

PRIESTLY TEMPLE VESTURE  
AND PURIFICATION RITUALS  
OF THE EGYPTIANS AND ISRAELITES  
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## PRIESTLY TEMPLE VESTURE AND PURIFICATION RITUALS OF THE EGYPTIANS AND ISRAELITES

### INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that temples and temple rituals have been a significant, if not a central, part of community life from the beginning of civilization.<sup>1</sup> This was especially true among the ancient Egyptians and Israelites.<sup>2</sup> Many scholars feel that Egypt was intimately connected with the scriptural account of the Israelites<sup>3</sup> while others add that Israel incorporated many of the rituals of the Egyptian temples into their Temple to Yahweh.<sup>4</sup>

Priests and priestly functions appear in connection with the temples and seem to be an important part of the temple rituals. The officiating priests are set apart from the community. Their purification rites and priestly vestments worn in the rituals make them unique.

This paper will examine and analyze the priesthood of these two kingdoms with an emphasis upon their sacred dress as it pertains to the temples. A comparative study of the similarities and differences of the ancient Egyptian and Israelite purification rituals of the priests at the time they are clothed in the sacred vesture will be made. The symbolic significance of the clothing and rituals will also be discussed.

## EGYPTIAN SACRED VESTURE AND PURIFICATION RITES

### ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TEMPLE PRIESTHOOD

According to Egyptian mythology, the gods caused the Egyptian land to be raised up from the primordial sea in the first morning of the world.<sup>5</sup> The gods established universal order for this world and then determined that a shepherd was needed -- a priest and guide -- to nourish and protect their earthly dominion and to guarantee a harmonious balance in its elements. This son of the gods, the shepherd of man was the king of Egypt.<sup>6</sup> For this harmony to endure, it would have to be preserved through the pharaoh on two levels:

First, the propelling force must be maintained -- the very existence of the gods, their divine activity in the world; thus the king would be responsible for religion. Then, the elements according to the predetermined plan must be maintained; to this end the legislative and judicial role of the king would correspond. "To maintain the universal order, assuring the divine religion and giving its laws to men" -- such would always be the double function basic to the king of Egypt.<sup>7</sup>

#### King as High Priest

From the early dynasties of Egypt the Pharaoh was the sole intermediary between the people and the gods. The Pharaoh was a god!<sup>8</sup> Since it was not possible for a king to be at the same time administrator and high priest, the temple priesthood came into being as a result of the king delegating his priestly rights and duties. Thus, the

responsibility went to ordinary mortals who were charged to  
9  
act for the king in his name.

### Need and Function of other officiating priests

The priests had to be initiated into the sacred service to be performed for the deity. It was necessary for them to belong to the divine sphere if they were to associate with the god.<sup>10</sup> The only way for this to take place was by representing the deified king.<sup>11</sup> Sauneron noted that the Egyptian priests were not set apart from the rest of society, as Israelite priests, recipients of revelation and converting crowds by impassioned sermons, but their role was only as substitute for the king. Their purpose was to perpetuate the religion of the gods through the various external ceremonies in their assigned temple service.<sup>12</sup>

### PURIFICATION RITUAL AND THE WEARING OF SACRED VESTMENTS

Purity was one of the basic concepts of the Egyptian religion. Nibley suggests that the order of the universe itself remained secure only while and because the beneficent power of Osiris remained sacred and uncontaminated,<sup>13</sup> rendering the life of all things pure and undefiled. Anyone associating with the god, the king, the priests and the dead<sup>14</sup> was to be purified.

The Egyptian rites of purification had enormous ramifications since all religious ceremonies of pharaonic times, whether performed on behalf of a deity, a deceased

noble, or the living king, were prefaced by some act of  
ritual cleaning.<sup>15</sup> Everyone approaching deity had to be  
pure.<sup>16</sup> This maxim was intended especially for anyone  
entering the temple. Bleeker indicates "above the temple  
entrance the warning could be read: 'Everyone who enters the  
temple must be pure.'<sup>17</sup>"

#### King as High Priest -- Purification ritual and Coronation

The king was esteemed to be the head of the religion  
of the gods and is repeatedly described as holy priest or  
high priest.<sup>18</sup> The purification of the king had to be  
performed before he could act as a high priest in the cult  
of the gods.<sup>19</sup> This was necessary at the time that he  
received the title of king or Pharaoh. Therefore his  
purification rites were part of his coronation ceremony.

#### Ablutions:

In the middle and later kingdoms the purification rites  
of the king began in his infancy with a pre-coronation  
ritual to prepare him for kingship. The ceremony consisted  
of sprinkling the child with water, not only for purifying,  
but also for endowing the prospective ruler with vital  
force and certain divine qualities.<sup>20</sup>

At the time of the accession of the king, he once more  
performed a purification ritual prior to the coronation  
ceremony. Gardiner called this ablution ritual "the Baptism  
of Pharaoh" (photos 3,4,5) which transferred to the new king

the power of the gods.<sup>21</sup> In it he was believed to be reborn<sup>22</sup> like his divine prototype, the sun-god. This ritual took<sup>23</sup> place in a special room in the temple, the Per-wer,<sup>24</sup> where priests representing the gods assisted.

Priests representing the two gods - Horus and Thoth, sprinkled or poured water over the king from two gold<sup>25</sup> vessels called hes-vases (photos 1,2). The ceremony of pouring over the king from the two vases depicted alternate emblems of life and purity. This hes-purification had its definite place in a series of ritual acts culminating in the<sup>26</sup> new king's presentation to the supreme god of the temple.

The water was very important in the ceremony. It represented a cleansing power, life, good fortune and that which renews life. Generally there was a sacred pool connected with each temple in Egypt from which the water was brought. A priest impersonating one of the gods addressed the king: "I purify thee with the water of all life and<sup>27</sup> good fortune, all stability, all health and happiness." The Pharaoh was not only purified but endowed with the qualities fitting him for his new position.

#### Incense and Natron

After the purification of the water, the king was fumigated with incense and given natron to chew. The<sup>28</sup> incense-smoke purified the king and through its medium prepared him for communion with the four gods -- Horus, Thoth, Seth, and Sepa. It is possible that the incense and

libations were performed together since the censuring of the body had the same effect as the ritual libation in restoring its lost moisture, by transfusion -- a technique<sup>29</sup> of chasing away the evil demons of dessication. The natron was a cleansing agent, a compound of sodium carbonate and sodium bicarbonate, mixed with varying proportions of sodium sulphate and common salt.<sup>30</sup> Its purpose was to make the king's mouth fit to pronounce the formulae that accompanied the various ritual acts and to chant the hymns in praise of<sup>31</sup> the god.

### Sacred Vestments

In the same temple room where the purification ritual took place, the king was clothed in a sacred vesture of one or more garments.<sup>32</sup> He also received his royal crown and regalia by an officiating priest representing one of the<sup>33</sup> gods.

The sacred vestment was believed to have been anciently the skin of an animal (photo.17). Budge, in The Book of the Dead, states that after the washing "I have put upon the skin of the panther."<sup>34</sup> The panther or leopard skin was later used only for a ceremonial garment (photo 21). The robe of office or royal vestment of the king was called the Shen'ot (the royal skirt) described as a "skirt with the simulated leopard or lion's tail and with the ends rounded off, between which hung down a narrow strip which was the most ancient symbol of royalty (photo 6)."<sup>34</sup> This skirt



could have had the simulated head and claws of the leopard etched upon the garment (photo 17).<sup>36</sup> It was the old-fashioned short mantle generally of precious cloth, of gold or gilded leather, and was often adorned with pictures or embroidery (photos 8,9).<sup>37</sup> During the Nineteenth Dynasty the underskirt was pleated and a decorative apron was added to the front of the old-style nobleman's short skirt in place of the narrow strip symbolic of royalty (photos 10,11).<sup>38</sup> A second insignium of royal dress was the white, golden, or variegated broad sash which was either wound around the breast, the body or hung down from the shoulders.<sup>39</sup>

In the same room where the purification took place the Pharaoh received a crown. Anciently, the Egyptian king "was presented with the two crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt (photo 12)."<sup>40</sup> The red crown of Lower Egypt was a "flat cap, with a spiral at the front and a tall projection at the rear" which symbolized physical life. The white crown of Upper Egypt was "tall and conical with a knob at the top" symbolizing the continuation of eternal life.<sup>41</sup> Gardiner suggests that the king also received the uraeus or cobra which was to be worn upon his brow (photo 13).<sup>42</sup>

The power of the king was emphasized by the royal regalia received. Different texts from different dynasties add or delete certain types of royal insignia. The royal regalia placed upon the king might have been: the ankh representing life (photo 15); the sceptre, the symbol of power; the crook signifying "to rule"; the flail or whip

held in addition to the sceptre and crook meant dominion (photos 13,14); the feathers standing for the laws of Maat or the two truths - right and justice; the horns suggesting the intellectual power; and the Uraei representing royalty (photos 18,19).<sup>43</sup>

