

Effigies and Exorcisms: Rituals to Purify Patients and Expel Hostile Spirits in Greece and the Near East

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Dedicated to the Brandeis Department of Classical Studies

and

My Father and Mother

ABSTRACT

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A thesis presented to the Graduate Program in Ancient Greek and Roman Studies

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My objective in this work is to examine magic rituals of exorcism and purification in Greece and the Near East, particularly those that involve the manipulation of wax effigies, and to demonstrate transmission of this particular sort of ritual practice from the latter civilization to the former. In doing so, I examine primary texts detailing rituals of purification and exorcism, primarily from Mesopotamia and the Greek world, but from Syria and Anatolia as well. On the one hand, the Near Eastern documents come primarily from cuneiform tablets upon which ritual prescriptions were written, although I utilize data from an inscription in Syria as well. The Greek documents, on the other hand, come from a wide array of sources, which also include inscriptions, along with sources such as historical works and poetic compositions.

When analyzing these sources, I look for specific parallels between Greek and Near Eastern rituals, whether in terms of how to appease a hostile spirit, specific types of sacrifices for purification, or similarities between incantation formulae. Lastly, I give a brief summary of material evidence for contact between Greece and the Near East. This includes an overview of Near Eastern sites where

Mycenaean pottery appears, as well as an overview of Greek expansion eastward and Assyrian expansion westward, thus establishing points of contact for the cultures I discuss. Having thoroughly examined all of these sources, I am able to demonstrate numerous parallels between Greek and Near Eastern rituals of exorcism and purification, and am able to prove the existence of the transmission of these rituals from the Near East to Greece.

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INTRODUCTION

In his treatise *On the Sacred Disease*, the physician Hippocrates begins by excoriating the so-called healers that he believed were plaguing Greece, casting them as charlatans and frauds who were out to take advantage of a naïve populace. Raging against their lack of knowledge, he states:

οὔτοι τοίνυν παραμπεχόμενοι καὶ προβαλλόμενοι τὸ θεῖον τῆς ἀμηχανίης τοῦ μὴ ἔχειν ὃ τι προσενέγκαντες ὠφελήσουσι, καὶ ὡς μὴ κατάδηλοι ἔωσιν οὐδὲν ἐπιστάμενοι, ἱερὸν ἐνόμισαν τοῦτο τὸ πάθος εἶναι.¹

Being at a loss, and having no treatment which would help, they [the healers]² concealed and sheltered themselves behind superstition, and called this illness sacred, in order that their utter ignorance might not be manifest. (Translation by W.H.S. Jones).

Hippocrates, clearly, held that this so-called ἱερὴ νόσος ‘sacred disease’ stemmed from a worldly source. While Hippocrates was ultimately correct in this assumption, his derision does not negate the fact that healers and purifiers played a large, and to many individuals important, role in the ancient world.³ A passage dealing with magic from Book XXX of Pliny the Elder’s *Naturalis Historia* attests that this sort of belief was still prominent at a later date:

In paucis tamen digna res est, de qua plura dicantur, vel eo ipso quod fraudulentissima artium plurimum in toto terrarum orbe plurimisque saeculis valuit. Auctoritatem ei maximam fuisse nemo miretur, quandoquidem sola artium tres alias imperiosissimas humanae mentis complexa in unam se redegit.⁴

1 Hippocrates, *On the Sacred Disease*, II.6-10.

2 A note on brackets and parentheses: Throughout this work I shall try to stick as closely as possible to the text of the scholars I cite. Thus, if a scholar uses brackets to make emendations or to add explanation to a text, I shall keep the brackets. Likewise, if parentheses are used for the same purpose, I shall keep with the parentheses. For my part, I shall use parentheses when making remarks within my own text and brackets to provide explanation to an outside source such as what I have done above.

3 Burkert, 1992, 55-65.

4 Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, XXX.1.1-1.6.

Indeed, there are few subjects on which more might profitably be said, were it only that, being, as it is, the most deceptive of all known arts, it has exercised the greatest influence in every country and in every age. And no one can be surprised at the extent of its influence and authority, when he reflects that by its own energies it has embraced, and thoroughly amalgamated with itself; the three other sciences which hold the greatest sway upon the mind of man.⁵ (Translation by John Bostock).

Indeed, as the passage from Hippocrates attests, the belief that the source of many illnesses was attacks by ghosts and hostile spirits was an accepted explanation, as was the corresponding notion that a skilled purifier or exorcist was needed to drive away the hostile entity, either from the body of the patient himself or, if a ghost was simply haunting a certain location, but not necessarily harming anybody, from the site. The passage from Pliny the Elder, moreover, demonstrates that similar beliefs in purificatory magic were not limited to the time of Hippocrates. Furthermore, of the *tres artes* 'three sciences' that Pliny mentions, one of them was medicine, and another was religion.⁶

Thus, magic had a strong association with healing and purification via divine means in the Classical era. Such beliefs, however, were by no means unique to the Classical world. In fact, they had distant and detailed antecedents in the Near East, particularly in Mesopotamia, though are found in Anatolia and Syria as well. A considerable body of literature exists from that part of the world describing the numerous types of phenomena and illnesses that were believed to be caused by hostile spirits and ghosts and, as might be expected, how to deal with them. In all of this, many parallels exist between the Greek and the Near Eastern methods of exorcism and purification. In particular, one encounters the use of effigies that represent the attackers, incantations and recitations to bind them and drive them away, and in many cases the offering of meals and gifts to the supernatural visitant along with the depositing of its effigies in a far-away place or family tomb, thus constituting a ritual reburial.⁷

⁵ For the purposes of this essay, I shall limit my discussion of exorcisms and purification rituals in the Classical world to those of the Greeks or, in one instance, to a later Roman author whose history touches upon Greek city-states in southern Italy. I cite Pliny the Elder above to demonstrate that even though the rituals and beliefs I examine are pre-Roman in origin, they by no means ceased to exist after the Roman conquest of the Mediterranean but, on the contrary, continued to flourish. Thus, a broader study that incorporates purification and exorcism rituals from Rome and the Western Mediterranean is necessary, but I do not have the time to explore thoroughly those sources for this essay.

⁶ Graf, 2003, 49-50. The last of the three 'sciences' was astrology.

⁷ Faraone, 1991, 180-189.

Furthermore, as I shall show, the similarities in exorcism and purification rituals go beyond the use of effigies and incantations and even involve specific parallels such as the same sacrificial animal to drive away the same sort of affliction. Similarities in ritual practice are the first reason I argue that the Greeks adopted these practices from the Near East, and the second is that the Near Eastern material is older than the Greek. Where the Hittite material I cite dates from the Late Bronze Age,⁸ the Mesopotamian material to the Neo-Assyrian period,⁹ that is, from the beginning of the tenth century B.C.E. to the end of the seventh, and the Syrian material to the eighth century,¹⁰ the Cyrenean foundation oath I shall discuss dates to the seventh century B.C.E.,¹¹ while the two Greek ritual prescriptions from Selinus and Cyrene date to the middle of the fifth century and 330-325, respectively.¹² Finally, I believe the Greeks would have encountered these practices both when trading with and settling towards the Near East. If the parallels I discuss between these rituals are not enough to establish contact between these civilizations by themselves, then the material evidence, along with evidence for Greek expansion eastward and Assyrian expansion westward, is. Indeed, upon a close examination of both Greek and Near Eastern rituals of purification and exorcism, it becomes clear that the Greeks borrowed many elements of these rites from the Near East and adapted them to their own purposes.

8 Faraone, 1993, 63.

9 Scurlock, 2006, 2.

10 Faraone, 1993, 62.

11 Faraone, 1993, 60.

12 Robertson, 2010, 4-7.

I: Effigies and Purification in the Greek World

Before discussing purification¹³ and exorcism rituals in the Greek world, one must acknowledge straightaway that primary sources on this matter are scarce. While Mesopotamian civilization has a large corpus of literature on the subject, the Greek material is rarer by far, though it is by no means nonexistent. Therefore, the scholar often must fill in the gaps that are encountered when tracing the contact between the Classical World and the Near East by drawing conclusions based on a thorough analysis of the material at hand. As I shall show, connections do indeed exist between Greek and Near Eastern purification and exorcism rituals, and a study of this subject proves illuminating for those scholars who wish to delve further into the subject of cross-cultural contact and hybridity beyond the well-trodden realm of creation myths and syncretic deities. And, although hardly unique to the Greek world, the employment of effigies to purify a given location of ghosts and hostile spirits was key to Greek exorcism rituals and occurred with enough frequency as to necessitate an overview of their use when beginning this discussion.¹⁴ Two particular episodes, one from the *Peloponnesian War* and the

13 For the purposes of this work, when discussing ‘purification’ I am referring to the ritual cleansing of a site or individual from ghosts, hostile spirits, and in certain cases, blood-guilt. Typically, I shall not use this term in the context of the preliminary rites performed by an individual before conducting religious ceremonies. This is not to say that I believe these rites were viewed as being conceptually different. I make this distinction simply for the purpose of concision in this paper.

