

# Textual Migration and Scriptural Authority<sup>1</sup>

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The authority of sacred texts emerges from a range of different aspects,<sup>2</sup> among which the writings' potential to represent divinity and divine revelation is indispensable.<sup>3</sup> The sociological dimension of this authority depends on the social influence of their carrier groups and related institutions.<sup>4</sup> Such institutions are frequently stable, that is, bound to certain places: temples, synagogues, monasteries, libraries, and universities. They bring people together to listen and read, to

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- 1 This article presupposes, builds upon, and integrates major parts of Dominik MARKL: *Media, Migration, and the Emergence of Scriptural Authority*, in: *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Philosophie* 143 (2021), 261–283. I am grateful to Walter Moberly and the OT Research Seminar at Durham University (4 May 2021) as well as Madhavi Nevader and the OT Research Seminar at University of Saint Andrews (29 April 2021) for inspiring discussions on the topic.
  - 2 For recent contributions see Konrad SCHMID: *Textual Authority in Ancient Israel and Judah. Factors and Forces of its Development*, in: Tobias NICKLAS/Jens SCHRÖTER (eds.), *Authoritative Writings in Early Judaism and Early Christianity. Their Origin, Collection, and Meaning*. Tübingen 2020 (WUNT 441), 5–21; Klaus VON STOSCH/Christiane TIETZ (eds.): *Normativität Heiliger Schriften in Judentum, Christentum und Islam*. Tübingen, forthcoming (*Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie*).
  - 3 See, better elaborated, MARKL: *Media*, 263–265. In addition to the literature mentioned there see, on the bearing of writing systems on theological epistemology, Eckart FRAHM: *Keilschrift als Katalysator theologischen Denkens in Babylonien und Assyrien*, in: Laura V. SCHIMMELPFENNIG/Reinhard G. KRATZ (eds.), *Zahlen- und Buchstabensysteme im Dienste religiöser Bildung*. Tübingen 2019 (*Studies in Education and Religion in Ancient and Pre-Modern History in the Mediterranean and Its Environs* 5), 246–267; Jean-Pierre SONNET, *God to the Letter: Alphabetical and Theological Thinking in the Hebrew Bible*, in: *Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 27 (2021), 203–225. On the development of the notion of revelation in the ancient Near East see, especially, Karel VAN DER TOORN: *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*. Cambridge 2007, 205–232.
  - 4 See, more elaborately, MARKL: *Media*, 266–268.

meditate and study, to reflect and discuss. However, the stability of institutions that store and cultivate knowledge correlates with the necessity for geographical mobility in order to communicate over great distances and to transport knowledge through experts and texts. Such migration may be voluntary and planned as occurs in trade, diplomacy, and religious mission. It may also be involuntary as in the diverse types of forced migration. When migration involves confrontation and communication with significantly different cultures, it frequently results in creative processes such as the re-signification of texts and the production of new texts and translations. I shall argue in this article that the cultural transposition of texts through migration enhanced the emergence of scriptural authority.<sup>5</sup> I shall address the topic in three steps by considering, first, textual migration in general, then by tracing some of the migratory movements of scribes and manuscripts in relation to the biblical writings, in order to finally consider the influence of textual migration on scriptural authority.

## 1 Textual Migration: Monumentality versus Transportability

Writings make their own way as people move. The invention of the alphabet itself in the early second millennium BCE resulted from migratory movements: the encounter between Egyptians and Canaanite semi-Nomads at Sinai, whose invention of alphabetic script subsequently spread through the Levant and beyond.<sup>6</sup>

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5 I am adopting a media-theoretical approach that has been inspired, especially, by Joachim SCHAPER: *Media and Monotheism. Presence, Representation, and Abstraction in Ancient Judah*. Tübingen 2019 (ORA 33); Jan ASSMANN: *Text and Ritual. The Meaning of the Media for the History of Religion*, in: *Religion and Cultural Memory. Ten Studies* (trans. R. Livingstone). Stanford 2006, 122–138.

6 Orly GOLDWASSER, *The Advantage of Cultural Periphery. The Invention of the Alphabet in Sinai (circa 1840 B.C.E.)*, in: Rakefet SELA-SHEFFY/Gideon TOURY (eds.), *Culture Contacts and the Making of Cultures. Papers in Homage to Itamar Even-Zohar*. Tel-Aviv 2011, 255–321; Ludwig D. MORENZ: *Die Genese der Alphabetschrift. Ein Markstein ägyptisch-kanaanäischer Kulturkontakte*. Würzburg 2011 (*Wahrnehmungen und Spuren Altägyptens* 3), esp. 267–268. On the development of alphabetic script in the Levant see, most recently, Felix HÖFLMAYER et al.: *Early alphabetic writing in the ancient Near East: the 'missing link' from Tel Lachish*, in: *Antiquity* 95 (2021) 705–719; <https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2020.157>.

As revolutionary as the invention of the alphabet was, it took a long time to be employed in genres of wider social and political relevance, when local kings in the Levant began to imitate imperial inscriptions in the Iron age.<sup>7</sup> The spatially visible and time-bridging materiality of writing entails authority.<sup>8</sup> The relationship of writing to matter and space tends towards either stability or movement. Monuments are usually bound to a certain place, whereas other types of writings such as letters, are meant to be carried across space to bridge the distance between sender and receiver. Materiality determines the writings' relation to space.<sup>9</sup> The larger and heavier, the more impressive and monumental they are;<sup>10</sup> the smaller and lighter, the easier to transport. A monumental inscription is a "word bound to a place".<sup>11</sup> Monuments are "time binders" that "serve to unify the ages", while light material such as papyrus, parchment and paper serve to "unify spaces horizontally".<sup>12</sup>

