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# THE BOOKS OF LEVITICUS AND NUMBERS

EDITED BY

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## RITUAL RHETORIC IN THE PENTATEUCH

THE CASE OF LEVITICUS 1–16

Ritual instructions in Leviticus function not just as components of the book's literary structure and as indicators of the Pentateuch's compositional history. Much evidence points to the fact that, in ancient Judaism, they were regarded as one of the most important parts of the Torah. Most modern lay readers, and even many scholars, will respond to this claim with disbelief. Leviticus has the popular reputation, especially among Christians, of being one of the most boring and irrelevant parts of the Bible and its ritual instructions particularly so. In Jewish interpretation generally and in ancient Judaism in particular, however, the ritual instructions of the Torah receive much more attention. Already in other parts of the Hebrew Bible, law books appear principally in stories of attempts to revive pilgrimage festivals and to reform religious practices, that is, in stories involving ritual concerns (especially 2 Kings 22–23//2 Chron 34–35; Neh 8). In the later Second Temple period, sectarian conflicts prominently featured debates over the interpretation of ritual instructions, according to Josephus as well as Qumran and Rabbinic sources<sup>1</sup>. Thus as the Pentateuch developed into scriptural Torah, ancient Jews and Samaritans asserted its authority first and most pervasively over the ritual practices of their temples and priests<sup>2</sup>.

Biblical references portray Torah being cited, read aloud, and displayed in order to convince people to engage in particular ritual practices or change how they performed them. Ritual texts were thus employed for rhetorical purposes, and the history of the canonization of the Torah largely charts its increasing use for persuasion. Rhetorical theories and methods therefore provide useful means for describing and analyzing the Pentateuch's function as scripture. Rhetoric has always

1. In addition to the well-known debates between Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenes, arguments over ritual practice played a big role in conflicts between Samaritans and Jews. See Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII,3; and P.W. VAN DER HORST, *Anti-Samaritan Propaganda in Early Judaism*, in P.W. VAN DER HORST – M.J.J. MENKEN – J.F.M. JOOP, *et al.*, *Persuasion and Dissuasion in Early Christianity, Ancient Judaism, and Hellenism*, Leuven, Peeters, 2003, 25–44.

2. J.W. WATTS, *Ritual Legitimacy and Scriptural Authority*, in *JBL* 124 (2005) 401–417 = *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, 193–217.

been concerned with issues of persuasion, sometimes principally so<sup>3</sup>. A rhetorical analysis that focuses on persuasion asks the question "Who is trying to persuade whom of what?" by writing or reading or displaying this text. Since the rhetoric of a text depends on who is using it to address whom, it will therefore change from one historical situation to another throughout the entire history of a text's use. Rhetorical analysis therefore encourages study of the history of interpretation to discover the various functions that a text has been used to perform. If, however, our goal is to explain the form and position of ritual texts within the literary context of the Pentateuch, rhetorical analysis must direct its attention to the writers and editors and their intended audiences to explain the persuasive purpose behind the text's literary arrangement.

That may seem to be a tall order, given the paucity of data about exilic Judaism and the early Second Temple period. Archeologists, however, have discovered ritual texts and inscriptions that employ ritual rhetoric among the literatures of many ancient Near Eastern peoples. Some of these texts, especially the royal inscriptions, describe their persuasive goals in a very overt manner. Comparisons of these texts with Leviticus and the Pentateuch can therefore provide evidence for the typical uses of ritual rhetoric in the ancient Near East. Correlation of such ancient conventions of ritual rhetoric with internal indicators in the Pentateuch allows one to describe the function of Leviticus' ritual rhetoric in the Pentateuch. It also permits us to estimate the book's influence in Second Temple Judaism as a central component of the increasingly authoritative Torah.

#### RITUAL RHETORIC IN ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TEXTS<sup>4</sup>

Many ritual texts lack any indication of how they may have been used in antiquity. They simply present, for example, festival calendars with lists of offerings, or instructions on how to perform particular rites, or the amounts of offerings due to particular deities or from certain kinds of worshippers or to various kinds of priests. The lack of any explicit rhe-

3. See K. BURKE, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Berkeley, CA, University of California, 1950, pp. 49-55, 61-62. For persuasive rhetoric in biblical texts, see D. PATRICK – A. SCULT, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation* (JSOT SS, 82), Sheffield, Almond, 1990, and J.W. WATTS, *Reading Law: The Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch* (The Biblical Seminar, 59), Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.

