# Introduction

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THE PRESENT VOLUME ORIGINATED in a conference organized at the University of Lausanne in May 2016. The main goal of the conference was to reexamine the relationship between "ritual" and "text" in the Hebrew Bible—predominantly in the Pentateuch—from various perspectives, and with a view to comparing and contrasting the situation in ancient Israel/early Judaism with other cultures of the Mediterranean and Western Asian world. The present introduction aims to (1) present the main methodological and theoretical issues involved in this collection, (2) outline the contents of its essays, and (3) identify some of the perspectives they open for future discussions on ritual texts and rituals in the Hebrew Bible from a comparative perspective. Scholarly literature on biblical rituals has grown abundantly in the last decade or so. This introduction does not claim to be comprehensive but rather focuses some of the most important discussions for the topic addressed in the present collection, namely, the relationship between text and ritual. Furthermore, because of the comparative focus of this collection, this introduction is meant to be accessible to scholars of the ancient world, and also students of rituals in general, who have little or even no familiarity with the biblical traditions; accordingly, some of the more technical discussions will only be briefly addressed or referenced here.

## i.1. Text and Ritual in the Pentateuch: A Survey of Methodological and Theoretical Issues

For historians who seek to reconstruct the rituals performed in ancient societies, written evidence about rituals is often a primary source of information. Much of our knowledge of Ugaritic rituals of the Late Bronze Age, for example, is based on cuneiform alphabetic tablets discovered on the site of Ras Shamra

that contain instructions for the performance of various rituals.[1] To be sure, there are other sources as well that can be used for the reconstruction of ancient rituals. Archaeology, in well-documented contexts, can provide us with substantial information regarding some key aspects of ritual performance, especially as regards their spatiality and materiality. But archaeology alone cannot reconstruct the way in which rituals were performed at a given site, and sometimes even the very nature of those rituals remains elusive. For several cultures of the ancient Mediterranean and Western Asian world, iconography can also be a valuable source for the reconstruction of rituals, giving access to important details concerning ritual performance, such as how ritual agents are positioned, how animals involved in the ritual are handled, and so on. But if the iconographic evidence does not include inscriptions detailing the nature and the contents of the ritual described, it may be quite difficult to determine the circumstances of that ritual as well as its functions and significance. In general, and without overstating the importance of written sources, it is arguably fair to say that the comprehensive reconstruction of a given ritual in its ancient context(s) remains a challenge without at least some sort of textual evidence.[2]

Yet if written evidence is instrumental for historians who seek to offer redescriptions of ancient rituals, such evidence raises specific issues that have not always been sufficiently considered. To begin with, the performance of a ritual and its textual representation are not one and the same thing. This distinction is documented through a number of ethnographic studies, which show that in the context of communities preserving written descriptions of their rituals, those descriptions are not necessarily regarded as normative for ritual performance and can actually be quite different from the rituals effectively practiced by these communities. For the practitioners of these rituals, what is usually decisive is the observance of customary practices, not the adherence to a written script.[3] Likewise, in ancient Mediterranean societies rituals were first and foremost transmitted through a set of unwritten customs; in general, the

1. For the edition of these texts, see D. Pardee, *Les textes rituels*, 2 vols., Ras Shamra-Ougarit 12 (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 2000); D. Pardee, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit*, WAW 10 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002).

2. On the limitations of reconstructing ancient religions without textual evidence, see, e.g., T. J. Lewis, "Syro-Palestinian Iconography and Divine Images," in *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East*, ed. N. H. Walls, American Schools of Oriental Research Book Series 10 (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 200), 69–107 at 75–76, who notes that while "iconography complements texts, it cannot replace them." For a more radical position on this issue, see V. Hurowitz, "Picturing Imageless Deities: Iconography in the Ancient Near East," *Biblical Archaeological Review* 23.3 (1997): 46–69, esp. 69.

3. A textbook example of this phenomenon is provided by the ethnographic study of the Jains of Jaipur by C. Humphrey and J. Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship*, Oxford Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 191–210.

"textualization" of the ritual—namely, the creation of a written version of that ritual—was not a necessary condition for the success of the ritual performance. This observation, in turn, raises two related questions: first, how close are ritual texts to actual ritual performance? And second, if the success of ritual performance was defined primarily through custom rather than through textual authority, what were the functions of ritual texts in ancient Mediterranean societies?

(1) Regarding the first issue, Catherine Bell, in her 1992 monograph *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, already insisted on the gap that can exist between textual descriptions of rituals and their actual performance. In particular, she noted that textual descriptions tend to promote a single, unified version of a given ritual, which does not account for the variations that can be involved in actual performances of that same ritual. As a result, Bell argues, the textualization of rituals can often result in fairly formalized and standardized descriptions that can be quite distant from actual practice. "Textual codification and standardization also open a gap between what is written and what is done by promoting an ideal of uniformity and the elimination or marginalization of alternatives. Frequently the result is a written ideal quite alienated from what is in fact being done in common practice."[4] She also notes further implications of the textualization of ritual such as especially the fact that textual codification often involves a shift in ritual expertise, conferring authority to those experts who control access to and interpretation of the texts.

Bell's remarks about the consequences of textualization on the representation of rituals are important, and they are consistent—at least to an extent—with the observations about the common gap between ritual text and ritual performance that is documented in several ethnographic studies, as mentioned above. At the same time, however, Bell can also be challenged on the grounds that—in the previous quote at least—she appears to assume a relationship between "text" and "ritual" that is perhaps too static and that does not consider the possibility of more complex and intricate interactions between these entities.[5] A good illustration of this point is provided by Christian de Pee's comprehensive study of Chinese wedding traditions from the Middle Period (eighth to fourteenth century CE).[6] In particular, de Pee observed that the diversity of local practices related to weddings appears to be partly preserved in those writings that were

4. C. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 137. See further C. Bell, "Ritualization of Texts and Textualization of Ritual in the Codification of Taoist Liturgy," *HR* 27.4 (1988): 366–92. On the gap between ritual and text, ritual practice and ritual text, see also the essay by J. W. Watts in this volume.

5. For a discussion and a critique of Bell's construal of the relationship between text and ritual, see also the essay by J. Rhyder in this volume.

6. C. de Pee, *The Writing of Weddings in Middle Period China: Text and Ritual Practice in the Eighth Through Fourteenth Centuries*, SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

themselves closely related to, or even embedded in, that practice: ritual manuals, wedding correspondence, and so on. On the other hand, the imperial laws and decrees relating to weddings tend to dissolve such local complexities of wedding practices as a consequence of the hegemonic perspective imposed by the imperial administration, to the point that "the practice of the text tends to obscure the practice of the ritual."

> The practice of wedding ritual survives where writing is a ritual practice and where the text is a ritual object: in the exegetical choreographies of ritual manuals, in the cultural capital of wedding correspondence, and in the cosmological calculations of almanacs and calendars. In those archaist ceremonies, in those displays of wit and erudition, in those prognostications of cosmic danger are lastingly configured living discursive notions of time, space, bodies, and text that forever await their refiguration in ritual performance or in reading. Where writing is not part of the ritual practice of weddings, and where the text is not a ritual object intended for nuptial exchanges, *the practice of the text obscures the practice of ritual*. Laws and verdicts circulated as ritual objects in the grand ceremony of imperial government. *They translate the time, space, bodies, and texts of weddings into the transparent, universal hierarchy of that government, thereby subjecting the local practice of weddings to the universalist practice of the legal text*—just as the writing of local customs disperses both the locality and the practicality of local weddings by placing them in the centered literary landscape of a civilizing empire.[7]

These sorts of observations open the way to a more dynamic understanding of the relationship between text and ritual. Bell's point remains correct at a general level: because ritual is first and foremost a performance, and not the mere repetition of a script, there will always be a gap between ritual performance and its textual representation. As such, ritual texts can only provide us with, at best, a broad approximation of an ancient ritual performance, even when these texts claim to describe that performance in detail.[8] And yet, simultaneously, one should recognize that the relationship between text and ritual is never simple, or straightforward, but can cover in fact a wide range of possibilities depending on the degree of a text's embedding within the ritual practice that it claims to represent. Consider, for instance, ritual "checklists" or *aide-mémoires*, which are abundantly documented in the Western Asian world. The description of rituals

7. Ibid., 242–23, my emphasis.

8. This observation also means, conversely, that ritual texts have a performative dimension of their own, which is not merely identical with the ritual performance, and which needs to be analyzed for itself. See further on this point below.

in these texts is certainly standardized, possibly even idealized, but it is unlikely to be completely divorced from actual ritual performance.[9] This is already suggested by the nature of the details preserved in these texts, which often only make sense if they were meant to be used by ritual experts.[10] Furthermore, in a number of instances, we even have actual evidence that these texts were effectively used for ritual practice.[11] A similar point could be made with regard to the so-called Greek sacrificial calendars (although "sacrificial lists" would arguably be a better descriptor), which could be consulted when conflicts arose over the way in which a public sacrifice had been conducted.[12] The actual performance of these sacrifices may not always have been conducted according to the details preserved in these lists. But the lists nonetheless inform us about the way in which local communities would have expected these sacrifices to take place.

