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Series IV: Writings and Publications, 1952-1992, undated.

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The Story of Scripture, draft, chapters 1 and 2, 1989.

Chapter 2

SACRED SPEECH

Once upon a time and for quite a long time, perhaps as long as eight centuries, there was a scriptureless Judaism. This is surprising to many since for most of the past two thousand years Jews readily accepted as historic fact the piety that God had dictated to Moses the entire Sefer Torah, from Genesis' description of Creation to God's eulogy of His faithful servant at the end of Deuteronomy.

Torah min ha-Shamayin, the revelation of the Torah by God, was and remains for traditional Judaism a central tenet of the faith. The Torah is from God. It presents His version of early history, His Instructions, and His promises as He wishes them to be known. The Torah was revealed at a particular place and time, early in Israel's history. Sinai, the place, became the rabbinic shorthand for this revelation which, if one accepts the Biblical claim that it took place just a few months after the Exodus from Egypt, means that Judaism began as a self-conscious faith in the 12th or 13th pre-Christian century.

This view emphasizes the originality of the Torah's teachings and their origin in God's will. Those who accept this view describe the subsequent history of the Jewish people as a conscious effort by the community to understand and abide ~~these~~ these instructions.

Sinai represents the gift of truth, promise, and identity and presumably set the shape of the religious life of the Jewish people for all time.

words, ideas, and insights continue to play an important role in the minds and lives of communicants.

There is nothing inherently illogical in the idea that God did in fact reveal His will to Israel at Sinai. God is omniscient. He knows what was and what will be and He makes known to those He chooses what He chooses. But life is one thing, fact another, and thanks to several centuries of literary and historical research ~~most records have concluded~~ *it has become clear* that the Sefer Torah is not an exact copy of what God dictated to Moses but a compilation of various themes and traditions composed at various places over many centuries, sometimes inconsistent, occasionally contradictory.

Judaism did not emerge as a full-blown religious tradition at Sinai any more than Christianity did when Paul had his vision on the road to Damascus, or Islam when Mohammed was moved to oracular speech. Individuals played formative roles, but religions are complex human institutions which evolve slowly and draw ideas from many sources. The Sefer Torah, the New Testament, and the Koran each represent ~~a~~ a largely unplanned selection of texts and traditions which has passed through many hands and minds, scribes and editors, until they achieved the form in which we know them.

A scripture often appears to be what it is not, the source book and summation of a tradition. A scripture presents a selection of cherished traditions found acceptable by a particular group of religious leaders at a particular moment in their faith's evolution. No scripture contains the first word or the last word. Many of the faith's formative ideas precede the assumed moment of revelation and much of a faith community's subsequent development represents the community wrestling with the text it has declared holy, whose words, ideas, and insights continue to play an important role in the minds and lives of communicants.

Handwritten notes:
 Perhaps give 2 or 3 examples to reader why divine origin has become questionable

Of the classic religions of the West, Judaism went the longest without a written scripture. This is hardly surprising since, despite the occasional late Biblical reference to Moses writing down God's instructions in a book, the Hebrew tribes of his day were not yet literate or interested in literacy. In such early semi-nomad societies neither leadership nor a reputation for wisdom depended on being literate. Moses may not have been able to read or write. In any case, in the development of Judaism tradition preceded text by a considerable period, precisely when some of the most creative and revolutionary thinking took place. Long before Israel had a scripture, it had developed the idea of the oneness of God and God's incomparability, the idea of God as Creator and a dependable power outside nature who judges men and nations by their actions rather than by the gifts brought to his altar; of man as in some measure responsible for his fate, of man created in God's own image, and of the common origin of the nations, humanity. Scripture would embody these ideas and many others, but they did not begin in Scripture; they began in the immediacy of individual religious experience, in the minds of prophets and sages, and worked their way toward the forefront of Israel's consciousness in the living situation of the community. The medium of religious revelation was the spoken rather than the written word.

The power of the idea that the faith was announced at Sinai lies in its simplicity and in the simple confidence with which it is asserted. This idea, which was universally affirmed by medieval Jews, sets the faith apart at its source and seems to provide it

with a sure, clear, and permanent identity. But it is an unacceptable claim for our historical and linguistically conscious generation, which no longer accepts the thesis of an original, complete, once and for all times, revelation. Simply put: if I cannot believe that God dictated the Torah in its present form to Moses, yet am told that it is the fact of that revelation which gives Judaism's teachings their authority, then the text's authority is no longer compelling. In emphasizing the event as crucial, rather than its content or the functional value of the teaching, Judaism puts itself at risk. If there was no Sinai, then what is there to depend on - only a faith which seems to be based on elegant but improbable legends, and who wants to make his ultimate commitments to a set of teachings which are clearly not what they have long been claimed to be.

The facts seem to be these. In the beginning the tribes of Israel, like all preliterate groups, carried their traditions in their heads and their hopes in their hearts. There was no scripture. Few, if any, could write or read. They certainly felt that the gods at times made known their will to shamans, prophets, or sheiks; their traditions certainly included reports of oracles and of divine activity, but these were treasured not on clay or papyrus but in the community's collective memory. The historical fact is that for most of what is commonly described as Biblical times, there was as yet no Bible. Each tribe had its own oral traditions. There is evidence in the later literature that priests and prophets knew certain well-established narratives and legal formulae and referred to these in their speeches and judgments.

and how evil had come to be. Since their cultural and physical

Oral traditions evidence a strong tendency to use and reuse incident, image, and idiom. These texts were written in the mind and stored in the tribe's collective memory and subjected to emendation when the community's interests demanded it.

The donkeys which carried the worldly possessions of the Hebrew tribes who began to enter Canaan toward the end of the second millennium B.C.E. were laden with tools and textiles but not with inscribed clay tablets or papyrus texts. The tribes of Israel enter history as preliterate semi-nomads whose various cultures consisted of seamless webs of practices and of traditions learned by imitation, hands-on instruction, or from the recitations of storytellers. Fathers taught their sons husbandry, the art of self-defense, and a code of responsibility and virtue. Mothers taught their daughters to sew, work in the fields, cook, and care for their infants. Holy men whispered magic formulas to carefully chosen disciples. Old women taught willing girls the skills of midwifery and herbal medicine. Rhapsodists regaled the community with well-known epics about their ancestors and well-known myths which explained the origins of life and the mysteries of nature, and they taught their sons those traditions so that they in turn could regale another generation.

The tribes had no written literature. Theirs was an oral culture, an amalgam of law, saga, cherished genealogies, sacred hymns and formulas, myths, a calendar, customs, and, of course, a many-sided folk wisdom which was both practical-- when to plant and when to harvest-- and philosophic-- how life had begun and how evil had come to be. Since their cultural and physical

environment changed little from generation to generation, conventional wisdom was confirmed by experience, consecrated by time, and accepted as right, sacred to the god(s). The way of the fathers felt natural to the sons. There was no generation gap.

The tribes that ultimately formed the Israelite confederation moved about West Asia and during their migrations must have come across scribes plying their trade, but there is no indication that any of the Hebrews undertook to master the art of writing. They had no need of documents. Cases brought before tribal sheiks like Abraham and Jacob were argued orally and decided on the basis of well-known legal norms. Oral testimony was taken. Documents had no standing in court. Judgments were publicly announced and recorded in the community's collective memory. A pile of stones at the corners of a field registered ownership. The early Biblical narratives confirm this picture. Abraham's purchase of a burial cave, the Machpelah, is described as a purely oral arrangement.

When Jacob seeks to be reunited with Esau, he sends presents and a spoken message. The drama surrounding Jacob's unwanted marriage to Leah assumes a preliterate society; had there been a written marriage contract, Laban would not have been able to trick Jacob into marrying Leah rather than Rachel.

The elders served the god(s) on various high places, seeking protection for the tribe, their trek and their flocks. They did so without benefit of Bibles or prayer books. Those who conducted the mandated rites learned the proper hymns and practices from their predecessors and the community knew through these what was

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Gen 23:1-20

Gen 32:14-22

expected of them. When there was a need to consult the gods, a sheik or priest cast lots or consulted the oracles and reported back at a public assembly the God's(s') instructions. God repeatedly reveals His will and then tells Moses: "Speak to the tribes of Israel. . ." In most tribes there was a family of specialists, speakers, trained rhapsodists, who had mastered and practiced the art of the formal recitation of the tribe's myths and sagas and were prepared to rehearse these traditions at appropriate ceremonies, as Moses is reported to have done on the 'other side of the Jordan' (Deut. 1) and Joshua at Schechem (Josh. 24).

Today, if a fact or quotation slips our mind we take down the Britannica or Bartlett's and look it up. Their situation was quite different. There were no libraries. If what had once been known was not stored in someone's memory, it was no longer recoverable. Careful attention was paid to the cultivation of the memory faculty. Stories were simply told, generally in a poetic style because rhythm and assonance make them easier to remember. 'Literature' necessarily was presented in as compact and memorizable a form as possible.

Israel's first literature was written in the mind rather than on clay, parchment, or papyrus and "read" by those who heard it spoken. Over time some of this literature, after going through many oral revisions as it was told and retold, was written down; but even after an extended passage of time such a text often reveals the hallmarks of its origin in an oral tradition, what Walter Ong has called its "orally constituted sensibility and tradition."¹ The language is spare, highly compressed, lacking

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embellishment. Nouns and verbs appear without modifying adverbs and adjectives. Phrases tend to be alliterative and rhythmic. An incident is quickly sketched. No attempt is made to analyze motivation. Images are concrete. Lists rely on repetitive formulas, "When Mahalalel had lived 65 years, he begat Jared" (Gen. 5:15), or employed a series of similar incidents as an aid to memory: "The Israelites set out from Rameses and encamped at Succoth. They set out from Succoth and encamped at Etham. . ." (Num. 33:5-6ff). The apparent willingness of Biblical narrative to let the imagination of the reader fill in the details and provide context has often been commented on as one reason for the book's unceasing appeal. It is a virtue born not of a conscious decision but of necessity. There was a need to compress as much text as possible into the finite capacity of the mind, or, if the text was to be written, it had to be written on a given and limited surface, for writing materials were expensive. Compression was not a conscious literary decision but the imperative of an oral culture where literature was created and stored in the memory.

We find it difficult to repeat a three-line story without significant distortion from one end of a classroom to the other, so we have difficulty accepting the idea that an oral literature could be kept for generations in something approaching a stable form. Yet, that in fact was the case. To be sure, stories changed slightly with each retelling, but the outlines of the incident and familiar idioms associated with the telling tended to remain stable.

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People not only paid close attention to what they heard, but were able to remember the recitations since one speech or story was not immediately followed by another and yet another and so the impression of the first was not blurred. Audiences generally anticipated what came next in a recital and were disappointed rather than pleased by innovation. Frequent hearing of the same tale, told using largely the same phrases, imprinted familiar phrases and incidents on the people's minds.