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- 7 Seth L. SANDERS: *The Invention of Hebrew*. Urbana 2009, 113–120. Ibid. 105: "Vernacular writing in the Iron Age Levant began as a medium for top-down genres of sovereignty. Royal monuments presented the king speaking in a local language. Local speakers of that language were supposed to recognize the language – and the king – as their own. Addressing the audience in a form of speech that they uniquely shared with the king was a way to imply that they were one people, and that the king's victories and inscriptions brought them together."
- 8 VAN DER TOORN: *Scribal Culture*, 207: "Since the written text has an objective existence outside its producers and consumers, it is a source of authority by itself." See, however, on the power of the spoken word in traditional oral culture Walter ONG: *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word*. New York 1982, esp. 96–101.
- 9 For an overview see Christoffer THEIS: *Mobile und immobile Schriftträger*, in: Thomas MEIER/Michael R. OTT/Rebecca SAUER (eds.), *Materiale Textkulturen. Konzepte–Materialien–Praktiken*. Berlin 2015 (*Materiale Textkulturen* 1), 611–618; Philip ZHAKEVICH: *Scribal Tools in Ancient Israel. A Study of Biblical Hebrew Terms for Writing Materials and Implements*. University Park, Pennsylvania 2020.
- 10 Vilém FLUSSER: *Does Writing Have a Future?* Minneapolis 2011, 18: Inscriptions are "laborious, slow, and therefore considered writings. They are *monuments* (*monere*, 'to consider')."
- 11 Jan ASSMANN: *Altorientalische Fluchinschriften und das Problem performativer Schriftlichkeit*, in: Hans Ulrich GUMBRECHT/K. Ludwig PFEIFFER (eds.), *Schrift*. München 1993 (*Materialität der Zeichen* A 12), 233–255, at 240: "Die Inschrift ist das ortsfest gemachte Wort."
- 12 Marshall McLuhan: *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man* [1964], ed. by Terrence Gordon. Corte Madera 2003, 40.

If monumental inscriptions and letters represent types of media that are inclined towards stability or movement respectively, others are more neutral with respect to space. The clay tablet, the material extension of the cuneiform writing tradition, is very durable when baked and transportable at the same time. Lighter materials such as papyrus or parchment, while less resistant, facilitate the easy transport of large amounts of text.<sup>13</sup> The materiality of texts in space needs to be considered in relation to the social geography of scribes.<sup>14</sup> Highly developed literature used to be closely bound up with space in antiquity, since professional scribes operated within a network of institutions of textual production and storage that were usually tightly connected with centres of political and economic power.<sup>15</sup> Institutional text collections – “archives” and “libraries” as they came to be called<sup>16</sup> – have been centres of intellectual power and cultural prestige from the tablet collection of Assurbanipal to the modern national libraries and archives. Such institutions tend to be stable focal points of culture unless political change

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- 13 On the materiality of scrolls, see Madadh RICHEY: *The Media and Materiality of Southern Levantine Inscriptions*, in: Mark LEUCHTER (ed.), *Scribes and Scribalism*. London 2021 (*The Hebrew Bible in Social Perspective*), 29–39; David M. CARR: *Rethinking the Materiality of Biblical Texts. From Source, Tradition and Redaction to a Scroll Approach*, in: *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 132 (2020) 594–621; William A. JOHNSON: *Bookrolls and Scribes in Oxyrhynchus*. Toronto 2016.
  - 14 See Eleanor ROBSON: *Ancient Knowledge Networks. A Social Geography of Cuneiform Scholarship in First-Millennium Assyria and Babylonia*. London 2019, esp. 98–148, on “Scholarly and textual mobility in seventh-century Assyria”.
  - 15 In order to understand the relationship between media and space in the ancient Near East more in depth, we would require a historical geography of media. On the emerging field of media geography see Jörg DÖRING/Tristan THIELMANN (eds.), *Mediengeographie. Theorie – Analyse – Diskussion*. Bielefeld 2009.
  - 16 See, e.g., Fredrik HAGEN: *Archives in Ancient Egypt, 2500–1000 BCE*, in: Alessandro BAUSTI et al. (eds.), *Manuscripts and Archives. Comparative Views on Record-Keeping*. Berlin 2018 (*Studies in Manuscript Cultures* 11), 71–170; Lionel CASSON: *Libraries in the Ancient World*. New Haven 2001; Wolfgang RÖLLIG: *Aspekte der Archivierung und Kanonisierung von Keilschriftliteratur im 8./7. Jh. v. Chr.*, in: Joachim SCHAPER (ed.), *Die Textualisierung der Religion*. Tübingen 2009 (*FAT* 62), 35–49; Kenton L. SPARKS, *Near Eastern Archives and Libraries*, in: *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible. A Guide to the Background Literature*. Peabody 2005, 25–55; Olof PEDERSÉN, *Archives and Libraries in the Ancient Near East, 1500–300 B.C.* Bethesda 1998.

or catastrophe cause their disintegration. They may be dispersed or destroyed, and only for important reasons are they moved to new locations.<sup>17</sup>

Before the electronic transmission of texts, written material travelled with people on the road,<sup>18</sup> especially with messengers and envoys. While all travellers convey information and contribute to cultural exchange, migrants are especially intense mediators between cultures, since their movement is both geographical and biographical. It requires deep psychological and communicative engagement to negotiate between their culture of origin and their new habitat. Migrants transport texts that become nostalgic objects of memory.<sup>19</sup> Literary texts that become part of a wider social discourse are vital to the formation of cultural memory and can thus be described as ‘portable monuments’.<sup>20</sup> For subsequent generations, these texts may provide a vital connection with the country of their ancestors’ origin.

## 2 Textual Migration and Biblical Writings

Attempting to trace how textual migration relates to the Bible, we need to distinguish between the representation of history as it is found in biblical historiography and the modern reconstruction of the history of ancient Israel and early Judaism. For the sake of readability, however, I shall here combine both aspects in one single account, moving from the representation of textual migration in

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17 A recent example is the clandestine movement of some 25.000 manuscripts from Timbuktu to Bamako (Mali) in 2012 to rescue Timbuktu’s historic archive from destruction by Islamicist extremists.

18 See the chapter on “Roads and Paper Routes” in MCLUHAN: *Understanding Media*, 127–144.

19 See, e.g., Doerte BISCHOFF: *Dinge und Migration*, in: Susanne SCHOLZ/Ulrike VEDDER (eds.), *Handbuch Literatur und Materielle Kultur*. Berlin 2018, 72–81, and, in the same volume, Susanne KOMFORT-HEIN: *Buch im Exil. Gefährdete Bibliothek und portatives Vaterland*, 305–312.

20 Ann RIGNEY: *Portable Monuments. Literature, Cultural Memory, and the Case of Jeanie Deans*, in: *Poetics Today* 25 (2004) 361–396; EADEM: *The Dynamics of Remembrance. Texts between Monumentality and Morphing*, in: Astrid ERLI/Ansgar NÜNNING (eds.), *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Berlin 2010, 343–353.

the Pentateuch to its actual historical occurrence, especially in the Neo-Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, Persian, and Hellenistic periods.

## 2.1 The Extraterritoriality of Torah: Textual Migration in the Pentateuch

The Pentateuch contains a major narrative of textual migration. The Exodus story presents God, after Israel's migration from Egypt, as revealing texts through his voice and in writing. Yhwh himself inscribes his words on tablets of stone – revelatory, Sinaitic stone.<sup>21</sup> While God writes on stone with his own finger,<sup>22</sup> Moses writes on scrolls: divine revelation at Sinai (Exod 24:4) and teaching of Torah in the land of Moab (Deut 31:9). The writing of Mosaic teaching is supposed to be continued in the land (Deut 6:8; 27:3, 8).<sup>23</sup> According to Deuteronomy, the “Levitical priests” are commissioned as the carriers of the ark (Deut 10:8; 31:9, 25) as a “vector” of texts.<sup>24</sup> They are in charge of textual transport, and they will possess the “master copy” of Torah that the future king is supposed to copy for himself (Deut 17:18).<sup>25</sup> The revelation of divine teaching occurs during Israel's forced migration from Egypt to the Promised Land. Sinai is a utopian place for

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21 On the symbolism of divine writing see Dominik MARKL: The Decalogue. An Icon of Ethical Discourse, in: Carly CROUCH (ed.), Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible and Ethics. Cambridge 2021, 9–22, esp. 15–16.

22 Rémi BRAGUE: The Law of God. The Philosophical History of an Idea. Chicago 2007, 49: “The divine writer is not represented in a pose like that of an Egyptian scribe with reed pen and ink, nor like a Babylonian with his stylus: he writes with his finger, as one writes in the sand, without any mediating instrument. This use of the body expresses a personal engagement: in giving the Law, God gives of his own and of himself.”

23 On the concept of writing in Deuteronomy and the significance of the diverse material media, see Jean-Pierre SONNET: The Book within the Book. Writing in Deuteronomy. Leiden 1997 (BibInt Series 14), esp. 262f.

24 Jean-Pierre SONNET: “Lorsque Moïse eut achevé d'écrire” (Dt 31,24). Une “théorie narrative” de l'écriture dans le Pentateuque, in: Recherches de Science Religieuse 90 (2002), 509–524, esp. 514f.

25 On the literary level, this motif creates a *mise en abyme*: SONNET: Book, 78–80. Politically, it subjects the (potential postexilic) king to the Mosaic law: Dominik MARKL, Deuteronomy's ‘Anti King’. Historicized Etiology or Political Project?, in: Agustinus GIANTO/Peter DUBOVSKÝ (eds.), Changing Faces of Kingship in Syria-Palestine 1500-500 BCE. Münster 2018 (AOAT 459), 165–186, esp. 175.

the formation of Israel as a “kingdom of priests” (Exod 19:6). The revealed covenantal texts are supposed to travel to the Promised Land in the ark that eventually arrives in the temple of Jerusalem (1 Kgs 8:1–9). The origin of divine revelation and Israel’s covenant with God is, as Jan Assmann put it, “extraterritorial, that is, independent of any territory, which meant that it remained universally valid no matter where in the world the Jews might find themselves.”<sup>26</sup> The extraterritoriality of divine revelation as it is presented in the Exodus story is an allegory for the Torah’s origin “elsewhere” and for Israel’s fate as a people of migration.

## 2.2 Forced Migration and the Transport of Manuscripts

While the Pentateuch presents a myth of Israel’s origin that is mostly to be read in historically allegorical ways, forced migration and the transport of manuscripts must have actually taken place in the forced migrations that ancient Israel and Judah suffered at the hand of the Assyrians and the Babylonians. In the decades following the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (722–720 BCE),<sup>27</sup> refugees from Samaria may well have migrated to the South and, manuscripts may have easily been transported to Jerusalem. Such migration of manuscripts, along with the need to integrate the interests of refugees in the South, has been proposed to explain the presence of Northern traditions in the biblical writings.<sup>28</sup> Scribal families who originated from Samaria may have cultivated their traditions in Jerusalem and collaborated with Judean scribes in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

26 Jan ASSMANN: *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization. Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*. Cambridge 2011, 180.

27 On this history, see Christian FREVEL: *Geschichte Israels*. Stuttgart 2018 (*Studienbücher Theologie*), esp. 274–277; Bob BECKING: *The Fall of Samaria: An Historical and Archaeological Study*. Leiden 1992 (*SHANE* 2).

28 See esp. William M. SCHNIEDEWIND: *How the Bible Became a Book. The Textualization of Ancient Israel*. Cambridge 2004, 64–81 and 94–96; Walter DIETRICH: *The Early Monarchy in Israel. The Tenth Century B.C.E.* Atlanta 2007 (*Biblical Encyclopedia* 3), 247f.; Israel FINKELSTEIN: *The Forgotten Kingdom. The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel*. Atlanta 2013, 155.

Textual migration must have occurred on a large scale during the two main moments of the forced migration of Judeans to Babylonia, in 597 and 587.<sup>29</sup> In 597, the Babylonian strategy was to weaken Judah's political establishment by deporting Jerusalem's elite to Babylonia. Scribes were likely to have been among this first group of deportees. Manuscripts were probably transported as personal objects of value and perhaps even under the auspices of the Babylonians themselves as a resource of cultural expertise for diplomatic purposes.<sup>30</sup> Since Judah was still supposed to function under the puppet king Zedekiah installed by the Babylonians, some administrative and scribal competence had to remain in Jerusalem. The memory of political disagreement between Jerusalem and the deportees in Babylonia in the first decade of Exile and communication between these distant places via dispatched written documents is reflected in the dispute between Jeremiah and Shemajah of Nehelam (Jer 29).

