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Chapter 3

There are few inevitabilities in a people's life and for Israel the emergence of a scripture was certainly not one. Neither Solomon nor Jeremiah looked to a sacred book as an ultimate source of authority. Neither the shrine priests of the early years nor the priest-theocrats after the return from exile sponsored convocations of scholars and scribes and charged them to assemble an authorized text. No one ever said 'Israel needs a scripture.' There is no evidence of a predetermined plan to create a scripture or even a standard text. The biblical age was not a time when a written text proved your point.

Though, as we have seen, the centuries after Moses saw a steady increase in the use of recordkeeping and of interest in literature, Israel's culture remained predominantly oral. So did the surrounding cultures of West Asia. The concept of a scripture, a holy book(s), treasured because it contained God's teachings, was unknown before the 4th century B.C.E. None of the religions of the area read from a holy book during public shrine ceremonies. The Prophet Zoroaster, roughly Jeremiah's contemporary (late 7th-6th centuries B.C.E.), spoke his messages and they were passed on by word of mouth for generations before being recorded. Many cultures possessed tablets or scrolls of venerated myths--Gilgamesh, the Vedas, the Avesta and sacred hymns--but none were treated as sacred objects. The concept of a book declared to be wholly inspired, whose every line, every word, was revealed, had not as yet dawned in anyone's mind.

The emergence of a scripture took place slowly and by stages over the course of nearly a thousand years. During the first part of this period, the seven centuries from Moses to Jeremiah, Israel's society was still largely agricultural and culturally homogeneous. Literacy was a special accomplishment. Authority resided in oral traditions which established custom and stability. Such written records as there were were useful but not of primary evidentiary value. The seminal ideas of Judaism before the Exile were composed in people's minds and passed on from mind to mind--through recitations and storytelling--rather than from mind to writing to reader.

It was only during the Babylonian Exile (6th century B.C.E.) that the books we know as the Pentateuch, the Prophets, and the Histories began to take shape. During the pre-exilic period bits and pieces of the traditions had gradually merged into a more coherent presentation as there developed a growing recognition of the value of written records, but none was completed before the fifth century B.C.E.

External pressures had a great deal to do with the process. Under continuing attack by neighbors, the separate tribes slowly transformed themselves into a confederation and then into a nation. In one of their periodic attacks on the west, the Assyrians in 722 B.C.E. effectively eliminated Israel's Northern tribes. Somewhat over a century later Babylonian armies captured Jerusalem (597-6 B.C.E.) and destroyed The Temple (586 B.C.E.) and exiled

the Judean elite of the South. Their fate was different from that of the Israelites one hundred and fifty years before. Removed from their homes, their Temple in ruins, lacking the usual props of faith and community, these exiles began to set out the national traditions in written form. They wrote to organize and preserve Israel's memory. Priest-scribes busied themselves during the exile preserving and arranging the old traditions. Some scribes drew together the nation's history. Some set down beloved hymns. Others compiled well-known maxims into wisdom tracts. Of the many reasons for the spurt of recordkeeping, none reveal a conscious plan to provide Israel with a scripture.

Hundreds of studies have attempted to describe how one or another of the volumes which emerged as scripture achieved its final form. The truth is that we really know precious little about that process other than that it was long and complicated. Many traditions circulated. Some remained oral. During the exile some appeared in both written and oral form. Sometimes a storyteller added new material he believed made his story more understandable or an ending his audiences found more satisfactory than the original one. Various traditions were amalgamated into a single telling. There was continuity and there was change, but the individual Judean was not aware that change was taking place. He lived within a coherent tradition. The past was the present. He did not feel the force of the slow change which beset his way.

The development of the texts of the Sefer Torah and the Prophets and the subsequent evolution of those texts into scripture was a long and labyrinthine process which we can confidently affirm but not fully describe. In some cases, oral tradition preceded the text by many centuries; in others it was only a matter of hours or days when, in a single day, Baruch wrote out Jeremiah's prophecies at the prophet's dictation. Sometimes the layers are visible and apparent, but often we cannot tell with precision when and why one particular tradition came to be set down or how several distinct versions of the same episode were blended into a single account. The various lists of torot in the Pentateuch are clearly of independent origin. Deuteronomy presents a different version of the Moses years than does Exodus-Numbers. Repetitions and inconsistencies are many, and that variety complicated the editorial process which sought to relocate and root all torot in the covenant experience at Sinai. Even in the final text, the received text, the torot are not ascribed to Moses; some are ascribed to Aaron.

In the oral tradition a variety of narratives about individual patriarchs indicated that each had received from God knowledge of a series of torot. Stray fragments of this tradition appear as late as the Hellenistic period in Jubilees' accounts of the lives of the patriarchs and of Moses' early life, stories that

are not a part of the received text. Early translations such as the Greek Septuagint include material which is not in the received text. Later rabbinic writings often cite ancient quotations which vary from those which became biblical, i.e., "official."

At no time during the Biblical period did the books we think of as Biblical monopolize the field. Narrative traditions not included in the Sefer Torah continued to be accepted by one group or another and to find their way into manuscript. Torot other than those now included in Biblical lists circulated. Other scrolls of trusted materials were prepared. A catalog of the Library of Qumran makes it clear that any number of works circulated including many that did not make it into scripture and yet seem to have been valued as sacred. The story, not included in the received text, that Terah, Abraham's father, made idols in Ur which the young Abraham tested and found impotent, and so broke into pieces, was as well known in Israel as any incident recorded in Genesis and was surely considered part of the "official" tradition.

Although written materials circulated, we cannot really speak of any single text being fully shaped much before the fifth century B.C.E. Even when the five scrolls of Moses and many of the Prophet books emerge as recognizable entities at about that time, they were not closed texts which could not be tampered with and they were not immediately enshrined. No special veneration was shown any scroll. That would come later. Centuries would pass before

the community's attitude toward these books changed from respect to reverence and from reverence to acceptance of them as a statement of God's will, powerful both as language and as source of redemptive truth.

During the exile, and at least the first half of the post-exilic period, the Biblical books were not considered Bible. William Hallo and others have provided useful descriptions of the more or less parallel development of written collections of revered myths and sagas among Israel's neighbors in West Asia. Producing a written composition of any length was a process that took generations, largely carried out by successions of individual scribes working in schools associated with the Palace or Royal shrine. This editorial work seems to have been more a matter of individual interest than a planned agenda sponsored by the authorities. The growing importance of records and written literature, together with the burgeoning literary interests of the scribes, encouraged scribes to set down the community's traditions and draw them into extended presentations. Since this work was not officially sponsored, there was no body or council interested in declaring one or another formulation as definitive, and it was not unusual for several versions of a text to circulate.

Scrolls emerged but played no role in shrine or royal ceremony. They were used primarily in schools where masters assigned them to students to copy and memorize. They were also useful to refresh

the memory of storytellers and rhapsodists. Scrolls were to be found in shrine archives, which were repositories of all manner of rolls, as well as in private hands. Clay tablets could not be bound together and papyrus and parchment scrolls consisted of individual sheets which, even if sewn together, often became frayed and separated. As a practical matter, therefore, lists were prepared of the opening words of successive tablets or sheets so a reader could know how to keep in order lengthy writings which covered a number of separate tablets or skins.

The final table of contents of the Tanakh, the twenty-two books which constitute the Hebrew Scriptures, was not fully determined until the second or third century C.E., but there is general agreement that portions of the Tanakh, the Sefer Torah -- the so-called Five Books of Moses, for Jews the Scripture -- and the Prophets, were accepted as authoritative before the fourth century B.C.E. This editorial achievement is generally associated with the work of the Judean priest-scribe Ezra and his immediate predecessors and successors.

Priests dominated Judean life during the exilic and post-exilic period and were largely responsible for the governance of Jerusalem when it was resettled. One theory holds that the priests prepared the five scrolls from oral traditions and available documents to provide Jerusalem with a constitutional document which clearly stated God's will when it once again became a city governed by a Judean elite. Ezra and his colleagues believed that obedience to such a document alone could guarantee God's generous protection.

Post-exilic leaders accepted the teachings of pre-exilic prophets like Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, who had driven home the lesson that the national fate depended on the people's loyalty to the covenant. They looked on the exile as deserved punishment. God had now forgiven the people, but to be secure the nation had to be pure before God, obedient. To be obedient, the nation had to know what was required and to do it. A proper and complete knowledge of God's will was a matter of crucial national concern. Since many divergent practices claimed to be authentic, Ezra and the priests took as their first task to make clear to the community which specific torot must be obeyed.

Torah began to be used in both a singular and collective sense, a law and the law, a special instruction and the body of sacred rules which God required the community to accept and abide. Torah came to be a general term which defined teachings accepted as part of the community's sacred traditions. Several of the lists of instruction which later would be patched into the received text were introduced with the phrase, 'Zot Torat "this is (God's) instruction concerning. . ." Torah designated not only the rules accepted as divine instructions but venerable sagas about the founding fathers, explanations of creation, reports about the Exodus, Sinai, the Wilderness Trek, the Conquest, and much else. Torah was not limited to material which ultimately found its way into the Biblical text. Torah designated any and all material the community held sacred. No one knew at the time

there would be a Sefer Torah.

In the early stages of their history the Israelites had lived within the envelope of an all-embracing tribal culture and felt little need for a written teaching to define what was expected of them. They knew what their way required, that their way was right and, if followed, pleasing to God. As they settled down, life became more complex. The tribes began to live cheek by jowl with those of other cultures. They began to recognize the need for a more specifically defined tradition. Which of various formulations of the rules of Sabbath, for instance, or the laws of property damage was Torah? Which formulation was truly God's will?

In these years of exile and return, as in earlier times, chance played its part in determining which traditions would become scripture and which would not. Earlier, it had been decided according to which tribe or group came to dominate a particular tribal assembly or which family of priests controlled the activities of a shrine. The various covenant-enabling ceremonies which are described -- Sinai, Schechem, Gilgal -- had played or were held to have played pivotal roles as occasions when confederations of tribes met and accepted a single set of obligations. Now, during the exile, the traditions binding on the priest-scribes prevailed because their caste had gained political ascendancy. The priest-scribes were heirs of certain traditions which they began to write down as sanctified. They included many matters held in common with the whole community and others which represented their own priestly traditions. Torah became the term which defined

the emerging consensus and continues to serve that purpose to our day.

To the storytellers and scribes of ancient Israel it must have seemed only natural to gather and present the sagas in historical sequence. This could not, of course, be done with the lists of torot. But, as we have seen, all the torot came to be associated with a single moment in history. This had not always been the case. Some laws refracted the conventional legal norms of West Asia, many of which were much older than Sinai. It is also likely that lists of instructions had been associated with various early historical figures or had been the cherished possessions of one shrine or another.

The term, Sefer Torah, a scroll of Instructions accepted as sacred and binding, appears only in the late layers of the Biblical text. We find it used in the reconstruction of the discovery in The Temple of a book of the law in King Josiah's day (ca. 621 B.C.E.); for the first time, more than six centuries after Moses, a written scroll of sacred traditions is described as playing a role in Israel's history. Sefer Torah appears again in the description of certain events of the fifth century B.C.E. when the chief Priest-scribe, Ezra, is said to have brought from Persia a roll, probably a parchment roll, and to have read from it to the Jerusalem community a list of torot which the community accepted as obligatory.

Some scholars describe Ezra's scroll as an almost final version of the Five Books of Moses, but there is no evidence to substantiate that claim. The text speaks only of a single scroll. What we know

of 5th century B.C.E. scribal practices suggests that another half millennium would pass before the Five Books were inscribed on a single roll. A number of scholars claim that Ezra's scroll contained the text of a single book, probably Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is the natural choice since it clearly stands apart from the other scrolls of the Sefer Torah in style and presentation. We will discuss this at length somewhat later in this chapter. Here we note only that as late as mid-fifth century B.C.E., the Sefer Torah as we know it not yet exist.

Much of the scripture's authority and functional value derives from the certainty that these words are 'the words.' God's words must not be trifled with. The text is fixed. "You shall not add nor subtract from it" (Deut. 4:2). Yet, in the centuries before Ezra and for some time there after, scribes routinely added or eliminated materials, juxtaposed separate lists of torot, and blended details from various versions into a single narrative. Since humans prefer order to chaos, this process of building up, once begun, proceeded slowly but inexorably. Over time, it was more or less inevitable that a consensus tradition would emerge, fueled by a growing sense of being a single people.

Yet, upon close examination, the received text seems more like a haphazard collection than a carefully edited text. In fact, it was in some measure simply a selection from the traditions which various scribes, for one reason or another, saw reason to set down. The Torah is not a systematic law code nor an inclusive chronicle but an anthology of myth, saga, and law which grew

out of various texts deemed venerable or inspired, whose merit was that they stood for the entire range of Israel's ancient and sacred traditions.

Much of the tradition was not set down. One could not expect that this ocean of traditions, as broad as the community's life, could be captured in a single volume or in even in several. Many laws and narratives were treasured by the community. If a saga was not set down or a law was not listed, this did not mean that it was not accepted as Torah, God's word. There seemed to have been no urgency to get it all down in one place or to limit authority to a single form. Chance, too, seems to have played a role in deciding which texts were set down. Variety does not seem to have bothered anyone.

But the important fact is that these scrolls were never intended to be exhaustive or complete. Inscribed texts were parts of much larger codes. The received text, for example, prohibits work on the Sabbath but does not define work. May someone travel on the Sabbath? Take care of livestock? Light a fire? Obviously, there were answers to such questions. There had to be. The community lived and such living questions had to have answers.

Some have argued that the practice of reading portions from the Sefer Torah during public worship, Keriat-ha-Torah, began during this time. This is highly doubtful. If books were read at meeting times, and some may have been, it was a purely local custom. There is no specific evidence from the Persian period (550-330 B.C.E.) of

a conscious effort to equip Israel with a scripture, or even of any apparent desire to do so. There was not as yet an accepted version of any one book nor an accepted list of trusted books. Various scrolls were copied. Some would make the Bible's table of contents, others would not, and all seem to have been treated with the same relative degree of care. It is also doubtful that the widely separated communities--in the East, in Egypt, and in Judea--possessed similar sets of Torah scrolls. Jerusalem, from the first return of some exiles in 520 B.C.E. to Ezra's arrival several generations later, seems not to have possessed a Torah scroll.

The records from the Persian period are few. Israel's priest-historians were not interested in recording a domestic history of the exiled community nor were they, really, interested in Jerusalem and Judea except to detail the story of the resettlement and the successful efforts of Ezra and Nehemiah to reestablish the authority of the priest classes over the altar and the capital.

There seems to have been a class called Soferim, literally scribes, who were Ezra's disciples and political heirs, but we know little about their activities. There is in the records no actual mention of scribes or editors working on a Torah document. Obviously, little is known about the actual process of the selection and editing of text. We are not even sure after written records of the oral tradition began to appear, how selections were made, and how and when oral and written traditions were brought together.

The Torah emerged in a world we can no longer fully illuminate. Judea was for more than 200 years a dependency of the Persian Empire and for almost the entire period Jerusalem was governed by a priestly elite. Yet, no prophet or priest set out to provide Israel with a scripture. Nor does the editing of the Torah seem to have been carried out to fulfill a direct royal command. The Torah simply grew. Popular interest and perceived need were the primary catalysts.

The process of compiling and editing was never centrally organized or coordinated. No one set out to examine all circulating traditions and texts and select those which met some predetermined standard of merit or authenticity. Scribes took what they found and added what they knew or what interested them. Naturally, traditions known and approved by the religious leadership, primarily other priests, had preference in the selection process. Researchers have found interpolations in various texts, designed to give added prominence to the priests. Rules governing the cult and the shrine occupy an incredibly large tole in the lists of Torot: but the result of these priestly efforts should not be seen simply as a triumph of a group of crafty and self-serving priests. These men did not invent. Tradition for them, as for the whole community, was a reflection of an ancient sacred body of obligations. Priest-scribes did much of the scribal work simply because they had the necessary skills and opportunity and interest.

They based their claim to authority on the God-appointed dynastic mission to serve at His altar. God had chosen Moses.

God had ordered Moses to appoint Aaron, his brother, as High Priest. The priests were Aaron's descendants. When Korah challenged Moses' right to the priesthood, God intervened to lay low the rebels. It was important to the priests that the sacred rules which governed their services at the altar be set down in a way that made it clear that their claims to authority went back to and derived from the original revelation. They worked zealously to this end.

The editorial work did not follow a master plan. Scribes with an archival bent compiled all the records they could locate or whatever ancient traditions they knew. Some presented the tradition as a storyteller would, with an eye to audience reaction. Some explained names or places. Some traditions were not recorded and disappeared from the text. One scribe may have tried his hand at turning several versions of a well-known episode into a single presentation, and another may have sewn together parchment sheets which contained quite disparate materials. Material was conflated, inflated, found, lost, kept for no apparent reason. None of the scribes busy recording the tradition felt that they had been set a divine task of peparing a scripture. They were simply memorizing, reciting, recording, and updating Israel's cherished traditions.

The scribes were not interested in being creative. They were presenting venerable traditions, not inventing stories or laws. They retained familiar story lines and much of the original language. Their work seems curiously unsystematic, part way

between a faithful submission to the authority of fixed recitation and a comprehensive editing which, by eliminating inconsistencies, stamped the material with a consistent point of view. The analogy is of wash hanging on a line. The scribes hung out the line and pinned on it unrelated blocs of long-familiar narrative and law. The image has a certain appropriateness, but does not do these men full justice. They did more than wash old clothes and hang them out to dry. They patched up some of the clothes with cloth taken from other garments or brightened them with ornamentation. They gave many of the garments style that they had not had before.

There is no indication that these men worked with any sense of urgency, or felt awed or restricted by any presentiment that they were dealing with materials which a later age would consider inviolate. There is no suggestion in the surviving texts that scribed working with the sacred traditions must be in a special state of ritual purity or must use specially prepared or blessed writing implements or surfaces, or must copy the material without change. Most trusted traditions commanded respect and even reverence, but were not yet known as words which it would be fatal to tamper with. It is unlikely that they approached the work of transcription with any fear that if they tampered with God's words they might suffer the fate of Nadab and Abihu, those two priests who were incinerated by divine fire for having brought a strange light to God's altar. The material was by and large faithfully copied because that was how scribes operated in

a traditional society. Traditions were marked 'Handle with Care' but not 'Danger, Explosive.' Changes could be and were made.

Preservation was always of primary interest. To that end, several inconsistent versions of the same episode were sometimes set down side by side or interleafed. In Chapter 24 of Exodus, we are told in successive paragraphs that Abraham, Nadab, and Abihu and seventy elders are to ascend the mountain, but only Moses is to come near God (v. 1); that Moses alone is to ascend the mountain (vv. 2, 12); that God gave Moses tablets which He, Himself, had written (v. 12). One senses that various editors simply piled up well-attested traditions about this crucial event because such traditions existed and no one knew how to choose between them. Nor was it important that a choice be made. Scribes who could not choose between one stream of tradition and another solved the dilemma by blending them together. The Garden of Eden story, as we have it, weaves together at least two originally separate traditions, one which focused on the Tree of Life, the other on the Tree of Knowledge. The animals entered Noah's Ark two by two and seven by seven.

Just as no attempt was made to produce a consistent and tightly edited narrative, no attempt was made to eliminate inconsistencies in the wording. Even the foremost of all Biblical passages, the Ten Commandments, is not presented in exactly the same language in Exodus and Deuteronomy. No scribe seems to have imagined that he was preparing a constitutional document or an all-inclusive

and systematic law code. When a rule is presented in several places, there are almost always subtle but important differences in language and context. The instructions, as set out, are anything but clear. One stipulation, for instance, requires that a husband who wishes to divorce his wife must give her a document, a get, "A Bill of Divorcement." There is no indication what specific matters that paper should address, how division of property issues is to be arranged, or how the get is to be drawn up and enforced. Though we are not told how or if a woman may initiate a divorce, women had some say in such a procedure, or so many rabbinic interpreters of this text assure us; but the text does not specifically mention this fact. As the interpretation assumes, we acknowledge the existence of a mere inclusive set of rules and regulations. Had the Judean scribes heard the later rabbis speak of the Sefer Torah as an all-encompassing revelation--"everything is in it"--they would have been more than a bit bemused. The idea of the Torah as an all-sufficient code text developed centuries later.

