# Ritual Scenes in the *Iliad*:
# Rote, Hallowed, or Encrypted as Ancient Art?

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To analyze ritual scenes in the *Iliad*, one first must contend with the myriad scenes scholars have deemed ritualistic. These include not only prayer, supplication, sacrifice, and oath-making,[1] but also gift exchanges and hospitality,[2] speechmaking and taunting,[3] grieving and funeral ceremonies,[4] and dressings and armings.[5] Indeed, the whole performance of the *Iliad* has been described as a ritualized feature of *Totenkult* (Seaford 1994; Derderian 2001) or, less comprehensively, a performance of *Todesdichtung* permeated with themes of lament, lament itself being identified as a micro-ritual with discernible performance features (Tsagalis 2004). Expressly or not, Homerists have attuned their ears to rituals in the poem ever since Parry and Lord discovered the performance-contexts for bards in the Balkans (for example, Lord 1960:13-29). By analogy with those performances, the *Iliad* represents an artifact of an extensive tradition of ritual performance: the ritual performed was the poem.

Although ritual is basic to oral-traditional performance and to many features of Homeric life, one cannot presume that ritual scenes simply reflect lived traditions outside of the poem. Given the likely evolution of the poems, the claim is just too broad. Whose rituals? Which side of the Mediterranean? Which generation of poets? Further, as Katherine Derderian notes of the poem's funeral rituals, they must be at least in part fictionalized (2001:9). We can be reasonably sure that funeral rituals did not occur in hexameter, for instance, or not wholly so. In this essay I ponder to what extent ritual scenes in the poem might reflect actual ritual traditions, by examining those scenes in the light of ritual performance theory. I will argue that ritual scenes are composed with unique constraints that reflect the crystallization of especially ancient ritual traditions. Thus, they reflect compositional pressures beyond those of other kinds of typical scenes.

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[1] On these scenes there is abundant scholarship. On prayer, see Lateiner 1997. On supplication see Thornton 1984, Crotty 1994, and Gould 1973. On sacrifice see Kitts 2002 and 2005. On oath-making see Karavites 1992.

[2] Among others, see Herman 1987, Reece 1993, and Edwards 1975.

[3] Among others, see Martin 1989 and Parks 1986.

[4] See Tsagalis 2004, Derderian 2001, Alexiou 1974 and 2002, and Seaford 1994.

[5] See Edwards 1987.

Scenes of commensal and oath sacrifice are convenient for this investigation because they are highly formalized. Sacrifice scenes will be treated as a subgenre of typical scenes with unique performance features and genealogies. The focus, however, is not on the cultural differences between these two sacrificial traditions,[6] but on the extent to which their respective typical scenes manifest the features we can discern in ritual performances at large.

## How to Identify a Ritual

To begin we must consider what features identify rituals *per se*. For the last four decades scholars have viewed rituals typically in terms of communication and performance theory,[7] focusing not on enacted myth[8] but on the typical features that shape and distinguish ritual communication. Such features usually are non-instrumental (Rappaport 1999:51), superfluous to practical aim, and irreducible to technical motivations (Whitehouse 2004:3). They might include, for example, exaggerated gestures, marked tempos, ceremonial implements, or speech acts in heightened registers or arcane dialects. This is not to say that higher order awarenesses or different affects may not emerge for participants in a ritual (Rappaport 1999:72; Whitehouse 2004:105-36), but merely that, from goose mating dances to a Latin mass, ritual is a distinct order of communication.

Identifying features depend on the theorist. Stanley Tambiah identified four principal features: formality, stereotypy, condensation, and redundancy (1981:119). Maurice Bloch observed degrees of formality, patterning, repetition and rhythm (1989:21). Roy Rappaport discerned ritual encoding by someone other than the performers, formality, degree of invariance, and metaperformative qualities, by which he meant the way that a ritual's performance establishes the conventions it enacts (1999:32-50). Valerio Valeri recognized ritual patterns as behaving like poetry: they communicate form over syntax, equivalence over difference, and on a paradigmatic rather than syntagmatic axis (1985:343). Even the evolutionary anthropologists, such as Alcorta and Sosis, have observed in ritual a deep structural grammar, which they claim has an ontogenetic basis (2005:332). Synthesizing all this for a short essay, we can compress these features into four: patterning, rhythm, condensation, and formality. These features overlap but have the advantage of being traceable in the poem.

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[6] See Kitts 2002 and 2003.

[7] This is to be distinguished from the nineteenth-century view of ritual as an addendum to or dramatization of myth, itself seen as primitive science or, at best, transtemporal communication with supernaturals (Tylor 1871/1958). Among classicists, Christopher Faraone, for instance, points out that the presence or absence of gods makes no difference in terms of form or effect in religious or magical ritual, and he denies the categorical distinction between magic and religion in any case (1993:60-80, espec. 77).

[8] An exception is Marcel Detienne, who famously ascribes mythic horror to the *Bouphonia*—the ritualized murder of a domesticated ox, traditionally regarded as a member of the household, at least by the Pythagoreans (1994:54-55; 1989:12).

**Patterning in Sacrifice Scenes**

Patterning is probably the most basic feature of rituals and characterized by predictability and conformity to a preordained shape. The authorial source for a ritual's shape tends to be inchoate (Valeri 1985:342), belonging to a primordial stratum of cultural memory wherein certain Ur-institutions—Rappaport calls them Rho postulates (1999:277-312)—were set down. According to Tambiah, audiences recognize primordially creative acts emanating through particular ritual performances in the way one recognizes underlying shapes emerging through abstract works of art (1981:134). Recognition will range from distinct to implicit, depending on the audience's anticipation of the underlying ritual paradigm and on the degree of formalization of the performance.

Commensal sacrifice scenes are distinctly patterned in Books 1, 2, 7, 9, and 24 and the patterning in oath-sacrificing scenes is conspicuous in Books 3 and 19, even while context allows for expansion and compression of both ritual types. Please note the number of telltale steps given in Charts 1 and 2.[9] We have 15 in our most extended commensal sacrifice scenes in Books 1 and 2, with 10 features represented identically in at least two ritual scenes among the five (Chart 1). It is possible to break down commensal sacrifice even further in the examples of Books 9 and 24, which include bread being laid out in baskets, meat being served (9.216-17, 24.625-26), and hands stretched out to the refreshments (9.221, 24.627). There are 11 telltale steps for oath-sacrifice (Chart 2), and only two identical verses. Yet there are four half-verses and many behavioral features in common. Oath-sacrificing rituals appear only twice in the poem.

Book 1's commensal sacrifice scene is the fullest, conceivably in narrative counterpoint to the disharmonies that precede and follow it. The context is the reconciliation of Agamemnon and Chryses. Steps include:

Chart 1: Commensal Sacrifice

| (1) 1.447-48*:*<br>. . . They swiftly set in order the sacred hecatomb for the god around the well-built altar, | (1) 1.447-48<br>. . . τοὶ δ᾽ ὦκα θεῷ ἱερὴν ἑκατόμβην<br>ἑξείης ἔστησαν ἐΰδμητον περὶ βωμόν, |
|---|---|
| (2) 1.449<br>They washed their hands and took up barley. | (2) 1.449<br>χερνίψαντο δ᾽ ἔπειτα καὶ οὐλοχύτας ἀνέλοντο. |
| (3) 1.450 [prayer]<br>On their behalf, Chryses held up his hands and prayed; . . . | (3) 1.450<br>τοῖσιν δὲ Χρύσης μεγάλ᾽ εὔχετο χεῖρας ἀνασχών· . . . |
| (4) 1.458 (**ditto 2.421**)<br>But once they prayed and threw barley, | (4) 1.458 (**ditto 2.421**)<br>αὐτὰρ ἐπεί ῥ᾽ εὔξαντο καὶ οὐλοχύτας προβάλοντο, |
| (5) 1.459 (**ditto 2.422; cf. 24.622**)<br>They held up the [victims' heads] first, and then cut the throats and flayed them, | (5) 1.459 (**ditto 2.422; cf. 24.622**)<br>αὐέρυσαν μὲν πρῶτα καὶ ἔσφαξαν καὶ ἔδειραν, |

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[9] I have separated these steps merely for ease in recognition. I see no precise grammar in ritual imagination, although I do see the inevitability of distinct rhythms.

