

# Gilgamesh's Request and Siduri's Denial. Part II: An Analysis and Interpretation of an Old Babylonian Fragment about Mourning and Celebration\*

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## I. Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to provide an analysis of two of the most powerfully evocative stanzas in Akkadian poetic literature. Such a study is surely fitting in a volume honoring Professor Yochanan Muffs. Yochanan's understanding of ancient texts is almost preternatural; one can only marvel at his ability to grasp and bring to life the emotions and metaphors that govern these texts. It seems appropriate, then, to celebrate a great scholar and dear friend with a study of the form and emotional force of passages from the Epic of Gilgamesh, passages that center upon themes which have also interested Yochanan.

The two stanzas are part of the justly famous exchange between Gilgamesh and the divine tavernkeeper Siduri in an Old Babylonian (OB) version of the Epic of Gilgamesh. The preserved part of their encounter begins with a request that Gilgamesh addresses to Siduri followed by her response (= OB Gilg., Meissner, ii-iii).<sup>1</sup> Each speech contains three stanzas. In translation, the two speeches read:

col. ii \*      My friend, whom I love dearly,  
1'      Who with me underwent all hardships,

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\* This essay and its companion study ("Gilgamesh's Request and Siduri's Denial. Part I: The Meaning of the Dialogue and its Implications for the History of the Epic," to appear in *Studies Hallo*, ed. M. Cohen et al. [Bethesda, Maryland, 1993]) have benefitted greatly from the comments of several scholars. Stephen A. Geller discussed the text with me in great detail, and both he and Kathryn Kravitz read the several drafts and made a number of helpful comments and suggestions. William L. Moran also discussed the text with me, Mordechai Cogan critiqued an early draft, and Diane Feinman suggested improvements in the final draft. I am grateful to all these friends for their interest and help.

1. The Meissner fragment was published by B. Meissner, *Ein altbabylonisches Fragment des Gilgamesepos*, *MVAG* 7/1 (Berlin, 1902). More recently, it has been joined to a fragment in the British Museum; see A. R. Millard, "Gilgamesh X: A New Fragment," *Iraq* 26 (1964), 99-105. For translations of both the Old Babylonian text and the later Standard Babylonian version of the epic, see, e.g., E. A. Speiser and A. K. Grayson in *ANET*<sup>3</sup>, 72-99, 503-7, and S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation: The Flood, Gilgamesh and Others* (Oxford/New York, 1989), 39-153. For studies of the epic, cf., e.g., Th. Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven, 1976), 195-219; J. H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia, 1982); T. Abusch, "Ishtar's Proposal and Gilgamesh's Refusal: An Interpretation of *The Gilgamesh Epic*, Tablet 6, Lines 1-79," *History of Religions* 26 (1986), 143-87.

- 2' Enkidu, whom I love dearly,  
 3' Who with me underwent all hardships,  
 4' Has gone to the fate of mankind.
- 5' Day and night I wept over him,  
 6' I would not give him up for burial—  
 7' (saying) "my friend perhaps will rise up to me at my cry!"—  
 8' Seven days and seven nights  
 9' Until a worm dropped out at me from his nose.
- 10' Since his death, I have not found life.  
 11' I keep roaming like a hunter in the open country.  
 12' Now, alewife, that I have seen your face,  
 13' The death that I constantly fear may I not see.
- 14' The alewife spoke to him, to Gilgamesh:

- col. iii    1 Gilgamesh, whither do you rove?  
 2 The life that you pursue you shall not find.  
 3 When the gods created mankind,  
 4 Death they appointed for mankind,  
 5 Life in their own hands they held.
- 6 You, Gilgamesh, let your stomach be full.  
 7 Day and night keep on being festive.  
 8 Daily make a festival.  
 9 Day and night dance and play.
- 10 Let your clothes be clean,  
 11 Let your head be washed, in water may you bathe.  
 12 Look down at the child who holds your hand,  
 13 Let a wife ever delight in your lap.<sup>2</sup>

Gilgamesh's speech encapsulates his emotional state: past, present, and future. Beginning with a description of the death of his friend, it moves on to an expression of his present anguish, and finally to his proposal for a solution. Siduri's speech provides her response and her advice. Elsewhere, I have examined the overall structure of this first set of speeches in the encounter between Gilgamesh and Siduri and there paid particular attention to the last, that is the third, stanza of each of the two speeches.<sup>3</sup> Here, I shall take up questions of poetic form and meaning of the second, that is, the middle, stanza of these two speeches.

In the aforementioned study, we noted that the two speeches run parallel to each other, but also form a chiasm. In either structural form, the second or middle

2. Following the end of the third stanza of Siduri's speech, there are an additional three lines that are largely broken. These lines might read:

"This alone is the conce[rn of woman/man.]  
 [Gilgamesh, whither do you rove?]  
 Let him who is alive [enjoy life]."

The first of these lines and perhaps the two that follow seem to be a concluding summary construction of Siduri's message.

3. Abusch, "Gilgamesh's Request and Siduri's Denial. Part I."

stanzas (ii 5'–9' and iii 6–9) correspond to each other and form the center of each speech. The middle stanza of Gilgamesh's speech contains the impassioned statement of his distress, and the middle stanza of Siduri's speech contains the goddess's direct response to that statement. The stanza iii 6–9 forms Siduri's solution to the personal and cultural crisis that Gilgamesh articulates in ii 5'–9'. Her injunction has been treated as a Babylonian form of "carpe diem." This interpretation of her advice perhaps distorts its meaning but, certainly, does not exhaust it. For her advice is not simply the urging of a hedonistic philosophy, a call for sensual pleasure: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (Isa. 22:13b). Rather, as we shall see, it is a prescription for healing, for therein the goddess draws a mourner away from the desert of grief and leads him back to the city of life.