4. The following section summarizes a more comprehensive description of ancient Near Eastern ritual rhetoric in J.W. WATTS, *Ritual Rhetoric in Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, in C. LIPSON – R. BINCKLEY (eds.), *Ancient Non-Greek Rhetorics* (forthcoming).

torical purpose led Baruch Levine to classify many of these texts as "descriptive", intended for archival purposes only<sup>5</sup>. Occasionally, one text or a group of texts may provide more overt indications of persuasive use. Some enjoin readers and hearers to perform the rituals they describe, such as an Egyptian lamentation that concludes, "You shall not be slack in reciting this book in the hour of festival"<sup>6</sup>. Somewhat more common are texts that promise blessings on those who follow their stipulations, such as this Ugaritic libation rite: "Your success he will ask of *Ba'lu*. To what you have requested he will bring you [...]"<sup>7</sup>. Some texts connect the reason for performing a particular ritual with its promised outcome, such as when ominous omens introduce some Babylonian ritual instructions that conclude, "If you do all this, no evil will approach the king"<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, most ancient ritual texts (and modern ones, as well) leave their motivations entirely unstated.

Fortunately, ancient royal and dedicatory inscriptions provide much more specific information about the function of ritual rhetoric. The standard justifications made by ancient Near Eastern kings to legitimize their rule were that they established peace in the land by repelling enemies and that they built and/or restored temples, their furnishings and their rituals. Many examples can be culled from the inscriptions and chronicles of kings of Egypt, Babylon, Mari, and Persia, as well as some smaller states in Syria<sup>9</sup>. Hittite texts contain some of the fullest expres-

5. B.A. LEVINE, *Ugaritic Descriptive Rituals*, in *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 17 (1963) 105-111; ID., *The Descriptive Tabernacle Texts of the Pentateuch*, in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 85 (1965) 307-318; ID., *The Descriptive Ritual Texts from Ugarit: Some Formal and Functional Features of the Genre*, in C.L. MEYERS – M. O'CONNOR (eds.), *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essay in Honor of David Noel Freedman*, Winona Lake, IN, Eisenbrauns, 1983, 467-75; ID., *Numbers 1-20* (AncB, 4), Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1993, pp. 81-82; ID. – W.W. HALLO, *Offerings to the Temple Gates at Ur*, in *HUCA* 38 (1967) 17-58; ID. – J.-M. DE TARRAGON, *The King Proclaims the Day: Ugaritic Rites for the Vintage* (KTU 1.41/1.87), in *RB* 100 (1993) 76-115.

6. Lamentations for Isis and Nephthys (Ptolomaic) transl. by M. LICHTHEIM, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 3 vols., Berkeley, CA, University of California, 1973-80, vol. 3, pp. 116-121 (= AEL).

7. RS 24.257 transl. by D. PARDEE, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit* (Writings from the Ancient World, 10), Atlanta, GA, SBL, 2002, pp. 193-195.

8. Transl. by A. SACHS, in J.B. PRITCHARD (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1969, p. 340 (= ANET).

9. E.g. the inscriptions of Egyptian kings Thutmose III, Seti I, Ramses II's Kadesh Battle Inscription, Nectanebo I's Naucratis stela (transl. by LICHTENHEIM, AEL [n. 6], vol. 2, p. 38.53-56.65, vol. 3, pp. 88-89); the inscriptions of Babylonian kings Nur-Adad (transl. by D. FRAYNE, in W.W. HALLO [ed.], *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions, Monumental Inscriptions, and Archival Documents from the Biblical World* [3 vols.], Leiden, Brill, 1997, 2000, 2002, vol. 2, 99A [= COS]), Hammurabi's law code (transl. by M. ROTH, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* [Writings from

sions of a rhetoric that ties a king's ritual achievements directly to his successes and failures. For example, King Mursili, in his annals, recounts how he came to the throne as a child, then says,

while I had not yet gone against any of the enemy foreign lands who were in a state of hostilities with me, I concerned myself with and performed the regular festivals of the Sungoddess of Arinna, my lady. I held up my hand to the Sungoddess of Arinna, my lady, and said as follows: "[...] the enemy foreign lands who have called me a child and belittled me, have begun seeking to take away the borders of the Sungoddes of Arinna, my lady [...]" The Sungoddess Arinna heard my words and stood by me.

Then in several battle reports, the turning point is narrated in this way: "The Sungoddes of Arinna, my lady, the victorious Stormgod, my lord, Mezzulla and all the gods ran before me". He concludes by vowing that "Whatever more the Sungoddess of Arinna, my lady, repeatedly gives to me (to do), I will carry it out and put it down (on clay)"<sup>10</sup>. Mursili documents his concern for ritual accuracy in a separate prayer to the goddess Arinna, in which he recounts his efforts to end a plague by ordering a search of archives to find old ritual and treaty texts whose provisions had fallen into abeyance. Then he reinstated the rituals and made lavish offerings to compensate for the treaty violations<sup>11</sup>.

