

AABNER

ADVANCES IN ANCIENT BIBLICAL
AND NEAR EASTERN RESEARCH

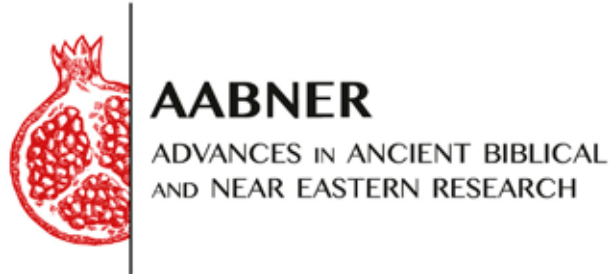
Varia Issue



EBERHARD KARLS
UNIVERSITÄT
TÜBINGEN



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK



**WE CAN REMEMBER IT FOR
YOU WHOLESALE:
THE SOCIAL THEORY OF
BIBLICAL LITERATURE**

Seth L. Sanders

Source: *Advances in Ancient, Biblical, and Near Eastern Research*
5, no. 2 (Autumn, 2025): 49–91

URL to this article: DOI 10.35068/aabner.v5i2.1206

Keywords: biblical studies, Hebrew Bible, literary evidence,
material remains, social theory

(c) 2025, Seth L. Sanders, via a CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 license.

Abstract

This article argues that biblical studies has relied on one underlying social theory since emerging from theology, namely, that the literary qualities of a text provide evidence of the qualities of the society that produced it. This theory reads whole aspects of a society off the form of the texts it leaves behind and thus allows scholars to reconstitute a lost culture from its traces in literary documents. But working with more or less the same texts (and material evidence), versions of the theory have been claimed to support opposite statements about the societies Hebrew literature came from: nonliterate and tribal on the one hand, or bureaucratic and scribal on the other. This article invites the reader to open the theory up to elements beyond the binary and suggests ways to better verify the fit between such theory and complex literary and archaeological data.



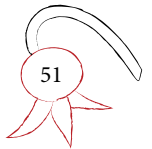
Seit ihrer Abspaltung von der Theologie stützt sich die Bibelwissenschaft auf eine Gesellschaftstheorie, die besagt, dass die literarische Qualität eines Textes Aufschluss über die Eigenschaften derjenigen Gesellschaft gibt, die den Text hervorgebracht hat. Diese Theorie liest ganze Aspekte einer Gesellschaft aus der Form ihrer Texte ab und rekonstruiert so eine verlorene Kultur anhand ihrer vermeintlichen Spuren in literarischen Dokumenten. Basierend auf den gleichen Texten wurden jedoch verschiedene und gegensätzliche Aussagen über die Gesellschaften gemacht, aus denen die hebräische Literatur stammt: einerseits wurden schriftlose und stammesbezogene Ursprünge der Texte postuliert, andererseits bürokratische und schriftkundige Ursprünge. Der Beitrag lädt den Leser dazu ein, die Theorie für Gesellschaftsmodelle zu öffnen, die über diese Zweiteilung hinausgehen, und macht Vorschläge, wie die Eignung von solchen Theorien zur Bearbeitung von komplexem literarischem und archäologischem Datenmaterial besser geprüft werden kann.



Source: *Advances in Ancient, Biblical, and Near Eastern Research*
5, no. 2 (Autumn, 2025): 49–91

WE CAN REMEMBER IT FOR YOU WHOLESALE: THE SOCIAL THEORY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

Seth L. Sanders



Introduction

This article argues that biblical studies has relied on one underlying type of social theory since emerging as an independent discipline from theology.¹ The idea is that the literary qualities of a text are culturally determined and therefore provide evidence of the qualities of the society that produced it. It was most directly reflected in form criticism and is still vibrant today in the concept of “scribal culture.” This theory

¹ This article has benefited hugely from the generous and incisive comments of the *AABNER* reviewers and Michael Helfield’s thoughtful editing; if building on their points has made the article a bit longer, it has also made it much better. I also want to thank the issue editors Kelly J. Murphy and Andrew Tobolowsky for their constant patience and encouragement.

implies a method of great potential power: that there are ways to read whole aspects of a society off of the form of the texts it leaves behind and thus reconstitute a lost culture from its traces in literary documents. The theory has been vital to the field because it offers a way to connect the ancient Hebrew literature available to us with the ancient Judah and Israel of over two thousand years ago. But if it offers a welcome way of getting around gaps in our evidence connecting preserved Hebrew literature with ancient Judahite and Israelite history, its application has also led to incoherent and contradictory results.

To start, it is illuminating just to show that biblical criticism *has* a social theory and how it developed, since the field is sometimes thought to lack unifying concepts. Indeed, at times historians of the field have struggled to find coherent intellectual foundations for it or have claimed that there are none.² But a broader look at intellectual history shows that the core social theory of biblical studies shares a genealogy with Classics, folklore studies, and anthropology.³ (part 1) Yet this theory also invites critical reflection on its history and meaning because it has sometimes produced highly contradictory results, a phenomenon driven less by the discovery of different evidence than by the changing ways in which the theory was developed—or failed to develop. Working with more or less the same texts and material evidence, versions of the theory have been claimed to support opposing statements about the societies Hebrew literature came from. Such literature has been used as evidence of nonliterate and tribal origins for texts on the one hand (parts 2-3), and predominantly bureaucratic scribal social origins on the other (part 4). As if to demonstrate the full extent of its malleability, recent instances of the theory have even been used to claim that the very same Iron Age societies that were once depicted as oral and tribal and then scribal and bureaucratic are now both at once oral and scribal, traditional, and bureaucratic. In this union of opposites, what used to



² For the theory of historical criticism as being so diverse as to be internally incoherent, see the discussion in Kurtz 2022 and the references he cites.

³ The groundbreaking history is that of Bauman and Briggs 2003, elaborated with respect to biblical studies in Sanders 2009 and Vayntrub 2019. An important and deeply researched alternative narrative is that in Legaspi 2010, discussed below.

be described as oral tradition is depicted instead as written “memories” manipulated by expert scribes (parts 5-6).

This article does not attempt to decide between these binarisms but *instead* suggests that the framework they represent is a problem, out-dated, and poorly supported. It invites the reader to open the theory up to elements beyond the old binary ones. Far from being the only way to look at the social dimension of ancient literature, the oral–literate dichotomy is a fundamentally flawed eighteenth-century version of a broader and more productive social theory. It is no longer productive to argue about whether biblical literature primarily reflects an oral society or a literate one, or whether literature even directly reflects social form, as both the “oral” and “scribal” versions of the theory assume. Instead, this article first discusses how biblical studies developed a social theory in the first place, as opposed to a theology, and why it centered on the opposition between “oral” and “literate” cultures. Its second goal is to point out that the diverse conclusions biblical studies scholars have drawn from this opposition have not been predominantly evidence-driven. Of course, any version of a theory THAT produce opposite results with the same evidence leaves something to be desired in terms of rigor and coherence.

Finally, it poses constructive questions about biblical studies’ main social theory: if the underlying concept of literature as a cultural product remains interesting and vital, are there better ways to connect it with the evidence? Do ancient Near Eastern comparanda really equally support whichever reconstruction of culture a social theory asserts? If not, what is the alternative? For if current versions of the theory can equally reconstruct an early “primitive” tribal society or a more developed “scribal” society from the same biblical corpus, this is not inherent to the culture concept. The last section of this article asks how we can better verify the fit between such theory and our complex literary and archaeological data (part 7).

The conclusion explores ways to put the social theory into a better-supported and more creative dialogue with the ancient evidence for Hebrew communication. The article ends by offering a programmatic suggestion on ways to develop such dialogue between theory and data. It draws on two well-documented recent examples of ways to *investigate*



rather than *assume* the relationship between the attested qualities of a text and the ancient social-communicative situation that produced it. These case studies are not necessarily any more neutral in motivation or free of historical context than any other (indeed, if they had no motivation or context, why would anyone care?), but they make well-supported and historically specific cases for how forms of literary creativity relate to ancient social worlds.

Biblical Studies and Social Theory: From Political Theology to Social Evolution (Part One)



What held the Bible together for premodern readers was neither a pair of covers⁴ nor any obvious unity in its content but an ancient theory. The most influential and enduring European concept about the Bible—still held in some form by many—was its divine origin: that it is a book of commands from the ruler of the universe transmitted to us via the prophets.⁵ This theory of the Bible's nature is obviously theological, but its implications are also linguistic and social: it does not just make claims about God but also about how He speaks to us and how we should organize ourselves.

The unifying premodern theory of the Bible has been described by intellectual historians like Mark Lilla (2007) as a *political theology*, a divinely dictated foundation for human order (as above, so below). Lilla contrasts it with the idea of *political philosophy*, which claims that human reason rather than divine dictation provides the best founda-

⁴ Indeed, none of the Bible's early readers could have encountered it in a single volume, since few scrolls were long enough to contain more than a few biblical works. Even the codex (pre-printing book) did not make people treat the text as a unified and coherent whole. For an eye-opening study of how media form affected biblical reading and interpretation, see Stern 2008. For the lack of inherent unity, consider the comment of Gotthold Lessing that if a traveler from another world encountered our Bible, they would hardly be struck by its unity or divinity.

⁵ As well as, for Christians, Jesus. On how the Bible's political significance was structured in European thought see Lilla 2007.

tion for ordering human affairs. Of course, both are forms of reasoning, but the first claims that its ultimate basis is otherworldly; all arguments about how to order human affairs must ultimately be answerable to God, whose will is embodied in the biblical text. What gives the text such a high status? In classic European political theology, the Bible's significance flowed from its unique communicative and political role as a self-authorizing set of divine words.⁶ The importance of biblical exegesis also flowed from this political theology: however cryptic or frightening some parts might be, the Bible is an urgent message from God if only we can properly interpret it.

