İSTANBUL ÜNİVERSİTESİ YAYINEVİ

darulfunun ilahiyat

RESEARCH ARTICLE

darulfunun ilahiyat

DOI: 10.26650/di.2023.34.1.1182929
http://ilahiyatjournal.istanbul.edu.tr

Submitted: 15.06.2022
Revision Requested: 01.10.2022
Last Revision: 08.12.2022
Accepted: 09.12.2022
Published Online: 16.03.2023

Sumerians in Light of Eliade's Concept of Sacredness

Eliade'nin Kutsallık Kavramı Bağlamında Sümerler

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Abstract

One of the most important phenomena that constituted the thought, religion, social, and cultural structure of antiquity was ab-origina, which includes concepts such as the prototype of everything being in the past, doing everything as it was done in the past, and doing everything because it was done in the past, and this phenomenon pushed the people of antiquity to create a society that stood against difference and change. As Eliade emphasizes, that truth can only be gained by practice or involvement because an object or activity only becomes genuine when it imitates or replicates an archetype. The replication of models created by divine action at a legendary beginning time is essential to human behavior in a mythologically-based world, and this is commonly denoted by the phrases "in illo tempore" or "ab origina." Sumerians, who created a brilliant culture in ancient Mesopotamia, were unique and personified people who experienced ab-origina and manifested divinity in their people. The aim of this study is to interpret the sacredness Sumerian society in terms of Eliade's perception.

Keywords: Ancient Religion, Ab-Origina, Sacred People, Sumerians, Rituals

Öz

Antikçağ düşünce, dini, sosyal ve kültürel yapısını oluşturan en önemli olgulardan biri *ab-origina* olarak adlandırılan her şeyin prototipinin geçmişte olduğu, her şeyi geçmişte olduğu gibi yapma yapılan her şeyin geçmişte yapıldığı için yapılması gibi kavramları içine alan bu olgu antikçağ insanını farklılığa ve değişime karşı duran bir toplum yaratmaya itmiştir. Eliade'nin vurguladığı gibi, hakikat ancak uygulama veya katılımla kazanılabilir çünkü bir nesne veya faaliyet ancak bir arketipi taklit ettiğinde veya kopyaladığında hakiki hale gelir. Efsanevi bir başlangıç zamanında ilahi eylem tarafından yaratılan modellerin kopyalanması, mitolojik temelli bir dünyada insan davranışı için esastır ve bu genellikle "in illo tempore" veya "ab origina" ifadeleriyle belirtilir. Antik Mezopotamya'da parlak bir kültür yaratan Sümerler, *ab-origina'yı* deneyimlemiş ve kutsallığın bir halk üzerinde tezahür ettiği eşsiz ve kişileştirilmiş bir halktır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Sümerler olarak adlandırılan bir toplumun kutsallığını Eliade'in algısı açısından yorumlamaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Antik Din, Ab-origina, Kutsal Halk, Sümerler, Rituals

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To cite this article: Dilek, Yesim. "Sumerians in Light of Eliade's Concept of Sacredness." *darulfunun ilahiyat*. Advance Online Publication. https://doi.org/10.26650/di.2023.34.1.1182929

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Introduction

The attachment to the essence and the desire to leave everything in its original fettle and in the state it was in the beginning was reflected in the understanding of the sacred in ancient societies. In connection with mythological stories, the sanctity of some objects was associated with the gods. As we learn from mythological stories, many societies considered every object in the world to be sacred as long as it could be linked to a first example in the realm of the gods. Therefore, it can be said that some sacred objects were considered sacred because they constituted the first example in the realm of the gods. In this respect, it is known that especially in some agricultural societies, objects used in cultivation were made by the gods for the first time and people were taught how to use them by the gods. For this reason, the societies that had such mythological stories regarded the tools used in agriculture, such as the plow, hammer/axe, and sickle, as sacred and used them in their rituals.[1]

