© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix

Abbreviations and Citation Practices xi

Rabbinic Literature: Editions Cited xiii

Introductory Remarks: The People of the Book before the Book 1

1 A Makeshift Scripture: Tales of Biblical Loss, Reconstruction, and Forgery 26

2 A Book That Kills: Rabbinic Stories about Lethal Encounters with Biblical Text 59

3 A Neglected Text: Mistaken Readings, Bible Avoidance, and the Dangers of Reading as We Know It 98

4 A Spoken Scripture: Unlinking the Written from the Oral in Rabbinic Practices of Bible Reading 119

5 A Third Torah: Oral Torah, Written Torah, and the Embrace of a Spoken Scripture 163

6 A Closed Book: The Torah Scroll as the Body of Revelation 193

Concluding Remarks: From the Third Torah to God's Monograph 221

Index 247

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The People of the Book before the Book

IF THE FIELD OF biblical studies has a foundation myth, it is the story of the great divide that separates modern critical analysis of the biblical text from the uncritical reading practices of the premodern religious thinkers who embraced the Bible as "an utterly consistent, seamless, perfect book" in which God speaks directly to his readers.[1] Seldom has a scholarly construct so thoroughly captured the public imagination. In debates about the appropriate role of the Bible in contemporary social life, both sides have been quick to embrace the notion that the academy's scientific analysis is opposed to the premodern reading practices of religious practitioners, who engage with the Bible in the modes of past centuries. In embracing this historicized inflection of contemporary fault lines,[2] both parties walk away with valuable spoils of war. The academy is assigned the values of innovation, scientific achievement, and intellectual progress. In exchange, certain types of religious Bible readers lay claim to the weight of nearly two thousand years of religious history.

1. James L. Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 15. For a recent review of scholarship on this issue, see Duncan MacCrae, *Legible Religion: Books, God, and Rituals in Roman Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 143–47.

2. For more on the construction of these intellectual positions in early modernity, see Michael Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*, OSHT (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), and the literature cited there. On the rise of similar patterns in Jewish communities, see Yaakov Elman, "The Rebirth of Omnisignificant Biblical Exegesis in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *Jewish Studies Internet Journal* 2, no. 1 (2002): 1–42.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

The early rabbinic relationship[3] with the Bible is often treated as the exemplar par excellence of this faithful reading practice. Yet an expansive survey of classical rabbinic traditions concerning biblical writings compels us to grapple with a much more complex picture of the premodern relationship to the Bible. While the late antique rabbinic authorities theoretically established the newly canonized Hebrew Bible as a central pillar of an emerging rabbinic Judaism, many early rabbinic statements about the nature of the biblical text and its status were ambivalent at best.

As we will see in the coming pages, many early rabbinic traditions did not valorize the Pentateuch as a perfect record of the divine will. Instead, they imagined the biblical text as a makeshift scripture—an echo of greater truths that had been cut off from the divine to be ravaged by history and repeatedly reconstructed by devoted human hands. In many early rabbinic traditions, indeed, the biblical text is identified not only as a dead form of sacred revelation pruned from an inexhaustible living branch of divine truth but also as a potentially deadly form of revelation. Drawing on the allegorical power of early rabbinic anxieties about the spiritual dangers posed by an uncontrolled female body, which was thought to carry immense power over men within a weakened vessel vulnerable to promiscuity and misdirection, classical rabbinic narratives often expressed concern about the tremendous supernatural power that written scripture contains within a limited material and linguistic vessel, which could be all too easily appropriated, misinterpreted, and corrupted.

3. I will use the designation "early rabbinic" and "classical rabbinic" interchangeably in this book to refer to the products of rabbinic Jewish culture from the period between roughly 200 CE and 650 CE. As such, this book cites materials gathered from all six major corpuses of late antique rabbinic literature: (1) the Mishnah, (2) the Tosefta, (3) early Palestinian "legal" midrash, (4) the Palestinian Talmud, (5) the early collections of "homiletic" midrash, (6) the Babylonian Talmud, as well as (7) later Palestinian midrash. Although it has become increasingly uncommon to analyze phenomena across the entire classical rabbinic period, basic practices of reading (particularly those associated with elementary education) are cultural phenomena that have proven slow to change over time and are often studied from a more longue durée perspective. (For a classic study along these lines, see Cavallo Guglielmo and Chartier Roger, *Histoire de la lecture dans le monde occidental* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1997). While I make no claim that early rabbinic practices of Bible reading remained unchanged over the entire course of late antiquity, the broad-strokes argument of this book proceeds on the premise that the classical rabbinic authorities cited here shared certain basic cultural assumptions concerning the nature of written text and its affordances that can be contrasted with the attitudes and practices of other periods.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

Nor were these facets of the rabbinic imaginary purely theoretical. In a sacred reading culture[4] in which careful attention to written text was exoticized and even denigrated, liturgical performance of biblical lectionaries might continue unabated but direct informational reading of the biblical text was limited to the point where written scripture was effectively quarantined from communal life and the Hebrew Bible would largely cease to speak as a communicative document.

This does not mean, however, that the classical rabbinic authorities were forerunners of modern higher criticism—nor that the biblical tradition would be eliminated from early rabbinic religious life. Instead, we will explore how it came to be that communal authorities so deeply ambivalent about the biblical text nevertheless established the emerging canon of the Hebrew Bible as a fundamental pillar of late antique Jewish life and thought.

Early rabbinic doubts concerning biblical textuality did not destabilize the emergent rabbinic movement as a biblical religion in part because the recitation-heavy communal reading culture that had grown up around scripture in early rabbinic circles had already rendered the written text a secondary, even superfluous, witness to the biblical revelation in communal thought and practice. As memorized vocal iterations of the biblical tradition circulated independently from the written text in daily practice, this spoken tradition of the biblical revelation had become not only the dominant form of scripture in rabbinic quotidian life but would also come to have a profound impact on how many early rabbinic practitioners imagined the biblical heritage in more abstract terms. Indeed, these memorized spoken formulas of the biblical tradition came to be embraced in many early rabbinic circles as a pivotal third category of Torah, a living Spoken Scripture that linked the silent Written Torah of the parchment scrolls to the growing Oral Torah of the rabbinic legal tradition.

As these recited formulas of the scriptural tradition were increasingly embraced as the authentic soul of the biblical revelation, the written text could retreat into a less threatening role as a communicatively inert parchment

4. I take this concept from William A. Johnson, *Readers and Reading Cultures in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), as will be discussed in more depth in the ensuing pages. Readers in religious studies will likely be more familiar with David Brakke's (in many ways analogous) concept of varied communal "scriptural practices." David Brakke, "Scriptural Practices in Early Christianity: Towards a New History of the New Testament Canon," in *Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity,* ed. David Brakke, Anders-Christian Jacobsen, and Joerg Ulrich (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), 263–80.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

vessel. This textual body, like its human counterpart, wielded sacred power most potently when it remained closed and covered so that its messy material and textual components were obscured and the physical vessel could become a dignified (and silent) conduit for a more intangible and otherworldly power.

This book thus demonstrates that even in the early days of the first millennium, when the Hebrew Bible was emerging as a distinct canon, biblical religion did not always work in the way that we have traditionally imagined it. Far from embracing this new textual transcript as a perfect blueprint for the religious life, many classical rabbinic inheritors of this sacred anthology were ambivalent about the very notion that knowledge of the divine will might ever be directly extracted from written text. These early rabbinic authorities thus constructed a scriptural universe[5] in which the written text of the Hebrew Bible was increasingly hemmed in with ritual honorifics that enhanced the normative power of the *idea* of a singular Sinaitic revelation that adhered to this written object while they simultaneously quarantined and silenced the biblical text as a written communication in practice.

In this system, the emerging textual canon came to function less as a written guide to God's will than as a ritual conduit for a very different iteration of the biblical tradition—a series of intangible spoken formulas of the scriptural tradition that would be embraced as the living soul to this fixed parchment body. For when these early rabbinic thinkers transferred the glamour of the new biblical canon to these recited biblical formulas passed from parent to child and teacher to student in different modes, the rabbinic Bible came to reside for all intents and purposes in spoken words. And while this Spoken Scripture would be ritually correlated to the biblical scrolls in occasional liturgical performances, it lived a qualitatively different kind of literary life—circulating primarily as decontextualized excerpts embedded in rabbinic teachings, conversation, and liturgy. The late antique traditions explored in this book thus thrived on a mélange of principles that modern thought treats as opposing categories: combining textual criticism of the biblical tradition with ritual perfectionism concerning material copies of the biblical text and uniting avoidance of the biblical text as a source of information with a communal culture thoroughly infused with biblical iterations in a different mode. The model of classical rabbinic biblicism explored in this book thus upends foundational categorizations concerning Bible reading that have structured so much popular thought about biblical religion.

5. I take this concept from Guy G. Stroumsa, *The Scriptural University of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

Detailed Discussion for the Specialist

This new portrait of a more complex early rabbinic scriptural universe may disrupt existing scholarly models of what the early rabbinic relationship with the Bible looked like, but, in doing so, it brings the classical rabbinic relationship with scripture into line with broader research trends that have emerged in the fields of biblical studies, comparative religion, and classics in the past twenty years. Building on early scholars such as Susan Niditch, who deconstructed the notion of a "great divide" between periods of orality and textuality in the development of the biblical tradition,[6] experts in Hebrew Bible such as David Carr, Bernard Levinson, and Raymond Person have made great strides in convincing the field of biblical studies that the texts found in the Hebrew Bible emerged in a reading culture distant from contemporary paradigms of "writing, book circulation, and silent reading." Biblical texts were generated instead in an environment characterized by a more complex interface "between writing, performance, memorization, and the aural dimension of literary texts."[7] In this complex literary ecology, a prophetic text was not conceptualized as a complete literary work represented by one authentic original but instead each version of a biblical text was "understood by the ancients as *one* instantiation of a traditional (oral and/or written) text."[8] Since a skilled scribe was "both thinker and religious visionary" in this system, "revelation is not prior to or external to the text" but rather each text produced was envisioned as an authentic reverberation of revelation.[9]

There has been a tendency among Hebrew Bible scholars to see this complex literary ecology dissolving with the emergence of the proto-Masoretic text into a more clear-cut culture of text and exegesis. But scholars of Second Temple Judaism such as Eva Mroczek, Hindy Najman, Judith Newman, and Molly Zahn have demonstrated that one still cannot "retroject notions of a fixed, stable text" onto sacred writing in the Second Temple period, when

6. Susan Niditch, *Oral and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 78.

7. David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Construction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

8. Raymond F. Person Jr., "Self-Referential Phrases in Deuteronomy: A Reassessment Based on Recent Studies concerning Scribal Performance and Memory," in *Collective Memory and Collective Identity: Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History in Their Context,* ed. Johannes Unsok Ro and Diana Edelman (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021), 219.

