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## Media, Migration, and the Emergence of Scriptural Authority\*

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**Abstract:** The article explores the relationship between media and migration in the development of the authority that sacred writings gained in ancient Israel and early Judaism. The question is framed using media theory, applied to the development of writing in the ancient Near East. A historical reconstruction of the migration of scribes and the transport of manuscripts, especially during the Babylonian exile and the return migration of Judeans in the Persian era, provides the background for considering three literary representations of the relationship between migration and scriptural authority: the extraterritoriality of divine revelation in the Pentateuch, the authorization of Torah after the return from Babylonia as reflected in the figure of Ezra, and its translation into Greek in the Hellenistic period, dramatized as narrative in the *Letter of Aristeas*. The article comes to the conclusion that transpositions through migration intensified the importance of writings as focal points of collective identity and thus contributed to their growing authority.

**Keywords:** media theory, writing, migration, scriptural authority, sociology of literature, Pentateuch, Early Judaism

One of the major puzzles of history is why the ancient cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia fell into near oblivion in late antiquity, while a particular set of texts from an area of minor importance in the Levant – the biblical scriptures – made a singular career in significantly influencing history up to the present. Their influence depends on the authority attributed to them, which originates in their conception as divine revelation, and in the historical and sociological conditions under which they emerged – a

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process that culminated in canon formation.<sup>1</sup> The following considerations will trace a hitherto undervalued historical and sociological contiguity: the interplay between media and migration in the emergence of scriptural authority. Although the Babylonian Exile has received much attention in its importance for the development of early Judaism,<sup>2</sup> the specific relevance of migratory movements for the authority attributed to writings has not yet seen systematic exploration.<sup>3</sup> In order to fill this gap, I shall first frame the question theoretically in terms of how the media of writing relate to authority. In a second step, I shall outline how the development of literature in ancient Israel and early Judaism is intertwined with migratory movements of scribes and manuscripts. This will provide the background for exploring literary representations of textual migration and for evaluating how its history enhanced scriptural authority.

## 1 The Authority of the Medium of Writing

For the purposes of the present argument, I understand “media” to be whatever facilitates communication.<sup>4</sup> While the topic mainly concerns writing and literature, it is useful to consider related media such as language itself, writing materials, images, and travelling scribes as well. Two revolutions occurred in antiquity in relation to the medium of writing: its invention in Mesopotamia and Egypt at the end of the fourth millennium BCE and

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<sup>1</sup> See, e. g., Jan Assmann, *Five Stages on the Road to the Canon: Tradition and Written Culture in Ancient Israel and Early Judaism*, in: idem, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, Stanford 2006, 63–80; Aleida Assmann / Jan Assmann, *Kanon und Zensur als kultursoziologische Kategorien*, in: iidem (eds.), *Kanon und Zensur (Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation 2)*, München 1987, 7–27; David M. Carr, *Canonization in the Context of Community: An Outline of the Formation of the Tanakh and the Christian Bible*, in: Richard D. Weis / David M. Carr (eds.), *A Gift of God in Due Season (FS James A. Sanders; JSOT'S 225)*, Sheffield 1996, 22–64.

<sup>2</sup> On the theological significance of exilic writings, see, e. g., Rainer Albertz, *Israel in Exile: The History and Literature of the Sixth Century B.C.E. (StBL 3)*, Atlanta 2003, 435–445.

<sup>3</sup> 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 (WUNT 441)*, Tübingen 2020, 5–21, traces three “Cornerstones of Textual Authority” in ancient Israel and Judah (ibid., 6–12): a gradual development that culminates after the destruction of Jerusalem’s temple in 70 CE, the attribution of authority (more than claims to it), and the political role of some core texts (especially Deuteronomy and the Torah as a whole). At the outset, however, Schmid states, “because the problem is multi-levelled, the field is still very open in many respects” (ibid., 5).

<sup>4</sup> For a theory of media within the framework of communication and perception, see Sibille Krämer, *Medium, Bote, Übertragung: Kleine Metaphysik der Medialität*, Frankfurt a. M. 2008. Marshall McLuhan’s work has inspired reflection on the relationship between media and their social and political impact; see esp. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* [1964], ed. by Terrence Gordon, Corte Madera 2003. On the history of the theory of media, see Dieter Mersch, *Medientheorien zur Einführung*, Hamburg 2009.

the development of alphabetic writing on the Sinai peninsula and in the Levant in the second millennium. In order to explore how the medium of writing relates to authority, three aspects will be considered: sacral, social, and material. The first concerns writing's relation to the divine, the second its relation to the sociology of knowledge, the third its materiality and transportability. These three aspects are interwoven, but considered separately for heuristic purposes.

### 1.1 Sacral Authority: Representation of the Divine and the Notion of Revelation

Writing has been connected with the realm of sacrality from the first. Once cuneiform writing had developed beyond counting tokens that served economic purposes in the second half of the fourth millennium BCE,<sup>5</sup> cuneiform texts from the Early Dynastic period (circa 2900–2340 BCE) began to appear on religious subjects.<sup>6</sup> At the turn from the fourth to the third millennium,<sup>7</sup> the first hieroglyphic monuments were “political manifestos in service of the emerging state”,<sup>8</sup> providing a “visible and permanent link between the world of humans and that of the gods”.<sup>9</sup> Script, “the words of the gods” (the meaning of the Egyptian word for ‘hieroglyphs’), was used only to record what was to be housed in the ‘sacred space of eternity’.<sup>10</sup> The earliest alphabetic script developed, as Orly Goldwasser and Ludwig Morenz argue, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century BCE in the desert of the Sinai peninsula, in immediate connection with the sanctuary of Hathor-Ba‘alat at Serabit el-Chadim.<sup>11</sup> Writing's involvement with sacrality implies specific aspects

<sup>5</sup> See esp. Robert K. Englund, *Accounting in Proto-Cuneiform*, in: Karen Radner / Eleanor Robson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, Oxford 2011, 32–50; Hans J. Nissen / Peter Damerow / Robert K. Englund, *Archaic Bookkeeping: Early Writing and Techniques of Economic Administration in the Ancient Near East*, Chicago 1993.