Zedekiah's disloyalty led to the second conquest of Jerusalem in 587 BCE, followed by the deportation of a major part of the population and the systematic destruction of the centres of power and administration, especially the temple and the royal palace (cf. 2 Kgs 25:9). Archives and collections of manuscripts were either annihilated or rescued in time – most likely by officials in charge of the respective collections. While it is possible that some scribes escaped to hiding places in Judah or elsewhere, it is likely that many manuscripts were brought to Babylonia by deportees. The Babylonians left people behind for the purpose of agricultural cultivation (2 Kgs 25:12). If any centre of writing continued to exist in Judah, Mizpah is the most likely candidate.<sup>31</sup>

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29 For an overview of the relevant history, see Rainer ALBERTZ: *Israel in Exile. The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E.* Atlanta 2003 (StBL 3), 45–111; FREVÉL: *Geschichte Israels*, 310–327.

30 A late reflection of such strategy may be seen in the book of Daniel, where young noble Judahites are brought to Babylonia to be trained in the “literature and language of the Babylonians” (Dan 1:4).

31 SCHNIEDEWIND: *How the Bible Became a Book*, 141–147; Jeffrey R. ZORN: *The View from Mizpah. Tell en-Naşbeh, Judah, the Sixth Century BCE, and the Formation of the Biblical Text*, in: Peter DUBOVSKY/Federico GIUNTOLI (eds.), *Stones, Tablets, and Scrolls. Tübingen 2020* (Archaeology and Bible 3), 229–252.

The deported scribal elite continued their work in Babylonia. King Jehoiachin's place of confinement at the royal court of Babylon suggests that this elite was most likely situated at the centre of the Babylonian empire.<sup>32</sup> The extensive amount of literature that reflects on the reasons for the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile indicates that the collective cultural trauma caused by these events led to intense scribal work.<sup>33</sup> The discontinuity caused by forced migration necessitated a written explication, the "excarnation of tradition": "The deportation into Babylonian exile led to the disappearance of the models provided by older generations that had previously been taken for granted. The normative tradition has to be put into writing because it can no longer be followed intuitively."<sup>34</sup>

Manuscripts rescued from Jerusalem must have been considered treasures: sources of memory, scribal culture and, not least, the Hebrew language. While Hebrew was not forgotten among Judean deportees in Babylonia, the second and third generations especially must have got used to Aramaic and perhaps even become acquainted with Akkadian.<sup>35</sup> Preserving the Hebrew language in this environment must have been a challenge, for which the written heritage acquired new significance.<sup>36</sup> The prolific work of scribes in Babylonia is seen in works such as Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah,<sup>37</sup> and other writings influenced by Babylonian

32 SCHNIEDEWIND: *How the Bible Became a Book*, 149–157. Schniedewind points out that the books of Kings, Jeremiah and Ezekiel show a positive bias towards Jehoiachin.

33 For an application of the notion of collective and cultural trauma to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Exile see Dominik MARKL: *The Babylonian Exile as the Birth Trauma of Monotheism*, in: *Biblica* 101 (2020) 1–25, esp. 7–15.

34 Jan ASSMANN: *Five Stages on the Road to the Canon. Tradition and Written Culture in Ancient Israel and Early Judaism*, in: *Religion and Cultural Memory. Ten Studies* (trans. R. Livingstone). Stanford 2006, 63–80, 69.

35 The documents from Al-Yahudu show that Judean exiles had to deal with Akkadian documents for legal purposes: Laurie E. PEARCE/Cornelia WUNSCH: *Documents of Judean Exiles and West Semites in Babylonia in the Collection of David Sofer*. Bethesda (Md.) 2014 (Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology 28).

36 On languages in situations of exile, see Doerte BISCHOFF/Christoph GABRIEL/Esther KILCHMANN, *Sprache(n) im Exil. Einleitung*, in: *Exilforschung* 32 (2014), 9–25.

37 For an overview of exilic literature, see ALBERTZ: *Israel in Exile*, 139–433; for a more sceptical view of literary production in exile, see SCHNIEDEWIND: *How the Bible Became a Book*, 139–164.

traditions.<sup>38</sup> In sum, it is fair to assume that a certain number of pre-exilic manuscripts were transported to Babylonia by the Judean scribal elite, who preserved this heritage and continued to develop Hebrew literature in Babylonia.

### 2.3 Textual Return Migration and Postexilic Restoration

While Hebrew scribal culture had been exiled to a large extent in the Babylonian period, the Persian period saw its return to Jerusalem. The historical reconstruction of the Judeans' return<sup>39</sup> and the rebuilding of the temple<sup>40</sup> is a thorny issue because of the scarcity of primary sources and the methodological difficulties in evaluating secondary sources.<sup>41</sup> One contested question concerns the dating of

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- 38 While the dating of texts such as the Flood Story, which displays knowledge of Babylonian flood narratives, and the tower of Babel story is disputed, they are prime candidates for texts that may have been (partly) composed in Babylonia. For examples of diverse views, see Diana EDELMAN: *Genesis. A Composition for Construing a Homeland of the Imagination for Elite Scribal Circles or for Educating the Illiterate?*, in: Philip R. DAVIES/Thomas RÖMER (eds.), *Writing the Bible. Scribes, Scribalism and Script*. Durham 2013, 47–66, esp. 51f.; John DAY: *Comparative Ancient Near Eastern Study. The Genesis Flood Narrative in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Flood Accounts*, in: Katharine J. DELL/Paul M. JOYCE (eds.), *Biblical Interpretation and Method. FS John Barton*. Oxford 2013, 74–88, esp. 84; Angelika BERLEJUNG: *Living in the Land of Shinar. Reflections on Exile in Genesis 11:1–9?*, in: Peter DUBOVSKÝ/Dominik MARKL/Jean-Pierre SONNET (eds.), *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Rise of the Torah*. Tübingen 2016 (FAT 107), 89–111.
- 39 R. J. VAN DER SPEK: *Cyrus the Great, Exiles, and Foreign Gods. A Comparison of Assyrian and Persian Policies on Subject Nations*, in: Michael KOZUH et al. (eds.), *Extraction & Control*. FS Matthew W. STOLPER. Chicago 2014, 233–264, rightly notes that the Cyrus Cylinder shows that Cyrus the Great allowed certain religious cult statues and groups of people to return to the cities of their origin in 539 BCE, which does “not prove all gods and all people were allowed to return” (ibid. 235). Still, this evidence is unlikely to be unrelated to the return of Judeans to Jerusalem.
- 40 See Diana EDELMAN: *The Origins of the ‘Second’ Temple. Persian Imperial Policy and the Rebuilding of Jerusalem*, Hoboken 2014; Peter Ross BEDFORD: *Temple Restoration in Early Achaemenid Judah*, Leiden 2001 (JSJ.S 65).
- 41 On the sources and methodological issues, see esp. Lester L. GRABBE: *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period. Volume I. Yehud. A History of the Persian Province of Judah*, London 2004 (Library of Second Temple Studies 47); Erhard S. GERSTENBERGER: *Israel in the Persian Period. The Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.E.*, Atlanta 2011 (SBLBE 8); FREVÉL: *Geschichte Israels*, 328–368.

Ezra-Nehemiah to the Persian or Hellenistic period.<sup>42</sup> While (parts of) Ezra-Nehemiah may well be influenced by Hellenistic contexts, these writings also contain cultural memory from the Persian period. Ezra-Nehemiah describes the Judean return migration and temple restoration as a Persian initiative (Ezra 1), which the “children of the deportation” employed to reject an offer of collaboration by the “people of the land” (Ezra 4:1-5). This, among other evidence, suggests that the returnees and their descendants dominated the ideological discourse in Persian Judah.<sup>43</sup>

The most prominent migrant scribe who came up from Babylonia is the figure of Ezra, “a scribe skilled in the Torah of Moses that Yhwh the God of Israel had given” (Ezra 7:6).<sup>44</sup> This paradigmatic student and teacher of Torah (v. 10) was supposedly sent by King Artaxerxes to install “the law of your God and the law of the king” (v. 26).<sup>45</sup> While Ezra 7 does not explicitly refer to the transport of manuscripts, the text clearly suggests that the “Torah of Moses” was imported from Babylonia. Since a firmly re-established priesthood at the temple of Jerusalem could have considered this tradition an embarrassment, its preservation suggests that esteem for the Babylonian origin of Torah was unbroken when Ezra-Nehemiah was redacted. Ezra’s priestly genealogy, presented as going back to Aaron (Ezra 7:1-5), indicates how closely the scribal craft was linked to the priesthood in the postexilic period.<sup>46</sup> Ezra-type Judean scribes who migrated from Babylonia to Jerusalem may have imported cultural knowledge about the scribal organiza-

42 It may suffice to refer to two major monographs: Ralf ROTHENBUSCH: „... abgesondert zur Tora Gottes hin“. *Ethnisch-religiöse Identitäten im Esra/Nehemiabuch*, Freiburg i. Br. 2012 (HBS 70), esp. 245, argues that none of the texts in Esra-Nehemiah post-date the Persian period. Raik HECKL: *Neuanfang und Kontinuität in Jerusalem. Studien zu den hermeneutischen Strategien im Esra-Nehemia-Buch*, Tübingen 2016 (FAT 104), esp. 400–410, considers none of the texts in Ezra-Nehemiah as originating from the pre-Hellenistic period.

43 See the extensive analysis in ROTHENBUSCH: *Abgesondert*, 267–330.

44 For a historical evaluation of the figure of Ezra, see GRABBE: *History*, esp. 329–331.

45 On the complex issues involved in this text, see Sebastian GRÄTZ: *Das Edikt des Artaxerxes. Eine Untersuchung zum religionspolitischen und historischen Umfeld von Esra 7,12–26*, Berlin 2004 (BZAW 337).

46 SCHNIEDEWIND: *How the Bible Became a Book*, 165–194; VAN DER TOORN: *Scribal Culture*, 89–96.

tion of Babylonian temple communities.<sup>47</sup> The frequent reference to written documents in Ezra-Nehemiah attests to the rise of a culture of writing.<sup>48</sup> While royal edicts and the exchange of letters conveyed via envoys<sup>49</sup> reflect the experience of imperial rule through written communication, the reference to the import and public proclamation of Mosaic Torah (Ezra 7; Neh 8) mirrors the importance of migration for the identity-forming role of Torah in postexilic Judah.

When Torah-material was transferred from Babylonia to Jerusalem, the Pentateuch was redacted at Jerusalem's temple, which became the most important centre of scribal activity and manuscript collection in postexilic Jehud.<sup>50</sup> Texts deliberately composed for the cult of the post-exilic temple were integrated into the Torah.<sup>51</sup> Just as the Pentateuch contains both the exilic perspective of the longing for the land and texts that serve the re-established cult in Jerusalem, Deutero-Isaiah similarly includes texts that seem to have been written in direct confrontation with the cultural experience of Babylonia, and other, probably

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47 Cf. Michael JURSA: *Cuneiform Writing in Neo-Babylonian Temple Communities*, Radner/Robson (eds.), in: Karen RADNER/Eleanor ROBSON (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*. Oxford 2011, 184–204.

48 Cf. Maria HÄUSL: "Eine Schriftrolle, darin ist geschrieben" (Esr 6,2). Zur Bedeutung der Schriftlichkeit im Buch Esra/Nehemia, in: Erasmus GASS/Hermann-Josef STIPP (eds.), "Ich werde meinen Bund mit euch niemals brechen!" (Ri 2,1). FS Walter GROSS, Freiburg i. Br. 2011 (HBS 62), 175–194.