9. Bernard Levinson, *Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 89.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

written text remained in some sense "secondary to the oral transmission of these discourses as part of a larger and living tradition in the process of continuous renewal," so that considerable *mouvance* is still evident in the varied written forms of the biblical tradition from this period.[10] For sacred writing continued to be imagined as the product of an ongoing divine revelation only "partially instantiated in concrete scribal projects."[11] Thus, reworking an earlier text means updating "the content of that text in a way that one claims to be an authentic expression of the law already accepted as authoritatively Mosaic."[12] So long as any given copy of a text represented "only an incomplete (and potentially inaccurate) extract of the sum total of divine knowledge," scribes could envision the work of rewriting "as bringing the tradition more fully into conformity with the divine exemplar, or as reformulating or expanding it to include more of the divine knowledge believed to be accessible to humans"—so that they were "continuing to unfold a practically inexhaustible store of divine wisdom."[13]

This more open and participatory model of written revelation is generally imagined by all parties to have come to an end with the early rabbinic "embodiment of revelation in a limited written text, the Bible, once revealed to inspired prophets, but now completed and given into the hands of the sages."[14] Within the fields of Jewish studies and religious studies more broadly, the idea that the rise of rabbinic Judaism marks the natural end of previous scriptural models is intimately tied to the sense that 70 CE marks an evolutionary watershed in Jewish history. As Jonas Leipziger recently pointed out, our understandings of late antique Jewish reading practices are still inflected by a widely accepted narrative that "the 'old' sacrificial cult of the temple was substituted after 70

10. Judith H. Newman, *Before the Bible: The Liturgical Body and the Formation of Scriptures in Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 5. For more on the development of the concept of textual fluidity borrowed from medieval studies in relation to New Philology, scribal versionism, and other related schools, see Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug, "Studying Snapshots: On Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology," in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, ed. Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), 1–19.

11. Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 188.

12. Hindy Najman, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 13.

13. Molly M. Zahn, *Genres of Rewriting in Second Temple Judaism: Scribal Composition and Transmission* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 221.

14. Mroczek, *Literary Imagination*, 185.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

CE by a 'literary cult' with the rabbinic emphasis on prayer and especially studying and reading Hebrew Scripture."[15] In recent years, of course, this model has been heavily nuanced by scholars such as Konrad Schmid, who argues that the "cult replacing functions of scripture and canon" did not take place in a single moment in 70 CE but instead represented a gradual sublimation taking place over the course of many centuries,[16] and Guy Stroumsa, who has framed the rabbinic turn to text as part of a broader Mediterranean movement from sacrifice to sacred textuality.[17] Yet we may need to further denaturalize the conceptual link that has been implicitly established between the fall of the cult and the rise of a particular attitude toward canonical reading.

Nor should the rising tide of scripturalism in this period be taken as the necessary death knoll of older attitudes toward revelation and authority. As Hindy Najman has observed, "within a family of approaches to the question of authorization, there could be both continuity and variation" so that more open Second Temple revelatory modes continued to thrive in communities such as Hellenistic Jewish Alexandria well into the new millennium.[18] Anne Kreps has similarly documented the ways in which late antique gnostic works such as the Gospel of Truth "endorsed a mode of open authority, recognizing ongoing oral and written revelation, instead of a closed canon of sacred books."[19] New Testament researchers such as Matthew Larsen and Yael Fisch have likewise argued that "discourses on textuality fluidity and growth" continued alongside the process of gospel textualization and proliferation[20] in ongoing oral metaprocesses of "intertextualization, decontextualization, and recontextualization."[21] If such echoes of Second Temple revelatory tropes did

15. Jonas Leipziger, "Ancient Jewish Greek Practices of Reading and Their Material Aspects," in *Material Aspects of Reading in Ancient and Medieval Cultures: Materiality, Prescence and Performance,* ed. Anna Krauss, Jonas Leipziger, and Friederike Schuecking-Jungblut (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 149.

16. Konrad Schmid, "The Canon and the Cult: The Emergence of Book Religion in Ancient Israel and the Gradual Sublimation of the Temple Cult," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131, no. 2 (2012): 304.

17. Guy G. Stroumsa, *La fin du sacrifice: Mutations religieuses de l'antiquité tardive* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2005).

18. Najman, *Seconding Sinai*, 109.

19. Anne Kreps, *The Crucified Book: Sacred Writing in the Age of Valentinus* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press: 2022), 2.

20. Matthew Larsen, *Gospels Before the Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2018), 5.

21. Yael Fisch, "The Origins of the Oral Torah: A New Pauline Perspective," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 51, no. 1 (2020): 57.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

indeed continue to permeate other Jewish and Jewish-adjacent corners of the changing scriptural landscape of late antiquity, then the claim that early rabbinic thinkers valorized a closed and all-containing written canon stands out against the streams of cognate religious movements of the era.

More importantly, perhaps, our understanding of how written canon functioned within the reading cultures of the Hellenistic and Roman Mediterranean more broadly has changed radically in recent years. As recently as the groundbreaking multi-author volume *Homer and the Bible in the Eyes of Ancient Interpreters*, one might still say that late antique Jewish readers of the Bible and Greco-Roman readers of Homer shared a common scholarly language of reading that "clearly distinguished between the canonical text and their own interpretation or commentary, taking seriously the author's intention and thus the literal meaning of the text."[22] While there is no question that many biblical reading cultures of the era would adapt scholarly apparatus and techne innovated by Greek- and Roman-speaking grammarians and rhetors,[23] even as the aforementioned volume was being published, changes were already afoot in the scholarly world that would subtly upend fundamental facets of this academic vision of how the relationship between canonical text and reader was conceived and practiced in the late antique Mediterranean milieu.

Drawing connections with biblical scholarship cited above, for instance, classicist Jonathan Ready has argued that the Homeric wild papyri represent a scribal ethos not unlike that attributed to biblical scribes, in which each "scribe produces a text that cleaves to his vision of what the traditional text should be . . . informed both by the text in front of him and by his previous encounters with written and oral texts."[24] This tendency toward textual *mouvance*, Ready thus demonstrates, had certainly not disappeared by the Ptolemaic period, even as the Homeric tradition was increasingly embraced as something approaching a canonical work.

Even as the formulas of the textual tradition congealed, scholars have demonstrated that late antique Mediterranean modes of reading these texts continued to generate other forms of wildness and multiplicity. C. M. Chin has

22. Maren R. Niehoff, "Why Compare Homer's Readers to Biblical Readers?," in *Homer and the Bible in the Eyes of Ancient Interpreters*, ed. Maren Niehoff (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 4.

23. See, for instance, Francesca Schironi, "Eusebius' *Gospel* Questions and Aristarchus on Homer—Similar Strategies to Save Different 'Sacred' Texts," in *The Rise of the Early Christian Intellectual*, ed. Lewis Ayres and H. Clifton Ward (Berlin: de Gruyter: 2020), 193–226.

24. Jonathan L. Ready, *Orality, Textuality, and the Homeric Epics: An Interdisciplinary Study of Oral Texts, Dictated Texts, and Wild Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 279.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

pointed out, for instance, the ways in which the expansive late antique discipline of grammar rendered texts "susceptible to linguistic expansion via translation, transliteration, and etymologizing"[25] so that "Augustine's scripture is not strictly coterminous with the biblical canon"[26] and "intertexts from Virgil and Greek myth transforms the concrete Latin Heptateuch into a point of entry for a larger textual universe."[27] As Blossom Stefaniw portrays late antique Christian Bible reading: "The substructure is found in the Bible, and the object of study is the knowledge of the world inherited through it, an object tacitly elided with the world itself."[28] In such a context, the rise of fixed canon cannot be imagined to usher in an era of faithful reading so much as a period of intellectual exploration rooted in the expansive embrace of a canonical text. Thus, even if we imagine early rabbinic thinkers more as Roman provincials than as the inheritors of Second Temple Judaism, it remains difficult to maintain a historically informed vision of rabbinic reading in which a reader would approach the text of the Hebrew Bible as a closed and complete transcript of a divine monologue.

Nor did this state of affairs change radically after closed and canonized scriptural texts had become a mainstay of many religious communities across the globe. Religious studies scholars have increasingly come to understand typical modes of engaging with written scriptures across diverse communities in ways that are subtly at odds with the valorization of sacred informational reading that is ascribed to classical rabbinic authorities. While some historical reading cultures have certainly approached written scripture in scholastic modes similar to those that are ascribed to early rabbinic thinkers, many more have not. In the past thirty years, religious studies scholars have documented a widespread tendency across diverse communities to eschew the potential of written scriptures as communicative documents in their own right in favor of a bifurcation in which the social life of scriptures is lived out, on the one hand, as sounded, recited formulas and performances that function in many ways quite independently of the written text and, on the other hand, in literally or metaphorically closed texts qua cultic objects that serve as silent referents to the capacity of scripture as a conduit of sacred power.

25. C. M. Chin, *Grammar and Christianity in the Late Roman World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 74.

26. Ibid., 17.

27. Ibid., 107.

28. Blossom Stefaniw, *Christian Reading: Language, Ethics, and the Order of Things* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 215.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

Since William Graham first gathered examples of oralized[29] scripture from a wide swath of global religious communities in *Beyond the Written Word*, researchers have analyzed the practical prominence of spoken scripture in virtually every type of religious community—from late antique Christians[30] and medieval Buddhists[31] to modern Korean *musogin*[32] and contemporary Christian communities.[33]

The function of oralized scriptures has sparked something approaching a subfield of its own, however, particularly in Qur'anic studies and in research on scriptural performance cultures in South Asia. Studies of variant traditions of the Ramayana, *katha* retellings of the Puranas and other sacred traditions from South Asia have copiously documented the ways in which these performed scriptural traditions do not capture folk orality in the imagined purity of a great divide narrative but emerge in creative spaces (much like the late antique parallels described above) in which oral performance and manuscript material have remained subtly, and apparently permanently, imbricated.[34] As McComas Taylor has described this dynamic in his ethnographic study of how Sanskrit verses are used in oral performance during Bhagavata Purana recita-

29. By which I mean to evoke not only scriptures that are preserved primarily in oral form but also "the specifically oral dimension of the written scriptural text"—that is, "the important, often primary, ways in which scripture has been a significantly vocal as well as visual fact: how individuals and groups have understood and dealt with their sacred scriptures not only as holy books to be calligraphed and illuminated, preserved and revered, paraded and displayed, but also as texts to be memorized, sung and chanted, read aloud, recited, retold and woven into the texture of their language, thought, and being as auditory facts." William Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 7.

30. Carol Harrison, *The Art of Listening in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

31. David Drewes, "Revisiting the Phrase 'sa pṛthivīpradeśaś caityabhūto bhavet' and the Mahāyāna Cult of the Book," *Indo-Iran Journal* 50, no. 2 (2007): 101–43.