<sup>6</sup> For a brief overview of the periodization of ancient Mesopotamian history and an overview of textual genres from these periods, see Ivan Hrůša, *Ancient Mesopotamian Religion: A Descriptive Introduction*, Münster 2015, esp. 15–20.

<sup>7</sup> On the development of Egyptian writing systems (hieroglyphic, hieratic, and demotic), see Ben Haring, *From Single Sign to Pseudo-Script: An Ancient Egyptian System of Workmen's Identity Marks* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 93), Leiden 2018, esp. 23–30.

<sup>8</sup> Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*, Cambridge 2011, 149. On the origins of hieroglyphic writing, see Ludwig D. Morenz, *Bild-Buchstaben und symbolische Zeichen: Die Herausbildung der Schrift in der hohen Kultur Altägyptens* (OBO 205), Freiburg i. Ue. 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, 150.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> 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-kananäischer Kulturkontakte* (Wahrnehmungen und Spuren Altägyptens 3), Würzburg 2011, esp. 266. For detailed doc-

of authority that relate to its capacity for representing the divine and the concept of divine revelation.

Writing allows for reference to and representation of the divine. The pictographic character of hieroglyphics makes them capable of representing divinity as image and script simultaneously, for example with the sun disc as ideogram of the sun god Ra or the falcon representing Horus, god of the sky. Although cuneiform developed more abstract signs by reason of its material form – wedge-shaped impressions in clay –, some of these signs still represent a deity symbolically, such as the ideogram for Inanna/Ištar, which represents the planet Venus in the form of a star. Moreover, written texts could be accompanied by iconographical representations of a deity. In the case of Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty (= EST), which carries three seal impressions of the god Aššur, the written tablet itself was considered divine.<sup>12</sup> Through the distribution of copies of these tablets, "the god Aššur was made manifest across the empire in the form of sacred text".<sup>13</sup>

Alphabetic writing is different. Although it was developed from signs that depicted concrete objects (*aleph*, "cattle" in the form of a bovine head; *beth*, "house", etc.), none of the alphabetic signs seem to be immediately related to divinity.<sup>14</sup> While hieroglyphs invite pictographic representation of deity, the alphabetic script enforces abstraction.<sup>15</sup> In alphabetic writing, the most immediate representations of divinity are written references to gods, especially divine names.<sup>16</sup>

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umentation and discussion, see idem, *Sinai und Alphabetschrift: Die frühesten alphabetischen Inschriften und ihr kanaänisch-ägyptischer Entstehungshorizont* (StSin 3), Berlin 2019. On the controversies over the origin of alphabetic writing, see Ben Haring, *Ancient Egypt and the Earliest Known Stages of Alphabetic Writing*, in: Philip J. Boyes / Philippa M. Steele (eds.), *Understanding Relations Between Scripts II: Early Alphabets* (Contexts of and Relations Between Early Writing Systems 1), Cambridge 2020, 53–67.

<sup>12</sup> See Jacob Lauinger, *Esarhaddon's Succession Treaty at Tell Tayinat: Text and Commentary*, in: JCS 64 (2012), 87–123, esp. 87 and 117; Frederick Mario Fales, *After Ta'yinat: The New Status of Esarhaddon's adê for Assyrian Political History*, RA 106 (2012), 133–158, esp. 153: "a truly 'theophorous' substance".

<sup>13</sup> Karen Radner, *Assur's "Second Temple Period": The Restoration of the Cult of Aššur, c. 538 BCE*, in: Christoph Levin / Reinhard Müller (eds.), *Herrschaftslegitimation in Vorderorientalischen Reichen der Eisenzeit* (ORA 21), Tübingen 2017, 77–96, at 81.

<sup>14</sup> This does not preclude secondary symbolic interpretations – such as the possible attempt to relate the three lines of "A" to the trinity in the early Christian Infancy Gospel of Thomas. See Morenz, *Sinai und Alphabetschrift*, 46f.

<sup>15</sup> The idea of the prohibition of images, as it was developed in ancient Israel, was therefore unthinkable in Egyptian religion. Alphabetic writing is arguably a conceptual presupposition for the development of aniconism.

<sup>16</sup> This led to the care with which the tetragrammaton is treated in the early textual tradition of the writings of the Hebrew Bible and its later reception. See esp. Robert J. Wilkinson, *Tetragrammaton: Western Christians and the Hebrew Name of God. From the Beginnings to the Seventeenth Century* (SHCT 179), Leiden 2015.

The second way in which writing has been imbued with divine authority is through the idea of revelation. Related to oracular divination, this is likely to be very ancient. The notion of revealed written texts emerged towards the end of the second millennium BCE, as is seen in the creation epic *Enūma eliš* (last quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> c. BCE).<sup>17</sup> It became prominent in the first millennium, when the *Catalogue of Texts and Authors* (circa 700 BCE) claimed that a series of ancient texts originated “from the mouth of Ea”.<sup>18</sup> Scripturally versed diviners in Mesopotamia even extended the idea of written revelation metaphorically to the cosmos, as they saw the sky like a “gargantuan lapis writing tablet” covered with “writing of the sky”, and the organs of animals as “tablets of the gods” (*ṭuppū ša ilī*).<sup>19</sup>

The idea of revelation in the Hebrew Bible is embedded in a cultural context where this notion was well established. Many texts of the Hebrew Bible relate direct discourses with the God of Israel, such as the revelations at Mount Sinai (Exod 20–23; 25–31 etc.). Revelation even extends to divine writing on tablets of stone.<sup>20</sup> Evidence for the idea that the Pentateuch as a whole was considered revelation is more recent, since its earliest attestation is found in the Book of Jubilees (mid 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE).<sup>21</sup> The idea of revelation is intrinsic to the notion of authority, derived from Latin *auctoritas*, which goes back to *auctor*, “author”.<sup>22</sup> The notion of the divine authorship of writings implies authorization beyond the human sphere. With the emergence of monotheism, such authorization became unsurpassable.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, Cambridge 2007, 212f.

<sup>18</sup> Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 207f.; for additional examples, see *ibid.*, 209–211.

