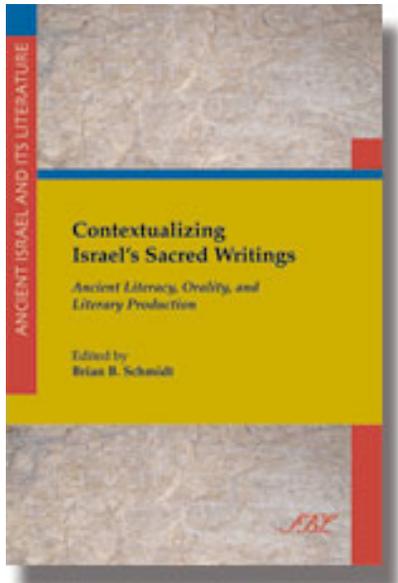


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**Brian Schmidt, ed.**

***Contextualizing Israel's Sacred Writings: Ancient Literacy, Orality, and Literary Production***

Ancient Israel and Its Literature 22

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Recent years have seen a resurgence of interest in the interaction between orality and literacy in ancient Israel and Judah and its implications for the formation of the Hebrew Bible. However, despite a proliferation of research, a considerable diversity of methods and opinions persists. It is into this space that the present volume enters, in an attempt to bring a number of leading theorists into dialogue. The collection of fourteen essays has its genesis in the International Conference on Orality and Literacy in the Ancient World, which was held in Ann Arbor in 2012.

The volume is divided into three interrelated sections. Part 1 concentrates on “Epigraphic Indications of Literacy and Orality in Ancient Israelite Society.” The first chapter, by André Lemaire, considers the evidence for Levantine literacy circa 1000–750 BCE. Lemaire approaches the problem geographically and diachronically and includes two valuable catalogs of alphabetic inscriptions: alphabetic Inscriptions from circa 1000–850 BCE, and West Semitic Inscriptions circa 850–750 BCE. He concludes by arguing that in the tenth–ninth centuries alphabetic writing was primarily limited to prestige use, but there is evidence for a diffusion of writing in the context of royal administration in the eighth century, indicating that “the beginning of a literary tradition in Israel and Judah in the ninth and tenth century is certainly not impossible” (34).

Nadav Na'aman narrows his focus to literacy in the Negev in the late monarchical period. Like Lemaire, Na'aman approaches the problem geographically (focusing on specific archaeological sites) and diachronically. Na'aman also raises the question of the social distribution of writing, arguing for a tiered system in which scribes possessing basic clerical skill were located at the Negevite fortresses and those with more advanced training at administrative and religious centers. Furthermore, based on the distribution of written artifacts at Horvat 'Uza, Na'aman raises the possibility that some middle-class individuals may have had the ability to read and write short, basic texts.

Christopher Rollston addresses the question of the scribal curriculum during the First Temple period. Based on his well-established criteria of synchronic consistency and diachronic development, Rollston argues that there was formal, standardized scribal education in Israel and Judah, that its curriculum included training in script, orthography, hieratic numerals, epistolary formulae, and foreign languages, and that it was conducted under the aegis of royal and military officialdom.

In his essay Brian Schmidt argues for three phases in the early history of lengthy literary text production in the southern Levant. First was the "state-scribal development" phase, in which literature was exclusively oral and writing was primarily limited to small-scale, brief expressions of ownership and apotropaism for elite clientele. The "conflict affective" phase followed, spanning the second half of the ninth century. This period was marked by a number of disruptive intraregional conflicts with Assyria and Aram. During this phase conventional writing systems continued to be used for administrative and small-scale production, but there was still no lengthy literary production. Finally, the "*royal prerogative*" phase encapsulates the sudden emergence of lengthy monumental writing in the late ninth century. According to Schmidt, the emergence of monumental writing in the ninth century can be attributed to a desire to emulate the literary traditions of imperial Assyria.

Next, Jessica Whisenant asks the question: Does the epigraphic data for text production in Judah attest the presence of lengthy, complex literary works such as those that are preserved in the Hebrew Bible? She considers a range of epigraphic evidence and its institutional context before narrowing her focus to Iron II Israel and Transjordan, concluding that, at best, this period may have given rise to the sorts of documents that served as sources for the Hebrew Bible.

Part 2 considers "The Interface of Orality and Literacy in the Hebrew Bible." David Carr opens with a discussion of the role of memory in the copying and transmission of texts, focusing on the evidence of memory variants in the formation of the Hebrew Bible. He concludes with a call to add memory as a distinct but related dimension to the poles of

orality and literacy. Carr's point about the constitutive role of memory is well taken; however, when reading the chapter, one has the sense that the cognitive study of memory has not progressed beyond Frederic Bartlett's influential 1932 study on remembering. Surely a corollary of Carr's call for the incorporation of memory studies into textual studies is the requirement also to take account of more recent developments in the field.

Robert Miller turns his attention to the performance of oral tradition in ancient Israel, using a range of comparative materials from the ancient Near East and Icelandic Skaldic and Eddic poetry to focus attention on the performance setting and paraphernalia of Israelite balladry.

