Levites as Prophets and Scribes and Their Role in the Transmission of the Torah

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During one of the plenary sessions of the Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense in 2016, Rainer Kessler quipped that we should assume that writers in Jerusalem were able to produce wisdom literature in the morning and prophetic texts in the afternoon, emphasizing that we associate too readily different literary genres with different groups despite connecting traditions or motifs.[1] The current literature gives the impression that Levites were responsible for writing or collecting most of the Hebrew Bible and, perhaps, even some of the New Testament writings. Analyzing the role of Levites as scribes and the sociohistorical setting of the production, collection, and curation of authoritative texts perhaps allows us to identify their scribal activity as the unifying force leading to the canon. But ascribing most texts to Levites is not without problems.[2]

1. Cf. Richard A. Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 196: "Scribes learned and copied texts of all sorts, from collections of laws and omens to psalms to myths and legends, and not just 'wisdom.'"

2. Similarly, Norbert Lohfink once lamented that "Deuteronomism" would become an empty name if everything were called deuteronomistic. See Norbert Lohfink, "Gab es eine deuteronomistische Bewegung?," in *Studien zum Deuteronomium und zur deuteronomistischen Literatur III*, SBAB 20 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1995), 65–142. Deuteronomy was linked to Levitical origins, too (cf. Lohfink, "Bewegung," 65). For the theory of a northern and Levitical origin of Deuteronomy, cf. also Risto Nurmela, *The Levites: Their Emergence as a Second-Class Priesthood*, SFSHJ 193 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 181; Mark Leuchter, *The Levites and the Boundaries of Israelite Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 159–60.

Who Wrote the Twelve?

According to a tradition preserved in the Talmud (b. B. Bat. 15a), the men of the "Great Assembly" (אנשי כנסת הגדולה) wrote Ezekiel, the Twelve, Daniel, and Esther. 'Abot de Rabbi Nathan ('Abot R. Nat. A1.3) posits that Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi received from the earlier prophets, while the Great Assembly received from those three. 'Abot R. Nat. perhaps supposes that Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi were part of this anonymous collective who would have been responsible for the conclusion of the Twelve. While the "Great Assembly" remains elusive, the tradition could reflect changes in the organization of knowledge in postexilic Yehud wherein the temple and Levites gained in importance.

Byron Curtis, for example, argues, based on the Levitical sermons in Chronicles, that Levites edited the Twelve. He believes that prophecy was "strategically important for the social consolidation and survival of a particular people, and with them, their faith."[3] The anthology Zech 9–14 reflects the changing history of the society as well as the role and fate of the prophet who becomes more and more alienated and marginalized, which he concludes from Zech 13.[4]

Zechariah 13:2–6 shows an interesting shift in the concept of prophecy seemingly predicting the end of prophecy: YHWH will remove the prophets (13:2) and anyone who still prophesies, "his father and mother who gave birth to him will pierce him through when he prophesies" (13:3).[5] The prospect seems unclear. Are all prophets removed as 13:2 seems to indicate or only the false prophets as 13:3 suggests?[6] We should pay attention, though, to what is not said. Zechariah 13:4–6 is preoccupied with the acting of prophets (נבא *niphal*) and the modes of revelation. They reject visions, public performances, prophets acting as miracle workers, or seeking ecstasy.[7] Prophets who interpret the Torah are not mentioned.

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3. Byron G. Curtis, *Up the Steep and Stony Road: The Book of Zechariah in Social Location Trajectory Analysis*, AcBib 25 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 1.

4. Curtis, *Stony Road*, 161; Mark J. Boda, *The Book of Zechariah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 68. Boda suggested "a canon consciousness for those responsible for Zech 9–14" (183, cf. 194–95) including Deuteronomy, other prophetic writings, and also Genesis. See Boda, *Exploring Zechariah, Vol. 2: The Development and Role of Biblical Traditions in Zechariah*, ANEM 17 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017).

