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(Cambridge, 2003)**

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**RESPONSE TO W. M. SCHNIEDEWIND,
HOW THE BIBLE BECAME A BOOK: THE
TEXTUALIZATION OF ANCIENT ISRAEL**

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William M. Schniedewind's *How the Bible Became a Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) is an extremely timely contribution to the debate about the formation of the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, it is so timely, that the present reviewer was both happy and anxious to hear of its imminent publication when asked to participate in a panel review of the book at the 2003 Society of Biblical Literature meeting in Toronto.¹ I myself was just completing a manuscript on similar topics, entitled *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature*, which was not to

¹ The following review is a slightly modified version of the presentation given at that meeting, thus retaining a few of the generic marks of its original oral *Sitz im Leben*. Thanks are offered to Professor Schniedewind, the other panelists and attendees at the session for their helpful remarks.

appear for another year (it appeared in February 2005 with Oxford University Press).² My book, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, focuses on the role of orality and textuality in ancient Israel and other cultures. So does William Schniedewind's *How the Bible Became a Book*. His book was going into proofs, while mine was to be deposited with the publisher just after the meeting.

As virtually any author would be in this situation, I was excited to see what kind of material Professor Schniedewind had put together on topics of mutual interest, but I also was concerned that he already would have said most of the things I meant to say in my book. As it turned out, this was an excellent opportunity to get an early look at an important book relevant to mine and many others' work. To be sure, it is a book aimed at a broad audience, so it synthesizes earlier work by Schniedewind and others and does not attempt to give detailed bibliography or engage other scholars at length. Nevertheless, Schniedewind pulls together some very important material, asks the right kinds of questions, and has propelled the discussion of these topics to a new level.

This review has three parts. It starts with a list of some of the ideas I found most interesting, proceeds to several problems I see in the argument of the book, and concludes with specific comments regarding the yield of the book for Pentateuchal studies, my primary area of competence.

² Materials relevant to the book, including a full bibliography of all cited works (the book includes only a select bibliography) and a rough overview of ancient "curricula" in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece, can be found at the reviewer's web-site: www.uts.columbia.edu/~dcarr.

Let me start with an overview of several things I liked about the book. First, this book provides a useful overview of epigraphic evidence, much of which is little known by Biblical scholars, let alone the general public. This material has been previously published, but the book provides an accessible overview of key finds organized by period. Second, contra arguments by Golka and the like,³ Schniedewind provides a compelling case -- built on epigraphic evidence from Moab to Tel Dan -- that even smaller kingdoms like Israel had scribal systems at an early stage. Though the scribal systems of larger empires are better documented, we have good evidence that smaller city-states likewise had their own scribal-education systems, often bi-lingual. Third, building beyond earlier work by Lemaire, Jamieson-Drake and others, Schniedewind has expanded the case for the late-pre-exile -- and by this I mean throughout the late eighth century to seventh century -- as a key point for the formation of many Israelite traditions.⁴ Below I will raise questions about just how many such traditions were written then, but Schniedewind and others have made a good case that

³ F. W. Golka, "Die israelitische Weisheitsschule oder 'des kaisers neue Kleider,'" *VT* 33 (1983): 257–70; translation published as F. W. Golka, "The Israelite Wisdom School or 'The Emperor's New Clothes,'" in *The Leopard's Spots: Biblical and African Wisdom in Proverbs*, by F. W. Golka (Edinburgh: T & T Clark).

⁴ For earlier work by Lemaire and Jamieson-Drake, see e.g. André Lemaire, *Les Écoles et la formation de la Bible dans l'ancien Israël*, OBO (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1981) and Lemaire's more recent synthesis "Schools and Literacy in Ancient Israel and Early Judaism," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible*, edited by Leo Perdue, translated by Aliou Niang (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 207–17; and for David Jamieson-Drake, see *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah: A Socio-Archaeological Approach*, JSOTSup (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1991).

early forms of numerous Biblical texts were written then. Fourth, Schniedewind makes some interesting arguments that link the growth in textuality in late pre-exilic Israel to Neo-Assyrian imperial dynamics of the time. These arguments appear, to this reviewer, to be relatively original and provocative. Fifth, Schniedewind's eighth chapter, a discussion of the exile, includes good arguments for the royal retinue of Jehoiachin as the most plausible home for key aspects of textuality in the exilic and early post-exilic periods. Some features of the Bible that may be located in that exilic/early post-exilic circle include: the adding of anti-Manasseh elements to Kings, the extension of the Deuteronomistic History after Josiah, the addition of similar elements to the MT/Babylonian version of Jeremiah, possible links of Isaiah 56-66 to the interests of the royal family in early post-exilic Judah, and even the formulation and transmission of early post-exilic prophecy. Sixth, I found suggestive his final comments on the comeback of orality in the wake of the destruction of that great repository of Greco-Roman Jewish textuality, the Second Temple. All too often people posit a one-way movement from "orality" to "literacy"/"textuality" in ancient cultures. Not only is this dichotomy problematic (on this, more below), but Schniedewind suggests that movement can go the other way too, particularly with the emergence of rabbinic Judaism.

This list of positive aspects of the book could go on. Nevertheless, I turn now to consider potential shortcomings of the book. I start with one issue that appears key to Schniedewind's

argument, but may not be. Though Schniedewind is fully aware of those who speak of the overlap of oral and written, the argument of the book sounds at times as if it revives a now discredited opposition between orality on the one hand and textuality on the other. Consider, for example, the following quote that stands at the outset of a chapter entitled “Josiah and the Text Revolution”:

With the emergence of literacy and the flourishing of literature a textual revolution arose in the days of King Josiah. This was one of the most profound cultural revolutions in human history: the assertion of the orthodoxy of texts. As writing spread throughout Judean society, literacy broke out of the confines of the closed scribal schools, the royal court, and the lofty temples...Basic literacy became commonplace, so much so that the illiterate could be socially stigmatized.⁵

This dramatic opening of the chapter posits a massive shift from orality toward the “orthodoxy of the text.” “Basic literacy” he avers, became commonplace” throughout the populace. At other points he qualifies such remarks, noting that universal literacy levels were not characteristic of any ancient society, that texts were always bound up with orality, and that Scripture always functioned as such within highly defined and hierarchical social systems.

I find Schniedewind’s more measured comments on this topic more helpful than the more sweeping formulations with which he

⁵ William Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 91.

introduces them. Though some sort of literacy appears to have spread through various parts of the Israelite bureaucracy in the late pre-exilic period, this is far from literacy becoming “commonplace.” The main testimony to possible stigma associated with illiteracy is the “Letter of a Literate Soldier,” at best evidence of stigma associated with illiteracy for a military officer.⁶ The best recent studies of literacy levels in the ancient world have concluded that no such ancient society achieved general literacy, including the Greeks who once were thought to have achieved general literacy by virtue of the simplicity of their alphabet.⁷ On the contrary, good arguments have been made *against* the idea that alphabetic textuality is necessarily a spur to an “alphabetic revolution.”⁸

⁶ Schniedewind’s discussion of this letter is on pp. 101-103 of his *Bible to Book*, summarizing earlier work in “Sociolinguistic Reflections on the Letter of a ‘Literate’ Soldier (Lachish 3),” *Zeitschrift für Althebraistik* 13 (2000): 157-67.

⁷ The most influential work on this is that of W. Harris, W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) on Greco-Roman literacy. A sampling of studies of other cultures includes: John Baines and Christopher Eyre, “Four Notes on Literacy,” *Göttinger Miszellen* 61 (1983): 65-96; P. Michalowski, “Charisma and Control: On Continuity and Change in Early Mesopotamian Bureaucratic Systems,” in *The Organization of Power. Aspects of Bureaucracy in the Ancient Near East*, edited by M. Gibson and R. D. Biggs (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1987), 47-57 and Ian Young, “Israelite Literacy: Interpreting the Evidence,” *VT* 48 (1998): 239-53, 408-22.

⁸ See, in particular, Anna Morpurgo Davies, “Forms of Writing in the Ancient Mediterranean World,” in *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition*, edited by Gerd Baumann (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 23-50 and comments regarding the supposed ease of alphabetic systems in Christopher Eyre and John Baines, “Interactions between Orality and Literacy in Ancient Egypt,” in *Literacy and Society*, Karen Schousboe and Mogens Trolle Larsen (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1989), 101-02.

