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Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel

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Jonathan Stökl

Innovating Ordination

Abstract: In this article I study the ordination rituals for Priests and Levites contained in the Hebrew Bible acknowledging the different purposes which the rituals themselves present (sanctification for priests, purification for Levites). Noting the absence of a priestly purification ritual where procedures at the temple suggest that they some such ritual must have existed, it is suggested here, that the Levitical ordination ritual has its origin as a priestly purification ritual, but has now been reused in its current function to indicate the new lower status of the Levites when compared to the priests.

Keywords: ritual, ordination, purification, ancient Near East, Priests and Levites

It is one of the insights of the anthropological study of ritual that so-called *rites of passage* exist in a tension between recreating the current social order and radically reforming it.¹ Particularly at key moments in history such rites can transform social order. Liturgies for coronation in modern Britain, for example, are adjusted each time that a new monarch comes to occupy the throne.² If the tablets containing the ordination of the female high priest of Emar are any indication, it appears that the same was likely also true in the ancient Near East. Three copies of the text are extant, none identical to the other. It seems likely that these copies were written for different occasions

1 See A. van Gennep, *Les rites de passage: Étude systématique des rites de la porte et du seuil, de l'hospitalité, de l'adoption, de la grossesse et de l'accouchement, de la naissance, de l'enfance, de la puberté, de l'initiation, de l'ordination, du couronnement des fiançailles et du mariage, des funérailles, des saison, etc.* (Paris: É. Nourry, 1909); and V. W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures, 1966; Presented to the University of Rochester, Rochester, New York; Chicago: Aldine, 1969).

2 They technically do not mark the change of status as the throne cannot be vacant, but as a ritual it still symbolises and formalises the legal and social change that has taken place previously. For an account of the evolution of the coronation ritual 1820–1977, see D. Cannadine, 1983. “The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual: The British Monarchy and the ‘Invention of Tradition’, c. 1820–1977,” in *The Invention of Tradition* (ed. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 101–165.

on which the ritual was performed.³ In other words, rituals are constantly adapted and changed, even though they also hark back to tradition and can often be understood within the broad parameters of preexisting ritual texts.

In this essay I will look at the various ordination rituals contained in the Hebrew Bible (i. e., Exodus 29, Leviticus 8 and Numbers 8) from the point of view of ritual innovation and evolution.⁴ In order to do that, I will briefly present the state of the methodological debate before discussing the texts themselves and then draw my conclusions from the textual observations. Because we only have one of each these texts, there is perforce a speculative aspect to the conclusions that I draw, and thus the conclusions are presented as offering a solution, though not conclusive proof. The Levites' ordination ritual carefully avoids the root קדש ("holy") and instead uses טהר ("pure"), thereby suggesting a different status for this ordination ritual as well as for the associated temple personnel. This, however, raises the issue of a purification ritual that priests underwent everytime they started their annual duty at the temple. I suggest that such a ritual is likely to have existed in historical ancient Israel and Judah, and that it likely included a shaving ritual, which would be in conflict with Ezekiel 44.

1. From Ritual Text to Ritual Theory and Back Again

My perception of trends in biblical scholarship with regard to the use of ritual theory differ slightly from the way Nathan MacDonald characterises them in this volume.⁵ Rather than emphasising the distance between the performed ritual and ritual text, in my perception the distance between text and ritual is often either ignored completely or downplayed.⁶ Instead,

3 See D. E. Fleming, "Emar's *entu* Installation: Revising Ritual and Text Together," in *Texts and Contexts: The Circulation and Transmission of Cuneiform Texts in Social Space* (ed. P. Delnero and J. Lauinger; SANER 9; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 29–47. For an edition and study of the text, see D. E. Fleming, *The Installation of Baal's High Priestess at Emar: A Window on Ancient Syrian Religion* (HSS 42; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992). Fleming also provided the more recent English translation in "Rituals from Emar," in *The Context of Scripture: Volume I: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (ed. W. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 427–443.

4 As will become clear, I do not, in fact, regard Numbers 8 as an ordination ritual per se, although it now fulfils such a social function in the textual world it inhabits. Instead, it appears to be related to a purification ritual and used in the context of Numbers 8 as a kind of "lesser" ordination ritual.

5 See also the essay by N. MacDonald in this volume.

6 G. A. Klingbeil, *A Comparative Study of the Ritual of Ordination as Found in Leviticus 8 and Emar 369* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1998) may serve as a case in point. But see also

insights from theoretical approaches to rituals as they have been developed largely by anthropologists are applied as if biblical and other ancient Near Eastern texts were not texts but direct depictions of rituals allowing researchers immediate access to the rituals themselves. This corresponds to a trend observable in studies that rely on sociological models and that apply these models to biblical texts as if the texts in question were a one-to-one representation of ancient historical reality.⁷ If contrary to my own perception, MacDonald is correct and the textual nature of biblical ritual texts is taken into account to a greater degree, then I welcome that.⁸

To the commonly adopted understanding of three kinds of ritual texts – descriptive texts, prescriptive texts, and utopian texts – I would add a fourth, textual rituals.⁹ The preserved ritual texts from the ancient Near East, which include biblical texts, cuneiform texts, and Egyptian texts, represent examples of all four of these categories, though the fourth is rare. The lines between these categories are at times blurred so they should only be used as an initial heuristic tool. The classification does not rely on its form or genre alone – a text can look as if it is descriptive and yet belong into either of the other two categories. Further observations – as well as a reader's reasoned assumptions – will form part of the way a text is understood, just as is the case with any other form of reading texts.