14 Throughout this work, I discuss effigies as they were used to compel a hostile spirit or ghost to flee a particular site or to end its persecution of an afflicted individual. I shall not delve into an examination of effigies in relation to their use in the manipulation of spirits to attack one’s enemies. This is not to say, however, that little evidence remains for this practice or that such a practice was not well known throughout the ancient world. Indeed, in his *Laws* Plato states that:

ταῖς δὲ ψυχαῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων δυσωπομέναις πρὸς ἀλλήλους περὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα οὐκ ἄξιον ἐπιχειρεῖν [πειθεῖν], ἄν ποτε ἄρα ἴδωσί ποιν κήρινα μιμήματα πεπλασμένα, εἴτ’ ἐπὶ θύραις εἴτ’ ἐπὶ τριόδοις εἴτ’ ἐπὶ μνήμασι γονέων αὐτῶν τινές, ὀλιγωρεῖν πάντων τῶν τοιούτων διακελεύεσθαι μὴ σαφέες ἔχουσι δόγμα περὶ αὐτῶν.

It is futile to approach the souls of men who view one another with dark suspicion if they happen to see images of moulded wax at

other from the history of Justinus, illustrate this practice. In the first book of his history, Thucydides described how Pausanias, the general of the Spartans, attempted to wrest control over Sparta and all of Hellas through the aid of the Persian king Xerxes. Word of his plan got out, and when the Ephors at Sparta gained irrefutable evidence of Pausanias' guilt, they made plans to arrest him. As the Ephors were about to seize him, one of their number gave a signal to Pausanias indicating what was about to happen and thus Pausanias fled to a nearby temple of Athena known as the Brazen House. Once inside the temple he had nowhere to go, and the Ephors blocked the exits, trapping him inside.¹⁵ Pausanias slowly starved inside the Brazen House and, when he was at the point of death, the Ephors brought him out and he died on the spot. Initially, the Ephors were going to cast Pausanias' body into the Kaiadas chasm, but eventually settled upon burying him nearby.¹⁶ Soon, however, Apollo instructed the Spartans to rebury Pausanias at the place of his death and:

ὡς ἄγος αὐτοῖς ὄν τὸ πεπραγμένον δύο σώματα ἀνθ' ἑνὸς τῇ Χαλκιοίκῳ ἀποδοῦναι.¹⁷

That they should recompense Athena of the Brazen House with two bodies in place of one, since their act had brought a curse upon them. (Translation by Charles Forster Smith).

And so the Spartans had two bronze statues made and dedicated these as a substitute for Pausanias, thereby removing the curse.¹⁸

While informative as a simple reference to the use of effigies in purification rituals, by itself Thucydides' account of the Pausanias incident remains somewhat obscure. In particular, the exact nature of the curse is never explained. Two excerpts from Plutarch, however, shed light on the issue. The first of these was cited from Plutarch indirectly by an unnamed scholiast who was writing a commentary on Euripides' *Alcestis*. It reads:

doorways or at points where three ways meet, or it may be at the tomb of some ancestor, to bid them make light of such portents, when we ourselves hold no clear opinion concerning them. (Translation by R.G. Bury).

Thus, the use of images in black magic was attested in the eras discussed in this work, but again, for the purpose of concision the subject will remain untreated in this essay. Plato, *Laws*, 933B.

15 Thucydides, 1.132-1.134.2.

16 Thucydides, 1.134.2-1.134.4.

17 Thucydides, 1.134.4.

18 Thucydides, 1.134.4.

Ψυχαγωγοί τινες γόητες ἐν Θεσσαλίᾳ οὕτω καλούμενοι, οἵτινες καθαρμοῖς τισι καὶ γοητείαις τὰ εἰδῶλα ἐπάγουσί τε καὶ ἐξάγουσιν· οὗς καὶ Λάκωνες μετεπέμψαντο, ἥνικα τὸ Πausανίου εἰδῶλον ἐξετάραξε τοὺς προσιόντας τῷ ναῷ τῆς Χαλκιοίκου, ὡς ἱστορεῖ Πλούταρχος ἐν ταῖς Ὀμηρικαῖς μελέταις.¹⁹

Some sorcerers in Thessaly are in this way called ψυχαγωγοί, who with certain purifications and magic spells send ghosts out [i.e., to attack] as well as send them away. Even the Spartans sent for them, when the ghost of Pausanias terrified people as they were entering the temple of the Goddess of the Brazen House, as Plutarch says in his *Lectures on Homer*. (Translation by Christopher A. Faraone).

Thus, in the commentary the scholiast explained the meaning of the word ψυχαγωγός, a type of sorcerer who, according to the scholiast, was both able to send ghosts out to attack individuals by means of magic spells and to drive them away through purificatory rites. So effective were these practitioners that, when the ghost of Pausanias was frightening worshipers away from the Brazen House, the Spartans sent for one to drive it away. In the next passage, Plutarch himself stated that:

ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Σπαρτιάταις χρησθὲν ἰλάσασθαι τὴν Πausανίου ψυχὴν ἐξ Ἰταλίας μεταπεμφθέντες οἱ ψυχαγωγοὶ καὶ θύσαντες ἀπεσπᾶσαντο τοῦ ἱεροῦ τὸ εἰδῶλον.²⁰

In a similar way, when the Spartans, too, were ordered by the oracle to appease the spirit of Pausanias, the ψυχαγωγοί were summoned from Thessaly,²¹ and after they made sacrifice, they drew the ghost [εἰδῶλον] from the temple. (Translation by Christopher A. Faraone).

With these two passages in mind, the account from Thucydides becomes much clearer. The ghost of Pausanias was haunting the Brazen House, causing trouble for the worshipers, and thus needed to be expelled from the premises via reburial. And, as stated above, while one could infer from Thucydides that the bronze effigies were employed in a ritual context, the passages from Plutarch and the scholiast confirm that these were employed by the Spartans in a ghost-banning ritual. The quotation from Plutarch proves particularly informative with its reference to a sacrifice that was made before expelling Pausanias' spirit from the premises. Furthermore, the aforementioned sacrifice involved rites of reburial. Burial and reburial rites in the Greek world involved a ritual meal known as a δεῖπνον or δαίς that consisted of various foods of which the departing ghost partook.²² Thus, the sacrifice described in

19 Scholiast, Euripides, *Alcestis*, 1128=Plutarch, *Moralia*, Fragment 126.

20 Plutarch, *Moralia*, 560.E.5-F.1.

21 Although the manuscripts read ἐξ Ἰταλίας, most editors amend the text to ἐξ Θεσσαλίας to make it consistent with the rest of the fragment. Faraone, 1991, 186.

22 Johnston, 1999, 41.

Plutarch can be taken to mean the ritual meal which the Spartans offered to Pausanias. Also, just as a living host would wash before a meal, water was offered to the deceased individual in order that he might do the same. Finally, offerings were made to the dead in the forms of jewelry, flowers, and little gifts such as swords, strigils, and mirrors.²³ After these actions the individual (or effigy) was buried. With all this in mind, clearly these effigies played a role in a ritual context, as opposed to being simple votive offerings.

