THE MEANING OF EZEKIEL 44,6-14 IN LIGHT OF EZEKIEL 1–39

The question of the historical and literary background of Ezek 44,6-14 has been much discussed and answered in different ways. As the following outline will show, Ezek 44,6-14 is usually interpreted either as a reference to a historical event outside the book of Ezekiel (perhaps mentioned in other biblical texts) or as an example of inner-biblical interpretation. While I do not reject either of these two approaches per se, the focus of this paper is on the question of whether Ezek 44,6-14 makes reference to earlier chapters within the Book of Ezekiel itself. When interpreting this pericope, *intra*-textual references should have priority over *inter*-textual and historical references. I will concede that there may be both intertextual and historical references in Ezek 44,6-14; I will argue, however, that the primary references are to preceding texts within the Book of Ezekiel itself. Any intertextual or historical reference should be regarded as subordinated to the message of the book itself.

Julius Wellhausen [1] identified the Levites in Ezekiel 44 with the priests of the high places that had been abolished by King Josiah, as reported in 2 Kings 23; he further identified the Zadokites with the priesthood in Jerusalem who had already been serving in the temple in Jerusalem before the time of Josiah. As such, he takes Ezekiel to be degrading the non-Jerusalemite Levites for the abominations they committed at the high places. According to this interpretation, Ezekiel 44 functions as the missing link between D, where all Levites were regarded as priests, and P, where there is no indication that the Levites ever served as priests. This view has dominated biblical scholarship for almost a century. In his influential study on Ezekiel 40–48, Hartmut Gese still operated with these assumptions [2]. It was Antonius H.J. Gunneweg who fundamentally questioned this model [3]. He rejected both the idea that Levites had been priests before the Josianic reform and the idea that the priests of the high places who had been brought to Jerusalem were Levites. As a result, he does not believe that the historical referent of Ezek 44,6-14 is the Josianic reform. As an alternative, he

[1] J. WELLHAUSEN, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (Berlin [6]1905) 115-145.

[2] See, e.g., H. GESE, *Der Verfassungsentwurf des Ezechiel (Kap. 40–48) traditionsgeschichtlich untersucht* (BHTh 25; Tübingen 1957) 121, n. 1.

[3] See A.H.J. GUNNEWEG, *Leviten und Priester*. Hauptlinien der Traditionsbildung und Geschichte des israelitisch-jüdischen Kultpersonals (FRLANT 89; Göttingen 1965) 118-126; 198-203.

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tentatively suggests that the conflict referenced in Ezekiel 44 is a conflict between the Zadokites, understood to be the former Jerusalemite priesthood, and a group of originally non-Jerusalemite priests and Levites, understood to have been influential for some time among the Jerusalemite post-exilic cult personnel [4]. Gunneweg believes that the Zadokites were responsible for composing Ezekiel 44, and that these same people were responsible also for the composition of Numbers 18, a text which formulates the distinction between priests and Levites in the same terms.

My goal here is not to provide a detailed outline of the history of research. While some scholars still defend Wellhausen's identification of the priests of the high places in 2 Kgs 23,5-9 with the Levites in Deut 18,7 [5], thus identifying the sin of the Levites mentioned in Ezekiel 44 as their service at the high places, others reject this identification and provide alternative explanations [6]. Nevertheless, as Nathan MacDonald has recently pointed out, "even Wellhausen's critics have taken his account as their starting point in offering alternative reconstructions" [7]. Many have suggested linking Ezekiel 44 to historical or literary (inner-biblical) backgrounds, such as Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16–18 [8], the idolatry with Baal of Peor in Numbers 25 [9], the story of the Gibeonites in Joshua 9 [10], the sin of Jeroboam

[4] GUNNEWEG, *Leviten*, 203.

[5] E.g., K.W. CARLEY, *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (CBC; Cambridge 1974) 294; N. ALLAN, "The Identity of the Jerusalem Priesthood during the Exile", *HeyJ* 23 (1982) 259-269, here 265-269; A. CODY, *Ezekiel: With an Excursus on Old Testament Priesthood* (OTM 11; Wilmington, DE 1984) 159-160; R.M. HALS, *Ezekiel* (FOTL 19; Grand Rapids, MI 1989); J. SCHAPER, *Priester und Leviten im achämenidischen Juda* (FAT 31; Tübingen 2000) 79-95.

[6] E.g. J.D. LEVENSON, *Theology of the Program of Restauration of Ezek 40–48* (HSM 10; Missoula, MT 1976) 134-140; R. ABBA, "Priests and Levites in Ezekiel", *VT* 28 (1978) 4-5; M. HARAN, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford 1978) 104-111; J.G. MCCONVILLE, "Priests and Levites in Ezekiel: A Crux in the Interpretation of Israel's History", *TynB* 34 (1983) 3-32, here 7-9; R.K. DUKE, "Punishment or Restoration? Another Look at the Levites of Ezekiel 44,6-16", *JSOT* 40 (1988) 61-81, here 66-72; S.S. TUELL, *The Law of the Temple in Ezekiel 40–48* (HSM 49; Atlanta, GA 1992) 150-151; I.M. DUGUID, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel* (VTS 56; Leiden 1994) 79-80; S.L. COOK, "Innerbiblical Interpretation in Ezekiel 44 and the History of Israel's Priesthood", *JBL* 114 (1995) 193-208; J. BLENKINSOPP, "The Judaean Priesthood during the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Periods: A Hypothetical Reconstruction", *CBQ* 60 (1998) 25-43, here 41-42; T.A. RUDNIG, *Heilig und Profan. Redaktionskritische Studien zu Ez 40–48* (BZAW 287; Berlin 2000) 291-295; M. KONKEL, *Architektonik des Heiligen. Studien zur zweiten Tempelvision Ezechiels (Ez 40–48)* (BBB 129; Berlin 2001) 304-317.