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|---|---|
| (6) 1.460-61 (**ditto 2.423-24**)<br>They cut out the thigh pieces and hid them under the fat, making two folds, | (6) 1.460-61 (**ditto 2.423-24**)<br>μηρούς τ' ἐξέταμον κατά τε κνίσῃ ἐκάλυψαν δίπτυχα ποιήσαντες, |
| (7) 1.461 (**ditto 2.434**)<br>They placed raw strips of flesh over [the thighs]; | (7) 1.461 (**ditto 2.434**)<br>. . . ἐπ' αὐτῶν δ' ὠμοθέτησαν· |
| (8) 1.462-63<br>The old man burnt them over split wood, and poured shining wine | (8) 1.462-63<br>καῖε δ' ἐπὶ σχίζῃς ὁ γέρων, ἐπὶ δ' αἴθοπα οἶνον λεῖβε |
| (9) 1.463<br>By him the young men held forks in their hands. | (9) 1.463<br>. . . νέοι δὲ παρ' αὐτὸν ἔχον πεμπώβολα χερσίν. |
| (10) 1.464 (**ditto 2.427**)<br>But when they had burned the thighs and tasted the innards | (10) 1.464 (**ditto 2.427**)<br>αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ κατὰ μῆρε κάη καὶ σπλάγχνα πάσαντο |
| (11) 1.465 (**ditto 2.428; cf. 7.317, 9.210, 24.623**)<br>they cut the rest into bits and pierced it with spits, | (11) 1.465 (**ditto 2.428; cf. 7.317, 9.210, 24.623**)<br>μίστυλλόν τ' ἄρα τἆλλα καὶ ἀμφ' ὀβελοῖσιν ἔπειραν, |
| (12) 1.466 (**ditto 2.429, 24.624; cf. 7.318**)<br>They roasted it expertly, and drew it all off [the spits]. | (12) 1.466 (**ditto 2.429 and 24.624; cf. 7.318**)<br>ὤπτησάν τε περιφραδέως, ἐρύσαντό τε πάντα. |
| (13) 1.467 (**ditto 2.430, 7.319**)<br>But once they had ceased their labor and prepared the feast, | (13) 1.467 (**ditto 2.430, 7.319**)<br>αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ παύσαντο πόνου τετύκοντό τε δαῖτα, |
| (14) 1.468 (**ditto 2.431,7.320**)<br>they feasted, and no spirit went lacking the equally divided feast. | (14) 1.468 (**ditto 2.431,7.320**)<br>δαίνυντ', οὐδέ τι θυμὸς ἐδεύετο δαιτὸς ἐΐσης. |
| (15) 1.469 (**ditto 2.432, 7.323, 9.222, 24.628**)<br>But when they had sated their desire for food and drink, | (15) 1.469 (**ditto 2.432, 7.323, 9.222, 24.628**)<br>αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πόσιος καὶ ἐδητύος ἐξ ἔρον ἕντο, |

Despite the fixity of many verses, it is possible to see in these sacrifice scenes more than a memorized verse sequence; instead there is an underlying performance pattern that audiences must have associated with the pleasure of a feast. To be sure, the pattern is both reified and abstracted. It is reified by its busy detail, sequential precision,[10] and repeatability, as well as by its concluding verses expressing satiety—clearly the final point of a commensal sacrifice. It is abstracted because in all five commensal scenes the victim's blood, an implicit element in battle scenes[11] and an explicit element in several major theories of sacrifice (for example, Burkert 1983:2-12; Girard 1979:33-36), is never mentioned, nor are the animal's last gasps and collapse. These omissions must be poetic fictions, given the presumably bloody and noisy work of slaughtering a large mammal. The victim's struggle is suppressed seemingly to highlight the bustling preparations and a gratifying meal. Johann Huizinga once wrote that a ritual is like play, in that it steps out of real life into a marked-off playground or ritual stage, assumes a fixed, culturally ordained form, and in an imperfect world brings temporary perfection (1950:19-20). So would seem the commensal ritual of Book 1.

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[10] 25 finite verbs in 15 verses; a ratio of 19:6 aorist to imperfect verbs.

[11] On its actual rarity and its implications when explicit, see Neal 2006.

Oath-sacrifice too is quite patterned, with eleven basic steps. (See Chart 2.) Yet its mood is radically different.

Chart 2: Oath Sacrifice

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|---|---|
| (1) 3.268-70<br> . . . But the high-born heralds led up<br>the trusted oath-sacrifices for the gods, and mixed<br>wine in bowls, then poured water over the hands of<br>the kings. | (1) 3.268-70<br>. . . ἀτὰρ κήρυκες ἀγαυοὶ<br>ὅρκια πιστὰ θεῶν σύναγον, κρητῆρι δὲ οἶνον<br> μίσγον, ἀτὰρ βασιλεῦσιν ὕδωρ ἐπὶ χεῖρας ἔχευαν. |
| (2) 3.271-72 (**ditto 19.252-53**)<br>Atreides, drawing with his hands the *machaira*,<br>which always hung by the great sheath of his sword, | (2) 3.271-72 (**ditto 19.252-53**)<br>Ἀτρείδης δὲ ἐρυσσάμενος χείρεσσι μάχαιραν,<br>ἥ οἱ πὰρ ξίφεος μέγα κουλεὸν αἰὲν ἄωρτο, |
| (3) 3.273<br>he cut hairs from the heads of the lambs, | (3) 3.273<br>ἀρνῶν ἐκ κεφαλέων τάμνε τρίχας· |
| (4) 3.273-74<br> . . . and then the heralds distributed them to the best of<br>the Trojans and Achaeans. | (4) 3.273-74<br>. . . αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα<br>κήρυκες Τρώων καὶ Ἀχαιῶν νεῖμαν ἀρίστοις. |
| (5) 3.275<br>Before them Atreides prayed, holding up his hands; | (5) 3.275<br>τοῖσιν δ᾽ Ἀτρείδης μεγάλ᾽ εὔχετο χεῖρας ἀνασχών· |
| (6) 3.276-80<br>"Zeus Father, counselor from Ida, best and greatest,<br>and Helios, you who see all and hear all,<br>and the rivers and earth, and those who from beneath<br>punish men having toiled, whoever swears a false<br>oath,you be witnesses, and protect the trusted oaths." | (6) (3.276-80)<br>"Ζεῦ πάτερ, Ἴδηθεν μεδέων, κύδιστε μέγιστε,<br>Ἠέλιός θ᾽, ὃς πάντ᾽ ἐφορᾷς καὶ πάντ᾽ ἐπακούεις,<br>καὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ γαῖα, καὶ οἳ ὑπένερθε καμόντας<br>ἀνθρώπους τίνυσθον, ὅτις κ᾽ ἐπίορκον ὀμόσσῃ,<br>ὑμεῖς μάρτυροι ἔστε, φυλάσσετε δ᾽ ὅρκια πιστά·" |
| (7) 3.292 (**ditto 19.266**)<br>So he said, and he cut the neck of the lambs with the<br>pitiless bronze. | (7) 3.292 (**ditto 19.266**)<br>Ἦ, καὶ ἀπὸ στομάχους ἀρνῶν τάμε νηλέϊ χαλκῷ· |
| (8) 3.293-94<br>And he put them on the ground, gasping, depleted of<br>life, for the bronze had taken away their strength. | (8) 3.293-94<br>καὶ τοὺς μὲν κατέθηκεν ἐπὶ χθονὸς ἀσπαίροντας,<br>θυμοῦ δευομένους· ἀπὸ γὰρ μένος εἴλετο χαλκός. |
| (9) 3. 295-96<br>Drawing wine from bowls with cups, they poured it<br>out, and prayed to the gods who always are, | (9) 3.295-96<br>οἶνον δ᾽ ἐκ κρητῆρος ἀφυσσόμενοι δεπάεσσιν<br>ἔκχεον, ἠδ᾽ εὔχοντο θεοῖς αἰειγενέτῃσιν· |
| (10) 3.297<br>and this is how each one of the Achaeans and Trojans<br>prayed; | (10) 3.297<br>ὧδε δέ τις εἴπεσκεν Ἀχαιῶν τε Τρώων τε· |
| (11) 3.298-301<br>"Zeus best and greatest, and all the other immortal<br>gods, whosoever should first violate the oaths,<br>so let their brains run to the ground like this wine,<br>and those of their children, and let their wives become<br>the spoil of others." | (11) 3.298-301<br>"Ζεῦ κύδιστε μέγιστε, καὶ ἀθάνατοι θεοὶ ἄλλοι,<br>ὁππότεροι πρότεροι ὑπὲρ ὅρκια πημήνειαν,<br>ὧδέ σφ᾽ ἐγκέφαλος χαμάδις ῥέοι ὡς ὅδε οἶνος,<br>αὐτῶν καὶ τεκέων, ἄλοχοι δ᾽ ἄλλοισι δαμεῖεν. |

Clearly there is a limited variability and shape in the order of the steps. The two most lethal verses, those for drawing the *machaira* (a knife never mentioned in commensal sacrifices) and for killing the victim (steps two and seven), are identically or nearly identically rendered.