## Anointing

To complete the purification ritual anointing was to follow the washing and censing. Anointing, usually classified as a purification ritual, was a sacramental action that conveys to the individual the kind of holiness we call ritual purity.<sup>44</sup> "The anointing with holy oil was also necessary to sanctify the king who had been clothed with royal and divine garments and insignia."<sup>45</sup> Bjerke informs us that while washing prepared one to receive an office, the anointing was part of the ritual which installed the individual in his office.<sup>46</sup> In the 18th Dynasty, a certain Amenhotpe (a priest) records his title and function as follows: "the imy-khant and greatest of anointers, who adorned the king in the Per-wer and made festive the Lord of the two lands in the Per-neser."<sup>47</sup>

After receiving the vesture and royal regalia, Thoth or the Imutef-priest proclaimed the god's decree declaring the newly crowned king as his legitimate successor.<sup>48</sup> The king was then led into the temple to an inner shrine where he knelt in the presence of the presiding god who formally adjusted the king's crown (photos 4,5).<sup>49</sup>

## Other Officiating Priests - Purification Rites and Sacred Vesture

Political regimes, social conditions, and economic factors became profoundly modified in the course of centuries. Even with this change the priests remained constant in the service they rendered not only in the rituals to the gods and to the living but also for the dead.

### Physical Purity

The characteristic mark of the priest from the earliest times was his purity. The word used for priest was we'eb<sup>50</sup> or uab<sup>51</sup> which means "the pure one." Since the priesthood did not strongly imply a moral obligation or a deep religious commitment, it therefore required in the priest certain conditions of physical purity.<sup>52</sup> Hence, the priest was separated from the layman by his purity rather than his sacrificial and intercessory function.<sup>53</sup>

It was necessary for the priest to have absolute cleanliness of body.<sup>54</sup> Hair was regarded as unclean, prompting the removal of all hair on the body. The priests are represented in Egyptian art and monuments closely shaven.<sup>55</sup>

Herodotus informed us, "the Priests would shave the whole body every other day, that no lice or aught else that is foul may infest them in their service of the gods."<sup>56</sup> It seemed that this operation constituted a very strict obligation. Various texts state that the priests must shave or depilate themselves up to the eyelashes and the brows of their face.<sup>57</sup> Along with the shaving of the body,

the priests cut their nails short. This was to prevent<sup>58</sup>  
harboring dirt which would render them ceremonially unclean.

Other customs were attached to priestly<sup>59</sup> bodily  
cleanliness. One was circumcision. Herodotus suggests  
that they were circumcised for cleanliness, for they put<sup>60</sup>  
cleanliness above aesthetics. The candidates for the  
priesthood were not always circumcised while they were in  
apprenticeship but they generally submitted to this  
operation the moment they officially acceded to their<sup>61</sup>  
charge. Another condition of purity was sexual  
abstinence. For the lesser priests this was only necessary  
during their month of restricted life in the temple, three<sup>62</sup>  
times a year. These lesser priests took their turns with  
priestly duties while continuing to earn their living as<sup>63</sup>  
laymen.

### Natron Purification

Prior to the purification rite the priest was<sup>64</sup>  
obligated to drink natron for a specified number of days.  
Until this prefatory purification was performed the priest  
could not enter certain parts of the temple precincts or<sup>65</sup>  
carry the image of the god. Gardiner even suggests the  
bread eaten by the priest during his prefatory purification<sup>66</sup>  
had to be white bread.

After all the conditions of purity were met, a priest  
had to undergo a purification ritual before entering into  
the service of the gods in the temple proper (photo 1).

This ritual prepared one for some special offices or callings.<sup>67</sup> It was not an end in itself but rather prepared the way for things to follow, being part of a larger sequence of ordinances.<sup>68</sup> This ritual took place not in the temple proper but in the "purification room" referred to as the per-~~wer~~ chamber annexed to the temple.<sup>69</sup>

#### Ablutions

Jequier postulates that in the purification ritual first came a solemn lustration performed on the officiant which was similar in nature to the lustration of the king before he officiated as high priest.<sup>70</sup> This purification rite had both a negative and positive significance. It eliminated the impurities of a former life and bestowed revitalizing power upon the person being purified.<sup>71</sup> Gardiner referred to this lustration as a baptism which provided a person with rebirth and and a new life permitting him unfailingly to maintain his daily service.<sup>72</sup> It is comparable to that of Christian baptism in which "a symbolic cleansing by means of water serves as initiation into a properly legitimated religious life."<sup>73</sup>

It is not too much to say that purification rites also effect a symbolic rebirth, sanctification, or divinisation, and enlightenment, water, light and air cleansing, and giving life at the same time.<sup>74</sup>

#### Incense

Next in the ritual came the incense or the fumigating of the priest. Nibley suggests that the censuring of the body

had the same effect as ritual libations. Smoke like water has certain obvious as well as symbolic functions. As fumigation it repels evil insects and demons and thus protects mortals and immortals alike.<sup>75</sup>

### Sacred Vestment

Dressing the priests in priestly garments was an important part of the purification ritual. Though the styles of the Egyptians changed throughout the dynasties, the priests retained the simple white linen kilt for temple service (photos 1,7).<sup>76</sup> This loin cloth frequently received the name of an "apron." It was either worn separately or under a "loose upper robe with full sleeves and was secured by a girdle round the loins. The loin cloth or apron could also be worn with a shirt with short tight sleeves, over which was thrown a loose robe, leaving the right arm exposed (photo 21)."<sup>77</sup> Though the details of the priestly costume varied according to rank and special duty of the wearer,<sup>78</sup> clean white linen was always worn by the Egyptian priests.<sup>79</sup> They also retained the leopard skin of earlier days as they represented the king in his royal ceremonial garment used in the temple rituals (photo 21). The spotted animal skin and the sidelock of hair became a granted honorific for certain priests (photos 16,17).<sup>80</sup> The leopard skin was frequently stylized in fabric with simulated head and claws (photo 17).<sup>181</sup>

As part of the clothing, sandals were received and worn

by the priests. According to Budge, "The famous Judgment chapter was to be recited by a man who was washed clean and purified, who was clad in linen garments, and was shod with white leather sandals." <sup>82</sup> As early as the ninth to the tenth dynasties the priest had to wear white sandals during his participation in the rituals. <sup>83</sup> These sacred sandals, according to the Egyptians, had power over evil, and gave one power over their enemies. "The sandal of Horus treads <sup>84</sup> on the serpent Nekka."

## ISRAELITE SACRED VESTURE AND PURIFICATION RITES

### ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TEMPLE PRIESTHOOD

According to the Bible, out of the thunders of Sinai, Yahweh -- the god of the Israelites -- opened the heavens to Moses. <sup>85</sup> With Yahweh's guidance, Moses led his people out of Egyptian bondage into the wilderness of Sinai. <sup>86</sup> Moses was not only their political leader, captain, statesman, and administrator, <sup>87</sup> but their spiritual guide as well. <sup>88</sup> Moses was considered both priest and prophet. At the time of the exodus he was the sole intermediary between the <sup>89</sup> people and Yahweh.

It seems an inescapable conclusion that a certain personality, who completely dominates the traditions of the Exodus, initiated and directed the revolutionary events that bound Yahweh with a nation, Israel, through the Covenant. It was the heroic achievement of Moses to have rallied an amorphous agglomerate of slaves and outcasts and imbued them with the faith to adhere to a single god, Yahweh.<sup>90</sup>

## High Priest and other officiating priests

Now that Yahweh brought his reconciled people unto himself, it was necessary to have some definite place where he would meet with and dwell among them. He also appointed means by which they should approach him and the manner in which he would manifest himself to them. One revelation received by Moses from Yahweh pertained to the construction of a tabernacle and a priesthood -- consisting of a high priest and other officiating priests -- which were to serve in it and the services which were to be performed. A time-honored tradition states that "the temple building at Jerusalem -- Solomon's temple -- was intended solely for the priests and servants of the cult. Laymen could only enter the enclosed court." It must be understood that Yahweh gave detailed instructions on the furniture to be placed in the tabernacle as well as the dress and rituals performed by the priests. He wanted all things to be made "after the pattern" which he showed to Moses on the mount. Nothing must waver from his instructions for everything had within it symbol and type.

