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# Bulls and rams

## The sacrifice to Erechtheus

### Abstract

The earliest literary reference to animal sacrifice in Athens is the passage in Homer's *Iliad* (2.550–551) that mentions Athenian youths propitiating their legendary king Erechtheus with bulls and rams. It is surprising that this passage has not been associated with the north frieze of the Parthenon, where twelve young men are leading four bovines and four sheep to sacrifice, in contrast with the ten cows on the south frieze which clearly represent the hecatomb for Athena Polias at the Panathenaia. While it is difficult to ascertain the sex of these eight animals, the horns and size of the sheep suggest that they are male. Given the prominence of the cult of the hero Erechtheus on the north side of the Acropolis, it is reasonable to identify these sacrificial animals as an offering to the *pater patriae* of the Athenians.\*

*Keywords:* Athens, Parthenon, Erechtheus, frieze, sacrifice, Panathenaia

<https://doi.org/10.30549/opathrom-14-15>

It is axiomatic that animal sacrifice was the main communal event of Greek cult practice. There is ample evidence for a variety of sacrificial rituals from ancient texts, inscriptions, vase paintings, votive reliefs, and sacrificial and dining debris found in sanctuaries.<sup>1</sup> Bovines, sheep, goats, pigs, and even birds and fish were killed at the altar not only for divinities, but also for heroes, local and pan-Hellenic like Herakles.<sup>2</sup> Such sacrifices were usually gendered, with female victims for female recipients and male for male.<sup>3</sup> One of the earliest mentions of animal sacrifice occurs in Homer (*Il.* 2.550–551) who cites the sacrifice of bulls and rams on the Acropolis for the autochthonous hero and legendary Attic king Erechtheus. Thus far there are no visual attestations to this ritual, but this paper will argue for a prominent one on the Acropolis itself.

## The Parthenon frieze

In spite of over two and a half centuries of study the sculptural program of the Parthenon, and in particular its unusual Ionic frieze, still presents some unresolved questions.<sup>4</sup> One of these concerns the quadupeds which are being led to the Acropolis for sacrifice. Although the north and south friezes are nearly identical with their 60 horsemen, chariots, older men, aulos and kithara players, and tray and hydria bearers, there is one puzzling and still unresolved anomaly between these other-

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\* An earlier version of this paper was first presented at the Religion Seminar of the Swedish Institute at Athens. I sincerely thank its director Jenny Wallensten for the invitation to speak and the audience for their comments. I am also grateful to Charalombas Krisas and Molly Richardson for advice on epigraphical matters, and Flint Dibble, the zooarchaeologist affiliated with the Wiener Laboratory for Archaeological Science of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, for helpful discussion regarding the anatomy of sheep and bovines. The suggestions and careful reading by the external reviewers proved very helpful and clarified my text for which I am most grateful.

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<sup>1</sup> For recent work on Greek animal sacrifice see Faraone & Naiden 2012; Hitch & Rutherford 2017. Also useful is *ThesCRA* 1 (2004), 60–134.

<sup>2</sup> The *locus classicus* for sacrifice in hero cult is Ekroth 2002.

<sup>3</sup> The 4th-century AD author Arnobius the Elder (7.19) makes this claim, but Tonio Hölscher (1997, 147–156) cites exceptions to this rule, especially in the case of Athena who received bull sacrifices, as prominently on the Nike parapet.

<sup>4</sup> Recent scholarship on the Parthenon frieze includes Neils 2001; 2005; Mizuta 2001; Fehr 2011; Jeppesen 2017.



Fig. 1. Bulls being led to sacrifice. Jacques Carrey drawing of Parthenon, north frieze II, 1687.



Fig. 2. Parthenon north frieze II. Acropolis Museum 857. Photograph: Alison Frantz Collection, American School of Classical Studies at Athens, AT 156.

wise parallel halves of the frieze; namely, there are ten sacrificial animals in the procession on the south, but only eight on the north.