Those for praying to gods and invoking the Erinyes, also profound acts, differ only minimally in word order and in the substitution of a descriptive phrase for the Erinyes in Book 3. Unlike in commensal sacrifice, in oath-sacrifice the death of the victim is central, and the animal is never eaten. This is not a bustling event. Rather than conclude with the sating of appetites, the ritual in Book 3 concludes with curses that reverberate ominously into the successive battles, because the oath is indeed violated. Oath-sacrifice is a somber killing ritual within and surely outside the epic.

## The Significance of Pattern

It would be foolish to insist that there was never any rote memorization in oral performance traditions around the world, but a glance at Book 9's commensal scene is helpful for disproving the rote hypothesis in the case of the *Iliad*'s commensal sacrifices. Similar to the scenes in Books 1 and 2, Book 9's commensal scene is distinctly detailed. Considering the usual poetic dictum of one indicative verb per verse, the activity behind this commensal scene is busy, with 20 finite verbs in 16 verses (9.206-22).[12] Yet this commensal scene also includes novel features: at its inception, guests are welcomed and seated on couches with purple covers (9.200) —seating being a typical gesture in hospitality scenes (*Od*. 5.86; 10.314-15; *Il*. 18.389, presumed at 24.597).[13] Patroklos is instructed to pour strong wine (9.201-03). The animals are already slain, and merely need to be cut (verses 9.208-09 distill a menu of meats). The fire's brightening and dying are noticed. Skewers are rested upon stones and meat is salted. But then, identically to the scene with Achilles and Priam in Book 24, bread is taken up and put on trays in lovely baskets (two half verses with Patroklos at 9.216-17; two half verses with Automedon at 24.625-26), Achilles divides the meats (9.217; 24.626), and the participants stretch their hands to the ready refreshments before them (9.221; 24.627). The event concludes with the formulaic verse that is a virtual flag for the end of a feast: "but when they had sated their desire for food and drink" (9.222, identical with 24.628, 1.469; 2.432, and 7.323). The commensal events at the tent of Achilles in Books 9 and 24 are more domestic than the formal feasts conducted by Agamemnon, but, given the identical closing formulae and the bustling preparations suggested by a preponderance of finite verbs, they would appear to describe variants on widespread hospitality traditions that we know permeated ancient Mediterranean societies. Ritual performance expectations, not rote memorization, explain the pattern of these commensal scenes.

If not rote, the ritual pattern might be imagined instead as its own "word," following John Miles Foley (2007). According to the "word" hypothesis, the entire pattern of a ritual scene may be argued to "idiomatically convey its traditional meaning, glossing the specific by adducing the generic, explaining the time-bound by evoking the timeless" (16). The ritual "thought-byte" correlates with the phenomenon Parry and Lord encountered when the Yugoslavian bards insisted that the song did not change per performance, while the recorders of Parry and Lord

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[12]  11:9 ratio of aorist to imperfect verbs. Compare the 25 finite verbs in 15 verses in the commensal sacrifice of Book 1, where the ratio is 19:6 aorist to imperfect verbs.

[13] For discussion see Edwards 1975:51-72.

would attest otherwise. There is felt to be an underlying *Gestalt* even within the multiplicity of particular performances (Nagler 1974:64-130). Foley's thought-byte or word-hypothesis coincides easily with ritual theory. Glossing the specific by adducing the generic is a lateral way of explaining what Tambiah would make layered: the Ur-form emerges through a particular performance in the way an underlying shape emerges through an abstract work of art. But rhythm is more elusive than patterning.

## Rhythms in Sacrifice Scenes

There is a rhythm in ritual, however elusive to recognition within dactylic poetry. This is in part because rhythm is essential to bodily expression and infectious in group dynamics. Any marked rhythm, claim Tambiah (1981:113), Rappaport (1999:226-28), and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1964:249), exerts upon those submitted to it a constraint that impels them to yield to it and to permit it to direct and regulate movements of the body and even of the mind. Simply put, it is easier to dance than to resist the beat. Maurice Bloch compares resisting a ritual to resisting a song (1974; 1975:6-13): the rhythms and communicational registers of both ritual and song elicit a respond-in-kind engagement that promotes acceptance and discourages open challenge of their premises. As seen by evolutionary anthropologists, both music and ritual stimulate neurophysiological responses that intensify experience,[14] kindle emotions,[15] and promote social bonding before events such as battle, in the *Iliad*. At many levels, then, both music and ritual induce rhythmic pacing and group cohesion.[16]

Discerning ritual rhythms in the poems is complicated because, of course, they are already rhythmic. Dactylic hexameter traditionally has been seen as imposed on natural speech (Maas 1923), but we need not simply accept this hypothesis anymore. Marcel Jousse observed that musical rhythms permeate human vocal and bodily expressions (Sienaert 1990); Paul

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[14] See Alcorta and Sosis 2005:336: "Music has important neurophysiological effects. As a 'rhythmic driver,' it impacts autonomic functions and synchronizes 'internal biophysiological oscillators to external auditory rhythms.' The coupling of respiration and other body rhythms to these drivers affects a wide array of physiological processes, including brain wave patterns, pulse rate, and diastolic blood pressure. This 'coupling effect' has been shown to be present in humans at a very early age. Music amplifies and intensifies this effect through the use of instruments, or 'tools,' thereby providing a means of synchronizing individual body rhythms within a group. Recent work by Levenson has shown that synchronized autonomic functions, including such things as pulse rate, heart contractility, and skin conductance, are positively and significantly associated with measures of empathy."

[15] See Alcorta and Sosis 2005:337: "The ability of religious ritual to elicit both positive and negative emotional responses in participants provides the substrate for the creation of motivational communal symbols. Through processes of incentive learning, as well as classical and contextual conditioning, the objects, places, and beliefs of religious ritual are invested with emotional significance. The rhythmic drivers of ritual contribute to such conditioning through their 'kindling effects'."

[16] See Alcorta and Sosis 2005:339: "Like the phonemes, words, and sentences of language, the use of musical instruments to produce sounds permits the combining of such sounds to create emotionally meaningful signals. These, in turn, can be arranged and rearranged within encompassing musical structures. The formality, sequence, pattern, and repetition of such musical structures themselves elicit emotional response through their instantiation of ritual. Music thereby creates an emotive 'proto-symbolic' system capable of abstracting both the signals and structure of ritual."

Kiparsky noted in natural speech "bound expressions" with favored sentence localization patterns, rhythms, and phonemic resonances (1976); and the bard Suljeman Makić explained to Parry and Lord that his *gusle* was his mnemonic device (Lord 1960:99-100). In short, music and rhythm penetrate poetic vocalization thoroughly. The integration of dactylic hexameter and natural rhythm is especially artful when *polla d' ananta katanta paranta te dochmia t' êlthon* (23.116)[17] mimics the sound of galloping mules.[18]

But Homeric expression is more than a natural meshing of music, rhythm, and poetry. The grouping of spondees and dactyls in Homeric hexameter also elevates the poetic register and helps to encrypt the poem as traditional art. A similar assertion may be made about the rhythms in ritual performances. Degree of behavioral formalization marks off the rhythms in ritual from the rhythms of ordinary expression and encrypts the ritual as a hallowed event.[19]Although compression into hexameter may be expected to muffle the rhythms of ritual to some extent, still we can trace in the poem two of the formalized features by which anthropologists have identified ritual rhythms. Those features are pacing (dancing to the beat, per Bloch 1974:55-81) and group contagion (social bonding, per Alcorta and Sosis 2005).