The mind of ancient man not only attributed sacredness to objects and phenomena but also became a mediator in their contact with the sacred, because in people's religious beliefs, it was generally thought that the first state of being was sacred. Since physical contact with the first being could not be established, the sacredness of other beings seen in later periods resulted from the perceptual contact established with the first being.[2] As Eliade states, the first perfect example of every type of construction or production in the ancient period is cosmogony. The creation of the world became the first example of any creative behavior of human beings, regardless of the reference plane. It is clear that settling in a land repeated the cosmogony and the effort to return to that first moment.[3] The wisdom required to replicate the divine models and re-found sacred time and space is passed on through myths, symbols, and rituals that serve as custodians of the memory of this earlier sacredness.[4] For people who believe in any religion, the concept of "sacred time" is a condition that necessarily exists within their belief. Sacred time is the ritual time when one dedicates oneself to the being or beings one believes in. There is also the reality of profane time, in which no religious action takes place. A person can easily move into sacred time at any time. Sacred time is by its very nature reversible,

1 M. Turgut, *Hitit Dini Ritüellerinde Kullanılan Objeler.* (Doktora Tezi, Selçuk Üniversitesi, Konya. 2018), 67.

2 M. Köktürk, *Kültür ve Sembol Bir Cassirer İncelemesi*. (Ankara: Aktif Düşünce Yayınları. 2014), 65.

3 M. Eliade, *Kutsal ve Kutsal Dışı.* (İstanbul: Alfa Mitoloji Yayınevi, 2017), 42.

4 C. Barth, "In illo tempore, at the center of the world: Mircea Eliade and religious studies' concepts of sacred time and space", Historical Social Research, 38(3), (2013), 62.

that is, it is the first mythic time that is made present in the true sense of the word. Archaic man wants to dwell in a sacred area in a manner similar to the urge to live in sacred time through repetition and regeneration. For a religious person, sacred space has existential significance, since without a previous orientation—and any orientation involves gaining a fixed point—nothing can start or be done. Because of this, religious man has always tried to establish his residence at the "center of the world.[5] In general, sacred space is a special space where the sacred manifests itself and is separated from the non-sacred space. Human beings cannot just pick a place and declare it sacred at will; for a place to be considered sacred, it must be identified by some kind of sign that shows that it is special and different from its surroundings.

Eliade's Perception of the Concepts of "Sacred" and "Ab-origina"

Archaic man attempts to protect himself from "the horrors of history" by immersing himself as much as possible in the sacred through all of his deeds, according to what Eliade terms "basic ontology," because the sacred is equated with power and reality.[6] Therefore, it is simple to comprehend the religious man's great longing to be, to take part in reality, and to be overpowered. Therefore, in order for man to be truly archaic, he must recognize the sacred and get rid of the "unreal" and pointless profane as much as he can. The only means for prehistoric man to acquire a sense of reality and purpose is through the recurrence of heavenly archetypes: "Only when an object or activity imitates or mimics an archetype does it become real. Therefore, truth can only be attained via practice or involvement."[7] Human practice in a mythologically grounded life depends on the replication of models provided by divine action at a legendary starting time, which is sometimes indicated by the expressions "in illo tempore" or "ab origina."

Since the rituals, worship, and sacrifices practiced in the time in which we live are the unchanging continuation of the phenomenon of *ab-origina,* the people of antiquity developed unchanging patterns within themselves. In this kind of thinking, as Eliade states, the moment of the first creation of the universe is the most sacred moment and the primordial experience begins here.[8] The most

5 C. Barth, "In illo tempore, at the center of the world: Mircea Eliade and religious studies' concepts of sacred time and space", Historical Social Research, 38(3), (2013), 64.

6 M. Eliade, *The myth of the eternal return: Cosmos and history*. (Paris: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3.