The middle stanzas rightly form the centerpiece of each speech and of the dialogue as a whole. In fact, each of these central stanzas itself revolves around a central element. Thus, the poem directs our gaze to the center(s) of the center(s) and requires us to pay particular attention to them. Yet, the meaning of the central element, especially in Siduri's speech, is far from clear, for we do not know the form or force of the feasts or festivities that she urges Gilgamesh to undertake. Moreover, the two stanzas exhibit difficulties—perhaps irregularities—of poetic form, especially at their centers, and the very placement of these centers would seem to be responsible for unusual forms elsewhere in the stanzas.

## II. Analysis and Interpretation

To understand the meaning of the two stanzas as well as the cultural and existential issues at stake, we do well to allow their peculiarities to guide us to an understanding of the message.

### A. Gilgamesh's description of his distress, ii 5'–9':

- 5' *urri u mūši elišu abki*  
 6' *ul addiššu ana qebērim*  
 7' *ibrīman itabbe'am ana rigmiya*  
 8' *sebet ūmī u sebe mušīātīm*  
 9' *adi tūltum imqutam ina appišu*

The center of the stanza is an utterance: "My friend perhaps will rise up to me at my cry!" Each of the four other lines of the stanza is sundered from its logical connection, and all four are set loosely around the center, for properly speaking, ii 5' and 8' belong together as do ii 6' and 9'.

### B. Siduri's central advice, iii 6–9:

- 6 *attā<sup>d</sup> Gilgameš lū mali karaška*  
 7 *urri u mūši hitaddu attā*  
 8 *ūmišam šukun hidūtam*  
 9 *urri u mūši sūr u mēlil*

Lines iii 7–8 parallel each other and form the center of the stanza; for their part, iii 6 and 9 open and close the stanza and also parallel each other. As parallel lines, the two inner lines are unduly repetitive and strike one as vague and generic. On

the other hand, the outer lines, while sharing elements with the core lines (*attā* in iii 6 and 7, *urrī u mūšī* in iii 7 and 9), are quite specific. This marked difference creates an imbalance.

Note, moreover, that in both Gilgamesh's and Siduri's speeches, it is only the middle two stanzas that are built around a central element, while the first and third stanzas are not. This contrast highlights the significance of the construction.

The poetic structures in these stanzas are part of the composer's way of conveying a message. To understand these stanzas, we must examine them more closely and answer several questions: What thought is expressed by the central themes and perhaps highlighted by the deviations and imbalances? Why did the poet build these stanzas around central points? What is the effect of this construction in each of the two different stanzas?

#### A. *Gilgamesh's Distress: col. ii 5'-9'*

We begin with the second stanza of Gilgamesh's speech (ii 5'-9'). The stanza describes Gilgamesh's mourning for Enkidu, but Gilgamesh's act of mourning is neither traditional nor effective:

- 5'. Day and night I wept over him,  
 6'. I did not give him up for burial—  
 7'. (Saying) "My friend perhaps will rise up to me at my cry!"—  
 8'. Seven days and seven nights  
 9'. Until a worm dropped out at me from his nose.

#### 1. Form

The stanza shows a breakdown of poetic form. Rather than being constructed in the form of groups of parallel lines, the poetry is loose and informal. The clause begun in line 6' continues beyond the end of its line and is only concluded in line 9'. Line 8', an adverbial phrase which modifies line 5' and/or line 6', has been separated from them and appears disconnected. At the mid-point of the stanza (line 7'), is a parenthetical remark; its occurrence is disruptive and creates an anacoluthon. Altogether, the stanza is characterized by disjunction. Instead of poetic calm, there is a rush of words. All this conveys Gilgamesh's confused, disruptive, and disjointed feelings. To appreciate the force of the stanza we need only notice how sharply it contrasts with the immediately preceding stanza. That stanza is formal and orderly:

- My friend, whom I love dearly,  
 Who with me underwent all hardships,  
 Enkidu, whom I love dearly,  
 Who with me underwent all hardships,  
 Has now gone to the fate of mankind.

By contrast, our stanza is both broken and tense.

Especially given the formal quality of the first stanza, we need to explain why the second stanza differs and follows a freer form. That we are right in highlighting

this contrast between the two stanzas is further indicated by the form of the second stanza in Tablet X ii 4–6 of the Standard Babylonian (SB) version; in that version, the stanza possesses the formal quality characteristic of the first stanza of the OB version. Thus, we might have expected that the OB version, too, would have a text form in line with the poetic structure of its first stanza. Accordingly, the freer manner of articulation of the OB stanza must be of particular significance.

## 2. Comparison of Versions

By contrasting the differing SB and OB forms of the same stanza, we may understand the OB (and the SB) forms better.

Standard Babylonian (X ii 4–6)

*6 urri u 7 mušāti elišu abki  
ul addinšu ana qebēri*

*adi tūltu imquta ina appišu<sup>4</sup>*

For 6 days and 7 nights I wept over him;  
I did not give him up for burial

Until a worm dropped out at me  
from his nose.