Thus achievements in restoring ritual spaces and practices often played as big a role in political propaganda as did military successes. Though ritual rhetoric reinforced political claims to power, it could also be used to challenge them. Conquerors and usurpers often used ritual criticism of their predecessors to legitimize their own reigns. The most famous example of this is the Persian propaganda against the last Babylonian king, Nabonidus, which lampooned his religious idiosyncrasies:

An incompetent person was installed to exercise lordship over his country. [...] for Ur and the rest of the sacred centers, improper rituals [ ] daily he recited. Irreverently, he put an end to the regular offerings. [...] By his own plan, he did away with the worship of Marduk, the king of the gods<sup>12</sup>.

the Ancient World, 6], Atlanta, GA, Scholars Press, 1995, pp. 76-140), Kurigalzu (transl. by B. FORSTER, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, Bethesda, MD, CDL Press, 2005<sup>3</sup>, pp. 365-366), Nabu-Apla-Iddina (transl. by V. HUROWITZ, in *COS*, vol. 2, 135), Nabopolassar (transl. by P-A. BEAULIEU, in *COS*, vol. 2, 121), and Nabonidus's Sippar cylinder (transl. by P-A. BEAULIEU, in *COS*, vol. 2, 123A); of Iahdun-Lim, King of Mari, (transl. By D. FRAYNE, *COS*, vol. 2, 111); and the bi-lingual Phoenician/Luwian Keratepe inscription of Azatiwata (transl. by J.D. HAWKINS, *COS*, vol. 2, 21).

10. Transl. by R.H. BEAL in *COS* (n. 9), vol. 2, 16.

11. I. SINGER, *Hittite Prayers* (Writings from the Ancient World, 11), Atlanta, GA, SBL, 2002, pp. 58-59.

12. Transl. by M. COGAN, in *COS* (n. 9), vol. 2, 124; similarly the so-called "Verse Account of Nabonidus" transl. by A.L. OPPENHEIM, in *ANET* (n. 8), pp. 312-315.

By contrast, the same text depicts the Persian conqueror, Cyrus, as a model of ritual fidelity.

Because ritual rhetoric naturally plays to the interests of temple priesthoods, ritual criticism could also be wielded by temple hierarchies against reigning monarchs. Such ritual criticism probably appeared frequently in the form of prophetic oracles, such as is found especially in many letters to the royal courts of Mari and Assyria<sup>13</sup>. Some priests went further and developed ritual criticism into a general principle for explaining historical change. They wrote chronicles focusing entirely on this theme (e.g. the Neo-Babylonian Weidner Chronicle)<sup>14</sup>. Thus between royal propaganda attacking other kings and priestly critiques of royal support, it is not an exaggeration to say that ritual rhetoric provided the principle vehicle for political criticism in the texts that have survived from the ancient Near East.

Royal and temple interests naturally dominate the rhetoric of ancient inscriptions, because those institutions could afford to produce such expensive documents. Their use of ritual rhetoric to legitimize themselves and criticize others presumably extended beyond elite circles to the broader population. Some epics invoke ritual performance as a key determinant of their plots (e.g. the Ugaritic Kirta epic)<sup>15</sup> or recommend it as a means to avert the catastrophes they narrate (e.g. the Babylonian Erra Epic)<sup>16</sup>. Together with the evidence of private votive inscriptions from across the region, these narrative themes indicate the wider appeal of ritual rhetoric in ancient cultures. Ritual rhetoric provided a means for explaining past events and instructions for controlling future ones. Ritual rhetoric and performance asserted human control over the apparently random course of both individual lives and national histories.

The fact that ancient peoples considered urgent issues to be at stake in ritual performances generated considerable anxiety about their accuracy<sup>17</sup>. Ritual texts could be used either to assuage such anxieties and

13. See many of the letters in the anthology by M. NISSINEN, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (Writings from the Ancient World, 12), Atlanta, GA, SBL, 2003.

14. The Weidner Chronicle explains the fortunes of a long list of kings by their treatment of the Esagila, the temple of Marduk in Babylon. See J.-J. GLASSNER, *Mesopotamian Chronicles* (Writings from the Ancient World, 19), Atlanta, GA, SBL, 2004, pp. 263-269, who observed that many Neo-Babylonian chronicles "favored a political line of reasoning that no longer guided the conduct of a ruler but told him what he could or could not do" (p. 77).

15. Transl. by E.L. Greenstein, in S.B. PARKER (ed.), *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (Writings from the Ancient World, 9), Atlanta, GA, SBL, 1997, pp. 9-48.