[7] N. MACDONALD, *Priestly Rule. Polemic and Biblical Interpretation in Ezekiel 44* (BZAW 476; Berlin 2015) 5.

[8] COOK, "Innerbiblical Interpretation".

[9] For further discussion, see LEVENSON, *Theology*, 136-138.

[10] W. ZIMMERLI, *Ezechiel*. 2. Teilband: *Ezekiel 25–48* (BKAT XIII/2; Neukirchen-Vluyn 1969) 1125. For further discussion, see also LEVENSON, *Theology*, 135-136.

in 1 Kgs 12,28-32 [11], the Carians mentioned in 2 Kgs 11,4-8 [12], the idolatry in the time of Manasseh in 2 Kgs 21,1-9 [13], the נתינים, descendants of the slaves of king Solomon, mentioned in Ezra 2,43-54 [14]. On the other hand, several scholars have concluded that, due to a lack of data, it is simply not possible to identify a historical background for the apostasy described in Ezekiel 44 [15]. According to Stephen L. Cook, who argues that Ezekiel 44 is an inner-biblical interpretation of Numbers 16–18, many scholars have misconstrued Ezekiel 44 "as a mirror of history" [16].

What all these approaches have in common is that they seek to locate the primary referent of Ezekiel 44 outside of the book itself, whether within history or within other parts of the Bible. As Michael Konkel has conceded in the introduction to his study on Ezekiel 40–48, these chapters have yet to be integrated into the Book of Ezekiel as a whole [17]. In his recent study on the canonical shape of the Book of Ezekiel, Tobias Häner similarly notes that Ezekiel 40–48 has often been studied apart from the rest of the book [18]. This is not to say that no proposals at all have been made. With regard to Ezek 44,10, Steven S. Tuell points to Ezek 6,3-6; 8,10; 14,3-4, where the same term for idols is used and where the place of the idolatry is the Temple [19]. Alice Hunt suggests that "Ezek 44 is an interpretation of Ezek 23" [20]. Most recently, Nathan MacDonald has argued "that Ezek 44:10-14 is a sophisticated example of inner-biblical interpretation in which two distinct texts have been interwoven: Numbers 18 and Ezekiel 14" [21]. However, these proposals focus on individual, isolated passages that are related to Ezekiel 44 on its own, rather than

[11] ABBA, "Priests", 5.

[12] L.C. ALLEN, *Ezekiel 20–48* (WBC 29; Dallas, TX 1990) 261; J. MILGROM, "Ezekiel and the Levites", *Sacred History, Sacred Literature*. Essays on Ancient Israel, the Bible, and Religion in Honor of R.E. Friedman on his Sixtieth Birthday (ed. S. DOLANSKY) (Winona Lake, IN 2008) 3-12, here 7.

[13] HARAN, *Temples*, 106.

[14] ZIMMERLI, *Ezechiel*, 1125.

[15] MCCONVILLE, "Priests and Levites", 25-26; RUDNIG, *Heilig*, 295; KONKEL, *Architektonik*, 317.

[16] COOK, "Innerbiblical Interpretation", 8.

[17] KONKEL, *Architektonik*, 7.

[18] T. HÄNER, *Bleibendes Nachwirken des Exils*. Eine Untersuchung zur kanonischen Endgestalt des Ezechielbuches (HBS 78; Freiburg 2014) 495: "Die partikuläre sprachliche und inhaltliche Gestalt dieses Buchteils hat indes in der Forschung zu dessen gesonderter Betrachtung Anlass gegeben, um in traditions- und redaktionskritischer Analyse das Werden des sog. ez. Verfassungsentwurfs zu beleuchten".

[19] TUELL, *Law*, 149.

[20] A. HUNT, *Missing Priests*. The Zadokites in Tradition and History (LHBOTS 452; New York 2006) 143.

[21] MACDONALD, *Priestly Rule*, 49.

looking at Ezekiel 40–48 within the context of the book as a whole. So the question that needs to be asked is this: is it possible to identify a conceptual link between Ezek 44,6-14 and earlier parts of the book? Are there connections that go beyond more or less isolated allusions?

I. Ezekiel 40–48 in the context of the Book of Ezekiel

Tobias Häner's recent synchronic study of the book of Ezekiel [22] offers many important insights that raise the question of whether Ezek 44,6-14 refers to texts that occur earlier in the book. According to Häner's stringent linguistic-semiotic analysis, the Book of Ezekiel is divided into an introduction and five acts:

1–3	Introduction: The entrance to the book
4–11	1st Act: "The end has come!" (Ezek 7,2)
12–24	2nd Act: "Turn, and live!" (Ezek 18,32)
25–32	3rd Act: "I spread terror in the land of the living" (Ezek 32,32)
33–39	4th Act: "When they dwell securely in their land with none to make them afraid" (Ezek 39,26)
40–48	5th Act: "I will accept you" (Ezek 43,27)