Old Babylonian (ii 5'–9')

*urri u mūši elišu abki  
ul addiššu ana qebērim  
ibriman itabbe'am ana rigmiya  
sebet ūmī u sebe mušātīm  
adi tūltum imqutam ina appišu*

Day and night I wept over him,  
I did not give him up for burial—  
(saying) "my friend perhaps will  
rise up to me at my cry"—  
seven days and seven nights  
until a worm dropped out at me  
from his nose.

In the SB version, ii 5'b and ii 8' of the OB version are joined together in X ii 4, and OB ii 6' and ii 9' are joined together in X ii 5–6. Thus, in the SB version, the amount of time that has elapsed (the number of days and nights) is joined to the statement of Gilgamesh's mourning over Enkidu, and Gilgamesh's refusal to give up Enkidu for burial is followed by the event—the appearance of the worm—which forces him to give up the body of Enkidu. While this version contains some elements of drama and surprise, it is fundamentally cast in narrative form. In the main, its organization is in line with prosaic logic and prosaic story-telling.

In the OB version, SB X ii 4 is split apart, and X ii 5 and 6 are separate. Gilgamesh's weeping (ii 5') is followed by his refusal to give Enkidu up for burial (ii 6') but is not preceded by—or in any way directly connected with—a number of days and nights (ii 8'); and his refusal to give up Enkidu is followed not by the appearance of the worm (ii 9'), but rather by his cry of futile hope that Enkidu might still rise (ii 7'), a cry that is itself followed by "seven days and seven nights" (ii 8'). Thus, whereas logically, OB ii 5' and ii 8', and ii 6' and ii 9' might belong together, in fact line 8' is separated from line 5', and line 9' from line 6'.

In both versions, the appearance of the worm brings home the point that Gilgamesh should have buried Enkidu much earlier and let us know how grossly

4. See Tablet X, col. ii, 4–6 (speech to Siduri), restored from Tablet X, col. iii, 25–26 (speech to Urshanabi) and Tablet X, col. v, 14–16 (speech to Utnapishtim).

inappropriate Gilgamesh's behavior was. Here, however, I would emphasize the importance in our text of the different treatments of time durations and placements of the elapsed number of days and nights.

Joined together, *6 urrī u 7 mušāti / sebet ūmī u sebe mušiātīm* and *elišu abki* (SB X ii 4 // OB ii 5'b + 8') are a formulation of a standard mourning motif and reflect the ceremonial reality of a period of mourning subsequent to the burial of the dead. Usually, burial would follow immediately upon death and only then would a seven day period of mourning ensue.<sup>5</sup> In both texts there is a delay in the recognition of the significance of Gilgamesh's mourning, but the recognition occurs at different points and becomes known by different means in each text with the result that the audience is affected differently in each case.

In the OB version, line 8' is separated from line 5' and linked with line 6'. Consequently, in contrast to the SB version, the continuous day-and-night mourning of line 5' is not of limited duration; instead, it is of unknown or indefinite length. Line 8' tells us only how many days Gilgamesh did not give up Enkidu before the reality of line 9' intervened.

But whereas the OB text presents mourning as indefinite and undefined, the writer of the SB text begins in line 4 by presenting the mourning as six/seven days in duration. This would appear to be proper behavior. But in line 5 we learn that Gilgamesh had not yet buried Enkidu and therefore that this six/seven day period of mourning was prior to burial. When, in the SB version, the reader learns that Gilgamesh has not yet buried Enkidu, one is surprised. Retroactively, the reader realizes that the seven days of weeping were not days of mourning subsequent to a funeral, but rather, days of suspension of funeral rites. Precisely because the number of days of weeping in line 4 is the same as the number of days of mourning after a funeral, the mention of a precise number of days rather than a generalized period introduces an ironic twist by showing how the rites of burial and mourning have been reversed.<sup>6</sup> For with the recognition that these seven days came before the burial, we realize that the mourning has served a purpose opposite to that which it was meant to serve. The period that should have been devoted to honoring the dead resulted instead in their dishonor, and this point is then brought home by the appearance of maggots.

The SB text seems precise and does not hold back information. The OB version is less precise but more dramatic and powerful. It conveys the impression of uncontrollable grief and manages to convey the inner life of the hero and to involve us in that life. In the OB version, mourning is generalized. Mourning day and night is followed by Gilgamesh's refusal to bury Enkidu. At this point in the text we cannot yet know either the full significance of the mourning or of the refusal to bury,

5. The assumption of a seven-day period of mourning in Mesopotamia seems reasonable, though I cannot recall a study that has established or examined the custom. Seven days seems to be the standard period of mourning in Israel; see, e.g., P. K. McCarter, Jr., *II Samuel*, AB 9 (Garden City, New York, 1984), 288 on v. 27 and 301 on v. 18; and cf. W. W. Hallo, "The Death of Kings: Traditional Historiography in Contextual Perspective," in M. Cogan and I. Eph'al, eds., *Ah, Assyria . . . : Studies . . . Tadmor*, Scripta Hierosolymitana 33 (Jerusalem, 1991), 159.

6. A comparable irony or reversal is perhaps presented to the onlookers by David's behavior in 2 Sam. 12:15-23, where David apparently mourns for seven days before the death of his sick child, but not after the death.

for a precise number of days has been mentioned alongside neither the weeping nor the refusal. Instead, the refusal is followed by an expression of hope.

