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MS-4850: Daniel Jeremy Silver Papers, 1972-1993.

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

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The Story of Scripture, draft, chapters 3 and 4, 1989.

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

Continued
wisdom

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.

analogous to
public history
Israel is
following
his lead

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 tcrot 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

Jer 36

primary
cite reference

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

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Bereshit
Rabba
Ch 38 #
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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. The 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 Judean elite. Ezra and his colleagues believed that obedience to such a document alone could guarantee God's generous protection.

the memory of storytellers and rhapsodists. Scrolls were to be found in shrine archives, which were repositories of all manner of ⁶⁶rolls, 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.

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Bible
146 f {
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 ^{D?} 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

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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

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referring to Josiah
What about
the note 2 K 17;
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1384
Ch VIII
1384

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 did not yet exist.

Documentary?

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 thereafter, 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.

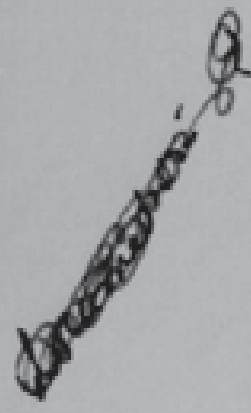
Yet, upon close examination, the received text seems more like a haphazard collection than a carefully edited text. In fact, it was in some measure simply a selection from the traditions which various scribes, for one reason or another, saw reason to set down. The Torah is not a systematic law code nor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

dynastic mission to serve at his altar. God had chosen Moses.

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

to all is
perhaps more
acceptable
spelling

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. *cut to dry. They patched up some of the clothes with cloth*

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 preparing 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

but note that
this was planned
as descendants
from

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 interleaved. 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 (v. 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

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57 Inst. for pp.
The Torah is not complete
what would R. Alter say?

Imp. whi-
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2

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 The Covenant--in which the various lists of Torah were ascribed to Moses' prophetic ministry.

Deut
24: 1

Ex IV
24-6

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 themselves scribe-administrators (II Kings 24:15¹⁶). 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. His people. "Behold, the days come, said the Lord, when I will

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. 1:20). 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.

Added: But in my favor I have had mercy on you. I will show you favor & mercy.

J.P.S.

*20 ads
'2 '3
'3 '3
(why drop it?)*

60:10

P.S. = I shall show compassion to you?

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 Jehoiachin, became courtiers at the exiles.

Not in Psalms
Isaiah 2:3
Micah 4:2

BB
158b

Levi's
leads with
this problem
Will you counter
his argument
in that case?

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 ^E 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) (2:8-304). 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 transgression 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. (I Kings 23:23-26, Jer. 40:6-12).

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

WHS ✓ 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* ~~(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 Scuthern Egypt dedicated a Temple-Shrine at Elephartine. 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 even reciters began to refer to notes. This language shift tended

(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 4:¹~~8~~^{6:18}~~AA8~~, 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.

* * * * *

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 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

what about
Aramaic
offspring
canonized
(see Bible 62)
(500 B.C.)

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), ✓
 8:8 ✓ "The Book, The Law of God" (Neh. ⁸8:8), 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 genealogical 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 genealogies. No author or source is indicated.

contains its own version of many incidents and torot mentioned in

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

to 2:25
discussing
? 2:17
more than

Numbers ??

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.

I don't know
the source?

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.

אולי זה = ד'... from Deut 16.
is also missing...
Prob. bcc this passage exclusively
with פסח אף
pilgrimage
festival
see summary
verse #16
177

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,

community must organize itself if it wished to please God. Those

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 ethics. 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 everywhere.

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. the scrolls in which such secrets were inscribed. Still, interest in Torah books was of particular importance to Judah's

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 allotting 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

What about
the 34:6-7
litany?

Does that
mean she
was gentile?

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Ex. 34:6-7

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" (11 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).

✓
did not
junk

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

6 vols read (trans)
p 223
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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-editor; 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. The Five Books of Moses and the scrolls of

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 ~~30B~~, ^{39b} 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 ^{or 12th? See Yoma 39b} 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 translations into Greek (Septuagint, 3rd Cent. B.C.E.). Centuries

Yoma 39b ✓
Tos. Sotah
Ch 13 ✓
#7

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 ^{5th}~~fourth~~ 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.

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

Menachot
29 b
Rashi Sota
49 a
SV 862
9122
2722