

## دور ممارسات الطقوس في بلاد الرافدين في تشكيل أساطير الثقافة الإغريقية

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### الملخص

كانت أساطير الطقوس الحجر الأساس الذي شكل ثقافات الشرق الأدنى القديم وكانت تعتبر شريان الحياة الذي لعب دوراً أساسياً في تحديد أمورهم اليومية والمستقبلية. يهدف هذا البحث لتقديم دراسة مقارنة لبعض ممارسات الطقوس القديمة في ثقافات وأساطير شعوب بلاد ما بين النهرين وشعب الإغريق عبر الاستفادة من بعض الأمثلة من ملحمتي جلجامش ولأوديسا. وعلى الرغم من وجود بعض الاختلافات فيما يخص الزمان والمكان وحتى اللغة في كل ملحمة، في هذا البحث تتم مناقشة بعض الأحداث التي تظهر التشابه الكبير بينهما. وتظهر هذه الدراسة أيضاً طريقة انتقال أفكار ممارسات هذه الطقوس في بلاد ما بين النهرين لتصبح شائعة بين الإغريقين لدرجة أنهم احتووها وضمنوها في أدبهم وثقافتهم.

ترتكز هذه الدراسة على المدرسة الفرنسية التي تقارن بين ملحمة جلجامش وملحمة لأوديسا عبر تسليط الضوء على بعض التشابهات بينهما، ففي ضوء هذه المدرسة يهدف هذا البحث لإظهار التأثير المباشر وغير المباشر للأساطير الشرقية على الأساطير الغربية عبر تعقب الخط التاريخي لتطور كل طقس مدروس وبهذا يتم إثبات الشرق كمصدر أصلي لأساطير الطقوس التي تتبع منه كل الثقافات اللاحقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطقوس، الأساطير، الشرق، الغرب.

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## **The Role of the Mesopotamian Ritual Practices in Shaping the Myths of the Greek Culture**

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### **Abstract**

Ritual myths were the basic stones that formed the cultures of the ancient Near East, and they were considered as a lifeline that played a major role in determining their everyday and future matters. This paper aims to provide a comparative study of some ancient ritual practices in the cultures and myths of the Mesopotamians and the Greeks by benefitting from some examples from the two epics of *Gilgamesh* and *The Odyssey*. Despite the existence of some differences concerning the time, place and even the language of each epic, some incidents that show their considerable likeness are discussed in this paper. This paper also shows how the ideas of the Mesopotamians' practices of these rituals were transformed to become popular among the Greeks that they included and indulged them in their literature and culture.

This study is based on the French school that compares *The Epic of Gilgamesh* with *The Odyssey* by shedding light on some similarities between them. In the light of this school, this paper aims to show the direct and indirect influence of the eastern mythology on the western one by tracing the historical line of the development of each studied ritual to prove that the East is the original source of ritual myths that all the following cultures sprouted from.

**Key Words:** Rituals, Myths, East, West.

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## Introduction

It has long been known that myths and rituals had emerged with the emergence of the world, and they were created by the people who lived in each place and in each time explaining and illustrating the specific cultures, traditions, and even the ways of thinking they had evolved in, "Myth, in short, gave expression to the fundamental experience of a divinely ordered world in which a conflict of supernatural powers and forces are immanent, the one hostile and the other beneficial to their well-being."<sup>1</sup> Because the eastern societies were among the earliest peoples to live on Earth, like the Akkadians and Assyrians according to The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, it can be said that the East is the original source of myths that enabled the following societies, like the Greek ones, to borrow various concepts from its cultural myths with many of their kinds and forms either directly or indirectly leading them to claim that these ideas were of their own and denying the fact that all these concepts came by no means as a result of a long process of the developing and continuous transitions from one culture to another. "To what extent Greek myth and ritual were derived from the Ancient Middle East has long been a matter of debate."<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, therefore, the study aims to show how the eastern mythology as portrayed in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* influences and repeats itself to a large extent in the mythology of the western culture in *The Odyssey*. This study also shows how these two works are interrelated and how heavy is the direct and indirect impact of the East on the West in the field of mythology. However, this chapter will mainly focus on three mythological rituals: extispicy, purification and feasting to be discussed in the light of the French school and its doctrines.