A particularly clear example of the fundamentally theological foundation that this theory provided for the medieval European political order is the concept of English kingship described by the author known as the Norman Anonymous. Around 1100 CE, he described the supernatural qualities of any legitimate king:

We thus have to recognize [in the king] a twin person, one descending from nature, the other from grace. ... One through which, by the condition of nature, he conformed with other men: another through which, by the eminence of [his] deification and by the power of the sacrament [of consecration], he excelled all others. Concerning one personality, he was, by nature, an individual man: concerning his other personality, he was, by grace, a *Christus*, that is, a God-man.⁷

The king has a divine right to rule, granted by virtue of his deification as God's son, a political paradigm laid down in biblical texts such as Psalms 2 and 89. Centuries later, the political philosopher Thomas Hobbes summarized the principle behind this theological view. In 1615,

⁶ This idea of attributing ultimate authority to an otherworldly document was already parodied by Machiavelli around 1517 in his *Discourses on Livy*. There, he describes Numa, the creator of Roman law, as employing a clever deceptive ploy to gain the compliance of the unruly but superstitious Romans: he tells them that the laws he is giving them are not his own inventions but were revealed to him in nightly meetings with his divine girlfriend, the nymph Egeria. The Romans, impressed by the supposed divine nature of his laws, accept them and form an orderly republic.

⁷ Cited in the translation of Ernst Kantorowicz (1957, 74).



he wrote: “The question of the Scripture is the question of what is law throughout all Christendom” (*Leviathan*, par. 33). What followed his summary was a devastating attack: a detailed argument that scripture cannot possibly provide a real basis for law.

Leviathan heralded not just an intellectual critique but a political shift. The decline of biblically based Christian theology required the rise not just of theories but of interest groups strong enough to contest it. Of course, none of the critiques were completely new—biblical scholarship had long used philology, the linguistically and grammatically informed close reading of texts, to seek out and argue about their original meaning.⁸ But these preexisting arguments emerged as a powerful new whole with the rise of expanding absolutist European states wishing to contest the divine right of local kings during the modern period (Van Creveld 1999).

The concept of the Bible as an artifact of human culture, not a direct expression of divine will, provided the most powerful alternative to classical political theology. The rising absolutist European states of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with their increased independence from the Church created a context in which a greater role for



⁸ The core methods of philology are more or less agreed on as involving grammatically and contextually informed ways of making sense of texts, but its history remains in dispute. It has been presented as pointedly modern and Western European—quintessentially German, even (see, e.g., Kurtz 2021), more broadly European (Turner 2014), or as a cross-culturally shared phenomenon (Pollock et al. 2015). Recent more fine-grained historical studies of how people actually did philology suggest that at least in modern Europe it was typically more than one thing. For example, the eminent German philologist Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel, one of the early nineteenth-century founders of modern Indology, far from being located comfortably in a German nationalist project, spent significant parts of his early career begging people in England and India for books and fleeing from one part of Europe to another. He “learned Sanskrit in a hybrid, non-linear way and . . . in his private letters, the haphazard and indeed unsystematic process by which he was forced to work is exposed” (Solanki 2025, 13). As a result, “Schlegel’s cosmopolitan alignment vis-à-vis his Sanskrit scholarship is not so much actively created, as it is a result of his passive imbrication in [his patron] Germaine de Staël’s ongoing clashes with the Napoleonic regime” (Solanki 2025, 11).

human agency, independent of traditional authority, was intellectually appealing.

At its modern origins, the study of the Bible was built on a social theory because it replaced a theological one. In turning toward a human rather than divine Bible, biblical interpretation remained in close dialogue with the development of European theory. But now instead of using political theology to understand how the Bible commands us, scholars used theories of literature and society to investigate the Bible, looking for ways to read its differing genres and historical voices as clues to what type of human artifact it was and what type of society it came from.

What did biblical scholarship do with the social theory that replaced political theology? A key use was to reconstruct the *type of society* a given biblical text came from, and thereby to create a context for the text's interpretation.⁹ At first, these types of society were depicted as two successive evolutionary stages connected to two dominant modes of communication: an early oral one and then a later more literate one that grew—or in some views, degenerated—from it. The early stage was a traditional, egalitarian tribal culture marked by its main form of communication and knowledge being oral. Knowledge of the past was held in memory rather than in written texts and transmitted in speech performances. The later stage was a more bureaucratic, hierarchical society dominated by expert writers: scribes and priests who managed knowledge of the past by writing down earlier oral traditions and editing them into texts. These two stages came from a media-based vision of social evolution current in the eighteenth century. In this view, societies progressed along a single track from simple and oral to complex and written. Even in the twentieth century, ancient Near Eastern



⁹ This is not to say that biblical scholars have had only one theoretical interest—far from it. But scholars have returned to one theoretical framework more consistently than any other, and contemporary discussion is still frequently driven by this framework and responses to it.

evidence was still used to reinforce this connection, providing support for these two hypothetical stages.¹⁰

By the end of the twentieth century, the theory's evolutionism had been subject to substantial challenge and gone out of vogue in archaeology and history. Near Eastern archaeologists like Norman Yoffee (1979) showed that Mesopotamian history provided a strong counterexample to the assumption that societies simply evolved toward greater and greater complexity (cf. Emberling 2016).

Yet both the tribal and scribal continued to thrive in biblical studies. The old "oral" categories of memory and performance were reinterpreted to apply equally to literate societies. Far from a taxonomic sign of a tribal society, written texts too came to be seen as memories, and writers as performers. The apparent ambivalence and loss of direction that resulted can be seen in a simple shift in punctuation around the turn of the millennium: in 1994, Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Na'aman's evolutionist state of the field was entitled *From Nomadism to Monarchy*. Thirty years later, Ido Koch et al. (2023) revisited the topic, but what we had learned turned it into a question: it was now called *From Nomadism to Monarchy?* The social theory of the Bible had proven productive, but in an excessive, contradictory way. This method could produce at least two different societies from the same body of evidence.¹¹

It is worth lingering on how we got here. The rise of biblical scholarship's social theory is part of a broader history shared not just with



¹⁰ For a critique of the way Ugaritic cuneiform texts were presented as documenting an early orality, see Hillers and McCall 1976, and for the issues in documenting orality in Mesopotamia, see Cooper 1992.

¹¹ It is worth noting that historical criticism has not always been depicted as having any underlying coherence, and can also be seen instead as a more accidental and contingent creation of nineteenth-century German Protestant scholarship. When John Barton (1998) attempted to define classical historical criticism, he gathered a somewhat disparate set of features: genetic questions, original meaning, historical reconstructions, and disinterested scholarship. And while he found four semi-related features, others found none at all: writing on German historical criticism, Steven Turner found no coherence at its heart and took that as a virtue, arguing that it "meant everything and nothing and so derived its power from suggestive imprecision" (1983: 472 *apud* Kurtz 2022, 18).

Classics but also anthropology, the study of folklore, music, and mythology as modern European sciences of culture.¹² For those who thought to wonder if the Bible could be something more than a sacred monument, its nature shifted—revealingly or disturbingly. If it was not a unique and self-contained divine object, what could it be?

Ruin the Sacred Truth: Seventeenth-Century Anxieties about Biblical Literature as Human Communication (Part Two)

In the seventeenth century, the promise and threat of seeing the Bible as subject to human convention was expressed with ominous beauty by Andrew Marvell. Concerned about John Milton's audacious plan to retell the biblical narrative in secular poetic form, he compared the sightless Milton to Samson, destroying the edifice of religion itself:



When I beheld the poet blind, yet bold,
In slender book his vast design unfold,
Messiah crowned, God's reconciled decree,
Rebelling Angels, the Forbidden Tree,
Heaven, Hell, Earth, Chaos, all; the argument
Held me a while, misdoubting his intent
That he would ruin (for I saw him strong)
The sacred truth to fable and old song,
(So Sampson groped the temple's posts in spite)
The world o'erwhelming to revenge his sight.¹³

¹² Bauman and Briggs 2003; for an insightful treatment of the history of work on biblical poetry and Hebrew “orality” informed by Bauman and Briggs’s approach, see Vayntrub 2019. While allowing that no intellectual history stands apart from pure contingency (what anthropologist Shannon Lee Dawdy [2015] calls “accidentalism”), these patterns are the most prominent.

¹³ From his 1674 preface to the second edition of *Paradise Lost*. The vivid phrase “ruin the sacred truth” is memorialized in the title of Harold Bloom’s (1989) lectures on the Bible, poetry, and belief, *Ruin the Sacred Truths*.

Milton's ambition elegantly reflected the politico-theological problem in literature: the Bible had been presented as a perfect body of divine commands to humans, instructing us on how to run our societies. Milton showed that it can be treated quite effectively as mere art, bracketing the "divine command" part. His sin was not to directly challenge assumptions about the Bible's authoritative divine nature but to put its sacred truth to the form of human culture, "fable and old song," by *retelling* it as poetry (though perhaps implying something more).