On the other hand, other written sources may present us with textual representations of rituals that are less directly embedded in, and therefore more distant from, actual practice. Royal inscriptions commemorating (or claiming to commemorate) rituals performed by a king can provide typical examples of this distance between text and practice, because in this case the primary function of the inscription was propagandistic—namely, to promote a certain ideal of the king as ritual agent—rather than strictly ritual (e.g., to provide a description that could serve for possible future reenactments of the ritual mentioned in the inscription). Even so, one should keep in mind that the difference between these written sources about rituals is relative rather than absolute. After all, even ritual descriptions in the context of royal inscriptions with a strong political and ideological agenda had to conform to certain social and cultural codes (or "canons" in Bourdieu's terms) in order to be relevant for the audiences of these inscriptions. Conversely, checklists and similar texts used by ritual experts may well be closely embedded in the ritual practice of those experts, but they could also

9. On the category of ritual "checklists" in the Western Asian world, see also the essay by P. Michel in this volume, who discusses various documents used by the main diviner of Emar.

10. While no single, rigid pattern can be observed, ritual texts from Ugarit generally include details concerning the date of a given ritual, the materials to be sacrificed, the recipient deities, possibly also the place where sacrifices are to be made. Other significant actions required for the performance of the ritual, such as the way in which the sacrificial animals are slaughtered, the distribution of sacrificial portions among divine and human participants, or even the ritual agents involved, are usually omitted from the description. Apparently, these aspects of the ritual performance were known by the practitioners and did not need to be written down.

11. For instance, in Ugarit, a list of deified kings that was circulated in Ugaritic and in Akkadian contains marks left by a scribe alongside the names of the king. These marks have been interpreted as "check marks" pointing to the effective usage of these lists in a sacrificial context. See D. Arnaud, "Prolégomènes à la rédaction d'une histoire d'Ougarit II: Les bordereaux de rois divinisés," *SMEA* 41.8 (1998): 153–73 at 168; also Pardee, *Ritual and Cult*, 200.

12. See on this now S. Georgoudi "Comment régler les *théia pragmata*: Pour une étude de ce qu'on appelle 'lois sacrées,'" *Mètis*, n.s., 8 (2010): 39–54.

serve other, additional functions as well—for instance, by conferring authority and status to their owner, or granting legitimacy in case of a dispute arising after the ritual performance.[13] It would be wrong, therefore, to oppose "practical" and "ideal" descriptions of rituals in ancient written sources. It is more helpful to think of these distinctions in terms of a *continuum*, with most ancient sources exemplifying both practical and ideal features in their representation of rituals, albeit to different degrees.[14]

(2) One of the main implications of the previous discussion is that it turns our attention to what could be called the *pragmatics* of ritual texts in the ancient Mediterranean. Because the textualization of rituals is not a necessary or logical outgrowth of ritual performance but a strategic activity, and because this strategic activity usually presupposes a larger body of customary ritual practices with which it interacts in different ways, and to various degrees, the question of the functions and the goals of ritual texts represents a key issue in the analysis of such texts.[15] In other words, historians must not merely look at *what* these texts say about rituals (as they have sometimes tended to do) but also, and perhaps even more importantly, at *how* these texts were effectively used in relation to ritual performance in the ancient Mediterranean.

The essays collected in this volume document a wide range of possibilities in this regard, each depending on the specific contexts in which these texts were practiced. A comprehensive mapping of the functions and purposes of ritual texts in the ancient Mediterranean remains a scholarly desideratum, although the present volume will hopefully represent a step in that direction. Examples already mentioned here include the use of ritual texts as *aide-mémoires* or "checklists" of sorts for the correct sequence of a ritual, as well as the creation

13. On this issue, see also the remarks by P. Michel, in this volume, with regard to the uses of the ritual texts for the diviner of Emar as well as the comments by D. Jaillard on the function of sacrificial lists in ancient Greek cities.

14. This approach is well illustrated, in particular, in the essay by D. K. Falk in this volume, who proposes different "maps" to construe the relationship between text and ritual in Qumran. The same approach is further reflected, to various degrees, in the essays by G. Lenzo, on Egyptian rituals, especially in the *Book of the Dead*, and D. Jaillard, on ancient Greek rituals.

15. This point is well illustrated, for instance, by the essays collected in A. Barchiesi, J. Rüpke, and S. A. Stephens, eds., *Rituals in Ink: A Conference on Religion and Literary Production in Ancient Rome Held at Stanford University in February 2002*, Potsdamer Altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 10 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2004). In their short introduction, the editors aptly comment that, "Texts participate in the wider society in which they were created. In that space texts have a performative dimension regardless of the mimetic or fictitious character of their embedded rituals. Such texts were part of their contemporary religious discourse; they are part of textual communication with their ancient audience, and they are inevitably part of a specific mode of communication that we call religion" (vii–viii). (This statement holds true whether or not one considers that "religion" is best described as a "mode of communication," which I would personally question.) Further on this issue, see in the same volume especially the essay by J. Rüpke, "Acta aut agenda: Relations of Script and Performance," 23–43. See also the comments by D. Falk in his essay for the present volume.

of a (relatively) authoritative version of a ritual, to which ritual agents and participants could then turn in case of disputes over the performance of that ritual. Other documented examples include (but are by no means restricted to) the use of ritual texts to legislate exceptional situations, to introduce or legitimize innovations in the performance of a ritual,[16] or to ensure the adequate distribution of the economic resources involved in the ritual performance among the participants, and many more possible scenarios. One particularly interesting example of the pragmatics of ritual texts in antiquity is when the creation and disposal of the text forms the main part of the ritual performance itself, rather than a kind of external commentary upon that performance. This is the case, for instance, when written "spells" were buried in Egypt to accompany the deceased in his or her journey in the afterlife,[17] the deposit of ritual tablets in the foundations of royal buildings such as palaces and temples in Mesopotamia,[18] or the Jewish practice of inscribing amulets with passages from the Torah (*tefillin* and *mezzuzot*).[19] In such instances, the textualization of the ritual goes hand in hand with the ritualization of the text: the two processes belong together, so to speak, and generate new ritual dynamics. This also means that the alleged transition from "ritual" to "textual" coherence in ancient societies[20] arguably corresponds to what is, in fact, a much more complex process. In the examples mentioned here, as well as in several others discussed in the following essays, it would be more accurate to say that the texutalization of rituals—in various forms and according to various degrees—provides the basis for new forms of ritual coherence.

The examples mentioned here already raise the larger comparative issue that underlies the collection of essays gathered in the present volume. Some documented uses of ritual texts can be found across several ancient Mediterranean and Western Asian societies. This is the case, for instance, of texts used as checklists or *aide-mémoires* for ritual experts, of texts used to facilitate or even legitimize ritual innovation, of inscribed amulets used in the context of prophylactic rituals, and so on. Other textual practices, for example, the burial of written spells to accompany the deceased in the afterlife, are more distinctive of a specific culture (in this case, Egypt). Furthermore, even in the case of textual practices that are documented across several ancient Mediterranean societies,

16. This was arguably one of the key functions of the so-called sacred laws in ancient Greece; on which see now J.-M. Carbon and V. Pirenne-Delforge, "Codifying 'Sacred Laws' in Ancient Greece," in *Writing Laws in Antiquity / L'écriture du droit dans l'Antiquité*, ed. D. Jaillard and C. Nihan, BZABR 19 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2017), 141–57.

