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A comment on the presentation

Dear OTSEM-participants,

The material I will present at the 2010 meeting consists of an early version of some introductory material from my ongoing dissertation. As can be seen from the form, this is a work-in-progress, meaning there are still many gaps to fill. Some parts have been left out from this presentation for want of space. In other places I have indicated a not yet written section with a headline in order to give a clearer idea of the planned structure. The exact place of all this material in the final dissertation will be "somewhere in the beginning".

I am very much looking forward to our discussion. Some of the things I hope will come up are:

- A general discussion on the structure of the text. I would be very happy for your input on the disposition plan which is still to be considered a rough sketch, as it is constantly changing. This presentation contains *Part I: Introduction* in its present, very modest form.
- The different explanations for the strong impurity and stigma of the disease which I discuss (and, for the most part, reject), starting on p 6. Can some parts of these themes be accepted as answers to my main question, why **צרעת** is the only disease to be strictly regulated by law?

I'm also hoping to hear some new things from you that I had no idea I should have thought of. See you all in September!

Best regards,

Linnéa

Disposition

Part I: Introduction

1. Outlining the problem
2. The recent discussion on the purity laws
3. Method, hypothesis, terminology
4. Skin diseases in the ancient Near East, a contextual background to Leviticus 13-14

Part II: Analysis

1. Text analysis: Lev 11-15
2. Text analysis: Other texts on **צרעת** in the OT.
3. Text analysis: Other OT-texts on ritual, purity, divine punishment and other relevant themes
4. Text analysis: Extrabiblical texts of interest for Lev 13-14
5. Reflections on the social function of the law
6. Isolation, stigmatization and fear of disease
7. Clean and unclean and its relation to being cured

Part III: Conclusions

The Law on צרעת in Lev 13-14

August 13, 2010

Linnéa Gradén

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1 Outlining the problem

The regulations on צרעת in Leviticus 13-14 is a long and dense legal section. It is also a very odd one. It revolves around one particular disease, which one we do not know for sure. Early on, tradition identified צרעת with leprosy. This identification has now been discarded by most researchers, and many modern Bible translations choose expressions like "scale disease" or even the very general "skin affliction" for this unknown illness. Still, the stigma remains. Commentators and everyday readers alike still seem prone to think "leprosy" when these chapters are mentioned. Doing so, one also often thinks "sin", "punishment", "disgust" and so on. Why is it so? Why is this disease so special?

Already in the first half on the twentieth century, a number of studies on the exact meaning of the word צרעת saw the light, and it has been shown over and over again that the illness we think of as *leprosy*, or with its modern name *Hansen's disease*, does hardly match the disease described in Leviticus 13-14.[1] Still, somehow, it's as if this conclusion never really made it into the minds of many readers. Even knowing about the issues of translation and identification (or at least, having seen the terminological studies), many present-day readers and commentators have not been able to rid their minds of the idea that the Bible talks about leprosy, leprosy being that dreadful, disfiguring, terminal and highly contagious disease that we know of from schoolbooks on mediaeval European history and from the colourful seventies movies. Ironically, a simple glance at the biblical texts themselves would have immediately shown that this is not what the Old Testament has in mind. There is also a widely spread idea that skin diseases were a major concern for legislators all around in the ancient Near East. We will see that this too is a misconception.

In modern day research, Leviticus has hardly been the most popular part of the Hebrew Bible. There are stunningly few detailed works to be found on this book. Rather, one seems to prefer to skip the boring lists of clean and unclean, and the pedantic priestly instructions on sacrifice. But in my view, this book holds the key to one of the great mysteries of our medical and cultural tradition: Where does our aversion towards leprosy come from? Most probably, the Bible is part of the reason. But - does even the Bible really have this strong antipathy? Does the biblical text in itself present the disease as dreadful, life-threatening, disfiguring or as a result of sin or punishment? How has that view of צרעת marked research on the Biblical purity system?

Research often tends to find certain areas of special interest within each book, resulting in some chapters being more extensively commented upon than others. Leviticus 13 and 14 are not among those popular chapters. Most of the attention has been given to the task of identifying the disease. As the terminological discussion (p 15) will show, I am personally doubtful that such an identification is possible, or even meaningful. Our further analysis will soon make it clear that the problematic singling out of צרעת does *not* depend on its precise medical identification. The biblical text nowhere presents a good reason for why there is so much talk of this disease and not others, and this would hardly be made clearer even if we could identify the disease.

