**The Ram of Ordination and Qualifying the Priests to Eat Sacrifices**

**Abstract**

The priests qualified for their priestly function in three main ways: being robed in the priestly vestments; being anointed; and undergoing the ceremony of the days of ordination. This article is intended to clarify the contribution of each of the three components of the procedure, but especially that of the ram of ordination. A semantic and literary analysis demonstrates that donning the vestments qualifies the priests to minister in the tabernacle; anointing them makes them “holy”; and the ram ceremony qualifies them to eat the sacrifices that are offered on the altar.

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The method by which the priests qualify for their priestly function is described in several places in the Bible. Looking at them in combination, it is possible to locate three basic components that must all be performed on the priests in order to consecrate them for their assignment: dressing the priests in sacred vestments, anointing them with oil, and presenting offerings during the days of ordination [[1]](#footnote-1). So, for example, at the end of the instructions about the vestments, the text reads: “For Aaron’s sons you shall make tunics and sashes and headdresses; you shall make them for their glorious adornment. You shall put them on your brother Aaron, and on his sons with him, and shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, so that they may serve me as priests” (Exod 28,40–41). Achievement of the final stage, including both consecration and priesthood, requires all three of the components: dressing the priests in vestments of glorious adornment, anointing them, and ordaining them — in the biblical idiom, literally, “filling their hands”.

These three elements are also mentioned in the verses that describe the appointment of the priests, or at least of the high priest, incidentally. So, for instance, at the end of the ritual cleansing of the tabernacle we read, “The priest who is anointed and consecrated as priest in his father’s place shall make atonement, wearing the linen vestments, the holy vestments” (Lev 16,32). This has nothing to do with the instructions about qualifying the priests for their role; it is only saying that the priest is able to cleanse the tabernacle. Yet all three parameters are mentioned [[2]](#footnote-2). So too with regard to the prohibition for the high priest to mourn: “The priest who is exalted above his fellows, *on whose head the anointing oil has been poured and who has been consecrated* [more literally, “whose hand has been filled”] *to wear the vestments*, shall not dishevel his hair, nor tear his vestments” (Lev 21,10).

In order to understand the complete process of qualifying the priests, we must define what each component achieves. It is difficult to meet this challenge by determining that each component stems from a different source, since they are interwoven over and over in such a way that, even if they stood alone in the original sources of each, it is obvious that they have been edited together with the perspective that each of the components is necessary. Michael Hundley is correct: “Thus… the priestly attire forms an integral part of the consecration process, one which, if extracted, would ruin the whole. To say that one element alone consecrates is to misunderstand both the complexity and interconnectedness of the ritual” [[3]](#footnote-3). Yet various texts highlight different aspects of the procedure. The challenge that lies in wait for us is to understand the contribution each component makes to the procedure for consecrating the priests.

This article, therefore, is devoted to examining the contribution of the various elements to the qualification of the priests. We intend, especially, to pay attention to the role of the days of ordination and the offering that is unique to these days, inasmuch as the contribution to this ceremony, in addition to the oil and the vestments, is particularly enveloped in fog.

The path to clarification of this subject begins with a linguistic examination that will bring the overall picture to light. The text uses three different expressions to describe the purpose of the actions that are designed to qualify the priests for their role: “consecration”, “priestification” (the root כהן used as a Piel verb), and “filling the hands” — ordinarily translated into English as “ordination”. It appears that each of these terms is related, at base, to one of the three components in the procedure for qualifying the priests (even if it may have been broadened to extend to the other components as well).

**The Anointing Oil**

The anointing oil “consecrates” the thing that is anointed with it — whether the thing is an object or a priest. It is difficult to determine why oil, of all things, was chosen for this purpose [[4]](#footnote-4), but the fact is stated explicitly in the passage devoted to the preparation of the anointing oil in Exod 30,22–33. Moses is commanded there to prepare “a sacred anointing oil” for the purpose of anointing the tabernacle and its utensils and thereby consecrating them: “You shall consecrate them, so that they may be most holy” (Exod 30,29). In this passage, Aaron and his sons are mentioned as part of the tabernacle and its utensils, meaning that they too require anointment in order to consecrate them: “You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and *consecrate* them, in order that they may serve me as priests” (Exod 30,30) [[5]](#footnote-5). The reader gets the impression from this passage that anointment with oil is sufficient to turn them into sacred things belonging to the tabernacle, just as it is for all the rest of the sacred utensils. Moreover, since anointment is sufficient for consecration, it is imperative to be careful not to anoint lay people with oil, lest they too become consecrated (Exod 30,32–33).

The consecration that is achieved by anointing with oil is highlighted in the commandment to do so, in Exod 40,9–11, and the description of the days of ordination also does not refrain from repeating the role of the oil in consecrating the sacred utensils, including Aaron the priest in the list: “Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them. He sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all its utensils, and the basin and its base, to consecrate them. He poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron’s head and anointed him, to consecrate him” (Lev 8,10–12).

Despite the apparent resemblance between the anointment of the priests and the anointment of the king [[6]](#footnote-6), it is clear from the way the purpose of anointing the priests is presented that we are not speaking of an anointment parallel to the anointment of a king, which does nothing more than to designate him for the role. Some kings are anointed in the Bible [[7]](#footnote-7), yet not a single one of them is considered “holy” [[8]](#footnote-8). Perhaps the symbolism of anointing a king with oil was intended to stimulate an association of divine appointment (as is especially apparent in the anointment of David in 1 Sam 16,1–13 and Ps 45,8 [7]) [[9]](#footnote-9), but this is not the same as consecration. Given that the anointment of the priests is listed along with that of the other tabernacle utensils, it is clear that this is not merely appointment. We must augment this anointment with an additional meaning: consecration.

**The Priestly Vestments**

From the language of the instructions about preparing the vestments in Exodus 28, it is apparent that the purpose of the vestments is to turn those who wear them into “priests” — those who are qualified to minister in the tabernacle. At the beginning of these instructions, Moses is told: “Then bring near to you your brother Aaron, and his sons with him, from among the Israelites, *to serve me as priests*” (Exod 28,1), and it is evident from what follows that the vestments themselves are enough to do that: “These are the vestments that they shall make … they make these sacred vestments for your brother Aaron and his sons *to serve me as priests*” (Exod 28,4). There is no hint in the instructions about the preparation of the vestments that the priests are considered part of the tabernacle utensils; they are, rather, those who minister in the tabernacle.