17. On this, see the essay by G. Lenzo in this volume.

18. See the essay by L. Marti in this volume.

19. See the essay by D. K. Falk in this volume.

20. See especially the section titled "Von ritueller zu textueller Kohärenz" in J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, 3rd ed. (Munich: Beck, 2000), 87–103.

these practices frequently evince significant differences relating to the local context in which they are documented. Conversely, a textual practice more specific to a given culture can migrate (so to speak) to nearby societies and even become a "marker" of foreign cultural influence in these societies. In these respects, the relationship between "text" and "ritual" is a topic that logically invites a comparative approach, on several levels simultaneously: differential, analogical, and even genetic. The purpose of such a large comparative perspective is not only to map the rich variety of ways in which ritual texts could be used in ancient Mediterranean societies and trace specific influences from one culture to another with regard to ritual textualization; it is also to better understand the specifics of ritual textualization in these societies.

What, then, about the Pentateuch? The Pentateuch, which technically denotes the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (from Genesis to Deuteronomy), presents us with a complex but nonetheless intriguing relationship between text and ritual. Rituals comprise a substantial portion of the Pentateuch, especially (albeit not exclusively) in connection with the establishment of the cult in the wilderness, which is recounted in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers (approximately Exod 19 to Num 10), as well as in portions of Deuteronomy. If we consider the Pentateuch as a foundational narrative about the origins of "Israel" as an ethnic group, then it is not excessive to state that rituals form one of the most central aspects in the definition of Israel. As Julia Rhyder demonstrated in a recent book,[21] it is through rituals, in particular, that the various groups composing Israel negotiate their relationships to the central sanctuary (the Tabernacle), the patron deity (the god YHWH), and its (main) ritual agents (the Aaronite priests). But this image of the Israelite cult is a highly idealized one: it is a narrative fiction, set in a foundational time (the exodus and the march toward the promised land) and space (the wilderness) and associated with foundational figures (like Moses, Israel's lawgiver).[22] It is usually difficult to know how the institutions and the customs described in the Pentateuch were meant to translate into the practice of ancient audiences, especially for the pre-Hasmonean period (i.e., before the middle of the second century BCE), and this certainly holds true for rituals as well.

21. J. Rhyder, *Centralizing the Cult: The Holiness Legislation in Leviticus 17–26*, FAT 134 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019).

22. I would avoid the term "myth," even though it has been commonly used to describe the narrative of the Pentateuch. The use of this term certainly accounts for the fact that the events described in the Pentateuch are not historical, at least not according to the primary meaning of this term. But defining "myths" simply as the opposite of "historical" facts betrays a narrow understanding of what myths are and how they operated in ancient societies. On the role of Moses as lawgiver from a Mediterranean comparative perspective, see now G. N. Knoppers, "Moses and the Greek Lawgivers: The Triumph of the Torah in Ancient Mediterranean Perspective," in *Writing Laws in Antiquity / L'écriture du droit dans l'Antiquité*, 50–77.

Previous research generally assumed that the rituals described in the Pentateuch would represent more or less the codification of actual practice, although there was much discussion regarding whether the practice reflected in these texts would reflect the period of the First Temple, the Second Temple, or a combination of both.[23] However, as the previous discussion suggests, recent scholarship indicates that the model of a narrow relationship between the ritual texts of the Pentateuch and the ritual practice of ancient Israel is problematic, to say the least, and is unlikely to do justice to the complexity of these issues. In effect, the limited evidence we have for the pre-Hasmonean period suggests that this relationship, in the case of the rituals of the Pentateuch, is anything but straightforward. Some of the ritual texts of the Pentateuch, especially in the "Priestly" portions of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, present substantial parallels, both in form and in content, with the Western Asian ritual checklists already mentioned above, and it is possible that *some* of these instructions go back to such lists.[24] Yet Priestly ritual instructions also present some significant differences with these lists. Ritual checklists, as noted above, were used primarily (if not exclusively) by ritual experts on specific ritual occasions; by contrast, Priestly ritual instructions are now part of a grand narrative of origins, in the course of which these instructions are to be disclosed to "all Israel."[25] The obvious parallel between the blessing formula prescribed in Num 6:24–26 and the text inscribed on two silver plates found in Ketef Hinnom (KH 1 and 2) confirms that *some* of the materials used in the rituals of the Pentateuch is consistent with the language used in Hebrew inscriptions from the Iron Age II or the early Persian period.[26] But the comparison between these texts also shows the degree of fluidity that the reuse of traditions (whether written or oral) in the Pentateuch could actually involve.[27] The comparison between the ritual texts of the Pentateuch and the

23. For a survey of this issue, see my discussion in C. Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of Leviticus*, FAT 2/25 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 1–19.

24. On this issue, see the essay by Y. Feder in this volume. For an attempt at a reconstruction, see also my previous discussion in ibid., 215–19.

25. See also on this point the discussion by Y. Feder in this volume. Although the "narrativization" of rituals (i.e., the combination of rituals with narratives), is not unattested in the Western Asian world (one may think, for instance, of the story of El's divine feast in *KTU* 1.114, which ends in the final lines with a recipe, apparently for curing the effects of a hangover), this phenomenon is not widely attested, and it is not found on the scale of what we have in the Priestly texts.

26. For the edition of these texts, see G. Barkay et al., "The Amulets from Ketef Hinnom: A New Edition and Evaluation," *BASOR* 334 (2004): 41–71. The Ketef Hinnom silver plates were initially dated to the Iron Age IIC, but this dating has been challenged in various recent publications. See, especially, A. Berlejung, "Ein Programm fürs Leben: Theologisches Wort und anthropologischer Ort der Silberamulette von Ketef Hinnom," *ZAW* 120.2 (2008): 204–30; more recently, N. Na'aman, "A New Appraisal of the Silver Amulets from Ketef Hinnom," *IEJ* 61.2 (2011): 184–95. See also the essay by C. Frevel in this volume.

27. For further discussion on this important issue, see now the two essays by C. Frevel and J. D. Smoak in this volume.

customs documented by archaeological findings points to a similarly complex and nuanced picture. For instance, recent archaeological analyses by Lidar Sapir-Hen and others suggest that the prohibition of the pig may reflect in part the situation prevailing in the territory of Judah in the Iron Age II B and C, but not in several parts of the kingdom of Samaria, especially the northern lowlands where pig consumption is still well attested at these times.[28] On the other hand, fish bones discovered in Iron Age II strata in Jerusalem, Ramat Raḥel, and other sites in Judah as well, include fish defined as unclean according to the biblical legislation.[29]

In short, comparison with the material culture—when it *is* possible—suggests that some of the rituals described in the Pentateuch may have their origins in Iron Age II customs (or possibly even earlier), while other rules may be completely invented.[30] Furthermore, even in those cases where it seems possible to relate the ritual texts of the Pentateuch with actual ritual practice in the Iron Age II or later, this practice is usually more varied and flexible than what the Pentateuch describes. Here also, therefore, it might be best to regard the relationship between the ritual texts of the Pentateuch and ritual practice as a continuum of sorts, with some texts being arguably more grounded in practice than others. Yet even in the case of ritual texts that present close ties with customs documented in the material culture of ancient Israel, the Pentateuch describes a ritual ideal that implies substantial standardization of a practice that was, in fact, much more diverse.

There is, however, a further aspect to consider. The relationship between the ritual texts of the Pentateuch and actual practice may be complex and nonlinear, for the reasons described above, but there can be no question that these texts, in turn, had a significant impact on the ritual practice of emerging Jewish and Samaritan communities. There is increasing evidence in the Hellenistic and Roman periods that these communities claimed at least some degree of conformity with the ritual norms defined in the Pentateuch and consequently sought to align their practices with these norms. Furthermore, as James W. Watts in particular has insisted, this development is prepared by the rhetorical strategies of the Pentateuch itself, which repeatedly claims maximal authority for the rituals

28. L. Sapir-Hen et al., "Pig Husbandry in Iron Age Israel and Judah: New Insights Regarding the Origins of the 'Taboo,'" *Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 129 (2013): 1–20. In a forthcoming publication, Sapir-Hen goes further and explains the distribution of pig remains in the southern Levant predominantly in terms of the distinction between urban and nonurban contexts.

29. See D. N. Fulton et al., "Feasting in Paradise: Feast Remains from the Iron Age Palace of Ramat Rahel and Their Implications," *BASOR* 374 (2015): 29–48.

