Acts that work, texts that work

Ritual in the Hebrew Bible

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INTRODUCTION

The Hebrew Bible is a collection of texts teeming with ritual. This may be exemplified by the first book in that collection, Genesis. When Cain and Abel present their offering (מנחה) to Yahweh in Genesis 4, they perform a ritual, as does Noah in Genesis 8 when he offers burnt offerings (עלת) to Yahweh after the Flood. In Genesis 17, Abraham performs a ritual as he circumcises himself and his household as a sign of his covenant with God (cf. the Shechemites in Genesis 34) and again, when he buries his wife Sarah in Genesis 23 (cf. the burial of Abraham in Genesis 25, of Isaac in Genesis 35, and of Jacob in Genesis 50). In Genesis 28, Jacob performs a ritual as he makes a conditional vow (נדר) to Yahweh, promising yet more ritual activity, to set up a standing stone and create a sanctuary and to offer tithes there, if Yahweh will ensure his safety. These are all relatively clear examples of ritual practices and most readers and interpreters of the Hebrew Bible would recognize them as such.[1]

If the abovementioned examples are 'clear' cases of ritual in the Hebrew Bible, there are also less clear hints of possible ritual practices in the texts. For instance in Genesis 15, where Abraham sees a smoking oven and a burning torch pass through a row of severed animal carcasses. This text may allude to a ritual practice connected with covenant-making, the details of which are now long forgotten. Admittedly, the text may also simply be using the obscure as a narrative tool in order to relate an experience of divine revelation. A slightly less obscure reference to a seemingly ritualized gesture can be found in Genesis 24, where Abraham orders his servant to place his hand under Abraham's thigh (ירך) as he swears (שבע) an oath. This way of substantiating a speech act, a solemn promise, with a formalized gesture, placing one's hand on the recipient of the oath, can certainly be categorized as a ritual action. Similarly, the reference to bear children on the knees (ברך) of another woman in Genesis 30 may carry the echo of a ritual practice or gesture intended

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[1] These are also texts that have been commented upon and analysed extensively and repeatedly, but focused ritual theoretical analyses of these texts remain rare.

to transfer parentage from a child's biological parents to its adopted parents. Again, it may also merely be a figure of speech in biblical Hebrew. Along the same lines, and with a similar lack of clarity, the mention of a great feast (משתה) on the day of Isaac's weaning (גמל) in Genesis 21 may allude to a customary ritual celebration of an important transition in a young child's life. However, it may also simply be a detail included by the author in this particular narrative in order to stress a father's delight in his firstborn son.

Indeed, the Hebrew Bible is so teeming with ritual, explicit and implicit, clear and obscure, that theorizing is necessary to foreground it. In the next section, I shall give an introduction to the study of ritual and outline the most prominent currents in ritual studies in recent decades. Then I shall offer a brief survey of the kinds of ritual we find in the Hebrew Bible and of the kinds of texts and literary genres that we find these rituals in. Here, I divide the Hebrew Bible into two main parts, the so-called priestly texts in the Pentateuch that have an explicit and almost programmatic interest in ritual and the non-priestly texts in the Hebrew Bible, in which ritual plays a much more subtle role. I conclude this section with a discussion of method and application, in which I offer a few reflections on the literary character of ritual in the Hebrew Bible and how best to apply ritual theory to Hebrew Bible ritual texts ('Literary Ritual and Ritual Fiction'). In the last two sections of the chapter, I present two examples to demonstrate how ritual theory may guide and inform an analysis of ritual in the Hebrew Bible.[2] The first example is ritual mourning. In the Hebrew Bible, ritual mourning is a relatively uniform set of practices, such as the absence of hygiene and personal grooming, wailing, gestures of despair and fasting, but, depending on the context of these practices, the ritual has different audiences and serves different functions. For this study, I have chosen petitionary mourning, the performance of ritual mourning behaviour in order to appeal to a deity. I have chosen this example because it illustrates three aspects of ritual particularly well: first, the relationship between one ritual form and several ritual functions, second, the connection between the 'genre' or category of a ritual action and expectations of ritual efficacy, and third, it is a good example of ritual as a category of action that mirrors social action. The specific example of King David's performance of petitionary mourning in 2 Samuel 12 is also a very good example of how a description of ritual behaviour is used as a literary tool to characterize persons in Hebrew Bible texts. The second example is the ritual behaviour prescribed for a female prisoner of war and her Israelite captor in Deut. 21.12–13. This brief legal text describes what can be called a classic rite of passage, where one of the ritual actors, the female captive, undergoes a transformation and changes her social status from captive to wife. This ritual is a good example of ritual transformation and of the tension between ritual efficacy and individual disposition. It illustrates what Roy A. Rappaport has called the *meta-performativity* of ritual – the capacity that ritual behaviour has to establish conventions of how behaviour *should* be in spite of any resistance felt by individual ritual actors (1999: 123).

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[2]I have chosen my two examples in the sections 'Doing Things with Tears' and 'Ritual Transformation' from non-priestly Hebrew Bible texts, because so far in Hebrew Bible scholarship on ritual in general, and admittedly in my own research as well, the priestly texts have received far more attention than the non-priestly texts. With this study, I have decided to make a small contribution to correcting this bias. Readers with a particular interest in ritual theory applied to priestly texts may find Gudme 2009b on the Nazirite law in Numbers 6, Gudme 2013c on the Law of jealousy in Numbers 5 and Gudme forthcoming on the ritual use of incense in Exodus 30 and Leviticus 16 informative.

RITUAL AND RITUAL STUDIES

Ritual studies has emerged and developed as an interdisciplinary academic field in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[3] The main contributions to ritual studies come from anthropology and religious studies, but theology and biblical studies also have a growing place as contributors to this field. Historically, ritual has been somewhat overlooked – or even purposefully avoided – by theologians and biblical scholars, possibly because of an anti-ritual bias influenced by Christian Protestant theology's wariness of ritual practices and 'works' in general (cf. Bell 2006: 399). Since the late twentieth century, however, ritual has increasingly come into focus in biblical studies as a steadily growing corpus of ritual-focused publications can attest.[4] Although this chapter is part of a companion to anthropology and the Hebrew Bible, I shall not limit myself to a survey of specifically anthropological contributions to ritual studies and ritual theory, but rather try to give a concise and functional summary of how ritual studies have developed in a conversation between anthropology, religious studies and their cognate academic fields. My aim is to provide a conceptual foundation and a theoretical toolbox for analysing ritual in the Hebrew Bible.

From defining to characterizing ritual

The first challenge that faces anyone interested in the study of ritual is the problem of definition and delineation. What exactly *is* a ritual? Whereas most people have an almost intuitive understanding of ritual and recognize it as a category of action when they see it performed in real life or described in a text (cf. Sørensen 2007: 33–45), it has proven impossible to formulate a commonly agreed upon definition of what constitutes a ritual. In 1979, the social anthropologist Stanley J. Tambiah suggested a definition of ritual as 'a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotype (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition)' (1979: 119).

A shorter but somewhat similar definition was formulated by the anthropologist Roy A. Rappaport in his both metaphorically and literally big book on ritual published posthumously in 1999: 'the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers' (1999: 24).

In both of these oft-quoted definitions of ritual, aspects such as formality, order, repetition/invariance and cultural encoding or construction are stressed. This stress is echoed in two 'lists' of characteristic features of ritual actions: the first was compiled by

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[3]For good introductions to the most important themes in ritual studies and to the history of research, see Bell 1997, 2006; Kreinath, Snoek and Stausberg 2006, 2007; Brosius, Michaels and Schrode 2013.

