

Substitution in Ancient Mesopotamian War Rituals

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Abstract

Ritual performance has its own set of beliefs. In particular, ritual in the broadest sense, performative behavior that is accepted as normal and not identified as such, or external conduct are the means by which the generative matrix of ideology is produced. From significant social and political gatherings to everyday actions by individuals, these rituals take many forms. War is another ritualized human habit. It is a set of practices that require a lot of preparation and design before the war action. In order to decide on the best course of military action and whether to go to war, the gods had to be consulted and enlisted in ancient Mesopotamia. Every phase of war, from peacetime to hostilities and from the demands of a military campaign to the return to daily life, is marked and facilitated by rituals. In some war rituals substitutes are used, such as clay figurines or animals, to symbolize the enemy. Then, these items or animals become the target of violence. Substitution is a way that the royal power is asserted. It is the pious king who is favored by the gods and enforcing divine justice who will ultimately beat the enemy, and success is always certain. The aim of this study is to draw attention to the practices of substitution in the war rituals of Ancient Mesopotamian New Assyria and Babylon period in the light of sample war ritual texts.

Keywords: Ancient Mesopotamia, War, Violence, War Ritual, Substitution.

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Geniřletilmiş Özet

Belirli bir yerde ve belirli bir durum çerçevesinde gerçekleştirilen, önceden belirlenmiş bir olay veya gelişim seyrine sahip, özellikle dini anlamda herhangi bir faaliyet en geniş anlamıyla ritüel olarak kabul edilmektedir. Ritüel hem modern hem de eski toplumlarda mevcut olan hem dini hem de seküler uygulamaları içeren insan toplumunun hayatının her alanına tezahür etmiştir. Ritüeller, kutsal eylemin kıyafet ve eşyaların kullanılması, taşınması, işaret edilmesi, eylemleştirilmesi, rol yapılması, şarkı söylenmesi, dua okunması gibi çok çeşitli törensel yönlerini içerir. Bu bağlamda, savaş da bir başka ritüelleşmiş insan alışkanlığıdır.

Savaş önceden planlanmış, amaçlı bir eylemdir. Bu nedenle, savaş uygarlığın diğer bazı kurumları ve gelenekleriyle aynı ışıltı altında görmek mümkündür. Eski toplumlarda savaşlar sadece insanları değil inançları doğrultusunda ilahî güçlerinde müdahalesini, işaretlerini, desteğini ve katılımını içeren eylemler olarak düşünülmüştür. Bu toplumlarda tanrıların savaşa katıldığı ve sonucun nihayetinde ilahî bir kararla belirlendiği düşünülmüştür. Savaş ilahî bir imtihan olarak görülmüştür ve kökenlerinin de ilahî emirden geldiğine inanılmıştır. Diğer birçok topluma yakın bir şekilde, ilahî iradeye uygun olarak eski Yakın Doğu halkı savaşın ağır sonuçlarıyla uzlaşmak için mitolojiye ve dine başvurmuştur. Eskiçağ toplumları için, tanrıları adına kozmik düzeni savunan ölümlü bir hükümdarın yetkiyi tanrılardan alarak savaş açarken adil ve yasalara uygun hareket ettiği yazılı metinlerden görülmektedir.

Eski Mezopotamya'da siyasi ve dini eylemler tek bir gerçeklik altında bir araya gelmekteydi. Dolayısıyla, kralın tüm siyasi eylemleri, özellikle de savaşlar, hüküm süren kozmik ideoloji ve dünya görüşü tarafından gerekçelendirilir ve bu bağlamda önem verilirdi. Savaştan önce ya da savaş sırasında tanrıların krala göksel kehanet ve çeşitli fiziksel işaretler şeklinde sinyaller gönderdiğine inanılırdı bunların anlamı ancak yetenekli kahinler tarafından ritüel gözlemler yapıldıktan ve ilgili makamlara danışıldıktan sonra anlaşılırdı. Kral ise kehanet yoluyla elde ettiği ilahî emirleri yerine getirmek için savaş açar, kültleri ve tapınakları korur ve ayinler düzenlerdi. Bu düşünce tarzında başarı, tanrıların kralı desteklediği anlamına gelirken başarısızlık da tam tersi bir anlama gelmekteydi. Kraliyet yazıtlarının aksine, savaştan önce ya da savaş esnasından bahseden savaş ritüel metinleri neredeyse hiç tarihsel bilgi ya da düşmanın tasvirini içermediği dikkat çekmektedir. Bu ayrıntı eksikliği nedeniyle savaş idealize edilebilir ve kaos ve düzensizliğe karşı kozmik mücadelenin bir devamı olarak görülebilir, bu da savaş ayinlerinin çeşitli bağlamlarda uygulanmasını mümkün kılar.