Though offering a tantalizing glimpse into the magical practices employed in the Greek world to cleanse sites of ghosts, when taken by itself the aforementioned episode would not be able to provide a thorough look at the practices of Greek purification and exorcism. A second episode, however, adds to the knowledge of this practice. When the people of Croton and Metapontum were further colonizing Southern Italy in the late sixth century B.C.E., they besieged and overran the city of Siris.²⁴ In this process, they slew fifty young men who had fled to the temple of Athena for safety, as well as killing the priest of the temple before the altar.²⁵ For this act of sacrilege, pestilence fell upon the inhabitants of both cities, and soon the people of Croton inquired of the oracle at Delphi what could be done to lift the curse. They received an answer that:

Finem mali fore, si violatum Minervae numen & interfectorum manes placassent. Itaque cum statuas juvenibus justae magnitudinis, & imprimis Minervae fabricare coepissent, Metapontini cognito oraculo deorum, occupandam manium & deae pacem rati, juvenibus modica & lapidea simulacra ponunt, & deam panificiis placant.²⁶

There would be an end of the evil, if they appeased the offended spirit of Minerva and the *manes* of the slain youths. And so after they had begun to fashion statues of the correct height for the youths, and especially for Minerva, with the oracle of the gods understood, the Metapontines reckoned the peace of the *manes* and the goddess was gained, and they placed stone effigies of moderate height for the youths, and they appeased the goddess with cakes.

Thus the Metapontines took similar measures after learning of the oracle the people of Croton received.

In their case they dedicated fifty smaller statues of stone for the *manes* of the youths and made a

23 Johnston, 1999, 41.

24 Bicknell, 1966, 294.

25 Justinus, *Justini Historiae Philippicae*, 20.2.

26 Justinus, *Justini Historiae Philippicae*, 20.2.

sacrifice of cakes to appease Athena. Thus, the pollution was removed from both cities and the curse was lifted.²⁷

Although the circumstances necessitating rites of purification in the case of Sparta and that of Croton and Metapontum were not exactly the same, the similarities involving the use of effigies to appease both ghosts and the same offended deity present within the rites themselves are enough to conclude that they stem from the same tradition. Beyond the fact that sacrifice was present in both instances (as this was simply a matter of course in ancient Greek ritual and, indeed, religious practices in many parts of the ancient Mediterranean), the use of effigies as replacement for human bodies in both episodes is telling. Moreover, another common thread between these stories is the presence of violent death which in both instances occurred in a sacred space.²⁸ As in many parts of the ancient world, a common belief was that an unnatural or agonizing death could result in restless spirits who would return to torment the living.²⁹ Thus, these narratives provide concrete examples from the Hellenic world of effigies being employed in a ritual context to banish hostile spirits and remove impurity from the temple.

I have established that effigies played a key role in ridding ancient Greek *πολεῖς* from troublesome spirits. This fact alone, however, does not provide insight enough to explain the precise nature of these rituals, and the practice occurred frequently enough in ancient Mediterranean civilizations that it cannot be used to establish a direct link with neighboring cultures by itself. Before delving into the more specific aspects of Greek purification and exorcism rituals that can provide evidence of cross-cultural contact, however, I must first examine how effigies were used in the civilizations of the Near East, especially that of Mesopotamia.

²⁷Justinus, *Justini Historiæ Philippicæ*, 20.2.

²⁸It should be noted here that while violence in a sacred space was considered an almost certain way to bring about a curse, a violent death needn't necessarily occur in a sacred precinct for the soul of the departed to return as an avenging spirit.

²⁹Luck, 1985, 165.

II: Effigies in Mesopotamian Civilization

While sources on exorcism and purification in the Greek world are rare, by no means is the case this way when dealing with Mesopotamia. Indeed, quite a large number of compilations and compendia are already at hand for the curious scholar, and numerous texts in university collections in both Europe and the United States have yet to be published.³⁰ Therefore, just about any conceivable aspect of this field of study is, if not easy in and of itself, at the very least far less difficult than its equivalent field in the Greek world, and this includes the use of effigies. Thus, one is able to give a relatively detailed account of how effigies were employed in rituals of exorcism in Mesopotamia. Before performing the ritual itself, the *āšipu* or ‘exorcism-priest’ would need to create the effigies that he would employ. These effigies were in general very simple, usually being made of clay, though at times they were mixed with tallow, wax, or ox blood.³¹

The process of creating these effigies, however, was more involved than one might initially imagine, as the source of the clay used to make the figurines (often a potter’s pit) needed to be purified. This preliminary procedure could take up to three days and often involved making offerings of flour, semi-precious stones, and precious metals as the purchase price for the clay. During the initial process, the offering would be thrown into the pit while the name of the afflicted individual was recited.³² After

30 For a particularly large volume of texts dealing with the subject of exorcism and purification with a thorough introduction beforehand, see Scurlock, 2006. For further purification texts, one may also consult Reiner, 1958. Lastly, for extra references to the use of effigies specifically, see Rituals 07 and 13 in Caplice, 1974.

31 Scurlock, 2006, 49.

32 Scurlock, 2006, 49

this initial ritual, the *āšipu* could create the effigy. Depending on the ritual, the effigy represented a hostile ghost, an illness, a demon, or “whatever evil thing” the source of the affliction happened to be.³³ Usually, one or two effigies were considered sufficient, although in some cases several effigies were created to stand in for several sources of affliction. Furthermore, if the source of the disturbance was believed to be witchcraft, the effigies came to represent the anonymous sorcerer and sorceress who had cast the affliction.³⁴

Beyond creating effigies to represent what was troubling the patient, the effigies needed to be identified. Thus, the name of whatever evil the effigy was to represent was written upon the effigy itself, often on its left shoulder, although in some cases the effigy was simply told its name. This name, however, was generally not very specific, particularly when the ritual for which the effigy was intended was meant to banish a ghost. Often, the patient did not know the name of the ghost that was afflicting him and, even if he were certain that he did, using general, broad terminology when labeling the effigy was better, lest a mistake be made and the ritual fail to banish the true culprit behind the attacks.

Thus, the effigy was given a name along the lines of “ghost who is persecuting PN (the patient).”³⁵ Therefore, even though effigies were created for a wide variety of rituals meant to banish several forms of evil, the identities assigned to them were generally rather vague. Lastly, the effigy could be adorned in various manners, including dressing it in a garment which was often though not always red or black in color, anointing it with oil, and giving it jewelry such as a carnelian necklace. The effigy may also have been given implements such as a golden staff, a copper axe, or a lead pipe or ox horn of the type used to perform libations for the dead.³⁶

Once the effigy was made, it would be employed in the appropriate ritual and then disposed of accordingly. Depending on the perceived source of affliction one could choose from three main ways

33 Scurlock, 2006, 49.

34 Scurlock, 2006, 49.

35 Scurlock, 2006, 49.

36 Scurlock, 2006, 50.

to go about this. If the source of trouble was believed to be a ghost, the effigy would generally receive a ritual burial or, barring this, disposal in an appropriate place such as the steppe.³⁷ If, however, the cause of the evil was believed to be witchcraft, harsher steps were taken and the effigies (in this case representing the anonymous sorcerers and sorceresses) were consumed by fire.³⁸ As for the first method, however, the assumption was that the ghost in question was causing problems simply because the spirit was not receiving its due funerary offerings or because its body had not been buried properly in the first place. Therefore, the solution to the problem lay in a ritual reburial.³⁹

To go about this, the effigy was first provided with a ritual feast for a period of up to three days. The contents of the feast could include broth, roasted grain flour mixed with water and beer, gruel, and porridge. The intent of the feast was to ensure that the ghost had enough provisions for its journey to the Netherworld.⁴⁰ Supplying these provisions, however, was not enough by itself to guarantee that the troublesome ghost would depart. Therefore, along with the ritual feast, the effigy standing in for the ghost would often be compelled to accept the offerings. Ways of doing this included chaining the effigy, covering its eyes and thereby blinding it, gagging it, or twisting its feet backward.

Another common practice was to place the figure on the roof of the patient's home amongst cedar chips, surrounded by a magic circle of flour, and covered with an unbaked fermenting vessel lest the ghost escape into the air. Furthermore, these precautions were often accompanied by threats and forced oaths in order to ensure the ghost would depart.⁴¹ After all this, the effigy was ready for burial. Often the effigy would be interred in a jar or perhaps a copper cup and buried in the steppe, a drainage pit, or even in the patient's family tomb. The burial was typically performed at sundown in order that the ghost would be sent down along with the sun to the Netherworld. Once this was done, a libation

37 Scurlock, 2006, 54-55.

38 Abusch, 2002, 228-234.

39 Scurlock, 2006, 50.

40 Scurlock, 2006, 50.

41 Scurlock, 2006, 50-51.

may have been performed and the site was often surrounded by a protective magic circle of flour.