30. On this latter aspect, see, especially, the essay by J. W. Watts in this volume. As Watts observes, several biblical texts refer to mandatory donations to the temple for the firstborn of both humans and animals, but the obligation defined in Lev 12 for the new mother to bring sacrifices to the temple for *every* newborn is never mentioned elsewhere in the biblical traditions and may well reflect, therefore, an innovation by the Priestly writers of Leviticus. See also the essay by D. Erbele-Küster in this volume, which deals with similar issues.

it describes. These strategies include, but are not restricted to, presenting these rituals as divine oracles and using formulations that insist that rituals can only be performed in the way described in the Pentateuch.[31] Furthermore, the two aspects are, in effect, closely tied, generating a mutually reinforcing dynamic: the more authoritative the Pentateuch became, the more authoritative its rituals would be, and vice versa. As such, the composition and transmission of the Pentateuch marks, in many ways, the beginning of a long and complex trajectory in which the textualization and scripturalization of rituals play an increasing role in the development of early Jewish and Samaritan communities in antiquity. But this trajectory is, again, anything but linear and straightforward.[32] For communities who claimed conformity with the Pentateuch there were many ways to relate to the rituals it describes, as is already shown by the importance of the debates and conflicts that ritual interpretation would generate among Jewish and Samaritan communities in the late Second Temple period and beyond (up to today, actually). Moreover, the authority of the ritual texts of the Pentateuch did not mean that the transmission of these texts was perfectly stable: on the contrary, they could still be transmitted in multiple versions, undergo revisions, or be amplified and expanded.[33] In several instances, differences in these versions can be linked to different views regarding the way in which a pentateuchal ritual should be performed.

For these reasons, the Pentateuch offers, in many respects, a remarkable case study of the complexities of the relationship between text and ritual in antiquity. The Pentateuch and its early Jewish reception exemplarily document a situation characterized by a growing interaction between text and ritual. In many ways, this growing interaction can be seen as one of the key components in the transition (itself complex and anything but linear) leading from ancient Israel to early

31. See, especially, J. W. Watts, "The Rhetoric of Ritual Instruction in Leviticus 1–7," in *The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception*, ed. R. Rendtorff and R. A. Kugler, VTSup 93, FIOTL 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 79–100; J. W. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). On this issue, see also now Rhyder, *Centralizing the Cult*, as well as the essay by C. Frevel in this volume.

32. On this important issue, see the essays by D. K. Falk and W. K. Gilders in this volume.

33. Sarianna Metso and Eugene Ulrich have proposed relating the greater textual stability of Leviticus to its use in the cult of the Second Temple period. See S. Metso and E. Ulrich, "The Old Greek Translation of Leviticus," in *The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception*, ed. R. Rendtorff and R. A. Kugler, VTSup 93, FIOTL 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 247–68, as well as S. Metso, "Evidence from the Qumran Scrolls for the Scribal Transmission of Leviticus," in *Editing the Bible: Assessing the Task Past and Present*, ed. J. S. Kloppenborg and J. H. Newman, RBS 69 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 67–79. This may well be true in general, but even in the case of Leviticus there are some clear exceptions. One good example is the additional instruction for the wood offering in one Qumran manuscript, 4Q365 23. Apparently, this instruction was considered to be part of the text of Leviticus in Qumran, on which see my discussion in C. Nihan, "Supplementing Leviticus in the Second Temple Period: The Case of the Wood Offering in 4Q365 23," in *Supplementation and the Study of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. S. Olyan and J. Wright, BJS 361 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 183–204. On this issue, see also the discussion by J. Rhyder in this volume.

Judaism. This growing interaction had a significant impact on ritual practice itself in the centuries before and after the turn of the era, in that the textualization of rituals generated new ritual dynamics: a number of earlier ritual practices were eliminated to the benefit of new rituals, while other practices were more closely aligned with ritual texts—or, more exactly, with the local interpretation of these texts. Finally, the texts themselves were more closely integrated into communal rituals, either as icons or as the object of ritual manipulations.[34] Each of these processes, however, has parallels in other cultures of the ancient world, as the previous discussion suggests and various essays in this volume effectively demonstrate. In this regard, the Pentateuch and its early Jewish reception point to a set of ritual dynamics that, while exemplary, are not necessarily unique and can therefore be of interest for other scholars of the ancient world.

## i.2. Summary of the Essays

The first essay, by Giuseppina Lenzo, discusses Egyptian funerary texts, specifically the different versions of the *Book of the Dead* from the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period. Lenzo begins by surveying the variety of funerary texts found in Egypt, noting the difficulties involved in providing clear-cut typological and chronological distinctions between these texts. Evidently, there was considerable fluidity in the transmission of these texts, which did not diminish the importance and efficiency of the funerary rituals, or "spells," which they contain. Turning to the spells found in the *Book of the Dead*, Lenzo demonstrates that the relationship between the ritual text and its performance is a complex one. The writing down of the spells was considered efficient in and of itself, because it provided the deceased with the knowledge required for his or her journey in the afterlife, yet actual performance of the ritual described in these spells could also take place. Comparison with material evidence from the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period, especially with regard to protective bricks and amulets, shows that the ritual that was practiced was generally consistent, but not identical, with the description found in the spells. Lenzo notes a number of differences and concludes that the spell represents a "written

34. On the significance of the iconic dimension of the Torah for the development of Judaism in Antiquity, see already the essay by K. van der Toorn, "The Iconic Book: Analogies Between the Babylonian Cult of Images and the Veneration of the Torah," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. K. van der Toorn, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 21 (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 229–48. On this issue in connection with the rise of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam more generally, see further the useful discussion by J. W. Watts, "The Three Dimensions of Scriptures," *Postscripts* 2.2–3 (2006/8): 135–59; reprinted in *Iconic Books and Texts*, ed. J. W. Watts (London: Equinox, 2013), 9–32. See also the essay by D. K. Falk in the present volume.

ideal": the actual practice allowed for significant adjustments and variations, especially with regard to costly materials like gold. Furthermore, the comparison between copies of the *Book of the Dead* from the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period also shows that the transmission of spells was independent from their actual performance. Overall, the evidence she presents suggests that the composition and transmission of ritual texts and ritual performance are parallel processes that can occasionally coincide but do not overlap: the writing down is enough to warrant the efficiency of the spell for the deceased, but the ritual performance will usually deviate—sometimes even significantly—from the written script. Lenzo concludes her essay by highlighting that modern descriptions of Egyptian evidence must be able to account for the considerable degree of fluidity that can be observed with regard to both the transmission of the spells and their relationship to actual ritual performance.

The following essay, by Dominique Jaillard, discusses various key issues regarding the role of texts, textuality, and textualization in Greek ritual practice. Jaillard begins by noting a number of methodological issues, such as the deeply local character of ritual practices and its impact on textualization, as well as the fact that texts about rituals could be publicly displayed or, on the contrary, concealed by the ritual itself. Jaillard then discusses the case of written texts about rituals that are not directly involved in the ritual performance, taking sacrificial calendars as an example. As he shows, these calendars do not represent a coherent and systematic codification of ritual practice, but rather a selection of specific aspects of the ritual performance, especially those aspects that were susceptible to become a matter of dispute—such as the distribution of the meat, the remuneration of the officiants, and so on. In specific cases, such as the laws from Kos or from Mykonos, the details of the ritual may be more comprehensive, but even then the written text is far from a complete description of the ritual; as Jaillard notes, "Most of the ritual knowledge that was needed to perform the ritual gestures remained implicit." In other contexts, especially those related to less public and more private forms of ritual practice, the written text served to confer authority to the ritual practitioners. Jaillard then turns to other contexts, in which the written text is more closely embedded into the ritual practice itself. He begins by discussing the practice of dedicating hymns and other poems as *anáthemata* in the sanctuary of a god, especially in the context of festivals. In this case, the production of the text is not oriented toward the recitation of the hymn but rather represents "another, complementary way to honor the gods, and to please them." In other contexts, such as the obligatory recitation of paeans in sanctuaries, the text can become a script for the ritual performance. In some instances, the written text can even *replace* the ritual utterance, as in the case of the *katádesmos*, or written ritual bindings that were buried in the ground. Even in this case, however, the written text requires the ritual performance in order

to be efficient. Jaillard concludes by noting that it is the concept of "text" that is problematic and requires further study: in particular, the text should not be identified with the mere writing but, rather, with the actualization of the text through each performance.

