

An Orientation on the ‘Contribution’ and the ‘Wave Offering’ (תְּרוּמָה *ṭrûmâ* and תְּנוּפָה *ṭnûpâ*)

Based on an earlier draft. 2018.

The תְּרוּמָה *ṭrûmâ* and the תְּנוּפָה *ṭnûpâ* are dealt with together, because they are closely related and raise similar questions. How do they both fit into the sacrificial system? Neither of them is a sacrifice. They are not burnt on the altar (ABD, vol. 5, p. 873). **The two terms denote certain parts that are taken away from some offerings and are first dedicated to the Lord and then (typically) given to the priests for consumption.** Lev 7:14 may serve as an example. Here, the *ṭrûmâ* comes “from” the other offerings.¹

NASB: Of this he shall present one of every offering [מִכֹּל־קָרְבָּן] as a contribution [תְּרוּמָה] to the LORD; it shall belong to the priest who sprinkles the blood of the peace offerings.

Bluedorn states (in: Pehlke (ed.): Zur Umwelt des Alten Testaments, 2002, p. 311):

... der Begriff *ṭrûmâ*, der oft als *Hebopfer* gedeutet wird, sollte eher als Abgabe im Sinne einer Steuer für das Heiligtum oder für die Priester verstanden werden und nicht als wirkliches Opfer.

English: ... the term *ṭrûmâ*, which is often interpreted as *heave offering* should rather be understood as a tribute / levy / contribution in the sense of a tax for the sanctuary or the priests and not as a real sacrifice [/ offering].

As to the relation between the *ṭrûmâ* and the *ṭnûpâ*, NIDOTTE (# 5677, vol. 3, p. 65) says (referring to Lev 10:15 etc.):

..., the same materials on the same occasion could be referred to as both a contribution and a wave offering because the former refers simply to the fact that something was turned over to the Lord as a contribution while the latter refers to the manner in which the contribution was presented to the Lord.

1. The contribution [*trad.* heave offering] (תְּרוּמָה *ṭrûmâ*)

‘Raise up’ or ‘set aside’? – Etymology and literature

NIDOTTE translates this noun “tribute / contribution” and explains (# 9556, vol. 4, p. 335):

..., it has commonly been thought that the latter [*ṭrûmâ*] derives from the Heb. vb. raise up, and for that reason is called a heave offering in some Eng. versions. However, this vb. in ritual contexts actually means remove something in order to present it to the Lord (i.e., to set it aside as a special contribution ...).

It is often used with the preposition *min* ‘from’, e.g. in Lev 7:32 (NASB):

You shall give the right thigh to the priest as a contribution from the sacrifices of your peace offerings.

Milgrom (Numbers, JPSTC, 1990) translates as follows (on Num 5:9; 15:19 etc., and in Excursus 42, pp. 426-427): “that which is set aside / dedication / gift / contribution”.

HALOT (s.v. תְּרוּמָה, under § E 1).²

¹ In some places, the *ṭrûmâ* is related to “the holy things / gifts” [קִדְּוָה] of the Israelites, see Lev 22:15; Num 5:9-10. What the exact relation is, is debated (see Ashley: Numbers, NICOT, 1993, on Num 5:9).

² Cf. HALAT (vol. 2, p. 1646): “Hebe, Abhub, ... Teilstück, ... Weihegabe, ... Abgabe”; for the verb (vol. 2, p. 1124, under hi., no. 4): “(Abgabe, Leistung) abheben (= aussondern) u. darbringen” (cf. also ho.).

given the link with הָרַף hif., as is most generally accepted, the sbst. can be translated literally as lifting, raising, so Rudolph KAT 13/4: 284, who goes on to explain: lifting, raising indicates a part or a portion which has been lifted from a greater whole for another purpose (usually within the cult) ... and has thus been separated; similarly Childs *Exodus* 523 (see above A a). In view of the cultic use of the sbst. it is advisable to adopt a rendering (over and above the literal translation) of consecrated gift, or simply offering, contribution (see A b and c).

Renderings

This list is based on spot checks in Lev 7:14/32 and Num 5:9; 18:24. A discussion follows at the end, under “Translation”.