5. Biblical quotations adapted from NRSV.

6. Paul L. Redditt, *Zechariah 9–14*, IECOT (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2012), 107–8.

7. Cf. the hairy robe alluding to Elijah in 13:4.

The Torah in the Twelve

At the end of the Twelve, Mal 3:22 reminds Israel to "Remember the *torah* of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel." LXX puts this verse last presumably preserving the original order. MT emphasizes the return of Elijah and the conversion of hearts promoting a prophetic perspective. Judging from the number of occurrences, torah is not a major subject for the Twelve. It appears as something forgotten, broken, or transgressed (Hos 4:6; 8:1, 12; Amos 2:4; Hab 1:4; Zeph 3:4)—the remarkable exception being the vision in Mic 4:2.[8] Zechariah 7:12, expanding on the theme of Zech 1:4–6 (see below), summarizes the behavior of the ancestors: "They made their hearts adamant in order not to hear the torah and the words that YHWH Ṣeba'ot had sent by his spirit through the former prophets. Therefore, great wrath came from YHWH Ṣeba'ot." In this view, Israel never kept the torah before the exile (cf. 7:7) although constantly reminded by prophets. Therefore, it needs to be persistently prompted to remember it after the exile.

Malachi 2:4–9 talks about the covenant with Levi and mentions torah four times. Levi is the role model for the priest as he obeys the law and gives true instruction (תורת אמת, 2:6). "For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge [דעת], and people should seek torah from his mouth, for he is the messenger [מלאך] of YHWH Ṣeba'ot (2:7)."[9] In contrast to Levi, the *kohanim* "have turned aside from the way," "have caused many to stumble by the *torah*," and have thus "corrupted the covenant of Levi" (2:8). The term torah refers to ethical demands concluding from 2:6.[10] While it could simply be an individual priestly instruction, the expression סור מן־הדרך evokes Deut 11:28 ("the curse, if you do not obey the com-

8. In Hag 2:11, torah is a priestly instruction concerning purity. See Martin Leuenberger, *Haggai*, HThKAT (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2015), 196.

9. According to Karel van der Toorn (*Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007], 93–94), "the Levites are still designated as priests (Mal 2:1–9), though the prophecy emphasizes the role of the Levites in giving reliable instruction in the Torah (Mal 2:6–7)." The division of tasks between Zadokite priests and Levites are subsequently more pronounced in Chronicles. See also Lester L. Grabbe, "The Priesthood in the Persian Period: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi," in *Priests and Cults in the Book of the Twelve*, ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, ANEM 14 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016): 149–56.

10. Cf. Henning Reventlow, *Die Propheten Haggai, Sacharja und Maleachi*, ATD 25.2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 144–45.

mandments of YHWH your God, but turn from the way"); 31:29; Judg 2:17; and the account of the golden calf (Deut 9:12, 16; Exod 32:8). While Israel transgressed the Torah all the time, Levi warrants its observation. Israel must be reminded of it, which is the duty of the prophets.

For James Nogalski, the "book of remembrance" (Mal 3:16), an early form of the Book of the Twelve dating from the first half of the fourth century, was "used for instruction and housed in the temple library ... and reflects an expanding curriculum for the temple elite to aid their instruction of the people."[11] In this regard, it is in line with the teaching obligations of the Levites according to Chronicles (cf. 2 Chr 17:7–9).

Prophets and Levites in Chronicles

While most date Chronicles to the end of the fourth century, Martin Hengel suspects that the canon of the prophetic writings was mostly finalized given that the Chronicler cites from prophetic books.[12] He presumes the first half of the third century.[13] Chronicles virtually identifies prophecy with scribal activity. As prophets become exegetes and scribes, the author of Chronicles sees his work as an inspired prophetic authority reinterpreting history.[14] By attributing his source, the Deuteronomistic History, constantly to prophets, he turns it into a written prophetic word, too.

Promoting the temple, Chronicles highlight the roles of priests and particularly Levites throughout. Already the genealogies in 1 Chr 1–9 point out the importance of the Davidic line, the tribe of Judah, and the tribe of Levi. The Levitical priesthood obviously wants to derive legitimation from the preexilic temple with its cult.[15] This explains the emphasis

11. James Nogalski, "How Does Malachi's 'Book of Remembrance' Function for the Cultic Elite?," in Tiemeyer, *Priests and Cults in the Book of the Twelve*, 211.

12. For the finalization of Chronicles, see, e.g., Sara Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, OTL (London: SCM, 1993), 27–28.

13. Martin Hengel, "'Schriftauslegung' und 'Schriftwerdung' in der Zeit des Zweiten Tempels," in *Judaica, Hellenistica et Christiana: Kleine Schriften II*, WUNT 109 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999 [1994]), 29, 30 n. 102.

14. Cf. William M. Schniedewind, *The Word of God in Transition: From Prophet to Exegete in the Second Temple Period*, JSOTSup 197 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), esp. 209–30; Steven James Schweitzer, *Reading Utopia in Chronicles*, LHBOTS 442 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 43–46.