<sup>19</sup> See Jeffrey Cooley, *Epistemology in the Biblical Tradition: Judean Knowledge-Building, Scribal Craftsmanship, and Scribal Culture*, in: Jochen Althoff / Dominik Berrens / Tanja Pommerening (eds.), *Finding, Inheriting or Borrowing? The Construction and Transfer of Knowledge in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Mainzer Historische Kulturwissenschaften 39), Berlin 2019, 99–122, at 101f.

<sup>20</sup> See esp. Exod 24:12; 31:18; 32:16; 34:1; Deut 4:13; 5:22; 9:10; 10:2, 4. On the conception of Yhwh as scribe, see Cooley, *Epistemology in the Biblical Tradition*, 108 n. 25.

<sup>21</sup> On Jubilee’s complex theory of revelation, see James C. VanderKam, *Jubilees 1: A Commentary on the Book of Jubilees Chapters 1–21* (Hermeneia), Minneapolis 2018, esp. 68–84; David Lambert, *How the “Torah of Moses” Became Revelation: An Early, Apocalyptic Theory of Pentateuchal Origins*, JSJ 47 (2016), 22–54. On early Jewish imaginations of revealed writings, see Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity*, New York 2016.

<sup>22</sup> On the connection between the concept of *auctoritas* and the person to whom it is attributed, see Jürgen Miethke, *Autorität I. Alte Kirche und Mittelalter*, TRE 5 (1979), 17–32, esp. 18. Van der Toorn points out that ancient “readers were more concerned with the authority of books than their authenticity”, so that the “author was deemed relevant mainly as a source of authority” (van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 27).

<sup>23</sup> On the relationship between monotheism and the unsurpassable authorization of revelation, 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,

## 1.2 Writing and the Sociology of Knowledge: Elitism Versus Democratization

The authority of writing has a sociological and political dimension which is related to its systemic complexity. While the highly complicated crafts of cuneiform and hieroglyphic writing were necessarily restricted to a small elite, the alphabetic script allowed for a process of democratization in terms of the sociology of knowledge. Professional Egyptian scriptural artisans had left monumental inscriptions at Serabit el-Chadim for centuries, before non-specialist Canaanite semi-Nomads imitated their scriptural craft and developed a system of much reduced complexity. The alphabet was created by and for amateur writers,<sup>24</sup> which led to the unprecedented historical career of this new medium. While the empires of Egypt and Mesopotamia sank into oblivion together with their writing systems,<sup>25</sup> the alphabet spread across the globe. This ultimately successful medium originated from a desert peninsula between the empires.

Egyptian scribes and scribal artisans formed a diversified sociological elite from the third millennium BCE.<sup>26</sup> Scribal education was limited to a small percentage of the population and related to temples and the “house of life”.<sup>27</sup> In Mesopotamia, the intimate connection between scribal art and political power is seen in the kings’ boasting of their training in the art of writing as an element of royal ideology.<sup>28</sup> Formal education in the art of writing was restricted to the royal family, administrators, and wealthy landowners.<sup>29</sup> In the first millennium BCE, temples became important

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193–222; cf. idem, *Gottes Gesetz und die Entstehung des Monotheismus*, in: Markus Graulich / Ralph Weimann (eds.), *Ewige Ordnung in sich verändernder Gesellschaft? Das göttliche Recht im theologischen Diskurs* (QD 287), Freiburg i. Br. 2018, 49–67.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Orly Goldwasser, *The Miners Who Invented the Alphabet – a Response to Christopher Rollston*, *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 4 (2012), 9–22.

<sup>25</sup> Cuneiform script was superseded by alphabetic script during the Hellenistic period: Philippe Clancier, *Cuneiform Culture’s Last Guardians: The Old Urban Notability of Hellenistic Uruk*, in: Radner/Robson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, 752–773. The hieroglyphs survived a few centuries longer. Haring, *From Single Sign to Pseudo-Script*, 23: “The latest datable hieroglyphic inscription is from 394 CE, and by that time there were only a few Egyptian priests who more or less understood what it said.”

<sup>26</sup> See, e. g., Niv Allon / Hana Navratilova, *Ancient Egyptian Scribes: A Cultural Exploration*, London 2017; Adelheid Schlott, *Schrift und Schreiber im Alten Ägypten* (Becks archäologische Bibliothek), München 1989.

<sup>27</sup> Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 67–71; David Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature*, Oxford 2005, 63–77.

<sup>28</sup> Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 54f.; Eckart Frahm, *Keeping Company With Men of Learning: The King as Scholar*, in: Radner/Robson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, 508–533.

<sup>29</sup> Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 55. On the sociology of scribal culture in first millennium Mesopotamia, see esp. Eleanor Robson, *Ancient Knowledge Networks: A Social Geography of Cuneiform Scholarship in First-Millennium Assyria and Babylonia*, London 2019; on Mesopotamian scribal education in general, see Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 20–34.

centres of scribal education.<sup>30</sup> The art of writing was usually handed down from father to son,<sup>31</sup> required several years of intense study and involved the memorization of and engagement with major corpuses of traditional literature.<sup>32</sup> Professional scribes could earn a good income and make a career at the royal court or at the temple workshop (*bīt mummu*).<sup>33</sup> Scribes understood themselves as initiates and jealously protected their social distinction by a culture of secrecy.<sup>34</sup> While kings depended on scribes for administration and cultural prestige, temples as scribal centres were a source of political upheaval.<sup>35</sup> Professional scribes who belonged to an elite segment of early Israel and Judaism were responsible for the production and handing down of texts that eventually became Scripture.<sup>36</sup> Scribes were employed by the royal administration and at the temple.<sup>37</sup> While the Hebrew Bible is the product of professional scribes who worked according to their specific epistemology,<sup>38</sup> epigraphic evidence suggests that the art of reading and writing increasingly extended to non-specialists.<sup>39</sup> In contrast to the exclusivist tendencies of Mesopotamian scribal culture, the book of Deuteronomy promotes the public reading and teaching of the written “Torah” (Deut 31:9–13) and even the use of writing by common people (especially Deut 6:9; 11:20). Archaeological evidence from phylac-

<sup>30</sup> Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 56.