Nor is there any apparent effort to ennoble the text's central figures. The incident in which Moses forgets to circumcise his son and is attacked by some malign spirit for that failure is certainly not ennobling. As a vignette of the great prophet, it was simply recorded. At the time, no one proposed to avoid mention of questionable actions by the great.

The process of amalgamation and editing proceeded slowly. Traditions were slightly reshaped by each retelling. A word or

phrase might be added, an incident dropped or relocated. Working with venerable traditions which they completely believed, the scribes had no need to say 'this sounds better' or 'this is what we meant,' still they consciously filtered traditions through their minds and presented them in ways which sounded right to them. Probably they could not have explained their standards had they ever felt compelled to do so--though clearly they respected the needs, interests, and beliefs of their audience. Just over a century ago conservatives, men like Zachariah Frankel, seeking a way to establish the structure of religious practice for a generation which no longer accepted on faith the right of the rabbis to set standards for the community, argued that community consensus and practice rather than the opinions and authority of individual scholars should define God's intentions. Frankel's argument was in many ways an update of an approach which had worked well for Israel in Biblical times when accepted traditions emerged naturally from community consensus. The scribes recorded some of that tradition, not the whole of it. These written texts were not seen and would not for centuries be seen as the sole source and substance of the community's sacred traditions--Torah.

As we have seen, it was in the East during the Babylonian Exile (6th Cent. B.C.E.) that the first serious editorial efforts seem to have been made, to draw together existing documents, record oral traditions, and organize them into a chronological presentation--Creation, The Flood, The Ancestors, The Exodus, The Covenant--in which the various lists of Torot were ascribed to Moses' prophetic ministry.

Those who were marched off into exile by the Babylonians in 587-586 B.C.E. were not a representative cross-section of the population pre-exilic Judah. Except for a sizeable draft of artisans taken because they would be useful on various imperial building projects, the exiles came mostly from the upper and urban classes, "The Notables of the Land," those who customarily employed scribes or were themselve scribe-administrators (II Kings 24:15~~7~~.16) Among them were certainly scribes and administrators whose work before the defeat had included preparing the Royal Chronicles and the lists of Temple deposits and records. Now, in exile, to work on these records would have seemed not only a natural concern, but also a matter of some urgency. The Princes and Priests needed copies of their genealogies and privileges which entitled them to tithes and other benefits. Cut off by defeat and exile from their estates and privileges, the leadership was almost certainly challenged by those who blamed them for the disaster. The elite in turn must have felt it imperative to record and secure their pedigrees, which backed their claim to tribal leadership. Since they no longer held the power of effective office, they would have to prove their claim to authority if they or their sons were ever to reclaim their family's privileges. As a reminder of their past glories and future hopes, the royal family encouraged histories of their dynasty's founder, David, and his heirs. But self-interest was not their only or overriding concern. The community had suffered a catastrophic defeat. The capital and national shrine were in

ruins. The altar had been pulled down and closed. Many of the priests and storytellers who knew the sacred lore lay in premature graves. Few remained who knew the traditions and there was danger these might be lost or become confused. The Temple archives, such as they were, apparently were destroyed along with The Temple, although some may have carried a tablet or two in their baggage into exile. It was in the exile that the effort to draw together and write down traditions began to take on significance. The exiles were a decimated community who could no longer be confident that there would always be a Jewish presence. They and their community needed reassurance that their traditions, and most particularly the prophecies of hope, would not be forgotten. In troubled times people do what they can to protect their most valued possessions. Treasured heirlooms may be hidden. Sacred tradition must be protected. This could be done, and it was done by turning memory into manuscript.

There was equal need to preserve and to reassure. The Temple lay in ruins. The princes of David's dynasty were prisoners. People were reminded that various prophets had predicted the defeat and had declared that defeat and exile were a deserved punishment. Because of His special relationship with Israel, God had brought disaster because despite repeated warning, the community had been faithless to the Covenant.

The prophets had brought words of judgment and also, fortunately, words of comfort and encouragement. God had not completely abandoned His people. "Behold, the days come, said the Lord, when I will

raise unto David a righteous shoot and he shall reign as King and prosper and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his day, Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell in safety" (Jer. 23:5-6).

During the exile such prophecies assumed new importance because they held out hope to the defeated and exiled nation. Scribes recorded the words brought by trusted prophets counselling repentance and promising forgiveness, so that the community would not lose the hearing of them, particularly the certainty of God's promise that a repentant and righteous people would be redeemed. God's judgments were fair and, consequently, a loyal and repentant community could expect better times. God rules the world in justice and in His justice and mercy lay the nation's hope. Their hope lay in understanding the reasons for their defeat and correcting them. There is nothing like a disaster to rekindle the sense of urgency: a way, a teaching, must be found which will lift the spirit and give hope, for without hope what may be only a temporary defeat becomes an unredeemable disaster.

God had not abandoned them. Those who drew together the early sagas and the law provided a reminder of the people's origins, their covenanted ties with God, and the terms of obedience. Those who wrote down the prophecies helped to explain what had happened and held out the promise of a better day. The scribes who began to edit the Biblical chronicles were showing how God's providence would work out in actuality. They did not see themselves as

writing what theologians today call divine history. Believing God controlled the destiny of men and nations, they and their histories explained events providentially. The nation would be/had been punished by God when it deserved to be and had prospered, would prosper, when the leaders were loyal to the Covenant. A nation loyal to God's instructions could expect to live securely. A faithful community of exiles could expect to be restored and favored. Israel's history offered clear proof of God's providential and just care of His people, tangible evidence of the operation of the Covenant. God is dependable. An obedient nation can expect to be restored to its land. This was history written to encourage hope.

Among the records of prophecies, those that preoccupied the exiles and consequently were recorded by their scribes promised restoration and made known the terms of Israel's obligations to God and the rewards of faithfulness. "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat of the good of the land; but if you resist and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword..." (Is. 1:19-20). The contemporary prophecies which commanded lasting attention were like those of Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah which spoke of a time when "Aliens shall rebuild your walls, their Kings shall wait upon you, for in anger I struck you down, but in favor I take you back" (Is. 60:10) and taught that the original redemption, the Exodus, was not simply an event of the past but a portent and promise of the second redemption that would soon be.

Much that became scriptural achieved that status because it offered the community guidance and hope. The land assumed new importance; it was the goal, the exiled people's dream. History filled it with a gracious past and memory lent enchantment to it--a land flowing with milk and honey. Later Jewish piety would also associate the dissemination of Torah with the Promised Land. The prophets insisted: "For out of Zion shall go forth Torah (The Law) and the word of God from Jerusalem" (Ps. 69:38). The rabbis would associate the Promised Land with religious inspiration. "The climate of the land of Israel makes one wise" (b. San. 158b). The medieval poet-philosopher Judah Ha-Levi argued that a prophet needed to be present in the land in order to hear God, even though scriptural history suggests otherwise. Moses received the original law in the Sinai wilderness. Ezra brought his scroll from Babylon. The process of collecting, inscribing, and editing the traditions and documents which ultimately became the Sefer Torah proceeded apace not in Canaan, but in what is today Iraq, where the exiles were quartered. No matter. In Jewish thought, the primary identification of the land of Israel and Torah was never seriously challenged.

The exiles were first settled in a number of villages in Central Iraq in the general area of modern Baghdad, but many of the wealthy and well-born managed rather quickly to move themselves into nearby commercial centers. Some members of the Royal Family, including apparently King Jehoiachim, became courtiers at the

Imperial center where they were thrust into a far more sophisticated and cosmopolitan world than any they had known before (II Kings 25:27ff). Commerce there was international. The capital teemed with scribes. The Babylonian Emperors necessarily had organized an elaborate imperial administration to manage their interest, and the Persians, who would soon take over the empire (circa 550 B.C.E.), followed suit.

The Palace supported schools where the needed cadres of officials and clerks were trained. The court patronized rhapsodists, poets, astronomers, mathematicians, and philosophers. It was a liberal, urban, and urbane society. Babylon was the capital of a sophisticated and cosmopolitan world. Jerusalem had been the capital of a small provincial country.

The exiled Judeans found themselves in a world where palace and temple contained extensive archives which included, besides the inevitable administrative records, tablets and rolls on which were incised well-known myths, hymns, royal annals, wisdom, legal texts, rituals and incantation lists, eulogies, even works of magic and medicine.

Literature was cultivated for pleasure as well as practical benefit. The Judeans quickly learned that writing played a far more important role in the East than it had back home and Judean scribes quickly discovered that their new professional colleagues had developed far more advanced techniques than any to which they had been accustomed. These accomplishments appealed to the exiles,

and Judean scribes adopted the script and many of the procedures of the imperial Bureaus.

The upper classes, particularly the priests whose lot seems to have improved rather quickly and significantly, showed a new interest in literature. It was during the exile that, for the first time, we come across literary images drawn from that Imperial world. The image of Moses in the later section of Deuteronomy as not simply the prophet who speaks God's will but as the scribe who sets it all down in a book, may have first appeared at this time. Ezekiel sees "A hand stretched out to me, holding a scroll, and ... it was inscribed on both the front and the back; in it were written lamentations, dirges and woes" (2:9-10). Ezekiel is not to read a scroll but to eat it, "Feed your stomach and fill your belly with this scroll and then go and repeat my very words to them" (3:3-4) ~~(2:8-3:4)~~. The scroll, incidentally, "Tasted as sweet as honey." (3:3)

Why eat a scroll? When we digest what we eat, it becomes part of us. Presumably, the image of eating a scroll was a way to indicate that its contents have been fully digested and absorbed. What is to us a surprising and somewhat awkward image indicated to the prophet's audience that he had fully understood and accurately reported God's message. Apparently, it was not yet self-evident that the normal thing to do with a sacred scroll was to study it carefully or read it aloud.

During the early years of the Exile (6th Cent. B.C.E.) the captives began to meet in assemblies (Kinishtu), from which came

the later Hebrew Kenesset, today used for both synagogue, Beit Ha-Kenesset, and for Israel's parliament. We know little about these meetings save that they were held, though many later commentators confidently describe Sabbath and festival meetings when psalms were sung and portions of a Torah scroll or a scroll of prophecies were read out or chanted. The Temple was in ruins. The priests could no longer officiate at the altar. So it is assumed that as a surrogate rite they chanted the hymns which had been used in The Temple during Sabbath and Holy Day sacrifices and recited the instructions, Torot, pertinent to that day's Temple ceremony, in this way substituting intention for the act. It is not unknown for a people who can no longer openly perform their sacred rites to create a substitute regimen in which the name, time, and certain spoken formulas are retrieved. It was the worshiper's intention that counted.

A community's religious life requires both shape and structure. One can argue with some logic that religious life requires a calendar, a visible public presence, and customary forms, and that the only way the exiles could have provided such essentials for themselves would have been to hold meetings on some kind of regular schedule, preferably one based on traditional sacred times, but to go farther and say that the exiles' religious life formed itself around meetings at which traditional narratives and respected prophecies were recited and/or read is to move into the realm of speculation. Moreover, though we know a good bit about the

sacrificial cult in pre-exilic times, we know little, if anything, about the role in it, if any, of recitation and prayer. We do know that nowhere in West Asia was there yet any formal tradition of reading from sacred books.

It may have been so. If it were so, it would help us understand one of the critical steps in the process which turned simple records of tradition into a sacred scripture. The fact that these records were, from their first appearance, associated with a public ceremonial moment, could have guaranteed their sacredness.

One could argue with equal logic that shrines, not unlike the Jerusalem Temple, were set up in the Exile and sacrifices offered there. The absence of any specific mention of such shrines in the Biblical materials can be explained by the argument that after the Exile, the theocrats who gained control of religious life and of the Second Temple--who were determined, as we know they were, to protect their interests in The Temple's uniqueness and centrality--gathered together and emphasized the Torot which stipulated that Jewish life was to be focused on a single and unique sanctuary, and controlled by its priests. Shiloh, Dan, Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpeh, Hebron, Bethlehem. . .had been for Israel during the pre-exilic period centers of pilgrimage, sacrifice, and worship. Each shrine had its own practices and probably worship, and probably its own list of Torot. A prophet such as Amos who was sent to preach at Bethel (8th Cent. B.C.E.) would have been surprised to be told

that there was a divine instruction that worship was to be carried out only at a single central sanctuary. Israel's trangression at the Shrine of Bethel was not in offering sacrifices there but in coming to the shrine there as a disobedient, violent and corrupt people.

The centralization of worship had developed gradually during the pre-exilic period, largely as a consequence of political circumstance, the most important being Assyria's defeat of the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C.E.; but, while the community had accepted worship at the Royal Shrine in Jerusalem as appropriate, it had not taken readily to the idea that a single central sanctuary was a required act of obedience to God. Most local shrines were not shut down until perhaps a generation before the Babylonian defeat, if then; and Mizpeh retained sufficient sanctity to become the cult center of an active religious life for those Judeans who eluded being taken as captives into exile in 586 B.C.E. (~~1 Kings 23:23-26~~, II Kings 25:23-26 Jer. 40:6-NA).12

During an Exile which they confidently believed would be only temporary, the former priests of Jerusalem preserved the traditions which had been cherished at the Royal Shrine with special emphasis on the role of the shrine priests. As priests, they operated within an institutional context that spawned records prescribing forms and precedents. It seems likely that during the Exile, priest-scribes began to assemble a special scroll of Torot, a list of

rules dealing primarily, but not exclusively, with cult regulations. A late section of Deuteronomy, probably prepared by them at this time, has Moses endow Levi with a mandate to "Teach Jacob Thy ordinance and Israel Thy Law," (33:10) with the clear import that the laws are to be promulgated on the basis of oracles specifically revealed to priests ("Let your thummim and urim be with your faithful one" (Deut 33:8). In the post-exilic period the only new history of interest to those who determined the contents of the Biblical records concentrated on the activities of the priests who returned and began the reconstruction of the Jerusalem Shrine and the prophets who prophesied there--indeed, this was the only history which really interested the generation of post-exilic priest-scribes.

Still, the histories, the prophecies, and the hymns which dwelt on the shrine and loom so large in the post-exilic literature must not make us forget that Jerusalem was not the only shrine at which Jews then worshipped. Early in the fifth century, Judean mercenaries in Southern Egypt dedicated a Temple-Shrine at Elephantine. There was an altar in Samaria built on Mt. Gerizim by Sanballat for his son-in-law, grandson of a Jerusalem High Priest. In Hellenistic times, there was an altar in Jordan and another at Heliopolis in Egypt maintained by some of Jerusalem's ancient priest families. The priest-scribes who inscribed the traditions and wrote and edited the histories which became scripture had every reason to choose not to mention such places, but the

records of their existence and that sacrifices were offered to God by pious Jews at these altars are undeniable.

The priest-scribes who worked on the written compilations during the Exile evidenced little interest in describing other forms of religious life or even in preserving the records of non-Jerusalemite Judean communities. Except for Ezekiel, who provided a vision of a glorious reopened Temple, and Deutero-Isaiah, who prophesied return, little of exilic life and thought has survived.

Prophecy which did not focus on God's promise of redemption and history which did not focus on Jerusalem and the Temple were of little interest. We hear a bit of the fate of the first generation of exiles and somewhat more about those who returned to Jerusalem after 520 B.C.E., but little else. It's not quite clear why. Was it that all their concerns centered on God's promise of return; the necessary preconditions of return--obedience, repentance, God's decision to act for His own glorification; and the fact of the return itself? Perhaps, but then how do we explain the fact that when given the chance to return, most exiles did not take advantage of it?

The literature which survives seems to be the work of a small caste of priest-scribes who returned and took over control of Jerusalem. What we have reflects their parochial interests. It may even be that they systematically eliminated records describing life in the Exile in order to heighten the importance of Jerusalem and the Shrine. Still, the cultural interest of the exiles must

have been of a high order--vide their interest in making records and editing traditions, and their involvement with such concerns as ritual purity and the oneness of God.

The few references to the religious life of the sixth century exiles provide few specific details. Songs certainly were sung. Some were lamentations (Psalm 137). Others were songs of hope (Ps. 116). Storytellers must have continued to practice their ancient and well-loved art. There were meetings where hymns were chanted and even sacrifices offered. Recitations certainly took place, probably as they always had at local and family events. Traditions were kept alive, but had a new ritual developed which featured the recitation of the Word of God as a central element of the liturgy, we would expect to find some trace of it in the literature. We do not. God still spoke directly to and through prophets and in oracles delivered by priests to whom people turned, as they had in the past, for help in determining an auspicious day for a marriage or for acquiring a home. In everyday life, the oral tradition continued to be determinative. No 'scroll was venerated. There was no tradition among Jews which encouraged the chanting of portions of holy books at public worship or formal study of such books. There is not a word about scrolls in Ezekiel's loving description of the architectural details of the rebuilt temple which would replace the destroyed sanctuary, nor any indication that the priests were to handle, teach, or read such scrolls as part of their official duties. The Elephantine Papyri, which

record some of the details of the activities of a fifth-century B.C.E. community of Judean mercenaries in Southern Egypt, mentions a shrine, sacrifices, altars, the Passover celebration, but not a word about sacred scrolls.

There is no indication that the priests who accompanied the first group of Zionists who returned from Babylon in the late sixth century and who served in The Temple until Ezra's reformation brought any sacred writings with them. When about a century later Ezra appeared, scroll in hand, it was a novelty. Ezra's use of the authority of that scroll to challenge a number of current religious practices was an even greater novelty. No Jerusalemite is described as pulling out a scroll of his own to dispute Ezra's claims and question the new regimen. If the commentators who have suggested that the practice of Keriat Ha-Torah, regularly organized scriptural readings, developed in the exile, are correct, it seems likely that the first returnees would have introduced the practice into the ritual of The Temple or the city. There is no evidence that they did so. Without scrolls, they had no texts with which to do so. Actually, there is no creditable evidence of a ritual that involves the reading or chanting of portions of a holy book in The Temple for another five hundred years.

Just as the tribes had entered Canaan at a propitious moment, soon after the alphabet had been shaped, so the exiles had the good fortune to find themselves among peoples who were making major improvements in all technical aspects of the scribal arts.

The scribes of the imperial bureaus of the Babylonians, and particularly their Persian successors, made a number of significant technical improvements in the art of writing that made these skills easier to master. Clay was finally abandoned for papyrus or parchment, a shift which permitted, among other benefits, the presentation and preservation of longer texts. A clay tablet can be inscribed front and back but cannot be hinged to another tablet, while strips of papyrus sheets and rolls of tanned leather can be joined into sizeable rolls. Parchment scrolls of the Hellenistic Period up to twenty-eight feet in length have been found (The Temple Scroll).

After 550 B.C.E., the newly established Persian administration established Aramaic as the language of record for all documents dealing with government matters and commerce in the western part of the Empire and adopted a formal script for official use. This script of squarish design was far more readable than earlier cuneiform-influenced predecessors and was quickly adopted by Judean scribes. Recognizing its eastern origins, they named this new script somewhat anachronistically, Ashurit, the Assyrian Script. It later became, and remains to this day, the standard followed for all liturgically approved Torah scrolls.

Linguistically, Aramaic is a near cousin to Hebrew. Both languages derive from Akkadian, and therefore, they share many words, employ essentially the same grammatical forms, and are written with the same alphabet. Bilingualism became increasingly common. By the time Alexander the Great's conquests ended the Persian Period

(late 4th century B.C.E.), Aramaic was well on its way to becoming the vernacular of most Palestinian Jews. The priest-scribe who sometime in the fourth century prepared a history of the reforms Ezra had instituted in Jerusalem, a chronicle included in the Bible, felt comfortable introducing several untranslated Aramaic documents purportedly issued by the Persian Imperial Bureau into his history (Ezra 4:7-6:18, 7:12-26).

The increased use of Aramaic, particularly by elite, literate Judeans, increasingly allowed these ex-provincials to feel themselves part of an international literary world. The exiles found Aramaic a useful, even indispensable, tool in maintaining contact between them and their hosts. The increased use of Aramaic also exerted an unplanned pressure toward the creation of a Hebrew scripture. As more and more Judeans used Aramaic as their vernacular, the number who could readily understand recitations of the tradition diminished and the existence of a bilingual audience (Hebrew and Aramaic) began to impose subtle, but important, changes on the traditional language in which the Torot and the narratives were presented. The need to be understood dictated linguistic change but at the same time there was a predictable conservative reaction determined to preserve familiar idioms and language.