Everything had a spiritual meaning -- the material of which the ark, the dresses of the priesthood, and all else was made; colours, measurements, numbers, vessels, dresses, services, and the priesthood itself--and all proclaimed the same spiritual truth, and pointed forward to the same spiritual reality.<sup>94</sup>

## Need and Function of officiating priests

When the tabernacle was erected and all things were in



order, the priesthood was established to administer and officiate in its services. The temple was modeled after the tabernacle.<sup>95</sup> The high-priest was the Yahweh-appointed mediator through whom Yahweh was approached and by whom he bestowed his gifts.<sup>96</sup> The necessity of acceptable relations with God, which were not natural to man, made the priests and their ministrations of highest priority. These were essential for the preservation of Israel's continuing contact with God.

The Israelite was related to God through a unique national covenant. This covenant involved the priesthood because of its essential mediatorial and representative function. Therefore the priest operated between God and the people to preserve the covenant relationship.<sup>97</sup> When ministering at the altar, offering a sacrifice or burning incense, the priest was acting as man's representative toward God. When delivering an oracle he was transmitting a message from God. When expounding the Torah he was passing on and interpreting divine teaching. "The priest was the mediator—made holy by virtue of his office."<sup>98</sup>

### Hereditary Priesthood

The Israelite priesthood was a hereditary office -- the appointed priest was born not made.<sup>99</sup> According to the biblical account the priesthood was maintained exclusively for one family of the Levite tribe, the family of Aaron, which was endowed with the hereditary functions,

responsibilities and privileges of the priestly office. <sup>100</sup>  
However, because of the wickedness of Aaron's two sons and <sup>101</sup>  
the Lord causing their death, it was shown that not only  
was the priesthood not subject to human choice, but it also <sup>102</sup>  
was to be holy. Since the priest was God's intermediary  
not only was his ritual purity involved but his entire <sup>103</sup>  
behavior.

### Priesthood Purity and Holiness

There were numerous everyday acts which the priest had  
to follow in order to become ceremonially pure and holy.  
Priests were forbidden to defile themselves by contact with  
a corpse except in the case of these immediate relatives --  
father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, and <sup>104</sup>  
spouse. The high priest was forbidden to defile himself <sup>105</sup>  
even in these cases.

A priest was not to marry a divorcee, a harlot, a woman  
born of an illicit priestly marriage, a proselyte or, in the <sup>106</sup>  
case of the high priest, a widow.

Certain physical deformities evidently were judged not  
to be compatible with the representation of the perfection  
of holiness. A blemished priest could not approach the al-  
tar or enter the temple to serve there, in the same way that <sup>107</sup>  
a sacrifice has to be "whole," with out taint.

The priests were not permitted to perform certain  
mourning rites which were introduced to Israel from foreign  
sources such as those that "make baldness upon their head,"

shaving off the corner of their beard or making gashes in  
108  
their flesh."

Strict laws were issued to the cleanliness of garments worn. White was the usual color of Hebrew dress either  
109  
natural or bleached by the fuller. White was appropriate not only for festive occasions but also as a symbol for  
110  
purity since a spot or stain was readily detected. 111  
According to a Zadokite fragment, laws as to unclean garments were explicit: "No man shall put on garments that are filthy or were brought by a Gentile unless they were  
112  
washed in water or rubbed with frankincense." Though this Zadokite fragment is of a later period it helps to clarify the stress placed on clean garments.

#### CONSECRATION AND PURIFICATION RITUAL AND SACRED VESTURE:

In Israel a hierarchical system of graduated powers and responsibilities existed with a chief or high priest at the  
113  
head of the organization. In the Old Testament the high priest was referred to as hak-kohen hag-gadol,  
114  
(הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדוֹל) "the high priest" or "the great priest." 115  
In this office Aaron occupied a unique position similar to the Roman pontifex who officiated over the bishops.

He (the high priest) alone wears the Urim and Thummim and the ephod. He alone may enter the Holy of Holies and offer there the offering of incense. 116

The seven-day consecration ceremony for the priests consisted of ceremonial and sacrificial rituals. Part of the ceremony included the purification rites:

## Ablutions

The ceremonial part began with Aaron and his sons being washed with pure water at the door of the tabernacle. 117

Ritual washings were common in the Old Testament and continued into Judaic and Christian eras. 118

The first step in the ordination involved the symbolic washing away uncleanness which might corrupt the "holy things" associated with the priestly ministry. 118

Moses directed the priests to wash themselves, ridding the body of uncleanness, which was a symbol of the putting away the filth of sin. Washing was a symbol of a spiritual cleansing necessary for approaching God. 119

## Sacred Vesture

Following the symbolic washing, the priests were then taken and clothed in the holy priesthood garments. The entire concept of priestly dress was cleanness, purity, or holiness. Before one could approach a holy God it was necessary that one's unholiness be covered with holy clothes. 120

These garments signified perfect purity. Ben-Sira revealed the importance of dress when he said, "The adornment (splendour) of God is man: the adornment of man is his dress." 121

The holy garments were intended not only to decorate the priests with glory and beauty, to distinguish them from the people, but to grant access to the sacred precincts not open to laymen. 122

This separation or reservation of the priest was designed to bring him into a closer relationship with deity. 123 124

The priests' garments, referred to as undergarments, worn by both the high priest and the ordinary priests were made according to a divine pattern.<sup>125</sup> These undergarments consisted of breeches, a tunic, a girdle and a head covering (photo 23).

(1) Breeches ( <sup>125</sup>מִכְנָסִים ): The Hebrew word for this garment means "something that is fast tied."<sup>126</sup> It was the intercrural cloth which Josephus described as, "a binder." They were drawers covering the loins, stitched of fine spun linen, into which one's legs are inserted as into breeches. This garment is cut short above the waist and terminates at the thighs around which it is drawn tight.<sup>127</sup> The primary purpose of the linen breeches was to cover the sexual organs of the priests while they ministered before the Lord. Such breeches were not normally worn in Israel, and the present provisions reflected a solution to the prohibition against going up the steps of an altar "that your nakedness be not exposed on it."<sup>128</sup> Maimonides says that these were to be worn as an evidence that the divine worship sanctioned no such impurities as were associated with idolotrous worship.<sup>129</sup>

(3) The tunic ( <sup>130</sup>הַכְּתָנִית ): It was a vestment made of fine white linen, doubled, which was worn over the inter-crural cloth. This vestment -- sometimes referred to as a robe -- reached down to the feet and sat close to the body. It was a one piece garment with long sleeves tightly

laced round the arms.<sup>131</sup> In the case of Aaron it was checkered or embroidered, but this ornamentation was absent from the tunic of the ordinary priests.<sup>132</sup>

(3) A girdle ( סָבִיל ):<sup>133</sup> It was wound around the tunic between the waist and the shoulders.<sup>134</sup> Josephus states it was four fingers breadth and it was loosely woven that the open texture gave it the appearance of a serpent's skin.<sup>135</sup>

Aaron's girdle is expressed in the Bible as rogem ( רֹקֶם )<sup>136</sup> workmanship which means variegated or needlework similar to the workmanship done on the tabernacle's lower curtains. Girdles without qualification are mentioned in connection with the ordinary priests.<sup>137</sup>

(4) The head covering included a Mitre or turban ( מִצְנֶפֶת ) worn only by the high priest (photos 24,25) and caps or bonnets ( מִגְבֵּרֹת ) worn by the ordinary priests.<sup>138</sup>

The turban or mitre of Aaron was flat upon the head. This head covering was linked with the king, being synonymous with the tarah or crown<sup>141</sup> and was of great superiority representing the symbol of royalty.<sup>140</sup>

The cap or bonnet of the ordinary priest rose up in the middle like a high crowned hat and was a sign of dignity and adornment (photo.23). It was connected with the head covering of the bridegroom and was to be worn only by the priests while serving in the Temple.<sup>139</sup>

The above four garments were made of white linen and were worn by Aaron and his sons. Linen garments were regarded as especially holy.

Four additional outer garments were exclusively for Aaron, the high priest, which were specifically identified as "holy garments" (photos 22,24,25). The flame-hued linen of the priestly garments emphasizes the fact that they were a scaled-down version of the tabernacle. This was evidenced by their fabric, form, function, general purpose, and the ritual connected with them.<sup>142</sup> Intended for a higher ritual purpose, these garments were regarded as more important and superior in sanctity.

(1) Tunic or robe ( <sup>143</sup>מִעֵיל ): It was a long robe reaching to the feet with skirts made of blue fabric. It was bound about the body with a richly colored sash or girdle embroidered like the tapestries of the sanctuary. This girdle and most of the shirt would not be seen by the people because of the Ephod which was placed over it. Woven in one piece, hem to hem, the tunic had a bound opening in the middle for the head. The hem was decorated with alternate gold bells and purple, scarlet and blue pomegranates.<sup>144</sup> Josephus tells us:

To the lower edge were stiched tassels, colored to represent pomegranates along with bells of gold, disposed with a keen regard for beauty, so that between each pair of bells there hung a pomegranate and between the pomegranate a little bell. This was the the undergarment without seam (photo.22).<sup>146</sup>

It has been suggested that the sound of the bells was to tell when the high priest went into the holy place and when he came out.<sup>147</sup> Others insist that the sound of the

bells gave notice to the people in the outer court when the high priest went into the holy place to burn incense that they might then apply their devotions at the same time hoping that their prayers might ascend to God through the incense which the high priest offered. <sup>148</sup> Another idea is that the pomegranates were symbols of the word and testimony of God as a sweet and pleasant spiritual food that enlivens the soul and refreshes the heart. The bells are also <sup>149</sup> identified as symbols of the sounding of this word.