[4]It is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer an attempt at a comprehensive bibliography of literature on ritual in the Bible, but two recent publications in the influential Oxford Handbook series may serve to illustrate the place that ritual now has in biblical studies. In 2019, Oxford University Press published *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ritual* (Uro et al. 2019), and in 2020 followed *The Oxford Handbook of Ritual and Worship in the Hebrew Bible* (Balentine 2020). Ritual has clearly moved from the periphery to the centre of biblical studies. It remains the case, however, that scholarship on ritual in the Bible tends to be quite undertheorized. This is regrettable, not only because theorizing can lift the quality of the analysis but also, and especially, because clear application of theory and method is the kind of scholarly 'conversation starter' that would enable a fruitful dialogue between biblical studies and cognate disciplines.

the anthropologists Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw in their 1994 publication on the *Archetypal Actions of Ritual*, and the second was put together by the scholar of religion and highly influential ritual theorist Catherine Bell a few years later, in 1997. Humphrey and Laidlaw's list comprises non-intentional, stipulated, elemental and archetypal and apprehensible (1997: 89). Bell's list of characteristics of ritual actions include formalism, traditionalism, invariance, rule-governance, sacral symbolism and performance (1997: 139–69). The strengths of these attempts to define ritual or to make a catalogue of ritual's most prominent features are that they do seem to capture what most people would identify as ritual. They all stress ritual as ordered, repetitive and sequential. They also stress ritual as formalized or stipulated and they all hint at the fact that ritual can somehow be apprehended or received, but that the message or communication in ritual is not necessarily invented by the ritual performers. Finally, there is a stress on performance, that ritual takes the form of acts and utterances. The weakness of these and many other attempts to define ritual is that they are not quite able to capture this phenomenon, which is seemingly formalized, rigid and invariant, but which may also sometimes be spontaneous, innovative and dynamic (Grimes 2000: 261–2).[5] There is an archaizing quality to the ritual form that gives the impression that a given ritual has been prescribed since the dawn of time, even if it is in fact performed for the very first time (cf. Bell 1997: 145–50, 2006: 397–8).

The steadily growing interest in ritual across academic disciplines has led to an increase in descriptions of ritual phenomena. This in turn has led to a dawning awareness that no one definition of ritual is going to sufficiently encompass all of ritual, just as no single 'big' theory of ritual will ever sufficiently map and explain all that ritual is and does (cf. Bell 2006: 406). Thus, generally, scholarship on ritual is gradually moving away from firm definitions of what a ritual is and towards more polythetic and fuzzy ways of categorizing rituals as phenomena that share a number of features, none of which are essential in itself for their categorization as ritual (Snoek 2006: 4–6; McClymond 2008: 25–34). In this way, it is possible to theorize actions as 'more or less' ritual, rather than as 'either or'. It follows from this way of thinking flexibly and dynamically about ritual that the working definition of ritual that one chooses, as well as the theoretical approaches that one applies, depends on the rituals that one wishes to study. In the following, I shall outline the most prominent 'trends' in ritual theory. This is not intended as a comprehensive history of research on ritual, but rather as a road map for choosing a fruitful theoretical angle when working on ritual.

Ritual between the social and the sacred

Historically, the most dominant trend in ritual studies has certainly been the investigation of the interrelationship between ritual and society. This kind of investigation enquires into the social functions of ritual actions and it is therefore sometimes referred to as social functionalism, or just functionalism (Bell 1997: 23–60). An early example of this line of enquiry is the French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), whose intellectual legacy is keenly felt in much sociological and anthropological scholarship of the twentieth

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[5]In an attempt to capture the dynamic and diverse nature of ritual, Ronald Grimes lists the key dynamics of ritual as four paradoxical pairs: (1) rituals empower and disempower groups, (2) rituals attune and disattune bodies, (3) rituals reinforce the status quo and enact transformation, and (4) rituals make and unmake meaning (2014: 302–28).

century. In his 1912 book, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Durkheim described ritual as behavioural rules intended to regulate between the domains of the profane and of the sacred, and particularly to regulate interaction with and behaviour around sacred objects (2001 [1912]: 40). Durkheim stressed that religious ritual is performed explicitly for the benefit of the sacred or the gods, but that it has a side effect, which is to recreate and reinvigorate the social (ibid.: 157–9, 283–5). When ritual participants come together to perform a ritual, they experience a feeling of 'effervescence', an experience of being part of something bigger than themselves, and this is the engine that fuels moral life and makes society possible. When a group comes together to perform a ritual, it both maintains and reaffirms itself, and thus ritual performance becomes as necessary to the moral life of society as ingestion of food is to physical life (ibid.: 284).

There is a clear line running from Durkheim's thoughts on ritual and society to the work of Rappaport and his 1999 monograph *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, mentioned above. Rappaport also saw ritual as the foundation for human society. Rappaport divided ritual into two types of messages, canonical and self-referential. The self-referential messages say something about the current physical, mental and social state of the participants, whereas the canonical messages are the liturgical order or world view encoded in the ritual (1999: 50–2).[6] The canonical messages are what is seemingly invariable and eternal in the ritual whereas the self-referential messages take advantage of the variance in the ritual situation, namely who participates, how many participate, *if* one participates at all etc. (ibid.: 53–4). The self-referential and canonical messages relate to each other as respectively the form and substance of a ritual, and Rappaport further described their function by reference to the sign theory developed by C.S. Peirce. The canonical messages relate to their content as a *symbol* relates to that which it signifies, that is a relation, which is purely arbitrary and established by law or convention. The self-referential messages, on the other hand, relate to their content as an *index* relates to its object, i.e. a relation where the index is directly affected by or connected with its object. As she performs the ritual, the ritual participant becomes an index of the abstract content of the canonical message (ibid.: 54–8). Since the canonical messages are symbols and their relation to their content is arbitrary, theoretically this content could just as well be expressed in another form, for instance in a text, but it is the ritual form and the combination of the canonical and self-referential messages that make the ritual situation unique. The ritual form adds to the symbolically encoded ritual substance something that the ritual substance cannot express on its own, and the ritual form depends on the ritual substance in order to be interpreted and understood. Abstract concepts such as honour, faith and valour are realized when they are given a bodily sign in ritual (ibid.: 31, 58). By participating in a ritual, the ritual actor indicates to himself and to anyone present, acceptance of the canonical message, which is encoded in the ritual. Acceptance, however, is not the same as personal belief and a person may disagree with the canonical message in a given ritual and still perform the ritual (ibid.: 119–20). The implied acceptance of a ritual's canonical message does not guarantee that the ritual participant will support this world view in the future and promises or commitments given in a ritual may be broken. However, because the ritual participant has communicated acceptance of the ritual order by participating in the ritual, any actions against the ritual order will be perceived as a transgression. The ritual participant's implied acceptance does not guarantee how the

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[6]There is a brief and helpful introduction to Rappaport's ritual theory in Jensen 2009.

ritual participant's actions *will* be, but it does create a convention of how the ritual participant's actions *should* be (ibid.: 123). To Rappaport this is the *meta-performativity* of ritual. Ritual is merely *performative* when it performs a conventional act, such as a marriage or a baptism, but ritual is *meta-performative* when at the same time it establishes and supports the conventions, which are the basis of the conventional act (ibid.: 278–80). Because of ritual's meta-performativity Rappaport names ritual *the* basic social act. By creating and maintaining social conventions and norms, ritual makes the social contract possible, which in turn makes human society possible (ibid.: 125–6, 138).

Practising bodies

Rappaport stressed two aspects of ritual in particular: first that ritual is *communicative*, that it contains some kind of message and, second, that ritual is *performed*. This dual stress on communication and performance can also be found in other influential scholars' work on ritual, such as in the work of another Durkheimian, the British social anthropologist Mary Douglas (1921–2007). In her work on ritual, Douglas combined Durkheimian influence with regard to religion and the social with structuralism inspired by the work of Claude Lévi–Strauss (cf. Bell 1997: 43–6). Douglas saw ritual as a communicative system that conveyed the values of a social group, such as the group's system of categorization, its hierarchies and its social organization (2003: 53–4). The performance of ritual communicates these values to the ritual participants and in this way ritual has a regulatory effect on social behaviour. Douglas's work on ritual impurity has had a significant impact on Hebrew Bible scholarship, especially in relation to the dietary laws in Leviticus 11 (cf. Deuteronomy 14) and to the 'priestly' (see 'Ritual in the Priestly Text of the Hebrew Bible' below) world view in the Pentateuch in general.[7] Douglas' work, however, is also a good illustration of the methodological challenges posed by an approach that views ritual as communication, because it presupposes that we are able to 'read' and decipher this communication. It follows that our understanding of a ritual performance is dependent upon our ability to 'crack its code'.