KJV: (offer / give for an) **heave offering** / offering

NASB: (present / give as a) **contribution** / (of the tithe:) offering

NRSV: (offer as a) **gift** (to the Lord) / give as an offering / (of the tithe:) **set apart as an offering**

NJPS: (offer as a) **gift** (to the Lord) / (of the tithe:) **set aside as a gift** (to the Lord)

NIV: (bring / give as a) **contribution** / (of the tithe:) present as an offering

NET: (present / give as a) **contribution offering** / offering // (of the tithe:) **offer as a raised offering**

REB: (present / give as a) **contribution** / (of the tithe:) **set aside as a contribution**

NLT: (present / give as a) **gift** (to the Lord) / offering / (of the tithe:) present as sacred offering

GNB: (present / give as a) **special contribution**

CEV: give (to the Lord) (Lev 7:14) / **donation** (Num 5:9) / “is for the priest” (Lev 7:32) / (of the tithe:) offer

Handbook (Lev 7:14): a (special) contribution

Handbook (Num 5:9): contribution / gift / donation (especially those that go to the priests)

NICOT (Lev): (of the thigh:) give as a contribution

NICOT (Num): (of the tithe:) set as a contribution

Function

The *ḥrûmâ* is given “**to the LORD**”.

“The function of the *ḥrûmâ* is to **transfer the object from its owner to the deity.**” (Milgrom, 427).

The *ḥrûmâ* is not a sacrifice that is burnt on the altar. **It is used or eaten.** (Exception: Ex 29:22-28; see NIDOTTE vol. 3, p. 66.)

The *ḥrûmâ* is usually **given as part of a whole**. The character of the *ḥrûmâ* as a kind of levy is underlined by its usage in Num 31: In vv. 28/29 it occurs in parallel with *mekes* ‘tax’, and in v. 41 together with that word in its construct state: “the tax of the contribution”.

In the typical case concerning the right thigh of the peace offering, it is given to the **officiating priest** (Lev 7:33), and – in some cases – also to his family (Num 18:9-11).

Items that are contributed (selection)

- voluntary(!) contributions towards building the Tabernacle, Ex 25:2ff.
- the right thigh of the peace offering, Lev 7:32
- one cake and one bread from the grain offerings accompanying the peace offering for thanksgiving, Lev 7:14
- a cake from the first dough after harvest, Num 15:20
- the tithe of the Israelites for the Levites, and the tithe of the Levites for the priests, Num 18:24/26.

Translation

If one wants to emphasize where the *ṯrûmâ* comes from, I would translate “**set aside as tribute / levy / (religious) tax** [out of something]”.

If one wants to emphasize what the function and purpose of the *ṯrûmâ* is, one can use the expression “**set aside as contribution / donation** [towards something / for somebody]”. One should check, however, whether the context is enough to clarify what the contribution is for, or who receives the donation.

Most of the English versions either use some expression with the word “contribution”, or say “gift”. The verb might depend on the context, but the noun should be kept the same, if possible – because the idea is always the same, and it should be recognizable. The versions offer several good models, but also show unnecessary inconsistencies. To take just one example, I do not see a reason why NRSV speaks of “offering as a gift” in one place, and, when it comes to the tithe, of “setting apart as an offering” in another.

A translation like “to offer as raised offering” (NET) builds on an etymology that probably points in the wrong direction, and is not helpful to convey the meaning.

Some of CEV’s renderings – e.g. just “to give” – seem too general for a technical term in the cult. The word “offering” (NIV) is also very general. There are all kinds of offerings. The word expresses neither the origin nor the purpose of the *ṯrûmâ*.

To speak of a “gift” (NRSV, NJPS, NLT) should not be mistaken as a “voluntary present” – most of the *ṯrûmâ* were obligatory. The priests depended on them for their living. Thus, to express the idea of **contributing** seems preferable; (“to contribute” is defined in dictionary.com as “to give (money, time, knowledge, assistance, etc.) to a common supply, fund, etc., as for charitable purposes.”).

Since the *ṯrûmâ* is not a symbolic gesture – Milgrom (427) speaks of “an oral declaration or a physical act” – one may even ask whether wordings like “to declare sth. a contribution / to designate sth. as a tribute” would be appropriate.