Eski Mezopotamya toplumlarında Sümerlerden başlayarak Akad Asur ve Babil yönetimlerinde asıl amacın savaşta galibiyet kazanmak ve düşmanı bertaraf etmek olduğu için savaş ritüel metinlerini kozmik devamlılık olarak görmek mümkündür. Mezopotamya hükümdarı, ilahî savaşçı rolünü tekrarlayarak bu mücadelede yer almışlardır. Tanrılar, kralların savaşlarını yürüten, destekleyen ve zaferi kazandıran asıl figürlerdi. Galibiyet, tanrılar tarafından onaylandığı için, savaş esnasında ve süreç boyunca işlenen her türlü şiddet sorgulanamaz ve bu durum savaşın meşrulaştırılması için önemli bir faktör olarak görülmüştür. Çivi yazılı belgelerden elde edilen bilgilere göre, askeri seferler düzenlenmeden önce ve esnasında gerçekleştirilen çeşitli ritüeller vardır. Bu ritüellerde düşmanın iç yağından yapılan ve başları arkaya dönük olarak tasvir edilen heykellerle sembolize edildiği görülmektedir. Heykellerin bu şekilde tasvir edilmesinin nedeni, düşmanın yenilgisinden sonra kaçışını betimlemektir. Bu uygulamalarda heykelin önüne kralın kendisi değil, aynı adı taşıyan ve kral gibi giyinmiş vekillerden biri oturtulurdu. Buradaki amaç, insanlar tarafından gerçekleştirilen ancak tanrılara toplu kurban sunma kavramıyla özdeşleşen savaşlar sırasında kralların karşılaşacağı tehlike ve sıkıntıları bertaraf etmektir.

İkame ritüelleri, benzerlik yasasından türetilen empati büyüsi ilkesine dayanır. Bu yöntemde, ulaşılamayan soyut kötülük ritüel olarak heykele ya da canlıya aktarılır ve heykele somut olarak zarar vererek kötülüğün kurtulmak amaçlanır Düşmanın yerine koyulan bir nesne ya da bir hayvan önceden kral tarafından öldürülerek ya da yok edilerek savaş esnasında olası tehlikeleri önceden yok etmek amaçlanmıştır. Savaş ritüellerinde uygulanan vekil tehlike ve felaketleri ortadan kaldırarak kralın hayatını kurtarmakla sorumluydu. Yeni Asur ve Babil dönemlerine ait PBS I/2, 106 = CBS 1516, Ki 1904-10-9, 18 (BM 98989), K 6207 + K 6225 (BBR 57) ritüellerinde düşmanı tasvir etmek için yerine konulan sembollerin kullanıldığı görülmektedir. Bu ritüellerde düşman genellikle nesne ya da hayvan olarak betimlenmiş ve düşman bir insana yüklenmemiştir. Savaş sırasında beklenen şiddeti öngören prosedürlerin bu figürlere uygulandığı anlaşılmaktadır. Düşmana karşı kraliyet gücünü sergileyen ve Mezopotamya kralını savaş esnasında koruyan bu ritüeller hem saldırgan hem de önleyicidir. Kralın gücünün hem etkili hem de kapsamlı olduğunu ve tanrıların onu koruduğunu ifade ederler. Öte yandan, düşman çaresiz ve kolayca yenilebilir olarak sunulur. Kralın askerleri için, yerini alma ritüeli ile düşman yerine geçen objeler ve hayvanlara karşı gösterilen yok etme eylemi güveni artırır ve doğru davranış için bir örnek oluşturur. Hükümdar ve ordusunun savaş esnasında uyguladıkları şiddet, düşmanla olan çatışmalarını bir savunma olarak sunan önceden uygulanan bu ritüellerle meşrulaştırılmıştır. Böylelikle, yerini alan figürlere karşı etkili şiddet kullanımını göstererek, tanrıların da desteği ile hem askerlere hem de halka karşı düşmanın yenilebileceğine ve zafer kazanılacağına dair güçlü inançlar geliştirmişler bulunmuşlar, kralın doğruluğunu teyit etmişler, düşmanı korkutmuşlar ve halkın güvenini artırmışlardır.

Introduction

Any activity especially in the obviously religious sense with a predetermined course of events or development that is carried out in a particular location and within the framework of a specific occasion would be considered ritual in the broadest sense. Rituals include a wide range of ceremonial aspects of the sacred act, such as using clothes and items, bearing, gesturing, moving, acting, singing, reciting prayers, and so on. The ritual includes both the phrasing and the activity. That is, the things spoken and done during a ritual reflect the dual nature of a ritual, which is both action and words (Riva, 2020, p. 220).

Ritual is a deeply communicative act with performative and social components that transmit a richness of meanings (Tambiah, 1979, p. 1979). In ritual, nothing happens by accident. Regardless of how well or poorly it is written and delivered, its message is intended for human, divine, or other supernaturals. The transmission of the message is influenced by audiences, both actual and imagined. It is important to distinguish between the mechanisms involved in message transmission and reception. Ritual is a performance that is always defined by contrast, conditional, and provisional (Bell, 2009, pp. 91-92). Bell (2009) stated that ritual is the practices that adapt the system of symbols to play, brighten and concretize them and that ritual creates a force that unites two symbols; one is the conceptual worldview and the other is the creation value system. Furthermore, ritual as performance provides a complementarity between abstract and conceptual categories and the cultural selectivity of ritual.