The art of rhetoric was cultivated. The ability to speak effectively was a prerequisite for leadership. A sheik did not have to be able to read or write, but he had to be able to make himself heard and understood. Moses tried to beg off from God's commission to be the agent of the slaves' liberation by arguing that he was slow of tongue and therefore would not be effective. (See Ex 4:10)

Words were not merely means of communication but objects of inherent power. Words spoken by priests and prophets, and almost certainly by poets, were felt to possess an innate power not unlike the power of a magical spell. Once uttered, such words took on a life of their own. A spoken oath was binding. Isaac recognized that he had been tricked into blessing Jacob instead of Esau, but his culture did not provide him the means to cancel the blessing (Gen. 27). Legend had Joshua stop the sun in its course with incantation. Blessings, curses and oracles once spoken were believed to carry weight. Had God not put words of blessing rather than the proposed curse into the mouth of the prophet Balaam, the tribes would have been effectively cursed. Jerusalem's conservative nobility demanded that Jeremiah be imprisoned because he had

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spoken aloud a prophecy of the city's destruction. Presumably, had he not spoken aloud the oracle, the threat it contained would have remained dormant. By bringing words of promise, a prophet certified the community's hopes. "The word that issues from My mouth does not come back to Me unfulfilled but performs what I ^{purpose} ~~propose~~" (Is. 55:11). *(Jer 20 Ginea 26:18 ff)*

All voices counted, but the voice that counted most was God's. God speaks, "thus says the Lord," Israel is encouraged to listen: 'Hear, O Israel.' God's spoken Instructions lie at the heart of the Biblical record. Indifference to God's admonitions was defined as a form of deafness: "You [the prophet] are to them like the one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it" (Ez. 33:32). It was the spoken, not the written, word which had standing. One of the signs that messianic times have arrived is "that the deaf shall hear even written words" (Is. ²⁹~~34~~:18).

→ The earliest ^{extant} Hebrew writings, a number of inscribed ring seals and the Gezer Calendar, a small limestone tablet which presents a list of months together with the agricultural tasks appropriate to each, are generally dated to the century which follows the establishment of David's monarchy (circa 1000 B.C.E.). Unfortunately, little Hebrew writing survives from the next three or four centuries, so the spread of the literary craft cannot be described, but certainly, once settled in Canaan, a few bright young Israelites must have set out to master the writing and reading skills in which they found many Canaanites adept and whose value as a useful and administrative tool became increasingly evident and

(Jer 20 Ginea 26:18 ff)

Is 29:18

Sentence too long?

necessary as the community settled in. They knew the scribe as a craftsman who offered his skills in the same way as the local smith or mason; as a tradesman the scribe learned his art by the time-honored way of apprenticeship.

There was, however, another level of scribe - administrators who, since Sumerian times (mid fourth millennium B.C.E.), had been the real promoters of writing because of its usefulness in managing affairs of state, collecting taxes and tribute, conscripting forced labor and troops, maintaining land registration, palace inventories, and the like. Such officials worked in the bureaus of the Canaanite city-states. They learned their skills in the way these arts were universally mastered by men of their class in ancient times -- in palace schools. There a teacher sounded the letters or spoke the phrases of the poem or saga being used as a text and the student repeated the lesson aloud while copying the letters on a wooden tablet. This process was repeated until the teacher was satisfied that the text was stored in the student's memory bank and that he could write out and perhaps also read aloud his copy.

The teacher made sure the neophyte scribe properly understood the text by having him sound it out. The mentor listened and made the necessary corrections. The Chinese schoolroom whose babble became a byword to Western visitors who compared it unfavorably with our presumed quiet and orderly classes provides, in fact, a similar scene to what a visitor would have found in a school for scribes in ancient West Asia. All reading was done aloud and since everyone was conditioned in this way, everyone in the ancient world who could read, read aloud. As late as the

fourth century C.E. Augustine in his memoirs expresses surprise when he notices a scholar off in a corner reading silently.

Education aimed at mastering what was already known rather than at enlarging the boundaries of knowledge. One of the paradoxes which accompanied the spread of literacy is that at first the existence of inscribed tablets and scrolls forced scribes to depend more, rather than less, on their memories. Writing was a primitive art and the written word was not yet corseted with a definite structure of spelling or grammar. Lines were irregular and text might run in several directions. Scribes compressed as much text as possible on a single surface, for writing surfaces were expensive. The result was that imaginative guesswork or familiarity with a text was required to make sense of it, particularly when a text was not an inventory, a list, but literature. Reading was an uncertain art. No wonder the Greeks taught that Mnemosyne (memory) was the mother of the Muses and set their sons to memorize the Iliad. Even if you had access to tablets or scrolls, what was not stored in your memory might as well not exist. Your library, such as it was, was in your mind. A neighbor or colleague might know a particular tradition you had forgotten, but the outer limit of collective knowledge was the sum of what could be recalled.

"My son, forget not my teachings. . . incise them on the tablet of your mind" (Prov. 3:1-3). Acquiring knowledge was a long, laborious, and tedious process and one never graduated.

Each tablet or scroll had to be learned. Adults repeated what they knew all their lives to make sure they had not forgotten.

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text imply a
prememorized
writing - for it
is full of
metaphors.

joined in a covenant which shall

We associate intelligence with literacy and creativity. The ancients associated intelligence with retentivity. "Memory," Aeschylus is reported to have said, "is the mother of all wisdom," so much so that the spread of literacy often raised fears about the future of civilization. How so? Someone who has access to a library may no longer review regularly what he knows and so may fail to keep it in mind. Many believe that what is not in the mind may as well not be, in the sense that forgotten ideas no longer have any impact on us. Their concern was fundamentally a moral concern. A well-stocked and active memory, full of noble thoughts, was held to be the mother of virtue. Why? Because what was in the mind inevitably showed up in your actions. Memory and virtue were in their thinking inextricably linked.

Shortly before the tribes entered Canaan, Canaanite scribes put the finishing touches on a phonetic system which reduced the cuneiform syllabary to a manageable alphabet of twenty-two or twenty-four consonants, a system whose manifest advantage over all previous systems gained for it quick acceptance in the various ^{handwritten} ~~bureaus~~ of West Asia. Because picture writing required an infinite number of signs, centuries of work had gone into the effort to replace these complex pictorial or hieratic scripts with a manageable system based on sound rather than image in which all the phonetics, the basic sounds used in a spoken language, could be suggested by a small number of symbols. With this achievement only one further change would be needed to produce the alphabet which still serves us well. That would come during the seventh or sixth centuries B.C.E. when the Greeks introduced into this alphabet a number of specific vowel signs, a change which markedly reduced the chances of making serious errors of pronunciation and, therefore, of meaning.

The Hebrews, adopting the alphabet they found in Canaan, never had to wrestle with all the complexities of an hieratic writing system, and there may be a connection between that fact and their remarkably consistent literary preference for simplicity over complexity. Language patterns affect thought patterns. Did Israel's late arrival into the world of the written word have something to do with their ability to conceive of one God over many, one creation over separate natural forces, one human family over separate and distinct tribal ancestors? The consonantal

alphabet made it possible to communicate ideas through a finite set of symbols which pointed directly to sound rather than to a visual image, and one wonders whether the fact that the Hebrews never had to accustom themselves to pictographic symbols might have made it easier for them to conceive of a God who could not be visualized or described.

In Canaan, as in all the city-states of West Asia, the development of writing techniques had been encouraged for their practical value as an administrative tool. Palaces sponsored the schools where scribes were prepared and which fostered experimentation designed to improve scribal techniques. As urban life developed and city-states grew into empires, officials found it increasingly necessary to provide help to the clerks trying to cope with the growing elaboration of political administration, the increasing number and complexity of land registries, tax records, inventories of military and palace supplies, census figures, and the palace's correspondence with provincial officials and foreign courts. Most of the inscribed tablets so far recovered from the ruins of the palaces and temples of West Asia -- the number runs into the tens of thousands -- deal with practical administrative matters: lists of taxes to be collected, registers of captured booty, inventories of items on deposit, copies of treaties, census matters, conscription documents, royal and priestly genealogies, and diplomatic correspondence. Only an occasional tablet records a venerated myth, sacred hymn, or collection of wisdom.

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maxim which made much the same point: "See a scribe skillful at

This was a world where illiterate kings sponsored schools for scribes because they needed graduates for the efficient and effective organization of their power. Literacy was a practical art, not as yet associated with literature. Writing was developed as an instrument of social and political control. Those who attended palace schools and mastered scribal skills tended to be the sons of the lower nobility or minor priests who in the ordinary course of events could not expect to inherit land or feudal authority but who had every reason to believe that demonstrable usefulness to those who governed would place them in the way of position, preference, and power. An Egyptian text, Teaching of Kety, Son of Duauf (~~early~~ 2nd millennium), imagines a father advising his son on the advantages of investing the long years required to master the scribal arts. "I have never seen ^{A SCULPTOR OR AN EMBROIDERER} ~~the smith~~ [as an ambassador] ^{NOR A GOLDSMITH WHEN HE WAS SENT OUT. (but)} ~~but~~ I have seen the ^{smith} ~~smith~~ at his work at the mouth of his furnace. His fingers like ^{were sometimes} ~~like~~ crocodiles, and he stank more than fish-roe ^{The small building contractor carries mud ... He is dirtier than vines or pigs... His clothes are stiff with clay...} ~~fish-roe eggs. ... The farmer's~~ ^{He is dirtier than vines or pigs... His clothes are stiff with clay...} ~~wears the same clothes for all times.~~ His voice is as raucous as a crow's. His ^{sides ache, as if heaven and earth were} ~~fingers are always busy~~ in them... ~~his arms are dried up by the wind. He takes his rest -- when he gets his rest -- in the mud.~~ ^{Behold, there is no profession free of a boss -- except for the scribe; he is the boss. But if thou knowest writing, then it will go better with thee than in these professions and I have seen it.} (2) This theme appears frequently in the literature, "Put writing in your heart that you may protect yourself from the hard labor of any kind." "The scribe is released from manual tasks, it is he who commands." A millennium later an editor of the Book of Proverbs still found it appropriate to include a maxim which made much the same point: "See a scribe skillful at

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his craft. He will serve kings. He will not serve common men"
(22:19).

Ordinary folk knew and feared the clerk as an agent of a distant and feared authority whose tablets or parchments often took away their land or added to their tax burden. The Hebrew term for a scribe emerges from the root 'spr,' 'to count,' rather than from the root 'ktv,' 'to write.' A scribe was originally a sofer, a counter. Scribes compiled conscription lists, tax rolls, forced labor assignments, and records of royal lands -- all activities which took from the many for the benefit of the few. In the process scribes wrote the documents which threatened the immemorial routines of tribal life: denying access to customary pasturage or tying up simple folks in a mesh of complicated, and imperfectly understood, contractual obligations. The mysterious squiggles and lines which the scribes produced often served as the basis of proceedings which appropriated their land or conscripted their sons into forced labor battalions. Where we associate literacy with the advantages of culture and civilization, our ancestors did not look on literacy as an unmixed blessing.

Like other peoples in the ancient world, the Israelites associated writing with tax collectors and royal extortion rather than with literature and civilization. The prophet Isaiah voiced the feelings of many in one of his famous "woe" oracles. "Ha! Those who write out evil writs and compose iniquitous documents, to subvert the cause of the poor, to rob of their rights the needy of My people; that widows may be their spoil, and fatherless

understand
subverted
like many

children their ^{booty} ~~booth~~! (10:1-2). Many popular myths named the god of death as the deity who first taught literacy to mankind.

