Sacrifice to Slaughter

Several millennia before the birth of Christ, a powerful king emerged among the peoples of the Nile river. Narmer-Menes united Upper and Lower Egypt into a single kingdom, creating the first great empire in Western history. Although he is remembered by historians for his extraordinary military accomplishments, Narmer-Menes’s spiritual achievements were no less significant. The new king introduced bull worship throughout his kingdom, creating the first universal religion.

According to legend, the bull god Apis was conceived by a special cow who had been impregnated by a ray of moonlight. The young bull god was revered and the spiritual throne of the new Egyptian empire, and from this vaunted position he ruled over the heavens and the affairs of society.

The bull god represented great strength and virility and the masculine passion for war and subjugation—an appropriate symbol for the age of conquest. Narmer-Menes ruled over Egypt by the grace of the new bull god. The king, in turn, was worshiped by the people as a bull god, as were all of his successors in the great dynastic reigns of the Egyptian empire. The kings were called “mighty bulls” and “bulls of the heavens.” A thousand years after the reign of Narmer-Menes, kings of the eighteenth and nineteenth dynasties were de-
sired in court chronicles as great bull gods who destroyed their enemies with their powerful hooves and gored them with their sharp horns. 2

The great bull god Apis shared the heavens with the cow goddess Hathor. It was believed that Hathor gave birth to the sun itself. Hathor represented fertility and nurture, the fecundity of the cosmos. The sky was conceived as a giant cow whose legs extend to the four corners of the earth and who is held up by other gods. 3 The queens of ancient Egypt were all viewed as cow goddesses and worshiped by the people.

Apis symbolized the vigor of youth and everlasting life and was embodied in a real-life bull kept in sanctuary and attended to by the priests. At the end of the old year the Apis bull was slaughtered in an elaborate ritual; his flesh was consumed by the king in an effort to incorporate the animal's fierce strength, majestic power, and vitality into his being so that he might enjoy immortality. The ritual slaughter of the Apis bull was a time for renewal, for resurrecting the personal and political fortune of the kingdom. It marked the end of the old year and the beginning of the new.

The impending death of the Apis bull sent the priests to scrounge the realm for a successor. When a new bull was located, its owner was handsomely rewarded and the priests immediately placed the animal in seclusion. For forty days and nights the bull was kept hidden away. Naked women were paraded in front of the animal to incite the god and secure the fertility of both the women and land of Egypt. 4 At the end of the period of seclusion the bull was transported to the holy city of Memphis in a sacred barge inside a golden cabinet. Upon arrival, the Apis bull was enshrined in the great temple of Peah, where he occupied a suite of special rooms equipped with elaborate sleeping quarters. The Apis bull was served special foods and given holy water from the sacred wells of Egypt. Cows were kept in adjoining rooms to serve as companions.

On holy days the bull was adorned with religious garments and paraded before the people in extraordinary processions. The birthday of the Apis god was preceded by a week of joyous feasting.

The Apis god was imbued with great powers, among which was the ability to predict the future. The animal's every movement and even its demeanor were viewed as signs or omens. The privileged

often paid to spend a night in the temple near the Apis bull so that their dreams could be interpreted with the help of the bull's gestures. It is said that the bellowing of the Apis bull foretold the invasion of Egypt by the armies of Augustus.

After the ritual slaughter and eating of the Apis bull its remains were mumified and buried in a special chamber entombed inside a grand sarcophagus weighing over fifty tons. 5

Humanity's relationship to cattle has radically changed since the days of Namar-Menes. Today, the birth of calves begins with "teaser bulls," also called "sidewinders." These animals are used to identify cows in estrus (heat). A teaser bull has undergone a surgical operation that retracts his penis so that it comes out through his side. 6 The bull becomes aroused in the presence of cows in heat and attempts to mount the females. Because his erect penis is off to the side, he can't penetrate the cow's vagina, but he does leave a colored dye on her rump from a marker that's been hung around his chin. Ranchers use the marker to identify the cows in heat so they can be seperated and artificially inseminated.

