

Cambridge University Press

0521855292 - Sanctified Violence in Homeric Society: Oath-Making Rituals and Narratives in the Iliad

Margo Kitts

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## SANCTIFIED VIOLENCE IN HOMERIC SOCIETY

In *Sanctified Violence in Homeric Society*, Margo Kitts explores the oath-making rituals and narratives of the *Iliad* and articulates a theory of ritualized violence. Analyzing ritual features that are common to acts of religious violence worldwide, she focuses on the paradigms, core metaphors, ritual fictions, and poetic registers of Homeric oath-sacrifices. Kitts sees the oath-sacrificing ritual performance as generating a symbolic text, which is interwoven with the poetic text of the *Iliad*'s oath-sacrificing narratives. The resulting intertextual rendering may be analyzed for semantic tensions. Kitts's interdisciplinary approach enlists ritual and metaphor theory to help explain some of those tensions, including that between sacrificed animals and slain men.

Margo Kitts is lecturer at Iowa State University. A scholar of ancient Near Eastern religions, she has contributed to *Kernos*, *History of Religions*, *Literature and Theology*, *Journal of Ritual Studies*, and *Metis*.

Cambridge University Press

0521855292 - Sanctified Violence in Homeric Society: Oath-Making Rituals and  
Narratives in the Iliad

Margo Kitts

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

# SANCTIFIED VIOLENCE IN HOMERIC SOCIETY

OATH-MAKING RITUALS  
AND NARRATIVES  
IN THE *ILIAD*

**MARGO KITTS**

Iowa State University



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

0521855292 - Sanctified Violence in Homeric Society: Oath-Making Rituals and Narratives in the Iliad

Margo Kitts

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521855297](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521855297)

© Margo Kitts 2005

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2005

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Kitts, Margo, 1952–

Sanctified violence in Homeric society : oath-making rituals and narratives in the *Iliad* / Margo Kitts.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-521-85529-7 (hardback)

ISBN-10: 0-521-85529-2 (hardback)

1. Homer. Iliad. 2. Epic poetry, Greek – History and criticism. 3. Trojan War – Literature and the war. 4. Holy, The, in literature. 5. Violence in literature. 6. Ritual in literature. 7. Oaths in literature. I. Title.

PA4037.K47 2005

883'.01 – dc22 2005014866

ISBN-13 978-0-521-85529-7 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-85529-2 hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

0521855292 - Sanctified Violence in Homeric Society: Oath-Making Rituals and  
Narratives in the Iliad

Margo Kitts

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

To my mother

*whose every story has an epic twist.*

Cambridge University Press

0521855292 - Sanctified Violence in Homeric Society: Oath-Making Rituals and  
Narratives in the Iliad

Margo Kitts

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	page ix
<b>Introduction: Why Another Treatment of Greek Sacrifice? . . . . .</b>	<b>1</b>
1. <b>Epics, Rituals, and Rituals in Epic: Some Methodological Considerations . . . . .</b>	<b>11</b>
2. <b>Premises and Principles of Oath- Making in the <i>Iliad</i> . . . . .</b>	<b>50</b>
3. <b>Ritual Scenes and Epic Themes of Oath-Sacrifice . . . . .</b>	<b>115</b>
4. <b>Homeric Battlefield Theophanies, in the Light of the Ancient Near East . . . . .</b>	<b>188</b>
<b>Conclusion . . . . .</b>	<b>216</b>
<i>Appendix: Homeric Texts for the Principal Oaths Discussed</i>	219
<i>Bibliography</i>	229
<i>Index</i>	241

Cambridge University Press

0521855292 - Sanctified Violence in Homeric Society: Oath-Making Rituals and Narratives in the Iliad

Margo Kitts

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

At the age of 20, I read Soren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* for a seminar on existentialism offered by John Williams at Raymond College (UOP Stockton, CA). I had scarcely any theological background, my previous exposure to biblical stories consisting of a beautifully illustrated children's book that I had encountered at a doctor's office when I was eight or nine years old. Kierkegaard's presentation of the possible mental tableaux with which Abraham may have prepared to sacrifice Isaac evoked a puzzling image I remembered from the children's book. It was a backside view of Isaac following his father up a mountain trail. Isaac looked at his father's back; his father, stooped under a bundle of wood, looked straight ahead. The viewer was allowed to perceive neither their faces nor their emotions, much as the reader of Genesis is given no index of either. Lacking those emotional signals, the story confounded me as a child, it fascinated me as a young adult, and it was one trigger for my later investigations of sacrifice and violence in the classroom. Those investigations have culminated in a handful of articles on ritualized violence and now in this book. Although this book is on the *Iliad*, I hope that the theory I present here will be seen to extend beyond Homer into the wider subject of sanctified violence, such as the violence that Abraham was prepared to perpetrate on Isaac.