Marvell's anxiety was well-placed for it arose in a context in which his countryman Thomas Hobbes had laid out a simple but devastating argument against political theology: it was fake—that is, people may *believe* they are obeying God's words under God's authority, but they have no way of *knowing* that because all we know about these laws is that they were transmitted and enforced by humans, none of whom can prove that the words have a divine origin.¹⁴



It is believed on all hands, that the first and original Author of them is God; and consequently the question disputed is not that ... [But] none can know they are God's word (though all true Christians believe it) but those to whom God himself hath revealed it supernaturally ... Lastly, when the question is propounded of our Belief, because some are moved to believe for one, and others for other reasons, there can be rendered no one general answer for them all. The question truly stated is, *By what authority they are made law*. (Leviathan, par. 33, emphasis in original)

What matters is human enforcement, not any supposed divine authority or people's conflicting beliefs about scripture. Political order goes back not to divine revelation but to the choice of human authority to enforce one law or another. If we want to understand politics—as well the Bible itself—we need to look to human nature and history.

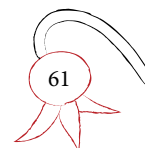
It is human sciences like philology and history that let us read the Bible not as eternally valid divine commands but as clues to the society that created it. In a remarkable moment during the seventeenth century, thinkers like Baruch Spinoza argued along similar lines to Hobbes

¹⁴ For the context and a more detailed presentation of Hobbes's arguments see, Sanders 2009, 19–21.

that we should use the same rules for interpreting the Bible as for other human products such as poetry or art, and in the eighteenth century Robert Lowth, Johann David Michaelis, and Johann Gottfried Herder provided precise new ways to do so: by arguing for a philology guided by new notions of social and historical development.¹⁵

In the following century, both the German philosopher of culture and language Herder and the British bishop Lowth—especially when joined to the insights of his German translator, Michaelis—went further. In compelling essays, they interpreted biblical prophecy and prayer according to human literary convention and as poetry, although the poetry of a remote time and culture whose rules were lost and had to be rediscovered. While the idea of biblical poetry is now taken for granted, with its own handbooks and manuals, it was shocking when first suggested. The shock came from how it humanized divine language: what was once God’s unique and direct word to us was now judged like any other artifacts of human craft. And these artifacts were especially obscure and remote, requiring deciphering by the same secular scholarly techniques applied to any other remains of a far-off time or place.

And so the most productive and powerful interpretive key to the Bible for modern scholarship would turn out to be that search for social context that arose after Milton: the project of classifying the Bible as an artifact of a historically specific kind of human communication. Ancient Hebrew literature was not divine language but a once-common local communicative medium—neither a plainspoken and transparent document nor an eternal revelation coded in an elevated sacred tongue. This historical gulf separating ancient Hebrew from modern European modes of speech makes it alien to the uninformed observer but interpretable by the scholar once the rules of ancient media are understood. If we understand what the Bible is an artifact of, it becomes newly readable and coherent; once it is appropriately categorized, we can finally ask the right questions of it.



¹⁵ For a concrete picture of how this kind of philology worked to create a social picture from ancient texts, see Bauman and Briggs 2003.

A Poetic Society (Part Three)

Biblical Literature as Folk Poetry in the Eighteenth Century

Marvell's worry was prescient. In his lectures of the 1740s, Bishop Robert Lowth hardly thought he was "ruining" the sacred truths, but he persuaded an increasing number of people that they were indeed best understood as "old song." Lowth, and following him Michaelis and Herder, was the first to recognize the Bible's roots in terms of ancient poetry. The "ancient" and "poetry" parts of the category are here so productive because they are combined: the Bible's texts have their distinctive, challenging form because they were designed to speak to different people according to their own conventions. The powerful and cryptic nature of the Bible's expression was—divine origins aside—due to the fact that it was not written for us but rather composed by and meant to address ancient people in their terms. But since they were also human terms, they can be understood. It is not that the Bible's language was illogical but that it followed an ancient Hebrew logic, it spoke *a different type* of language from the sort we speak today, albeit one that we are able to learn. The promise of philology was to make those rules available to everyone so they could understand the codes by which ancient Hebrew speakers communicated and hear the Bible as its creators and intended audience had heard it. As Lowth put it:

We must even investigate their inmost sentiments, the manner and connexion of their thoughts; in one word, we must see all things with their eyes, estimate all things by their opinions: we must endeavor as much as possible to read Hebrew as the Hebrews would have read it ... hearing or delivering the same words, at the same time, and in the same country.¹⁶

This discovery that ancient texts—even sacred ones—follow human cultural rules is arguably the most powerful tool of philology and what unites it with the social sciences. "Lowth's justification for taking up this problematic line of inquiry," Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs write, "is suffused with the spirit of the Enlightenment: he naturalizes the poetry of the Old Testament," just as earlier scholars like Thomas

¹⁶ For this passage and a revealing analysis, see Legaspi 2010, 115.



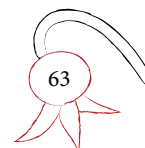
Blackwell had naturalized the poetry of Homer, “and then proceeds to bring it under the aegis of naturalistic, scientific study,” asking why only classical writers like Homer “should be reduced to method and theory” (2003, 109).

The insight that the Bible must be interpreted by the rules of human culture rather than special theological codes has determined how biblical studies uses social theory. It was part of a move from the use of theology to the use of philology to address political questions. It finds precedent in the first truly epochal use of humanist textual scholarship to replace theological claims with historical ones, Lorenzo Valla’s critique of the Donation of Constantine, made as part of his polemic with the Catholic Church.¹⁷ In the fifteenth century he showed that the document used to claim that the emperor Constantine had deeded large swaths of Europe to the Church was a forgery. He used the new concept of anachronism to demonstrate that because the language and modes of expression of the text were later than the Latin of Constantine’s time, it was a fake. Each text belongs first to its historical context and must be first understood according to the conventions of that context. By the same token, every text is best located and understood in the authentic time and culture of its origin.

This essential linkage between texts and cultures—the idea that communication and meaning are historically shaped and embedded—is the discovery underlying all biblical philology in one way or another. It has been so productive because it is so supple in the way it moves outward from a text to a whole world. It recognizes that when the Bible—or any ancient text—speaks a different language, this is not just a matter of deciphering words or sentences. It speaks differently in the broader sense that it has a different set of values and assumptions.

A classic instance of the Hebrew Bible’s literary qualities that reflect different, now-lost, assumptions about language and communication is the repetition so common in biblical poetry. As Jacqueline Vayntrub (2019) shows, these qualities have been understood as artifacts of the misunderstood, more poetic and primitive world that biblical literature came from. Zech 9:9 famously describes the Messiah this way:

¹⁷ On Valla’s method, see Ginzburg 1999.



Rejoice greatly Daughter Zion, and shout out Daughter Jerusalem
For now your king comes to you, vindicated and victorious, Humble
and mounted on an ass (חֲמֹר), on a donkey (עֵיִר), the colt of an
onager (בֶּן־אֶתְנָח).

Each line of Zechariah's prophecy contains an echo, creating a kind of semantic rhythm. This recurrent verbal echo, called "parallelism" by Lowth, was interpreted by scholars as a kind of oral chant typical of verbal performers. In the first line, "shout out" echoes "rejoice," and Daughter Zion and Daughter Jerusalem seem to be two different names for or sides of the same addressee. In the final line, there are two echoes, each phrase building on the previous one: ass, donkey, colt of an onager.

This traditional style poses a challenge for literal readers of the text who may misunderstand the ancient Hebrew assumptions behind it. Without understanding Zechariah's poetic rules, it would seem that the future king is depicted as riding two separate animals (or three if בֶּן־אֶתְנָח is understood separately from עֵיִר). And in fact, this is precisely how some early readers did understand the text in post-Hebrew contexts!

The cryptic image of a king riding two mounts is already suggested in the Septuagint rendering of Zechariah and was adopted in Matt 21:2–7 where it is elaborated into a provocative symbolic act by Jesus, who demands both a donkey and its colt to ride. The image is so distinctive and unusual that Matthew's author actually quotes Zechariah, showing that the point of this paradoxical act is to show that Jesus literally fulfills every word of the prophecy about the Messiah.¹⁸

¹⁸ Already, the Septuagint renders it as two separate animals, with ὑποζύγιον καὶ πῶλον νέον (literally, "riding on a beast of burden and a young foal") presenting the beasts as a pair. The original, common-sense understanding remained, as reflected in Mark 11:2–7, Luke 19:30–35, and John 12:14–16. Of the three, John seeks to reconcile the gap between the common-sense tradition and the literal reading by explaining one term as a variant of another: "And Jesus found a young ass and sat upon it; as it is written, 'Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on an ass's colt!' (πῶλος). His disciples did not understand this at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that this had been written of him and had been done to him." Here, πῶλος is the term used in Mark



This strange reception of biblical poetry is part of a broad phenomenon in early Judaism: “the ‘forgetting’ of parallelism,” as James Kugel calls it (1981, 96). Scholars have long recognized that the rabbis treated poetic parallels as separate statements with separate individual references; as George Gray already noted in 1915: “Rabbis in the second century a.d. misunderstood the parallelism that is characteristic of most of the poetry of the Old Testament” (1915, 19–21). Kugel explains the irony that even as early Jewish poets continued to be able to successfully produce parallelistic poetry for their *own* work, which they of course understood as humanly authored, they interpreted scriptural parallelism in an entirely different way. Because of the limitless significance of divine language, they simply “did not recognize the possibility of re-statement,” assuming that “the slightest details of the biblical text have a meaning that is both comprehensible and significant” (1981, 102, 104).

Breaking from this long theological tradition, Lowth observed that the apparent repetition of topics is in fact one of the defining cultural features of ancient Hebrew poetry, like rhyme or meter in English poetry, and is not really repetition at all.¹⁹ Instead, what he called “parallelism” is a crucial creative mode in ancient poetic diction, found in a variety of poetries (ranging, as Roman Jakobson famously demonstrated [1966] from classical Russian to the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins).



and Luke, while John’s ὀνάριον (“young donkey”) and ὄνος (“donkey”) are more common terms than the Septuagint’s vague “beast of burden.”