A descriptive ritual text is a text that is written in order to describe a ritual. This entails that it is the product of a subjective experience of either an observer of or a participant in a ritual. Even the most objective observers will not be able to see all parts of a ritual and thus no descriptive text is likely to be comprehensive. Descriptive ritual texts can be full of theological

M. Broida, *Forstalling Doom: "Apotropaic Intercession" in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (AOAT 417; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2014), 15–18 who goes straight from the observation of the difference between text and ritual to Bell's concept of ritualising (C. M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992]).

7 Naturally, many scholars use sociological models entirely responsibly and in helpful and innovative ways. I would like to point to K. Southwood, *Ethnicity and the Mixed Marriage Crisis in Ezra 9–10* (OTM; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and the essays in S. M. Olyan (ed.), *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion: Essays in Retrospect and Prospect* (SBLRBS 71; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) as excellent examples for the use of sociology in biblical studies.

8 Most of the studies in his excellent volume, N. MacDonald (ed.), *Ritual Innovation in the Hebrew Bible and Early Judaism* (BZAW 468; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016) are helpful in this regard.

9 B. A. Levine, "The Descriptive Tabernacle Texts of the Pentateuch," *JAOS* 85 (1965): 307–318; M. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1985).

reflection and political positioning, depending – again – on the describer's purpose in writing their description.

Prescriptive texts are written prior to carrying out a ritual, and they intend to give instruction on how to do so. This can be in the form of practical liturgical instruction, almost in list form, or it can be in the form of a prose text. Prescriptive texts are not trying to describe what a ritual was or is like, but instead are trying to shape the future form that a ritual might take. Prescriptive texts need to be in some form realisable, which distinguishes them from the third kind – utopian ritual texts.

Utopian ritual texts are also theological texts, since they express their theological view in the form of a ritual text, but they still envisage a reality in which they can be carried out. The line between prescriptive and utopian texts is blurry and the distinction often cannot be made on purely formal aspects. Indeed, what may seem utopian at some point in time can become prescriptive at a later date. It is also possible that a text moves from being a prescriptive text to a utopian text.

A purely textual ritual, in my understanding, is a ritual that only exists as the result of exegetic or systemic pressure. In such texts, there is little relation to any rituals carried out other than the ritual activity underlying their composition.

Exodus 29, Leviticus 8 and Numbers 8 are likely all part of the third category of utopian ritual with aspects of the fourth – textual ritual. They are likely related to actual ordination and purification rituals carried out, but this relationship is not straight forward and cannot easily be determined if at all. Their purpose goes beyond a mere descriptive or prescriptive nature. Their literary setting assumes considerable importance. In my conclusions I will also point towards possible historical ramifications, but these are necessarily more tentative. They follow from the literary, thematic, and ritual observations on aspects of these texts.

2. Renewing Social Identity Through Ritual

One of the most important insights of Arnold van Gennep is that *rites de passage* mark changes of status in individuals in their society.¹⁰ In so doing, at least in van Gennep's view, society's social order recreates itself. In many societies, priestly classes are an instructive example of this recreation and

10 Van Gennep, *rites de passage*, i–33.

reaffirmation of power structures. In a more contemporary parlance, rites of passage serve to perpetuate structural privilege.

Victor Turner emphasised the potentially revolutionary aspect of rites of passage as they put in place new individuals in positions of power, thereby creating the potential of change and renewal of society.¹¹ For example, this change is noticeable in the installation of John XXIII as Pope in 1958 – or, indeed, the inaugurations of Barack Obama and more recently Donald Trump as president of the United States of America.¹² But the changes ushered in can also be of a more modest and personal scale, since most rites of passage focus not on the change of society, but rather of the individuals undergoing the ritual itself.

Irrespective of whether the ordination rituals in the biblical text were ever carried out as described in the text, general observations with regard to the function of real life ordination rituals also apply to them.¹³ Ordination rituals enable those who undergo them to carry out priestly functions. The details of how this is achieved, however, differ historically from culture to culture and from textual ritual to textual ritual.

The few ancient Near Eastern texts from the first millennium B.C.E. which list preconditions to ordination agree in general terms with each other: a priest had to be of priestly descent, without any “defect”, pure, have “fear of god” and no criminal record.¹⁴ The biblical corpus is alone in regarding men of priestly descent as priests irrespective of whether they are

11 V. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 125–130.

12 The examples are chosen to illustrate the potential for change that follows a rite of passage not to indicate approval by the author of this paper. Not all change is good change.

13 See also the discussion by C. Frevel, “Practicing Rituals in a Textual World: Ritual and Innovation in the Book of Numbers,” in *Ritual Innovation in the Hebrew Bible and Early Judaism*, (ed. N. MacDonald; BZAW 468; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 129–150 on the problem of text and performance. A very different approach, which regards the “gap” between text and performance as less difficult to overcome can be found in G. A. Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap: Rituals and Ritual Texts in the Bible* (BBRSup 1; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007).