Ritual performance creates its own ideological base. The production of the generative matrix of ideology specifically occurs through external conduct, ritual in the widest sense, or performative behavior that is perceived as part of everyday life and is not recognized as such (Bahrani, 2008, p. 69). A universal component of human society, ritual encompasses both holy and secular acts that are found in both contemporary and historical cultures. These rituals range from large-scale social and political events to individual daily behaviors. War is another human behavior enmeshed in ritual (Riva, 2020, p. 219).

War can be described as organized violence. Therefore, it is possible to see war in the same light as certain other institutions and customs of civilization. As Bahrani states that some time ago, in the early twentieth century, war was initially described as a sort of organized, controlled, and even ritualized violence (Bahrani, 2008, p. 9). In ancient times, the gods participated in war and the outcome was ultimately decided by divine decree.

War was seen as a divine trial and its origins came from divine command. As Levto (2014) states the conduct of warfare in the Ancient Near East can be characterized as the planning of purposeful harm in ceremonialized social settings. In this way, warfare was similar to the religion of the sacrificed temple in that it was a unique theater of operations where social hierarchies under control carried out specified practices that were thought to influence the structure and destiny of communities. Similar to the worship of sacrifice temples, ceremonial responsibilities were ascribed in many contexts of Ancient Near Eastern warfare (pp. 39–40)

Close to numerous other societies, in accordance with the divine will the ancient Near Eastern people resorted to mythology and religion to reconcile with the severe results of warfare. For the ancients, a mortal ruler defending cosmic order on behalf of his gods would act justly and lawfully when waging war. Political and religious action came together under their one reality. Thus, all of the king's political actions, particularly wars, were justified and given significance by the reigning cosmic ideology and worldview (Melville, 2016, p. 219).

According to Weippert's analysis (1972) of the Assyrian sources, the phrase *holy war* refers to the belief that the gods decide on conflicts by signs such as omens, that they are present during military campaigns by means of heavenly standards, and that in the original sources, the gods are considered to be the actual combatants. The result was a theological interpretation of the earthly conflict, suggesting that the army is led by the gods, that the warriors are their property, and that the adversaries of the army are their enemies (pp. 476-484). Galter (1998) recognizes that the intricate relationship between religion and politics in Mesopotamia may make it unnecessary to refer to Assyria as being in a holy war (p. 89-94). In this sense, every function of the king was sacred. The king's role's sacred and profane components were inextricably linked (Ataç, 2010, pp. 113-24). The Assyrian ruler was considered the gods' human agent, invested by the

deity's grace with the power to rule and at the same time also his head priest, leading him religious as well as political authority (Radner, 2018, p. 5).

In Assyria, as a successor of ancient Mesopotamian kingship ideology a rebellion against the king was seen to be a violation against the deity since it was perceived as an act of defiance against the god's designated representation within Assyria. In the same way, it was considered disrespectful to the god of Mesopotamia for a ruler from another state to show animosity or declare war against Assyria. In each case, the rebel or enemy king was punished for a heinous crime that he had done (Pekşen & Topaloğlu, 2024, p. 22). As in written documents the king and divine relationship can be found on the rock reliefs and stelaes of Neo-Assyrian period.¹ Scribes used a specific set of adjectives and titles in their descriptions of gods and kings, for example, terms such as 'strong king', great king, king with no equal etc. were employed not necessarily because of the territorial extent of the Assyrian Kingdom but rather as a requirement of the language of correspondence (Köroğlu, 2018, pp. 162-163).

As Galter (2022) mentioned that the self- image of Assyrian king as a warrior reflects the ideology of Assyrian war ideology. Ashurnasirpal's II lengthy inscription from the Ninurta temple in Kalhu is the example. There the king is called "heroic warrior, fearless in battle, trampler of all enemies, establisher of victory over all lands, capable in combat, foremost in battle, conqueror of cities and highlands, exalted and merciless hero. In other texts he is described as 'strong one' and as 'martial king'. He boasts in a self-praise: "I am a hero, I am a warrior, I am a lion, I am a man". This is paralleled by the almost exclusive use of the first person singular in the narrative sections of the military accounts: "I mustered my chariot-troops", "I marched", "I besieged, conquered and defeated", "I massacred many of them" and finally "I razed, destroyed and burnt their cities (109-110).