Häner shows that, despite having a distinct character, Ezekiel 40–48 belongs to the rest of the book and even forms its climax. While the fourth act announces a new exodus event in which Israel will return to its land, the fifth act portrays what Israel's identity in the land will truly be, mediated by God's assurance of forgiveness. According to Häner [23], the theocentric focus of the book as a whole finds its cultic enactment in the fifth act. The dramaturgical composition of the first four acts functions to shame its readers by portraying Israel's exile and the return as YHWH's acts in history. The fifth act, on the other hand, contains the goal of this process, which is Israel's recovery of its true identity, an identity brought about only by YHWH's assurance of forgiveness and his return to the temple. It is only on this basis that it can be possible once again to encounter YHWH in the cult. Ezekiel 40–48 does not only pick up and develop Ezekiel 33–39, but it also contains several allusions to the first act, especially to the first temple vision in Ezekiel 8–11. The two most obvious allusions are:

[22] Häner, *Nachwirken*.
[23] Häner, *Nachwirken*, 542.

- Ezek 40,1-4 [24]: the dating in Ezek 40,1-4 alone is enough to cause the reader to recollect the first chapters of the book. An allusion to Ezek 1,1-3 is also created by means of the keywords: "exile" (גלות), "hand of YHWH" (יד יהוה), and "visions of God" (מראות אלהים). Yet the expressions "hand of YHWH" and the "visions of God" are also mentioned at the beginning of the first temple vision in 8,1-4. There, as in Ezek 40,1-4, the prophet is brought to Jerusalem (simply called the "city" in Ezekiel 40,1). The fact that the prophet is placed on a "high mountain" (הר גבה) links the text to the promise of salvation in Ezek 17,22-24, the only place where the same expression is used. Ezek 17,22-24 is further developed in Ezek 20,40-45. Häner concludes that Ezek 40,1-4 recalls the abominations committed by Israel in the first temple vision and the judgment involving the fall of Jerusalem, but also the forecast of the salvation that is related to the "high mountain".
- Ezek 43,1-9 [25]: In Ezek 43,3 ("just like the vision that I had seen before") we find an explicit reference to the temple vision in Ezekiel 8–11. Ezek 43,4-5, a passage reporting the return of the glory of YHWH to the temple from the East, has several verbal allusions to Ezekiel 8–11, a passage describing the departure of the glory from that location. Ezek 43,7-9 calls to mind the abominations that were committed in Jerusalem (the expression תועבות אשר עשׂו in Ezek 43,8b occurs several times in Ezekiel 8).

Tobias Häner has provided a more detailed outline of the allusions to Ezekiel 8–11 in Ezek 40,1-5 and 43,1-9. Yet the hints provided here suffice to indicate that the temple vision of Ezekiel 40–48 should be read in the light of the earlier visions and promises in the Book of Ezekiel. Indeed, according to Ezek 43,10, Ezekiel has to inform the house of Israel of the shape of the temple (which refers back to Ezekiel 40–42), "that they may be ashamed of their iniquities", and according to Ezek 43,11 he has to teach them the statutes and instructions of the temple (which point forward to Ezekiel 44–46), "so that they may observe all its laws and all its statutes and carry them out". Ezek 43,12 should thus be understood as an introductory formula to what follows [26]. It is therefore very clear that the temple vision in Ezekiel 40–48 should be read in the light of the abominations mentioned earlier in the Book of Ezekiel, especially in the light of the former temple vision in Ezekiel 8–11.

[24] See HÄNER, *Nachwirken*, 522-524.
[25] See HÄNER, *Nachwirken*, 524-526.
[26] See ALLEN, *Ezekiel*, 249.

Ezek 43,10-11 raises two questions that might help us understand Ezek 44,6-14. First, why should the house of Israel be ashamed of their iniquities when they see the plans and the shape of this new temple (v.10)? Second, how do the laws and statutes contribute to the further avoidance of abominations after the return of the glory of YHWH? The key to the first question lies in the new features of this new temple in comparison with the first temple, namely the distinction between the inner and the outer court. In the new temple, the house of Israel was no longer allowed to enter the area of the altar; this shall be their shame [27]. As such, the answer to the second question is that the laws and statutes serve to preserve the holiness of the inner court of the temple by preventing everything that is profane (including the people of Israel and even the Levites) from coming into contact with that which is holy. The opposite is also true. As demonstrated in, e.g., Ezek 42,13-14, these laws prevent everything that is holy from leaving the inner court and thus coming into contact with that which is profane.

This suggestion is supported by Ezek 44,4-5, the two verses that introduce the following verses. According to 44,4a, the prophet is brought to the northern gate, the place where Ezekiel 8 locates the first case of idolatry in (Ezek 8,5-6). There, he sees the glory of YHWH (44,4b) filling the temple after it has returned (Ezek 43,1-12), just as he had seen the glory of YHWH in the temple in Ezek 8,4 before it left the temple in 11,22-23. Afterwards, Ezek 44,5 announces the statutes (חקות) and instructions (תורת) of the temple and calls attention to the entrance of the temple and all the exits of the sanctuary; this is a clear back reference to Ezek 43,11. The text therefore provides the reader with a very clear connection between Ezekiel 43 and 8–11: The statutes and instructions regarding the entrances and the exits in the light of the return of the glory of YHWH are related to the abominations of Ezekiel 8; their purpose is to avoid another defilement of the sanctuary.

II. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EZEK 44,6-8 AND 9-14

Thilo A. Rudnig notes that scholars consider Ezek 44,6-14 to be a unity, with Ezek 44,6-8 functioning as a word of reproach and 9-14 as a word of judgment [28]. However, Rudnig challenges this concept of the text's unity on the base of the following observations [29]:

[27] Cf. DUKE, "Punishment", 63.
[28] RUDNIG, *Heilig*, 205.
[29] RUDNIG, *Heilig*, 205-207.

- There is a change of person between Ezek 44,6-8 (2.P.Pl.) and Ezek 44,9-14 (3.P.).
- Given that Ezek 44,6-8 concerns the Israelites, one would expect the word of judgment in Ezek 44,9-14 to concern the Israelites as well; yet the judgment seems to concern the Levites only.
- Although the idea of judgment is present in 9-14, the main focus is on cultic instructions.
- The reason for the judgment in 9-14 (idolatry) is not the same as the accusation in 6-8 (access of foreigners to the sanctuary).

Rudnig has recently been followed by Nathan MacDonald, who has added the following argument:

> Thirdly, we would expect the reproach to refer to past transgressions and the word of judgment to draw future consequences. In fact, the word of judgment moves repeatedly between past and future. The verses oscillate between past actions, typically expressed with *qatal* and *wayyiqtol* forms (vv. 10a, 12a, bα, 13bβ), and the consequences that are to result, expressed with *weqatal* and *yiqtol* forms (vv. 10b-11, 12bβ-13bα, 14) [30].

Both Rudnig and MacDonald immediately call for a diachronic solution to this problem without even trying to read the text synchronically. Yet their solutions differ in that Rudnig presents a literary-critical solution, while MacDonald's solution is based on inner-biblical interpretation. According to him, an original oracle (44,6-7*.9*.15*) interpreted Isaiah 56, while a later extension (44,7*.8.10-14.15*.16-19) interpreted Numbers 18 and Ezekiel 14.

Although it certainly makes sense to inquire into possible inner-biblical sources, the first interpretive step should be to try and understand the logic of the text on a synchronic level. The following observations should be taken into consideration:

- On a synchronic level, the change of person from 2.P. to 3.P. simply means that when the 2.P. is used somebody is being addressed directly, whereas when the 3.P. is being used someone is being spoken of indirectly. Since the change of person coincides with the change of subject (2.P.: Israelites; 3.P.: Levites and Priests) there is no formal problem with the change of person on a synchronic level; with the reference to the duties of the Levites and Priests in 9-16, it is still the house of Israel that is being addressed.

[30] MACDONALD, *Priestly Rule*, 22.

- Even if one tries to separate 9-14 from 6-8 by means of diachronic explanation, the fact remains that v. 9 takes up the issue of 6-8 (foreigners) while v.10 (כי אם) links the issue of the foreigners with the issue of the Levites. The text therefore obviously intends to link these two issues and so the task of the exegete must be to try to understand this linkage.
- The place of Ezek 44,6-14 within the book as a whole supports the view of Rudnig that Ezek 4,9-14 cannot be a word of judgment [31]. Ezekiel 40–48 forms the fifth act of the book of Ezekiel. Israel's abominations were judged when the glory of YHWH left the temple. But now the glory of YHWH has returned. The context of Ezekiel 44 is not judgment but restauration. The sins that were judged shall not be judged a second time. According to Ezek 44,5 the speech is not about judgment but about the entrance and exits of the sanctuary and the need to stop the former abominations from ever being committed again.

On the basis of these observations we will now interpret Ezekiel 44,6-14 in the context of the Book of Ezekiel as a whole.

III. EZEK 44,6-8: THE ABOMINATIONS OF ISRAEL

A reader who peruses Ezek 44,6-14 within the narrative framework sketched out above, namely that the glory of YHWH has returned to the temple and that the law of the temple is now being given so that the former abominations that had led to the fall of the temple and to the departure of the glory of YHWH will be avoided, this reader will not first think of stories from the Pentateuch or the Book of Kings when he reads the accusations against the house of Israel and the Levites. According to Ezek 44,4, the prophet is brought to the north gate in front of the temple where he had previously seen the first abomination (Ezekiel 8,3-6). Ezek 44,6 addresses the house of Israel as a whole [32] and calls them "rebellious" (מרי). This is the same term used in Ezek 12,2.3.9.25, immediately after the departure of the glory of YHWH from the temple. According to Ezek 44,7-8, the house of Israel as a whole is responsible for the following abominations:

[31] RUDNIG, *Heilig*, 206.

[32] DUGUID, *Ezekiel*, 75-76, rightly states that the "first point to notice about this chapter is that the object of critique is not simply the Levites but the entire house of Israel". See also MCCONVILLE, "Priests and Levites", 26; DUKE, "Punishment", 69.

- They allowed foreigners [33], uncircumcised in heart and flesh, to enter the sanctuary [34].
- They broke God's covenant.
- They did not guard the holy items [35] but set foreigners as guards of the sanctuary instead.

While the term תועבה ("abomination") that designates the sin of the house of Israel in Ezek 44,6-7 is used throughout the Book of Ezekiel and thus fits the sin described in Ezekiel 8–11, where the term is used seven times, Ezekiel 8–11 makes no mention of foreigners [36]. This might be the reason why scholars mostly have looked outside the book to identify the sin of the house of Israel.