14 See C. Waerzeggers with a contribution by M. Jursa, “On the Initiation of Babylonian Priests,” *ZAR* 14 (2008): 1–37. Interestingly, the “Ordination of a Priest of Enlil” and the “Enmeduranki Text” imply a direct connection between the priestly body’s lack of imperfection and their purity. The biblical corpus does not do that, although many read it into the catalogue of מומים in Leviticus 21. Neither of the rituals from Emar, nor the fragmentary Old Babylonian text that has been identified as an ordination ritual, mention any such preconditions. On that text see G. Farber and W. Farber, “Von einem, der auszog, ein gudu₄ zu werden,” in *Literatur, Politik und Recht in Mesopotamien: Festschrift für Claus Wilcke* (ed. W. Sallaberger, K. Volk and A. Zgoll; Orientalia Biblica et Christiania 14; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 99–114. I agree with Walter Sallaberger’s caution (personal communication) that the ritual edited by the Farbers may, in fact, not be an ordination ritual but a purification ritual instead.

ordained. Descent alone, however, did not suffice to allow them to carry out their priestly function. For that they needed also to have access to those parts of the temple where they carried out their priestly function. The purpose of the ordination ritual then was to sanctify (לקדש) the individual, so that they can enter the temple.

I agree with James Watts that one of the purposes of the narrative section in Leviticus (i. e., chapters 8–10) is to emphasise the importance and the dangers of fulfilling the priestly function in the temple.¹⁵ Only the right kind of people, with the right kind of qualifications, who do the right kind of thing, can safely fulfil the rituals which keep Israel alive. The accusations against the ‘wrong’ pre-exilic cult personnel, as they are found in Ezekiel 44:6–9, underline this:

⁶Say to the rebellious House of Israel: Thus says the Lord YHWH: For too long have you committed all your abominations, O House of Israel ⁷admitting foreigners [בְּנֵי-נֹכַר],¹⁶ uncircumcised of heart and flesh, so that they are in my sanctuary and profane my temple, when you offer up my food – the fat and the blood. You have broken my covenant with all your abominations. ⁸You have not kept my holy obligation, but instead have appointed [them] to keep my obligation in my sanctuary on your behalf. ⁹Thus said the Lord YHWH: No foreigner, uncircumcised in spirit and flesh, shall enter my sanctuary – no foreigner who is among the people of Israel.

The biblical ordination rituals therefore not aim to turn a non-priest into a priest, but rather to sanctify a priest so that he – to our knowledge, priests in the first millennium B.C.E. are almost exclusively male – was holy. Only then could he enter the inner parts of the sanctuary in order to carry out the holy charges, such as offering the deity his food.

Whether in the real world or the textual world, such access to the temple is what provides the newly ordained priest with the majority of his social status. It is unlikely that many priests would have worked full-time as priests in the real world in the ancient Near East.¹⁷ Most would have spent the majority of their time in whatever other profession they had where they lived. Admittedly, there is little positive evidence for a prebendal system in the Levant comparable to that operating in Mesopotamia. Nor has evidence of priestly “courses”/“division” (משמרות/מחלקות) survived prior to the com-

15 J. W. Watts, *Leviticus 1–10* (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 429–435.

16 Some biblical texts contain xenophobic sentiments. While this expression has an undeniable xenophobic aspect, that is not its main thrust here. The point is that YHWH accuses the “rebellious House of Israel” of straying far from that which ought to happen, namely that the priests are of one of the priestly houses. The expression is here used as a hyperbolic expression for the degree of the Israelite transgression.

17 Contra J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 53–54, 289.

position of 1–2 Chronicles.¹⁸ But it seems likely that some such system did exist. The argument that such a system ought to have left evidence in the textual record is unconvincing as the underlying assumption that no aspect of priestly life was organised orally or on papyrus is itself likely to be inaccurate. To the contrary, both are eminently possible, even likely solutions for rosters by which either individual priests or – perhaps more likely – priestly families were scheduled to fulfil certain temple duties.¹⁹ M.Ta'an. 4:2 gives an idea of how this might be organised (although there is no guarantee that Ta'anit's description corresponds to historical reality either in the Graeco-Roman or Persian periods). This is not to say that some priestly duties, such as the high priesthood, did not demand a full-time presence in or near the temple, but most priestly duties were likely carried out by part-time priests.

The evidence for social life in Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid period Mesopotamia suggests a relatively high social status for the priesthood without necessarily suggesting greater wealth or power than other social groups.²⁰ Thus, merchant and banking families, especially royal merchants, were often more well-to-do than priests, and particularly after the revolt against Xerxes early in the fifth century, local power relationships were changed. It is possible that the nature of our sources favours priestly families over those families who were focussed on other walks of life. But it is likely that even in the Hellenistic period, being a descendant of a priestly family conferred social capital to the individual. While this is not proof that the situation in Yehud would have been identical, it seems likely that priests had considerable social power. High priests and others high up in the priestly hierarchy likely enjoyed considerable political influence.²¹ Participating

18 H.G.M. Williamson, "The Origins of the Twenty-Four Priestly Courses: A Study of 1 Chronicles 23–27," in *Studies in the Historical Books of the Old Testament* (ed. J. A. Emerton; VTSup 30; Leiden: Brill, 1979), 251–268. On the priestly courses see also the unpublished Habilitation by U. Gleßner, "Die ideale Kultordnung: 24 Priesterordnungen in den Chronikbüchern, den kalendarischen Qumrantexten und in synagogalen Inschriften" (unpublished Habilitationsschrift, Universität Hamburg, 1995).