2. The wave offering (תְּנוּפָה *ṯnûpâ*)

Wave or elevate? – Etymology and literature

Data from the Ancient Near East can be interpreted as giving support for both interpretations – “waving” or “elevating” the offering.

Ashley explains (on Num 5:25, footnote):

The traditional translation [“to wave”], which comes from rabbinic tradition, is explained as a sideways movement toward and away from the altar.

(Ashley translates “dedicate” in this place.)

Milgrom (Excursus 41, p. 425) says: “The Targums ... consistently translate *ṯnûpâ* and its verbal forms by the root *r-w-m*, “raise, elevate.”” After giving his own reasons, he concludes:

Thus philology, typology, and logic reinforce each other in favor of the rendering of *ṯnûpâ* as “elevation offering.”

HALOT (s.v. תְּנוּפָה), after presenting the options, is inclined to follow this. It says:³

C. ... —1. the meaning of the sbst. is disputed, but possibilities include.

—a) traditionally from I תָּנַף hif., on which see especially KBL: consecration effected by swinging, or brandishing upon the hands before God or the altar; ...

—b) from Arb. *nāfa* (see above A b), so Milgrom loc. cit.: ‘תָּ in the sense of uplifted (raised) offering

—c) from Neo-Babylonian *nūptu* addition, additional payment (AHw. 804b; CAD N/2, 343a) from which ‘תָּ means special supplement, so Driver JSS 1 (1956) 100ff; similarly von Soden UF 2 (1970) 271 = *Bibel und Alter Orient* (BZAW 162; 1985)

³ Cf. HALAT: “Erhebungsoffer > **Weihgabe**”. (The earlier entry on the verb תָּנַף still speaks of “**move backwards and forwards in front of the altar** presenting the “wave-offering”.”)

132: from Arb. *nauf* excess, surplus (Wehr-Cowan *Dict.* 1011b), so that 'תָּ means a supplementary offering.

—d) deciding which proposal to accept is difficult, but the first (a) probably comes into consideration less than seemed apparent for a long time; and the second (b) probably deserves greater preference to the last (c), not only because of the expression ... תָּנִיפָהּ יָד Is 1916 (see below 4a) but also because of the Egyptian offering ritual, as mentioned by Milgrom loc. cit.; see also de Tarragon loc. cit. see above B c). ...

—3. תָּנִיפָהּ: uplifted offering > consecrated gift: a) referring to the raising (consecration) of the objects offered or the portions of the offerings ...

One should note that the meaning “to wave / swing back and forth” cannot be ruled out. It makes perfect sense in Deut 23:26 [Engl.25] (NASB): “..., but you shall not wield a sickle in your neighbor's standing grain.”

NIDOTTE (# 5677, vol. 3, p. 63-67) translates the verb in the hi. with “move back and forth” and keeps the rendering of the noun as “wave offering”. The writer discusses the etymology without a firm conclusion. On the one hand he is reluctant to talk of a motion (64):

It seems unlikely that a motion of waving or even physically elevating is intended, for example, in Num 8:11, where Aaron was ordered to present the whole tribe of Levi as a *ṣnûpâ* before the Lord. ... It is possible that at one time there was a kind of gesture or mode of presentation that was intended but, at a later time, the expression could be used more generally for the special presentation of an offering, whether the original gesture was performed or not.

On the other hand he says (65):

The manner of presenting a wave offering was apparently a conspicuous act meant to draw attention to the parts actually offered to the Lord ...

Leaving the etymology aside, I would say that the consecration of the Levites is an exception and should not govern our understanding of the more usual cases. The description in Num 6:19/20, for instance, clearly involves a motion:

NIV: ¹⁹“After the Nazirite has shaved off the hair of his dedication, the priest is to place in his hands a boiled shoulder of the ram, and a cake and a wafer from the basket, both made without yeast. ²⁰The priest shall then wave them before the LORD as a wave offering; they are holy and belong to the priest, together with the breast that was waved and the thigh that was presented. ...

