

Panel proposal

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Warfare and Sacrifice in Indigenous Southeast Asia: Anthropological and Historical Perspectives

This panel addresses the classical problem of the relationship between warfare and sacrifice; an issue which is central to the understanding of indigenous religion, cosmology and politics in Southeast Asia. Warfare and feuding, often in the form of ritually coded inter-group hostilities such as headhunting and related forms of institutionalized violence, were common in the history of indigenous Southeast Asia. At the same time, animal sacrifice was – and continues to be – a central institution in indigenous religion in the region, accompanying practically all major rituals and communal undertakings – including, in the past, warfare and raiding.

To what extent can this ritually coded violence against human others be considered as an extreme form of sacrifice – a kind of human sacrifice? Was headhunting and related forms of violence conceived as a particularly potent form of blood sacrifice, continuous with regular forms of animal sacrifice? In other words, is there a conceptual affinity between traditional warfare and sacrifice in indigenous ontologies of the region?

This issue has been amply discussed by classical scholars and historians of the Ancient World but rather less so by anthropologists and historians of Southeast Asia. A closer look at the topic in the light of the rich and varied ethnography of indigenous Southeast Asia promises to shed new light on the meaning of warfare and sacrifice and their possible conceptual interconnectedness. The panel invites contributions from various disciplines, including papers based on library research and ethnographic fieldwork.