In addition, Schniedewind leans hard at this point on early work of Jack Goody, along with that of Walter Ong and Eric Havelock, all of whom pushed a now discredited idea of a large divide between orality and literacy. Subsequent scholarship, including some later work by Goody himself, has clarified that there is a constant interaction between orality and literacy, even in supposedly “literate” contexts.⁹ Thus, at best, there is a move from orality to an oral-textual mix, and even in the latter instance one must be careful not to posit global shifts in thought patterns, cultural organization, etc. In so far as Schniedewind’s book aims to argue for a massive textual revolution in ancient Israel involving the triumph of textuality and the emergence of widespread literacy, it is a house built on sand. But, as suggested above, there is much more to Schniedewind’s work than this.

Following Harris and other scholars who have studied ancient literacy levels, I think that it is highly unlikely that even “basic literacy” was “commonplace” across all of ancient Israel. Even the augmented epigraphic evidence that Schniedewind amasses won’t sustain this conclusion.¹⁰ Though Schniedewind and others are probably right that literacy expanded outward in the late-pre-exilic

⁹ For review of the major contributions and critiques of these thinkers, see Peter Probst, “Die Macht der Schrift: Zum ethnologischen Diskurs über eine populäre Denkfigur,” *Anthropos* 87 (1992): 167–82; John Halverson, “Goody and the Implosion of the Literacy Thesis,” *Man (n.s.)* 27 (1992): 301–17; and J. Collins, “Literacy and Literacies,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 75–93.

¹⁰ For more detailed arguments for this conclusion, see my *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 116–22.

period to include many bureaucrats and artisans who previously were not literate, it is anachronistic and *unnecessary to his argument* to posit a more general spreading of literacy -- as he says -- “throughout the populace.” He could still be right about a substantial increase in literacy and expansion of the Israelite textual corpus in the pre-exilic period, even without asserting that the society underwent a textual revolution including widespread literacy.

In addition, we need to distinguish between different sorts of literacy cultivated in ancient societies. All too often scholars implicitly understand “literacy” to consist of basic reading and writing ability, a “literacy” corresponding to low-level definitions of literacy prominent in recent literacy politics (e.g. the U.N. literacy initiatives). Yet this was not the sort of literacy that counted in the ancient world. There we see the most intense focus on a “literacy” that consists of mastery of a given, textualized cultural tradition -- like the Gilgamesh epic in the Sumero-Akkadian tradition, the Instruction of Kheti in the Egyptian tradition, or Homer in Greece. For now I’ll refer to this latter sort of text by Assmann’s term, “cultural text.”¹¹ And though literacy for business purposes and literacy in such “cultural texts” can overlap, each of these cultures shows a tendency toward conservation of cultural texts in an older language, sometimes an older script, and often using different --

¹¹. Published in full form as Jan Assmann, “Kulturelle und literarische Texte,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, edited by A. Loprieno (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 60–82 and available in a shorter, English version as “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125–33.

more perishable writing materials. This means that we can easily have a situation where -- in a given period -- we may find a wealth of ostraca and other hard inscriptional materials attesting to the business use of one language -- say Aramaic -- even as a small elite continues to educate itself through older cultural texts -- say in Hebrew -- and even extend them. Yet those cultural texts are lost to us because they were written on more perishable media like parchment. This is particularly true in later periods of Israelite history where Hebrew assumed a primarily ideological function -- as Schniedewind himself notes -- and the Biblical tradition serves as a cultural symbol of access to an earlier past. Business was conducted in Aramaic and -- later -- Greek, while Hebrew is used -- particularly within temple contexts after demise of the monarchy -- to preserve the indigenous cultural tradition.

Another problem I have with the argument of the book is that I think it over-emphasizes the eighth and seventh centuries as *the* formative time for the formation of Biblical literature. Part of this is an over-correction in response to those who have argued that there was *no* pre-exilic history of Israelite literature, that all was written in the post-exile, or that Israelite literature was formed primarily in the Hellenistic period. These are, indeed, implausible positions. Yet this book ignores indicators, some of which Schniedewind himself has gathered, that earlier -- perhaps 10th or 9th century -- temple and royal-bureaucratic Judean matrices already may have developed a nucleus of writings used to educate/form literate elites, some of which formed the core of later

Biblical corpora. Moreover, Schniedewind does not highlight as much as I would like the possible extensive role of early Northern monarchal traditions -- e.g. Omri-Ahab and Jeroboam II -- in supplementing those early traditions and helping to stimulate the expansion of textuality in the seventh century South. The epigraphic and archaeological evidence that he uses with such good effect to argue for expansion of textuality in seventh century Judah would also point to some important developments in eighth century (or earlier) Israel.¹²

In addition, Schniedewind's position excessively de-emphasizes textual structures in the exilic and post-exilic periods. The examples of the latter portions of the book of Isaiah, late Psalms, and some later prophetic material show the ongoing vitality of the classical Hebrew tradition -- promoted by sixth and fifth century masters of the oral-written Hebrew classical tradition. Furthermore, his argument that virtually all exilic Israelite textuality took place in the royal retinue of Jehoiachin is too narrow. The example of Ezekiel at the least, indicates that Israelites produced texts elsewhere as well. Moreover, following on Assmann's concept of textual "excarnation" amidst crisis, I remain inclined to see the exile (and early post-exile) as *an* important time for the reproduction and reformulation of pre-exilic written traditions.¹³

¹². See the summary of evidence in Lemaire, "Schools and Literacy," 208.

¹³. Jan Assmann, "Fünf Stufen auf dem Wege zum Kanon. Tradition und Schriftkulture im alten Israel und frühen Judentum," in *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis. Zehn Studien*, by Jan Assmann (München: Beck, 2000), 87–89.

The written form of such traditions probably were lost amidst the destruction of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, because of the oral-written character of the ancient educational system, a fairly exact form of such writings were retained in the minds of Israelite scribal masters, masters who then could both reproduce and augment the tradition in light of intense dislocation and crisis.

I will add just one more point of general argument vis-à-vis Schniedewind's overall approach. If we were to look toward a "textual revolution" in ancient Israel, the Greco-Roman portion of the Second Temple period makes almost as much, if not more, sense as a candidate than the seventh and eighth centuries that Schniedewind so focuses on: we have writing and teaching patriarchs depicted in the pseudepigrapha, explicit mentions of a school possibly in Ben Sira¹⁴ and certainly in later materials, clearly documented libraries including a temple library, explicit claims -- however exaggerated -- that all (male) Israelites were taught reading, writing and Torah, descriptions of ongoing reading rituals on the sabbath, etc.¹⁵ Let me be clear: I am not proposing that the Bible was written then. Instead, I am arguing that this period is an important comparison point for the late pre-exile which

¹⁴. For questions about the oft-cited reference in Ben Sira 51:23 as a reference to a "school" see Rainer Riesner, *Jesus als Lehrer: Eine Untersuchung zum Ursprung der Evangelien-Überlieferung*, WUNT (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1981), 166–67; Oda Wischmeyer, *Die Kulture des Buches Jesus Sirach*, BZAW (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995), 175–77 and Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 7, note 7.

¹⁵. This is a brief synopsis of the results of an argument given in detail in my *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart*, 201–72.

Schniedewind so emphasizes, a comparison point that shows the limitations of what happened then. Though few texts in the Bible were written then, they achieved a decisively new status and shape.

Let me turn now to a focus on the Pentateuch, particularly Schniedewind's case that the work of creation of Mosaic Torah was already complete by the time of the exile and that the post-exile was basically a time of transmission of the Mosaic Torah by temple elites and did not involve substantial production of new material. Again, part of this is a welcome correction to older over-emphases of the post-exile as *the* formative time, particularly of Priestly material. As linguistic and comparative studies have shown, much of the Priestly Pentateuchal material is equally as early as the non-priestly material, and both bodies of literature have substantial pre-exilic elements. Furthermore, in my study of the Qumran finds I have found a remarkable pattern in the distribution of divergent editions of the Torah and non-Torah portions of the Hebrew Scriptures. These finds and/or the evidence preserved in the Septuagint, show that the present Jewish Bible preserved the later forms of several non-Torah books like Joshua, Samuel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and possibly the Song of Songs. These "prophetic books" -- widely construed -- were enough in flux that later redactions still were included in the authoritative, proto-Massoretic tradition. Yet it turns out that the version of the Torah included in the Jewish Bible is clearly earlier than extremely conflatory editions of the Torah represented by the so-called "proto-Samaritan" tradition, the so-called "4QRP" texts, and the Temple Scroll. As others have

shown, these are variant editions of the Pentateuch that stretch back into the fourth century, yet they did not find their way into the stream of authoritative tradition. This reinforces points often made by Schniedewind about Qumran providing a terminus ad quem for Biblical traditions. In this case, Qumran establishes an earlier terminus ad quem for the Mosaic Torah than it does for non-Torah, “prophetic” traditions.

