

(Read free) Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism)

## Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism)

Catherine Hezser

DOC | \*audiobook | ebooks | Download PDF | ePub



[Download](#) [Read Online](#)

#1321657 in Books Coronet Books Inc. 2001-12-31 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.75 x 5.75 x 1.001, 1.90 #File Name: 3161475461557 pages | File size: 33.Mb

**Catherine Hezser : Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism):

6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Covers everything you want to know about literacy in Roman Palestine. By Jeri Bart Ehrman interested me in this book when he claimed Hezser posited a literacy rate in Roman Palestine at 3%, a figure that seemed astoundingly low. Ehrman was wrong. Hezser mentioned Bar Ilan's speculation

about a 3% literacy rate, but Hezser herself never gives any estimate, other than to postulate that the literacy rate may have been below the standard 10-15% argued by Harris and that it "must be considered to have been lower than the average Roman rate" (p 496).. She may be a minimalist, but she is fair. At any rate, this is an excellent book, absolutely exhaustive in detail, with over 500 pages. There is no easy answer to the question of how many people were literate in the ancient world, but Palestine is especially vexing problem. Various scholars have argued that, after the Maccabees especially, the Jewish people became more focused on teaching every male child to be able to read the Torah. Wilhelm Bacher wrote that "In the first centuries A.D. the Jewish community was...united in...teaching...its written and oral traditions (as) the highest 'national' goal" (p 40). Bacher noted the reference to 480 "synagogues with associated schools...in Jerusalem before the destruction of the city" (p 42) and that Shimon b. Shetach ordained that all Jewish male children should attend school. "According to Nathan Drazin, fathers continued to be expected to provide an elementary school education to their sons in Second Temple times" (p 44), and it is certainly likely that the most religious fathers would be anxious to have their sons to read the Torah. Gerhardtsson believes that "toward the end of the Amoraic period, school attendance was, to judge from the evidence, quite general, although not compulsory, among the Jews" (p 45). Reading was more frequently taught in ancient schools from Egypt to Rome than writing. In Palestine, evidence in the form of abecedaries were discovered on many ostraca and the occasional parchment across Palestine, also notably at Qumran and at Masada. Abecedaries were also found in funeral inscriptions, clearly not educational in purpose. There is also '4Q Therapeia' "a small piece of leather or parchment with meaningless words on it" (p 87) and various ostraca with scribbles on them. Exercises by children or...? The Lachish ostraca and the Elephantine papyri caused Drazin to argue that both Hebrew and Aramaic were taught to Jewish children from the 7th century B.C. The Qumran community offers an example of strong religious belief coupled with an insistence that every male be able to read the Torah, starting at the age of ten. Those who joined the community later were taught to read. "Torah reading seems to have been an important feature of all or at least some of the pre-70 synagogues in Palestine" (p 452) and may explain why early Christian communities read religious texts when the Christians were at worship. Although some scholars have dismissed the evidence from Qumran as likely only being applicable to the Essenes, there is evidence that even very small villages kept Torah rolls. In 50 AD, Josephus wrote that when an imperial freedman was set upon and robbed, Cumanus ordered all nearby villages to be raided. One of the soldiers burned up a Torah scroll. From a tiny village. R. Shimon b. Gamliel wrote that there were some 500 'houses of scribes' "in Bethar at the time of the Bar Kokhba revolt Even the smallest of these schools is said to have been attended by not less than 500 children" (p 50). It is also true that rabbis associated knowledge of the Torah with the supporters of Bar Kokhba, "just as they thought that that knowledge was prevalent amongst the inhabitants of pre-70 Jerusalem" (p 50). Since the last years of the Second Temple, being able to "read the Torah is repeatedly emphasized in Greek Jewish writings and by Josephus... Josephus writes that the Torah 'orders that they (children) shall be taught letters...and shall learn both the laws and deeds of the forefathers'" (p 68). The emphasis on the Torah appears to have been standard in all the different types of Judaism. Hengel assumes that this education developed by the Pharisees "gave rise to the later Rabbinate" (p 69). Ancient education stressed memorization, so it is unsurprisingly to learn that "Antigonos of Sokho (about 3rd B.C.) had two disciples who would repeat ...his words...and they would repeat them to disciples and disciples to disciples" (p 98). "Rabbis' claim to have accurate traditions from earlier generations" (p 429) The ancients, who "because of the classical training in mnemotechnics, Greeks and Romans trusted their memories to an extent that we would never trust ours today" (p 423). Which may explain why "Quotations were usually not checked" (p 423). When was the Jewish canon formed? "By the first century B.C.. most books which would later form part of the canon were already in high esteem" (p 193). Torah scrolls were cherished. In 50 A.D. Josephus writes about a Roman soldier burning a Torah school, causing rioting, and only the summary execution of the soldier quelled the angry populace. Hebrew was the common language in Palestine until the time of Alexander the Great. Hebrew would remain the holy language, the language of Torah, but Aramaic gained ascendancy over it among the populace as time passed. After Alexander the Great, Greek towns were established across Palestine, and it appears many, if not most, of Second Temple Jews spoke Aramaic and Greek. Saul Lieberman's "studies have been groundbreaking in their argumentation for a widespread knowledge of Greek amongst Palestinian Jews" (p 231).

Since Judaism has always been seen as the quintessential 'religion of the book', a high literacy rate amongst ancient Jews has usually been taken for granted. Catherine Hezser presents the first critical analysis of the various aspects of ancient Jewish literacy on the basis of all of the literary, epigraphic, and papyrological material published so far. Thereby she takes into consideration the analogies in Graeco-Roman culture and models and theories developed in the social sciences. Rather than trying to determine the exact literacy rate amongst ancient Jews, she examines the various types, social contexts, and functions of writing and the relationship between writing and oral forms of discourse. Following recent social-anthropological approaches to literacy, the guiding question is: who used what type of writing for which purpose? First Catherine Hezser examines the conditions which would enable or prevent the spread of literacy, such as education and schools, the availability and costs of writing materials, religious interest in writing and books, the existence of archives and libraries, and the question of multilingualism. Afterwards she looks at the

different types of writing, such as letters, documents, miscellaneous notes, inscriptions and graffiti, and literary and magical texts until she finally draws conclusions about the ways in which the various sectors of the populace were able to participate in a literate society.

About the Author Catherine Hezser, Born 1960; 1986 Dr. theol. at the University of Heidelberg; 1992 Ph.D. at the Jewish Theological Seminary New York; 1997 Habilitation at the Free University Berlin; Professor of Jewish Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London.