

1.5.1 The Fifth Day of the *Akītu* Festival¹³³

One of the most widely known disposal rites from Mesopotamia is that occurring on the fifth day of the *akītu* festival for the purification of the Ezida cella of the god Nabu in Marduk's larger temple, Esagila.¹³⁴

ri). The stick and cup are left in one place, while the almond branch and goat are placed in another place. The goat is slaughtered. The legs are put in the skin, the head is cut off, and the flesh is cooked. Bronze bowls with honey and oil in them are brought. The skin is put around the almond branch. The front legs are tied with snares. A hole is dug in which the honey and oil are placed. A foreleg (^{uzu}*da-ra-*³) is cut off and put in the hole. The almond branch is placed in the hole, and on top of it, the other foreleg. From here the text is broken and obscure. We can only understand fully the last lines which say that the patient has been healed. This rite does not seem to exhibit transfer and elimination. Rather, the goat is a substitute for the man. The slaughter and cooking of the animal, plus the deposit of honey, oil, and flesh parts into the hole are to be considered an offering, not a disposal of an impure scapegoat. Ahituv has suggested that this is an offering taken and given to a demon in the wilderness. More specifically, I think it is either an offering given to a god to aid the patient in his quest for healing or, better, an offering given to the demon (*ilu rašmu*, cf. vs. 1; rs. 10) who is affecting him as a substitute for himself. In this way it would be much like the Hittite plague rituals which manifest the motif of substitution. But this understanding is complicated by the patient's eating of the meat which should be for the angry god ([UJZU.MEŠ *an-nu-u KÚ*, rs. 7; the text is broken here and thus the activity is not entirely clear). It seems somewhat strange for a patient to eat the meat intended to placate a deity. Further, it is not clear how the wilderness locale is to be viewed here. It may have no significance in this particular rite as a place where evil is disposed. With all these obscurities and complications, the text cannot really be effectively compared to the biblical rite.

¹³³A copy, transliteration and translation of this ritual is published in F. Thureau-Dangin, *Rituels accadiens* (Paris: Ernest Levoux, 1921) 127–54. An English translation appears in *ANET*, 331–34. For a recent treatment of the *akītu* festival in general, see J. A. Black, "The New Year Ceremonies in Ancient Babylon: 'Taking Bel by the Hand' and a Cultic Picnic," *Religion* 11 (1981) 39–59. A recent comparison of this section of the ritual with the Day of Atonement ritual is in M. Weinfeld, "Social and Cultic Institutions," 111–13.

¹³⁴In lines 345–47, the *mašmaššu*, the "exorcist" (see *CAD*, *AHw*, s.v.; cf. J. Renger, "Untersuchungen zum Priestertum in der altbabylonischen

352. On top he mixes perfumes and cypress.
353. He summons the slaughterer.¹³⁹ He decapitates a ram.
354. The *mašmaššu* wipes the temple with the carcass of the ram.
355. He recites the incantations for exorcising the temple.
356. He purifies the whole cella including its surrounding areas and then takes down the censer.
357. The *mašmaššu* takes up the carcass of that ram
358. and goes to the river. He sets his face westward and
359. throws the carcass of that ram into the river.
360. He goes to the open country.¹⁴⁰ The slaughterer does the same with the ram's head.
- 361–62. The *mašmaššu* and the slaughterer go out to the open country. As long as Nabu is in Babylon, they shall not enter Babylon.
363. From the fifth day to the twelfth day they dwell in the open country

This rite is simply for the transfer and disposal of evils affecting Nabu's cella; it contains no motif of substitution as often appears in Hittite and other Mesopotamian rituals. The carcass of the ram is used to wipe away evils present in the room (line 354). It thereby becomes saturated with impurity and must be disposed of properly by casting it into the river (line 359).¹⁴¹ Because the rite only manifests the ideas of transfer and disposal, it is conceptually similar to the scapegoat rite.

Another notable similarity between the two rites is the pollution incurred by the officiants. In the *akītu* rite, the *mašmaššu* and the slaughterer cannot return to the sanctuary complex but must remain in the open country until the end of the festival (lines 360–363). This implies that they have suffered pollution from the rite. This perception

¹³⁹Read GÍR.LÁ as *ṭābiḫū* (AHw, 1376).

¹⁴⁰EDIN = *ṣēru* "steppe, open country." See chap. 9, section 9.4.1, below.