“Priest” or some derivative of it occurs particularly in the description of the purpose of preparing the vestments: “The expression לכהנו לי occurs three times in this paragraph, at the conclusion of three sentences; undoubtedly this was intended to give it emphasis” [[10]](#footnote-10). This linguistic combination alludes to the purpose of the vestments: those who wear them are distinguished from the mass of the people and turn into priests. In the instructions to Bezalel to prepare the vestments, it similarly says: “the vestments of his sons, for their service as priests” (Exod 31,10), and so too the purpose of the vestments is presented in the instructions about the days of ordination: “Then you shall bring his sons, and put tunics on them … *and the priesthood shall be theirs*by a perpetual ordinance” (Exod 29,8–9) [[11]](#footnote-11).

The difference between the anointing oil and the vestments is clear: unlike the oil, which can even consecrate inanimate objects, the vestments belong to the human realm and they relate to the priests in their role as subjects who inspire feelings of dignity and splendor. Dressing them in these vestments turns them into people who serve the Lord as priests, just like anyone who wears a uniform that identifies him as a member of a particular group. The mere fact of putting on the uniform denotes him as a someone who belongs to that group; “It emphasizes his job rather than his name” [[12]](#footnote-12).

But it is possible to point to a more specific function in the realm of service that the vestments achieve for the priests: One who wears the special vestments can enter the sacred space in the courtyard of the tent of meeting. It is the vestments that turn the priests into “non-outsiders” with regard to the tabernacle; after all, “any outsider who encroaches shall be put to death”. That is, it is entrance into the sacred space that demands “sacred vestments”. This is connected with the fact that, although the vestments of Aaron do not “consecrate” him, they are nonetheless called “sacred vestments” (Exod 28,2.4). We need not understand this expression to mean that the vestments themselves are “sacred”; rather, they are “sacral”, that is, vestments in which it is permissible to enter the sacred space”, being especially intended for use there, like the “prison clothes” of 2 Kgs 25,29 or the vestments that we call “bathing suits” [[13]](#footnote-13). We see this in the tabernacle cleansing ritual of Leviticus 16. There we find that in order to enter the Holy of Holies, Aaron must wear special vestments: “Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place … He shall put on the holy linen tunic, and shall have the linen undervestments next to his body, fasten the linen sash, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy vestments” (Lev 16,3–4). Since these are “holy vestments”, Aaron can “come into the holy place” while wearing them. There is a link between entering the holy places and the vestments that one wears.

The idea of sacral vestments leads also to an additional conclusion connected to the difference between the high priest’s vestments and those of the ordinary priests. It is common to view this as an expression of the difference in their status, but it seems more likely to be connected to the different sacred spaces which they permit one to enter [[14]](#footnote-14). It is only the vestments of Aaron, who serves inside the tabernacle [[15]](#footnote-15), that are called “sacral vestments”; those of his sons, who serve in the courtyard of the tent of meeting, are merely “for glorious adornment”. Nowhere are they designated “sacral vestments” [[16]](#footnote-16). This is conspicuous in every place they are called “the service vestments” (בגדי השרד):

• “The service vestments, the holy vestments for the priest Aaron and the vestments of his sons, for their service as priests” (Exod 31,10).

• “The service vestments for ministering in the holy place, the holy vestments for the priest Aaron, and the vestments of his sons, for their service as priests” (Exod 35,19).

• “The service vestments for ministering in the holy place, the sacred vestments for the priest Aaron, and the vestments of his sons to serve as priests” (Exod 39,41).

To these verses should be added the heading to the preparation of Aaron’s own vestments: “Of the blue, purple, and crimson yarns they made service vestments, for ministering in the holy place; they made the sacred vestments for Aaron” (Exod 39,1).

Without deciding between the various possibilities for understanding the phrase בגדי השרד (NRSV translates as “finely worked vestments” rather than “service vestments”) [[17]](#footnote-17), all these texts preserve a clear distinction between Aaron’s vestments, which are “sacred vestments” for “ministering in the holy place”, while his sons’ vestments are “for their service as priests”.

This same sense arises from various texts; we will content ourselves with just two examples. The instructions for the vestments begin by saying, “Then bring near to you your brother Aaron, and his sons with him, from among the Israelites, to serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. You shall make sacred vestments for the glorious adornment of your brother Aaron” (Exod 28,1–2). First Aaron and his sons are mentioned, using the more general designation of the vestments: “to serve as priests”, which is appropriate for the vestments of all of the priests. As soon as the focus narrows to Aaron alone, the double designation of his particular vestments bursts forth: “sacred vestments for the glorious adornment”, while in the continuation of the chapter, the description of his sons’ vestments says merely “For Aaron’s sons you shall make tunics … for their glorious adornment” (Exod 28,40). These are for glorious adornment, but they are not sacred vestments.

Something similar is reflected in the command about robing the priests in Exodus 40: “You shall put on Aaron the *sacred vestments*, and you shall anoint him and consecrate him, so that he may serve me as priest. You shall bring his sons also and put tunics on them” (Exod 40,13–14). It is difficult to assume that this is a coincidental distinction: Aaron must be robed in sacred vestments, while his sons need be dressed only in tunics with no special designation.

On this account, we must understand the “sons” mentioned in Exod 28,4 — “They make these sacred vestments for your brother Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests” — as Aaron’s successors in the high priesthood [[18]](#footnote-18). This is the reading that is demanded in any case, since the verse describes the special vestments of the high priest (“These are the vestments that they shall make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a checkered tunic, a turban, and a sash”) and it is clear that there is no need to make these vestments for Aaron’s sons, who are priests of lesser rank.

A connection between the vestments and the sacred space that Aaron is permitted to enter is supported also by the match between Aaron’s vestments and the cloth used for the tabernacle itself (Exod 26,1.31.36). “One notes immediately that the fabrics and colors of the materials for the vestments were the same as those also used for the lovely inner curtains and entrance curtain of the tabernacle itself” [[19]](#footnote-19). If this is not merely a commonality that stems from the fact that in the biblical approach these are fabrics and colors of “glorious adornment”, it is possibly intended to hint at a connection between the wearer of the vestments and the sacred complex which he is expected to enter [[20]](#footnote-20).