A history of the development of literacy in ancient Israel remains to be written, but it seems likely that at first it was simply a matter of Israel's kings doing what kings elsewhere had long found to be to their benefit. Having established a permanent court for his mini-empire in Jerusalem, David found that the management of his newly acquired kingdom required the maintenance of record-keeping bureaus and set about accomplishing his ends by hiring scribes from other courts. (3)

Illiteracy was not seen as a disabling handicap which precluded the exercise of power or even a reputation for learning. Not a single line in the Book of Judges suggests that Deborah, Gideon, Samson or any other leader of the settlement period could read or write. The Deuteronomic histories routinely describe the kings of Israel and Judah as listening to the speeches of their counselors or being read to by a royal scribe. The few stories in the Deuteronomic histories which describe a royal figure as actually writing are clearly revisions of earlier recitals. One is a report that David inscribed the message which ordered a field commander to dispatch Uriah on a suicide mission and another that Ahab's queen Jezebel wrote the letter plotting to charge Naboth with treason. Reading both scenes one feels certain that a later storyteller had reshaped these exciting but unseemly tales to emphasize the royal personages' need to handle an ugly business with maximum secrecy. It is doubtful that either David or Jezebel could read and/or write Hebrew. David is described

make reference

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perhaps briefly from Judges has done this "feeling I certainly come about?"

as a farm boy turned mercenary, an upbringing which would not have provided him the opportunity or wherewithal to attend a school for scribes had one been available to him. Jezebel was Phoenician and a woman; neither circumstance made it likely that she would have been able to write a letter in Hebrew.

Kings were kings, not scribes. They needed to win wars, not write or even read books. The neo-Assyrian Emperor Ashurbanipal (668-626 B.C.E.) who lived three centuries after David is the first king of renown who ^{boasted that he had} specifically described himself as having mastered the scribal arts: "I wrote on tablets, both wrote and read them, and when I had finished with them placed them in my library so that I can peruse them for myself or read them aloud to my guests." (4) In Ashurbanipal's case, literacy became something of a disabling passion. In middle age he abandoned statecraft for bibliomania and depleted the royal treasury in order to build the library of Nineveh, which was in its day the largest in West Asia.

A capable sword, a strong will, and common sense were the attributes a king required. He could always hire scribes to keep the necessary accounts, prepare and read correspondence, and record his triumphs; as well as storytellers and poets who would entertain the court with recitals of the community's sagas and legends. A quick and retentive mind combined with political and military success and, in Solomon's case, sufficient interest in culture to patronize poets and musicians, easily established a royal reputation for learning which later generations translated into legends describing Solomon as an author in his own right,

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a princess

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crediting him with having written Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. A critical review of Solomon's capacities makes it doubtful that he could read any of the scrolls his scribes had begun to collect in the palace archives. Solomon's wisdom expressed itself in speech rather than script. "Men of all peoples came to hear Solomon's wisdom" (Kings ^I ~~4:34~~ ^{4:34}).

Solomon was shrewd enough to be concerned that the kingdom be guaranteed a steady supply of able administrators and clerks. His solution was to establish in the palace a school for scribes, Israel's first; and to appoint scribes to major posts where literacy was useful. The register of senior officials in Solomon's court includes: "Elihoreph and Ahijah, sons of Shisha, scribes. . . ." (I Kings 4:3). We hear of scribe-administrators throughout the period of the kingdoms. King Jehoash assigned a scribe to serve as controller of a project to refurbish the fabric of The Temple (II Kings 12:10-12). When Jerusalem was captured by the Babylonians three centuries later, "the scribe of the army commander who was in charge of mustering the people of the land" became one of an unfortunate group of officials executed on the orders of Nebuchadnezzar (II Kings 25:19, ^{II} ~~4~~ Ch. 26:11).

Not all scribes, of course, were senior administrators. Most served as notaries who maintained the tax rolls, palace inventories, and lists of tribute, and as the clerks who made copies of the court's correspondence with other governments, army commanders in the field, and provincial officials, and maintained the administrative files. As commercial life developed in the larger towns,

→ A
 merchants began to use clerks to record purchases, sales and inventory. Clans like "the families of scribes who inhabited Jabez" (1 Ch. 2:55) began to specialize in this craft and trained up their sons for the work much as other families specialized in being smiths or vintners. Jars were stamped with the owner's name or mark. Inscribed seals became common, used even by illiterate commercial types to signify that they had heard a contract read out and agreed that this document recorded the agreements they had entered into. A few such seals have been found inscribed in Hebrew letters and some who owned them probably learned to puzzle out the signature which a professional had cut into the stone; but few Israelites felt a need to spend the years required to master the literate arts. The scarcity of Hebrew inscriptions earlier than the seventh century B.C.E. may suggest simply the use of perishable writing surfaces or bad archeological luck, but it certainly also suggests the numerical insignificance of the literate classes.

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 Neither scribes nor written records played a significant role in the religious life of the pre-exilic community, a not surprising fact since no people of the time ascribed holiness to any written document. No West Asian shrine enshrined a scripture and no liturgy of the time featured readings or recitations from sacred tablets. Some Temples had libraries, but these were little more than archives where the priests kept lists of donations and of valuables left on deposit. To be sure, some texts of myth, magical formulae, and sacred hymns have been found in these archives; but standardized. Few scrolls or tablets were free of scribal mistakes.

how do we know this?

none of these tablets or rolls was intended to be publicly exhibited or to be read out during a public service; and as far as we can tell none was treated with any special ceremony. As we have seen, the ancients had little reason to revere the written word, though they most certainly felt its mysterious presence as they did whenever they came face to face with any art or skill they did not fully understand.

(5)

One of the reasons, perhaps the main one, that it took nearly a millennium for the Five Books of Moses and the Prophets to emerge as a written scripture is that at this early date people had little reason to assume that the written word provided a truly dependable record. Later communities would be eager to compile a scripture in order to secure the text of their oral traditions; but in the pre-exilic period the art of writing had not yet developed to the point where people could be sure that anyone reading a text would get it right. Deciphering a written text, decoding its symbols, in short reading, was not, as it is with us, a fairly simple skill which once mastered allows the reader to proceed with confidence.⁽⁵⁾ Not all scribes had a good hand. Writing surfaces were difficult to prepare and consequently expensive. Since compression was required, words and sentences were run together or abbreviated. Texts were inscribed without punctuation signs or word or paragraph divisions, without a system for capitalizing proper names, and without any particular acknowledgement of the forms of grammar. There were no accepted rules of punctuation, spelling, or grammar. There were no vowels. Spelling was not yet standardized. Few scrolls or tablets were free of scribal mistakes.

It is not hard to imagine that a text never seen before presented itself as a complicated puzzle. Often there were a number of equally 'logical' readings. Even a well-trained and intelligent scribe could not be sure of the author's meaning. Long after writing was developed, oral transmission remained the more dependable way of transmitting sacred traditions.

People who knew how to write, wrote; but people trusted what they heard from those who knew rather than from what was written down. A short oracle in the book of Jeremiah which appears to come from the very end of the pre-exilic period reflects the sense of undependability associated with written texts: "How can you say, 'why, we are wise for we possess the (written) instructions of God.' Assuredly, for naught has the pen labored, for naught the scribe!" (Jer. 8:8). ✓

Literacy was far more widespread in fifth-century Greece than in pre-exilic Israel (1200-600 B.C.E.) and books were more carefully edited; yet, Socrates felt compelled to say: "Anyone who leaves behind him a written manual, and likewise anyone who takes it over from him on the supposition that such writing will provide something reliable and permanent must be extremely simple-minded"

(Phaedrus: 278-217).

An ambassador sent to another court might be provided with a written copy of his message, but he was expected to deliver his master's wishes orally. The letter he carried was little more than a way for the recipient to confirm that the message he was told reflected the message with which the agent had been entrusted.

God has made it so well for us (17c) don't write down things seriously

I did not check this

How do we know this

At a time when ordinary folk generally feared the written document as a tool of tyranny, the emergence of a scripture which assumes and commands positive feelings of loyalty and a sense of holy awe was out of the question. Writing was accepted as a practical but somewhat anxiety-creating art. Whatever sense of the sacred attached to it came from the awe with which humans endow skills they do not fully understand, yet recognize as powerful.

Uncertainty about the value of written records affected all West Asian legal practice. Oral testimony was preferred to documentary evidence. Generally, elders dispensed justice without recording their proceedings. Witnesses could describe what they had seen and heard. They might lie, but there could be no mistaking their testimony. On the other hand, a written document was inevitably subject to a variety of readings and meanings because of the compression of text, confusion in spelling and word division, and inevitable scribal error. The use of documents in judicial proceedings was limited almost entirely to issues in which there was no alternative, such as divorce, which involved a woman as an interested party. In Hebrew law, and in the law of most West Asian societies, a woman had no standing before a court. As a consequence, the usual procedure in a divorce case of relying only on oral testimony by the husband would have excluded the wife's evidence and put her at an unfair disadvantage. Thus, the necessity of devising a bill of divorce (Get) that could be given into the woman's hand and establish her rights (Deut. 24:1).

equated priestly instruction, the counsel of wise men, and the speech of prophets, and describes all three as forms of spoken authority (18:18).

but what if it reflected "tyranny" of God? etc

as well as the ambiguity which inevitably adheres to all literature, impossible, but etc

But such still is an advantage? Disadvantage? etc

Handwritten signature or initials.

Handwritten note: (improvement)

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T? ^{DC}
torot, divine instructions, perhaps set down on papyrus or wood by a scribe associated with one of Israel's shrines who for one reason or another wrote out a list of rules he had heard recited or been taught; but such lists, like the early chronicles, were not treated as holy. The scroll of torot found during a refurbishing of The Temple ordered by Josiah in 621 B.C.E. apparently had not been missed and once found was not treated with any particular veneration.

Records were useful in organizing the financial administrative work of the shrine but as yet no one associated sacredness or holiness with the written word. The Bible speaks of holy people, holy places, the holy Temple, holy things, but never of a holy book.

The ancient world knew and valued sacred speech. Torah was "heard". Prophets spoke God's message. Singers sang God's praise and that of the king. Those who were "skilled in speech" (I Sam. 16:18) were much sought after. Priests consulted oracles like the Urim and Tumim and announced God's will. Those who tended the altar knew by heart the sacred hymns. There is no indication of a ritual involving the reading of sacred literature or the public display of sacred tablets or scrolls. Literacy was not a required attainment for those who aspired to the priestly office.⁽⁶⁾ The priestly role was deeply identified with the spoken word: "proper rulings were in his mouth/nothing perverse was on his lips. . .

The lips of a priest guard knowledge. ^{And} Men seek rulings from his mouth. ^{for} He is a messenger of the Lord ^{of Hosts} ~~and High~~ (Mal. 2:6-7). Jeremiah equated priestly instruction, the counsel of wise men, and the speech of prophets, and describes all three as forms of spoken authority (18:18).

but note that
 He's guarding
 his
 secrets
 always
 critically

II K 22-23
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 it as spirit ed the
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1/21/21 ? ? ?
 1/23/21 ? ? ?

(6)

Israel shared with other peoples of that time and place the belief that the spoken word, when uttered by a holy man in a holy place, was a vehicle of power. The prophet was a speaker, not a scribe. The tongue was sacred to prophecy. Isaiah knew that his lips had been touched with a purifying coal. Jeremiah records that "The Lord said this to me: herewith, I put My words into your mouth. See, I appoint you this day (a prophet) over nations and kingdoms; to uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:9-10). "God made my mouth a sharp sword" (Is. 49:2).

The prophet did not need to be literate, and probably few were. The prophet heard the voice of God in a vision, but it was not this private vision which brought to life the events described but the prophet's decision to make public what he had seen and heard. At times it appears that for the words to have effect the prophet must not only speak but speak to a specific audience. The Balaam story assumes that the prophet must travel to the place where the tribes are encamped for the curse he proposes to speak to have effect. Amos had to go to Bethel and Jonah to Nineveh.