<sup>31</sup> Robson, *Ancient Knowledge Networks*, 255.

<sup>32</sup> Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 55–59; Petra D. Gesche, *Schulunterricht in Babylonien im ersten Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (AOAT 275), Münster 2001.

<sup>33</sup> On scribal careers, see van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 59–65.

<sup>34</sup> Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 65–67; Eleanor Robson, *Do Not Disperse the Collection! Motivations and Strategies for Protecting Cuneiform Scholarship in the First Millennium BCE*, in: Mladen Popović / Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta / Clare Wilde (eds.), *Sharing and Hiding Religious Knowledge in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Berlin 2018, 8–45. On secrecy as a feature of Egyptian religion and ritual writings, see Jan Assmann, *Text and Ritual: The Meaning of the Media for the History of Religion*, in: idem, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 122–138, esp. 128–131.

<sup>35</sup> Robson, *Ancient Knowledge Networks*, 204–252.

<sup>36</sup> For a helpful assessment of the biblical evidence, see van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 75–108. On scribal education, see William M. Schniedewind, *The Finger of the Scribe: How Scribes Learned to Write the Bible*, Oxford 2019.

<sup>37</sup> William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel*, Cambridge 2004, attributes major parts of the Hebrew Bible to the work of royal scribes: “one major source for the biblical narrative must have been royal archives (from both Israel and Judah)” (ibid., 79). Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, esp. 82–89, in contrast, argues for a more important role of temple scribes.

<sup>38</sup> Cooley, *Epistemology in the Biblical Tradition*, 103–105.

<sup>39</sup> An interesting case in point is a letter from the Neo-Babylonian destruction layer at Lachish (588 BCE), in which a soldier complains to his superior Yaush about being suspected of illiteracy, which points to “seminal changes in the social fabric of society during the late Judaean monarchy”: William M. Schniedewind, *Sociolinguistic Reflections on the Letter of a ‘Literatē’ Soldier (Lachish 3)*, ZAH 13 (2000), 157–167. For graffiti as evidence for the capacity to write among non-scribes, see idem, *How the Bible Became a Book*, 104.

teries suggests that this practice actually developed in the Second Temple period.<sup>40</sup>

### 1.3 Media Materially Manifested in Space: Monumentality Versus Transportability

Cultural artifacts, including those that function as media, make their own way as people move. The invention of the alphabet itself 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>41</sup> Media that are materially manifest such as images and writing convey information through time. This spatially visible and time-bridging materiality of writing entails authority. “Since the written text has an objective existence outside its producers and consumers, it is a source of authority by itself.”<sup>42</sup>

The relationship of media to matter and space tends towards either stability or movement. Monuments tend to be place-bound, while other types of media, such as letters, are meant to be carried across space to bridge the distance between sender and receiver. Materiality determines such media’s relationship to space. The larger and heavier, the more impressive and monumental they are; the smaller and lighter, the easier to transport. Monuments in stone are “time binders” that “serve to unify the ages”, while light material such as papyrus, parchment and paper serve “to unify spaces horizontally”.<sup>43</sup> Inscriptions are “laborious, slow, and therefore considered writings. They are *monuments* (*monere*, ‘to consider’).”<sup>44</sup> Monuments such as the Mesopotamian *kudurru* inscriptions mark boundaries. A monumental inscription is a “word bound to a place”.<sup>45</sup>

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

<sup>40</sup> See Nathan Jastram, *Other Sources*, in: Armin Lange / Emanuel Tov (eds.), *Textual History of the Bible: The Hebrew Bible. Volume 1B: Pentateuch, Former and Latter Prophets*, Leiden 2017, 105–125; Dominik Markl, *The Ambivalence of Authority in Deuteronomy: Reaction, Revision, Rewriting, Reception*, in: *Cristianesimo nella storia* 41 (2020), 427–461, esp. 452–454.

<sup>41</sup> Morenz, *Die Genese der Alphabetschrift*, esp. 267f.

<sup>42</sup> Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 207. 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.

<sup>43</sup> McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 40.

<sup>44</sup> Vilém Flusser, *Does Writing Have a Future?*, Minneapolis 2011, 18.

<sup>45</sup> Jan Assmann, *Altorientalische Fluchinschriften und das Problem performativer Schriftlichkeit*, in: Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht / K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (eds.), *Schrift (Materialität der Zeichen A 12)*, München 1993, 233–255, at 240: “Die Inschrift ist das ortsfest gemachte Wort.”

cuneiform writing tradition, is very durable when baked and transportable at the same time. Lighter materials such as papyrus or parchment,<sup>46</sup> while less resistant, facilitate the easy transport of large amounts of text.<sup>47</sup> The materiality of texts in space needs to be considered in relation to the social geography of scribes.<sup>48</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. Institutional text collections – “archives” and “libraries” as they came to be called<sup>49</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 or catastrophe cause their disintegration. They may be dispersed or destroyed, and only for important reasons are they moved to new locations.<sup>50</sup>

Before the electronic transmission of texts, written material travelled with people on the road,<sup>51</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 media: objects

<sup>46</sup> The oldest preserved papyrus scroll dates from around 2800 BCE: Haring, *From Single Sign to Pseudo-Script*, 43 n. 67.

<sup>47</sup> On the materiality of scrolls, see Madadh Richey, *The Media and Materiality of Southern Levantine Inscriptions*, in: Mark Leuchter (ed.), *Scribes and Scribalism (The Hebrew Bible in Social Perspective)*, London 2021, 29–39; David M. Carr, *Rethinking the Materiality of Biblical Texts: From Source, Tradition and Redaction to a Scroll Approach*, in: ZAW 132 (2020), 594–621; William A. Johnson, *Bookrolls and Scribes in Oxyrhynchus*, Toronto 2016.

<sup>48</sup> See Robson, *Ancient Knowledge Networks*, esp. the chapter on “Scholarly and textual mobility in seventh-century Assyria” (ibid., 98–148).

