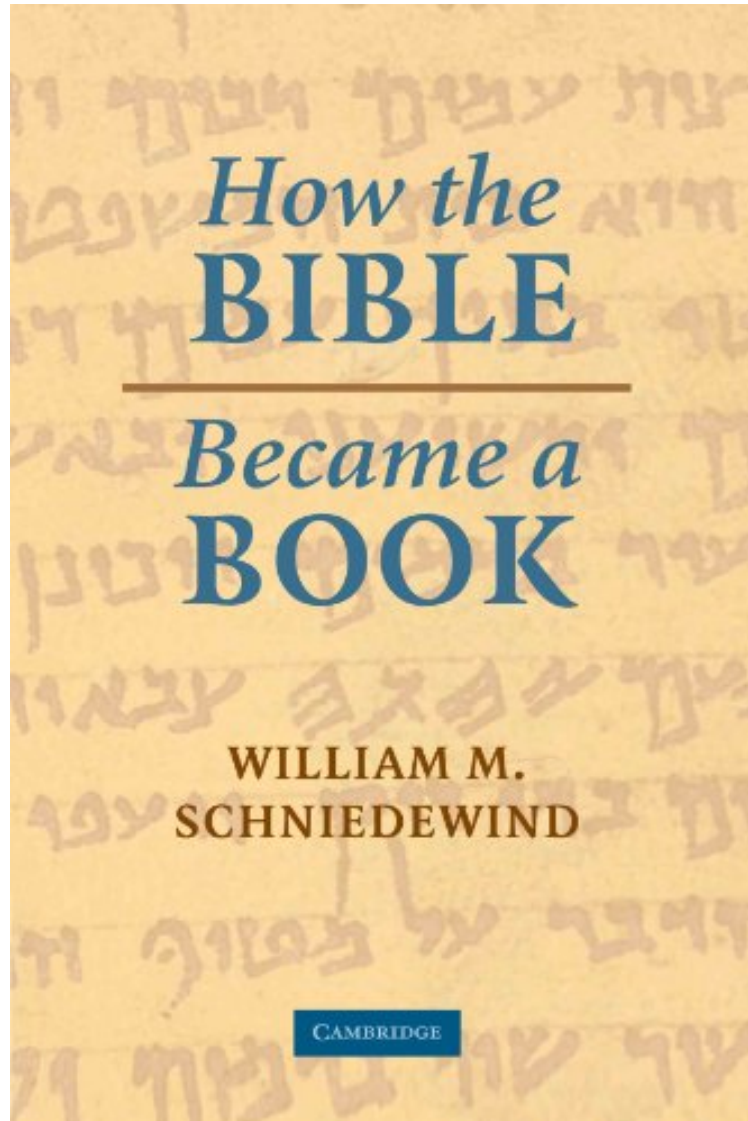


(Library ebook) How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel

How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel

William M. Schniedewind

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent information. I learned an enormous amount from this ...By Kerry ShirtsExcellent information. I learned an enormous amount from this book! Well worth having. Good, significant scholarship and careful on the speculation. Grounded in actual evidence. Just the kind of perfect book for a

rainy day.... a sunny one, a cloudy one, heck ANY day.4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. The Transition from Oral Teaching to the Written Word By Edward G. Schniedewind uses archaeology and the study of literacy to argue against leading theories of when the Hebrew Bible was written. Most scholars have followed Julius Wellhausen in adopting a documentary hypothesis that focuses on J, E, D, and P documents. A great many scholars also emphasize the Persian period as the time when most of the Bible was written. Schniedewind counters these scholars by pointing to the limitation of literacy to palace and temple up to the days of Hezekiah. Thus, J, E, and P were oral traditions and not written documents. Wellhausen's claim that P was the latest of the four is countered by pointing out that P material shows no sign of being aware of traditions being written rather than oral, whereas Deuteronomy is very clear that key religious teachings are in writing. The Persian period, he maintains, was a dark age when few books of the Bible were developed. Part of the archaeology that supports this point is the proof that Aramaic rather than Hebrew became the ordinary language in Jewish lands under the Persians. Most of the Hebrew Bible, says Schniedewind, was written down from the eighth through the sixth centuries B.C.E., the period from Isaiah to Jeremiah, centering on the policies of Kings Hezekiah and Josiah. Archaeology indicates that Judah underwent extensive urbanization following the conquest of Israel by Assyria, so that literate elites from Israel migrated into Judah and brought royal archives and traditions with them. Thus Hezekiah's period saw an emphasis on trying to blend the traditions of Israel and Judah, which resulted in glorifying the united kingdom of David and Solomon as a golden age which Hezekiah hoped to recapture. There was an agrarian rebellion that put Josiah on the throne, leading to writings that demoted the influence of Israel and its transplanted elites. At the same time, literacy spread and literature flourished leading to "one of the most profound cultural revolutions in human history: the assertion of the orthodoxy of texts." (p.91) From that time onward there was a tension between the oral tradition and the written holy text. Among the interesting points Schniedewind makes is how the story of the Ten Commandments differs in Exodus and Deuteronomy. In Exodus, the commandments are oral rather than written. "Somehow the story of the revelation in Exodus 19-23 seems unaware that the Torah is a text. This fact will become all the more remarkable when we see how later traditions will be obsessed with telling the story of the writing of the Torah." (p. 121) His analysis of the narratives in Exodus and Deuteronomy leads him to conclude that the tablets Moses received contained plans for the tabernacle rather than the Ten Commandments. The tension between oral tradition and the written text becomes an important theme from the time of Josiah. Schniedewind points out that the Book of Chronicles was the first text to apply the term "word of YHWH" to the written Torah rather than to words spoken by prophets. He maintains that the priesthood which ruled during the period of the second temple championed the written text as holy and that the Sadducees and Essenes were movements which focused on the written text. But, he says, the Pharisees, early Christians, and Rabbinic Judaism emphasized a key role for the oral tradition. This is a book that can be enjoyed by the general public as well as biblical specialists. Anyone interested in Bible study will find his analyses enlightening. His focus on the spread of literacy and the transition from oral to textual culture adds a significant dimension to study and understanding of the Bible.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great book! By Twocents This book was a fantastic exploration of what archaeology and rational analysis indicate about when the bible was transcribed and compiled. Along the way it gave great information about the early culture and history of the Jewish people. It answered many questions I had regarding the relationship between the invention of and early days of alphabetic writing, and the writing down of the bible. I would not recommend it for devout Christians and Jews who believe the bible was written by god. However, I do recommend it wholeheartedly to anyone who is interested in religion and the bible, but does not believe in magic and the supernatural.