<sup>150</sup>  
(2) ephod ( אֵפֹד ): This was the most distinctive of the garments exclusively for the high priest. It was an ornamental kind of waistcoat supported by two shoulder <sup>151</sup> pieces. On each of the two shoulder pieces was an onyx stone inscribed with the names of the twelve sons of Jacob. The duty of the high priest was to enter into the presence of God and make atonement for the people as their mediator. As the priest ministered before the Lord, he continually <sup>152</sup> bore his people with him.

The ephod was a sleeveless, close-fitting garment consisting of richly variegated fabric (blue, purple, scarlet, and fine twined linen, interwoven with gold thread) <sup>153</sup> reaching down as far as the waist. The fabric and workmanship was similar to that used on the inside curtains of the tabernacle, the entrance screen and the inner veil <sup>154</sup> before the ark. A skillfully woven band was fastened to the ephod close about the waist. It was permanently <sup>155</sup> attached to the ephod and made of the same fabric.



156

(3) breastplate ( חֹשֶׁן ): This garment was doubled<sup>157</sup> to form a bag or pouch about nine inches square in which<sup>158</sup> the Urim and Thummim ( אֲדָמָה וְתֻמִּימִים ) were kept.

The Hebrew root for Urim means "light and illumination." The root of Thummim means "perfection and inviolability."<sup>159</sup> It was, therefore, referred to as the Breastplate of Judgment, for through the Urim and Thummim<sup>160</sup> "God's will was sought and usually found." With the Urim and Thummim the high priest had a double function. His priestly approach to God involved both bringing into the presence of God the sacrifices and gifts of the people and bringing from God his gifts for the people, vis,<sup>161</sup> reconciliation and blessing.

The breastplate fit exactly into the opening of the Ephod. It was connected to the ephod by golden rings so that it could be worn across the chest, hence the name<sup>162</sup> "breastplate." To represent the twelve tribes of Israel, twelve precious stones of differing sorts were set on the breastplate. On each stone was engraved the name of one of the tribes.<sup>163</sup> The high priest not only bore the names of the Israelites upon his shoulders, the place of strength,<sup>164</sup> but also up his heart. Aaron and future high priests bore the judgement of the people of Israel upon their hearts before the Lord regularly.

The breastplate fastened on the front face of the ephod may well have been intended to be an equivalent of the holy of holies.

It was made of the same gold and flame-colored material as the holy of holies and its square shape corresponded at once to the square frame of the entrance to the holy of holies and to all the square faces of that cuboid room. And functionally the breast-piece was, like the holy of holies, the locus of the divine judgment oracle, being called "the breast-piece of judgment."<sup>165</sup>

The turban or mitre of the high-priest was adorned with a diadem of gold (כִּטְוֶה יָצִיב). Its name is taken from the Hebrew root "to shine."<sup>166</sup> The diadem of gold was placed upon blue lace or bound with purple-blue cords.<sup>167</sup> Like the two stones of the ephod and the twelve of the breast-piece that were engraven with the names of the tribes of Israel, the diadem bore the tetragrammaton, or rather the words "Holy to Yahweh."<sup>168</sup> It was placed upon Aaron's forehead, "that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts; and it shall be always upon his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord."<sup>169</sup>

Identity of cultic function of the officiating or lesser priests were expressed by the workmanship and quality of the fabric in the four garments which correlated with the hangings and curtains of the court. These four garments were meant to be worn by officiating priests in the outer altar area.<sup>170</sup> The second four garments worn only by the high priest were correlated with the inner curtains of the tabernacle and the golden vessels within it. This suggests that these garments were to be worn only for rites performed by the high priest. Haran suggests that when the

high priest took part in offering sacrifices in the court he wore the same linen vestments as the ordinary priests and was distinguished from them only by a special girdle and turban but when he performed the rituals within the tabernacle, he then would dress in the appropriate garments. 171

Though the Israelites wore shoes in their everyday activities, for reverence they went barefoot. Therefore the priests did not wear shoes in the tabernacle and temple. 172

### Anointing

In order that the high priest and the lesser priests could carry out their cultic functions, after they were dressed in priestly vestments, they were anointed with the sacred oil. 173 The anointing endowed the priests and their vestments with the same holiness as that of the tabernacle. Both they and their vestments together with the furniture, which was also anointed, entered one common circle of sanctity. Thus, Ezekiel stressed to the priests that when the priests "go out into the outer court, to the people," they must put off the priestly vestments, leave them in the holy chambers, and put on "other garments" which were virtually associated with the common dress of the day. 174

Bjerke's comments pertaining to the anointing explains why this part of the ritual was important:

"Anointing can thus be seen to be a part of the actions that enable the object of the ritual to hold a new office. The previous rites of washing and clothing create the capacity to hold office, the anointing on the other hand, is part of the ritual which installs the object in his office."175

Frequently the anointing is awarded to the high priest alone. He is the one designated by the title "the anointed priest,"<sup>176</sup> though, all of the priests were anointed with the holy oil and even the ordinary priests were called anointed priests. There appears to be differences in the method of anointing at the consecration ceremony. All the priests, including Aaron, were anointed with oil sprinkled on their vestments, whereas in Aaron's case it was also poured on his head.<sup>177</sup> Thus, the anointing of the high priest was more elaborate than that of the priests and the anointing with holy oil referred primarily to him.<sup>178</sup>

### Consecration and Sacrifices

The consecration ritual not only involved the ceremonial washing, robing, and anointing but the offering of three sacrifices on behalf of the priests. One bullock as a sin offering, one ram as a sweet savour offering, and another ram as a consecration offering were required for sacrifice.<sup>179</sup> The priest who ministered before God was to first experience within his own life those things which he would later be responsible in doing for others.<sup>180</sup>

Aaron and his sons identified with the young bullock and ram of the offerings by placing their hands upon the animals. This action made the value of the animals' sacrifice accrue to the benefit of Aaron and his sons,<sup>181</sup> purifying them for their priestly roles.

The blood of the "ram of consecration" was put upon the

tip of the right ear signifying the priest's inclination to both hear and obey the voice of God. The blood was put upon the thumb of the right hand indicating the consecration of his occupation as priest in the sanctuary to act before God as a holy person on behalf of the people. It was placed upon the great toe of the right foot of Aaron and of each of his sons demonstrating their consecration to the hallowed precincts of the tabernacle -- later the temple -- where unconsecrated persons were not allowed to enter.<sup>182</sup> Perhaps the idea that one's walk related to all one's behavior as is seen elsewhere in the Bible was also in mind.<sup>183</sup>

The blood of the "ram of consecration" was sprinkled also upon the altar, uniting the altar and the priests in the consecrating rites.<sup>183</sup> Blood from the altar, mingled with anointing oil, was sprinkled also upon Aaron, his sons,<sup>184</sup> and their garments.

These actions certainly were to show that consecration to the priesthood involved the whole man and all his behavior. He was to be God's man, a representative of God to the people portraying holy separation from ceremonial impurity and sin and as a representative of the people to offer acceptably the sacrifices on their behalf and officiate in the prescribed services as instituted by God through Moses. Thus the priest acted as the official mediator between God and man.<sup>185</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

As we have seen, priests and rituals have played an

important part in temple worship from the early dynasties of Egypt as well as the beginning of Israelite civilization. A comparative study suggests both similarities and differences in the ancient Egyptian and Israelite purification rituals of the priests at the time they were clothed in the sacred vesture:

### Temples, the site of Priestly Service

#### Similarities:

(1) The temple was a place invested with holiness in which supernatural power and presence were manifest. It was a spot separated from others and surrounded by restriction as to access and ordinary use.

(2) Within the temple was an inner sanctuary that appeared to be very sacred.

(3) Only the priests could enter the temple and use the holy temple apparatus.

(4) Certain rituals were performed within the temple.

#### Differences:

(1) The Egyptian temple priesthood served mainly the God of the temple and the pharaoh. The Israelite temple was a "holy site" where the priestly service was a means of securing and retaining for the people an acceptable standing and fellowship with God.

(2) The Egyptian priesthood served their gods in many temples while Aaron and his sons were set apart for service in the tabernacle to Yahweh.