Apart from the quest for terminological exactness, some work has also been done on the subject of ritual and law in the later years, but this research has tended to over-

[1]

look the peculiar place occupied by Leviticus 13-14, the law(s) on צרעת. Studies on Leviticus have been focusing on what or how, paying little attention to why. It is for this reason that the present study will focus not only on traditional exegesis with classical methods, but also more explicitly on social and anthropological concerns.

1.1 The material

2 The recent discussion on the purity laws

On several occasions, exegetes have maintained that **צרעת** holds a particularly strong place in the Israelite system of pollution.[2] If this is true, that would surely explain why so much text is devoted to the disease. One could, however, ask what is the chicken and what is the egg. Was **צרעת** so unclean that it required a law, or did an excessive amount of legal material change how the disease was regarded?

We now approach the one of the central questions of this study: Why does **צרעת** pollute? Why do some things pollute and not others, why some more than others? Is there a general rule to control the entire system or do we have to look for individual explanations for each piece of the big purity puzzle?

The more common explanations to what gives something the power to pollute all focus on the association of those things with danger and illness, foreign cults and idolatry, demonic or other supernatural forces, boundary functions and death. For our interest, the two latter themes are the most relevant. The subject of epidemic illness will be rejected as an explanation of the prominent position of **צרעת**. A connection with apostasy is hardly in question. Thoughts of demonic forces and divine punishment will also be considered as this thought is still going strong in modern exegesis. Let us examine the proposed explanations for the allegedly extreme impurity of **צרעת**.

2.1 Contagion and duration

One common misconception is that **צרעת** is a lethal and highly contagious disease. Though we may not be able to identify the disease with absolute certainty, we can be very certain that contagion or permanent illness is hardly the main concern of the Old Testament texts. Harrison's suggestion that the lack of description of the disease in its more advanced form is due to the text's interest being to isolate the infected person as early as possible for the protection of the community is neither plausible nor necessary.[3] This suggestion stems from the outdated conviction that **צרעת** is to be identified with leprosy, or at least with a contagious disease. This is the view I argue cannot be supported by Leviticus itself.

While an argument of silence may not, if standing on its own, be very convincing, it sure is odd that a medical instruction as thorough and detailed as Lev 13 should fail to mention the dangers of contagion had that been considered a risk. The mere presence of an elaborate rite of cleansing, clearly said to take place after the disease is gone (Lev 14:3b) tells us that obviously a complete recovery was possible, and probably even expected. Similarly, the statement in 13:46 that "He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease" (כָּל־יְמֵ֨י אֲשֶׁר־הַנֶּ֥גַע בּוֹ) seems rather to expect the patient to be cured.

The fact that the unit Lev 13-14 mentions neither this risk of contagion nor the risk of an epidemic spread, makes no claims the disease could be terminal, and presents no symptoms even remotely life threatening, all point in the same direction: **צרעת** is not regarded as a health hazard, neither to the public nor to the individual. It is also clear that, even with nothing said of the durance of the disease, a complete healing is definitely possible and probably also expected.

[2]

[3] Harrison 1980, 153

The same conviction is indubitably expressed in the story of the Aramean commander Naaman in 2 Kgs 5. Even though he suffers from **צרעת**, Naaman still holds a high office in the Aramean army. When he learns that someone in Israel might cure him, he goes to the Aramean king to discuss the matter. Next, he pays a visit to the Israelite king to ask for help. If Naaman's disease was thought to be contagious, it is hardly possible he would have been able to keep his high position in the army. It is even less probable that he would have been allowed personal meetings with not just one, but two kings.

The *conclusion* must be that the Hebrew Bible does not fear an epidemic outbreak of **צרעת**. This is further reinforced by Lev 13:12-17, which deals with a case of passing and returning **צרעת**. As soon as the **צרעת** whitens and covers the entire body of the patient, that person is to be declared clean. But if "raw flesh"(**בְּאֶשֶׁר חַי**) has appeared, he is unclean. If then the raw flesh turns white again, the patient is again clean.

Since this purity is the condition for the person to be allowed to return to the camp, the fear of contagion can once again be rejected. It simply makes no sense, if there is a common fear of an epidemic outbreak, to allow a person carrying the disease to wander in and out of the camp if the diseasewas expected to break out again.