War Rituals in Ancient Mesopotamia

Before or during the warfare it was believed that the gods sent the king signals in the form of heavenly omens and various physical indications, the meaning of which was only known by skilled observers after they had performed ritual observation and consulted the relevant quantities (Rochberg, 2004, p. 44–97). For his part, the king waged war, maintained cults and temples, and carried out rites in order to carry out the divine commands gleaned through divination. In this way of thinking, success meant the gods were supporting the king so failure meant the opposite. War, in its widest sense, was thus given cosmic meaning and turned into a ritualized activity, an *ordalic procedure* by which the king and his army appeased the gods (Melville, 2016, p. 209). While meticulous military preparation undoubtedly assisted in defeating adversaries, Schwemer (2007) claims that in this case, the gods ultimately decided who would win. The king may carry out a number of additional rites to make sure the gods backed his cause, but before going into combat, oracles were consulted to confirm that his decisions had the blessing of the gods (p. 29).

As Bahrani (2008) put forwards the conduct of war was identified by the Mesopotamians as a ritualized organization characteristic of complex civilizations; they immediately connected it to the formation of the city and, subsequently, the state when these societies came into their own (p. 10-14). Rituals can foster impersonal distance as well as individual identification and participation in the group. It is possible that formalized communication acts as a collective process of legitimizing organized group violence and that rituals, particularly in times of war, play a prominent role as a means of exonerating the individual (Lang, 2020, p. 232).

In contrast to the royal inscriptions including a narrative that precedes the battle, the war rites almost hardly include historical information or the enemy's description. The enemy is conventionally depicted, going by the names *nakru* or *nākiru*² (CAD (N), 2008: 189-190). Due to this lack of detail about enemies, the battle can be idealized and seen as a continuation of the cosmic struggle against chaos and disorder, which makes

¹ For the illustration of reliefs and stelaes, see: Köroğlu "Anadolu'daki Yeni Asur Dönemi Stelleri ve Kaya Kabartmaları."

² The relationship between the Assyrian king and his enemies can be characterized through several keywords. One is the verb *ṣaḥāpu*. For a detailed analysis of this verb, see Karlsson Mattias's "The Assyrian King and His Enemies According to the Verb *Ṣaḥāpu* in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions."

it possible to apply the war rites in a range of contexts.³ Reprising the role of the heavenly warrior the Mesopotamian ruler takes part in this fight. He calls upon the gods, who carry out his battles and whose support ensures his triumph. Since conquest is approved by God, whatever violence committed throughout the process is unquestionable (Lincoln, 2012, p. 86).

As a representative of the divine warrior, the ruler set out to protect Assyria and the entire civilized world against chaos and evil forces on behalf of the divine assembly. His royal responsibilities included this. In order to bring about the ultimate triumph of order over chaos, he had to expand his kingdom and make the god's dominion over the universe a reality. Before the real coronation event, the king had to symbolically reenact Ninurta's battle against chaos, according to a Neo-Assyrian ritual commentary⁴ (Galter, 2022, p. 113).

The king and his army are justified in their violent deeds because they ensure the land's abundance by reestablishing order and containing evil. Written historical chronicles, if by that mean accurate and impartial descriptions of an event, are not what the records of war and its rites are. However, they are documentary in that they are first hand accounts of the power structures of antiquity and the ways in which the war machine is fueled by governmental brutality, the biology, the law, omens, and the divine (Bahrani, 2008, p. 206).

According to the information obtained from cuneiform documents, there are various rituals that were performed before military campaigns were organized. In these rituals, it is seen that the enemy was symbolized by statues made of interior fat and depicted with their heads turned backwards. The reason for depicting the statues in this way is to symbolize the escape of the enemy after his defeat. In these rituals, the king himself was not placed in front of the statue, but one of his officers with the same name and dressed like the king. The purpose here was to eliminate the dangers and troubles that the kings would face during the wars, which were carried out by humans but identified with the concept of offering mass sacrifices to the gods. The person who temporarily replaced the king was responsible for saving the king's life by eliminating these dangers and enemies (Akkuş Mutlu, 2014, p. 285; Pekşen, 2016, p. 57).

Substitutions in War Rituals

Substitution rituals are based on the principle of empathy magic derived from the *law of similarity*. In this method, the unattainable abstract evil is ritually transferred to the statue, animal or a person, with the aim of getting rid of the evil by concretely damaging the statue (Butler, 2017, p. 250). Assyrian ideas about representation and reality were linked, in that it was possible to destroy something by destroying an image of it. The reverse was also true. Representation was thought to make things happen, not simply to depict. The making of images had a performative and indexical relation to the thing portrayed, rather than being a mimetic copy of the real world, although it incorporated details of the real, especially in the art of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (Bahrani, 2008, p. 53).