(3) A statue of a god was in a sanctuary within the Egyptian Temple. The Israelite 'holy of holies' was said in Hebrew parlance to be a spot in which God had 'put his name'.

### Priestly Office

#### Similarities

(1) The priests had to be initiated into the sacred service to be performed for the deity.

(2) Both the Egyptian and Israelite priesthood were led by a high priest.

(3) Both Egyptians and Israelites had lesser or officiating priests.

(4) The high priest was the mediator between the god and the people.

#### Differences:

(1) The Israelite priesthood was hereditary, being descendents of Aaron, yet qualifications of holiness were necessary. The Egyptian priests were chosen by the pharaoh with no set qualifications of holiness.

(2) The Egyptian priests were ordinary mortals who had been delegated to their office by the pharaoh-god who was the sole mediator with the gods. The Israelite priests were chosen by their god. The high priest was the sole mediator with God, the officiating priests assisting him.

(3) The Israelite priests had divine privileges whereas the Egyptian priests were only substitutes for the

pharoah.

(4) The high priest of the Egyptians was the pharaoh who was known as the son of a God. The Israelite high priest was Aaron and his firstborn descendants.

(5) The Israelite priests were all known as perpetual mediators between Yahweh and his people. The Egyptian pharaoh was the only mediator between the gods and man.

### Purification Ritual

#### Similarities:

(1) Certain laws of cleanliness were enforced upon the individual entering into the purification rites.

(2) Water was used by both Egypt and Israel in their purification rituals. It was deemed "holy" and was an important cleansing power for the initiate. It also brought about a new life which endowed the priests with qualities for their new position.

(3) The ritual of washing included the washing of the hands, feet, and head.

(4) The purification ceremonial rite was performed in a "holy" space which was a particular area close to the temple or tabernacle.

(5) The ritual set apart the priest from the common people for his divine service.

(6) The purification ritual enabled him to enter into the presence of the god and to contact the holy or sacred apparatus of worship such as altars, altar bowls, cups and



other vessels of the sanctuary.

(5) The anointing ritual followed the cleansing and clothing of the priests.

(6) Not only was anointing used for further sanctification but also for installation of the priest to his office.

(7) The oil was poured or placed upon the head.

#### Differences:

(1) The Purity of the Egyptian included the shaving of hair from the body. Shaving of the head and shaving the corners of the beard were forbidden to the Israelite priest.

(2) The Egyptian priests went through a type of fumigation with incense and were given natron to chew, a substance that was not found in Israel.

(3) The purity of the Egyptian priests was mainly bodily cleanliness while the Israelite priests were commanded to live pure and clean lives as well as having bodily cleanliness.

#### **Priestly Vesture**

#### Similarities:

(1) The Egyptian pharaoh and the Israelite high priest wore garments that set them apart from the other officiating priests such as a crown, elaborate apron, girdles, etc.

(2) White linen clothing for the priests was necessary for ritual purity.

(3) An important part of temple service was changing

into special clothing. At the completion of the temple service the priest changed from this special clothing and left it in the vicinity of the temple or tabernacle.

(4) The Egyptian pharaoh in his royal vesture and crown was qualified to be a mediator between the gods and his people. The Israelite high priest in his four outer garments, including the turban and diadem, was qualified to be a mediator between God and his people.

(5) Being barefoot was a form of retaining purity.

#### Differences:

(1) The skin of the leopard was an ancient priestly garment of the Egyptians and was apparently important enough to continue to be worn in certain rituals.

(2) The officiating Egyptian priests retained the simple white linen kilt or apron for temple service even though styles of dress changed. The officiating Israelite priests had four set garments which they wore along with a cap.

(3) The Egyptian priests were known to wear white slippers in the temple while the Israelite priests went barefoot during their temple service.

### **Consecration Sacrifices**

#### Similarities

(1) The natron and incense fumigated parts of the Egyptian priest's body for further sanctification. The blood of the "ram of consecration" was placed upon parts of the Israelite priest's body for further sanctification.

## Differences

(1) Though there appeared to be sacrifices in early Egyptian religion, research of the third and second millennium B.C. revealed no sacrifices connected with the purification rituals. However, there were sacrifices connected with other segments of the king's coronation ritual.

(2) Israelite purification rituals appeared not to have used natron for cleansing the mouth.

(3) Israelite priests, in order to complete their ordination, had three series of sacrifices -- the bullock as a sin offering, one ram as a sweet savour offering, and another ram as a consecration offering.

(4) The blood of the "ram of consecration" was sprinkled upon the altar and upon certain body parts of Aaron and his sons. This united the altar and the priests in a common circle of sanctity.

Though this comparative study has pointed up differences between the Egyptian and Israelite priesthoods, it also shows that there are many marked similarities between the two. This, however, cannot demonstrate a link between Egyptian and Israelite priesthoods and temples, since investigation into other Near East cultures could very well point out similar phenomena. Since, according to Bleeker, the idea that "the one and the same mythical ritual pattern characterizes all civilizations of antiquity,"<sup>187</sup> it is possible to suggest -- tentatively -- that Israelite and Egyptian liturgy might have derived from some older model.

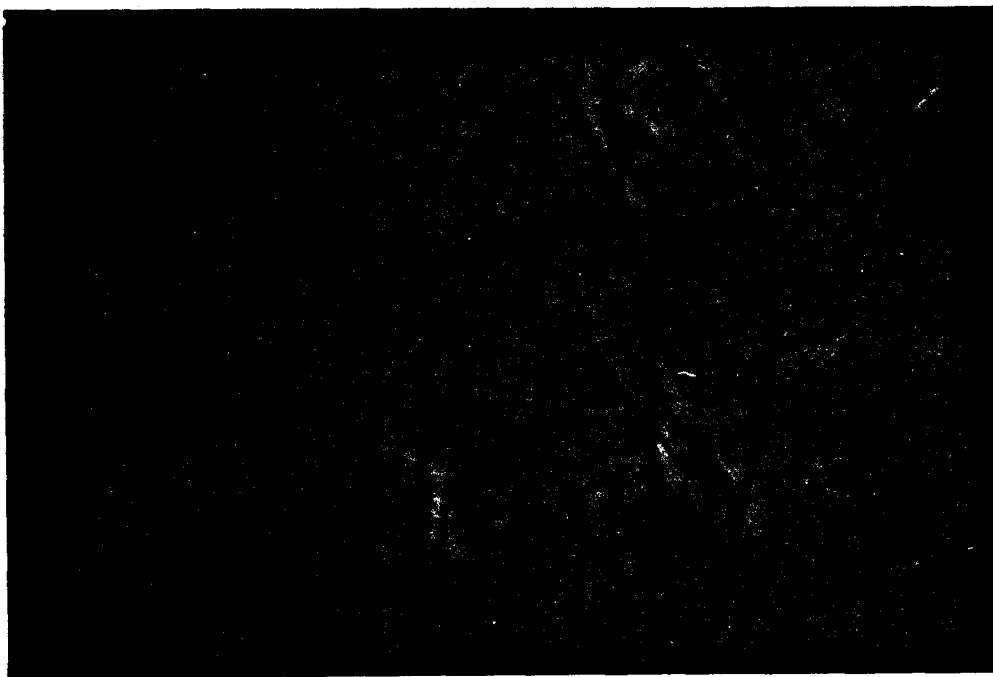


Photo 1

(after Lepsius, Denkmäler, Part III, pl. 11)  
 Blackman, Aylward M., "Sacramental Ideas  
 and Usages in Ancient Egypt," RECUEIL de  
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Photo 2

From the Sanctuary of Philip Arrhidaeus  
 at Karnak (Leps., Denkm. IV, 2) THE BAPTISM  
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chaeology 36 (1950) p. 5.