It should therefore not be surprising that Aaron’s vestments are connected at base with his entering into the tabernacle. In connection with the precious stones that must be put on the ephod, we read this: “Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord on his two shoulders for remembrance” (Exod 28,12). The term “before the Lord” can sometimes be merely metaphoric, but in connection with the tabernacle it is easier to see it as an expression that denotes entering the tabernacle [[21]](#footnote-21). We see this even more clearly with regard to the breastpiece: “So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on his heart *when he goes into the holy place*, for a continual remembrance before the Lord … and they shall be on Aaron’s heart *when he goes in before the Lord*; thus Aaron shall bear the judgment of the Israelites on his heart *before the Lord* continually” (Exod 28,29–30). Given that the context of these instructions is Aaron’s entrance into the sacred space, it is appropriate to hear that the bells on the robe are connected to precisely this matter: “Aaron shall wear it when he ministers, and its sound shall be heard when he goes into the holy place before the Lord, and when he comes out, so that he may not die” (Exod 28,35), and that the headdress too must be on Aaron’s forehead “before the Lord” (Exod 28,38).

Despite this repeated emphasis with regard to the vestments of Aaron that are mentioned in the chapter, in the description of his sons’ vestments there is no hint about entering the tabernacle. They too require priestly vestments; after all, they are the attendants of the altar. But their vestments are not “sacred vestments”, for they enable then only to enter the courtyard. In light of this fact, we must read the verse about the breeches as divided between the two: “Aaron and his sons shall wear them when they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister in the holy place; or they will bring guilt on themselves and die” (Exod 28,43). “When they go into the tent of meeting” applies to Aaron, while “when they come near the altar” applies to his sons [[22]](#footnote-22)

**The Ordination Offerings**

The uniqueness of the ordination offerings in the process of qualifying the priests is noticeable in their absence from the instructions in Exodus 40, which includes only the requirement to anoint them and to robe them. Except for this absence, the instructions in Exodus 40 do resemble the process described when the ordination is actually carried out in Leviticus 8: Moses must “bring Aaron and his sons” to the entrance of the tent of meeting (Exod 40,12); wash them with water (v. 12); robe Aaron in sacred vestments (v. 13) and his sons in tunics (v. 14); and anoint them (v. 15) [[23]](#footnote-23). Here it is already recognizable that the sacrificial offerings play a unique role. It is not they that consecrate the priests or permit them to serve as priests (v. 13) — the oil and the vestments are enough for that.

If so, what is missing in the process of qualifying the priests that requires such a complicated array of offerings during the days of ordination?

**Primary and Secondary in the Ordination Ritual**

In order to establish the purpose of the ordination period (“the days of filling” as Lev 8,33 literally refers to it), we must begin by clarifying what the focus of this ceremony is. All three of the components are mentioned in the description of the ordination period in Leviticus 8: the vestments (vv. 7–9, 13), the anointing oil (vv. 12, 30), and of course the offerings. For this reason, it sometimes seems that the ordination ritual focuses equally on all three components [[24]](#footnote-24). But further examination reveals that the offerings, and especially the ram of ordination, are the focus of the ordination period; we should not view the other two components mentioned there as central to this chapter.

This can be easily established by comparing the ordination ceremony described in Leviticus 8 with the instructions transmitted in Exodus 29 [[25]](#footnote-25). Leviticus 8 opens with a list of the things that Moses is required to “take”:

“Take:

1. Aaron and his sons with him

2. the vestments

3. the anointing oil

4. the bull of sin offering

5. the two rams

6. and the basket of unleavened bread” (Lev 8,2).

In the instructions in Exodus 29 the things that Moses must take are similarly detailed, but there Moses is required to take only the offerings and the basket of bread:

“Take:

1. one young bull

2. two rams without blemish

3. and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and … you shall put them in one basket” (Exod 29,1–3).

The absence from Exodus 29 of the vestments and the oil demonstrates that they are secondary. True, the instructions in Exodus about the ordination process do mention the oil and the vestments, but this mention is identifiable as secondary. After the list of vestments that Moses must “take”, God orders that Moses must wash the priests whom he has “brought” to the entrance of the tent of meeting — and with this the actual description of the day begins — only after which, as if these other components had been forgotten, is Moses instructed to take the vestments (v. 5) and the oil (v. 7).

Though the description of the ordination process in Leviticus 8 is also a fulfillment of the instructions given in Exodus 40 [[26]](#footnote-26), including in it both robing the priests in the vestments and anointing them with the oil, which after all are both required for the consecration of the priests, when we examine the purpose of the ordination process, these are an addendum to the central innovation of the ordination process — the offerings.

The offerings, and especially the offering of the ram of *ordination*, are therefore the main action whose role it is to *ordain* the priests [[27]](#footnote-27). This is evident from the chiastic arrangement of the chapter, which puts the offerings at the center: “The central section of the ritual can be found in vv. 14–29 which describe the sacrificial service and which should be understood as the centerpiece of the chapter” [[28]](#footnote-28).

Alongside the offerings must be mentioned the requirement in Leviticus 8 for the priests to remain for a week at the entrance of the tent of meeting (Lev 8,33); this week of waiting in the tabernacle courtyard also precedes the ordination.

Unlike the vestments, the donning of which enables one “to serve as priest”, and unlike the oil, anointment by which “consecrates” one, by means of the offerings — and chiefly by means of the ram of ordination — the priests’ “hands are filled” [[29]](#footnote-29). Such “filling of the hands” by means of offering sacrifice is found elsewhere as well, e.g., “Have you not made priests for yourselves like the peoples of other lands? Whoever comes to fill his hand with a young bull or seven rams becomes a priest of what are no gods” (2 Chr 13,9). The exegetical challenge with which the ordination process presents us is, therefore, to determine the meaning of “filling the hands” and what gives the ram of ordination the power to effect this. What specific component of priesthood does “filling the hands” operate on?

The idiom “filling the hand of a priest” occurs 16 times in the Bible. Its meaning is standardly assumed to be acceptance of appointment to a specific role: (cf. Exod 32,29 [[30]](#footnote-30); Jud 17,12; 1 Kgs 13,33; 2 Chr 29,31). Wellhausen already suggested that the background of the expression is a real ceremony in which something was actually put into the appointee’s hands. Yet even if this is true, in our passage the expression is simply an idiom. Jouön writes, correctly, that in both the ordination passages (Exod 29,35; Lev 8,33), “filling the hands” must continue for seven days. It is hard to imagine some object being placed in the hand of the priests throughout the seven days [[31]](#footnote-31). But even if “filling the hands” means “appointment”, it would seem possible to suggest a specific role for this particular appointment that is achieved during the ordination process.

**Is the Ram of Ordination an Offering of Well-Being?**

In order to understand the function that the ram of ordination performs, we must first discuss the question of what kind of offering it is. Is this ram a *šelāmîm* offering? On the one hand, the answer to this is clearly affirmative. Some would even argue that the ram of ordination is the etiological basis on which the priests’ getting the breast and thigh of every *šelāmîm* offering was based [[32]](#footnote-32). If the ram of ordination is the model of what must always be done “from their sacrifice of offerings of well-being” (Exod 29,28, Lev 7,34), it is reasonable to assume that the ram of ordination is itself such an offering, for which it could therefore be used as a model. Indeed, the rules for the ram of ordination are identical to those for the *šelāmîm* offering: the way in which the blood must be sprinkled on the altar, the burning of the fats, the bringing of the basket of unleavened bread, and especially its being cooked and eaten by the priests without the breast and thigh, which are removed from it.

This is a standard position. But despite the clear links between the ordination offering and the *šelāmîm*, the picture is more complicated [[33]](#footnote-33).

First, for whatever reason, the text never calls the ordination offering a *šelāmîm*; rather, it is always called by its own specific name of *milluʾim*, e.g. “This was an ordination offering [*milluʾîm*] for a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the Lord” (Lev 8,28). This designation is completely missing from the description of this ram even in the context where the rules for the offering are specified in its sacrificial context, where at least we might expect to have found it described as a *šelāmîm*: “You shall also take the fat of the ram, the fat tail, the fat that covers the entrails, the appendage of the liver, the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and the right thigh (*for it is a ram of* milluʾîm)” (Exod 29,22). On the assumption that the end of the verse specifies the burning of the fats (and not just the right thigh), this is indeed surprising. An even clearer specification might have been the obligation to offer the fat portions because “it is a ram for a *šelāmîm*”, an offering whose rules are known. A good place to notice this is in Lev 8,28: “Hier erscheint das Wort millu’im als Bezeichnung einer selbständigen Opferart neben *chattat* (V. 14–17) und *‘ola* (V. 1–21)” [[34]](#footnote-34). In Lev 7,37 as well the ram of ordination is a separate offering, alongside the *šelāmîm* offering.

Second, even from the legal perspective there are some notable differences between the ordination offering and the *šelāmîm* offering — especially in everything connected to eating the sacrifice. Votive and freewill offerings may be eaten over the course of two days, while the ram of ordination must be eaten in a single day (Exod 29,34). Since it does not appear to be a thanksgiving offering, we might expect the ram of ordination could also be eaten for two days. If this limited time for eating the offering were the only difference, we might explain it as the result of this being a required offering [[35]](#footnote-35), but this limitation is accompanied by two other differences: the offering may only be cooked and eaten in a holy place — at the entrance to the tent of meeting, as the text repeatedly emphasizes (Exod 29,31–34). Even more surprising is the requirement that only priests may eat of this offering: “No one else shall eat of them, because they are holy” (Exod 29,33). Since an ordinary *šelāmîm* may be eaten by non-priests, and since the *šelāmîm* is not in the category of offerings called holy, the limitation on who may eat the ram of ordination is a striking departure from the general rules for a *šelāmîm*.

The unique regulations for eating the ordination offering, combined with the stubborn refusal to define the ordination offering as a *šelāmîm*, bring us to the unusual blood ritual that is performed with the ram of ordination — the placing of the blood on the actual bodies of the priests (Exod 29,20).

Alongside the sprinkling of the blood on the altar — as is regularly done with *šelāmîm* — the blood of the offering is here placed on the ears, the thumbs, and the big toes of the priests [[36]](#footnote-36). From the resemblance of this ceremony to that of the purification of the leper (Lev 14,14–18), some have argued that the placing of the blood does not effect consecration, but only purification [[37]](#footnote-37). In fact, it is precisely this comparison with the leper that tells us that the purpose of placing the blood on the priest’s body is not purification. The purification of the leper is not dependent on the blood of the guilt offering, but on the purification offering and the burnt offering that he brings on the eighth day of the purification process. The cases of the other impure people who must bring offerings — the woman who has given birth and the person with a genital flux — demonstrate that the sin offering and burnt offering are enough to complete the purification process. It is more likely that the blood of the guilt offering and the oil that are put on the body of the leper are connected to his reabsorption into the Israelite camp, *after* he has already been purified. Once the leper has been purified, he is invited to return to the altar and the tabernacle after having been excluded from the camp for a long period: “He may freely enter the sanctuary, partake of sacred food, and participate in all of the rituals and festivals incumbent upon the Israelites” [[38]](#footnote-38). Something similar happens with the priests, although there is a difference between the two ceremonies that reveals the difference between these two actions. The blood of the ram of ordination is placed on the priests twice, and the second time it is taken from the altar and sprinkled on the priests (Lev 8,30), a ritual that is missing from the leper’s procedure. That is, apparently the ram of ordination connects the priests specifically with the altar.

It is possible to compare the effect of the ram of ordination on the priests to the effect of the bull of purification offering during the ordination period. The consecration of the tabernacle and its utensils during the ordination period follows two different models. The tabernacle and its utensils are sanctified by anointment with oil only (Lev 8,10). But the altar requires two actions: first, like the other utensils, it is anointed (Lev 8,10), but alongside this the blood of the purification offering bull must be put on its horns, an action whose purpose is likewise to cleanse and consecrate it: “Then he purified the altar … Thus he consecrated it, to make atonement for it” (Lev 8,15).

The qualifying of the priests for their role follows the model of the altar in requiring consecration with sacrificial blood in addition to the anointing oil. The phrase “he consecrated it, to make atonement for it” in the description of the cleansing of the altar is matched in the description of the effect that the ram of ordination has on the priests: “They themselves shall eat the food by which atonement is made, to ordain and consecrate them” (Exod 29,33). We will return to this verse later on, but the similarity of these texts is distinctive, not just linguistically but legally: For the priests — as for the altar — the anointing oil is not sufficient. They must go through an additional process, similar to the process the altar went through.

Indeed, the use of the verb נתן for putting the blood of the ram on the body of the priest (“take some of its blood and put (ונתת) it on the lobe of Aaron’s right ear …”, Exod 29,20), shows us the resemblance between this application of blood and that of the purification offering, the only other one where *נתן* is used along with the verb “take”: “The priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put (ונתן) it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering” (Lev 4,30). It is hard to say that the purpose of the ram’s blood, like that of the purification offering, is to “purify” the priests, since it is specifically the blood of purification offering that has the power to cleanse, and it is not likely that the ram of ordination, which more resembles a *šelāmîm* offering, would have a similar function. But the resemblance between the ram and the purification offering reveals something basic about the effect of the blood of the ram of ordination. In other sacrifices the blood is “dashed” on the altar, it is being offered as a gift to the One on high, but the blood of the purification offering acts on the place where it is put. If we are talking about a purification offering — its job is to cleanse; if about the ram of ordination — its job is to act on the priests and to qualify them for something, albeit not to cleanse them.

