



Ephod – What Was It and What Was Its Use? A Question About the Potential Way Forward in the Development of Its Role in the Old Testament Texts

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Abstract: In biblical texts, *ephod* appears most often as part of priestly garb. In the statements of non-priestly authors (before the Babylonian Exile), the linen *ephod* symbolizes priestly ministry in general. Sometimes, it is also regarded as an object of illicit worship (a practice condemned by the Deuteronomist) or an instrument necessary for divination practices (a symbol of priestly ministry). In these cases, the verb used indicates not so much a garment as an object. For the post-exile priestly authors, the richly woven and decorated *ephod* is henceforth exclusively part of the high priestly garb. This change in the role of the ephod represents the only discernible path of “evolution” in the use of *ephod* in the Hebrew Bible. One can only speculate about its possible earlier uses, such as garment put on statues of deities, based on the suggested (Akkadian, Ugaritic; cf. Isa 30:22) etymology of the word.

Keywords: ephod, priestly garb, high priest, divination practices, illicit worship

The Hebrew word אֶפֹד/אֶפֹדָה (*ēfōd/ēfōd*; 49 times in the Hebrew Bible) is one of those “special expressions” that we are unable to translate with an adequate word into any of the modern European languages. Therefore, all we can do is transcribe it. In the LXX translation, *epōmis* (Exod 25:7; 28:4, 6, 7, 8), used as an equivalent for this Hebrew word (Exod 29:5), can also mean “shoulder pieces” (Exod 36:1[39:4]) (Lust, Eynikel, and Hauspie 1992, 179; Jurewicz 2000, 377). The difficulty arises both from the fact that the etymology of the term is not fully explained and from its very use in the Old Testament texts. A good overview of the discussion related to this “object,” especially in the context of its use in mantic practices, is offered by Frederick H. Cryer (1995, 278–81) and Ann Jeffers (1996, 202–8), among others. Today, most of these past attempts to interpret the role that *ephod* played and what it was are, according to Jeffers (1996, 204–5), unacceptable. This is because, on the one hand, in most of the instances (29 out of 49 uses) in which the word is found in the Hebrew Bible, it refers to an elaborately crafted piece of the high priestly garb (P texts: Exod 25:7; 28:4, 6, 12, 15, 25–28; 29:5; 39:9 – together with חֹשֶׁן [*hōšēn*] – a kind of breast pocket/pouch (breastpiece) containing fortunes; Exod 35:9, 27), being at the same time a symbol of this office (Lev 8:7). On the other hand, the earlier texts only refer to a kind of simple linen loin cloth associated with the priestly ministry (1 Sam 2:18, 28: little

Samuel/priests; 2 Sam 6:14 / 1 Chr 15:27: David). In still other pre-priestly accounts, it more or less explicitly refers to some object of worship (Hos 3:4; Judg 8:[23]27; 17:4–5; 18:14–20; 1 Sam 14:3? 1 Sam 21:10) or instrument appearing as a result of consulting God (1 Sam 23:4–6; 30:7).

In view of this variety of uses, there have been suggestions in the history of research that *ephod* (henceforth, we use the simplified form of the transcription) may have denoted a variety of objects during the monarchy, the use of which depended on the place and the role assigned to it (item of clothing, object of worship, divination instrument; May 1939, 44–69; Morgenstern 1942, 153–266; 1943, 1–52; Mayers 1992, 550). However, this begs the question of what, then, was *ephod* before it became an important distinguishing feature of high priestly garb according to priestly authors of the Second Temple period? An item of clothing? A priestly accessory with some special purpose? Seeking answers to these questions, we put forward the thesis that *ephod* was from the beginning a special element of priestly garb associated with the priestly ministry and its “atypical,” in relation to the priestly description, uses were solely due to this role. Another issue is the question of what was the reason for its special significance for the priestly ministry? This is another question we seek to answer in the following article.