In spite of lacunae and the lack of Jacques Carrey drawings (executed in 1674) for the south frieze, the reconstruction of ten heifers is generally accepted.<sup>5</sup> Fortunately a Carrey drawing does exist for the north frieze and it depicts four bovines (Figs. 1, 2), and one sheep (Figs. 3, 4).<sup>6</sup> Like the ten cows on the south frieze (blocks XXXIX–XLIV), the four bovines on the north (blocks I–III, Fig. 2) have horns and are being led toward the east by draped youths (N 1–8). There are three of these youths per animal on the south, but only two on the north. The four horned sheep on north block IV (Fig. 4) are attended by one draped youth each (N 9–12). The foreparts of three sheep are well preserved on the block in the Acropolis Museum, while only part of the body and hooves of the fourth can be seen between two of the youths.<sup>7</sup>

It is generally assumed that the ten female bovines or heifers on the south frieze represent the hecatomb for Athena Polias which is mentioned in an inscription of 410/409 BC.<sup>8</sup>

The number ten no doubt references the ten Attic tribes who appear elsewhere on the south frieze: in both the number of horsemen (ten groups of six each) and the number of racing chariots with *apobatai*, equestrian contestants in a tribal event at the Panathenaia.<sup>9</sup> But who are the recipients of the eight animals on the north frieze? Are they divine or heroic, male or female? And what is their relationship to the Panathenaic festival, the subject of the frieze?

In the past, few answers have been proposed, and it has generally been assumed that all of the sacrificial animals are female, i.e. cows and ewes.<sup>10</sup> Using textual evidence Erika Simon argued for separate rituals on the basis of an old Athenian law recorded in Philochoros (*FGH Hist* 328 F 10) that whenever Athena Polias received a cow, a ewe was sacrificed to Pandrosos, the dutiful daughter of King Kekrops.<sup>11</sup> This interpretation assumes that Pandrosos shared an altar with Athena in the Erechtheion since we know of no altar (except to Zeus Herkeios) in her neighboring shrine, the Pandroseion. It has since been demonstrated that this law pertains to individuals rather than to a state occasion, so the ritual is not likely to be part of the *polis*-sponsored Panathenaia.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For south blocks XXI–XLVII, see Brommer 1977, 99–105; Berger & Gisler-Huwiler 1996, 138–145; Neils 2001, 150–154; Mizuta 2001, 76–89, 299–306.

<sup>6</sup> For north blocks I–IV, see Brommer 1977, 24–28, pls. 52–55; Berger & Gisler-Huwiler 1996, 59–63; Neils 2001, 150–154; Mizuta 2001, 120–127.

<sup>7</sup> Athens, Acropolis Museum 860. According to Akira Mizuta (2001, 126–127) this represents the rear half of the fourth sheep, making for a very long animal.

<sup>8</sup> Paris, Louvre MA 831, so-called Chouseul Marble, *IG I<sup>3</sup>* 375, lines 6–7. A total of 5,114 drachmas is allotted by the treasurers for the hecatomb at the Greater Panathenaia; at approximately 50 drachmas per cow, this amount would buy at least 100 cows. See Osborne & Rhodes 2017, 474–482, no. 180.

<sup>9</sup> On the *apobatai* see Neils 2001, 138–141. There are actually eleven chariots on the north but one (North 55) is lacking an *apobates* figure; although the passenger holds a shield, s/he is wearing a long chiton. See d'Ayala Valva 1996 who suggests that the figure is Erichthonios, the inventor of the *apobates* race.

<sup>10</sup> Brommer 1977, 215 reviews the various opinions on the sex of the animals. One exception is Kardara 1961, 141, who identified the animals on the north as bulls and rams and recognized them as sacrificial victims for Erechtheus at the first celebration of the Panathenaia. Kadletz 1976, 96 refers to the animals on the north frieze as “bulls or cows”.

<sup>11</sup> Simon 1983, 61.

<sup>12</sup> Parker 2005, 264–265, n. 47.



Fig. 3. Sheep being led to sacrifice. Jacques Carrey, drawing of Parthenon, north frieze IV, 1687.



Fig. 4. Parthenon, north frieze IV. Acropolis Museum 860. Photograph: Alison Frantz Collection, American School of Classical Studies at Athens, AT 159.