7 M. Eliade, *The myth of the eternal return: Cosmos and history*. (Paris: Princeton University Press, 2005), 34.

8 M. Eliade, *Kutsal ve Kutsal Dışı.* (İstanbul: Alfa Mitoloji Yayınevi, 2017), 21

ideal situation and moment is the time when the gods put the world in order in the beginning, sometimes in the realm of the divine realm before the creation of man. The reason for the rituals practiced was because they were first performed in that state and time. Therefore, every ritual and worship should be as close as possible to its original form in the ideal. Putting individuality on the back burner, the glorification and constant repetition of the past entails the ideology of being a closed society in itself. If everything was perfect in the past, the future is frightening and it is not necessary to take risk.[9]

The phenomenon of "perfection in the beginning" emerged as a result of the attachment to the essence which was one of the basic life ideologies of ancient, closed societies, and the reaction against the unknown and the future had another result that served the psychological aspect of the individual besides its socio-psychological side. The passion for the past had contributed significantly to the maintenance of childlike purity and understanding, as it kept the individual tied to the "womb" in which he or she was born. Any attempt to leave the womb would be punished. Every return to the past through rituals was a dive into the womb that cleanses the unconscious. Worship in a temple or new time entered into on a holy day took one back to one's original state in the womb. When compared to antiquity, the difference between the divine time dimension and the secular time dimension that one enters in modern times through festivals or special occasions is extraordinarily clear. In the ancient mentality, rituals were gaps in time, facilitating the transition from one section to another, purifying the person. The desire to return to the first ensured the continuation of the perception of the magical universe. There was nothing new. Novelty was a deviation and a disruption of cosmic harmony.

Ritual times and ritual spaces have become sacred times and sacred spaces because they provide communication with the divine realm and are separated from the normal plane. Time and space limitations were determined according to certain criteria. Sacred times were determined by many factors, such as naturalistic elements, seasonal cycles, and the meaning of each month. In the same way, there were also certain elements necessary for a place to be suitable for ritual and to be sanctified. The perception of the world created within the Mesopotamian religious system influenced the criteria for determining both. "According to traditional cultures, only what is sacred has a reality; the sanctified space, such as a temple, a holy city, or a riverbank, was the only reality because the whole universe was concentrated there. The only real time was liturgical, sacred time; man had reached this absolute time by actually taking part in rituals."[10]

9 K. Demirci, *Eski Mezopotamya Dinlerine Giriş Tanrılar, Ritüel, Tapınak*. (İstanbul: Ayışığı Kitapları, 2013), 6.

10 M. Eliade, *Babil Simyası ve Kozmolojisi.* (İstanbul: Kabalcı Yayınevi, 2002), 28.

The people of ancient Mesopotamia believed in many gods from the beginning of their existence in prehistory until the spread of monotheistic Christianity in the region. Supernatural beings were the forces to which Mesopotamians dedicated their existence. As the divine and sole owners of the universe, these powers endowed people with life and civilization. Due to the conditions of their time, Mesopotamians shaped everything that happened and developed around them according to their feelings. Thus, they were able to establish the relationship between the divine realm and the real world by creating systematic rules to serve this divine world. The organized form of these systematic principles, which constitute the indicators of devotion, such as prayer, offering, mythological stories, and magic, required ritual practices.[11] Archaeological and philological data confirm that the Sumerians, who are considered to be the first inhabitants of the region and who did not speak the Semitic language, were the first to establish this belief system. This polytheistic religious system was adopted and adapted to their culture and lifestyle by the Sumerians, who were the first to settle in the region, and then by the Semites, who dominated the region.

Sumerian Sacredness in the Context of Eliade's Perception

As evidenced by written sources, archaeological data, and anthropological approaches, Mesopotamia was one of the most prominent ancient civilizations where *ab-origina* prevailed. The Sumerians, thought to be the first inhabitants of the ancient Mesopotamian civilization, were people who lived through the *ab-origina* phenomenon and embodied the definition of sacredness. The origins of Mesopotamian religion date back to the least known periods of prehistory. By the time the first written texts appeared, the Sumerians already had a perception of the universe and the powers that control it. They envisioned the Earth as a flat disk covered by a large solid crust. This flat disk was covered on all sides by primordial water, including the top and bottom.[12] In Mesopotamia, wind or air was believed to separate the sky from the earth, and the sky was thought to be a much larger and grander version of the earth.[13]

There were many cultures that had influenced this region in terms of beliefs. The perception of the universe they believed in had remained as it was first created for

11 C. Nakamura, "Dedicating Magic: Neo-Assyrian Apotropaic Figurines and the Protection of Assur", World Archaeology Vol. 36(1): The Object of Dedication. Taylor & Francis, Ltd, 11-25, (2004), 14.