Manuals sometimes list Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve as 'literary' prophets. The term, a modern invention, indicates no more than that, unlike other prophets named in the Bible of whom we know only incidents told about them, we have from these men texts which purport to present passages from their speeches. With one exception, Jeremiah, none of the 'literary' prophets seem to have arranged for his speeches to be written down, yet all apparently confidently expected that their messages would survive.

(yet it didn't do
much good)

is not
a prophet

very different
system
of prophecy
than
the
other
prophets

My...
...
...
...

The occasional reference to a prophet who takes pen in hand on examination turns out to be anachronistic revisions. The scroll of Isaiah includes two versions of an oracle in which God orders the prophet to give his son a symbolic name, Maheṣ ṣalal haš baṣ, "pillage hastens, looting spreads" (8:1) ✓ as a warning of impending destruction. In one version God simply orders Isaiah so to name the boy. In the other the prophet is told to prepare a poster "and write on it in common script maheṣ ṣalah-ḥaš baṣ." Today, no self-respecting demonstration takes place without attention-getting placards and God's demand seems commonplace; but one wonders about the impact of a word-filled placard on an illiterate Judean crowd. Who among them would have been able to read the emblazoned motto? It seems likely that someone later retelling this story to a post-exilic audience -- among whom there would have been a sizable number of readers -- felt that the story told better this way. (2)

Jeremiah lived over a century after Isaiah, at a time when the urban expansion of Jerusalem was considerably more advanced and literacy far more common; but he, too, shows little interest in writing out his speeches. To be sure, the received text contains two references which suggest that God specifically ordered Jeremiah "to write down in a scroll all the words that I have spoken to you in a book" (30:2, 36:2); but in each case Jeremiah responded by hiring a professional scribe, Baruch, son of Neriah, who "wrote down in the scroll at Jeremiah's dictation all the words which the Lord had spoken to him" (36:4). When a charge of treason is lodged against Jeremiah, the king, Zedekiah, orders that a scroll

Modern
Hebrew
do many
things do
also!

containing the prophet's speeches be prepared and brought to him. Zedekiah orders the Royal Scribe to read the scroll to him and, as the reading proceeds, the king cuts from the scroll each leaf after it had been read and throws it into the fire, apparently hoping in this way to cancel the predicted disaster. Determined that there be a written record of God's judgment, perhaps also to dramatize the fact that the king's actions lacked the power to cancel God's decision, Jeremiah has another scroll prepared; again he, himself, does not inscribe it. A true child of the age of memory, he knew the oracles by heart, even those which had been delivered years before, and simply dictated his speeches as they had been originally delivered to Baruch, who wrote out the replacement scroll. (7)

The care with which prophetic statements were transmitted and eventually recorded derived primarily from the interest of various pious groups in using such oracles to "prove" God's power. Events had happened as the oracle, God, had predicted they would. At first, evidence of this oracular kind seems to have been left entirely to the memory of the faithful. 'Bind up the message, seal the instruction with My Disciples' (Is. 8:16). Why? For "you are my witnesses, says the Lord" (Is. 43:10). But since at times there was a considerable hiatus between the pronouncement and the occurrence of the predicted event, and the witnesses who had heard the oracle spoken were no longer available, the only way to prove that God had announced the event beforehand was to show a written record; "Now, go write it down upon a tablet and inscribe it in a record that it may be with them for future days, a witness forever" (Is. 30:8). Such written witnesses must have

Jer 36
XX + XI
(7)

17 May 1951

been particularly important to the exiled community (6th cent. B.C.E.) because their hope of return depended on the certainty of God's promises of return and the audience who had heard the original oracle might have been killed or scattered. The proof that God's word was powerful and certain/assured the nation that the promises explicit in the covenant could be expected to be fulfilled if the community proved repentant and loyal.

Memory was the trusted means of keeping traditions alive. In recent years much has been written about the role of professional storytellers and rhapsodists in shaping and preserving oral and folk culture. Generally, these men have been described as highly reliable transmitters. Indeed, some students have been so impressed by what they believe to be the fidelity of the oral transmission of narratives and legal formulae that they came to some rather overly-dramatic conclusions about the reliability of the Bible's reports of events which had taken place centuries before they became a part of Israel's written record. We do find details of much older practices and customs as well as venerable idioms embedded in various later Biblical narratives. Oral traditions were handled carefully, but the Hebrews, like all peoples of the time, were not committed to an absolutely faithful transmission. True, the familiar sagas were repeated with a high degree of accuracy, and familiar details and images reappear with each telling. Innovation was not a goal. Yet, when anthropologists have been able to compare a spoken version of a preliterate tribe's history with earlier telling, they have found that though neither the speaker nor his audience were aware of any changes, the story had

been adapted. The later version contained changes which reflected political events which had occurred since the earlier version. In one case, researchers happened to record an African saga about the tribe's origins. A generation later other researchers heard the same narrative and found that it had been adjusted to reflect the fact that two clans were no longer members of the tribal group. (8)

At every telling the story must be made understandable to the immediate audience. The Homers of the ancient world recited with love and respect the well-known sagas of their tribe, using familiar phrases, idioms, and incidents, but they did so in ways which allowed them to respond to the cultural preconceptions, political knowledge, and emotional interests of their audience. The audience helped to "write" the history. The storyteller might add ^{an} incident, omit a phrase, alter a genealogy or use a current idiom to satisfy the expectations of his audience. If the version he recited felt old, if the incidents and formulae passages seemed right to his audience, it was accepted as authentic. Neither he nor they might have been conscious that changes had been made. It follows that a culture which is not yet encumbered with a scripture retains a subtle but functional capacity to reshape its fundamental traditions without being conscious of doing so. Literacy had become a much used social tool. Such familiar recitations were not simply good theater but the important bonding experiences which tied listeners to their past, each other, and their god(s). Part of the joy and power of such moments lay in their familiarity. The audience could anticipate words and phrases and thus have tangible proof that what they believed to be true and right was in fact so. The story's value

lay in the recital which brought the past to life and guarded their present with the security of trusted teachings. The narrator did not need to belabor the message. The experience was the message. Its value lay in the emotional security which came from sharing a common heritage and present.

✓ Later, unfortunately, as reading replaced recitation as man's primary path to literature, much of the immediacy of the experience was lost. In a scriptural religion there is a certain distance between the word and the human soul. A reader can become emotionally or intellectually engaged in the text, but he cannot affect it. The book he puts down is the same book he picked up. Reading is a one-way experience. A scripture represents an emotional reduction from a recitation or speech since it depends on a literary approach which encourages reflection and analysis rather than engagement.

✓ Though a scripture is a book, it was at first not developed to be read but to be read aloud. Chants which suggested the inflection and mood created by the storyteller or the prophet were formalized. Communities encouraged the reader to memorize and publicly recite the text in the same sing-song which the rhapsodists used in their recitations. Conscious efforts were taken to transmit sacred traditions orally long after literacy had become a much used social tool. To this day Muslim schools emphasize the memorization of the Koran. The actual text is used only to assure against mistakes. In India the Rig Vedas were already well known in the thirteenth century B.C.E. but were not written down for another thousand years. As far back as we can trace public readings from the Sefer Torah we find that they were not read but chanted.

From ivory palaces ^{stringed instruments} ~~made of gold~~ (Oxford) ^{For}
 musicians entertain you in palaces decorated with ivory (good news)
 93
 From ivory palaces lute entertain you (SP)

Throughout the period of the monarchy (10th through 7th century B.C.E.) the kings of Israel and Judah used scribes with some regularity not only to organize tax collections, maintain correspondence, and administer their various bureaus but to prepare dynastic chronicles. Scribes discovered that the royal ego was pleased when they prepared records of royal triumphs. The earliest royal annals have been lost but are known to us by name only because a later generation of chroniclers, who edited the Deuteronomic and priestly histories, cited them in their histories (Annals of the Acts of Solomon (I K, 11:41); Annals of the Kings of Judah (I Kings 14:29); Annals of Samuel the Seer (I Ch. 29:29). The earliest chronicles recorded the king's noble pedigree, dramatic events in the life of his ancestors, his victories and munificences, and may be considered Israel's first written literature. The Psalms contain reflections of the courtly ethos in which these scribes worked: "My heart has composed a sweet melody: I shall recite my work, O King, my tongue is the pen of a skillful scribe, you are the fairest of (the children men)." (Ps. 45:2-3). "How many are the ivory palaces? How many shall acclaim you? Daughters of kings shall be stationed in your mansions, the queen at your right hand in the gold of Ophir" (Ps. 45:10). Two other early "books" are cited in the later histories: The Book of the Wars of the Lord (Num. 21:14) and The Book of Jashar (Josh. 10:13). Jashar appears to have been a collection of short poems associated with important incidents in the early history of the Israelite Confederation. The two citations of those poems which survive include a few lines of a hymn ascribed to Joshua

14:29

to a king
men

* among your ladies of honor (Oxford) are your favorites (J.P.S)
 Among the ladies of your court (good news)

also 2 Sam 1:18

praising God for having commanded the sun and the moon to stand still so that the military route of the Amorites could be completed

Joshua 10:12-14 X (Joshua 19:11-13) and David's moving lament for Jonathan and Saul.

"Your glory, O Israel, lies slain on your heights: How have the mighty fallen!" (2 Sam. 1:18-27). Of The Wars of the Lord we know only that it included a Northern Israel boundary list set out in memorizable form (Numbers 21:14). The appearance of such material which seems to reflect the cultural interests of the palace and to be designed for no nobler purpose than to flatter or intrigue a royal ego, in a text which will be acclaimed as scripture, underlines the role of chance and circumstance in the development of the Biblical canon and reminds us that no one set out to write or edit a Holy Bible. Scriptures represent selections from a community's literature, particularly, but not exclusively, from materials of religious interest. Many elements enter in the editorial decisions: availability, presence in a well-known text, general interest. Books became holy because readers declared them to be so, not because of the author's or storyteller's original intent. The Gentile prophet Balaam could never have anticipated that some of his prophecies spoken about Israel would become holy writ.

Early on literacy became associated with a particular "cosmopolitan" culture which developed among the scribes of many nations. Responsible as they were for all correspondence between their court and the outside world, scribes were the first group in each community to break out of the tight-knit envelope of tribal and cultural insularity which enveloped all societies and to take a serious interest in other cultures. Humans are by nature curious

you are referring to Numbers exclusively.

Do you believe he really existed & said these things? Hebrew?

Is there a parallel in ancient history?

and some of these men who were, after all, an educated elite, became eager to learn about the political concerns and even the cultural interests of the scribes of neighboring groups with whom they corresponded and, when deputized as ambassadors, sometimes visited. They discovered what others thought about the brevity of life, the vagaries of individual destiny, the best way to raise a family, advance a career, tolerate fools, and manage relationships with the powerful. In many cultures the community's "wisdom," its advice for the management of a successful life, was capsuled in compact, easily remembered proverbs and maxims which were passed on as commonplace advice from father to son, from teacher to student, and from native to foreign scribe.