One way to accomplish this was to fix the material in written form. The population at large was, as it had always been, dependent on professional memorizers and reciters. Since fewer and fewer of the traditional forms and idioms were part of everyday speech, even reciters began to refer to notes. This language shift tended

to reduce significantly the average listener's ability to remember text with a full complement of original phrases and cadences. Understanding the reciter less, the audience exerted less influence on the storyteller who, in turn, gave his recitations more by rote. There is a law of cultural transfer that the more endangered an oral repertoire, the greater the felt pressure to record it. Memorization became, for many, a self-conscious effort.

The tradition would have lost all sense of being tradition had people bridged this growing sense of distance from the original material by the use of translations. Language is an essential element of tradition. The best translation can only approximate the meaning and style of the original. Fortunately, they made no such attempt. On the level of popular faith, the issue was not accuracy or understanding but the people's belief that the language of tradition possessed special power. To translate the tradition possessed special power. To translate the tradition into Aramaic would have vitiated its power, which in the popular mind derived as much from its ancient phrases as from the ideas it contained. Greek rhapsodists continued to recite the Iliad in the classic tongue long after Demotic Greek had become the vernacular of their audiences who, though they no longer fully understood the words, recognized familiar cadences and, most of all, responded to the power of the words. In the Middle Ages, Muslim scholars routinely taught that a translation of the Koran was no longer Koran and in modern times non-Arab speaking Muslims in far places like

Malaysia and Indonesia, where Arabic is little known, are routinely set the task of memorizing the Koran in the original.

Pre-exilic Hebrew, the ordinary vernacular of the tribes and the language in which the sagas had been formed, now begins its measured ascent into the status of Lashon Ha-Kodesh, holy speech. Hebrew took on a gravity and weight which it had not enjoyed when it was simply the people's speech. A cloak of holiness was spread over whatever was written or spoken in the classic speech. The old words were seen as heavy with power. Since Hebrew had been the language in which the prophets had reported God's message, it followed that God spoke in Hebrew. Praise of Hebrew as a divine tongue would become a stock element of the rabbinic tradition. "Our Hebrew language is called the holy tongue because the Holy One brought it into being. . .its words are not accidental, but the result of a wondrous design and sublime wisdom, based on profound mysteries and meanings" (Delmedico, Koah Ha Shem 1631). Over the centuries and until quite recently, Jews have found it difficult, though there are exceptions, to revere any work, however learned or pious, which was not written in Hebrew.

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We can, to a degree, discover what was written during the Exile and how those who wrote it conceived of their work when we consider the scroll Ezra is reported to have brought up to Jerusalem from Persia sometime in the middle of the fifth century B.C.E. The story

of Ezra's scroll, as told by later priest-historians whose efforts are recorded in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, is significant because it is the first indication we have that the community seems to acknowledge that religious authority can lodge in a text. This is something of a surprise since little in the earlier Biblical records prepares us for such a change from familiar patterns. The first group of Judeans to return to Jerusalem (ca. 520 B.C.E.) with the aim of renewing the cult apparently had not felt the need to bring a Torah-type scroll with them. At least none is mentioned. In the intervening generations before Ezra's arrival, we hear of prophets who brought God's word to Judea (Haggai, Zechariah, etc.), of priests who were consulted about the oracles, of the altar and its implements, but no mention that a scroll of any kind played a significant role, or a role of any kind, in the life of the community. Even later writers, like the rabbis of the Talmudic Period, who assumed that the Sefer Torah had been in existence since Moses' day, sensed the novelty and the importance of the event: "Ezra was worthy of having the law given through him to Israel had not Moses preceded him" (b. San. 21b).

The date of Ezra's mission is still in dispute; some prefer a mid-fifth century date, others place it in the first decade of the fourth; but what is not debated is that Ezra's activities and those of another contemporary official who came from the East, Nehemiah, represent attempts by the Judean aristocracy among the exiles, primarily the priests, to assert the authority of their views and practices over The Temple and the City of Jerusalem, an

effort which seems to have been backed by the Persian Court. Both Ezra, a "Priest and Scribe of the law of God of Heaven," and Nehemiah, a nobleman who had served as a cup bearer in the Royal Court, came on missions authorized by the Persian Court.

The chronicle presented in Ezra and Nehemiah was edited, years after the events described, from several traditions which agree on the intimate involvement of Temple personnel, priests and Levites, in what occurred. The most dramatic event reported was a public ceremony held in Jerusalem. Upon Ezra's arrival he read, or had read, to an assembly of tribal leaders from a scroll that is variously called "The Book (Scroll) of the Law" (Neh. 8:3), "The Book, The Law of God" (Neh. 8:8), The Book of the Law of YHWH, Their God" (Neh. 9:3), and "The Book of Moses" (Neh. 13:1). The absence of a precise citation suggests that though this particular incident was well known, the specific scroll was not and there were different traditions about it. This absence also suggests that the scroll was not identified as one of the received scrolls, one of the five scrolls which became the Pentateuch, for later editors would surely have been able to identify such a scroll.

Questions abound. What was the provenance of this scroll? What text did it contain? Did it contain narrative as well as law? Which, if any, of the Five Scrolls that make up the Sefer Torah did it approximate and to what degree? The questions are easier to ask than to answer. Nothing is known of the scroll's provenance except that Ezra brought it with him. It cannot be identified as a scroll taken East by those who had been exiled in 586 B.C.E. We

do not know for sure if the scroll was available in 520 B.C.E. when the Persian Court allowed the first small group of Judean nobles and priests to return to Jerusalem. The Biblical record indicated that they brought to Jerusalem with them money, "The vessel of the House of the Lord," what was left of the booty taken in 586 B.C.E., and various geneological records of the priests who would serve at the altar, but no mention is made of a scroll of Torot (Ezra 1:7). It seems probable that Ezra's scroll had been prepared in the East, probably sometime during the previous half century, by scribes of the priest caste to which Ezra belonged and whose interests he represented, but even this is not certain.

It would appear that this scroll was not a complete Sefer Torah or even some early version of that anthology. Every reference speaks of a single scroll. Although quite early in the post-exilic period the five scrolls came to have a special degree of authority associated with them, they were not inscribed as a single text on a single scroll until at least the first century C.E. We cannot even be sure, though it seems likely, that "The Book of the Law" refers to an early version of any of the scrolls which are included in our Torah. Our information is simply too scanty.

Two thousand years of knowing and treating the Sefer Torah as a single entity has somewhat dulled our perception of the distinct signatures in style and content which can be seen in each scroll. Genesis consists of a string of narratives more or less bound together by recurring geneologies. No author or source is indicated.

There is almost no law and certainly no list of Torot. Exodus opens with a review of the closing portion of Genesis (46:8ff). The presence of such a review was a common practice developed by ancient scribes to indicate to a reader that the scroll he had in hand followed on another since scrolls were not titled or bound. Exodus dwells at length on the Passover history and the Sinai covenant, providing along the way several short blocs of Torot. Leviticus also presents lists of instructions but does so in a more discursive way than Exodus, where the approach, particularly in cultic matters, is simply prescriptive. Both books end with summaries. Numbers hangs various blocks of instructions on a framework which describes in some detail the stages of the trek made by the tribes as they pass from the Mountain of Revelation to the Plains of Moab, preparing to enter the Promised Land. Various instructions are introduced which were presumedly given during the latter portion of the trek. The editors of Numbers seem not to have been as concerned as those responsible for the other scrolls to make the point that all the Torot were included in the climactic revelation at Sinai. ~~Leviticus~~ also contains what must have been originally an independent novella which centers on a gentile prophet, Balaam, and makes the point that, despite the power of prophetically-uttered words, Israel need not fear the prophets of other nations. Deuteronomy presents itself as a series of valedictory speeches in which Moses, about to give up his office, reflects on what he has heard, taught, and seen. It contains its own version of many incidents and torot mentioned in

Exodus-Numbers and has long been recognized as having had development independent of the other scrolls before its inclusion in the Sefer Torah.

Ezra's scroll is called a Sefer, which tells us only that the manuscript had been prepared following generally accepted scribal norms. The writing surface would have been specially prepared parchment sheets; the inscription, ink on skin. Once inscribed, the sheets would have been sewn together and kept as a roll. The text would have been consonantal, unvocalized, and probably set out in the new Ashurit script which had become the official script of the Jews who corresponded with the Persian administration. The scroll may have been wrapped, as was the custom, in a single linen slip to protect it from dust and sun. It may have been Ezra's own property, perhaps by his own hand, perhaps by the hand of another Judean priest-scribe.

Ezra is called "A Scribe (Sofer) skilled in the Law of Moses" (Ezra 7:6). Used in this way Sofer does not conjure up the image of a humble notary but of a well-born and well placed priest, a senior administrator, who had acquired position and authority based less on his ability to handle a quill than on birth and rank as a senior member of the Judean priest caste.

At least two accounts of the public ceremony which accompanied the reading of Ezra's scroll are reflected in the present text. In one Ezra mounts a platform set up just outside The Temple, opens a scroll, and reads it in its entirety to the convened citizenry in a ceremony which lasts from dawn till noonday (Neh. 8:1-4). In

the second version Ezra convenes the assembly, elevates and recites a blessing over the scroll, but does not himself read. A group of leading citizens, Levites, performed that task with care, "gave the sense" and "caused the people to understand the meaning" (Neh. 8:3-8). The assembly then confessed their sins and made "a firm covenant" to obey God's instructions. Nehemiah then joins Ezra. Together they declare the day holy and inform the assembly that, although much of their practice does not conform to God's instructions that they have just heard, they should not be downcast. They now know what is expected of them. From now on matters would be set right and the day should be treated as festive rather than a time for lamentations.

A sequel, or perhaps a fragment of a third version, describes another assembly, convened the following day, again outside the area of The Temple proper. No details are given as to how the scroll was handled on that occasion, but we are told that "they discovered written in the law" rules which required that every Judean dwell in booths during the Succoth Festival. The community's response is described as immediate. Booths were quickly erected and the community lived in them during the seven days of the holiday, a holiday celebrated by daily reading "in the Book of the Law of God" (Neh. 8:13-18).

What text was inscribed in Ezra's scroll? We know only that it contained a number of discrete Torot. Which ones? We know only that one dealt with Succoth and another with foreign wives. Did the scroll also contain narrative? We can't say, though that

possibility cannot be ruled out. While the priestly editor of this history tends to use "Torah" in the limited sense of divine instructions given to priests, the community had long been accustomed to presentation of the tradition which combined narrative and divine law. The earliest covenant renewal ceremonies are described as including, beside the list of torot, references to God's redemptive acts (cf. Neh. 9). Law and narrative were often combined, as we see in early descriptions of the recitation of the Exodus narrative and the laws which govern the Passover ceremonies.

The priests who dominated Jerusalem's political life during the Persian Period looked back to Ezra's ceremony as the covenantal act which confirmed their authority and set out the terms of their mandate. These were the men who imagined themselves in Moses' role writing down God's instructions. As Moses' stand-in, Ezra read or had read from "The Book of Moses," which as a sofer he might well have inscribed. The official histories present Ezra and his fellow officials as dressed that day in robes appropriate to a ceremony of covenant acclamation. The reading takes place on the Temple Mount but outside The Temple precincts, "in the broad place that was before the Water Gate" (Neh. 8:1). The event is described in constitutional rather than liturgical terms.

The day turns on the scroll. Its contents are obviously of major interest and concern, but the day does not end with the scroll's consecration. The scroll is blessed, read, interpreted and/or translated, but not enshrined. We are not even told whether it was placed in The Temple archives though that seems its likely

fate. The history we are presented assumes that scroll's identity with the received text, but the Letter of Aristeas--a second century B.C.E. text--raises doubt on this point.

Aristeas is an encomium which purports to describe the preparation of the Septuagint, the early 3rd century B.C.E. Koine translation of the Pentateuch which became sacred to Greek-speaking Jews. Aristeas reports that when Ptolemy II (c. 280 B.C.E.) requested of the Jerusalem High Priest that a proper Hebrew text be sent from The Temple archives to Alexandria to be the master copy for an official translation, there is no indication that the text requested was Ezra's scroll which that worthy priest had placed in The Temple archives. Certainly, the High Priest did not offer to send it. A half millennium later, a Talmudic source names a few Torah scrolls which it claims were known to have been kept in The Temple Library before its destruction by the Romans (70 C.E.); none is identified as Ezra's.

Some have suggested that the synagogue's practice of reading publicly from the Torah on holidays and the Sabbath derives from Ezra's public ceremony. Some argue that Ezra's exaltation of the Torah, the presence of others on the platform, the recitation of prayers before the reading, the addition to the reading of an interpretation or translation, all suggest that reading from the Torah during public worship was already in the fifth century B.C.E. a well established ceremonial routine, probably one which had its origin in the emerging synagogue, and that the sole unique aspect of Ezra's ceremony was the content of the scroll he brought.

Had an attitude that ascribed authority to scrolls of torot developed among the returnees? If so, how and why? Many of the returnees could no longer speak Hebrew. That they could not understand the scroll's language illustrates the power of a sacred scriptural tongue to transcend its meaning.

Scholars debate the meaning of the phrase "and give the interpretation." One possibility is that the Levites rendered the text intelligible by translating it. If so, knowing what we do about the loss of charisma by translation, were the people responding to the power of God's words or simply to the imperial authorization Ezra brought with him? Incidentally, the royal mandate establishing Ezra's power was in Aramaic.

The scroll may have been chanted, perhaps to a learning melody such as scribes customarily used to assist them in their work. Such a chant would have added sacred resonances to the recitation, but it also would have made understanding more difficult. All we can say is that the accounts suggest that Ezra knew that his authority was ultimately based on the Emperor's command and that he used that authority to effect certain reforms in the governance of Jerusalem.

Ezra apparently used his scroll as a symbol of his mandate from God, almost as an oracle from God brought by a priest, and to buttress his claim that certain torot which he and his caste affirmed must be enforced if the community wished to be right with God. One suspects that Ezra was a shrewd politician. He might simply have recited torot and stipulated that they were authentic

statements of God's will, but he chose to heighten the drama of the occasion by emphasizing certain goals for the community. Apparently, he gained his ends. The community bowed to his will, less, one suspects, because of the written "proof" he offered than because of force majeure, the imperial mandate. What was read out from the scroll had about it an aura of authenticity. The memories of defeat and exile were still fresh. No one wanted to take any chance that God might have reason again to punish Jerusalem.

During the post-exilic period images of Moses placing inscribed tablets of stone in the ark after the Sinai ceremony and writing out a scroll of Torot began to be featured in literary recreations of those ancient but critical events. Apparently, the long familiar version which described the Sinai Covenant as an encounter was no longer fully satisfying. People had become accustomed to written records of myths, dynastic histories, and laws as well as of treaties and commercial transactions. The community needed to know that their obligations were fixed, their past chronicled, and the future promise set down. They were to do the right in a culture where right and wrong were treated as definable categories. Many must have felt that the recent disasters were caused not so much by the willful disobedience as by confusion over what it was that God required.

Ezra's scroll was not a Sefer Torah, though it probably contained a substantial part of central legal sections of the Book of Deuteronomy. Why Deuteronomy? More than the other four scrolls Deuteronomy emphasizes the relationship between covenant and divine

judgment, a theme of particular interest to a community which had been judged and found wanting and now sought to reorganize itself on the basis of fidelity. Deuteronomy is also the Pentateuchal text which most emphasizes the importance and incomparability of a central shrine.

There are other technical reasons. Ezra's ceremony apparently took place on Rosh Hashanah and laid specific emphasis on the proper observance of Succoth. There is no mention in the list of Laws of Yom Kippur, the Great White Fast which falls between Rosh Hashanah and Succoth. Yom Kippur's omission is surprising. During the post-exilic period, the period in which these chronicles took shape, Yom Kippur was the great day of The Temple year. The Great White Fast was deemed indispensable to remove the weight of sin from the nation and so assure its future. Its rites were elaborately conducted by priests and were supervised by the High Priest. Temple priests never ceased to emphasize Yom Kippur's importance and constantly elaborated its rituals. Since it is unlikely that Yom Kippur was not observed in Ezra's day, the most likely explanation of the absence of any mention of it in Ezra's reading is that it was simply not referred to in the scroll. The absence from one law list of any instruction dealing with the Day of Purgation is not surprising since none of the lists pretend to be exhaustive on any subject. Deuteronomy's code may have been the source of Ezra's since it is the one list of holy days which does not include Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur appears in two lists, Leviticus and Numbers, but is absent in the calendar of holy days which appears in Deuteronomy (16). A scroll which does not mention Yom Kippur might well have been an early version of Deuteronomy which, incidentally, names Succoth as the Festival of Booths, precisely the title used by the editor of the Ezra histories. One could, of course, argue that the chronicler and/or Ezra felt that Jerusalemites observed Yom Kippur appropriately and that there was no need to emphasize the day's observances, but then we would have to account for the fact that laxity of observance seems to have been a general charge made against them.

A likely reconstruction then is that Ezra brought with him an anthology of torot, probably some version of Deuteronomy, probably one of the lists of torot which in our version became the central chapters of the received text. The major question still hangs in the air: What did Ezra think he would accomplish by bringing such a scroll and organizing such a ceremony? We know of no precedent nor of any development in the Persian environment which would have suggested to the Judeans that they should ascribe sanctity and authority to a sacred book. Though many of the Magi were literate and displayed what we would call today literary interest--some were, after all, administrators of wealthy institutions and masters of shrine and court schools where wisdom was taught as well as technical skills--the focus of their religious activity was on the conduct of public ceremonies, the sacrifices, purification rites,

and the recital of sacred hymns and magic. Such records as we have of their activity make no mention of the chanting of portions of a sacred text or the adoration and study of a sacred book. Studies of libraries found at Persian shrines and palaces have revealed that they contain collections basically similar to the libraries of the previous millennium. An occasional tablet presents some well-known myth or a coronation hymn or dynastic chronicle, but most entries deal with administrative matters. We have to wait until the second century B.C.E. before we come across contemporary description originating in West Asia which depicts the reading from a sacred book during a public worship service. A Greek geographer, Pausanias, has left us in a passing note a description of a service he attended at which Magi read a portion of Zoroaster's teachings (5:27- 6).

There is always the possibility that Ezra presented the scroll for no better reason than that a scroll was available to him and he and his backers felt that its presence would add significance to the moment and mute complaints about the measures they intended to impose. Armed with such a 'witness' they could say: 'it is God, not we, who makes these demands.' Presenting the scroll also highlighted the extent of authority being demanded by the priest class whose interests Ezra promoted. Heretofore, priests had served at the altar and consulted the oracles; apparently now they began to claim a broader authority based in part on possession of books containing ancient and sacred traditions which defined the way the community must organize itself if it wished to please God. Those

who possessed the records and the skills to consult these texts became God's interpreters, indispensable authorities.

We do not know why the assembly reacted as it did. Were they moved by remorse? By piety? By necessity? Since Ezra was armed with an imperial commission and had been granted the power to appoint civil magistrates and judges (Ezra 7:12-26), the assembly had no alternative but to submit.

Finally, one cannot, of course, rule out the slight possibility that there was no scroll and that the record we have represents legendary embellishments of a crucial moment in the people's history dramatized by priest-historians who, in the century after Ezra, prepared such scrolls. If they could put a scroll in Moses' hand, why not in Ezra's?

It is clear that something new was being introduced into or had developed within the Judean ethos. For the first time, a story appears which describes the written word being used for its suasive and persuasive authority. It may be that people simply responded with and to ancient and powerful phrases but the history, as we have it, does not suggest that everyone ascribed magical power to these teachings. Ezra's accomplishment was practical. The plain sense of what was read led to some immediate reforms. Ezra's day at The Temple Mount is described as one of constitutional import whose ends were practical.