Extispicy by definition is an ancient kind of divination that uses the animals or their entrails to examine their role in predicting the events of the future. This ritual is very old, and it survives from the ancient Near East cultures, especially ancient Mesopotamia due to the fact that the archeological excavations in this region had proved the use of extispicy by many Mesopotamian soothsayers who used to use this way to ask the gods for their decisions, so they can see the future

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<sup>1</sup> JAMES, E.O., 1958- **Myth and Ritual in the Ancient Near East**, Frederick A. Prager, New York. 307.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 208.

in advance using animals and their organs which provide them with specific meanings and interpretations. "The primacy of Mesopotamia-its cities are the earliest known in the world, its scribes developed writing centuries before it emerged elsewhere- has led historians and archaeologists worldwide to use it as the paradigmatic case of state information."<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, this kind of divination was an essential part in the lives of the easterners who depended on its results to know their destiny, and this was exactly what the critic Ammar Annus referred to in his book when he talked about extispicy and its origins saying "with roots going back to the third millennium, it gained in importance over the millennia and became an important element in decision making at the Neo-Assyrian court."<sup>2</sup> Extispicy in the ancient eastern cultures ought to be practiced by special persons, which are called the diviners, that they were believed to have godly features and a considerable knowledge in the field of divination. People, on the other hand, used to believe in these diviners who determined their future events and settled their critical issues that demanded a lot of risking concerning their private matters.

In *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, which is "One of the finest literary products of Babylonia, the earliest Akkadian versions of which belong to 2000 B.C. with still earlier material on the tablets."<sup>3</sup>, extispicy was presented through the famous figure of the mother of Gilgamesh, the goddess Ninsun, when Gilgamesh asked her to ask Shamash, the god of the Sun, for help and support in his journey with his dear friend Enkido to the Cedar Forest to kill Humbaba. To do this, Ninsun decided to practice an extispicy to ask Shamash for his decision concerning her son's dangerous journey. "She offered fragrant cuttings, and raised her arms to Shamash."<sup>4</sup>

In another incident, before going to the Cedar Forest to fight Humbaba, Gilgamesh made an offering of cuttings to Shamash to know the result of his fearful journey. Therefore, Shamash sent him a

<sup>1</sup> RISTVET, L., 2015- **Ritual, Performance and Politics in the Ancient Near East**, Cambridge UP, New York. 2.

<sup>2</sup> ANNUS, A., 2010- **Divination and Interpretation of Signs in the Ancient World**, Library of Congress, Chicago. 45.

<sup>3</sup> JAMES, E.O., *ibid*, 43.

<sup>4</sup> CARNAHAN, W., 1998- *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Stanford UP, London. Tablet III.

message that he will have a victory with Enkido on Humbaba through one of his dreams. These dreams in their turn were said to be interpreted also by a divine person who has, at the same time, a close relationship with the hero intended. In this case, Enkido, who was sent from the gods specifically for Gilgamesh, was the person who interpreted the dream for him.

Coming to the odyssey there were many incidents of practicing extispicy. To be put in mind, Homer did not speak about the idea of extispicy directly, but he only used it in a circumstanced way. He included kinds of divination that are related to animals and that played a great role in the life of the epic's characters. In other words, practicing divination and the results depending on it were intended to involve something about animals like seeing or dreaming of a certain kind of them; the matter which cannot have any other name rather than extispicy.

In *The Seer in Ancient Greece*, M. Flower referred to the fact that the Greeks borrowed the ritual of practicing extispicy from ancient eastern origins when he said, "extispicy was the last of the major divinatory practices to reach Greece from the Near East. The Greeks themselves considered the art of divination to be either a home grown idea or imported from Egypt. By the classical period extispicy was certainly a fully integrated part of the Greek culture, whatever its origins."<sup>1</sup> As a result, the Greeks didn't know about this kind of divination; they merely took it for granted. It is just another case of repeating something because other people have repeated it without any evidence.

Because, as mentioned previously, this kind of divination was practiced by a divine person to know the outcomes or opinions of gods, a striking similarity between two incidents in the two epics can be pointed out. In *The Odyssey*, Homer made the divine Penelope, who is Odysseus' wife and the daughter of Icarious of Sparta and the nymph of Periboea, do a certain kind of religious rituals to ask the gods for their decision about her son's trip to find his long lost father. Although these rituals are not exactly the same, and they may even differ in manner and in kind, yet they are done for very similar purposes, and in both epics they are done with a direct relationship to the diviners.