In Ezekiel 8 the prophet witnesses the following abominations:

- An idol-image [37] stands in the northern entrance of the temple (vv.3-5).
- The house of Israel is guilty of committing abominations with this idol-image (v.6).
- Seventy elders of Israel are worshiping several idols (vv.10-11).
- Women are weeping for Tammuz (v.14) [38].
- Twenty-five men, who are identified in Ezek 11,1 as leaders of the people, are worshipping the sun (v.16).

Is it possible that Ezek 44,7-8 is referring back to the abominations of Ezekiel 8? As demonstrated above, by means of intra-textual allusions

[33] Some scholars (see COOK, "Innerbiblical Interpretation", 198, n. 15) have argued that בני נכר does not necessarily mean ethnic non-Israelites but might refer to any non-belonger. However, since the text underlines that they are uncircumcised not only in heart but also in flesh, it is difficult to interpret them only as Israelites who were not Levites or priests.

[34] N.J. WARREN, "'The Sin of the Sanctuary' and the Referent of מקדש in Ezekiel 44", *BBR* 25 (2015) 311-323, has recently argued that Ezekiel 44 says nothing about the foreigner's exclusion from the outer court of the temple complex in general, but, rather, refers to the inner court.

[35] See the interpretation of the plural קדשי in GUNNEWEG, *Leviten*, 191: "Überhaupt bedeutet קֹדֶשׁ, anders als מקדש, mehr das Heilige, die Heiligkeit und kann darum, verbunden mit einem anderen Substantiv im Status constructus, im Sinne eines Adjektives gebraucht werden: בגדי קדש (heilige Kleider), כלי קדש (heilige Geräte) usw. Die Mehrzahl meint immer [...] die heiligen, Jahwe geweihten Gaben [...]".

[36] In fact, in the Book of Ezekiel the expression בן נכר (plural or singular) only occurs in Ezek 44,7.9.

[37] The term סמל occurs only five times in the Old Testament: Deut 4,16, Ezek 8,3.5; 2 Chr 33,7.15.

[38] For the identity of Tammuz, who is only attested here in the Old Testament, see K.-F. POHLMANN, *Das Buch des Propheten Hesekiel (Ezechiel) Kapitel 1–19* (ATD 22/1; Göttingen 1996) 140.

Ezek 43,1-11 and 44,4-5 clearly introduce the following speech (Ezek 44,6 – 45,8) in light of the temple vision of Ezekiel 8–11. This suggests that it is the abominations of Ezekiel 8 that the reader should have in mind when reading Ezek 44,7-8. This raises the question, however, of why Ezekiel 8 makes no mention of foreigners, whereas Ezek 44,7-8 takes their access to the sanctuary to be the main problem. It is clear that the mention of foreigners in Ezek 44,7-8 cannot be regarded as a literary allusion to Ezekiel 8. There is no clear hint in Ezekiel 8 that the abominations have something to do with foreigners. This means that Ezek 44,7-8 should be taken as an interpretation of Ezekiel 8, one that goes a step beyond what Ezekiel 8 states. The simplest way to imagine Ezek 44,7-8 doing this is to hold foreigners responsible for bringing the idol-image of Ezek 8,3-5 and possibly also the other idols (vv.10-11), the Tammuz-cult (v.14), and the sun worship (v.16) into the temple. Perhaps this is why Ezek 44,7-8 takes the main problem to be the gate and the deficient guarding of the temple, for these should have kept the foreigners out. When Ezek 44,7 recalls the breaking of God's covenant, it is clear that this covenant could not have been broken by foreigners because this covenant is between God and Israel; this can be seen in Ezekiel 16 (and 17), where the breaking of God's covenant plays a central role (these verses also allude to Ezekiel 8–11). Thus, rather than the foreigners in Ezek 44,7-8 being the ones who have committed the abominations, they are the ones who have caused the Israelites to commit the abominations. To summarize, in the center of the accusation of Ezek 44,7-8 Israel is rebuked for breaking the covenant, which in the first instance is a reference to earlier chapters in the book (16–17), chapters which interpret the abominations of Ezekiel 8 in terms of covenant [39].

That the abominations have something to do with foreigners is already stated in Ezekiel 23, where we find several parallels to Ezekiel 44. Alice Hunt has identified the following [40]: the defilement of the sanctuary, the issue of the Sabbath, idols, "my house", concern with foreigners, abominations, and blood. As such, Ezek 44,6-8 is not the only place in the Book of Ezekiel where foreigners play a role in Israel's abominations. In Ezekiel 23 the two sisters Oholah (Samaria) and Oholiba (Jerusalem) are accused of committing several abominations, including their defilement of the sanctuary (23,38) and their sending for men to come from afar — men who then came (23,40). Ezek 44,6-8 is therefore not the only place in the

[39] The idea of covenant in Ezekiel 16–17 might come from Leviticus 26, cf. HÄNER, *Nachwirken*, 278-289.

[40] HUNT, *Missing Priests*, 141-142.

whole book where the defilement of the sanctuary, first described in Ezekiel 8, is somehow related to foreigners. Although the term בני נכר is not used for the "men who came from afar" (אנשים באים ממרחק) in Ezekiel 23, there is a lexical connection between Ezek 44,7-8 and 23,38-39. The former section speaks of foreigners being admitted "to be in *my sanctuary* to *profane* it, *my house*", the latter accuses the two sisters of having "defiled *my sanctuary* on the same day and *profaned* my Sabbath" (v.38), with v.39 announcing what they did "in *my house*", namely they "called for men to come from afar" and they came (v.40). Even if these men are not designated as "foreigners" (בני נכר), it is quite fair to assume that Ezek 44,7-8 is referring back to Ezek 23,38-40 on a lexical level, with Ezek 23,40 being summarized by the term "foreigners". If we accept this textual allusion to Ezek 23,38-40, it becomes clear that Ezek 44,7-8 interprets the abominations of Ezekiel 8 in light of Ezek 23,38-40.