Chance and circumstance in the political arena played a large role in this emergence of scripture. Descendants of the royal family apparently incurred the wrath of the Persians by making a

bid for power during the first years of the return. That experience suggested to Persian administrators that it might be good policy to send more compliant leaders to reorganize the troubled governance of Judea. Priests, men like Ezra and Nehemiah, who had knowledge of Israel's law and were recognizable figures of authority, filled the bill. Priests had political ambitions, but not kingly ambitions that might trouble the peace of the empire.

This powerful and literate priest group had developed its own particular version of tradition and accepted it as God's will. It now found itself with a chance to govern the city where God dwelt as well as where The Temple was located, which played such a central role in the lives of Judeans everywyere.

Because the scribal art had developed sufficiently to allow literate people to feel generally confident about reading a document with accuracy, trust in textual evidence grew. The language shift and the growing distance of the community from the oral tradition paradoxically played an important role in this new emphasis on written texts. Because everyday life no longer reinforced the oral tradition, records were, for the first time, essential. The exiles had found themselves in a world with significant literary interest and capacity and had begun to appreciate the larger world more than ever before. Moreover, the development of a scroll tradition was part of a process of bringing together the different traditions into an apparently united presentation which allowed the exiled community to feel that they knew what God demanded of

them, how to repent, and how to gain God's forgiveness. The priests benefited from all these developments, as scribes as interpreters of the tradition, and as leaders of the nation.

Eager to secure their authority against all challenges, priests began to suggest that the gates of prophecy had been closed. The priests wanted Israel to consult God through them and to break the popular habit of consulting wandering soothsayers or itinerant prophets. Conservative by habit as well as profession, the priests remembered the challenge Hosea and Jeremiah had raised to their claim for the centrality of sacrifices at The Temple altar and their role at these sacrifices; so they encouraged the populace to see them as guardians of God's Laws and to turn to them for the proper interpretation of that law.

God's speech was affirmed, but since it was generally limited to the distant past, how could God continue to be heard? God's speech could be heard in the books which were ascribed to Him. All reading was aloud; therefore, God spoke from the ancient texts whenever someone opened and read one of them. In a society increasingly comfortable with records, it must have seemed natural to argue that authority lay with those who had possession of venerable records, who could consult them and properly decipher their meanings. Records became 'proof' against any challenge to priestly authority, and for the priests possession of records became nine-tenths of charisma.

We face a fascinating paradox. The priests sponsor continuing work on these scrolls but show little eagerness to make public use of the results. At least no such use is written or talked about. The priests made no effort to enshrine the scrolls in some visible place in the sanctuary, nor did they introduce any regimen of readings into Temple ceremony. The scrolls were not publicly paraded. Priests did not convene a council to declare a particular scroll the authorized version, nor did they set scribes to work producing numbers of copies of a 'final' edition which would be made available for study or worship in communities outside of Jerusalem.

Perhaps the priests acted as they did because they knew of no divine instruction which required the public presentation, exaltation, or chanting of a text. Another possibility suggests itself. Various traditions still circulated. The priests may have been determined to establish their way and did not want to get into debates over which version was the authorized one. Priests did not treat these works as reserved texts which they alone could consult. There seems to have been no attempt to deny public access to these scrolls. We know of no attempt made by priests to preclude others from making copies or from owning their own texts, an attitude which distinguishes them from similar priest groups in Egypt and Babylonia who carefully guarded the 'secrets' of their cult, including the scrolls in which such secrets were inscribed. Still, interest in Torah books was of particular importance to Judah's

priests since they not only presented the nation's literature but provided written certification of their rank and role.

The priests' power to define God's rules did not go unchallenged. Over the course of the next century or so writings appear attacking the thesis that God requires that gentile wives be set aside. The author of Ruth makes a heroine of a Moabite wife, a gentile and rewards her loyalty to her Israelite mother-in-law not only with a happy second marriage to a well-to-do Israelite but by alloting her a place of honor in the ancestry of King David and by extension of the Messiah. Similarly, the poetry of Song of Songs celebrates a prince's love for a girl who was not one of "the daughters of Jerusalem."

A major step toward the emergence of Torah as scripture has been taken, but Ezra's text was still more record than scripture. It was not enshrined or apparently consulted. Primary authority still lay in the oral tradition. This fact can be seen in many ways, not least the way phrases, ideas, and incidents appear and reappear, offering evidence that they were clearly part of the living tradition. People knew the traditions. Jeremiah's prophecy of a return after seventy years is cited in four or five different contexts. The famous litany which Moses is said to have used at Mt. Sinai--"The Lord, The Lord God, is merciful, gracious, long suffering and abundant in mercy and ever true. . ." (Ex. 34:6-7) appears in various forms at least half a dozen times in Biblical literature. Tradition is cited but there is no record from the

Persian period of anyone citing a text directly from a scroll and little evidence that scribes and rhapsodists felt constrained by a need for absolute accuracy in transcription. Any taboos there may have been against writing down the traditions had long since disappeared, but the reverse taboos which would protect the Torah's sacredness had not yet emerged. There were as yet no special rules governing the writing or handling of a Torah scroll.

For some centuries, during and after the Persian period, these scrolls played a larger role in the schoolhouse than in the sanctuary. Some scrolls may have been used at informal meetings, but if they were, the reading had as yet no set form. There may have been certain readings on the holidays, but these would not have been from an authorized text nor would they have followed a set form. In different places, Jews read from entirely different texts. There were not as yet enough scrolls to go around so that every village had one or more. Many readings, like those for the Passover, were undoubtedly still oral recitations.

But a new attitude was in the air, evident in the version that reports that Ezra limited his role to praising and exalting the scrolls and left to certain Levites the task of reading and interpreting them. On the face, this detail is unlikely. Extensive and time-consuming preparation would have been required for the readers to get the reading right. Yet, we are told that Ezra had just arrived. Behind this detail there may be a reference to the fact that during the fifth century, some Levites took on the

responsibility to make known to the nation at large the increasingly unified tradition which Temple scribes recorded. A tradition recorded in Chronicles describes the Levites as circuit-riding teachers who "taught in Judah having the Book of the Law with them" (II Ch. 17:9). Morton Smith and others have observed that the narratives of this period (Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah) seem to be full of what look suspiciously like brief sermons which may reflect the work and the techniques of such teachers (Smith p. 259).

When a culture reaches a certain degree of complexity--urbanization and commerce are usually the major contributing factors--the community begins to seek reassurance that its traditions are appropriate, stable, and secure. In the face of many different values and interpretations, everyday life no longer clearly supports a single tradition. As people became more comfortable with the written word and more confident that the written word could be accurately deciphered, they learned to accept the existence of reliable texts as confirmation of their traditions. Here is the original speech, faithfully recorded, laying to rest doubts that a speaker may have misstated the tradition.

The Persian Age is full of literary interests: Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah, the so-called priestly history, Job, Ruth, Jonah, Tobit, Song of Songs, various biographies of the prophets and some psalms appeared at this time. There is growing respect for the written word, which begins to spill over into areas ~~which~~

~~begins to spill over into areas~~ which include ascription of divine authority. God begins to have His own book. A favorite vanity of the apocalyptic visionaries of the Hellenistic period is that a mortal (Enoch and Elijah) is taken up to heaven where he is allowed to read from a book which records the future of the world. By the second century, B.C.E. we begin to hear of debates among those who have studied such books and taken what they found there as important in matters of faith. Some who are not priests but who are literate begin to contest the priests' monopoly and to demand their way in defining the text.

The community increasingly finds encouragement in written records, finding in them a sense of certainty about their way of life. They were living as God intended them to live. The presence of such records like the stones at Canaanite altars, served as a witness to the power and presence of God's prophecies. The narratives 'proved' His control of history and the laws symbolized God's eternal covenant with Israel.

Increasingly, there are two sources of authority: the oral culture and the written word. Text and tradition begin to become separate categories of religious activity. The oral tradition continues to develop and to have force, particularly among the non-literate portions of the population. The elite begin to see parts of the oral tradition as folklore and to argue that only a carefully preserved text can be completely trusted. The text came to be used by the literate elite as a means to enforce

conformity to their way against the more flexible, less organized tradition of the populace.

After the fifth century B.C.E., written words became increasingly available and important. There are many scrolls. By the late fourth century B.C.E., texts of the Five Scrolls of the Pentateuch and of the major prophets existed and had achieved pretty much the form with which we are familiar. Unfortunately, there is little available information as to how these scrolls were used. An introduction by the grandson of Ben Sirah, the Jerusalem schoolmaster, to a collection of his grandfather's wisdom, written in a later period (last quarter 2nd century B.C.E.) reports that his grandfather had taught his young scholars, among other curriculum items, "The Law, The Prophets, and other writings of the ancestors." This schoolmaster's book provides few indications of how this teaching was done or what specific books were included in Ben Sirah's tripartite curriculum. He cites Biblical events and uses Biblical phrases but does not comment on or interpret specific laws or directly quote from Biblical material or use proof texts to prove a point. Almost certainly, Ben Sirah made sure that his students correctly read the scrolls, but we do not know whether they were simply given to them to be read and memorized or whether much attention was paid to their interpretation. What is clear is that the texts, those that became parts of the Bible and those that did not, became sources to which individuals could come for answers to the questions which led people to turn to religious

leaders. Intellectuals increasingly turned to the writings for serious and sophisticated guidance and, while the oral tradition continued in full force, in their limited ways the non-literate, too, began to feel that their nation's documents were important.

During the nearly three centuries which separate Ezra from Ben Sirah much happened in Israel's religious development, but, unfortunately, almost all of it is hidden from view. These are the blank centuries of Jewish history. During this time Ezra's one partial scroll is replaced by five, fleshed out and broadly accepted as constitutional and inspired. By the end of the Persian period, Torah has become The Torah.

During the Persian era no scrolls had as yet gained uncontested authority as the authentic statement of God's will. Traditions are still heard in people's heads. Rhapsodists and storytellers still make their rounds of the villages and towns. Priests are consulted for oracles. Men with special spiritual powers continue to be consulted on private matters. Scrolls circulated which contained torot and narratives other than those which later gained official support.

During these three Persian centuries, supported by the authority of the priest, the scrolls compiled by the Jerusalem priest-scribes began to gain a special place in Israel's religious life. Bit by bit, the psychological and spiritual foundations for the acceptance of sacred scrolls as scripture were laid. The simple fact that they existed gave them importance. That these scrolls could be

seen and read aloud gave them standing. The scrolls became known as presenting venerable matters. Though still relatively rare and costly, manuscripts were growing more numerous.

Some portions claimed to be in God's own words. Priests consulted them. Priest-scribes found reason to busy themselves with them. They were written in the original language of the tradition, in classic hebrew, which the community associated with its origin and knew as God's own language. An aura of magic began to surround these writings. The text contained God's special name. They were identified in popular history with Moses writing down what God had told him at Sinai.

Texts became a part of the sanctified tradition, a part but not the whole. No one yet looked on these texts as the only authoritative statements of the tradition or as a complete statement of its fundamental teachings. Life was still governed primarily by edict and ancient custom. The ascription of an all-embracing holiness to these scrolls would come later and with it would come the problem of defending a limited set of writings as all-inclusive and a particular set of formulations as normative.

The Biblical canon ends abruptly and confusedly with the events which centered on Ezra's career, the acceptance of the terms of the covenant that he imposed, the development of a new basis of financial support for the Shrine, and the purification of Jerusalem (that is, the separation of the alien wives). The priest-editors were not interested in writing a broad-based history but a history

which would legitimize their claim to authority and assert and underscore their understanding of the 'rewards and punishments' of covenant loyalty.

We know exasperatingly little about the details of life in Judea from roughly the mid-fifth to the end of the third century B.C.E. After Ezra only one name emerges, a priest, Simon the Just, whom the rabbis describe as the last of the Soferim. Simon is extravagantly praised for piety, demeanor, and leadership; II Maccabees, 1st Cent. C.E.; Josephus; and the Talmud (B. Yoma 38b, Tos. Sotah 13 #7), but what Simon actually accomplished is never made clear nor are the sources in agreement about his dates. We are not even sure whether there were one or two men of the same name.

Ben Sirah describes Simon as a High Priest who fortified The Temple with high double walls, built stone houses and cisterns in the city to enable it to withstand a siege, was a prepossessing figure when he served at the altar and a priest whose blessing was known to be powerful (#50). A rabbinic tradition from half a millennium later mentions him as the 1st of the High Priests actually to speak aloud the Tetragrammaton, God's miracle-working name. What little we know then suggests that the religious leaders of the time, whoever they were, were like Ezra, priest-magistrate, and that their authority was dynastic and Temple-centered, not book-centered. The altar was primary. But a second front in the struggle for religious authority was beginning to open up. Religious leadership was increasingly invested in or reserved for those who

knew and could interpret the text of accredited holy books.

As texts multiplied, varying degrees of authority were ascribed to the separate works. The Five Books of Moses and the scrolls of the major prophets were the first to be accorded a high degree of sanctity. Certainly, by the ~~fourth~~ fifth century B.C.E. the Pentateuch scrolls, which presented the early saga and the climactic events of the Exodus and Sinai as well as lists of torot, were acknowledged to present the traditions central to the community's life. No one yet asserted that the entire text of any of these scrolls had been inspired by God. That piety came later. But no one doubted that God had spoken or that His words could be heard again when these scrolls were read. The distinction between Sefer Torah on the one hand and the other books of histories and wisdom on the other was a natural one. They engaged the community's emotions at quite different levels and claimed quite different pedigrees.

A consontal text of the Books of Pentateuch and the Prophets in pretty much the same form we know it must have been in circulation by the time the Persian era ends (330 B.C.E.) but not insignificant variations of language, presentation, spelling, and even text existed and would continue to trouble scribes for centuries. Books claiming plenary authority for their particular list of torot circulated. The lists and narratives that qualified as scripture clearly were accept as part of the tradition. The existence of variant versions helps explain the numerous differences which exist between the Hebrew text and the texts used as the basis for early translations into Greek (Septuagint, 3rd Cent. B.C.E.). Centuries

later rabbinic Midrash would frequently cite one or another variant reading, some of which may represent scribal error but some of which had a long history as accepted variations. Standardization increases, but given the manuscript tradition and the fact that the scrolls were not used ceremonially in The Temple, there was little pressure to get it all straight.

The Talmud speaks of scrolls containing variant readings being shelved in The Temple's library and of discussions among the sages about textual variants. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls were some scrolls written in the old Ketav Ivri, and others, the majority, using the newer script, Ashurit. No one as yet could have made the argument attributed to Akiba (2nd century C.E.) that every letter was the vehicle through which God has transmitted His will to Israel. There was as yet no agreement on every letter or every phrase or even every sentence. Tradition was becoming text, but text had not yet become scripture.

Chapter 4

THE HELLENISTIC WORLD

The communities of West Asia had been subject to various Greek invluences for some time before their conquest by Alexander and his armies in 330 B.C.E. But it was only after the Greeks established control over the area that the Greek cultural impact became pervasive. The Judeans of Palestine who had remained during the Persian period what they had always been, primarily an agricultural and pastoral community, now found themselves increasingly urbanized and engaged in commerce.

Jerusalem, the capital, grew substantially. Under Persia Jerusalem was a theocracy where activity was carefully regulated by Torah rules which the priests insisted were God's Instructions. Since its reconstruction the Jerusalem Temple had become the unrivaled religious center of the whole Jewish world. Every Jew, no matter where he lived, paid an annual half shekel tax toward is upkeep.

Jews lived in Judea and throughout West Asia and Egypt. By the second century, Alexandria, the new city built in Egypt by Alexander's generals, was well on its way to becoming the region's most populous and prosperous city of Hellenistic times (late 4th century B.C.E.-1st century C.E.) and home to a sizable and increasingly prosperous and cultivated Judean population.

For the Greeks, with their lively interest in literature, books played a central role in the definition of culture. Beside numerous private collections, the Greeks established and lavishly endowed

libraries in Pergamon (by the Attalids), Antioch (by the Seleucids) and Alexandria (by the Ptolemies). By some estimates, in the first century B.C.E. half a million parchment or papyrus items were available in the Museum Library of Alexandria and another one hundred thousand in its companion across the park, the Serapeum. Unlike the peoples of Asia, Greeks wrote books and signed their names to their work. Under Greek influence, the first time West Asians began to recognize that a book could be a shaped and self-contained work which presented a consistent and individual point of view.

Greek scribes had refined the techniques of manuscript production and editing, and developed sophisticated techniques which enabled them to clarify the grammar and construction of classical texts, fix their presentation, and determine the most reliable of several manuscript traditions. "Authoritative" texts of many works were established and scholia--marginal comments which discussed doubtful spelling, the meaning of unusual words and forms, apparent omissions or repetitions, and so forth--were added to the more important works. Measured by these standards, Judean editorial work was quite primitive, but stimulated by contact with the Hellenistic ethos, local scribes soon caught up and a great age of writing and scroll production dawned.

The importance of the Greek alphabet's technical advance over the Aramaic and Hebrew, particularly its introduction of vowels, is evident in the greater number of works prepared for Greek-speaking

Jews compared with the number of works in Aramaic and Hebrew. Greek works were easier to edit and read. A translation service from Hebrew and Aramaic into Greek seems to have operated in Jerusalem, perhaps in The Temple itself. There is no record of a similar service designed to translate Greek scrolls into Hebrew or Aramaic. It was among the Greek-speaking diaspora population that the first tentative experiments with a vowel system for the Hebrew-Aramaic alphabet appeared.

Literacy spread rapidly among the Judeans, as it tends to do among people who move from farms and villages into towns where commerce requires them to read contracts and do numbers. The number of available copies of well-known manuscripts increased significantly. We begin to hear of scrolls written by a single author on such diverse subjects as medicine, history, astronomy, and even the esoteric meaning of a prophet's speeches. Ben Sirah's academy in Jerusalem must have had a library of some size as did, we know, the monastic community of Qumran. Writing in the first century B.C.E., a courtier of the Hasmoneans reports, probably inaccurately, that Nehemiah in the fifth century had established a library in Jerusalem in which he had collected "books about the kings and prophets, the writings of David and Temple matters" (Ben Sirach). This may be simply a legend, but the report that Judah Maccabee in the middle of the second century B.C.E. "collected all the books that had been lost on account of the War" (2 Mac. 10-14) probably can be credited. The Temple had a sizable archives, as did most shrines, where scrolls were deposited for safekeeping.

It was the change from an oral culture to a manuscript culture which changed people's perceptions of what the early narratives meant. A written narrative takes on a non-emotional, linear, factual aspect. When a story becomes such a narrative readers judge its accuracy rather than its impact. Victor Hugo understood this transformation when in Notre Dame de Paris he portrays a scholar, examining the first printed book he has ever seen, who looks up from his desk toward the cathedral and muses, "Ceci Tuera Cela": "This will kill that."

The Hellenistic ethos was, at least among upper-class Jews, highly literate, book-oriented, and inclined to endow classic texts with an aura of sacredness and to discover in them depths of meaning which the original authors may well not have recognized. The Book, as Book, begins to play an increasingly central role and to be accorded an ever increasing degree of charisma. This process raised many questions. Which version of a work is the accredited one? What does it mean for a book to claim to be inspired by God? Which books are so endowed? Who determines what the written word means? On what basis? There would be many answers offered to these and related questions, but the important fact is the framework of the questions: that Jews have entered an age in which the community, or at least its leading spirits, begin to look to books for religious guidance and to assume that knowledge of what was in them provided a blueprint for community organization.

Over the course of the generations which followed Ezra's mission to Jerusalem, the five separate scrolls which we now know as the Sefer Torah, the scrolls attributed to individual prophets, and the two extended histories edited by priest-scribes largely in Jerusalem, achieved approximately the form in which we know them. They were on the way to becoming the three-tiered Hebrew Scripture. The appearance in Egypt, beginning in the third century B.C.E., of Greek translations of some Hebrew scrolls, particularly the Septuagint, the first translation of the Sefer Torah done in any language, testifies to the access to books and the existence of scrolls of "the law and the prophets and other writings of the fathers" (Ben Sirach Prologue). The discovery in the Dead Sea caves above Qumran of portions and fragments of various Hebrew texts is further testimony; some were destined for inclusion in the Hebrew Scripture and some were destined to be set aside as the faith tradition was redefined. Work on the translation of the Biblical corpus seems at first to have concentrated on the five scrolls of the Pentateuch but soon extended to the whole published text as the work of definition continued over half a millennium.