The sum of these reflections and observations came to be called Wisdom. Although each community had its own Wisdom tradition, the commonalities of West Asian society were such that proverb and observation tended to pass fairly easily from one community to another, hence Wisdom had a cosmopolitan character. In time, compilations of cautionary sayings and sound advice and sober speculation about the twin mysteries of life and death were compiled, often with large sections of "borrowed" material. (9)

Wisdom as we know it is a body of literature of which The Book of Proverbs is a classic example. Its style is that of brief, rhythmic, often picturesque, adages obviously shaped by the needs of memorization and everyday speech as well as by numerical formulas. "Three things there are which are ^{Q'N}stately in their ^{Q'N}stride, four which are ^{Q'N}striking as they move, . . ." (Prov. 30:29) or acrostic structures, the famous woman of valor poem with which the book closes (Prov. 31:10-31).

why transl.
differently
in some B's?

Wisdom still reflects its origin in an essentially oral culture. It is assumed that wisdom's truths enter the mind through the ear rather than through the eye. "Hear, my son, and be wise" ✓ (Prov. 23:19). "My son, listen to my words, incline your ear to my sayings" (Prov. 4:20). In Egypt teachers of wisdom believed that "a hearing heart" was essential to good character development. I know of no wisdom maxim which advises: 'to be wise, my son, spend your youth with the scrolls of ancient wisdom.' Rather, the prodigal confesses: "I did not listen to the voice of my teachers, my ears were shut to those who tried to instruct me" ✓ (Prov. 5:13). It was generally believed that the ideas which were memorized remained active in the mind and helped to determine behavior; it was generally agreed that unless the gods or Fate intervened, decisions were made on the basis of the ideas you had appropriated as your own, which meant those which were uppermost in your mind.

It is not surprising then that as formal schooling developed across West Asia, teachers used these prudential and monitory observations as set pieces for students who were being introduced to the scribal arts. Presumably, in speaking aloud and copying such exercises the young scholar took them into his mind and made them his own. A good memory full of good thoughts was the indispensable prerequisite for a good character. There could be no doubt that teachers who helped to put good ideas in a youngster's memory bank shaped the youth's character.

Scribes wrote on whatever writing surface was at hand, mostly clay or papyrus, using the same script and forms they employed for their registers or

or, inform
to help
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is that
true?

Like the scribes who compiled the royal chronicles, these scribes, busy with their musings and their maxims, had no idea that some day their thoughts would be enshrined as scripture. They valued Wisdom highly. It had among them the status philosophy enjoyed in the Middle Ages but they made no claim that these thoughts were revealed, only that they were useful, in conformity with what we would call natural law, and in that sense ultimately true. The words were those of Solomon, Agur, or Lemuel, not God's.

The identification of Hebrew Wisdom with God's words developed over a considerable span of time late in the Second Temple period.

As the kingdoms matured and their administrations became better organized and as trade's importance in the economy grew, the use of scribes increased. Inevitably, so did the number of written records. Record-keeping is addictive. After recording the rota of deposits in the shrine treasury, a scribe might record the calendar of holy days observed in that place or the number and form of sacrifices or the hymns sung during the ceremonies. Others, out of interest or when ordered, inscribed portions of familiar epics or perhaps a list of torot, divine instructions, which ~~late~~ priests had collected. There were writings of various kinds and content, but during the pre-exilic period none of these documents was treated as sacrosanct.

Even the record of a divine oracle was simply a record. God spoke. The power was in the spoken word. No special care was lavished on the written form of this literature. Scribes wrote on whatever writing surface was at hand, mostly clay or papyrus, using the same script and forms they employed for their registers or

Was canonized
over a mark
of divine
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(10) in

Is it
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ordinary correspondence, a cursive alphabet which strongly suggested its origin in a provincial cuneiform script which later generations would call Ketav Ivri, Hebrew writing, and we, in our time, paleo-Hebrew.

There were no taboos against making a written record of any part of the oral tradition, even of power-laden sacred formulae. In 1985 an amulet was discovered at a grave site at Ketef Hinnon just outside the walls of pre-exilic Jerusalem, datable to the late pre-exilic period. It consisted of two small inscribed cylindrical silver plates. These two thin metal plaques, each incised with a text in Ketav Ivri script, bear the names of individuals, possibly the amulet's owners, and a blessing which closely resembles the formula which became the most powerful blessing known to ancient Israel, the Priestly Benediction (Num. 6:24-26). ✓ The language of this blessing is specific. The amulet writer has usefully provided this explanation: "Thus they shall link My name with the people of Israel and I will bless them. . ." ✓ (Num. 5:27).

The three-fold invocation of YHWH's name was spoken by Temple priests on ceremonial occasions and believed by all to offer real protection to the community. It is a custom taken over and continued to this day in the synagogue. Whether the deceased wore these amulets during his life time or they were prepared to be placed in his grave, it is clear that they served a protective purpose. Such amulets offer further evidence of the magical power associated with written formulae invoking God's name. (10)

traditions were set down piecemeal. A scribe who may also have

Incidentally, the use of phrases so similar to a well-known blessing provides us with some understanding of the way well-known proverbs, idioms, formulae and phrases were known. The universe of discourse was rich in familiar phrases which circulated broadly and were used often, sometimes in slightly changed form. So we find the separate formula phrases of this blessing -- "May YHWH bless you and keep you;" "May YHWH make His face shine upon you and show you favor;" "May YHWH lift up His countenance upon you and grant you fulfillment" -- appearing not only on these amulets but separately in various Psalms (67:2, 80:4, 8, 38).

The language of well-known forms was probably a greater force for the persistence of familiar formulae than any conscious effort in that direction. Such phrases were the ready-at-hand building blocks out of which storytellers, priests, and teachers constructed their presentations. Michael Fishbane, in an analysis of a denunciation of priestly activities by the post-exilic prophet Malachi, has shown how a skillful speaker used the idioms of the Priestly Benediction to heighten the sarcasm of his condemnation: "So now, beseech the countenance of God that He may show us favour. . . will he be gracious ~~unto~~ to you?" (11)

There were no cultural bars to the inscription of the oral tradition, but at the same time, no compelling reason for undertaking a concerted effort to set down Israel's religious tradition. Indeed, it is doubtful if during these pre-exilic centuries anyone could have defined with any precision the boundaries of Israel's sacred traditions. Religion permeated every aspect of life. The traditions were set down piecemeal. A scribe who may also have

also in
changed
form
67:2
80:4
8
38

80:4
8
38

the
same
clearly
from
allusion

(11)

(11)

been a priest may have been ordered to prepare a list of divine instructions (torot) sacred to his shrine. Another of a more literary bent busied himself after working hours setting down the local version of the Flood story. Such material was all part of a diffuse tradition or, rather, traditions since there were local variations based on tribal traditions.

Over time bits and pieces of these traditions became text. Texts of various kinds existed but, and this is the crucial point, they were not as yet treated as sacred writings or featured in shrine worship. No presentation, oral or written, of the sagas, genealogies, dynastic chronicles, lists of torot, and wisdom sayings was accepted at any time during the pre-exilic period as sacrosanct or inviolate, though, obviously, these materials were trusted and believed. Pre-exilic Biblical Israel had religious traditions but no Bible.

These early years were a period of consolidation of various strands of tradition. During and after the period of settlement the separate traditions of the separate tribes were gradually brought together, sometimes by accident and sometimes by design, and various formulations slowly took shape -- a process that continued over some centuries. The confederation was composed of tribes, not all of whom shared a common history. The various tribes knew different versions of the creation myths and patriarchal stories and each tribe held sacred its own sagas. Not all tribes had been slaves in Egypt. Some tribes cherished traditions about the Exodus but not about the Sinai covenant, while others cherished memories of the Sinai covenant but not about the Exodus. Different

lists of the Instructions required by God's covenant were cherished at the various shrines: Beth El, Gilgal, and Schechem. It was during the period of confederation and settlement that these separate scenarios and themes began to be brought together into a more or less single narrative.

Over time these multiple traditions and discrete narratives were drawn into the chronological framework with which we are familiar. This framework within time had a certain inevitability. Professional storytellers knew that to keep an audience's attention they had best tell the story in sequence. The patriarchal stories, and the David saga, like the Iliad, are told in that fashion. The spoken word disappears as soon as it is spoken, so for memory's sake recitation tends to be of necessity linear. Walter Ong has made the useful point "that knowledge and discourse come out of human experience (so) the elemental way to process human experience verbally is to give an account of it more or less as it really comes into being and exists, embedded in the flow of time."⁽¹²⁾

Since no one had any idea that a record of these traditions would one day be venerated as scripture, being innocent of the very concept, the reciters who first drew traditions together and later the scribe-editors who set them down felt little need to edit out all inconsistencies. People heard and later read only parts of the tradition, never the whole. When several strands of tradition were brought together as much of the familiar as possible was maintained even if this meant inconsistent versions. What did it matter if several inconsistent versions of the Creation myth were in circulation? That's why the animals march into Noah's Ark in

pairs and also in families of seven. Editorial consistency was not a goal. The important thing about these materials is that they were familiar and trusted. Each had developed in one or another section of the community and had survived a thousand retellings and numerous editings.

Much later, looking back on their origins, Jews tended to assume that the now venerable sacred books, the scriptures, which were so central to their culture had played the same role in the lives of their ancestors. They had not. Ancient Israel lived in an essentially bookless society. Traditions and teachings were inscribed in their minds and hearts rather than on papyrus or parchment.

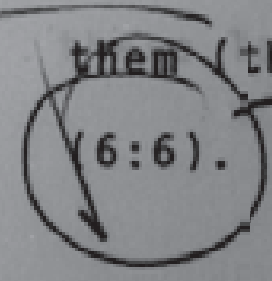
Still, the later generations did not lack what they believed was convincing proof of The Book's central role in their faith. The proof was in The Book. It was all there, black on white, "When Moses had put down in writing the words of the Teaching to ^{the} very end" (Deut. 31:24). Since they now accepted the Sefer Torah as truth, and believed that what was had always been, it followed that Israel had had this teaching, the Torah, from the beginning of its national history, ever since Sinai. Indeed, not only had Israel had The Book but the community had been under an obligation to read and study it. Again, the proof was seen as incontrovertible.

Deuteronomy contains a paragraph which has been recited daily during the synagogue service for nearly two thousand years which was understood to require that each Jew spend some time each day introducing his sons to the sacred book: "And you shall teach

them (these laws) to your children and shall speak of them. . . ."
(6:6). That such a text required an interpretation which associated

Deut
31:24

is that really
the actual text?



schooling with books was deemed self-evident. It was not. At no time during the pre-exilic years was the study of the tradition as text actively encouraged. It could not have been. Pre-exilic Israel knew nothing of a written scripture. There was Torah, a body of divine tradition; but as yet no Sefer Torah, no scripture.

This Deuteronomy sentence encouraged parents to introduce their children to their traditions. Faith was a family affair. In its original context the sentence read: "You shall impress them

> (v'shinantem^a) upon your children and you shall recite them. . ."

✓ (Deut. 6:7). The verb used, v'shinantem^a, designated common speech, oral instruction. Recite the traditions to your children until the sagas and Instructions have become second nature to them, indelibly etched in their memory! Books were not involved here. Rote learning and cultural conditioning are. Indeed, neither reading nor writing is encouraged in the Torah. The cultivation of memory is: "My son, attend to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. ^{ר' י'א (1210-15) י'א; ה'א} Keep them constantly in mind. ^{א'א' א'א' א'א' א'א'} Cherish them in your ^{א'א' א'א' א'א' א'א'} heart of hearts for they mean life to him who possesses them and health to his whole body" (Prov. 4:20-22). ✓

Torah comes from a root yarah which originally meant to throw and which came to denote the casting of lots, more specifically casting lots to discover God's will. In the Bible the noun

'Torah' defines the specific terms of God's will and embraces many roles and duties. A Torah was a commandment which the community accepted as divinely ordained and, therefore, obligatory. Originally, these laws (torot) were not attributed to any particular historical

personality or event. They represented venerable and venerated practice and long-held concepts of right and virtue and so, inevitably, the will of God.