15. See also Rainer Albertz, *Religionsgeschichte Israels in alttestamentlicher Zeit*, GAT 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 622.

on its destruction in 2 Chr 36 as well as the call to rebuild it and to go up there (36:23). In this final chapter, 36:15–16 seeks the cause of the destruction in the constant rejection of the prophets:

> YHWH, the God of their ancestors, sent persistently to them by his messengers [מלאכיו], because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets [נביאיו], until the wrath of YHWH against his people became so great that there was no remedy. (2 Chr 36:15–16)

The notion that God had consistently sent his prophets in vain resembles the opening verses of Zechariah closely:[16]

> Do not be like your ancestors, to whom the former prophets [הנביאים הראשנים] proclaimed, "Thus says YHWH Ṣeba'ot, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds." But they did not hear or heed me, says YHWH. Your ancestors, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? But my words and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets [דברי וחקי אשר צויתי את־עבדי הנביאים], did they not overtake your ancestors? So they repented and said, "YHWH Ṣeba'ot has dealt with us according to our ways and deeds, just as he planned to do." (Zech 1:4–6)

While these former prophets had not been successful, the "words and statutes" eventually were. The rare expression דברי וחקי brings to mind: (1) the Torah the king is supposed to copy from the Levitical priests "so that he may learn to fear YHWH his God, observing all the words of this *torah* and these statutes" (Deut 17:19); (2) the title of Ezra: "the priest, the scribe, the scribe of the words of the commandments of YHWH and his statutes to Israel" (Ezra 7:11); (3) and, less closely, Josiah's covenant according to 2 Chr 34:31.[17] Furthermore, the phrase וחקי אשר צויתי has its closest parallel in Deut 6:17: ("You must diligently keep the commandments of YHWH your God, and his decrees, and his statutes that he has commanded you [וחקיו אשר צוך]") with several similar instances in Deuteronomy.[18] Two further sets of parallels are noteworthy as they

16. So also 2 Kgs 17:15, where YHWH's warnings are rejected by the people.

17. Also Ps 147:19 according to the *qere*: מגיד דְּבָרָו ליעקב חקיו ומשפטיו לישראל.

18. Cf. Deut 4:14, 40; 6:1, 17, 20, 24; 7:11; 26:16; 27:10; see also 1 Kgs 8:58 (also אבתינו); 9:4; Num 30:17.

also contain references to Moses and the Torah: (1) the end of the Twelve, Mal 3:22, (discussed above); and (2) three passages in Chronicles: 1 Chr 22:13 within David's charge to Solomon; 2 Chr 7:17 promising the establishment of the royal throne to Solomon; and 2 Chr 33:8 recalling the promise to David and Solomon while explicitly mentioning the exile (cf. also Neh 1:7; 9:14). A cluster of allusions links Chronicles to the prophets as well as the Torah, especially Deuteronomy. At the same time, Levites are characterized not only as teachers and exegetes of the Torah but also as prophets.[19] In the view of Chronicles, a prophet is a "Mosaic figure," that is, someone who follows the commands of the Torah, as Ehud Ben Zvi put it: "In practical terms, this means these prophets must be imagined as following the agreed upon readings of existing authoritative texts."[20]

Levites and Torah in Chronicles

The extensive details on the duties of the Levites in Chronicles reflect postexilic conditions in an idealized way.[21] They testify to a development in which several groups of the lower clergy were included in the class of the Levites adding significance and expanding their range of responsibilities (see, e.g., 1 Chr 26) while priests recede to the background in comparison, for example, with the Priestly Code.[22] According to 2 Chr 34:13, "some of the Levites were scribes, and literate officials, and gatekeepers [סופרים ושטרים ושוערים]," but the priest Ezra was also a scribe (ספר מהיר, Ezra 7:6).[23] "There appears to have been significant overlap in these indi-

19. Cf. Leuchter, *Levites*, 245, 248.

20. Ehud Ben Zvi, "Observations on Line of Thoughts concerning the Concepts of Prophecy and Prophets in Yehud, with an Emphasis on Deuteronomy–2 Kings and Chronicles," in *Words, Ideas, Worlds: Biblical Essays in Honour of Yairah Amit*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Frank H. Polak, HBM 40 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), 14.