16. Transl. by S. DALLEY, in *COS* (n. 9), vol. 1, 113.

17. Anxiety over correct performance is a characteristic feature of many ritual practices, as theorists have noted. See S. FREUD, *Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices*, 1907, reprinted in R.L. GRIMES (ed.), *Readings in Ritual Studies*, Upper Saddle River, NJ,

reinforce the authority of presiding priests or to heighten such concerns in order to justify ritual reforms and even political changes. Unlike oral traditions that can only be embodied in a person, texts appear to speak from the past with an authority independent of those who present and read them aloud. Priests and kings therefore sometimes used ritual texts to justify their practices, especially in situations of social conflict or crisis. That, in turn, elevated some texts to the status of religious icons that could be manipulated and displayed as ritual objects<sup>18</sup>.

#### PENTATEUCHAL RITUAL RHETORIC IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

The Pentateuch's ritual texts share characteristics with the ritual rhetoric found in royal inscriptions and narrative epics of other ancient cultures as well as with their ritual texts more narrowly defined<sup>19</sup>. The divine voicing of all the laws of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers casts YHWH in the conventional role of the king. Though many commentators have made this observation by comparison with Hammurabi's voicing a collection of civil and criminal laws, the comparison holds equally well with how, in other inscriptions, Hammurabi and many other ancient kings voice ritual regulations in the form of royal edicts. Most of these edicts deal with financial issues, such as land grants to temples, temple tax exemptions, and royal stipends for offerings, but some edicts dictate more specific festival calendars, or schedules and amounts of offerings, or priestly prebends. By commanding ritual instructions, YHWH takes the conventional role of an ancient monarch by supporting and regulating the proper conduct of temple rites.

There are, of course, no comparable parallels in royal inscriptions to the detail and scope of the ritual instructions of parts of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. For anything remotely similar, one must read those texts usually categorized as "ritual texts", which

Prentice Hall, 1996, pp. 212-217; cf. J.Z. SMITH, *The Domestication of Sacrifice*, in R.G. HAMERTON-KELLY (ed.), *Violent Origins*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1987, 191-235. Others have documented the prevalence of ritual change and, frequently, the lack of standardization in ritual practice: see R.L. GRIMES, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory*, Columbia, SC, University of South Carolina Press, 1990, pp. 17-18, and R.A. RAPPAPORT, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 36-37.124-26.

18. WATTS, *Ritual Legitimacy* (n. 2), pp. 401-417.

19. For this argument in greater detail, see J.W. WATTS, *The Rhetoric of Ritual Instruction in Leviticus 1-7*, in R. RENDTORFF - R.A. KUGLER (eds.), *The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception* (SupplVT, 93), Leiden, Brill, 2003, 79-100 = *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus* (n. 2), 37-62.

contain similarly detailed casuistic regulations for festivals, offerings, priestly incomes, and the like. Placing these instructions in the mouth of the deity makes the rhetorical function of biblical ritual texts much more obvious than for most ritual texts from other ancient cultures. In those cultures, we must intuit the persuasive stakes involved in the use of ritual texts from the briefer mentions of ritual in royal and dedicatory inscriptions and letters recounting the oracles of temple prophets. Here in the Pentateuch, casting the deity as the royal sponsor combines the force of a royal edict with that of a prophetic oracle to mandate support for temple rites and for the Aaronide priests that preside over them.

The Pentateuch also employs ritual rhetoric in narratives to model proper and improper piety, just as some ancient Near Eastern epics do. Its identification of the deity as the royal sponsor, however, prevents it from employing the usual ancient Near Eastern literary and iconographic theme of the pious king. In its place, the narrative depicts venerated ancestors (Noah, Abraham, Jacob) and the archetypal prophet (Moses) worshipping Israel's God. These heroes model the piety expected of the text's readers and hearers. Pentateuchal narratives also depict false worship (e.g. the stories of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4, of the golden calf in Exodus 32, and of the Korahite rebellion in Numbers 16) as leading to individual and communal destruction, like the ritual criticism found in other cultures' royal inscriptions and priestly chronicles. In combining the ritual rhetoric of narratives with that of ritual texts, however, the Pentateuch's writers and editors did not conform the details of the former to the latter's instructions, as many commentators have observed. For example, the offerings of the ancestors in Genesis do not conform to P's insistence that they must be offered by Aaronide priests. Most likely, the writers and editors did not regard such consistency as necessary because the two conventions of ritual rhetoric perform different functions: the narratives model the promise and peril of ritual worship to motivate performance (a point reinforced explicitly by the promises and threats at the end of Leviticus and Deuteronomy), but it is the ritual texts that specify what proper ritual performance should consist of and they also emphasize the authority of the Aaronide priests to adjudicate ambiguities and conflicts.