Likewise, a suspected case of **צרעת** in a person or a house is not a source of uncleanness until it has been so pronounced by the priest. This can be seen several times in Lev 13, i.e. verses 3, 8 and 22. It is even clearer in 14:36, which treats the case of a suspectedly infected house: "The priest shall command that they empty the house before the priest goes to examine the disease, or all that is in the house will become unclean; and afterward the priest shall go in to inspect the house." In other words, the impurity status depends on a formal proclamation, which also doesn't support the idea of any big fear for an epidemic. The rules of quarantine simply are not strict enough to prevent the spread of an epidemic disease.

2.2 The levels of impurity

Many attempts have been made to sort out and organise a hierarchy of biblical impurities. The most elaborate is probably the one presented by Jacob Milgrom.[4] Based on several factors, such as the duration of the state of impurity, the purification procedures required, the communicability of the impurity and its effect on the common and sacred domains, he concludes that there is a clear hierarchy of the severity of the impurities, with **צרעת** topping the list as the most unclean. His list sorts uncleannesses of human impurity bearers, thus not including unclean objects and animals, producing this hierarchy:

1. The person with **צרעת** (Lev 14)
2. The parturient (Lev 12)
3. A person with genital discharges (Lev 15:3-15, 15:28-30)
4. Corpse-contaminated priest (Ezek 44:26-27)
5. Corpse-contaminated lay Nazirite (Num 6:9-12)
6. Person with accidentally prolonged impurity (Lev 5:1-13)

[4] Milgrom 2000, 986-991

7. Corpse-contaminated lay-person (Num 5:2-4, Num 19)
8. Menstruant (Lev 15:19-24)
9. Handler of red cow, scapegoat or burnt **חטאת** (Num 19:7-10, Lev 16:27-28)
10. A man who emits semen (Lev 15:16-18)
11. A carcass-contaminated person (Lev 11:24-40, Lev 22:5)
12. A secondarily contaminated person (Lev 15, Lev 22:4b-7, Num 19)

This thorough work of classification that has been carried out has given many good and new insights, as well as providing a fine illustration of a system of rank and value that was surely present in the general conception of impurity. Still, the systematization proposed is not infallible. It suffers from several weaknesses and fails to answer many questions, the most importantwhy the hierarchy should look like this, including some conditions and ignoring others. It also cannot explain why the impurities should be ranked this way. Philip Peter Jenson, referring to an earlier study by Goody, hits the nail on the head with the words "... lists, tables and written structures are a feature of literary, rather than less developed cultures, and there is a temptation to fill in all the blanks in a system that is not fully worked out in a culture."[5]

Another obvious problem is that the biblical sources themselves are not in accordance with each other. One example of this is that while Numbers requires the removal from the camp of the persons with **צרעת** as well as **זב** (Num 5:1-3), Leviticus commands this only for the person with skin disease (Lev 13:45-46), and not for the otherwise very thoroughly considered **זב** (Lev 15). Milgrom partly acknowledges this in ascribing the different views to differing redactional strata, though still drawing his conclusions based on the cumulative effect of all the restrictions found in the separate strata together.[6] In my view, it is important to distinguish between the diverging Pentateuchal traditions and admit that the system of purity is not totally coherent.

As Jenson rightly points out, some inconsistencies may be due to a complex theology rather than to conflicting source material.[7] Still, given the obvious fact that different biblical books show different views on **צרעת**, we have no reason to exclude the presence of diverging views *not* resulting from a complexity of theological thought, but rather from the existence of traditions from separate backgrounds even within the Pentateuch. Such contradicting elements within the laws are actually not uncommon.

Consider for example Lev 15:24 and 20:18, both of which treat the subject of a man who has sexual intercourse with a woman during her menstruation. While 15:24 states that the man, like a menstruating woman, will be unclean for seven days, 20:18 commands that both the man and the woman be cut off from their people. Since it doesn't make much sense to combine the two, it is more logical to consider this an example of two diverging views on the severity of a given impurity. We should thus not be surprised to find several opinions on the subject of **צרעת** as well. In other words, we may in the case of regulations on intercourse during menstruation, as well as in the case of the skin disease, have an instance of originally conflicting source material, which later grew into being a complex theology.