If Ezek 44,7-8 is related to Ezekiel 8 in this sense, then it is also possible to take other references to the foreigners in other biblical texts into consideration. To give an example, scholars occasionally connect Ezek 44,8 with 2 Kgs 11,4-8, where "Carians, members of the royal guard in Jerusalem who had originally come from Asia Minor [41]", are set as guards of the temple of YHWH by Jehoiada [42]. Ezek 44,8 might be referring to these Carians in a historical sense (if a temple guard of foreigners formed by Carians existed), but this would hardly be a case of inner-biblical interpretation. There is no evidence on the level of the text that Ezek 44,8 is trying to draw the reader's attention to 2 Kings 11 as an intertext.

To summarize, the meaning of Ezek 44,6-8 is simply that the abominations of Ezekiel 8 were caused by foreigners being granted access into the temple building (cf. Ezekiel 23) where they enticed the Israelites to commit idolatry and to break God's covenant (cf. Ezekiel 16). The sin is attributed to Israel, not to the foreigners. By restricting entrance to the sanctuary, the architecture and rule of the new temple function to prevent such abominations from ever being committed again. These observations take us to vv.9-14.

IV. EZEK 44,9-14: THE LEVITES AS GUARDS

Contrary to exegesis in the tradition of Wellhausen, the new thing that Ezekiel 44 is dealing with is neither the distinction between priests and Levites nor the degradation of the Levites; rather, it is the differentiation

[41] BLOCK, *Ezekiel*, 622.

[42] Thus, e.g., ALLEN, *Ezekiel*, 261; DUGUID, *Ezekiel*, 76; BLOCK, *Ezekiel*, 622-623.

of the temple court into an inner and an outer court with the effect that the altar now belongs to the holy area. This raises the question of who is allowed to enter the inner court. This is important for a correct understanding of Ezek 44,9-11, especially v. 10.

What does כי אם ("rather", "but", "on the contrary") in v.10 serve to contrast? It is usually understood in the following sense: that for which the foreigners were responsible is now the responsibility of the Levites instead. This is then interpreted either in light of v.8 to mean that the Levites instead of the foreigners will be the guards of the sanctuary [43], or that the Levites instead of the foreigners will be allowed to enter the sanctuary [44]. Both interpretations raise serious problems. On the one hand, the problem with the first interpretation, asserting that it is the Levites rather than the foreigners who will be guards of the sanctuary, is that כי אם refers not to שמר ("guard", v.8) but rather to באו ("enter", v.9). The issue here is not that the foreigners shall not guard the sanctuary but that they shall not enter it. On the other hand, the problem with the latter interpretation, asserting that the Levites instead of the foreigners are allowed to enter the sanctuary, is that Ezek 44,12-14 explains the service of the Levites in light of their sin. This raises the question as to why the Levites should be honored for their sin by being granted access to the sanctuary. Furthermore, Ezek 44,13 explicitly forbids the Levites from coming near to YHWH, which is the exclusive task of the priests. There is a third possible interpretation of the text which not only fits the sense of the passage as a whole but also does justice to the wording. This interpretation can best be shown alongside the two rejected interpretations:

a. The foreigners shall not **guard** the sanctuary; rather, the Levites shall **guard** the sanctuary
b. The foreigners shall not enter into the sanctuary; rather, the Levites shall enter into the sanctuary
c. The foreigners shall not enter into the sanctuary; rather, the Levites shall **guard** the sanctuary

[43] Thus GESE, *Verfassungsentwurf*, 58.

[44] Thus, e.g., DUKE, "Punishment", 71, who adds the verb "enter" in his translation in brackets: "[...] but, rather, the Levites [will enter], who went far from me [...]". The same applies to DUGUID, *Ezekiel*, 77; COOK, "Innerbiblical Interpretation", 200; BLOCK, *Ezekiel*, 624; MILGROM, "Ezekiel", 6; MACDONALD, *Priestly Rule*, 38; WARREN, "Sin of the Sanctuary", 319. According to RUDNIG, *Heilig*, 284, v.11 is a new sentence, which leads to the same reading, that not the foreigners but the Levites shall enter the sanctuary.

The point of sentence (c) is that the Levites are in fact not commanded to do something instead of the foreigners [45]. Rather, they are commanded to do something against the former practice of the foreigners. Verse 9 forbids the foreigners from entering the sanctuary, and, in contrast, vv.10-11 command the Levites to guard the doors (outside the inner court). Thus, neither the foreigners nor the Levites are allowed to enter the inner court, but the Levites have the task of guarding the doors that lead to the inner court [46]. Verse 11b does not allow the Levites to render any priestly service. According to Ezek 40,39-43, the act of slaughtering takes place at the vestibule of the door that leads to the inner court and is, therefore, a Levitical task. As such, the Levites in Ezek 44,11 are being commanded not only to be guards outside the inner court but also to perform there the ministry of slaughtering. The priests, on the other hand, have the task of offering sacrifices within the inner court at the altar (Ezek 44,15-16).

Therefore, Ezek 44,12-14 does not explain why the Levites are commanded to do something instead of the foreigners; rather, these verses explain why the Levites have to do guard duty and some lower ministry outside the inner court (which did not exist in the former temple as a court separated from the outer court) without having permission to enter the inner court.