49 On the role of envoys in the Persian context, see Reinhard Gregor KRATZ: *Judean Ambassadors and the Making of Jewish Identity. The Case of Hananiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah*, in: Oded LIPSCHITS/Gary N. KNOPPERS/Manfred OEMING (eds.), *Judah and the Judeans in the Achaemenid Period. Negotiating Identity in an International Context*. Winona Lake 2011, 421–444.

50 Jerusalem's central cult object, the ark, had been lost and was not to be restored (Jer 3:16). Unsurprisingly, therefore, the return of deported cultic paraphernalia as media of religious continuity was a prominent topic for postexilic Judean scribes. Cf. Steven WEITZMAN: *Surviving Sacrilege. Cultural Persistence in Jewish Antiquity*. Cambridge (Mass.) 2005, esp. 13–25.

51 See the classic formulation of this view by Julius WELLHAUSEN: *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* [1885]. Atlanta 1994, 35–38. On the Menorah as an example see Dominik MARKL: *The Wilderness Sanctuary as the Archetype of Continuity Between the Pre- and the Postexilic Temples of Jerusalem*, in: DUBOVSKÝ/MARKL/SONNET (eds.), *Fall of Jerusalem*, 227–251.

later, texts that concern the restoration of Jerusalem.<sup>52</sup> The Pentateuch and Deutero-Isaiah are examples of Judeo-Babylonian texts that were “(re-)jerusalemised” in postexilic Jehud. They represent textualized migratory history.

Both the Pentateuch and Ezra/Nehemiah suggest that the Torah of Moses gained importance for the identity of emerging Judaism in the Second Temple period. The emergence of monotheistic claims entailed the ultimate authorisation of the Torah as conveying the law of the one and only God of the universe.<sup>53</sup> Moses’ instruction to the Levitical priests to teach the Torah in the land (Deut 31:9–13) has its most significant counterpart in the public teaching of Torah when the scribe Ezra has come to the land (Neh 8). The public proclamation and teaching of Torah in connection with ritual repentance (Neh 9) and its implementation (Neh 10) represent a new and effective authority for Torah.<sup>54</sup> Torah becomes the “center of Israel’s religion” and its reintroduction is “a turning point in Israel’s history”, comparable to Josiah’s reform.<sup>55</sup> The story is also, against the background of Deuteronomy 31, one of the earliest references to “a Torah that was conceived to be in the form of one book.”<sup>56</sup> The interpretation of the written Torah by appointed experts (Neh 8:4) is a clear sign of the canonical character of the text, which requires an institutionalized “cultivation of meaning”

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52 For the historical context of (the earlier texts of) Deutero-Isaiah in Babylonia, see David S. VANDERHOOF: *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets*. Atlanta 1999 (HSM 59), 169–188; for theory on redactional activity after the return to Jerusalem, see Ulrich BERGES: *Jesaja 40–48*. Freiburg i. Br. 2008 (HThKAT), 43–45; ALBERTZ: *Israel in Exile*, 376–433.

53 See Dominik MARKL: *Divine Law and the Emergence of Monotheism in Deuteronomy*, in: Ignacio CARBAJOSA/Nicoletta SCOTTI MUTH (eds.), *Israel and the Cosmological Empires of the Ancient Orient. Symbols of Order in Eric Voegelin’s *Order and History**, Vol. 1, Leiden 2021 (Eric Voegelin Studies. Supplements 1), 193–222; IDEM: *Die politische Theologie des Monotheismus im Kontext des persischen Weltreichs*, in: *Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 27 (2021), 175–186.

54 Cf. ROTHENBUSCH: *Abgesondert*, 331–374.

55 Juha PAKKALA: *Ezra the Scribe. The Development of Ezra 7–10 and Nehemia 8*. Berlin 2004 (BZAW 347), 278.

56 *Ibid.*, 279.

(*Sinnpflege*).<sup>57</sup> Another, related mark of textual canonization, the “cultivation of the text” (*Textpflege*),<sup>58</sup> is visible in the development of textual standardization, which is more pronounced in the Pentateuch than in other writings in the Second Temple period.<sup>59</sup>

Ezra-Nehemiah presents the Torah’s public authorization soon after its return from Babylonia (Ezra 7–10; Neh 8–13) as an originating myth of textual canonization and the rise of book religion.<sup>60</sup> The Pentateuch’s redaction in Jerusalem is not a result of immediate Persian imperial authorisation, but rather of intra-Judean developments within the context of the Persian empire.<sup>61</sup> The Torah was promoted as a focal point for the collective identity of Judeans.<sup>62</sup> While Jerusalem’s temple became the centre of manuscript collection,<sup>63</sup> the rising authority of Torah is seen in its translocation and the multiplication of the institutions of its textual

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57 Aleida ASSMANN/Jan ASSMANN: Kanon und Zensur als kultursoziologische Kategorien, in: iidem (eds.), Kanon und Zensur. München 1987 (Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation 2), 7–27, esp. 13–15.

58 Ibid., 12f.

59 Armin LANGE: “They Confirmed the Reading” (y. Ta’an. 4.68a). The Textual Standardization of Jewish Scriptures in the Second Temple Period, in: idem et al. (eds.), From Qumran to Aleppo. A Discussion with Emanuel Tov about the Textual History of Jewish Scriptures in Honor of his 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday. Göttingen 2009, 29–80.

60 See esp. Sebastian GRÄTZ, Alter Wein in neuen Schläuchen? Die Bücher Esra/Nehemia zwischen Tradition und Innovation, in: Maria HÄUSL (ed.), Denkt nicht mehr an das Frühere! Begründungsressourcen in Esra/Nehemia und Jes 40–66 im Vergleich, Göttingen 2018 (BBB 184), 77–91, esp. 85–90.

61 For critical discussion of Peter Frei’s thesis of Persian imperial authorization, see James Watts (ed.): Persia and Torah. The Theory of Imperial Authorization of the Pentateuch. Atlanta 2001 (SBLSymS 17); Gary N. KNOPPERS/Bernard M. LEVINSON (eds.): The Pentateuch as Torah. New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance. Winona Lake 2007.