Lionel Marti turns our attention to the relationship between text and ritual in Mesopotamia through the example of inscriptions relating to the construction of royal buildings (such as temples and palaces) in the Neo-Assyrian period. After discussing the interest of these inscriptions for the larger issue of the relationship between text and ritual in Mesopotamia, as well as the sources at our disposal and the nature of the corpus, Marti turns to a detailed analysis of the main stages of building construction during the Neo-Assyrian period and the role of texts and rituals in this process. Among other observations, he remarks that various sets of rituals were involved at each and every stage of the construction process, although the apparent brevity and simplicity of the formulas used in some royal inscriptions may often conceal the complexity of the ritual processes actually involved. In many cases, only a portion of these rituals may effectively be reconstructed on the basis of the available evidence. Several rituals were concerned with securing the assent of the gods for the building project, especially during the preliminary steps involved in the construction work. However, the most important part of the building or rebuilding process had to do with the foundations and the materials deposited within them. Although the role of writing in these deposits remains unclear, they were commemorated in various foundation inscriptions that often use the same materials as the deposits themselves and appear to have enjoyed a votive status of sorts. The primary function of these inscriptions appears to have been the memorialization of the king; additionally, they were also used by later kings to legitimize their own building or rebuilding projects. In the third part of his essay, Marti illustrates the complex relationship between the status conferred to royal foundation inscriptions and the possibility of adjustments in the face of new historical and political circumstances, with the example of the rebuilding of Babylon by Assarhaddon. He concludes his study by highlighting a number of methodological points, such as the basic difference between texts describing rituals and texts directly used in ritual performance, like foundation inscriptions, as well as the importance of acknowledging how the royal dimension of these documents, "written in order to exalt the ruler's achievements," significantly impacts their formulation.

The essay by Patrick Michel is devoted to the relationship between text and ritual in the Late Bronze Age city of Emar. Michel begins by situating the historical and geographical context of Emar, which was located at the juncture of the Syro-Anatolian and Assyro-Babylonian cultures. He then turns his attention to the texts preserving evidence about religion and rituals in Emar, especially three tablets that can be considered to preserve some of the most significant

information about ritual practice in that city: the installation of the *entu*-priestess of Baal (Emar 369), the installation of the *maš'artu*-priestess (Emar 370), and the *zukrum* festival (Emar 373), in the course of which the statue of Dagan was brought outside of the sanctuary and carried in the countryside. Michel focuses on three key features found in these texts, which illustrate the insights that these tablets provide into ritual practice at Emar. The first feature concerns the prescriptions regarding the veiling and unveiling of the deity during the procession, as well as of the *entu*- and *maš'artu*-priestesses during their installations. Michel shows that the issue of visibility was an important one during the performance of these rituals, and this seems to be the reason why the texts provide substantial details regarding this point. The second feature concerns the role of anointing in these rituals; here also, the nature of the details provided in the texts suggests that this procedure was especially significant in the ritual performance. The third feature concerns the offering of the *kubadu*, a type of burnt sacrifice, which is specific to the *zukru* festival. Michel concludes that these tablets are not liturgical texts properly speaking but reflect practical concerns by one of the main functionaries of the city. This functionary, Michel suggests, should presumably be identified with the diviner who supervised the main ceremonies in the city, and one of the main functions of the tablets would have been to ensure his payment in the course of the rituals. Overall, the features selected in these tablets seem to correspond to aspects of the ritual that were of particular importance. However, other aspects that must have been important for ritual performance at Emar, like prayers and hymns, are simply not documented in these texts.

Yitzhaq Feder offers a detailed discussion of Hittite rituals and their contribution to interpreting the Priestly texts of the Pentateuch. In this regard, his essay provides a transition of sorts from the ancient Mediterranean and Western Asian evidence to the biblical texts more specifically. After noting the interest and significance of the Hittite ritual texts for biblical scholars, and proposing a first, general description of these texts, Feder focuses on two main issues: first, how Hittite ritual texts were composed, and the type of scribal activity they reflect, and second, the purpose and function of these texts. With regard to the first point, Feder helpfully observes that Hittite ritual texts cannot be dichotomized according to simplistic oppositions (such as innovation vs conservation) but actually exemplify a broad range of scribal activities with various degrees of intervention. These activities include (but are not necessarily restricted to) copying (with the possibility of several variants being accidental rather than deliberate), compiling (including cross-referencing two or more tablets), adjusting rituals to new situations, and introducing ritual innovations. Concerning the second point, Feder argues that the primary function of these texts appears to have been serving as *aide-mémoires* for ritual specialists, but this aspect did not prevent other additional functions, including "the long-term preservation of

ritual traditions, imposition of royal authority over local cults, and regulation of legitimate practice." In the last section of his essay, Feder turns to a comparison with the biblical ritual texts, especially those preserved in the Priestly traditions of the Pentateuch. He observes that the two corpora present several formal similarities (including their casuistic structure, chronologically arranged instructions, or lists of paraphernalia), but also significant differences: Priestly rituals are part of a larger narrative; they seldom exist in multiple forms, or versions; and they present detailed instructions for ritual performance (e.g., Lev 1–7 in the case of sacrifices) that are generally unparalleled in Hittite or Ugaritic texts. Feder concludes by suggesting that the two corpora are likely to originate from similar contexts of usage, "as aids to ritual practice," but that Priestly textualization of rituals exemplifies a greater degree of control because the editors of these texts had a specific "literary, ideological, and socioreligious agenda" to which they sought to adapt their rituals.

In his contribution to this volume, Rüdiger Schmitt provides a helpful survey of the evidence regarding the archaeological evidence for cultic activity in the territory of Judah (and beyond) from the Iron Age II C (corresponding to the late monarchic period) to the Persian period. Although the essay does not address directly the issue of the relationship between text and ritual in ancient Israel, it does provide an important background for the essays that follow. Schmitt begins by observing that the longstanding view of E. Stern and others according to which cultic diversity would be a characteristic of the Iron Age II but would not be continued in the Persian period has been challenged from various sides recently and that the time is ripe for a reassessment of the evidence with regard to this issue. Using the typology for cult places that he developed with Rainer Albertz, he then offers a comprehensive summary of the evidence for each of these types, first in the Iron Age II C—and then in the Persian period. The summary includes a discussion of the cultic assemblages found on each site, along with other relevant material evidence regarding ritual performance at these sites. With regard to the archaeological evidence for the Iron Age II C, Schmitt observes that the number of cult places related to the royal administration remains limited and that there is much more diversity when we consider "carrier groups of cultic activities below the stratum of official bodies," such as households, specialized ritual sites (e.g., for the care of the dead), regional sanctuaries connected to trade routes, and so on. Furthermore, Schmitt notes, a substantial portion of this cultic and ritual diversity carried over to the Persian period, as is evinced by limestone altars, terracotta figurines, and other types of evidence. Such evidence should also be considered alongside that of various Yahwistic sanctuaries besides the temple of Jerusalem in the Persian and Hellenistic periods—the "solar shrine" in Lachish, the "house of Yahû" (*byt yhw*) mentioned in an Idumena ostracon, the temple in Yeb/Elephantine, the

Samaritan sanctuary on Mount Gerizim, and the Oniad temple in Leontopolis. Together, this evidence indicates that cultic centralization was emerging and not (yet) fully developed in these time periods. The difference with the Iron Age II C should be qualified, and the evidence for the Persian and Hellenistic periods suggests that there was still "a pluriform Yahwism with different social, local and/or regional, and political bodies as carrier groups of cultic activities."

The essay by James W. Watts consists of two main parts. The first part focuses on the distinction between ritual and text, and the impact of this distinction on ritual studies in general and the study of biblical rituals in particular. After noting that "the meaning or function of the ritual is not the same thing as the meaning of the text describing the ritual" and that the ritual itself and its "verbal reflections, oral and written," are distinct types of socially situated acts, Watts shows how this distinction has impacted research on biblical rituals in the last decades. He provides a helpful survey of biblical scholarship, identifying several significant trends. He notes, in particular, the critique of attempts to identify singular meanings in biblical descriptions of rituals and the development of alternative approaches, such as the indexical approach inspired from C. S. Peirce, as well as growing scholarly attention paid to the *rhetorical* dimension of biblical texts about rituals. On the other hand, he also remarks that more classical approaches that view biblical rituals from a symbolic or theological perspective have remained quite popular. Additionally, several new approaches have been developed that are based on the analogy between ritual and language. Against these linguistic approaches to biblical rituals, Watts notes that, while ritual and language share some general features (in particular, they are rule-bound and conventional), the status of meaning is different: while meaning is usually essential to the success of linguistic acts, "a ritual's meaning is not essential to its function and can vary with each participant." In the second part of his essay Watts turns to a case study, the ritual for the new mother in Lev 12, in order to show the difference between "textual rhetoric about ritual and ritual practice." Specifically, Watts argues that the text of Lev 12 does not provide information about rituals for new mothers in Israel but rather informs us about the distinct agenda of the Priestly writers of Leviticus. In this respect, he proposes that we understand the text of Lev 12 as being first and foremost a "payment schedule," defining which offerings need to be brought to the sanctuary by the new mother, and when. It is also possible that the request to bring offerings for each human birth is an innovation by these same authors, since this obligation is referenced nowhere else in the biblical texts. Overall, the text's function is predominantly economic, whereas the specific form of the ritual it describes depends on literary conventions.