Moreover, these revisions of the Pentateuch at Qumran provide clues about the final stages of the formation of the Torah. First, this material suggests that there was ongoing work of revision and supplementation of the Torah into the Persian and early Hellenistic periods, despite the fact that such revisions did not find their way into the authoritative tradition. Second, it suggests that the character of such work by that point was largely conflatory and harmonizing. This latter point becomes interesting when considering possible examples of conflation that are in the version of Mosaic Torah preserved in the Jewish tradition. In a volume on Exod 34:10-26 I surveyed the conflatory traditions at Qumran and used them to argue that the law in Exodus 34:10-26 exhibits quite similar conflatory characteristics.¹⁶

¹⁶ David M. Carr, “Method in Determination of Direction of Dependence: An Empirical Test of Criteria Applied to Exodus 34,11–26 and its Parallels,” in *Gottes Volk am Sinai: Untersuchungen zu Ex 32–34 und Dtn 9–10*, vol. 18, edited by Matthias Köckert and Erhard Blum, Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie (Gütersloh: Kaiser, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2001), 107–40.

This kind of phenomenon is important because Schniedewind puts much weight on another text that I would argue is a good candidate for such a late conflationary tradition, this time a section in Exodus 24:4-8 that links the Sinai Torah with Deuteronomy and particularly the Torah celebrated by Josiah. For Schniedewind, this text is a key thematization of textuality that may be a marker of the textual revolution begun in the time of Josiah. In this case, it adds an explicit scene of writing for a public to pre-exilic P and non-P Sinai narratives that lacked such public writing. Working from the above-discussed examples of conflationary traditions I would go further and stress the probable late character of this addition. Like the above conflationary traditions, this text in Exod 24:4-8 links P and non-P elements of the Exodus Sinai narrative, harmonizing both with Deuteronomy on the one hand and 2 Kings 23 on the other. Exod 34:10-26 is another example of such a tradition, indeed a tradition characterized -- like Exod 24:4-8 -- by semi-Deuteronomistic language and themes. Exod 24:4-8 is a likely part of this stream. Insofar as it can be taken as an index of the importance of textuality at a particular period in Israelite history, it probably reflects the ongoing importance of textuality in the Persian period.

Schniedewind has other arguments for the early character of the Mosaic Pentateuch, but they have problems too. Though Hurvitz and others have established the probability of early strata in P, they have not successfully dated all of the P material to the pre-exilic period. Moreover, I am not as sure as Schniedewind that

later scribal circles were unable to continue pre-exilic linguistic structures into the exilic period. Though the Qumran sectarians half a millennium later may not have been able to pull off an exact imitation of Biblical Hebrew, exilic or even early post-exilic scribal circles may have been able to maintain substantial continuity in language and style into the early Persian period.¹⁷ Indeed, preliminary soundings suggest that early pre-exilic works such as Zechariah and Haggai are considerably different from books such as Chronicles in their linguistic profile and extremely close to their “classical Hebrew” counterparts.¹⁸ Other minor problems whose treatment would take me beyond a response of this sort here include Schniedewind’s dependence on what I consider to be a problematic treatment of P and H in I. Knohl and J. Milgrom’s work and Schniedewind’s arguments that the twelve tribe focus of Pentateuchal materials should be located in the Hezekian period of re-integration of the North. It could be that such a twelve-tribe *emphasis* started then, but it appears in later texts as well. Moreover, it is striking that several of the texts that Schniedewind situates

¹⁷. On this point, however, see the important article by Jan Joosten, “Pseudo-Classicism in Late Biblical Hebrew,” in *Sirach, Scrolls and Sages*, edited by T. e Muraoka and J. Elwolde (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 146–59 which extends and concretizes some methodological points made through work by A. Hurvitz.

¹⁸. On this see in particular Martin Ehrensävär, “Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts,” in *Biblical Hebrew: Studies in Chronology and Typology*, edited by Ian Young (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 175–86. Other essays in the volume raise good questions regarding different explanatory models to account for linguistic variation in Biblical texts. Certainly diachronic models are important, but some differences (e.g. that between Ezekiel and “P”) may be explained by factors such as dialect differences, diglossia, etc.

firmly in the Hezekian period, e.g. the four eighth century prophets, lack any emphasis on the twelve tribe structure.

Enough on problems. In conclusion, I think Schniedewind's book joins others in providing a useful corrective to an over-emphasis on the Persian or later periods as *the* generative time for the formation of the Pentateuch and other Scriptures. Moreover, though a popular work, it provides useful additional arguments for the importance of the late pre-exilic period in the formation of Biblical literature. All too rarely do Biblical scholars attempt this sort of broadly directed synthesis, partly because it is all too easy to critique works of this scope. Schniedewind deserves our appreciation both for his results and the way he raises important questions regarding the origins of Biblical tradition, questions that deserve further discussion.

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IMPLICATIONS FOR AND FROM EZRA- NEHEMIAH

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The angle of vision that shapes my present paper concerns the developments in 5th century Judah as Schniedewind interprets them. In an earlier work, *In an Age of Prose: A literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah*, I approached Ezra-Nehemiah (EN) from a literary perspective and concluded that EN is organized so as to express three themes (that are attributed to events in the 5th century): the power and authority of the written text (with the Torah as most authoritative); the pivotal role of the community as a whole, not merely its leaders; and the expansion of the notion of the house of God to encompass the entire city of Jerusalem, not merely its temple, a notion that includes the dedicated people themselves as one aspect of that house of God (Eskenazi, 1988).

What most interests me in examining Schniedewind's book is investigating the historical context for this three-fold emphasis. Since Spinoza, Ezra has been credited with a major role with respect to the Torah. He has been described as the one who had the means, motive, and opportunity to shape the Torah into the book we now have. What the shaping entailed, and what the Torah included, remain contested topics. The traditional view that what Ezra introduces in Nehemiah 8 largely corresponds to the Torah as we know it has come under fire. The time and place for the composition of the sources that comprise the Torah remain subject to debate. Current studies that reassess the size of postexilic Judah and Jerusalem, and their economic resources, conclude (as Schniedewind also reports) that Jerusalem and Judah were small, and poor. These conditions challenge the supposition that much creative work such as composing the Torah would have been possible.

From whence did the Torah come and what was it? Was it in the 5th century that the compilation as we know it emerged? Was the Torah simply edited at that point out of earlier sources? Were the sources actually composed in this century, as the so-called "invention of ancient Israel" theories suggest? Or was this period only the beginning, with Deuteronomy as the main available text, and with other strands developed only later by a priestly circle (as the so-called "Heidelberg school" suggests)?

The questions for my part of the discussion concern the postexilic period. They are: In what way does my research support,

challenge or require that Schniedewind modify his thesis? Conversely, in what ways does his thesis challenge, support or require that I modify my own?

My remarks are very much work in progress, as is befitting the topic. The purpose of the SBL session for which this paper was written is to raise the questions and reflect on them together, rather than attempt to formulate final conclusions. With these points in mind, let me begin by summing up some of the basic claims and conclusions of Schniedewind's engaging book as a way of focusing my response.

Schniedewind offers an excellent review of how the Torah itself accounts for its own textuality (118). He then traces the textualization of the Torah and argues that a paradigm shift took place in the Josianic revolution (91-117). The tradition about sacred texts and the self-consciousness about the "importance of the written word" (accordingly) developed especially during the Josianic reforms (212). "As literacy became more prevalent, textuality became more plausible" (213). A particular emphasis in Schniedewind's thesis concerns the role of the royal court. The documents of the Torah, according to him, are largely preexilic, written and preserved in the court under royal sponsorship. The process of writing and editing continued during exile as well, with the Judaeon court in Babylon as the location for the transmission and preservation of the Torah. The postexilic era, according to Schniedewind, was not a fruitful time for these developments.

