

## Horse Sacrifice in Homer: The Indo-European Tradition in the Funeral of Patroclus

Death and its aftermath are integral themes in Homer's *Iliad* and, to a lesser extent, the *Odyssey*. One major aspect of the aftermath of death in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are Homer's descriptions of the funerals of some of the major heroes. The funerals of Patroclus (*Iliad* 18 and 23) and Hector (*Iliad* 24), as well as the brief description of Achilles' funeral (*Odyssey* 24), are noteworthy not just in the narration and theme of the poem(s), but also in the ritual context in which they exist. In these three major funerals the Homeric *τάφος*, or funeral rite, was a regularized procedure (Garland 1984). Through looking at the three extended descriptions of funerals in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, commonalities between the rites, especially formulaic aspects, can be used to construct a model for Homeric funerals. This ritual included, but was not limited to: washing and anointing the corpse, clothing/covering the body, erecting a bier, the laying in state (*prothesis*) of the body upon the bier, burning the body on the pyre (cremation), extinguishing the pyre with wine, gathering the bones, wrapping the bones in cloth/placing the bones in a vessel, and burying the bones.

There are two significant divergences from the Homeric funeral paradigm detailed above that occur during the funeral of Patroclus: (1) the irregular sacrifices, both animal and human, made by Achilles; and (2) the treatment of Patroclus' bones after his cremation. Achilles conducts a sacrificial slaughter of both animals, including four horses and nine dogs, and young men – twelve Trojan youths (*Iliad* 23.170-177). Patroclus' funeral, therefore, is markedly different from the other two major funerals, and cannot be taken, as many scholars have done, as the standard Homeric funeral. This differentiation is significant because the divergences from

the typical Homeric funeral in Patroclus' funeral refer back to earlier Indo-European traditions for royal and elite members.

This paper will specifically explore one such deviation from the Homeric funerary paradigm, the sacrifice of horses at Patroclus' funeral (*Iliad* 23.171-172). Horses are not sacrificed during any of the other Homeric funerals, so the inclusion of horses in the funeral of Patroclus serves to differentiate and highlight Patroclus' funeral compared to the other Homeric funerals. Homer does not specify the origin of the sacrificed horses, but this paper will theorize that the horses were of Trojan origin and were captured as war booty. These horses then represented Trojan wealth, both physically and symbolically, and their sacrifice stands in for the destruction of Troy by the Achaeans, especially Achilles.

The sacrifice of these horses in the funeral of Patroclus will subsequently be compared to those that occur in the Hittite *Šalliš Waštaiš* ritual and the Indic *aśvamedha* ritual. In the Indo-European tradition, horse sacrifice is inextricably linked with kingship (Fortson 2005). Indeed, horse sacrifice is included in the *Šalliš Waštaiš* ritual, but is not elsewhere attested in Hittite (Puhvel 1970; Rutherford 2020). The Indic *aśvamedha* ritual was performed by a king to demonstrate and solidify power (Jamison 1996). Similarly, the *Šalliš Waštaiš* ritual was an immense demonstration and validation of power, but for a dead king or queen. Patroclus is neither alive nor a king, but this sacrifice is more about Achilles, the sacrificer, than Patroclus, the recipient of the sacrifice. In elevating Patroclus' funeral to such an extent through mortuary sacrifices associated with Indo-European kingship, the power of Achilles is in turn affirmed.

## Bibliography

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