Protracted behavioral pacing and intense group contagion are illustrated in the oath-rituals of Books 3 and 19. In Book 3, a pause initiates the ritual and seems to prepare participants for bonding toward a common goal. As indicated in Chart 2, before the oath-sacrifice both sides rejoice at the possibility of ending the war through the oath and the duel to follow (3.111-12), so they dismount chariots and remove armor, which they pile on the ground so that "little was the ground around them" that is, an implicit unity, whether of armor (Leaf 1900:322, line 7.342; Seymour 1891: lines 3.113-15) or warriors (Kirk 1985:279) (3.113-15).[20] Before the oath of Agamemnon in Book 19, the Argives all sit where they are, in silence, according to custom, listening to their king (19.255-56).[21] In both cases, the pause appears infectious: the participants unite in intention and await the action to come.

Perhaps the most suspenseful moment is when Agamemnon draws his *machaira* (3.271; 19.252), a ritual knife that always hung by the sheath of his sword (3.272; 19.253). This verse, identical in both scenes, conceivably retards the ritual pace in order to dramatize the moment: a stall is implied by the phrase specifying where the *machaira* always hung. Furthermore, the act

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[17] πολλὰ δ' ἄναντα κάταντα πάραντά τε δόχμιά τ' ἦλθον.

[18] Nicholas Richardson notes the striking preponderance of a-sounds in this verse (1993:180), and I have pointed out elsewhere that the string of participles is also Hittite (2008:218).

[19] Stanley Tambiah points to an abundance of marked speech in rituals—rhymes, spells, mantras, demon languages, and other forms of "hitting with sound"—as well as a remarkable disjunction between profane and religious language in world religions, whose liturgies often are built on sacred languages associated with a period of revelation or on spells whose power is based on analogical attribution or magical conveyance (1981:176-93). As already noted, Alcorta and Sosis argue that rhythms in ritual stir audience response at subliminal levels (2005:339).

[20] ῝Ως ἔφαθ', οἱ δ' ἐχάρησαν Ἀχαιοί τε Τρῶές τε | ἐλπόμενοι παύσασθαι ὀϊζυροῦ πολέμοιο. | καί ῥ' ἵππους μὲν ἔρυξαν ἐπὶ στίχας, ἐκ δ' ἔβαν αὐτοί, | τεύχεά τ' ἐξεδύοντο· τὰ μὲν κατέθεντ' ἐπὶ γαίῃ | πλησίον ἀλλήλων, ὀλίγη δ' ἦν ἀμφὶς ἄρουρα· (3:111-15). Comments by Seymour are available on these lines at http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=3.115&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0087.

[21] τοὶ δ' ἄρα πάντες ἐπ' αὐτόφιν ἥατο σιγῇ | Ἀργεῖοι κατὰ μοῖραν, ἀκούοντες βασιλῆος.

of distributing the hairs cut from the lambs by this knife, in Book 3 (3.273-74), implies cohesion, since in accepting them leaders from both sides agree to the terms of the oath. But in Book 19, with the *machaira* Agamemnon merely cuts hairs from the boar for himself (19.254), as his is the only destiny affected by that oath-ritual.

Then comes the prayer, introduced by a nearly identical phrase in both scenes: raising his hands, he prayed (3.275; 19.254-55). With Richard Martin, I see no reason to suppose that bards would have performed all speech acts in exactly the same tone or identically to other reported actions, despite the hexameter. Plato's *Ion* and comparative epic suggest otherwise (Martin 1989:6-7; 45-46). This speech act reported by *euchomai*, unlike an *epos* or even a *muthos*, is likely to be intoned with great solemnity and a sustained pace, particularly considering that the formal gesture of raising the hands precedes and introduces it. As traditional speech, the prayer summoning divine witnesses is likely to retain archaic features. Hence Zeus is invoked with a whole verse of epithets, and Helios too, described as a judge and overseer—presumably an Anatolian reflection, as is the invocation of rivers to witness the oath (Puhvel 1991:9-12). As auspicious speech it is likely to be somber. Hence the punishing role of the Erinyes is spelled out in a verse and a half, so also prolonged. The pacing of this ritual speech is *largo*.

Cutting the throats of the lambs and boar is a climactic moment (nearly identical at 3.292 and 19.266), a dramatized cruelty designed to compel identification with the victims and to elicit a shudder of horror for potential perjurers—the horror would be contagious. Audiences would be left dangling were the drama to end abruptly after this event; hence in Book 3 the next two verses extend the horror by fixing on the death experience. The lambs are laid on the ground gasping and deprived of life, as the bronze has stripped them of vigor (3.293-94). In Book 19 the fate of the boar is also specified: it is thrown into the sea to become food for fish (19.267-68). Although the ritual in Book 19 ends at this point, the next ritual act of Book 3 is explicitly collective, wherein they draw cups of wine and pour it on the ground, praying that the brains of perjurers and their families be poured out as well. That the prayer is collective is signaled by the iterative *eipesken*, which appears to have distributive force, as Leaf observes also of the participle for drawing.[22] These last acts, from the death spectacle to the distributive curse, are evidence for ritual contagion, if it were not already evident from the initial pause. The net effect of the oath-ritual's rhythm is to set apart the action and to fix the attention of the group.

The pacing of the scene for commensal sacrifice could not be more contrasting. It is lively (see Chart 1). In our fullest account, the hecatomb is even said to be swiftly prepared (1.447-48). The entire ritual is replete with finite verbs, on average two per verse, suggesting a series of rapid micro-actions. Excluding the prayer—presumably its own order of micro-ritual— here there are only two participles to the whole ritual account, among 25 indicative verbs (19 of them aorists) and all within 13 verses. By implication, this is a bustling event, very *allegro*.[23] In comparison, the oath-sacrificing verb sequence is ponderous. Not counting the prayers, the indicative verbs in oath-sacrifice number 14 in 24 lines, slightly more than one per two verses,

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[22] See comment on the participle at http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0056%3Abook%3D3%3Acommline%3D295.

[23] This is reminiscent of Egbert Bakker's observation that the performance of sequential aorists may, as it were, bring the mountain to Mohammed, not Mohammed to the mountain (2005:154-76, n.b. 173).

and that is including the active verb describing the hanging *machaira*—which arguably does not belong to the action. The action of the commensal sacrifice is almost four times busier! These two ritual type scenes could not be more different. Pacing separates them from each other and also elicits different traditional associations.

The only relatively prolonged moment in the commensal sacrifices of Books 1 and 2 is the prayer, which is adapted to context. Superficially, the prayer of Book 1 seems to unify participants. It is introduced with the same formula: "holding up his hands he [Chryses] prayed" (1.449; cf. 3.275, 19.254-55). As in the oath-prayer, the god is described by an epithet and known behaviors, here his responsiveness to Chryses' request that a plague befall the Achaeans. Chryses' is a thank-you prayer, which continues for four lines. The new request is short-order: "now too bring to fruition this my wish, and protect the Danaans from unseemly ruin"[24]—very simple, perhaps less than heartfelt given the bitter history. Agamemnon's prayer in the commensal sacrifice of Book 2, however, is extended by malevolent wishes for the utter destruction of Priam's family and citadel (2.410-18). While the moods vary, the prayers in commensal sacrifices superficially emphasize group commitment. The commensal sacrifices are also unifying on their faces, as they conclude with formulaic lines indicating as much: "Once they had completed their labor and prepared the feast, they feasted, and no one's *thumos* went lacking the balanced feast" (identical at 1.467-68, 2.430-31, and 7.319-20).

Thus, considering pacing, the two ritual scene types appear to mimic the rhythms of actual ritual performances, with their very different tempos. One is busy; the other is ponderously slow. The differences suggest underlying performance patterns based on lived traditions. Considering unity—the other ritual marker—commensal and oath rituals are not intrinsically different. Participation in both kinds of ritual intensifies group cohesion, in marked contrast to the apparent discord that surrounds the ritual scenes—battlefield wrangling, leadership uncertainty, and so on. If the anthropologists are right, the group cohesion and different pacing implied in the scenes rings true of ritual events beyond the poem.