Christian Frevel offers a comprehensive discussion of rituals in the book of Numbers, and their contribution to our understanding of the relationship between ritual, tradition, and community in the emergence of Judaism. He begins

by observing that the Mosaic Torah is an example of a (more or less homogeneous) tradition shared by several communities simultaneously (namely, Jews and Samaritans inside and outside their homeland) and inquires as to the role of the rituals described in the Torah in negotiating relations between these communities. He notes that the relationship of these ritual texts to actual practice is a complex one and that simplistic alternatives should be avoided: the rituals of the Pentateuch are neither a codification of practice nor simply divorced from it; they have a symbolic, or theological, meaning, but they are not entirely consistent and do not form a closed "system" of values. The textualization of rituals in the Pentateuch, especially in its "Priestly" portions, should be viewed as a complex, multidimensional process that engages issues of "authority, regulation, homogenization, and representation" for the communities for which these texts were written. Turning to the book of Numbers, Frevel observes that the importance of rituals in this book witnesses a form of "ritual densification," to use the category introduced by Bell, which (building on Bell's insights) is likely to reflect larger formative social, economic, political, and religious processes at the time Numbers was composed. Frevel then illustrates this point by discussing key aspects of the textualization of rituals in Numbers, especially by means of a detailed case study of the so-called Priestly blessing of Num 6 and its relationship to the silver scrolls of Ketef Hinnom (KH 1 and 2). He concludes that textualization, in this instance, produces and legitimizes a new ritual practice, which does not need to correspond "in every aspect" to the written ideal but remains nevertheless bound to the latter. This relationship between ritual text and ritual practice has significant implications for the construction of communal identity in the Second Temple period. Frevel continues this argument by discussing the various dimensions of textualization, noting that the production of ritual texts not only leads to standardization and homogenization but also enables variance in the performance of rituals. Based on these observations, Frevel argues in the final part of his essay that the textualization of rituals was a central component in the creation of the Torah as an "identity reservoir" for various communities during the Second Temple period.

The essay by Jeremy D. Smoak is likewise devoted to the Priestly blessing in Num 6:22–27, although his approach differs from Frevel's in various respects. Smoak begins by presenting the text of Num 6 and its place in the scholarship on biblical rituals. He notes that much of the research conducted during the twentieth century looked at the Priestly texts primarily as a source for Israelite ritual practice in the monarchic period and often understood these texts as a mere "codification" of that practice. More recent studies, however, have shifted the focus to the performative aspect of these texts, especially their *rhetorical* dimension (Watts and others). Applying this approach to the Priestly blessing in Num 6 implies, according to Smoak, that we must consider this text not only in relation to the

temple and the cult but also in relation to the authority of the priesthood (as the intended performers of the blessing) and the creation of the ritual rhetoric of the Torah in general. Smoak addresses these issues by analyzing how the wording of the Priestly blessing in Num 6 defines what he terms a "carefully crafted chain of authority that closely identifies the priestly act of blessing Israel with the divine commands of Yahweh." He notes that the syntax that is used has close parallels in scribal epistolary discourse and provides a useful comparison of this syntax with epistolary conventions used in Iron Age letters. In particular, he argues that Num 6 has adapted such epistolary conventions in order to construe the blessing as an authoritative message from Yahweh to Israel and to project the priest as the messenger tasked to read and perform this message. "Numbers 6:22–27 cast the blessing as something that should be performed before audiences as part of the ritual reading of *torah*. The blessing was a divine message given from Yahweh to Israel but delivered and performed by Yahweh's messengers—the sons of Aaron." In the final section of his essay, Smoak compares this reading of Num 6 with two other biblical texts that describe priests reading texts to an audience, Jer 29 and Neh 8. He shows that both texts document the way in which priestly reading bridged scribal authority and oral performance by locating the authority of the texts in the realm of "secondary orality," while simultaneously articulating and maintaining religious hierarchies. Additionally, in the case of Num 6 (and Torah reading in general), priestly performance also served to bridge the distance with the foundational past of the Sinai revelation, thereby conferring further authority to both the divine instructions and their priestly performers.

The topic of the performance of the ritual texts found in the Pentateuch is also addressed by Dorothea Erbele-Küster, albeit from a distinct perspective. Specifically, Erbele-Küster looks at the way in which these texts, and especially the collection preserved in Lev 12–15, project and define a specific construal of bodies. After discussing some key methodological issues involved in the study of these texts, such as the numerous "gaps" found in the description of rituals in the Pentateuch, she analyzes first the obligation to circumcise male newborns in Lev 12. She argues that while circumcision presupposes the sexual difference rather than creates it, it plays a central role nonetheless in the gendering of the child and his integration into the cultic community. At the same time, Erbele-Küster also remarks that the text contains no instruction for the performance of circumcision and that all bodily details regarding this act remain likewise unmentioned: "A tension exists between an embodied and a disembodied manner of description, between the body's visibility and invisibility in the text." She further notes that the subsequent instructions in Lev 12 for the purification of the new mother imply a similarly complex construal of her body in ritual perspective, since her impurity is defined with regard to her child (the duration of impurity being longer in the case of a girl than of a boy) as well as to the sanctuary, and not primarily

with regard to her postpartum blood emissions, as it is sometimes assumed. She concludes that the text of Lev 12 mirrors "the socioreligious structure" that produced it and "is a fine example of the priestly ideology wherein ritual place and ritually defined time intersect and define the body." Turning to her second text, Lev 15, Erbele-Küster shows how the complex model of contamination, direct and indirect, articulated in this chapter further contributes to a construction of gendered bodies (with both parallels and differences between women and men), in a way that now also integrates domestic objects such as beds and seats. In the last section of her essay, she concludes that the aim of these texts is not to describe realistically physiological phenomena but to construe gendered bodies through the description of ritual performance. This construal, in turn, cannot be dissociated from the ideological perspective that informs the Priestly texts.

Julia Rhyder addresses the relationship between text and ritual in the early Second Temple period through a close reading of selected texts from Nehemiah and Chronicles. She begins by noting that the notion that the writing of ritual texts would foster ritual standardization has become axiomatic in ritual studies and that the existence of narratives recounting the celebration of festivals instructed in the Pentateuch provides us with a fine opportunity to verify this notion. While these descriptions do not reflect actual historical events, they inform us nonetheless about "the diverse ways in which [. . .] scribes imagined that the law might be ideally applied." Basing her analysis on three key texts (Neh 8; 2 Chr 30; 2 Chr 34), Rhyder argues that in each of these accounts the description of the festivals claims to adhere to the instructions found in earlier laws, while in fact simultaneously presenting many examples of adaptation, innovation, and revision with regard to them. The story of Neh 8 presents "a new conception" of how the feast of Sukkôt (Booths) "was to be applied to the urban context of Jerusalem specifically," which connects in particular the feast more closely to the household than the corresponding law in Lev 23. Second Chronicles 30, which recounts Hezekiah's Passover, presents substantial deviations from the pentateuchal model for this festival—such as the celebration of the feast in the second month instead of the first, or the eating of the sacrificial meat by unclean members of the community—which in turn justify the introduction not only of new ritual customs but also of new forms of ritual agency (especially, albeit not exclusively, royal agency). Similar findings apply in the case of Josiah's Passover in 2 Chr 35; additionally, the latter account introduces new references to written authorities, associated with the royal figures of David and Solomon respectively, which supplement the written authority of the pentateuchal texts. In her conclusion, Rhyder remarks that, while these texts recognize the pentateuchal rituals as normative, the relationship to the pentateuchal norm is dynamic and flexible rather than static. She also makes the important point that "the ritual law serves functions that extend beyond that of providing a ritual standard," such as introducing

new ritual roles, negotiating new ritual hierarchies, or even justifying departure from the law's prescriptions. These conclusions, in turn, force us to qualify and complicate the relationship between textualization and ritual standardization.