62 Bob BECKING: The Idea of Torah in Ezra 7–10. A Functional Analysis, in: idem, Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Construction of Early Jewish Identity, Tübingen 2011 (FAT 80), 43–57 [= Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und Biblische Rechtsgeschichte 7 (2001) 273–286], esp. 56f.

63 Jean Louis SKA: From History Writing to Library Building. The End of History and the Birth of the Book, in: KNOPPERS/LEVINSON (eds.), The Pentateuch as Torah, 145–169; Charles T. R. HAYWARD, Scripture in the Jerusalem temple, in: James Carleton PAGET / Joachim SCHAPER (eds.), The New Cambridge History of the Bible. Volume I. From the Beginnings to 600. Cambridge 2013, 321–344, esp. 335–343.

cultivation: at the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim,<sup>64</sup> in synagogal worship<sup>65</sup> and, especially, in the creation of the Septuagint.

#### 2.4 From Jerusalem to Alexandria – from Torah to Nomos

The Jewish Scriptures underwent a crucial cultural migration when they were translated into Greek, beginning with the Pentateuch in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE.<sup>66</sup> The *Letter of Aristeas*, written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE,<sup>67</sup> presents this history in a dramatic narrative. The first act of the “translation” is the physical transport of the Torah from Jerusalem to Alexandria. As per request of King Ptolemy II,<sup>68</sup> envoys are sent to Jerusalem with gifts. Jerusalem’s high priest Eleasar sends translators and, with them, a Torah scroll, “remarkable parchments on which the legislation had been written in golden writing in Judean characters” (*Let. Arist.* § 176),<sup>69</sup> which is presented to Ptolemy. The translation is executed (§§ 301–307) and proclaimed to the assembly of the Jews who approve of it (§§ 308–311).<sup>70</sup> It is

64 See, e.g., Gary N. KNOPPERS: Parallel Torahs and Inner-Scriptural Interpretation: The Jewish and Samaritan Pentateuchs in Historical Perspective, in: Thomas B. DOZEMAN/Konrad SCHMID/Baruch J. SCHWARTZ (eds.), *The Pentateuch. International Perspectives on Current Research*, Tübingen 2011 (FAT 78), 507–531; Benedikt HENSEL: Debating Temple and Torah in the Second Temple Period. Theological and Political Aspects of the Final Redaction(s) of the Pentateuch, in: Markus WITTE/Jens SCHRÖTER/Verena LEPPEL (eds.), *Torah, Temple, Land. Constructions of Judaism in Antiquity*. Tübingen 2021 (TSAJ 184), 27–47.

65 The conception in Nehemiah 8 of a textual festival in which the Torah is “publicly read to the entire people forms the fundament for the later synagogal institution”. PAKKALA: *Ezra the Scribe*, 279. On the origins of synagogues, see Bloedhorn HANSWULF/Gil HÜTTENMEISTER: *The synagogue*, in: William HORBURY et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism*. Volume 3. The Early Roman Period. Cambridge 1999, 267–297.

66 On the dating of the translation see James K. AITKEN: *The Ptolemaic Setting for the Translation of the Greek Pentateuch*, in: *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 9 (2020), 398–414.

67 Benjamin G. WRIGHT: *The Letter of Aristeas: ‘Aristeas to Philocrates’ or ‘On the Translation of the Law of the Jews’*. Berlin 2015 (CEJL), 21–30.

68 For historical considerations on the potential role of the Ptolemaic court in the production of the translation, see Arie VAN DER KOOIJ: *The Septuagint of the Pentateuch and Ptolemaic Rule*, in: KNOPPERS/LEVINSON (eds.), *The Pentateuch as Torah*, 289–300.

69 Translation of WRIGHT: *The Letter of Aristeas*, 313.

70 On this and other means of canonizing the translation, see Giuseppe VELTRI: *Libraries, Translations, and “Canonic” Texts. The Septuagint, Aquila and Ben Sira in the Jewish and*

then read to King Ptolemy who “marveled greatly at the mind of the lawgiver” (§ 312). According to the *Letter of Aristeas*, the Torah indeed became – as Moses had prophesied – the Jews’ wisdom “in the eyes of the peoples” (Deut 4:6).<sup>71</sup> The translation of “Torah” into “Nomos” meant another decisive increase in scriptural authority, as the divine nomos could even be applied as binding law.<sup>72</sup> Translated into Greek, the Torah-Nomos became a central point of reference for the collective identity of Jews in Egypt.<sup>73</sup>

## 2.5 Biblical Writings as Migratory Texts

The textual migration from Jerusalem to Alexandria seen in the translation of the Septuagint entailed the first transposition of Jewish Scriptures into the language

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Christian Traditions, Leiden 2006 (JSJ.S 109), 26–42; Francis BORCHARDT: Influence and Power. The Types of Authority in the Process of Scripturalization, in: *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 29 (2015), 182–196.

