

Death Dogs: Justifications for Dog Sacrifice in the Funeral of Patroclus

Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are awash with the pervading themes of death and its aftermath. Indeed, Jasper Griffin asserts that “the Homeric poems are interested in death far more than they are in fighting” (Griffin 1980, 94). One key feature of this ever-present theme of death is how the Homeric poems approach the funerals of the major heroes, Patroclus (*Iliad* 18 and 23), Achilles (*Odyssey* 24), and Hector (*Iliad* 24). The Homeric funeral rite, or *τάφος*, was a regularized procedure (Garland 1984), however there are significant differences in the description of the funeral of Patroclus. Significantly, Patroclus' funeral includes the irregular sacrifices of four horses, two dogs, and twelve Trojan youths (*Iliad* 23.170-177). These divergences from the other major Homeric funerals make clear that Patroclus' funeral is markedly different and cannot be taken as representative of the standard Homeric funeral. Instead, the divergences from the typical Homeric funeral in the funeral of Patroclus are indicative of connections to older Indo-European ideas and practices relating to kingship, power, and conquest.

This paper seeks to specifically investigate the presence of dog sacrifice in the funeral of Patroclus (*Iliad* 23.173-174). Dogs were not commonly used in Greek ritual (Rutherford 2020), so their sacrificial presence serves to thereby mark Patroclus' funeral compared to the other Homeric funerals. Through a careful etymological and linguistic analysis of the phrase *τραπεζῆες κύνες*, “table dogs” (*Iliad* 23.173), this paper will establish that these dogs were trained, domesticated dogs- fundamentally different from the wild dogs that roam the battlefield in the *Iliad*. Indeed, the phrase “table dogs” is not isolated to Homer's poems, but also occurs

elsewhere in the Indo-European family in the Hittite Ritual of Huwarlu, a purification ritual for the king and queen (Collins 1990).

The presence and significance of dog sacrifice in the funeral of Patroclus will subsequently be compared to dog sacrifices that occurred in Hittite purification and military rituals as well as the Indic *asvamedha* ritual. These comparisons with earlier Indo-European traditions will clarify the inclusion of dog sacrifice in Patroclus' funeral, especially given the resemblances to specific Hittite and Indic rituals, which were intrinsically linked to ideas of royal authority and conquest. This paper will thereby propose an interpretation of the sacrificed dogs at the funeral of Patroclus as symbolic representatives of the dog of the underworld meant to lead their master to the land of the dead.

Bibliography

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