32. Yohan Yoo, "Performing Scriptures: Ritualizing Written Texts in Seolwi-Seolgyeong, the Korean Shamanistic Recitation of Scriptures," *Postscripts* 10, no. 1–2 (2019): 9–25.

33. Brian Malley, *How the Bible Works: An Anthropological Study of Evangelical Biblicism* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira, 2004); *The Social Life of Scripture: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Biblicism*, ed. James Bielo (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009); and Matthew Engelke, *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

34. For a selection of now-classic work on this topic see Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger and Laurie J. Sears, eds., *Boundaries of the Text: Epic Performances in South and Southeast Asia* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991) and the works cited there.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

tions, verses are *entextualized* "in the sense that the exponent draws on the authority of the Bhagavatapurana in the use of verses extracted from the text" while they are simultaneously *contextualized* "in the sense that the exponent adjusts or adapts his spoken discourse to a particular audience in a particular time and place."[35] Such bidirectionality is possible Ilona Wilczewska argues, because "internalizing the scripture can go to such a level that the text is not only memorized, but its language, themes, and images come to permeate the mental processes in various ways"[36] with the aim that "a qualified *katha* speaker is able to tell a story with passion and extract a moral from the story in a way that is applicable to anyone in the audience."[37] In studies of South Asian spoken scripture, we thus encounter a rich body of documentation on the ways in which spoken scripture continues to live out subtly different "textual lives" alongside written transcripts of those same tradition.

Research on Qur'anic recitation has brought a yet more subtle lesson to the table, demonstrating the ways in which even a spoken scripture that represents a word-for-word match for a written transcript may still take on a qualitatively different social life of its own in sounded and embodied circulation. Drawing on classic work, including Kristina Nelson's *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an* and Navid Kermani's *Gott ist schön*, researchers such as Anna M. Gade have revealed the ways in which even textually fixed recitation traditions may convey diverse "affective norms of beauty (including the use of melody), improvisation, and feeling"[38] while Michael Frishkopf has pointed to the ways in which these "sonic contrasts" between different styles of Qur'anic recitation "directly support theological interpretations."[39] Scholars such as Lauren Osborne, moreover, draw our attention to the ways in which recitation performances are contextually situated and multidimensional, so that these aural experiences of scripture include "the listener and listening cultures, rather than focusing

35. McComas Taylor, *Seven Days of Nectar: Contemporary Oral Performance of the Bhagavatapurana* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 127 and 129.

36. Ilona Wilczewska, " 'Live with the Text and Listen to Its Words': Bhagavata Recitation in Changing Times," in *The Bhāgavata Purāna: Sacred Text and Living Tradition,* ed. Ravi Gupta and Kenneth Valpey (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 214.

37. Ibid., 212.

38. Anna M. Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice: Learning, Emotion, and the Recited Qur'an in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 164.

39. Michael Frishkopf, "Mediated Qur'anic Recitation and the Contestation of Islam in Contemporary Egypt," in *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia*, ed. Lauden Noushin (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 100.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

solely on the reciter and the moment of the recitation."[40] Rudolph Ware has advocated that we also take seriously the notion that one who has memorized the Qur'an is *hafiz* (in the sense that they embody scripture) since "this kind of embodiment goes beyond the metaphorical meanings of the term in English—as exemplar or practical application—and encompasses meanings closer to incarnation, instantiation, and manifestation."[41] Qura'nic studies has thus richly documented myriad ways in which a spoken scripture might technically duplicate its written transcript and yet simultaneously circulate in radically different exegetical and experiential modes.

Nor is the type of written text paired with these spoken scriptures most often a form of written communication that is read for information. Instead, these written texts are engaged not so much as a direct source of knowledge but as ritual artifacts—symbolic representations of revelation. As the classic work of Philip Lutgendorf on the interplay between spoken scripture and written scripture has captured the profound ritual silence of written scripture in such cases: a reader might recite from memory in front of a largely illegible manuscript because "if they glance at the text it is only to note the first word of a line or an approaching break for a dialogue" not to derive specific textual information[42] or a reader might even recite formulas from a closed book set before him without ever opening its petal-strewn cover.[43]

The ritual status of scriptural books as simultaneously relic and reliquary is beautifully captured in Jinah Kim's work on medieval Buddhist practices of ritual text in which a book might be opened to offer a simplified visual image of text at the conclusion of a ritual or rest closed on a stele for worship, so that the same book "is itself a relic as a sacred text and, at the same time it encases a true relic of the Buddha, his teachings written in beautiful letters."[44] As sacred

40. Lauren E. Osborne, "The Experience of the Recited Qur'an," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48, no. 1 (2016): 127.

41. Rudolph Ware, *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 8.

42. Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text: Performing the Rāmcaritmānas of Tulsidas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 306.

43. Phillip Lutegendorf, "Ram's Story in Shiva's City: Public Arenas and Private Patronage," in *Culture and Power in the Banaras: Community, Performance, and Environment*, ed. Sandra Freitag (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 34. See, similarly, McComas Taylor, "Empowering the Sacred: The Function of the Sanskrit Text in a Contemporary Exposition of the Bhagavatapurana," in *Orality, Literacy and Performance in the Ancient World*, ed. Elizabeth Minchin (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 129–50.

44. Jinah Kim, *Receptacles of the Sacred: Illustrated Manuscripts and the Buddhist Book Culture in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 40.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

icons and relics, rather than sources of communication, these silent holy books thus manifest the powers ascribed to scriptures above and beyond their persuasive message.

Rabbinic studies has been largely inoculated against these trends in the study of how scriptures function, however, by a widespread tendency to attribute all *mouvance* in early rabbinic thought and practice to the development of the rabbinic tradition itself. When these broader trends in religious studies came to be applied within the field of rabbinics, therefore, they were directed toward studying the growth of the rabbinic tradition rather than scripture. As Steven Fraade has put it, scholars have almost universally seen midrash "an appropriate place to begin an examination of the complex interplay of oral and textual registers of tradition and its transmission, so much the focus of recent study of other traditional cultures and so much the character of Rabbinic culture from antiquity to the present."[45] In the wake of the association developed between trends in the study of scriptural practices and the growth of the rabbinic oral tradition, scholars such as Fraade, Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, Yaakov Elman, Richard Hidary, Catherine Hezser, Martin Jaffee, Shlomo Naeh, David Nelson, and Yaacov Sussmann,[46] fundamentally redefined our

45. Steven D. Fraade, "Literary Composition and Oral Performance in Early Midrashim," *Oral Tradition* 14, no. 1 (1999): 33.

46. For the role of orality in the formation of the body of work traditionally called the "Oral Torah," see, for instance, Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, *Transmitting Mishnah: The Shaping Influence of Oral Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Yaakov Elman, "Orality and the Redaction of the Babylonian Talmud," *Oral Tradition* 14, no. 1 (1999): 52–99; Elman, "Orality and the Transmission of Tosefta Pisha in Talmudic Literature," in *Introducing Tosefta: Textual, Intratextual and Intertextual Studies*, ed. Harry Fox and Tirzah Meacham (Hoboken: Ktav, 1999), 117–74; Yaakov Elman and Israel Gershoni, eds., *Transmitting Jewish Tradition: Orality, Textuality, and Cultural Diffusion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); Steven D. Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and Its Interpretation in Midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991); Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001); Richard Hidary, *Rabbis as Greco-Roman Rhetors: Oratory and Sophistic Education in the Talmud and Midrash* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Martin Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE–400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Shlomo Naeh "The Structure and Division of Midrash Torat Kohanim (Part 1)," *Tarbiz* 66 (1997): 483–515; Naeh, "The Art of Structures of Memory and the Organization of Texts in Rabbinic Literature," in *Mehqerei Talmud 3: Talmudic Studies in Memory of Professor Ephraim Urbach*, ed. Yaacov Sussmann and David Rosenthal (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005), 543–89 (in Hebrew); David Nelson, "Textuality and Talmud Torah: Issues of Early Rabbinic Written and Oral Transmission of Tradition as Exemplified in Mekhilta of Rabbi Shimon b. Yohai" (*PhD* diss., Hebrew Union College, 1999); Nelson, "Oral Orthography: Early Rabbinic Oral and Written Transmission of Parallel Midrashic Tradition: In the

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

understanding of the way in which "rabbinic disciples encountered as oral tradition the performative embodiment of memorized rabbinic manuscripts"—by pushing us to recognized that (like scriptural traditions in other cultures) the rabbinic oral tradition functioned in a "continuous loop of manuscript and performance that had no 'ground zero.' "[47] It is thus the study of *rabbinic tradition* that has moved along with advancements in our understanding of how scripture and canon work within religious studies and cognate fields.

When the transformative force of these emerging insights was directed toward the study of the rabbinic tradition, however, they were simultaneously channeled away from the study of how *biblical* text functioned within the rabbinic community. I would argue that the tendency to bypass the rabbinic relationship with the Hebrew Bible in these investigations has its roots in foundational presuppositions regarding the forms of religious tradition available to early rabbinic communities. The diversion of emerging trends in scriptural studies away from the rabbinic relationship with the Hebrew Bible appears to derive ultimately from what Martin Jaffee has dubbed the "ontological" distinction ascribed to the fixed textuality of written scripture and the fluidity of the oral tradition in the early rabbinic system.[48] The fact that the classical rabbinic authorities primarily engaged with the Hebrew Bible as a series of memorized formulas in quotidian practice is one of those odd historical realities that is widely accepted on a nominal level and yet continues to go unacknowledged in the larger structures of scholarship[49]—a technical detail mentioned in foot-

---

Mekhilta of Rabbi Shimon B. Yoḥai and the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 29, no. 1 (2005): 1–32; Nelson, "Orality and Mnemonics in Aggadic Midrash," in *Midrash and Context (Proceeds of the 2004 and 2005 SBL Consultation on Midrash)*, ed. Lieve M. Teugels and Rivka Ulmer (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2007), 123–38; and Yaakov Sussmann, "Torah shebeʿal peh," in *Mehqerei Talmud 3: Talmudic Studies in Memory of Professor Ephraim Urbach*, ed. Yaakov Sussmann and David Rosenthal (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005), 209–384.

47. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth*, 124.

48. See Martin Jaffee's extended treatment of the "ontologically" textual nature of the Pentateuch even as it was orally incorporated in the rabbinic Oral Torah: "A Rabbinic Ontology of the Written and Spoken Word: On Discipleship, Transformative Knowledge, and Living Texts of Oral Torah," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, no. 3 (1997): especially 536 and 540–43. Indeed, Moshe Halbertal has argued that "[in rabbinic Judaism,] text is more than a shared matrix for a diverse tradition—it is one of the tradition's central operative concepts, like 'God' or 'Israel.' " Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 2.