Thus, the ritual burial was complete.⁴²

A similar ritual process with a somewhat harsher outcome (for the ghost, at any rate) was one that ended in disposal rather than burial for the effigy involved. Like the procedure for burial, the effigy and thus the ghost in question would receive a meal for up to three days. Also, as with burial, the dispatch would occur at sunset so that the ghost would forever depart to the Netherworld. In this case, however, the effigy would be dispatched in a more unpleasant manner. Often, the effigy representing the offending ghost would be fastened to a tree and forced to swear an oath never to return. Even more extreme, a wax effigy could be placed in a vessel, at which point a torch would be raised to it and the *āšipu* would make the patient recite an incantation. After this, the contents of the vessel would be discarded in an uninhabited wasteland. Such measures were only taken with ghosts the patient could not identify. If the patient believed the ghost to be a member of his family a ritual burial such as was described above was considered the appropriate course of action.⁴³

Harsh though the last type of ritual may have been, that ritual was not as extreme as the sort reserved for instances when sorcery was believed to be involved. In the anti-witchcraft text *Maqlû*⁴⁴ a main way of ridding an individual from the effects of sorcery is, as the name suggests, burning wax effigies made to represent those who had inflicted the harm upon him. The central idea of this act is that, unlike the ghosts whose images are generally not burned and thus return to netherworld, the witches' spirits are scattered, never finding their place in the afterlife.⁴⁵ A different method with the same ultimate effect is also described in the same text. Effigies of dough are created and again, instead of burying them, they are fed to wild animals such as dogs and vultures. Just as the wax effigies were consumed wholly by the fire, the effigies of dough are completely torn apart by the beasts, fully

42 Scurlock, 2006, 51.

43 Scurlock, 2006, 53-55.

44 That is, "Burning."

45 Abusch, 2002, 229.

destroying the bodies of the sorcerers and preventing them a place in the Netherworld.⁴⁶

Thus, the corpus of Mesopotamian literature contains a wide range of instances involving illnesses induced by hostile spirits or sorcery and just as wide a list of ways to deal with these problems. Effigies of the offending ghosts or evil witches were created and employed in the ritual appropriate to the specific situation, which were then buried or discarded accordingly. At any rate, now that the use of effigies has been treated in both its Greek and Mesopotamian contexts, I am now able to move on to discuss specific parallels between the Hellenic world and the Near East in these practices.

46 Abusch, 2002, 230.

III: Wax Effigies and Their Employment in Their Greek and Near Eastern Contexts

From what has been treated above, the parallels between the ritual feasts in both Greek and Mesopotamian reburial rites are readily apparent. Both of these rituals employed an effigy that stood in for the ghost and partook in a ritual meal. These rituals also involved the adornment or provision of jewelry for the figure as well as gifts that could be brought down to the Netherworld. Lastly, as we show, a ritual burial was conducted, thereby completing the process and laying the roving spirit to rest. The particulars of ritual reburial, however, are not the only point of contact between Greece and the Near East. When speaking of the purifiers who claimed to be able to heal patients of illnesses brought on by divine forces, Hippocrates states that after they had recited their incantations and employed καθαρμοί or “objects of purification”:⁴⁷

καὶ τὰ μὲν τῶν καθαρῶν γῆ κρύπτουσι, τὰ δὲ ἐς θάλασσαν ἐμβάλλουσι, τὰ δὲ ἐς τὰ ὄρεα ἀποφέρουσιν, ὅπη μηδεὶς ἄψεται μηδὲ ἐμβήσεται.⁴⁸

Some [of the objects of purification] they hide in the earth, others they throw into the sea, others they carry away to the mountains, where nobody can touch them or tread on them. (Translation by W.H.S. Jones).

Hippocrates' description is reminiscent of the ritual procedure discussed above to banish an unidentified ghost. Unlike the process for a ritual burial, the *āšipu* created an effigy of wax which was placed in a vessel and melted with a torch while an incantation was recited. While Hippocrates does

47 Hippocrates, 1952, IV.44. Dismissive as Hippocrates was of the practices of these purifiers, he does not go into detail about what sort of implements were employed. The only one mentioned in particular is blood, which was sprinkled over the patient.

48 Hippocrates, *On the Sacred Disease*, IV.43-46.

not mention the melting of wax effigies specifically, the words he uses for “objects of purification,” καθαρμοί, is worth investigating. Ambiguous by itself, a similar word, κάθαρμα, can refer to that which is thrown away in cleansing or the refuse left over from a sacrifice. Furthermore, κάθαρμα can also refer to a sort of residue, such as that left over from ore after smelting.⁴⁹ Therefore, it is not a stretch to believe that Hippocrates was referring to healers who would melt wax effigies in their purification rituals in order banish harmful spirits from the presence of their patients. If Hippocrates was indeed referring to healers such as these, a parallel between Greek and Near Eastern purification rites would be established. Regardless of one’s interpretation of καθαρμοί, however, its disposal in the wilderness where no one should come across it is certainly in line with what one encounters in Mesopotamian practice.

While the potential for Greek and Near Eastern interaction that one can infer from rites of reburial and authors such as Hippocrates is intriguing, taken by itself this evidence for cross-cultural contact would hardly be overwhelming. Thankfully, much more concrete evidence exists in the form of an inscription from Cyrene. Excavated by the Italians, the inscription bears what is presumed to be the foundation oath taken by Theraian settlers when they founded their new colony in Libya.⁵⁰ The inscription reads:

ἐπὶ τούτοις ὄρκια ἐποίησαντο οἱ τε αὐτεῖ μένοντες καὶ οἱ πλέοντες οἰκίζοντες καὶ ἀράς ἐποίησαντο τὸς ταῦτα παρβεῶντας καὶ μὴ ἐμμένοντας ἢ τῶν ἐλ Λιβύαι οἰκεόντων ἢ τῶν αὐτεῖ μενόντων. κηρίνος πλάσσαντες κολοσὸς κατέκαιον ἐπαρεώμενοι πάντες συνενθόντες καὶ ἄνδρες καὶ γυναῖκες καὶ παῖδες καὶ παιδίσκαί· τὸμ μὴ ἐμμένοντα τούτοις τοῖς ὄρκίοις ἀλλὰ παρβεῶντα καταλείβεσθαί νιν καὶ καταρρὲν ὥσπερ τὸς κολοσός, καὶ αὐτὸν καὶ γόνον καὶ χρήματα.⁵¹

On these conditions they made an agreement, those who stayed here and those who sailed on the colonial expedition, and they put curses on those who should transgress these conditions and not abide by them, whether those living in Libya or those staying in Thera. They moulded wax images and burnt them while they uttered the following imprecation, all of them, having come together, men and women, boys and girls: 'May he, who does not abide by this agreement but transgresses it, melt away and dissolve like the images, himself, his seed and his property'. (Translation by Christopher A. Faraone).

Thus, the settlers from Thera swore an oath at the founding of Cyrene and uttered a curse upon

49 LSJ⁹ s.v. κάθαρμα.

50 Jeffery, 1961, 139.

51 SEG ix.3.41-49.

themselves that whoever violated the oath would be utterly destroyed along with his lineage and his possessions.⁵² Furthermore, wax effigies were melted during the ceremony in order to bind magically the founders to the oath they had taken. As for the wax images themselves, the first parallel from the Near East that comes to mind is *Maqlû*. The burning of wax effigies was a key element of that text, with the reciter commanding “Dissolve, melt, drip ever away!”⁵³ Furthermore, in addition to the presence of wax figures, the language employed in this text is similar to the language in the oath above; both express the wish that the wrongdoer dissolve and melt away. The main difference between these two texts is, of course, their intended targets. Where *Maqlû* is a lengthy ritual targeted against practitioners of witchcraft, the example from Cyrene directs the curse at those who would violate their oath.

Therefore, while parallels between the two do indeed exist, it is still worth pointing out that they remain different from one another in purpose. Another Near Eastern text, however, bears a very similar purpose. An Aramaic inscription from the site of Sefire in Syria bears witness to a treaty between two kings; Bir-Ga’yah and Matî`el.⁵⁴ After a lengthy introduction in which numerous gods both Mesopotamian and Syrian are invoked, curses are placed on Matî`el, the subordinate king, should he ever violate his treaty with Bir-Ga’yah.⁵⁵ Among these imprecations are the words “Just as this wax is burned by fire, so shall Arpad [the city of Matî`el] be burned” and “Just as this wax is burned by fire, so shall Matî[`el be burned by fi]re.”⁵⁶ In this case the connections between the Near Eastern text and the Greek text from Cyrene are clear. Both are instances of oaths involving the burning of wax effigies, thereby cursing the individuals whom they represent should those individuals ever violate their

52 Although the ritual in the Cyrenean oath does not involve purification or exorcism, which is the main focus of this work, the way in which wax images are manipulated bears too many similarities to what one encounters from the Near East to ignore it. Thus, a discussion of this oath will serve to shed light on the Greek and Near Eastern connections between the use of images in magic rituals in their broader context.