To sum up what has been discussed so far: the new element is the distinction between the inner and the outer courts, or, more to the point, the new element is that the altar now belongs to the sacred space of the temple building and no longer to the space of the temple's court yard. It is clear that the foreigners and the house of Israel are not allowed to enter the inner court, and it is equally clear that the priests are allowed to enter it. The question is: what about the Levites? Do they belong on the side of the priests and serve the priests (and thus enter the sanctuary together with the priests), or do they belong on the side of the people and serve the people (and thus stay outside the sanctuary together with the people)? The answer is that the Levites belong to the side of the people whom they "serve" (Ezek 44,11a). But why?

If we search the Book of Ezekiel for a reference to the sin of the Levites we do not find any mention of the Levites at all. Ezek 44,10 states that the Levites went far from YHWH "when Israel went astray". Here reference is made to an event that the reader is presupposed to already know. We can

[45] Cf. KONKEL, *Architektonik*, 105.

[46] I agree with WARREN, "Sin of the Sanctuary", 311-323, that Ezek 44,9 does not exclude the foreigners from the whole temple area but only from the inner court. However, I do not agree that the inner court is "the realm of the Priests and Levites" (322). Rather, it is the realm only of the priests.

therefore ask: when did Israel go astray? In Ezekiel 1–39, the verb תעה ("go astray") occurs only once, namely in Ezek 14,11. There it is stated that the house of Israel went astray in the past. Ezek 14,1-11 in turn refers back to Ezekiel 8 (cf. 14,1 and 8,1 where the elders sit before the prophet) [47]. But there are several other verbal echoes in Ezek 44,9-11 of Ezek 14,1-11, e.g. "idols" and "bearing guilt" [48]. If Ezek 44,10 is referring via Ezek 14,1-11 to Ezekiel 8, which is when the house of Israel went astray, it is ascribing a co-responsibility for this event to the Levites. What might their responsibility have been? The answer to this question is quite simple: the claim that the Levites "went far from YHWH" is not meant spiritually but quite literally, for they left the sanctuary they should have been guarding. In Ezekiel, the verb רחק ("be/go away") always refers to physical distance from the sanctuary (8,6; 11,15-16; 43,9). Thus, according to Ezek 44,10, the Levites left the sanctuary and neglected their guard duty when Israel strayed after their idols, as described in Ezekiel 8.

Many scholars since Hartmut Gese [49] have pointed to the relationship between Numbers 18 and Ezekiel 44. More recently, scholars, such as Fishbane [50], Cook [51], and MacDonald [52], have argued that Ezekiel 44 is an inner-biblical interpretation of Numbers 16(–18). In a straightforward way this would mean that Ezek 44,9-14 intends to identify the past sin of the Levites who "had gone far from YHWH" with Korah's rebellion. This is indeed what Cook seems to suggest when he writes that the "*traditum* and direct referent of Ezekiel 44 is an authoritative description of a wilderness conflict, not any actual priestly conflict in Israelite history" [53]. This raises the question as to whether there are any hints that Ezek 44,9-14 identifies the past sin of the Levites with Korah's rebellion. In Numbers 18, the distinction between the Levites and the priests is clarified as a reaction to Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16–17. According to Numbers 16, Korah and his sons, who were Levites, stood up against Moses together with 250 leaders of the people, reminiscent of the 25 leaders of the people mentioned in Ezek 8,16 and 11,1. According to Num 16,3, they said that

[47] Cf. HÄNER, *Nachwirken*, 276: "Durch die Parallele von 8,1 und 14,1 wirkt die Schau der kultischen Vergehen, die dem Propheten in 8,5-18 zuteil wird, als Hintergrund in 14,1-11 mit ein, wodurch zur Geltung gebracht wird, dass die Exilierten Anteil haben an den in Tempelnähe begangenen Gräueln, da sie die 'Götzen', die dort verehrt werden, 'auf ihren Herzen' tragen".

[48] For the relationship between Ezek 44,10-15a and Ezek 14,1-11 see MACDONALD, *Priestly Rule*, 47-48.

[49] GESE, *Verfassungsentwurf*, 65-66.

[50] M. FISHBANE, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford 1985) 138-143.

[51] COOK, "Innerbiblical Interpretation".

[52] MACDONALD, *Priestly Rule*, 41-47

[53] COOK, "Innerbiblical Interpretation", 205.

the whole community is holy and therefore not only the priests can approach YHWH [54]. As a result of the rebellion, Num 18,1-7 makes clear that the priests are responsible for the sanctuary and the altar, while the Levites are responsible for the whole tabernacle (excluding the holy items).

Was Ezek 44,10 formulated in such a way that it clearly identifies the sin of the Levites with the rebellion of Korah? This is precisely what Cook argues for [55]. However, there are several reasons why this is unlikely. First, as argued above, the formulation of Ezek 44,10 has a referent in Ezek 14,11, which in turn leads to Ezekiel 8. Again, as argued above, within the context of the Book of Ezekiel the language of the Levites "going far from YHWH" refers to their leaving the sanctuary. According to Numbers 16–17, however, the sin of the Levites is just the opposite, namely their entrance into the sanctuary! Secondly, the Book of Numbers as a whole makes no use of the verb תעה, which is the term Ezek 44,10 uses to describe Israel's sin. Thirdly, neither idolatry nor foreigners play a role in Numbers 16–17 [56]. Cook's explanation that neither "idols" nor "uncircumcised" (Ezek 44,7) need to be taken in a strictly literal sense [57] is hardly convincing.