³ Royal rites had a significant social impact and the ability to turn the destruction of battle into something purposeful and constructive. As it is clear war rituals functioned as rites of passage that signified the several phases of soldiers' experiences, thereby reducing the potential disruption to the social order that resulted from their taking up arms, departing from a well-ordered civilized life, engaging in combat, and ultimately coming home. Analyzing the concept of ritual from an anthropological perspective, Arnold Van Gennep conducted a comparative study by observing a large number of rituals and concluded that all rituals follow the same model. Van Gennep observed that rituals develop briefly in three stages. In the first stage, the ritual object (What is referred to here as the 'object' is the original intention, purpose and main factor that is the reason for its transformation and the reason for the practice of the ritual.) is removed from its current existence. In the second stage, the object is caught between two entities. In the final stage, it succeeds in reaching its new existence, that is, the expected state desired for it. This is the first analysis of a ritual process. Van Gennep called these three stages "rites of passage" (Gennep, 1975, pp. 10-11). In later periods, theorists developed this concept and extended it to a wider area as "transformation ritual". Most theorists and experts agree that these steps, which cover the basic practices of ritual, are valid for all rituals and can be adapted to all rituals. For example, Morris Brian, another important anthropological thinker on the subject of religion, argues that this three-step process is strictly applied in a ritual, whether it is a ritual of transformation or not. (Morris, 1987, p. 247).

⁴ "The king standing on the war chariot: the king, the hero, the lord Ninurta is he." "The king, (coming) out from the Ekur, wearing the golden crown on his head and sitting on a throne, while they carry him and go to the palace: Ninurta, the avenger of his father, (is he)." (Livingston, 1989, pp. 99-102).

Oppenheim (1977) states that Mesopotamian written sources contain a large number of spell texts and that the most common spells are those defined as sympathy/empathy attraction or substitution. These spells have a wide range of applications, including transmission practices as substitution rituals (p. 180). Oppenheim (1977) also put forwards that sympathy spells, which are practiced for a good purpose, have a system of transferring bad luck to the bad in order to drive away the evil spirit by directing it towards the enemy and to cleanse the person or object from evil. Sympathy spells are based on the relationship between people, animals, objects and plants. This type of belief suggests a theory of communication in which distant, independent and unconnected objects are connected to each other through special methods that create a kind of sympathy bond (p. 180).

Sympathy spells have always been one of the rituals that make the most extensive use of objects in rituals. Since objects in sympathy spells can substitute for countless supernatural powers and even for other objects far away from them, these rituals are based entirely on objects (Butler, 2017, p. 216). Sympathy spells are known to be based on a relationship between animals, humans, inanimate objects and plants that can directly affect each other. This relationship and connection was not random and required certain qualities. As Butler (2017) mentions in the relationship between gods and objects there were two different aspects of the sympathy relationship; the object represented the power of the god in its entirety, while at the same time the god had to be involved in the order of the ordinary sympathy bond (p. 217). Frazer (1900) put forward the *law of similarity* and explained the relationship of objects to other beings in sympathy spells with the phenomenon of “it takes one to know one”. The *similar* was able to dominate over the *similar* and the *similar* could be used to treat, correct and cure a situation. The opposite of this, the *law of opposite*, has also been demonstrated in the same direction but with a different functioning. In this principle, the opposite of something was able to dominate the other thing and make the bad situation disappear (p. 9). It is noteworthy that both laws require substitution.

In Babylon and Assyria the relationship of the signified to the signifier is characterized by a constant shifting between the integral to the real realms. Bahrani mentions that if this shifting between the two realms was made possible by the visual shape of things in the case of words (although iconic signifiers were not privileged), then the realm of visual signification must also take into account encountering things in various ways. Therefore, image and name, and the organic body of a person were all ways of encountering that person. A body double (an organic substitute body for the person), a wax or clay effigy, or a statue of durable materials such as stone or bronze can be likened to the iconic or homophonic substitute signifier, which functions by means of resemblance. Likewise, things related to magical substitution (fragments of attire, fingernails, sand taken from one's footprint) as well as offspring or seed are metonymic extensions of the person (Bahrani, 2003, p. 128)

The king was the commander in chief, the leader of the army, but as mentioned above he followed the decrees of the gods, whose will be made known through omens and oracles. At least one baru-priest marched in the vanguard with the troops, and every military plan was checked against the omens before being put into effect. The omens were taken and corroborated by means of other omens in a series of observations and repetitive queries. The corroborating omens were taken from other forms of portents such as from astronomical observations, from dream interpretation, chance portents, and so on. It is clear that the omens were taken seriously; they were not propagandistic acts for repression or coercion of the people but part of a religious ideology to which the king himself submitted. The same system of belief resulted in the ritual of the substitute king,⁵ in which violence and evil were localized into the body of the substitute as scapegoat⁶ (Bahrani, 2008, p. 197).