¹⁹ While Lowth’s theory of parallelism certainly does not exhaust the features of ancient Hebrew poetry, its continued usefulness is suggested by the fact that even the most detailed recent challenge ends up echoing Lowth’s main observations in perhaps somewhat broader terms as a phenomenon that “restates the point, often using near synonyms, overlapping imagery, sometimes extending the image...” (Holmstedt 2019, 642). Key to the critique is the idea that ancient poetic structures cannot be “parallel” because they can include three phrases, not just two (2016, 623n13-14) but this assumes that only two lines can be parallel (an assumption shared with Dobbs-Allsopp’s lengthier treatment (2015)). Yet “parallel” is widely understood to define “two *or more* lines” (thus Cambridge Dictionary, Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 5th Edition), a widespread phenomenon exemplified in the three parallel lines of the Adidas sportswear logo.

Described by the biblicist James Kugel (1981) as “A, and what’s more, B,” it is a tool for the poet to show the different ways in which one object can be heard and understood. In this way, each line’s increasing intensity and elaboration create a regular pattern, a rhythmic and semantic structure that gives the poem its backbone.

The significance of Lowth’s move went far beyond clarifying a convention that lets us appreciate a poem aesthetically. Unlike Milton, who loved the Bible’s poetry but did not provide a taxonomy of its poetics, Lowth provided insight that also *distances* us from biblical poems by describing in convincing detail what is different about them: there is a rupture between the communicative rules of ancient Israel and the expectations of a modern reader (and, as we have seen with Matthew, later ancient readers as well). But at the same time, it makes it possible to connect the texts to a previously unrecognized ancient culture, the traditional society of Israel, which should henceforth be the dominant context for interpreting it.



When read with Lowth’s new understanding of prophetic speech as poetry, Jesus’s attempt to fulfill Zechariah’s prophecy takes on a challenging cast. Rather than showing how the New Testament completes the Old, it suggests how the New Testament could not possibly complete it. The New Testament could not accurately fulfill biblical prophecy like Zechariah’s because of the cultural gap between first-century Roman Palestine and Persian-period Judah. In his own time, Zechariah was saying something that neither Jesus nor the gospel’s author could have fully understood. And these incommensurable gaps, between ancient Hebrew, Hellenistic Greek, and early modern ways of communicating, are inherent to the changing nature of language and culture. This is how, as Paul Kurtz puts it, “reading texts with an eye to their own history once threw Europe into panic” (2022, 15).

The eighteenth-century discovery of oral poetry had the alienating effect of pulling the testaments apart from each other, and from us, by showing how the Hebrew Bible’s prophecy was anchored in a faraway culture and an older world. Later, ancient Near Eastern discoveries were to confirm Lowth’s and Michaelis’s analyses, showing that parallelism was widespread in Near Eastern poetry and one of the main tools of Israel’s literary ancestors in Syria, where it lay at the heart of Ugaritic

epic as well. But far from being incomprehensible or exotic, this pattern of Hebrew literature was cross-culturally common, fulfilling what Hopkins called “the essential function of poetry, which is to create a relationship between parallel parts (whether those be the verses of a sonnet or the phrases of a psalm) that connect the form of language to its content.”²⁰ At one stroke the discovery of this ancient convention allowed us to see what was obscure and isolated as something comprehensible and widely shared, and to project our understanding into the minds of ancient poets and their audiences.

It was Lowth’s contemporaries Robert Wood, Michaelis, and Herder who took the next step of connecting the form of a literature with the form of a whole society, a step that has remained most decisive for the methodology of biblical studies. Parallelistic poetry went hand in hand with whole poetic cultures: it was not just a way of making and hearing literature, it was an essential trace of a whole vanished stage of civilization. Wood, one of Michaelis’s first readers and major English influences along with Lowth, laid out these concepts in his 1769 publication *An Essay on the Original Genius and Writings of Homer*. There, he wrote that it does not seem to be “given to one and the same Kingdom, to be thoroughly civilized, and afford proper subjects for poetry. The marvelous and wonderful is the nerve of the epic strain. But what marvelous things happen in a well-ordered state?”²¹ The marvelous oral poetry of Homer’s bards and Israelite tribes was a function of their primal state; our well-ordered state could no longer do this. From observing concrete literary forms, scholars like Woods conceptualized a literary type, oral poetry, around which they built whole lost cultures—oral societies.



²⁰ “The artificial part of poetry, perhaps we shall be right to say all artifice, reduces itself to the principle of parallelism. The structure of poetry is that of continuous parallelism, ranging from the technical so-called parallelisms of Hebrew poetry and the antiphons of church music up to the intricacy of Greek or Italian or English verse” (Hopkins 2006, 4:120).

²¹ This discussion draws on the incisive histories in Bauman and Briggs 2003 and Legaspi 2010. For the role of Wood in relationship to biblical studies, see Sanders 2009, 22–25.

Ancient oral-tribal societies such as those that had produced the *Iliad* and Hebrew Bible were thought to be characterized by forms of knowledge that were uncertain but took emotionally compelling communicative form: such societies believed not in history or philosophy but in tradition, which they expressed best in poetry. By contrast with such old-fashioned poetic societies, more advanced, civilized societies communicate through prose and oratory and know things more rationally through history and philosophy. Michaelis contrasted the poetic immediacy of Hebrew and other ancient Semitic languages like Arabic with the lengthy prose narrative and oratory of advanced societies like ancient Greece or Rome, or modern Germany or England.

Scholars began to understand the Hebrew Bible's distinct mode of poetry-making as not just a literary convention but also a key to the whole traditional worldview and oral society that produced it:



Eloquence, as I will show, is the daughter of free cities, which tends to be born late, in nations which are trained in all sciences, where skillful men, well versed in literary eloquence, plead copiously and hold forth on political matters, not with short propositions but in long orations. (Michaelis's commentary on Lowth cited in Legaspi 2010, 124)

This evolutionist social typology held out a promise for biblical scholars: if a specific developmental stage of culture produced a specific type of literature, then we could also reverse-engineer the process, placing each type of literature in the Hebrew Bible back into its appropriate historical layer.

But orality was thought to hold the key. The most creative culture, the one that produced the most vital biblical poetry and prophecy, was understood to be of the same preliterate type that produced Homer, as well as the striking poetry of other similar tribal societies: a world of bards and singers of tales. In Wood's typology, oral societies were organized by natural, family, or tribal forms of association, their behavior was characterized by passion, and their media were dominated by the use of memory and performance as their main means of communication. By contrast, the supposedly more advanced societies of modern Europe were characterized by complex political agreements and rational understanding. Their primary media were writing and book learning, which

were seen as later layers that could give us access to the oral originals but also that potentially distorted and obscured them.

Biblical Literature as Folk Poetry in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Connecting philology with social theory made new possibilities out of old problems, to the extent that the very obscurity of biblical texts could itself become a clue. The anonymity of most biblical authorship, the lack of colophons, signatures, or archives that would give direct testimony as to when or why most of its texts were written had previously made its context a daunting obstacle, comparable to the “Homeric Question” in Classics.²² And linking textual form to social form using compelling examples from Homer to contemporary Bedouin groups let the concept of “orality” bridge what seemed an insurmountable gap. Anonymous collective authorship or mythical attribution to legend-shrouded figures from Moses to Isaiah themselves became data that could be used to recreate the lifeways and social context behind a text in its near-total absence.

The new explanatory power of connecting modes of textual creation with types of culture would first become enshrined as form criticism in the work of Hermann Gunkel, but it has remained biblical studies’ most important way of doing theory.²³ Gunkel (1933) created a typo-



²² For the concept of the Homeric Question and one type of solution, see Nagy 1996. For the ways that biblical texts’ anonymous presentation or self-presentation were paired with modern social theory and used as a clue to their origins, see Vayntrub 2019.

²³ Gunkel’s own definition of historical criticism is more aspirational and ideological than descriptive. Making a claim to its role as the queen of the sciences, which Kurtz (2022) shows to be typical of German scholars of his era, he argued that *Kritik* was the “art of judging, distinguishing, and separating,” “the fundamental activity of every scientific, especially historical, research” (1912, 1780–81, as translated and discussed in Kurtz 2022, 20). Of course, as in other areas of intellectual history, it can be at least as revealing to base an account of Gunkel’s method on looking at what he actually did in his work.

logy for the Psalms arguing that you could connect each major biblical genre to its actual social context by looking for literary markers. Some psalms belonged to the Temple, others to the royal court, others to private use. Gunkel's analysis of the Psalms was then built on by scholars such as Sigmund Mowinckel (1961), who reconstructed even more specific ritual settings for each psalm. For Mowinckel (1952), the rituals of Deuteronomy also found their social function in a rite of tribal unity called a "covenant renewal ceremony," which was the central cultural form for a political entity, the twelve-tribe amphictyony, reconstructed by Martin Noth (1930) from biblical tribal lists.

The notion that each genre of Hebrew text had a predictable role in tribal life implied a one-to-one correspondence between literary form and social context. This assumption became enshrined in terms like *Sitz im Leben* ("role in [social] life"). This term could take on mystifying, almost pseudoscientific connotations, implying that each piece of Hebrew literature had one and only one corresponding context.²⁴

The productivity of the oral literature-tribal society connection continues to extend far beyond the life of Gunkel's form criticism. It powerfully influenced American biblical studies in the second half of the twentieth century in the work of the polymath Frank Moore Cross, whose 1973 study "The Cultus of the Israelite League" attempted to update and solidify the social implications of the previous generation's philology (1973, 77–144). Serious critique emerged in works such as those of Susan Niditch (1996) and David Carr (2005), who no longer accepted the assumption of a one-to-one relationship between literary and social forms. Yet both preserve the notion of an "oral world," to use a book title of Niditch's, even as they admit the intertwined influence of writing. The old divide between a traditional, oral society and a bureaucratic, literate one has collapsed, leaving scholars to imagine a social world where no particular set of features can be assumed to dominate. But as Vayntrub points out, echoes of the developmentalist

²⁴ For a brief but constructive critique, see Rofé 2009, which shows how any socially meaningful ancient text is likely to take on more than one role in social life over the course of its history.



framework tend to remain, including in the assumption—already found in Wood—that poetry preceded prose (2019, 22).