1. Etymology

The analysis should begin with the question about the etymology of the word *ephod*, which is not entirely clear. Dictionaries (*KBL* 1, 75; *Ges*¹⁸, 88; Jenson 1997, 476; cf. also Rambiert-Kwaśniewska 2023, 122–23) suggest references to the Akkadian word *epattu* (plural *epadātu*) “a costly garment” (*AHW* 1:222 – *CAD* 4, 183) and Ugaritic *ʾpd* – “garb” (*KTU* 1.136: 10; 4,707: 11.13; 4,780: 1.3.4.7). Manfred Görg (1991, 472–73), with reference to a dissertation by Ingolf Fredrich (1963), still points to the possibility of an Egyptian borrowing (eg. *jfd* – “linen, four-weave”), but other researchers have not taken up this last suggestion. Indeed, many of them believe, however, that originally *ephod* may have been part of the precious metal costume adorning the statues of deities, and that its use in a divination context merely symbolized the presence of the deity itself (Smend 1994, 420; Görg 1991, 473; Cryer 1995, 280; Utschneider 2008, 1351).

If pointing to Akkadian *epattu* and Ugaritic *ʾpd* is correct, then – given the basic meaning of both words: “cover/wrap” – it may also have referred to a type of container/pouch for fortunes used in divination practices (Jeffers 1996, 209). The above-mentioned older scholars believed that the Old Testament texts reflected a certain evolution in the meaning of the term, and that before the Babylonian Exile it referred to something originally associated with a deity, and later it was exclusively

a priestly garment or accessory that had nothing to do with the earlier uses (Elliger 1958, 19–35; Grntz and Sperling 2007, 455–56; Groß 2009, 459). It should be noted, however, that many contemporary exegetes doubt that such an evolution of meaning can really be demonstrated (Noort 1997, 103; Cryer 1995, 280–81; Utzschneider 2008, 135), since the pre-priestly texts themselves, in their opinion, do not recount historical events and thus do not provide us with any convincing data on the actual, earlier use of the *ephod* mentioned in them. Cryer (1995, 278), for example, considers all texts concerning *ephod* in 1–2 Sam to be post-deuteronomistic. Consequently, he and many others believe that *ephod* has a purely theological function in them, indicating that everything in specific scenes happens according to the will of YHWH and in the presence of a priest (Schmitt 2014, 112). Such statements, however, do not provide us with any answer about what the term *ephod* actually meant.

Interesting in the context of the discussion of the etymology and origin of the word *ephod* may be the difficult-to-date (Beuken 2010, 161, 166) text of Isa 30:22, which features the term אֲפֹדָה (*ʾăfuddâ*) – meaning “(a closely fitting) covering” (KBL 1, 75), referring to a garment made of silver covering (סָפָה *sāpâ*) a statue of a deity (cf. Exod 28:8; 39:5: “waistband”) (Oppenheim 1949, 172–93). The verb stem אָפַד (*ʾāpad*) – “to be (tightly) tied (with a belt)” (cf. Exod 29:5; Lev 8:7) (KBL 1, 75) belongs to the same word family as the noun *ephod*. For some exegetes (Alexander 1997, 475), this is an occasion to suggest that *ephod* originally may have had this exact role – a (metal) covering used to adorn an idol. Practices of this kind, known from Egypt and Mesopotamia and confirming such a possibility, are described by Hans Wildberger (1982, 1198–99), among others. Indeed, in the statement from Hos 3:4 *ephod* occurs without any link to the priestly function alongside תְּרָפִים (*ʿrāfîm*). On the one hand, the mere absence of such a link expressed explicitly does not necessarily mean that it did not exist. On the other hand, however, we also cannot exclude the validity of the aforementioned opinion that *ephod* may have had different uses and taken different forms in different periods, from a simple piece of divine attire or covering, to a more ceremonial reworking of its role and appearance towards the end of the monarchy, and then linking it exclusively to the high priestly ministry during the so-called Second Temple period ([post]priestly texts; cf. also Sir 45:6–13, esp. v. 8) (Jenson 1997, 476).

2. Element of High Priest's Attire

For the priestly circle of the Second Temple period, *ephod* is first and foremost an elaborate element of a high priest's attire made of precious materials (Exod 28:6–14). It is mentioned as the first element of this attire (Exod 28:8; 39:2) along with the fact that it was woven entirely of multicolored yarn interspersed with gold (Exod 39:3).

The quality and most precious nature of these materials and the first place on the list, as assumed by the priestly authors, emphasize the supreme sacred status of this element, resulting from the high priestly ministry in the Tabernacle.