19 If nothing else then the sheer number of men of priestly descent who therefore had access to the Priesthood would have made it necessary to have some sort of system either of restricting the priesthood yet further, or having rosters.

20 See, e.g., C. Waerzeggers, *The Ezida Temple of Borsippa: Priesthood, Cult, Archives* (Achaemenid History 15; Leiden: NINO, 2010) throughout, and specifically on brewers, pages 169–170.

21 This is not the place to argue for the beginning of the political position of the Jewish high priest as leader of the people. See, e.g., D.W. Rooke, *Zadok's Heirs: The Role and Development of the High Priesthood in Ancient Israel* (OTM; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); I. Kislev, "The Investiture of Joshua (Numbers 27:12–23) and the Dispute on the Form of the Leadership in Yehud," VT 59 (2009): 429–445; J.C. VanderKam,

through the ritual of ordination provided a priest with access to this social position, and the ritual marked the change that allowed a priest to access the temple.

3. Innovating Ordination

The precise relationship between the ancient historical reality of social position and ordination rituals on the one hand, and the textual record in the Hebrew Bible on the other, is of little concern to me here. Suffice it to say that irrespective of the proximity of the actual rituals to the surviving texts, the realities of ancient ritual set some confines to the imagination of the texts' authors.²² This does not mean, however, that precise inferences can be drawn from the texts' descriptions of rituals to the rituals as they were carried out. The *gar garstig weite Graben* cannot be bridged that easily.²³

In this section I will discuss the evolution of ordination rituals in the Hebrew Bible. This requires a close look at the texts themselves as well as their implied purposes. I will look at the texts first in canonical order, not because I think that that represents the order in which these texts were conceived, but rather because they exist and were transmitted in this order and it allows me to separate my argument for their order from the textual observations of each individual ordination ritual(s). In the following, then, I will look at Exodus 28–29, Leviticus 8 and Numbers 8.

3.1 Observations on the Text of Exodus 28–29 and Leviticus 8

Most modern studies of ordination rituals take Leviticus 8 as the textual basis of their comparison, and regard it as reliant on Exodus 29.²⁴ Exodus 28–29 form part of the wider instructions about the initial set up of the Israelite cultus in Exodus 25–40. While the instructions for the ordination ritual proper are only contained in Exodus 29, the previous chapter does contain

From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004).

²² See, e.g., Frevel, "Practicing Rituals".

²³ Contra Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap*.

²⁴ See, e.g., Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 545–49 for a summary. B. A. Levine ("The Descriptive Tabernacle Texts of the Pentateuch," *JAOS* 85 [1965]: 307–318) argues for Leviticus 8's priority. C. Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus* (FAT II/25; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007) has relatively recently challenged this consensus and understands both Exodus 28–29 and Leviticus 8 as integral parts of primary Priestly composition.

instructions on how to make the vestments for Aaron in order to “sanctify him so that he can serve me as a priest” (לְקַדְּשׁוֹ לְכַהֲנוּלִי, Exod 28:3). This expresses neatly that the function of the ordination ritual was not to turn Aaron and his sons into priests, but that its purpose was to sanctify them so that they might be able to serve as priests. The logical part that is not expressed in Exod 28:3 is that the purpose of the sanctification was that they might be able to enter the sanctuary which is where they could perform their priestly function. Indeed, Exod 28:43 makes this abundantly clear:

They shall be worn by Aaron and his sons when they enter the Tent of Meeting or when they draw near to the altar to serve in the sanctuary,²⁵ so that they do not incur punishment and die. It shall be an eternal law for him and for his descendants after him.

וְהָיוּ עַל-אַהֲרֹן וְעַל-בָּנָיו בְּבֹאֵם אֶל-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד אוֹ בְּגִשְׁתָּם אֶל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְשֵׁרֶת בִּקְדָּשׁ וְלֹא-יִשָּׂאוּ עוֹן וּמָתוּ חֻקַּת עוֹלָם לֹא וְלִזְרֹעוֹ אַחֲרָיו

The vestments are described in great detail, like other parts of the material implements for the sacrificial cult in Exodus 25–40. The narrative that relates the making of the garments can be found in Exodus 39 and the instructions for the consecration of the sanctuary are provided in Exodus 40. In their canonical order, these chapters are divided from Leviticus 8–10 by the description of the main sacrificial rites in Leviticus 1–7, but Leviticus 8 does have a very short note about the consecration of the tabernacle (vv. 10–11), which does not give this important step much space in the narrative.