<sup>49</sup> See, e. g., Fredrik Hagen, *Archives in Ancient Egypt, 2500–1000 BCE*, in: Alessandro Bausi et al. (eds.), *Manuscripts and Archives: Comparative Views on Record-Keeping (Studies in Manuscript Cultures 11)*, Berlin 2018, 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 (FAT 62)*, Tübingen 2009, 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.

<sup>50</sup> 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.

<sup>51</sup> See the chapter on “Roads and Paper Routes” in McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 127–144.

that carry cultural meaning, especially images and texts, and that become nostalgic objects of memory.<sup>52</sup> For subsequent generations, these things may be the only material connection with the country of their ancestors' origin.

## 2 Textual Migration in Ancient Israel and Early Judaism

Among the diverse aspects that contributed to the development of the authority of sacred scriptures in early Judaism, the role of migration has received little systematic attention. In order to address this issue, we should first outline a historical reconstruction of relevant instances of textual migration.

### 2.1 Literary Migration From Samaria to Jerusalem After the Assyrian Conquest

In the decades following the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (722–720 BCE),<sup>53</sup> the area and population of Jerusalem grew significantly.<sup>54</sup> Whether or not this massive increase in size suggests significant influx of refugees from the North has been a matter of debate.<sup>55</sup> It seems historically likely, however, that some refugees migrated from Samaria to the South and, even if there were only a few, 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>56</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.

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<sup>52</sup> 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.

<sup>53</sup> On this history, see Christian Frevel, *Geschichte Israels* (Studienbücher Theologie), Stuttgart 2018, esp. 274–277; Bob Becking, *The Fall of Samaria: An Historical and Archaeological Study* (SHANE 2), Leiden 1992.

<sup>54</sup> Israel Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom. The Archaeology and History of Northern Israel*, Atlanta 2013, 154; Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*, esp. 277–284.

<sup>55</sup> Arguments for migration from the North are presented by Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom*, 154f.; idem, *Migration of Israelites into Judah after 720 BCE: An Answer and an Update*, in: ZAW 127 (2015), 188–206; for a review of related discussion, see Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*, 280f.

<sup>56</sup> See esp. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*, 64–81 and 94–96; Walter Dietrich, *The Early Monarchy in Israel: The Tenth Century B.C.E.* (Biblical Encyclopedia 3), Atlanta 2007, 247f.; Finkelstein, *The Forgotten Kingdom*, 155.

## 2.2 Preserving Collective Identity During the Babylonian Exile Through Writing

The two main moments of forced migration of Judeans to Babylonia, in 597 and 587,<sup>57</sup> differed significantly, which affected the fate of scribes and manuscripts as well. 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>58</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 with manuscripts 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>59</sup>

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>60</sup> The extensive amount of literature that reflects on the (reasons

<sup>57</sup> For an overview of the relevant history, see Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 45–111; Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*, 310–327.

<sup>58</sup> 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).

<sup>59</sup> Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*, 141–147.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 149–157. Schniedewind points out that the books of Kings, Jeremiah and Ezekiel show a positive bias towards Jehoiachin.

for the) destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile indicates that the collective cultural trauma caused by these events led to intense scribal work.<sup>61</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>62</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>63</sup> Preserving the Hebrew language in this environment must have been a challenge, for which the written heritage acquired new significance.<sup>64</sup> The prolific work of scribes in Babylonia is seen in works such as Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah,<sup>65</sup> and other writings influenced by Babylonian traditions.<sup>66</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.

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<sup>61</sup> 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: Bib. 101 (2020), 1–25, esp. 7–15.

<sup>62</sup> Assmann, *Five Stages on the Road to the Canon*, 69.

<sup>63</sup> 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 Scfer* (Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology 28), Bethesda (Md.) 2014. On the reconstruction of the sequence of generations in the Babylonian exile, see Dominik Markl, *Die Soziologie des babylonischen Exils und die göttliche Vergeltung „bis zur dritten und vierten Generation“*, in: ThPh 95 (2020), 481–507, esp. 486–491.

<sup>64</sup> On languages in situations of exile, see Doerte Bischoff / Christoph Gabriel / Esther Kilchmann, *Sprache(n) im Exil: Einleitung*, in: Exilforschung 32 (2014), 9–25.

<sup>65</sup> 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.

<sup>66</sup> 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* (FAT 107), Tübingen 2016, 89–111.

### 2.3 Textual Return Migration and Postexilic Restoration in Jehud

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>67</sup> and the rebuilding of the temple<sup>68</sup> is a thorny issue because of the scarcity of primary sources and the methodological difficulties in evaluating secondary sources.<sup>69</sup> One contested question concerns the dating of Ezra-Nehemiah to the Persian or Hellenistic period.<sup>70</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 Jehud.<sup>71</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>72</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>73</sup> While Ezra 7 does not explicitly

<sup>67</sup> 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.

<sup>68</sup> 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* (JSJ.S 65), Leiden 2001.

<sup>69</sup> 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* (Library of Second Temple Studies 47), London 2004; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Israel in the Persian Period: The Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.E.* (SBLBE 8), Atlanta 2011; Frevel, *Geschichte Israels*, 328–368.

<sup>70</sup> It may suffice to refer to two major monographs: Ralf Rothenbusch, „... abgesondert zur Tora Gottes hin“: *Ethnisch-religiöse Identitäten im Esra/Nehemiabuch* (HBS 70), Freiburg i. Br. 2012, 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* (FAT 104), Tübingen 2016, esp. 400–410, considers none of the texts in Esra-Nehemiah as originating from the pre-Hellenistic period.

<sup>71</sup> See the analysis in Rothenbusch, „... abgesondert zur Tora Gottes hin“, 267–330.

<sup>72</sup> For a historical evaluation, see Grabbe, *A History of the Jews*, esp. 329–331.

<sup>73</sup> 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* (BZAW 337), Berlin 2004.

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>74</sup> Ezra-type Judean scribes who migrated from Babylonia to Jerusalem may have imported cultural knowledge about the scribal organization of Babylonian temple communities.<sup>75</sup> The frequent reference to written documents in Ezra-Nehemiah attests to the rise of a culture of writing.<sup>76</sup> While royal edicts and the exchange of letters conveyed via envoys<sup>77</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>78</sup> Texts deliberately composed for the cult of the post-exilic temple were integrated into the Torah.<sup>79</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

<sup>74</sup> Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*, 165–194; van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 89–96.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Michael Jursa, *Cuneiform Writing in Neo-Babylonian Temple Communities*, Radner/Robson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, 184–204.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Maria Häusl, „Eine Schriftrolle, darin ist geschrieben“ (Esr 6,2): *Zur Bedeutung der Schriftlichkeit im Buch Ezra/Nehemia*, in: Erasmus Gaß / Hermann-Josef Stipp (eds.), „Ich werde meinen Bund mit euch niemals brechen!“ (Ri 2,1) (FS Walter Groß; HBS 62), Freiburg i. Br. 2011, 175–194.

<sup>77</sup> 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.

<sup>78</sup> 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.

<sup>79</sup> 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.), *The Fall of Jerusalem*, 227–251.

experience of Babylonia, and other, probably later, texts that concern the restoration of Jerusalem.<sup>80</sup> The Pentateuch and Deutero-Isaiah are examples of Judeo-Babylonian texts that were “(re-)Jerusalemised” in postexilic Jehud. They represent textualized migratory history.

#### 2.4 Comparative Evidence: Neirab and Assur

Since the Cyrus Cylinder suggests that several groups returned to their cities with their cult statues after 539 BCE, comparison between Judean and other cases of return migration is in order. Concentrating on the role of written documents in the context of return migration, I shall here consider the Neirab archive and Assur’s “last state archive”.

The Neirab archive consists of 27 cuneiform tablets discovered in the town of Neirab some 10 km southeast of Aleppo (Syria). The documents had actually been composed in the villages of deported Neirabians in the Babylonian region of Nippur during the reigns of Neriglissar (560–556 BCE), Nabonidus (556–539 BCE) and Darius I (521–486 BCE).<sup>81</sup> During the reign of Darius I, “after a period of exile of more or less forty years, they returned home to Neirab, bringing with them some of the documents they had drafted in Babylonia.”<sup>82</sup> Although the legal documents (mainly promissory notes) were already out of use, they were still brought back to Neirab, possibly as evidence for the leading social role of the descendants of Nusku-gabbe, the documents’ owners.<sup>83</sup> The Neirab archive soon lost its social relevance and was discarded. The literary texts brought back by Judeans from Babylonia, very different from the Neirab archive in genre and function, continued to be relevant for Judean collective identity.

Another case for comparison is “Assyria’s last state archive”<sup>84</sup> in the temple of the god Aššur in the city of Assur. The temple had been renovated under king Sennacherib (r. 704–681 BCE)<sup>85</sup> and was destroyed by

<sup>80</sup> For the historical context of (the earlier texts of) Deutero-Isaiah in Babylonia, see David S. Vanderhooft, *The Neo-Babylonian Empire and Babylon in the Latter Prophets* (HSM 59), Atlanta 1999, 169–188; for theory on redactional activity after the return to Jerusalem, see Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 40–48* (HThKAT), Freiburg i. Br. 2008, 43–45; Albertz, *Israel in Exile*, 376–433.

<sup>81</sup> Israel Eph’al, *The Western Minorities in Babylonia in the 6th–5th Centuries B.C.: Maintenance and Cohesion*, Or. 47 (1978), 74–90, esp. 84–87; Gauthier Tolini, *From Syria to Babylon and Back: The Neirab Archive*, in: Jonathan Stökl / Caroline Waerzeggers (eds.), *Exile and Return: The Babylonian Context* (BZAW 478), Berlin 2015, 58–93, esp. 60–63.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 92f.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Peter A. Miglus, *Das letzte Staatsarchiv der Assyrer*, in: Barthel Hrouda (ed.), *Von Uruk nach Tuttul* (FS Eva Strommenger), München 1992, 135–142.

<sup>85</sup> Eckart Frahm, *Einleitung in die Sennacherib-Inschriften* (AfO.B 26), Wien 1997, 170–173.

Median forces in 614 BCE.<sup>86</sup> If Karen Radner's hypothesis is correct, the structure designated "Temple A" by archaeologists was built not long after 539 BCE above the ruins of the south-eastern part of the enclosure of the destroyed temple, by worshippers of Aššur who returned from their exile in the Southern Babylonian city of Uruk.<sup>87</sup> A "great number of old texts were moved into the Second Temple, most importantly 82 stone tablets and 24 clay prisms and cylinders with royal inscriptions as well as clay tablets with royal decrees and religious texts. These documents all relate directly to the god Aššur and Assyrian history, from Erišum I in the early 2nd millennium to Sin-šarru-iškun at the very end of the imperial period."<sup>88</sup> The texts, however, were not brought from Uruk, but archaeologically recovered from the destroyed temple.<sup>89</sup> Such high appreciation for the ancient texts is explicable, as the texts allowed for continuity with Assur's pre-exilic cult. They represented "a very real connection to god Aššur" and "some of them were considered actual manifestations of the deity."<sup>90</sup> At a late stage, the texts were integrated into the temple architecture and thus served as monumental icons.<sup>91</sup> The eventual devaluation of these texts is a symptom of the decline of the cuneiform script, as "the Aramaic script and the Aramaic language had replaced cuneiform and Assyrian entirely" by the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE.<sup>92</sup>

Judah saw transitions in writing materials and script as well – from papyrus to leather and from the Paleo-Hebrew to the Aramaic script –,<sup>93</sup> but the alphabetic culture allowed for continuity. Assur's "Second Temple Period" is especially interesting for comparison with postexilic Judah since, in both cases, a pre-exilic cult sponsored by the king underwent transformation to a post-monarchic, community-based cult.<sup>94</sup> In both instances, the transition was facilitated by the development of new forms of worship during the exile; and, in both cases, texts played a vital role in cultic continuity in the postexilic situation. While Assur saw the archaeological recovery of

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<sup>86</sup> Babylonian Chronicle 3, lines 24–27: Albert Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, Locust Valley 1975, esp. 93.