12 J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. (3rd ed. with supplement, Princeton. 1969), 60.

13 J. D. Nijhowne, *Politics, Religion and Cylinder Seals: A study of Mezopotamian Symbolism in the Second Millenium B.C.* (Doktora Tezi. Anthropology in the Graduate School of the State University, USA. 1979), 117.

thousands of years and had not changed. Throughout its history, Mesopotamian civilization was subjected to countless waves of peaceful and hostile migration, resulting in a cosmopolitan culture. As a result, the region was constantly under the influence of external sources. Nevertheless, it created and maintained its own character with remarkable consistency throughout the period of its existence, not being overwhelmed by external ideas but only using them. This consistency stemmed from Mesopotamia's attachment to the essence. For them, the essence was sacred, and altering it meant a kind of disloyalty to the faith. In this context, the Sumerians maintained their spiritual existence for thousands of years as a sacred people for all Mesopotamian communities. All elements related to the Mesopotamian divine world were special accumulations that were passed down from one generation to the next, their essence remaining unchanged. The Sumerians transmitted all their values to Mesopotamia. Although they disappeared historically, the Sumerian language and culture survived for about two thousand years. The Sumerians were the social embodiment of the concept of "ab-origina," and their language, lifestyle, and sacredness were considered sacred by the societies that followed them. For this reason, many ritual practices were left unchanged, as the Sumerians practiced them. All these are quite remarkable elements for a civilization that existed for thousands of years as an indicator of the concept of fidelity to the essence.

One of the reasons for this opposition to change was the fear of returning to the chaos that had existed before the creation of the universe. The ab-origina-encompassing concepts, such as the idea that the first essence of everything exists in the past, loyalty and longing for the past, a sense of trust in the past, the desire to do everything as it was done in the past, and doing everything because it was done in the past, were a sacredness and power that connected Mesopotamian people to the past. At the time, rituals were practiced and worship was based on the tendency to relive the essence over and over again in order to stay safe. All Mesopotamian societies were under Sumerian influence in order to get rid of chaos and to keep the moment when the gods had established world order constant. "Rituals are performed because they were performed for the first time in that situation and at that time. Therefore, every ritual and worship should ideally conform to its original form as much as possible."[14] Innovation was avoided in order not to disrupt the universal order, and this was the absolute truth of the people of that period. For example, although they knew that the firing process of bricks was more efficient and advantageous, Mesopotamians used sun-dried bricks in the construction of

14 K. Demirci, *Eski Mezopotamya Dinlerine Giriş Tanrılar, Ritüel, Tapınak*.(İstanbul: Ayışığı Kitapları, 2013), 6.

sacred buildings. They preferred fired bricks for non-sacred buildings.[15] The conservatism of the Mesopotamians in sacred architecture, and their faithfulness to their predecessors' techniques, clearly demonstrated their approach to all things sacred.

The Sumerians were a society that developed and promoted cultural unity among the peoples of Mesopotamia and had a very important place among Mesopotamian societies. Bottero mentioned Sumerian influence by stating that the Sumerian language remained the language of religion and science until the end of the country's history after its suppression by the Samaritans as an autonomous tribe.[16] Religious documents, legends, epics, and elegies have been copied and passed down from generation to generation almost unchanged for thousands of years, and it is often difficult to tell from when a document originated. As Demirci points out, in such a vast and heterogeneous world, one would expect belief systems to be different from one another, but on the contrary, Mesopotamian beliefs were so uniform that they almost form a whole. Even though many phenomena such as gods, rituals, and worship had different names (sometimes they were used in the same sense), everything from myths to cults seemed to be a continuation of each other. The main civilization that provided this mortar was the Sumerian civilization.[17] The continuation of the Sumerian tradition, the sanctity of these people and their place in the ab-origina was seen in the texts, prayers, dreams, and all stages of the religious cycle in the temple built by King Gudea of Lagash.