Raymond Person considers the use of text criticism as a lens for understanding the transmission of ancient texts in their oral environment. Drawing on comparative evidence for textual transmission in a range of ancient and medieval sources, Person argues that the text-critical "variants" found in these manuscript traditions reflect a general cultural acceptance of the type of multiformity found in oral traditions. He then turns to the relationship between Samuel–Kings and Chronicles, suggesting that, instead of assuming their literary history to have begun with a single authoritative text either corrupted by errors or deliberately changed for theological reasons, we should assume that the history of these texts began with a multiplicity of texts, all of which were an imperfect iteration of the broader tradition.

Frank Polak continues his project to use discourse analysis to identify an oral substratum in the language of the Hebrew Bible. He focuses specifically on the linguistic style of the Abraham-Jacob narrative in Gen 12–35 and contrasts it with that of Deuteronomy. He concludes that the Abraham-Jacob cycle generally ranks highly in terms of what he identifies as oral-style features, before positing that stylistic diversity within the cycle might be explained as a result of the immediacy with which a text is connected with oral performance.

Elsie Stern considers the relationship between the literary function of royal letters and Torah scrolls in Ezra-Nehemiah, concluding that: (1) the first appearance of scrolls of Torah within the Tanak occurs in Ezra-Nehemiah; (2) as with other texts within the narrative, references to written scrolls function as an authorizing strategy within the text; (3) the authors of Ezra-Nehemiah present the Torah scroll as a sacred object. But at the same time, within the narrative Torah scrolls have not yet been "scripturalized," and authoritative dicta are placed in the mouths of authorized tradents.

Part 3 addresses "Aspects of Orality and Literacy in Ancient Israel in Comparative Perspective." The opening essay by James Bos considers the "literalization" of the biblical

prophecy of doom. For Bos, writing and prophecy (divination) are state-sanctioned activities. As such, the preservation and transmission of the prophetic oracle of doom presents something of a problem: Is it likely that state-sponsored scribes (who had a vested interest in supporting the status quo) would record and preserve subversive literature that could jeopardize their livelihood. Consequently, he understands the oracle of doom as an inversion of the older oracle against a foreign nation. He then considers three scenarios that could account for this development: the first sees oracles of doom as *ex eventu* compositions intended to explain why Judah had been destroyed by the Babylonians; the second posits a related process but one that began after the destruction of Israel by Assyria in 721 BCE; the third is set amidst the inner-Judahite diplomatic squabbles of the early sixth century BCE.

Seth Sanders asks the provocative question: What if there are no empirical models for pentateuchal criticism? For Sanders, attempts to find ancient Near Eastern parallels for the redactional processes underlying the primeval history in Gen 1–11 typically overlook the fundamental distinctiveness of the biblical text. That is, whereas in the editorial history of Gilgamesh, for example, new material was generally appended to the existing text, the pentateuchal narratives attest the interweaving of preexisting materials. Sanders thus posits a three-stage development of Hebrew literary values: stage one involved a process of integrative literary collection; stage two saw the interweaving of existing literary creations, which reflects a set of values apparently unique to Judea; and stage three witnessed a fading of these values in the postpentateuchal period, which led to more heterogeneous sorts of harmonization and conflation.

William Schniedewind considers the phenomenon of scripturalization in ancient Israel, arguing that a key aspect of the process is the endowment of sacred authority to the written word. For Schniedewind, the watershed in the process of the transference of sacred authority was the Neo-Assyrian period. He identifies three social contexts for the phenomenon, each of which has Neo-Assyrian parallels: divine writing (especially in the foundation of temples); messenger formulas; and ritual magic, especially as used in treaty curses.

Finally, in an essay that is heavily reliant on the writings of Jack Goody and Walter Ong but that evinces little or no awareness of the significant problematization of their “great-divide” mentality (e.g., the critiques by Ruth Finnegan), Joachim Schaper addresses the question of Hebrew culture at the interface between written and oral. He argues that the rising prominence of writing in the eighth century is a direct result of the increasing division of labor in Israelite and Judahite society. For Schaper, the inclusive rhetoric of texts such as Deuteronomy demonstrates that writing continued to be dominated by orality. Nevertheless, following Ong, he views writing as a technology that “restructures

consciousness” (331), leading to a new kind of perceived immediacy between words and things (i.e., sign and signified), which ultimately resulted in a “fetishizing” of writing and an ever-increasing veneration of the written word in the primarily oral society of ancient Judah.

The significance of this volume is twofold: it represents a timely reflection on the state of the field by some of its leading participants; and, it contains several important—and at times challenging—steps forward in the ongoing dialogue at the interface between literacy and orality in ancient Israel and Judah. As such, it will no doubt serve as a major reference and point of departure for future studies. To take just one example, a theme that is reflected in a number of the essays is the political *Sitz im Leben* of writing: writing was primarily a function of, and sponsored by, the state, not temples. This raises profound questions for the textualization of supposedly cultic and liturgical materials in the Hebrew Bible, such as the Psalms and the Priestly materials.

The text is generally free of typographic errors; however, on 55 read “Freud” rather than “Freund”; on 166 read את for תא, שפחה for הפחש, and אמה for מאה, and on 169 read את for תא.