<sup>87</sup> Radner, *Assur's "Second Temple Period"*, 85–87; on the cult of Aššur by the Assyrian exiles in Uruk, see *ibid.*, 83f.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 88, against the background of Miglus, *Das letzte Staatsarchiv*.

<sup>89</sup> Radner, *Assur's "Second Temple Period"*, 89.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* This forms an interesting analogy with late Egyptian temples of the Hellenistic period that are conceived as monumental textual revelation. See Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, 156–174.

<sup>92</sup> Radner, *Assur's "Second Temple Period"*, 90.

<sup>93</sup> Mark Leuchter, *The Aramaic Transition and the Redaction of the Pentateuch*, in: *JBL* 136 (2017), 249–268.

<sup>94</sup> Radner, *Assur's "Second Temple Period"*, 78–85.

cuneiform texts monumentally inscribed in stone and clay, Judah's alphabetic writings on transportable material allowed for dynamic continuity through textual migration.

### 3 The Emergence of Scriptural Authority

Having sketched the outlines of textual migration in Israel and Judah from the pre-exilic to the Persian period, it remains to explore how it relates to the rise of scriptural authority. I shall look at three literary representations that reflect this development: allegories of textual migration in the Pentateuch, the rise of Torah in the Persian province of Jehud as reflected in the figure of Ezra, and textual migration from Jerusalem to Alexandria in the creation of the Septuagint, narratively dramatized in the *Letter of Aristeas*.

#### 3.1 The Extraterritoriality of Torah: Media and Migration in the Pentateuch

The Pentateuch, generally considered to have been redacted at the postexilic temple of Jerusalem, 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>95</sup> Divine revelation through writing goes hand in hand with the rejection of images, a transformation of media that is intensely reflected, as Joachim Schaper has shown, in Deuteronomy 4.<sup>96</sup> Such contrasting of images and writing presupposes the development of alphabetic script and implies a rejection of writing's pictorial origins, which were living on especially in Egypt.

If the Pentateuch's idea of written divine revelation at Sinai does not contain some distant memory of the invention of alphabetic writing on the Sinai peninsula, the convergence of historical fact and literary motif is an intriguing coincidence. Canaanite semi-Nomads had developed the alphabet on the Sinai peninsula in their encounter with Egyptian writing,

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<sup>95</sup> See above n. 20 and, on the symbolism of divine writing, 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.

<sup>96</sup> See Joachim Schaper, *Media and Monotheism: Presence, Representation, and Abstraction in Ancient Judah* (ORA 33), Tübingen 2019, 127–147. As a consequence, the Torah gradually took on an “iconic” role: Karel van der Toorn, *The Iconic Book: Analogies Between the Babylonian Cult of Images and the Veneration of the Torah*, in: idem (ed.), *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (CBET 21), Leuven 1997, 229–248. On the later development, see David Ganz, *Clothing Sacred Scriptures*, in: idem / Barbara Schellewald (eds.), *Clothing Sacred Scriptures: Book Art and Book Religion in Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Cultures* (Manuscripta Biblica 2), Berlin 2019, 1–46.

creating a medium for their own cultural identity.<sup>97</sup> The divine writing from Sinai prohibits divine images, which implies a rejection of Egyptian script. The most ancient alphabetic signs are preserved in rock inscriptions on the Sinai peninsula. Sinaitic stone bears the divine inscription according to the Pentateuch's narrative. In both instances – the historical invention of the alphabet on the Sinai peninsula and the narrated revelation of divine writing at Mount Sinai – alphabetic writing contrasts with the hieroglyphic script. The Sinai narrative may thus imply some awareness of the importance of the alphabetic script for the identity of Levantine and, particularly, Hebrew culture, in contrast to Egypt.

While God writes on stone with his own finger,<sup>98</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>99</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>100</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>101</sup> The revelation of divine teaching occurs during Israel's forced migration from Egypt to the Promised Land. Sinai is a utopian place for 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 puts 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>102</sup> The extraterritoriality of divine revelation as it is presented in the Exodus story is an allego-

<sup>97</sup> See Morenz, *Die Genese der Alphabetschrift*, 268.

<sup>98</sup> 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.”

<sup>99</sup> 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* (BibInt Series 14), Leiden 1997, esp. 262f.

<sup>100</sup> Jean-Pierre Sonnet, “Lorsque Moïse eut achevé d'écrire” (*Dt 31,24*): Une “théorie narrative” de l'écriture dans le Pentateuque, in: RSR 90 (2002), 509–524, esp. 514f.

<sup>101</sup> On the literary level, this motif creates a *mise en abyme*: Sonnet, *The Book Within the 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* (AOAT 459), Münster 2018, 165–186, esp. 175.

<sup>102</sup> Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*, 180.

ry for the Torah's origin "elsewhere" and for Israel's fate as a people of migration.

### 3.2 The Rise of Torah in the Persian Period

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>103</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>104</sup> The story is also, against the background of Deut 31, one of the earliest references to "a Torah that was conceived to be in the form of one book."<sup>105</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" (*Sinnpflege*).<sup>106</sup> Another, related mark of textual canonization, the "cultivation of the text" (*Textpflege*),<sup>107</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>108</sup>

Ezra-Nehemiah presents the Torah's public authorization soon after its return from Babylonia (Ezra 7–10; Neh 8–13) like an original myth of textual canonization and the rise of book religion.<sup>109</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>110</sup> The Torah was promoted as a focal point for the collective identity

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Rothenbusch, „... abgesehen von der Tora Gottes hin“, 331–374.

<sup>104</sup> Juha Pakkala, *Ezra the Scribe: The Development of Ezra 7–10 and Nehemiah 8* (BZAW 347), Berlin 2004, 278.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>106</sup> Assmann/Assmann, *Kanon und Zensur als kultursoziologische Kategorien*, 13–15.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 12f.

<sup>108</sup> 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.

<sup>109</sup> See esp. Sebastian Grätz, *Alter Wein in neuen Schläuchen? Die Bücher Esra/Nehemia zwischen Tradition und Innovation*, in: Maria Häußel (ed.), *Denk nicht mehr an das Frühere! Begründungsressourcen in Esra/Nehemia und Jes 40–66 im Vergleich* (BBB 184), Göttingen 2018, 77–91, esp. 85–90.