⁵ In this distinctively Mesopotamian ritual, the king was provided with a substitute (Sar-pahi) when astronomical omens spoke of an evil fate for the king that would affect the entire kingdom. The substitute king was a citizen carefully chosen for this role by the priests. He was never a prisoner or a slave. He was dressed in the king's regalia and made to submit to a series of ritual incantations naming him as the king in an incantational utterance, and also by means of inscribing the name of the king onto his person. The name was either written onto something that was attached to his garment, or alternatively, the name was written onto something that could be ingested by the substitute. In either case, in order to be incorporated, it appears to have been important that the name was both uttered and written into the body of the substitute king. When the imminent evil finally came, it was expected to leave the previous-real king unharmed, the substitute king having become the decoy that would absorb the evil fate in his place. In some cases, it appears that the substitute was in fact killed as the final part of this ritual, but the texts are unclear on the matter, and the question of sacrificial death remains open (Bahrani, 2008, p. 198). The appointment of a substitute for the king in Late-Assyrian times has been the subject of much discussion. It is clear that when an eclipse occurred which, according to the omen texts, should have resulted in the king's death, a substitute was temporarily put on the throne to die in place of the real monarch, who was thus saved.

These images used in rituals of substitutions are called *šalmu*. *Šalmu* is the Akkadian word used in Assyrian and Babylonian texts to refer to what in our view is a representation. Traditionally, philologists have translated this word variously as statue, relief, monument, painting, and image. More recently, it has been argued that the term image is a more accurate translation of *šalmu* than one that assumes the word defines a particular type of monument (Morandi, 1988, pp. 105-106). Winter (1992) has further argued against the use of portrait when referring to *šalmu* as a representation of a person (p. 36).

Bahrani claims that Akkadian notion of *šalmu*⁷ is substitution than the image because it is a sign representation that takes its place in the realm of the real. Rather than being a copy of something in reality, the image itself was seen as a real thing. It was not considered to resemble an original reality that was present elsewhere but to contain that reality in itself. Therefore, instead of being a means of signifying an original real thing, it was seen as ontologically equivalent to it, existing in the same register of reality (Bahrani, 2003, p. 127). In this sense, it is clearly illuminated by examples of ritual texts on the use of substitution rituals in warfare in ancient Mesopotamia.

The ritual PBS I/2, 106 = CBS 1516⁸ which is a Babylonian ritual and incantation aimed at providing protection for the king against the enemy. The structure of the ritual features a ceremonial framework that includes an image of flour at both the outset and conclusion⁹, complemented by various incantations directed towards deities linked to the establishment of fate.

*PBS I/2, 106 = CBS 1516*¹⁰

Obv., 5-8

5 You should make / draw on the ground an image of flour before Šamaš.

6 ...the king...

7 On that image you should cause to stand...

8 You should set up a reed hut for Ea, Šamaš, and Marduk.

In this ritual, the image of flour is created, and offerings are made to the gods who decide fates in a location designated for that purpose. The image of flour that appears in the first and end parts of the ritual may or may not be the same as *zisurrû*¹¹, the circle of flour that regularly appears in Namburbi rites¹² and magically wards off evil. The image's meaning and operation are not explained in the rite¹³. As the passage is broken it is not identified but it is clear that something is put on the image. The text continues with the

The purpose of the present contribution is not to participate in the discussion of the many outstanding problems, but to make available a new text. This custom of substitution is known so far from royal correspondence in which it figures (Lambert, 1958, p. 109).

⁶ For example a text of Assur-Nirari V of Assyria (754-745 BC) concerning a treaty with a Syro-Hittite ruler contains evidence of a remarkable ritual that enacts the threat of a curse that will operate if the oath and treaty are broken. The ritual, which is in some sense one of substitution, seems to have been carried out during an animal sacrifice. It has the performative quality of an incantational utterance: "This head is not the severed head of a ram but the head of Mati'ilu ... should Mati'ilu break these agreements, his head should be cut off, just as this head of the ram has been cut off" (Bahrani, 2008, p. 202). It is common to discuss the Mesopotamian ceremony in connection with a Hittite "Substitute king." The Hittite ritual is more like to the Biblical scapegoat, and it has no direct link to the Mesopotamian Substitute king, with the exception of parallels with the *šar pūhi* in the ritual mechanics pertaining to substitution (Verderame, 2020, p. 196).

⁷ The use of figurines (*šalmu*) to operate on a person, who is not physically present, is widespread in Mesopotamian rituals; particularly in anti-witchcraft (*Maqlû*). The use of substitute figurines is also one of the main methods of witchcraft, but it is only indirectly documented in the anti-witchcraft instructions as the cause of illness and in the diagnostic section (Verderame, 2013, p.304).

⁸ As Soohoo (2019) explained this ritual was initially copied by Lutz and subsequently published and translated by Ebeling (p.346).

⁹ PBS I/2, 106 = CBS 1516 Reverse 27 "He should throw (it) down on the image of flour, which is drawn on the ground."

¹⁰ Ebeling is used as a source in this study.

¹¹ For detailed information see Dilek, Y. & Turgut, M., (2019). "To Create Sacred Settlements Using "Flour" and "Reed" in Ancient Mesopotamian Religion (p.127).