Rabbinic Judaism would assume the primacy of the Sefer Torah over the other books of the three-tiered Scripture. Only the Sefer Torah is kept in the synagogue Ark. Only the five scrolls of Moses, the Sefer Torah, are read through annually as an essential element of the Sabbath liturgy. The rabbis later added selections

from the other books (Haftarah) to this Torah reading ritual, but these are not used systematically or exhaustively.

The authority of the five scrolls rested on the fact that they were accepted as God's own words. Most researchers have taken for granted that in the early Hellenistic period primacy of place was already given to the Torah scrolls. But we really don't know which scrolls were on the meeting house shelves nor is it clear that the rabbinic doctrine of Moses' absolute superiority as prophet yet broadly held.

The rabbis of the Talmudic period (2nd century C.E.-6th century C.E.) would insist that since Moses' day the Torah had been fully shaped, the text carefully controlled, and its proper interpretation broadly acknowledged. They insisted that Talmud Torah, the obligation incumbent on every Jew to read and interpret the Torah, had always been fully recognized; that the reading (really, chanting) of the Torah during synagogue worship, Keriat-ha-Torah, was already established ritual; and that on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, sections from the Torah were read out as part of the service in The Temple--in short, that the Sefer Torah was, and had always been, acknowledged and revered as scripture.

While there are occasional references in the Hellenistic period to the study of the Pentateuch and other scrolls, there is no evidence that a regimen of reading from the Sefer Torah during synagogue worship was widely acknowledged and every reason to believe that Talmud Torah, the obligation of all Jews to study Torah,

of the Pentateuch and other scrolls, there is no evidence that a regimen of reading from the Sefer Torah during synagogue worship was widely acknowledged and every reason to believe that Talmud Torah, the obligation of all Jews to study Torah, had not yet been clearly enunciated or widely accepted. Further, contrary to the later rabbinic claim, as we shall see, no scroll played a role in any Temple ceremony.

The first solid evidence that any group of Jews had adopted a discipline centered on the study of venerated texts comes from the records of the millennarian sect whose headquarters were at Qumran (2nd cent. B.C.E. - 1st cent. C.E.). "The many" were to study The Law and the prophets one-third of every night. One man out of ten was appointed "to study The Law day and night, continuously for the improvement of all" (M.D. MANUAL OF DISCIPLINE VI: 4-8. The purpose of this study was to uncover "hidden things," a term which seems to include both the sect's special interpretations of the Torah laws and its understanding of God's plans for redemption and End Time. This sect sometimes called itself "those of the Torah" or the Essenes (C.D. DAMASCUS DOCUMENT III: 14,15).

About the use of scrolls during the informal meetings which took place in those institutions which go by the awkward name of proto-synagogue, we know too little to speak with any confidence. On the Sabbath and holy day portions from a Torah scroll, the Psalms, or perhaps a prophet's message may have been recited or read but there was no formal schedule of readings and, where

scrolls were chanted, practice must have varied from place to place. Such readings may have even occasionally been taken from works not destined to become part of the Hebrew Scriptures. We simply do not know which scrolls Ben Sirah's grandson had in mind when he described his grandfather's curriculum as "The Law, the Prophets and other writings of the Fathers" (1:1). There were individual scrolls but as yet no canonized scripture. Discussions continued in the early rabbinic period on the acceptability of Ezekiel and Esther, possibly also on Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes and the Wisdom of Ben Sirah. It was only in the third century C.E. that the final selections were made, and there was still no agreement whether certain scrolls were to be listed in the section known as Prophets or in that known as Holy Writings and in which order they were to appear. Masoretic work of proper scriptural presentation under careful editorial supervision on textual matters, spelling, word division, and meaning went on for a millennium.

The ordinary Jew probably knew that the Exodus story was central and the story of Samson and Delilah less so since he rehearsed the Exodus deliverance every Passover and heard about Samson only on an occasional visit by a wandering storyteller or professional reader. If he thought about it, which he probably didn't, he might have sensed that there must be some gradations of authority among the scrolls. But he probably never saw all the scrolls which were finally included in the Hebrew Scriptures, certainly never in one place, bound together, and designated as

scripture. In the way of laymen in all generations, he left these issues to the few who took them seriously.

As education began to be seriously encouraged, the layman began to be conscious of books and their potential importance, but as yet the concept of a scripture was not fully developed in his mind. There was no Ark in the local worship place. The armoria, the book case which contained his community's scrolls, may have included other rolls besides the Sefer Torah.

During this period the Prophets had a status equal to the Pentateuch as a source of ultimate truths and were avidly studied for their secrets. That the prophetic speech witnessed to God's justice and set forth the sacred promises in Hebrew, God's own language, commanded respect. Prophecy recorded God's original bond with their nation, proved His just treatment of them, and stated God's promise of national redemption. Obedience was crucial. "If you agree and give heed you will eat the good things of the earth but if you refuse and disobey, you will be devoured by the sword" (Is. 1:19-20). The Teacher of Righteousness who in the second century B.C.E. founded the monastic community of Qumran drew his special knowledge primarily from his inspired understanding of the work of such prophets as Isaiah and Habakkuk.

When and why did the two histories (Joshua-Judges-Samuel-Kings and Chronicles) come to be treated as scriptural? The editors of these annals make no claim that they are setting down revealed or inspired material. These chronicles had been shaped to make the point that all that had happened to Israel and Judah was

explained by the operation of the covenant. Israel's history was set forth as an object lesson in the value of covenant faithfulness. God's justice and mercy were revealed through His control of the destiny of Israel and the nations; as He had promised, so it had happened. God's dependability gave Israel reason for hope. God had told the people the consequences of covenant disloyalty and Israel had been punished, but God had also promised the people that His anger would not burn forever, and they would be redeemed. The histories tell them they could also depend on that promise.

During Hellenistic times an increasing number of Jews outside the priest class became literate and were able to study the writings. New issues emerge: Who had authority to interpret those texts: which texts were authoritative, how much authority is reserved for community practice, the unwritten tradition, what we would call common law.

Not all groups had the same writings of the Fathers. The Sadducees, a conservative land-owning group, accepted as authority--in addition to the Law, the Prophets, and other writings of the Fathers--a Book of Decrees of which unfortunately not a trace remains. The Pharisees, a table fellowship who had set for themselves particularly stringent standards of purity and tithing, and thought of themselves as another priestly elite accepted the Law and the Prophets and a limited number of writings of the Fathers together with an oral tradition based largely on text interpretations shaped in their circles. Groups of apocalyptics had their own

understanding of the Prophets and their torot differed in part from those in the received text. There were ascetic communities like the Essenes who had, in addition to the Sefer Torah and the Prophets, their own scrolls, such as the Manual of Discipline. To a surprising degree, variety rather than uniformity was the hallmark of the age and, paradoxically, the emergence of accepted texts encouraged greater variety. As modern literary critics have shown, a text can be construed to mean almost anything.

Josephus revealed his hopes and those of the Pharisees among whom he had trained rather than the actual state of affairs in 1st century Judea when he wrote: "We have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another (as the Greeks have), but only twenty-two books which contain the records of all the past times, which are justly believed to be divine and of them five belong to Moses which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death" (Contra Apion 1:8).

Torah in Hellenistic times meant law and, broadly, tradition. The prophetic books were trusted but treated separately from the five books of Torah. The "writings of the Fathers" seem to have been a varying list. Mikra, the rabbinic term for Scripture, does not appear as yet in the literature, nor does the acronym term for the three-tiered scripture, Tanakh, a concept of rabbinic times.

There were many texts and more appeared all the time. Some were simply other versions of well-known narratives and oracles. Others were entirely new. An occasional work like Tobit floats outside the scope of scriptural narrative, but most of the story scrolls which were not canonized were somehow connected to the Biblical text. Susanna provided another illustration of Daniel's wisdom as does Bel and Dagon. The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men with their theme of religious loyalty were placed between two verses in the third chapter of Daniel. There is no way to know why such material as the prose biography of Jeremiah was canonized and the Epistle of Jeremiah was not. Perhaps it was simply that one tradition came into the hands of the right scribe at an appropriate time and the other did not. Some judgments reflect the seriousness of the material involved. Others were simply serendipitous. Contrary to most modern assumptions, the decisions to include or exclude were sometimes made for reasons as superficial as the fact that when a scribe had some empty space available at the end of a scroll he had just copied, he added something he liked to fill in the space.

Sometime in the third century of the Common Era, the rabbis finally settled on a table of contents for scripture, the order of which to this day governs the masoretic text. This table of contents numbered twenty-two books, the result of considering Judges-Ruth and Jeremiah-Lamentations as separate books. It seems to have been desirable to have twenty-two books in the Hebrew

scriptures to correspond to the twenty-two letters in the Hebrew aTphabet. Since the alphabet was seen as containing all the building blocks out of which the universe is constructed, and served also as Israel's numeration system, this equation suggested that all knowledge was to be found in these texts.

No one could play such numbers games until there was a consensus on which books were accepted as scripture. Agreement was not fully achieved until the rabbis emerged as the leaders of a reconstructed Judaism in the period after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. There were many books in existence, all the books that became scripture and all which did not, and no one as yet felt a need to proclaim an official selection. We simply do not know what was included in "the other books of the fathers" (B.S. Intro 1.1f.

In Hellenistic times no one claimed, as the subsequent rabbinic leadership so evidently did, that the Hebrew scripture was a Kol Bo, an anthology which contained all truth and wisdom. A first century C.E. scroll, 2 Esdras, describes how Ezra, under divine inspiration, produces a copy of all the sacred books after they had been incinerated in a fire. Ezra, we are told, dictated to secretaries ninety-two books. Ezra is told: "Make public the twenty-two books that you wrote first and let the worthy and unworthy read them: but keep the seventy that were written last in order to give them to the wise among your people for in them is the Spring of Understanding, the Fountain of Wisdom and the

River of Knowledge" (2 Esdras 14:45-47). For the author of Esdras, as for the teacher of righteousness, who lived two centuries earlier, the most precious knowledge, essentially that which deals with eschatology, lay outside the twenty-two books which became scripture.

There is no thought in the Hellenistic centuries of a defined sacred anthology. Even as late as the early Talmudic period there are still debates about whether certain scrolls should be included or excluded from a collection which has not yet been named or defined. Editorial consistency is one hallmark of an active push for the text's unity, yet editors still seem not to have felt the need to remove or resolve all the divergent descriptions of the same event or different presentations of the same speech when these appear in the Deuteronomic and priestly histories. Even the ten commandments appear in slightly different forms in Exodus and Deuteronomy; vide their separate explanations for the rules of Sabbath observance. Nor do the scrolls present the ten instructions in the same order. "You shall not murder" precedes "You shall not steal" in the Masoretic, Samaritan, Qumran texts, and Josephus but follows it in the Septuagint and Philo.

Studies by J. A. Sanders of dead sea psalm manuscripts found in Caves 7 and 11 allow us to look at the editing and publishing process as it operated at a fairly late stage in the development of the psalter. Several psalms appear which are not found in our Psalter. There are differences in the brief programmatic notes

which preface psalms, variations in the order in which the psalms are presented, and slight textual variations in language between versions. A number of the Dead Sea texts, like that of Psalm 145, reproduce a congregational refrain after each verse--"Praised be the Lord and praised be His name forever and ever"--a practice only occasionally followed in the received text. Sanders argues that a broad consensus governing the presentations of the psalms was in place by the first century B.C.E., but that scribes still felt free to make additions, elaborations, or even revisions. Scrolls were formed but not yet fixed.

Variations are even more apparent in the sectarian literature and in individual works which were not accepted into the Canon. Jubilees presents a different version of the narratives of Genesis and of the early sections of Exodus. Jubilees differs from the Canon text in many details, most dramatically in certain torot and in describing a lunar calendar which differs considerably from that of the accepted text. Its presentation of the Sabbath laws, more detailed and stricter than those in the Sefer Torah, are described as having been revealed to Abraham rather than to Moses. Abraham's death bed valedictory admonishes his family to observe the laws requiring the death penalty for an adulteress, the prohibition against meat containing any residue of the animal's blood, and the proper ritual for a peace offering and other sacrifice (20:4, 21:6ff). Portions of several copies of Jubilees were found in the dead sea caves along with portions of the Pentateuch, suggesting that these versions were accepted as complementary.

Late in the Hellenistic period, the Pharisees would begin to press for a more rigorous definition of the acceptable and the unacceptable. Their way of faith depended on precision, but most Jews of the period were not particularly involved; as long as dues were regularly paid to The Temple and the cult was in operation, most were satisfied. The idea that Judaism could be defined by holy texts did not yet dominate most people's thinking, but we can see it beginning to emerge. We see it developing in the writings of the Essenes who reserved their secrets to the initiated and looked on any outside their circle as blind to the saving truths. In such sectarian circles conflicting claims as to Torahic authority could lead to bitter dispute. In one of the Hodayot or hymns of the Qumran community, the author speaks of "Teachers of Lies" who scheme to entice believers "to exchange the Torah engraved on my heart for the smooth things which they speak to thy people."

The Damascus Document which served as the constitution of the Qumran community openly challenged the claim that the lists of instructions in the five books contained the full text of revelation. "God established His covenant with Israel by revealing to them hidden things concerning which all Israel had gone astray" (6:10). When the Qumran hymns praise the Oseh Torah, those who follow the Torah law, they have in mind those who follow their Torah and calendar rather than the general run of Judeans who knew and obeyed only the generally accepted text.

Samaritan leaders cherished the five scrolls of the Torah and only those scrolls. Their text was similar to that of the Judeans but included in the ten commandments a requirement that an altar be built on Mt. Gerizim and sacrifices be offered there. It also changed Mt. Ebal to Mt. Gerizim in Deut. 27:4 as the place where the first altar was to be erected in the promised land, a change that made the Samaritans schismatics in the eyes of Judeans since it cast doubts on the primacy of The Temple in Jerusalem.

The recently published Temple Scroll (2nd cent. B.C.E.) included torot sacred to the Dead Sea community but unknown to the received text: animals could be slaughtered only by priests in The Temple and all sexual intercourse was banned in the holy city. It also requires that priests celebrate an annual ordination festival and participate in several other unknown agricultural festivals, one celebrating the first fruits of the vine, another the first fruits of the orchard, and another the first waving of a newly cut barley sheaf. Various groups had their own narrative and law traditions, and unless we dismiss such works as deliberate forgeries or the idiosyncratic writings of some "inspired" individual, it is at least apparent that religious attitudes of one or another group of Judeans are reflected in such texts.

The decisions to include or exclude were ultimately determined by extrinsic as well as intrinsic factors. The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms were the heart of the tradition and the first to be accepted by all. Other scrolls were judged by other

criteria. That the canon turned out as it did is not a resolution of conflicting claims about which version God preferred but that certain scrolls were cherished by the group of sages who ultimately gained sway. In the end the sages limited the library of venerated work to the texts they found fully acceptable.

Minor textual variations could become significant. Yigael Yadin, in his careful analysis of the Temple Scroll, has shown how the author quotes from a text substantially similar to the known text but at times in a slightly different mode. Such "slight" differences must not be overlooked since a different text inevitably led to interpretations other than the normative ones. The Temple Scroll declared that the king may not marry more than one wife and insisted that his wife be from his father's tribe and family, a rule apparently based on the textual tradition which also lies behind the Septuagint rule governing the marriage of a high priest: "He shall take to wife", wife, not wives, "A virgin of his own people," not from another family. The rabbinic tradition based on Deuteronomy 17 would rule that the king "may choose for himself wives, of the daughters of priests, Levites or Israelites," in short, any Jewish woman (Tos San. 4:2).

Various scrolls circulated which contained versions of the early narratives and variant lists of torot as well as speeches and biographies of the prophets. At the end of the scrolls of Jeremiah and II Kings, there are several chapters concerning the last days of the Kingdom of Judah which are in all respects identical.

Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 present an identical end-of-days oracle. The scrolls which include such repetitions seem to have developed independently and circulated independently.

In this late Hellenistic period it is perhaps best to think of books rather than the book. People assumed they all fit together, but the effort to actually weave the texts into a single design had not yet fully begun: this would be the work of the early rabbis of the second and third centuries. In the quiet studies of the priest-scribes, as among the general community, the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms were venerated, but the task of sorting out what other scrolls should be included under the rubric of 'divinely inspired' had not yet been taken up. In many cases there were still open questions about which text tradition of a particular scroll was the authentic one. Corrections made by a scribe to one of the Dead Sea scrolls are almost all in the direction of the version that became the accepted text; corrections made by another scribe to a scroll of Deuteronomy take it further away from our text. Our Jeremiah text differs considerably from scrolls which served as the basis of the Septuagint translation. A psalm scroll from Qumran divides some of the poetic units differently than the accepted text does and contains several hymns not included in the one hundred and fifty presented in the Psalter. The two Isaiah scrolls found in Cave 1 differ from each other and from our text not only in script--one was written in the old Ketav Ivri, the other in the newer square Ashurit--spelling, and grammar, but also in content. Such variations testify

to an active interest in literature and to an attitude which did not yet consider such works as sacrosanct. These distinct textual traditions were not yet sufficiently disturbing to prompt the community to appoint a commission to declare one scroll authorized and another suspect. Scribes and readers chose whichever version appealed to them, or perhaps simply whatever text was available. While the Talmudic "history" written later must be rejected as anachronistic, still, there was by late Hellenistic times a broad acceptance of a particular textual stream for the five Torah scrolls and the prophetic books, and an acknowledgement of their special role in the community's life. A faith which had been essentially bi-polar--tradition and The Temple--was becoming tri-polar: Tradition, Temple, and text. Two of these three focii, Temple and text, were controlled by an elite disparate, but nonetheless, an elite, those who were born to the priestly caste and those who could read and took the effort to master the texts.

Besides the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms, Hellenistic Jewish scribes in Palestine worked on histories, wisdom, and, increasingly, on apocalypse (Daniel, the last half of Zechariah, Enoch, Esdras). Apocalyptic interests peaked during the Maccabean revolt and the early Roman centuries when there was a widely held belief that the millennium was at hand and the kingdom of God just beyond. Apocalypse presents the history of the future and deals with such themes as the ultimate fate of Israel and the nations. It generally took the form of a report by someone who had been allowed to enter heaven and to read there from the book of the

future or who had heard from some heavenly personage revelations about the future. Apocalypse might also be presented as an esoteric commentary on some well-known prophecy which revealed the razim, secret information about End Time. The Essenes treasured scrolls of Pesharim, eschatological interpretations of Biblical material (Habakkuk, Isaiah, Nahum, Micah, Hosea and Psalms) in which the sect's founder, the teacher of righteousness, passed on esoteric explanations of textual meaning. The scrolls which contained these secrets were zealously guarded by the Essenes lest their secrets be revealed to the unworthy. Had they been of critical interest to the later rabbis, some of this material would undoubtedly have been included in the scriptural anthology.

For the first time in Palestine and the diaspora, there were writings authorized or authored by known contemporaries: Ben Sirach, the Teacher of Righteousness, Artapanus, Ezekiel the Tragedian. Histories appear (the Hasmonean Chronicles, Artapanus) as do collections of Wisdom (Ben Sirah), Novella (Tobit, Judith) and Hymns (Qumran's Thanksgiving Hymns).

The Hellenistic world delighted in moralistic biography, books designed to provide readers with upright and virtuous heros whose lives could serve as compelling examples of noble character. In addition to Daniel, Judith, Hannah, and the Maccabees, the patriarchs were generally portrayed costumed in nobility. Abraham is zealous for God even to the point of burning down an idolatrous shrine ([redacted]). He meets every test of loyalty to

Jubilees 12:12

God with patient endurance and is often depicted, as are the other patriarchs, giving high-minded advice to his family gathered about his death bed.

Interest in literature was apparently even greater in the Greek-speaking Egyptian diaspora than in Judea. Philo devoted a whole volume to a panegyric to Moses (Vita Moysis). There historians (Artapanus, Eupolemos), philosophers (Philo), and even playrights (Ezekiel) plied their trade. The Greek-speaking world produced histories, books of wisdom, novellas, testimonies, and extensive commentaries.