49. For a rich account of the practical circumstances that favored biblical memorization in early rabbinic circles, see Catherine Hezser, "Bookish Circles? The Use of Written Texts in Rab-

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

notes or brief asides that has yet to significantly influence our account of the way that early rabbinic culture engaged with its sacred scriptures.[50]

In some cases, this scholarly dichotomy is rooted in a binary reading of the emic rabbinic categories of Written and Oral Torah. In this imaginary, "the former consists of a fixed, closed text, the latter of a fluid oral transmission and expansion."[51] In other cases, this framing reflects deeply rooted narratives about the cessation of prophecy and the resulting calcification of revelation that took place in its wake. For with the cessation of prophecy, "the interpreter of scripture, not the prophet, would reveal God's will, and would do so not through inspiration or God's direct revelation but instead through the mastery of a skill."[52] With such accounts of the canonization and transmission process on the tips of so many tongues, it is not surprising that scholarly theories of scriptural *mouvance* were applied first to the fecund multiformity of rabbinic

binic Oral Culture," *Temas Medievales* 25 (2017): 63–82. The current book, however, seeks to garner increased recognition of this broader *implications* of this practice in the scholarly discussion by (1) demonstrating that this practice was ideologically as well as practically motivated, and (2) asking the reader to consider some of the resulting implications of early rabbinic reading practices for the study of the way that biblical religions relate to the written text of the Bible.

50. It is not uncommon in recent studies, for instance, to see qualifying statements such as this one: "By arguing that the rabbis acquired their knowledge of the Bible from hearing it read aloud . . . I am not suggesting that the rabbis knew the text of the Torah *solely* as a heard document, or that the rabbis were in any way oblivious to the fact that the Torah was a written text. As I have explained, they were familiar with *every detail* in the Written Torah, and part of the rabbinic educational curriculum was learning to read and chant the Torah aloud from a scroll. Rabbis certainly consulted written texts of the Torah, some studied from written texts, and there are rabbinic stories that pivot on written copies of Scripture." David Stern, *Jewish Literary Cultures: The Ancient Period* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Press, 2015), 176.

51. Steven Fraade, "Concepts of Scripture in Rabbinic: Oral and Written Torah," in *Jewish Concepts of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction,* ed. Benjamin D. Sommer (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 31–32.

52. Michael L. Satlow, *How the Bible Became Holy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 267. For surveys of the classic scholarly literature on this question, as well qualifications to this account, see the classic surveys of Fredrick Greenspahn, "Why Prophecy Ceased," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108, no. 1 (1989): 37–49; Thomas Overholt, "The End of Prophecy: No Players without a Program," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 42, no. 3 (1988): 103–15; and Benjamin Sommer, "Did Prophecy Cease? Evaluating a Reevaluation," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115, no. 1 (1996): 31–47. On the extent to which this developmental vision of Jewish textuality is reflected in the modern period, see S. Guzmen-Carmeli, "Texts as Places, Texts as Mirrors: Anthropology of Judaisms and Jewish Textuality," *Contemporary Jewry* 40 (2020): 471–92 and the literature cited there.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

tradition and exegesis while the biblical text continues to be broadly portrayed as embodying all the limits and stability of textual fixity.

The scholarly vision of the rabbinic relationship with scripture has not remained static, however, as researchers in the parallel field of rabbinic exegesis have increasingly sought to define more precisely the hermeneutic modes of engaging with written scripture that held sway in different rabbinic schools and genres. The results have done much to nuance and complicate our vision of how early rabbinic authorities conceptualized and related to written scripture as researchers look beyond explicit rabbinic statements about nature of Torah and instead "make a conscious effort to reconstruct the *implicit* fore-understandings of Torah that determine the ancient readings."[53] As scholars such as Jonathan Kaplan, Tzvi Novick, Alexander Samely, and Azzan Yadin-Israel took these concerns to the study of the hermeneutic modes adopted in particular rabbinic corpora, novel facets of the rabbinic conceptualization of scripture emerged in stark relief.[54] While scholars such as Benjamin Sommer and Christine Hayes have recently begun to ask if we could use this research to paint a more explicit and abstract portrait of early rabbinic "conceptions of scripture" and revelation.[55]

These advances in the field of Jewish biblical interpretation have done little as yet, however, to shift the traditional academic portrayal of the role played by the Hebrew Bible in the rabbinic imagination and practice, which continues to hold sway within much of religious studies, rabbinic studies, and Jewish studies more broadly. This monograph seeks to work toward the goal of destabilizing this widely accepted portrait by uncovering the alternate structures that undergird broad swaths of early rabbinic thought and practice. Whether one understands the counter traditions analyzed in these pages to represent the dominant rabbinic stance toward written scripture or one underappreci-

53. Emphasis added. Azzan Yadin, *Scripture as Logos: Rabbi Ishmael and the Origins of Midrash* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 9–10.

54. Jonathan Kaplan, *My Perfect One: Typology and Early Rabbinic Interpretation of Song of Songs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 184; Tzvi Novick, *What Is Good, and What God Demands,* Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Alexander Samely, *Rabbinic Interpretation of Scripture in the Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Azzan Yadin-Israel, *Scripture and Tradition: Rabbi Akiva and the Triumph of Midrash* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

55. Benjamin Sommer, introduction to *Jewish Concepts of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction,* ed. Benjamin Sommer (New York: New York University Press, 2012); and Christine Hayes, *What's Divine about Divine Law? Early Perspectives* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 166–270.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

ated thread of early rabbinic tradition among many, these traditions call us to reconsider widely held presuppositions about the ways in which written scriptures were encountered and conceptualized in early rabbinic communities.

A Brief Outline of the Project

This book is divided into two parts. The chapters that make up part 1 argue that, rather than valorizing the Pentateuch and its prophetic echoes as perfect transcripts of the divine will, many early rabbinic practitioners experienced the Bible as a problem. In the first chapter, "A Makeshift Scripture," the reader is asked to reconsider the tenor of early rabbinic comments about the writtenness of scripture. The traditions analyzed in chapter 1 represent a stream of rabbinic thought in which the biblical text is theorized not as a perfect record of divine knowledge but as a treacherously limited and changeable vessel for preserving the divine will. The chapter begins by analyzing early rabbinic traditions about Ezra the Scribe and other scribal heroes who narrowly saved the biblical text from oblivion at repeated junctures in the history of Israel—even, at times, reconstructing the lost text from memory. In these narratives, the vulnerable material nature of each instantiation of the Bible text has rendered the biblical tradition susceptible to repeated erosion, loss, and change. The chapter continues by investigating early rabbinic traditions that contrast the first tablets of the law destroyed by Moses with the second tablets of the law ultimately bequeathed to the people of Israel. These two tablet traditions are treated as a form of narrative theorizing about the nature of written text and its limits as a vehicle for divine revelation. In such stories, the first (lost) tablets of the law come to represent the impossibility of authentically capturing the divine will in a material written text. While the second (received) tablets of the law become a locus for reflection on the inherently brittle and imperfect nature of the written revelation that was bequeathed to history.

In the second chapter, "A Book That Kills," the reader is asked to question the widespread presupposition that rabbinic practitioners embraced the biblical text as "a tree of life to all who grasp it" (Prov 3:18). In the early rabbinic traditions collected in chapter 2, the biblical text is imagined as a mortally dangerous artifact that can leave death and destruction in its wake. Unlike the first chapter, chapter 2 is not organized thematically but is instead divided into a rough chronology to highlight distinct developmental stages in rabbinic thinking about the perils of biblical texts and its affordances. The chapter opens by analyzing tannaitic traditions in which the mortal dangers of the

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

biblical text emerge when it is read by *minim* (sectarians, heretics, or early Jesus followers). These traditions often use images of an adulterous wife to capture a notion that the biblical text was hazardous because the lures of its lyrical beauty and spiritual pleasures remained intact even as the text was corrupted and put into the service of the enemies of Israel—transforming the biblical text into a Trojan horse for heresy and spiritual poison. Later Palestinian sources transfigure the motif of textual promiscuity so that the danger posed by the biblical text lies not in its potential to be shared between communities but instead in the way the written text makes its unbounded spiritual forces available to anyone who approaches it. In these early amoraic sources, the tannaitic triangulation between biblical textuality, heresy, and physical death was now applied to actors *within* Israel. As a hypostasized font of divine power, the biblical text portrayed in these narratives produces a proliferation of uncontrollable spiritual modes, many of them deadly. In later Babylonian traditions, the imagery that emerged in previous traditions is further concretized and expanded until simple proximity with the biblical text can wipe out both individuals and populations without any transparent spiritual mechanism at work. In such traditions, the very existence of a material written revelation had become a source of a multiform and inchoate terror.[56]

Chapter 3, "Neglect of Text," argues that the dangers attributed to the biblical text in these mythologizing narratives were also reflected in more quotidian practical measures that restricted use of the biblical text as a source of religious information in many late antique rabbinic circles. Adopting a more expansive and nuanced definition of restriction and censorship, chapter 3 explores different modes through which late antique rabbinic authorities sidelined and restricted the written text of the Hebrew Bible as a source of communal information. The chapter opens by analyzing how practices of inaccurate citation both reflected and cultivated neglect of the written text of the Hebrew Bible by trivializing textual engagement as a potential source of knowledge. The chapter then looks at how diverse rabbinic injunctions deterred practitioners from deriving information directly from the written text of the Bible by discouraging informational reading in general, by placing restrictions on reading the Bible at certain times and on certain days, and by proscribing the circulation of vernacular copies of biblical texts. The third chapter thus completes

56. Similar to the phenomenon Matthew Engelke has called "terror of the text" (*Problem of Presence*, 7) following Johannes Fabian, "Text as Terror: Second Thoughts about Charisma," *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (1979): 166–203.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

part 1 of the book, which explores different ways in which early rabbinic thinkers approached the biblical text as a problem.

Part 2 asks how a community so deeply ambivalent about the biblical text nevertheless elevated the Hebrew Bible as a central pillar of communal thought. The chapters in the second half of the book argue that this apparent paradox was possible because early rabbinic practitioners approached the practices of reading and engaging with written text very differently from modern informational readers. It argues that the memorization-heavy reading practices described in early rabbinic literature had already rendered the written text of the Hebrew Bible a secondary, even superfluous, witness to the biblical tradition in daily practice. So much so, in fact, that early rabbinic thinkers came to think of these recited oral formulas of the biblical traditions as a distinct revelation in their own right. Until Spoken Scripture came to be theorized as a third type of Torah that flourished in the liminal space between the consonantal transcripts of the Written Torah and the emerging rabbinic traditions of the Oral Torah—a more authentic echo of the scriptural revelation at Sinai than could be contained in a scroll's limited parchment.