Rappaport stressed that there is no intrinsic relationship between a ritual's form and a ritual's substance. For instance, there is nothing in the act of scooping handfuls of water onto an infant's head that in itself signals baptism just as there is no natural connection between the act of touching a person's shoulders with a sword and receiving the accolade (1999: 114–15). The connection between the ritual form and substance is based solely on convention, and therefore in order to decipher the message communicated in a certain ritual one will have to be socialized into or in another way informed of this ritual's symbolic system (cf. ibid.: 106, 111). In her study on Hebrew Bible dietary laws, 'The Abominations of Leviticus', which was part of her 1966 monograph *Purity and Danger* (2002: 51–71), Douglas suggested an interpretative key to the classification of clean and unclean animals in Leviticus 11. Here, the category clean corresponded with holiness, wholeness and perfection, whereas unclean was attached to the species that were perceived to be either imperfect examples of their class or whose class itself was seen to go against the scheme of the world as expressed in the creation account in Genesis 1 (ibid.: 67–71). According to Douglas, 'the dietary laws would have been like signs which at every turn

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[7]See especially Douglas 2002, which was originally published in 1966, and her renewed interest in the books of Leviticus and Numbers in Douglas 1999 and 2004.

inspired meditation on the oneness, purity and completeness of God' (ibid.: 71). Douglas's work received much praise and a great following, but also much criticism, which she addressed and largely acceded to in her preface to the Routledge Classics edition of *Purity and Danger* published in 2002 (ibid.: xiii–xvi; see also Hendel 2008). In this preface, Douglas among other things noted 'the absence of any positive implications for the social system of the biblical Hebrews for whom the rules were made' (Douglas 2002: xiv). To place this in the context of the present discussion on ritual as a mode of communication, there was no positive information in the Hebrew Bible to support that Douglas's way of deciphering the system behind the dietary laws was correct, nor that it was a symbolic system that would have been recognized by the authors of these texts. As a twentieth-century scholar, Douglas had obviously not been socialized into an *emic* understanding of these ancient texts and the texts themselves did not give the key to the deciphering of their symbolic communication. It goes almost without saying that limited or no access to the substance of a ritual action, its symbolism or meaning, is a recurring methodological challenge to scholars studying the rituals of ancient societies. More often than not ancient ritual texts and iconography does not come with an interpretative key that may 'socialize' us into the ritual's symbolic universe. Anthropological research has shown, however, that scholars who study contemporary ritual and who have performances to watch and ritual participants and experts to interview, are in fact not much better off. In their study on the Jain *Puja* ritual, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual*, Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw clearly demonstrated that both ritual experts and 'ordinary' ritual participants gave a multitude of different answers and interpretations, when asked about the 'meaning' of the ritual they performed (1994: 16–57). Based on the results of Humphrey and Laidlaw's fieldwork, the Puja ritual did not communicate one message or meaning, but rather *at least* one meaning per ritual participant. Humphrey and Laidlaw summarized this in the following way: 'Ritual acts are publicly stipulated cultural constructs, yet wide variations in how they are enacted and how they are thought about indicate that while they are in this sense not individual, they are not completely shared either' (ibid.: 133). This research indicates that the quest to decipher and 'read' a message communicated through a ritual performance may be slightly off point, because there is not necessarily a commonly agreed upon and previously encoded message built into the ritual.[8] At least if this message is there, it may be accessible neither to the ritual actors nor to an outside observer and interpreter. The ritual performance itself is all there is, and in as far as there is communication in ritual, the performance of the ritual *is* the message, or at least it is the only message that we have access to. If we frame this in Rappaport's terminology, the indexical messages is all we have, whereas the canonical messages are either non-existent or inaccessible.[9]

Humphrey and Laidlaw's work also indicates that we should see the ascription of 'meaning' to a ritual performance as a secondary product of the act rather than as a primary prerequisite for the ritual (1994: 64–81).[10] Whereas Douglas and other scholars of her

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[8]Cf. the discussion in Jay 1992: 8–16.

[9]Interestingly, scholars of contemporary ritual have been more ready to adopt this insight than their colleagues studying ancient ritual (but see the recent treatment of this topic in Gilders 2020: 136–7). This is presumably because living ritual participants and ritual experts are able to disagree with the ways in which ritual scholars decode and 'translate' their ritual behaviour, whereas historical ritual texts and other expressions of ritual material culture are unable to 'talk back'.

[10]Cf. the critique of Mary Douglas in Kazen 2011: 23–4, and Lemos 2013.

generation imagined a symbolic system or message, which was communicated through the medium of ritual, Humphrey and Laidlaw suggested that we start with an action or a practice, which undergoes *ritualization* over time and thus becomes ritual (ibid.: 88–110, 153–5). The process of ritualization introduces a shift in the intentionality of an action and in the connection between the purpose of an action and this action's form. Whereas in everyday quotidian actions there usually is a strong and immediately perceptible link between purpose and form, this link is undermined by ritualization and appears weak in ritual actions (ibid.: 167–87). The disconnection between purpose and form in ritual actions creates a 'gap', which then calls for meaning and interpretations (ibid.: 191–208).

A focus on ritual as practice is also voiced in Catherine Bell's 1992 monograph, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, in which she proposes a 'practice approach' to ritual, inspired by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Bell 1992: 74–93). Bell sees ritual as one social practice among many, and she stresses the fact that ritual is *embodied* and that the performance of ritual requires bodily ritual mastery (ibid.: 94–108).[11] In the decades following the publication of *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, it has become increasingly common in scholarship to focus on the embodied and performative aspects of ritual. This is a development which is well aligned with the general 'material turn' in the humanities in general and in religious studies in particular, where the past three decades has seen an increasing focus on practices and on the materiality of religion, rather than on beliefs and ideas (Hazard 2013; Roberts 2017).

Acts that work

The latest trend in recent ritual theory, which I would like to highlight for the purpose of this study, is an increased focus on ritual as a category of action and on how ritual actions are efficacious. This trend has been influenced significantly by the emergence of the cognitive science of religion although it is not limited to the work of scholars, who study the relationship between human cognition and religion.[12]

In their 2002 monograph, *Bringing Ritual to Mind*, the religious studies scholar Robert N. McCauley and the philosopher Thomas E. Lawson presented their 'theory of religious ritual competence' (2002: 8), in which they described religious rituals within the framework of an Action Representation System (ibid.: 13–16). According to McCauley and Lawson, a religious ritual is an action that contains the roles of 'agent', 'act' and 'patient' and in which one of these roles includes a reference to a so-called 'culturally postulated superhuman' (CPS) agent (ibid.: 8).[13] Depending upon the role of the CPS

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[11]For an example of an application of Bell's practice approach to ancient Near Eastern ritual, see Neumann 2019.

[12]Of the scholars mentioned in the section, Robert N. McCauley, Thomas E. Lawson and Justin Barrett all self-identify as working within the paradigm of the cognitive science of religion, whereas Jørgen Podemann Sørensen and Catherine Bell do not.