¹² Most of the well-preserved examples of namburbi rituals from the 8th-6th century BC have been recovered from Nineveh and Assyria. In fact, the language of such texts and the presence of rare documents from Babylonia and the West suggest that the namburbi ritual tradition originated in the vicinity of Babylonia and was used in the region influenced by Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian civilizations (Çeçen et al., 2020). Detailed information can be find in Caplice, R., (1974) *The Akkadian namburbi Texts: An introduction*.

¹³ Ebeling (1949) believes that the picture of flour is a stand-in for the king, but the text makes no mention of this (p. 173).

description of the various attributes of the gods and what they do. From line 21 onwards, the ritual of substitution begins to shape.

- 21 *The one whom the governor opposes / opposed (?)...*
 22 *...my substitute(?)...*
 23 *For the desire of my heart(?)...*
 24 *...like the image...*
 25 *Speak and at your command they shall make a supplication.*
 26 *Impose my evil signs...*
 27 *Provide provisions before Šîn and Šamaš.*
 28 *Remove my evil. Establish goodness.*
 29 *It is you who have established the going...*
 30 *Spare my life from distress. Save me from the tomb.*
 31 *In doing battle and combat, let me not come to have a rival.*
 32 *Ea, Šamaš, and Marduk, establish for me help!*

This imperative section of the ritual asks the gods to intercede on behalf of the king. It begins by referring to the image mentioned at the beginning of the ritual. This ritual was carried out prior to combat or a military campaign, according to certain specifics in the text. In addition to asking that his life be preserved and that he be rescued "from the tomb," the king also asks that he not face any combat in war or conflict. As it is understood from the text, the king asks for help from the gods for protection by attributing meaning to the substitute before facing his enemies.

In the reverse, the ritual applied by the king to the substitute to protect him from the enemy in battle.

Reverse 24-28.

- 24 *Day and night let me pray to you*
 25 *...and let me make glorious to the Upper World your great deeds*
 26 *You should say this and the king slaughters a substitute.*
 27 *He should throw (it) down on the image of flour, which is drawn on the ground.*
 28 *He should perform on (it) a tamarisk (purification) / bathing-procedure.*
 29 *Liturgist instructed to act like the king's barber (gallābūtu) and he (with the hair?) should go to the land of the enemy.*

The king is meant to throw the substitute¹⁴ upon it at the end of the ritual. Whether the substitute is an actual person or an object, like a clay figurine, is not made clear. The connection between words and ritual actions is an intriguing aspect of this ritual. Its incantations primarily address the king's security and welfare. He specifically calls upon the gods who decide fates and begs them to grant him life and safety. In order to convince the gods to grant him life, the king must ritually sacrifice a substitute. The ruler can achieve victory in combat by securing divine favor by sacrifice, both human and animal. One life representing the enemy substitute is sacrificed in order to protect the king. Its slaughter becomes a sign of the defeat of the enemy.

Another war ritual that substitution action is seen Ki 1904-10-9, 18 (BM 98989). Sections are separated by rulings, and the text is broken at the beginning and the end. Since several sentences are not completely preserved, it is challenging to ascertain the ritual's meaning and organization. Furthermore, the lack of a colophon makes dating the work and pinpointing its precise provenance ambiguous and tentative. Given that it was written in the seventh century BCE and came from Nineveh, it seems likely that Ashurbanipal's library had it. The text was either an original or a copy, but no further versions have been found to date (Schwemer, 2007, p. 30). In the ritual two substitution action draws attention. One is a šalmu object and the other is a pig.

Ki 1904-10-9, 18 (BM 98989)
Reverse 14-26

¹⁴ In the Neo-Assyrian substitute king ritual, Pūḫū refers to the person who took the throne and was slain following the eclipse (Lambert, 1958). But it can also be used to describe clay figurine or other items that are used to represent a person. However, the king's acts toward the substitute are described using the verb "to slaughter," indicating that the pūḫū is a living being.

- 14 *[You should make an image of...] You should cause it to carry a qulmû¹⁵-axe in its right hand.*
 15 *You should write on its left shoulder "...[o]f the humankind," its name.*
 16 *You should write "...my [enemies]," its name.*
 17 *[You should slaughter a white pig with a dagger.] You should collect its blood in a bowl.*
 18 *[The ruler] pours out [the blood of the pig t]o the south, the north, the east (and) the west.*
 19 *The [sk]in of the white pig that was slaughtered...*
 20 *...[You] should smear (it) (with)...You should place the dagger and the image inside.*
 21 *...You should seal (it) with clay.*
 22 *[You] should seal (it) [with a seal.] The ruler places his hand on the skin of the pig.*
 23 *He should say: "Turn around! Stay away!"*
 24 *horned] alkali and gypsum [of] his hands...in water...*
 25 *my...] I have [removed] over you.*
 26 *to the bor]der of the land of the enemy he [leaves it].*

The liturgist is instructed to create a figurine (šalmu) on the tablet's reverse a hatchet (qulmû) in its right hand. The figurine's name is inscribed on both its left and right shoulders, however neither is completely intact. After a white pig is killed with a dagger, the king gathers the blood in a bowl and pours it out to the south, north, east, and west. The figurine and blade are then inserted into the pig's skin after it has been smeared with something. Like a letter, the skin is sealed in clay. Using gypsum and horned alkali, two substances used in purifying rites, the monarch rubs his hands over the pig's skin.