Summarizing the book, Schniedewind states “Throughout this book I have contended that the making of books and the appeal to the authority of writing was largely derived from the institutions of state and temple. Writing was the domain of the royal court and then the priestly aristocracy. Writing was used as a tool of government and then taken over as a tool of religious authority and orthodoxy” (212). As will be discussed below, I am particularly interested in the shift from government, i.e., royal court, to religious authority.

An intriguing aspect of Schniedewind’s thesis is the claim that the Judean royal household in exile continued to be the main center for the transmission and preservation of the Torah, with Jehoiachin as a prominent figure. The royal family was comfortable and the royal house had the means, motive and opportunity, as it were, to produce and preserve texts. “Fundamentally, the writing of the exilic period was an extension of writing by the state. It was writing by and for the Judean royal family” (164). While I have many questions about the strength of this claim, my own issues do not depend on this particular point but have to do with the postexilic use of the written text.

If I understand Schniedewind rightly, Zerubbabel and his entourage form a key link in the transmission of the (already largely completed) text. “Zerubbabel, representing the exiled Judean royal family, returns to Jerusalem ” (162). Although Schniedewind does not say so explicitly, the implication is that Zerubbabel was responsible for transporting the texts to Judah . What is explicit in

Schniedewind's book, however, is the view that EN reflects only the intensification of a process. Thus he writes: "Although the scribe Ezra circulated and publicized the Book of the Torah in the early Second Temple period (Ezra 7:6, 11, Neh 8:1, 4), this was only 'an intensification of the process already started at the time of Josiah'" (136; citing B. Levinson's *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of legal Innovation*. New York/Oxford: Oxford, 1997). While the phrase, "intensification of the process," comes from Levinson, the description of the events in the postexilic era as "only" intensification seems to come from Schniedewind or, at any rate, is accepted by him. According to Schniedewind, "the priests and scribes were preserving the literature of Israel rather than creating it" (166). "Although the Pentateuch was essentially composed in the pre-exilic period, its final editorial shaping took place in the Jerusalem temple" (166). Under the subheading "The Textualization of Jewish Religion" Schniedewind cites Neh 8:1-15 as the time when "Not only does Ezra read the *Torah* out loud to the people, but they also come together to study *Torah*" (184).

Subsequent writings, Schniedewind shows, illustrate that textualization has taken place already. Thus, "In Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, the reference to a written Mosaic legislation appears as a regular feature of the historian presentation. The last two expressions, 'the *Torah* of Moses' and 'the word of YHWH,'" point to a critical semantic shift from oral to written tradition" (189-190).

Let me respond by stating first that I find Schniedewind's elaboration of "how the Bible became a book" very compelling. My questions emerge regarding the time and nature of textualization of the tradition (to be differentiated from the composition of the text). My own research on EN leads me to the conclusion that much more than "only intensification" took place in the postexilic period with Ezra (as EN depicts Ezra and his era). I suggest that EN reflects and propagates a decisive paradigm shift. Although my conclusions differ from Schniedewind, it is precisely his study that helps articulate the nature of this shift and helps show how EN represents it. Indeed, some of the points I wish to make are already embedded in the Schniedewind's book's title, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Israel's Traditions*. Seemingly the part after the colon represents a subtitle. But the longer I thought about it the more convinced I became that in fact the title describes two related but very distinct questions and processes: becoming a book, and textualization of the tradition. Schniedewind addresses both topics in a most helpful fashion and this is what makes the book so valuable. However, "Textualization" of Israel's traditions can signify something other than possessing a text. Indeed, Schniedewind's discussion of orality, literacy and textualization articulates very well some of the things that textualization signifies.

I very much appreciate Schniedewind's observation that the road to textualization, of Israel's traditions - to the establishment of the written word as a source of authority - was rocky. "Two

issues shaped the path of this road. The first was the give and take between orality and literacy. As literacy became more prevalent textuality became more plausible. . . . The second was competition between orality and textuality as modes of authority. Orality and literacy were stages along the same road, whereas *orality and textuality was the fork in the road*” (213; emphasis added). “Although there is an ebb and flow to orality and literacy, orality and textuality stand on opposite and sometimes competing sides of cultural authority” (197).

I fully agree with these observations and find them important for any analysis of Israel’s history. When one examines EN, one can make the case that the significant shift, as EN depicts it, was not from royal court to the temple but from royal *and* temple control to textualization as control, constructing a different infrastructure, separate from either court or temple. Textualization, in other words, means in EN a challenge to both the court and the temple. Here I fully agree with Schniedewind’s title for a subunit, that (for example) “*Textualizing the Word of YHWH*’[*meant*]- *The Eclipse of Prophecy*”.

I also agree that “. . . the spread of writing [after Hezekiah] into everyday life meant that now writing could become *a tool for the subversion of centralized power of the government*. Texts were no longer only the products of the palace or the priests” (192; emphasis added). He writes about Deuteronomy that “the deuteronomic revolution gave the rural elders a written voice. Ancient writings, *which had been elevated as literary propaganda in the days of Hezekiah, were*

turned on their head. Writing becomes a typical mode of expression in the later days of the Judean monarchy. Biblical literature realized its apex in the last decades of the Judaeen monarchy” (192; emphasis added).

But I would go even further. In EN, textualization also meant the eclipse of the royal court and the temple’s priesthood. Let me use these observations to sum up my points and then briefly explain how and I why I interpret the era and the text this way.

It seems to me that no book displays the subversive nature of textuality more fully than EN, and no book more fully demonstrates how textuality ought to be used to subvert an ultimate control by either monarchy *or* priesthood. Schniedewind moves too quickly, I think, between the shift from monarchy and priesthood. But EN illustrates a third option, one with Deuteronomy as the overriding model. Hence, as was true in Hezekiah’s time, the text gives voice to a broader segment of the population. EN consistently demonstrates such a shift in power.

Schniedewind, as noted, systematically traces the textualization of the Torah, implying that a paradigm shift took place in the Josianic Revolution” (91-117). It is undoubtedly true that the first explicit and major sign of a shift to the text takes place at that date. But the literature that follows (see e.g., Jer 8:7-9) does not exemplify the kind of pervasive textualization of the symbols of power that EN represents (and that Schniedewind attributes to the early period). My point is that the importance placed on a written

text can be dated to the time of Josiah and Huldah (2 Kings 22-23), but that the genuine paradigmatic shift is to be found in EN.

The notion of *a book* of Torah, and especially a Torah of Moses, is not evidently normative until we come to EN. Other postexilic sources such as Mal 2:7, Hag 2.11-17 and Zech 7:3, imply that priests, as custodians of the teachings, were sources of authority, or rather, more explicitly, sources of *torah*, and were expected to offer new rulings when there was no precedent. A written Torah of Moses as the norm is not evidently *the* widespread, overriding assumption. (see, e.g., Japhet, “Law,” 102).

We need to make it clear that possessing written traditions is not equivalent to textualizing the tradition, if by “textualizing” we mean granting authority to texts, not simply preserving traditions in texts. My contention is that the literature after Josiah and before EN does not show signs of textualization, even though texts seem to be available.

Thus a major difference between Schniedewind’s and my reading of the postexilic period has to do with the assessment of relative importance. The writing of the Torah is of course the *sinqua con non* for textualization. But royal libraries, such as Assurbanipal or Hezekiah, do not achieve the kind of textualization of the tradition that we associate with “the peoples of the book.” This is true of the library in Alexandria as well. The transformation into a people of the book *is* a postexilic phenomenon. The availability of texts is a necessary condition, but

not itself an explanation. Greeks do not become a people of the book despite the great reservoir of comparable literature in the same period. Herodotus, Sophocles and Homer - enormously significant as they are - do not become "Scripture." I think this difference places the achievements of EN in a different light than what Schniedewind describes.

Comparing EN (and its contribution) with Herodotus can show this difference in yet another way. When Herodotus seeks to establish the authority of a statement he refers to eye-witnesses as a source. When EN seeks to do so, it utilizes documents. As Sara Japhet has shown, EN's historiography is driven but what Japhet calls "the documentary imperative." This characteristic is rooted in the paradigm shift at work.