What effect, then, is the ram of ordination supposed to have on the body of the priests? Why, after all, do the priests in this passage resemble the altar and not the other utensils of the tabernacle, for whom anointment with oil is sufficient? Some suggest that “filling the hands” of the priests is a specific allusion to the part of the sacrifices that comes into their hands [[39]](#footnote-39). It is appropriate to follow this lead, but let us be more precise: We are not talking about qualifying them to acquire the priestly gifts as a possession; rather, the role of the ram of ordination is to qualify the priests *for eating the offerings*. The purpose of “filling the hands” of the priests during these seven days is essentially to qualify the priests for eating the offering; the twofold process they undergo, then, resembles the consecration of the altar — which likewise “eats” the offerings (as the Hebrew of Lev 6,3 literally says) — a procedure that also occurred in two stages.

Note that eating is the first and only act that the priests actively undertake during the seven days of ordination. After two sprinklings on the priests, of oil and of blood, Moses commands Aaron and his sons to boil the ram and eat it — with the bread in the basket of unleavened cakes — at the entrance of the tent of meeting: “Boil the flesh at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and eat it there with the bread that is in the basket of ordination offerings, as I was commanded, ‘Aaron and his sons shall eat it’” (Lev 8,31). The end of the verse is especially noteworthy: Moses emphasizes that there is a commandment to eat and even quotes it: “Aaron and his sons shall eat it”. This cannot do otherwise than to focus the reader’s attention on this key point, the climax of the ceremony [[40]](#footnote-40). The day is capped with this commandment — Aaron and his sons shall eat it, at God’s command.

In other words, the “filling of the priests’ hands” in the ordination passage focuses on qualifying their mouths to eat the sacrifices. This is achieved by offering the ram of ordination, sprinkling its blood on the priests, and eating it. It is easy to see how closely the priests’ eating the ram is linked with their ordination, as far back as Exodus 29:

“You shall take the ram of ordination, and boil its flesh in a holy place. And Aaron and his sons shall *eat* the flesh of the ram and the bread that is in the basket, at the entrance of the tent of meeting. They themselves shall *eat* the food by which atonement is made to ordain and consecrate them, but no one else shall *eat* of them, because they are holy. If any of the flesh for the ordination, or of the bread, remains until the morning, then you shall burn the remainder with fire. It shall not be *eaten*, because it is holy” (Exod 29,31–34).

The root אכל occurs four times in this passage: it must be eaten at the entrance to the tent of meeting; the priests eat the offerings by which atonement is made for them; it is forbidden for a non-priest to eat them; and it is forbidden to eat any that is leftover until morning.

The verse that calls for special clarification is this: “They themselves shall *eat* the food by which atonement is made to ordain and consecrate them” (v. 33). What role does the clause “to ordain and consecrate them” play in this verse? Is it in apposition to the clause “by which atonement is made”, giving us a sort of run-on sentence: “They shall eat the flesh and the bread — by which atonement has previously been made in order to ordain and consecrate them”? [[41]](#footnote-41) But if we read it this way, their ordination is achieved by the ram, in the process of offering it and putting its blood on their bodies. It may be, though, that this phrase is in apposition to what is mentioned at the beginning of the verse — “they shall eat them”. If this suggestion is correct, we would read the verse this way: “They shall eat the flesh of the ram and the bread — by which atonement has been made — in order to ordain and consecrate them” [[42]](#footnote-42). According to this reading, it would be eating the flesh that ordains the priests and consecrates them.

It is hard to decide between these two possibilities, but we lean toward the latter of them. It is hard to say that offering the ram and putting its blood on the priests “consecrates” them. Lepers have the blood of their offering put on them as well, and in that process there is no question of “consecration” [[43]](#footnote-43). Apparently only the repeated sprinkling of the blood taken from the altar *in combination with the anointment oil* consecrates the priests (Exod 29,21). If this reading is adopted, then Lev 8,33 says explicitly that eating is an indispensable component of ordaining the priests [[44]](#footnote-44).

This may also clarify the question previously raised — about putting the blood of ordination on the “horns” of the priests. The surprise of this action reveals its purpose: Blood that was intended for the altar to “eat” is placed on the priests as well, designating the priests themselves as an additional “horn” of the altar. From now on, they are an extension of the altar, and their own mouths can eat on its behalf.

It is interesting that the distinction between Aaron and his sons returns in this connection as well — as an additional result of the differing function of their vestments. The commandment to robe Aaron’s successors in the vestments for a week (Exod 29,29–30) is inserted between the description of the burning of the sacrificial parts of the ram of ordination and the commandment to boil and eat it. For some reason, robing Aaron’s successors in the vestments interrupts the sequence of the instructions for offering the ram of ordination. It would have been easy to place it instead at the end of the unit, after the description of the ritual of the ram.

The vestments have already been inserted into the text previously, and that, it seems, is where we find the answer to this problem. First it says that some of the blood of the ram, along with the oil, must be sprinkled on Aaron and his sons while they are wearing the vestments: “Then you shall take some of the blood that is on the altar, and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his vestments and on his sons and his sons’ vestments with him; then he and his vestments shall be holy, as well as his sons and his sons’ vestments” (Exod 29,21). It is not by chance that the vestments are grouped together with their wearers (Aaron and his vestments … his sons and their vestments), rather than grouping first the people and then the vestments (Aaron and his sons … and their vestments). The vestments too are consecrated by means of sprinkling the blood of the ram, mixed with the oil, on them. But this is a different kind of consecration, since Aaron’s vestments are “sacred vestments”, which enable him to enter the Holy of Holies, while his sons’ vestments enable them only to enter the courtyard of the tabernacle and to approach the outer altar and basin that are located there.

Therefore, after the description of the burning of the ram, the description of the days of ordination splits in two. First, there are instructions for the consecration of Aaron’s successor as high priest — on whom must be placed the vestments soaked with the blood of the ram and the anointing oil, the wearing of which for seven days qualifies him too to enter the sacred space — “The *sacred vestments* of Aaron shall be passed on to his sons after him; they shall be anointed in them and ordained in them. The son who is priest in his place shall wear them seven days, *when he comes into the tent of meeting to minister in the holy place*” (Exod 29,29–30). A simple reading of these verses tells us that there is no need to anoint every High Priest with oil, since the purpose of dressing them in the vestments is so that “they shall be anointed in them and ordained in them”. The vestments stand in for the anointment; this is how they ordain the High Priest.