Chapter 4, "Rabbinic Practices of (Bible) Reading," demonstrates that common early rabbinic modes of Bible reading bypassed the written text as a source of information—treating written words as nothing more than a ritual corollary to spoken language, in whose spoken formulas true meaning and communication were thought to reside. The chapter opens by exploring a widespread early rabbinic commitment to memorized ritual recitation as the primary mode of engaging with biblical text and argues that these practices of ritual reading served to marginalize written texts of the Hebrew Bible as a source of cultural transmission and knowledge. Since this mode of early rabbinic liturgical reading was rooted in recitation formulas passed directly from teacher to student and did not derive meaning directly from written words, both transmission and meaning in this reading practice were thought to reside primarily in the spoken words. The rest of the chapter seeks to illuminate this conceptual inversion of text and meaning by looking at early rabbinic literacy pedagogies as both representative and formative of a reading practice that treated written texts as secondary—and often temporary—props in the transmission of recited formulas from teacher to student.

Chapter 5, "The Third Torah," argues that this bifurcation of the biblical tradition into oral and written iterations was not merely an incidental development in rabbinic practice but was theorized by many early rabbinic thinkers as reflecting a more fundamental bifurcation of the scriptural revelation at

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

Sinai into two distinct historical echoes: a limited consonantal transcript preserved in the biblical text that was bequeathed to history and a more authentic spoken iteration of the biblical revelation transmitted through the living recitation of the tradition by human mouths. These traditions characterized the memorized spoken formulas of the biblical tradition as a discrete, qualitatively different, and ultimately superior witness to the biblical revelation—a distinct third form of Torah preserved at the interstices between the Oral and Written Torah. Chapter 5 opens by exploring how early rabbinic thinkers could conceive of two largely parallel formulas of the biblical tradition as distinct forms of revelation. This section first explores early rabbinic traditions in which the small divergences that foreshadowed the Masoretic *qere* and *ketiv* ("read thus, though it is written thus" traditions) were taken as signs of deeper metaphysical divergences between the spoken formulas of the biblical tradition and the consonantal transcript. The discussion then moves on to consider Babylonian rabbinic traditions in which *mikra* (the spoken formulas of the biblical tradition) and *masoret* (the written transcript of the biblical tradition) were imagined as distinct revelatory works, configured in a hierarchy of authenticity in which the spoken version of the biblical tradition was embraced as the primary witnesses to the biblical revelation. The chapter then examines in more detail the ways in which these memorized oral formulas of the biblical tradition were envisioned as a qualitatively superior echo of the biblical revelation that passed down almost material traces of a living revelatory divine speech through the corporeal mechanisms of breath, scent, and taste. The chapter closes by tracing traditions in which this third Torah of Spoken Scripture was imagined as the survival of its own distinct moment of biblical revelation: the first, more authentic, biblical revelation that was temporarily inscribed on the first tablets of the law and then released into its natural form as speech and sound with the smashing of the tablets.

Chapter 6, "The Closed Book," asks how practitioners imagined the status and character of the written consonantal transcript passed down on parchment scrolls once they no longer functioned as communicative witnesses to the biblical revelation. While many researchers have suggested that Torah scrolls functioned primarily as ritual objects, this chapter argues that we should go further and take seriously the many early rabbinic traditions in which the Torah scroll was envisioned as a form of corporeal avatar—an almost-living biological body that could act as an intermediary between the divine and the human. The chapter opens by analyzing the ways early rabbinic traditions treat the Torah scroll like the human body, as an entity that manifests sacred powers

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

most strongly when it is closed, covered, and whole—so that the scroll's all-too-material textual facets are exposed to view only during the carefully regulated moments of intimacy allowed for liturgical recitation-reading. The chapter then explores the very biological bodily imagery utilized in traditions that imagine the Torah scroll being touched, moved, or physically manipulated in liturgical contexts—particularly in rituals in which the Torah scroll is treated as a member of the human community. The chapter closes by considering how the Torah scroll came to be imagined as a personified avatar of sacrality—a conduit between heaven and earth—in the absence of a sacrificial priesthood acting within the Temple cult. The chapters that make up the second part of the book thus argue that early rabbinic authorities were able to maintain the Pentateuch's central status in rabbinic thought and practice while retreating from the biblical text as a communicative document because the biblical text had come to be treated not as a written communication so much as a personification of revelation that housed a living recited soul within a powerful (if dangerous) parchment body.

The concluding chapter of the monograph asks how this portrait of the early rabbinic relationship with biblical text changes our perception of subsequent developments in the Jewish relationship with Bible. Contemporary Jewish approaches to the Bible are deeply rooted in the medieval tradition of systematic biblical commentary. Yet it has proven challenging to explain the sudden global rise of these new forms of commentary in the Middle Ages so long as medieval Jewish approaches to biblical textuality were projected back into the classical rabbinic period. With this new portrait of classical rabbinic approaches to the biblical text, stark contrasts begin to emerge between medieval Jewish conceptions of biblical textuality and those of the early rabbinic period. The conclusion thus suggests that the far-reaching transformations in Jewish modes of engaging with the biblical text that arose with the Middle Ages were not spurred by particular cultural or technological developments so as much as a sea change in Jewish conceptions of what *kind* of book the Bible was. That is, the conclusion theorizes that the all-important medieval shift in Jewish modes of engaging with the biblical text derived from a global transformation in the Jewish vision of the Bible's genre and affordances.

What This Book Is Not: Some Notes on Method

There are fields of research that intersect with various topics in this book that will not be extensively addressed as part of this work's scholarly genealogy.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

Many of the themes analyzed in the first half of the book, for instance, also appear threaded through a series of groundbreaking contributions to academic theology generated on the Upper West Side of Manhattan over the course of the last fifty years by Abraham Joshua Heschel, David Weiss Halivni, and Benjamin Sommer.[57] However, this book is intended as a descriptive account of a particular reception history rather than a constructive project and it remains unclear to me, and others, how these two very different approaches might productively intersect.[58]

Scattered throughout this monograph, the reader will also find copious references to sectarians, Christians, and Romans of all walks of life—both within the primary source material produced by early rabbinic thinkers and in my own analysis of those late ancient materials. In order to maintain focus on rabbinic scriptural reading cultures, this book will not be theorized as an intervention in the field of Jewish-Christian relations or the study of late antique intercommunity relations more broadly. Instead, this project should be understood as loosely grounded in the following principles regarding intercommunity relations: First, this project is premised on the assumption that one can sometimes identify broader "antipodal" tendencies, as Shaye Cohen has put it, between certain early rabbinic and emerging Christian attitudes regarding the nature of scripture and its affordances—even if a direct textual genealogy between particular sources cannot be traced.[59] Yet the materials analyzed in the project are not limited to antipodal relations in which rival claims are configured as opposing positions. Instead, many of the materials cited here participated in similar, though not identical, ways in a broader Mediterranean vernacular emerging around the nature of canonical text and its function. When it came to reading, early rabbinic practices might be best categorized as what Seth Schwartz has called "accommodative"—in the sense that at the very "moment that the rabbis were striving to extricate themselves from the Roman

57. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Heavenly Torah Refracted through the Generations,* vol. 1 (London: Soncino, 1962); vol. 2 (London: Soncino, 1965); and vol. 3 (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1995); David Weiss Halivni, *Revelation Restored: Divine Writ and Critical Responses* (New York: Avalon, 1998); Benjamin D. Sommer, *Revelation and Authority: Sinai in Jewish Scripture and Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

58. For an extended discussion of this challenge, see Sarah Wolf's review of *Revelation and Authority* in *Journal of Law and Religion* 33, no. 2 (2015): 322–25.

59. Shaye Cohen, "Antipodal Texts: B. Eruvin 21b–22a and Mark 7:1–23 on the Traditions of the Elder and the Commandment of God," in *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schaefer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Ra'anan S. Boustan (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 108.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

system . . . they were also demonstrating their commitments to some of its core values."[60]

The final way in which this book may deviate from expectations is one of bibliographic method. Both biblical studies and rabbinic studies participate with unusual robustness in a bibliographic practice that Anthony Grafton has famously attributed to the influence of German philology, whereby "footnotes often serve to prove the author's membership in a guild rather than to illuminate or support a particular point" as "citations are heaped up, without much regard to their origins or compatibility in order to make the text above them seem to rest on solid pilings."[61] Indeed, Anne Stevens and Jay Williams have argued that such notes are aimed less at "the traditional recognition of the work of like-minded scholars" than at establishing that the author possesses a proper "consciousness of their place in the field."[62] This is where the "Germanic footnote" becomes a problem, it seems to me. In the fields treated in this book, we do not currently have adequate bibliographic and technical apparatus available to comprehensively survey work on a particular passage or topic. Without a comprehensive apparatus in place, what we miss in our citations tends to systematically reproduce structures of inequity along networks of gender, ethnicity, class, geography, employment status, and institutional prestige. I am therefore wary of approaching footnotes as a ticket of admission to the guild when that technique has functioned so inefficiently to include and has proven so effective at excluding.

Within rabbinic studies, there is a particular manifestation of this practice about which I have strong reservations: the practice of citing and arguing against every previous author who has offered an analysis of a topic or passage that deviates from one's own. While *makhloket leshem shamayim* (dispute for the sake of heaven) may have sharpened the minds of the rabbinic thinkers we study, Jeffery Rubenstein has also painted a sobering picture of the social costs of such an intellectual milieu[63]—which we might do well to consider before adapting the discourse for modern studies of the subject. But the more

60. Seth Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 165.

61. Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 43.

62. Anne H. Stevens and Jay Williams, "The Footnote, in Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (2006): 211.

63. Jeffery Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 54–79.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

pressing reason to eschew this practice, it seems to me, is that it tends to privilege those scholars who have had the most experience with this particular rhetoric from their time in elite, Ashkenazic, masculine yeshiva contexts. Those who trained exclusively in secular institutions and in women's, egalitarian, and non-Ashkenazic schools of advanced Talmud study were taught different modes of interacting with these texts, and with each other. This particular mode of relating to disagreement is only one of many native idioms.

The reader may take it as a given that this work is respectfully founded on the widely acknowledged pillars of the field. Although these works hover in the background, I have not attempted to cite each scholar's entire oeuvre to prove my familiarity with highly cited works in the field. Nor have I provided a bibliography, which would serve a similar purpose. Instead, I have tried to argue constructively in this book by citing primarily those authors whose thinking on a particular subject helped give shape to my argument. I will not as a rule include long lists of other readings of a passage, nor argue against other readings of a given text. Instead, I hold that alternate readings may successfully bring out different facets of these multivocal texts, without necessarily being in opposition to one another.