Another approach is exemplified by Luigi Beschi's and Evelyn Harrison's emphasis on the number four, which they argue relates to the four original Ionian tribes.<sup>13</sup> They contrast the prevalence of the number four on the north frieze with that of the number ten on the south, and conclude that these two sections of the friezes allude to pre- and post-Kleisthenic eras. Ludwig Deubner, followed by Simon, saw the south side representing the more civic complexion of the cult and the north the more sacred.<sup>14</sup> The destination of the south procession would be the goddess of democratic Athens, Athena Parthenos, while the north proceeded to Athena Polias, the ancient palace goddess of the Bronze Age kings. However, there is no known altar of an Athena Parthenos, nor a priestess, and so it is unlikely that she would be the recipient of cult.<sup>15</sup> The earlier reference to Pheidias' statue as the *Athena Parthenos* occurs at the end of the 4th century BC.<sup>16</sup>

While such readings do not do justice to the unity and synchronous nature of the entire frieze, they also are not consistent. We know that the number four also played out in the south with the kitharists, as seen in Carrey's drawing, and possibly also the other carriers (*hydrophoroi*, *skaphephoroi*) in the procession on this side. The number ten is equally evident on the north, with the ten *apobatai*, and the 60 horsemen, as recently argued.<sup>17</sup> So while the number ten can clearly be related to the Kleisthenic tribes, the number four probably does not play any role in the overall design scheme.

<sup>13</sup> Beschi 1984, 182; Harrison 1984, 233.

<sup>14</sup> Deubner 1932, 26–27.

<sup>15</sup> See Hurwit 1999, 27 with further references.

<sup>16</sup> See Davison 2009, 70. While the term *parthenos* is used by Aristophanes in reference to Athena, it may simply be a descriptive term rather than a cult epithet.

<sup>17</sup> Neils 2001, 53–56.

## Textual evidence: bull and rams

One need not look far for a reference to the joint sacrifice of bovines and sheep. One of the earliest Greek references to an animal sacrifice,<sup>18</sup> this line from Homer's *Iliad* (2.550–551) states: “ταύροισι καὶ ἀρνειοῖς ἰλάονται κοῦροι Ἀθηναίων”. Part of the catalogue of ships in Book 2, the entire passage reads as follows:

the people of great-hearted Erechtheus, whom Athena, the daughter of Zeus reared, and the grain-giving earth bore him, and Athena set him down in Athens, in her own rich temple, where *the young men of Athens propitiate him with bulls and lambs* as the seasons come round. (trans. R. Parker 1996, 19)

This passage provides the requisites for Greek hero cult: a special locale and an annual sacrifice of male animals. In the case of the autochthonous Athenian king Erechtheus we could assume, even if there were no later Erechtheion, that his shrine was on the Acropolis where once stood the Bronze Age palace. Erechtheus was killed by Poseidon (or Zeus at the request of his brother) during his war with the god's son Eumolpos over control of Eleusis.<sup>19</sup> At some point after the Persian Wars his cult was combined with that of Poseidon who is worshiped for the first time on the citadel.<sup>20</sup>

Homer's text is corroborated by a passage in Euripides' tragedy *Erechtheus* (fr. 65.94 Austin) produced in 422 BC. At the end of the play Athena directs King Erechtheus' wife

<sup>18</sup> It is sometimes assumed that this line was added to the *Iliad* in the 6th century BC, during the Peisistratid recension of the Homeric poems which were recited during the contests of the Great Panathenaia.

<sup>19</sup> Sources include Lycurgus *Against Leocrates* 98–101, Plutarch *Moralia* 310d, Demaratus *Stories from Tragedy* FG<sup>2</sup>H F 4, Apollodorus 3.15.4–5, Hyginus 46, and Euripides *Erechtheus*.

<sup>20</sup> For the cult of Erechtheus see Kearns 1989, 160.



Fig. 5. Athena and Kekrops libating Erichthonios on the Acropolis. Attic red-figure krater, name-vase of the Kekrops Painter, c. 400 BC. Adolphseck, Schloss Fasanerie 77. Photograph: museum.

Praxitheia to build a *sekos* or shrine in the city with a stone enclosure, and in recollection of his killer Poseidon, the citizens shall sacrifice bulls and call him Poseidon Erechtheus. The ritual may have formed part of the Panathenaia, a festival which some scholars have argued was originally dedicated to Erechtheus.<sup>21</sup> The Classical version of this *sekos* is the Erechtheion which preserved either the trident mark of Poseidon (or the thunderbolt impression of Zeus) and so presumably the spot where Erechtheus entered the underworld.

The sacrifice of a ram (*ἀρνέως*) to Erechtheus is mentioned in the sacrificial calendar of Athens dated to 403/402–400/399 BC in relation to the state festival known as the Genesis.<sup>22</sup> It is assumed that this rite took place on the Acropolis in the vicinity of the Erechtheion, and would be entirely appropriate for a hero considered to be the ancestor of all Athenians. Such a rite is possibly referenced on a calyx krater attributed to the Kekrops Painter in the Schloss Fasanerie in Adolphseck which depicts Athena pouring a libation over

<sup>21</sup> Mikalson 1976, 153.

<sup>22</sup> See Lambert 2002a, 77–78; 2002b, 368. The term *ἀρνέως* is a hapax. It has been suggested that it refers to a three-year-old lamb, since the usual term used in the calendar for rams is *κρίός*.

the basket of Erichthonios (Fig. 5).<sup>23</sup> Kekrops is also present pouring a libation and offering a small sheep or lamb. The setting is the Acropolis as evidenced by the olive tree behind the basket and between the two deities. Because this vase dates to c. 400 BC, it is likely, as Alan Shapiro suggests, that it is referencing the cult of Erechtheus within the newly constructed Erechtheion.<sup>24</sup>

Herodotus (5.82.3) mentions an annual joint sacrifice to Athena and Erechtheus, but one on the part of the Epidaurians at Epidaurus. On account of a crop failure they consulted the Delphic oracle which called for new cult statues made of domesticated olive wood. This material they obtained from the sacred olive trees of Athena and in return the Athenians demanded annual offerings to Athena Polias and Erechtheus. What makes this narrative interesting is its association of olive wood not only with Athena but also with Erechtheus. Exactly what these *hierai*, or sacrificial animals were is not explained, but if combined with the earlier reference in Homer, it is clear that Erechtheus received animal sacrifice, and that he enjoyed semi-divine status as a recipient of worship along with Athena.

## The importance of Erechtheus

The importance of Erechtheus to the political and religious life of the Athenians cannot be overstated.<sup>25</sup> In terms of ancestry, cult, and political association he was the *pater patriae*. The Athenians referred to themselves as the “Erechtheidai”, that is descendants of Erechtheus. The priestess of Athena Polias, the most important cult official in ancient Athens, was supplied by the genos Eteobutadai which traced its ancestry to Erechtheus and his brother Butes.<sup>26</sup> The tribe Erechtheis headed the Athenian casualty lists, as the first among equals.<sup>27</sup> While his mythical background is somewhat obscure before the production of Euripides’ *Erechtheus*, Erechtheus emerges in the Classical period as a major protagonist in early Athenian history. The sacrifice of his daughter(s) to save the city, recorded in this tragedy, puts him on a par with Agamemnon, and reinforces his aura as a king and leader of his people.

As shown in the Homeric passage discussed above, Erechtheus had a particularly close relationship with the goddess Athena. If he is the adult equivalent of the baby-hero Erich-

<sup>23</sup> Adolphseck, Schloss Fasanerie 77. Name-vase of the Kekrops Painter, BAPD 217589. See most recently Meyer 2017, 639, figs. 346–347.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of the setting see Shapiro 2009.

<sup>25</sup> For recent discussion see Sourvinou-Inwood & Parker 2011. Summary in Kearns 1989, 160. See also Mikalson 1976 and Kron 1976, 32–83, 249–259.