The fact that these texts have survived to the present day unaltered and faithful to their essence shows that this religious belief was mostly adopted by the Semitic peoples who raided the Sumerians in 2000 BC. Most of the Sumerian deities remained the same, but their names were changed or merged with new ones.[18] In addition to Sumerian administrative texts, Sumerian literary texts, hymns, laments, prayers, incantations, codes of law, legal decisions, proverbs, and myths have been found in many places, especially in Nippur, Uruk, Ur, Telloh, Drehem, and Lagash. The transmission of these texts to the Akkadians was gradual. First, certain groups of texts originated in the court, such as codices and royal inscriptions, and some of them disappeared before they could be translated into Akkadian. The Akkadian translations of religious texts, on the other hand, passed directly into Akkadian culture

15 A. L. Oppenheim, "The Mesopotamian Temple", The Biblical Archaeologist, The American Schools of Oriental Research. Vol. 7, No. 3. 54-63. (1944), 58.

16 J. Bottero, *Mezopotamya: Yazı Akıl Tanrılar*. (Ankara: Dost Kitabevi. 2012), 91.

17 K. Demirci, *Eski Mezopotamya Dinlerine Giriş Tanrılar, Ritüel, Tapınak*.(İstanbul: Ayışığı Kitapları, 2013), 11.

18 A. Schimmel, *A. Dinler Tarihine Giriş*. (İstanbul: Kırkambar Yayınları. 1999), 46.

as myth and epic texts. It is important to note that in the Old Babylonian period, the original Sumerian language, not the translated texts, continued to be read and written.[19] The continuation of Sumerian traditions as the language of religion and culture demonstrates the importance of fidelity to the essence in social life. Many of the temple names and ritual terms have remained in their Sumerian form. The custom of reciting all religious texts in Sumerian, which remained the language of rituals by the priests until long after many of the prayers and incantations had become dead languages, continued for thousands of years.[20]

The cohesive synthesis of Sumerian and Akkadian religion began with the incorporation of some Sumerian deities into the Akkadian pantheon, along with their duties. The majority of deity transfers occurred in deities associated with celestial bodies and natural gods.[21] For example, the Sumerian sun god UTU, worshipped at Larsa, became equivalent to the Semitic sun god Šamaš, whose cult center was at Sippar, and the chief god of Uruk, INANNA, became the Samian Ištar. The Akkadians adopted many of the Sumerian gods directly, adapting only their names to their own language and making no other changes in their power and sacredness. In addition, some gods, such as Gula, Ninurta, and Ningirsu, were adopted with their names as they were. In these respects, it is proven that the Semitic religion has its roots in Sumer.[22]

The concept of fidelity to the essence, the most prominent and fundamental characteristic of Mesopotamian religious belief, facilitated inferences about the past. With adherence to the essence, the texts were not renewed but only improved, based on the main text. Therefore, being able to analyze the texts of almost all Mesopotamian religious practices, which are the continuation of earlier periods, has made it possible to understand ancient times.

Ritual practices and the prayers that accompany them were often stereotyped as they consisted of instructions and repetitions. They were therefore less aesthetically appealing than other Mesopotamian literary works. However, as stereotyped as the prayers were, they also managed to reflect the religious feelings of the people

19 A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia- Portrait of Dead Civilization*. (London: The University of Chicago Press. 1977), 51.

20 S. H. Hooke, *Ortadoğu Mitolojisi*. (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi. 1993), 39.

21 P. A. *Beaulieu, Mesopotamia: Ancient Religions. edited by Sarah Iles Johnston.(*London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 2007), 168.

22 D. Rosenberg*, Dünya Mitolojisi Buyuk Destan ve Soylenceler Antolojisi, 3. Baskı.* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi Yayınları. 2003), 244-245.

who recited them, which were unique to them and to the society in which they lived. The repetitiveness of the prayers reflected the depth of feelings and beliefs, in the context of a commitment to the essence, and made the Mesopotamian religious system easier for modern people to understand. The same was true for ritual performances; they were performed over and over again because people thought they were useful. In other words, they symbolized something valid and meaningful for both the individual and society. In this context, the monotony of texts gave them a different significance for contemporary research.