In the additional space created by abstaining from these widely embraced bibliographic practices, I have often sought out less acknowledged scholars and scholarly sources. I do this not in any attempt to diversify by checklist. (In fields that are so imbalanced ab initio, this seems an impossible and misguided task.[64]) Rather, I have often found the greatest delight and stimulation in works that seem to have fallen slightly by the wayside in the networks of convention—work by international academics, women and nonbinary scholars, researchers of color, and those working at less prestigious institutions. Those who have been marginalized by the field are also free of it in many ways. As a result, their work more often takes unexpected and winding paths of their own devising. As Sara Ahmed has put it in another context, "Work that has been too quickly . . . cast aside or left behind, work . . . created by not following the official paths laid out by disciplines" generates for us other paths which Ahmed

64. For the past decade, the Society of Biblical Literature membership has remained around or above 75 percent members who identify as men. According to the most recent Society of Biblical Literature's Member Data Survey, 24.22 percent of responders in the 2018 survey selected the identification "female," 75.68 percent selected the identification "male," and 0.10 percent selected the identification "transgender," Society of Biblical Literature, *Member Data Report*, January 2019, 8: https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/sblMemberProfile2019.pdf.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

has named "desire lines."[65] I hope that the resulting arguments of this book will, in turn, provide new food for thought to this alternate network—whether they make it at the center or not.

In a similar effort to put the thoughts of others before the task of garnering scholarly authority, I have done my best to seek out authorized English translations of modern quotations whenever I cite at any length from the foreign-language work of a contemporary scholar. All translations of premodern works from Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin are, of course, my own—except in the rare cases where I have indicated. However, when a living author has authorized a particular translation into English, I am uncomfortable substituting my own linguistic judgment for theirs, in a misguided attempt to demonstrate that my many years in Israel were not wasted. So, while the translation of any passages quoted from modern works in Hebrew, German, French, or Italian are my own unless otherwise indicated, I will quote from English versions of each author's arguments wherever that is possible.

With all of this said, this book was completed amid a global pandemic. There were works which I wished to consult that I was not able to acquire for practical or budgetary reasons. I regret the insufficiencies this leaves in the final product. Nevertheless, as we so often say in acknowledgements, all errors and omissions are entirely my own.

65. Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 15.

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

INDEX

abecediaries, 138–39
Achaemenid Behistun inscription, 210
adultery, use of biblical text in *sotah* ritual for wife accused of, 64, 67, 68–69, 202–5, 219
Aeschylus, 134
Against Heresies (Irenaeus), 31n16
Against the Christians (Porphyry), 30–31
Agron (Saadia Gaon), 227n23
Ahmed, Sara, 24–25
R. Akiva: dangerousness of biblical texts, stories of, 65, 73, 76, 77, 79, 87–93; literary pedagogies and, 140, 150–52; martyrdom of, 88–93; on unreliability of scripture, 40
Alexandrian grammarians, 102
alphabetic literacy. *See under* literacy pedagogies
amulets and amuletic practices, 194n3, 206, 209
Anonymous A, 227n23
Aphrahat, 49n51
Apostolic Constitutions, 49n51
Aquila, 230n26
Aramaic square script, 36–37
Aramaic targums. *See* targums
Aramaic transition and Ezran authorship tradition, 29, 32–39
Aristophanes, 145–46, 147
ark of the covenant: cherubim on, 214; power/dangerousness of ancient biblical material in, 81–83, 96; Temple ark conflated with, 215–16; women's body, analogy of Torah Scroll inside ark as, 212–17, 219
The Art of Reciting the Qur'an (Nelson), 11
Asian scriptures, 10–11, 195–96, 198
Assyrian/Assyrian script, 33, 36, 38, 181
Augustine of Hippo, 9, 148
Avot de Rabbi Natan, 56n63, 64n18, 140, 151, 172, 229n25

Babylonian Talmud: appearance of texts with linguistic components necessary for informational or sight-reading, 229n25; daily life, restricting bible reading in, 115n35; dangerousness of biblical texts in, 64n18, 66n24, 69n31, 69n33, 73n42, 74n44, 77, 83, 83n53, 84–96; Ezran authorship tradition and, 29, 32, 34, 36, 38, 41; Hillel in, 41–42; R. Hiyya in, 42–43; informational reading, on dangerousness of, 109n25, 110n28; literary pedagogies in, 141–43, 150, 151, 152–53, 155–56, 159–60; mistaken, faulty, and inaccurate readings in, 103–5, 106–7; on paleographic/linguistic evidence of historical variation, 39n32; on phylacteries and mezuzah texts, 206, 207; on recitation-reading (*keri'ah*), 123, 124, 125n9, 126, 127n13, 128, 129, 130n17; on *sotah* scrolls, 204; as source, 2n3; tablets of Moses, first and second versions of, 45; tablets of Moses, on first and second versions of, 46n45, 47; on Third Torah, 166, 167, 169–72, 174, 176, 177n29, 178–80, 182–83, 186, 190, 191; on Torah scrolls, 201nn28–33, 208–9, 213–14, 216n72, 218,

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

Babylonian Talmud (*cont.*) 219; on triple loss and reestablishment of Torah, 40–41, 44
Bar Kokhba, 79, 81
Baruch's rewriting of Jeremiah's prophecies, 40
Beitar, downfall of, 78–81
body, Torah scroll as, 195–200, 211–20
body and soul in Jewish thought, 197n13
Book of Lights and Watchtowers (Qirqisani), 243
Buddhism, 10, 12–13, 196
burning of martyrs wrapped in Torah scrolls, 75–78, 80

Cairo Geniza, 161, 228–31nn24–26
call and response reading, 140, 148–49, 152–54
Callimachus, 148n74
canonical text, emergence of, 4, 6–8
Cassiodorus, 135n30
censorship. *See* limitations on access to written scripture
centrality of Bible to Jewish thought, 3, 19–21, 222
cherubim on ark of the covenant, 214
Christianity: access to biblical texts in middle ages and, 98–99; ark of the covenant, Temple ark conflated with, 215; carnal scripture in, 196–97; codex, adoption of, 65n22, 229n24; dangerousness of biblical texts and, 65n22, 66, 69, 71–72, 73, 74; death and dying, late antique visions of, 60; Ezran authorship tradition in, 31–32, 36; Gospel texts, concerns about Hebrew Bible used in conjunction with, 64; literacy pedagogies and, 132; medieval Jewish commentary and, 225–26, 235, 242; methodological approach to, 22; *minim* possibly identified with, 65n22, 66; Paul, on oral and written scripture, 164–65n6; reading culture and spoken scripture in, 7, 9, 10; sounded scriptures in, 163; supersessionism, 48–49, 52, 54, 56, 65n22; tablets of Moses, on first and second versions of, 48–49, 52, 54, 56
Cicero, 148
Clement of Alexandria, 137n33, 138n44
Clouds (Aristophanes), 147
codex: Christian adoption of, 65n22, 229n24; ideologies of writing born with, 233; Judaism, codexification, 226–32; paper revolution and, 232n27
craftsman literacy, 143

daily life, restricting bible reading in, 112–18
dangerousness of biblical texts, 2, 17–18, 59–97; R. Akiva and, 65, 73, 76, 77, 79, 87–93; ark of the covenant, ancient biblical material in, 81–83, 96; arrest of R. Eliezer, 73–75; authority of oral tradition over written text and, 72–73; in Babylonian rabbinic tradition, 83–97; Beitar, downfall of, 78–81; betrothed daughter, biblical text compared to, 93–95; books themselves as malicious actors, 65–67; Elazar b. Dama and the snake, 69–73, 77, 82, 96; Ezekiel, book of, 83; feminine textual promiscuity/infidelity, themes of, 61–63, 64, 67, 68–69, 73–75, 93–95; to gentiles studying Torah, 93–95; R. Hanina b. Teradion, martyrdom of, 75–78, 84–89, 93; King Yannai and Elazar b. Poʾirah, 95–97; in later Palestinian sources, 75–83; *minim* (sectarians/heretics), in hands of, 18, 63–68, 73–75; process of informational reading, as dangerous, 99–100, 107–12; *sotah* ritual (for wife accused of adultery), use of biblical text in, 64, 67, 68–69; in Tannaitic tradition, 63–75; as theoretical reflections, 60–61
Daniel, Ezran authorship tradition and Aramaic portions of, 32–35
Darius (king of Persia), 210
deadliness of biblical text. *See* dangerousness of biblical text
deceased body of *met mitzvah*, Torah scroll used to wrap, 211

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

Demonstrations (Aphrahat), 49n51
Deuteronomy Rabbah, 51n53
Dialogue with Trypho (Justin Martyr), 49n51
Didascalia, 49n51
Dionysius of Halicarnassus, 135n29
directionality of reading, 120
Divine Institutes (Lactantius), 49n51
divorce, association of second tablets of Moses with, 50–56
Dunash ben Labrat, 226

East and South Asian scriptures, 10–11, 195–96, 198
Ecclesiastes Rabbah, 48n48, 69n31, 73n42, 167n15
R. Elazar b. Arakh and the Diomset spa, 142–43
Elazar b. Dama and the snake, 69–73, 77, 82, 96
R. Elazar b. Perata, 84
Elazar b. Poʾirah, 95–97
R. Elazar the Modai, 79, 80
R. Eliezer, arrest of, 73–75
R. Eliezer of Beaugency, 242
Elisha b. Abuya, 155n86
Esther Rabbah, 155n86
"ethnography of reading," 99
Euripides, 153
Exodus Rabbah, 48n47, 50n53
Ezekiel, dangerousness of book of, 83
4 Ezra, on loss of biblical text, 29
Ezra the Scribe: Ezran authorship tradition, 17, 28, 29–39, 40, 41, 242–43; fluency in Torah attributed to, 36, 167, 169, 171

faulty, mistaken, and inaccurate readings, 103–4
females. *See* gender/sexuality
First Jewish Revolt, 80

Rabban Gamliel, 116, 117
gender/sexuality: ban on teaching/transmitting Torah to women, 205; betrothed daughter, biblical text compared to, 93–95; bodily humiliation/shame in exposure of Torah scrolls, 215, 218–19; marriage and divorce, association of second tablets of Moses with, 50–56; *sotah* ritual (for wife accused of adultery), use of biblical text in, 64, 67, 68–69, 202–5, 219; textual promiscuity/infidelity and dangerousness of biblical texts, 61–63, 64, 67, 68–69, 73–75, 93–95; Torah scroll as female body, 212–16, 219
Genesis Rabbah, 36n24, 124, 155, 157, 167n15, 167n17, 171
genizah, 117, 203
Gospel of Truth, 7
Greek and Roman reading cultures, 7, 8–9, 22–23, 132–33. *See also under* literacy pedagogies