**Condensation in Ritual Scenes**

Condensation is not altogether separable from patterns and rhythm, but nonetheless has its own poetic implications. Tambiah sees condensation in ritual as dialectically related to redundancy. Both can intensify meaning, and also diminish it (1981:130-33). Redundancy—repeating an expected sequence of events—may diminish the impact of a ritual event, presumably because it implies predictability. We expect commensal rituals to end with feasting and the sating of appetites. We expect oath-rituals to display ominous words and acts and to engage the attention of participants. Redundancy arguably weakens a ritual's force.

Yet, and this applies especially to literature, because the ritual sequences are also condensed—notice that both scenes contain very little extraneous information—and because oath

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[24] κλῦθί μευ, ἀργυρότοξ᾿, ὃς Χρύσην ἀμφιβέβηκας | Κίλλαν τε ζαθέην Τενέδοιό τε ἶφι ἀνάσσεις· | ἠμὲν δή ποτ᾿ ἐμεῦ πάρος ἔκλυες εὐξαμένοιο, | τίμησας μὲν ἐμέ, μέγα δ᾿ ἴψαο λαὸν ᾿Αχαιῶν· | ἠδ᾿ ἔτι καὶ νῦν μοι τόδ᾿ ἐπικρήηνον ἐέλδωρ· | ἤδη νῦν Δαναοῖσιν ἀεικέα λοιγὸν ἄμυνον (1.451-56).

and commensal ritual traditions radiate their distinct cultural significances, there is also proportionality between the condensation of a scene and its evocative power. We see this correlation when a predictable ritual step, or several of them, is skewed by the poet to introduce nuance. It just makes sense that the more condensed the sequence of traditional elements, the more startled will be audiences privy to the usual order when they hear a perversion of it. Condensation of elements within a ritual translates to economy and power within a ritual scene, as I argue below.

In 1976 Leonard Muellner distinguished ritual scenes by their plenum of indicative verbs and minute detail, which he interpreted as representing a series of behavioral micro-adjustments typical of sacred acts. As already noted, commensal sacrifice is comprised of a series of finite verbs suggesting just such a sequence of minute acts, whereas oath-sacrifice has the opposite tempo and communicational register. However, both are relatively bare of figurative embellishment and reflect great economy in relating ritual steps.

Just a glance at the verses of commensal sacrifice (Chart 1) illustrates both micro-detail and economy. Step 2, the preparation, involves washing hands and taking up barley—two indicative verbs in one verse. In step 4, identically in two scenes they finish praying and throw barley—two indicative verbs per verse. In step 5, representing the actual slaughter, condensed into one simple verse is what must have been a very time consuming event. The animal's head is held back, its throat cut, and the animal is flayed: three actions in one verse, identical in two of the scenes and nearly so in a third. Similar is step 6, with its two indicative verbs depicting the cutting of thigh pieces and hiding them in fat. We have two verbs in step 8, in step 10, and the same pattern of two indicative verbs per line all the way to the end of feasting at step 14, each step replicated in other scenes beyond our showcase in Book 1. What Muellner sees as minute ritual adjustments would appear in this case to reflect the kind of ritual sequencing that Tambiah recognized as a component of constituting and regulating rituals (1981:127-28). Constituting and regulating rituals tend to culminate with practical business such as dining in the present case.

Notice also the relative dearth of non-essential information. The only conceivable figurative expressions I can see are *daitos eisês* and *aithopa oinon*. The "equal feast"—*daitos eisês*—is definitely a formula, occurring six times in the *Iliad* at the end of the line. *Eisês* is what Parry called in 1928 a particularized epithet (1971:155-65), affixed but not empty of significance. Attached to *daitos* it resonated with the traditional attributes and rhythms assigned to the poetic character of feasts. For Gregory Nagy it would be a distinct epithet: "like a small theme song that conjures up a thought-association with the traditional essence of an epic figure, thing, or concept" (1990:23). The same may be said about "shining wine"—*aithopa oinon*. Nine times in the *Iliad* wine is shining, whether libated, poured, or drunk, and eight of those nine it falls at the end of the verse, as here. On the other hand, *eudmêton peri bômon,* "around the well-built altar," at the start of the ritual, occurs only here and *eudmêton* does not appear to be formulaically affixed to *bômon*. I can only presume that altars are essential furniture for religious work, so their sturdiness is worth noting, and poetically weighty because the sacrifice of Book 1 signals appeasement of the god and reconciliation between foes.

Bearing in mind this constellation of indicative verbs, meaningful detail, and paucity of figurative language in both types of ritual scenes, now contrast ritual scenes with killing scenes. Killing scenes have their own stylistic peculiarities, of course, but among them is prosodic

flexibility. Advocates of composition by single words, such as Edzard Visser (1988) and Egbert Bakker and Florence Fabbricotti (1991), have noted that killing verses typically are built around a semantic nucleus denoting "X killed Y"—subject, indicative verb, object, plus a mandatory conjunction—and these tend to be localized in the initial part of the verse. But then there is a remarkable prosodic variety in the rest of the verse, specifying, for instance, whose son is the victim, where he is struck, what strikes him, how he dies or bereaves his parents. These might be comprised of any variety of supplementary participles and instrumental datives and can extend for verses beyond the killing verse. The peripheral expressions represent details semantically inessential to the act of killing and show that the poet was able to compose with great lexical freedom.

Commensal scenes could not be less flexible. Not only is each element ritually essential, but the ends of each verse, far from semantically peripheral, designate constituent ritual features, such as hecatombs, altars, wine, or significant actions reported in indicative verbs (see Chart 1). There are only two participles at the ends of verses in Book 1's elaborate commensal scene, not counting the speech acts. Even the formula of the entire concluding verse is culturally weighty. Sating one's desire for food and drink is nothing short of a flag for the feast. I am not arguing that commensal sacrifice scenes are the least poetic constructs in the poem, but rather that their aesthetic quality is determined in part by the features that show actual ritual performance, such as condensation—these compressed and meaningful details; rhythm—replicated by finite verb sequences and micro-steps; and patterning—wherein we see the Ur form emanating through the particular performance.

Oath-sacrifices also reflect a condensation of essential features. While there is not the same preponderance of indicative verbs—as noted, this is presented as a much less busy event—*every act and word matters*. The preparatory verse in Book 3 designates the bringing in of oath-victims, *horkia pista* being not just a poetic metonym but a ritual one, while in Book 19 the boar is named as such. Being more elaborate, the oath-sacrifice in Book 3 reports heralds mixing wine and purifying the hands of participants, two collective acts lacking in the shorter oath of Book 19. The identical lines in which Agamemnon draws his *machaira,* "which always hung by the great sheath of his sword," are not extraneous bits of information but embellish a religious act; the *machaira* is a specialized sacrificial implement, the very hallmark of oath-sacrifices,[25] and never mentioned in Homeric commensal sacrifices. That it is worn in one's belt appears to signal authority, an emergent authority the third and last time it is mentioned, in the belts of young men dancing alongside marriageable maidens on Achilles' great shield (18.593-98). It may seem odd that the *machaira* cuts hairs of the boar in the oath-sacrifice of Book 19, since they are not distributed to anyone. But, as noted, this is a meaningful exclusion, since only Agamemnon risks perjury in this oath.

The prayer, reported with the verb *euchomai,* is a constitutive act for oath-making, accompanied by a constitutive act for praying, raising the hands. The speech act is not part of a fluid exchange between peers, but an appeal to the gods. Hence the language is ceremonial and somber. Even so it requires strengthening by a ritual gesture that conspires with the speech act to heighten ritual effect. As Rappaport notes, words by themselves sometimes feel just too

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[25] Its possible link with healing was explored in Martin 1983.

ephemeral, so a commissive gesture is required to seal them into time (1999:141). The *euchê*, introduced by raising the hands, introduces some of the most lethal language in the whole *Iliad*: it invites self-destruction by gods should participants be lying. Following John R. Searle (1974), J. L. Austin (1975), and Rappaport (1999), we may see such speech acts as perlocutionary: they change the organization of reality by putting the ritual participants at deadly risk.