Because they set their narratives in the distant, pre-monarchic past, the Pentateuch's writers could not employ ritual criticism for political critique in the way that Neo-Babylonian scribes did. The Deuteronomistic History, however, did wield ritual criticism to produce a far more thoroughgoing condemnation of entire dynasties of Israelite and Judean kings than did any Babylonian scribe. The developed rhetorical

potential in ancient Near Eastern cultures for temple priests to wield ritual criticism in political attacks on monarchs probably accounts for why the books of Kings emphasize ritual issues to the virtual exclusion of the Torah's moral teachings.

The writers of the Pentateuch, then, combined distinct ancient literary conventions of ritual rhetoric from diverse genres in order to place ritual concerns at the thematic and literary center of the Torah. The combination emphasizes the ritual texts as key components of the Pentateuch's persuasive strategy. As a result, the most concentrated collection of ritual regulations, Lev 1–16, conveys considerable rhetorical force.

#### THE RHETORICAL ROLE OF LEVITICUS 1–16 IN THE PENTATEUCH<sup>20</sup>

The persuasive intent behind the composition of Lev 1–16 appears most obviously in ch. 8–10. These chapters contain the only large block of narratives in the book. They clearly legitimize the ritual authority of the Aaronide priests by telling about their installation by Moses on the basis of divine commands (ch. 8). The priests then fulfill every detail of the deity's ritual instructions (ch. 9). Chapter 10 grounds the high priests' interpretive authority to determine correct ritual practice in a divine revelation to their ancestor, Aaron (vv. 8–11). Thus, at its literary center in Leviticus, the ritual rhetoric of the Pentateuch focuses on legitimizing the privileges and duties of the Aaronide priesthood and, especially, its high priest.

That conclusion will be relatively uncontroversial for Lev 8–9, but my inclusion of ch. 10 in this theme requires further discussion. Most commentators have assumed that the story of ritual malpractice in Lev 10,1–3 contradicts the previous chapters support of the Aaronide priests and represents a critique of at least some of them<sup>21</sup>. I disagree. Attention to the likely rhetorical impact of this story on the intended ancient audience suggests that it would have strengthened the legitimation of the Aaro-

20. The conclusions of the following section have been defended in considerably more detail in *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus* (n. 2), pp. 37–141.

21. E.g. M. NOTH, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, trans. J.E. Anderson (OTL), Philadelphia, PA, Westminster, 1965, p. 84; N.H. SNAITH, *Leviticus and Numbers* (New Century Bible), London, Nelson, 1967, p. 75; J.C. LAUGHLIN, *The 'Strange Fire' of Nadab and Abihu*, in *JBL* 95 (1976) 559–565, p. 562; P. SEGAL, *The Divine Verdict of Leviticus 10:3*, in *VT* 39 (1989) 91–95; B.A. LEVINE, *Leviticus* (JPS Torah Commentary), Philadelphia, PA, Jewish Publication Society, 1989, p. 58; L.L. GRABBE, *Leviticus* (Old Testament Guides), Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, p. 221; W. HOUSTON, *Tragedy in the Courts of the Lord: A Socio-Literary Reading of the Death of Nadab and Abihu*, in *JSOT* 90 (2000) 31–39, pp. 38–39.

nide priests in Lev 8–10, rather than undermining them<sup>22</sup>. Chapters 8–10 constantly emphasize how necessary it is for priests to comply with the divine instructions through Moses, in other words, with Torah (8,4.5.9.13.17.21.29.31.34.35.36; 9,5.6.7.10.21; 10,5.7.11.13.15.18). This chain of refrains reporting compliance with divine instructions is broken in 10,1 by an act described specifically in the language of non-compliance (Nadab and Abihu did “what had not been commanded”), only to have compliance reestablished through the rest of the chapter. The automatic cost of non-compliance illustrated by 10,1–2 shows not only that the priests must comply (the usual moral drawn), but also implies that their continued survival shows that they usually do comply. The fact that their work, if done incorrectly, places them in mortal danger only emphasizes the priests' dedication. The rarity of such divine outbreaks implicitly attests to the priests' competence. The chapter further emphasizes the mystique of priestly office with Moses' cryptic oracle in v. 3, with the divine revelation to Aaron of his unique interpretive authority over ritual matters in vv. 9–11, and by Aaron demonstrating that new power by resolving the conflict over ritual performance at the end of the chapter. Indeed, in comparison with other stories in the Hebrew Bible of prominent fathers facing the actual or threatened deaths of their sons (e.g. Eli, David, Jereboam), Aaron distinguishes himself by not letting this tragedy interfere with his assigned duties. The position authority he gained by divine appointment and inauguration in the previous chapters deepens in this chapter into a personal authority based in his character. Chapter 10, then, joins ch. 8–9 in legitimizing and defending the Aaronide priests' monopoly over Israel's temple offerings by glorifying their ancestor, Aaron.

