



THE ATHENS GREEK RELIGION SEMINAR, Tuesday, May 14, 2024

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***Why Does Zeus Care About Burnt Thighbones Only?
Burnt Animal Bones at *Thysia* Sacrifice Between the Homeric Poems
and Zooarchaeological Evidence from the Late Bronze Age and
Early Iron Age***

ABSTRACT

This presentation deals with the selection of animal bones to be burnt at *thysia* sacrifice in the Homeric poems.

Thysia was the most significant sacrificial ritual practiced in ancient Greece. It is frequently represented in written sources and iconographical materials, and its existence has been shown to trace back to the Mycenaean period. At *thysia*, the animal victim was dedicated to the deity and divided between the gods and the human worshippers: certain parts were burnt as an offering to the divinity, while the remainder was eaten or used by the humans. The divine portion primarily consisted of select animal bones: thighbones wrapped in fat, often in combination with tail sections (the *sacrum* bone and caudal vertebrae).

Within the narrative of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, *thysia* sacrifice constitutes the predominant ritual. Some *thysia* performances are extensively described, and both immortal and mortal characters often refer to past celebrations of this sacrificial ritual. At Homeric *thysia*, the bone portion for the gods is always composed of thighbones only. However, in post-Homeric times, *thysia* sacrifice was usually characterized by the burning of thighbones together with tail sections, as indicated by the written sources, and the iconographical and zooarchaeological evidence, spanning from the Archaic to the Hellenistic periods.

The purpose of this seminar is to explore why Homeric poetry only 'cares about' burnt thighbones. For this purpose, the Homeric representations of *thysia* will be situated in relation to the zooarchaeological material contemporary to the extended and generations-old oral tradition and composition of the Homeric poems, that is from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age.

The seminar takes place **Tuesday, May 14, 2024, 17.00 (Athens)** with live presence at the Swedish Institute and online via Zoom.

To participate, please register at:

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