TWO KINDS OF $HATT\text{\textae}T$

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Two discrete procedures are prescribed for the $hatt\text{\textae}t$. They differ in that in one the blood is daubed on the outer, sacrificial altar and its meat becomes the perquisite of the officiating priest (Lev. iv 30; vi 19), and in the other the blood is daubed on the inner, incense altar and sprinkled before the $p\text{\textae}ket$-veil, but the animal, except for its suet, is burned on the ash heap outside the camp (Lev. iv 6-7, 11-12). This distinction is to be maintained rigidly: “No $h\text{\textae}t$ may be eaten for which blood is brought into the Tent of Meeting to effect purgation in the sanctuary; it shall be burned by fire” (Lev. vi 23; cf. x 18). But how can it be explained?

Y. Kaufmann suggests that since both $h\text{\textae}t$ offerings are purificatory they are dangerous and must be eliminated either by eating or burning 1). He adduces Lev. x 17b to prove that the $h\text{\textae}t$ is eaten by the priests who thereby destroy Israel’s sins. However, A. Ehrlich was surely right in rendering this verse: “and I have given (the $h\text{\textae}t$) to you for bearing the responsibility of the community by performing purgation rites before the Lord on their behalf” 2). $n\text{\textae}t$ $\text{\textae}$ $\text{\textae}$ in P always means “bear responsibility” (e.g. Exod. xxviii 43; Lev. v 1,17; xvii 16; Num. xviii 1,22; xxx 16), and it never means “remove the guilt/sin”, as Kaufmann and most commentaries and translations render it 3). Thus the eating of the $h\text{\textae}t$ does not “remove sin” but is the largess granted the priests for assuming the burden, indeed the hazard, of purging the sanctuary on behalf of the offerers of the $h\text{\textae}t$ 4).

1) Tôledôt h\text{\textae}mûnûd hayyišre (Dvir: Tel-Aviv, 1938), pp. 568 f. It motivated my thesis that the $h\text{\textae}t$ should not be rendered “sin offering” but “purification” or “purgative offering,” VT 21 (1971), pp. 237-239.

2) Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel (Leipzig, 1908-1914), ad. loc.

3) Of course, it has this meaning in other pentateuchal sources, but in P the notion of “removing sin” always has God as the subject and is expressed by $\text{\textae}$.

4) This thesis is developed in J. Milgrom, “Israel’s Sanctuary: The Priestly ‘Picture of Dorian Gray’”, RB (forthcoming) and earlier in idem, “The Function of the $h\text{\textae}t$ Sacrifice,” Tarbiz 40 (1970/71), pp. 1-8 (Heb).

Vetus Testamentum, Vol. XXVI, Fasc. 3
Moreover, to my knowledge, there is no evidence anywhere in the ancient Near East that impurity was eliminated by eating. All the more so in Israel, where holiness is the irreconcilable foe of impurity, is it conceivable that the holy priest—warned so frequently that defilement could be fatal (e.g. Lev. xxii 3-9)—would be commanded to eat a hatta’t used in purging impurities? Lastly, if the issue between Moses and Aaron on the eating of the hatta’t was only a matter of eliminating impurity why did Moses make such a fuss (Lev. x 16-20)? Burning was surely as effective a means of eliminating as eating!

Kaufmann further distinguishes between the two kinds of hatta’t by the place where this elimination takes place: one is eaten within the sacred precincts and the other is burned outside the camp. For Kaufmann, this distinction is crucial: “One of the dominant ideas in this source (P) is the distinction between the domain of holiness and the domain of impurity ... The camp is the sphere of holiness; outside the camp is the place of impurity” 5). Thus, the hatta’t taken outside the camp cannot be eaten because it has become contaminated; it must be burned. This explanation, however, does not take into account that the burning of the hatta’t must take place in a mágóm tábór, “a pure place” (Lev. iv 12; cf. vi 4; Num, xix 9); a priori, the area outside the camp cannot be impure. Similarly, that the text must specify ‘el mihús lā’ir ‘el mágóm jāmē, “to an impure place outside the city” (Lev. xiv 40, 41, 45), indicates that not everywhere outside the city is impure. Lastly, Kaufmann’s topographic distinction finds no support in the ancient Near East. To the contrary, there is evidence that the Israelite notion of “a pure place” outside the camp/city where ritual purifications are disposed is not its own invention, e.g. ana šeri dšri elli šusima, “take it out to the plain, the pure place” 6). Thus the Mesopotamians also did not assume that the open field was automatically under demonic control 7).

It is then clear that “outside the camp/city” designates a neutral area, hōl, distinguished from the camp, also hōl, by being out of the contamination range of the sanctuary. Only sins and impurities committed within the camp/city can pollute the sanctuary. For this reason, according to an old P law, the bearers of leprosy, pelvic dis-

6) E. Reiner, Šurpu (Graz, 1958), vii, 63; cf. v, 165.
7) Significantly, the domain of Azazel is not outside the camp but the desert, in ṭeres gēţērā, “an inaccessible land” (Lev. xvi 22).