The essay by Daniel K. Falk offers a detailed and careful discussion of the relationship between text and ritual in the Dead Sea Scrolls, focusing specifically on the prayer texts and their uses in diverse contexts. Falk highlights the interest of the Qumran evidence for the discussion of the relationship between text and ritual and remarks that "Qumran has unique data for the study of this problem in the ancient world because of the density of its ritual life and the abundance of texts dealing with rituals in various ways." He notes, furthermore, that the issue of ritual in the Scrolls requires developing models that can account for the *materiality* of texts in relation to ritual, and he emphasizes the need to maintain the distinction between text and ritual while also acknowledging that texts can be used as ritual artifacts. Based on these preliminary remarks, Falk proceeds to analyze prayer texts used in four different contexts in Qumran: (1) purification liturgies, (2) collections of liturgical prayers, (3) *tefillin*, and (4) covenant ceremony. Each of these texts provides different, but also complementary, types of evidence regarding the relationship between text and ritual in Qumran. In the case of purification liturgies, two scrolls at least (4Q414 and 4Q512) show a close connection with ritual performance itself; in this case, Falk argues, "prayer is a significant, scripted element in a complex ritual." A similar conclusion applies in the case of collections of liturgical prayers; the corresponding manuscripts contain a number of indications that they could be used as scripts in a ritual performance, which also accounts for the amount of ritual details that they preserve. The *tefillin*—small leather pouches worn on the arm and the forehead and inscribed with scriptural passages—present us with a different type of evidence because they are clear ritual artifacts, but their ritual usage is never mentioned in the texts of Qumran themselves. It is therefore difficult to map precisely their place in the ritual practice of the community. In any case, the *tefillin* present one of the clearest examples of the material, rather than merely functional, use of texts in ritual contexts. Finally, the covenant ceremony described in the Community Rule (1QS 1:18–2:18) provides yet another type of evidence, preserving the outline of what was a constitutional ceremony for the community; in this case, its relationship to ritual performance would be indirect at best. Through his analysis of these four cases, Falk delineates four corresponding "grids" that, together, provide a comprehensive framework for some of the main parameters involved in the relation between text and ritual at Qumran.

The final essay, by William K. Gilders, addresses the ways in which the ritual text of Lev 16, describing the ceremony that will become Yôm Kippur in Second Temple Judaism, is handled in various rabbinic traditions such as the Mishnaic tractate Yoma (m. Yoma), the Toseftim tractate Kippurim (t. Kippurim), and the

halakhic midrash Sifra Aḥare Mot. Gilders begins by observing that the literary description of a ritual, such as Lev 16, is not the ritual performance itself; consequently, his study deals with "how a textual ritual can embody interpretations of an earlier textual ritual." The three rabbinic texts are themselves interconnected, and rather than treating them sequentially, Gilders opts for an approach comparing the way in which they handle key issues regarding the interpretation of Lev 16. A first issue concerns the authority of Lev 16. The Mishna, Gilders observes, insists that conformity with a textual norm—presumably represented by Lev 16—is instrumental for the performance of the ritual. But it nonetheless implicitly acknowledges that this textual norm may not be sufficient to cover all the aspects of the performance itself: "While of fundamental significance, the scriptural text is not the only source of relevant information." Gilders then goes on to address various prescriptive details in the text of Lev 16 that required interpretation. The rabbinic interpretation reflected in m. Yoma and t. Kippurim rejects the Boethusian interpretation according to which incense should be placed on the coals of the censer held by the high priest before entering the inner sanctum. Both m. Yoma and Sifra Aḥarei Mot interpret the reference to *kipper* in verse 6 and 11a of Lev 16 as denoting a confession spoken by the high priest, in addition to the confession already mentioned explicitly in verse 21. Finally, m. Yoma, t. Kippurim, and Sifra Aḥarei Mot disagree on the wording of the confession recited by the high priest. All these examples attest to complex and creative engagements with the text of Lev 16. Gilders remarks, for instance, that the reference to additional confessions in m. Yoma and Sifra Aḥarei Mot substantially reframes the ceremony, reinforcing the significance of the high priest but also his own need for divine forgiveness. The whole discussion has larger implications regarding the way in which textual interpretations of an earlier ritual text operate, all the more so since the rabbinic texts became themselves ritual manuals "also requiring interpretation in new contexts."

## i.3. Perspectives for Future Discussion

It is not possible to discuss here all the findings brought by this rich collection of essays. However, by way of a conclusion to the present introduction, I would like to highlight some of the key perspectives that emerge from the collection and show potential for future research and discussion. Since most of the essays in this volume deal with the Pentateuch and early Jewish rituals, the following survey will focus on these topics. However, some of the points mentioned arguably remain of relevance to scholars from other fields as well.

(1) *The relevance of a comparative approach*. A first point concerns the relevance of a large comparative approach. Rituals in the Pentateuch, and in

the Hebrew Bible more generally, have been the subject of several studies in the last two decades (a helpful survey of which is provided by James W. Watts in his essay for the present volume). Many of these studies are influenced by, or conversant with, developments in theoretical and ethnographic approaches in the study of rituals. But they have tended to focus on these rituals in their ancient Israelite and early Jewish contexts predominantly, or sometimes even exclusively, without necessarily considering other questions that could arise from adopting a larger comparative perspective. Occasionally, some of these studies have addressed specific instances of comparison with selected Western Asian rituals, but even then the comparative approach has usually remained genetic or analogical.[35] However legitimate such an approach may be, it also runs the risk of circular reasoning, because the questions that are considered relevant for the study of ancient Israelite and early Jewish rituals tend to be primarily reconstructed on the basis of the biblical texts themselves (and, occasionally, similar Western Asian traditions), rather than considering the whole range of possibilities evidenced by the study of ritual texts and ritual practices in antiquity. By contrast, a comparative approach that is not merely genetic and analogical but is first and foremost *differential*[36] can provide a larger background for the study of biblical rituals and illuminate the specifics of these rituals in the context of ancient societies. This is all the more necessary in the case of biblical rituals because, as mentioned above, the rituals of the Pentateuch present a written ideal, which can at times be quite remote from (or even foreign to) actual practice. By contrast, comparing these rituals to those documented in ancient Greece, Egypt, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and other ancient cultures as well, forces the students of biblical and postbiblical rituals to ask new questions about their own materials. For instance, such comparison highlights the degree to which the Pentateuch erases local Israelite customs in its representation of rituals, to the exclusive benefit of a centralized cult.[37] This observation, in turn, highlights the importance of centralization in the description of pentateuchal rituals; it also raises further questions regarding the extent to which local customs and traditions may nonetheless be preserved in some biblical descriptions of rituals.

35. Consider, for instance, the important study on Hittite and Israelite blood rituals by Y. Feder, *Blood Expiation in Hittite and Biblical Ritual: Origins, Context, and Meaning* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011).

36. On the comparative approach in the study of antiquity, see, in particular, the essays collected in C. Calame and B. Lincoln, eds., *Comparer en Histoire des religions antiques* (Liège: Presses universitaires de Liège, 2012).

37. The deeply local nature of rituals in ancient societies, and correspondingly the importance of local and regional variations in ritual performance, are especially noted in the essay by D. Jaillard and R. Schmitt in the present volume. It is also evident, to some extent, in the essays by G. Lenzo, L. Marti, P. Michel, and C. Frevel.

(2) *The need for more complex models*. A second point concerns the need for more complex models for the relationship between text and ritual, in the Pentateuch and beyond. In the case of the Pentateuch, earlier discussions of this issue have often tended to focus on the question of whether or not these rituals were practiced at the time of their writing. Yet this may well be a false alternative in many respects. As several essays in the present volume document, the relationship between text and ritual in antiquity was never simple or straightforward. Rather, several possibilities could coexist, even at the same time and in the same place, ranging from the text as a guide to ritual practice to the text as a substitute for the practice it claims to describe.[38] The situation may not be different in the case of the Pentateuch, or other biblical rituals for that matter, and this point is corroborated, to an extent, by the limited evidence that can be gained from the comparison with the material culture of ancient Israel, as noted above. This conclusion, in turn, corroborates the point already made above, namely, that it would be helpful for biblical scholars (and for scholars of the ancient Mediterranean and Western Asian world in general) to think of the relationship between text and ritual in terms of a continuum, rather than of a rigid alternative. In some cases, the ritual described in the Pentateuch may represent the generalization of a local custom; in other cases, it may textualize a well-accepted norm; and in yet other instances, it may represent a complete innovation. It is highly unlikely, however, that the same rule should apply to all the rituals described in the Pentateuch. Furthermore, and no less importantly, highlighting the complexities involved in the relationship between text and ritual in ancient societies also raises new questions regarding the textualization of ritual in the Pentateuch. What effect, precisely, did the texts of the Pentateuch have on ritual performance in the Second Temple period, and how were they embedded in this practice? In this regard, the demonstration by Daniel K. Falk, in his essay for this volume, that the evidence from Qumran points to different degrees of involvement of texts in the ritual practice of the community is an important step forward. However, more studies will be required on this topic in the future.