[13]In their later work, McCauley and Lawson changed their terminology from 'culturally postulated superhuman agent' (CPS agent) to 'counter intuitive agent' (CI agent), cf. McCauley and Lawson 2007. One disadvantage of McCauley and Lawson's definition of religious ritual is that it is rather exclusive:

> Our claim that all religious rituals (as opposed to religious action more broadly construed) include an agent doing something to a patient departs from popular assumptions. Priests sacrifice goats, ritual participants burn offerings, and pilgrims circle shrines, but people also pray, sing, chant, and kneel. Even though such religious activities may be parts of religious rituals, in and of themselves they do not qualify as religious rituals in our theory's technical sense.
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> —McCauley and Lawson 2007: 223

agent in the ritual action, McCauley and Lawson classify religious rituals as 'special agent rituals', 'special patient rituals' and 'special instrument rituals'. In special agent rituals, the CPS agent or a representative of the CPS agent fills the place of the agent in the ritual. Examples of special agent rituals are initiations, consecrations and ordinations. Special patient rituals are rituals where the CPS agent occupies the patient slot in the Action Representation System, i.e. rituals where someone does something to the gods, such as presenting them with gifts. The third and final category, special instrument rituals, includes rituals where the closest link with the CPS agent is in the act/instrument slot. A good example of special instrument rituals is rituals of divination, in which a particular object or substance is manipulated in order to divine the will of the gods. Along similar lines, in an article co-authored with Justin Barrett, Lawson describes ritual actions as mirror images of social actions in the sense that 'someone performs some kind of action in order to motivate another's action or change in disposition' (Barrett and Lawson 2001: 185).[14]

A focus on agency in ritual and on ritual as a category of action that mirrors social action can be fruitful in an analysis of ritual, because it helps to shift attention away from the social functions of ritual in order to focus on the purpose of the ritual, what the ritual participants expect their ritual to *do*.[15] This is not to say that the social function of ritual is not important to a ritual analysis, but simply to stress that ritual's impact on society and on social structures is only part of the picture. Ritual participants perform ritual for a variety of reasons, reasons that they may be more or less conscious of having, and quite often it seems that the society – facilitating aspects of ritual behaviour, which I described above, are not among the salient reasons for performing a ritual.[16] Ritual is performed rather in order to please the gods, to cure an illness, to initiate a priestess or simply to do 'good' in a vague or general sense, because there is a perception that the world *with* this ritual performance is in some way better than *without* it. This stress on the purpose or efficacy of a ritual action can be seen for instance in the work of historian of religion Jørgen Podemann Sørensen, who defines ritual as 'representative acts designed to change or maintain their object' (Podemann Sørensen 1993: 19–20). The aims of ritual actions can be as diverse as to uphold the cosmos, to cure gout or to make it rain. What ritual actions have in common is that they are designed to *work*, to have an effect: 'A ritual is designed and performed on the assumption that once it is accomplished, the world is not quite what it would have been without the ritual' (ibid.: 18). It is the context of each individual ritual that determines what the ritual is expected to achieve in a given situation. To illustrate this Podemann Sørensen mentions the singing of a hymn in different ritual circumstances. If the hymn 'A

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[14]See also Lawson and McCauley 1990. According to Barrett and Lawson, the objective of ritual actions is to bring about 'non-natural' consequences. 'That is, rituals are actions that are performed to accomplish something that would not normally follow from this specific action. For example, a person who strikes a special pot in order to bring rain would be performing a ritual; whereas, a person who strikes a special pot in order to create pottery fragments, would not be performing a ritual' (2001: 184). This attempt to discern between ordinary quotidian actions and ritual actions is quite similar to what Humphrey and Laidlaw do in their description of ritualization, which I summarized above. Seen from an etic perspective, this division works, but seen from an emic perspective striking a special pot in order to make it rain or indeed applying blood to a curtain in order to purify it from ritual impurity (cf. Lev. 16.14) may be just as 'natural' as striking a pot in order to break it. Cf. Bell 1992: 72.

[15]Along similar lines, Ronald Grimes discerns between ritual intentions, ritual functions and ritual effects (2014: 301).

[16]With terminology borrowed from the sociologist Robert K. Merton, William K. Gilders discerns between the 'manifest' and the 'latent' functions of ritual (2004: 181–91). Manifest functions are consciously attributed by actors to their actions, whereas latent functions are generally not recognized.

Mighty Fortress Is Our God' is sung in church during a regular Sunday service its aim or purpose appears to be primarily maintaining and laudatory. However, if the same hymn is sung at sea during an awful storm the purpose of the ritual may take on a new sense of urgency and it may now be intended to rescue the ritual participants from drowning (Podemann Sørensen 2006a: 66–7; see also Podemann Sørensen 2006b).

It is the context of a ritual performance and not the ritual's form that determines the purpose of a given ritual action (cf. DeMaris 2018: 6–11). Catherine Bell has proposed six 'basic genres of ritual actions' (1997: 93–137). These are: Rites of Passage; Calendrical Rites; Rites of Exchange and Communion; Rites of Affliction; Feasting, Fasting, and Festivals; and Political Rites. Most rituals will match more than one of these basic genres, but quite often one genre does appear to be leading in relation to a given ritual more than the other genres. In this way, Bell's basic ritual genres may be a helpful tool in determining the purpose of a ritual action, what this particular ritual action is expected to have an effect on and to either change and maintain.

RITUAL IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

Ritual in the Hebrew Bible falls into roughly two categories: ritual that appears in the so-called priestly texts in the Pentateuch and ritual in 'the rest' of the Hebrew Bible. In the following, I shall first give a brief presentation of the latter, followed by a short introduction to the former and then, finally, offer a few reflections on the literary character of ritual in the Hebrew Bible and how best to interpret these texts using anthropology and ritual theory.

Ritual in the non-priestly texts of the Hebrew Bible

As we saw in the rough survey of the Book of Genesis in the Introduction above, the narrative texts in the Hebrew Bible have plenty of more or less explicit references to ritual practices. Just as we are told that the characters in the narrative stand up or sit down, we are also frequently informed that these characters engage in some kind of ritual performance. The challenge posed by these references to ritual practice is that they are usually incredibly terse and offer little or no detail. As an example, let us return to the text in Gen. 23.19, where it says that 'Abraham buried (קבר) Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah facing Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan'.[17] This brief description leaves the reader enlightened as to the where, but completely in the dark when it comes to the how. How is a burial or just this particular burial performed?[18]

Similarly, in Josh. 5.3, we are told that 'Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath-haaraloth', but we are not given any details about how a circumcision is performed. For that matter, we are not told how to make flint knives either. This lack of detail on ritual in most Hebrew Bible narrative texts can probably be explained by a combination of overlapping factors. The author did not think that the details of the ritual practice were particularly important to include in the narrative, either because they were

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[17]Here and in the following, I use the NRSV translation of the Hebrew Bible unless otherwise stated.
[18]For more on burial in the Hebrew Bible, see Bloch-Smith 1992: 114–20 and see 2 Samuel 31–37. For death and care for the dead in the Hebrew Bible, although not with an explicit interest in ritual theory, see Ackerman 1992: 143–51; Schmidt 1996: 1–13, 132–273; Stavrakopoulou 2010: 1–53; Suriano 2018; and Sonia 2020.

of no consequence to the story that was being told or because it was assumed that they needed no explanation, because the intended audience were as familiar with them as they needed to be. Either way, it is clear that the authors of the majority of Hebrew Bible texts have no particular interest in educating their readership on ritual. This is illustrated quite well by the Joshua passage mentioned above. Joshua 5 is completely silent to the how of the circumcision, but it does give us an answer to the why. The problem is that it is not the kind of answer we want. Josh. 5.4 begins in a very promising way by saying 'this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them'. The reason follows in v. 5: 'all the people born on the journey through the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised'. Joshua circumcised the Israelites because they were uncircumcised. As Nancy Jay (1992: 9) writes: 'Why he should circumcise them in the first place is not considered to need explanation. What was problematical to the author of Joshua was not circumcision itself, but rather why all those grownup Israelites were uncircumcised. The interpretation in Jos. 5 is disappointing because it is an explanation for someone else, in some other situation, not one for us.'

If we turn to other literary genres in the Hebrew Bible, such as law texts, poetics texts, wisdom texts and prophetic texts, we also find relatively frequent and quite compact references to ritual. So, for instance in Ps. 66.13–15, where the psalmist promises to come to Yahweh's temple to pay the conditional vows (נדרי) he made to him, when he was in trouble. The psalmist intends to offer several animals as burnt offerings (עלות), fatlings, rams, bulls and goats, but that is as much detail as we get in this passage both on the ritual practice of making and paying conditional vows and on the ritual practice of making animal sacrifices.[19] Similarly, in Prov. 15.8 the sacrifice (זבח) of the wicked is compared with the prayer (תפלה) of the upright, but no additional information is offered on either practice.

As the analysis of our two Hebrew Bible examples of ritual below will show, this lack of detail in the texts does not mean that nothing whatsoever can be said about ritual practices in the Hebrew Bible. Sometimes a little actually does go a long way. It does mean, however, that one should be conscious of the limitations of the data and refrain from trying to make it yield more information than it reasonably can (cf. Gudme 2009a; Gilders 2020).