<sup>110</sup> 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* (SBLSymS 17), Atlanta 2001; Gary N. Knoppers / Bernard M. Levinson (eds.), *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance*, Winona Lake 2007.

of Judeans.<sup>111</sup> While Jerusalem's temple became the centre of manuscript collection,<sup>112</sup> the rising authority of Torah is seen in its translocation and the multiplication of the institutions of its textual cultivation: at the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim,<sup>113</sup> in synagogal worship<sup>114</sup> and, especially, in the creation of the Septuagint.

### 3.3 Jewish Nomos: Textual Migration From Jerusalem to Alexandria

The Jewish Scriptures underwent a crucial cultural migration when they were translated into Greek, above all the Pentateuch in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE.<sup>115</sup> The *Letter of Aristeas*, written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE,<sup>116</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>117</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>118</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>119</sup> It is then read to King Ptolemy

<sup>111</sup> Bob Becking, *The Idea of Torah in Ezra 7–10: A Functional Analysis*, in: idem, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Construction of Early Jewish Identity (FAT 80)*, Tübingen 2011, 43–57 [= ZAR 7 (2001), 273–286], esp. 56f.

<sup>112</sup> 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.

<sup>113</sup> 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 (FAT 78)*, Tübingen 2011, 507–531.

<sup>114</sup> 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 Hanswulf Bloedhorn / 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.

<sup>115</sup> On the dating of the translation, see James K. Aitken, *The Ptolemaic Setting for the Translation of the Greek Pentateuch*, in: HeBAI 9 (2020), 398–414.

<sup>116</sup> Benjamin G. Wright, *The Letter of Aristeas: 'Aristeas to Philocrates' or 'On the Translation of the Law of the Jews'* (CEJL), Berlin 2015, 21–30.

<sup>117</sup> 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.

<sup>118</sup> Translation of Wright, *The Letter of Aristeas*, 313.

<sup>119</sup> 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 Christian Traditions* (JSJS 109), Leiden 2006, 26–42; Francis Borchardt, *Influence and Power: The Types of Authority in the Process of Scripturalization*, in: SJOT 29 (2015), 182–196.

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>120</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>121</sup> Translated into Greek, the Torah-Nomos became a central point of reference for the collective identity of Jews in Egypt.<sup>122</sup>

#### 4 Conclusion: Media, Migration, Scriptural Authority

The authority of sacred writings was determined in the ancient Near East by three principle aspects: the capacity to represent divinity and divine revelation; the social influence of those capable of writing; and writing’s potential to facilitate communication, bridging both time and space. While these aspects apply to the authority of the sacred writings of emerging Judaism as well, this article has explored an additional, hitherto undervalued factor: the influence of migration. Textual migration is likely to have occurred after the conquest of the Northern Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians (720 BCE), attributing to writing a new value as a medium of cultural rescue. The migration of manuscripts must have happened on a significant scale when the Babylonians deported Jerusalem’s elite in 597 BCE and the remaining administrative elite to Babylonia in 587 BCE. Judean deportees transported manuscripts and produced new writings in

<sup>120</sup> Adrian Schenker considers Deut 4:6–8 as a principal motivation for the translation of the Torah into Greek: *Wurde 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 [= FZPhTh 54 (2007), 327–347].

<sup>121</sup> See Kimberley Czajkowski / Stéphanie Wackener, *Legal Strategies of Judeans in Herakleopolis, Middle Egypt, According to the Archives of the Politeuma*, in: HeBAI 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 (DCLS 16)*, Berlin 2013, 1–15. On the Jewish *politeuma* in Egypt, see Patrick Sängler, *Die ptolemäische Organisationsform Politeuma: Ein Herrschaftsinstrument zugunsten jüdischer und anderer hellenischer Gemeinschaften* (TSAJ 178), Tübingen 2019.

<sup>122</sup> See Sylvie Honigman / Ehud Ben Zvi, *The Spread of the Ideological Concept of a (Jerusalem-Centred) Tōrā-centred Israel Beyond Yehud: Observations and Implications*, in: HeBAI 9 (2020), 370–397.

exile. 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. While textual migration and the rise of scriptural authority began with the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem’s temple, Judaism’s Scriptures became migratory texts, especially after the temple’s ultimate destruction by the Romans in 70 CE.<sup>123</sup> While the ancient and monumental cultures of writing in Mesopotamia and Egypt, based on narrow elitist carrier groups, were declining, 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 sponsorship 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

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<sup>123</sup> 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: JBL 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.

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>124</sup>

**Zusammenfassung:** Der Artikel untersucht den Zusammenhang zwischen Medien und Migration in der Entwicklung der Autorität sakraler Schriften im alten Israel und entstehenden Judentum. Die Analyse erfolgt im Rahmen einer medientheoretischen Reflexion über die Entwicklung der Schriftkultur im alten Orient. Eine historische Rekonstruktion der Migration von Schreibern und des Transports von Manuskripten, besonders im Kontext des Babylonischen Exils und der Rückkehr von Judäern in persischer Zeit, bietet die Grundlage für die Auswertung von drei literarischen Repräsentationen des Zusammenhangs von Migration und Schriftautorität: der Extraterritorialität der Offenbarung im Pentateuch, der Autorisierung der Tora nach der Rückkehr aus Babylonien, wie sie sich in der Gestalt Esras zeigt, und deren Übersetzung ins Griechische, narrativ dramatisiert im Aristeasbrief. Der Artikel kommt zu dem Schluss, dass Transpositionen durch Migration zu einer größeren Bedeutung von Schriften als Brennpunkte kollektiver Identität führten und so zu deren wachsender Autorität beitrugen.

**Schlagwörter:** Medientheorie, Schrift, Migration, Schriftautorität, Literatursoziologie, Pentateuch, frühes Judentum

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<sup>124</sup> Heinrich Heine, *Vermischte Schriften*. Vol. 1, Hamburg 1854, 85: “portatives Vaterland”.