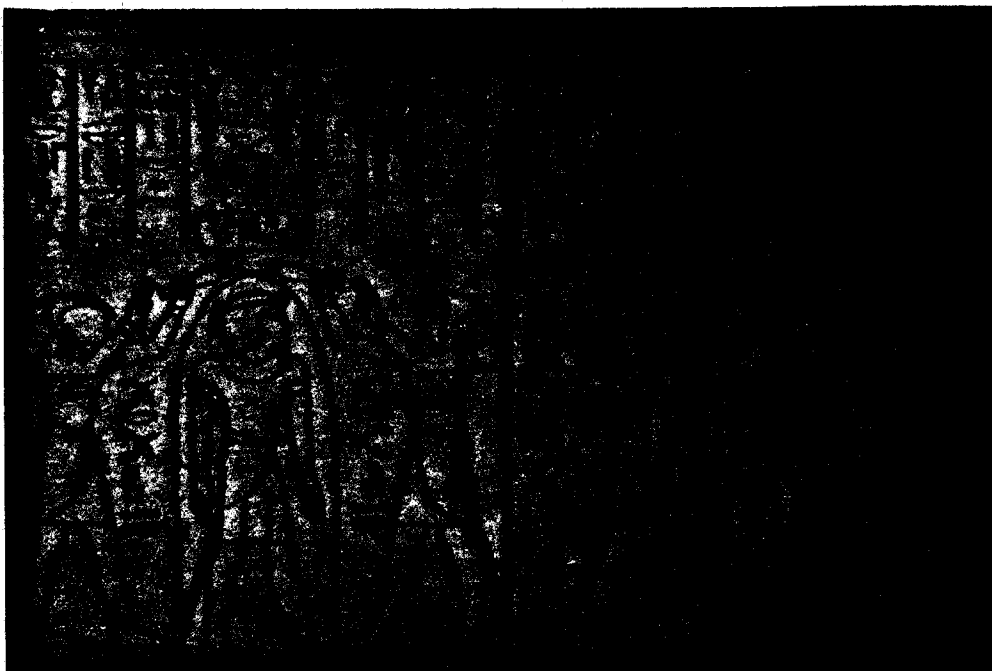
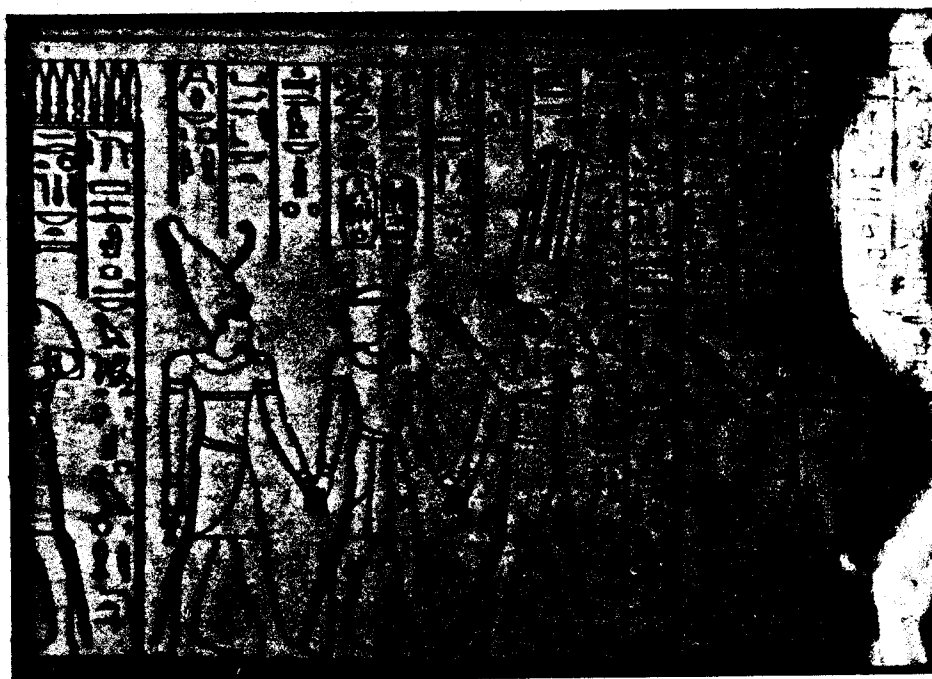


Photo 3

Photo 4

Sanctuary of Philip Arrhidaeus  
 (Leps., Denkm. IV, 2)  
 TISM OF PHARAOH, The Journal of  
Archaeology, #ç (1950) p. 5



5) Amenophis III purified by  
 and Thoth. (Luxor temple, room  
 east wall, 1st reg. Unpublished.)

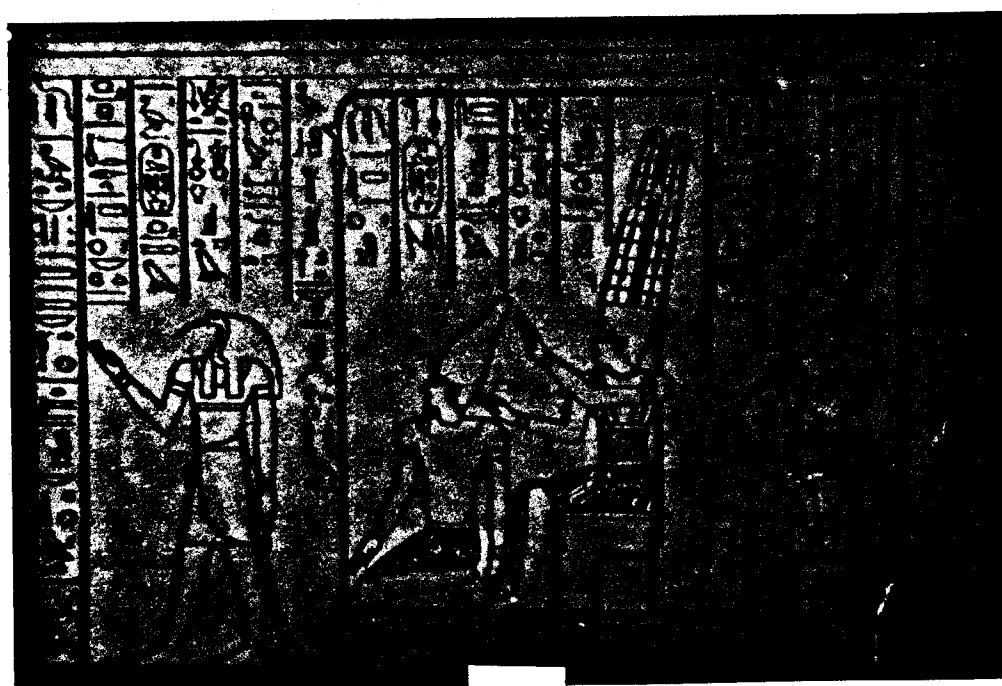


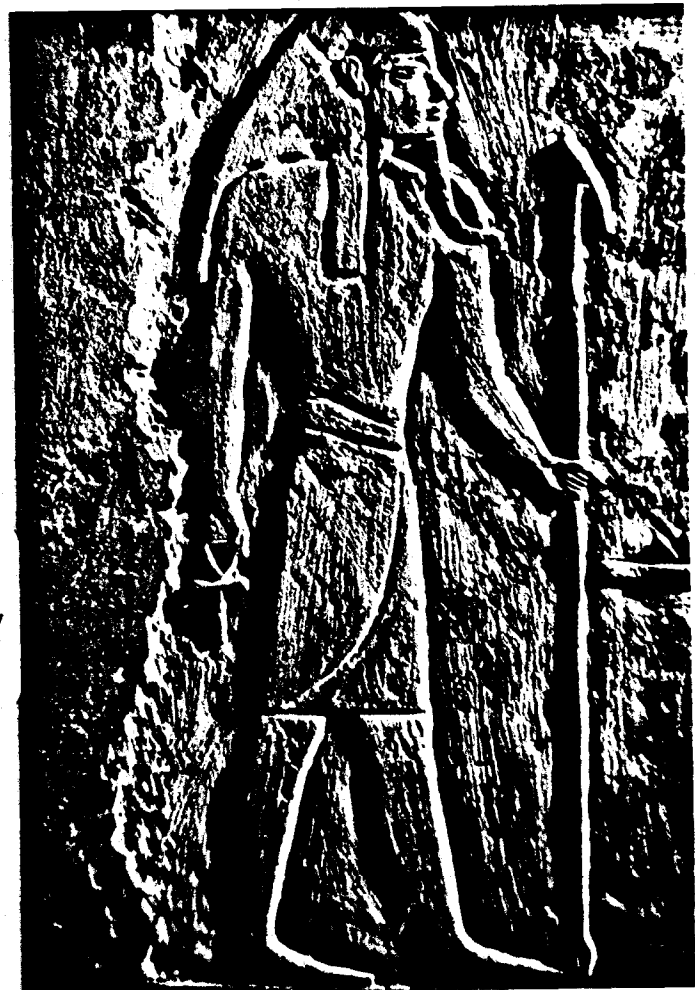
Photo 5



Photo 6

Narmer wearing the crown of Upper Egypt National Geographic Magazine, March 1977, p. 294.

Photo 7



Carrying scepter and ankh, or life sign. The unfinished tomb of PHaraoh Horemheb National Geographic Magazine, March 1977 p. 306.

Photo 8

Statue of Tuthmosis III. Reign of Tuthmosis III. 1490-1440 B.C., Luxor Museum. Museums of Egypt, New York; Newsweek p. 100.