<sup>26</sup> On the Eteobutadai see Parker 1996, 290–293.

<sup>27</sup> An excellent summary of the scholarship on Erechtheus is that of Adam Rappold (2015) in the *OCD Online*: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.013.2480>. See also Papachatzis 1989.

thonios, as seems likely, then Athena was his surrogate mother and reared him on the Acropolis. His autochthonous birth from Attic soil was celebrated not only in numerous Attic vase paintings of the Classical period, but also on the base of the joint cult statue of Athena and Hephaistos in their temple above the Agora.<sup>28</sup> This relationship is affirmed in the visual arts by at least three document reliefs found on Acropolis, two of which list inventories of the treasurers of Athena.<sup>29</sup> Carol Lawton has written: “Of all the eponymous heroes Erechtheus, the autochthonous king of the Athenians who shared a shrine on the Akropolis with Athena, is the most appropriate guardian of her treasury.”<sup>30</sup>

Pausanias (1.27.4) cites a statue group of the warrior-king Erechtheus fighting Eumoplos, the Thracian king of Eleusis and son of Poseidon, on the Acropolis (date unknown).<sup>31</sup> This duel is depicted near the top of the Pella hydria, c. 400 BC, with Erechtheus on the side of Athena and Eumolpos above Poseidon.<sup>32</sup> Below is the contest of these, their respective parents, for the hegemony of Athens. So while this battle narrative is rare in art and literature, it is not unknown, and its fatal end for the victor Erechtheus constituted one the *martyria* on the Acropolis.<sup>33</sup>

Not surprisingly Erechtheus and his eponymous tribe are quite prominent in the sculptural program of the Parthenon, erected from 447–432 BC. He naturally appears in the east frieze as one of the ten eponymous heroes, probably the one closest to the north side (East 46), as an elderly statesman leaning on his staff.<sup>34</sup> On the north frieze there is an eleventh chariot (not one of the tribal contestants) in which a person wearing a long chiton and holding a shield (North 62) has been identified as Erechtheus/Erichthonios since he is credited with the establishment of this special equestrian event, originally unique to Athens.<sup>35</sup> On the south among the ten groups of horsemen, Harrison has identified the six riders wearing military garb (cuirasses on South 32–37) with the tribe Erechtheis because its eponymous hero was best known as the warrior-king for his victory over Eleusis.<sup>36</sup> In a close examination of the leading *apobates* team, the author and Peter

Schultz have identified the winning charioteer (North 47) as belonging to the tribe Erechtheis on the basis of similar armor.<sup>37</sup> Thus Erechtheus and his tribe play a considerable role in the imagery of the Panathenaia as depicted on the frieze, more so than any other Attic hero or heroine.<sup>38</sup>

## Sexing the animals

One way to prove that these eight animals could be the sacrificial victims for Erechtheus is by determining their sex. The sex of sacrificial animals is a much-discussed but still problematic topic. Sacrificial calendars are not helpful as they rarely give the sex or age of the victims.<sup>39</sup> Artistic renderings of animals are often indeterminate when it comes to the genitalia.<sup>40</sup> We cannot be certain that artists would be familiar with or even care about the subtle variations in genital anatomy, except in cases where the narrative clearly indicates the sex. Such is the case in depictions of the rams who escort Phrixos over the sea and Odysseus out of the cave of Polyphemos, and the one in the cauldron tended by the daughter of Pelias, or the ram sacrificed to Ares on the battlefield.<sup>41</sup> Through the use of horns, and often genitalia, these sheep are clearly shown to be male.

The sacrificial animals on the Parthenon frieze also rarely display their sex.<sup>42</sup> Because they are being escorted by standing draped youths who conceal the pertinent areas, ascertaining the sex of the bovines and sheep is a challenge. Only the foreparts of the sheep are shown, while in the case of the bovines in only one instance is the genital area visible and it is unclear whether an udder or scrotum is intended (*Fig. 6*). It is difficult to determine the exact shape and Carrey’s drawing of 1674 (*Fig. 1*) is not particularly helpful. We know that many male domesticated animals were castrated for ease of handling, and this too complicates the images preserved in painting and sculpture.<sup>43</sup> Hence, the default for most scholars is to assume

<sup>28</sup> See Shapiro 1998, and for this imagery on the frieze of the Erechtheion, see Clements 2015; 2016.