How the Bible Became a Book combines recent archaeological discoveries in the Middle East with insights culled from the history of writing to address how the Bible was written and evolved into sacred Scripture. Written for general readers as well as scholars, the book provides rich insight into how these texts came to possess the authority of Scripture and explores why Ancient Israel, an oral culture, began to write literature. It describes an emerging literate society in ancient Israel that challenges the assertion that literacy first arose in Greece during the fifth century BCE. Hb ISBN (2004) 0-521-82946-1

From Publishers Weekly Since the 19th century, scholars have argued that the earliest stories in the Old Testament were probably recorded during the reigns of David and Solomon. Source critics have tended to isolate at least four sources that lie behind the Pentateuch (J, E, D, P) and have ascribed descending dates to the compositions of these sources. In a richly textured and revolutionary book, Schniedewind argues that the stories traditionally thought to have been written in the 10th and ninth centuries B.C.E. were most likely composed more than 100 years later. Taking a detailed historical and literary approach, he reminds us that early Israel was a largely oral culture, and that even during the consolidation of the kingdom under David and Solomon, few scribes were interested in chronicling the stories of a people. By the eighth century B.C.E., however, during Hezekiah's reign (727-698 B.C.E.), the king's scribes engaged in writing and editing historical narratives and collecting the proverbs attributed to Solomon. The urbanization of Jerusalem provided the social context that allowed the movement from a primarily oral culture to a primarily literary

one. Thus, Schniedewind contends that the historical narratives of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, in addition to the Pentateuch and some of the prophetic writings, can be dated to Hezekiah's reign rather than to an earlier Solomonic period or to a post-exilic Persian period. Schniedewind's provocative thesis will likely generate some controversy, but it will be well received among those who accept the historical revisionism of Israel Finkelstein and others. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. "...provides an excellent example of how a historian acts as a detective... Daniel J. Harrington, *America: The National Catholic Weekly*"Exploring the evolution of literature in society and its secular as well as religious ramifications, *How the Bible Became a Book* is a welcome addition to Biblical studies shelves, as readable and articulate as it is scholarly." *The Midwest Book* "A fascinating read for lay or scholarly readers, it illuminates why these texts have authority as Scripture. History buffs will enjoy learning why Ancient Israel, an oral culture, began to write literature." *Horizons*"...a richly textured and revolutionary book..." *Publishers Weekly*"In this extremely well written book, William Schniedewind tackles what has emerged as the most important question in biblical studies of our time - the issue of when the ancient Israelite accounts and traditions were put in writing. In what is probably the most thorough discussion of the shift from oral tradition to literacy and textuality in Ancient Israel, Schniedewind engages the broader cultural and historical questions of the circumstances under which the Bible was written. . . . Sophisticated and broad in its scope and yet easy to follow, this book will certainly become a cornerstone in biblical studies and in the search for the historical Ancient Israel: a real intellectual delight." Israel Finkelstein, co-author of *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts*"For general readers interested in ancient history and religion, for Jews and Christians who study the Bible and its backgrounds, and for scholars who study the relationship between orality and literacy, this book will be both tremendously helpful and very enjoyable.... it has the potential to reshape the study of the Hebrew Bible for years to come." Benjamin D. Sommer, author of *A Prophet Reads Scripture*"In this and previous publications [Schniedewind] demonstrates a thorough grasp of the archaeology of ancient Israel, the history of the Hebrew language, and the development of biblical historical literature. Here he synthesizes the research of many others to develop a comprehensive story of the writing of the Old Testament. The result is a grand narrative of the development of scripture in Israel." *The Christian Century*"This is a well researched and written book." - *Bible Today* Diane Bergant"This book adds a new angle to the discussion of the origins of the Bible." *An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* Ely Levine, Harvard University

About the Author Professor William M. Schniedewind chairs the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures and is a Professor of Biblical Studies at UCLA. He has been a fellow at the Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem as well as a Visiting Scholar at the Hebrew University. He received his PhD in Near Eastern and Judaic Studies in 1992 at Brandeis University. He is most recently the author of *Society and the Promise to David*, published in 1999.