Ritual in the priestly texts of the Hebrew Bible

Whereas the majority of texts in the Hebrew Bible seem to have been written by authors who took no particular interest in the details of ritual, the authors of the so-called priestly texts in the Pentateuch seem to care for little *else* than ritual. The priestly texts are concentrated especially in the books of Exodus and Leviticus, and they offer a systematic description of Yahweh's sanctuary and the rituals to be performed there.[20] These texts

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[19]For more on conditional vows in the Hebrew Bible, see Cartledge 1992; Berlinerblau 1996; Gudme 2013a: 41–3, 2013b.

[20]The idea of a priestly textual layer or redaction in the Pentateuch originates from the early era of historical-critical biblical scholarship and the so-called documentary hypothesis; see Carr 2016: 106–14. For the priestly writings specifically, see Gorman 1997: 2–5; Hundley 2011: 1–4. For the sake of the example and simplicity, I have chosen not to include texts that seem to be ideologically related to the priestly writings, such as the holiness code in Leviticus 17–26 and the book of Ezekiel, in the discussion here, but much of what I say about the priestly texts as literary ritual in 'Literary Ritual and Ritual Fiction' below could be applied to these texts as well.

have been designated as 'priestly' in Hebrew Bible scholarship, because their focus on temple ritual and on priestly privileges makes it seem plausible that the authors were indeed priests of Yahweh by profession. Traditionally, the priestly texts have been dated to the Persian period and it is often assumed that their authors were affiliated with the Jerusalem temple in postexilic Judah/Yehud.[21]

The priestly texts are characterized by a certain literary style, by the use of a distinct terminology and by a kind of narrative logic with which it orders a body of texts that are primarily composed of ritual 'laws', divinely ordained prescriptions for the ideal Yahwist sanctuary according to the priestly authors.[22] The texts gain divine authority from the story of the revelation on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19 and 24).[23] The priestly prescriptions for the tent of meeting, Yahweh's transportable sanctuary, and the ritual practices that pertain to it, are placed in the deity's mouth as they follow immediately after the event of the revelation (Exod. 25.1–9).[24] Although the bulk of text that follows in Exodus 25–40 (minus the incident of the golden calf in chs 32–34) and Leviticus 1–16 contains very little actual narrative, the priestly ritual texts do seem to be ordered according to a narrative logic or sequence, where the various components of the sanctuary and its rituals are 'told' in the right order. First, in Exodus 25–31 Yahweh gives his instructions for the construction and furnishing of the tent of meeting. Then, in Exodus 35–40 the text meticulously and rather repetitively relates how everything is carried out in exact accordance with Yahweh's instructions, and finally, in Exod. 40.34–35, Yahweh moves in to his new sanctuary and dwells among his people exactly as he said he would in Exod. 25.8.

The careful construction of the sanctuary according to divine command is the prerequisite for installing the divine presence (cf. Exod. 40.34), in the *adyton* of the sanctuary. The indwelling of the divine presence in turn is the prerequisite for the ritual laws that follow in Leviticus 1–16, where prescriptions are given for the two most important general ritual categories in the priestly material; how to correctly present sacrifices and offerings to Yahweh (Leviticus 1–7) and how to identify, avoid and dispose of ritual impurities (Leviticus 11–15).[25] Finally, in ch. 16, the final building block is put into place as Yahweh instructs Moses on how to perform the annual ritual for purification of the sanctuary on the day of atonement or Yom Kippur. In sum, the bulk of priestly texts that stretches from Exodus 25 to Leviticus 16 can be read as a carefully constructed

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[21]This remains the majority view on the dating of the priestly texts, but a minority sees these texts as pre-exilic or even premonarchic and possibly connected with the sanctuary in Shiloh, see Milgrom 1991: 3–35; Grabbe 2001: 92–4; Nihan 2007: 1–17.

[22]Helpful descriptions of characteristic priestly literary style and priestly theology can be found in Gorman 1990: 39–60; Jenson 1992: 15–39.

[23]The priestly 'law' is one among several Hebrew Bible law collections that draw authority from the narrative of the revelation on Mount Sinai. The same can be said about the two versions of the Decalogue (Exod. 20.1–21 and Deut. 5.1–22), the so-called 'Covenant Code' (Exod. 20.22–23.33), the 'Holiness Code' (Leviticus 17–26) and the 'Deuteronomic Law' (Deuteronomy 12–26).

[24]George 2009: 133–4. For the description of the sanctuary in Exodus 25–31 and 35–40, see Gudme 2014b: 2*–6*.

[25]These two blocks of ritual laws are linked by descriptions of the initiation of the priesthood (Leviticus 8) and the High Priest, Aaron's, first sacrifice (Leviticus 9), which is followed by the first illegitimate offering in Leviticus 10. The text instructively juxtaposes Aaron's first successful sacrifice, which is consumed on the altar by a fire that emanates from Yahweh's divine presence inside the tent of meeting (Lev. 9.24), with the unauthorized incense offering by Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu. In this way, the benefits of performing rituals in accordance with Yahweh's instructions and the consequences of not doing so are very clearly illustrated in the text (Gorman 1997: 54–67).

assembly set for the ideal cult of Yahweh. First, Yahweh gives his instructions for the cult (Exodus 25–31), then Moses and Israel carry them out (Exodus 35–40), so that Yahweh can move into his new dwelling (Exod. 40.34–35). As soon as the divine presence is installed in the sanctuary, the rituals for guaranteeing divine satisfaction, sacrifices and purifications (Leviticus 1–16), are put into place (Gorman 1990: 45–8; Hundley 2011: 91–3).

Compared with the non-priestly texts in the Hebrew Bible, the priestly texts are abundant in ritual details. To mention but a few examples, they specify the dress code for the High Priest (Exodus 28), the ingredients for the sacred anointing oil (Exod. 30.22–24), what exactly a grain offering must consist of (Leviticus 2) and how to detect the ritually problematic skin disease (Leviticus 13). At the same time, in spite of their meticulous wealth of detail on the how of ritual, the priestly texts are practically silent on the why (cf. Gilders 2004: 58). Much like their non-priestly colleagues, the priestly authors do not feel a need to explain why exactly all *fat* belongs to Yahweh (Lev. 3.16), why some types of sacrifices are categorized as 'pleasing odours' for the deity and others are not, or why a discharge from the genitals is a source of ritual impurity (Leviticus 15) whereas a runny nose is not.[26]

Literary ritual and ritual fiction

In terms of literary genre, the priestly ritual texts in the Pentateuch are a peculiar phenomenon. They contain a wealth of information on ritual space, ritual utensils, ritual actors and ritual practices, but they are clearly not intended to be a ritual manual or a handbook for priests. In spite of their seeming comprehensiveness and sense of detail, these texts are not functional as manuals for praxis (Smith 1987: 109; George 2009: 70–1). The exact reasons that the priestly authors wrote these texts are lost to us. It has been suggested that the priestly writings were created to legitimize a certain ritual system, a particular priestly class or family, or to support the introduction of new ritual practices.[27] Furthermore, it is unclear what relationship there is between any kind of historical or 'actual' ritual practice in Iron Age Palestine and the rituals described in the priestly texts. On the one hand, the highly idealized and programmatic nature of the priestly ritual texts point in the direction of a theological charter outlining an ideal cult or even a cultic theology (Grabbe 2003). On the other, the ritual forms mentioned in the priestly texts are generic, such as sacrifices, presentation offerings, purification rituals etc., and as such comparable with ritual practices known from ancient Mediterranean cultures in the Bronze and Iron Ages (cf. Gudme 2014a; Gane 2020). If one wishes to discover a historical 'core' in the priestly ritual texts in the Pentateuch, it requires careful 'sifting' of the information in the texts, comparison with archaeological material and cognate texts when available and a healthy dose of qualified guessing (cf. Gilders 2020: 137).

Here, I would like to move in a slightly different direction and reflect upon what it is that *literary ritual* brings to the table that ordinary performed ritual does not. By literary ritual, I mean ritual that has been turned into literature or perhaps rather ritual-as-literature: texts that prescribe and narrate ritual practices with a purpose that extends

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[26]For a discussion on the fat, see Gudme 2019, and for a discussion of the term 'pleasing odour', see Eberhart 2002: 48–52, 186. Finally, for a discussion of the 'system' behind ritual impurity in the Hebrew Bible, see Kazen 2019.