Renderings

KJV, NASB, NIV, NET: **wave offering**

NRSV, NJPS: (elevate as an) **elevation offering**

REB: (present as) **dedicated portion**

NLT: special gift / lift up as **special offering**

GNB: (present to the Lord as a) **special gift**

CEV: lift up to show that the offering is dedicated to me [the Lord] (Lev 7:30) / offer (Lev 23:15) / **lift up in dedication to me** [the Lord] (Num 6:20)

The *Handbook* on Lev says (pp. 5-6 under “Translating Leviticus” – § 4 Language and style):

The words “wave offering” (23.15) or “waved as a wave offering” are used more than a dozen times in Leviticus. However, it probably was not a separate kind of offering. It is more likely that it had to do with a particular gesture associated with sacrifices that required something extra. Both TEV and NEB place the emphasis on the special nature of the sacrifice and not on the gesture itself.

Then, on Lev 7:30, it recommends:

“It is probably best to translate here “present it as a special gift.” as in TEV.”

This piece of advice is questionable to me. Why should one not translate the verb as a concrete gesture – whether it was elevating or waving? **Two things speak against dropping the motion:** (1) It seems clear that “a conspicuous act” (NIDOTTE, see above) was involved; (2) this act is one of the features by which the *ṣnûpâ* is distinguished from

the *ʿrûmâ*. Also, the action of “elevating” is not an abstract concept or difficult to say (although “waving / swinging” might).

The *Handbook* on Num gives a good summary and some more models. It says (on Num 6:20):

The exact gesture indicated by the Hebrew verb rendered wave and the related noun translated wave offering is not known. It probably means “elevate.” so NRSV provides a more accurate translation of this clause with “Then the priest shall elevate them as an elevation offering before the LORD” In any case, the action apparently symbolized the transfer of the ram’s shoulder, the unleavened thick bread and the unleavened thin bread to the LORD in the sight of everyone present. CEV says “You will hand them back to the priest, who will lift them up in dedication to me.” GNT has “Next, the priest shall present them as a special gift to the LORD,” and REB translates “The priest will then present them as a dedicated portion before the LORD.” FRCL offers another model, though rather complex at the end: “The priest himself then offers them to the Lord, with the ritual gesture of presentation.”

NICOT (Lev 7:30): dedicate as a dedication

NICOT (Num 6:20): **elevate as a dedication offering.**

Function

The *ʿnûpâ* denotes a **dedication** performed by a ritual in the sanctuary, i.e. “**before the LORD**” (Milgrom on Num 15:19), or that dedicated portion. Milgrom (on Num 6:20):

The *ʿnûpâ* is a rite of dedication that transfers the elevated objects from the property of the offerer to God. That is why all the portions given to the priests are first placed on the palms of the donor to indicate that they initially belonged to him, that they are his to donate. Then the **elevation movement** is performed by the priest (**probably by placing his hands under the palms of the donor**), **graphically transferring the objects to God**, after which they may be eaten by the priest.

The *ʿnûpâ* is not a sacrifice that is burnt on the altar (exception: Lev 8:27-28).

In the typical case of the breast of the peace offering, it is given to **all priests** and their families (Lev 10:14).

Items that are waved (selection)

- of all the things given towards building the Tabernacle, the gold only is said to be waved Ex 35:22
- the breast of the peace offering Lev 7:30
- the shoulder of the Nazirite's peace offering Num 6:19+20
- the sheaf of the first of the harvest Lev 23:10+11
- the Levites themselves(!) Num 8:11.

Translation

I would either translate “**offer as elevation offering**” – this translation is based on the root and the physical action; or, in order to underline the significance, “**dedicate / present sth. by elevating**” (or, if that interpretation is preferred: “dedicate sth. by waving”) / “**lift up in dedication**”.

The problem with rendering *ʿnûpâ* as “special gift” (NLT, GNB) is that this term could be applied to the *ʿrûmâ* as well. Also, it is not clear in what way it is “special”; to offer the *ʿnûpâ* was a permanent rule. Further, calling it “gift” could lead to the misunderstanding that it was voluntary, but in most cases it was not. It seems better to focus on the gesture.

One problem with the rendering “elevation offering” is that it could be mistaken as an alternative name for the “heave offering”, which would confuse the *ʿnûpâ* with the *ʿrûmâ*. If someone happens to favor the etymology for “to raise up” with regard to the *târûmâ*, and at the same time favors the etymology for “to elevate” with regard to the *tânûpâ*, then the translation must be based on the function, not the etymology, because the two terms would be undistinguishable – and no version does that.