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<sup>1</sup> FLOWER, M. A., 2008- **The Seer in Ancient Greece**, University of California Press, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed, Berkley and Los Angeles. 97.

Since Homer did not want to show that he used extispicy in his epic, he used dreams as a kind of prophesying from birds,

But come here respond to a dream for me and listen to it. I have twenty geese at home, they eat out of the water, and I delight in looking at them. But a great eagle with a curved beak came from the mountain and broke each one's neck and killed all of them, and they lay in heaps in the house, while the eagle rose up high in the shining ether.<sup>1</sup>

By this dream and by having the eagle figure- the symbol of strength in ancient mythology, Penelope interprets her dream to have a great victory over the suitors. On the other hand, the geese here represent the weak suiters and the eagle represents Odysseus, her strong husband, according to the Greek mythology, and so this in itself can be seen as a kind of practicing extispicy. "The birds of prey are favored as sign-givers already highlights the connection with animal, meat, and Greek tragedians made the link with extispicy."<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, in Book 15, when Telemachus visited Nestor, they offered cuttings for the gods and on the leave of Telemachus, they saw an eagle 'Upon the word there flew out from the right an eagle whose talons held an enormous white goose, one of their fowls from the yard'<sup>3</sup> to which Menelaus immediately interpreted that Odysseus shall come back and avenge himself from the suiters. So lately in book 20, nearly at the end of *The Odyssey*, Odysseus scarified and slaughtered sheep, goats and swine for the gods in order to gain their blessings concerning his revenge from the suitors in his house. Therefore, it is clearly evident that the ancient Near Eastern cultures contributed to a large extent in transforming the idea of extispicy to the ancient Greek culture that they were embedded greatly in the acts and minds of the Greek people.

The second mythological ritual to be discussed in this study is the practice of purification. The purification ritual according to the ancient cultures of the Near East is the process of making something spiritually or ceremonially clean. This kind of rituals could be practiced in various ways, such as the purification through blood, through fire, through water, etc. In this paper the purification practice

<sup>1</sup> HOMER, 2002- *The Odyssey*, York Press, Lebanon, 97.

<sup>2</sup> LINDSAY C. G., 2014- *The Oxford Handbook of Animals in Classical Thought and Life*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. 316.

<sup>3</sup> Homer, *ibid.* 156.

through water and oil anointment to regain rule over one's country with the support of the gods will be the point of discussion. Talking about the origins of this ritual, Burkert went back in history to archaic Crete that predates Homer's creation long centuries ago as it dates back to 2700-1420 B.C. and which connects directly to the time of ancient Mesopotamia that has a long history of texts that show the purification ritual as an integral part in the political matters of the Mesopotamians who used to depend on it to reconcile their military issues and have reunion with their nations. "It is archaic Crete which, according to the Greek texts, is the home of 'cathartic' knowledge."<sup>1</sup>

As it is intuitively known, the ancient Near East cultures in general and the Mesopotamian one in particular, provide a great heritage of ritual texts which have been known since antiquity, and which have been written in the oldest languages in the world, the Sumerian and the Akkadian, a fact which tells about their age and also hints to their origin. "Concern about purification appears to be characteristic of the Archaic period."<sup>2</sup> It is also worthy to be mentioned that the existence of these ritual texts in such ancient eastern areas and in such languages helps a great deal in relying on this piece of reality as the basic stone that supports this orientalist discussion.

According to the myths of the ancient Near East cultures, rituals had played a big role in the successful ways of fighting evils, repelling enemies, sorting out the mess in the royal courts and establishing peace on the land. By doing rituals, the kings and warriors gained god's blessings that served to provide them with order and stability in their courts. "In fact, the very many texts assert that ritual performance is the most determinative factor in the success or failure of rulers and nations."<sup>3</sup>

A very vivid example that shows the huge extent of practicing purification in ancient Mesopotamia is in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* which "establishes the clean body as a requirement for participation in

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<sup>1</sup> BURKERT, W., 1992- **The Orientalizing Revolution**. Harvard UP, Cambridge. 63.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>3</sup> W. WATTS, J., 2009- **Ritual Rhetoric in the Ancient Near Eastern Text**, Parlor Press, West Lafayette. 39.

society.”<sup>1</sup> In tablet II, for instance, there was a scene of Enkidu purifying himself in order to get ready for helping Gilgamesh, with the aid of gods, in his battle with Humbaba the horrible because purification was considered as a means through which one, especially the king or every person of divine features, can acquire gods’ support in any critical event that would serve to achieve success and victory. In this scene as in many similar ones, there is a considerable concentration on the use of oil anointment along with water in every time that required to do this ritual. “Anointment has a place in the particular rituals by which certain men receive positions of eminence.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, oil anointment is a part and parcel of water purification; they complement one another.