The following is a summary of the ritual stipulations in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8. Famously, the first few verses differ considerably from each other. Exod 29:1–3 describes in some detail the quality of the breads for the sacrifice, while Lev 8:2 simply gives a short summary. Conversely, Leviticus 8 demands that the entire community be assembled at the entrance of the tent of meeting, while the presence of the community is not required for Exodus 29. With Durkheimian eyes, it is hard not to view the presence of the community in Leviticus 8 as inaugurating the ritual community through ritual. Durkheim’s insight that those who perform a ritual together start forming a ritual community may itself be the product of the nineteenth century C.E., but the logic that the witnessing presence of the community itself confirms the new priests’ status is compelling nonetheless. Leviticus 8 requires the entire community to acknowledge the newly ordained priests and their new status.

Both texts then describe the washing of Aaron and his sons (Lev 8:6 // Exod 29:4), but the following investiture only applies to Aaron who is men-

²⁵ The expression לְשֵׁרֶת בִּקְדָּשׁ is a technical expression for temple service restricted to P and Ezekiel 44 (Exod 28:43; 29:30; 35:19; 39:1; 39:41; Num 4:12; Ezek 44:27).

tioned explicitly in Exod 29:5–6 and only by pronoun in Lev 8:7–9. Since Exodus has already narrated the consecration of the tabernacle, it moves directly to Aaron's anointing, while Lev 8:10–11 includes a verse for the consecration of the tabernacle (Exod 29:7 // Lev 8:12). Moses' anointing is followed by the investiture of his sons (Exod 29:8–9a // Lev 8:13).

After that Exodus has the half verse: *ומלא את יד־אהרן ויד־בניו* (Exod 29:9b) as if to imply that the actions hitherto have not been part of the enabling or ordination process itself – unless it is to be understood as a summative statement – unlikely given the verbal morphology.

The sacrificial sections (Exod 29:10–26 // Lev 8:14–30) are very similar indeed. There are some minor changes in the way that the ritual activity is described as well as one verse which occurs at a different place. Milgrom regards the difference between Exod 29:20 and Lev 8:23–24 as significant as Leviticus makes more of a difference between the blood manipulation for Aaron and for his sons than Exodus.²⁶

Exodus follows the sacrificial killing of the second ram (the “ram of the ordination”; *אֵיל מִלֵּאִים*, Exod 29:22 // Lev 8:29) with an instruction that some of the blood of the first ram and some leftover anointing oil ought to be sprinkled on Aaron, his clothes, and his sons' clothes in order to consecrate them (v. 21). Leviticus 8 also contains that verse, but transposes places it after the manipulation of the second ram's entrails and all the breads. The placement of this verse in Leviticus follows the logic that all sacrificial manipulation is finished first before the sprinkling on of the blood and oil mixture.²⁷ Already Noth observes that the sprinkling of oil and blood on both priests and altar serves to create a link between both, a link which emphasises their respective function in the sacrificial cult.²⁸

The next larger amount of text attested in Exodus but not Leviticus are to be found in Exod 29:27–30 and concern more manipulation of sacrificial goods as well as the future of the vestments Aaron wears for the ordination, and a comment which limits the high priesthood to his direct descendants (v. 30). It is noteworthy that Leviticus 8 does not contain this description. While it is true that within the narrative it is Aaron himself who is ordained and that it is largely descriptive and not prescriptive, Leviticus 8 does not

²⁶ Milgrom, *Leviticus* 1–16, 545.

²⁷ Milgrom's argument that Leviticus does not need to consecrate Aaron anymore because he is consecrated already after the initial anointing does not convince entirely as Lev 8:30 explicitly mentions that the sprinkling on of the blood and oil mixture served to “consecrate Aaron and his vestment, and also his sons and their vestments,” *ויקדש את־אהרן ואת־בגדיו ואת־בניו ואת־בגדי בניו אתו*.

²⁸ M. Noth, *Das zweite Buch Mose: Exodus* (ATD 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959), 190; see also Watts, *Leviticus* 1–10, 470–471, albeit commenting on Lev 8:23–24.

have any problems adding additional prescriptive text at the beginning of the ritual (e.g., vv. 1–3). This raises the question, to be discussed later, whether this note was added to Exodus 29 or taken out of Leviticus 8. Similarly, Exod 29:33 limits the consumption of offerings during the ordination of priests to priests. Other regulations regarding sacrificial meat as well as the length of the ritual itself – seven days – are largely shared (Exod 29:31–35 // Lev 8:31–33).

Exod 29:36–40 gives some details of the daily rituals during the seven day ordination, which verse 42 uses as a founding myth of the regular offering (תמיד), with verse 41 building a bridge between these two parts. Exodus 29:43–46 reads like a historical doxology that fits the description of an ordination ritual into the setting of the Exodus narrative. Leviticus 8 finishes as it began with the explicit claim that the commands of Exodus 29 were carried out as YHWH had commanded them.

The argument is sometimes made that ancient Near Eastern narratives often contain an announcement, and then relatively precise retellings of the announcement in narrative form.²⁹ One famous example can be found in *Ištar's Descent to the Underworld* in which she is told what she will have to do at each of the gates, and then we are told that she does precisely these things in the right order at the various gates of the Underworld. If there were no other noticeable oddities or doublets between these two pericopes, then that argument would hold. However, the observation that Leviticus does not seem to know much of Exodus 40 and the consecration of the tabernacle counters the argument that Exodus 24–40 and Leviticus 8(–10) are part of a coherent narrative.³⁰ Instead each set of chapters have their own, albeit overlapping, interest in the implication of starting a sacrificial cult with a new, and divinely authorised priesthood.