The various collections of torot which survive in the received text evidence some concern for a content-based arrangement, but none for comprehensiveness. Much of the arrangement seems dictated not by a desire to arrange material topically but by the habit of the time of stringing together related matters to ease the process of memorization. Matters relating to a calendar of holy occasions and rules governing the sacrificial cult are generally separated from other rules, but often instructions on a variety of topics simply follow each other without apparent logic and nowhere, in the text is there a fully exhaustive list of rules governing any area of practice.

What was unique in the treatment of the emerging collections of torot was an increasingly evident determination to root them in a particular act of divine speech and to identify them as the message brought by a single prophet: "And the Lord spoke to Moses." Beginning in the last centuries of the pre-exilic period a conscious effort was made to root the various collections of torot in the Sinai covenant. Some of the torot are much older than Sinai and reflect well-known legal traditions of West Asia from the second millennium. Others, like those which were to govern the sacrificial cult, undoubtedly date from the period of settlement when Israel for the first time built shrines. This editorial effort had not been fully completed when the present text of

gave
to
priests.

Exodus-Numbers was finalized and we read in those scrolls that Moses received some instructions on other occasions and in other places, such as the Tent of Meeting. Deuteronomy avoids any mention of Divine Instructions being given to Moses on any occasion other than Sinai.

To explain this tendency to relate all torot to Sinai and Moses, those who see self-interest as the primary human motivation point to the interests of the priesthood and the important role that the priests and priest-scribes played in the drive to set down the tradition. The authority of the priests was linked intimately and dynastically to that of Moses. If all the torot had been revealed through Moses and Moses had ordained his brother Aaron, the founder-dynast of the priest class, no one could mount a serious challenge to the claims by the existing priestly class that their service and privileges were divinely mandated. But more than priestly self-interest was involved. There was a need for a unifying myth which would give a sense of coherence and unity to the tradition as it slowly acquired a single form.

As the tribes became a confederation and then a kingdom, a need was felt for a single presentation of God's Instructions. Each tribe, each shrine, had its own list. There was no way to prove that one Tcrah formulation was more worthy than another. The authenticity of a particular formulation of torot could always be contested, so a single and singular event, Sinai, was declared to be the source of all accepted torot.¹³ The reports of the covenant-enabling ceremonies organized at Schechem by Joshua and at Mizpeh by Samuel were stripped of the register of stipulations

But it opened
Moses to charge
of self interest
And what about
his motives
in giving only

13

which must have been confirmed on those occasions. These lists or parts of them may well have found their way into one or another of the anthologies of torot which today co-exist in the received text. Not surprisingly, there began to circulate torot which proclaimed it God's will that no one add to or subtract from the teachings given through Moses at Sinai.

The texts which contain the messages brought by the prophets who followed Moses contain no statutory laws. Perhaps Israel's culture did not look to prophetic oracles for laws, but if that is so, how shall we explain the major prophetic role assigned to Moses? More likely, the later prophetic texts came from a time when the myth of Sinai had become a cardinal article of the faith and when torot were expected from shrine oracles rather than from individual prophets. In any case, the Bible presents the prophets as bound to a mission to summon the community to return to God's ways rather than to practice some new duty.

The co-existence in the received text of clearly distinguishable blocks of torot, the separate "coda" which often contain divergent formulations of a particular rule, leaves no room for doubt that each "coda" had its own developmental history. The torot did not come as a unit from Sinai but represent separate traditions, each possibly related to the tradition of one or another tribal shrine. One instruction allows Levites to begin their Temple service at twenty-five years of age (Num. 8:24); another stipulated thirty as the proper age (Num. 4:23). We hear that an Israelite slave girl is to be freed after seven years (Deut. ~~15:12~~); but another

increasingly comfortable to them, and since their world seemed coherent, no one tried to find inconsistencies in what seemed to be a natural unity.

152 107 107

reference to the issue of slavery makes no mention of such a requirement (Ex. 21:7). The spring harvest has three names in three different lists: (Katsir) (Ex. 23:16); the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot) (Deut. 16:9-10); and the Feast of First Fruits (Bikkurim) (Num. 28:26); and there is some confusion among them as to precisely when this many-titled holiday is to be celebrated.

Those in the post-exilic period who ultimately edited the written records into what we know as the Sefer Torah were not primarily interested in presenting a systematic and exhaustive statement of an authorized and catholic tradition. They presented those laws which for one reason or another had achieved a particular holiness and probably had served the various pre-exilic shrines as symbol of the entire covenant tradition. Ancient Israel's approach was not unlike that taken by many who still today see the Ten Commandments as symbolic of all that is good and right, God's will.

There was no original Torah, only various developing streams of tradition which were more or less shaped into a text that gave the appearance of a single tradition. There is a growing sense of national unity and a natural preference for order over disorder, although the existence of different traditions and codes was not particularly disturbing since there was as yet no scripture and no concept of one. Some in Israel knew one list of torot, some another. Many were not aware that there were lists. The community accepted the authority and consistency of traditions which were part of the warp and weft of daily life. As each generation heard again the tradition, particular readings and interpretations seemed increasingly comfortable to them, and since their world seemed coherent, no one tried to find inconsistencies in what seemed to be a natural unity.

cf 4th of July / Independence Day / Veterans Day / Armistice Day

what is this? can't stand against

As indicated earlier, many pious folk dismiss this developmental reconstruction out of hand, offering as evidence the Sefer Torah's own testimony, a text or, rather, one or another of a small number of texts which indicate that Moses actually wrote out part or all of the received text. These texts exist, but they do not provide the solid proof claimed for them and they cannot stand against all we now know of the development of Israelite thought and practice.

No one knows what happened at Sinai, or with certainty that there was a Sinai. There are no reliable eye-witness accounts and our texts all come from much later periods. But it is clear that one of the most consistent themes in the telling, one which is described at length and in various versions, presents Moses as prophet, not scribe. Moses is the prophet through whom God's message is transmitted. He is God's man, ish ha-elohim, who cries out to the community the Instructions of the King of Kings. Again and again we find the phrase, "The Lord said to Moses: 'thus shall you say to the Israelites'" (Ex. 20:18¹⁸ passim). The one consistent element in the various pieces which make up the Sefer Torah's presentation of Sinai is that there was a revelation at that place, an event where the voice of God dominated. God spoke. Moses spoke. The people heard and acclaimed.

The various scenarios of the covenant-enabling assembly presumably held at the foot of Mt. Sinai describe a ceremony which involved sacred words cried out by a tribal leader acting as officiatory priest or prophet, the assemblage affirms and accepts these obligations as forever binding on their community, and an

20: 18

enabling ritual was celebrated, probably a blood sacrifice, which declared the covenant in force. Moses is pictured throughout as a prophet, God's spokesman. The original story focused entirely on the spoken word. There was no stenographer at Sinai.

How and why, then, did the Sinai episode come to include the famous image of the two inscribed stone tablets? They are there but they were not always there. They represent a storyteller's inescapable need to dramatize events and to do so in ways his audience would appreciate and understand. The tablets served as a dramatic element which revealed the presence of God at the moment the covenant was fashioned. By their presence they served as a visible witness to the covenant's continuing power.

The Canaanites often erected stones, masseboth, in their shrines. These stones were held to represent the presence of the god(s) at the rites conducted in their honor. When Jacob fled Esau, he raised an altar on the spot where God promised him protection and put beside it a stone, a massebah, which, in the accepted symbolism of the day, witnessed to the fact that God has been present here, and by inference that God could in the future be approached here. Most of these stones were unadorned; a few, like the plinth found at the Canaanite altar at Hazor, were inscribed with some of the attributes associated with the god(s) worshipped there. An Israelite audience would have understood and appreciated a narrative which associated God's presence at a religious site with a sacred stone(s). There were such stones all over Canaan. It is unlikely that these masseboth were inscribed,

(gestalt?)

not clear?

but again, an Israelite audience would have been aware of the not uncommon West Asian royal practice of setting up stone stele in various locations inscribed with the imperial law, usually prefaced with paragraphs of fulsome praise of the reigning king's magnificence and power. Would the King of Kings to establish his authority have done less than the great emperors of the time? Exodus reports, "God spoke (va'yedaber) all these words (devarim) saying," (20:1), and its narrative about the tablets comes later; here the operative words are va'yedaber and devarim from the root dvr, to speak. Speech precedes inscription, I would argue, by centuries rather than by just a few paragraphs.

Storytellers must fit well-known images to the events they are describing. Sinai was a way station on the long march out of Egypt. It would have made little sense to set up a sacred stone, inscribed or not, at a place the tribes might never revisit; so the stones had to be portable. There are two tablets, and the explanation is again cultural style. One way the ancients emphasized authority was to double the indicated phrase. God was the King of Kings. If kings inscribe their law on a selected stone, God would inscribe His law on the stone of stones.

We cannot recover with any certainty how and why Israel's storytellers wove new details into successive retellings of the Sinai events, but we can suggest how eager audiences unraveled the details. God was there. The Law is not only royal but divine, fixed for all time. God gave the Law twice to Israel. The Law is unique, God's own.

not less?

Just as ambassadors in those days took an oral message but also carried their king's instructions in a letter to assure the recipient that the agent was correctly conveying his lord's message, so the emphasis here is on the stone tablets, on which God, Himself, inscribed His words, as the confirming document. What better proof could you offer for its authenticity?

In another version of the Sinai story, God instructs Moses, His faithful agent, to do the writing. Moses' complete reliability is emphasized in the eulogy which closes Deuteronomy: "The servant of God" whose "eyes were undimmed and his vision unabated," (Deut. 34:7) becomes the text's authenticator. The tablets provide what an ancient audience would have considered tangible proof that Moses had spoken God's Instructions precisely as he had been commissioned to do. There were other narrative benefits. The tablets are of stone. Stone suggests permanence. To inscribe God's Law on stone is to testify to durability and unchangeability. Words cut into stone cannot be readily changed. This is a law for all times.

One of the many uncertainties which emerge from the present form of the Sinai narrative concerns precisely what was said. Were there only the ten statements? Just those ten? The tablet image suggests this was the case, but the received text explicitly introduces many other torot into its presentation of the Sinai revelation and at least one other slightly different version of the Ten Commandments.

That the tablets came into being in the course of pious narration becomes even more certain when we consider their subsequent history or, rather, lack of history. According to the text we possess,

* What about
I Krip 8:9
~ (II Chr 5:10)
~ what is the
~ 112

the first set of tablets was shattered by an enraged Moses when he discovered that the tribes were worshiping the Golden Calf, and the replacement set, once engraved, was placed for safekeeping in the Holy Ark, Israel's portable shrine. Then, incredibly, it simply disappeared from history. We hear no more of the tablets, not a word.* Had there been tablets believed to have been written by God or by Moses, they surely would have been among Israel's most precious possessions, objects to be revered. Such tablets would have been the making of any shrine. One can imagine a constant stream of pilgrims arriving to venerate those holy objects and to draw on their power; but there is no indication that this was ever the case. After Sinai we hear much more about the ark but not a word about the tablets.