A Prosaic Society: Biblical Literature as Scribal Culture (Part Four)

But not all ancient Hebrew literature was tribal poetry: someone wrote it down, composed prose narratives as well as poems, and edited it—and scholars were well aware of this. In fact, the most distinctive problems that the Hebrew Bible posed involved distinctively written features. So a very different thread began when the theory of form–society correspondence was applied to biblical genres other than poetry. Beyond looking for bardic performers, scholars also combed Hebrew literature for clues to the expert writers who shaped it, leading to an expansion in explanatory power. The Pentateuch's prose narrative and laws had long posed interpretive problems because of their large swaths of repetition and contradiction, as if they had been pieced together in a collage. Why did it retell the stories of the creation, Abraham's adventures, the Exodus, and the wilderness wanderings in such elaborate and conflicting ways?

Since the eighteenth century, scholars have noted a problem that went far beyond the orality hypothesis, namely, that different versions of the Pentateuch's narratives had distinct personalities, showing more in common with each other than with the other versions of the same story that now accompanied them. And some of these threads did not evoke oral performance at all. Genesis 1–2:4a's creation, with its aloof divine architect Elohim, who created the world with his words alone in an orderly ritual, contrasted sharply with the alternative creation that immediately followed it, starring the irritable and jealous Yahweh who handcrafted humans in Genesis 2–3. The first story's focus on ritual order appeared again in parts of Genesis and Exodus, then took over completely for the book of Leviticus. Precisely calculated, showing careful attention to detail, and systematic, the thinking behind Leviticus, which scholars termed "Priestly" could hardly be farther from the marvelous but disorderly world of oral poetry.

The repetitions of the Pentateuch revealed not an oral world but a written one. Connected with other puzzling features immanent in



biblical narrative and law, they began to seem like clues to a very different kind of society than the repetitions of the Psalms and the prophets. And so scholars such as Wilhelm de Wette and Julius Wellhausen argued that as incoherent as the contradictions and large-scale coherences of the Pentateuch might seem, they too made sense when their social nature was understood. Israel may have begun as a traditional tribal society, producing authentic folk literature, but transformed when this patrimony fell into the hands of court and Temple intellectuals. This transformation was tied to a culture that had become rule-focused. Philological analysis now showed not a primitive oral culture but a complex scribal culture behind the Hebrew Bible. Wellhausen wrote that the technology of writing was key to the transformation of Hebrew literature and the Hebrew spirit:



When it is recognized that *the canon* is what distinguishes Judaism from ancient Israel, it is recognized at the same time that what distinguishes Judaism from ancient Israel is *the written Torah*. The water which in old times rose from a spring, the Epigoni stored up in cisterns. (Wellhausen 1885, 410)

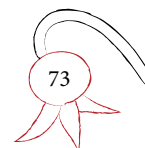
The folk literature that scholars from Lowth to Gunkel identified as the source of the Hebrew Bible's distinctive genius now began to recede to a "pre-literary" stage, providing raw material for very literary editing. This was evident in studies such as Noth's *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch* (1948), which began to treat the texts as evidence of learned literary reconfiguring of originally tribal narratives such as the conquest stories of Joshua and Judges. Noth agreed with Gunkel and Lowth that there were relics of folk poetry in the Bible, but he argued that the traditions had gone through a long process of literary editing. It was only by reverse-engineering this detailed process of writing—by following the scribes, as it were—that we could understand how these traditions developed.

The next step in Europe, moving the vision of the Hebrew Bible's literary history to a written one, was taken by Rolf Rendtorff (1977). He argued that the process Noth saw as pre-literary should itself be visible in the Pentateuch's literary remains. Adopting but transforming Gunkel's assumption that small-scale, simple stages of society communicated in

small-scale, simple forms of communication, Rendtorff applied it to the work of learned scribes rather than oral storytellers. He developed a methodology of breaking down Hebrew narratives of the Pentateuch into “minimal units,” the smallest coherent passages or scenes. Today, the debate on the sources and composition of biblical narrative continues between two basically scribal poles: the non-documentarians, who tend to see more fine-grained written sources and layers, and the documentarians, who see whole extended written sources.²⁵

Meanwhile, in American scholarship John Van Seters argued that biblical patriarchal narrative did not tell us about a tribal society but illuminated how scribes talked about their past. He attacked the notion of ancient folk tradition in his 1975 *Abraham in History and Tradition*: rather than something one could trace and verify historically, literary traditions such as those of Abraham were really impossible to connect to early sources. Far from a “history of traditions,” such traditions were in conflict with history.

This move toward seeing the world of the Hebrew Bible from the viewpoint of those who physically wrote down and copied it meant that the ancient Israel most clearly visible from the Hebrew literature was a scribal culture. That the world directly behind the Bible was an intellectual and literary one more than a folk or tribal one could be supported by comparing the extensive evidence—hundreds of thousands of bureaucratic tablets—of the complex, large-scale imperial societies of Mesopotamia. From elementary education to complex literary works, every stage of Mesopotamian scribal training was preserved in cuneiform. This corpus gave scholars a three-dimensional view of a whole subculture of writers across nearly three thousand years of ancient Near Eastern history. Just as the parallelistic epics from Ugarit with their calls to the audience could evoke a world of oral performance, so too the educational material from Mesopotamia now evoked a world of literary composition and copying.



²⁵ For a survey and points of convergence, see Sanders et al. 2023.

Elite Scribal Culture or Popular Collective Memory? (Part Five)

But the early twenty-first century's reconstructed world of literary intellectuals was lonely. If, as Karel van Der Toorn wrote, in his 2007 *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, “scribes wrote for scribes,” how did they gain a broader audience? After all, the Hebrew Bible was later claimed as not just the central text but the early autobiography and spiritual foundation of not one but two different religions. And if the society directly behind the Bible was an isolated and refined elite one, with no clear connection to popular culture or sentiment, how could it represent the life and history of Israel? For a century, biblical studies had focused on the role of the “community” of Israel, Judah, and early Judaism to whom the creeds, laments, and covenant rituals had been addressed.



The new sustained focus on a written world—the tools of script, education, and memorization—by scholars like William Schniedewind (2004, 2019, 2023), who developed the works of Carr (2005) and Van der Toorn (2007), honed in on reconstructing a fuller and more detailed picture of a professional class. But it did not directly address why people beyond this small, highly literate group came to care about these texts. “Israel” as a society, the broader community these texts represented and addressed, or at least imagined, seemed to recede.

If the culture of the Bible was the culture of narrow scribal elites, how did it connect with any broader culture of Judah or Israel? One of the more distinctive features of texts in the Hebrew Bible—and thus presumably of the scribal society that would have created it—was the varied, fragmentary, and often conflicting ways in which it narrated its past. One conclusion that remained from the nineteenth-century tribal-oral view that virtually every critical scholar agreed on—from historians and archaeologists to form and source critics—was that Hebrew accounts of the past were not coherent or rational in the ways modern historians might expect. The older picture of the Bible as reflecting a folk culture, with its varied history of oral traditions, had fit this diversity well.

But in the twenty-first century scholars began to describe scribal culture in ways that echoed the old picture of traditional oral culture, removing the boundaries that earlier biblical studies had depended on to reconstruct two chronologically distinct and typologically contrasting stages of ancient Israel's development. This allowed them to harmonize the formerly contrasting textual features of "orality" and "literacy." Features that had been ascribed to "oral society," such as a reliance on memory as opposed to written records, or communication through real-time performance rather than writing and reading material objects, were folded into a now seemingly all-encompassing scribal culture.²⁶

Key to bridging the apparent gap between the durable edited products of small groups of elite writers and the unwritten experience of a broader nonliterate society was the concept of "collective memory." The Bible's varied and sometimes contradictory written accounts of Israel's past no longer represented later edited versions of different oral traditions that scribes had fixed in textual form. Instead, scribal products could be in and of themselves directly identified as group memories. This was a powerful new solution to the old goal expressed by Lowth of investigating Israelites' "innermost sentiments," since we could literally read their memories on the pages of the Bible—a shortcut into the collective head of Israelite society.²⁷

Scholars found a pathway from edited texts into the collective mind of ancient Israel in the concepts of a sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs. Halbwachs was a member of the vital school of French sociology that had formed around Émile Durkheim in the first decades of the



²⁶ An early emblem of this unification of what had been opposites was Raymond Person's 1998 "The Ancient Israelite Scribe as Performer" with its merging of orality and literacy, spontaneous performance, and the crafting of durable written objects.