¹⁴¹The rite is similar to the disposal of the *ḥaṭṭāʾt* remnants (Lev 16:27). The body of the *ḥaṭṭāʾt* animal is impure after the blood application in various parts of the Tabernacle; hence, the animal must be discarded. However, instead of casting it into a river, it is burned in a pure place outside the camp (cf. Lev 4:11). See chap. 6.

is underscored by the stipulation that the *šešgallu*¹⁴² is not to observe the exorcising of the temple lest he become impure. Only after the rite is completed can the *šešgallu* resume his work in the temple.¹⁴³ In the scapegoat rite, the one who led the goat out to the wilderness and the one who burned the *ḥaṭṭāʾt* carcasses are impure and need to bathe before reentering the camp (Lev 16: 26, 28).

Another similarity between the two rites is that both are used once a year in connection with cleansing a sanctuary. Yet, beyond this broad similarity, the two rites are in striking contrast. The scapegoat rite is the climax (or one of the climaxes) of the ceremonies on the Day of Atonement, carrying away all of the nation's sins. The Babylonian rite, however, is relatively minor, being concerned with only one of many cellae in the larger temple, and that of a visiting god, Nabu. The purification of Nabu's cella is by no means one of the great climaxes of the *akītu* festival, such as the procession to the *akītu* house, the ritual battle, or the arrival of Nabu for the festival. This cleansing rite, together with setting up the "Golden Heaven" in the cella and arranging various offerings,¹⁴⁴ are all preparatory acts done prior to Nabu's arrival from Borsippa. Consequently, it is inappropriate to consider this rite an annual temple cleansing rite on the same order as the Day of Atonement in the Bible.

1.5.2 A Ritual from the *Utukkī Lemnūti* Series¹⁴⁵

A ritual segment from the *utukkī lemnūti* series shows a disposal rite similar to the New Year festival rite, but for the benefit of a person rather than a building. Ea instructs his son, Marduk, how to purify the patient who is beset by demons:

- 115–16. At evening, bring a *mašḥultuppû*-goat to the man's body, son of his god.
- 117–18. Bind his head with the headband of the *mašḥultuppû*-goat.

¹⁴²Do not read *urigallu*; see *AHw*, 1220a.

¹⁴³Lines 364–68, not cited here.

¹⁴⁴Lines 369–70, not cited here.

¹⁴⁵Edited and translated by O. Gurney, "Babylonian Prophylactic Figures and their Rituals," *AAA* 22 (1935) 86–89.

119. Whether it is an evil *utukku*-demon, an evil *alû*-demon,
an evil *eṭimmu*-demon, an evil *gallû*-demon, an evil god,
an evil *rābiṣu*-demon,
120. a *lamaštu*-demon, a *labaṣu*-demon, an *aḥḥāzu*-demon,
121. an *utukku*-demon which overcomes a man, an *eṭemmu*-
demon which has seized a man,
122. an evil one, one who has an evil face, an evil mouth, an
evil tongue,
123. headache, toothache, chest pain or intestinal disease—
- 124–25. by means of this incantation let them be torn away from
his head!
- 126–27. May Ishum, the great messenger and exalted overseer of
the gods, stand at his head! May he not cease (to stand at
his head)!
- 128–29. Let your pure and exalted mouth say: “Arise from the
body of the restless man!
- 130–31. Let everything evil arise and go out to the place of
Ereshkigal!”¹⁴⁶
- 132–33. Carry away the skin of the *mašḥultuppû*-goat from the
body of the restless man.
- 134–35. [Throw it] into the square, in the wide street.
- 136–37. Let everything evil ret[urn] to the earth! (See n. 146.)

This ritual, like the foregoing rite for the cleansing of Nabu’s cella and the scapegoat ritual, contains only the motif of transfer and disposal. Substitution is not present. A goatskin¹⁴⁷ is placed on or near the patient (lines 115–16, 132–33). After an incantation calling on Ishum to help in the removal of the evil (lines 126–31)—an example of entreaty—the text speaks of removing the goat skin and throwing it into the street (lines 132–35).¹⁴⁸ This symbolizes the return of the evil to the underworld (lines 136–37). The goat’s headband placed on the patient (lines 117–18) serves to absorb the evil or, like the colored wools in Hittite rites, to concretize the evil. The expression in lines

¹⁴⁶The place of Ereshkigal is the nether world. The term “earth” (KI = *eršitu*) indicates the underworld also.

¹⁴⁷Lines 115–16 do not say that only the skin is placed by the patient, but lines 132–33 seem to indicate this was the case since only a goatskin is removed from him.

¹⁴⁸On disposal in the street, see chap. 9, section 9.4.1.

124–25 (“by means of this incantation let them be torn away from his head!”) implies that when this was said, the headband was removed from the patient’s head, symbolizing the removal of the evil.¹⁴⁹

An important contrast with the biblical scapegoat evident in this rite is the nature of the evils removed. Here the evil is demonic afflictions as the long list of demons in lines 119–23 indicates. In the scapegoat rite, only the people’s sins which affect the sanctuary are removed. There is no concern about exorcising demons. Another contrast is found in the idea of discarding evils in the underworld (lines 130–31, 136–37). The biblical rite does not carry this idea as we determined earlier.

