



Greek Animal Sacrifice During Battle

What was the role and significance of sacrifice in ancient Greek warfare?

Introduction

Derived from the Greek verb σφάζειν, which translates “to pierce the throat;” this term displays the ritualistic activity of animal sacrifice. Scholars have called this sacrifice one of the “indispensable preliminaries of a Greek battle”(Pritchett 109).

- What determines if a sacrifice takes place?
- What are the different contexts of sacrifice?
- What are the differences between thysia and blood rituals?

Determining if a Sacrifice Takes Place

1. The Omen: The signs which are displayed as good or bad, ex: earthquakes, sea monster, lightning strike
2. The Diviner: Interpreted the omens and read them, relayed them to the general
3. The General: Had the final remark on battle decisions, decided if a sacrifice took place
4. The Soldiers: Affected by the sacrifice, boosted morale

Evidence

TABLE 2
SACRIFICES BEFORE BATTLE

Herodotus	Thucydides	Xenophon	Polybius	Plutarch	Polyseus	Diodorus	Aelian
6.112.6 (sp.)	4.92.7 (sp.)	Hell. 3.1.17	Nothing in Szymanski and no pertinent reference amongst those to be found in the lexicon of Schweighauser	Age. 6	1.27.2	13.97	2.26.4 (Esp. Alex.)
7.167.1 (sp.)	6.69 (sp.)	Hell. 3.2.16		Alex. 25	3.9.8	15.85	
7.219.1 (sp.)		Hell. 3.4.23		Alex. 31	3.9.9		
9.96 (sp.)		Hell. 4.2.18		Arist. 17,18	4.20		
9.37.1 (sp.)		Hell. 4.2.20		Nicias. 24			
9.41.4 (sp.)		Hell. 7.2.20-21		Polop. 21			
9.45.2 (sp.)		Hell. 7.4.3		Phoc. 13			
9.61 (sp.)		Anab. 1.8.15		Them. 13			
9.62 (sp.)		Anab. 6.4.25		Ther. 27			
		Anab. 6.5.7-8					
		Cyr. 3.3.4					
		Cyr. 6.4.12					
		De Rep. Lat. 13.8					
Total: 9	Total: 2	Total: 13	Total: 0	Total: 9	Total: 4	Total: 2	Total: 1



Fragmentary Red-Figure Kylix (Drinking Cup): Warrior Sacrificing Ram, 490-480 BC, Cleveland Museum

Attic Red-Figure Calyx Krater Fragment, about 430 BC, Athens, Greece, Getty Museum



Athenian red-figure stamnos attributed to Triptolemos Painter, ca. 500-450 BCE. Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig



Framework

McClymond's Elements of Sacrifice

- Selection- General type of offering
- Identification- Correlates offering with patron, benefits from sacrifice
- Association- Linkage with deities
- Killing- Execution of victim
- Heating- Placing victim on sacrificial fire
- Apportionment- Splitting and sharing of offering
- Consumption- Ingestion of offering

Thysia vs. Blood Ritual

Thysia

- Dedicated to gods of the underworld, gods of war, Olympian gods
- Altar and fire
- Carcass is burned
- Sharing and eating of the meat

Blood Ritual

- No dedication to Gods
- No altar nor fire
- No sharing nor eating of the meat
- Carcass is discarded

Different Contexts of Sacrifice

At Home, before the Departure

At the Borders

At Rivers and the Sea

Camp-Ground Sacrifice

Battle-Line Sacrifice

Thysia

Thysia

Blood Ritual

Thysia

Blood Ritual

Conclusion

Animal Sacrifice is an important factor in Greek warfare and displays a religious ritual activity in a different context than what is commonly known. Animal sacrifice during battle displays that there was no distinction between religious and secular activities because the sacrifice was integrated into every stage of warfare. Studying ancient warfare and its different parts allows us to see how modern warfare has evolved which is important to how our world has transformed into what it is today.