More recently, a new generation of estrus-synchronizing drugs has been developed and commercially marketed, allowing farmers to dispense with teaser bulls. 7 The drugs are injected into all of the cows in a herd at the same time so that they will all come into heat simultaneously. The Upjohn Company boasts the efficiency and predictability of its own estrus-synchronizing drug with the advertising slogan "You call the shots." 8 By synchronizing the estrus cycles of an entire herd, commercial ranchers can plan ahead, picking the ideal time of the year for the calving season.

After birth, young male calves are castrated to make them more "docile" and to improve the quality of the beef. There are several methods of castration. In one procedure, the scrotum is dropped and stretched out tightly, a knife is stuck up through the scrotum and then used to cut open the sac, and each testicle is pulled out with the long cord attached. In another procedure, a device called an emasculator is used to crush the cord.

To ensure that the animals will not injure one another, they are dehorned with a chemical paste that burns out the roots of their horns. Some ranchers prefer to wait until the calves are older and
BEYOND BEEF

then use an electronic dehorner with a cupped attachment that castrates the horns tissue. With older steers, saws are also used to cut off the horns and the testicles, without the use of anesthetics.

Calves enjoy a short reprieve and are allowed to run with their mothers for six to eleven months on the open range before being transported to the giant eviscerated feedlots where they are fattened up and readied for slaughter. There are some 42,000 feedlots in thirteen major cattle-feeding states. The 200 largest lots feed nearly half the cattle in the United States. The feedlot is generally a fenced-in area with a concrete feed trough along one side. In some of the larger feedlots, thousands of cattle are lined up side by side in cramped quarters.

In order to obtain the optimum weight gain in the minimum time, feedlot managers administer a panoply of pharmaceuticals to the cattle, including growth-stimulating hormones and feed additives. Anabolic steroids, in the form of small time-release pellets, are implanted in the animals' ears. The hormones slowly seep into the bloodstream, increasing hormone levels by two to five times. Cattle are given estradiol, testosterone, and progesterone. The hormones stimulate the cells to synthesize additional protein, adding muscle and fat tissue more rapidly. Anabolic steroids' improve weight gain by 5 to 20 percent, fat efficiency by 5 to 12 percent, and lean meat growth by 15 to 25 percent. Over 95 percent of all feedlot-raised cattle in the United States are currently being administered growth-promoting hormones.

In the past, managers used to add massive doses of antibiotics to the cattle feed to promote growth and fight diseases that are rampant through the animals' cramped, contaminated pens and feedlots. In 2014, over 15 million pounds of antibiotics were used as feed additives for livestock in the United States. While the cattle industry claims that it has discontinued the widespread use of antibiotics in cattle feed, antibiotics are still being given to dairy cows, which make up nearly 15 percent of all beef consumed in the United States. Antibiotic residues often show up in the meat people consume, making the human population increasingly vulnerable to more virulent strains of disease-causing bacteria.

Castrated, drugged, and needle-cattle spend long hours at the feed troughs consuming corn, sorghum, other grains, and an array of exotic feeds. The feed is saturated with herbicides. Today 80 percent of all the herbicides used in the United States are sprayed on corn and soybeans, which are used primarily as feed for cattle and other livestock. When consumed by the animals, the pesticides accumulate in their bodies. The pesticides are then passed along to the consumer in the finished cuts of beef. Beef ranks second only to tomatoes as the food posing the greatest cancer risk due to pesticide contamination, according to the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences. Beef is the most dangerous food in herbicide contamination and ranks third in insecticide contamination. The NRC estimates that beef pesticide contamination represents about 15 percent of the total cancer risk from pesticides of all foods on the market today.