The idea that the revelation was inscribed on tablets seems to have emerged at a fairly late stage in the elaboration of the Sinai events and to have served to emphasize God's presence at Sinai and the importance of the text; but both Moses and God are unlikely scribes. Of God I cannot speak, but what we know about the cultural and social level of the Hebrew tribes in Moses' day makes it extremely doubtful that Moses could read or write. Even if we assume that the legend of a childhood spent in an Egyptian palace is not the pure invention it seems to be, we cannot take for granted that he would have been schooled there in the scribal arts, certainly not in the languages required of a Hebrew scribe. Egyptian princes were taught the arts of governance and war, not how to read and write. In the unlikely case that Moses had been

enrolled in such a palace school, he would have become adept in the hieratic script favored in the New Kingdom, not in the Ketav Ivri, the quite different script and alphabet in which the Israelites kept their records. If we assume Moses was raised as a Hebrew, the slave encampments were not places which could provide the young with the time and leisure for extended schooling.

Moses is presented primarily as a speaker. In his day literacy was not a requirement for the sheik who wished to maintain authority or even for the prophet who brought the word of God. Exodus presents a Moses sensitive to the fact that he lacks the qualifications to be God's spokesman. At the Burning Bush he worries that he will not be an effective messenger: "I have ^{not} ~~never~~ been a man of words" (Ex. 4:10). Upon his commission Moses brings to Pharaoh a spoken message, not a letter; and another spoken message, again not a letter, to the council of tribal elders. Deuteronomy presents itself as a series of valedictory addresses in which Moses, about to relinquish the mantle of responsibility, reviews Israel's history, discourses on God's redemptive acts and the operation of the covenant: "On the other side of the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to expound ^{this} ~~the~~ Teaching" (1:5). Phrases in which God orders Moses to speak to the Israelites occur with almost thirty times greater frequency in our text than do sentences in which he is ordered to write something down.

The few references to Moses as a writer are uniformly anachronistic. Someone has inserted into Exodus 24, which is clearly a composite of various traditions about the events at Sinai, a

how do we know?

book? ?
 * it is so unclear what was the value of it?
 nothing

sentence which reads: "Then Moses wrote down all the commands of the Lord" (24:4). After an unrelated paragraph in which an elaborate covenant-making ceremony is described, the theme of a written covenant is again picked up: Moses "took the ^{book} record of the covenant and read it aloud to the people" (Ex. 24:7). The text is at best unclear. Which commandments did Moses record? What happened to this record? If there was a scroll why were the stone tablets necessary? None of these questions can be answered. These two sentences are a late insertion into an earlier version of the history of the Sinai covenant which described the occasion as one purely of sacred speech and sacrifice.

definitely traditions drawn together

The why and wherefore of the appearance of the theme of a written record can only be guessed at. Some suggest that as the nation became more aware of the habits of surrounding cultures, storytellers added to the older narrative details which their audiences had come to associate with customs now broadly recognized as linked to treaty-making. In West Asia treaty texts often were placed for safekeeping in a shrine, protected by all kinds of taboos as well as high walls; the texts' presence there implied that the gods approved and took responsibility for insuring that the agreed-on terms were kept.

frst?

days Similarities have been noted between the Sinai episode and descriptions of covenant and treaty-making ceremonies among the Hittites and other peoples of the area. It was common practice when making a treaty to include a eulogy to the king's power, a proclamation of the vassals' submission, and their mutual

acceptance of the treaty terms. The ceremony usually included a sacrifice, calling the god's attention to the treaty and summoning him to punish disobedience. The terms were written down so that the king could organize an annual ceremony of resubmission at which the terms would again be read to his vassals, who would be forced again to recognize publicly the overlord's superior power.

Num. 33:2 introduces a detailed list of the forty-two camps occupied by the tribes during their trek with this sentence: "Moses recorded the starting points of their marches as directed by the Lord" (V5L). On the basis of style as much as substance, scholars confidently assign this text to priestly traditions drawn together in exilic or post-exilic times. A sentence such as this proves no more than that a priest-scribe who lived some seven centuries after Moses knew, or thought he knew, of an old tradition of the trek which went back to Moses. Perhaps he even had seen a parchment. As any guide in the Holy Land will tell you, the document in your hand may be, and probably is, a pious forgery.

Finally, there are several references to Moses as a scribe in Deuteronomy 31 which are the texts cited repeatedly by the sages to prove their claim that Moses wrote down the entire Sefer Torah following God's dictation. Deuteronomy 31 is set during the last days of Moses' life just before he transfers authority to Joshua. After counseling Joshua on his responsibilities, we are told, Moses wrote down "this Teaching," contents unspecified, and presented the text to the levitical priests and the elders of Israel who are instructed to read from this teaching to the entire

sentence refer to some portion of Deuteronomy's legal code.

difficult to visualize proper elaborate

L

Deut
31

community each sabbatical year during the Feast of Booths (31:9-13). The language is formulaic and seems to pick up one of the conventional requirements that a treaty be renewed every year by the kind of enabling ceremony already described, that is, an annual ceremony which featured a public reading of the treaty's terms and the vassal's resubmission to them. There is no evidence that the practice of a regular sabbatical reading of the Torah text was ever the custom in Israel and certainly no reason to believe, as the rabbinic tradition would claim, that the document referred to as "this Teaching" necessarily contained the entire Pentateuch as we know it. (14)

✓ Deut. 31:24 is the text most frequently cited by those who insist that Moses wrote the whole Sefer Torah on God's specific command. Moses is described as using his last hours to write the words of "this Torah" to the very end. God further commands Moses to have the Levites place "this book of Teaching (presumably the scroll he has been working on) beside the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God and let it remain there as a witness against you" (v. 26). What the phrase "this book of Teaching" specifically refers to can no longer be ascertained. Rabbinic Judaism related it confidently, but without warrant, to the whole Sefer Torah. In recent times some scholars have claimed it to be a reference to Deuteronomy, which is known to have circulated for a considerable period as a separate scroll, but this identification assumes a much earlier publication of the Deuteronomy scroll than most researchers would accept. A more enlightened opinion has the sentence refer to some portion of Deuteronomy's legal code, 'a

* what about Josiah: 8:31, 34 23:6, 24:2

II K 14:6

8:18, 9:3 13:1
8:8

portion which developed independently of other parts of the book. This may be the case. If it is, then Moses is described here as writing out a selection of torot which were not drawn together as a separate unit until centuries after his death.

↑
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The reference to a written scroll is late and singular; no other reference exists to such a scroll. This scroll disappears without a trace. There is no further reference to it. As far as we know, during the entire Biblical period, this scroll, which would have been precious beyond price since it contained God's teachings in Moses' own hand, was never consulted or made the centerpiece of tribal ceremony. There is no suggestion that the scroll found in Josiah's day (late seventh century B.C.E.) was related to it. When, two centuries after Josiah, Ezra brings a scroll of torot to Jerusalem from Babylon he does not advance the claim that he has brought back Moses' scroll or even a faithful copy.

The earliest and most consistent image of Moses presented to us is that of a prophet, not a scribe. Indeed, Moses may not have been literate. He need not have been to serve effectively as prophet or as sheik. Joshua almost certainly was not. Joshua is described as Moses' aide-de-camp, a field commander, who succeeded his leader as sheik of the tribal confederation. The governance of a semi-nomadic tribe required military skill, courage, and good sense but not the ability to read and write. The details we are offered about Joshua's life raise the question when this man, born into slavery, who spent his adult life on a desert trek, might have found the opportunity to spend the required years of training.

(II K 22)
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How do we know for sure that it's a late addition?

A scribe has bridged the end of Deuteronomy and the opening of the scroll of Joshua with a speech in which God advises Moses' heir that "this book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you should meditate therein day and night, that you may observe to do all that is written therein. . ." (1:8); and the Joshua scroll closes with the description of a covenant-enabling ceremony in which he again is made to appear as a writer. The tribes are assembled at Schechem. Joshua presents a lengthy oration in which he details the record of God's protection of Israel. He warns the sub-chiefs that they must not serve alien gods. The assembly shouts "we will serve the Lord."

The earliest presentations of this event probably included a list of torot, covenant rules, which Joshua, as was the custom, had recited during the ceremony and which the assemblage had acclaimed, but these have been eliminated in line with the overriding priestly concern to locate all torot in the prophetic mission of Moses. What we have instead is an editorial postscript.

— "On that day at Schechem, Joshua read a covenant for the people and he made a fixed rule for them. Joshua (has) recorded all this in a book of divine instruction. He took a great stone and set it up at the foot of the oak in the sacred precinct of the Lord; and Joshua said to ^{all} the people, 'see, this very stone shall be a witness against ^{us} you lest you break faith with your God.' Joshua then dismissed the people to their allotted portions" (24:24, ²⁵⁻²⁸ ~~27-28~~). Other than the list of torot enshrined at this ceremony, what was there for him to record? Again, if there was such a scroll, what

24:25-28

(b' Sefer 3 Torot Elohim)

(וְיִשְׁחָקֵם לְעֵד עָלֵינוּ כִּי לֹא נִשְׁכַּח מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ כִּי לֹא נִשְׁכַּח מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ)

deleted!

happened to it? The stone which witnessed to God's presence reiterate a familiar thematic element in a covenant ceremony, but Joshua's role as a notetaker is clearly out of character for a twelfth century B.C.E. sheik of semi-nomad tribesmen. It suggests, as does the book's preface, a much later and more literate age, probably the early post-exilic centuries, when priests took for granted that lists of torot and records were to be inscribed and kept. Otherwise again, we have to account for the surprising disappearance from Israel's history of what would have been an infinitely precious document.

The only other references to Joshua as a writer can readily be dismissed. Chapter 8 presents various traditions about an altar which Joshua is reported to have erected on Mt. Ebal. A short insertion which clearly breaks the flow of the narrative reports that Joshua "inscribed (on the altar stones) a copy of the teaching which Moses had written for the Israelites" (v. 32). Joshua is also said to have "read all the words of the Teaching" (v. 34). Again, the language of this section reflects the late priestly concerns with amassing detail and is in fact a rather self-conscious midrash, a story invented to prove Joshua's fidelity to his predecessor who, according to a narrative in Deuteronomy, had ordered Joshua to erect an altar upon his successful entrance into the promised Land: "And coat the stones with plaster, and inscribe upon them all the words of the Teaching" (Deut. 27:3). How this passage came to be need not detain us. It seems to reflect the massebah tradition and/or the Egyptian practice of writing laws prophet. None of these roles required literacy.

wouldn't this question present a problem to the reader of at least 19 additional?

20th century
plausible
and all
in 1st

Torah?

at Mishnah Torat Moshe
in the presence of
Moses he
which Moses had written for the Israelites

Torah

2-3

and history on the plastered wall surfaces of their shrines. All that needs to be said is that at some point a late priestly editor or historian felt it important to indicate that Joshua had faithfully fulfilled his commission. But the image of Joshua as a fresco painter is hard to credit and there is no other evidence that the Israelites ever inscribed texts on the plastered surfaces of their shrines.