3.2 Numbers 7–8

Like Exodus 25–40 and Leviticus 8–10, Numbers 7–8 also tries to organise a sacrificial cult in a newly established sanctuary. In chapter 7 a Levite cult is set up, once the tent of meeting has been consecrated – seemingly oblivious of the final form of Exodus 40. Indeed, Numbers 7 contains a long list of sacrificial animals and votive offerings per tribe, with a summary at the end

²⁹ See also the fuller discussion of this point in Jacqueline Vayntrub's contribution to this volume.

³⁰ Many regard the core of Exodus 40 (consisting of vv. 16–17, 33b and 34) as the end of the Priestly Source, with Leviticus 8–10 (growing into the book of Leviticus) as a secondary redaction. But the vast majority of Exodus 40 is usually recognised as secondary.

that specifies that these are all part of the “dedication offering of the altar (חֲנֻכַּת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ) after its anointing” (Num 7:88).

Numbers 8:5–12 contains a short ordination or purification ritual; verses 13–19 a discussion of the succession; verses 20–22 a notice that “Moses, Aaron and the whole Israelite community” did as commanded; and verses 23–26 complete the chapter with the levitical retirement plan.

The purpose of the priestly ordination ritual was to consecrate priests so that they might be able to enter the temple, at least in principal, given the unspoken requirement to be pure (טָהוֹר). The purpose that Num 8:7 gives to the levitical ordination ritual – if that is what it is – is to “purify” (לְטַהֵר) the Levites. As is well known, purity and holiness are by no means identical, even if they are both required for access to the temple according to biblical texts. The Levites are to be sprinkled with water of purification (מִי חֲטָאִית), shave their entire bodies and wash their clothes – thus they will purify themselves. The JPS translation “thus they shall be cleansed” is infelicitous as it blunts the force of the hitpael of the verbal root טָהַר, which normally has reflexive force. While verses 5–7a speak about the Levites as the objects of verbs, in 7b–8a they become subjects. Like in Lev 8:3, the whole community is to witness the ritual in front of the tent of meeting (Num 8:9) and even take part through the laying on of hands on the Levites in verse 10.

The laying on of hands in Num 8:10 is reminiscent of the laying on of hands of the priests on the bull and the two rams (Exod 29:10, 15, 19 // Lev 8:14, 18, 22), and the Levites are subsequently dedicated to YHWH (לַיהוָה) so that they may perform the service (עֲבֹדָה) of YHWH.³¹ Like in the priestly ordination ritual, the Levites then put their hands onto the heads of the sacrificial animals, which are two bulls. The theological interpretation as to why the Levites are to carry out the service of the sanctuary seem to follow a slightly different theological framework than the previous verses. In Num 8:5–15 the root קָדַשׁ is carefully avoided. The aim of the ritual is not to consecrate but to purify the Levites. They do not have to access the sanctuary in the same way that priests do, or handle the sacrificial animals at the altar. Num 8:16–19 provides an explanation why it is not the first-born but the Levites who are marked by YHWH. The first-born are explicitly said to have been consecrated/made holy (לְהַקְדִּישׁ).³²

31 H. Seebass, *Numeri (1,1–10,10)* (BKAT 4/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2012), 207, 216 translates תְּנוּפָה as “Weihe” (“dedication”). See also the discussion by N. MacDonald in this volume.

32 Num 8:17 uses the root קָדַשׁ in the hiphil not in the piel which is more common to P, certainly in the context of consecrations.

3.3 A Comparative Reading of Biblical Ordination Rituals

Traditionally, the purification ritual of the Levites and the sanctification ritual of the priests have been read separately. But it is remarkable that there should be no purification ritual for priests to carry out before they enter the temple itself upon arrival for their annual priestly duty. It is safe to assume that some purification ritual, involving diagnostic testing, would likely have been carried out each time a priest entered the temple. This points again to the many aspects of ritual life that we cannot access in the received Masoretic Text.

Martin Noth famously regarded the anointing of the high priest as a final indication that Leviticus 8 (and Exodus 29) is of post-exilic origin, written and conceived of in a situation in which there was no indigenous kingship and a power vacuum needed to be filled.³³ Daniel Fleming's work on Emar 369 and the anointing of the female high priest of Baal in that text clearly shows that the anointing of high priests could be carried out even when there was a king.³⁴ A critic of Fleming might point out that the political situation of Emar in the Hittite succession states was non-standard inasmuch as Emar had a king who seems to have had a mostly representative role and less political power than kings elsewhere, but there does not appear to have been a power vacuum that the high priest needed to fill.³⁵ One might add to Fleming's observation that there was a priestly class called *pašišu* which is commonly translated as "anointed."

Indeed, like the biblical high priest, the female high priest of Baal at Emar is also anointed twice (lines 3–4 and 20–21). And like in the biblical text, two different verbs are used for the two times that the new high priest is anointed:

³*ina ūmi šāšuma šamna ištu ēkalli* ⁴*u ištu bīt Ninkur ilaqqūmu an'a qaqqadiši išakkanū*

^{3–4} On the that same day they will take the oil from the palace and from the temple of Ninkur (and) apply it on her [=the new high priest's] head.