<sup>29</sup> See Lawton 1995, 54, 86–87 no. 8 (Louvre MA 831), 89–90 no. 14 (Athens National Museum 1479), and 92–93 no. 20 (Athens Epigraphical Museum 7859).

<sup>30</sup> Lawton 1995, 89.

<sup>31</sup> Vinzenz Brinkmann recently tried to identify the Early Classical Riace warriors with this group by arguing for Thracian headgear, an *alopekis*, worn by Warrior B instead of a helmet. See Brinkmann 2016, 114–125.

<sup>32</sup> Neils 2013.

<sup>33</sup> See Meyer 2017, 261–264.

<sup>34</sup> *LIMC* 4, s.v. Erechtheus, 923–951 (Kron).

<sup>35</sup> d’Ayala Valva 1996.

<sup>36</sup> Harrison 1984, 232–233.

<sup>37</sup> Neils & Schultz 2012.

<sup>38</sup> In a forthcoming article, the author identifies the group in the Parthenon’s west pediment traditionally identified as Kekrops and his daughter (West B/C) as Erechtheus and Pandrosos (Neils forthcoming).

<sup>39</sup> There are exceptions, e.g. a civic sacrificial calendar of Miletos stipulates a “white female sheep, pregnant, mated by a white ram”. See *CGRN* no. 6.

<sup>40</sup> For a thorough discussion of the iconographic challenges see Ekroth 2014, 157–163.

<sup>41</sup> There are two images of a pre-battle sacrifice on Attic vases: a kylix in the Cleveland Museum of Art (1926.242; *BAPD* 9003650; Ekroth 2014, 160, fig. 5), and a krater in the J. Paul Getty Museum (86.AE.213, *BAPD* 15394). A ram which is thought to be a symbol of Patroklos on the hydria in Basel (Antikenmuseum BS 477, *BAPD* 203796; Ekroth 2014, 161, fig. 6) is also shown in a battlefield context. See also Jameson 1994.

<sup>42</sup> The horses on the frieze and the centaurs on the metopes of the Parthenon are clearly male, and in the case of the centaurs, the genitalia are quite prominent.

<sup>43</sup> Castration of sacrificial animals is discussed by Ekroth 2014.



Fig. 6. Detail of bovine, Parthenon, north frieze III. Acropolis Museum. Photograph: author.