A related point is EN's position concerning the priests. A careful look at EN shows that it portrays Ezra as a priest who indirectly challenges the activities of certain priests (see the case of the so-called "mixed-marriage" and the large proportion of cultic personnel who are marked as violators - 17 out of 110 or 111; this includes the high-priestly family; see also Nehemiah's conflict with the leading priestly families). The reading of the Torah in Nehemiah 8 is striking for the absence of priests and the lack of focus on any of the cultic activities associated with the temple. Although events are reported as taking place during what we now call Rosh Hashanah and for which Numb 29:1-6 prescribes sacrifices, there is no mention of sacrifices or any other temple

related worship. The narrative focuses on understanding and implementing the written Torah.

It is true that Nehemiah 10 includes support for the priesthood and the temple, but it grants them only financial support, not authority. The difference is crucial. Authority in EN is the prerogative of the written text and its interpretation. The scribal revolution challenges the powers of state and priesthood, the “state” being Persian government, and “priesthood” being the Jerusalem temple. The emphasis on the Levites (who are elevated at the expense of the priests) is but one aspect of this revolution (see J. Schaper on tension between Nehemiah and the priests and J. Min for tension between Ezra and the priests; see also my forthcoming essay on “The Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah” in the Lipschits and Oeming, ed., *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*).

EN articulates the “coming out of the closet” of the Torah. It is not merely a case of a tradition preserved and available through a text. Rather, it is the case that the text becomes the primary, acknowledged source of authority. EN develops its narrative so as to illustrate how this new source of authority functions: communal reading (emphasis on “communal”) leads to implementation. The paradigmatic moment, as it were, is Nehemiah 8.

Schniedewind rightly emphasizes the programmatic nature of this scene, under the subheading “The Textualization of Jewish Religion.” Citing Neh 8:1-15, he observes: “Not only does Ezra

read the *Torah* out loud to the people, but they also come together to study *Torah* ” (184). As I note in my book on the subject, *In an Age of Prose* , Ezra essentially disappears after this scene, leaving the community holding the book, so to speak. Everything that follows indicates that the book has become the source of authority. The pledge in Nehemiah 10 is a *written* oath to follow the Torah; the concluding ceremony includes a reading that leads to action: “On that day it was read in the book of Moses, in the ears of the people, and it was found written in it that an Ammonite and Moabite should not come into the assembly of God ever And it was upon their hearing the Torah, they separated all admixture from Israel ” (Neh 13:1-3). Note that neither Ezra, nor priests in general, not even the Levites, play a role in this reading, although the previous chapters suggest that Levites have taken the role of readers and communicators (see especially Neh 9:4-5).

The point I wish to stress is that with the Torah, priests become accountable to an authority outside their own circle. Publicizing the Torah demystifies their roles and makes them subject to another authority, authority that enables other segments in the community to scrutinize and challenge the priesthood. This option and its consequences are exemplified in Ezra 9-10. In sum, a new paradigm of authority has been installed. It is not insignificant therefore, and carries some symbolic meanings, that the reading of the Torah in Nehemiah 8 takes place outside the temple.

The battle for “*yehudit*” as the language of the people, a battle that Schniedewind so effectively highlights, is integral to this paradigmatic shift. Nehemiah’s point in Neh 13:23-24 concerns the loss of *yehudit* – presumably Hebrew - and is a witness to the insistence in the 5th cent that Hebrew *is* the national language.[19] Moreover, even if it contains many Aramaisms, not only Aramaic, EN is nonetheless written primarily in Hebrew, not Aramaic. The EM and NM in particular stand as witnesses, as do the records of what was said by the people (e.g. Nehemiah 9) and what was written by them (Nehemiah 10). While Aramaic is associated with the early stages of the return (Ezra 4-6), it is gradually and persistently displaced by a *demonstrated* revival of Hebrew. [20] The violation of such return to Hebrew incurs Nehemiah’s wrath – an attitude that would be inexplicable if Aramaic had become the accepted norm in postexilic Jerusalem.

As Schniedewind argues throughout the book, the preservation and reproduction of Hebrew documents such as the Torah, would make less sense if there were not potential readers. Yet, Schniedewind’s work leads me in places to different conclusions from some that he draws. A commitment to the revival of Hebrew and literacy appear to be very much part of 5th cent Jerusalem, and Judah. EN and the very shift it portrays and enacts, is one example. Chronicles shows the continuation of such a commitment, whereas Haggai and Zechariah illustrate the use of Hebrew in the 6th cent. This kind of renewal with its deliberate reaffirmation of national identity, and the insistence that texts

represent a central power or expression of authority, is a postexilic phenomenon.

The transition from a royal court to another authority is of momentous consequences. In Israel, such change takes place during the postexilic period. This makes the era a pivotal one, with inestimable consequences. Although the possibility of such a shift flows from earlier stages (as Schniedewind shows) and depends on them, the particular form the change takes is not a simple intensification. It constitutes a paradigm shift that undercuts prior structures of authority and enlarges the scope of public participation and power.

When Ezra takes the Torah out of the closet and leaves it with the leaders (Nehemiah 8), he replaces royal and priestly monopoly on knowledge with communal power and with a new source. The source had existed earlier (in some form), but it only becomes decisive from this point onward. The emergence in the following centuries of what J. Kugel calls “the re-written Bible,” namely, the proliferation of texts that are clearly dependent on the Bible, is one of the many testimonies to the shift that has taken place.

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IMPLICATIONS FOR AND FROM CHRONICLES

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As the title of my remarks here indicates (although I did not choose it), Professor Schniedewind's book has some rather profound implications for the study of Chronicles. At the same time, the field of Chronicles studies also can have implications for how we read his book. In my remarks, therefore, I will address these two aspects of the relationship between his book and Chronicles.

Certainly, as a cursory examination of the recent commentaries will show, we have been dating the authorship of Chronicles to the Persian period – more likely the end of it than the beginning. Schniedewind seems to hold to the Cross-Freedman scheme of a sixth century edition followed by a fourth century edition. The two-edition hypothesis of Chronicles

authorship is not one I have seen asserted in print recently, other than by Schiedewind himself in an earlier essay.¹⁹ To be sure, Schniedewind does not argue very hard for this dating, and at other points of the book he does suggest that we can really only argue for a Persian period date for Chronicles (fifth-fourth century). Given the central thesis of the book, that it was really in response to late-eighth and seventh century Assyrian domination that the majority of biblical texts were written, it would have been interesting to see how he might have developed the two-edition hypothesis of Chronicles authorship in that context. Perhaps one implication of his book might be the revisiting of the two-editions hypothesis – personally I must say that I would resist this revisiting, and in some part for the reason that he gives: since the literary frame and construction of 1 Chron. 10-2 Chron. 36 is so well integrated, other than the genealogies, it is very hard to see what might have been added in a “second edition.” And even the genealogies are well integrated into the ideological purpose of the book. Why I think the two-edition hypothesis might be worth revisiting comes out of the argument of this book – after reading Schniedewind’s book, I cannot see how one might possibly justify *any* literary activity in the Persian period, and in fact this is what he argues – that the Persian period was a period of collection, editing and interpreting. However, I wonder if perhaps instead of leaving Chronicles in the (late) Persian period – which date Schniedewind has always

¹⁹ William M. Schniedewind, “The Chronicler as an Interpreter of Scripture,” in *The Chronicler as Author: Studies in Text and Texture* (ed. M. Patrick Graham and Steven L. McKenzie; JSOTSup 263; Sheffield: Sheffield AP, 1999), 158-59.

resisted²⁰ – whether this book might not give us the arguments we need to push the dating of Chronicles into the Hellenistic period, when as he says, we have extra-biblical evidence for a literary culture in Hebrew once again. I suspect that he would be reluctant to do so, given his statements around the date of Qohelet in this book, and his arguments elsewhere about the language of Qohelet.