²⁰*ana pāni nubatti šamna ṭāba ša bīt Ninkur u [... an]a bāb Ba'lu bārū i[na qaqqadi]*

²¹*ša etti itabbuk*

^{20–21} Just before the evening [...] good oil from the temple of Ninkur and [...] a)t the gate of the Baal temple the diviner pours [it] on [the head] ²¹of the high priest.

³³ See M. Noth, "Amt und Berufung im Alten Testament," in *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (vol. 1; TBü 6; Munich: Kaiser, 1957), 309–333 translated by D. Ap-Thomas as "Office and Vocation in the Old Testament," in *The Laws in the Pentateuch* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 229–249.

³⁴ D.E. Fleming, "The Biblical Tradition of Anointing Priests," *JBL* 117 (1998): 401–414.

³⁵ Inversely, Fleming's claim that the presence of anointing in Emar 369 proves the antiquity of Leviticus 8 appears to rest on the assumption that a text is old unless we can prove that it is young.

The first anointing uses *šakānu* (“place”) while the second uses the more common *tabāku* (“pour”). In the biblical text, both Leviticus 8 and Exodus 29 first use יָצַק (“pour”) and מָשַׁח (“anoint”) and at the second place נָזַח (“sprinkle”). The ritual act implied by *šakānu* is difficult to decode as the verb can be used for almost any appropriate action. Schwemer suggests that the first time only small amounts of oil are used while the verb *tabāku* (“pour”), which is used the second time, suggests a greater amount of oil.³⁶ The biblical combination of pour and sprinkle implies the inverse. But it is remarkable that the new priests are anointed twice in both traditions.³⁷

Looking at biblical ordination rituals with an ancient Near Eastern perspective, the absence of shaving is noticeable. The nominalised D-infinitive is the standard term for an ordination ritual available in Akkadian.³⁸ Conversely, the purification ritual in Numbers 8 calls for it as part of the Levites’ ordination.³⁹ It is also a requirement to be declared fully fit to re-enter society after recovery from the skin disease צָרַעַת in Leviticus 14. This suggests not only a purifying, but also a potentially diagnostic aspect to the shaving.⁴⁰ We might speculate that a priest would have to undergo a detailed examination before being admitted into the temple, in order to ensure their physical purity as well as their physical completeness – that is, the absence of any מוֹם (“blemish”), a requirement on the priesthood according to Lev 21:17–23.⁴¹ This absence of shaving in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8 becomes more curious when we take not only Numbers 8 and the comparative ancient Near Eastern evidence into account, but also Ezek 44:20. Most of the commentaries link the proscription of shaving the head hair of priests in Ezek 44:20 with the proscriptions against cutting hair in Lev 10:6; 19:27; 21:5; and

36 D. Schwemer, “III. Texte aus Syrien: Akkadische Texte aus Emar,” in *Omina, Orakel, Rituale und Beschwörungen* (ed. G. Wilhelm and B. Janowski; TUAT.NF 4; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008), 231–242, 235 n. 12. As Schwemer points out, the use of *šakānu* in the context of anointing is not unusual.

37 This observation does not support the view of Nihan, *Priestly Torah*, 128–130 that both Exod 29:21 and Lev 8:30 are secondary interpolations.

38 See, e.g., the discussion in Fleming, *Installation*, 180–182.

39 Even though the Levites are “only” purified, it is this ritual which enables them to fulfil their cultic function, and thus they are “ordained.”

40 On the use of hair manipulation see the instructive essay by H. Scheyhing, “Das Haar in Ritualen des alten Mesopotamien: Der Umgang mit Haar im Bereich von Religion und Kult,” *WO* 29 (1998): 58–79.

41 Psalm 24:3–4 asks “who may enter the mountain of YHWH” and v. 4 answers that only “he who has clean (נָקִי) hands and a pure (בָּר) heart, who has not taken a false oath by my life or sworn deceitfully” shall enter and “carry away a blessing from YHWH, a just reward from God, his deliverer” (v. 5).

21:10.⁴² Of these, the two attestations in Leviticus 21 appear to be general obligations on priests, with the first one in verse 5 directly following rules for priestly behaviour in the context of mourning. Leviticus 10:6 also gives a clear link to mourning ritual as Aaron, Eleazar and Ithamar are told not to mourn outwardly for their two deceased brothers, Nadav and Avihu. Leviticus 19:27 occurs in the context of a mixed collection of rules for priestly behaviour with the following verse also indicating the context of mourning. No such context is given in Ezekiel 44. Either we take the reasonable step to supply the same context also for Ezek 44:20, understanding it as a proscription against outward mourning, or we take seriously the marked absence of mourning here and simply see this as a behavioural rule against shaving. Shaving appears to have been one of the constants of priestly life in the ancient Near East throughout the millennia, and Ezekiel's proscription against it could be read in the wider context of chapter 44 in which the presence of people who are characterised as *בְּנֵי נֶכֶר* ("foreigner") in the temple are given as the cause of the exile (vv. 4–14). In the context of exilic literature, the insistence on indigenous temple personnel as defined by Ezekiel 44 offers the possibility of reading the ban on cutting one's hair as a way to exclude those from acting as priests who, according to Ezekiel, ought not to be considered as part of the legitimate priesthood. In my view, the polemical nature of the text further supports this reading.

