

Boxing and Sacrifice: Dares and Entellus in *Aeneid* V

Vergil's *Aeneid* is full of dynamic, unique characters, captivating narration, and vivid episodes, but perhaps one of the passages which best combines these three aspects is the boxing match between Dares and Entellus in *Aeneid* V. This boxing match is actually presented as a ritual with many sacrificial aspects, and this sparks a question about how Vergil represents all combat in the *Aeneid*—does he see sacrifice and combat as intrinsically connected? I contend in this paper that the boxing match of Dares and Entellus is a religious ritual, ordered toward and ending in sacrifice, and this theme of sacrifice and its connection with combat in general is developed by Vergil throughout the entire *Aeneid*.

With the help of scholars Matthew Leigh and Richard Hunter, I examine how the sacrificial aspect of the boxing match is the key to understanding the central tension and conflict in the scene, with the loser inevitably forfeit as sacrifice, only escaping his fate by the substitution of the prize bull. I also look at the linguistic connection in Vergil's works between bulls and young pugilists. This linguistic connection, endorsed by T.E. Page, leads one to see Aeneas' human sacrifice of Latin prisoners-of-war in a new light. It also leads to the conclusion that Vergil sees all combat as a religious ritual, with the losers as sacrifices (unless there is a substitution, as at the boxing match), meaning that fighting is not good in itself, but only good when undertaken with the sanction of the gods and for a pious purpose. Piety is at the root both of Entellus' fight with Dares and Aeneas' killing of Turnus, which is why both Entellus and Aeneas are victorious—they are fighting for the right reasons, in a pious manner which evokes ritual sacrifice. This ethical and pious aspect of fighting, especially in the boxing match, is in direct contrast to the vainglorious and non-religiously colored parallel boxing match in Homer's

Iliad, as Michael Poliakoff also notes. In fact, by making fighting and winning admirable only under a pious and sacrificial light, Vergil has once again turned the values of the Homeric epics upside down and created a whole new standard for judging what had previously been the main topic and glory of epic poetry—war and warriors.

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