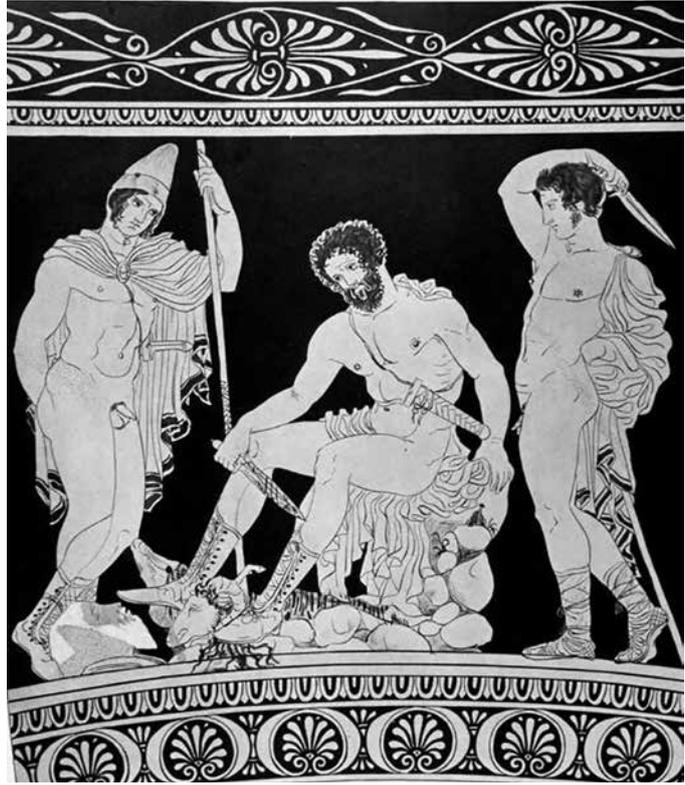


Fig. 7. Odysseus summoning the shade of Teiresias by means of the blood of two slain sheep. Lucanian red-figure calyx-krater by the Dolon Painter, c. 440 BC. Paris, Cabinet des Médailles 422. After Furtwängler & Reichhold 1900, pl. 60l.

these bovids on the north frieze are heifers like the victims on the south.

However, other diagnostic features, namely secondary sex characteristics, may be of some use. Larger size and the presence of horns are characteristic of male animals. However, both cows and bulls have horns so this feature is not useful in the case of the bovines, but it may be diagnostic when it comes to sheep. Although ewes can have horns, in much of Greek art horns indicate that the sheep depicted are meant to be seen as rams or wethers (castrated sheep) while most clearly female sheep (ewes) lack horns.

A pertinent illustration occurs on the well-known Lucanian calyx-krater in Paris which depicts Odysseus consulting the shade of Teiresias (Fig. 7).<sup>44</sup> The seer has been brought up from the underworld by means of the blood of two slaughtered sheep whose bloody heads lie at the feet of the hero. One has a prominent horn, and the other appears to be hornless. (The

hero rests his foot on an object which is more likely a stone given its position than a large horn.) In the *Odyssey* (11.35) after pouring their blood into a *bothros* or pit, the hero then burns the carcasses for the gods of the underworld, Hades and Persephone. Since Odysseus has attracted the shades of the dead, both male and female, one could surmise that a ram and a ewe are depicted although the text in Book 11 mentions only sheep. However, if one turns back to Book 10 (10.529) and Circe's instructions to the hero, we find that she specifically mentions a ram and a ewe. The artist is clearly aware of this passage and is careful to differentiate the two victims through the presence, or not, of horns.<sup>45</sup>

The visual comparanda thus strongly suggest that the sheep on the Parthenon's north frieze should be identified as rams. If the sheep are male, then the bovines should be bulls, and

<sup>44</sup> Paris, Cabinet des Médailles 422. Lucanian calyx-krater attributed to the Dolon Painter. See Trendall 1989, fig. 79. Odysseus' pit ritual is discussed in Ekroth 2018.

<sup>45</sup> It should be noted that the related scene on the pelike by the Lykaon Painter in Boston (Museum of Fine Arts 34.79, *BAPD* 213553) which depicts two horned sheep has been interpreted both as two rams, and a ram and a ewe.



Fig. 8. Ram and bull at altar with owl. Attic black-figure hydria by the Theseus Painter, c. 500 BC. Gustavianum, Uppsala University Museum 352. Photograph: museum.

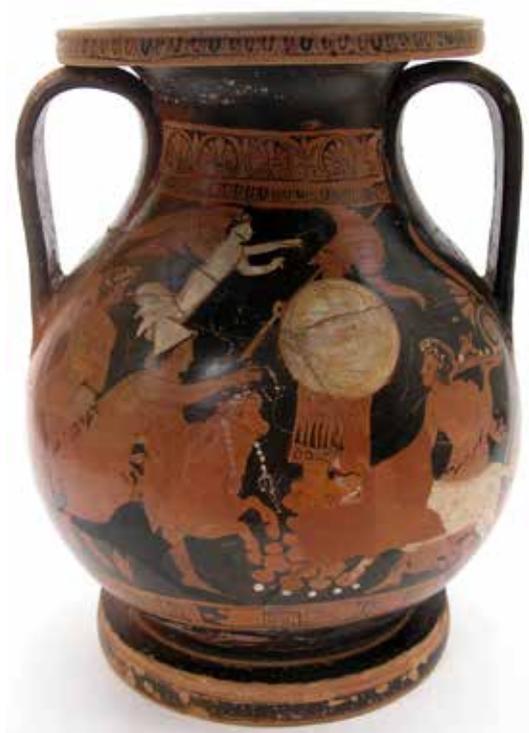


Fig. 9. Bull and ram being led to sacrifice at a tropaion. Attic red-figure pelike, c. 400 BC. Athens, National Museum 1693. Photograph: museum.