1.5.3 A Ritual from the *Asakkī Marṣūti* Series¹⁵⁰

- 68–69. He cannot sleep, he ca[nnot] rest.
70–71. He has caused his god concern.¹⁵¹
72. Marduk noticed. “Whatever I know.”¹⁵² Go my son!
73–74. Take a white goat of Dumuzi.
75–76. Lay it near the sick person.
77–78. Remove its heart.
79–80. Place it in the hand of that man.
81. Recite the incantation of Eridu.
82–85. Wipe that man with the goat whose heart you removed
and with bread and dough.¹⁵³
86. Pass censer and torch alongside of him.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹For a similar action, but with an unclean type of headgear which is thrown into the *rebītu*, see *CT* 17.26: 73–79 (= *DES* 2. 94–96). In another ritual, a *tigillū* (“Koloquinte”) and goathair are tied to a patient’s head (*CT* 17.19–20: 36–51 = *DES* 2. 67–68). These items are to take away headache. The disposal of them is not specified. Cf. also *TuL* 68 vs. 13–14.

¹⁵⁰*CT* 17.10–11: 68–87 (= *DES* 2. 32–35).

¹⁵¹Cf. *CAD* A/2, 423a.

¹⁵²The phrases “Marduk noticed. ‘Whatever I know.’” are abbreviations of a larger dialogue between Ea and Marduk often found in ritual instructions. A full form is observed in *Shurpu* vii 37–50 (note especially 37, 51, 53, where the phrases in this line of the *asakkī marṣūti* rite occur).

¹⁵³The verb *kuppuru* can take two accusatives, one of the object wiped and one of the material used for wiping (see appendix 2 on *kuppuru*). See the translation in *CAD* A/1, 239a.

¹⁵⁴See n. 136.

87. Dump (the materials[?]) out in the street.
88–89. Draw a flour circle (around) that man.”

This ritual segment from the *asakkī marṣūti* series is again an example of transfer and disposal. Ea instructs Marduk to take a goat and place it near a person suffering from demonic affliction who is now restless and cannot sleep (lines 68–69). The heart is removed and placed in the patient’s hand (lines 77–80). After an incantation, the goat and some bread and dough are used to wipe the man (lines 82–85). A censer and torch are then passed over the patient (line 86). Finally the wiping materials, censer, and torch are apparently thrown into the street (line 87).¹⁵⁵ This rite is similar to the one in the *utukkī lemnūti* series. Thus the contrasts with the biblical rite are much the same and do not need discussion.

1.5.4 A Ritual from the Shurpu Series

A most intriguing example of transfer and disposal is found in the Shurpu series. Ea instructs Marduk how to relieve a person suffering from demonic sickness. He says:

- vii 53. [Go my son, Mar]duk!
54–55. Take seven loaves of bread made of pure *tappinni*-flour.
56. String (them) on a bronze (skewer).
57. Set a carnelian bead (on it).
58–59. Wipe the man (with it), son of his god, whom the curse has seized.
60–61. Cast his spit upon the wiping material.
62. Cast the incantation of Eridu (upon it).
63. Take (it) out to the open country, the pure place.

¹⁵⁵It is not absolutely clear that the wiping materials are placed in the street since no object is explicitly mentioned (line 87: SILA.ŠË U.ME.NI.DUB.DUB.BU “you shall dump in the street”). The syntactic unit immediately preceding mentions the censer and torch. Hence, it might be thought that these items alone are put in the street. However, due to the fact that in other rites, wiping materials and other objects of transfer may be thrown into the street (see chap. 9, section 9.4.1), I am persuaded that in addition to the censer and torch, the kid, bread and dough were also placed in the street.

- 64. Place (it) at the base of an *ašāgu*-bush.¹⁵⁶
- 65–66. Remove from his body [the disease? that be]set him.
- 67–68. Deliver his curse [to the] Lady of the Open Country and Plain.¹⁵⁷
- 69–70. May Ninkilim, lord of animals, transfer his serious illness to the vermin of the ground!