²⁷ A concern expressed incisively by Andrew Tobolowsky when he cautions against using the idea of collective memory to avoid investigation of the composition and historical embeddedness of ancient Hebrew literature, when "the concept of collective memory is used *as if* it were only a contemporaneous means of arriving, once again, at conclusions like Noth's and Cross's," namely that archaic biblical poetry provides direct access to Early Iron Age Hebrew culture (2023, 12 n. 38).

twentieth century, a school that went far beyond the one-to-one connection between literary and social form that had inspired eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German and English scholars. Durkheim's group included such original thinkers as Marcel Mauss and Robert Hertz, each of whom made unique creative contributions in the area of social action, not just literary study. These included forms of giving and exchange, physical habits and body techniques, and the social shape of death.²⁸ Halbwachs's work makes the most sense in this context of investigations into the vitality and creativity of human social life beyond written texts. Halbwachs's goal was to provide a more three-dimensional version of Durkheim's account of how societies reconstitute themselves through rituals that embody shared ideas, which Durkheim called "collective representations." Those collective representations included the building blocks of the social world such as gods and the people itself, and Halbwachs's "question was how they could continue to shape society during those periods between ritual performances which constituted most of daily life. His solution was that collective representations were transmitted across time in shared images of the past that groups held in common, which he called collective memory."²⁹ These images appeared in everything from individual dreams to widely repeated stories.

The idea of collective memory seemed to solve the problem of the gap between written texts and a mostly nonliterate society because it was imagined as being widely shared, present in people's minds and reg-



²⁸ On body techniques, see Mauss 1973 (1934); on the gift, see Mauss 2016 (1924); on death, see Hertz 1960 (1907).

²⁹ Halbwachs 1992, 47 (in the "Introduction" written by Lewis A. Coser). The work gathered in this volume is a selection of essays that appeared in 1925 and 1941. Halbwachs did not invent the concept of collective memory out of whole cloth but explicitly drew on prior thinkers, including the phenomenologist Henri Bergson, who had defined two kinds of memory: a more objective and disinterested historical one, and a more "interested" and socially engaged but therefore more malleable and less reliable one. This distinction echoes Friedrich Nietzsche's (1980 [1874]) ambivalent evaluation in his *Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, history here meaning a critical assessment of past events rather than a biased and ideologically motivated but inspiring account that could actually move people to action.

ularly emerging to drive people's behavior. It did not inhere in religious texts or rituals themselves (after all, Durkheim had already explained the role of those) but, for example, in how people *talked about* those religious practices. "Ritual," Halbwachs wrote, "is fixed, corresponding to a written text, and memory is the interpretation of the fixed ritual that makes it meaningful again" (1992, 117) Like all forms of collective memory, religious memory really exists only in human thought and action, the shared frameworks they use to act together. As human memory, it is not contained in physical artifacts though it is inseparable from them since they serve as its landmarks and triggers: social memory "does not preserve the past but reconstructs it *with the aid of the material traces, rites, texts, and traditions* left behind by that past," (1992, 119).

The problem is that Halbwachs was mostly not talking about texts. As befits an attempt to complete Durkheim's theory of human belonging, Halbwachs' account is broad and focuses not on written objects at all, but patterns of conversation. Society coheres insofar as all its members can regularly refer to a shared past when they talk with each other: "it follows that social thought is essentially a memory and that its entire content consists only of collective recollections of remembrances." (1992:189) Its dominant features are active, pervading public life and activity—hardly things locked away in a written archive. Collective memory does not include isolated or inaccessible documents but "only those recollections subsist that in every period society, working within its present-day frameworks, can reconstruct." (1992:189).

Despite the fact that Halbwachs defined his social memory in contrast to a set of canonical texts, biblical scholarship applied it to nothing but canonical texts, adopting the concept of collective memory as a way of addressing the problems that had arisen in applying its main social theory to the Hebrew Bible. Collective memory could be used to bridge the gap between the isolated and inaccessible work of elite scribes and the majority-nonliterate society of the ancient Levant, as well as the apparent historical inaccuracy of that work.³⁰ Mark Smith describes this



³⁰ As my PhD student Aron Tillema noted, this theoretical move seems like a natural response to help bridge the gap between isolated scribes and the collective

redefinition as a “paradigm shift” to treat the Hebrew Bible as containing not historical records but memories: “First and foremost, the Bible does not simply record fact or fiction, history or literature ... Instead, many biblical texts might be better characterized as constituting the record of Israel’s cultural memory” (2004, 131).

In addition to fitting awkwardly with Halbwachs’s concept of memory, which was mainly anchored in human discourse rather than canonical texts, the new framing of biblical studies’ old social theory still echoes certain eighteenth-century concepts: the recent use of “memory” in many ways still follows the older use of “tradition” in biblical studies. For example, Smith sometimes uses the terms interchangeably as when he applies the notion of memory to biblical traditions about locally significant places: “Similarly, how Moses was remembered likely varied, depending on the local traditions associated with him at various sites” (2004, 134).³¹ Indeed, in work on memory very similar recent arguments about a topic like the Exodus are framed in terms of either “memory” or “tradition,” as when Ronald Hendel and Nadav Na’aman both discuss the biblical account of the Exodus as representing traditions about the historical Late Bronze Age Egyptian withdrawal from Canaan, which were transformed into a literary account of a Middle Bronze Age Israelite withdrawal from Egypt.³²



public implied in the concept of “scribal” (as opposed to, say, Judahite) culture (personal communication September 2020).

³¹ Note that Halbwachs himself already made similar interchanges between “memory” and “tradition” in his analysis of the geography of the Gospels. ... Smith emphasizes the role of place in memory: “For those sites that did not survive, the memory of Moses at such places would not have remained in competition. One dominant view of Moses in the Bible seems to be his status as super-prophet and conveyor of Torah, which apparently shows the stamp of northern Israelite prophetic circles and the circles that produced Deuteronomy” (2004, 135). This leaves open the question of how the memories of Moses in northern Israel—surely a site that did not survive!—were stamped on the Pentateuch.

³² Compare Hendel 2001 with Na’aman 2011. Na’aman, unlike Smith and Hendel, does not claim we have direct access to Israelite collective memory: “The great difficulty,” he points out, “in discussing Israelite collective memory is the early date in which it was shaped. It was first molded through oral tradition at a stage

The Communicative Contexts of Ancient Hebrew Literature: The Search for Sites of Memory (Part Six)

One of Halbwachs's most powerful insights—albeit one difficult to pursue in purely literary investigations—was about the special relationship between memory and physical space: he saw active social memory as more than a purely cerebral, internal activity but one that people produce in specific places in relationship to things they see that trigger or facilitate recollections. Some biblical scholars continue to emphasize this relationship between place and memory, which could be investigated through the archaeological study of material traces of place. As we will see, Daniel Pioske (2015, 2018) has demonstrated that certain particular literary accounts of events and places in Samuel can be investigated in this way because they vary depending on whether their locales can be shown to have been still visible in the Early or Late Iron Age—a powerful argument that material connections to place did indeed convey and trigger different types of culture and narrative.

Smith reflects on the broader difficulties of reading a physically located collective memory into competing literary accounts when no material traces are preserved for us. In the end, the dominant note is indeterminacy. He writes that the

variety in witnesses about Sinai and the revelation that took place there shows an ongoing discussion ... over which and whose collective memory and religious norms were to be championed. In the end, the text functions as a sort of compromise document that preserves both the older traditions of Exodus and later interpretations emerging from priestly and Deuteronomic circles ... all enshrined in Israel's collective memory of the foundational events at Mount Sinai. (Smith 2004, 141)

Such a site of collective memory could erase the gap, discussed by scholars from Noth to Na'aman, between unwritten oral traditions

that antedated by hundreds of years the emergence of biblical historiography, leaving behind no written sources by which it can be examined" (2011, 63).



and scribal documents, if only we could locate it. The older concept of “tradition” was understood to constitute specific, coherent pre-literary narratives. In this case the “memory” of all of Israel appears completely blurred with the intricate layers of an edited document of uncertain provenance and readership.

Here we see a recurring problem in identifying the edited literary products of a small group with the mind of a historically specific group of people: the question of audience, reception, and power. Without some contemporary data—whether on the basic level of book history, of the copying and distribution of physical manuscripts, or on the physical level of the sites of material production, reception, and use—how do we know which people accepted these scribal artifacts as the internal products of their own minds?



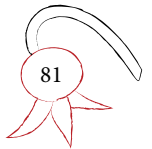
Can we disentangle the conditions under which these apparent memories were created, finding for whom and to what extent these crafted literary works were authentically “collective” memories, as opposed to narrower, top-down attempts to influence people’s views of themselves? A modern case offers some answers about the extent to which a curated set of texts or images can represent an organic collective “memory.” Classic studies of modern Israel and Palestine have investigated sites where what is presented as a natural group memory is the result of deliberate creative political work (which could equally be termed propaganda) developed by interested parties as part of a project of shaping group consciousness. Yael Zerubavel’s *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* offers a critical view on the creation of collective memory as what Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger term an “invented tradition.”³³ Similarly, Susan Slyomovics’s *The Object of Memory: Arab and Jew Narrate the Palestinian Village* (1998) offers a multi-perspective view of the erasure of the Palestinian village of Ein Houd, the displacement of its inhabitants to a nearby housing project in view of their original village, and its replacement by an Israeli

³³ For the concept of invented tradition, which may provide one of the most useful counterproposals to the idea of collective memory, see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983.

artist colony. She describes two opposing collective memories created under violently different conditions.

From better documented present-day examples, we can see the danger of uncritically accepting the concept of a general, transhistorical collective memory or cultural memory that can erase the specific historical contexts, political agendas, and coercion that may go into its creation. If some of the biblical treatments assume an organic, even hive-like collective that is doing the remembering, they may be working to naturalize one dominant group's account of history. At an extreme, if the idea of a unified collective memory is naturalized, it could become difficult to distinguish in practice from the Jungian concept of race memory with its authoritarian assumption that every real group shares the same thoughts.