Of course, a book on Homer cannot be explained away by illustrations in children's books. Other influences were more direct. One important influence was Professor Michael Nagler, who endured many semesters of Homeric Greek and oral traditional studies with me during my graduate school days at UC Berkeley. My debt to him is obvious in this book. Professor Ruggero Stefanini was truly a mentor who endured just as many semesters of Hittite language, rituals, and Homeric cross-over studies with me. Both professors indulged my obsession with the figure

Cambridge University Press

0521855292 - Sanctified Violence in Homeric Society: Oath-Making Rituals and Narratives in the Iliad

Margo Kitts

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

of Lykaon with gentle humor. Professor Gary Holland was a big aid in my Hittite studies, offering me an independent course on Hittite prayers and midwifery rituals, as well as courses with other students. On the subject of ritualized violence, and particularly its contemporary relevance, my debt is to Professor Mark Juergensmeyer, a longtime mentor and friend whose support has been inestimably precious to me. On biblical themes, I was stimulated by studies with Professors Norman Gottwald, Jacob Milgrom and Victor Gold, who are not to be held responsible for any simplifications I may have made in Chapter 4. Professor Dan Foxvog taught me what little I know of Akkadian and Sumerian, and his independent course with me on the Emesal dialect of Sumerian was terrific bait for studies I would like to continue someday. It was Professor David Stronach's gentle prodding that made me realize that the end of graduate school is not the end of one's studies, and he was right, as the ideas I have put forth in this book bear only remotely on ideas I put forth in my dissertation.

Yet writing is a lonely task, and the above friends and mentors assisted with my creation of this book primarily in the form of memories. Concurrent with the writing of this book, I fell in love with Paul Ricoeur's work on metaphor and Roy Rappaport's work on ritual. Unfortunately, it is too late to meet and thank either scholar. More recently I have been stimulated by the friendships of Classicist Madeleine Henry, who hosted my presentation of some arguments from this book before members of the Classics and Foreign Language Department here at Iowa State University, and of Hector Avalos, a fellow member of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies who took my ideas seriously enough to read and contemplate my articles from *Kernos* and the *Journal of Ritual Studies*. Phil Sellew's sessions on Greco-Roman religions at the 2004 and 2005 Upper Midwestern Regional meetings of the American Academy of Religion provided a wonderful forum for presenting my ideas before a rare group of AAR members who actually knew what I was talking about. I have him to thank for arranging that. In addition, I would like to thank longtime friends Joe Illick and Brian George for their enduring confidence in my ability to think. I also must remember Father Tom Casey (now deceased) and Padraic O'Hare (quite alive), two former colleagues who provided riotous humor and moral support during my travail at a small New England Catholic college in the 90s.

My greatest debt is to Cambridge University Press Humanities Editor Beatrice Rehl, who, then as Senior Editor in Classics, read the first chapter of this book in rough form and gambled on my ability to write something

Cambridge University Press

0521855292 - Sanctified Violence in Homeric Society: Oath-Making Rituals and Narratives in the Iliad

Margo Kitts

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

of interest. It was she who encouraged me to write this book, read the manuscript in its entirety when I first wrote it, facilitated its review by anonymous reviewers, and promoted it into production. I am grateful to her beyond words. I also thank those anonymous reviewers whose suggestions for improvement I took seriously. Then I thank Eric Crahan, Assistant Editor in Social Sciences who took over for Editor Rehl and helped me to maneuver the field of copyrights and other details. I am grateful, further, to Peter Katsirubas of TechBooks for masterminding the copyediting and production of this book and for reading it, too.

Final gratitude must go to my 11-year-old son Giordan, who had to share me with some old Greek books for a number of years, and to Molly Maquire and Liza Doolittle, our fuzzy, oversized companions whose need for romps and cuddles brought us right down to earth on a regular basis. I am also blessed with the friendships of Sita Zarnegar and Margaret Olson, with whom I have enjoyed many hours of diversionary play and politics.

Needless to say, no one of these benefactors is responsible for what I have written in this book. All errors of prose, thought, and Greek translation are mine.

Margo Kitts

Ames, Iowa

July 1, 2005