The transfer of evil is effected by wiping the patient with loaves of bread (lines 58–59). The patient also spits on the breads to further transfer his affliction (lines 60–61).¹⁵⁸ The materials are taken far from the patient to the open country and put in the custody of gods in charge of this area and the animals there (lines 67–70). Though an animal is not used here as the vehicle of transfer, the rite is extraordinarily similar to the biblical rite since, like the scapegoat, the impurity laden material is disposed of in the wilderness. Even more striking is the mention of deities of the steppe and animals to which the impurity is delivered. The phrase “deliver his curse [to the] Lady of the Open Country and Plain” (lines 67–68) is amazingly similar to the biblical requirement of sending the goat to Azazel in the wilderness (Lev 16:10). Yet it is in this very similarity that the greatest contrast is found. The desert deities in *Šurpu* are very prominent and active. Ninkilim is called upon to act in transferring the evil to the vermin (line 69–70). The ensuing portion of the ritual calls upon other deities to revive, purify, and bless the patient.¹⁵⁹ In contrast, Azazel does not act; he has no personality. The name refers more to a locale than a supernatural figure.

1.5.5 A Namburbi Ritual for the Evil of a Dog¹⁶⁰

- Vs.10–11. A namburbi ritual for the evil of a dog which howls and moans in a man's house

¹⁵⁶Compare the burial of figurines at the base of an *ašāgu*-bush in Castellino, “Rituals and Prayers Against ‘Appearing Ghosts,’” *Or* 24 (1955) 260, line 24.

¹⁵⁷ *ḫBēlit* EDIN *u ba-ma-a-ti*. In *Maqlu* (iv 25) the patient's affection by sorcery is described in part as being delivered over to this personality.

¹⁵⁸Cf. the Hittite examples in n. 56, above.

¹⁵⁹Lines 71–85.

¹⁶⁰Caplice, “Namburbi Texts in the British Museum, II,” *Or* 36 (1967) 1–8; E. Ebeling, “Beiträge zur Kenntnis den Beschwörungsserie Namburbi [Part 9],” *RA* 50 (1956) 90–94.

12. [o]r spatters its urine on a man. You recite (the incantation) three times.
 13. The evil of that dog will not come near the man and his house.
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14. Its ritual: You make a dog of clay.
 15. You place cedar wood on its neck. You sprinkle oil on its head.
 - 16–17. You put goathair on it. You place horsehair for its tail. You set up a reed altar at the river bank before Shamash.
 18. You arrange twelve loaves of emmer. You pile up dates and fine flour.
 19. You set out *mirsu*-confection, honey, and ghee.
 - 20–21. You set up a *pīḥu*-jug. You fill two *kukkubu*-containers with fine beer and set (them) out. You set out a censer of juniper wood.
 22. You libate fine beer. You make the man kneel.
 23. He lifts up that figurine and says the following:
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24. Incantation: Shamash, king of heaven and earth, judge of areas above and below,
 25. luminary of the gods, governor of mankind,
 26. the one who gives judgement on the great gods—
 27. I turn to you; I seek you. Among the gods command that I live!
 28. Let the gods who are with you command my prosperity!
 - 29–30. On account of this dog who has urinated on me I am afraid,
 31. disturbed, and worried.
 32. Avert the evil of this dog from me
 33. so that I may proclaim your glory.
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34. [Wh]en he has recited this before Shamash,
 35. you say the following over that figurine:
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36. I have given you [as] my []; I have given you as my substitute.
 37. [I have stripped off all the evil] of my body onto you.
- Rs. 1. I have stripped off, I have strip[ped off] all the evil of my flesh onto you.

2. I have stripped off all the evil of my bodily figure onto you.
 3. [I have st]ripped off all the evil before and behind me onto you.
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4. When you have recited this, you leave the presence of Shamash and
 5. go [off] before the ri[ver]. You recite the following:
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6. Incantation: You, River, are the creator of everything.
 7. I, so-and-so, the son of so-and-so, whose god is so-and-so, whose goddess is so-and-so—
 8. that d[og] has spattered his urine on me.
 9. I am afraid and disturbed.
 10. [Just as] this figurine will not return to its place,
 11. (so) may its evil not come near! [May it not ap]proach! May it not draw near!
 12. May it not appear to [m]e! May the evil of that dog be far from my body
 13. so that I may da[ily bl]ess you;
 14. so that those who s[ee m]e may forever proclaim your [glor]y.
 15. Incantation: Car[ry] that dog to the depths.
 16. Do n[ot re]lease it! Take it down to your depths.
 17. Remov[e] the evi[l] of the dog from my body!
 18. Give me happiness and health!
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19. When you have recited this three times,
 20. you throw that dog (i.e., the figurine) into the river. Tha[t m]an
 21. shall not look behind him. He enters a tavern and [its] e[vil will be undone].

The purpose of namburbi rites in general is to avert portended evil.¹⁶¹ In this particular ritual some indefinite calamity is signaled by a dog howling in a person's house (lines vs. 10–11) or by a dog urinating on a

¹⁶¹Caplice, "Namburbi Texts in the British Museum, I," *Or* 34 (1965) 105; *The Akkadian Namburbi Texts: An Introduction* (SANE 1/1; Malibu: Undena, 1974) 7–9.