Then the text immediately turns its focus on the actual sons of Aaron, in the sense of the lesser priests. How are they ordained? The answer lies in the eating of the ordination offering, which is described in great detail: “They themselves shall eat the food by which atonement is made, to ordain and consecrate them” (Exod 29,33). Aaron and his sons are both inserted into this description (see v. 32); after all, he too must approach the altar, and his mouth too must be “opened” for the purpose of eating the altar offerings.

In light of this role of the ram of ordination, we must understand its being eaten by the priests in a more complex way. They of course are functioning (chiefly) like people who bring *šelāmîm* offerings to the tabernacle, eating the flesh of their offering along with its basket of bread (and they therefore do *not* eat the breast and thigh that ordinarily go to the priests), but this particular act of eating must also be viewed through the lens of its being the very first act of eating that they carry out as “priests”: “Though Aaron and his sons in this sacrifice are in the role of worshippers rather than priests, they are told that they must eat the flesh of the peace offering within the precincts of the tabernacle… Aaron and his sons are being ordained to the priesthood, therefore they must eat the flesh of the sacrifice in the holy place” [[45]](#footnote-45). This is particularly in the unique rules for this ordination offering, which must be eaten at the entrance to the tent of meeting, and not outside the tabernacle. This requirement might be viewed as a technical result of the requirement that the priests remain in the courtyard of the tent of meeting for the whole of the seven days, but the instruction not to leave the tabernacle grounds for seven days is itself inserted later on in the chapter (vv. 33–35), and not mentioned at all in the instructions given in Exodus 29. From the wording of the verse, there appears to be special concern that the offering be eaten “at the entrance of the tent of meeting”, and it therefore appears that in eating it they also function, for the first time, as priests eating sacrificial meat, not merely as bringers of a *šelāmîm* offering, who may eat it in any pure place.

**The Ram of Ordination and *pīt pî***

If all this is so — that the main function of the days of ordination is connected to qualifying the priests to eat of the offerings — we may compare this ritual to the Mesopotamian ritual of “opening the mouth of the gods” [[46]](#footnote-46). In various texts from the ancient Near East we find a complex ritual that enables the mouth of a new idol to eat of the offerings that are brought before it and qualifies it to begin to function as a god [[47]](#footnote-47): “They had … to transform the lifeless matter into presence. During these nocturnal ceremonies they were endowed with ‘life’, their eyes and mouths were ‘opened’ so that the images could see and eat, and they were subject to the ‘washing of the mouth’, a ritual thought to impart special sanctity” [[48]](#footnote-48). The essence of the ritual focused on opening the mouth of the god so that it could eat [[49]](#footnote-49). The two main spells used in this connection were the “rinsing of the mouth” (*mīs pî*) and the “opening of the mouth” (*pīt pî*), which together enabled the statue to eat the foodstuffs and drink the liquids that were presented to it as a meal [[50]](#footnote-50).

If the role of the ram was to consecrate the priests so that they would be able to eat of the sacrifices brought to the altar, we may read the biblical ritual against the background of these rituals, since the two steps in question can also be found in the days of ordination: First, Moses (as king? as viceroy of the Lord?) washes the priests and purifies them; then he robes them in vestments of glorious adornment [[51]](#footnote-51); and finally he carries out the instructions that accompany the ram of ordination. This comprises the consecration of their mouths, which permits them to eat of the sacrificial offerings.

This resemblance also reveals the gap between the biblical “opening the mouth”, of the priests, and that which was customary in the ancient Near East [[52]](#footnote-52). In the Bible, no human being has the power to consecrate the mouth of God, nor is there any need to do so, since God himself does not eat the sacrifices that are presented before him. It is the mouths of his representatives, who do eat the sacrifices, that must be consecrated — that of the altar, on the one hand, and those of the priests, on the other.

**The Ordination Period and the Laws of Sacrifice (Leviticus 6–7)**

The role of the days of ordination in qualifying the priests to eat is directly connected to a reading of this passage against the background of the second list of sacrifices (Leviticus 6–7). Some argue that the legal and linguistic disparities between Leviticus 8–9 and the sacrifices unit of Leviticus 1–7 prove that the latter is an independent unit [[53]](#footnote-53). But the more widely accepted position, which views the days of ordination as a continuation of the sacrifices unit and in particular as the conclusion of the second list of sacrifices, appears to be the correct one [[54]](#footnote-54).

In this light, “the opening of the mouths of the priests” attains its full meaning. The second list of sacrifices (Leviticus 6–7) focuses on the eating of the sacrifices: We see this first with regard to the burnt offering, which is “eaten” by the altar: “He shall take up the ashes to which the fire has reduced [literally, “eaten”] the burnt offering on the altar” (Lev 6,3. Then, for the rest of the sacrifices, the focus is on the rules pertaining to the priests’ eating them. In this unit, the priests’ eating is not understood simply as a way to provide for the priests, but as a continuation of the same “eating” the altar has done, and as a continuation of the process by which the one who brought the sacrifice receives atonement.

It is therefore fitting that the ordination period, which concludes the second list of sacrifices, should clarify the connections of the priests with the altar, and how their hands were “filled” so that they would be able to eat the offerings sacrificed on the altar.