Samuel, the last of the trio of pre-exilic giants, is described in the Bible as organizer of a covenant ceremony for the tribal confederation. Presumably he celebrated it at Mizpeh where he cried out various rules respecting the office of the king and recorded God's Instructions in a scroll document which we are told "he deposited before the Lord" (I Sam. 10:25). Samuel may have been literate. By the beginning of the eleventh century, the tribes were already fairly well settled and had adopted many Canaanite ways. Samuel is said to have been raised by a shrine priest and to have lived in settled communities where literacy would not have been that uncommon. Still, the image of Samuel as a scribe is an unlikely one. A "child of prayer," Samuel is said to have been dedicated at birth to the rule of Nazarites, an ascetic group which promoted the simple life and sought to revive the austere virtues of Israel's nomadic origins. Nazarites had little need for, and no interest in, the administrative arts; and it is unlikely that they would have sent a neophyte, however promising, to a shrine school to master this Canaanite skill. In later years, Samuel is variously described as a circuit-riding charismatic, clairvoyant, judge and prophet. None of these roles required literacy.

There is in the entire pre-exilic literature only one creditable reference, a late one, to a scroll of torot which was apparently of some religious significance. The story is that during a refurbishing project organized by King Josiah in 621 B.C.E., a "scroll of the Teaching" was found in the treasury of the Jerusalem Temple. Two reports of this incident exist (II Kings 22; II Ch. 34). In one, workers discover the scrolls; in the other the High Priest does. In both versions the find is treated as interesting but not momentous. In both versions the scribe-administrator who reports the find to the king raises with him a number of routine business matters before mentioning the find.

The accounts agree that the find was unexpected. Apparently, no one had noticed or cared that the scroll was missing. Perhaps no one had bothered to list this scroll in the inventory of Temple possessions though scrolls were expensive, hand-crafted items of some value.

Set against the rather unexcited reaction of the court officials, the king's reaction seems surprising. Once the scroll had been read to him, Josiah is said to have rent his garments, adopted a formal state of mourning and ordered his staff to inquire of God what must be done. A prophetess was consulted. Huldah confirmed that the Instructions were authentic and announced that God intended to punish Jerusalem because of the sin of idolatry, but that the king would be spared because he had humbled himself and devoted his energies to religious reform. This scroll then seems to have become the centerpiece of a covenant-enabling ceremony of the type with which we have become familiar. In one version Josiah himself

by the
scribe-
administrator
being

is said to have read the entire text to the assembly. We are not told how this man, who just a few paragraphs earlier had required the service of the Royal Scribe to read to him from the text so that he might know what was in it, managed this feat. The ceremony ends with the removal from The Temple of "all the objects made for Baal and Asherah and all the hosts of heaven" (II Kings 23:4).

It is hard to know what to make of all this. The incident is twice told. There seems little doubt that it rests on a kernel of fact. But what are the facts and what point is being made? Because of the importance scripture has assumed over the centuries in both Jewish and Christian life, researchers have tended to focus their interest on the scroll and to ask such questions as what text the scroll contained. The usual answer to this question is that it presented portions of the legal sections of Deuteronomy. Without further information, there is no way to prove or disprove this thesis. Indeed, one wonders if the issue of content was that important to those who first reported this incident. It seems more likely that in the sixth century Huldah's prophecy about Jerusalem's fall and Josiah's being spared would have been the focus of popular interest, rather than the covenant torot that might have been contained in the scroll.

This story in its present form could not have been shaped earlier than Josiah's death in 608 B.C.E. and probably must be dated sometime after the Babylonian invasions of 597 B.C.E. and the destruction of The Temple in 586 B.C.E. That traumatic event and the consequent exile preoccupied the religious feelings of the defeated nation. They wanted to know why the disaster had occurred

And the text
(p. 222)

and why God allowed a king who had permitted idolatry in the royal shrine for the first eighteen years of his reign to escape punishment and die peacefully while many who had never accepted the presence of the idols were made to suffer God's punishment. The answer this text offers is that this was God's will. Josiah had repented. In this context the scroll seems to be an almost incidental agent of God's will.

Some have suggested that the scroll was a pious forgery executed on Josiah's order to justify a program of religious reform on which he was determined. In the absence of any other evidence it seems unlikely that at this stage of Biblical development a scroll, whatever its contents, could have played a pivotal role in determining the community's structure of belief. Documents, even documents which dealt with important religious themes, were simply confirming records. The spoken word and the oral tradition were still primary.

If the whole episode is not pure invention then we must suppose that a scroll of torot was, in fact, discovered during Josiah's reign and that memory of this event later was merged with memory of Huldah's prophecy about one of Judah's best known and most powerful kings.

If so, how and why did such a scroll come to be written and how could such a scroll be lost? These questions cannot be readily answered. Josiah's scroll is another scroll which is never again mentioned. After the king's first excitement over the find there is no mention of further exhibition or consultation of the scroll.

We are not even told that the text was placed in the Holy of Holies or in some other sacred location. Neither this scroll nor any

other is listed among the sacred objects taken as booty from The Temple by the Babylonians. If, in fact, there was such a scroll, it was either a personal ^{scroll} ~~scroll~~ inscribed by a priest-scribe for his own purposes and forgotten when he laid it aside or died, or a list of torot cherished at a particular shrine which had been brought to Jerusalem sometime during the preceding century, as local shrines were closed as part of a cult centralization program, and forgotten. In either case, the scroll seems to have been the product of private initiative rather than of anyone's sense of sacred duty. It had no public standing.

The idea that Moses or Samuel or Amos or Isaiah may have been non-literate troubles many. These were respected and wise men whose lives have served as role models to a hundred generations of literate folk and whose teachings are held sacred throughout the West; we must not impose on them attainments appropriate to our times but not to theirs. Today literacy is a prerequisite for standing in the community and there is a proven link between incapacity and illiteracy. That linkage, self-evident to us, was not self-evident to our Biblical ancestors. In pre-exilic Israel, scribes were useful folk who could be hired by the day and paid piece work wages. Not everyone needed to master that skill any more than everyone needed to be a smith or a potter. Many were learned but not literate. Literacy was not essential to the creative process. People composed in their minds, spoke their compositions, and the audience soaked up and in effect memcrized what they heard. Developed as a tool of administration, literacy was not as yet universally acknowledged as essential to civilization and private advancement.

Literacy has proven to be a boon to civilization, but civilization did not have to await literacy any more than the development of Biblical religious thought had to await the publication of the Sefer Torah. Few periods in Israel's history were as productive as the seven centuries between Moses and Jeremiah. This was the time when the idea of monotheism surfaced, was refined and purified, when the wise and sensitive in Israel began to recognize God as not only powerful but dependable, not only as Creator but as Redeemer, not only as Lawgiver but as trusted Judge. This was the period in which Israel's prophets defined righteousness as a covenant-faithful way of life and developed a definition of religious obligation which went far beyond conventional ideas about placating the gods through sacrifices and shrine attendance. Poets composed in their minds moving hymns which expressed their needs and faith. A Promised Land was settled and the concept of stewardship was developed as Israel's teachers warned the community that peace and prosperity depended not on power or might but on their careful management of their patrimony and their willingness to obey God's Instructions. Wisdom balanced these doctrines with a down-to-earth prudential morality and a tendency to reflect seriously on the brevity of human life and the uncertainties which accompany every life.

Religious development did not have to wait for the publication of a scripture. Tradition preceded scripture. People thought and spoke. Some began to write down what they heard, but no one, as yet, was aware that some day a selection of those writings would be part of a published anthology which millions would call scripture and declare to be inspired and sacred.

Extremely well written

NOTES

pp. 68 67
 (68) Note 1 - Ong, Walter J.; Orality and Literacy, p. 99

(78) 77
 Note 2 - ~~CHILDS, 1911, 187-9, 1912, 108, 110~~
 PRITCHARD, J. B. Ancient Near Eastern Texts. Princeton, P.U. Press, 1950. pp. 432-4

(80) 79
 Note 3 - A certain Seraiah is described as a senior official who had charge of David's palace buildings and grounds as well as responsibility for the court's provisioning and possibly, also, for diplomatic correspondence. Some scribes were merely clerks; others became administrators.

(81) 80
 Note 4 - RICHARDSON, E.C. BIBLICAL LIBRARIES. PRINCETON, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
 1914, pp. 22, 128

(84) 83
 Note 5 - The problems of deciphering a manuscript were of such a magnitude that despite the reverent attention of generations of editors and, in recent years of experts in linguistics and lexicography, many textual questions involving the Biblical text remain unsolved. As an example: to this day we are not sure whether an ancient legend about the prophet Elijah indicates that he was fed by ravens or by wandering Arabs while hiding from the king's wrath. The problem is that the consonants in question allow either reading.

(87) 84
 Note 6 - The stories which report the finding of the scroll of torot during Josiah's refurbishment of the Temple suggest that the senior priest, Hilkiah, had to ask a royal scribe, Shaphan, to read him the contents (2 Kings 22:8 ff. 2 ~~Ch~~ 34:15).

Chr.
 in the book of Proverbs to some of the Egyptian sayings known as The Teachings of Amen-em-hep (c. 19th cent. B.C.E.).

(90) p. 89
 Note 7 - One other reference connects writing with Jeremiah's career. In the narrative sections which were added to the scroll considerably after the prophet's active career there is a report that shortly after the defeat of 597 B.C.E. Jeremiah wrote a letter to those who had been taken to Babylon as captives, urging them to settle in. If such a letter was actually sent, it is likely that Jeremiah dictated it to a professional scribe; that was his way. (Jer. 36) (91)

(92) p. 91
 Note 8 - A remarkably similar situation exists in the Biblical literature where several different lists of the twelve tribes which presumably comprised the Israelite Confederation are presented; each is obviously the grouping as it was known at a particular moment in the community's history. An oral culture can forget or change details as long as the general theme, in this case, the existence of a twelve-tribe confederation, is maintained.

Goody, J., ed. Literacy in Traditional Societies, Cambridge U. Press, 1968, p. 33 cf also Lord A.B., The Singer of Tales, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature, #24, 1960. Comparing a series of recitations by a Yugoslav Bard and finding that no two presentations were absolutely identical, Lord concluded that the singer adjusted his material to the reactions of the audience, the feel of the meeting, and his own feelings and that he was unaware of having made any change.

(96) p. 95
 Note 9 - A classic example of such borrowings is the close paraphrase in the book of Proverbs to some thirty Egyptian sayings known as The Teachings of Amen-em-ope (c. 11th cent. B.C.E.).

(99) p.98 Note 10 - The existence of a tiny space between the two plaques through which a string could be threaded makes the identification of these plaques as amulets fairly certain and the use of a precious metal, silver, and of God's most powerful Name, the Tetragrammaton, makes it clear that this plaque was highly valued as a protective device or charm.

(100) p.97 Note 11 - Fishbane, Michael, Biblical Interpretations in Ancient Israel, Cirendon Press, 1905, pp 332.

(102) p.101 Note 12 - Ong, Op. cit., p.140

(106) p.105 Note 13 - The signal importance of Sinai is shown by the proliferation of versions which have gone into the received presentation. A single chapter in Exodus (24) tells us that Moses went up in the mountain alone (v. 2), that Moses was accompanied by his brother, Aaron, and Aaron's two eldest sons and seventy elders (v.1), and that Joshua accompanied Moses on the climb (v. 13). In one version God, Himself, inscribes the stone tablets; in another this task is left to Moses, and so on. All versions emphasize the importance and accuracy of these instructions. They are God's own, stated exactly as God had intended.

(117) p.114 Note 14 - At this late date it seems hardly necessary to make the argument that one cannot assume the existence of the received Torah at the time this sentence became part of the tradition. Deuteronomy's history is a long and complicated one and any reference to this 'teaching' cannot refer to the entire scroll but only to certain specific torot.