Not all contemporary lists of venerated scrolls are identical or even complete. The Greek-speaking diaspora developed its own Table of Contents, those scrolls which came to be known under the umbrella label of Septuagint. The sectarians at Qumran also developed their own consensus over several hundred years.

There was as yet no agreed-on formal method for the presentation of venerated writings. Most scrolls were set out in the new square script (Ashurit), but others continued to be written in the old Ketav Ivri. Still, the scrolls had achieved a recognizable role in the life of the community. Among the scribes and those who cared there was a heightened interest in establishing a textus receptus - a 'received' or 'correct' text. Many questions of orthography, spelling, and word division were resolved. Versions were compared and decisions made as to the correct reading. Issues of particular concern included syntax, spelling, word division, and pagination as well as scribal glosses or corrections which had mistakenly entered into the body of the text, often

resulting in a conflated reading.

Standardization was in the air, but it was not yet fully achieved. Nor was establishing an authorized text seen as an absolute necessity. During Hellenistic times the scribes who worked on these scrolls did not feel constrained from making minor changes in spelling, orthography, even from deleting sentences. Torah and Prophetic rolls found in the Qumran caves included letters which had been struck out and words inserted above other words. Rabbinic Judaism would later require that a scribe who made an error in copying a single letter of a Torah scroll carefully erase it and get it right; mortals are not allowed to tinker with God's words. The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms carried a large and increasing measure of authority, but in these pre-rabbinic centuries had not yet fully graduated to the rank of scripture, in which it is crucial that every word and every letter be presented accurately and copied faithfully.

Judean scribes began to develop a Masorah, a tradition of proper scriptural presentation, and soon Hebrew scholia began to appear. Although no text of the early Masorah survives, some of its methods can be deduced from Qumran scrolls which survive from this period and from comments on masoretic issues which found their way into rabbinic writings, including numerous observations such as: "Ha-Er is written, but we read Hatzer", (b. Erv. 26A 2K 20:4). Researchers have discovered among the various manuscript fragments of the Sefer Torah in the Qumran materials evidence of textual and orthographic variations. Most of the Qumran

manuscripts were written with care and represent a single text tradition. Editorial judgment comes into play. Rather elegant theories of textual criticism are discussed. Scholarly and literary motivation play increasingly important roles in what can for the first time honestly be called a literary enterprise.

The Torah scrolls and those of the prophets were among the first on which this effort was concentrated. Great care was taken to establish their correct texts. The Talmud describes Magihei Sefarim, investigators of texts, who were responsible for examining Torah scrolls to insure that they were free from error, and suggests that these scribes were paid from Temple funds (b. Ket. 106a). Such detail puts a bit too much of an administrative gloss on what was certainly a less than formally organized process, but editorial work was in progress. Hebrew scrolls were beginning to get the attention Greeks normally gave to written documents.

Most of the community was not unaware that much of this technical interest had been stimulated by the Hellenistic environment. A number of legends surrounded the 'officially accepted' Torah translation into demotic Greek, the Septuagint. These legends suggest a felt need among Jews to confirm that they treated their books with at least the same care as the Greeks.

Scholars would work for almost a thousand years before the masoretic effort established a fully accredited written text. At this early stage of that effort a more significant purpose was to insure the proper reading-chanting of the text. In a world where no one read silently, it was only natural that scribes

should think first of how a text would sound rather than of how it looked. Since books were always read aloud, the Hellenistic Jewish world instinctively associated the written and spoken word. In many of the Qumran texts, the word adonai was written above God's name, YHWH, to insure that the reader would not utter God's most powerful name. A typical early masoretic effort inserted weak consonants in words where their presence would help the reader properly sound the unvocalized text: The Vov was used to indicate 'o', the Yod, 'i'. These so-called Matres Lectiones helped to insure accurate pronunciation but did not provide a full-blown system of vowel notation, and none was developed during the Hellenistic centuries. An uninstructed reader could not be fully confident of his recitation; still, much had been accomplished. The Greeks had significantly improved the usefulness of the alphabet when they introduced, perhaps in the sixth century B.C.E., vowel signs into their texts. Vowels so markedly reduced the uncertainties in sounding phrases that a person could pick up a voweled text and be fairly sure that he could read it aloud accurately.

Koine, the popular Greek dialect, became the vernacular of the large Egyptian-Syrian diaspora and was even spoken by some in Judea. Jews who could write and read Greek could take advantage of Greek books and culture. Perhaps Koine's widespread use was one of the reasons literary interest was more highly developed in the diaspora than in Judea. A knowledge of everyday Greek was, however, no guarantee that a person could read the Iliad or

Plato in the classic tongue. Philo's catholic knowledge of the classic Hellenistic curriculum was, as far as we know, unique among diaspora Jews, but there can be little doubt that the intelligentsia of the large Jewish community of Alexandria had access to that city's libraries and that they were influenced by Greek literary forms and interests, and even by the contents of the Greek classics.

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By the second century B.C.E. there is little doubt that most diaspora Jews could no longer speak or understand Hebrew. For a Greek-speaking Jew to have mastered the Hebrew texts would have been a significant accomplishment, requiring learning not only an unfamiliar alphabet but also the sounds of a language rarely heard or used. Greek translations were an absolute necessity. Despite the claim of The Letter of Aristeas, a late second century B.C.E. text, that the Ptolemaic court had ordered the Septuagint translations, there is little, if any, evidence that the Greeks of West Asia were interested enough in the sacred literature of their oriental subjects to have any of it translated. This was a task for Jews.

cf b. Megilla 9a-b

Hebrew was losing out on all fronts. Aramaic was becoming the vernacular of Palestinian Jews as Koine was for diaspora Jews. An editor of the priestly history has Nehemiah say that on arrival in Jerusalem he found among its citizens many whose "children spoke the language of Ashur. . .and could no longer speak the language of Judah," one of several texts which point to the spread of

Aramaic as a vernacular among the Jews in Judea. Beside the Aramaic material which found its way into the Bible, Aramaic texts found at or near Qumran include fragments of a prayer ascribed to the Babylonian King Nabonidus, sections of Tobit, Enoch, The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, a translation of Job and The Genesis Apocryphon. There is also in Aramaic a Megillat Ta'anit, a small scroll listing 36 days on which fasting is prohibited, which some regard as a document of a rebel party fighting Rome, apparently written in haste and for popular consumption, shortly before the temple's destruction in 70 C.E. Josephus wrote the text of The Jewish Wars in Aramaic and then arranged for its translation into Greek (Josephus, Introduction).

Despite the dethronement of Hebrew as the national vernacular, schooling and custom insured that familiar hymns, stories, phrases, and idioms in the old speech remained part of an active universe of discourse. But the oral tradition in its original form was no longer of a piece with the community's daily speech, a change that served to spur interest in written texts. As contemporary culture no longer reinforced the classic tradition, the study of Hebrew texts increasingly became the preserve of a segment of a literate elite who, increasingly and sometimes without consciously planning it, found themselves determining and shaping tradition through their ability to interpret the revered texts.

Any text requires interpretation, if only to put the bare words in some appropriate context. Who but a well-informed

commentator could provide that understanding? Those who knew Hebrew were obviously the only ones who could provide background and context and also derive from the texts written in Hebrew new levels of meaning. During this period hebrew became for Judean intellectuals what Latin was for Europe's best and brightest during the Middle Ages: a proof of status, a means of self-conscious academic communication, and the basis of a claim to religious authority.

Men wrote in Hebrew for many of the same reasons and particularly to associate their words with God's speech, to dress them up in holiness. The Temple Scroll, Jubilees and the Pesher on Habbakuk were written in Hebrew. So was the Wisdom of Ben Sirah, so were Tobit and Judith. The fact that a book had been written in Lashon Ha-Kodesh (Hebrew, the holy tongue) rather than in Aramaic or Mishnaic Hebrew, a contemporary scholar's vernacular, seems to have played a role in rabbinic times in determining whether it made the final cut. But in the history of these changeful times nothing is uncomplicated: the existence of a work in Aramaic or Mishnaic hebrew, a contemporary scholar's vernacular, seems to have played a role in rabbinic times in determining whether it made the final cut. But in the history of these changeful times nothing is uncomplicated: the existence of a work in Aramaic was not a compelling reason for exclusion -- vide the Aramaic portions of Ezra-Nehemiah and Daniel--or a work in Hebrew for inclusion--vide Ben Sirah, Judith, and Tobit.

One bit of evidence from rabbinic times of the synagogue's emergence as Mikdash Me'at, a small sanctuary which possessed some of the redemptive power once associated with The Temple, was the deliberate retention of some Hebrew in the worship service and the requirement of public readings from the scrolls in their original hebrew. Theoretically, one could pray in any language--there were Aramaic and Greek prayers--but the sense of power and mystery associated with Hebrew tended to outweigh more practical considerations. Hebrew was, for the most part, deliberately kept alive in the house of prayer. Much of the power implicit in the liturgy lay in the participant's use of God's language. Hebrew was the language in which God had addressed Israel and it was the language in which Israel felt it proper to address God. Though it is not generally considered in this light, the rabbinic ritual of Keriat Ha-Torah--reading the Torah--for which every male was trained was shaped to be a rite of communion. A reader read God's own phrases in God's own tongue.

It was an age of intellectual ferment. New ideas circulated about the after life, personal immortality, and the individual's fate -- as well as the nation's, about the Messianic promise, martyrdom, and the secret, deeper meaning of certain cherished texts. Midrash, that massive interpretive effort through which Jews examined every aspect of their scripture and in so doing changed its thrust and nature, begins here. Midrash emerges as a full-blown discipline which required ingenuity and intellectual legerdemain since the texts were old, in a sacred language, dealt with limited subject

matter, and sometimes seemed at odds with the needs and sensitivities of the cultural milieu in which Jews now found themselves. Midrash inspires awe and sometimes bemusement at its ingenuity, but we must not forget that at Midrash's heart lay the conviction that the sacred texts meant more than they seemed to mean. There was more in them than context, logic, or common sense readily suggested, which is another way of saying that even as Jews began to accept the concept of a holy scripture, the leaders pressed vigorously to insure that the community accept these texts in a proper light -- theirs. The sages did not rewrite these texts. They reinterpreted them. They held the texts sacred, but this did not bar their reading into them unexpected meanings.

Despite the increased importance and visibility of written scrolls in late Hellenistic times, the oral traditions continue to exert a powerful, though no longer totally dominant, influence. Toward the end of the period Philo felt it appropriate to make clear the importance and force of the non-written tradition.

> You shall not move your neighbor's landmark, set up by previous generations (Deut. 19:14). This law applies not merely to allotments and boundaries of land. . .but also to the safeguarding of ancient customs. For customs are unwritten laws, the decisions approved by men of old, not inscribed on monuments nor on leaves of paper which the moth destroys but on the souls of those who are

> partners in the same citizenship, for children ought to inherit from their parents, besides their property, ancestral customs which they were reared in and have lived with even from the cradle and not despite them because they have been handed down without written record (De. Spec. Legibus 4:149).

If anything, the emergence of separate texts added to the importance of the envelope of oral custom, ancient practice, and familiar precedent which framed the text. Various groups used elements from the ocean of the oral tradition to make sure a text was understood in a particular way. The Sefer Torah would be placed in the synagogue Ark unencumbered, a pristine symbol: but it would not be read in the synagogue without Targum, an interpretive Aramaic translation, or studied in the schools without commentary. The Pharisaic habit of thought which became the dominant one in the centuries after 70 C.E. emphasized the careful definition of texts. Until quite recent times the masters in the yeshivot seriously frowned on a student found reading Biblical texts without the mantle of Targum and commentary into which the rabbis had woven their interpretations.

No group within the late Hellenistic Jewish communities would have appreciated the early Protestant insistence on each individual's right and duty to approach Scripture with an open, unencumbered mind. Jews saw such an approach as a guarantee of division within the community. Moreover, it ran counter to the Biblical belief that God had specifically laid out what Israel must do. A text

might have many legitimate levels of meaning, but at each level only one interpretation was acceptable.

The more widely literacy spread, the more easily the community accepted the idea that there was a particular set of sacred writings: the Torah, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Tradition and the texts are not complementary but not identical. Tradition spreads a wider net. A critical shift in perspective began to take place. The written text had been largely a repository of tradition. It now begins to be seen as the place where investigation and discussion start, the source from which the tradition flows. Scribes and others began to study the texts to fully understand doctrine and discipline and for their secrets. The texts began to shape tradition.

The change was first manifested among the literate who cared about religious ideas, had access to the texts and valued them. Trained as editors and scholars, they gravitated naturally to the analysis and the interpretation of texts and, inevitably, not only new insights but differences of opinion began to emerge. Philo and the Pharisee drew quite different theologies and definitions out of the same text.

This change of perspective appears first in the use of the various Biblical prophecies as sources for messianic and millennarian expectations. Qumran's Teacher of Righteousness took this approach to services in the Pesharim on various prophetic books which he prepared for his followers. The Essenes venerated their founder, the teacher of righteousness, as an inspired interpreter of the

Torah and prophets: "God had made known (to him) all the secrets of the words of His servants to the prophets" (4Q Pss 37 [illegible]). This translates to mean that he had examined the texts of various prophets and been inspired to discover in them eschatological information. His Pesharim developed the esoteric truths which sustained his followers. They studied the commentaries and writings and other books that they considered "biblical" to understand what the teacher had uncovered when he had [illegible] the well" (C.D. III:16) and to make sure that they kept the law of God as it should be kept. As they studied the original Torah and its prophets, they discovered "[illegible] hidden from Israel" which they would make known to their brothers and sisters but not to outsiders (M.D. VIII:11-12).

Two different Midrashic techniques were adopted quite early by all groups. Peshat, a straight-forward contextual analysis of a passage's implications which made reasonable deductions from the text, filling in details and making connection between one text and another; and Derash, a more imaginative and artful approach, and in early rabbinic times (2nd/3rd centuries C.E.) a more important one, using imaginative etymologies, assuming connections between homonyms or meaning in sentences containing the same word which otherwise have nothing to do with each other. Derash provided detail for sparsely sketched incidents and assured that the ancestors' actions were put in a good light. The Pharisaic sages did not invent these two forms of Midrash. One finds both already in the Bible. One example: There are two scriptural versions of

the slaying of the giant, Goliath. In the Deuteronomic telling, David does the deed with his trusty slingshot (I Sam. 17). In the priestly version a soldier, Elhanan, is credited with the slaying (I Ch. 20). A priest-interpreter resolved this contradiction by breaking up the words in the second text when David's victim is named, "The Hittite Goliath" (Hallahmi-et-Golyat) to read Lahmi ahi Golyat Lahmi "the brother of Goliath." Two different dead Philistines figure in what has become two different stories. Derash transcends logic. Derash uses verbal casuistry to make the text yield what the interpreter knew ahead of time it must yield. Later, the rabbis promulgated a set of rules for Derash, but there is no doubt that the ultimate test of such interpretation was the rabbinic community's judgment that a particular Midrashic analysis resulted in a fit interpretation.

Some interpreters felt themselves to be inspired. Some spoke of a Bat Kol, a heavenly voice not unlike Socrates' Daimon who whispered inspired interpretation to them. Interpretation, when it hit the mark, was not simply human speculation: it was linked somehow with the holy spirit.

The emergence of commentary significantly enlarges the authority of tradition, defines a particular stream of meaning, and is strong evidence that we have entered a world where the books of the Bible have begun to be seen as constitutive. Later, in rabbinic times, instead of asking priests to consult the oracles, people will ask their sages to ascertain God's will from holy texts.

The rabbis would later insist that prophecy had ceased in Israel soon after the exile. It had not. People turned to texts more often than to prophets, but prophets continued to speak and to be consulted on public and private matters. In post-exilic times there are numerous references to what had been said before. The editors of Chronicles had the Deuteronomic histories in mind. Jubilees knows Genesis. Jonah is a novella built around a well-known prophecy concerning the destruction of Nineveh and a known historical figure. Increasingly, texts provided a place from which could be drawn the process of defining and extending the covenanted way of life. No one could predict what a latter-day Amos might claim to be God's will, but the text was there, solid, fixed.

The text had another virtue. The scrolls were available to anyone who could read. The power that accompanied the interpretation of texts served well the religious concerns and ambitions of many in the growing literate sections of the community. The priest-scribes of The Temple may not have used the texts in Temple ritual, but they were available, and anyone who could write or hire a scribe could acquire a copy. History is full of paradoxes. One of my favorite is the proposition that if Israel's scripture had had a more exalted birth the text probably would have been shut away as a prerogative of the priests; but since the texts had begun life simply as records of well-known oral traditions or as

garden-variety histories, no one tried to monopolize them. Since no one at first had associated these writings with divinity, there was no reason to secrete them. The texts were looked on "as the inheritance of the whole household of Israel."

In Hellenistic times those who dealt with texts did so primarily in cult and academic settings, where tests were looked at, studied, and interpreted as a way to understand God's design for the religious life of His people. Some, like Qumran's teacher of righteousness, examined certain prophetic texts to understand their teaching about End Time. Some, like the Alexandrian scholar-preacher Philo, read the law allegorically and in so doing dressed Judaism in philosophic clothes. Some, like the Pharisees, developed an intricate exegetical method, Derash, to extricate from the texts all that they knew God had placed there. It would take some generations for the Pharisees to convince the community that their interpretation of Torah was the only acceptable one, but history -- in the form of the failed rebellions of 68-72 and 132-135 -- came to their aid by making it clear that Jews needed clear disciplines and a fully articulated way of life.

It was not pure logic that carried the day. The sages had followed the advice of their early leaders and raised up many disciples. Confident of their approach, they were ready and willing to fill the power gap which opened after the revolt of 68-72 was crushed and The Second Temple destroyed. Their Midrashic technique

was not unlike contemporary Greek techniques used in interpreting Homer, little more than ingenious, sometimes elegant, ways to discover meanings that were not self-evident. The Pharisaic way would ultimately be the Jewish way.

During Hellenistic times the texts were not the only source of authority. Until The Temple altar was forcibly closed in 70 C.E., people continued to consult the priests for oracles. Philo reports that the Theraputae, a group of Egyptian Zenobites, sometimes spoke prophetically in their sleep. Daniel, which was probably written during the Maccabean revolt (168-165 B.C.E.) describes its hero as one "who had understanding of all visions and dreams" (1:17). God reveals to Daniel the context of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and then interprets its meaning. In his prayers Daniel thanks God "who gives wisdom to the wise. . .and reveals deep and mysterious things" (2:21-22). Daniel is both sage and seer whose knowledge comes equally from the mastery of texts and from purification and prayer. He eats only pure foods, fasts regularly, and prays three times a day. He interprets well-known traditions, such as Jeremiah's prophecy that the Judeans would return to Jerusalem after seventy years of exile, even as he receives knowledge of other secret things. Visionaries like Enoch are pictured entering heaven to receive the knowledge of the future which is available there. Leaders of all these groups claimed divine inspiration for their views and their interpretations of sacred texts.

The Judean sages who developed the "oral law" wanted to associate their formulations with Torah, but some could not use the classic language, scriptural Hebrew, with ease. To remedy that lack they developed an updated Hebrew dialect, which we call Mishnaic, whose grammar, syntax, and vocabulary show significant Aramaic influence and include also a number of Persian and a greater number of Greek words. It is not clear to what degree those who spoke the revised Hebrew dialect could understand a tongue any more than a Greek speaker in Ptolemaic Alexandria who used Koine could understand a rhapsodist reciting Homer. Targumim, popular Aramaic translations of various scrolls, begin to appear. The original Hebrew speech becomes Lashon Ha-Kodesh, a sacred tongue, powerful because of its association with God's speech, revered for its identification with the ancient tradition and for its use by the priests when they conducted Temple ceremonies--all associations which helped raise the chosen Hebrew scrolls to the rank of Scripture.

