

Where *חֹק* *ḥōq* and *חֻקֵּי* *ḥuqqâ* mean ‘share’, not ‘statute’

Peter Schmidt. 2020. Quotes from NASB.

The fixed phrase “perpetual statute”

The phrase *חֹק-עוֹלָם* *ḥoq-’ôlām* occurs 11 times, in Exod. 29:28; 30:21; Lev. 6:11 [English 18], 15 [22]; 7:34; 10:15; 24:9; Num. 18:8, 11, 19; Jer. 5:22.

The phrase *חֻקֵּי עוֹלָם* *ḥuqqat ’ôlām* occurs 22 times, in Exod. 12:14, 17; 27:21; 28:43; 29:9; Lev. 3:17; 7:36; 10:9; 16:29; 16:31, 34; 17:7; 23:14, 21, 31, 41; 24:3; Num. 10:8; 15:15; 18:23; 19:10, 21.

Both phrases (the second one in about half the cases) are sometimes followed by the phrase *לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם* *l’ dōrōtêkem* ‘throughout your generations’.

Oftentimes, *ḥuqqat ’ôlām* occurs toward the end of a stipulation, and characterizes it as something that has to be observed “forever” (> “perpetual statute”). For example:

Exod. 30:21: So they shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they will not die; and it shall be a perpetual statute for them, for Aaron and his descendants throughout their generations.”

Lev. 3:17: It is a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwellings: you shall not eat any fat or any blood.

Num. 10:8: The priestly sons of Aaron, moreover, shall blow the trumpets; and this shall be for you a perpetual statute throughout your generations.

The meaning ‘share / due’

But there are cases where the English versions translate differently. E.g., in Lev. 7:34, they translate *ḥoq-’ôlām* as “perpetual share” (NIV11R) or “due forever” (NASB) (with different wording, but in the same sense also NJPS, NRSV, GNTD, NLT07).

The question then is: **Where is this sense of ‘due / share / portion’ appropriate, and why?**

1. That *ḥoq* can mean something like ‘allotted portion’ is clear from Gen. 47:22 (most versions: ‘allotment / allowance’):

Only the land of the priests he did not buy, for the priests had an allotment [חֹק] from Pharaoh, and they lived off the allotment [חֹק] which Pharaoh gave them. Therefore, they did not sell their land.

Compare also Prov. 30:8 (NJPS):

... Give me neither poverty nor riches, / But provide me with my daily bread [חֹק]

2. That *ḥoq* cannot mean ‘statute / decree / ordinance’ in Lev. 7:34 is clear from the syntax. The verse reads:

כִּי אֶת־חֲזֶוֶה הַתְּנוּפָה וְאֶת | שׁוֹק הַתְּרוּמָה לְקַחְתִּי מֵאֵת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִזִּבְחֵי שְׁלַמֵּיהֶם וְאֶתְּם לְאֶהֱרֹן
הַכֹּהֵן וּלְבָנָיו לְחֹק־עוֹלָם מֵאֵת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

For I have taken the breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the contribution from the sons of Israel from the sacrifices of their peace offerings, and have given them to Aaron the priest and to his sons as their due forever from the sons of Israel.

(a) The phrase comes with the preposition ל' *l'*: לְקִדְשׁוֹ לְעֹלָם לְחֹק-עֹלָם *l'hoq- 'ōlām* ‘as their due forever’. This is different from the cases where it is a closing formula, as in Exod. 30:21, where a prepositional phrase with *l'* follows it, indicating for whom it is binding: לְוִי וְלִבְנָיו לְדֹתָם לְחֹק-עֹלָם לֹא יִזְכָּר *hoq- 'ōlām lō 'ūl'zar 'ō* ‘a perpetual statute for him [= Aaron] and his descendants.

(b) The verb “to give” and its complement “from the sons of Israel” cannot be used together with “statute / decree”. “From the sons of Israel” is constructed with מִן *min* ‘from’,¹ indicating a source (so also Exod. 29:28) (but see Residue below).

(c) Although it is not the case here in Lev. 7:34, in other places the *hoq- 'ōlām* is said to be מִמַּעֲשֵׂי יְהוָה *mē 'iššē Yhwh* “from the gifts of the LORD” (NET08) / “of the food offerings presented to the Lord” (NIV11R) (Lev. 6:11; 24:9). A statute cannot come “from the gifts of the LORD”.