53 *Maqlû* I.140-43/V.152-55 cited in Abusch, “Socio-Religious Framework,” 229.

54 Sefire Inscription, cited in Fitzmyer, 1961, 178-222.

55 Fitzmyer, 1961, 185.

56 Fitzmyer, 1961, 185.

respective oaths.

A Hittite military oath with similar actions and outcomes is also worthy of discussion. In order to ensure the loyalty of the soldiers, the following ritual was performed:

Then he throws wax and mutton fat [on a pan] and says: Just as this wax melts, and just as this mutton fat dissolves, whoever breaks these oaths, [shows disrespect to the king] of the Hatti [land], let him melt lik[e wax], let him dissolve like [mutton fat].' [The me]n declare 'So be it!' (Translated by Albrecht Goetze).⁵⁷

Thus, as with the rituals from Cyrene and Sefire, wax (along with mutton fat, in this case) is melted to serve as an analogy for those who would break the oath. Taking into account the Cyrenean oath's similarity to *Maqlû*, the treaty from Sefire, and the Hittite military oath in terms of language and the extra parallels that the Greek example has with the Aramaic and the Hittite regarding their purpose, along with the similarities to funerary and exorcism rites treated above, the borrowing of Near Eastern magical and purificatory rituals by the Greeks becomes difficult to deny. And, though one could insist on emphasizing the differences in purpose between the Cyrenean oath and *Maqlû* along with the fact that the Aramaic treaty applied to two kings as opposed to an entire population, in light of the strong parallels between these texts the differences are rendered trivial.

One should not be surprised that when borrowing practices from other cultures the Greeks would adopt these traditions to their own needs. Moreover, while the Aramaic treaty may have applied to only two individuals, the Hittite oath was indeed intended for a large group of people, as was the oath from Cyrene. Thus, we have multiple points of contact between Greek oath ceremonies and their Near Eastern counterparts. And, as I discuss below, connections among rituals to rid citizens of blood-guilt are also found in the sacred laws of two Greek *πολεῖς*.

⁵⁷ Hittite Military Oath, translated by Albrecht Goetze, cited in Faraone, 1993, 63.

IV: Near Eastern Rituals, Hellenic *Leges Sacrae*, Blood-Guilt, and Summoning the Dead

A two-columned lead tablet from Selinus, a Greek city in southwest Sicily, bears an inscription with a *lex sacra* detailing rules for various sacrifices. Among these procedures is a sacrifice for those who wished to be purified of blood-guilt. Lines 1-7 of column B read:

[αἰ] κ' ἄνθρωπ[ο]ς [αὐτορέκ]τα[ς ἐλ]άστερον ἀποκα[θαίρεσθαι]
[λ<ε>ι,] προειπὸν ἡόπο κα λει καὶ τῷ ἔ[τ]ρος ἡόπο κα λει καὶ [τῷ μενὸς]
ἡοπεῖο κα λει καὶ <τ>ἡμέραι ἡοπεῖα κα λ<ε>ι, π{ο}ροειπὸν ἡόποι κα λει, καθαιρέσθο. [καὶ ἡυ]-
ποδεκόμενος ἀπονίμωσθαι δότο κάκρατίξασθαι καὶ ἡάλα τῷ αὐ[τοῖ].
[κ]αὶ θύσας τῷ Δι χοῖρον ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἴτο καὶ περιστ{ι}ραφέσθο *vacat*
καὶ ποταγορέσθο καὶ σῖτον ἡαιρέσθο καὶ καθευδέτο ἡόπε κ-
α λει.⁵⁸

If a person wishes to be purified of an ἐλάστερος⁵⁹ by slaying with his own hand, he shall announce wherever he wishes and whenever in the year he wishes and in whatever month he wishes and on whatever day he wishes, and he shall announce in whatever direction he wishes, and shall set about being purified. And he shall entertain to a meal, and provide washing and supping and salt for this same one. And he shall sacrifice a piglet to Zeus, and shall go forth from there, and shall turn his back, and shall converse, and shall take food, and shall sleep wherever he wishes.⁶⁰

In short, the guilty individual proclaims his intent for purification, provides the angry spirit with a meal, a bath, and salt, sacrifices a piglet to Zeus, and is henceforth cleansed of the guilt. One should also pay attention to the line stating he “shall turn his back.” In all likelihood, one should read this as meaning that the individual in question did not look back after the sacrifice and thus went home a different way from which he came, as was common in rituals where dangerous divinities such as

⁵⁸ Originally published in Jameson, Jordan, and Kotansky, 1993.

⁵⁹ That is, an ‘avenging spirit.’

⁶⁰ Sacred Law of Selinus, edited by Robertson, 2010, lines 1-7, 16.

Hecate or the Erinyes were to appear.⁶¹ As it stands, even without a reference to effigies this ritual clearly was akin to the rites of burial and reburial discussed above. During the process of purification, a meal was provided for the spirit, as was a bath. The ἐλάστερος received a gift; salt, just as spirits that were ritually reburied received gifts. The prescription above can easily be tied in with related Greek purification rituals, but also bears similarities to those from the Near East. A ritual from the Mesopotamian collection *Asakkī Marṣūti* or *Evil Demons of Illness* reads:

[Take] a suckling pig [and...] [at] the head of the sick man [put it (?) and] take out its heart and above the heart of the sick man [put it], [sprinkle] its blood on the sides of the bed, [and] divide the pig over his limbs and spread it on the sick man; then cleanse that man with pure water from the Deep and wash him clean and bring near him a censer [and] a torch, twice seven loaves cooked in the ashes against the shut door place and give the pig in his stead and let the flesh be as his flesh, and the blood as his blood... they [the demons] shall take it... (the heart which thou hast placed upon his heart), as his heart give it: they shall take it. [lacuna] [that the] pig may be a substitute for him... May the evil Spirit, the evil Demon stand aside! May a kindly Spirit, a kindly Genius be present!⁶²

Aside from the sacrifice of a piglet, the ritual detailed above does not initially appear to have much in common with the Selinuntine *lex sacra*. The only other comparison one could initially draw would be that of the ritual bath, although in this case it is for the patient, not the demon. A look at the characterization of the avenging spirits pertaining to blood-guilt in the Greek world, however, reveals that these two rituals have more in common than it may initially seem.

In Euripides' *Orestes*, Orestes describes the madness that has plagued him since he murdered his mother. When Menelaus exclaims to Orestes, ὡς ἠγρίωσαι πλόκαμον ἀρχμηρόν,⁶³ or "how wild you have made your dirty lock[s]," Orestes laments his condition, referring to his sickness as μανία⁶⁴ and μητρὸς αἵματος τιμωρία⁶⁵ or 'vengeance of [my] mother's blood.' With this description of his illness in mind, one should examine another Mesopotamian exorcism text where, after the *āšipu* performs a lengthy ritual involving the creation of an effigy, provisions for the figurine, and the

61 Johnston, 1999, 47-48.

62 Thompson, 1976, 17-21.

63 Euripides, *Orestes*, line 387.

64 'Madness.'