The surrounding chapters justify the priestly monopoly over ritual offerings as necessary in order for Israel to comply with divine commandments. Lev 4–5 and 12–16 make this persuasive reasoning especially evident. The instructions for the *ḥattā't* and the *'āšām* offerings emphasize the priest's mediation in performing these offerings as the only means for forgiveness (4,20.26.31.35; 5,6.10.13.16.18.26)<sup>23</sup>. The rituals for dealing with severe pollution similarly emphasize the priest's essential role in helping worshipers gain purification (12,7.8; 14,20.21.31.53;

22. C. NIHAN reached a similar conclusion, that the story served to justify the monopoly of the priests, and especially the high priest, over incense offerings (*From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2007, pp. 92, 103–104).

23. The Masoretic Text of 5,6 omits the phrase “it will be forgiven him”, but the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Septuagint, and some other Hebrew manuscripts from the Cairo geniza include it.

15,15.30). These two sets of refrains contain the largest concentrations of the word *kipper* "atone" in Leviticus. Their repetition emphatically connects the act of atoning with the themes of forgiveness (in ch. 4–5) and purification (in ch. 12–15). The three ideas interact even more tightly in the instructions for the Day of Atonement in Lev 16 that juxtapose sin and impurity in the context of atonement. The ritual achievements of that day are summarized by v. 16: the high priest "will atone on behalf of the sanctuary from the impurities of the children of Israel and from their transgressions, for all their sins". In P, the subject of the verb *kipper* is always a priest, or Moses acting in the role of a priest. Thus Leviticus presents the priests' atoning activities as essential because only their ritual performances make forgiveness from sin and guilt and cleansing from severe impurities possible<sup>24</sup>.

Leviticus does not argue for the Aaronide priests' monopoly over Israel's offerings as bluntly as this survey makes it seem. It introduces the themes of ritual offerings and pollution with catalogues of customary practices (Lev 1–3, 11) that do not emphasize the priests' roles to such a great extent. The book begins by focusing on the 'ōlāh offering, as do most other references to Israel's offerings in the Hebrew Bible. This conventional presentation of the priority of the 'ōlāh therefore immediately creates the impression that the following chapters present traditional, long-standing practices. Any innovations that P may introduce hide within this conventional framework. It also delays any suspicions that priestly self-interests might be at work in these chapters, since the 'ōlāh is the only one of Israel's animal offerings from which priests were never to receive any meat (though they do receive the hide, according to Lev 7,8). A similar rhetorical strategy orders the rules of purification in Lev 11–15. They begin with lists of unclean animals (Lev 11),

24. There has been extensive debate among commentators over whether the *זבח* ritual purifies the sanctuary or the worshiper, or both: see J. MILGROM, *Leviticus 1–16* (AncB, 3), New York, Doubleday, 1991, pp. 254–56; N. KIUCHI, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function*, Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1987, p. 65; A. MARX, *Sacrifice pour les péchés ou rites de levée de sanction*, in ZAW 100 (1988) 183–98; B.J. SCHWARTZ, *The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature*, in D.P. WRIGHT – D.N. FREEDMAN – A. HURVITZ (eds.), *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, Winona Lake, IN, Eisenbrauns, 1995, 3–21; R. GANE, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy*, Winona Lake, IN, Eisenbrauns, 2005, pp. 106–143. We do not need to resolve this debate, however, in order to understand the persuasive force of P's rhetoric of forgiveness and purification. The Pentateuch's stories of divine punishment for past ritual infractions (Exod 32, Num 16) and threats of retribution for future sins (Lev 26, Deut 27–30) leave little doubt as to the urgent need for mechanisms of forgiveness and purification, no matter how the ritual mechanism is understood to operate.

prohibitions that must be observed by lay people in their own homes. Infractions require mild purification procedures performed without priestly mediation. Only after this chapter does Leviticus present the priests' central role in purification rituals for cases of severe pollution (ch. 12–15). The book introduces itself as a neutral arbiter of correct ritual practice, a rhetorical stance that reinforces its own authority<sup>25</sup>. Thus, in addition to legitimizing the Aaronide priests, the Torah's ritual rhetoric serves to establish itself as the supreme authority for ritual practice.

The ritual rhetoric of Leviticus serves other thematic purposes as well. It employs the conventions of royal inscriptions to characterize YHWH as a king who cares for the welfare of Israel by providing ritual rectification for threatening circumstances. Thus the ritual legislation joins with the Pentateuch's legal ordinances and covenant language to depict the god of Israel as a just and merciful monarch<sup>26</sup>. The rhetorical consequence of such divine legislation is that Israel gains the means for determining its own future. The alternative futures (blessings and curses) enunciated by Lev 26 and Deut 27–30 can be chosen by readers and hearers through their obedience or disobedience to the Torah's legal and ritual provisions. The internalization of this rhetorical logic appears explicitly in the prayers of confession of the post-exilic community depicted in Ezra 9 and Neh 9–10. Thus ritual rhetoric plays a vital role in unifying the Pentateuch's diverse contents into a persuasive argument for obedience to Torah and for cultic mediation by Aaronide priests. Though interpreters have long noted the presence of many different, even discordant, themes in the Pentateuch, the history of its growing authority in the Second Temple period shows that its message was primarily understood in precisely this way.