Another dimension of the Mesopotamian religious perception of ab-origina, which is referred to as loyalty to the essence, and therefore how the Sumerians created a homogeneous religious structure, is the rituals practiced in the region. The preservation of existing order, the desire to avoid any situation that would cause chaos, and the desire to repeat the practices practiced by their ancestors in their time and found to work were at the heart of the ritual concept. In this context, a way of communicating with the sacred had always been sought by remaining faithful to its essence. Therefore, the ritual could only be improved but not changed, and it was faithful to the original example. Significant parts of the rituals were accompanied by mythology. The first reason for this was the emergence of various stories of supernatural powers, created in the context of the creation of the universe. In a related way, myths popularized rituals and rituals popularized myths. No matter how complex a religious ritual was, it was always as it had been in the beginning (ab origina), and at the time of its performance there was a sacred event that was assumed to have taken place. Thus, every participant in the ritual was a contemporary of the mythic event. He or she would have the opportunity to leave his or her secular time and include himself or herself in the sacred time, that is, in the sacredness of the essence. He could return to the essence that belongs to eternity and take part for the first time.

Regarding the ritual system of the region, Bottero notes that they were generally very conservative about ritual and that rituals were changed even less than ideology in the long run.[23] This point shows how important the issue of ab-origina was in the belief system of this community. As Eliade mentions, in the ritual, which consisted of the repetition of a behavior performed by ancestors or gods "in illo tempore" (at the beginning of history), societies did not allow the belief to be forgotten in the first place.[24] The behaviors of the gods, which were initially created with mythological stories, were repeated continuously and established a single and

23 J. Bottero, *Mezopotamya: Yazı Akıl Tanrılar.* (Ankara: Dost Kitabevi.2012), 251.

24 M. Eliade, *Kutsal ve Kutsal Dışı.* (İstanbul: Alfa Mitoloji Yayınevi. 2017), 54.

standardized religious system that was absolutely not open to change. Each society had its own ritual practices based on its social, economic structure and cultural life. Although the Semitic peoples had a specific ritual system of their own, even after they dominated the region, they did not completely destroy the Sumerian rituals, but integrated them with their own practices. Ritual practices in Mesopotamia always continued in the Sumerian form while remaining faithful to their essence. The most obvious proof of this is the presence of Sumerian copies of ritual texts in the library of the 7th century BC Neo-Assyrian king Asurbanipal. What had been done in the beginning was what was tried and succeeded. Therefore, they represented a safe space, that is, power. In this context, for any action to become a ritual, it had to have been tried and worked in the beginning. In this way, it could continue to be performed in its original form. Since the consequences of the unknown could not be experienced, the most feared thing in Mesopotamia was the possibility that the existing order would be disrupted and chaos would ensue.

The best example of such a situation was the temple building rituals. As can be seen from the archaeological data, the structure and location of temples in Mesopotamia were not changed, and the new one was rebuilt on top of the old one in the same way. The rituals performed in temples in Mesopotamia were carried out by a designated team of priests. There was a system of paths and unchanging rules that had to be followed while performing ritual actions. These authorized priests were responsible for having specialized knowledge of the ritual to be performed and for directing the course of the ritual without changing the rules.

Since the construction of temples in Mesopotamia was based on fidelity to the essence, the first prototype was based on the construction of Enki's temple in Eridu. According to the narrative in the texts, this temple was built on the Abzu water coming from the depths and decorated with gold, silver, and precious stones. "ENKI, the lord who determines destinies, built his house of silver and lapis lazuli stone, and in lapis lazuli, like shining light...he built the pure house. He furnished it with lapis lazuli and adorned it with gold."[25] In another text, the construction of the temple is described in the same vein: "Once upon a time, Enmenkar, the son of the sun god UTU, decided to make Aratta a state under him. Then he prayed to his sister INANNA to enable the people of Aratta to bring gold, silver, lapis lazuli and precious stones to build various sacred places and temples for him, especially Abzu, the temple of ENKI at Eridu."[26] It is clear that these precious materials were used in the temples of Mesopotamia in the context of devotion to the essence. All