He splashed his shaggy body with water,  
and rubbed himself with oil, and turned into a human.

He put on some clothes and became like a warrior.<sup>3</sup>

From this scene, therefore, it can be inferred that Enkidu, who was sent by the gods for the sake of Gilgamesh, stands for being the perfect standard for doing the purification ritual in the epic as he is considered to be divine, and as he symbolizes being Gilgamesh’s right hand that would achieve his great victories in all the coming battles in his future life. In this case then, Enkidu can be seen as another face of Gilgamesh that there is no difference between them whoever did the purification ritual, the idea that leads to prove the practicing of purification before battle in ancient Mesopotamia, and at the same time, the idea that justifies all the victories achieved by the two intimate friends in the epic, Gilgamesh and Enkidu.

However, in the western cultures, namely the Greek culture, the purification ritual also held a central place in the lives of ancient Greeks. Similarly, a lot of written texts are there to show the considerable use of purification by the kings or warriors before and after battle as a kind of seeking help from their gods and attaining good luck and easiness during their hard journeys. According to the myths of the Greeks, rituals that meant to cleanse and purify the body, the same like that of the Mesopotamians’ case, played an essential role in

<sup>1</sup> HOWTHORN, A., 2017- **Body Cleaning, Social Norms, and Value in The Epic of Gilgamesh**. Goeth University of Frankfort and Main, Frankfort.

<sup>2</sup> EDITORS OF ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA. **Anointment**, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, n.p..

<sup>3</sup> CARNAHAN, W., *ibid*, Tablet II.



stabilizing the security situation of those immanent and important persons and assuring their secure returning to normalcy, and so *The Odyssey* comes as clear evidence that supports this discussion that shows the Greek's immense borrowing from the Near East cultures. In this epic, there is a great concentration on practicing rituals in every event that conciliates the important future matters of the king, Odysseus. So the purification ritual, among other various religious rituals, had a large stake in leading to his success and imaginary victory at the end of the epic.

In *The Odyssey* epic, the same narrative and the same technique used in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is repeated and copied along with the same ways and occasions that required practicing the purification ritual. Similarly, in the epic after Odysseus came back to Ithaca from his long tiring journey, he decided to kill the suitors, his enemies, to restore peace in the court. So, before he did or planned for any procedure, he washed and purified himself to gain the blessings of the gods in hope that they would help him in his revenge and have victory over them in the coming battle and so becoming the legal king again "and Odysseus after being washed and anointed with smooth olive oil dragged his bench nearer the fire to warm himself."<sup>1</sup> Then this scene, of course, directly drags the attention to remark the obvious resemblance between this epic and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

Even more surprising in *The Odyssey* is the similar use of oil anointment in purification to that used in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. In both epics, oil anointment and water to practice this ritual are inseparable, the matter which leads to the one and only idea; the purification ritual is of eastern origins. Therefore, it can be inferred from the previously cited extracts from the two epics that Humbaba in *Gilgamesh* is parallel to the suitors in *The odyssey*; both are vicious and both are enemies to the epics' protagonists. In fact, the corresponding practice of the purification ritual in both epics does not only meet this practice before a battle, but also after it. "The difference between the eastern civilizations and Greece corresponds to the specific levels of culture attained in different regions."<sup>2</sup>

The third mythological ritual that will be compared in this chapter is feasting. Feasting by definition is the act of eating and drinking special kinds of foods and drinks at special occasions to

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<sup>1</sup> HOMER, *ibid*, 196.

<sup>2</sup> BURKERT, W., *ibid*, 60.

celebrate or commemorate a particular event or ceremony that brings together two parts of people or more, “Celebratory feasts are reunions between equals, these include wedding and harvest feasts, backyard barbeques potluck suppers.”<sup>1</sup> As a significant feature of ancient times, feast rituals used to be done along with other various preparations that were held to make the ceremonies perfectly celebrated.