[5] Jenson 1992, 68
[6] Milgrom 2000, 984-991
[7] Jenson 1992, 23

Either way: the lack of clarity already in the Hebrew Bible on how impurities are to be treated should make it clear enough to us that not all questions can be answered by arranging the impurities into a diagram. If the concept of purity is not totally clear in the Old Testament, we should not set our hopes to sorting it out merely by a hierarchical arrangement.

The most important *conclusion*, thus, is that the ritual system can give us some clues as to the varying degrees of impurity within the system. Our text analysis in Part II will consider this more in depth. For now, suffice it to say that this hierarchy of impurities sure is interesting, but not convincing enough to explain why this is the only disease to be regulated by law.

2.3 Boundaries

It is a fact well known to anthropologists that human cultures show a special interest in borderline phenomena. This is easily recognised when we consider the large number of rites de passage present in any human culture: rites related to time, age, change of social status or group membership, weddings, births, deaths, festivals celebrating calendric changes and so on.

In the view of anthropologist Mary Douglas, the border theme is clearly present in the Old Testament as well, and is one of the keys to understanding its purity scheme. She suggests that all major sources of impurity stem from their unclear status between different categories. To be counted as clean, an animal must fit fully within one of the fixed classes.[8] Developing this thought some further, this would mean that the impurity of some of the unclean animals can be explained by observing that they are often notoriously hard to classify. Shellfish and eel, for example, live in the sea but still do not have all the common traits of a fish. This would make them hard to categorise and therefore unclean.

Likewise, the impurity of the parturient (Lev 12) could be explained by the birth of a child being part of a transitional process, that is, an opening between two categories. The זב and זבה of chapter 15 are explained in the same way, as well as the menstruant (to these latter could possibly also be added the theme of association with death, see 2.4 below). But the question remains: Can this theory explain the particular position of the law on צרעת?

According to Douglas, and with support from Milgrom, the explanation for the "extreme" level of impurity of the disease is its focus on the failure of the skin to fill the function of a boundary.[9]

The skin is viewed as the most outer border of the body, with the double task of keeping the body closed inside and strange elements kept outside the body. A damaged skin may not be able to do this. Broken skin allows blood and other liquids to leak out and exposes open flesh. Open wounds let dirt and strange particles enter the body. The boundary between inner and outer, between a person and the world around is thereby not clear. This is proposed as an explanation of the importance of boundaries, which is then claimed as the reason behind the purity system.

[8] Douglas 1991, 55
[9] Douglas 1991, 121

There are several objections to be made here, both to the idea of holding this as the overarching rationale for the purity system and as an explanation for **צרעת** in particular.

To explain the system as a whole, the observation of boundaries can surely be one important part. Festivals that break up the year into sections and passage rites that mark divisions between one part of a person's life and another are just as central to Israelite religion as to any other culture. It is not very likely though that this theory could explain all that there is to Israelite sense of purity. Why animals that do have cloven hooves and chew cud should be less of a border crossing phenomenon than animals with just one of these traits is hardly clear, and Douglas's own explanation is not very convincing.[10]

In the discussion of the animals, one must also ask whether the system seems to presuppose a limited number of categories, and then ask whether that thought is realistic. Unless one wants to propose the existence of a number of fixed "natural" categories, remembering Douglas's own crisp clear formulation of how anthropologists will always insist that "nature is culturally defined"[11], it is hard to see why categories of purity should not be able to include certain animals. Likewise, one must observe that some things that could be very clearly classified – such as a clean dead animal – are still impure. As for the effect on **צרעת**, there are several problems with the idea of a boundary theme as the explanation.

Firstly, it is not explicit from the text in Lev 13 that **צרעת** does necessarily result in a leaking and broken skin. Though it must be admitted that there are a number of hapax legomena in chapters 13-14, and that all terms for swellings and blisters are not clear to us, the text still never explicitly talks of open wounds or leakage of bodily fluids.

Quite to the contrary, it is made perfectly clear that even a spot of a change of colour can be enough to call it an unclean **צרעת**. Lev 13:4 instructs that "But if the spot is white in the skin of his body, and appears no deeper than the skin, and the hair in it has not turned white, the priest shall confine the diseased person for seven days." and 13:8 then concludes: "The priest shall make an examination, and if the eruption has spread in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is a leprous disease."