[27]See for instance Watts 2007: 27–36; Bibb 2009: 5–69; Hundley 2012; Boorer 2016: 1–107.

beyond documenting a certain ritual performance or giving instructions for a ritual performance.[28] I take inspiration from the classicist Mary Beard, who has pointed out that 'more ritual [. . .] takes place in the head than on the street' (2004: 121). Beard continues: 'ritual is not solely performative. It exists as much in literary representation, in recollection, re-telling and imaginative fantasy as it does on the ground or at the altar' (ibid.: 125). I find this a helpful line of thought when analysing the priestly texts in the Pentateuch and the literary representations of ritual that we find there, but in fact also when analysing ritual in the non-priestly texts in the Hebrew Bible. These texts, these literary rituals, are part of the ritual imagination of their authors and as such they are something other and more than ritual performance.[29] Analysing literary rituals is not entirely different from analysing performed rituals. One significant difference between literary ritual and performed ritual of course is that we cannot interview the texts about the purpose of the ritual, the ritual participants' reasons for taking part etc., but as we saw in 'Practising Bodies' above, access to informants does not in itself solve the hermeneutical problem posed by ritual. In the Hebrew Bible, we only have access to the information the authors of the texts have chosen to pass on to their readers (cf. Gilders 2020: 136), and as we have also seen in 'Ritual in the Non-Priestly Text of the Hebrew Bible' and 'Ritual in the Priestly Texts of the Hebrew Bible' above providing detailed reasons for why rituals are performed or what exactly a certain ritual is expected to do is rarely on the authors' agenda.

Another difference between literary ritual and performed ritual is exactly the aspect of performance (cf. Wright 2012: 197–9). Literary rituals are not performed, they are written and (perhaps) read, and I think this is a more important aspect of literary ritual than it is sometimes given credit for. A literary ritual is not an extension of or a supplement to a performed ritual, a textual 'echo' of a practice. A literary ritual is written purposefully by an author *instead of* – or even independently of – the performance of ritual practice, and therefore we have to ask ourselves what it is that literary ritual can do that is different from or better than what a ritual performance may do.[30] The exact answers to this question certainly depend on the literary rituals that we study. If we turn to the priestly ritual texts in the Pentateuch, it is characteristic for these texts that they seem quite invested in promoting a particular ritual system as divinely ordained and therefore 'true'. Thus, in the case of the priestly texts, literary rituals may offer their authors and readers a kind of ritual virtual reality, which for one reason or another cannot be realized in real life. This may be due to a lack of influence, a lack of means, a lack of freedom, a lack of a temple, a lack of ritual competence or simply a lack of time or commitment.[31] Literary ritual has the clear advantage of offering an ideal version of reality, where no one forgets

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[28]See the discussion on textualization of ritual in MacDonald 2016 and Frevel 2016.

[29]See McClymond 2016: 92–3 for a discussion of 'imaginal ritual' and 'discursive *representations* of ritual' (original emphasis).

[30]I find the term 'literary ritual' particularly relevant in relation to the majority of ritual texts in the Hebrew Bible. This is a collection of texts that has been compiled and heavily edited over time and this makes it very much a literary product and not a 'documentary' source. If we look to other cultures in the ancient Near East and ancient Mediterranean, we find a wider variety of different types of ritual texts, some that would fit the definition of literary ritual and others that appear to be less 'literary' and more like ritual instructions or checklists.

[31]See Podemann Sørensen 2009 for a very interesting Egyptian example of how a ritual text may store ritual competence and how the preservation of a written ritual appears to just as efficacious as the performance of this ritual. See also the interesting discussion of the priestly writings and the Holiness Code in the Pentateuch in Wright 2012: 199–209.

the words, no one spills the oil and where the fire on the altar is never obstructed by wind or rain or damp kindling.[32]

In this way, the ritual virtual reality created by literary ritual resembles the 'ritual subjunctive', a term coined by Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett and Bennett Simon to describe the conscious tension in ritual between the world as it is and the world as it should be (2008: 21–8; see also Smith 1982: 63–5). Performed ritual creates an illusion of a better world, an 'as-if' version of reality, where the world is presented as the very best version of itself. In a way, literary ritual does exactly this as well, but it is removed one step further from reality: literary ritual presents the ideal version of performed ritual, which presents an ideal version of the world. Literary ritual is subjunctive in the second degree, it lives out its authors' ritual imagination. I believe this is part of the reason for why literary ritual is such an apt medium for communicating theology. Literary ritual utilizes a category of action, ritual, that excels in constructing ideal realities to express the ideal relationship between deities and their worshippers or between members of a group. In the priestly ritual texts in the Pentateuch, the 'as-if' character of the texts is particularly noticeable in the chapters in Exodus (25–31 and 35–40) that portray the tent of meeting and its trappings. The texts are packed with sensual impressions, bright colours, luxurious textures and alluring smells. In this way, the sanctuary that is constructed in the priestly ritual texts is even more vibrant, lush, bright and fragrant than any actual physical sanctuary ever could be. There is no dust in the corners, no animal blood or dung on the floor, no stale oil or mouldy bread; there are only bright colours, glittering gold, perfumed air and the majesty of Yahweh's presence that descends on the sanctuary.[33]

If we turn to the non-priestly texts of the Hebrew Bible, we also often find ideal versions of ritual practice in these texts. For instance, in Ps. 66.13–15, which was quoted in 'Ritual in the Non-Priestly Texts of the Hebrew Bible' above, the author promises exemplary ritual behaviour and thus paints a picture of himself as a model worshipper and of Yahweh as a deity worthy of such praise. Similarly, in Job 1.5, the information that Job would get up early in the morning to sacrifice a burnt offering for each of his children in case they had sinned in their hearts, contributes to the portrayal of Job as a particularly righteous and upright man. In this way, ritual performance can be used in both poetic and narrative texts as a literary tool that constructs identity for the characters in the texts. Similarly, less-than-ideal ritual performance may be used to underline a person's moral failures, such as when the ritual offences of the ultimate 'bad king' in the Hebrew Bible, King Manasseh, are listed in 2 Kgs 21.3–6. So, although explaining the details of ritual behaviour is rarely first on the biblical authors' agenda, rituals are usually mentioned in these texts for a reason. This may be to accentuate the moral character of a person in the text, but ritual may also be used to set the scene for a story, such as when Elkanah travels to Shiloh to sacrifice with his family and this leads to his wife Hannah receiving a divine promise of a son, the prophet Samuel, in 1 Samuel 1. We can refer to this literary use of ritual as *ritual fiction*. It is ritual-as-literature, and it may be analysed as such.

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[32]The notion of ritual failure is largely absent from the priestly texts in the Pentateuch. The exception that confirms the rule is Nadab and Abihu's failed offering in Leviticus 10 mentioned above. This is one of the noticeable differences between the priestly texts and ritual texts from Mesopotamia, where cases of ritual gone wrong are addressed explicitly, see Ambos 2007.

[33]In a way, this is also true about the description of the construction and organization of the Jerusalem temple in 1 Chronicles 22–29 and in the much shorter account in 1 Kings 6–8. Here, we also find ideal versions of temples and cult.

DOING THINGS WITH TEARS: PETITIONARY
MOURNING IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

We can apply ritual theory developed in social anthropology and cognate fields in order to analyse the ritual in the text, just as we would analyse a ritual performed in real life. In order to see how this may be done, we shall turn to our first example, ritual mourning in the Hebrew Bible.[34] Let us begin with an extract from 2 Samuel 12. In this part of the David story, the child born to David by Bathsheba has been struck with an illness by Yahweh as a punishment for David's sin in stealing another man's wife and causing her husband's death (2 Sam. 12.14–15). The child is gravely ill for seven days and during this time David lies on the floor and will accept no food. The child dies and when he is told of the death, David's reaction surprises his servants:

> Then David rose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes. He went into the house of Yahweh, and worshipped; he then went to his own house; and when he asked, they set food before him and he ate. Then his servants said to him, 'What is this thing that you have done? You fasted (צום) and wept (בכה) for the child while it was alive; but when the child died, you rose and ate food.' He said, 'While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, "Who knows? Yahweh may be gracious to me, and the child may live." But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.'

