

"The Work Of Producing The Bible: Training And Writing Of The Scribes Of Ancient Israel"
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I. Introduction -- Context and Purpose

The magic of writing-reading!

Rethinking the work that went into the formation of the Torah: Cognitive Technology

II. The method: use of well-documented scribal systems (Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece] to get at shape of less documented Levantine/Israelite systems

Four quotes: from an Edubba Dialogue (Sumerian-Mesopotamian), Satirical Letter (Egypt), Prometheus Bound (Greece) and Proverbs (ancient Israelite)

Presented in more detail in *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford, 2005); *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford, 2011) and "Torah on the Heart" in *Oral Tradition* 25 (2010; for quotes see p. 19 of <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/160735682.pdf>).

III. Overview of Three Well-Documented Writing-Education Systems

A. Mesopotamia -- Tablet culture (well preserved), list focus, often impractical material and archaic nature, for educating elite "scribes"

B. Egypt -- Educational lists, greater focus on wisdom instructions, more focus on textuality...

C. Greece -- Art as evidence (?), Developments in Hellenistic Period Education (Problems of sharp distinctions between alphabetic and other systems)

[PAUSE FOR Q AND A]

IV. Ancient Israel: diverse evidence

A. Overall distinctions from above systems: smaller scale, dependent on older systems and somewhat imitative initially, alphabetic in character

B. (even with perishable scroll medium) epigraphic evidence for Levantine oral-written education: Tel Zayit abecedary (10th century BCE Shephelah), Deir 'Alla Plaster depiction of scroll literature in Egyptian mode (early 8th century BCE Transjordan), Kuntillet Ajrud practice letters and graffiti (eighth century BCE Sinai trading post)

C. Text-critical evidence - 'cognitive' variants in early biblical parallels (e.g. parallel Proverbs, Samuel-Kings and Chronicles, Citations of Bible at Qumran and other parts of early Judaism, etc.)

V. 4 Similarities between these systems:

A. Literacy is internalization of written corpus of texts

B. Contours of the Oral-Written Corpus: archaic, obscure, ancient -- foreign language

C. Education Corpus has Similar Trajectory: mastery of sign system through lists (not so much in Egypt), transitional literature of hymns and elementary moral-instructional material, broader expanse of legends, origin myths, love songs, royal histories, etc.

D. Difficult Education/Enculturation: Physical Beating and the "Rod" of the Text

VI. Qualifications and Outlook (toward Professor Sommer's Presentation)

Important different developments of this system in Israel as opposed to otherwise similar systems - ideal in Deuteronomy of Israel as educated in Torah and wise, Josephus and others promoting Judaism as fulfilling Greek ideal of universal literacy, and celebration and development of Torah learning in diverse forms of rabbinic Judaism!