According to the historical texts that show the origins of this ritual, making feasts in special ceremonies dates back to long centuries ago and they belong to the period when the ancient Near East cultures, especially ancient Mesopotamia, existed and dominated to spread their concepts and beliefs during that time. To be mentioned, this old story from the ancient Sumerian poem “Inanna and Enki: The Transfer of the Arts of Civilization from Eridu to Uruk” was when the goddess Inanna went to the home of her father Enki, where he welcomed her with a feast after he hurt her by deciding to leave her with dominion over nothing at all. “The earliest reference to feasting in literature dates back to a Sumerian [3000-3500 BC] myth in which the god Enki offers the goddess Inanna some butter cakes and beer.”<sup>2</sup>

In ancient times, feasts were held to celebrate the renewal and change or move to a new life that is totally different, and the purposes of making these feasts vary a great deal according to the type of each ceremony like the funeral ceremonies, wedding ceremonies, kings’ coronations ceremonies and many others, and they were considered as a medium to create some kind of communality among the people in the ceremony through participating in the feast by having or bringing any shares and, at the same time, viewing this ritual as a way that leads to a better society that embodies the human civilization, “Archaeologists have discovered that the consumption of food and drink in ritually prescribed times and places- known technically as feasting- is one of the cornerstones of heightened sociality and cooperation throughout human history.”<sup>3</sup> To be specific, in what follows, the wedding ceremony along with its aspects and conditions according to cultures of the ancient times will be the point of discussion and comparison.

<sup>1</sup> Hirst, K. K., 2018- **Feasting: The Archeology and History of Celebrating Food**, ThoughtCo. n.p..

<sup>2</sup> Hirst, K. K. Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> STANISH, C., 2018- **Feasting Rituals and the Cooperation They Require- are- a Crucial Step toward Human Civilisation**. *The Conversation*, University of South Florida., Florida.

According to some historical accounts, the feast ritual of the sacred marriage originally existed in Sumer in the city of Uruk from about 3000 B.C. or even earlier when it was considered a basic ritual that was usually practiced by people before the marriage of the bride and the groom, and to follow the prevailing conventions of the marriage procedures at that time, these feasts were made to act as an essential medium to declare the wedding for other people and to complete the marriage process officially "The feast was one of the necessary prerequisites of marriages in ancient Mesopotamia."<sup>1</sup>

In *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, feasting took a big concern in shaping this piece of literature as a ritual practiced to celebrate different ceremonies in various incidents, especially the feasts made for marriages because making feasts was the respectable way to ask the hand of the girl in the culture of ancient Mesopotamia, "the wedding ceremony had to include a feast in order to be considered legitimate."<sup>2</sup> In table II, for example, there is a mentioning of a wedding feast after Enkidu was turned into a human by the harlot Shamhat. Being a human, when Enkidu saw a man in a weird situation he asked the harlot about the matter of that young man to know why he was speeding and upon his question the young man replied: "I have heaped up tasty delights for the wedding on the ceremonial (!) platter."<sup>3</sup> This incident, therefore, appears to expose the Mesopotamian rituals concerning wedding traditions that were followed before the marriage and that were practiced from the ancient times of the Near East. In another article that talks about this ritual of the sacred marriage in Sumer Melissa Barker says: "The sacred marriage festival was a jubilant event that was celebrated during the New Year Celebration with a banquet of food, dancing and joyous music of which was mostly ecstatic love songs."<sup>4</sup>, evidencing by this fact that the marriage ceremony in the cultures of the Near East was celebrated with a rich feast that reflects the ancient Mesopotamian civilized society and its norms at that time.

In addition, feasting rituals in ancient Mesopotamia were usually followed by a kind of a contest that included a fighting

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<sup>1</sup> J. MARK, Joshua, J., 2014- **Love, Sex and Marriage in Ancient Mesopotamia**, *World History Encyclopedia*. World History Encyclopedia. n.p..

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> CARNAHAN, ibid, Tablet II.

<sup>4</sup> BARKER, M., 2013- **The Sacred Marriage Ritual of the Sumerians and the Kings that Practiced It**, *Academia*, University of South Africa. n.p..

between two great heroes to win by this the hand of the bride and so the winner could marry her. The best scene that exemplifies practicing this ritual in the epic of Gilgamesh is after the wedding feast was held when Enkidu got angry upon hearing the story of Gilgamesh which was the habit of Gilgamesh's sleeping with every bride before her marriage with her real husband, so Enkidu decided to challenge and prevent him from doing this by fighting with him fiercely, fulfilling by this battle the eastern tradition of the legitimate sacred marriage,

They grappled with each other at the entry to the marital chamber,

In the street they attacked each other, the public square of the land.

