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Ritual Mourning and Cultural Adaptation: The Case of Adonia

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Abstract

This paper examines the Adonia festival as a distinctive ritual phenomenon within the Greek world, characterized by mourning and collective expressions of grief that set it apart from officially regulated religious celebrations. It argues that Adonia cannot be understood as a purely Greek festival, but rather as a ritual shaped by Near Eastern, particularly Mesopotamian, traditions that were culturally adapted while preserving core themes of loss and lamentation. The study adopts a comparative historical approach, analyzing Greek and Latin literary sources alongside Mesopotamian texts related to the myth of Inanna and Dumuzi, and situating the ritual within its broader historical and cultural context. The paper demonstrates that Adonia emphasized cyclical death rather than complete rebirth and functioned as an informal space for expressing loss, anxiety, and everyday concerns. In the Athenian context, its practices were primarily associated with women, reflecting the festival's non-institutional character. The study concludes that Adonia is best understood as a symbolic mourning ritual that articulates human vulnerability and the transience of life beyond formal religious structures.

Keywords: Ancient Near East – Comparative History – Greek Religious Practices – Lamentation Traditions – Non-institutional Rituals