment of death and the practical challenges involved in killing large, potentially unruly creatures, such as bulls. The traditional explanation is that the animal was struck on the head with a hammer or an axe in order to stun it, then had its throat cut and bled to death. Precisely how the axes, hammers, and knives were employed, and in what circumstances one was preferred over the other, remains unexplained. This talk draws upon a range of evidence derived from ancient sculpture, comparative historical sources, and animal physiology in order to offer a new interpretation of this procedure.

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**7:30 P.M.**

**Pattee Auditorium in the Center for Science and Business  
Monmouth College, Monmouth, Illinois**