However, this does not mean that there is no allusion to Numbers (16–)18 in Ezek 44,9-14 at all. I agree with those scholars who regard the links between Numbers 18, in particular, and Ezek 44,9-14 to be clear enough to indicate some kind of intended allusion. Furthermore, I follow the majority opinion in seeing Ezekiel 44 as being dependent on Numbers 18 [58]. Yet the verbal allusions and conceptual links between the two texts do not function to identify the sin of the Levites but rather to restore the cultic order of the temple personnel, as described in Numbers 18. It seems that the author had tried to find a solution for his design of a restored temple service that was in accordance with the concepts of the Mosaic instructions. For this reason, he moved back and forth between Numbers 18 and

[54] Cf. GUNNEWEG, *Leviten*, 176: "Ihre Empörung besteht also nicht darin, dass sie eigenmächtig priesterliche Funktionen ausüben oder auch nur ausüben wollen, sondern dass sie einen anderen Heiligkeitsbegriff vertreten".

[55] COOK, "Innerbiblical Interpretation", 199.

[56] Cf. MACDONALD, *Priestly Rule*, 26.

[57] COOK, "Innerbiblical Interpretation", 200.

[58] I do not attempt here to give new arguments for the direction of dependence between Numbers 18 and Ezekiel 44, namely for the priority of Numbers 18. As KONKEL, *Architektonik*, 308, states, all positions since Gese's study in 1957 agree that Numbers 18 antedates Ezekiel 44 at least traditio-historically. There is therefore no need to repeat the arguments here. The assessments of the direction of dependence between Numbers 18 and Ezekiel 44, which come to the conclusion that Ezekiel 44 depends on Numbers 18 (at least in general) include: GUNNEWEG, *Leviten*, 198-203; ABBA, "Priests", 6-9; FISHBANE, *Biblical Interpretation*, 138-143; DUKE, "Levites", 64-75; COOK, "Innerbiblical Interpretation"; BLOCK, *Ezekiel*, 628-629; RUDNIG, *Heilig*, 295-304; KONKEL, *Architektonik*, 311-313; MACDONALD, *Priestly Rule*, 41-47.

Ezekiel 14, as MacDonald has convincingly demonstrated [59]. This means that the reader is drawn to Ezekiel 14 with regard to the sin of Israel going astray (44,10), but he is drawn to Numbers 18 with regard to the cultic order with its distinction between priests and Levites. In other words: Ezekiel 44 does indeed depend conceptually on Numbers 18, but it does not accuse the Levites of committing the sins of Korah's rebellion. Rather, it blames the Levites for having left their guard duty at the sanctuary in the context of the sins described in Ezekiel 8. The defilement of the sanctuary led to the division of the temple court into an inner court and an outer court, whereby the altar is made inaccessible to the people. As a result of their sin and in agreement with Numbers 18 the Levites may not enter the area of the altar in the inner court; instead, they must be guards on the outer side of the doors that lead to the inner court [60].

V. Conclusion

To conclude, a synchronic reading of Ezek 44,6-14 that takes into account the whole context of the Book of Ezekiel makes good sense of the text. On this reading, the house of Israel is being addressed concerning entrance into and exit from the sanctuary. Because the sanctuary was defiled, the altar is now made inaccessible to the people. The cause of the defilement of the sanctuary (Ezekiel 8), which is formulated in terms of the breaking of God's covenant (as in Ezekiel 16), is that foreigners (cf. Ezekiel 23) entered the sanctuary due to the Levites going far from YHWH, which means that they neglected their guard duty (when Israel went astray; Ezekiel 14). The house of Israel is thus now told that although the Levites shall resume their guard duty, due to their sin (and in conceptual accordance with the Mosaic instructions in Numbers 18) they shall be excluded from the altar area like the lay people, and they shall serve these people on the outer side of the doors that lead to the inner court (cf. Ezek 44,11 with Ezek 40,38-43).

As long as Ezek 44,6-14 is read as an isolated text and related to events recounted in Old Testament texts outside of the Book of Ezekiel

[59] MacDonald, *Priestly Rule*, 49-51.

[60] It does not fit the context, therefore, to suggest, as Duke, "Punishment", 70 does, that this is a restoration of the Levites rather than their punishment. The point is not that the Levites are allowed to perform some prestigious tasks instead of the foreigners, but rather that, in light of the new distinction between the inner and outer court, they are excluded from entering the inner court due to their past sin that led to the contemporary state of abomination.

the proposed solutions will be beset with insurmountable problems. If, on the other hand, Ezekiel 44 is primarily read against the background of the rest of the Book of Ezekiel, the other inner-biblical allusions find their right place.

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SUMMARY

This paper argues that the primary referent of Ezek 44,6-14 is located in the former chapters of the Book of Ezekiel (esp. Ezekiel 8) rather than in historical events or biblical texts outside of the book of Ezekiel. On this reading, Ezek 44,6-14 not only refers to Ezekiel 8 in a direct way, but it also takes into account the interpretations that Ezekiel 8 has received in Ezek 14,1-11 (the house of Israel went astray), Ezek 16,58-63 (the abominations broke God's covenant with Israel), and Ezek 23,38-42 (the defilement of the sanctuary has to do with foreigners).

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