One of the key arguments in Schniedewind's book that pertains directly to Chronicles is the development of a textual culture in Israel (by which he really means Judah), i.e., a culture where written authority displaces oral authority. He notes at several points the importance of writing for Chronicles: the appeal to written word as authoritative, in terms of Temple plans and in terms of *torah*. It has always been clear, I think, that Chronicles shows a concern for the written word that most other biblical books do not show as overtly. But by drawing our notice to this overt textualization in Chronicles, Schniedewind's book can help us see that this is perhaps a feature peculiar (in the canon) to Chronicles, although he argues that this is a key marker on a roadway towards a textualized culture in the late Second Temple period. After all, there are other biblical books that seem to depend on written texts, yet do not draw on the authority of the previously written word in order to bolster their own authority (as does Chronicles). Ezekiel's scroll-eating antics (Ezek. 3.1-3) in fact might lead us in other directions. And of course, we know that

²⁰ William M. Schniedewind, *The Word of God in Transition: From Prophet to Exegete in the Second Temple Period* (JSOTSup 197; Sheffield: Sheffield AP, 1995), 249.

where Chronicles did demonstrably cite/quote/plagiarize a source text, there is no citation formula of any kind! (The repetitive resumptions formula discussed by Schniedewind is a different kind of phenomenon.)

There are other implications for Chronicles in Schniedewind's arguments. There is a certain stream in Chronicles studies that suggests that Chronicles was produced at a time when there was a great deal of literary production happening.²¹ Schniedewind suggests just the opposite: that Chronicles is a text interested in preserving and commenting upon the past, not in creative literary production. It is an archival text, in a way, a text of "retrenching." This argument suggests that Chronicles is very much a product of a scribal culture in the sense of copyist/editor, rather than being a product of a scribal culture in the sense of literate elite. In his argument, we might imagine Chronicles easily growing out of a need to copy, re-copy, gloss, edit and retouch Samuel-Kings. This would not be proto-midrash (which implies a certain amount of creative re-articulation and interpretation), but simply scribal. It is unclear to me how Schniedewind is conceiving of the difference between a simple scribal culture of copying, minor glossing etc. (suggested to me by the term "retrenchment"), and a culture of

²¹ A. Graeme Auld, *Kings Without Privilege: David and Moses in the Story of the Bible's Kings* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 150, 173-74; Ehud Ben Zvi, "What is New in Yehud? Some Considerations," in *Yahwism After the Exile: Perspectives on Israelite Religion in the Persian Era* (ed. Rainer Albertz and Bob Becking; STAR 5; Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2003), 32-48.

literary creation – are editing and retouching considered scribal or creative processes?

Schniedewind also suggests that we can see in Chronicles how textual processes in ancient Israel/Yehud/Judea actually worked. I think this is an important point. Chronicles, in this view, makes use of earlier texts in an expansionistic way. In no other canonical book do we have as clear a picture of the use of earlier texts. Really, if we want to know how almost all of the biblical books came to be, we should be looking at Chronicles as our model, and Schniedewind does draw on an extended illustration to show how Chronicles used Kings. This was a process with several stages, moving from the “deuteronomic” to the “chronistic.” Although, as he notes, there is a good deal of “deuteronomic” ideology in Chronicles, in fact I would point out that they really are in many ways parallel histories, with differing ideological and theological concerns, and Chronicles is not merely the (expected?) extension of a textual process that began with Kings. Related to this issue is Schniedewind’s argument that in Chronicles we can see the move from reference to an oral tradition to reference to written texts, especially in the matter of the *torah*. I have one problem with this presentation, however: there are few comments on canonical processes in Schniedewind’s book – lots of comments on how individual books came to be created and what impact that had on the development of Judaism, but few on the canonical process, and deliberately so, I think. I would like to emphasize that there are serious implications of this discussion of canon for the creation of

Chronicles. It comes down to this: was the Chronicler commenting on/expanding/interpreting an authoritative, perhaps canonical body of literature, or was the Chronicler adding his voice to an on-going theological debate? I think I know Schniedewind's answer from other parts of the book (as well as from his previous work) – there was something authoritative or canonical or scriptural (if you like) out there, and the Chronicler was commenting on/expanding/interpreting it, not engaged in theological or ideological debate.

However, as we move from “implications for” to “implications from” Chronicles in light of Schniedewind's book, it is this tendency to see Chronicles as a product of a culture of “retrenchment” that I think we should resist. Schniedewind states that Chronicles is essentially a plagiarized text. This is a characterization of Chronicles that I think some recent readings of the text have tried to overcome.²² Certainly the Chronicler used something like Samuel-Kings as a source text, and in some places deviated very little from this source. However, in other places the Chronicler did show remarkable creativity and literary awareness. In the Chronicler's description of the reign of Asa, for example, we can find allusions to a variety of biblical books: 2 Chron. 13.23, “and the land had rest for ten years,” and 2 Chron. 15.3-6 (the speech of Azariah) both use language reminiscent of Judges; Asa's

²² Cf. Christine Mitchell, “Transformations of Meaning: The Accession of Solomon in Chronicles,” *JHS* 4 (2002) 3. (<http://purl.org/jhs>); Gary Knoppers, “Greek Historiography and the Chronicler's History: A Reexamination,” *JBL* (2003): 627-50.

preparation of his own grave in 2 Chron. 16.14, recalls the grave the patriarch Jacob prepares for himself in Gen. 50.5; the great fire made for him in 2 Chron. 16.14 recalls Jer. 34.5 which also alludes to the burning done in honour of the kings, and also does link to Saul's death as depicted in 1 Sam. 31.12. Not only are there allusions, but also the allusiveness of the text is so well synthesized, that it is clear that we are not looking at a simple quotation-and-commentary text. Instead, we are looking at a sophisticated author, who both knew how to use his literary heritage in a creative way, and expected that his audience would hear this creative use of the heritage! This creative transformation of previous texts is also found in Hellenistic-period works such as *Jubilees*, the Temple Scroll, the Genesis Apocryphon, and so forth, as Schniedewind discusses in some detail.

I wonder if research on Chronicles could not be used to stand at least part of Schniedewind's argument about the date of the textualization of early Judaism on its head. Schniedewind seems to assume that authors write what they know – that is, they bring their stories up to their own day, or set their stories in their own times. This assumption operates from a notion of realism or realist literature – that authors try naturally to depict realistically their stories. Thus Schniedewind posits a seventh-century date for a great deal of biblical literature, compiled and edited in the sixth century in Babylon. However, as comparative research on Chronicles has shown, it is possible to conceive of an ancient historiographical work that does not bring the story down to the

author's day,²³ and perhaps it might be better to look at other ancient modes of authorship for our theoretical base. As well, I am intrigued by the two diametrically opposed views on the possibilities for literary production in the Persian period that emerge in current research: Schniedewind's, who says that there simply was not the material base for textual production, and Ben Zvi's, who says that the wealth of literary production from the small material base points to a certain kind of social organization (Temple-based).²⁴ Ben Zvi also points out that although almost all biblical literature is profoundly marked by the exilic experience or memory, there is almost no literature that directly describes that experience.²⁵ Perhaps we can draw on Smith-Christopher here, and suggest that the experience was so traumatic that it could not be written except in the most fragmentary, elusive and allusive way.²⁶ Chronicles, therefore, does not depict the Chronicler's own times because his own times were so traumatic/marginalized in his thought.

Implicit in Schniedewind's book is that creative literary production and commentary or interpretation cannot co-exist. Thus, there is a period of intense creative activity in the late-eighth and seventh centuries, a period of copying/glossing/ interpretation in the sixth through fourth centuries, and a second period of creative activity beginning in the third century. In this scheme, if

²³ Cf. Knoppers, "Greek Historiography."

²⁴ Ben Zvi, "What is New in Yehud?" 42-45.

²⁵ Ben Zvi, "What is New in Yehud?" 38-39.

²⁶ Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002).

we see Chronicles as being primarily a work of scribal copying and interpretation, then it must belong in the Persian period – if it is a work of creativity, then it must go elsewhere. But if this scheme does not hold, and we see creative literary production (however defined) and commentary co-existing, then Chronicles can belong in any period after the events it describes. And more importantly, it can be an example of a literary culture where creative literary production and commentary overlap. I would like to thank Professor Schniedewind for framing these issues in this way – it has certainly given me much food for thought.

ADRIFT: HOW THE BIBLE BECAME A BOOK

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Plato made a good point when he critiqued the written word: “Written words seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing forever. And once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place” (*Phaedrus*, §275d). Sometimes reading a review provokes the question of whether the reviewer has read the book that you wrote. Thankfully, this is not the case with the present reviewers. Indeed, it is quite an honor to be reviewed by such thoughtful and qualified scholars, and their reviews push my book in useful directions. I am grateful that they understood that my book was merely a hors d’oeuvre into the study of the textualization of the Hebrew Bible. To my mind, their reviews

largely regard questions of emphasis or overemphasis, nuance or lack thereof, as well as issues with what I have left out. I did not write enough, and no living voice can prevent what I have written from drifting in directions that I had not intended or even imagined.