- 71 Adrian SCHENKER considers Deut 4:6–8 as a principal motivation for the translation of the Torah into Greek: Würde die Tora wegen ihrer einzigartigen Weisheit auf Griechisch übersetzt? Die Bedeutung der Tora für die Nationen in Dt 4,6–8 als Ursache der Septuaginta, in: idem, *Anfänge der Textgeschichte des Alten Testaments. Studien zu Entstehung und Verhältnis der frühesten Textformen*. Stuttgart 2011, 201–224 [= *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 54 (2007), 327–347].
- 72 See Kimberley CZAJKOWSKI/Stéphanie WACKENIER: Legal Strategies of Judaeans in Herakleopolis, Middle Egypt, according to the Archives of the *Politeuma*, in: *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 9 (2020), 415–434, esp. 429–433. On the development of the authority of the Pentateuch in the Second Temple period, see Jonathan VROOM: The Authority of Law in the Hebrew Bible and Early Judaism. Tracing the Origins of Legal Obligation from Ezra to Qumran. Leiden 2018; Reinhard KRATZ, Temple and Torah. Reflections on the Legal Status of the Pentateuch between Elephantine and Qumran, in: KNOPPERS/LEVINSON (eds.), *The Pentateuch as Torah*, 77–103; Stefan SCHORCH: Which Kind of Authority? The Authority of the Torah during the Hellenistic and the Roman Periods, in: Isaac KALIMI/Tobias NICKLAS/Géza G. XERAVITS (eds.), *Scriptural Authority in Early Judaism and Ancient Christianity. International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books*. Berlin 2013 (DCLS 16), 1–15. On the Jewish *politeuma* in Egypt, see Patrick SÄNGER: Die ptolemäische Organisationsform *Politeuma*: Ein Herrschaftsinstrument zugunsten jüdischer und anderer hellenischer Gemeinschaften. Tübingen 2019 (TSAJ 178).
- 73 See Sylvie HONIGMAN/Ehud BEN ZVI, The Spread of the Ideological Concept of a (Jerusalem-Centred) Tōrâ-centred Israel beyond Yehud: Observations and Implications, in: *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 9 (2020), 370–397.

of an empire. Just as the Hebrew Scriptures spread with communities to synagogues in the diaspora, their Greek translations opened the Jewish writings to non-Jewish Hellenistic audiences, a prerequisite for the Christian mission in the Hellenistic cultural realm. Tracing the further history of the relationship between migration and the authority of biblical Scriptures would amount to rewriting the history of the Bible and its reception itself.<sup>74</sup> The writings of the New Testament originate from migratory texts; letters written by Paul, himself a migrant missionary, are their most ancient genre.

Significant migratory expansions opened up new spaces of authority to the biblical writings through translations even beyond the Roman empire, such as in Armenia and Ethiopia. Within the Roman empire, Jerome is an interesting example for the dynamics of migration of textual authority. While Jerome himself withdrew from Rome to Bethlehem in the biblical heartland at the fringes of the empire, he entertained a network of friendships for sponsorship and scholarly exchange across the Mediterranean basin so that his translations spread across the Latin world of the Roman empire by the end of his lifetime to eventually become the Vulgate of the Western Church.<sup>75</sup>

### 3 Textual Migration and Scriptural Authority

Textual migration contributed, as the argument has shown, to the rise of scriptural authority. While sacred writings' capacity to represent divinity and divine revelation as well as their carrier groups' social influence are essential to the authority of sacred texts, migration added to the writings' sociological significance. Textual migration is likely to have occurred after the conquest of the Northern Kingdom

74 See Brennan W. BREED, *Nomadic Text. A Theory of Biblical Reception History*. Bloomington 2014; Dominik MARKL, *Reception History of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*, in: *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*. Oxford University Press 2020. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.112>.

75 See Adam KAMESAR: *Jerome*, in: PAGET/SCHAPER (eds.), *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, 653–675; Alfons FÜRST: *Hieronymus. Askese und Wissenschaft in der Spätantike*. Freiburg i.Br. 2016.

of Israel by the Assyrians (720 BCE), in the deportations of Jerusalem's elite in 597/587 BCE. Writing and the Hebrew language were given a new cultural energy as vessels of cultural memory and as the focus of collective identity for a minority in a foreign environment. When Judeans returned to Jerusalem in the aftermath of the Persian conquest of Babylon (539 BCE), the reconstructed temple became a new focal space for the sacred writings.

Ezra-like scribes brought some form of the "Torah of Moses" from Babylonia to Jerusalem, where it underwent further redaction and became a central symbol of Jewish identity. Having migrated from Judah to Babylonia and back, evolving along the way, Jewish sacred writings underwent their next major migratory transformation when they were translated into Greek in Alexandria starting from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. Textual migration and the rise of scriptural authority had begun with the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem's temple, but Judaism's Scriptures became migratory texts, especially after the temple's ultimate destruction by the Romans in 70 CE.<sup>76</sup> While the ancient and monumental cultures of writing in Mesopotamia and Egypt, based on narrow elitist carrier groups, were in decline, alphabetic sacred texts started their career of growing influence. The migratory dynamics that they had absorbed over centuries rendered them transportable, translatable and adaptable to ever new contexts in the Jewish diaspora and Christian missions.

Transitions and transformations were a decisive force in the emergence of scriptural authority. While the production of literature requires stable institutional contexts, the destruction of institutions and the transposition of literature into new environments requalified its function and enhanced its authority. Besides the geographical displacement that the Babylonian exile meant for the production of literature, it also brought about the sociological transition in institutional spon-

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76 Cf. Konrad SCHMID: *The Canon and the Cult. The Emergence of Book Religion in Ancient Israel and the Gradual Sublimation of the Temple Cult*, in: *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131 (2012), 289–305. ASSMANN, *Text and Ritual*, 136, suggests that "it is one of the most remarkable coincidences of history that the Temple of the Jews was destroyed at the very moment when the internal development of the religion had rendered it superfluous and undermined the meaning of the rituals." The Jewish writings, however, had provided theological means to overcome the necessity of cultic ritual only because the temple had already once been destroyed by the Babylonians.

sorship from royal to priestly authority. The Babylonian exile transformed Judean writings into a residue of collective identity in an imperial context that was partly perceived as hostile. The Persian empire was embraced as an instrument for the restoration of Judean cultural identity, initiated by return migration: Ezra's Tora provided identity and self-esteem for early Judaism in the "eyes of the nations" (Deut 4:6). Judaism's Scriptures emerged on a long journey through time and space, via imagined and real places such as Sinai, Zion, Babylon and Alexandria, transmitted by travelling leaders such as Moses and Ezra. Charged with migratory energy, the Scriptures became a "portable homeland."<sup>77</sup>

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77 Heinrich HEINE: *Vermischte Schriften*. vol. 1. Hamburg 1854, 85: "portatives Vaterland". A more recent Jewish reflection on this motif is found in George STEINER: *Our Homeland, the Text*, in: *No Passion Spent. Essays 1978–1996*. London 1996, 304–327.