The very description of *ephod* resembles a kind of tight sleeveless garment, similar to an apron, held on the body by cords, straps and rings (Kugler 2007, 278; Rambiert-Kwaśniewska 2023, 121–26). As we have mentioned, it was woven with precious multicolored yarn (Exod 28:6, 8), connected with a waistband and shoulder pieces (Exod 28:7–8) and adorned with precious stones (Exod 28:9–13). “The structure of the description indicates that *ephod* is a protection used to immobilize and secure *hōšen* (Exod 28:28), the latter being a kind of pouch for the prophecy elements proper, called *urim and thummim* (Exod 28:30).” (Lemański 2009, 564) It is from the above description that exegetes conclude that *ephod* itself may have been a type of above-mentioned apron, which was lowered and joined by a belt (v. 8) running around the hips (Houtman 2000, 487; Utzschneider and Oswald 2023, 234–35. On *hōšen*, see Rambiert-Kwaśniewska 2023, 126–34; on the relationship of *ephod* to *urim and thummim*, see Majewski 2012, 91–107). However, this appearance (Exod 28:6–14) and role of it (cf. Exod 28:15–33) are characteristic only of P and even later redactions (cf. Exod 39:2–8) (Görg 1991, 473), for whom *ephod* became – as we mentioned – one of the symbols of the high priestly office (Lev 8:7; cf. 1 Sam 2:28). It constituted one of the four distinctive features of the high priest’s attire (cf. Sir 45:6–13; Mishna *Yoma* 7:5; Josephus, *Ant.* 3:162; *J.W.* 5:231–361), which emphasized, with its craftsmanship and the use of precious materials, the higher degree of sanctity characterizing the central and most important architectural element of the temple (Jenson 1997, 477), to which only the high priest had access. For this reason, similarly made garments were not allowed to be worn/used in secular life (cf. Lev 19:19b).

3. Waistband/Apron

In texts other than the priestly texts, however, the appearance of *ephod* seems to be much more modest (Rambiert-Kwaśniewska 2023, 285–94, 424–25). The verses 1 Sam 2:18 (little Samuel) and 2 Sam 6:14 / 1 Chr 15:27 (David) mention אפוד בר (*ēfōd bād*) – a “linen *ephod*” with which little Samuel and the adult David are “girded” (הגיר *hāgar*). It is also mentioned that the same “linen *ephod*” was also worn by the 85 priests of Nob, murdered by Doeg the Edomite (1 Sam 22:18). In the latter case (vv. 18b₂, 19), however, this is a post-Deuteronomistic addition to the text (Dietrich 2015, 618). Returning to the other two texts, it is important to note that Samuel wore *ephod* while still a child entrusted to the service of the temple in Shiloh, and David while performing a quazi-priestly service when transferring the ark to Jerusalem (Lemański 2006, 126–28). *Ephod* itself is also mentioned in these contexts

as an item of clothing characterizing those performing priestly service (1 Sam 2:28). In this case, however, as in 1 Sam 22:18, reference is made to “wearing” (נָשָׂא *nāšā*) *ephod*, which is rather ambiguous, since the verb used in the Hebrew Bible refers to wearing objects rather than clothing (KBL 1, 683–84. Cf. also Dietrich 2010, 133). This is rather intriguing, since verses 27–29 in 1 Sam 2 constitute, according to scholars, a later addition originating in priestly circles (Caquot and Robert 1994, 56; Dietrich 2010, 121, 141). Thus, both cases (1 Sam 2:28; 22:18) involve a later, post-exile redaction. Thus, later redactors in both cases may have viewed *ephod* not so much as a piece of clothing, but as an accessory with which the priest of the “time of David” girded himself or which he carried with him.

