

Lost Sanctuary

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An Allegorical Dark Souls Murder Mystery

Atop the Greek Mount of Lykaion, before the times of the Olympian Gods, a young man lost his life and was committed to a grave amidst a site of ceremonial sacrifice. The remains, bordered by large stones, lay undisturbed in what is known as the Alter of Ash until 2004 when began an excavation on the site, unearthing a mystery that seems as old as the stories that lead them to the mountain's ceremonial Alter. Human sacrifice wasn't a common occurrence, as the young man is the only body they've uncovered, though the remains of "copious animal sacrifices" were found.

There have been stories about this tallest peak of Arcadia in Greece. Known as "Wolf Mountain", the tale of Lykaion stretches back to the times of the Olympians. A then King, Lykaion (Lycaon, Lykaion, Lycaeus, etc.), wished to test the merits of his God Zeus, and so opted to try and feed him the flesh of humanity. He did so by killing his own son and offering him up as a meal to the highest of the Greek Gods. Zeus saw right through it, struck down Lykaion's home with furious lightning and transformed the king and his remaining sons into wolves. The dead son, Nyctimus – meaning Dark or Night – was resurrected.

As time passed, the mount became a site for a special ceremony, that of Lykaia, where a ritual rite of passage was held in secret for the young men of Arcadia. The rite: "the threat of cannibalism and the possibility of a werewolf transformation". Legend holds that Damarchus, an Olympic Champion, changed into a wolf during the rite and upon the ninth year following was changed back.

Mount Lykaion, in these ancient times, was a lush site. It's ceremonies hidden in dense groves of trees known as The Sanctuary of Pan. Statues adorned the base, with pillars and stone steps leading through the site where celebration and sacrifice was held.

Today, the festival has seen a resurgence, but in the form of a challenge of sport. The motto now holds that the festival's purpose is to celebrate and hone the moral perfection of man rather than offer rewards. At the site, beneath crumbled southern pillars, is carried and kept the eternal flame of Arcadia. The flame is then carried down to the stadium – perhaps a location similar to the ancient Hippodrome that is known to the site – and lights the alter.

By this point you're probably wondering when I'm going to mention something about Dark Souls, but I think you've likely drawn many of the conclusions of what this story of ancient Greece reflects. A sanctuary leading to the grave of the unearthed dark and a champion changed into a beast. The tale of Oolacile is one harvested from a murder mystery that is older than history can perceive for us. Well, a sacrificial mystery, but one so old that it is the root of what we've come to know today as the origin of werewolves.

What stands out as interesting are a few key points and a few key omissions. I've mentioned before in my last write up that Dark Souls, while it samples from ancient myth and religions, doesn't always cut its story from a single source. This is the foundation of the legend of Oolacile, but far from its whole story. It's interesting to think that if the story of Lykaion were pound for pound that of Oolacile, then a counteractive rite could have saved Artorias from the madness of the Abyss. FROM's places the responsibility of raising the Dark on man rather than a Zeus-like entity who may have resurrected the child in earlier legend. It's disturbing to think that all this depravity and succumbing to the Dark is the result of feasting upon the flesh of man, that Artorias may be corrupted insofar as to say he became cannibalistic. Is this the nature of Oolacile's downfall and the cause for the corruption that turned its citizens into creatures twisted and deformed by the Dark? Obviously, this is left to the wind. Only so much can be true, as only the hearsay of an ancient tale is what's left to explain the mysteries of their time. It's easy enough to hide the heroics of great warriors in the actions of another. This is how times are distorted in the real world, by retelling parts rather than the whole.

What's missing from this story is kept in another legend from the Far East. The root is derived from the Chinese Buddhist deific figures of the Four Heavenly Kings. They were transposed upon the Japanese story of the Shitennō or Four Guardian Kings/Braves. These are four loyal retainers who fought great battles against demons and armies under the leadership of Minamoto no Yorimitsu, a military servant to the Fujiwara Clan. Their names being Watanabe no Tsuna, Sakata no Kintoki, Urabe no Suetake, and Usui Sadamitsu.

Our chief concern is with the greatest exploit of Watanabe no Tsuna, where he single-handedly fought Ibaraki-doji, a rather vicious Oni who stood by the Southern Rashomon Gate (walling off Kyoto). Tsuna fought the demon until finally drawing his sword (a Tachi named Missing Sun) and cutting off the demon's arm. Ibaraki-Doji fled and Tsuna kept the arm wrapped and locked away in a chest. The demon later seeks out Tsuna, disguised as Tsuna's aunt, and tricks him into retrieving the arm, at which point the demon steals it back and is never seen by the gate again.

Such tales of the Shitennō are characteristic of the heroics we expect from the four knights of Gwyn. Usui Sadamitsu is often noted as being a female, and most commonly cited in the story of the ground spider, where Yorimitsu – know to this tale as Raiko – falls to illness caused by the illusion of a great spider. The hornet being a mortal enemy to spiders, safeguards her captain until the illusion is revealed and the spider is killed. The Golden Boy, Sakata no Kintoki, is a legend still celebrated in Japan today. His exploits as an immensely strong boy carried him into adulthood when he cross paths with Yorimitsu who, taken by the boy's great strength, made him one of the Shitennō. Urabe no Suetake is the marksman archer of the lot, said to be able to “shoot a needle hung from a thread”, however there is a tale where he can't hit a man at a dozen yards. Such is reminiscent of a 'blind' archer that we've come to know. The tales of Minamoto no Yorimitsu and his gallant samurai retainers are recounted in the Konjaku Monogatarish.

As a final aside for anyone who's read this far, I have a final offering for your Ashen Alters. No great conclusion, but something to consider the validity of the tale. A sort of bowing to the law of “pics or it didn't happen”. The following image is that taken of the body unearthed atop Mount Lykaion. The only known human sacrifice in its sanctuary to Zeus. Remember it next time you're standing tall over your victory at the grave of Primeval Man. The similarities are yours to draw.

<https://listserv.ucsb.edu/lsv/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind1010&L=nabokv-l&D=0&P=49411>

<http://www.thehistoryblog.com/archives/date/2016/08/15>

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Lykaion

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lykaia>

<https://books.google.ca/books?id=ojvJDAAAQBAJ&pg=PT395&lpg=PT395&dq=konjaku+suetake&source=bl&ots=C-tYKCJKodS&sig=qUCFoIOvmYoVpIlbEjkFg8pIlg8&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwitzcaUx8LSAhUJrIQKHe2wDmMQ6AEI-JzAC#v=onepage&q=konjaku%20suetake&f=false>

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minamoto_no_Yorimitsu

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konjaku_Monogatarish%C5%AB