It is not clear whether the preachers and religious teachers of the Greek diaspora could manage classic Hebrew. There is a long-standing scholarly argument whether Philo, the best trained Jewish scholar of the period, could read Hebrew: Philo's commentaries are seen to be based entirely on the Septuagint, which he apparently quotes from memory. That such a question is raised about the most scholarly preacher-teacher of this age and is still unresolved suggests the distance between Greek-speaking

Jews and their Hebrew traditions. if sections from the Hebrew scrolls were chanted during worship in the prayer halls of the Egyptian diaspora, the congregation must have felt quite at sea. This is one reason why one should be careful in locating the origin of the ritual of regular Torah readings from the original Hebrew texts in the proto-synagogues of the diaspora. For most diaspora Jews, understanding of the Hebrew text required their translation. The rabbinic rule that a Jew may speak his prayers in any language suggests the need to accommodate monophones.

Scrolls were probably read only in translation in most early diaspora synagogues, but this was not the case in Palestine, although there, too, comprehension sometimes required translation. Aramaic derives from the same Akkadian mother language as Hebrew and uses the same alphabet. Aramaic speakers could sound out a Torah text and make intelligent guesses at the drift of what was read, but for most this was difficult work, indeed. Aramaic-speaking Judeans must have understood the Hebrew scripture's sentences in much the same way a modern English-speaking audience hears and "understands" Chaucer or Marlowe.

It was likelier for Palestinian Jews to be bilingual, Aramaic and Hebrew. A Targum, an Aramaic translation or paraphrase of the synagogue reading, was necessary to give most audiences a full understanding of the text and not simply, as some would argue, to impose a particular interpretation of the text. We see here the separation of symbol from substance which will to some degree

characterize all subsequent treatments of scripture. The Targum was to be read aloud. It was not a sacred writing but a device to heighten understanding. Written versions did appear, but Targumim were never encrusted, as the Septuagint was, with legends designed to establish their perfection and thus their use as a primary resource.

Stories circulated in Hellenistic times in both oral and written form, were widely credited, and would be credited for centuries. History was still seen largely as story, and many imaginative products of this age, particularly the early Aggadah, can be understood only as story. Aggadah is the non-legal part of the post-Biblical oral history embracing narratives, legends, parables, allegories, poems, prayers, theological and philosophical reflections. The Midrash literature, developed over more than a millennium, consists almost entirely of Aggadah, and much of the Talmud is aggadic.

Several examples will stand for many. According to Jubilees, when Abraham's father, Terah, was born, the satanic angel, Mastema, unleashed a plague of ravens against his birthplace, the city-state of Ur. it was the planting season. Ravens ate the seeds before the grain had a chance to grow. The community faced starvation and had no relief for many years, until Abraham grew up and came to the rescue. Abraham had developed special powers. He had acknowledged the one true God and had become a Shaman. When the flock of predator ravens returned, Abraham stood in the fields and ordered the birds "to return from whence you come." The birds turned tail. Farmers heard of Abraham's accomplishment and asked

this all-powerful sorcerer to protect their fields. He plied this trade successfully and profitably for a year, but not wanting to spend his life as a sorcerer-scarecrow, Abraham invented a mechanized substitute for his presence, a dispenser which fit on the front of the plow and drops the seed directly on the ploughshare and so into the furrow. The seed is safely in the ground before the bird can get at it (Jub. 11).

How did Abraham come to acknowledge the one God? Jubilees offers two explanations. On the one hand, Abraham simply thought out the idea and God rewarded him by having the Angel of the Presence reveal to him theological secrets. And on the other, Abraham had noticed that the stars moved in irregular circuits through the heavens and had reasoned that if these bodies had been gods they would have arranged comfortable symmetrical circuits for themselves. Their erratic, rather than circular, paths meant that their movements were controlled from the outside. Man, Abraham reasoned, should worship the controller, not the object controlled (Ant. 1:7). Incidentally, in this period Abraham had quite a reputation as an astronomer. Josephus reported that Abraham had used the occasion of his visit to Egypt to teach Egyptian priests the astronomical knowledge of the Chaldeans (Ant. 1:8),

Other versions of the early life of Abraham departed even further from the official narrative tradition. A Latin translation of a Greek translation of what was probably a free-wheeling, first-century C.E. story-history in Hebrew, The Antiquities of the Jew, (Pseudo-Philo) dates the beginning of Abraham's career

to the generation which tried to build the Tower of Babel. Abraham is one of twelve men who objected to the tower project and refused to work on it. Their reasons are not stated, but it is suggested that they knew that God opposed the project. The local building committee threatened the protesting twelve that they would be burned in a brick kiln on the construction site unless they relented immediately and participated. One committee member, Jaftan, disturbed by such an arbitrary threat, sets out to save the protesters. He pleads for time, a week, during which he suggests the twelve may change their minds. He promises to keep the prisoners under close arrest during the grace period. His colleagues grudgingly agree. The twelve are jailed in Jaftan's house and he arranges their escape. All are eager to go except Abraham who, apparently, feels perfectly safe since God protects the blameless. The others flee. Abraham stays. The week ends. The mob returns. Jaftan tries to save Abraham by telling the mob that everyone had escaped, but Abraham is discovered. At least there is one available victim. Abraham is cast into a fiery kiln. God protects His faithful. he sends an earthquake. The kiln cracks and its flames spread in all directions, killing those who stand about. Like Daniel, Abraham emerges unscathed. The tale, again like Daniel, applied to a generation which had to endure the harsh represseion of Antiochus IV against whom the Maccabees rebelled. The story is pure invention, but like most ancient inventions, it is not without some link to tradition. Someone had noticed the similarity

in sound between Ur, Abraham's birthplace, and Or-~~Light~~, fire. Abraham emerges safely from Ur-Or, having given proof that his faith is alight. After those events Abraham is rewarded with land and covenant. He settles in Canaan while the generation of the tower are scattered abroad.

Many portions of the written literature reveal the imprint of an oral culture's training in the use of memory aids. The frequent repetition of phrases, even of whole segments of a story, a prominent feature of Biblical narrative, was one way storytellers helped their audiences fix the story in their memories. Much Biblical prose is handled with great economy of language while also featuring repetitive patterns and word play. Here was a way audiences could hear the salient details they had missed the first time around. We have noted that certain psalms (111, 145) are organized on an acrostic pattern as are the first four chapters of Lamentations and the encomium to the "Woman of Valor" which closes Proverbs.

The chant was a traditional aid to memory. Rhyme, rhythm, and melody help fix lines in the mind. Hebrew poetry, following familiar West Asian poetic styles, depends on a pattern of parallel lines which develop or contrast related themes and on the use of alternating stressed and unstressed syllables. Alliteration and word play, common stylistic elements, also helped memory.

No one confronted a manuscript as we do a book, as a silent, inert object. Oral tradition became the written text and was known as Mikra, that which is heard. Reading was never a silent activity. To those who read aloud, manuscript and speech were

intimately identified. In his extensive commentaries on Biblical texts, Philo, whom we cite as representative of the scholarly elite of the Hellenistic diaspora, never cites a particular Septuagint translation; rather, he quotes from memory, as do the sages cited in Mishnah and Tosefta, where most citations begin, She-ne-emar, "as it is said," rather than Ka-katuv, "as it is written."

Writing has become easier and swifter. Parchment is easier to come by. Scribes allow themselves greater latitude in descriptive phrases and detail. Some literature begins to show the signs of being just that. The priestly chronicles are expansive and full of lists. Novella like Esther are verbose. In Job the poet's imagination runs over any need for compression.

Written compositions begin to indulge in an elaboration and expansion of detail which was impossible when writing materials were scarce and writing techniques uncertain. Examples can be seen clearly in late rewritings like the Genesis Apocryphon, a Midrashic elaboration found among the Dead Sea scrolls. As an example, Abraham's visit to Egypt:

> There was a famine in the land and Abraham went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. As he was about to enter Egypt he said to his wife Sarai, "I am well aware that you are a beautiful woman. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'She is his wife', and they will kill me, but let you live. Say then that you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may remain alive thanks to you."

When Abraham entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw how beautiful the woman was. Pharaoh's courtiers saw her and praised her to Pharaoh, and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's palace. And because of her, it went well with Abram, he acquired sheep, oxen, asses, males and female slaves, she-asses and camels.

But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his household with mighty plagues on account of Sarai, the wife of Abraham. Pharaoh sent for Abraham and said, "What is this you have done to me! Why did you not tell me that she was your wife?

Why did you say, 'she is my sister,' so that I took her as my wife? Now, here is your wife: take her and be good. And Pharaoh put men in charge of him and they sent him away with his wife and all that he possessed.

Prolixity and--what cannot be seen from the translation--the fact that the work was in Aramaic rather than in Hebrew, are dead giveaways that the work was set down at a time when the art of reading had become relatively common. The author clearly wrote for readers and not for listeners who needed to memorize his story.

In fact, most scrolls composed and written in Aramaic or Greek during this period seem to have given little weight to the necessity of memorization. They not only tend to be wordy but they make less use of mnemonics, alliteration, word play, and the other techniques used in oral cultures to ease memorization. Increasingly, written works are attributed to specific authors and claim attention not because they are inspired but for the force of their ideas and the reputation of their author.

By contrast, the hebrew writings of the Pharisees and early rabbinic sages stands out from other writings of the time because they continue the emphasis on compactness. Their work shows little, if any, evidence of the changes which occur when an oral culture is transformed by the introduction of writing. Far from being verbose, these writings consist largely of discrete axioms marked by succinctness, economy of phrase, and the use of mnemonic devices and other aids to memory. The few statements cited in M. Pirke Avot (3rd cen. B.C.E.-1st C.E.) in the name of sages of the second and first century B.C.E., are so terse as to appear gnomic. The earliest statement attributed to any of these men, "be prudent in judgment, raise up many disciples and make a fence for the Torah" (M. Pirke Avot 1:1), characteristically can be read in any number of ways depending on the context the reader assumes.

The Mishnah is a collection of compact sayings, statements of law, briefly noted incidents, and cryptic references to scholarly debates presented in the updated Mishnaic Hebrew without elaboration or connective tissue. Not one rabbi cited in the Talmud is reported to have written a book of his own. It can be said of the literary legacy of the Pharisees and their successors, the rabbis of the Talmudic Age, what critics have observed of the Shaker settlements, that you could look at any building they erected and not find a trace of ornamentation. Theirs was, however, not the unself-conscious use of compression by storytellers and earlier teachers who expected and desired that their words become a living part of

'the national memory. This was Torah - material which should be in the forefront of every Jew's mind because it revealed to him what he must do to please God.

All this suggests that in the pre-Mishnaic centuries (3rd century B.C.E.-3rd century C.E.) for the first time people begin to turn to texts for authority and consciously design texts to exert authority. Certain essential features of a scriptural tradition have emerged, the basis of the later rabbinic teachings. Since, at least symbolically, a scripture serves as the court of final appeal on all issues that concern the basic requirements of a community's religious life, it must be understood as pregnant with good thoughts and examples. Essene commentators went to great lengths to protect the good name of the founders of the Davidic dynasty who, they believed, would rule again in Messianic times. God, Himself, had promised that "the scepter shall not depart from Judah" and "that sprigs will grow from the root of Jesse. . ." (Is. 11:1 ff). David and Solomon were not only renowned and successful kings but founders of the Messianic dynasty: yet, in violation of Torah law both men had taken gentile wives. How could this be? Apologetes told a story that the Torah had not been available to the great kings, "David read not in the book of the law." How could that be? From the time when Israel had sinned with the Golden Calf the Torah books had been sealed and placed in the ark: that seal was not broken until the time of the high priest Zadok (C.D V:2-5).

Schooling in Judea remained as it had been, tutorial, conservative, concerned with imprinting the classic traditions and consensus values on the youth's mind: "Train up a child in the way that he should go" (Prv 22:6). As had been the case since time immemorial, most children did not learn to write or read. Imitation of the ways of their elders and immersion in an embracing and distinctive culture provided most of the young with the skills, conventional wisdom, and value system that they required. Only well-born or extremely fortunate young men were given the opportunity of a formal education.

Most book learning consisted primarily, as it had for centuries, of simple repetition until certain rudimentary texts were firmly fixed in the mind. We can describe only one school of this period, the early second-century B.C.E. Academy for the sons of Jerusalem's well-to-do, whose head master, Joshua Ben Sirah, fortunately for us, took the time to set down his favorite observations about morals and the nature of life for the benefit of his students and posterity.

An Egyptian grandson later added several paragraphs about his grandfather's school and methods. While Hellenistic schools for upper-class Greek youths were often situated in a campus-like setting which included various buildings for lectures, athletics, and communal eating, Ben Sirah's school undoubtedly was not so grand. Apparently, Judean schools met out of doors. The term Yeshivah, which became the designation for what we would call a

secondary school or college, comes from the root 'to sit' and suggests that students met wherever the teachers were, perhaps where they lived. The master was the school, not the building. Even in winter any public place could do.

We do not know what Ben Sirah called his school. In a preface to the book his grandson called the school a Beit ha-Midrash, literally a place for the exposition of venerated traditions, and described a curriculum which aimed to provide students with considerable proficiency in the correct reading and understanding of "the law, the prophets and the other books of our Fathers" (Prologues 1:10). That is the wisdom which provides enlightenment. The grandfather's commonplace book contains observations on ethics, the arts, morals, manners, and the rules of literary interpretation.

Ben Sirah taught his students to read properly the texts that he believed should be known by any educated Jerusalemite. He seems to have believed, as did many Jews and non-Jews at the time, that a person is, and only can be, what the ideas he carries around in his mind allow him to be. Maxims were assigned not simply because they were memorable and useful as discussion starters but because they presented ideas that ought to be imprinted on the mind. Having the right thoughts was essential to the development of good character.

Ben Sirah considered a proper education the key to the good life. He insists that only education can implant the best thoughts in a person's mind, and appeals to his students, sons of privilege,

'to recognize and appreciate their advantages. Farmers, tradesmen, and craftsmen have their necessary place, but their tasks deny them the opportunity "to study the law of the most high." A scholar's wisdom depends on ample leisure. If a man is to be wise, he must be relieved of other tasks. it is a given that literacy confers authority. "They, the peasantry and city laborers, are not sought out for the council of the people. They do not obtain eminence in the public assembly. They do not sit in the Judge's seat, nor do they understand the sentence of judgment" (38:33).

His assumptions about the value of memorizing good thoughts were consistent with other ideas held in his day. The practice of using certain traditional affirmations as mantras was fairly common. Already in pre-exilic times, the Shema, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One" (Deut. 6:14), may have served in this way. During the Hellenistic period this practice of reciting key paragraphs from the tradition was expanded to include, beside the Shema, other and longer sections from the five books (Deut. 6:4-9, 11:13-21) and the Ten Commandments, which many recited twice a day. Among unlearned people such recitations not only fixed key ideas in the mind and so helped to keep people on the right path, but also served as talismen, protective formulae, which warded off evil thoughts and evil spirits.

Ben Sirah would have none of this. He concentrated on ideas and values that would help his young scholars make their way in the world and lead effective and responsible civic lives. In

tune with Hellenistic pedagogical practice, he offered, beside good thoughts, a selection of role models. His book closes with a series of thumbnail biographies of the heroes of the past in which their civic virtues are highlighted. Abraham is presented as a model of faithfulness. Joseph is omitted; presumedly his youthful egotism might have suggested to the boys that self-centeredness was a virtue. Ben Sirah often only suggests an incident in the lives of his heros. He clearly expected that his charges could fill in the details, another indication if one is needed, of the community's broad familiarity with its early traditions.

The oral tradition remained very much alive. It had to be. Many Judeans still could neither read nor write. The growing importance of the Torah text did not mean that the oral traditions were cast aside or even reduced to the caliber of the legendary. The historical writers of this age--Eupolemus, Artapanus, Josephus of Tiberias and, of course, Flavius Josephus--used the oral tradition with the same ease and sense of reliability as they used the written texts.

How did Ben Sirah teach "the Torah, the Prophets and other works of the Fathers?" When we give students a book as a homework assignment we expect them to work out its argument on their own. Ben Sirah could not operate this way. Few homes had books. They were still too expensive. His pupils had to memorize. Learning required reading aloud and being corrected by the master--

listening and repeating, listening and repeating. "Wisdom is known through speech and education comes through the spoken word" (Deut. 4:24). Even with improved scribal techniques, books could not be instantly read. Ben Sirah must have used long familiar methods to teach students the correct reading of a manuscript. Though his goal was the mastery of a text, he probably gave an occasional lecture on ideas suggested by the reading. Hellenistic Judaism did not develop a systematic interpretive methodology. Neither Proverbs nor Ben Sirah concern themselves with what would be called today semiotics, a methodology for interpreting texts, nor do they present the steps through which an idea was winkled out of the text.

Ben Sirah believed that truth came from many sources. His student is to "investigate all the wisdom of the past." He studies the prophecies, preserves the sayings of famous men, and "penetrates the intricacies of parables and the hidden meaning of Proverbs. . ."prepared in this way he will give sound advice and dispense knowledge. . .he will disclose what he has learned from his own education and still take pride in the law of the Lord's covenant" ( ). Knowledge, as Ben Sirah offered it, comes from inspired texts, experience, the intellectual deposit we call wisdom and probably from a variety of ideas that had simply caught his fancy. All wisdom is at base one, but Ben Sirah never imagined that all wisdom could be found in any one text. Ben Sirah's book does not present itself as a commentary on any

scroll or set of scrolls but as an independently wrought synthesis of Torah and Wisdom. Though his language is replete with familiar Biblical phrases, he does not provide proof texts to support his teachings. The value of whole tradition, oral and written, is assumed.

The earliest source which speaks of a venerated text as the source of esoteric, religious traditions derives from prophetic literature. The Essene faithful held that their Teacher of Righteousness had had revealed to him the esoteric truths which lay embedded in the prophetic speech of Habakkuk and other prophets [illegible]. His followers thanked God, for had God [illegible] (I Q H [illegible]) I Q H IV: 24-25

The prophetic texts are seen as containing apocalyptic teachings and millennarian secrets. In this sense they are the heirs of the Biblical writers who reinterpreted the seventy-year oracle spoken by Jeremiah so that it referred to later events (25:9-12, cf. 2 Ch. 36:19ff, Zech. 1:12, 7:5, Daniel 9). The men of the Hellenistic age and the Talmudic sages after them looked on certain books as their forefathers had looked on certain oracles, as predictions of events yet to happen.

Accustomed to print and the linear, matter-of-fact thought patterns that silent reading imposes, we tend to assume a text is no more or less than it presents itself to be. To these men a written text was frozen speech. They never saw it without hearing

it read. hearing speech is a happening, an event, full of surprises. We hear with our eyes as well as our ears. We listen creatively and sometimes surprise ourselves in the way we respond. The language in which these men begin to talk of the meaning of the venerated texts is revealing. One who knows the texts "pours out teaching and prophecy" (B.S. 21:23). The psalmist asked God "unveil my eyes that I may behold wondrous things from out of Your Torah" (PS. 119:18).

Benshira?

Not in Ben Sira 21:23 ✓

* * * * *

It is hard to assess how much impact Greek assumptions about the importance of a constitution had on the emergence of the five scrolls as preeminent within the Jewish tradition. In the Greek-speaking diaspora Nomos, law, was the term most often used to translate Torah (cf. Septuagint Ex. 28:12 etc.). On the one hand, Nomos suggested a narrower range of meanings than Torah, law rather than tradition. On the other it extended the meaning of Torah by associating it with the idea of a constitution. Constitutions were much prized in the Hellenistic world. They provided the basis of social order and in so doing defined the right and set standards for every citizen. To have a constitution was proof that one belonged to a civilized community.

did not check But the word does not appear in Ex 28:12

In the apologetic literature we find Moses pictured as a Hebrew Solon and the claim, which seems to have satisfied the Jews who made it, that they possessed not only a constitution but the constitution, God's own. Jews could and did say not only 'we,

'too, have good laws' but also 'our law is older and better.' Apologetes knew few limits to their enthusiasm for the law. One wrote, 'Moses taught law to Plato.' A philosopher such as Philo took the matter more seriously. His depiction of Moses in Vita Moysis as a paragon who embodied all the accepted virtues was his way of underscoring the unique virtues of the law itself. Moses' law was a reflection of his moral and spiritual perfection. We also find Philo making the somewhat inconsistent argument that the Torah's superiority derived from its author--not unlike Solon or Lycurgus, mere mortal, but God.