In itself, Gilgamesh's statement, "my friend perhaps will rise up to me at my cry," is not wholly unreasonable.<sup>7</sup> But the true significance of also this statement is not clear until the mention of seven days and seven nights in the following line. For only then do we realize how long Gilgamesh had failed to give up Enkidu for burial and how delusional his hope had been. Surely, his statement of hope was only believable when we thought that Enkidu had only just died and had been kept out of the grave for a short time. Until the mention of seven days and seven nights in line 8, recognition has been delayed. Were we told the number of days originally, in line 5, we would have immediately known the impropriety of Gilgamesh's refusal to give up the body and the profoundly delusional character of his hope. His statement would then have had little impact, for it would have been unbelievable.

The delay is longer and the surprise and shock all the greater in the OB text, for the delay has allowed us to be privy to, and has brought us to accept, both Gilgamesh's unlimited grief and his belief that Enkidu might actually not be dead and might shake off his deep sleep and rise up. The mention here of seven days and seven nights introduces reality in such an explosive way that we condemn what we before accepted. And this recognition is now capped off by a sense of revulsion at the appearance of the maggots.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. Emotional Logic of the Text

But let us now review the OB version of the second stanza in greater detail, but this time more from the point of view of Gilgamesh's experience. While the

7. It is sometimes necessary to ascertain that the deceased is actually dead and has not simply fallen into a suspended state from which he might revive. Hence, prior to burial, one function of mourning is to attempt to revive one who seems to have died, but may yet be brought back to life (cf. *muballiṭ mīti*). For the latter reason, David, in the incident in 2 Sam. 12:15–23, did not continue to mourn the child after his death. For not only did he probably lack emotional engagement with the infant and had already performed virtual rites of mourning for the child when he was alive for the sake of doing penance for him in order to revive him, he also knew that the child was irrevocably dead: "He replied, 'While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept because I thought: "Who knows? The Lord may take pity on me, and the child may live.'" But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will never come back to me'" (2 Sam. 12:22–23; trans. New J.P.S.).

8. Rather than basing the analysis of the OB text on the number of days, one might instead focus on the delusional statement: "My friend perhaps will rise up to me at my cry!" (ii 7'). For it is possible that this statement immediately informs the audience, even prior to the mention of six/seven days (ii 8'), that the mourning over Enkidu and the delay in his burial were not acceptable forms of behavior. If this is correct, the audience of the OB text hears the mention of six/seven days knowing already that it is wrong to act so and to not have buried Enkidu immediately. It is possible that Gilgamesh's statement was understood as a delusion immediately upon its mention in the text. But even if it is acknowledged that the delusional quality of line 7' is immediately sensed, the full delusional force would probably only have been fully recognized and understood with the mention of the days in line 8'. For initially, the reader would not be sure how to interpret line 7': on the one hand, he might agree that it was possible that Enkidu was only asleep; but on the other, even one who fully sympathizes with Gilgamesh's grief recognizes that the reality of death is obvious. Only with the mention of the seven days/nights would the full force of the delusion become evident, and the reader would realize how horrendous and unacceptable Gilgamesh's behavior had been and that he had acted solely on the basis of his delusion.

text is not ordered in conventional poetic terms, it seems to represent Gilgamesh's reality more faithfully than the SB version. It follows an emotional logic and is forceful and expressive. Every line is different from and contrasts with every other line, and as we read the OB version, we become increasingly conscious of its dynamic, almost chaotic, and pressured quality:

*Line 5:* Gilgamesh tells us that he weeps over his friend day and night. Rather than being finite, the weeping and mourning are indefinite.

*Line 6:* Gilgamesh is not able to bury and separate from the dead Enkidu. Instead of burying his friend immediately and then weeping over him for seven days, he holds back his body from burial.

*Line 7:* For he grasps at the delusion that his friend might rise up from the bier upon hearing his lament. The statement expressing this thought, this delusion, is here inserted into the text and disrupts the passage—as it disrupts Gilgamesh's life. It is set in the middle of the stanza and governs it from beginning to end.

*Line 8:* "Seven days and seven nights." His chaotic thoughts and behavior have persisted for these many days. The days that should have defined the period of mourning instead designate the number of days of delusion. The absence of a verb highlights the emotional and behavioral disjunctions. The line that indicates duration here applies not to Gilgamesh's mourning or weeping, but to his resistance or inability to bury Enkidu, and it specifies the number of days that he was in the grip of delusion before reality forced him to bury his friend.

*Line 9:* The rotting of dead human flesh shocks Gilgamesh and forces him to recognize the failure of his attempt to keep Enkidu alive. The climactic events of this line call a halt to his deluded and futile behavior. His failure throws him back into a despairing reality.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4. Psychological and Cultural Significance

The appearance of the worm demonstrates how perverse and topsy-turvy Gilgamesh's world had become. The outcome of preventing Enkidu's burial is ironic. Leaving the dead unburied is actually the worst treatment that can be accorded them. By not giving Enkidu's body over for burial, Gilgamesh wished to keep Enkidu present in the hope that his friend might come back to life. But Enkidu's body could not remain in a state of preservation, and, therefore, rather than expressing his love for Enkidu, Gilgamesh's behavior actually resulted in the mistreatment and dishonor of Enkidu. Gilgamesh has committed an offense against Enkidu and has deprived him of that which he had been promised: a proper burial. For it is not his friend that he has preserved, but his own delusion. He has become so self-centered that he has forgotten his friend. Gilgamesh needed to be reminded of this as, in another epic, did Achilles. In Patroclus' words to Achilles:

Sleeping so? Thou has forgotten me, Akhilleus.  
 Never was I uncared for in life but am in death.  
 Accord me burial in all haste: let me pass the gates of death.<sup>10</sup>

9. Notice also that the text never states explicitly that Gilgamesh finally gave Enkidu up for burial.

10. Homer, *Iliad*, 23.69–71, trans. R. Fitzgerald (New York, 1974), 537.

As Whitman noted regarding this passage, "What can be the meaning of this accusation, when Achilles can think of nothing but Patroclus? While his friend was alive, Achilles had listened to him, considered his nature, yielding to his claim upon him. Now he is dead. Achilles' actions are appropriate to himself, but not to Patroclus. What the dead wants is burial, burial in human decency. . . ." <sup>11</sup> So, too, Gilgamesh has thought only of himself and has allowed Enkidu's beautiful body to suffer disfigurement. And the worm brings this horror home to Gilgamesh in a profoundly shocking way.

Especially in our OB stanza, there is a mixture of order and confusion, continuity and disjunction. Order and continuity are visible to an outsider looking upon a burial scene which stretches over time and shows the duration of mourning activity. The confusion and disjunction, on the other hand, are most palpable when we step into the scene and experience the emotional pressure that compels and impels Gilgamesh.

Gilgamesh's state of mind is one of confusion and disorder, and his grasp of reality is weakened. He is driven by his feelings and is unable to follow the burial customs of his society. Funerary rites have failed him, and he is thus unable to separate from his dead friend and come to terms with reality. His special status allows him to flout the customary practices of his community; as with other aspects of his life, he rebels here against accepted norms. But, in effect, his idiosyncratic performance of the rites merely mimics them and thus conveys both their expected form as well as their distortion.

The stanza conveys to the audience the collapse of Gilgamesh's world and his identity within it. The various literary means give verbal expression to Gilgamesh's anguish and disintegrated state. Especially the breakdown of literary form, the deviations from poetic order, convey a breakdown of internal order and of cultural forms of mourning and burial.

Both versions describe the failure of funerary rituals. But unlike the SB version, the OB version does not simply present this failure and Gilgamesh's recourse to unconventional mourning and burial rites in a formal or schematic fashion, that is, in a ritualized form of poetic expression, but rather uses free form and emphasizes the centrality—the power—of the delusion and the long period in which Gilgamesh was deluded and could not surrender his friend to the grave. Whereas the SB version presents the events from the perspective of one looking back on a completed event, the OB version actually carries the speaker and the audience back to the experience itself. It presents the event as if it were ongoing and causes the audience to share in it. The OB text expresses, imitates, and draws us into Gilgamesh's state.

Delusion is shown to be central to the thought of the stanza by the placement of the delusional statement—"My friend perhaps will rise up to me at my cry"—at its center, and the stanza is built around this line. The disorder and poetic tension in ii 5'-9' make clear the failure of the mourning rites, for Gilgamesh could not bury his friend immediately after death, as he should have done in accordance with standard rites.

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11. C. H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), 214.

Even delusional behavior did not succeed, and finally Gilgamesh was forced to recognize that Enkidu was dead. But even then, he was unable to bury and truly separate from Enkidu. By the same token, Gilgamesh was unable to accept his own mortality and finiteness. Mourning in all its different forms has failed. Hence, his flight and eventual movement towards the alewife. Hence, also, the necessity for her to pry him loose from his attachment to the burial place and bring him back to everyday life. This, then, brings us to the middle stanza of Siduri's speech, to which we now turn.

### B. Siduri's Advice: col. iii 6-9

6. You, Gilgamesh, let your stomach be full.
7. Day and night keep on being festive, (you).
8. Daily make a festival.
9. Day and night dance and play.

#### 1. Joy

The whole of Siduri's speech has more than once been compared with the Egyptian Harpers' Songs. And for our purposes, it is worth attending to the Harpers' Songs and related orchestra songs,<sup>12</sup> for the core of the second stanza of Siduri's speech seems to represent or be based upon a set phrase, a phrase which would seem to have been taken over from elsewhere. In any case, the phrase repeats a refrain found in the Harpers' Songs: *ir hrw nfr*, "enjoy a festive day."<sup>13</sup>

These texts have a holiday or feast-day setting and are normally associated with festive banquets where they may have been sung. J. Assmann has recently provided an apt characterization of the Harpers' Songs:

Es gibt eine Gattung, die wir—ungenau—"Harfnerlieder" nennen, und die ihre typische Aufführungssituation, ihren "Sitz im Leben" in der geselligen oder intimen Festfeier des "Schönen Tages" hat. Diese Gattung ist Ausdrucksform einer ganz spezifischen Lebensweisheit. Der bedeutendste Text steht . . . im Londoner Papyrus Harris 500. . . .

Der Text ist zweigeteilt . . . Die erste beklagt die Vergänglichkeit alles Irdischen, die zweite fordert zum Festgenuss auf. . . .