Let us now return to the two texts mentioned earlier. The above-mentioned story of young Samuel and the priests of Shiloh is composed of two narrative threads: Samuel and his function and Heli and his sons. 1 Sam 2:18 is part of the oldest version of the story (1:1–28; 2:11a, 18b–21, 26), supplemented at the end of the monarchical period by, inter alia, v. 18a (Dietrich 2010, 125–26). It can therefore be assumed that in the case of Samuel, the biblical author still has in mind a pre-monarchical version of *ephod*, although the question of whether the legend of Samuel and the *ephod* he wore goes back to the beginning of that monarchy must remain open (Dietrich 2010, 126). However, we find here no description of *ephod*, and the only information concerns the fact that it can be used to “gird” oneself. Thus, the biblical author is more likely to be thinking of a scanty item of clothing, especially since, on the one hand, a moment later it is added that the mother made young Samuel an additional little robe every year (cf. 1 Sam 2:19; cf. also Exod 28:4, 31). On the other hand, the scantiness of this item of clothing can also be inferred from the description of the *ephod* worn by David. In this case, the mentioned *ephod* is part of a redaction that is difficult to date, giving the tradition about the transfer of the ark to Jerusalem a processional character (see a discussion in Dietrich 2019, 564–66). The image of the king performing an ecstatic dance in front of the ark may suggest that this redaction dates from the period of the so-called Davidization of the Psalter (Porzig 2009, 166–77).

Moreover, according to the biblical author, his garment provokes an ironic statement by Michal, David’s wife, that he went around “half-naked” in full view of the slave girls of his servants” (cf. 2 Sam 6:20b). Both examples lead us to believe that they may refer to a type of waistband, and thus – as we mentioned – rather a type of modest and symbolic only garment. However, if – as suggested by other pre-priestly statements – the aforementioned *ephod* was a certain item related to priestly ministry that was strapped to the hips, it may have already resembled some kind of “apron” worn in this way (like the Scottish kilt) (Klein 2002, 25).

The “wearing” of *ephod* is also referred to in 1 Sam 14:3 (the priest Ahijah, a descendant of Heli the priest of Shiloh). In this case, it is done in the context of Saul’s war expedition against the Philistines and the verb used here already describes, without doubt, an object (Dietrich 2015, 80: “ein fester, vermutlich kostenförmiger

Gegenstand”) that can be carried (נָשָׂא *nāsāʾ*) (so 1 Sam 14:3, 18; 22:18) rather than worn as a piece of clothing. In this case, reference is then made to bringing this *ephod* to seek prophecy (1 Sam 14:18). It can therefore be speculated that originally *ephod* may also have meant a linen pouch/container for fortunes, which only with time became a distinctive and symbolic element of priestly garb, first in the form of a waist-band/ apron (so 1 Sam 2:18; 6:14), and later elaborate piece of clothing characteristic only of the high priest’s attire (thus, in some places *ephod* may appear as a garment, and in others as “urn, pouch, container”; so suggests Scherer 2003, 593). The already mentioned Julian Morgenstern (1943, 1–15) even thought that it should be assumed that originally there may have been multiple *ephods* with different uses (such as that of Micah in Dan – Judg 17; of Gideon in Ophrah – Judg 8:27; of the priests of Nob – 1 Sam 23:9).

The context of 1 Sam 14:3, 18 and the very form of expression in both these verses has given rise to a discussion on the possible identification of *ephod* with the ark (Porzig 2009, 158–61). Indeed, the Masoretic text (also Kušmirek and Parchem 2022, 364–65) mentions the ark (אָרֹן הָאֱלֹהִים *ʾārôn hāʾēlōhîm*), but the LXX already mentions *ephod*. David Toshio Tsumura (2007, 365) argues for assuming that in the war with the Philistines the two objects could have been used together, and so explains the above discrepancy. Some scholars, however, have explained this discrepancy on the grounds that the LXX translator wanted to hide the fact that there were multiple arks used in divination practices (Arnold 1917; Toorn and Houtman 1994, 209–31). The existence of two arks was postulated, for example, by Rabbi Judah ben Lagish. Most rabbis, however, rejected this suggestion (ySot 8,22b–c; ySher 6,49c; cf. Dietrich 2015, 87). It must then also be noted that the ark was never used as an instrument for prophesying (Dietrich 2015, 87). Moreover, the historicity of the whole story is also questionable here (Davies 1975, 86–87). Moreover, with this interpretation, one would have to explain why it was decided to replace the ark with *ephod* only in 1 Sam 14:18 (Dietrich 2015, 87). It is possible that the original statement in the Hebrew text was understood as a mention of an ordinary container (cf. Gen 50:26), and for this reason the Masoretic version included the ark in this role (Caquot and Robert 1994, 165: “une simple boîte”; Scherer 2003, 600).

