Achilles oversees a series of funeral games to celebrate the memory of Patroclus. The first event is the chariot race, and Achilles lays out rich prizes for the victors. Eumelus, Diomedes, Menelaus, Antilochus, and Meriones participate in the race. For instance, unlike the wrestling match between Odysseus and Ajax, there are no ties. The next event is the footrace, where Odysseus, Little Ajax, and Antilochus are the participants. The funeral games (Il. 23.257-897) have long served to construct persuasive theories of Greek religion and culture (e.g., Nagy 1979); but more recently, book 23 has been primarily used to interpret the origins of the Greek polis (Brown 2003), sport (Kyle 2006), and cultic heroes (Currie 2005). While there has been continued interest in how the funeral games relate to cultural identity and cultic practice, few have examined the specific ritual aspect of the games themselves. This topic is interesting in light of recent work in ritual theory, which has begun to once again influence the field of classical... The heightened interest in ritual theory makes it a worthwhile endeavor to reexamine Iliad 23, questioning how the ritual aspects of the funeral games actually work.

Abstract

Analysis of function and meaning of the Funeral Games in the Iliad. Book 23, although marking a deliberate contrast with both the preceding and the following one, is connected to the rest of the poem by a number of thematic links: this rules out the possibility that it did not belong to the original narration of Achilles’ deeds.

Keywords

Homer; Iliad; Greek poetry; Achilles

Full Text:

PDF

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