1. Weinel is correct that the description of the ordination procedure is organized around five components: purity; robing with the vestments; atonement; consecration; and the “filling of the hands” (H. Weinel, “משח und seine Derivate: Linguistisch–archäologische Studie”, *ZAW* 18 [1898] 42-43), but not all five of these elements are unique to the priests. Purity, for example, is required of the Levites as well (Num 8,6–7). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. As to the unique vestments demanded for the ceremony of cleansing the tabernacle, they are mentioned at the end and as a description of what is demanded of the priests, unlike the other two elements, which are incorporated directly in the description of the priest. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. M. B. Hundley, *Keeping Heaven on Earth.* Safeguarding the Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle (Tübingen 2011) 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See, e.g., the discussion in C. Houtman, “On the Function of the Holy Incense (Exodus xxx 34–8) and the Sacred Anointing Oil (Exodus xxx 22–33)”, *VT* 42 (1992) 458–465; A. Viberg, *Symbols of Law.* A Contextual Analysis of Legal Symbolic Acts in the Old Testament (Stockholm 1992) 89–119. See also Magness’ discussion on the absence of references to the anointing oil at Qumran and in Josephus: J. Magness, “The Impurity of Oil and Spit among the Qumran Sectarians”, *With Letters of Light.* Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Early Jewish Apocalypticism, Magic, and Mysticism (eds. A. A. Orlov – D. V. Arbel) (Berlin – New York 2010) 223–231. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. As is well known, there are contradictory sources with regard to the question of whether the sons of Aaron were also anointed or just Aaron himself (see Weinel, Linguistisch). Many scholars argue that priests were anointed only in the period after the destruction of the Temple, though Fleming has challenged this approach (D. Fleming, “The Biblical Tradition of Anointing Priests”, *JBL* 117 [1998] 401–414). In any case, it is universally agreed that even in passages where only the high priest is anointed, his sons are sprinkled with oil (Exod 29,21; Lev 8,30). It is therefore not relevant to our discussion; the oil consecrates all the priests, whether by anointing or by sprinkling (see further R. Rendtorff, *Leviticus 1.1–10.20* [BKAT; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1985] 285). In some of the texts where the sons of Aaron are described as being anointed with oil it is possible to argue that the reference is specifically to the successors of the high priest (as D. K. Stuart, *Exodus* [NAC; Nashville 2006] 622, n. 438 argues; and see further below), but in other places this reading is impossible, as in Exod 28,41 and 40,15. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. North tried to prove that anointing kings indicated that in the biblical view as well (not just in that of the rest of the ancient Near East) the kings were understood to have an intimate connection with God. But as even he emphasizes, while the anointment of priests is permanent, a king’s anointment can be nullified. Nowhere is there any hint that anointing a king turns him into someone with a sacral, priestly role (C. R. North, “The Religious Aspects of Hebrew Kingship”, *ZAW* 50 (1932) 8–38). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See K. Seybold, “משח”, *TDOT* 9: 45–46. On the question of whether all kings were anointed, see Weinel, Linguistisch, 21–23. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. “The interaction between the kings and the priesthood is one of the outstanding features of Israel’s history; in Israel – unlike the rest of the ancient Near East – the king himself never claimed to be a priest” (W. Dommershausen, “*kōhēn*”, *TDOT* 7: 73). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This is particularly apparent in the fact that the person anointing the king is the prophet or the priest (Weinel, Linguistisch, 23–25). In the Septuagint of 1 Sam 11,15 it appears that the people “anointed” (משכו) Saul; the Masoretic Text says that they “crowned” (וימליכו) him. If “anointed” is original, such anointment of a king by the people is certainly anomalous. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (trans. I. Abrahams; Jerusalem 1967) 371. See further: M. Ederer, *Identitätsstiftende Begegnung.* Die theologische Deutung des regelmäßigen Kultes Israels in der Tora (FAT 121; Tübingen 2018) 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Admittedly, at the end of this verse it also says “You shall then ordain Aaron and his sons”, but this concluding verset should be viewed as the transition to the next unit, which describes the priestly offerings. The expression “a perpetual ordinance” is common as the conclusion to a legal passage (as in Lev 7,36), and here too it apparently concludes the role of the vestments in “priestification”. After this component, the narrator transitions to the offerings of the days of ordination, which opens by saying “You shall then ordain Aaron and his sons”. See further below. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (NICOT; Grand Rapids 1979) 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Compare: Houtman, *Exodus*, 473. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. M. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford 1978) 165–174; F. H. Gorman Jr. *Ideology of Ritual Space Time and Status in the Priestly Theology* (JSOTSup 91; Sheffield 1990) 108; Hundley, *Keeping*, 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (AB; New York 1991) 232–233. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. On the meaning of the phrase “for glorious adornment”, see Ederer, *Identitätsstiftende Begegnung*, 72–73. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. There may be a semantic link between שׂרד and שׁרת, with interchange of ד and ת, and this sense of the word may be documented also in the Ugaritic Keret Epic (M. Held, “An Obscure Biblical Passage and Its Parallel in Ugaritic”, *Eretz-Israel* 3 [1954] 101–103). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. For example: W. H. Propp, *Exodus 19–40* (AB; New York 2006) 430. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Stuart, *Exodus*, 605. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See further C. Houtman, *Exodus* (vol. 3; HCOT; Leuven 2000) 466; N. MacDonald, “The Priestly Vestments”, *Clothing and Nudity in the Hebrew Bible* (ed. C. Berner, et. al.; London 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Propp, *Exodus*, 429; 619–620. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Nahum Sarna suggests that the verse refers not to the function of the breeches but to that of all the vestments (N. Sarna, *Exodus* [JPS; Philadelphia 1991] 186). If he is correct, our claim is further strengthened. But the simpler reading is that this is the conclusion of the instructions about the breeches. Note that since the role of the vestments is to turn the priests into those who minister to the Lord and can enter his tabernacle, the order in which the three components are mentioned in the passages that deal with the qualifying of the priests is clear: robing them in the vestments, anointing them with the oil, and ordaining them by means of the offerings. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Note that robing and anointing Aaron are accompanied by the expression “and consecrate him, that he may serve Me as priest” (v. 13). In light of our suggestion that the vestments are what make Aaron a priest and the anointing is what makes him sacred, it is clear that the verse is chiastic: A. Put the sacral vestments on Aaron ; B. and anoint him / C. and consecrate him / D. that he may serve Me as priest. The “vestments” at the beginning relate to “serve Me as priest” at the end; “anoint him”, in the middle, goes with “consecrate him” immediately following. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. So (e.g.) Weinel, who thinks that Exodus 29 is the main source for understanding the anointment also (Weinel, Linguistisch, 34). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Since Wellhausen, most scholars attribute (a significant portion of) Leviticus 8 to a later hand than Exodus 29 (J. Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* [4th edition; Berlin 1963] 142–144; J. Milgrom, “The Consecration of the Priests: A Literary Comparison of Leviticus 8 and Exodus 29”, *Ernten, was man sät* (eds. D. R. Daniels [et al.]; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1991) 273–286). Nonetheless, some have argued that Leviticus 8 is actually earlier, such as B. A. Levine, “The Descriptive Tabernacle Texts of the Pentateuch”, *JAOS* 17 (1965) 307–318; B. Janowski, *Sühne als Heilsgeschehen.* Studien zur Sühnetheologie der Priesterschrift und zur Wurzel KPR im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament (WMANT 55; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1982) 215, n. 168; R. Peter-Contesse, *Levitique 1–16* (CAT; Geneve 1993) 36. Others attribute the skeleton of both chapters to the same author, e.g. C. Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch.* A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus (FAT 2; Tübingen 2007) 124–147. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. This applies not only to the priests, but also to the anointing of the tabernacle and its utensils in the description of the ordination process (Lev 8,10–11), which is not mentioned at all in Exodus 29, but which precisely fulfills what Moses is required in Exod 40,9–11 to do (see especially Fleming: Anointing Priests, 411–413). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Weinel, Linguistisch, 46. Snijders writes that the term “ordination” applies, during the days of ordination, to the burnt offering (Lev 8,28) as well (L. A. Snijders, “מלא”, *TDOT* 8: 303). But it seems more likely that the verse on which he bases this does not describe the burnt offering but the ram of ordination and the basket of bread (vv. 22–28). It is unlikely that the burnt offering too “ordains the priests”. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. G. A. Klingbeil, “The Syntactic Structure of the Ritual of Ordination (Lev 8)”, *Biblica* 77 (1996) 510. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The Hebrew of Lev 8,28 refers to this offering in the plural — *milu’im hem* — and theoretically this might be suggested to refer back to all of the offerings, which would then collectively ordain the priests. But it should rather be seen as an intensive plural (GKC §124), “meaning something like ‘full atonement’” (V. P. Hamilton, *Exodus. An Exegetical Commentary* [Grand Rapids 2011] ???. It may also be possible that the plural was inserted here under the influence of the plural form *milu’im*. It is clear from the end of the verse that it is talking about a single offering: “it is an offering by fire to the Lord”. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Gorman, Ideology, 128, argues that “filling the hands” in Exodus 32 is later than the ordination pericope, being written to strengthen the position of the Levites and to depict them as similar to the priests. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. P. Jouön, “Locutions hébraïques”, *Biblica* 3 (1922) 64. His argument is supported as well by the resemblance of the biblical idiom to the Akkadian expression *mullü qātā* (= “to appoint someone to a post”). See especially M. Weinfeld, “Social and Cultic Institutions in the Priestly Source against their Ancient Near Eastern Background”, *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish* Studies: Bible Studies (Jerusalem 1981) 124–126. On the meaning of the requirement to remain within the sacred area for seven days, see G. A. Klingbeil, “Ritual Time in Leviticus 8 with special reference to the seven day period in the Old Testament”, *ZAW* 109 (1997) 500–513. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. J. P. Hyatt, *Exodus* (NCBC; London 1971) 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See also Gorman, *Ideology*, 129–130. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Rendtorff, *Leviticus*, 283. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. G. A. Anderson, “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings”, *ABD* 5: 878. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. This pattern is reminiscent of what happened during the making of the Sinai covenant. There too Moses took half the blood and sprinkled it on the altar, put the other half in basins, and sprinkled it on the people: “Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, ‘See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words’” (Exod 24,8). According to this, there may be an element of covenant-making in the dashing of this blood on the altar for the priests as well. See further in the direction of this reading in Weinel, Linguistisch, 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. B. A. Levine, *Leviticus* (JPS; Philadelphia 1989) 53; C. Eberhart, *Studien zur Bedeutung der Opfer im Alten Testament.* die Signifikanz von Blut- und Verbrennungsriten im kultischen Rahmen (Neukirchener Verlag 2002) 222–288. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 856. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. For a survey of this position, as well as some reservations about it, see Snijders, “מלא”, 302–303. This argument is part of the more general contention that the idiom “filling the hands” is based on actually putting something in someone’s hand; in our case, the priest’s hand is filled with the gifts he receives from the altar. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Several scholars consider eating the ram an addition to the ceremony of ordination, which they see as concluding with the sprinkling of the blood and the oil on the priests as described in v. 30 (e.g. Levine, *Leviticus*, 54). But Moses’ emphasizing that there is a commandment for the priests to eat it paints this act too as an essential component of the ceremony. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. This is way most modern translations take it. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. E.g. Snijders, “מלא”, 304. Compare, for example, 2 Kgs 10,29: “However, he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat – which he had caused Israel to commit (אשר החטיא את ישראל) – the worship of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan.” [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 529, who proves from this verse that the purpose of *putting* the blood on the priests is to make atonement for them. He distinguishes between *sprinkling* the blood on them, which is intended to consecrate, and *putting* the blood on them, which is intended to make atonement. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Perhaps that is why the boiling of the flesh is emphasized in this verse: “Die ausdriickliche Erwähnung des Kochens in 8,31 könnte in Parallele dazu verstanden werden, da nur in disen beiden Fällen die Priester das Opferfleisch essen. Der Rückverweis auf den göttlichen Befehl ‘wie mir befohlen worden ist’ hebt ebenfalls die Besonderheit dieses Verfahrens hervor” (Rendtorff, *Leviticus*, 286). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Wenham, *Leviticus*, 143–144. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Most of the evidence we have is from Mesopotamia. Nonetheless, Ann Roth has shown that the Egyptians too made use of this ritual. She even found a surprising overlap between Mesopotamian and Egyptian birthing rituals and rituals of opening the mouth of the gods (Roth, “Opening the Mouth”). [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. There is much scholarship on this ritual and its meaning. See, e.g., V. Hurowitz, “Isaiah’s Impure Lips and Their Purification in Light of Mouth Purification and Mouth Purity in Akkadian Sources”, *HUCA* 60 (1989), pp. 39–89 and the references given there. To read the texts themselves, see C. Walker – M. Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia.* The Mesopotamian *Mīs Pî* Ritual*.* Transliteration, Translation, and Commentary (Helsinki 2001). See also: M. Dietrich – O. Loretz, *“Jahwe und seine Aschera”.* Anthropomorphes Kultbild in Mesopotamien, Ugarit und Israel.Das biblische Bilderverbot (Münster 1992) 5–38. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia.* Portrait of a Dead Civilization (revised edition; Chicago 1977) 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. There is various evidence about who was responsible for these rituals. Victor Hurowitz has shown that sometimes the king was responsible, and sometimes it was other gods who opened the mouth of the new statue (V. Hurowitz, “עשה לך פסל”, *Bet Mikra* 40 [5755]: 337–347). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. M. J. H. Linssen, *The Cults of Uruk and Babylon.* The Temple Ritual Texts As Evidence for Hellenistic Cult Practices (Leiden – Boston 2004) 153–154. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. On the ritual of garbing the gods (*lubuštu* — not at their “birth” but regularly during the course of their “lives” — apparently once a week), see Linssen, *Uruk*, 51–56. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. McDowell argues that another biblical polemic against this ritual is found in the story of the creation of humanity in Genesis 1 and in the story of the Garden of Eden: C. L. McDowell, T*he Image of God in the Garden of Eden.* The Creation of Humankind in Genesis 2:5–3:24 in Light of the *mis pi pit pi* and *wpt-r* Rituals of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt (Winona Lake 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC; Texas 1992) 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. The main reason for a continuous reading of this kind is the insertion of the ordination offering as the conclusion of the second list of sacrifices (Lev 7,37). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)