> —2 Sam. 12.20–23

What David does in this narrative is to engage in a distinct type of behaviour that signals a ritualized expression of mourning.[35] This behaviour is characterized by an inversion of everyday life. Instead of eating and drinking, the ritual actor will fast, instead of attending to personal hygiene and grooming, the ritual actor will have a shabby an unkempt appearance and the ritual actor may sit or lie directly on the floor or ground instead of using furniture. Finally, gestures and expressions of grief and distress may accompany this behaviour (Olyan 2004: 29–34).

In a number of Hebrew Bible texts, this ritual behaviour is associated with mourning the dead. For instance, in 2 Sam. 1.11–12, where David and his men mourn (ספד) the deaths of Saul and Jonathan by tearing their clothes, weeping (בכה) and fasting (צום).[36] However, in 2 Samuel 12, David is clearly not mourning the dead, for as soon as the child dies, he ceases to mourn and returns to normal life. In the narrative, David himself provides the explanation: 'While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, "Who knows? Yahweh may be gracious to me, and the child may live"'. David performed ritual mourning, because he hoped that this behaviour would persuade Yahweh to spare the child. Thus, we see two distinct types of ritual mourning, mourning the dead

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[34]In this section, I have shamelessly stolen the first part of the title from Paul Delnero's brilliantly titled recent book, *How to Do Things with Tears: Ritual Lamenting in Ancient Mesopotamia* (2020). I hope Delnero will take this in the spirit it is intended: imitation is the highest praise.

[35]Ritual mourning is well-described in Hebrew Bible scholarship. A clear and systematic treatment of the topic can be found in Olyan 2004, but see also Hvidberg 1962; Anderson 1991; Pham 1999; Kozlova 2017.

[36]See also the informative instruction on how to fake mourning behaviour in 2 Sam. 14.2: 'Joab sent to Tekoa and brought from there a wise woman. He said to her, "Pretend to be in mourning [אבל in Hithpael]; put on mourning garments, do not anoint yourself with oil, but behave like a woman who has been mourning many days for the dead"'. For more examples, see Olyan 2004: 28–40.

like David and his men do in 2 Sam. 1.11–12 and petitionary mourning in 2 Samuel 12 (Olyan 2004: 62–96).[37]

Here, I would like to pick up on two points from the sections 'Practising Bodies' and 'Acts that Work', above. The first is related to the relationship between ritual's form and substance and to the context-dependence of determining a ritual's function or purpose. Rappaport stressed that there is no intrinsic relationship between a ritual's form and a ritual's substance (1999: 114–15). This connection is based on convention in a culture, and there is no 'natural' or 'obvious' connection between the distinct set of behaviours summarized as ritual mourning above and the purpose of either mourning the dead or petitioning the gods.[38] This is also a good example of how the same ritual form, in this case mourning behaviour, may be performed to achieve various purposes. This illustrates Podemann Sørensen's point that it is the context of each individual ritual that determines what the ritual is expected to achieve in a given situation (2006a: 66–7). The reaction of David's servants in 2 Samuel 12.21 reveals that they seemingly interpreted David's ritual mourning as mourning associated with death and therefore it baffles them that he ceases to mourn exactly when death has occurred. David's explanation clarifies that his behaviour was intended as petitionary mourning, and he hints that he, at least in this case, finds mourning the dead a complete waste of time: 'Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?' (2 Sam. 12.23).[39] This is also a good illustration of Humphrey and Laidlaw's observation that 'ritual acts are publicly stipulated cultural constructs, yet wide variations in how they are enacted and how they are thought about indicate that while they are in this sense not individual, they are not completely shared either' (1994: 133). In the story, David's servants recognize David's behaviour as ritual mourning and thus display a shared knowledge of a ritual form, but they mistake David's individual purpose in performing this ritual: they assume that he is mourning the (almost) dead child, but he is in fact attempting to petition Yahweh.

My second point has to do with how ritual actions mirror social actions and with Barrett and Lawson's point that ritual actions are intended to 'motivate another's action or change in disposition' (2001: 185). In 2 Samuel 12, David performs a ritual in order to bring about a change in Yahweh's disposition and to motivate him to spare the child. According to McCauley and Lawson's theory of religious ritual competence (2002: 8), the ritual performed by David is a special patient ritual, a ritual in which the culturally postulated superhuman (CPS) agent, Yahweh, occupies the patient slot in the Action Representation System. In short, David does something to Yahweh. If we turn to Catherine Bell's six basic genres of ritual actions (1997: 93–137), we can classify David's petitionary mourning as a Ritual of Affliction.[40] This category of ritual 'attempt[s] to rectify a state of

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[37]Compare with Delnero's distinction between lamenting the dead and proactive lamenting intended to prevent a catastrophe (2020: 31–8).

[38]Olyan identifies four distinct sets of mourning behaviour in the Hebrew Bible: mourning the dead, petitionary mourning, non-petitionary mourning in times of calamity, and the mourning of the individual afflicted with skin disease. This distinction is helpful for analytical purposes, but in practice these may not always be distinct and exclusive ritual actions. For instance, one could, in the act of mourning, be petitioning the god(s) to make sure the dead successfully make the transition to the world of the dead. I am grateful to Richard E. DeMaris for pointing this out.

[39]In other situations, David seems to put mourning the dead to good use for political purposes. See for instance 2 Sam. 3.36–37, where David's enthusiasm in mourning Abner persuades the people that David had no part to play in Abner's death, see Olyan 2004: 51–6.

[40]This classification sets petitionary mourning apart from mourning the dead, which is usually categorized as a rite of passage, see Bell 1997: 94–102; Davies 2017: 25–7.

affairs that has been disturbed or disordered; they heal, exorcise, protect and purify' (Bell 1997: 115).[41] In 2 Samuel 12, the state of affairs that requires rectifying is a dying child and the means to do so is to sway Yahweh with petitionary mourning. Sadly, David's petitionary mourning does not have the outcome he hopes for and the child dies. This is not always the case with petitionary mourning in the Hebrew Bible, however. In a humorous story, in the book of Jonah, the King of Nineveh and his subjects (including the animals!) manage to change Yahweh's mind by performing petitionary mourning. The King removes his robe and covers himself in sackcloth (שׂק) and ashes (אפר). Then he commands all of Nineveh to follow his example and to fast and to 'cry mightily to God' (Jon. 3.6–8). When Yahweh sees this, he 'changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it' (Jon. 3.10). As the reader knows, Yahweh's change of heart and Nineveh's survival causes considerable grief for the prophet Jonah (cf. Jonah 4).

In 2 Samuel 12, the description of David's petitionary mourning portrays him in a particular light. I would say that his ritual behaviour characterizes him as a man of action rather than a man of tradition. He engages in ritual as long as it serves a clear and well-defined purpose such as averting Yahweh's anger, but once the tragedy has occurred and the child is dead, David moves on and returns to his duties. David's refusal to mourn the dead child portrays him as an unsentimental and somewhat cynical person, one who is not ruled by cultural norms or the expectations of others. David mourns if and when it suits him. It is interesting to compare David's violent public expression of grief over the deaths of his two adult sons, Amnon (2 Sam. 13.31.36) and Absalom (2 Sam. 18.33–19.4), with his reaction to the death of a baby in 2 Samuel 12.[42] David is clearly not portrayed as a man who holds no affection for his children in general, but he reacts much more strongly to the deaths of grownup sons and potential heirs to the throne than to the death of an infant.[43]

RITUAL TRANSFORMATION: THE FEMALE PRISONER OF WAR IN DEUT. 21.12–13

My second example is a passage from the law code in the book of Deuteronomy (Bultmann 2001: 144–51).[44] It follows not immediately but quite soon after the Deuteronomic description of ideal warfare in Deuteronomy 20, and it is placed in a section of the text

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[41]One could make a case for interpreting David's petitionary mourning as a ritual of 'Exchange and Communion' (Bell 1997: 108–14), where David's abstention from food, hygiene and comfort can be seen as a 'negative gift' (cf. the discussion in Berlinerblau 1996: 175–6) offered to Yahweh in return for his clemency.