Secondly, this theory cannot explain why only **צרעת** is treated by the Old Testament. If the skin's failure to fulfil its barrier duties were enough, one would expect to see a much larger number of symptoms and diseases listed. One would expect comments on all the boils and blisters of other biblical texts. One would expect references to open cracks and wounds. One would certainly not, however, expect to find, as one does in Lev 13:12-13 and 13:34, that there are skin afflictions, even **צרעת** variants, that are clearly clean.

Thirdly, it is hard to explain why this "border theme" did not create a never-ending list of other diseases to be regulated by law. Why are there no references to other kinds of skin disease? Or to illnesses causing running eyes and noses? Eye diseases are believed to have been among the most common medical issues in the ancient Near East, much due to the large number of parasites and infectious diseases present in this climate, combined with poor hygiene and lack of water.[12] This is further buttressed by the earlier discussed medical parts of the Code of Hammurabi, where eye operations

[10] Douglas 1991, 55
[11] Douglas 1999, 144
[12] Miles and Driver 1952, 417

make a prominent part of the legislation on medical practice.[13] As shown on page **??**[14] , blindness is commonly mentioned also in the Hebrew Bible. Simply, the diseases that cause symptoms approaching that fine line between the inside and the outside of the human body should be quite numerous.

The *conclusion* of this discussion on boundaries must be that this theme alone cannot really answer many questions. It fails to make clear why and how categories should be fixed, and more importantly fails to explain why **צרעת** should be the only disease seen as one threatening the borders of the human body. The human fear and fascination for borderline phenomena probably has some important input to provide into the discussion on **צרעת**, but is not enough as an answer.

2.4 The association with death

"Do not let her be like one stillborn, whose flesh is half consumed when it comes out of its mother's womb." Aaron's words in Num 12 as God strikes Miriam with **צרעת** has probably played a fundamental role in establishing the association with death as something particular for this disease.

Douglas and Milgrom share the view that the purity system must be understood, in Douglas's words, in the perspective of "the God of life as opposed to all things related to death".[15] This association is held to be made on two levels: the symbolical and the visual. On the symbolical level, Douglas and Milgrom argue, everything that represents death, or loss of life, must be considered unclean.[16] This is not necessarily the same as saying that everything that is unclean is so because it symbolises death (we will return to that question in Part II), but focuses on the diametral opposition between the God of Israel and the realm of death.

With this way of thinking, it is self-evident why dead bodies of both humans and animals should be considered unclean, as well as graves. As for the theme of death and loss of life in relation to **צרעת**, the connection is less clear. The impurities of the **זבה** and the menstruant are in this scheme of things explained by the loss of blood being understood as a sign that the woman is not pregnant – therefore the loss of a potential life.[17] The same goes for the **זב**, where the flow also does not lead to a pregnancy but again, a loss of potential life.

As for **צרעת**, Aaron's words in Num 12 have been used to show that the disease was supposed to make the ill person look like dead. Aaron's words sure are strong. But does it really show that **צרעת** has a stronger connection with death than other diseases? Milgrom's claim that the source of the impurity is not the disease in itself but its appearance is interesting but not entirely fitting.[18] Obviously, ages before the knowledge of bacteria, a diagnosis must be made on the basis of the looks of the skin condition. But as we have seen earlier, a fully visible **צרעת**, covering the patient from top to toe in white does not necessarily make the person unclean (Lev 13:12-13). We

[13] Roth, Hoffner, and Michalowski 1995, 123 § 215-220

[14] Not included in this paper, thereby the lacking page reference

[15] Douglas 1993, 24

[16]

[17] Douglas 1999, 178

[18] Milgrom 2001, 817

have also found that even a smaller spot of צרעת can render a person unclean.[19] The size of the affected area is not what is decisive for the diagnosis.

It is also worth repeating that Leviticus does not describe the physical symptoms in very severe terms, and surely not as severe as Aaron does. It is hard to see how this remark could create a clear and obvious difference between צרעת and all other diseases, so that צרעת requires treatment in its own law. It is simply hard to understand why other diseases should not attract the same kind of impurity if looks are all that matters. What does "death" look like anyway? Is it plausible to assume that צרעת is the only disease able to provoke this thought? What about its visual appearance would be the cause of an extreme impurity?