3. Similar verses where *hoq* occurs without *'ōlām* provide supporting background. E.g. Lev. 10:13 reads: “You shall eat it, moreover, in a holy place, because it is your due and your sons’ due [*hāqkā w' hāq-bānēkā*]...” (note the possessive suffix). Then, in v. 15, it says “...; so it shall be a thing perpetually due [*hoq- 'ōlām*] you and your sons with you, ...”.

4. In Num. 18:8, we find the parallel wording “... I have given them to you as a portion and to your sons as a perpetual allotment.” NASB’s translation of the rare word מַסֵּה *māsē hā* as “portion” is in line with NICOT and WBC.

Results

Examining all occurrences leads to the following results: Although *hoq- 'ōlām* and *huqqat 'ōlām* are fixed phrases, they have two different meanings. While the words *hōq* / *hūqqā* overlap widely in their usage, they display an almost consistent difference in their combination with *'ōlām*:²

- With the exception of Exod. 30:21,³ ***hoq- 'ōlām* always means “perpetual share”** – usually something that the priests are entitled to receive. The *Handbook* also suggests this in most places (except in Exod. 29:28, which is unfortunate, because its content is so close to all the occurrences in Lev, even though the verse does not have a direct equivalent in the parallel text Lev. 8). (Jer. 5:22 is a different matter.)

- ***huqqat 'ōlām* usually means “perpetual statute”.**

A debatable case is Exod. 29:9. Most English versions match NASB (“...; and they shall have the priesthood by a perpetual statute”). But one could follow NJPS (“And so they shall have priesthood as their right for all time.”).

A special case is Num. 10:8, which contains the clause “and they will be to you for an eternal ordinance” (NET08) – with the subject most likely being the trumpets (see *Handbook*). In REB89 and NLT07, it is not quite clear whether a sense of obligation or privilege is carried over from this phrase into the first clause of the verse (REB89: “the duty of the Aaronite priests”; NLT07: “Only

¹ Gesenius / Donner, p. 694, s.v. מִן, § 8: “i. Verb. m. anderen Präp.en u. Adv.en a) von ... her, weg v. jem.em od. etw., wobei die 2. Part. den Ort angibt, an dem sich die Pers. od. S. vorher befand ... מִצֵּאת aus d. Nähe, v. d. Seite jem.es weg”. BDB (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), p. 86, s.v. מִן II, § 4: “from proximity with ... coupled almost always with *persons* ... Hence **b.** of rights or dues, handed over from, given *on the part of*, any one: Gn 47²² ...; oft. in P, as Gn 23²⁰ Ex 27²¹ a perpetual due מִן יִשְׂרָאֵל *from*, or *on the part of*, the children of Israel, Lv 7^{34b} 24⁸ Nu 3⁹ 7⁸⁴ ±; ...”.

² TWOT acknowledges this difference, see # 728, p. 317. NIDOTTE’s entry (# 2976, §2) is in this regard of no help. Milgrom (*Leviticus 1–16*, AB, 1991) discusses the issue (on Lev. 7:34, 36; 10:13).

³ Not sorted out in TLOT s.v. חֹק *hqq*, § 4c.

the priests ... are allowed”), or whether the renderings are simply based on the *yiqtol*. That the “perpetual statute” is one for the Israelites, not the priests, is clear from the 2. person in “your generations”; it was not the priests who were addressed.

Exod. 28:43 and Lev. 10:9 are examples for how *ḥuqqat ‘ôlām* can be used regarding the priests, and *not* mean ‘share / due’.

- Where the two phrases occur in proximity, they might nevertheless be used to express different things. TLOT assigns Lev. 7:34 to the cases for the formula about the priestly share, but Lev. 7:36 to the cases for the closing formula.⁴
- Special case: That *ḥoq-‘ôlām* in Lev. 6:15 [English 22] occurs with לַיהוָה *layhwāh* ‘for the LORD’ is “strange” (Hartely, *Leviticus*, WBC, 1992). But it is not inexplicable: This ordination offering is not one that the priests *receive*, but that they *give* to God. NIV11R’s rendering makes sense: “It is the Lord’s perpetual share” (similarly NRSV), and is preferable over “by a permanent ordinance” (NASB) or “It is a perpetual statute” (NET08). So also Milgrom (“it is the Lord’s due for all time;”, against NJPS).

In most places, most English versions translate appropriately. (A spotcheck of NASB, NRSV, NIV11R, GNTD, NJPS, and NLT07 in Lev. 6:18 [MT 11]; 7:34, 36; 10:15; 24:9; revealed that the only instances where the meaning of ‘share / due’ was not chosen are Lev. 6:18 NASB and Lev. 7:36 GNTD (with the wording in v. 34 being somewhat ambivalent.) But the reasoning behind their decisions might not be transparent right away. I hope this little treatise helps to see what is behind the differences between these places and those with the closing formula “it shall be a perpetual statute”.