65 Euripides, *Orestes*, line 400.

enclosure of that figurine in a magic circle, the patient recites an incantation containing the lines:

*ša ina šibsāt ili u^d15 i'iltu ī'ilanni|utukku rābišu eḡemmu lilū himittum ḡimītum šimmat šīri|šaššaḡu miḡit
ḡēmi išqulūnimma ūmišamma*

[I,] who as a result of the anger of god and goddess, an obligation has bound. An *utukku*-demon, a *rābišu*-demon, a ghost (and) a *lilū*-demon-paralysis, twisting, numbness of the flesh, dizziness, *šaššaḡu* (and) insanity have they weighed out for me and daily they cause me to twist.⁶⁶

Although the illness described in this particular text is far more detailed than what is *Orestes* depicts, nevertheless a similarity exists. Both *Orestes* and the patient of the Mesopotamian ritual have been driven mad, their bodies and their minds ravaged by sickness. Furthermore, when *Orestes* described the source of his madness to Menelaus he said they were phantoms, τρεῖς νυκτὶ προσφερεῖς κόρας,⁶⁷ or “three maidens, similar to night.” Here *Orestes* is describing the Erinyes; the avenging spirits who punished those guilty of murder, and this personification of illness as a demonic force that torments its victims could have a relation to the concept of the “anger of god and goddess” as described in the incantation above. On the one hand, however, it is not possible to say for certain on this topic. On the other hand, the ritual for washing away blood-guilt as described in Aeschylus’ version of the story of *Orestes* bears a strong parallel with Near Eastern ritual. Namely, in the *Eumenides* *Orestes* declares:

βρίζει γὰρ αἷμα καὶ μαραίνεται χερός,|μητροκτόνον μίασμα δ’ἔκπλυτον πέλει·|ποταίνιον γὰρ ὄν πρὸς
ἔστία θεοῦ|Φοίβου καθαρμοῖς ἠλάθη χοιροκτόνοις.⁶⁸

For the blood is growing drowsy and fading from my hand,|And the pollution of matricide has been washed out:|at the hearth of the god Phoebus, when it was still fresh,|it was expelled by means of the purification-sacrifice of a young pig. (Translation by Alan H. Sommerstein).

And later he states:

πάλαι πρὸς ἄλλοις ταῦτ’ ἀφιερώμεθα|οἴκοισι, καὶ βοτοῖσι καὶ ῥυτοῖς πόροις.⁶⁹

I have long since been purified in this way at other houses,|Both by animal victims and by flowing streams. (Translation by Alan H. Sommerstein).

Just as with the ritual from *Asakkī Marṡūti*, *Orestes*’ impurity has been absolved through the blood of a

66 *BAM* 323 in Scurlock, 2006, lines 28-30, 531-532.

67 Euripides, *Orestes*, line 408.

68 Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, lines 280-283.

69 Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, lines 451-452.

sacrificial piglet and washed away with pure water. Thus, with all these accounts in mind, the similarity between the *lex sacra* of Selinus and the Mesopotamian mode of purification becomes much clearer. The victim rids himself of sickness, as personified by a wasting demon in both the Greek and the Mesopotamian accounts, through the sacrifice of a piglet and the washing away of its blood, thus washing the illness away with it.

Moreover, this sickness is often a form of madness, whether due to blood-guilt in the case of Orestes or due to some divine wrath in the case of Mesopotamia. I should note here a further parallel between Greek and Near Eastern ritual, the ridding of impurity via an impure substance. In addition to blood, individuals in both Greece and Mesopotamia used many other substances to purify as well. The Greeks used bran cakes, bran mash, and even mud, while in Mesopotamia bread, dough, and flour paste were often employed.⁷⁰ Far from polluting the patient even further, the operative idea here was likely that the unclean nature of the substance enabled it to absorb the uncleanliness of the man, thus purifying him in the process.⁷¹

All this is not to say that the scenarios are exactly alike; in the case of both the *lex sacra* of Selinus and the story of Orestes there is a clear case of crime, whereas in the Mesopotamian it is unclear what, if anything, the sick man has done wrong. Moreover, differences appear in the particulars of the Selinuntine ritual and the versions found in *Asakkī Marṣūti* and *Orestes*, such as the fact that in the procedure from Selinus the ritual bathing is intended for the ἐλάστερος, not for the patient. Still, these discrepancies should not negate the fact that connections between these practices existed.⁷²

In addition to the law from Selinus, yet another *lex sacra* bears even stronger parallels with Near Eastern ritual, in this case one from Cyrene. In addition to laws for averting famine, purchasing

70 West, 1997, 51.

71 West, 1997, 51.

72 Burkert, 1992, 57-60.

wood from sacred land, and other such matters, a prescription is given for what to do about a *ικέσιος*

ἐπακτός or a ‘suppliant sent from afar.’ It reads:

ικέσιος, ἐπακτός. αἶ κα ἐπιπεμφθῆι ἐπὶ τὰν οἰκίαν, αἰ μέγ κα ἰσαῖ ἀφ’ ὅτινός οἱ ἐπῆνθε, ὀ-
νυμαζεῖ αὐτὸν προειπὼν τρεῖς ἡμέρας. αἰ δ[ἐ]
κα τεθνάκηι ἔγγαιος ἢ ἄλληι πη ἀπολώλη[ι],
αἰ μέγ κα ἰσαῖ τὸ ὄνυμα, ὀνυμαστι προερεῖ. αἰ
δέ κα μὴ ἰσαῖ, ὧ ἄνθρωπε, αἶτε ἀνήρ αἶτε γυνὰ
ἔσσι. κολοσὸς ποιήσαντα ἔρσενα καὶ θήλεια[ν]
ἢ καλίνος ἢ γαίνος, ὑποδεξάμενον παρτιθ[έ]-
μεν τὸ μέρος πάντων. ἐπεὶ δέ κα ποιῆσες τὰ
νομιζόμενα, φέροντα ἐς ὕλαν ἀεργὸν ἐρε-
[ῖ]σαι τὰς κολοσὸς καὶ τὰ μέρη.⁷³

Suppliant conjured by magic. If something be sent against the house, if he knows from whom it came against him, he shall name him while giving notice for three days. If he is dead beneath the earth or done for in some other way, if he knows the name, he shall give notice by name, but if he does not know it, the words are “O creature, whether you be man or woman.” After making figurines male and female of either wood or clay, after receiving them for entertainment, set out the share of everything. When you have done the customary things, bring the figurines and the shares to an uncultivated wood and set them up properly.⁷⁴

The prescription from Cyrene is very much in line with the practices of the Near Eastern rituals described above. In order to exorcise an unknown, hostile spirit that has been sent against one’s house, effigies are made to represent the anonymous source of evil, and they are provided with the hospitality due to a guest and are given rations (the setting out of “the share of everything”). And, as usual, once the ritual was complete the effigies were deposited in the wilderness where they would not be discovered. Connections with Near Eastern ritual also appear in ways that are more subtle. Although the words for the incantation in the Cyrenean text were in all likelihood severely truncated since no elaboration follows after the words “whether you be man or woman,⁷⁵ this phrase likely implies that a sort of ‘catch-all’ incantation was employed in order to bind the evil force attacking the house, whatever it may be. These words are reminiscent of Mesopotamian incantations in which a long list of hostile spirits are named in order that they be banished from the afflicted individual’s presence. A part of one such incantation reads:

⁷³ Originally published in Ferri, 1927.

⁷⁴ Sacred Law of Cyrene, edited by Robertson, 2010, lines 111-121, 262-263.

⁷⁵ Faraone, 1991, 182.

GIDIM₄ *mu-kil* SAG HUL-*tim* šá GAR-*nam-ma* ÚS.MEŠ-*ni* | *hat-ta pu-luh-ta* TUKU.MEŠ *u ana ha-ba-li* | *u šag-ga-ši* GUB.GUB-*za lu-u* UDU₆ *lem-nu* | *lu-u A.LÁ lem-nu lu-u* GIDIM *lem-nu lu-u* GAL₅.LÁ *lem-nu* | *lu-u* GIDIM₄ *qeb-ru lu-u* GIDIM₄ *la qeb-ru* | *lu-u* GIDIM₄ šá ŠEŠ *u NIN NU TUKU-u lu-u* GIDIM₄ šá *za-kir* MU NU TUKU-*u* | *lu-u* GIDIM₄ šá IM.RI.A-*šu mur-tap-pi-du* | *lu-u* GIDIM₄ šá *ina* EDIN *na-du-ma* IM-*šú la ed-pu* | MU-*šú la zak-ru ana* GIDIM₄ IM.RI.A-*šú pi-qid-su*...
 ʾDÚʾ.DÚ.BI ʾ4 NU.MEŠ ʾ šá IM DÚ-*uš* GIN₇ ʾGAN.NAʾ NIGIN.MEŠ-*šú-nu-ti* | *raṭ A.BÁR in-na-šu-u* NU GIG šá DUH.LÁL DÚ-*uš* | TÚG GIŠ.GIŠIMMAR IGI.MEŠ-*šú-nu ta-rim ina* IZI *tu-har-šú* | *ina* KI.MAH IM.RI.A-*šú tuš-na-al-šú-nu-ti*

A ghost (or) *mukīl rēš lemutti* which was set on me and so continually pursues me-I am frightened and terrified (about him)- he continually sets about oppressing and murdering me. Whether he be an evil *utukku*-demon or an evil *alû*-demon or an evil ghost or an evil *gallû*-demon, whether he be a buried (person's) ghost or an unburied (person's) ghost or a ghost who has no brother or sister, or a ghost who has no one to invoke his name or the roving ghost of (one of) his family, or a ghost (of one) who was abandoned in the steppe and thus his spirit was not blown away (and) his name was not invoked, entrust him to his family ghost(s)...

