Sharing the Civic Sacrifice: Civic Feast, Procession, and Sacrificial Division in the Hellenistic Period

Stéphanie Paul

Introduction

The sharing of civic sacrifice has been intricately linked with the modes of organization of the polis itself: on the one hand, granting choice portions would have emphasized the particular status of priests, magistrates, or honored individuals within the civic community; on the other hand, the ‘egalitarian’ division of the sacrificial meat has been thought to reflect a certain ideological model of equality of rights (isonomia) that might be inherent in the conception of the polis.1 Yet, the epigraphic evidence often provides us with a partial and disparate picture that does not allow us to comprehend fully all the implications of the sacrificial division. For instance, it is not always clear whether the diversity presented in the inscriptions comes from exceptions to a norm, or simply reflects the numerous traditional practices existing in the Greek poleis.

This paper deals with the practicalities of the sacrificial division in civic rituals in the Hellenistic period. More precisely, it focuses on the two elements at both ends of the feast: the procession and the meat distribution, both employing a hierarchic principle and for which participation was strictly regulated and

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1 Detienne and Svenbro 1979, 222: “Mais d’Homère à Plutarque, pendant près de dix siècles, le repas égalitaire fonctionne, à travers les sacrifices et les banquets publics, comme une pratique institutionnelle solidaire des rapports sociaux qui sous-tendent la figure isonomique de la Cité.” Cf. Plut. Quaest. Conv. 642f–644; Ath. 1.12d–e. See also Loraux 1981, 623; Berthi-aume 1982, 53; Schmitt Pantel 1992, 49–52. For distinctions between citizens in access to the feast, see Blok and Van ’t Wout this volume; for negotiation between honor and equality in providing the feast, see Lambert this volume.
controlled. Using epigraphic evidence, I address the question of whether there existed a correspondence between the participation in the procession and the allocation of meat portions, and if so, how it was articulated and what were its purposes and meanings. I argue that several inscriptions do underline such a correspondence, insofar as those who actively took part in the procession either exclusively benefited from a share in the sacrifice, or were allotted more sizeable portions than the rest of the worshippers. As such, participation in both elements helped define one’s specific status or function within the cult and the community, in a way that is not fixed, but rather highly dependent on local contexts and traditional practices.

Zeus Sosipolis in Magnesia on the Meander

As a touchstone to address this topic, I begin with a well-known inscription from Magnesia on the Meander concerning the introduction of a new festival in honor of Zeus Sosipolis. The decree, which was passed by the Council and the People of Magnesia in the early second century, can be summarized as follows: every year in the month of Kronion, at the beginning of the sowing period, a bull was purchased by the oikonomoi and “presented” or “consecrated” (ἀναδείκνυσθαι) to Zeus. This presentation came with a prayer pronounced by the sacred herald in the presence of priests and public officials, and before nine boys and nine girls having living parents (amphithaleis). A few months later on the 12th of Artemision, a procession escorted the statues of the Twelve Gods toward the agora, where a tholos and three couches had been set up next to their altar. The bull was sacrificed to Zeus Sosipolis, and additional sacrifices were offered to Zeus, Artemis Leukophryste, and Apollo Pythios. The prescriptions concerning these sacrifices are followed by details regulating the meat distribution:

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2 *I.Magnesia* 98 = *LSAM* 32. The inscription has been cited very frequently, but see the recent studies by Wiemer 2009 on the significance of the festival within the Hellenistic context and Chankowski 2010, 392, 400–403, on the procession.

3 The eponymous stephanephoros Aristeas Demetriou is also mentioned in the inscription recording a peace treaty between Miletus and Magnesia (*I.Milet* 148), which has been conventionally dated to the year 197/6. This date has been recently moved, however, to the late 180s by Errington 1989 (*contra* Wörle 2004, who argued in favor of the earlier date).

4 On the significance of the Twelve Gods at this festival, see Georgoudi 1998a, 88.