(3) *The relevance of material culture*. A third point concerns the significance of analyzing and interpreting biblical rituals in closer connection with the study of the material culture of ancient Israel. This issue is addressed and developed in several essays of the present volume, especially by Rüdiger Schmitt, Christian Frevel, and Jeremy Smoak, in the case of ancient Israelite and biblical rituals, and Daniel K. Falk, in the case of Qumran rituals. It confirms a recent scholarly trend to insist on the importance of grounding more firmly the study of biblical rituals in the material culture of the society that

38. This point is well illustrated, in particular, in the essay by G. Lenzo with regard to funerary papyri of ancient Egypt in the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Periods.

produced these texts.[39] Much more remains to be done in this regard, however. Especially in the case of the "Priestly" texts of the Pentateuch, a comprehensive analysis of the *realia* mentioned in these texts from an archaeological, historical and exegetical perspective remains largely a scholarly desideratum.[40] Other important issues that require further exploration include (but are not restricted to) economic aspects involved in the biblical rituals,[41] constructions of spatiality and their relationship to actual ritual spaces in the Levant,[42] or the relationship of biblical rituals to cultic materials documented by archaeological finds.[43] The discussion of epigraphic evidence for ancient Israelite rituals, and the significance of that evidence for biblical descriptions of rituals, remains an important area of research, although some substantial work has already been done on this topic.[44] On the other hand, it is important to keep in mind that biblical texts

39. See, e.g., B. B. Schmitt, *The Materiality of Power: Explorations in the Social History of Early Israelite Magic*, FAT 105 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016). See also, programmatically, F. Stavrakopoulou, "Materialist Reading: Materialism, Materiality, and Biblical Cults of Writing," in *Biblical Interpretation and Method: Essays in Honour of John Barton*, ed. K. J. Dell and P. M. Joyce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 223–42.

40. See, for instance, my discussion of the vestments of the high priest in C. Nihan, "Le pectoral d'Aaron et la figure du grand prêtre dans les traditions sacerdotales du Pentateuque," in *Congress Volume Stellenbosch 2016*, ed. L. Jonker et al., VTSup 177 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 23–55, as well as my discussion of the recipe for the sacred compound of incense in Exod 30 in C. Nihan, "Une recette pour l'encens," *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 149 (2017): 305–22.

41. This issue remains understudied. See, however, P. Altmann, *Economics in Persian-Period Biblical Texts: Their Interactions with Economic Developments in the Persian Period and Earlier Biblical Traditions*, FAT 109 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), esp. 192–96 and passim. On the relationship between the sacrificial calendar, patterns of reproduction, and seasonal availability during the year, see also N. J. Ruane, *Sacrifice and Gender in Biblical Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 62–64.

42. See, for instance, J. D. Smoak, "From Temple to Text: Text as Ritual Space and the Composition of Numbers 6:24–26," *JHebS* 17 (2017): 1–27, doi:10.5508/jhs.2017.v17.a2. On this topic, see also the earlier study by M. K. George, *Israel's Tabernacle as Social Space* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2009); J. Rhyder, "Space and Memory in the Book of Leviticus," in *Scripture as Social Discourse: Social-Scientific Perspectives on Early Jewish and Christian Writings*, ed. T. Klutz, C. A. Strine, and J. M. Keady (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 83–96; Rhyder, *Centralizing the Cult*.

43. On incense altars and incense burners, see, e.g., the earlier study by W. Zwickel, *Räucherkult und Räuchregeräte. Exegetische und Archäologische Studien zum Räucheropfer im Alten Testament*, OBO 97 (Fribourg: Editions universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990); more recently on this topic, see C. Frevel and K. Pyschny, "Perserzeitliche Räucherkästchen. Zu einer wenig beachteten Fundgattung im Kontext der These Ephraim Sterns," in *A "Religious Revolution" in Yehûd? The Material Culture of the Persian Period as a Test Case*, ed. C. Frevel, K. Pyschny, and I. Cornelius, OBO 267 (Freiburg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 111–220.

44. See, for example, the important study on blessing rituals and practices by M. Leuenberger, *Segen und Segenstheologien im alten Israel: Untersuchungen zu ihren religions- und theologiegeschichtlichen Konstellationen und Transformationen*, ATANT 90 (Zürich: TVZ, 2008), which compares and contrasts epigraphic and literary evidence in ancient Israel. The Ketef Hinnom silver plates and their parallels with Num 6 have already been the subject of substantial research in particular; see on this the essays by C. Frevel and J. D. Smoak in this volume, with references to earlier scholarship.

tend to provide a highly idealized description of rituals—an aspect that is also highlighted in various essays in the present volume.[45] In this regard, the contextualization of biblical rituals in the material culture of ancient Israel does not only serve to re-create the material and practical background against which these ritual texts were formed and transmitted. It also serves, simultaneously, to highlight the significant differences and discontinuities that can exist between biblical descriptions and ancient Israelite or early Jewish practices—or to put it somewhat bluntly: between what people were told to do (or even were told that they were doing) and what they effectively did.[46] Much as the comparative approach highlighted above, the contextualization of biblical rituals in the material culture of ancient Israel is made possible only when scholars attend to both parallels and contrasts.[47]

(4) *Bridging the study of biblical and early Jewish rituals*. Last but not least, another point concerns the relevance of a kind of *longue durée* approach for the study of biblical rituals. Until now, the study of biblical rituals and of early Jewish rituals from the Second Temple period have largely developed independently of each other. While this is understandable, the present collection suggests that there is much to be gained in bringing these two fields of study more closely together. First, later Jewish traditions can often illuminate the gaps, ambiguities, and problems perceived by ancient interpreters in a biblical ritual. These traditions can therefore provide an important source of information regarding how these rituals were effectively read and practiced, even if we always need to take into account the specifics of these traditions, which have their own agendas.[48] Second, and even more important, later Jewish traditions can often illuminate the complex issue of the authority of biblical rituals, and the nature of that authority. In many documented cases, the authority of the biblical ritual does not translate into a kind of literal application of that ritual. In fact, as William K. Gilders aptly comments in his essay for this volume, the biblical text is usually a major source of inspiration for later tradents, but *not* necessarily the only one. In this regard, the authority of biblical rituals is *dynamic* rather

45. On this basic issue, see, especially, the essays by J. W. Watts and D. Erbele-Küster in this volume.

46. In this volume, see, especially, the essay by R. Schmitt, which shows that, from the Iron Age II C to the Persian or even Early Hellenistic periods there existed a degree of cultic diversity and plurality that significantly contrasts with, and even contradicts, the image of a fully centralized cult that tends to be projected in several traditions of the Pentateuch.

47. For such contextualization, the basic parameters identified by R. Grimes that define the "field" of ritual activity—ritual space, objects, time, sound, and language, etc.—can prove to be especially helpful. See R. L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, rev. ed. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 24–39.

48. This approach is well illustrated, in the case of the ritual of Lev 16, in the essay by W. K. Gilders in this volume.

than static: it is by being continuously reinterpreted and recontextualized that these rituals could effectively be kept alive, even in a sense *after* the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. Interpretation, in this case, is not just required by the gaps or the difficulties of the ritual text; it is first and foremost the activity through which the authority of the ritual text is reaffirmed and negotiated in new contexts.[49] The specifics of this process, by which the authority of ritual texts is shaped and transmitted, may and of course do vary from one culture to another in the ancient world. But the process itself is arguably present, in one way or another, in all ancient cultures that resort to ritual textualization. The case of the Pentateuch and its ancient Jewish reception is exemplary in this regard, because it allows us to trace the emergence and the development of the authority of ritual texts across several centuries. As such, it is of interest not only to biblical scholars and students of ancient Judaism but also to students of ritual and ancient historians in general.

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49. On this issue, in addition to the essay by W. K. Gilders, see also the essays by C. Frevel, J. Rhyder, and D. K. Falk, all of which also deal with communal interpretive strategies as a key aspect of the negotiation of authority in relationship to ritual texts.

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