Der zweite Teil fordert zum Festgenuss auf. Zwei Elemente sind uns vertraut: der hier als "Refrain" eingeführte Trinkspruch *jrj hrw nfr* "feiere den schönen Tag," und die Aufforderung, sich durch weisse Kleidung, duftende Salben und Öle und die Gemeinschaft der

12. For this literature, see: M. Lichtheim, "The Songs of the Harpers," *JNES* 4 (1945), 178-212; E. F. Wente, "Egyptian 'Make Merry' Songs Reconsidered," *JNES* 21 (1962), 118-28; M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, Vol. 1: *The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley, 1973), 193-97; Vol. 2: *The New Kingdom* (Berkeley, 1976), 115-16; M. V. Fox, "A Study of Antef," *Or.* 46 (1977), 393-423; idem, "The Entertainment Song Genre in Egyptian Literature," in S. Israelit-Groll, ed., *Egyptological Studies*, Scripta Hierosolymitana 28 (Jerusalem, 1982), 268-316; J. Assmann, "Der schöne Tag—Sinnlichkeit und Vergänglichkeit im altägyptischen Fest," in W. Haug and R. Warning, eds., *Das Fest—Poetik und Hermeneutik* 14 (Munich, 1989), 3-28. For several further references, see Assmann, "Der schöne Tag," 18, n. 70.

13. For this phrase, see, e.g., Fox, "Entertainment Song," 293-96; Lichtheim, "Songs of the Harpers," 207-8; idem, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:195.

"Schönen" dem Fest hinzugeben. Diese Elemente stammen unmittelbar aus der Festsituation. Es scheint mir evident, dass das "Bnteflied" eine literarisch-poetische Elaboration solcher Lieder und Trinksprüche darstellt, wie sie in der mündlichen Überlieferung des Festes seit alters ihren Ort haben.<sup>14</sup>

While Siduri's first stanza, like the first part of the Harper's Song, tries to convey the theoretical underpinnings of the transitoriness of life, it is actually Gilgamesh's speech itself which conveys that sense with power and poignancy. Siduri's speech is focused more on the second part, the theme of enjoyment, and here, therefore, we deal only with aspects of the second of the two parts of the Harper's Song.

The Harpers' Songs and related orchestra songs emphasize the theme of *ir hrw nfr*, "enjoy a festive day." This theme recalls our iii 7-8: *urri u mūši hitaddu attā // ūmišam šukun hidūtam*, "day and night keep on being festive, daily make a festival." This Egyptian motif and our lines iii 7-8 are parallel formulations of the same thought and possibly reflect or derive from similar settings. For this reason, these lines have, as we have noted, a general quality. The general theme forms the centerpiece of our stanza, around which are arranged the more specific lines 6 and 9. Like Gilgamesh's second stanza, the stanza is created from the middle outward. Lines 7 and 8 parallel each other. Line 8 is the less poetic and its concrete formulation of a command to act suggests that it represents the original festival prescription (*hidūtam šakānu* may well be a technical term) and that line 7, which has richer poetic texture, was then formulated to serve as its poetic parallel and as the first line of the pair. Lines 6 and 9 detail and make explicit the main pleasures of the day: food in iii 6; music and dance in iii 9. They thus specify aspects of the more general festival occasion and render the occasion concrete.

The structured repetition in our stanza conveys a sense of order. In fact, the stanza forms an interpenetrated or interlocking circular structure. Line 7 ends with *attā* (you), which word also begins line 6. The repetition of the word links lines 6 and 7, and personalizes the event and directs the advice to Gilgamesh. And line 9, the last line of the stanza, repeats *urri u mūši* of line 7 (rather than *ūmišam* of line 8). The repetition of *urri u mūši* from line 7 may serve to achieve variety by avoiding the repetition of *ūmišam*<sup>15</sup> from the immediately preceding line. It may also be used here because it recalls the parallel stanza in Gilgamesh's speech where this same phrase opens the stanza (ii 5'). But most of all, the use of this phrase in line 9 serves precisely to highlight its use in line 7. In line 7, the words *urri u mūši* and *attā* bracket *hitaddu*; thus, the repetitions in lines 6 and 9 in concert highlight the remaining and central word of line 7 and of the text: *hitaddu*. Graphically, this emphasis may be represented as follows:

6.			<i>attā</i> . . .
7.	<i>urri u mūši</i>	<i>ĤITADDU</i>	<i>attā</i> . . .
9.	<i>urri u mūši</i> . . .		

14. Assmann, "Der schöne Tag," 18-20.

15. Note also the alliteration of *ūmišam* and *mūši*.

The composer plays with and highlights line 7 rather than line 8 because this line may have been his own poetic formulation of the central theme. Lines 6 and 9 are not simply added to create a stanza. They personalize its central message; they lead up to and highlight the fundamental purpose of the festival: joy. Hence, the use of forms of *ḥadû* in the two center lines.

The stanza's several devices create a central assertion of the joy of this life and a re-affirmation of its goodness and value. This emphasis on joy as a way of affirming life then achieves a further climax in line 13 of the next stanza, for in that final line the climactic act of integration, the relationship with the woman, is expressed by the same verb *liḥtaddâm*.