[42]2 Sam. 19: 1–8 is another example of how David's behaviour goes against common expectations even to the point where it causes embarrassment. The usurper, Absalom, has been killed by David's soldiers and therefore David-the-king should be glad, but David-the-father displays such violent grief in public that the victory feast in the city is turned to shame (see Olyan 2004: 54–5).

[43]There may also be an element of gendered ideal behaviour in this narrative. Whereas Bathsheba is in need of comfort over the death of her child (2 Sam. 12.24), David does not dwell on their loss. I cannot help but hearing a faint echo of the ideal of a composed response to the death of their two-year-old daughter for which Plutarch commends his wife in *Consolatio ad Uxorem* 4.

[44]Unlike the priestly texts in the Pentateuch (see 'Ritual in the Priestly Texts of the Hebrew Bible' above), ritual in the book of Deuteronomy has not been paid much attention in Hebrew Bible scholarship, but see Melissa D. Ramos's (2021) recent monograph on rituals of covenant re-enactment in Deuteronomy 27–30. See also Brett E. Maiden's reading of Deuteronomic theology as 'cognitively costly religion', a reading inspired by corporate social responsibility and signalling theory (2020: 64–132).

that deals with various cases of family law (Deut. 21.10–21; Bultmann 2001: 149; Beukenhorst 2021). It reads:

> When you go out to war against your enemies, and Yahweh your God hands them over to you and you take them captive, suppose you see among the captives a beautiful woman whom you desire and want to marry, and so you bring her home to your house: she shall shave her head, pare her nails, discard her captive's garb, and shall remain in your house for a full month, mourning (בכה) for her father and mother; after that you may go in to her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife. But if you are not satisfied with her, you shall let her go free and not sell her for money. You must not treat her as a slave, since you have dishonoured her.

> —Deut. 21.10–14

The ritual prescribed here seems intended to transform a female ritual actor from a prisoner of war to the wife of an Israelite man. In a Deuteronomistic context, the content of this law is somewhat surprising because of its relaxed attitude to exogamy (Beukenhorst 2021: 276), a practice that is generally forbidden in the strongest terms both in the book of Deuteronomy (e.g. Deuteronomy 7) and in the Deuteronomistic History (e.g. 1 Kings 11). The ritual consists of three stages. First, the woman is selected and brought to the man's house. Second, once inside the house, the woman must undergo some physical changes. She has to shave off her hair, clip her nails and discard the clothes that she was wearing as a prisoner. Then she must spend a month in the house mourning or weeping over (בכה) her parents. Lastly, the Israelite man can have sex with her and take her as his wife. This ritual can be categorized as a Rite of Passage according to Catherine Bell's six basic genres of ritual actions (1997: 93–137). This type of ritual 'culturally mark[s] a person's transition from one stage of social life to another' (Bell 1997: 94). Arnold van Gennep first described rites of passage as consisting of three distinct phases. A phase of separation, where the ritual actor is set apart from society, a liminal phase in which a symbolic threshold (*limen*) of some sort is crossed and a transformation takes place, and a phase of incorporation, where the ritual actor is re-integrated into society in a new social role (1960: 10–11, 116–45). If we apply this scheme to the ritual in Deut. 21.12–13 it fits relatively well. The first phase, the separation, takes place when the woman is brought to the man's house. She is separated from her fellow prisoners of war from which she was singled out and taken, and she is separated from the people of Israel, because she is to be kept inside her captor's house. The second phase, the phase of transformation, takes place in the house, which becomes a liminal space for the woman.[45] Here, she must shed her hair, her nails and her clothes and shed tears for her parents, who are now presumably lost to her.[46] The text offers no explanation for why these particular actions are required, but the repeated shedding of body tissue, of garments and of tears does seem to call forth a mental image of leaving the past behind. The month-long weeping and the reference to cutting hair and removing clothes overlap to a certain extent with ritual

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[45]One could argue that the physical transformation is part of the phase of separation and not of the phase of transformation, because especially the shaved head will set the woman apart from others.

[46]There is an echo of Ps. 45.10–11 here: 'Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; *forget your people and your father's house*, and the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your lord, bow to him' (emphasis added). For a much-needed critical look at so-called marriage by rape, see Bowen 2003 on Psalm 45, Niditch 2014: 197–200 on Deuteronomy 21, and Parker 2020 on 'trafficking' of women in the Hebrew Bible in general.

mourning (see 'Doing Things with Tears' above), but the focus in this ritual text seems to be on the woman's transformation rather than on her mourning her parents (Olyan 1998: 617–19, 2000: 97–8; Niditch 2008: 130; Quick 2021: 58–9). The final phase of the ritual, the phase of incorporation, is when the woman becomes the man's wife. She is now no longer a captive, but the wife of an Israelite and as such a member of the people of Israel.

Here, I bring in Rappaport's work on ritual and how he described the relationship between what he called the canonical and self-referential messages in ritual (cf. 'Ritual Between the Social and the Sacred', above). The self-referential messages say something about the current physical, mental and social state of the ritual participant, whereas the canonical messages are the liturgical order or worldview encoded in the ritual (1999: 50–4). By participating in a ritual, the ritual actor indicates to herself, and to anyone present, acceptance of the canonical message, which is encoded in the ritual. Acceptance, however, is not the same as personal belief or personal desire, and a person may disagree with the canonical message in a given ritual and still perform the ritual (ibid.: 119–20). Let us try to apply this to a ritual such as the one described in Deut. 21.12–13. This ritual's canonical message is something along the lines of what we find in the book of Deuteronomy and it contains ideas about the mighty deity Yahweh and about his chosen people, Israel, and their special privileged relationship that makes Yahweh deliver other peoples into the hands of Israel to do with as they please. The difference between Israel and other people is so significant that it is necessary to bring about a transformation in order to make someone a member of Israel. Part of this canonical message is certainly also a patriarchal view of sex and society, where male desire (Deut. 21.11) is relevant, whereas female consent and a woman's right over her own body is irrelevant (cf. Deut. 22.13–30). Finally, the canonical message seems to consider the female prisoner of war as something other than a 'sex slave', since she cannot be sold on as a slave once she has been used as a wife (cf. Exod. 21.8–11). If a woman were to perform the ritual stipulated in Deut. 21.12–13, her performance would make her an indexical sign of this ritual's canonical message and she would appear to indicate acceptance of this message. This is so, even if her participation was forced by her captor and his family and she was secretly plotting her escape as she went through the motions of cutting her hair and nails etc. Because of what Rappaport called the *meta-performativity* of ritual, the woman's implied acceptance creates a convention of how her actions *should* be (1999: 123). This means that if she were to try to make a run for it either during her one-month detention in her captor's house or at any point after this, she would most likely be viewed by her captor and his family and by their community as a transgressor. She would be seen as a wayward wife, who tried to abandon her husband-master (בעל), and not as a courageous woman, who managed to regain her freedom and control over her own body.

The ritual procedure in Deut. 21.12–13 is part of a host of laws in the book of Deuteronomy, and just as it is the case in the priestly ritual laws in the Pentateuch, these rules are framed in Deuteronomy as uttered by Yahweh during the revelation on Mount Sinai and thus given the highest possible authority (Bultmann 2001: 135–6). It is uncertain if a law and a ritual such as this one has ever been practised, but as it sits in the text it becomes part of Deuteronomy's description of the ideal existence in the promised land, which Yahweh will give to his people – an existence in which, according to Deut. 21.10–14, Israel will be victorious thanks to Yahweh and Israelite men will be able to take their pick from beautiful and desirable captive women. It is a ritual fiction that describes an ideal life in an ideal land in accordance with divine law.

IN CONCLUSION: TEXTS THAT WORK

The Hebrew Bible is a collection of texts teeming with ritual, and although these texts are indeed *texts*, cases of literary ritual and ritual fiction, it is still possible to utilize terminology and theory from anthropology and cognate fields when analysing them. We can use ritual theory to identify ritual in the text and to categorize these rituals in order to speculate about their would-be functions – with regard to both ritual and literary efficacy – that the authors may have envisioned as they wrote their texts.

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