Its ritual: You make four figurines of clay. You wrap them as you would a pestle... They carry a lead pipe. You make a wax figurine of the illness. You cover their (the clay figurines') eyes with date palm bark. You melt (?) it (the wax figurine) with fire. In his family grave you lay them (the clay figurines).⁷⁶

Thus, we encounter a long list of hostile forces, both demons and ghosts that were potentially preying upon the individual, but as usual, one set of effigies stands in for them all. So the case seems to be in the Cyrenean law code. While one cannot tell for sure, the abbreviated nature of the phrase “O creature, whether you be man or woman” implies a lengthy formula akin to those from Mesopotamia. Furthermore, note the change in perspective that occurs in both of these prescriptions. In the Mesopotamian account, the incantation was written from the first person perspective. Thus, the incantation was intended to be recited as written by the patient. The ritual itself, however, was written in the second person as instructions for the *āšipu*. A similar phenomenon is encountered in the Cyrenean *lex sacra*. While the words are initially written from the third person perspective as one might expect from a code of law, in the last sentence there is a curious shift to the second person. Given all the other similarities that Greek rituals of this sort have with the Near East, it is not unreasonable to believe that the Greeks at Cyrene were imitating and adapting such ritual prescriptions from Mesopotamia or an intermediary culture.

On the subject of intermediary cultures, a necromantic ritual practiced by the Hittites (of

⁷⁶ KAR 21 in Scurlock, 2006, lines 3-12 and 14-17, 197-198.

apparent Hurrian origin)⁷⁷ bears great similarity to the ritual Odysseus used to summon the ghost of Teiresias in the *Odyssey*. In Book X of the *Odyssey*, before Odysseus embarks from Circe's abode to consult the seer, she instructs him as follows:

βόθρον ὀρύξαι, ὅσον τε πυγούσιον ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα,|ἀμφ' αὐτῶι δὲ χοῆν χειῖσθαι πᾶσιν νεκύεσσιν,|πρῶτα
μελικρήτωι, μετέπειτα δὲ ἡδέι οἴνωι,|τὸ τρίτον αὖθ' ὕδατι· ἐπὶ δ' ἄλφιτα λευκὰ παλύνειν.|πολλὰ δὲ
γουνουῖσθαι νεκῶν ἀμενηνὰ κάρηνα,|ἐλθὼν εἰς Ἴθάκην στεῖραν βοῦν, ἥ τις ἀρίστη,|ῥέξειν ἐν μεγάροισι
πυρὴν τ' ἐμπλησέμεν ἐσθλῶν,|Τειρεσίηι δ' ἀπάνευθεν οἶν ἱερευσέμεν οἴωι|παμμέλαν', ὅς μήλοισι
μεταπρέπει ὑμετέροισιν.|αὐτὰρ ἐπὶν εὐχῆισι λίσιη κλυτὰ ἔθνεα νεκρῶν,|ἔνθ' οἶν ἀρνεῖον ῥέξειν θῆλύν τε
μέλαιναν|εἰς Ἑρεβος στρέψας, αὐτὸς δ' ἀπονόσφι τραπέσθαι|ἰέμενος ποταμοῖο ῥοάων· ἔνθα δὲ πολλὰι|
ψυχαὶ ἐλεύσονται νεκῶν κατατεθνηῶτων.|δὴ τότε' ἔπειθ' ἐτάροισιν ἐποτρῦναι καὶ ἀνῶξαι|μῆλα, τὰ δὴ
κατάκειτ' ἐσφαγμένα νηλεί χαλκῶι,|δείραντας κατακῆαι, ἐπεύξασθαι δὲ θεοῖσιν,|ιφθίμωι τ' Αἰδίηι καὶ
ἐπαινήι Περσεφονείηι·|αὐτὸς δὲ ξίφος ὄξυ ἐρυσσάμενος παρὰ μηροῦ|ῆσθαι, μηδὲ ἔαν νεκῶν ἀμενηνὰ
κάρηνα|αἵματος ἄσπον ἴμεν, πρὶν Τειρεσίαο πυθέσθαι.|ἔνθα τοι αὐτίκα μάντις ἐλεύσεται, ὄρχαμε λαῶν,|ὅς
κέν τοι εἴησις ὁδὸν καὶ μέτρα κελεύθου|νόστον θ', ὡς ἐπὶ πόντον ἐλεύσειαι ἰχθυόεντα.⁷⁸

Dig a pit the size of a cubit on all sides.|Pour a libation about it for all the dead,|First of honey mixture,
and then of sweet wine,|And the third one of water; sprinkle white barley on it.|Beseech the feeble heads
of the dead with many prayers,|Saying that when you go to Ithaca you will sacrifice|Your best barren cow
in your halls, heap a pyre with goods,|And consecrate apart for Tiresias alone|A sheep all of black that
stands out among your flocks.|And when you have besought the famed tribes of the dead with prayers,|
Sacrifice a ram and also a black female,|Bending their heads to Erebus; turn the other way yourself,|
Setting on for the streams of the river. And there many|Souls will come of the corpses of those who have
died.|And then urge your companions on and command them|To take sheep which lie slain with the
pitiless sword, To flay them and burn them and to the gods,|To mighty Hades and dread Persephone.|You
yourself draw your sharp sword from beside your thigh.|Stay put, and do not let the feeble heads of the
dead|Go near the blood till you learn from Tiresias.|At once, then, leader of the people, the prophet will
come,|Who will tell you the course and measures of the way|And about a return, how you may go on the
fish-laden ocean. (Translation by Albert Cook).

Thus, the ritual consists of an elaborate offering to the dead. First, Odysseus must dig a pit into which he will pour his libations. Then, after prayers and supplications, he is to sacrifice a ram and a black ewe. As with the ritual from Selinus, Odysseus is instructed to turn his back after making the sacrifice. Next, his men must flay and burn the sheep while Odysseus himself prays to the gods of the Netherworld. After guarding the blood from the sacrifice, Teiresias would appear, and Odysseus could inquire of him. Finally, remember that in Book XI, Odysseus digs the pit with his sword.⁷⁹

The parallels this shares with the Anatolian ritual are striking. In this ritual, one digs a pit with either a spade or a sword.⁸⁰ He then sacrifices a sheep into the pit, allowing the blood to run down.

77 West, 1997, 426.

78 Homer, *Odyssey*, X.517-540.

79 Homer, *Odyssey*, XI.23-25.

80 West, 1997, 426.

And while not always the case, some versions of the ritual specify a black sheep.⁸¹ After this, oil, beer, wine, and the beverages *walhi* and *marnuwan*⁸² are poured as a libation, with groats and bran mash sprinkled on top.⁸³ Once the offerings are complete, the performer of the ritual would pray to the Sun-goddess of the Earth to open the gate of the Netherworld and allow the Former Gods to arise. Among these deities are the seer Aduntarri and female dream interpreter Zulki, who will both receive a share of the offerings.⁸⁴ Thus, we encounter many common elements among both the Greek and Hittite/Hurrian rituals to summon the dead. One was to dig a pit, often with a sword, pour libations with grain sprinkled over them thereafter, sacrifice a sheep, and offer prayers to the gods of the Netherworld. And even though the Anatolian ritual was to summon deities as opposed to the souls of the departed, the fact that two of these deities were known for their prophetic powers is worthy of emphasis.

With all this in mind, at least some connection between this ritual and the one in the *Odyssey* becomes hard to deny. And while Odysseus's ritual and the Anatolian ritual described above were for consulting the spirits or deities of the Netherworld as opposed to driving away hostile spirits or ridding one of pollution, a similar rite from the same corpus was in fact performed by the Hittites to remove the pollution of a crime or a curse.⁸⁵ We have already seen above that Greeks adapted numerous elements of Mesopotamian purification rituals for their own purposes, so the Hittite ritual possibly came to them in the same way.