If Ezekiel needs to press the absence of shaving to this degree, given the broadly attested ancient Near Eastern topos of priests having shaven hair, then the absence of any shaving in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8 becomes noticeable and hard to interpret, as absences always are.

The view that Exodus 29 precedes Leviticus 8 historically has many adherents.⁴³ Both are normally ascribed to the Priestly source, even though frequently not as part of the original composition. Christophe Nihan's impressive work on the priestly corpus, however, furnishes us with good reason to support the view not only that Exod 28–29 are original parts of the Priestly source, but also that the original form of the Priestly source must have included a version of Leviticus 8–9.⁴⁴ Omitting the line of descent in Leviticus 8 appears surprising. Either the requirement of priestly and high priestly descent is already so ingrained that it does not require explicit men-

⁴² See, e.g., D. I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 641; W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1–24* (2nd ed.; BKAT 13/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), 1134.

⁴³ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 545–549.

⁴⁴ Nihan, *Priestly Torah*, in particular pp. 51–58, 111–150, and the literature given there.

tion, or this is an attempt to distance high priests from this requirement. The absence in Leviticus 8 of such a requirement is, in any case, surprising.

We see, then, that Leviticus 8 is unlikely ever to have stood on its own. It requires a wider network of ritual traditions and ritual texts to allow it to function. That said, it is not only the distance which Leviticus 1–7 puts between the end of Exodus 40 and the beginning of Leviticus 8 that separates that narrative from Exodus 25–40, but also the literary character of the narrative itself. Its textual context colours its use of language and phrasing to such an extent that it is an integral part of the book of Leviticus, in spite of its content largely fitting into the context of Exodus 25–40.

4. Conclusions

In the previous pages, I have gone through the known ordination ritual texts from the Hebrew Bible. While priests and high priests must have undergone some rite of passage to mark their new status, it is clear that few if any underwent, to the letter, the ritual described either in Exodus 29 or in Leviticus 8, if for no other reason that Moses could not have anointed a new high priest in the first millennium B.C.E., and the ritual does not mention anyone who might replace Moses in his role. Because the description of the ritual activity is not always very precise in its detail, there are many different ways one could devise an ordination ritual on the basis of these texts. In other words, it is likely that a great amount of time was spent finding ways of performing the ordination ritual in a way that suited the needs of the moment but that stayed at least roughly within the confines of the text.

It is also likely that all priests and temple personnel had to undergo purification rituals at the beginning of their annual shift – rituals similar to Numbers 8. The fact that shaving is part of that ritual supports a relatively early dating of at least parts of an underlying ritual, even if the current form of Numbers 8 comes from a later date in its transmission.⁴⁵ The reason is that, if the ritual had been written at a late date, there ought to have been a special dispensation for those Levites in Numbers 8 who are Zadokite Priests, since they are banned from shaving their entire head and body hair. Pressing these observations this far may overstretch their potential to interact with each other and to reflect a modicum of ancient reality, whether imagined or observed.

45 B. A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 4A; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 279–290.

Which brings me to the other absence – the absence of shaving in the priestly ordination ritual according to Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8. Indeed, as Klingbeil and Fleming have demonstrated, the biblical ordination ritual for priests shares many similarities with the Emarite ritual. Considering that all of these texts come from the same stream of tradition and that they all provide a solution for the same situation, namely how to mark the ordination of a high priest, this may not be overly surprising. The absence of a shaving ritual in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8, however, is all the more surprising as even the double anointing is present in both.⁴⁶ The absence of shaving could either be the result of a cultural peculiarity or the result of creative exegesis of shaving bans in the context of mourning or more generally. If the latter is the case it may be possible speculatively to identify a scenario in which this is likely to happen: the absence of any polemic against shaving indicates that the conflict marked in Ezekiel 44 lies in the past, and that shaving as part of priestly ordination had been abandoned. Naturally, this would place the current form of the texts of Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8 *after* the writing of Ezekiel 44. Many scholars regard Ezekiel 44 as a later addition to Ezekiel's temple vision; however, the polemical nature of the priestly regulations in Ezekiel 44–48 suggests a situation of considerably more conflict than that behind Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8, 10 and 21.

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⁴⁶ As we have seen above, I would understand both Exod 29:10 and Lev 8:30 as part of the original text of their respective pericope. Indeed, one might even speculate that slightly different positioning of these rights corresponds to the slight differences in ritual stipulations between manuscripts A and B + C (on this see Fleming, "Emar's *entu* Installation"; M. Rutz, *Bodies of Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Diviners of Late Bronze Age Emar and Their Tablet Collection* (AMD 9; Leiden: Styx, 2013), 146; W. Sallaberger, review of "The Installation of Baal's High Priestess at Emar: A Window at Ancient Syrian Religion (HSS 42; Scholars Press: Atlanta), 1992, by D.E. Fleming," *ZA* 86 (1996): 140–147. Fleming, in particular suggests that the two texts correspond to two different uses of the underlying rituals.

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