It is not irrelevant that the author of Aristeas translated Torah as Nomos, law, and most of the Greek writings by Jews follow suit. This translation may only respond to The Letter of Aristeas' invention that Ptolemaic administrators had encouraged the Septuagint because they needed a constitutional document to guide them in their relationship with this particular millet community. But he also goes to some length to indicate how central this law was to Jews. Such an approach would not have seemed strange to Hellenistic Jews. Ezra's use of a Torah scroll was, in its own way, constitutional: 'Here is your law, O Israel' (Ezra). Having become in a relatively short time both numerous and prosperous, Alexandrian jewry needed a constitution for practical political reasons and for cultural self-respect.

Aristeas describes how an authoritative translation of the five books of Moses into demotic Greek was completed in Alexandria

'during the reign of Ptolemy II (ca. 280 B.C.E.). This translation of the five scrolls, commonly called the Septuagint on the basis of Aristeas' report that seventy-two scholars had worked in separate cells on the translation and that their individual efforts had agreed in every detail, became for the Jews of the Egyptian diaspora the equivalent of Solon's laws, a divinely-appointed constitution for their community. Constitutions were considered by the Greek culture the vitalizing structure of a city, an attempt to manage properly a human community in ways which conformed to the laws of the universe, not only as to the will of the gods but as necessary guidance in the organization of the social order.

The account is highly legendary, probably written in Palestine rather than Egypt well over a century after the events it claims to describe. The author seems to have had several purposes in mind: to validate the miraculous accuracy of the translation against all challenges; to suggest that it contained all meanings and, therefore, shared the authority God had placed in the Hebrew original; and to praise its value as a constitution so Jews need not feel culturally inferior to the Greeks to whom a constitution was the absolutely indispensable foundation of any civilized community. Indeed, Jews could legitimately feel superior because the Jews' constitution alone was divine.

Aristeas reports that the court of Ptolemy was urged by one Demetrius, the founding administrator of the famous Museum Library, to request a translation of the five scrolls. Demetrius, we are

'told, informed his royal patron of the library's need for a Greek language version of the "Book of the Law of the Jews", presumedly so that the court would have access to reliable information about the laws of a sizeable segment of the Alexandrian community. Jews had flourished there since the king's father and city founder, Ptolemy I, fearful of populating his new capital with potentially rebellious natives, had brought a Judean labor battalion down to Egypt to help build his city and protect his rule, and then had allowed them to stay. Alexandria was from the first a remarkable success and the Jews had flourished with it.

Demetrius asks for translators "who have led exemplary lives and are experts in their own law. . .so that when we have examined wherein the majority agree, the work of making an accurate translation can proceed" (1:32). His letter indicates that the library owned manuscripts of the five books "written in Hebrew characters and in the Hebrew tongue. . .committed to writing experts, not adequately" (I:30). In short, that Hebrew manuscripts existed but they did not meet the standards Greeks expected of major manuscripts.

The meaning of "not adequately" is unclear. It may suggest scrolls written in the old, hard-to-read Ketav Ivri script or that the manuscripts in the library's collection were, for one reason or another, suspect. Perhaps there were questions whether the scribe(s) who had made them had worked from a reliable master copy, had done their work carefully or had filled the margin with

'corrections. Whatever the explanation, that the existing scrolls were unreliable is taken for granted, and there was anxiety that a translation based on such a text would be inadequate.

According to Aristeas, written more than a century after the event, the king passed on his librarian's request to the Jerusalem High Priest, Eleazer, who, as Ptolemy's subject; was quick to do his overlord's will and dispatched Temple scribes to sort out textual problems and prepare a usable translation. A skilled courtier, Eleazer dispatched not merely the requested scholar translators, six from each of the twelve tribes, but sent along several scrolls which could serve as a secure textual basis for the translation. There is no indication that the scrolls he sent were handled in any special way or treated as sacred objects. In Alexandria the scrolls were "uncovered" and "unrolled" in the king's presence so that his curiosity about them could be satisfied. Aristeas shows no concern about a violation of ritual purity--a holy object was exposed to contamination by contact with those who were ritually "impure," that is non-Jews (I:176-8), an event which would have horrified later generations. Eleazer requested that his scholars be returned, but there is no mention that the master scrolls should be returned.

There are many problems with this version of events, not the least that Demetrius did not hold the librarianship under Ptolemy II and that when the translation was completed it was not shelved

'in the library but proclaimed by the Jewish community as their law. The library, after its initial efforts, seems profoundly indifferent to the work it had commissioned. It seems unlikely that a dependable translation became possible and was, in fact, accomplished when Alexandrian Jewry finally acquired a clear text, possibly an Ashurit scroll. Scrolls in this square script were prized for their legibility. A sage quoted in the Palestinian Talmud explains that Ashurit has the meaning of "the even writing" (P.T. Meg 1:71b).

The Greek-speaking diaspora seems to have accepted a version of the Septuagint Pentateuch as constitutional, to have used copies of this translation in their schools; to have accepted it to be what their religious leaders told them it was, a translation which was as good as the original, and to have used it as such.

In the translation which became normative, attempts were made to pick up some of the nuances of the Hebrew original. "I" in Greek is Ego: in Biblical Hebrew it is Ani and in rare cases Anochi; in the Septuagint Ani became Ego and Anoch Eim. Such uses opened up many interpretive possibilities; at the least is suggested the importance of attention to language. No wonder Philo called these translators "prophets and priests of mysteries, whose sincerity and singleness of thought has enabled them to concur with the purest of spirits, the spirit of Moses" (Vita Moysis 2:7-41).

If the original purpose was to develop a Greek translation which was useful for administrative and constitutional purposes, the existence and popularity of this particular translation

insured that it would not be seen simply as a translation but as a primary text which included the original speech of God. Many in the diaspora must have believed that God spoke Greek. The Greek diaspora came to prize this translation, lavishing effusive praise on it. The Septuagint Pentateuch played so central a role in the Greek-speaking diaspora that elaborate legends (such as Aristeas') were told about its translation, apparently to defend it against Palestinean detractors who objected to the various ways it differed from their understanding of the Hebrew text.

Despite such pious legends as Aristeas, the facts suggest that several translations circulated until one version gained widespread approval and became in the diaspora the basis of schooling, storytelling, ceremony, and preaching. The analogy that suggests itself is to the impact on English life and thought of the King James translation of the Bible which became after its appearance in the seventeenth century not only the authentic word of God, who many in the Anglican church assumed spoke English, but the standard for centuries of English style and speech.

In this Hellenistic world inspired texts were deemed worthy of the most careful study. So, as with Homer, scholars conned the text for its deep meanings. Some interpreted the text contextually, others allegorically. Among the intelligentsia there were extreme allegorists who treated the letter of the law "with easygoing neglect" and literalists who paid little, if any, attention to its philosophic implications (Philo, De Migration~~e~~

'Abrahmi (9-93). All groups acknowledged the text's importance.

There is a possibility that the Torah scrolls first began to be read publicly in the diaspora as part of an organized ceremony. The final scene of Aristeas' little drama describes a public reading of the newly completed translation to "the community of Jews," their acclamation of the text, and the uttering of a curse against anyone who would in the future alter it in any way (I:308-315). Though Temple scribes worked on Torah texts and were encouraged to do so by the hierarchy, the texts were never used liturgically. The Temple dominated Jerusalem and priestly conservatism dominated the use of the Temple scrolls. Readings had played no role in the ancient cult. The Temple was sacred to Alexandrian Jews who paid their annual dues toward its operation; but day-in-day-out local practice in the diaspora developed its own ritual forms. Religious life was organized around prayer halls (Proseuchai) and informal meetings. By the turn of the millennium, we hear of buildings set aside for public worship. Subjects relating to various Torah texts seem to have been discussed sermonically in these diaspora proto-synagogues, though it is not clear whether there developed a formal schedule of public readings from the Septuagint.

Much depends on how we interpret Philo's comment: "so on each Sabbath there stands wide open in every city thousands of schools of good sense, temperance, courage, justice and the other virtues in which the scholars sit in order, quietly, with ears alert and

with full attention, so much do they thirst for the draught which the teachers' words supply, while one of special experience rises and sets forth what is best and sure to be profitable and will make the whole life grow to something better. But among the vast number of particular truths and principles, these studies, there stand out particularly high above the other two main ones: Duty to God as shown by humanity and justice" (De Specialibus Legibus @:62-63, 282). Philo speaks here of a sermon rather than specifically of a Torah reading, but it is reasonable to conjecture that such sermons were tied in some way to a reading or recitation as were, in fact, his own sermons. This certainly became synagogue practice.

We do not really know why and when the practice of the public reading from a Torah scroll began. Qumran's Manual of Discipline (1st cent. B.C.E.) describes a practice of that community which may go back to the second century B.C.E. A member of the order was appointed to read aloud during meals and at certain convocations, but it is not clear whether such readings were limited to the five scrolls of The Law, whether other texts were read, or whether any prescribed order was followed.

Philo's description of the Jewish monastic sect, the Theraputae, may reflect a similar discipline though it is not clear that he describes a public function. "They read the whole law book and seek wisdom from their ancestral philosophy by taking it as an allegory since they think that the words of the literal text

'are symbols of something whose hidden nature is revealed by studying the underlying meaning. They also have writings of men of old, the founders of their way of thinking who left many memorials of the form used in allegorical interpretation and these they take as a kind of archetype and imitate the method in which this principle is carried out" (The Contemplative Life 28:29).

The public reading from the Torah on Sabbath, holidays, and market days seems to have its origin somewhere in the early history of the synagogue. Such readings had never been part of Temple practice. Here was a way to immerse oneself in God's instructions and listen again to His words without intruding on the religious forms that the priests declared to be reserved for The Temple. As the synagogue's familiar name, Beit Ha-Kenesset, place of assembly, suggests, the meeting rather than the building came first.

The synagogue came into being to fill a community need for a local gathering place where political or guild issues could be discussed and religious practices given an intimacy which the magnificent ceremonies of The Temple could not provide. Debate over the synagogue's origins is unresolved. Some trace it back to informal meetings presumedly organized during the Babylonian Exile. Some locate it in the Ma'amadot, the local groups raised in the towns of Judea after the Exile when it was their turn to provide The Temple with a delegation to assist at the communities outside Jerusalem for institutions more intimate than the national shrine. It is evident that meetings of various

kinds developed in different locations as Jews sought ways to keep their customs alive, satisfy God through worship, and renew their knowledge of and attention to sacred customs and lore. When there were at last scrolls considered sacred, reading and recitation of them inevitably played an increasingly important role at such meetings.

As we have seen, already in the late Persian period Levites traveled through the villages of Judea carrying scrolls and teaching the law. Some of these men may have read from their scrolls during local meetings and followed the reading with an explanation in the vernacular. About the only certainty in this complex history is that the practice of Torah reading cannot be traced back, as some have attempted to do, to Temple practice. The Torah never played a role in Temple ceremony.

Whatever form these meetings took, they differed from those in The Temple in that they were not the responsibility or province of the priests. The ancient priestly traditions make no mention of them. Priests organized the sacrificial cult. Strict rules of ritual purity surrounded the lives of the priests. Such rules did not apply to those who led whatever worship took place in the synagogue. The synagogue had no altar. Familiar hymns could be sung and traditional narratives could be retold. Someone might read from a text which had somehow come into his hands or recite a list of torot which applied to the Sabbath or a holiday. The same worship calendar was observed as in The Temple, though the

religious exercises appropriate to the Sabbath and holy days differed.

The rabbis had a tradition which they codified in two Mishnah texts (early 3rd century C.E.) which indicate that portions from the Torah had been read during certain Temple ceremonies. Yoma 7:1 and Sotah 7:7 describe an elaborate Yom Kippur rite in the course of which the high priest presumedly read certain Torah portions to the assemblage. According to the Yoma description the high priest conducted this reading clothed in white linen garments at a time which coincided with the most important Yom Kippur sacrifice, an offering of a bullock and a he-goat on the high altar. The reading is said to have taken place at some distance from the altar so that a spectator could not see both the activity around the altar and the high priest reading from a Torah scroll. The reading was surrounded with ceremony. Three officials hand the scroll from one to the other (Segan, Rosh Ha-Hakeneset, Chazan Ha-Hakeneset). The last of the three presented it to the high priest who received the scroll while standing and read it standing. The reading consisted of sections from Leviticus which describe how the Yom Kippur rites are to be observed (Lev. 16; 23:26-32). When the reading was completed, the High Priest rolle up the scroll, put it in its case, spoke a formula, "more is written than I have read out to you," and recited by heart a short list of Yom Kippur laws taken from another section of the Torah scroll (Num. 29:7-11). He then completed this section of ceremony by reciting eight

blessings listed by title in the Yoma description.

Profusion of detail, of course, is no proof of authenticity. Nor does the appearance of a historical note in the body of the Mishnah guarantee its facticity. The Mishnah was edited over a century and a half after The Second Temple was destroyed..and some of its historical notes reflect not eye witness testimony but "recollections" of what Temple practice was imagined to have been by men confident that their practices were based on sacred precedent--in this case, the belief that Torah readings on a holy day had been a Temple practice.

There is no reference to such a ceremony in any of the surviving literature written during the period when The Temple was still standing. A careful examination of the Mishnah's description also raises doubt as to its accuracy. The rituals of Yom Kippur were carefully choreographed. "Every ceremony of Yom Kippur was carried out according to prescribed form. If one act was done out of order it lost all its force. . ." (M. Yoma 5:7). Yet, we are told: "Those who saw the sacrifice could not see the reader and those who saw the reader could not see the sacrifices" ( ). It is hard to believe that priests would have organized the drama of Yom Kippur in such a way as to prevent those in attendance from observing two of its most important moments, since these would take place at the same time and at some distance from each other. But the most intractable barrier to accepting the text is that

'it requires the High Priest to be at two different places at the same time; he presides at the sacrifice and reads the Torah portions. The only explanation possible requires us to assume that two high priests were involved. In late Temple times the title of high priest seems to have been both specific to the priest who had effective authority over The Temple and an honorary title borne by those who had served in this office and by other senior members of Zadokite families. But there is no suggestion here or anywhere else in the literature that on Yom Kippur any but the current high priest conducted the rituals which were crucial to the nation's future.

The description in M. Sota 7:7 also deals with a Yom Kippur reading though it focuses more directly on the portions of the five books to be read on that holy day (Lev. 16:1ff, Lev. 23:~~27~~26ff and Num. ~~28~~29:7ff) and the specific blessings to accompany the ritual. The impression is inescapable that the purpose of this section was to enhance the emotional power of the Yom Kippur reading in the synagogue by attaching to it a precedent in the practices of the Temple. This is a habit not uncommon in rabbinic thought.

Another report which deals with a public reading of the Torah in the Temple follows immediately on the above. This subsequent paragraph (7:8) describes a reading by "the King" said to have taken place on the first day of the Festival of Succoth during successive sabbatical years. According to the Mishnah, a temporary wooden

platform was built in the temple court, the scroll to be used was ceremoniously handed to the king by four officials (Chazan Ha-Keneset, Rosh Ha-Keneset, Segan, and High Priest): the King received the scroll standing but read seated; the reading consisted of certain portions from Deuteronomy (Deut. 1:1 ~~6:9~~, 11:~~12ff~~, 14:~~11ff~~, Deut. ~~17:11ff~~, ~~28:15~~), concluding with the same eight blessings which the High Priest is described in Yoma as using on Yom Kippur. A specific instance is cited: King Agrippa had participated in such a ceremony.

This ritual may have been observed, albeit in not quite so elaborate a form and not necessarily regularly. Unlike the high priest's reading on Yom Kippur, the Succoth practice has some support in the Torah. In Deut. 31:10-13 Moses instructs the priests that during the Succoth Festival when the holiday occurs on a sabbatical year, "You shall read this teaching aloud in the presence of all israel" as long as "they (your children) live in the land which you are about to cross the Jordan to occupy." This tradition may lie behind the association of Ezra's reading with Succoth and the ruling, also in Ezra, that such readings should be repeated each sabbatical year. The Tosefta (late third century C.E.) specifically quotes Nehemiah 8 in this connection and goes on in some detail about the trumpet flourishes and royal pomp with which the ceremony was managed.

According to Chronicles, Ezra's reading took place on a temporary platform erected on the Temple Mount but outside The

'Temple proper before the Water Gate. The Mishnah places the King's reading outside the sanctuary proper in The Temple court. The corresponding Tosefta speaks only of some place, undesignated, on the Temple Mount. The Septennial reading was a political, not a priestly, ceremony. No special rites of purification are indicated as required of the participants nor are we told that special vestments were worn (Tosefta Sota 7:~~13-17~~ 8-9 (Vilna, I don't have Lieberman or Zuckermandel)). The ceremony as described lacks all the distinctive elements of shrine ritual, including the most important of all, location in the shrine itself.

M. Sota 7:8

The purpose of this spetennial ceremony seems to have been the desire to sanctify two political pieties: 'The king derives his authority from God's law' and 'the king must obey God's law.' For a Hasmonean or Herodian dynast this ceremony would have been of practical benefit as a way of validating both title and authority. The portion he was asked to read includes: "After you have entered the land that the Lord your God has given you. . . you shall be free to set a king over yourself, one chosen by the Lord your God" (Deut. ~~16~~ 17:14-15). To gain this cachet, he need make only a symbolic submission to God's overriding authority: "to observe (faithfully) every word of this teaching. . .to the end he and his descendants may reign long in the midst of Israel" (Deut. 17:19-20). Kings find acts of symbolic submission to God infinitely preferable to actual constraints imposed by public law or a constitution.

Deut 17:14-15

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An unlikely list of Temple personnel are listed as playing minor roles in this ritual. The Segan, like the high priests,

was a Temple official; but the other two who are named bear titles which derive from synagogue administration. The Chazan Ha-Keneset role is unclear, but his title implies he was specifically associated with the synagogue. The Rosh Ha-Keneset was the synagogue's paid administrator who, among his other functions, had charge of preparing the scrolls, bringing them into the synagogue from the chests where they were stored, and selecting those who were to read (P. Meg. 75b ff). Neither official needed to be a priest or a Levite. I find it hard to imagine that a high priest would share Yom Kippur, his great day, Israel's most momentous occasion, with officials of a non-Temple institution or allow non-priests to play a significant role in the ceremony.

Some explain the presence of these officials by the assertion that the Temple complex included a synagogue, that in the synagogue the Torah scrolls were kept, and that these officials were involved because they were the keepers of the scrolls. Those who describe such a synagogue offer as evidence the list of synagogue officials found in this Mishnah. There is no other evidence. We can suggest how the legend developed that a synagogue had been located in the Temple. A portico which surrounded The Temple Mount on all sides included meeting rooms used for various purposes. Scribes taught and worked in some of these rooms and work on the Torah scrolls must have been carried on there. Since the definition of the synagogue was not yet specific and the early synagogue included

study rooms--and places to eat and rest as well as for worship--any of these spaces might well have been identified by later generations as a synagogue, a place of meeting and reading.

The argument that synagogue officials lent their scroll to the Temple for this ceremony makes no sense. As the national archives, the Temple possessed its own Torah scrolls. Aristeas assumes that the High Priest has the most accurate scrolls in his possession. The priests had long supported scribal activity. Had a scroll been needed for the Yom Kippur ceremony, The Temple had its own. Temple worship was elaborate and highly formal. Great care was lavished on the shrine's apparatus. Utensils used during the sacrifices had to be without blemish and in a state of purity. Surely, if shrine ritual had required a Torah scroll the priests would have had one of appropriate sanctity and would not have used a scroll whose sanctity they could not vouch for. The priests would not have had to borrow a synagogue's scrolls.

In understanding the emergence of the Sefer Torah as scripture, it is important to recognize the role almost inadvertently played by the conservative formalism of the priests. The fact that they had no interest in using these scrolls in Temple liturgy made them open-handed with the Torah scrolls and assured their availability to the general community. In Egypt and Babylonia the priests withdrew books of sacred magic and lore from circulation. Priests tend to be jealous of their prerogatives. Israel's priests did not feel the need to reserve the scrolls. Not being

'one of the Temple's sacred implements meant that the Sefer Torah could be seen as "the inheritance of the whole congregation of Israel." Anyone could read a scroll, own a scroll, or study it and, in fact, was encouraged to do so.