Hopefully, this review process can help my written words come to rest on some solid ground. Unfortunately, I cannot react to all the comments, critiques, and observations by David Carr, Christine Mitchell, and Tamara Eskenazi. I wish to also acknowledge many helpful comments and observations in the SBL session by Oded Lipschitz and particularly Daniel Smith-Christopher. Here I offer a limited number of reactions and clarifications to what I have written and how it has been read.

Perhaps it will be useful to reflect on how my book became a book, and what I thought I was arguing. *How the Bible Became a Book* was an excursus from a larger research project on the “The Social History of the Hebrew Language.” This research is interested in the extra-biblical sources for the history of the Hebrew language and scribal institutions. One question that I asked was how the role of writing in ancient Judah and early Judaism might be paralleled in the history of the Hebrew language. This led to digressions on topics such as role of writing in the formation of the Hebrew Bible. In the end, the issue that attracted much of my attention was the tension between the authority of the oral and written tradition. Although there is a dynamic relationship between orality and literacy, the spoken and written word had different loci of

authority. It is also important to point out that I did not intend my book to be primarily a critique of the so-called minimalist school, although I do argue that the main period of literary composition was the late eighth through the sixth centuries BCE. These reviews are focused on the import of my work for the post-exilic period because they were originally part of an SBL session devoted to the post-exilic period, yet this is only a small part of my book. Finally, my book arose out of an interest in the role of writing in society, and not in the canonical process. Clearly there are many implications that could be drawn from my arguments, but these are not always the implications that I would draw or the directions that I would go. But I have written what I have written, and I am not unhappy that it is now adrift.

David Carr's review takes issue with the style and rhetoric of my argument. For example, Carr writes, "Though Schniedewind is fully aware of those who speak of the overlap of oral and written, the argument of the book sounds at times as if it revives a now discredited opposition between orality on the one hand and textuality on the other." Carr dislikes my "dramatic introduction[s]" to chapters, which he seems to fear will give the wrong impression. My response would be three-fold. First, the style of the argument is to begin with the larger, bolder claim and then to nuance it with the details in the development of the chapter. It would be a misreading to take such statements in the opening paragraph of a chapter and not allow the details given in the rest of the chapter to contextualize my argument. Second, I do make an important —

and I think original — contribution in distinguishing between the continuum between orality and literacy, on the one hand, and the tension between the spoken and the written word as competing centers of cultural and religious authority, on the other. Moreover, my book charts an ebb and flow between orality and literacy as well as the authority of the oral versus written word. Finally, I think Carr too easily considers certain ideas “discredited” (both here and elsewhere), when in fact they are “debated.” I was certainly aware of the critiques of scholars like Goody, though I hardly think Goody has been “discredited.” Indeed, Goody has modified some of his views (as I myself continue to do); moreover, I believe that my distinction between the orality-literacy continuum and the oral-written tension is an important contribution to the discussion.

Given the limited nature of our evidence, I find it unlikely that there will be scholarly consensus on the issue of literacy in ancient Judah. There is some evidence, however, that is beyond dispute. Namely, a great number and variety of extra-biblical Hebrew texts appear beginning in the late eighth century until the early sixth century BCE. The degree that this constitutes evidence for “literacy” will continue to be debated and will be partially dependent upon our definition of literacy. The word “literacy,” like the word “book,” is really an anachronism when applied to an ancient society like pre-exilic Judah. Although I was aware of the shortcomings of my terminology, I also was aware that such terms immediately draw scholars into an interesting and, I believe, often productive debate. My interest in raising the literacy debate was

really concerned with the beginnings of textual authority. The increasing prevalence of writing in monarchic Judah made it possible to have a broader appeal to written authority and initiated a fascinating story of the written word in ancient Judaism.

There is a tendency, I believe, to over-identify my arguments with that of Finkelstein's *The Bible Unearthed* (2001). Specifically, Finkelstein argued for the Josianic period as the main locus of literary production in ancient Judah. This is decidedly not my argument. While I recognized the important role that the Josianic period played in the flourishing of biblical literature, I believe it is important to recognize the Hezekian and exilic periods as well. Moreover, as Carr recognizes, I even argue (contra Finkelstein) that there were scribes in early monarchic Judah (10th-9th C. BCE) so that the beginnings of biblical literature might be traced back to this earlier period; at the same time, I have argued that the flourishing of biblical literature as we have it preserved in the Hebrew Bible only began in the eighth century BCE. My line of reasoning begins with the history of the Hebrew language itself. I maintain (and will develop in more detail in my current book project) that Biblical Hebrew is largely the language of Judean scribes of the eighth through sixth centuries BCE. Archaic Biblical Hebrew (i.e., texts like Judges 5 and Exodus 15) is the pre-classical Hebrew dialect(s) of the 12th-9th century BCE; and, late Biblical Hebrew (i.e., Chronicles, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah) is the language

of the 5th-3rd centuries BCE.²⁷ Moreover, I would certainly agree with the observations of both Carr and Mitchell that the Hellenistic and Greco-Roman periods were important periods of literary creativity. Indeed, if I were to offer some self-critique, I would say that I did not engage Ehud Ben Zvi nearly as much as his work warranted, and I am pleased the current discussion partially redresses this deficiency.²⁸ Ben Zvi also pointed out the deficiencies with the Persian period, yet argued that biblical literature flourished within the temple. To be sure, the temple-based elites could account for some creative literary activity in the Persian period (like Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah), or just as plausibly in the Hellenistic period (e.g., books like Esther). I am open to dating Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah, Esther, Qohelet, and the redaction of the Psalter in the Hellenistic period, although it is difficult to date them precisely. The alert reader will notice that while I sketch general outlines for the composition of biblical literature, I have not been specific on a number of texts.

David Carr tries to defend the oft-stated, offhand suggestion that late Persian, Hellenistic or Greco-Roman scribes could have perfectly imitated Classical Hebrew style. But this is simply not in

²⁷ See my review of this important linguistic debate in a book edited by Ian Young entitled, *Biblical Hebrew: Studies in Chronology and Typology* (JSOTSS, 369; Continuum: London/New York, 2004); Schniedewind, "Steps and Missteps in the Linguistic Dating of Biblical Hebrew," *Hebrew Studies*, forthcoming.

²⁸ See Ben Zvi, "The Urban Center of Jerusalem and the Development of the Literature of the Hebrew Bible," in *Aspects of Urbanism in Antiquity: From Mesopotamia to Crete* (edited by W.E. Aufrecht, N.A. Mirau, and S.W. Gauley; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1997) 194-209.

line with linguistic facts on the ground or with linguistic theory. Ancient Jewish scribes did not know historical linguistics, and the kind of data and linguistic theory that would lead to the development of the discipline of Historical Linguistics would only evolve centuries later. Moreover, even the suggestion that ancient scribes “classicized” implies a particular linguistic ideology and a knowledge of historical linguistics. The closest example of an ancient classicizing linguistic ideology would be the Qumran sect, but their linguistic ideology was religious and not historical; and, consequently, their language is not strictly an attempt at classicizing, and linguistic knowledge is better described pseudoclassicisms.²⁹

There are problems with the traditional approaches to the history of the Hebrew language that have lent credence to Carr’s critique of the periodization of Hebrew. One problem is the use of the exile as the watershed of the history of the Hebrew language.³⁰

²⁹ See Schniedewind, “Linguistic Ideology in Qumran Hebrew,” in *Diggers at the Well: Proceedings of a Third International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira* (edited by T. Muraoka and J.F. Elwolde; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 245-55; J. Joosten, “Pseudo-Classicism in Late Biblical Hebrew, in Ben Sira, and in Qumran Hebrew,” in *Sirach, Scrolls, and Sages: Proceedings of a Second International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Ben Sira, and the Mishnah, Held at Leiden University, 15-17 December 1997* (edited by T. Muraoka and J. F. Elwolde; Leiden: Brill, 1999) 146-59, and “The Knowledge and Use of Hebrew in the Hellenistic Period: Qumran and the Septuagint,” in *Diggers at the Well: Proceedings of a Third International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira* (edited by T. Muraoka and J.F. Elwolde; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 115-30.