But the apex of the oath-ritual follows the prayer: "So he said, and he cut (*tame*) the throat of the lambs/boar with the pitiless bronze." *Tamnô* is of course a simple verb and a range of cuttings are attested for it. But it is missing from commensal sacrifices, where the killing is rendered by *sphazdô* (1.459, 2.422; 9.467, 24.622),[26] a verb apparently specialized for the occasion. *Tame* is simple but unmistakably deadly when it occurs with its instrumental dative *nêlei chalkô* ("with the pitiless bronze")*,* which it does four times in the *Iliad* (3.292, 13.501, 16.761, 19.266; variations on *tam-* and *chalkô* occur elsewhere). "With the pitiless bronze" is the single figurative phrase in oath-sacrificing scenes. Although it occurs 12 times at the end of a verse, it is hard to imagine that the power of the phrase could ever have been unfelt, since its context is always lethal. Richard Martin saw in these short formulae theme fragments, which the story would fill out (1993). In Book 3, it is filled out when the lambs are laid on the ground gasping, deprived of life, because the bronze—a second metonym—has taken their vigor. This action is followed in Book 3 by a collective prayer with the analogical pouring of wine and, as I have argued elsewhere, it conscripts participants to support the oath (2005:146-51). Then the curses on oath-breakers reverberate through the poem with the six-time reference to "those who were first to violate oaths" (slight variations among 3.300; 4.65-67; 4.71-72; 4.236; 4.271; 7.351-52).

So this scene type also is condensed, with a paucity of figurative language and a fixed sequence of behavioral adjustments. Nothing is extraneous—no nuclear center or inessential periphery. Even the unitive *te* at the end of 3.297 conceivably serves the distributive-iterative aspect of *eipesken*, "they said," that launches the curse and renders all the participants witnesses to the oath. All of this supports the claim that ritual scenes are configured differently than are scenes that report battlefield events.

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[26] Also, one time by *hieuro* (7.314).

**The Exception that Proves the Rule**[27]

One commensal ritual that violates these expectations is the funeral feast at the start of Book 23 (Chart 3). Ostensibly spirit-soothing, and eventually rounded off with the formular feasting lines wherein no *thumo*s went lacking the equal feast (23.56-57),[28] this sacrifice is nonetheless perverted, conceivably for poetic effect. It begins after a chariot tribute to Patroklos and the infectious wailing that Thetis stirs up among the Myrmidons. The pre-feast slaughter is noisy and profuse. Only here do we hear many white bulls bellowing (*orechtheon*) around the iron, as they are being slaughtered by *sphazdomenoi*, and we may also hear bleating goats if *mêkades* is not solely an ornamental epithet. In the four other scenes with *sphazdô,* the animals' struggles and dying are not acknowledged at all. Perhaps most importantly, blood, absent in the other commensal scenes, here is so plentiful that it could be caught in cups. It runs all around the corpse (23.29-34). The blood and apparent agony of the animals break the patterns of traditional sacrificial feasts. Why is this so?

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[27] It should be pointed out that not all commensal scenes are explicit sacrifice scenes. Consider the meal at Agamemnon's hut when Nestor and others coax Agamemnon to offer *apoina* ("treasures") to Achilles (ca. 9.90). There is no sacrifice there, even though the feast is spirit-soothing (μενοεικέα δαῖτα) and we hear the famous formular lines: they all put their hands to the good foods before them, but when they had sated their desire for food and drink (9.91-92: οἱ δ' ἐπ' ὀνείαθ' ἑτοῖμα προκείμενα χεῖρας ἴαλλον ǀ αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πόσιος καὶ ἐδητύος ἐξ ἔρον ἔντο). The scene at 7.466-81 is lacking most steps as well; they slaughter cattle and take a meal (7.466: βουφόνεον δὲ κατὰ κλισίας καὶ δόρπον ἕλοντο), then the Achaeans and Trojans simply feast all night long. The mood is strange: Zeus thunders ominously and the Trojans libate him with wine. In Phoenix's story about longing to leave his father's house, his friends try to entice him to stay home by sacrificing (πολλὰ δὲ ἴφια μῆλα καὶ εἰλίποδας ἕλικας βοῦς ǀ ἔσφαζον, πολλοὶ δὲ σύες θαλέθοντες ἀλοιφῇ ǀ εὐόμενοι τανύοντο διὰ φλογὸς Ἡφαίστοιο, 9.466-68), but no dining and good cheer are mentioned, and he finally escapes (9.457-79). Other dining scenes are reported at 10.577ff., 11.620ff.; 11.769ff., in passing at 12.310ff., 19.314. Curiously, Trojan feasts refer only obliquely to sacrifice, except perhaps at 8.504-49. Experts deny the authenticity of 8:548 and 8:550-52, which refer to hecatombs to the immortals (see Kirk 1990:340 and Leaf at http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0056%3Abook%3D8%3Acommline%3D548). Nonetheless, smoke is reported to rise to the heavens at 8.549.

[28] δαίνυντ᾽, οὐδέ τι θυμὸς ἐδεύετο δαιτὸς ἐΐσης. / αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ πόσιος καὶ ἐδητύος ἐξ ἔρον ἔντο.

Chart 3: Funeral Feast of Book 23

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|---|---|
| . . . αὐτὰρ ὁ τοῖσι τάφον μενοεικέα δαίνυ. | But he prepared a spirit-soothing funeral feast for them. |
| πολλοὶ μὲν βόες ἀργοὶ ὀρέχθεον ἀμφὶ σιδήρῳ (30) | Many white oxen bellowed around the iron as they were |
| σφαζόμενοι, πολλοὶ δ’ ὄϊες καὶ μηκάδες αἶγες· | slaughtered, and many sheep and bleating goats; |
| πολλοὶ δ’ ἀργιόδοντες ὕες, θαλέθοντες ἀλοιφῇ, | many white-toothed swine teaming with fat |
| εὑόμενοι τανύοντο διὰ φλογὸς Ἡφαίστοιο· | being singed were stretched across Hephaestus’ flame; |
| πάντῃ δ’ ἀμφὶ νέκυν κοτυλήρυτον ἔρρεεν αἷμα. | all around the corpse ran blood, cupfuls of it. |
| Αὐτὰρ τόν γε ἄνακτα ποδώκεα Πηλεΐωνα (35) | But the kings of the Achaeans led the swift-footed lord, son of Peleus, to godlike Agamemnon |
| εἰς Ἀγαμέμνονα δῖον ἄγον βασιλῆες Ἀχαιῶν | |
| σπουδῇ παρπεπιθόντες ἑταίρου χωόμενον κῆρ. | With difficulty they persuaded him, still vexed at heart for his |
| οἱ δ’ ὅτε δὴ κλισίην Ἀγαμέμνονος ἷξον ἰόντες, | companion. When they led him to the hut of Agamemnon, at |
| αὐτίκα κηρύκεσσι λιγυφθόγγοισι κέλευσαν | once they ordered shrill-voiced heralds |
| ἀμφὶ πυρὶ στῆσαι τρίποδα μέγαν, εἰ πεπίθοιεν (40) | to set around the fire a great tripod, if the son of Peleus would |
| Πηλεΐδην λούσασθαι ἄπο βρότον αἱματόεντα. | be persuaded to wash off the bloody filth. |
| αὐτὰρ ὅ γ’ ἠρνεῖτο στερεῶς, ἐπὶ δ’ ὅρκον ὄμοσσεν· | But he refused vigorously, and swore an oath: |
| “οὐ μὰ Ζῆν’, ὅς τίς τε θεῶν ὕπατος καὶ ἄριστος, | “Not by Zeus, who is the highest and best of the gods, |
| οὐ θέμις ἐστὶ λοετρὰ καρήατος ἆσσον ἱκέσθαι, | it is not sanctioned for water to come near my head |
| πρίν γ’ ἐνὶ Πάτροκλον θέμεναι πυρὶ σῆμά τε χεῦαι (45) | before I put Patroklos in the fire and pour a *sêma* |
| κείρασθαί τε κόμην, ἐπεὶ οὔ μ’ ἔτι δεύτερον ὧδε | and cut my hair, since not a second time |
| ἵξετ’ ἄχος κραδίην, ὄφρα ζωοῖσι μετείω. | will such grief come to my head while I go among the living. |
| ἀλλ’ ἤτοι νῦν μὲν στυγερῇ πειθώμεθα δαιτί· | But come and let us be persuaded to the hateful feast. |

It is not just because funeral feasts are a different order of feasts—however likely[29]—but conceivably because poetic considerations have overwhelmed ritual performance expectations, which we can appreciate because of the condensation typical of commensal rituals. Whatever the poetic tradition's initial vision of this pre-funeral feast, it has become represented as a commensal sacrifice—hence the use of *sphazdô* and the formular verses for satiety at its conclusion. But it swerves from the commensal pattern when, notably, the sacrifice is broken at verse 35. Achilles is called away to the tent of Agamemnon right in the middle of the ritual (23.35-36). And here is the crux: despite the commensal ritual markers *sphazdô* and the concluding formular lines for satiety, the interruption loosens the pattern and the condensation, and dissipates the rhythm of commensal sacrifice, allowing other themes to penetrate the ritual scene.