#### THE TORAH'S RHETORICAL ROLE FOR ANCIENT JEWS AND SAMARITANS

The two chief goals of Leviticus' ritual rhetoric – the authority of Torah and the legitimacy of the Aaronide priestly monopoly – might seem to be in some tension with one another. Many commentators have assumed that temple priests had no need for a book of ritual instructions

25. The persuasive power of such dispassionate introductions remains potent. It has misled many modern commentators to think that, in contrast to the much more overt rhetoric of Deuteronomy or the prophetic books, Leviticus encodes no persuasive interests. The claims of objectivity made by modern science should, however, serve to illustrate in modern culture the rhetorical power gained by denying any persuasive interest at work.

26. See WATTS, *Reading Law* (n. 3), pp. 91–109.



because they would have learned their tasks through the priesthood's oral traditions of ritual practice. Some therefore concluded that the texts were written to serve the interests of other groups, perhaps to educate diaspora Jews in the practices of the far-away temple and/or to provide a basis for evaluating and challenging the priests' conduct of the cult<sup>27</sup>. There can be no doubt that the Torah came to serve these purposes as the Second Temple period progressed. Its characterization of Moses as scribal interpreter, especially in Deuteronomy, anticipates and models a kind of scholarly authority that, when embodied in figures like Ezra and groups like the Pharisees and Essenes, challenged the interpretive authority of the reigning high priest and eventually, embodied in the Tanaaitic rabbis, replaced the priests as the spiritual and temporal leaders of the Jews.

The changes in religious authority over the subsequent half millennium, however, can hardly have been anticipated by the writers of the Pentateuch. There is every reason to believe that the writers of P and the final editors of the Pentateuch (if they were different people) viewed their own interests as identical with those of the Aaronide priesthood. Proof of this can be seen in the Pentateuch's odd relationship to Israel's historical institutions. As many commentators have observed, for a lawbook the Pentateuch has remarkably few provisions governing Israel's actual institutions of government and religion. Kings go unmentioned, except to stipulate that they read Torah (Deut 17). Instead, it depicts Moses as wielding political and ritual authority over Israel, but then asserts that Moses had no peer or successor (Deut 34,10-12). It does anticipate that prophets will carry on his work (Deut 18,15-19), but the prophets presented by the Deuteronomistic History in this role almost always take anti-institutional positions and revel in their outsider status (e.g. Elijah). The Pentateuch alludes to the Jerusalem Temple obliquely only in a hymn (Exod 15,17). Instead, it depicts cultic worship taking place in an idealized tent sanctuary, the Tabernacle, which no longer existed in the monarchic and Second Temple period, if it every did. The Torah validates only one institution that wielded effective religious and political power during Israel's whole history in the land, namely, the Aaronide priesthood. The Second Temple period was the time of its greatest power and influence, first under the descendents of the first post-exilic

27. For the former view, see E. GERSTENBERGER, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, transl. D.W. Stott (OTL), Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox, 1996, pp. 34-37; for the latter, see R. KRATZ, *Temple and Torah: Reflections on the Legal Status of the Pentateuch between Elephantine and Qumran*, conference paper presented to the Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting in Edinburgh, July 3, 2006.

high priest, a single dynasty that held the high-priesthood in Jerusalem for three hundred years, as well as the Samaritan high-priesthood. Then the Hasmonean dynasty usurped the high-priesthood in the second and first centuries BCE and eventually took the title "king" as well. So in the midst of the Pentateuch's nostalgic and utopian evocation of Israel in the wilderness worshipping God without land, temple, or king, it firmly establishes the authority of the only enduring leadership institution in Second Temple Judaism, the Aaronide high priests. The priestly interests served by placing Leviticus at the center of the Torah could not be clearer.

Because of its setting in an idealized, nomadic past, the Pentateuch's writers could not take advantage of ritual rhetoric's potential for political critique in the way that the Deuteronomistic Historians could. Stories of ritual malpractice foreshadow the possibility of such criticism, but their fictionalized setting usually obscures the identity of their historical targets, much to the frustration of modern historians. Nevertheless, Leviticus' ritual legislation lays the basis for political uses of ritual criticism by making proper worship crucial for divine support for Israel. That rhetoric rebounded to the advantage of high priests who outmaneuvered secular rulers for authority in Persian and Hellenistic period Jerusalem. The legitimacy accorded them by this apparently millennium-old document made it worth running the risk of the Torah being used against them by other priestly factions, such as those led by Ezra and by the Teacher of Righteousness at Qumran. They could not anticipate that ritual criticism would eventually be turned against them by a new class of religious leaders, non-priestly (for the most part) scribes who would parley their textual expertise into a rabbinic authority that trumped even that of the high priests.

In the Second Temple period, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers presented a utopian religious ideal (worship in the Tent of Meeting surrounded by the idealized camp of the twelve tribes of Israel) as available from an existing dynastic institution (the Aaronide priesthood). It grounded that institution's origins in Israel's legendary pre-history at Sinai. It hid the priestly interests in its promulgation by placing its ritual rhetoric in the voice of God, here playing the conventional role of a benevolent king, and in descriptions of the inaugural actions of Moses. Like priests elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern and Hellenistic cultures, the Aaronide priests avoided writing in their own voice. Instead, they grounded their ritual legitimacy in the ancient edicts of a divine king and his legendary prophet. The resulting document legitimized the priesthoods of both Jewish and Samaritan temples and gained greater



authority than any text had ever held before. It became the prototypical example of a new religious force, the idea of scripture.

Lev 1–16 thus played a vital role in the Torah's growing authority in Second Temple Judaism. Modern scholarship's focus on compositional history has over-emphasized literary, especially thematic, issues at the expense of attention to the social function of the text in its various historical contexts. Rhetorical analysis can help rectify that imbalance by calling attention to indications of the Pentateuch's persuasive shaping and to the appropriation of its rhetoric by various groups in different times and places. This approach will therefore not just provide insights into literary structure and history. It will also cast light on the processes by which a collection of stories, laws and ritual instructions became the first real scripture in Western religious history.

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## STRUCTURE ET THÉOLOGIE EN LV 1,1–3,17

Dans une thèse publiée récemment<sup>1</sup>, j'ai essayé de montrer qu'une lecture synchronique et attentive (*close reading*) pouvait conduire à découvrir et à apprécier dans le Lévitique – par-delà les apparences – une organisation et un art littéraire consommé, tant au niveau des unités littéraires de base qu'à celui de l'œuvre entière. Pour s'en rendre compte, il faut commencer par prendre au sérieux et par respecter un des indices de composition parmi les plus évidents du livre dans son état final, à savoir les 36 formules d'introduction narrative qui donnent à cet ouvrage la forme qu'il a: une succession quasi-ininterrompue<sup>2</sup> de discours divins toujours adressés à Moïse (sauf une fois à Aaron: 10,8), avec charge pour ce dernier de transmettre les instructions reçues à différents destinataires<sup>3</sup>. Analysés pour eux-mêmes, ces discours divins qui constituent les «briques» élémentaires de l'ouvrage, manifestent la plupart du temps une cohérence interne impressionnante, tant du point de vue conceptuel que structurel. Au plan du livre, c'est-à-dire au niveau de sa macro-structure, divers indices (lexicaux, stylistiques ou autres) permettent en outre d'établir des correspondances entre discours et de mettre en évidence une construction chiasmique, centrée sur Lv 16 (*Yom Kippur*) et porteuse d'une intention théologique forte, notamment en terme de fidélité et de miséricorde divines.

Je me contenterai, dans cette brève note, d'illustrer mon propos au niveau microstructurel en examinant la manière dont le premier discours du Lévitique (1,1–3,17) est composé. Ce discours ouvre la «Torah des sacrifices» (Lv 1–7), laquelle constitue sans aucun doute la section la plus facilement identifiable du livre, grâce notamment à son contenu (présentation systématique et détaillée<sup>4</sup> de cinq grands types d'offrande) et à l'ample conclusion récapitulatrice qui la clôture (7,37–38).

1. D. LUCIANI, *Sainteté et pardon. I: Structure littéraire du Lévitique* (BETL, 185), Leuven, University Press – Peeters, 2005.

2. Lv 8–10 et 24,10–23 constituent deux intermèdes narratifs un peu plus développés.

3. Ces formules introductives (1,1; 4,1; 5,14.20; 6,1.12.17; 7,22, etc.) sont *grosso modo* du type: «Et YHWH parla à Moïse disant: 'Parle à x disant'», avec des destinataires différents (x = les fils d'Israël, Aaron avec ou sans ses fils...), de légères variantes dans les formes verbales et, de temps en temps, l'absence du second membre (l'ordre de transmettre). Ces interventions répétées du narrateur, outre leur fonction structurelle, ont le mérite de rappeler au lecteur qu'il n'est pas devant une loi, mais devant le récit de sa transmission.

4. Détaillée, mais toutefois incomplète; en tout cas insuffisante pour connaître pré-