In awareness of this danger of one particular dominant faction monopolizing a group's past, writers such as Zerubavel suggest that alternative collective memories do arise, which she terms "counter-memories," citing Michel Foucault.³⁴ But the concept of counter-memory has a problematic foundation. Its sole source seems to be a single paragraph in Foucault's *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*.³⁵ And its current



³⁴ Among the useful points in Zerubavel's critique of invented traditions in modern Israel is her emphasis on ways that official versions of the past can often be disputed. She refers to these alternative versions of the past as "counter-memories," telling the reader to "see" Foucault 1977 (without a page number, implying the topic is discussed throughout the book). But Foucault only mentions "counter-memory" on a single page (160) in a provocative but tantalizingly brief discussion that is not clearly set up or developed. In any event, Zerubavel's use of counter-memory in her book to mean "competing memory" or "memorial that contests the mainstream one" seems to have little to do with Foucault's. Similarly, Natalie Zemon Davis and Randolph Starn's introduction to the special 1989 "Memory and Counter-Memory" issue of *Representations* gives the suggestion to "see Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* ... , esp. 139–64," where the reader will find no mention of the concept on twenty-four of those pages.

³⁵ As the Foucault scholar Niki Kasumi Clements emphasizes, in the original French of this text the term "contre-mémoire" is used in a destructive way, and Foucault even concludes his essay with the idea of the "déstruction du sujet de connaissance," another indication of how harsh his critique of any monophonic

use in writers like Zerubavel is different from and less pointed than Foucault's own, as well as that of Foucault's stated inspiration, an essay of Nietzsche's that is starkly critical of the value of any official or public memory at all. In fact, Foucault deploys counter-memory in a way that contests the very idea of collective memory. Foucault intended counter-memory to question the validity of any single narrative history, and it may thereby offer a more fruitful potential for critiquing and rethinking the problematic concept of collective memory.

Beyond Bards and Scribes: Putting Biblical Studies' Social Theory in Dialogue with New Discoveries (Part Seven)



So far, we have explored both the remarkable productivity and limits of biblical studies' main social theory, from orality to scribalism and from tradition to memory. The assumption that literary form lets you reconstruct cultural form led to a binary contrast between two kinds of society based on two dominant modes of communication: an early oral tribal and a later literate bureaucratic scribal culture, with the earlier defined by poetry and the later defined by prose. By the end of the twentieth century, the analytical distinction undergirding this binary collapsed once its evolutionist assumptions were challenged. But in place of developing new analytical tools, scholars instead harmonized the two contrasting concepts, arguing that they equally explained the same texts via a single reconstructed oral-literate society. And as we have seen, the concept of a whole culture's broadly circulating "collective memory" does not actually cohere well with a set of narrowly circulated scribal texts.

memory is and an homage to Nietzsche. It is "not about an 'alternative collective memory' but about breaking down the conceit of a singular history or narrative." Counter-memory is not just another form of collective memory, because part of its nature is to transgress collective norms and social formations (personal communication September 2021).

But the idea that forms of communication are historically and culturally embedded remains an essential insight. Rather, what the critiques of cultural evolutionism that we reviewed here showed was that communicative form is complex and bears more than one relationship to social context. How can we *investigate* rather than *assume* the relationship between the attested qualities of a text and the ancient socio-communicative situation that produced it?

We will now explore two case studies that pose communicative context as a research question rather than an *a priori* assumption about oral or literate societies. To do so, they focus on a narrow corpus of linguistic material and a tightly delimited set of related material evidence to create a dialogue between written messages and archaeologically excavated material evidence of their related communicative situations. One example is from the Late Bronze Age archive of Hittite literature, the other from Iron Age Jerusalem.

In their 2016 study entitled “Memorization and Hittite Ritual: New Perspectives on the Transmission of Hittite Ritual Texts,” Hannah Marcuson and Theo van den Hout point out that scholars have tended to stereotype rather than investigate the differing communicative modes of ancient Near Eastern scribes, leading to a narrow focus on “copying traditions, scribal schools, and redaction.” In the case of Hittite ritual, the assumption has been that each group of scribes began with an original written “master copy” of a given text, which they consciously modified “in various ways over the years, resulting in differing texts that might themselves then exist in multiple copies” (Marcuson and Van den Hout 2015, 145). To investigate this assumption, they look more closely at a set of two ritual text-traditions from Late Bronze Age Hattuša (the capital of the Hittite empire) whose purpose has been characterized as “scribal,” and then demonstrate that they were probably not created by scribes at all.

In contrast to Hittite annals from the same time and place, which show strong evidence of visual copying, the ritual texts show just those sorts of variants that Paul Delnero (2012) identifies as “memory” in the Old Babylonian Sumerian curriculum. But unlike Sumerian scribes, who often seemed to use both memory and vision to copy, in this case it is unlikely that the scribes were the ones doing the remembering.



Instead, as Marcuson and Van den Hout show, the texts, which are attributed to named ritual experts sometimes titled “The Old Woman,” seem to have been created from memory in a few separate individual instances, set down in cuneiform by dictation, and then transmitted by visual copying of tablets: “It seems as though a text was written from memory, and/or composed, producing [one *Vorlage*] ... and then that tablet was copied by eye, producing the near-identical exemplars. The text was also produced from memory separately, creating a variant version, and copied again, resulting in [a different, second *Vorlage*]” (Marcuson and Van den Hout 2015, 163). This fresh picture of textual creation and transmission gives “credit to the declared authors of these texts, the ritual practitioners, many of whom are female, and none of whom appear to have been literate” (Marcuson and Van den Hout 2015, 167). These “Old Women” worked regularly with scribes to create a distinct genre of textual tradition driven by *multiple types* of participants and transmission methods.



If there is enough material evidence to locate specific places and ways in which ancient Hittite communication was shaped, can we investigate ancient Hebrew communication in the same way? Pioske demonstrates that under some circumstances we can, if we ask the right questions of the material evidence. In particular, Pioske has carried out a series of investigations into what sites were available to ancient Hebrew writers to remember during the Late Iron Age, and asked how the literary representations compare with the sites themselves.

Pioske synthesizes archaeological findings to literally put literature in its place, showing how Jerusalem remained salient and physically present to the Hebrew writers who worked in its vicinity through the end of the Iron Age but that it was regularly transformed over the centuries. Here, certain features attributed to David’s Jerusalem, such as its agrarian character and the limited stronghold location that preceded David’s conquest of the site (2 Sam 5:6–9), fit with memories and the still-available material remains of the early tenth-century BCE settlement.

In the passages Pioske analyzes, we find not the luxuriant Jerusalem of the Chronicler but a simple highland settlement enclosing a מצדה, or citadel, and that, after its takeover by David, had few building pro-

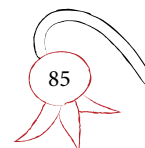
jects enacted within it other than alterations to its preexisting Jebusite fortress (2015, 232). Conversations with locals beyond a narrow circle of scribes would have evoked the recollections and background information that went into the learned scribal accounts of David's Jerusalem. Meanwhile equally important Early Iron Age sites can be shown to have been remembered or erased depending on whether they were preserved through the Late Iron Age like Jerusalem or abandoned. This, Pioske (2018) shows, is true of Khirbet Qeiyafa, Tel Masos, Khirbet en-Nahas, Khirbet ed-Dawwara, Tel Rehov, and Tell Wasil.

If the Hittite evidence let Marcuson and Van den Hout separate out two specific communicative situations—verbal performance from memory and visual copying—with two different categories of participants, nonliterate, mostly female ritual experts and mostly male scribes, the Hebrew evidence let Pioske differentiate between at least two different communicative situations as well. In the first of Pioske's cases, physical sites like certain Iron Age remains of Jerusalem were still visible to be talked about and triggered specific verbal recollections of the material features of the sites, which were then fixed in written form by scribes. In the second, the sites no longer remained and faded from salience.

The Hittite and Judahite case studies suggest something interesting about the social theory of biblical literature. The idea that communicative form is related to social form is vindicated but transformed. It is true but has been deployed in too rigid and oversimplified a way. Introduced into a richer dialogue with more diverse evidence, it gains in detail and explanatory power: each of the communicative contexts that these studies plausibly reconstructed, there was more than one mode of communication and more than one type of participant.

Of the four situations identified, it is only Pioske's first that corresponds well to a social "collective memory" in which scribes picked up accounts of the past from other locals. In the other cases, gender, social role, and physical space each played a decisive part, a part that *could not have been predicted* merely from the general type of text or society in question.

The underlying social theory of biblical studies is still vital, but it must be reconceived in order to work with our actual data. The preceding case



studies suggest a key area to reimagine it: the eighteenth-century model imagined the production of culture centered around two opposite stereotypical agents, the bard and the scribe. The evidence that Marcuson and Van den Hout and Pioske analyze requires that we imagine further kinds of agents outside of the stereotyped two—these could include on the one hand, ritual experts like the Old Woman, and, on the other hand, the community that guided the scribes of Samuel, showing them what they remembered.

Beyond this, we can expand the power and precision of our theorizing by introducing appropriate new models of creation. This may include, on the one hand, the most widespread and well-documented image of literary creativity, the weaver or joiner, an image evoked by the first known author in history, the Sumerian poetess Enheduanna, a model uniquely suited to explain the literary texture of the Pentateuch, Psalms, Proverbs, and prophetic books,³⁶ and, on the other hand, it may include new models of the community to which Hebrew literature was addressed: to explain how biblical literature reached an audience beyond the scribes, it could be said that they had a *public*, a community brought into being by the circulation of texts.³⁷



Conclusion

Since the eighteenth century, biblical studies has relied on a persistent but mostly unacknowledged social theory, which posits that literary form reflects social form. This theory has produced contradictory results, reconstructing oral or literary texts from tribal or scribal groups from the same data. Terms like “collective memory” tend to repackage the eighteenth-century ideology under new labels, flattening the contradictions inherent in the theory’s eighteenth-century form.