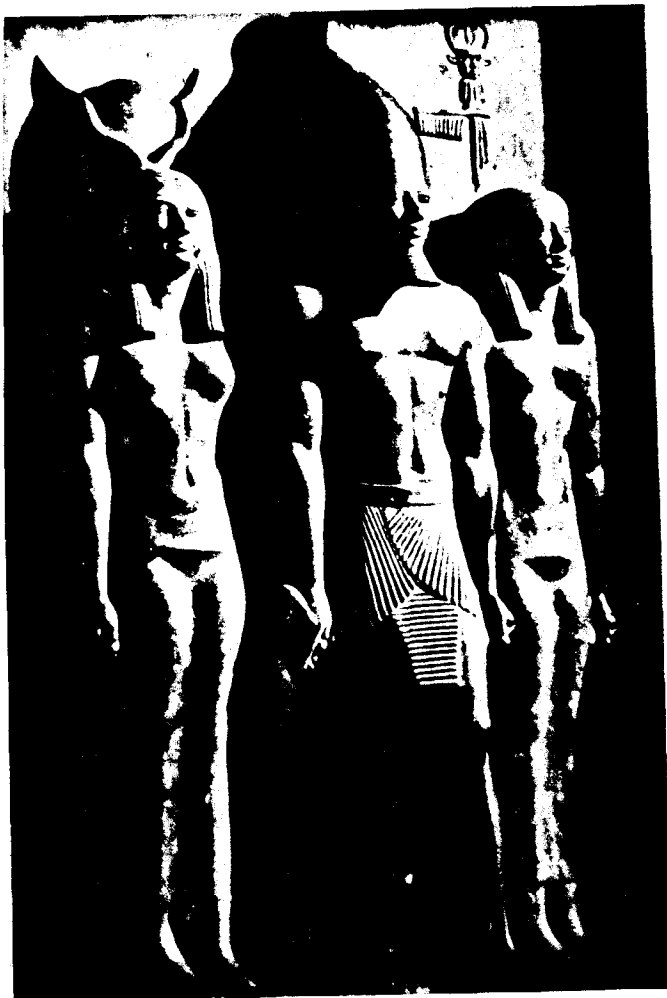


Photo 9

Pharaoh Mycerinus joins hand with cow-horned Hathor, and a lesser deity. National Geographic Magazine, March 1977. p. 295.



Photo 10

Ramses III clasping hands with the God Imsety. Tomb of Amen-hor-khepeshef, Valley of the Queens (Dynasty 20 (1190-1160) B.C. Museum of Egypt, New York: Newsweek p. 81.

Photo 11



Ramses III Clasping hands with Ptahtenen, Father of the Gods. Antechamber, Tomb of Amen-hor-khepeshef, Dynasty 20 (1190-1160 B.C.) Museum of Egypt, New York: Newsweek p. 84.



Photo 12



Atum, wearing the pschent-the double crown of the pharaohs, embraces the 12th Dynasty Pharaoh Sesorstris I, Richard Patrick, Egyptian Mythology, London: Octopus Books Ltd. p. 5

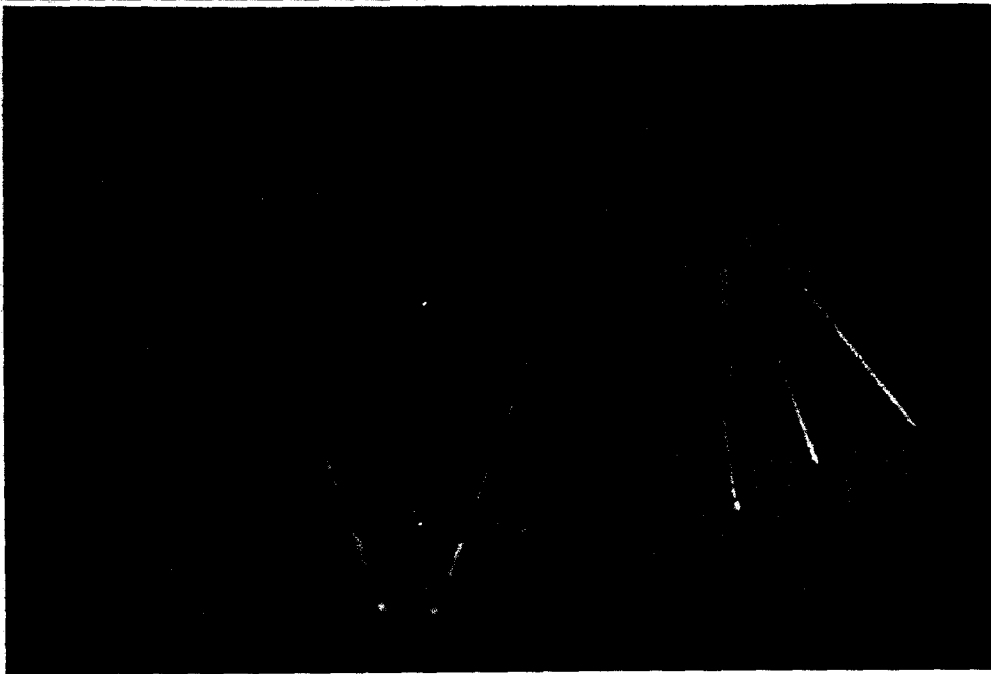
Photo 13



A miniature coffin that contained Tutankhamun's internal organs. Found in Tutankhamun's tomb.

Treasures of Tutankhamun, New York: Ballantine Books, p. 83.

Photo 14



The crook and the flail; insignia of the beneficent god Osiris carried by Pharaoh Tutankhamun, New York, Ballantine Books, p. 41.

Photo 15



The ankh, hieroglyphic sign for "life" Found in Tutankhamun's tomb. Treasures of Tutankhamun, New York: Ballantine Books. p. 66

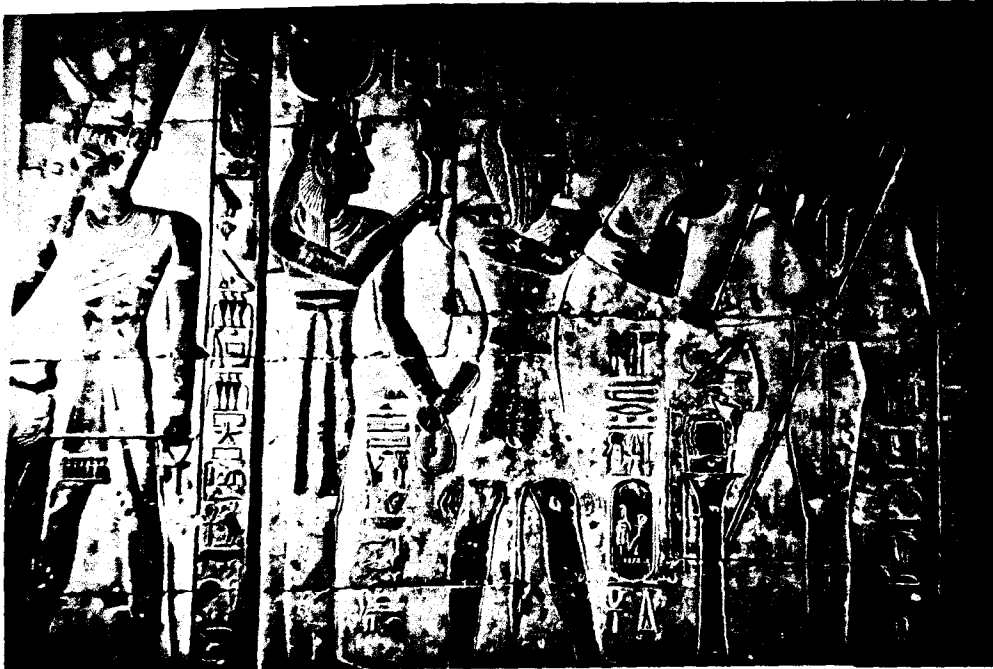


Photo 16

Deification of Sety I, Painted relief,  
Shrine of Sety I. west wall, Temple of  
Sety I, Abydos, Dynasty 20(1305-1290 B.C.  
Museums of Egypt, New York; Newsweek.  
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Photo 17

Wearing the priestly leopard mantle in  
the tomb of King Seti I at Thebes.  
National Geographic Magazine, March 1977,  
p. 307.



Temple of Seti I; Horus seated on the throne gives Pharaoh the sceptre of power.  
Egypt, Cairo: Casa Editrice Bonechi 1981.  
p. 54.



Photo 19

Pharaoh Amenophis II is facing Osiris who offers him the breath of life in the ankh symbol. Egyptian Mythology by Richard Patrick, London: Octopus Bks, p.2.  
42



Photo 20

"Purification Scene; Tomb of Sen-nufer,  
Museums of Egypt, New York: Newsweek  
p. 114.  
Amenhotep II, 1440-1410 B.C.