In any case, here *lectio difficilior* (ark) does not mean *lectio probabilior*, but rather *improbabilior*, and the ark in the Masoretic text probably replaced the *ephod* originally mentioned there (*Vorlage* LXX). There may have been two main reasons for this change. First, the fact that *ephod* was considered here as an “idolatrourous object of worship,” and then also the fact that in 1 Sam 4 it was the ark that was treated as a war palladium (Porzig 2009, 160. Cf. also Kio 1996, 240–46) and the change in 1 Sam 14:18 was “forced” by the war context of the entire story. It should be noted again, however, that in this case it is *ephod*, in turn, that never serves as a war palladium, but is an object used in divination practice (Dietrich 2015, 88: “Klar ist dann auch, dass Ahijas Ephod ein kastenförmiges Gebilde war”).

4. Object of Worship

In some non-priestly texts, *ephod* also appears not so much as an item of clothing, but as some kind of object of worship. In this role, it is mentioned as an object located in the sanctuary at Nob (1 Sam 21:10). However, Walter Dietrich (2015, 569–70) classifies 1 Sam 21:2–7, 9–10 as part of a later redaction. It is mentioned in some places that *ephod* can be placed (יָצַג *jāṣag*), worn (נָשָׂא *nāšā*; 1 Sam 2:28; 14:3), brought (נָגַשׁ *nāgaš*; 1 Sam 23:9; 30:7), and which – through the “hand of the priest” – is brought down (יָרַד *jārad*; 1 Sam 23:6). Verse 6 in the latter case bears the hallmarks of a typical Deuteronomistic redaction (Dietrich 2015, 669–70). In the description in Judg 8:27 it clearly has the characteristics of an object made (עָשָׂה *‘āšâ*) of gold and intended for worship in Gideon’s hometown of Ophrah. From the point of view of the Deuteronomistic redactor, however, this is illicit worship (cf. also Judg 17:4–5; 18:14–20; Hos 3:4). The connection between *ephod* and objects of worship as well as the interpretation of their role, especially in Judg 17–18, is studied by Rüdiger Schmitt (2014, 96–100), among others. The fact is, however, that in the latter texts, unlike in Judg 8:23–27, the role of these objects is not explained.

Gideon, rejecting the offer to become king (Judg 8:23), collects the precious golden valuables taken from the defeated Midianites/Ishmaelites (Judg 8:24–26) and uses them to make (Judg 8:27: עָשָׂה *‘āšâ*) *ephod*. The situation is reminiscent of that which took place “earlier” at the foot of Sinai (cf. Exod 28:6: golden valuables + Exod 32:2–4); Walter Groß (2009, 459) points to similar vocabulary in these texts (cf. also Webb 2012, 264). An extensive discussion of this issue is also provided by Diane M. Sharon (2006, 89–112), and Gideon plays a role similar to Aaron and his sin of making the Golden Calf (Judg 8:27a vs. Exod 32:1, 4) (The way the whole situation is described is typical of the Deuteronomistic phrasing concerning the installation of illicit objects of worship; cf. Scherer 2005, 269–73; Groß 2009, 458). He fabricates (עָשָׂה *‘āšâ*) *ephod* from the collected valuables and then sets it (יָצַג *jāṣag* hifil) (cf. 1 Sam 5:2; 2 Sam 6:17; 1 Chr 16:11: about the ark) in Ophrah, his hometown (v. 27a). However, the Israelites begin to worship it, which is clearly met with criticism from the biblical author, who describes such behavior as prostituting (זָנָה *zānâ*) and calls the event a “snare” (מִוְקֵשׁ *môqēš*) for Gideon and his family (v. 27b). The context indicates that we are talking about *ephod* that becomes an object of worship in a private shrine. The initiative to make such an object came solely from Gideon. He did not act here at the behest of YHWH or any of his representatives (cf. 1 Sam 13:8–14; Spronk 2019, 248). Is this, then, about private worship and reducing the true God to the role of a “personal god”?