³⁶ For the cross-cultural prevalence of the weaver or joiner, see Helle 2019; for the co-creation of Enheduanna’s role as author in Sumerian literature, see Helle 2020; and for the appropriateness of this model for aspects of biblical literature, see Sanders 2023.

³⁷ For the theory, see Warner 2002. For its relevance to Hebrew literature, see Sanders 2009.

But putting the social theory into dialogue with the past century of discovery lets us renew it. We can use the rich new archaeological and textual resources at our disposal to investigate communicative context empirically. Asking the right questions of material evidence and its textual representation allows us to differentiate multiple communicative situations and agents, from scribes who worked as copyists and female ritual experts who generated texts creatively, to the triggers of memory at material sites that spur new scribal creativity. The social theory of biblical literature turns out to be most effective as a way to *pose research questions* about the connections between literary and social form, rather than as a way of predicting their answers.

Bibliography



- Barton, John. 1998. "Historical-Critical Approaches." In *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, edited by John Barton, 9–20. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bauman, Richard, and Charles Briggs. 2003. *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bloom, Harold. 1989. *Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Carr, David McLain. 2005. *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cooper, Jerrold S. 1992. "Babbling On: Recovering Mesopotamian Orality." In *Mesopotamian Epic Literature: Oral or Aural?* edited by Marianna E. Vogelzang and H. L. J. Vanstiphout, 103–22. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Cross, Frank Moore. 1973. *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Davis, Natalie Zemon, and Randolph Starn. 1989. "Introduction." *Representations* 26: 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928519>.
- Delnero, Paul. 2012. "Memorization and the Transmission of Sumerian Literary Compositions." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 71, no. 2: 189–208. <https://doi.org/10.1086/666645>.
- Dobbs-Allsopp, F. W. 2015. *On Biblical Poetry*. Oxford University Press.

- Emberling, Geoff, ed. 2016. *Social Theory in Archaeology and Ancient History: The Present and Future of Counternarratives*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Finkelstein, Israel, and Nadav Na'aman. 1994. *From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeological and Historical Aspects of Early Israel*. Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. 1999. *History, Rhetoric, and Proof*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England for Brandeis University Press.
- Gray, George Buchanan. 1915. *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Gunkel, Hermann. 1912. *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch in gemeinverständlicher Darstellung*, vol. 3. Edited by Friedrich Michael Schiele and Leopold Zscharnack. Tübingen: Mohr.
- Gunkel, Hermann. 1933. *Einleitung in die Psalmen: Die Gattungen der Religiösen Lyrik Israels*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Helle, Sophus. 2019. "What Is an Author? Old Answers to a New Question." *Modern Language Quarterly* 80, no. 2: 113–39. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-7368183>.
- Helle, Sophus. 2020. "The Birth of the Author: Co-creating Authorship in Enheduana's Exaltation." *Orbis Litterarum* 75, no. 2: 55–72. <https://doi.org/10.1111/oli.12250>.
- Hendel, Ronald. 2001. "The Exodus in Biblical Memory." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120, no. 4: 601–22. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3268262>.
- Hertz, Robert. 1960 (1907). *Death and the Right Hand*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Hillers, Delbert R., and Marsh McCall Jr. 1976. "Homeric Dictated Texts: A Reexamination of Some Near Eastern Evidence." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 80: 19–23. <https://doi.org/10.2307/311230>.
- Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terence Ranger, eds. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Holmstedt, Robert D. 2019. "Hebrew Poetry and the Appositive Style: Parallelism, Requiescat in Pace." *Vetus Testamentum* 69, 4–5: 617–48. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685330-12341379>.
- Hopkins, Gerard Manley. 2006. *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Edited by Lesley Higgins and Michael F. Suarez. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jakobson, Roman. 1966. "Grammatical Parallelism and Its Russian Facet." *Language* 42, no. 2: 399–429. <https://doi.org/10.2307/411699>.



- Kantorowicz, Ernst. 1957. *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Koch, Ido, Oded Lipschits, and Omer Sergi. 2023. *From Nomadism to Monarchy? Revisiting the Early Iron Age Southern Levant*. University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns.
- Kugel, James L. 1981. *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Kurtz, Paul Michael. 2021. "The Philological Apparatus: Science, Text, and Nation in the Nineteenth Century." *Critical Inquiry* 47, no. 4: 747–76. <https://doi.org/10.1086/714541>.
- Kurtz, Paul Michael. 2022. "A Historical, Critical Retrospective on Historical Criticism." In *The New Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Ian Boxhall and Bradley C. Gregory, 15–36. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lee Dawdy, Shannon. 2015. "Anti-History." In *Social Theory in Archaeology and Ancient History*, edited by Geoff Emberling, 328–42. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Legaspi, Michael C. 2010. *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lilla, Mark. 2007. *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West*. New York: Knopf.
- Marcuson, Hannah, and Theo van den Hout. 2015. "Memorization and Hittite Ritual: New Perspectives on the Transmission of Hittite Ritual Texts." *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 15: 143–68. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15692124-12341272>.
- Mauss, Marcel. 1973 (1934). "Techniques of the Body." *Economy and Society* 2, no. 1: 70–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147300000003>.
- Mauss, Marcel. 2016 (1924). *The Gift*. Expanded ed. Chicago: HAU Books.
- Mowinckel, Sigmund. 1952. *Zum israelitischen Neujahr und zur Deutung der Thronbesteigungspsalmen: zwei Aufsätze*. Oslo: I kommisjon hos J. Dybwad.
- Mowinckel, Sigmund. 1961. *Psalmestudier*. Amsterdam: Verlag P. Schippers.
- Nagy, Gregory. 1996. *Homeric Questions*, 1st ed. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Na'aman, Nadav. 2011. "The Exodus Story: Between Historical Memory and Historiographical Composition." *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 11, no. 1: 39–69. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156921211X579579>.
- Niditch, Susan. 1996. *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. 1980 (1874). *Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. Edited by Peter Preuss. Indianapolis: Hackett.



- Noth, Martin. 1930. *Das System der zwölf Stämme Israels*, vol. 1. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Noth, Martin. 1948. *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Person, Raymond F. 1998. "The Ancient Israelite Scribe as Performer." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117, no. 4: 601–9. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3266629>.
- Pioske, Daniel D. 2015. *David's Jerusalem: Between Memory and History*. New York: Routledge.
- Pioske, Daniel D. 2018. *Memory in a Time of Prose: Studies in Epistemology, Hebrew Scribalism, and the Biblical Past*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Pollock, Sheldon, Benjamin A. Elman, and Ku-ming Kevin Chan, eds. 2015. *World Philology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rendtorff, Rolf. 1977. *Das Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Rofé, Alexander. 2009. *Introduction to the Literature of the Hebrew Bible*. Jerusalem: Simor.
- Sanders, Seth L. 2009. *The Invention of Hebrew*. Champagne: University of Illinois Press.
- Sanders, Seth L., Walker Rhea, and Kay White. 2023. "Visualizing Pentateuchal Composition: A New View of the Creation of Ancient Hebrew Literature." *Avar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Life and Society in the Ancient Near East* 2, no. 2: 379–432. <https://doi.org/10.33182/aijls.v2i2.2842>.
- Schniedewind, William M. 2004. *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Schniedewind, William M. 2019. *The Finger of the Scribe: How Scribes Learned To Write the Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schniedewind, William M. 2024. *Who Really Wrote the Bible: The Story of the Scribes*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Slyomovics, Susan. 1998. *The Object of Memory: Arab and Jew Narrate the Palestinian Village*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Smith, Mark S. 2004. *The Memoirs of God: History, Memory, and the Experience of the Divine in Ancient Israel*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Solanki, Tanvi. 2025. "In Pursuit of Ancient India: August Wilhelm Schlegel's Cosmopolitan Philology." *History of European Ideas*: 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01916599.2025.2581485>.
- Stern, David. 2008. "The First Jewish Books and the Early History of Jewish Reading." *Jewish Quarterly Review* 98, no. 2: 163–202. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jqr.0.0005>.



- Tobolowsky, Andrew. 2023. "On Comparisons with Ancient Greek Traditions: Lessons from the Mid-Century." *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 23: 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs29633>.
- Turner, James. 2014. *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Turner, Steven. 1983. "Historicism, Kritik, and the Prussian Professoriate, 1790–1840." In *Philologie und Hermeneutik im 19. Jahrhundert. II = Philologie et herménétique au 19ème siècle. II: aus dem Förderungsbereich "Grundlagen der geisteswissenschaftlichen Forschung" der Fritz Thyssen Stiftung*, edited by Mayotte Bollack et al., 450–89. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Van Creveld, Martin. 1999. *The Rise and Decline of the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Van der Toorn, Karel. 2007. *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Van Seters, John. 1975. *Abraham in History and Tradition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Vayntrub, Jacqueline. 2019. *Beyond Orality: Biblical Poetry on Its Own Terms*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Warner, Michael. 2002. *Publics and Counterpublics*. New York: Zone Books.
- Wellhausen, Julius. 1885. *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*. Translated by John S. Black and Allan Menzies. London: A&C Black.
- Yoffee, Norman. 1979. "The Decline and Rise of Mesopotamian Civilization: An Ethnoarchaeological Perspective on the Evolution of Social Complexity." *American Antiquity* 44, no. 1: 5–35. <https://doi.org/10.2307/279187>.
- Zerubavel, Yael. 1995. *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