Hadrian (Roman emperor), 79
R. Hananel, 169–70
R. Hanina, 173
R. Hanina b. Teradion, martyrdom of, 75–78, 84–89, 93
haqiqa exegesis, 223
Hekhalot Rabbati, 229n25
Hellenistic and Roman reading cultures, 7, 8–9, 22–23, 132–33. *See also under* literacy pedagogies
heretics/heresy: Elazar b. Dama and the snake, 69–73, 77; R. Eliezer, arrest of, 73–75; R. Hanina b. Teradion, martyrdom of, 76–78; *minim* (sectarians/heretics), biblical books in hands of, 18, 63–68, 73–75. *See also* Christianity
Hermeneumata pseudo-dositheana, 145
Herodas, 134, 148
R. Hilfai, 143n58
Hillel the Babylonian, 41–42
R. Hiyya, 41, 42–44, 168, 170
R. Hiyya b. Ba, 109, 110
Homer and Homeric reading, 8, 102, 138n41, 141, 145, 147, 149, 158
horizontal scrolls, 230–31n26
hypomnemata, 233, 234

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

Ibn Ezra, 48n47, 238n46, 240, 241
Ibn Nuh, 228n23
ibn Tibbon, Samuel, 236
icons/relics/reliquaries, sacred texts as, 12–13. *See also* Torah scrolls
ijaza, 165
Iliad. *See* Homer and Homeric reading
inaccurate, faulty, and mistaken readings, 103–4
informational reading: alienation of rabbinic oral scholasticism from, 108; appearance of texts with linguistic components necessary for, 229n25; dangerousness of process of, 99–100, 107–12; defined, 108, 120; liturgical performance/ritual reading versus, 3, 120; in modern literacy education, 133–34
inks used to produce Torah scrolls, 64, 201, 204, 211
Institutes (Quintilian), 158
interstitial hour, ten sacred objects created in, 46
Irenaeus of Lyons, 31, 49, 52, 54
Islam/Islamic studies, 10, 11–12, 166, 225–26, 233, 234–35, 243

Jeremiah's prophecies, Baruch's rewriting of, 40
Jerusalem, destruction of synagogues and their schools in, 80
Joseph Rosh HaSeder, 243–44
Josephus, 202–3n34
Judah HaNasi, 208
Justin Martyr, 49n51

Karaites and Karaism, 224, 228n23, 238
keriʾah. *See* recitation-reading
ketiv (written) tradition, 20, 127, 176, 179
killers, biblical texts as. *See* dangerousness of biblical text
King Yannai and Elazar b. Poʾirah, 95–97
2 Kings, "Book of the Torah" discovered in, 35, 40
Korean *musogin*, 10

Lactantius, 49n51
Lamentations Rabbah, 40n34, 78n50, 79, 110n30, 125n9, 159n93, 173
lethality of biblical text. *See* dangerousness of biblical text
Leviticus Rabbah, 48n48, 109n27, 110n30, 154–55, 167n15, 173
Libanius, 132n21
limitations on access to written scripture, 18–19, 98–118; careful readers, modern scholarly portrait of rabbis as, 101–3; daily life, restricting bible reading in, 112–18; dangerousness of process of informational reading, 99–100, 107–12; effects/effectiveness of, 100–101; mistaken, faulty, and inaccurate readings, 100, 101–7; in "scenes of reading," 99–100; valorization of scholarship over textual fidelity, 106–7
linguistic differences between consonantal and vocal texts, 181
literacy pedagogies, 131–61
  alphabetic literacy (phonetic decoding), 135–36; early Jewish sources on, 138–44; Greek and Latin evidence on, 136–38; in Syriac, 139–40; tongue-twisters, nonsense words, and obscure terms, 136–37, 138, 139, 141
  differentiated from modern literacy education, 133–34
  first encounters with written text, 144–57; aural notation, 149–50, 156–57; brevity, inaccuracy, and impermanence of texts used, 145–47, 150–52, 155–56; call and response reading, 140, 148–49, 152–54; early Jewish sources on, 150–57; Greek and Latin sources on, 144–50; literary inaccuracy of texts used, 145–46; memorization of oral formulas, 144; preliminary reading and responsive recitation (*praelectio*), 140, 148–49, 152–56
  freeing oneself from the text, 157–58; early rabbinic evidence of, 158–61; Greek and Roman sources on, 158

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

Greek, Latin, Persian, and Syriac communities, using information from, 132–33
as means of accessing rabbinic modes of Bible reading, 120–21
recitation, emphasis on, 134–35
writing versus reading literacy, 143n58
liturgical performance: appearance of texts with linguistic components necessary for informational or sight-reading, 228n24; informational reading versus, 3; Pentateuchal lectionaries, ability to recite, 166; preservation of biblical tradition in, 180; recitation-reading as, 125–30; translations/translators, 126–27, 191

Macrobius, 148
"magic," Torah scrolls viewed as, 194n3, 202, 207, 208n43, 209, 210
manuscripts, papyri, Torah scrolls, and ostraca: CM Add. MS 37516, 145n60; Jerusalem Yad Harav Herzog MS of mTaʿanit, 217n73; London MS of mTaʿanit, 217n73; Moses ben Asher codex, 229n24; MS Bodl. Heb a 3.30, 145n60; MS Paris 671, 87n64; MS Schocken-Jerusalem 3654, 84n56, 85nn57–58; Munich 95, 217n73; Munich 140, 217n73; O.Bodl. 1.279, 145–46, 147n68; O.Bodl. Gk. Inscr. 1506, 158, 159; Oxford MS of mTaʿanit, 217n73; P. Ryl. 3.545, 158; P.Col. 8.193, 137; P.Flor. 18.6, 137; P.Gen. 2.53, 137; P.Mil Vogl. 3.120, 138; P.Reinach Inv. 2089, 147, 149; P.Ryl. 3.545, 137, 158, 161; T.Bero inv. AM 13839, 149; TS 6 H9-H21, 228n24; T-S 20.155, 229n25; TS Ar 1a.140, 231n26; TS Ar 53.9, 231n26; T-S AS 74.260, 217n73; T-S AS 78.253, 217n73; T-S AS 93.544, 217n73; T-S F 1(1).47, 217n73; T-S Misc. 24.124, 217n73; Vatican 134, 217n73; Vilna and Pesaro manuscripts, 217n73
Mar Barhadbsabba, 139–40
marriage and divorce, association of second tablets of Moses with, 50–56
masoret/Masoretic text, 5, 20, 104, 165, 176n24, 178, 228–30nn23–26
masters of Spoken Scripture, 167–68
maʿamadot (standing rituals), 130, 166n12
medieval commentary tradition and reading culture, 20–21, 221–45; book (*syngramma* versus *hypomnema*), reconception of Bible as, 232–45; Christianity and, 225–26, 235, 242; codexification of Judaism and, 226–32; genres, diversity of, 223–24, 235–36; global Jewish shift to systematic, text-based commentary, 222–25; introduction form, use of, 237–40; Islam and, 225–26, 233, 234–35, 243; literacy pedagogies and, 142n56; literature, exegetical treatment of Bible as, 236, 240; multiple authorial and editorial hands in Bible, approaches to, 240–45; origins and development, uncertainty about, 225–32; paper revolution and, 232n27; single-authored compositions, rise of, 223, 233–34, 237, 239, 243; textual openness of, 243–44
Mediterranean reading cultures, 7, 8–9, 22–23, 132–33. *See also under* literacy pedagogies
R. Meir, 124, 168, 171
Mekhilta, 105
Mekhilta de Rabbi Yishmael, 185–86, 207–8
memorization and recitation, reading by (*keriʾah*). *See* recitation-reading
Menahem ibn Saruq, 226
met mitzvah, 211
mezuzah texts, 106, 166n11, 194n3, 205–8
midrash: appearance of texts with linguistic components necessary for informational or sight-reading, 229n25; medieval commentaries and, 224; as source, 2n3. *See also specific works*
mikra, 20, 104, 122n5, 165, 182, 192, 228n23
minim (sectarians/heretics), biblical books in hands of, 18, 63–68, 73–75
minyan, 216–17

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

Mishnah: appearance of texts with linguistic components necessary for sight-reading or informational reading, 229n25; dangerousness of biblical text in, 63, 64n18, 69, 83n52, 86; interstitial hour, on ten sacred objects created in, 46; literary pedagogies in, 142n56; on phylacteries and mezuzah texts, 205, 206; precedence over Bible reading, 114; on rabbinic literacy, 143n58; on recitation-reading (*keri'ah*), 124, 125–30; on Shema recitation outside of canonical hours, 127n14; on *sotah* scrolls, 203, 204, 205; as source, 2n3; on Third Torah, 177n27, 177n29; on Torah scrolls, 201n30, 217–18
mishneh hatorah, 32, 35
mistaken, faulty, and inaccurate readings, 103–4
Mosaic tablets. *See* tablets of Moses, first and second versions of
Moshe HaDarshan, 226
al-Muqammas, Daud, 227n23

R. Nahman, 207
R. Nehemiah, 113
Nero (Roman emperor), 155–56
al-Nihawendi, Benjamin, 227n23
[not] reading the bible. *See* written biblical text, early rabbinic relationship to

Odyssey. *See* Homer and Homeric reading
Oklah ve-Oklah, 227n23
ontologically textual nature of Pentateuch, 14
Oral Torah: binary reading of Written Torah and, 15–16, 164–65; dangerousness of preferring written text to, 72–73, 96; informational reading, alienation of rabbinic oral scholasticism from, 108; motives of rabbinic authorities for circumscribing Written Torah and, 59–60; targums as part of, 115n34; Third (spoken) Torah existing between Written Torah and, 3, 19, 20, 164–65 (*See also* Third (spoken) Torah); triple loss and reestablishment of Torah, stories about, 41; vocabulary of, applied to Third Torah, 172–74, 183
ostraca. *See* manuscripts, papyri, Torah scrolls, and ostraca

paleo-Hebrew, 36, 38–39
Palestinian Talmud: daily life, restricting bible reading in, 114–15; dangerousness of biblical texts in, 69n31, 69n33, 72, 78–83, 86n61; Ezran authorship tradition in, 35, 36–38; informational reading, on dangerousness of, 107–12; literary pedagogies in, 151nn78–79, 153, 154; marriage contracts, "Palestinian formula" for, 50n53; mistaken, faulty, and inaccurate readings in, 105–6; on paleographic/linguistic evidence of historical variation, 39; on phylacteries and mezuzah texts, 208; R. Hiyya in, 43; on rabbinic literacy, 143n58; on recitation-reading (*keri'ah*), 123, 125n9, 127n13, 128, 130n17; on *sotah* scrolls, 203, 204, 205; as source, 2n3; tablets of Moses, on first and second versions of, 45, 47, 48; on Third Torah, 167n15, 168–70, 171n19, 173, 178–81; on Torah scrolls, 201nn28–30, 208, 216n72
paper revolution, 232n27, 233–34
R. Pappos b. Yehudah, 87–89
papyri. *See* manuscripts, papyri, Torah scrolls, and ostraca
parchment for Torah scrolls, 43, 46, 196, 201, 204, 211–12
peshat commentary, 223
Pesikta de Rav Kahana, 174n23
Petronius, 144n59
Philo of Alexandria, 177n28, 202–3n34
phonetic reading (reading out loud), 111n33, 120, 122n5
phylactery texts, 79, 80, 81, 166n11, 194n3, 205–8
physical Torah scrolls. *See* Torah scrolls