Even if Gideon’s intentions were good and stemmed from his piety, the worship of the object he ordered to make was judged to be evil. Here, *ephod* did not serve the purpose of consulting God, but became an object of worship itself. Barry G. Webb (2012, 264) notes that rulers (David being the exception) generally

consulted God through prophets, and *ephod* is associated more with “the time of Moses” (cf. Num 27:21). He suggests, therefore, that what we have here is a reference to the “ideal of Moses,” in which *ephod* would play the role of a symbol of divine authority. Indeed, from the earlier description, it does not appear that the whole situation is something reprehensible. Such an evaluation of it is only given by the post-Deuteronomistic redactor of this text (Groß 2009, 457). Nevertheless, it should also be noted that here *ephod* is clearly and from the outset acting as an object of worship. Whether it was in fact originally a metal garment put on statues of deities is debatable (Groß 2009, 459), since the latter are not mentioned in this text (but cf. Judg 17:4–5; 18:14–20). Perhaps here *ephod* was in fact only to be used as an element of divination practices, and its worship (comparable to the worship of the Golden Calf in Exod 32) was treated as a violation of a commandment from the Decalogue, which explains the negative final evaluation (v. 27b) (Groß 2009, 459). Thus, ultimately it all comes down to illicit worship and the wrong image of YHWH. Hence the above-mentioned statement about it “becoming a snare/trap” for Gideon and his family. A similar situation is described later in Judg 17–18. This is about a Deuteronomistic text containing a clear polemic of the Judean environment against the worship practiced in the north (Dietrich 2014, 229).

This time the precious metal is silver, and the objects made of it (עֲשָׂה, *āśā*) for the private shrine of Micah are described as “carved” and “cast metal statues” (פֶּסֶל וּמַסְכָּה *pesel ūmassēkā*; Rambiert-Kwaśniewska 2023, 287–88). The first are the idols forbidden in the Decalogue (cf. Exod 20:4; Deut 5:8), and the second of the expressions is again likely an intentional reference to the story of the Golden Calf (Exod 32:4; cf. 1 Kgs 14:9). Later on, Micah also makes אֶפֹד וְתַרְפִּים (*ēfôd ūtē-rāfim*) for his sanctuary and appoints (literally: fills his hands) one of his sons as his priest (Judg 17:5). This is evidently his private sanctuary (cf. v. 5a *casus pendens*: “Now this man Micah had a shrine”), which, judging by the description, had little to do with YHWH (Block 1999, 478; Spronk 2019, 467).

It includes objects of worship (v. 4) and staff (v. 5). What is the role of *ephod* and *teraphim*, two objects clearly linked here? It is about a traditional pairing (cf. Hos 3:4). It is clear from the description that they are not likely to be objects of worship here (as in Judg 8:27), but constitute the temple inventory that is essential to the legitimacy of this private shrine. Perhaps they are instruments used for divination (cf. 1 Sam 23:9–12; 30:7–8). Using them to obtain answers from God in this place would be sufficient proof of its “legitimacy.” This “private shrine” is later taken over by the Danites, who take it (the objects and staff) when they decide to migrate north (Judg 18:14–20). In this way, the object of worship from one of the prominent village houses (cf. Judg 18:14) (Spronk 2019, 478) will be transformed into an object of worship practiced at a Danite tribal shrine.

One can also consider the late, redacted text (Wolff 1990, 72–73) of Hos 3:4, where *ephod* is again mentioned along with תַּרְפִּים (*tē-rāfim*), to be close

to this Deuteronomistic critique of illicit worship (Wöhrle 2006, 230–32). The two items, when occurring together, are always mentioned in this order (cf. Judg 17:5; 18:14, 20). The latter was an object of domestic worship (cf. Gen 31:19, 34, 35), and had an anthropoid form (cf. 1 Sam 19:13–16) and also served as a divination instrument (cf. Zech 10:3; Ezek 21:26). A similar role is also attributed to it in Hosea's speech. In this case, *ephod* – according to the intuition of the LXX translator¹ – may instead be a metonymy and not so much signify an idol as appear as a symbol of the priesthood (Gruber 2017, 179–80). This understanding stems from the connection of the two objects to each other. As A. A. Macintosh (2014, 105–6) notes, the sequence listing the items that Israel will be deprived of contains repetitions of the word אֵין (*ʿēn*) – “without/there is no,” which is, however, missing before the word תַּרְפִּים (*ʿrāfīm*). He believes that this means that the two objects belong together. According to the same scholar (Macintosh 2014, 107), *ephod* may originally have been “a metal breast-plate attached to an image of god” (cf. Judg 8:27) and only over time did it become part of the priestly garb (cf. 1 Sam 2:18; 2 Sam 6:14) and later the high priestly garb (P texts). In any case, in the present context, both items are mentioned as necessary for seeking prophecy. In this case, *ephod* is probably mentioned by the prophet as an item used by the Israelites to Yahwistically legitimize pagan worship (Andersen and Freedman 1980, 306; similarly Macintosh 2014, 107).