The pig is obviously a transitional item. The color is significant as white could represent purity. (Schwemer, 2007, p. 31). Initially, it is killed and turns into a carrier of the evil that will be used against the adversary. However, because the pig's blood wards off evil, the violent act of killing it also permits the protection of the soil. The king's prosperity and well-being are exchanged for the substitute's life. The pig becomes a symbol of what will happen to the opponent, just as omens, when interpreted by professionals, reveal divine anger. The killed pig is transformed into the envelope containing the emblems of that punishment, which include the same dagger that kills it and the figure holding a hatchet, which will bring the violence against the enemy to life. At last, the pig is driven to a transitional area which is the enemy's territorial border. In order to protect them and maintain their newly gained purity, the evil-bearer is geographically isolated from the monarch and his realm. The violence and bad luck inside the pig will be transferred to the opponent when they come into contact with it.

Another war ritual that involves a substitute is K 6207 + K 6225 (BBR 57) Elat Text IIa. As Soohoo (2019) stated Zimmern edited and published this ritual first. Elat compiled and revised the text in observance of "the day the king (goes?) into combat and battle," (p. 586). In the final part of the ritual, the substitution of enemy appears.

K 6207 + K 6225 (BBR 57) 11-12

11 You should make an image of the enemy out of tallow.

12 You should tie (it) around with an ulinnu-cord from its front to its back.

As the rite comes to an end, a cord is tied to a tallow-made figure of the enemy (šalam nakri). Just like hair or a fingernail might represent a person, this image serves as a substitute. Figures used in other Mesopotamian rituals are made to ward off evil and safeguard a person or home (Gurney, 1935, p. 31-63). The purpose of this ritual is to render the enemy incapable of posing a danger. The portrayal is handled with the same brutality and bindings that a genuine vanquished adversary would receive. A magical rope is affixed to the image's head, and its face is obliterated.

Conclusion

A variety of rituals were carried out both before and during the organization of military expeditions, according to information obtained from cuneiform writings. Statues of the enemy with their heads turned

¹⁵ The word "qulmû" describes a tool used for digging, cutting trees, and hewing stone (CAD (Q) 1982, p. 299-300).

backwards, fashioned from inside fat, were used as symbols at these ceremonies. This arrangement of the statues is intended to represent the enemy's flight following his defeat. One of his officers, who had the same name and wore the king's clothing, was positioned in front of the statue during these rites instead of the king himself. This was done to remove the risks and problems that the kings would encounter during the human-led conflicts, which were associated with the idea of presenting large sacrifices to the gods. It was the duty of the person who took the king's place temporarily to save his life by removing these threats and adversaries.

In war rituals, by symbolizing real opponents while hiding their humanity, the employment of substitutes serves to sanitize violence against actual enemies. The opponent is objectified, rendered helpless, and subjected to violence in the replacement procedures and other war rites. When war rituals use substitutes, they normalize behavior that would otherwise be viewed as severe and portray an idealized view of combat that obscures the messy aspects of the violence connected to conflict. Since the public only sees symbolic violence, the detrimental impacts of war are concealed from them.

The safety of the realm is intimately tied to the well-being of the king. The divinities cannot favor both the king and his rival. Eventually, they determine the destiny of one at the expense of the other. In order to guarantee their benevolence, the expert's proper rituals, involving prayers to soothe their hearts, purification, and sacrifices, need to be performed to persuade them. Evil needs to be contained and neutralized through a performative act involving a slaughtered pig that ritually brings about this reality by being sent away from the royal person and the land he rules.

The practice and intensification of violence are made possible by socialization processes in each of the rituals covered above. To portray the enemy, substitutes are employed. The opponent is dehumanized since they are often objects or animals. Procedures that foresee the violence that is anticipated during war involve these substitutes. When it comes to respectable, well-known authority figures, this social modeling works particularly well. It becomes simpler to use violence in the future as a result of desensitization and the normalization of behavior that would otherwise be considered harmful due to practice and repetition.

The three war rituals that use replacements are marked by and accompanied by violence. By displaying royal might against the enemy and defending the Mesopotamian king from injury, these rites are both offensive and preventive. They convey that the king's power is both effective and extensive, and that the gods look after him. On the other hand, the enemy is presented as helpless and easily vanquished. For the king's men, the brutality toward the substitutes fosters trust and sets an example of proper conduct. The monarch and his army's aggression were justified by these ceremonies, which presented their conflict with the adversary as a defensive. By demonstrating the effective use of violence against the substitutions, they made strong claims that the enemy could and would be vanquished, confirming the king's righteousness, frightening the enemy, and boosting the confidence of his subjects.

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