male sacrificial animals presume a male recipient.<sup>46</sup> Although Zeus or Poseidon are possibilities since both were worshipped on the Acropolis, we have no textual evidence for sacrifices to them of bulls and rams at the Panathenaia. Hence the altar of Erechtheus in the vicinity of the hero's burial spot is the likely destination for these eight animals. The confluence of associations with this eponymous hero at the north-east corner of the Parthenon (eponymous hero East 46, *apobates* winner North 47) argues for this conclusion, as does its proximity to the shrine of the hero, the Erechtheion.

We conclude with two Attic vases that show the sacrifice of a sheep and a bovine produced approximately a century apart. The first is the well-known small hydria of c. 500 BC attributed to the Theseus Painter, which was purchased in Athens in 1905 and now resides in Uppsala (Fig. 8). It depicts a large sheep being led by a draped youth to an altar atop which perches an owl.<sup>47</sup> At the right is a column with a Doric

entablature which is shorthand for a temple. Emerging from the right border is the forepart of a horned bovine, its horns decked out with red *stémata* (woolen garlands). This scene has been called a “traditional sacrifice of cow and sheep” with the presence of Athena indicated by the owl.<sup>48</sup> Although the bovine could be male or female, the sheep who otherwise looks female, has a horn in added white, which has now faded. Because of the presence of an owl, the altar has been identified as that of Athena, but the ram/bull combination is more appropriate for Erechtheus as we have attempted to demonstrate. The passage in the *Iliad* discussed above indicates joint worship of Athena and Erechtheus, and I would propose that the Uppsala hydria is possibly another representation of this important ritual act.<sup>49</sup>

The second vase is a late red-figure pelike of c. 400 BC, also from Greece (Fig. 9).<sup>50</sup> It too depicts the sacrifice of a bull with *stémata* and a white ram, but in this case they are led to a *tropaion*

<sup>46</sup> Rams can be sacrificed to female deities. A famous example is the paired sacrifice to Persephone and her mother Demeter: a ram and a sheep. It is argued that the goddess of the Underworld receives a male victim as a chthonic deity. See Healey 1990, 101–109; Gawlinski 2007, 46.

<sup>47</sup> Uppsala University 352, hydria attributed to the Theseus Painter, *BAPD* 330696. See Gebauer 2002, 81–86, P41, fig. 40; Borgers 2004,

89–90, 163 no. 161, pl. 36a.

<sup>48</sup> van Straten 1995, 17.

<sup>49</sup> This possibility was raised in the publication of the Uppsala hydria by Catharina Melldahl and Johan Flemberg (1978, 77).

<sup>50</sup> Athens, National Museum 1693. *BAPD* 30667. See Gebauer 2002, 113–115, P64, fig. 65.

*paion*, rather than an altar, by two youths. This trophy as well as the Nike hovering nearby suggest a sacrifice in honor of a military victory, while the pile of stones may suggest a hero shrine. This scene is likely a sacrifice to an Athenian hero, and if inspired by the words of Homer, that hero would be Erechtheus.

## Conclusion

While the Parthenon's sculptural program has been studied in detail for over two centuries, it behooves us to consider alternative interpretations that may carry more weight in terms of Athenian cults, and to consider the importance of Attic heroes along with deities as objects of intense veneration. Born of and dying into the very soil of Athens, they are intimately associated not only with legend but also with rituals performed to ensure their continued benevolence toward the citizens of the polis.

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## Abbreviations

*BAPD* = *Beazley Archive Pottery Database* (online)  
<https://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/pottery/default.htm>

*CGRN* = *Corpus of Greek Ritual Norms* (online)  
<http://cgrn.ulg.ac.be/>

*ThesCRA* = *Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum*,  
Los Angeles, 2005–

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