Indeed, many conditions could bring about the association with death – let's just start by considering what chronic starvation does to the human body. Fevers and lung diseases sure take their toll, as well as many other diseases with symptoms on the skin that are not covered under the term צרעת. Measles, chickenpox and plagues can all be lethal, not to mention how open sores and wounds, contracted in battle, hunt or in the dangerous heavy agricultural work must have reaped innumerable deaths from fevers and infections. The impurity status of צרעת , then, cannot be explained simply in terms of visibility.

Milgrom also states that צרעתwas hardly considered a disease, since furniture which was removed from an infected house before the house was declared unclean did not become impure.[20]This, in my view, supports the suggestion that a visible affliction is not enough to cause impurity - even נֶגַע צָרַעַת is not unclear until the priest has declared it officially טמא.

If the visibility of the disease were the reason, and the priest's declaration were only a confirmation of what was already suspected, namely that the house's affliction really is נֶגַע צָרַעַת, one would wonder why this has no retroactive effect on the removed furniture. The view generally held in Leviticus is rather that impurity is a non-conditional state, totally unrelated to the human agent's conscious or deliberate contact with the source. In Lev 11, a dead animal is impure no matter what the circumstances. The same goes for a grave. The command in Lev 5:17-19 that a person who inadvertently commits a sin and realises it only later must bring forward a sacrifice for this sin shows that sin cannot be ignored only because it was committed unknowingly. From this we can suppose that the priest's role in declaring the impurity of the infected house is *not* to confirm the house owner's suspicion.

In view of this, is it really sensible to claim that צרעת is extremely and particularly connected with death? I do not think so, and more importantly: neither do the purity laws of Leviticus.

In the Pentateuch, some of the short texts that speak of the skin disease mention purity as the reason for removing people with צרעת and זב from the camp. Lev 13-14 too has the view of צרעת as something potentially unclean, and devotes the entire chapter 14 to the purification rite. It does not, however, explain why the disease is

[19]Lev 13:24-25: "Or, when the body has a burn on the skin and the raw flesh of the burn becomes a spot, reddish-white or white, the priest shall examine it. If the hair in the spot has turned white and it appears deeper than the skin, it is a leprous disease; it has broken out in the burn, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean. This is a leprous disease."

[20]Milgrom 2001, 819

special or where the purity stems from. More important yet in this case: the text in Leviticus, as we have seen, never mentions any extreme symptoms, which makes the explanation of a connection with death rather dubitable. Why, if that connection is so important, is this not expressed in the legal text?

The possible, but not very clear, traces of the thought of death, are to be found in Lev 13:46-47 and in chapter 14. 13:46-47 prescribes a behaviour associated with mourning rites be observed by the diseased person. In chapter 14, the ritual of purification for a person that is now rid of the disease has some elements in common with the ritual for purification after corpse-contamination in Num 19. Whether these traits are common for rituals dealing with impurity associated with death, or with any purity, or if they are actually just common elements for any kind of ritual will be investigated further below in Part II..

As for the comparison of death and **צרעת** made by Aaron, it will be a task for our later detailed exegesis of all the pericopes on **צרעת** to elucidate the relation between the different Pentateuchal opinions on the disease. Given the fact that some of the pericopes differ in time and place of origin it is hardly self-evident that all texts do share Aaron's opinion. The aesthetic and narrative function of the disease in Num 12 will also be considered.

The *conclusion* of this discussion is that the idea of connecting **צרעת** with death is expressed somewhat clearly in only one Old Testament pericope. Yet, even in that pericope the function and use of that particular disease must be discussed. Our full exegesis of this text in Part II will look further into the role of the disease.

The legal text of Lev 13-14 has nothing explicit to say of the **צרעת**-death connection and neither do the other texts. And the crucial question remains: commentators have not been able to explain why **צרעת** should be more closely connected with death than any other disease, and no explanation can be easily derived from the biblical texts as to why **צרעת** should be so special.ss

2.5 Demons and divine punishment

2.6 The disease as a polluter of sancta

2.7 Conclusions

3 Method and disposition

The above outline of the problem will hopefully have made clear that the aim of this study is to fill the gap that has been left open between the textual and anthropological sides of the study of the purity laws. I'd like to make the presupposition that the growth of a legal text is the result on one hand a textual process, involving scrolls and temple archives and redactions, and on the other hand a social process where popular customs, likes and dislikes have a chance of influencing the legislators' ways of viewing the world. Therefore, I am convinced that the most accurate way of reading any legal composition is with an eye open also to the wider social context, the scope being not only to understand the text, but to understand the text's place in its own society, and, equally important, realizing the effect of society on the composition of the text.

After making these initial observations on the problems still remaining considering Leviticus 13-14, the question, method and working hypothesis follow almost naturally. The basic question underlying this study can be easily condensed into one simple phrase: Why is there a law on צרעת in Leviticus? My starting hypothesis suggests that the law on צרעת in Lev 13-14 has undergone significant alteration since its first formulation. I would like to propose the existence of an original core consisting of a few of the verses in Lev 13-14, mainly verses containing ritual instructions, which makes the law on צרעת appear more consistent with chapters 12 and 15 both in form and content.

I suggest that these three ritual texts in chapters 12-15 share a common origin which differs from that of Lev 11 and the rest of Leviticus. Considering that the physical conditions dealt with in 12-15 can be supposed to have been very common, I suggest that they were all considered rather undramatic and normal. The extreme views on צרעת as a very threatening and very sinful disease might rather be a result of its odd place in the biblical canon.

The task of applying social and anthropological methods and considerations to the study of a particular biblical law is for the one purpose of answering the question: Why does the Hebrew Bible include a law on צרעת and not on other diseases? In doing this, it remains my hope not to fall into the common trap of producing a result that consists of nothing but observations. The explanation I would like to propose to the dissertation's main question is a two-faced one, assuming the answer is best found combining a thorough study of the text with a sociocentric investigation of the function of purity law.

While the Biblical text itself may have a long and complicated composition history, this history is not unrelated to society's view of a certain disease or of the purity system altogether. The use of anthropological material for comparison is of course not an unknown way of exploring biblical texts, and is especially common when discussing matters of purity and ritual. In many cases, striking parallels can be shown between the biblical material and its contemporary Near Eastern neighbouring cultures.

It is for this reason that I will take advantage of some anthropological material. While textual issues and canon questions are more specific to the history of the text in question – that is, the Hebrew Bible – some other questions can be helped by being compared with similar occurrences outside the Israelite context. Thus, some knowledge from outside will be brought in to enhance this investigation. A number of studies on different aspects of human behaviour will be relevant, for example some classic

analyses of the presence of body-house symbolism within societies, or on the function of laws that consolidate social stratification.

Anthropologists have also been able to identify many important aspects of biblical views shared also by present-day peoples all over the world. In other words, taking on a view that puts the human nature on centre-stage should tell us a lot about why purity laws are of interest to a certain society. At the same time, it is obvious why the focus of a study like this must be the biblical text itself and that classical methods are able to produce a lot of information about the text's growth. I therefore believe this combination of methods will prove most fruitful.

Respecting this presupposition, the introductory chapter will conclude with an overview of the ancient Near Eastern context in which Leviticus must be placed. After that follows the main part of this study, namely the analysis of the texts in question, starting with the purity laws in Lev 11-15 and then broadening the perspective to include other relevant texts from the Hebrew Bible and a few extrabiblical texts as well.Some sections will follow dedicated to understanding some social aspects of disease and of cultic law, after which we will sum up the discussions in the section of conclusions.

3.1 Terminology

This section has not been written yet. When written, it will include:

1. An overview in the change of understanding of the term **צרעת**. This word has a complicated translation history. Antique uses and translations show clearly that the term originally intended no precise diagnosis, but should be understood as a rather general and vague term for a skin disease or a group of diseases. A simple look at the symptoms described in Lev 13-14 also make it clear that **צרעת** should not be identified with leprosy. Since the disease(s) cannot be identified, and since Leviticus does not really describe a disease, but a number of more or less related symptoms, I have chosen to keep the term **צרעת**.

2. A discussion on my use of terms such as "patient" and "disease", which might at first glance seem to be too medical for the discussion of an essentially cultic text.

3. Some comments on the word **זב**, which I am not sure that I will translate. A good translation could be "discharge" or "genital flux". Some commentators use "gonhorreic flux", but I am anxious not to use an unnecessarily precise medical term, since I believe that striving for medical exactness in this case is missing the point.

4. Some comment on **טהר** and **טמא**.

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