It is important to note one more interesting text in the Books of Samuel. In 1 Sam 21:10, there is no mention of either a piece of clothing or a prophecy, but of Goliath's sword, which is located in the shrine at Nob. The whole episode (1 Sam 21:1–10) fits both into the narrative thread associated with Saul and the tradition associated with the place (Dietrich 2015, 569). In the present context, the sword itself seems to have the status of some “legendary weapon,” but in the narrative of David's battle with Goliath it does not play any special role (cf. 1 Sam 17:51a, 54). However, it is possible that it is this “legend” that was picked up and written into the episode of the fight with Goliath. In the text of interest, 1 Sam 21, the information about his sword as a trophy “wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod” is intriguing. The mention of *ephod* is confirmed by 4QSam^b (*ʿhr ʿpd*), some Greek versions (including the Codex Alexandrinus) and the Peshitta. It is, however, omitted in the Codex Vaticanus. In such a case, the words “wrapped in a cloth” may be a later gloss explaining the role of *ephod* in this place or an alternative reading (McCarter 1980, 348). Without it, however, the mere statement that the sword was behind the ephod אַחֲרֵי הָאֶפֹּד (*ʾaḥrê hāʿēfôd*) may suggest that originally *ephod* here meant neither a part of the garment nor some sort of sword sheath, but an object of worship located at Nob (McCarter 1980, 350; Tsumura 2007, 534), behind which the sword in question was placed. On the other hand, one cannot exclude the suggestion that

¹ The LXX does not contain this word, but the use of the word *hieratias* in this case may be an interpretation of it (metonymy) and, understood as an apron worn by a priest, be synonymous with the priesthood.

this object of worship (statue?) may have owed its name to “the garment placed on it, called *ephod*” (Rambiart-Kwaśniewska 2023, 290).

5. Instrument for Prophecy/Consultation with God

The way we interpret the role of *ephod* in Hos 3:4 leads us to the question of the role it played in divination practices. In such a context, *ephod* appears primarily in two texts: 1 Sam 23:9; 30:7. In both situations described therein, it is used by the priest Abiathar, the son of Ahimelek, who is commanded by David to “bring” (שָׁנַן *nāgaš* hifil) him *ephod* in order to seek prophecy from God. In both of these places, however, as Schmitt (2014, 112) notes, it is unclear whether *ephod* is an instrument for making prophecies, or whether its presence is merely necessary during the ritual of consulting God. In his opinion (Schmitt 2014, 113; 2022, 243; similarly Cryer 1995, 280–81; Utzschneider 2008, 1351–52), in both cases *ephod* symbolizes the person of the priest and thus the presence of God, on a *pars pro toto* basis (as part of the priestly garb). It thus constitutes a necessary element in practicing a legitimate form of divination. The high priestly *ephod* is perhaps a derivative of the role it played earlier in divination practices, but it should be noted that the latter role is only mentioned in texts recounting the “times” of David. Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that the two situations mentioned here are solely a construct of the later author of these texts, as rightly noted by Dariusz Dziadosz (2002, 193, n. 5). *Ephod* itself, however, is not a divination instrument. This role, as exegetes often add, was probably performed by *urim and thummim* (McCarter 1980, 371; Dietrich 2019, 145. On *urim and thummim*, see Schmitt 2014, 93–94; Dietrich 2015, 99–101). Abiathar is in fact the keeper of the sanctuary who “brought the ephod down with him” (1 Sam 23:6). However, several peculiarities arise in the latter case. First, the closer context (cf. 1 Sam 23:2–4) suggests a consultation with God conducted without the need for *ephod* (this is what the Masoretic text implies. However, firstly, many exegetes – following the Targum and Peshitta – suggest an article at this point next to the word *ephod* (cf. Stoebe 1973, 419; Dietrich 2015, 656: translation + 657 note 6b), and secondly, the information itself about *ephod* being “worn” by Abiathar is quite unusual. The verb used (יָרַד *jārad*) suggests by its basic meaning “descent” (*KBL* 1, 415), as if the object were personified here. This can be understood as “an expression of the divine power that resides in it” (Dietrich 2015, 676 with a reference to Fokkelman 1986, 423: “a fascinating personification of the holy article which refers to its real owner” and through him, it reveals itself. The ark was described in a similar way earlier (cf. 1 Sam 6:8–9). Tsumura (2007, 552) suggests that the verb refers to the person of Abiathar, but the preposition כִּי (*b^c*) at the beginning of the sentence – according to him (Tsumura 2007, 553) – should not necessarily be understood as indicating that this event preceded the events described