## 2. Funeral and Festival

Emphasis on joy does more than just affirm the goodness or pleasure of life. Here we may remember that the parallel of the second stanza of Siduri's speech in the Egyptian materials is part of a song that gives concrete expression to the banquet of the festive day.<sup>16</sup> Examples of Harpers' Songs and related orchestra songs have been collected and interpreted by M. Lichtheim and others. A short example from the tomb of Haremhab at Thebes reads:

For thy *ka*! Make holiday in thy beautiful house of eternity, thy dwelling of everlastingness. . . . Receive garlands, anoint thyself with fine oil. Take part in a holiday in the favor of that good god of the west of Thebes.<sup>17</sup>

Egyptologists have tried to determine whether the banquet and the accompanying Harpers' Songs are primarily of a mundane or of a mortuary character.<sup>18</sup> Without entering into that debate, it is worth noting that the Egyptian materials are usually attested in mortuary contexts and are associated with the dead.<sup>19</sup> In view of this association, it is tempting to wonder whether the banquet song here in Gilgamesh might not also have had primary or secondary associations with rituals for the dead. It is not unusual to find festive activity associated with funerals in the Near East (cf., e.g., the *bêt marzēah*).<sup>20</sup> And funerals in Mesopotamia include feasts; sometimes dying people seem to have been called to the banquet of the gods at

16. Although iii 10–11, the first two lines of Siduri's third stanza, are not treated here in my analysis, these lines parallel elements in the Harpers' Songs and may originally also have been part of the "mortuary/festive banquet" background of our passage. I have not included them here because I have focused my analysis on the formally defined central stanzas. For a study of these two lines, see Abusch, "Gilgamesh's Request and Siduri's Denial. Part I."

17. Lichtheim, "Songs of the Harpers," 183.

18. Contrast, e.g., *ibid.*, 178–212, with Wente, "Egyptian . . . Songs Reconsidered," 118–28, and cf. Fox, "Entertainment Song," 268–316.

19. Cf., e.g., Lichtheim, "Songs of the Harpers," 178–212, esp. 182–83 and 208–9; Fox, "Entertainment Song," 268–316, esp. 270–71 and 275–78; *idem*, "Study of Antef," 396–97.

20. Cf., e.g., Jer. 16:5–9 and see M. H. Pope, "The Cult of the Dead at Ugarit," in G. D. Young, ed., *Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic* (Winona Lake, Indiana, 1981), 174–79; K. Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, AOAT 219 (1986), 196–202 and 248; T. J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit*, HSM 39 (Atlanta, 1989), 80–94.

their death.<sup>21</sup> These scenes also recall traditions of dead or translated heroes feasting continuously in Elysium,<sup>22</sup> traditions which in turn recall Gilgamesh's original hope to live forever with Siduri (// Calypso/Circe).<sup>23</sup>

The banquet Siduri urges on Gilgamesh surely takes place in this world. But, here, in the context of a response to Gilgamesh's uncontrolled grief and futile desire to remain with the dead and live forever with Enkidu, the evocation of a banquet scene might well even be an ironic re-use of a scene resonant with netherworld associations. Siduri, too, perhaps mimics and distorts the rites for the dead. The irony turns on her suggestion that instead of performing the act of feasting as part of a mortuary ritual or in the netherworld itself, he ought to do it in this life; instead of taking destructive pleasure in netherworld celebrations he ought to feast in this world. But it remains ambiguous/unclear to the hearer whether it is Siduri or Gilgamesh who is distorting the convention, for the possibility of a double meaning inherent in the use of the banquet scene remains present, and it can be construed or misconstrued as a meal for the living or for the dead.

Especially if this portion of the text originally had a mortuary context, here the author's use of the topos allows Siduri to acknowledge Gilgamesh's struggle, his clinging to death and mortuary rites, his confused identification of death and life, and to help him disentangle life from death. Thus her advice to enjoy life now effectively serves to redirect his energies away from the dead and back to this world. At the very least, her advice means that Gilgamesh ought to perform the re-integrating funeral meal in a proper and effective way.

Of course, the banquet Siduri urges on Gilgamesh is surely also a worldly one. As well as being a goddess who may originally have had netherworld associations, Siduri, it should be remembered, is the goddess of the tavern. Speeches like that of Siduri's are associated with worldly parties and celebrations.<sup>24</sup> Thus, for our purposes, it is unimportant whether the speech is primarily of a mundane or a funerary nature, for it belongs not only to the funereal setting, but also to the tavern, the drinking party, and even the more formal banquet. This mundane association allows

21. See R. Harris, "The *Naditu* Woman," in R. D. Biggs and J. A. Brinkman, eds., *Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim* (Chicago, 1964), 120, and cf. idem, "Independent Women in Ancient Mesopotamia?" in B. S. Lesko, ed., *Women's Earliest Records: From Ancient Egypt and Western Asia* (Atlanta, 1989), 154.

22. See, e.g., Homer, *Odyssey*, 4.561–70, trans. R. Lattimore (New York, 1965), 79–80; and Hesiod, *The Works and Days*, 167–75, trans. R. Lattimore (Ann Arbor, 1959), 37–39. Cf. W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), 198; G. Crane, *Calypso: Backgrounds and Conventions of the Odyssey*, *Beiträge zur Klassischen Philologie* 191 (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), 15 with 22–23, nn. 1–6, and 40–41 (the reference there to *Theogony* should be changed to *Works and Days*); and especially E. Rohde, *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks* (New York, 1925 [trans. of 8th German edition]), 55–87 for the translation of heroes to the Elysian plain or the islands of the blessed, especially in Homer and Hesiod, and chap. 14, part 2, esp. 535–39 and 564–65, n. 99, for the later periods.

23. For this interpretation, see my "Gilgamesh's Request and Siduri's Denial. Part I," where I suggest that Gilgamesh hoped that the goddess Siduri would allow him to live with her in her realm, thus attaining the boon of eternal life. I also note there that Siduri was viewed as a Calypso-like character and would therefore have had netherworld associations.

