

The important of sacrifice in Greek warfare

Introduction

In this essay I will be discussing the importance of ritualistic sacrifice of animals and objects in classical Greek warfare. Whilst doing this I wish to use both ancient sources and modern scholarship to assist my argument that ritual sacrifice was important because it boosted the morale of the Greek soldiers, another argument that I wish to tackle would be whether or not the Greeks actually took part in the sacrifice of a human being.

Content

One of the first cases of sacrifice I found was in the modern scholarship, *Mimesis, Ritual Sacrifice, and Ceremony of Proskynesis*, where it is discussing another authors interpretation on how sacrifice was used to bring out aggression against a unified target, "In fact, the "Mimesis of antagonist"¹ is directed spontaneously toward unifying mimetic unanimity and unifying sacrifice." From this I can gather that the author that Martinez was referring to believe that sacrifice could be used as a way that the Greeks could boost their morale supporting my argument.

The next scholarship that I encountered that discussed sacrifice in the classical Greek world was Herodotus, Dionysus, and The Greek Death Taboo. The Homeric Hymn to Demeter and The Construction of the "Chthonic" in Greek Literary Tradition, in this text is an argument that concerns Herodotus and his refusal to mention the Greek Pantheon and their dealings with death. In this I found the following quote by the scholarship, "of Heracles slaying the Egyptians who were about to sacrifice him to Zeus, Herodotus makes the following averting formula"² the scholar then moved onto a translated piece of text from Herodotus which is Herodotus making a plea to the gods to keep his good faith. From this I can gather that sacrifice of a human was a taboo subject which lead to consequences for the so-called blasphemers.

In the same scholarship I found another piece that delved deeper into sacrifice and what type of sacrifice that was typical for the classical Greek period, I found this in the following quote, "This conforms with my general thesis: the religious rites and traditions are ancient, agricultural practices, involving the processual methods of libation, blood-sacrifice."³ From these last two pieces I can infer that the classical Greek standard of sacrifice are agricultural based, often involving animals to fulfil the blood-based aspect, I can also infer that these standards transfer over to war based sacrifices because of the taboo involving human death and invoking the name of Greek gods that is involved with a ritualistic sacrifice.

¹Parrilla Martínez, Desiderio, 2017. *Mimesis, Ritual Sacrifice, and Ceremony of Proskynesis*. *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis & Culture*, 24, pp.57–73..

²Sandin, Pär, 2008. Herodotus, Dionysus, and the Greek death taboo. *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter and the construction of the "chthonic" in Greek literary tradition*. *Symbolae Osloenses*, 83(1), pp.4.

³Sandin, Pär, 2008. Herodotus, Dionysus, and the Greek death taboo. *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter and the construction of the "chthonic" in Greek literary tradition*. *Symbolae Osloenses*, 83(1), pp.12.

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One case of sacrifice that I found within Herodotus: The Histories was related to the preparations made for the war with Persia, where an oracle makes a prophecy for them to pray to the winds and in response “they raised an altar to the winds at Thyia and worshipped them with sacrifices.”⁴ From this I can infer that the Greeks would pray before a war and then depending on the advice they would receive they could make a sacrifice, which from my previous inferences would include a animal of sorts and maybe a various food items such as berries, fruit and a bale of wheat.

Another case of sacrifice in Herodotus: The Histories that I found discussed Boreas and Orithyia how they would have “offered sacrifice both to Boreas and likewise Orithyia entreating them to come to their aid and to destroy the ships of the barbarians.”⁵ After reading the quote I came to the conclusion that Boreas and Orithyia were gods of the wind and that the barbarians that they speak of are the Persians as it was previously mentioned that the Greeks should pray and sacrifice to the winds and this was in the context of the Persian war.

Conclusion

In conclusion to my essay, I believe that the case that the greeks used ritualistic sacrifice to boost the morale of their troops or as they believe gain the support of the gods, is partially correct as most cases I found believed that sacrifice was a good thing for the Greeks, but some scholarships have partially proven me incorrect as sacrifice of a human is a taboo subject and if perform could have lead to a massive decrease in morale of the Greek soldiers. Continuing with my conclusion I believe that the importance of ritualistic sacrifice in Greek warfare was of the utmost significance because it have shown in the work of Herodotus that these sacrifices have significantly influenced the way that the combined might of the Greek soldiers fight the Persian war.

Bibliography

1, Parrilla Martínez, Desiderio, 2017. Mimesis, Ritual Sacrifice, and Ceremony of Proskynesis. Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis & Culture, 24, pp.57–73.

2,3, Sandin, Pär, 2008. Herodotus, Dionysus, and the Greek death taboo. The Homeric Hymn to Demeter and the construction of the “chthonic” in Greek literary tradition. Symbolae Osloenses, 83(1), pp.2–18.

4, Herodotus, Herodotus: The Histories, Book 7, Paragraph 178

5, Herodotus, Herodotus: The Histories, Book 7, Paragraph 178

⁴ Herodotus, Herodotus: The Histories, Book 7, Paragraph 178

⁵ Herodotus, Herodotus: The Histories, Book 7, Paragraph 189