Which themes? In addition to Achilles' still unmitigated grief and thirst for revenge, there is the theme of oath-making. It emerges at the tent of Agamemnon when Achilles swears not to bathe until Patroklos is buried (23.46-47) and triggers an echo of the eight other oaths or would-

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[29] For the possible Anatolian background, see Kitts 2008.

be oaths between Books 19-24.[30] In fact, as ritual leitmotifs, some oath-making features may have penetrated the actual scene of commensal sacrifice: hence the oath-like death rattle of victims and the blood—compare the gasping lambs of Book 3 and the "blood of lambs" as a trope for the oath-sacrifice later: "In no way barren is the blood of lambs, the unmixed libations, and the right hands in which we trusted" (4.158-59). Even if there were invisible historical reasons for this slaughter and blood, the perversion of the usual expectations for commensal sacrifices, based on our five examples (referenced in Chart 1), must have startled audiences and highlighted the other themes that penetrate the scene. The condensation of traditional elements in commensal sacrifice is arguably proportional to this startling effect.

Evidence for the brokenness of this ritual is also apparent on its face. Although the ritual begins among the Myrmidons only, the formular concluding verses (23.56-57) apply to the wider circle of men at Agamemnon's tent who, in response to Achilles, are persuaded to partake of "the hateful feast" (23.48). Thus, condensation is an important and predictable feature of ritual scenes, presumably based on performance expectations. Audiences privy to those expectations will react when the ritual performance goes awry.

## Formality in Ritual Scenes

The last performance feature of rituals is formality, by which is meant a high performance register. This may be gauged by a ritual's marked features, hallowed authority, and resistance to structural change over time. Marked features are evident in the previously discussed killing acts as well as pacing, unique per sacrificial scene type (for example, *sphazdô* vs. *tamnô*; plenum of aorists vs. few). Hallowed authority is supported by an apparent meticulousness in performance, which may be sensed in the aforementioned condensation and also in the relative fixity of patterning reflected in Charts 1 and 2.

As for the resistance to structural change, Roy Rappaport and Maurice Bloch both have observed that audiences respond to rituals on a scale of increasing formality and decreasing spontaneity, with the most punctilious performances generating an intangible sense of power that discourages open challenge (Rappaport 1999:34, 1996:428; Bloch 1975:6-13). This power may be enhanced by evocative, grotesque, and dissonant features (Alcorta and Sosis 2005:331); hence the apparent shock value in Book 3's gasping, dying lambs, which, conjoined with the spilled wine and curses, surely riveted the attention of audiences to oath-sacrifices. Commensal sacrifices have been shown to be equally fastidious, although their sway over participants is based on different, presumably more pleasant, cultural associations.

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[30] See these instances: 19.215-37: Odysseus essentially coerced Achilles into participating in the oath-sacrifice with Agamemnon; 19.203-14: Achilles vowed to fast until vengeance was paid; 21.1-125: Oblique oath-making leitmotif with the *deirotomia* of Lykaon (see Kitts 2005, 2007, and 2008); 21.285-86: Hera and Poseidon bound themselves by oath to support Achilles in battle; 22.119-21: Hector contemplated an oath before senators to renew the oath of Book 3; 22.252-59: Hector urged Achilles to swear an oath that the victor respect the loser's corpse; 23.46-47: Achilles vowed not to bathe before he has cut his hair and buried Patroklos; 23.576-85: Menelaos challenged Antilochus to swear an oath that he did not cheat during the chariot race; 24.671-72: Achilles promised Priam to withhold the raid of Troy until Hector was buried.

Because rituals performed in high registers discourage challenge to the basis for the rituals in the first place, rituals tend to perpetuate and instantiate the conventions they perform. This is obvious in oath-making rituals. Once made, they bind. In ancient Near Eastern statecraft, for instance, ritualized commitments (for example, treaties) cannot be superseded except in kind, by performing new rituals. The high register of such a ritual emanates a power proportional to the felt threat of violation, which explains the elaboration in the oath between the Achaeans and Trojans in Book 3.The untrustworthiness of the sons of Priam is a veritable trope between Books 3 and 7, intoned repeatedly in "those who were first to violate the trusted oaths" (for example, 3.300-301; 4.65-67; 4.71-72; 4.234-39; 4.269-71; even 7.351-52).[31]

The tension is different in commensal sacrifices, which likely reflected pleasure instead of dread. Despite the different tension, commensal sacrifices also bind participants, by cementing relationships through hospitality. A violation of hospitality is the ostensible reason for the war in the first place, and several encounters—Diomedes and Glaucos, Achilles and Lycaon—remind us that dining together, ancestrally or personally, is expected to ensure an enduring bond. Leonard Muellner has shown that a suppliant (*hiketês*) is in essence a guestfriend (*xeinos*) in need of his first favor (1976:87-88),[32] and famous scenes of failed supplication (especially Lycaon to Achilles (21.74-96)), evoke guestfriendship by inversion, startling audiences who expect the convention to bind.

The high register of ritual performance is supported by authorities felt to be ancient and profound. The gods support hospitality conventions in the *Iliad*, and also subscribe to them (for example, at 1.597-604 and 18.385-410). Oath-rituals, also primordial in origin, bind Zeus (1.524-27; 19.108-13), Hera, who invokes the River Styx (15.36-40), and also humans, under threat of punishment by Zeus, the Erinyes, and a host of natural forces (for example, at 3.276-80 and 19.260-61). The lethal punishment for violation of oath and commensal traditions is clearly dire, as the entire *Iliad* attests—first in its aetiology of violated guestfriendship (at 3.351-54 and 13.622-27), and second in the reiterated theme of Trojan perfidy in regard to oaths.

The power and antiquity of oath-making rituals are indisputable also outside the *Iliad*, which supports the claim of formalization within it. In formula and form Homeric rituals share features traceable to early second-millennium Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and the Levant. The oath-making formula "friendship and trusty oaths" (3.73, 3.94, and 3.256)[33] is a hendiadys of international significance, given similar collocations in Hebrew *(bryt šlwm, bryt wsd;* covenant and peace/grace), in Aramaic (*'dy' wbt*'; bond and goodness), in Akkadian *(riksu salïme, adê salïme;* bond and peace), and in Hittite (*išiul and lingai-;* bond and the oath)[34] (Beckman 1996;

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[31] This by Antenor, who observes that "now we are fighting as those who have violated the oaths sworn" (7.351-52).

[32] On the theme, see also Herman 1987 and Reece 1993.

[33] φιλότητα καὶ ὅρκια πιστά.

[34] The notions of oath and friendship would also seem to be at least collocated in Tudahliya IV's pact with Kurunta: "when my father saw the friendship (*aaššiatar*) between us (Vs. II. 46), . . . he caused us to be bound by oath (*lienganuut*)" (47) (KBo 86/200) (Author's translation).

Weinfeld 1990:176-77), and "cutting oaths" (for example, at 3.73, 3.256, and 3.94),[35] metonymic in some of our earliest treaties,[36] continue to be a dramatic act among first-millennium Aramaeans and Neo-Assyrians: "Abba-an is under oath to Yarimlim and also he cut the neck of a lamb. He swore: I shall never take back what I gave you"; "This shoulder is not the shoulder of a spring lamb, it is the shoulder of Mati-ilu, it is the shoulder of his sons, his magnates, and the people of his land. If Mati'-ilu should sin against this treaty, so may, just as the shoulder of this spring lamb is torn out . . . the shoulder of Mati'ilu, of his sons, [his magnates] and the people of his land be torn out . . . ."[37] There is clearly a shock and awe quality to these enactments, which speaks to the commanding register of oath-making rituals across the ancient Near East (Hillers 1964; Kitts 2005:100-14), even when oath-gods are not bound as cosmic enforcers.