The doorposts trembled and the wall shook,<sup>1</sup>

As previously said, the natural result of such a fighting, according to the usually followed norms, should have been winning the hand of a girl to get married with the battle's winner, but in this case it seems that the author of this epic wanted to convey the idea that Gilgamesh won the hand of Enkidu instead of winning the hand of the bride, "They kissed each other and became friends."<sup>2</sup>, the supposition that was interpreted by many authors in different sources in which they assumed that Gilgamesh and Enkidu were intimate friends that loved each other so deeply "we are told that Gilgamesh loves Enkidu like a bride, and they often kiss and embrace. In many ways, they appear to be lovers and many critics believe this is a reasonable interpretation of their relationship."<sup>3</sup>

Concerning *The Odyssey*, feasting also played a central role in the Homeric epic. The element of Homeric feasting along with its specific practices and values is eminent in different occasions in *The Odyssey* as it can be seen throughout most of the epic's books to celebrate special occasions that happened in the epic and that enables the researcher to make interesting comparisons with parallel situations to those found in *Gilgamesh*. To say that feasting in the Homeric epic goes back to long historical areas that cover some places like the Near East and after making some kind of analysis of chronological layering of some aspects of the Homeric epic such as culture and language, Sherrat said: "There is no reason to suppose that this sort of layering

<sup>1</sup> CARNAHAN, W., ibid, Tablet II.

<sup>2</sup> CARNAHAN, W., ibid, Tablet II.

<sup>3</sup> SPARKNOTES., n.d. - **The Epic of Gilgamesh**. *Sparknotes*, n.p.

and transfer may not also apply to feasting practices and attitudes to feasting.”<sup>1</sup> to clarify by this the eastern origins of practicing this ritual.

One of the examples of the wedding feasts that took place in *The Odyssey* and that can be compared to that of Gilgamesh is found in book 20 after the suiters lost hope from Odysseus’ return to home and to determine, as a result, to marry his loyal wife Penelope. Upon this occasion, they gathered on a juicy and abundant feast in Odysseus’ house to ask the hand of Penelope tactfully asking Telemachus to inform his mother about their will, “So sit down beside your mother and put it to her that she must wed the best man and the highest bidder.”<sup>2</sup> From another hand, this sacred feast that Homer makes it happen on the sacred day of the Archer god Apollo can be seen as a wedding feast because it proceeded the new marriage and union between Odysseus and Penelope, “Today is sacred to the Archer-god and his public feast ... Come on, have the server fill once more our cups that we may offer libation before the bow as it lies there in a hoop.”<sup>3</sup> Consequently, this scene greatly coincides with that scene in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* when

people gathered to have a feast before the marriage ceremony and also on a sacred day that was celebrated annually by, Anu, the sky-god in the Mesopotamian mythology.

To make the comparison more evident, this wedding feast in *The Odyssey* was also followed by a bow and arrow contest, the matter that intuitively leads to see the Greek blind imitation of the followed traditions of practicing this ritual that dates back to the time of ancient Mesopotamia. However, this contest in *The Odyssey* came with the prize of the union between Penelope and Odysseus whereas in *Gilgamesh* the prize was the union of Enkidu and Gilgamesh.

In a nutshell, rituals in the ancient myths of the Near East were a basic element that shaped the culture of the societies at that time. Although the rituals from those ancient times were widely known in ancient eastern cultures, yet there is no doubt that the following societies have used them repeatedly through their everyday life details and the rituals discussed above along with their strategies exemplify the great correspondence between the Greek’s cultures and the ancient Mesopotamian one in which practicing such rituals was an integral part

<sup>1</sup> SHERRAT, S., 2004- **Feasting in Homeric Epic**, *Ashmolean Museum*, Oxford.

<sup>2</sup> HOMER, *ibid*, 204.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 210.

of the Near East. "Whatever the hidden reality of unrecorded past may have been, myth and ritual serve to cover certain inconsistencies created by historical events rather than to record and re-enact them exactly."<sup>1</sup>

All the previously mentioned stories of practicing rituals in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* in specific events and situations and that were repeated and incorporated in *The Odyssey* epic can be considered as doubtless evidence that affords a vivid and significant picture of the transition of the mythological rituals that were moved from one generation to another until they reached the Greek culture and put in their narratives.

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