Photo 21

"The Opening of the Mouth" ceremony  
Richard Patrick, Egyptian Mythology,  
London: Octopus Books Ltd. p. 63  
Plate 86)



Photo 22

Moses ordaining Aaron to preside over  
the priesthood. (Harry Anderson)  
Old Testament Student Manual, Cover,  
Salt Lake City, Ut: LDS Church 1981



Photo 23

Priestly clothing of the officiating  
priests of the Tabernacle (Harry Ander-  
son) Old Testament Student Manual, (Salt  
Lake City, Ut: LDS Church 1981)(Cover)

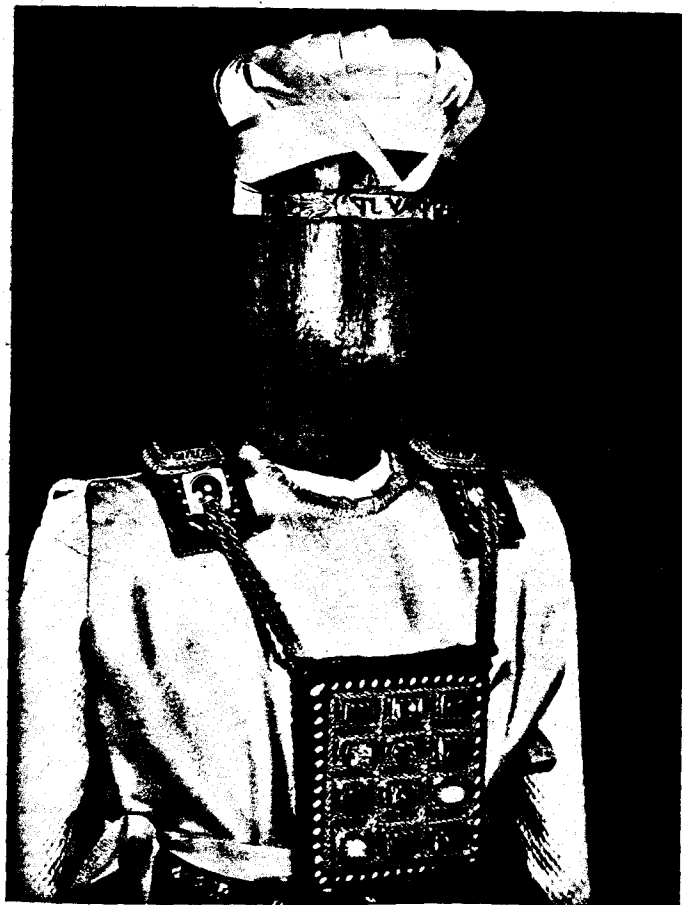
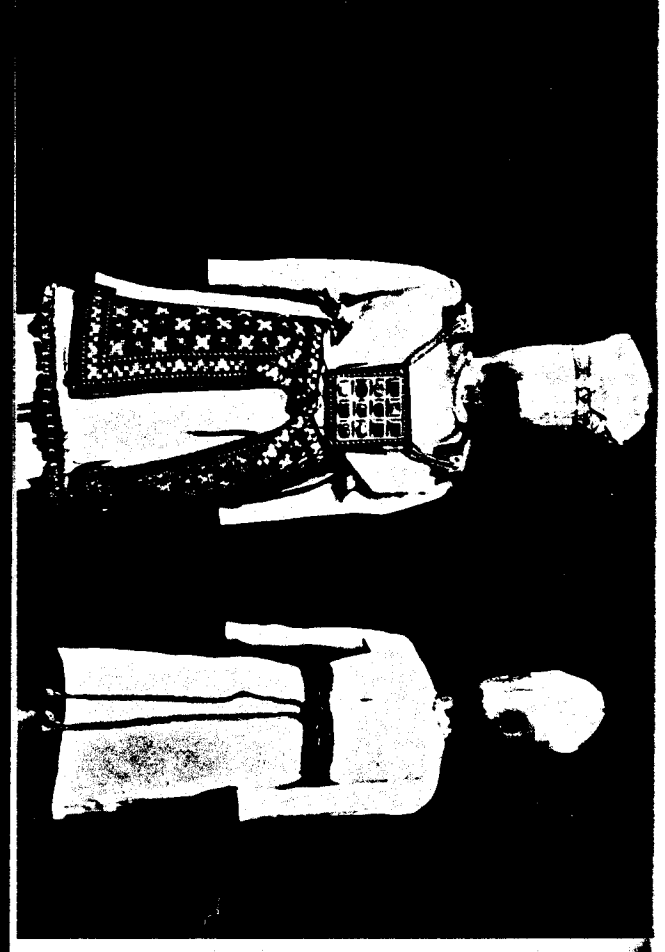
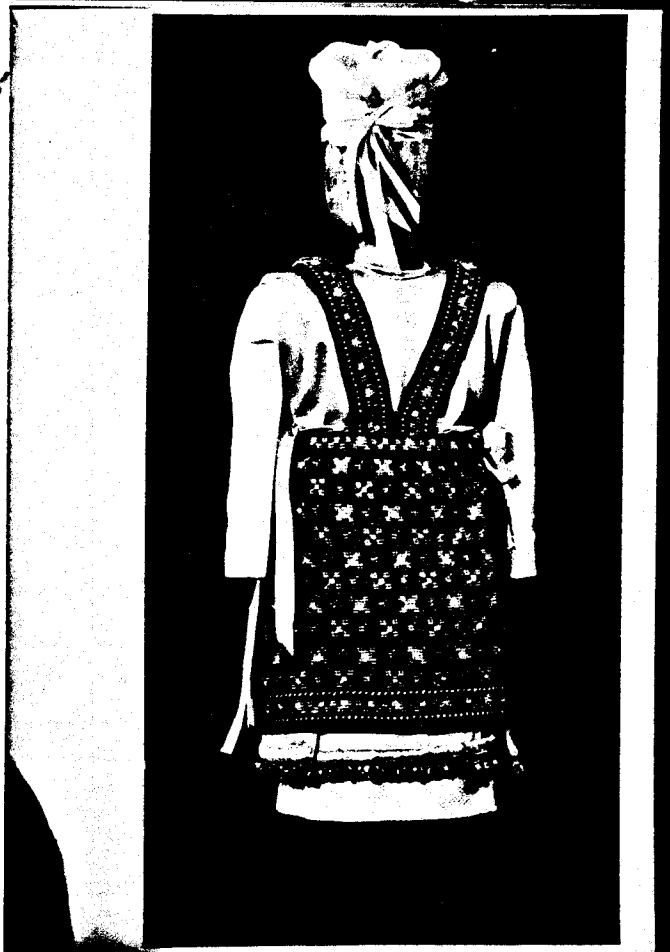
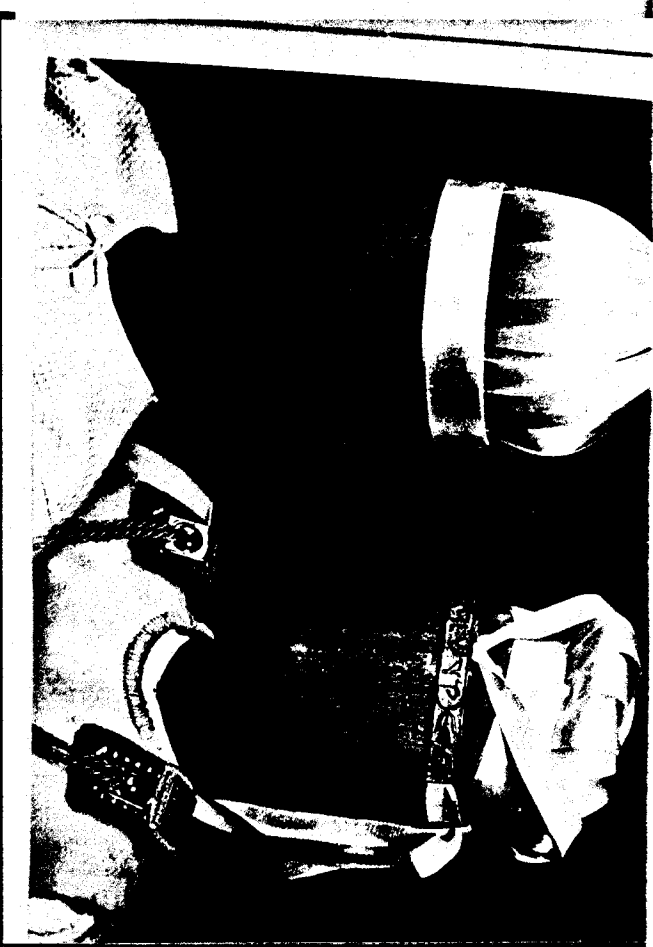


Photo 24

Model of the high priest wearing  
his vestments.  
Moshe Levin, Melekheth Hammishkam,  
Tel Aviv, Israel: 1968.  
(taken from slide.)



Photo 25





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