Commensal and hospitable conventions are similarly visible in nearby Anatolian traditions, although sacrificial slaughter is played down. Only two known Hittite myths refer to human feasting, both indirectly.[38] But commensality among gods seems to echo the hospitality traditions we see in *Iliad* 9 (the embassy to the tent of Achilles) and to some extent in Book 18 (the visit of Thetis with Hephaestus). For example, in a Hurrian-Hittite bilingual tablet the storm-god visits Allani, an underworld goddess, who seats her guest on a throne and sets his feet on a footstool. Then she girds him with something (a bib?), and slaughters 10,000 oxen and 30,000 sheep, lambs, and billy goats. Her bakers prepare bread, her cooks bring in meat, her cupbearers cups. The storm god sits down to eat, with the former generation of gods seated to his right. With long and lovely fingers, the goddess serves food to her guest. The broken end of the text includes words about good things and thriving (KBo XXXIII 13)—not exactly "and they feasted, and no spirit went lacking the fine feast," but a thought-provoking inclusion nonetheless. Hospitality is clearly important.

The same paradigm is present but perverted in other examples. The goddess Inara entices the monster Illuyanka and his offspring to a feast, after which they fall into a drunken stupor and her mortal boyfriend Hupasiya, or alternatively the weather god, kills them (KBo III 7). Her hospitality was a hoax. In a prayer to the dying god Telepinu, his refusal to accept food offerings is equated with anger and disappearing bounty from the land (KUB XXIV 2). Ishtar of Nineveh (also known as Sauska), initially paralyzed with fear about the monster Hedammu, cannot bring herself to accept an offered throne, food-table, and cup (KBo XIX 112 5a and 5b), while Hedammu is invigorating himself on thousands of oxen, horses, lambs, kids, and even fish of the plains (conceivably pollywogs) and dogs of the rivers (otters) (KUB VIII 67:7-9).[39] Divine feasting appears to represent divine thriving.

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[35] οἱ δ' ἄλλοι φιλότητα καὶ ὅρκια πιστὰ ταμόντες/τάμωμεν.

[36] On what is cut, exactly, see, for example, Bickerman 1976, Finet 1993:135-142, and also Giorgieri 2001. On the persistent logic, see Burkert 2006:28.

[37] Both may be found in Arnold and Beyer 2002:101.

[38] Appu despairs because he has no son to bring to the feast (CTH 360), and the fisherman and his wife connive to get gifts of food by pretending a child is theirs (CTH 363). Both texts are available in translation by Hoffner (1990:63-65).

[39] These summaries are based on my translations.

If degree of detail in commensal rituals supports their formality, it is worth noting the comparable detail in the elaborate display of hospitality at the sixteenth day of the Hittite AN.TAH.SUM festival, wherein the king plays host to gods and deified things. His offerings are sumptuous, not only to gods but to sacred loci, such as door bolts, deified thrones, window sills, and the Inanna instruments, while entertainment includes singers, apparent clown men, callers, and so forth. Tables before the gods are laden with the raw flesh of bulls, cows, sheep, and goats, with bread, and with libation containers of wine. Couches are brought in. The king, flanked by royal functionaries, is greeted by entertainers wearing white powder and playing instruments. The cook places meat at the deified throne, the war god, the hearth, the wooden throne, the window, the bolt of the door, and again at the hearth. Cooks libate three times before the deified throne and the war god, clean the table, then again libate the hearth, the deified throne, the window, the doorbolt, the hearth, and the image of Hattusili-deified. The king bows, entertainers speak, callers call, and the king, standing, "drinks" to the throne god and the war god. He offers wine to the Inanna instrument, singers sing, entertainers speak and the king and queen sit on the throne.[40] Notice that offerings extend frequently to the hearth, which is an apparent matrix for human-divine discourse, given "As by day, oh hearth, humankind continuously surrounds you, by night the gods surround you" (KBo XVII 105).[41] All of the aforementioned examples speak to a traditional power of ritual engagement through hosting and dining.

These tiny snippets illustrate Walter Burkert's point that borders are likely locations for cultural cross-fertilizations culminating in shared conventions (1992:68). Treaty-traditions, while probably not introduced to Homer by the Hittites, clearly share binding powers across the Mediterranean world. Rappaport would see this phenomenon as due to an inherent slipperiness in human promises (1999:13).[42] Oaths are the one universal convention across cultures (Rappaport 1999:132), presumably because commitments by words are so intrinsically fragile. They must be reinforced by the most formal of sealants, which dramatic acts illustrate through sacrifice and other ritual cruelties that threaten perjurers and bind participants as witnesses. Hospitality conventions would seem equally binding, largely because of the inherent danger in trusting a stranger. In both cases—oath-making and hospitality—it would seem to be the highly formal nature of these rituals that makes them binding.

In 1990 Gregory Nagy hypothesized that bardic recomposition before successive panhellenic audiences would have resulted in gradual patterns of fixity in which regional

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[40] Summary of KBo IV 9 I:1-III:26, based on author's translation and notes.

[41] The hearth is a veritable metonym for the human domicile in Hittite law 24, which demands payment to the former owner of a slave who has escaped "to the hearth" of a benefactor, apparently for protection. A parallel valuation of the hearth and compassion is implicit when Nestor scolds the Achaeans for forgetting about the hearth: "Without clan, without law, and without hearth is he who loves chilling civil strife" (*aphrêtôr athemistos anestios estin ekeinos, / hos polemou eratai epidêmiou okruoentos*) (9.63-64). References to the "meal of Demeter" have the same valence at 21.76 and 13.321-25. Hittite offerings to the hearth are analyzed by Archi (1975).

[42] Similarly, Burkert refers to an unbearable lightness of language (2006:29).

elements were eclipsed by a reach back to protomaterial.[43] Combining this insight about proto-material with the tendency toward fixation in rituals at this high level of formality, we may speculate that features of Homeric rituals are also traceable into very early times. Anatolian traditions were famously syncretistic, combining Hurrian, Hattian, Luvian, and presumably Nesite (Hittite) customs. A number of excellent studies have outlined the trajectories of influences from Mesopotamia west and Greek influences east to Mesopotamia.[44] It is therefore not a stretch to suppose that ritual traditions as we have them in the *Iliad* may preserve traditions traceable to even older ones due East. Formality in performance surely helped to preserve these. As Rappaport implied, the higher the ritual performance register, the more likely it is that the performance tradition will resist the vagaries of change over time (1999:129-30).

**Conclusion**

Gregory Nagy once speculated that favorite phrases over time may have generated favorite rhythms, around which hexameter poetry was built.[45] Stretching through Indo-European language families, his evidence was not simple, but the simple implication was that in the imaginations of the composing poets, theme remained primary, phraseology and metrical constraints secondary, and yet they evolved together in performances integrating themes, formulae, and meter into a rhythmic event before audiences who came to expect a traditional shape to all of it.

A parallel route may be imagined for ritual. The event was primary, but patterning, rhythm, condensation, and formality colluded to congeal ancient ritual traditions for generations of participants. Conceivably, poets integrated the performance features they knew, at least implicitly, into ritual scenes. Over successive poetic performances, the telltale ritual features became encrypted within the fixed texts we now possess. So, for instance, whereas peer to peer conversations on the battlefield likely came to be couched in idioms contemporary to audiences (Martin 1989:45ff.), ritual scenes preserved ancient and auspicious speech, with whole line epithets and formulae. It is arguable that ritual scenes, similarly to formulae and auspicious speech acts, resisted narrative exigencies for the most part and preserved some of the oldest cultural formations in the *Iliad*.

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[43] "The wider the diffusion, the deeper the tradition must reach within itself: the least common denominator is also the oldest, in that a synthesis of distinct but related traditions would tend to recover the oldest aspects of these traditions" (1990:24). He compares the poet, evolving by Classical times into a rhapsode, to an ethnographer who in facing multiform traditions would attempt to reconstruct back to the prototype. The epic synthesis, thus, "operates on the diachronically oldest recoverable aspects of its own traditions" (1990:56).

[44] See, for instance, Suter 2008, Gunter 1990, Villing 2005, and Bachvarova et al. 2008.

[45] "Predictable patterns of rhythm emerge from favorite traditional phrases with favorite rhythms; the eventual regulation of these patterns, combined with syllable count in the traditional phrases, constitutes the essentials of what we know as meter . . . its origins are from traditional phraseology" (1990:30).

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