Interestingly, in this matter the versions offer a more harmonic picture than some of the commentaries.

- Hartley (*Leviticus*, WBC, 1992), in Lev. 6:11 [18], translates “perpetual decree” and remarks:

חֶקֶק means “statute, decree,” and according to Levine (37), by extension it means “due,” one’s rightful share. H. Ringgren (“חֶקֶק *ḥāqāq*,” TDOT 5:144) considers חֶקֶק a technical term for various offerings being the priests’ legal portion. There is much to commend this position, but given the fact that חֶקֶק עוֹלָם, “perpetual decree,” is used a few times in Leviticus (e.g., 3:17; 7:36; 17:7) to underscore the enduring quality of various laws, there does not seem to be a valid reason to depart from that translation here. This is supported by the fact that לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם, “for your generations,” occurs with the phrase here as in many places in Leviticus.

This does not take into regard the difference between *ḥoq-‘ôlām* and *ḥuqqat ‘ôlām*. – In 7:34, he does translate “as a perpetual portion from the people of Israel” (in v. 36 “perpetual decree” again).

- Disappointingly, Hieke in his voluminous commentary (*Leviticus 1-15*, HTK, 2014), in Lev. 6:11 [18], translates “(Dies sei) eine ewige Satzung [= everlasting statute] für eure Generationen über [= about] die Feueropfer JHWHs.”, without commenting on the issues (so also at 7:34, 36).
- Ashley (*Numbers*, NICOT, 1993) translates *ḥoq-‘ôlām* “as/for an everlasting due” in Num. 18:11, 19. And in 18:8 he explicitly prefers the meaning ‘perquisite / share’ for מַשְׂחָה *māšḥâ*. Strangely, he translates *ḥoq-‘ôlām* with “everlasting statute” in this verse. Budd (*Numbers*, WBC, 1984) has “perpetual due” in all three verses.

⁴ *Ibid.* – Milgrom would adopt the Sam.’s reading *ḥoq-‘ôlām* also in v. 36.

Residue

Admittedly, Exod. 27:21 poses a difficulty in this regard. Exod. 27:21 and Lev. 24:3 are parallel texts about tending the lampstand. *ḥuqqat 'ōlām* occurs in both of them. But only Exod. 27:21 ends with the phrase מֵעַתָּה בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל *mē'ēt b'nē Yisrā'el* 'from the sons of Israel'. Virtually all English versions translate *ḥuqqat 'ōlām* in the sense of 'perpetual statute' in both places. But this entails an unusual rendering of מֵעַתָּה *mē'ēt* in Exod. 27:21 as 'for / by / among [the Israelites]' – e.g. "for the sons of Israel" (NASB), "to be observed by the Israelites" (NRSV), or "among the Israelites" (NIV11R). Assigning this meaning to מֵעַתָּה *mē'ēt* is difficult to account for.⁵

NJPS is the only version that reflects the Hebrew text more closely by saying "It shall be a due from the Israelites for all time". It thus applies the meaning 'due' in this case also to *ḥuqqat 'ōlām*. In the parallel Lev. 24:3, NJPS uses the normal closing formula: "it is a law for all time". GCLNR00 does the same.⁶ Can this be justified? What is the 'due' in Exod. 27:21? The paragraph demands from the Israelites "that they bring you clear oil of beaten olives for the light, to make a lamp burn continually". Possibly, this oil is the 'due' that the Israelites owe the priests – like they owe them other things as well; the specialty in this case is that it is not meant for the priests' personal use, but to enable them to tend the lamps. – The demand to bring oil is the same in Lev. 24; but the author might have chosen to put the emphasis here on the perpetual statute. Anyway, this difficulty, to me, does not seem to be a strong enough argument for translating *mē'ēt b'nē Yisrā'el* in Exod. 29:28 and Lev. 7:34 differently than with 'from the Israelites'.

⁵ Note that BDB makes no exception for Exod. 27:21, but lists it alongside the other occurrences (see footnote no. 1).

⁶ GCLNR00 says:

Exod. 27:21: ... Auch in allen kommenden Generationen sind die Israeliten zu dieser Abgabe verpflichtet.

English: ... In all coming generations as well, the Israelites are obliged to [offer] this due.

Lev. 24:3: ... Diese Anordnung gilt für alle Zukunft.

English: ... This order applies for the whole future.