Regardless, the strong parallels between this ritual and the one in the *Odyssey* indicate that the Greeks made a practice of utilizing the ritual prescriptions of this culture when they suited their needs. One could certainly argue that the examples discussed above are coincidental, but the combined weight of all the similarities between Greek and Near Eastern purification and exorcism rituals makes this

81 West, 1997, 426.

82 The content of these beverages is undetermined.

83 West, 1997, 426.

84 West, 1997, 426.

85 Robertson, 1982, 128.

unlikely. Indeed, to believe that a society would not borrow from the cultures with which it interacted requires a far greater stretch of the imagination than to believe it did.

V: Trade and Transmission between the Near East and Greece

With all of the parallels between Greek and Near Eastern rituals involving effigies, exorcism, and purification, the only remaining topic is a discussion of some of the more tangible ways in which the civilizations of Greece and the Near East interacted together. This can be accomplished through a discussion of trade contacts between Mycenaean Greece and the Near East in the Late Bronze Age as well as the eastward expansion and founding of colonies by the Greeks toward the end of this same period. Further contact, moreover, can be demonstrated by Assyrian expansion westward in the Iron Age and the mass deportations that came with it.

As for trade in the Late Bronze Age, the greatest amount of Mycenaean-Near Eastern commerce occurred in the Late Helladic III period, from the end of fourteenth century through the thirteenth century B.C.E.⁸⁶ During this period, colonies of merchants and craftsmen were established at ports with a window to the East, and the settlements on Rhodes and Cyprus seem to have attained an importance equal to sites on the Greek mainland.⁸⁷ Furthermore, a great amount of LH IIIa pottery has been found at numerous sites in western Asia, including Gezer, Byblos, and Ugarit.⁸⁸ Examples of LH IIIb ware have been found at these same sites, in addition to Megiddo.⁸⁹ Lastly, LH III pottery has been

⁸⁶ Kantor, 1947, 79-82.

⁸⁷ Kantor, 1947, 79.

⁸⁸ Kantor, 1947, 80-81. It should be noted that a significant amount of this type of pottery has been found in Egypt as well. I shall not, however, discuss these examples at length as I have left Egypt out of the discussion throughout this essay. This is not to say that the Egyptian contribution to the rituals and beliefs discussed above and the material evidence for trade is insignificant. It is simply the case that, as with the Roman material, a thorough treatment of this subject would require a much longer study.

⁸⁹ Kantor, 1947, 81.

found in Anatolia as well. A great deal of Mycenaean pottery from this period has been unearthed at Alalakh, and layer VI at Troy has yielded more of the same.⁹⁰ Thus, from pottery alone the Greeks clearly were in contact with Near Eastern civilizations since at least the Late Bronze Age.

Contact between Greece and the Near East extended beyond trade alone, however. Since the fifteenth century B.C.E., the Greeks had been expanding eastward, starting with the conquest of Knossos.⁹¹ This expansion continued through and intensified at the end of the Bronze Age, and while the exact causes are unknown, famine, economic collapse, and overpopulation have all been postulated.⁹² Whatever the reasons for the expansion, it must have played a pivotal role in exposing Greeks to Near Eastern civilization and culture. One point of settlement that must have been particularly important in this regard was Cyprus. As mentioned above, Cyprus would have provided the Greeks with an outlet for contact with the Near East, particularly southern Anatolia and northern Syria. This alone would have facilitated contact with the civilizations of the Near East, but importantly, one should note that Cyprus at this time was already inhabited and that these inhabitants in the era of the Amarna letters had used cuneiform and the Akkadian language to communicate with other Near Eastern peoples.⁹³ Thus, the Greeks who arrived at a later period would have encountered a people familiar with and influenced by the cultures of numerous civilizations of the Near East. Finally, by the ninth century B.C.E., Phoenicians from Tyre had established a colony at Kition, thus creating the potential for direct and continuous cultural influence.⁹⁴

While this eastward trade and expansion by the Greeks would likely have been enough to open them to contact with and influence from the Near East, discussing one final source of contact, namely, the Assyrian expansion westward in the Iron Age, is important. The uprooting and transportation of

90 Kantor, 1947, 81-82.

91 West, 1997, 612.

92 West, 1997, 612.

93 West, 1997, 612-613.

94 West, 1997, 613-614.

large groups of conquered people was a regular practice that the Assyrian Empire employed, and one that would have had significant cultural consequences.⁹⁵ These deportations were numerous and often had not only the effect of transporting people dwelling near the Mediterranean to the east, but the reverse effect as well. One example is Tiglath-pileser III's deportation of the inhabitants of Samaria and the repopulation of the land with people from northern Syria, Babylonians, Elamites, and members of Arabian tribes.⁹⁶ Another example is after Sargon II's conquest of Hamath in Syria, when he deported the inhabitants of the city and brought in 6,300 Assyrians.⁹⁷ Thus, people from many different parts of the Near East were being brought to regions near the Mediterranean, including former inhabitants of Mesopotamia themselves. These deportations and resettlements, combined with the Greeks' previous expansions eastward, would have significantly increased the likelihood of cultural interaction between the peoples of Greece and the Near East.

All of this is to say that the numerous parallels between the use of effigies and exorcism and purification rituals in Greece and the Near East ought to be enough to prove the existence of interaction between the cultures of these regions. But if they are not, the eastward movements of Greeks and the westward movements of various Near Eastern peoples, in particular those from Mesopotamia, along with Aegean-Near Eastern trade relationships demonstrated by pottery, should be sufficient. The continuous movement of the Greeks to the eastern shores of the Mediterranean and their trade with the people dwelling there in the Late Bronze Age, as evidenced by the presence of Late Helladic III pottery at numerous sites in Anatolia and the Levant, as well as settlements on islands such as Rhodes and Cyprus, would have put Greeks of that era in continuous contact with Near Eastern civilization. The Assyrian expansion to the west, moreover, along with their policy of deportation and repopulation, would have only increased the cultures with which the Greeks would have interacted. Thus, one ought

95 Oded, 1979, 02.

96 Oded, 1979, 29-30.

97 Oded, 1979, 29.

not to have difficulty accepting that over the course of centuries the Greeks would have exchanged ideas as well as wares with their Eastern contacts and, given the large body of work concerning effigies, exorcisms, and purification rituals from that part of the world, one should not be surprised that the Greeks adapted some of those rituals to their own ends.

CONCLUSION

With all this evidence in mind, it becomes hard to deny that Greek exorcism and purification rituals borrowed from Mesopotamia and the broader Near East. The use of effigies to manipulate hostile spirits is attested in the Greek world in texts by Classical authors such as Thucydides and Justinus, as well as in law codes and foundation oaths. While the employment of effigies for such purposes by itself would not be enough to indicate significant contact with the Near East, the specific practices surrounding the use of these effigies do. In both Greece and Mesopotamia, effigies representing ghosts were provided with hospitality and provisions, given gifts and, after the proper incantations were recited, deposited safely in the wilderness or in a family tomb, thus constituting a ritual reburial. Wax effigies were also melted in certain Greek exorcism rituals to drive away hostile spirits, just as they often were in Mesopotamia. Furthermore, the rites of purification and exorcism as prescribed in the *leges sacrae* from Selinus and Cyrene provide further ties with Near Eastern antecedents. Blood from a sacrificial victim, namely a piglet, that is washed away with pure water can remove the stain of impurity from an individual along with the spirits that prey upon him.

While some differences appear in this instance, particularly that the Greek ritual was for the removal of blood-guilt, this should not be taken to mean that a link with the Near East did not exist. Furthermore, the method for dealing with a *ικέσιος ἐπακτός* from the law code at Cyrene appears to be a truncated form of a Mesopotamian exorcism ritual. Lastly, the use of effigies in Greek oath

ceremonies bears great similarity to their use in oath ceremonies from the Near East, particularly to those of Anatolia and Syria. If one takes these things into consideration, one would have difficulty denying that a link between Near Eastern and Greek rites of purification and exorcism existed. And if the similarities within the rituals themselves are not enough to establish contact, one need only look to the evidence for trade between Greece and the Near East and expansion eastward and westward, respectively.

Some, however, might insist that all these parallels are merely coincidences, pointing out that, for all their similarities, differences between the Near Eastern rituals and the Greek, both in purpose and practice, also exist. This is true. Differences are indeed encountered and one should not deny them. Such differences, however, do not negate contact between these civilizations. That societies would adapt practices they acquired from others to suit the needs of their own culture is only natural, and more reasonable still that the particulars of such practices would vary by location and context. Indeed, if one were to stand by the hypothesis that the only practices one culture could have adopted from another are those that are exact copies of the original then one must come to the conclusion that all societies arose within a vacuum.

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