³⁰ Carr cites M. Ehrensverd’s article, “Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts,” for support of his critique; however, the article by David Talshir, “The Habitat and History of Hebrew During the Second Temple Period,” in the same edited volume [*Biblical Hebrew: Studies in Chronology and Typology*

While the exile played a role, it was the changes in the scribal institutions and not merely historical events that shaped the history of the Hebrew language. As I allude to in *How the Bible Became a Book*, the scribal institutions of pre-exilic Israel continued into the early Persian period (i.e., the end of the sixth century BCE); however, these scribal institutions were eclipsed by the Achaemenid institutions that trained scribes to write Imperial Aramaic. There is no clear evidence for the reemergence of Hebrew scribal schools until the end of the third century BCE, although I suspect they began to resurface in the fourth century when the Achaemenid Empire declined in the west.

Christine Mitchell has rightly identified vagueness in my discussion about the composition of the Book of Chronicles. I am indeed drawn to the Cross-Freedman hypothesis that would see at least a dual redaction of Chronicles, yet I am aware of the problems of this thesis. It seems hard to deny the power of the observations of Cross and Freedman for an early Persian (late sixth century) edition of Chronicles.³¹ Yet, the book as it stands seems to date to the late Persian period. Mitchell would seem to prefer a Hellenistic date, but Hellenistic Jerusalem continued to be underpopulated and

(edited by Ian Young; New York: Continuum, 2003) 251-75] is a better assessment of the linguistic situation. See my review essay on this volume, "Steps and Missteps in the Linguistic Dating of Biblical Hebrew."

³¹ See especially F. M. Cross, "A Reconstruction of the Judean Restoration," *JBL* 94 (1975) 4-18, and D. N. Freedman, "The Chronicler's Purpose," *CBQ* 23 (1961) 436-42.

impoverished until the end of the 3rd century BCE.³² The reign of Antiochus III (223–187 BCE) was marked by generous allotments to Jerusalem's elites, an expanding population, and important construction projects. Although this was a favorable environment for literary flourishing, it is too late to locate much of biblical literature. To my mind, the later one pushes the final composition of Chronicles, the more necessary it also becomes (linguistically and ideologically) to posit an early edition/redaction of Chronicles. Although there is a trend in biblical scholarship to be only interested in the final text and to pooh-pooh the search for earlier sources/editions/redactions, I fancy myself as a historian interested in the intellectual and social history of ancient Israel and early Judaism. The unraveling of biblical sources, editions, and redactions is a window into history, and any scholar interested in the history of ancient Israel can ill-afford to neglect the traditional disciplines of biblical criticism. That said, I regarded an extensive redactional analysis of Chronicles too technical and outside the scope of my book, although I am glad if my work generates a renewed discussion.

As Carr notes, *How the Bible Became a Book* also has implications for Pentateuchal research. The textualization of *torah*, and its transformation from teaching to text, has not received the attention it deserves. Carr draws attention to my interpretation of Exodus 24, which is certainly a powerful illustration for the

³² See A. Berlin, "Between Large Forces: Palestine in the Hellenistic Period," *Biblical Archaeologist* 60/1 (1997) 3-51.

development of the awareness of textual authority within the Bible. Carr thinks the redactional development (specifically vv. 4-8) of this text is Persian, but I think it is difficult to be certain about such dating. Too often dating of texts begins with the assumptions of the writer (myself included). In writing *How the Bible Became a Book*, I was impressed, and even amazed, by the lack of the awareness of written texts and their authority in the Priestly texts of the Pentateuch, especially in counterpoint to the role of written authority in Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. P still has strictly an oral *torah*, while Ezra places great emphasis on the authority of the written *Torah* of Moses.³³ For me, this added another strong argument (in addition to the linguistic argument) for dating the Pentateuch, and specifically the Priestly writings, as pre-Persian. This does not mean that there was no editing of the Pentateuch in the Persian period, but certainly casts doubt on it as purely a product of Persian and/or Hellenistic scribes.

Other scholars, particularly Tamara Ezkenazi, had already latched onto the important transformation in textual awareness and authority. Ezkenazi's review elaborates this theme, which she had already developed in her important book, *In an Age of Prose*. For me, it was important to acknowledge that the textualization of ancient Judaism began already in the late monarchy; indeed, I would say that it began already in the time of Hezekiah, although I focused

³³ I develop this observation further in "The Textualization of Torah in the Deuteronomic Tradition," in *Das Deuteronomium zwischen Pentateuch und Deuteronomistischem Geschichtswerk* (edited by E. Otto and R. Achenbach; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004) 153-67.

more on the period of Josiah. Eskenazi takes exception to my assertion that “only intensification” in the textualization process takes place in the postexilic period with Ezra. I understand her critique, and I do not wish to gainsay the editorial and literary activities of the Persian period. Perhaps I have been guilty of overemphasis for rhetorical effect. But we also have different perspectives. I was trying to sketch the larger story, whereas Eskenazi as well as Mitchell (especially in the context of the SBL session hosted by the Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah group) are focused on the postexilic period. Moreover, I felt that the introduction of the textualization process in the 8th-6th centuries was the more remarkable story in my sketch of the textualization of ancient Israel. I believe that my reading of Jeremiah 8:7-9 served to argue that the textualization of ancient Israel introduced the tension between oral and written authority. I think that Ezra-Nehemiah represents one voice in the Persian period that advocated a further shift to written authority. As I point out in my final chapter however, it is clear that the tension between oral and written authority continued and intensified in the Second Temple period, in early Christianity, and in Rabbinic Judaism.

I had a different objective than Eskenazi. In footnote two she writes, “I am not making a historical claim but rather a narrative one: this is how EN portrays the development.” This is an important distinction, and it is clear throughout that Eskenazi represents the narrative claims quite well and incisively. But I was more interested in making historical claims. Eskenazi writes, for

example, “A commitment to the revival of Hebrew and literacy appear to be very much part of 5th cent Jerusalem, and Judah.” This is a legitimate narrative claim. However, the archaeological, inscriptional, and historical evidence that I outline in my book would only suggest that the commitment to the revival of Hebrew certainly began by the 3rd century BCE, and perhaps we can push it back to the 4th century. It was the disintegration of the Achaemenid Empire and its scribal institutions that facilitated the reassertion of nationalism and national languages. This is my historical claim. I would suggest that Ezra-Nehemiah dates to the late Persian period, and it projects back into the earlier postexilic period (its own golden age) the politics of the late Persian and Hellenistic period.

A few clarifications. I cannot understand Mitchell’s objection to my description of the Persian period as a period of “retrenchment.” In my description, the word merely refers to the reduction and diminishment of the population and economy of Judah in the Persian period. I did not, however, ever speak of “a culture of retrenchment.” It would be difficult and problematic to describe cultures using such terminology. Mitchell is perhaps right in feeling unease at the description of Chronicles as “plagiarizing.” The term is anachronistic to the ancient world (as is the word “book”), but it does capture in the popular mind the way that Chronicles often borrows from sources without attribution. Indeed, plagiary isn’t my general understanding of Chronicles. In fact, I used the word only one time in my final draft (which is what

Mitchell had for her SBL response), but I edited it out for fear that some might misunderstand my intention (“plagiarized” was replaced with the innocuous “closely follows” on page 184 of the book). Plagiarism is a provocative and loaded term, which makes it nice for starting a discussion; however, it is also open to misreading so I guess I was right in replacing the term! Finally, to my mind, Mitchell creates a straw man when she concludes, “Implicit in Schniedewind’s book is that creative literary production and commentary or interpretation cannot co-exist.” I’m glad that this is not my statement because it would be quite foolish. My argument was simply that certain social, economic, and political situations favor intense literary production and others do not. Using the observations of linguistic anthropologists and the facts created by archaeological research, I tried to sketch out the social contexts that contributed to the formation of the Bible. One does need to be cognizant that the role of writing in the post-Babylonian destruction was quite different than in post-World War II. Literary creativity as a response to catastrophic ancient events would not have played the same role in the impoverished and largely illiterate society of Persian Yehud as it does in a modern literate society.

More than anything else, I believe my book asked interesting questions and brought a different perspective to the formation of the Bible as a written text. I sketched out the contours of some answers to these questions, but much more can be done. The questions are now adrift, and it will be interesting watching where they run aground.