25 S. N. Kramer, *Sumer Mitolojisi.* (İstanbul: Kabalcı Yayınevi.2021), 120.

26 S. N. Kramer, *Sümerler.* (İstanbul: Kabalcı Yayınevi.2002), 356.

the food offered daily to the statues of the gods in the temples and all the offerings made during rituals were made in gold vessels and trays. An important site in the temple area, and one of the ultimate representations of devotion to the essence, was the Abzu (water of the depths), a representation of primordial water. This source of water, probably in the form of a pool, was the cosmic water that comes from beneath the earth and ascends to the level of the gods. At the entrance to the temple was the ritual pool that purified and returns the person to their "original state" (ab origina). The shuluh (hand washing) ritual was performed here.[27]

In fact, rituals practiced by Sumerians were sacred time itself, a separation from ordinary time, and an integration with mythic time. The early beginnings of the construction of ritual time in Mesopotamia were linked to the understanding of the times in myths and the focus on the movement of the earth and often the sky. As Cranz notes, any moment in Mesopotamia in which a divine sign was witnessed could also be designated as a ritual time.[28] For the Mesopotamian perception of religion, "time" was not a plane in which events unfold haphazardly. The designated sacred times were separate from the normal flow of time. These were especially the times when rituals were performed, because humans were re-enacting the actions of the gods before the beginning of time. By re-enacting the exemplary actions of the gods, man recreated the mythic period when the gods had been active on earth. In doing so, they brought themselves closer to the gods and to the absolute truth that lied beneath the earth. Rituals provided a return to that period by reliving the creation of the universe or the creation of a particular aspect of nature, and this repetition of divine behavior reflects the phenomenon of creation in nature. The phenomena of creation and creation were re-enacted as part of the ritual, such as cosmogony, healing, preparation for a journey, and the enthronement of a king. In addition, the ritual practice of cosmogony was always part of periodic festivals, such as the celebration of the New Year.

Conclusion

The Sumerians, considered to be the first inhabitants of a civilization in the context of Eliade's view of the sacred mentioned above, are an ab-original people. Ab-origina, which includes ideas such as everything being in the past, everything being done as it was done in the past, and everything being done because it was done that way in the past, was one of the most important phenomena that constituted

27 K. Demirci, *Eski Mezopotamya Dinlerine Giriş Tanrılar, Ritüel, Tapınak*.(İstanbul: Ayışığı Kitapları, 2013), 86.

28 I. Cranz, I. *Impurity and Ritual in the Priestly Source and Assyro-Babylonian Incantations.* (Doktora Tezi, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore: Maryland, 2012), 182-183.

the thought, religion, social and cultural structure of antiquity. This phenomenon pushed the people of antiquity to build a society resistant to difference and change. This idea emerged from an etiological logic and a cosmic perspective that aimed to explain the origin of every action. As evidenced by written records, archaeological findings, and anthropological techniques, Mesopotamia was one of the most important ancient civilizations dominated by ab-origina. The Sumerians, thought to be the first inhabitants of ancient Mesopotamia, were exceptional, embodied individuals who came into direct contact with the divine and made divinity evident in their people. The Sumerian people were a reflection of divinity and embodied ab-origina, which includes the idea that the primordial essence of all things exists in the past, a sense of attachment and longing for the past, a sense of trust in the past, a desire to perform all actions as they were performed in the past, and a desire to perform all actions because they were performed in the past.

In this context, for any activity to become a ritual, it must have been initially tried and successful. In this way it could continue to be performed in its original format. The most feared thing in Mesopotamia was the possibility that the existing order would be disrupted and chaos would ensue because the effects of the unknown could not be experienced. The rituals during the construction of temples are the best example of this concept. As can be seen from the archaeological evidence, the structure and layout of the temples in Mesopotamia remained unchanged and the new temple was built on top of the previous one in the same way. The rituals performed in Mesopotamian temples were conducted by a select group. Ritual actions had to be performed according to a set of immutable rules. These approved priests were responsible for directing the course of the ritual by adhering to the established rules and were expected to have in-depth knowledge of the ritual to be performed.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.
Conflict of Interest: The author has no conflict of interest to declare.
Grant Support: The author declared that this study has received no grant support.

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