



The Athens Greek Religion Seminar, October 3, 2017

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Aristophanes victimized: Animal sacrifice in the old comedy.

Over the past centuries old comedy has been one of most important sources for the reconstruction of the sacrificial practice and theory of ancient Greeks. The interpretation of relevant passages, however, has been conditioned by preconceptions that scholars held regarding what animal sacrifice was and what it was like. Some recent publications (e.g. by Naiden, Ekroth, Parker, and Georgoudi) on the ritual under discussion take into account a new kind of data (zooarcheology) and make use of well-known material (epigraphy, iconography) in a way that is more consistent than before. These publications tend to question the previously widespread understanding, and the very definition, of animal sacrifice in ancient Greece. In this context, it is worthwhile to reassess the value of the philological sources. The questions I would like to ask are, how often do the comic poets actually speak of sacrifice, and what do they really have to say about it? Some of the answers are surprising, since comedy turns out to be a documentation of the true piety of Athenians, rather than of their appetites for meaty meals.