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

Pirka de-Rabbenu ha-Kadosh, 231n26
Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer, 46n45, 47n46, 216–17
piyyut, 163, 240
Porphyry of Tyre, 30–31
practical literacy, 120
praelectio, 140, 148, 149, 154
priestly body, Torah scroll analogized to, 212
problem, biblical text experienced as, 2, 17–19, 221
Prometheus Unbound (Aeschylus), 134
proto-Masoretic text, emergence of, 5
purity practices in early rabbinic Judaism, 49, 199, 203, 206

qere (read) tradition, 20, 176, 179, 180
al-Qirqisani, Yaʿqub, 35, 242–43
Quintilian, 138, 148n71, 158
al-Qumisi, Daniel, 227n23
Qur'an. *See* Islam/Islamic studies

rabbinic modes of Bible reading, 19, 119–62. *See also* literacy pedagogies; recitation-reading
rain, Torah scroll in communal prayer for, 217–18
Rashbam, 236, 242
(pseudo-)Rashban, 236
Rashi, 142n56, 224–25n8, 225–26, 225n14, 235–36, 238–39
reading the bible. *See* informational reading; rabbinic modes of Bible reading; written biblical text, early rabbinic relationship to
recitation-reading (*keriʾah*), 121–30; access to texts provided by, 122–23; defined, 120; lectionary readings, 129–30; as liturgical performance, 125–30; meaning applied to rather than derived from written text in, 122, 130; memorization as basis for, 119, 122; oral "text," derivation from, 125; of Shema, 127–29; as standard/common mode of rabbinic reading, 119, 121–22, 130; text [in]dependence of, 123–29; unavailability of written text, despite, 126, 128, 129–30; voiced nature of, 120, 121–22n5
relics/reliquaries/icons, sacred texts as, 12–13. *See also* Torah scrolls
restricted access. *See* limitations on access to written scripture
Reuel of Byzantium, 226, 241
"Risala" (Yehudah ibn Quraish), 227n23
ritual reading, 3, 119, 120. *See also* liturgical performance; recitation-reading
Roman and Hellenistic reading cultures, 7, 8–9, 22–23, 132–33. *See also under* literacy pedagogies
rotuli, 231n26
Ruth Rabbah, 190–91

Saadiah Gaon, 227n23, 239–40
sacrifice/slavery, association of second Mosaic tablets with, 50, 51, 56–57
Salmon ben Yeroham, 238
Samaritans: Ezra, traditions about, 30n13; personification of scripture by, 198
Saturnalia (Macrobius), 148
"scenes of reading," 99–100
scientific reading, 223
Second Temple Judaism, 5–9, 59–60, 99–100, 164, 176n24, 214n64, 215n66
sectarians. *See* heretics/heresy
semiotic transduction, 196
serugin manuscripts, 230n26
sex/sexuality. *See* gender/sexuality
Shabbat, bans on reading on, 114, 160, 173
Shaphan (in 2 Kings), 40
She'iltot of R. Ahai, 231n26
Shema, recitation-reading (*keriʾah*) of, 127–29
Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel, 80, 114, 160, 205
shonim, 173–74
shonin, 173
Sifra Behukotai, 53
Sifra Tazria, 179

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

Sifre Deuteronomy, 40, 44, 46n45, 68, 78, 125n10, 167n15, 184–85, 187, 201n28
Sifre Numbers, 63–66, 204
Sikhism, 195–96
silent reading/reading aloud, 111n33, 120, 122n5
Sinai, revelation at: escape of original divine revelation from written form, 186–89; relationship of Third Torah to, 19–192. *See also* tablets of Moses, first and second versions of
slavery/sacrifice, association of second Mosaic tablets with, 50, 51, 56–57
smell, original divine revelation associated with, 182–83, 190
Soferim, 156–57
Song of Songs Rabbah, 41–42, 45, 185, 186, 187, 189–90
sotah ritual, 64, 67, 68–69, 202–5, 219
South and East Asian scriptures, 10–11, 195–96, 198
spoken Torah. *See* Third (spoken) Torah
supersessionism, 48–49, 52, 54, 56, 65n22
syngrammata, 233

tablets of Moses, first and second versions of, 44–57; in ark of the covenant, 82; Christian supersessionist accounts of, 48–49, 52, 54, 56; limited and deficient nature of second tablets, 48; marriage and divorce, association of second tablets with, 50–56; miraculous product, first tablet viewed as, 45–48, 185; slavery/sacrifice, association of second tablets with, 50, 51, 56–57; Third Torah and, 165, 185–86
tahrif accusations, 243
Tanhuma, 115–16, 182n35, 187–88, 190
Tannaitic tradition, dangerousness of biblical text in, 63–75. *See also under* dangerousness of biblical text
R. Tarfon, 66, 67, 172
targums: daily life, restricting bible reading in, 115–17; deviations between recited formula and written text, rabbinic conceptualization of, 180–81; with linguistic components necessary for informational or sight-reading, 229n25; in literary pedagogies, 161; as part of Oral Torah, 115n34; on phylacteries and mezuzah texts, 207; tablets of Moses, on first and second versions of, 47n46; on unreliability of written scripture, 33–34, 47n46
taste, original divine revelation associated with, 190–91
tefillin. *See* phylactery texts
tetragrammaton, 177, 180
Third (spoken) Torah, 3–4, 19–20, 163–92; deviations between recited formula and written text, 176–79; emergence of, 165–75, 182; escape of original divine revelation from written form, 186–89; as independent witness to Biblical revelation, 175–82; interstices of Oral and Written Torah, existing between, 3, 19, 20, 164–65; linguistic difference from written text, 181; masters of Spoken Scripture, 167–68; preservation of original divine revelation in, 189–92; rabbinic conceptualization of differences between written text and, 179–82; recreation of written transcript from, 170–72; Sinai, relationship to revelation at, 19–192; temptation to forgo reference to written transcript, 168–70; vocabulary of Oral Torah applied to, 172–74, 183
Tibetan "paper bards," 124–25n8
Torah scrolls, 3–4, 20–21, 193–220; bodily humiliation/shame in exposure of, 215, 218–19; as body, 195–200, 211–20; burning of martyrs wrapped in, 75–78, 80; closed/silenced/illegible books as most powerful, 195, 202–10; deceased body of *met mitzvah*, used to wrap, 211; iconic or ritual power of, 194–95, 198; inappropriate scribal form/scribe invalidating, for ritual use, 200–202; inappropriate scribe invalidating, for ritual use, 201–2; inks

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

used to produce, 64, 201, 204, 211; as "magic," 194n3, 202, 207, 208n43, 209, 210; message/text, sacredness not derived from, 200–202; *minyan*, serving as member of, 216–17; parchment for, 43, 46, 196, 201, 204, 211–12; priestly body, analogy to, 212; rain, in communal prayer for, 217–18; scarcity of, 121; *sotah* ritual (for wife accused of adultery), use of biblical text in, 202–5, 219; woman, as body of, 212–16, 219. *See also* manuscripts, papyri, Torah scrolls, and ostraca, *for specific scrolls*

Tosefta: daily life, restricting bible reading in, 116–17; dangerousness of biblical texts in, 63, 64n19, 65–67, 69–72, 73–75, 83n53; Ezran authorship tradition in, 32–36; Hillel's saving of biblical text in, 41–42; literary pedagogies in, 150, 159; on recitation-reading (*keri'ah*), 124, 128–29, 130n18; on *sotah* scrolls, 203; as source, 2n3; tablets of Moses, on first and second versions of, 50–57; on Third Torah, 169, 171n19, 172, 177; on Torah scrolls, 201n32, 208, 212–13

tractate Semahot, 75–78, 86

translations: Aquila's translation of Kings, 230n26; biblical texts combined with, 229n25; liturgical translations/translators, 126–27, 191. *See also* targums

triple loss and reestablishment of Torah, 40–44

unreliability of written scripture, 17, 26–58; Baruch's rewriting of Jeremiah's prophecies, 40; corruption, revision attributed to, 34–35; Ezran authorship, early Jewish traditions about, 17, 28, 29–39, 40, 41; historical contingency of received text, early rabbinic recognition of, 26–29; 2 Kings, "Book of the Torah" discovered in, 35, 40; *mishneh hatorah*, 32, 35; paleographic/linguistic evidence of historical variation and, 39; triple loss and reestablishment of Torah, rabbinic accounts of, 40–44. *See also* tablets of Moses, first and second versions of

Vespasian (Roman emperor), 80

Virgil, 9, 148

women. *See* gender/sexuality

writing versus reading literacy, 143n58

written biblical text, early rabbinic relationship to, 1–25; binary reading of Written and Oral Torah, 15–16, 164–65; canonical text, emergence of, 4, 6–8; centrality of Bible to Jewish thought, 3, 19–21, 222 (*See also* rabbinic modes of Bible reading; Third (spoken) Torah; Torah scrolls); comparative religious studies of oralized scripture, 9–13; definition of early/classical rabbinic, 2n3; evolving scholarly models of, 5–8; Hellenistic and Roman Mediterranean reading cultures and, 7, 8–9, 22–23, 132–33 (*See also under* literacy pedagogies); medieval commentary tradition and, 20–21, 221–45 (*See also* medieval commentary tradition and reading culture); methodology of study, 21–25; motives of rabbinic authorities for circumscribing, 59–60; myth versus reality of, 1–4, 17, 26; problem, biblical text experienced as, 2, 17–19, 221 (*See also* dangerousness of biblical texts; limitations on access to written scripture; unreliability of written scripture); rabbinic tradition, scholarly focus on, 13–17; Third (spoken) Torah existing between Oral and Written Torah, 3, 19, 20, 164–65 (*See also* Third (spoken) Torah)

Yannai, 163

Yefet b. 'Eli, 224n8, 244

R. Yehoshua, 105, 159

R. Yehoshua b. Levi, 109

R. Yehuda b. Roetz, 178

R. Yehudah, 151

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

Yehudah ibn Quraish, 227n23
R. Yishmael, 69–73
R. Yishmael b. Elisha, 159
R. Yishmael b. Yose, 111, 168
R. Yohanan b. Nazif, 116, 117
Rabban Yohanan b. Zakkai, 50, 54
R. Yose b. Kisma, 84–89
Yosef bar R. Nissan of Neve Kiryatayim, 228n24

zahir exegesis, 223
R. Zeira, 154, 218

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu