

## ***Leviticus 10:1: Strange Fire and an Odd Name***

RICHARD S. HESS  
DENVER SEMINARY

*This study will argue that the names of Nadab and Abihu, as well as the unique description "strange fire," describe an association with cultic activities that are not merely outside the divinely approved actions of the priests but represent an innerbiblical association with the sin of Aaron in Exodus 32 as well as a parallel with Semitic rites of ordination found in extrabiblical texts from thirteenth-century BCE Emar. Together these support the conclusion that the condemned actions were idolatrous.*

*Key words: Aaron, Abihu, coals, Emar, Exodus 32, fire, Golden Calf, idolatry, incense, Leviticus, Nadab, ordination, torch*

Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took their firepans  
and put coals in them.

They placed the incense on top  
and offered strange fire before the LORD,  
that he had not commanded them.

The significance of the 'ēš zārâ, "strange fire," and the nature of the action that provoked the deadly response of v. 2 have been the object of much discussion. Some scholars have identified the culprit as inappropriate incense.<sup>1</sup> Others have emphasized the condition of the priests, suggesting that the fire was offered when the priests were drunk or before they were actually priests.<sup>2</sup>

1. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch* (trans. J. Martin; Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes 1; reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 340; Ronald E. Clements, "Leviticus," in *The Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman, 1970) 2.29-30; Baruch Levine, *Leviticus* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989) 58-59. Jacob Milgrom (*Leviticus 1-16* [AB 3; Garden City: Doubleday, 1991] 351, 628-33) argues that the polemical purpose of the story was to discourage the unauthorized burning of incense by Israelites during the Monarchy.

2. For drunkenness, see W. H. Gispen, *Het Boek Leviticus* (New York: Revell, 1951) 166. Roland K. Harrison (*Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* [TOTC; Leicester:

Commentators have also proposed that the term designates fire or coals that were not part of the fire that was authorized to burn continually within the Tabernacle precincts.<sup>3</sup> Finally, some have been satisfied with the final phrase in the verse, that it was contrary to God's command, and they have not pressed any further.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this study is to consider the nature of the transgression and the meaning of the "strange fire" by examining the literary context and structure of the verse, the significance of the personal names of the two sons, and the role of the ancient Near Eastern context of rites of anointing priestly figures in the West Semitic world.

### STRANGE FIRE AS A FOREIGN CULTIC ACTIVITY

This section will consider the importance of fire in the immediate literary context of Lev 10:1, the "strange" nature of the fire and how its association with the incense recalls non-Yahwistic practice, and literary parallels between this text and others that also suggest foreign cultic activities.

---

IVP, 1980] 110) raises it as a secondary cause. John E. Hartley (*Leviticus* [WBC 4; Waco: Word, 1992] 135) attributes this explanation to the final editor of the account. The latter interpretation, proposed by N. H. Snaith (*Leviticus* [Century Bible; London: Nelson, 1976] 75-76) understands the root behind זָרָא *zārâ* as "layman" rather than "strange." Alternatively, Roland Gradwohl ("Das 'Fremde Feuer' von Nadab and Abihu," *ZAW* 75 [1963] 285-96) suggests that they had no right to enter the sanctuary or that they were not properly prepared. However, both interpretations contradict many appearances of the two men where they are connected with the priesthood (Exod 28:1, 41; 29:44; 40:2-15; Lev 7:35; Num 3:1-3) and so had the right to perform priestly duties. See John C. H. Laughlin, "The 'Strange Fire' of Nadab and Abihu," *JBL* 95 (1976) 559-60. Further, N. Kiuchi (*The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function* [JSOTSup 56; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987] 79-82), noting similar phrases with Leviticus 16, and Hartley (*Leviticus*, 132-33) both argue that Nadab and Abihu entered the Most Holy Place. However, this is unlikely as Milgrom (*Leviticus* 1-16, 599-600) demonstrates, citing similar phrases with the Numbers 16 incident of Korah, as well as several arguments from Leviticus 10 alone; for example, that the fire came out of the Tent to reach the two sons, that Mishael and Elzaphan were told to draw near to get the bodies, rather than to enter, and that the deaths took place before all the people.

3. Laughlin, "The 'Strange Fire' of Nadab and Abihu," 561; Milgrom, *Leviticus* 1-16, 597-98. Milgrom maintains that the reference to 'iš maḥātō, literally, "each his fire-pan," suggests unsanctified pans that, like the fire, came from outside the sanctuary precincts. Both Laughlin and Milgrom compare a similar description in the account of Korah and his company (Num 16:17-18; 17:3). See also Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996) 117-20.

4. S. H. Kellogg, *The Book of Leviticus* (3d edition; A. C. Armstrong, 1899; reprinted, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978) 238; Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 155; Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 117.

Leviticus 8-9 considers the act of ordaining Aaron and his sons into the priesthood. Of the various literary connections of these chapters with chap. 10, Warning has observed the sevenfold repetition of the word 'ēš, "fire."<sup>5</sup> The initial occurrences describe the sacrifices on the first day, where parts of the bull are burned outside the camp, while bread and flesh are burned as an offering to God inside the camp (Lev 8:17, 32). The remaining references to fire all take place on the eighth day. The phrase, *watēšē' 'ēš millipēnē yhw̄h watō'kal*, "fire broke out from before the LORD and it consumed. . . ," brackets the last four appearances of the noun at 9:24 and 10:2. Douglas finds here "three fiery episodes."<sup>6</sup> The first deals with God's acceptance of the burnt offering. This is followed by the fire that was brought into the Tent by Nadab and Abihu. Finally, there is the destruction of the two sons of Aaron by fire.

Positioned between the two occurrences of 'ēš, "fire," in v. 1, is the *qētōret*, "incense," that is offered with the fire. This reference to incense serves a literary purpose. The term, 'ēš *zārâ*, "strange fire," only appears again with reference to this incident (Num 3:4; 26:61). Nevertheless, the *zwr* root is often found with reference to a person outside of the nation of Israel or as a description of deities other than Yahweh.<sup>7</sup> A closer parallel occurs in Exod 30:9, where incense is described in this manner, as *qētōret zārâ*. In the context it forbids any offering to God of incense other than that made according to the recipe that appears a few verses later in Exod 30:34-38. Thus the reference to incense in Leviticus 10 alerts the reader to the previous usage of *zārâ* as a description of a mixture to be offered at the altar. In both Exodus 30 and Leviticus 10, what is "strange" is a substance not approved by God. In light of the specific commands regarding fire in the sanctuary (Exod 27:20-21), the strange fire would have been brought in from outside the Holy Place. Furthermore, the already noted association of the root, *zwr*, with foreigners and with other deities invites the possibility that the fire was used or produced in a manner similar to other non-Yahwistic cults.<sup>8</sup>

It is the nature of the fire that is the key to the transgression, as it is to the punishment. This reciprocity, along with the repeated emphasis on fire in this passage, and the references to the strange fire of

5. Wilfried Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus* (Biblical Interpretation Series 35; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 75-76. The word appears in 8:17, 32; 9:11, 24; 10:1 (twice) 2.

6. Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 200.

7. For foreign people, see Isa 1:7; 29:5; 61:5; Jer 30:8; 51:2, 51; Ezek 7:21; 11:9; 28:7, 10; 30:12; 31:12; Hos 7:9; 8:7; Joel 3:17; Obad 11; Lam 5:2. For other deities, see Isa 43:12; Jer 2:25; 3:13; 5:19; Pss 44:21; 81:10. See L. A. Snijders, "זָרָא/זָרָא' *zûr/zâr*," *TDOT* 4.52-58.

8. Philip J. Budd, *Leviticus* (NCB; London: Pickering / Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 151.

Nadab and Abihu in Numbers, all support the understanding that the cause of the fiery judgment was the strange fire itself.

The final clause of v. 1, "that he had not commanded them," recalls the use of this expression (in the first person) in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah. There God does not command either prophets to prophesy in the name of other gods (Deut 18:20) or Israel to sacrifice their children to Baal (Jer 7:31; 19:5). Thus the expression is associated with foreign cultic activities.<sup>9</sup>

There is a close association between the sons, Nadab and Abihu, and their father, Aaron. This connection was expressed by Damrosch in his review of the literary context of Leviticus.<sup>10</sup> In particular, he emphasized the relationship of the sin of Nadab and Abihu with that of their father, Aaron, who worshiped the Golden Calf. Although the sons do not appear in that incident in Exodus 32, the connection is a reasonable one from a literary perspective.<sup>11</sup> In fact, this is the closest narrative event before Leviticus 8-10, in which Aaron is the main character. His own abuse of the cult in the act of creating the Golden Calf and leading the people in worship foreshadows that of his sons, who also abuse their privileges in their performance of the cult. Like their father, the sons introduce practices that are foreign to the cult as decreed by Yahweh.<sup>12</sup>

9. Ibid.; Moses Aberbach and Leivy Smolar, "Aaron, Jeroboam, and the Golden Calves," *JBL* 86 (1967) 139.

10. David Damrosch, "Leviticus," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (ed. R. Alter and E. Kermode; Cambridge: Belknap, 1987) 66-77, esp. 70-72. See also Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 202-5. Damrosch's attempt to link Aaron and his sons with Jeroboam I and his sons, Nadab and Abijah, is interesting. Indeed, the parallels, in which the sons die before their time, the sin of the father involves a calf image, and the names of the sons are similar in both stories, seem more than coincidental. However, the key name, Abihu, is not found in the Jeroboam account.

11. Both the rabbis and modern commentators observe verbal and thematic connection between Exodus 32 and the narratives of Leviticus 8, 9, and 10. See Hartley, *Leviticus*, 122, 123, 134; Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 148; Mark E. Rooker, *Leviticus* (NAC 3A; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000) 149. Martin Greenberg ("The True Sin of Nadab and Abihu," *JBQ* 26 [1998] 263-67) asserts that Nadab and Abihu designated the Golden Calf as Israel's gods in Exod 32:4. Their sin in Leviticus 10 was a failure to confess and atone for this earlier idolatry. However, this is contrary to the explicit statements of Lev 10:1 that focus the issue on the "strange fire."

12. Those who make this connection with Aaron relate the sin of the Golden Calf as one that anticipates the cultic sins of the sons. See Damrosch, "Leviticus," 71; Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 201-5. Walter Houston ("Tragedy in the Courts of the Lord: A Socio-Literary Reading of the Death of Nadab and Abihu," *JSOT* 90 [2000] 31-39) suggests that the punishment of the sons is actually an attempt to transfer both punishment and guilt from Aaron to these sons, who would have no heirs and represent no priestly family. Thus the story becomes a means by which the guilt of Aaron is dealt with, and the surviving sons retain no stain of sin. While of interest in assessing the meaning of the two events, this interpretation remains highly speculative and ignores both the distinction of the two narrative events (one concerns Aaron and the other concerns his

A parallel may also be drawn with Jeroboam I, who also erected golden calf images at Bethel and Dan (1 Kgs 12:28-32; 2 Kgs 10:29; 2 Chr 11:13-15; 13:8).<sup>13</sup> The sons of Jeroboam, Nadab and Abijah, possess names similar to the sons of Aaron. The extent to which there is an intentional parallelism between the narrative of Leviticus 10 and those concerning Jeroboam implies a similar purpose to the actions. Thus, insofar as the biblical texts accuse Jeroboam of the worship of other deities, the same charge may be considered appropriate regarding the activities of the sons of Aaron. They also introduced foreign cult practices.

Thus the nature of the fire as "strange" and the association of its bearers, Nadab and Abihu, with their father and with later figures who bear similar names provide repeated connections with non-Yahwistic cult practices as identified in the Hebrew Bible.

### THE PERSONAL NAMES

#### *Other Occurrences and Etymologies of Nadab and Abihu*

The names of the two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, occur only in this chapter in the book of Leviticus. They appear elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in four contexts: (1) with reference to their genealogical roles as two sons of Aaron (Exod 6:23; Num 3:2; 26:60; 1 Chr 6:3; 24:1); (2) as the two named figures who along with Moses, Aaron, and the 70 elders ascended Mt. Sinai at the covenant-ratification ceremony (Exod 24:1, 9); (3) as the first group to be anointed as priests (Exod 28:1); and (4) in other biblical allusions to the events recorded in Leviticus 10 (Num 3:4; 26:61; 1 Chr 24:2).

There are other figures in the Bible who bear the name Nadab. The son of Jeroboam I, who reigned for a short period after him in the early ninth century BCE (1 Kgs 15:25-31), has already been mentioned. No one else in the Bible bears the name Abihu, however. It is unique to the son of Aaron.

In addition to the name of Israel's king, Nadab may be associated with other first-millennium BCE names. The root occurs in Old South

---

sons) and the connection with the other narratives in which Nadab and Abihu appear. As to this latter point, it is the unique relationship with fire that repeatedly appears and deserves further examination.

13. Aberbach and Smolar ("Aaron, Jeroboam, and the Golden Calves," 129-34) list 13 parallels. It seems unlikely that these parallels and the similarity in the names of Nadab and Abihu/Abijah are coincidental. The preexilic context of the name Nadab and the presence of a second-millennium BCE West Semitic ordination ritual with similarities to Leviticus 10 (as will be argued below) allow for the possibility that the Deuteronomistic editor of the accounts in Kings could have been aware of this tradition concerning Nadab and Abihu and intentionally made use of parallels in crafting the account of Jeroboam I and his sons.

Arabic names, on a seventh-century BCE ostrakon from Tel Arad, a shekel weight from Lachish, and at least nine eighth-, seventh-, and sixth-century BCE Hebrew and Ammonite seals.<sup>14</sup> It serves as a root for nouns and other forms meaning "noble, willing." The personal name may retain a shortened form of the confession, "DN is noble, willing." This longer form is found in the name on the Arad inscription and many of the seals. However, it is important to note that the root is found in personal names from second-millennium West Semitic cultures as well. From the early second millennium there are Amorite names such as *in-du-ub-ša-lim*, *na-du-bu-um*, *na-du-be-lí*, and the feminine name, *na-du-ba*.<sup>15</sup> From thirteenth-century Ugarit, the root appears in the personal names *ndbn* and *ndbd*.<sup>16</sup> Also at thirteenth-century Emar, the root occurs in a name, a patronym, *ye-en-di-ib-LUGAL*.<sup>17</sup>

Abihu is a confessional name meaning "He is my father." As has been argued elsewhere, the *yod* is best understood as a pronominal suffix rather than merely a *hireq compaginis* or binding vowel.<sup>18</sup> This name is of a recognized type in the ancient Near East in which a kinship term, such as "father," is used to describe the deity. The two elements in the name are common West Semitic and could be used in names at any time in Israel's history. The absence of this particular form of the name in Biblical Hebrew and extrabiblical Hebrew inscriptions is therefore surprising and noteworthy.<sup>19</sup> In fact, the name Abihu, "he is my father," is unusual among West Semitic names.<sup>20</sup>

14. Yohanan Aharoni, *Arad Inscriptions* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981) 68-69, inscription 39, line 3; Graham I. Davies, *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions: Corpus and Concordance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 262; Nahman Avigad, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* (revised and completed by Benjamin Sass; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Israel Exploration Society, and Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997) numbers 921, 924, 953, 954, 955, 956; Robert Deutsch and Andre Lemaire, *Biblical Period Seals in the Shlomo Moussaieff Collection* (Tel Aviv: Archaeological Center Publications, 2000) numbers 33, 65, 156. Of the latter three, numbers 33 and 65 use the shortened name, *ndb*.

15. I. J. Gelb et al., *Computer-Aided Analysis of Amorite* (AS 21; Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1980) 332.

16. F. Gröndahl, *Die Personennamen der Texte aus Ugarit* (Studia Pohl 1; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967) 164.

17. D. Arnaud, *Recherches au pays d'Aštata—Emar VI. 3: Textes sumériens et accadiens* (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1986) 188-89, text 176, line 30.

18. Scott C. Layton, *Archaic Features of Canaanite Personal Names in the Hebrew Bible* (HSM 47; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990) 146-50, 154.

19. Abihu should be distinguished from Abiyahu, with an attested consonantal spelling that occurs both within and outside the Bible in a manner identical to Abihu, except for an omission of the final *'alep*.

20. Nor has the Akkadian equivalent, *a-bi-šu*, turned up in second-millennium West Semitic archives such as Ugarit, Emar, and Alalakh.

*Abihu, Aaron, and Fire*

The result of this examination of the two names is that they both possess easily identifiable Hebrew etymologies and include in their names elements that are well known in personal names. However, Nadab is the only name that is attested elsewhere. The form, Abihu, does not occur. This may be accidental, or it may suggest that the unique form of this name was used in the Bible to communicate something important in the context in which it appears.

It is therefore of interest to review the four contexts in which Abihu appears, as suggested above. In the genealogies, the anointing of the first priests, and the ascent at Mt. Sinai to meet God, the name "he is my father" connects Abihu with his physical father, Aaron. This literary connection stands, although the onomastic interpretation of the expression has to do with a confession to God. Further, each of the two events, the ascent of Sinai and the instructions for anointing the priests, is preceded by narratives that describe fire. The narrative that precedes Exod 24:1 is described in 19:1-25 and 20:18-21. Exod 19:18 portrays God as descending to meet Moses "with fire." Exod 20:18 describes the Israelites as witnessing "the thunder and the lightning" (NRSV), where the word for lightning is the plural of *lappid*, the Hebrew for "torch."<sup>21</sup> The holy fire of God as described in Exodus 19 and 20 stands in contrast to whatever occurs in Lev 10:1.

The other narrative occurrence of Abihu forms an introduction to the divine instructions for the ordination of the priests in Exod 28:1. Despite the literary proximity of Leviticus 10 to the actual ordination in chapters 8 and 9, Aaron's sons are not mentioned there. However, Exodus 28 immediately follows the commands concerning the sanctuary lamp that Aaron and his sons are to keep burning at all times (Exod 27:20-21). Again, there is a contrast between the holy fire of the sanctuary and the "strange fire" of Leviticus 10.

Thus the broader literary context of Nadab and Abihu, along with the nature of the fire and the relation of Nadab and Abihu to others who are involved in non-Yahwistic cults, associates them with God's holy fire as well as with foreign cultic activities.

#### rites for anointing priests in the West Semitic world

The discovery and publication of ritual texts from thirteenth-century BCE Emar has provided new insights into religious practices of the

21. Only here, among its 14 occurrences, is *lappid* used with the meaning of "lightning." The use of a torch as an image for lightning is otherwise unknown. Although its implications for the event of Leviticus 10 may seem remote, it will be argued that the torch has cultic significance in a related ritual text.

Late Bronze Age West Semitic world. Among these ritual texts, one of the most interesting is the ritual for the installation of the high priestess of the storm god at Emar. This has also been one of the most intensively studied texts that has come from the site. As many as seven cuneiform fragments comprise five manuscripts, each representing its own text with greater or lesser variants in comparison with the others.<sup>22</sup> Three scholars have published complete editions of this text: Daniel Arnaud, who published the editio princeps, Manfred Dietrich, and Daniel Fleming.<sup>23</sup>

Cultic installation texts for priestly figures are relatively rare in the West Semitic world. The only ones that are known to provide a measure of completeness are from Emar. Of these, the most complete is text number 369. This one, along with the ordination found in Leviticus 8-9, provide the most comprehensive accounts of priestly installation rituals in the West Semitic world. Similar elements in these West Semitic rituals invite study and contribute to the understanding and interpretation of Leviticus 10.

The ceremony for the cultic installation of the priestess at Emar may be summarized briefly. The "priestess" (NIN.DINGIR) is chosen by lot from the citizenry of Emar. On the day of her selection, various sacrifices are made to the storm god <sup>d</sup>IM, translated Addu.<sup>24</sup> A variety of sacrifices, feasts, and other ceremonies continue through the week. At the end of the week, on the last day according to Fleming, the priestess enters her new home in the temple.<sup>25</sup> Of special interest are lines 62b-63:<sup>26</sup>

*a-na pa-ni nu-ba-at-ti 1 GUD 7 UDU.ĪA 3 SILA<sub>4</sub>.MEŠ <GIŠ> KI GI.ZI.LÁ  
ù lú.meš za-ma-ru a-na pa-ni-ša DU-ku*

which Fleming renders:

Just before the evening watch, one ox, seven sheep, three lambs, along with a torch and the singers, will go ahead of her. . . .

22. Text A: Msk 731027 and Msk 74245; Text B: Msk 731042; Text C: Msk 74286a; Text D: Msk 731061 + Msk 74274; and Text E: Msk 74286e. The last of these was identified by Fleming.

23. Arnaud, *Recherches au pays d'Aštata*, 326-37 text 369; Manfred Dietrich, "Das Einsetzungsritual der Entu von Emar (Emar VI/3, 369)," *UF* 21 (1989) 47-100; Daniel E. Fleming, *The Installation of Baal's High Priestess at Emar* (HSM 42; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

24. So Dietrich, "Das Einsetzungsritual der Entu von Emar (Emar VI/3, 369)," 78 et passim.

25. Fleming, *The Installation of Baal's High Priestess at Emar*, 56-59, 186-92. Dietrich ("Das Einsetzungsritual der Entu von Emar [Emar VI/3, 369]" 84-87) identifies some of these rituals as occurring on the fifth day and others on the sixth.

26. Fleming, *The Installation of Baal's High Priestess at Emar*, 24.

What is of interest here is the mention of a torch. It draws no further comment from any of the editions and commentaries. Perhaps it serves to give light along the way to the temple in the evening. However, its mention is surprising, since it does not occur in any of the previous rituals. This is true despite the fact that the evening time is also specified twice before this ceremony (lines 20 and 40), and in at least one of those cases a procession takes place at that time of day (line 45). Only on the final day of the ceremony is a torch mentioned, and only then does it explicitly form part of a procession before the priestess that includes sacrifices and singers. All of the sacrifices and singers, as well as the ritual axe that follows the priestess, have also appeared on previous days. Only the torch is a new addition.

This unique addition on the final day is not an accident, nor is it the result of a careless scribe. Three aspects of the text support this. First, Emar 369 is a prescriptive ritual text that is designed to define the ritual for all performances.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it outlines the essential components of the festival and particularly those that might be overlooked. If a torch, such as the one mentioned in line 63, was considered a feature of the previous evening processions in this text, it would have been mentioned there. In fact, it is more likely to have received attention in the first evening procession than in the last one. The fact that it is designated only in the final procession suggests a special importance for it at that point.

Second, the installation text has two structuring devices; a temporal structure divided by days and a spatial framework divided by a series of five processions between the temple and the priestess's house.<sup>28</sup> Four of the five processions are described in detail. Thus it is extremely important to specify the details of performances according to day and procession. It is no more likely that an object in one of the processions, such as a torch, would be optional in regard to its mention than it is feasible that it was optional to enact any of the rituals on days other than those specified for their performance.

Third, in the three processions to the temple, "The order for the installation does not vary, though the participants do."<sup>29</sup> Animals and singers precede the priestess and the divine weapon, an axe,

27. This contrasts with descriptive texts, which relate the events of a single, particular ceremony. For the difference in ritual texts from Ugarit, see Baruch A. Levine, "Ugaritic Descriptive Rituals," *JCS* 17 (1963) 105-11. Fleming, *The Installation of Baal's High Priestess at Emar*, 70, observes this by noting the following features: "The verbs are universally present/future, without reference to any event beyond the scope of the festival. We find specific place-names but no personal names. Emar ritual is conducted from the perspective of the impersonal 'they.'"

28. *Ibid.*, 105-6, 117-19.

29. *Ibid.*, 108. See lines 7-8, 29-30, and 63-64.

follows her. This is true in every one of the processions to the temple. The only "participant" not previously mentioned in any of the processions is the torch. The only other evening ceremony, described in lines 43-45, involves a procession to the house of the priestess's father. Although sacrificial animals are omitted, because the goal of the procession is not the temple, in this ceremony as well singers precede the priestess, and the weapon follows her. According to the text, both this procession and the last one take place at the same time, *a-na pa-ni nu-ba-at-ti*, "Just before the evening watch" (lines 40 and 62). If the torch were for illumination and did not possess some cultic significance, it surely would be mentioned in this earlier account of an evening procession. All the other expected participants appear.

Therefore, the nature of the text, its structure, and the careful sequence of participants in the processions all support the addition of a torch in the final procession as having a unique and special cultic significance for the last part of the ritual.

When the biblical account of the ordination of Aaron and his sons in Leviticus 8-9 is compared with the ordination of the priestess at Emar, there are many differences. It is not the purpose of this paper to detail them. Nevertheless, certain facts argue for a shared tradition of type or genre: both rites originated in the West Semitic world, both share a common time frame of a week to eight days, and both serve a common purpose in the anointing of one or more individuals for priestly service. Indeed, these two texts are unique in their detailed description of an ordination ritual.

Of special interest for this study is the last day of the Emar ceremony and its comparison with the last day (plus one) of the ceremony of the ordination of the priests in Leviticus. Leviticus 10 describes this period of time.<sup>30</sup> It also provides for a comparison between the acts of Nadab and Abihu and those of the priestess's procession to the temple, where she will take up permanent residence. In the process, the priestess has a torch of fire pass before her. Of course, Nadab and Abihu also present fire as they go into the Tabernacle. Their fire is from outside the cultic precincts, as is true of the fire in the Emar text. Could it be that this torch of fire, included as it is with the sacrifices, represents a special offering to the storm god, whether he goes by the

30. Verses 12-20 detail a discussion about eating offerings and sacrifices and the controversy that ensues when Aaron and his sons do not eat the remaining meat. In the context of chaps. 8-10, the meat that is mentioned refers to sacrifices that form part of the ordination of the priests in the previous chapters. Therefore, the events of Leviticus 10 are linked to those of the preceding two chapters, and they are involved in the completion of the ceremony set aside for the ordination of the priests. The eighth day (Lev 9:1) does not end with chap. 9. The events narrated in Leviticus 10 occurred at the end of a week of ordination ceremonies.

name of Addu or Baal? The text from Emar is an illustration of the background out of which the sons of Aaron offered their fire. At the end of the festival, when the final sacrifices were performed, West Semitic priestly ordination rituals involved the presentation of fire to the deity. Nadab and Abihu were thus following a custom known elsewhere in ordination rituals. Although the full significance of this rite eludes the modern reader, the parallel demonstrates the origin of the act in the ordination of priestly figures in West Semitic cults such as those of the storm god, Baal or Addu. Previous suggestions in scholarship that have connected the offering of strange fire with practices of devotion in other religions have posited an origin to the cultic activity in Egypt or in Zoroastrian Persia.<sup>31</sup> The West Semitic context suggested here is closer culturally and attached to the only other ordination ritual with a detailed description.

It also provides one further link with fire in the Pentateuch. The use of a torch in the Emar ritual invites comparison with the unusual and surprising appearance of the Hebrew word for torch that is used to describe the lightning at Mt. Sinai in Exod 20:18. Does the use of the term in this context also suggest a cultic significance? It does seem appropriate to the cultic law of the altar that follows in Exod 20:22-26 and introduces the Book of the Covenant.

The prohibition on intoxicating drink is also of interest in light of the ordination ritual at Emar. Throughout the ritual week and on the last day in the ritual from Emar (lines 67 and 73), wine and beer are mentioned. Again, this may suggest a background of the use of intoxicating drink in such rituals, similar to their use elsewhere in ritual texts. However, in Lev 10:9 it is forbidden. This prohibition is unusual, both because it is the only specific command given from God directly to Aaron in this passage and because it seems out of place in a context unrelated to drunkenness. However, the phrase in the verse "when you enter the Tent of Meeting, that you may not die," suggests a possible connection with the experience of Nadab and Abihu. Were they also involved in drinking and did their inebriation bring about the fiery judgment? Thus, although v. 1 emphasizes the strange fire as the cause, it is not possible to discount entirely the role of drunkenness. This is especially true in light of this verse and its explicit association with death at the Tent of Meeting. Here perhaps is another link with the ancient West Semitic rituals of ordination, one that the biblical text wished to avoid. In this manner, the ordination

31. Hartley (*Leviticus*, 131) suggests that Nadab and Abihu borrow their rites from Egyptian religion, a contention for which he provides no evidence. Laughlin ("The 'Strange Fire' of Nadab and Abihu," 563-65) suggests a Zoroastrian fire ritual. However, little is known about this event and so the comparison is speculative.

of Aaron and his sons was to be distinguished from those of other priestly figures in the surrounding lands.

The view that the sons of Aaron were performing a ritual associated with non-Yahwistic West Semitic cults is defensible. Like Aaron, who earlier in the narrative of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32) was condemned for worshiping other gods, his sons also engage in a rite that has its background in the worship of other deities and the appointment to their priesthood. Thus the comparative ritual from Emar, the name Abihu, and the literary allusions in the text all unite to indict the sons of Aaron in the condemned practice of their father.