Some feedlots have begun research trials adding cardboard, newspaper, and sawdust to the feeding programs to reduce costs. Other factories farm scrap up the methane from chicken houses and pigpens, adding it directly to cattle feed. Cements dust may become a particularly attractive feed supplement in the future, according to the United States Department of Agriculture, because it produces a 30 percent faster weight gain than cattle on only regular feed. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) officials say that's not uncommon for some feedlot operators to mix industrial sewage and oil into the feed to reduce costs and fatten animals more quickly. At Kansas State University, scientists have experimented with plastic feed, small pellets containing 80 to 90 percent ethylene and 10 to 20 percent propane, as an artificial form of cheap roughage to feed cattle. Researchers point to the extra savings of using the new plastic feed at slaughter time when upward of 20 pounds of the stuff from each cow's rumen can be recovered. The rest is washed and recycled into new pellets. The new plastic pellets are much cheaper than hay and can provide roughage requirements at a significant savings.

Every aspect of the animal's environment is closely monitored, controlled, and regulated on the feedlot to optimize weight gain. Even flies can be a source of annoyance, disturbing the cattle and keeping them from eating. Cattle can lose up to half a pound a day feeding off swarms of flies. Flies also spread diseases, including pinkeye and infectious bovine rhinotracheitis. High doses of antibiotics are sprayed from high-pressure nozzles atop tractors that drive along access roads next to feedlots."ousing the pens and sometimes
the animals made with a cloud of poison." In the biggest feedlots, where 50,000 head or more are quarantined, managers sometimes fly to aerial spraying. Crop-dusting aircraft fly back and forth over cattle pens and spray feedlots with insecticides, drenching the facilities with toxic rain.24

After being fattened to their "ideal" weight of 1,100 pounds, the mature steers are herded into giant truck trailers, where they are crammed together without room to move. Because the journey to the slaughterhouse is often a rough and brutal one, animals frequently fall and are trampled upon inside the trucks, suffering broken legs or pelvises. Unable to rise, these animals are known as "downers."25

The cattle are transported for hours or days along interstate highways without rest or nourishment and frequently without water. At the end of their journey, intact animals are deposited in a holding pen at the giant slaughterhouse complex. Downers, however, must wait hours to be unloaded. Although downed animals are frequently in severe pain, they are rarely euthanized or anesthetized, as that would translate into a loss of carcass and additional expenses. Often spread-eagled on the floor of the trailers, unable to stand or walk, these hapless animals are chained by their broken legs and dragged from the truck onto the loading ramp to await their turn for slaughter. Animals who die en route are thrown into a heap on the "dead pile."

Some of the more modern plants, like the Holcomb, Kansas, plant of Iowa Beef, take up fourteen acres or more.26 The steers enter the slaughterhouse single-file. Immediately upon entry they are stunned by a pneumatic gun. As each animal sinks to its knees a worker quickly hooks a chain onto a rear hoof, and the animal is mechanically hoisted from the platform and hung upside down over the slaughterhouse floor. Men in blood-soaked gowns, handling long knives, slit each steer's throat, thrusting the blade deep into the larynx for a second or two, then quickly withdrawing the knife, severing the jugular vein and carotid artery in the process. Blood spurs out over the workstation, splattering the workers and equipment. A journalist describes the scene:

The kill floor looks like a red sea...warm blood bubbles and coagulates in an ankle deep pool. The smell stuns the nostrils. Men stand in gore...each night the goony mess is wiped away...27

The dead animal moves along the main disassembly line. At the next workstation the animal is skinned. The hide is cut open at the outline of the stomach and a skinning machine strips the animal of its hide, leaving the skin in one piece. The carcass is decapitated, the tongue is split and removed, and both head and tongue are impaled on hooks attached to the disassembly line chain. The carcass is then gutted. The liver, heart, intestines, and other organs are removed. After the viscera are removed, the body is hurried along to the next station, where the carcass is cut down the center of the backbone with motorized saws and the tail is pulled off the animal. The split carcass is boxed down with warm water, wrapped in cloth, and sent to a meat cooler for twenty-four hours. The next day workers use power saws to cut the carcasses into recognizable cuts—steaks, chuck, ribs, briskets. The cuts are tossed onto conveyor belts, each manned by thity to forty butchers and trimmers, who cut off and box the final products. The nearly trimmed, vacuum-packed cuts of beef are then shipped off to supermarkets across the country, where they are displayed along finely lit meat counters.