in 1 Sam 23:1–5 (as suggested by Althann 1984, 33). Indeed, vv. 6, 9 give the impression of something added to the narrative of vv. 2–4. In the latter verses, the presence of *ephod* when consulting God seems unnecessary (cf. 1 Sam 22:6–19: the account of the murder of the priests of Nob). In vv. 6, 9, opinion on the matter has clearly changed an important role in the practice of divination begins to be played by the figure of priest Abiathar wearing *ephod* (cf. 1 Sam 22:20–23: the account of Abiathar's escape² and his protection by David). This information is therefore secondary in the present version of the text (Dietrich 2015, 676). That same interpretive tradition also includes the second mention of Abiathar and his *ephod* used when consulting God (1 Sam 30:7–8) (Dietrich 2019, 145).

Conclusions

Etymological suggestions (Akkadian: *epattu*, Ugaritic *ʿpd*) make it possible to link the biblical word *ephod* to some item of clothing, perhaps originally associated with a deity statue itself (cf. Isa 30:22). The priestly texts (cf. Exod 28:6–14) explicitly refer to one of the elements that distinguish the high priest's garb and symbolize his superior office relative to other priests (Lev 8:7; cf. 1 Sam 2:28). From the context (cf. Exod 28:6–14 / 15–33), it appears that it may have taken the form of a richly decorated apron, atop which was placed a container/ breastplate containing items (*urim* and *thummim*) used to seek prophecy. In the non-priestly texts, however, reference is already made only to a modest item of clothing, perhaps a linen waistband or a short apron (1 Sam 2:18; 2 Sam 6:14), which at the same time could not only be worn like a garment, but also “brought” like an object (1 Sam 2:18; 14:3, 18; 22:18) and used for other purposes as well. In the latter cases, we are dealing with two different situations. In one, it is clearly an object of worship (Judg 8:27; 17:4–5; 18:14–20), which is evaluated negatively by the Deuteronomistic redactor (as in Hos 3:4), and in the other, it is an object brought and used in divination practices (1 Sam 23:9; 30:7). The latter usage seems to be related not so much to the use of *ephod* as a divination instrument, but to its symbolic-theological role (it represents the presence of the priest/god) in divination practices.

The role of *ephod* is thus referred to in the Hebrew Bible in two theological contexts: priestly (a richly decorated element distinguishing the high priest's garb) and Deuteronomistic (a modest [linen] element of priestly garb also used in “illicit worship” or when seeking prophecy). On this basis, it can be assumed that in the final period of the monarchy, *ephod* was, in its most general definition, an item of clothing associated with the “legitimate,” Yahwistic priestly ministry (like the modern

² Cf. 1 Sam 30:7–8; 2 Sam 8:17; 15:24, 32; 17:5; 20:35.

stole), and only in the Second Temple period did it become a distinguishing feature of the high priestly garb. This is the only path of “evolution” in the meaning of *ephod* that can be demonstrated based on the Old Testament texts. Initially, it may have been surrounded by some aura of divinity (*numinosum?*), as suggested by statements about the worship use of the object. When it comes to its potential earlier role, however, one can only speculate based on the above-mentioned presumed etymology and the words of the prophet Isaiah (Isa 30:22). Accepting these etymological suggestions as valid, some scholars suggest that the biblical role of *ephod* may derive from its earlier association with garments put on deities. Such an opinion, however, is now purely speculative, since none of the biblical texts allow such conclusions to be drawn directly.

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