24. Cf. Assmann, "Der schöne Tag," 23–25.

and even fosters the re-focusing toward this world of the topos of festivity and thereby the re-direction of Gilgamesh's psychic energy and human attachments. Thus, Siduri is able to impart different resonances of meaning to the topos of the banquet. And now she is able to refocus the scene away from its mortuary dimension and transfer it back to the mundane enjoyment of the pleasures of this world.

Elsewhere, I have argued that iii 12, "Look down at the child who holds your hand," is secondary and was inserted into a tavern song by the epic poet responsible for the Gilgamesh epic. By introducing this new theme of progeny he introduces both mortal and immortal dimensions into the vision of Gilgamesh's future.<sup>25</sup> Here, we would notice that yet another reason for the insertion is the re-definition of the banquet scene. The mention of the child in line 12 of the next stanza would seem to move the banquet scene back into this world in an unambiguous way. Even the enjoyment (*lihtaddām*) of the woman (l. 13), as the enjoyment of the feast (ll. 7–8: *hitaddu, hidūtam*), may be part of the eternal banquet of dead or translated heroes, but the mention of the child surely transfers or defines the scene as having a mundane setting. Certainly, the evocation of this scene of human celebration in a context in which hope for eternal life is explicitly denied (iii 2–5) serves to emphasize the this-worldly joy of the festivity and thus redirects Gilgamesh's attention away from his futile quest for immortality and towards the world of the living.

But whatever the case—whether the festivities only reflect a this-worldly celebration or also have funerary associations—the final effect is the same: the use of the banquet scene serves to celebrate the pleasures of life and to re-affirm life itself.

### C. Complaint and Response

Thus far, we have explained the elements which occur in Siduri's speech, but we must also explain the repetitive structured quality that characterizes her speech. We do this best in the context of an answer to our original query regarding the significance of the poet's construction of the second stanza of both Gilgamesh's and Siduri's speeches around central elements and the disposition of strange patterns around them. It is surely valid to consider the two stanzas together. For whether the two speeches run parallel to each other and/or are chiasmic in relationship, these two stanzas correspond to each other. Moreover, the connection is drawn tighter by the occurrence of similar formulations in each: *urri u mūši . . . sebet ūmī u sebe mušīātīm* ("day and night . . . seven days and seven nights") in Gilgamesh's second stanza and *urri u mūši . . . ūmišam . . . urri u mūši* ("day and night . . . daily . . . day and night") in Siduri's second stanza.

Gilgamesh states that he constantly grieved and daily participated in mourning rituals. Siduri responds that he should not feast only when a beloved dies, that he should not restrict his feasting to mourning rites; rather than consuming his own life over the beloved's death, he should instead lay out a feast every day. The meal she urges here is a daily meal (*urri u mūši // ūmišam*)<sup>26</sup> and not a holiday feast or funerary meal. The two stanzas are intended to speak to each other with

25. See Abusch, "Gilgamesh's Request and Siduri's Denial. Part I."

the central thought of Siduri responding to the central thought of Gilgamesh. The second stanza of Gilgamesh's speech represents a description of the failure of mortuary rites; the responding second stanza in Siduri's speech represents an attempt to free a human being from overly strong identification with the dead and to re-direct him to enjoyment with the living. It is this shared enterprise that explains the use of similar literary structures.

Siduri's stanza conveys a new center and a new orderliness to existence by means of content and form. Here we would recall the crucial contrast between the two stanzas: chaos and order. Gilgamesh's speech is chaotic; one word tumbles out before the preceding one is finished; it is a flood of words and emotions. Siduri's stanza, on the other hand, introduces calm by means of a repetitive, almost unchanging structure of discourse—a calm Gilgamesh himself started to introduce in ii 12'–13' when he spoke of seeing Siduri's face. Whereas Gilgamesh's second stanza centers on a delusional thought around which is set a range of chaotic actions, Siduri's speech places at its center a realistic thought and surrounds it with ordered statements. Counseling a new way of thinking, it conveys the notion that we can impose joy on existence by means of orderly disposition and behavior.

Siduri's advice here in the epic is more than just a trite Mesopotamian version of "pluck the day." The composer's purpose in formulating and structuring these stanzas as he did was to suggest that there are occasions when grief is so very great that the standard rites of mourning do not suffice to allow the bereaved to separate from the dead and to resume a normal life. Having once recognized the potential for failure of standard forms of separation, he emphasizes, perhaps in an exaggerated way, the wisdom of celebration as a way of vigorously re-affirming life.<sup>27</sup>

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26. Cf. the use of 'every day' in the Egyptian entertainment songs associated with the netherworld; see, e.g., Fox, "Entertainment Song" (see n. 12 above), 278: "The majority of entertainment scenes have no special ties to a particular occasion, funerary or festival. One help in identifying representations of the daily mortuary meal is the use of a phrase signifying daily recurrence of the entertainment, as, for example, when Djeserkerasonb (TT 38) is advised to 'do it (sc. make merry) every day, . . .'"

27. G. A. Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion* (University Park, PA, 1991), esp. 74–82, studies some of the same issues treated in the present essay and its companion pieces. This work is an interesting and useful treatment. Unfortunately, it appeared after my studies of the Gilgamesh-Siduri dialogue had been completed and could no longer be incorporated into the essays.