21. Cf. Schweitzer, *Reading Utopia*, 12–13; Joachim Schaper, *Priester und Leviten im achämenidischen Juda: Studien zur Kult- und Sozialgeschichte in persischer Zeit*, FAT 31 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 291; skeptical: Thomas Willi, "Leviten, Priester und Kult in vorhellenistischer Zeit: Die chronistische Optik in ihrem geschichtlichen Kontext," in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel*, ed. Beate Ego, Armin Lange, and Peter Pilhofer, WUNT 118 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 84.

22. Cf. Schaper, *Priester und Leviten*, 280–302; Schweitzer, *Reading Utopia*, 149–75.

23. Cf. Horsley, *Scribes*, 80.

cations of status and position in the operation of the temple-state."[24] Levites are essential for the cult, not just subordinate to the priests.[25] At times, they take on tasks of priests or lay people in order to guarantee a smooth functioning of the cult, "but *no one* ever substitutes for the Levites—their unique duties are not performed by others in any circumstance."[26]

Several authorities legitimize cultic and other practices, first and foremost Moses and the Torah of Moses, David, and Solomon, but also other kings and even the קהל (2 Chr 30:2) and words of prophets. These authorities demonstrate that current practices comply with the tradition. They legitimize innovations, especially regulations not found in the Pentateuch.[27]

Moses and the Torah of Moses are of particular importance: Eighteen of twenty-one instances belong to the Chronicler's *Sondergut*.[28] The Torah is invoked seven times by the expression ככתוב especially in the context of cultic regulations like the Passover (2 Chr 23:18; 25:4; 30:5, 18; 31:3; 35:12, 26). This formula implies a written source, although no actual quotation is given. It serves as a homology; stipulations that in fact differ from the Torah of Moses are claimed to be consistent with it.[29] References to Moses coincide with an emphasis on the Levites.[30] The Torah represents the framework for the detailed regulations by the kings, but some of their regulations differ in substance.[31] Especially King David interprets the Torah. He introduces the majority of cultic regulations, organizes the

24. Horsley, *Scribes*, 79.

25. Cf. Schaper, *Priester und Leviten*, 298. Their secondary role is mitigated, e.g., in 1 Chr 23:13 where Moses and Aaron are shown as part of the Levite genealogy. Cf. Gary N. Knoppers, "Hierodules, Priests, or Janitors? The Levites in Chronicles and the History of the Israelite Priesthood," *JBL* 118 (1999): 70.

26. For the smooth functioning of the cult, see, e.g., 2 Chr 29:34; 30:17–20; 35:11–15. Quotation from Schweitzer, *Reading Utopia*, 154.

27. Cf. Gary N. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1–9*, AB 12 (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 92–93; Judson R. Shaver, *Torah and the Chronicler's History Work: An Inquiry into the Chronicler's References to Laws, Festivals, and Cultic Institutions in Relationship to Pentateuchal Legislation*, BJS 196 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 73–86.

28. Ernst Michael Dörrfuss, *Mose in den Chronikbüchern: Garant theokratischer Zukunftserwartung*, BZAW 219 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994), 3.

29. Willi, "Leviten, Priester und Kult," 86 ("Schriftkonformitätsklausel").

30. See, e.g., 2 Chr 30:16; 35:6, also 35:12 probably refers to actions of the Levites.

31. Cf. Sara Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought*, BEATAJ 9 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1989), 237–38.

Levites, and allocates their responsibilities. It signals the completion of the Torah that new stipulations were not included.[32]

Teaching the Torah is primarily, albeit not exclusively, the duty of Levites, as can be learned from 2 Chr 17:7–9 where Jehoshaphat sends out ten Levites and two priests alongside five officials to teach the ספר תורת יהוה in Judah.

Levites and Psalms

Levites were in charge of temple music, according to Chronicles. Thus, they probably were responsible not only for the performance of psalms during temple liturgy but also for the writing, collecting, and composing of the Psalter. The Psalter shows an affinity to the Torah right from the beginning (Ps 1:2), and David plays a prominent role in it. Erich Zenger has summarized his understanding succinctly: Levitical temple singers composed the Psalter for laypeople; it served as an abridged version of Torah and Prophets and connected Torah wisdom with prophetic eschatology and the piety of the poor.[33]

A recent volume edited by Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, Johannes Bremer, and Till Magnus Steiner deals with different groups responsible for the creation and the development of the Psalter.[34] Ulrich Berges considered the connections of Isaiah and especially Deutero-Isaiah to the Psalter. He thinks that it is no longer sufficient to demonstrate literary links between texts. Those must be corroborated in regard to the sociological background of literary production. He believes that those transmitting Isa 49–54 had close relationships to those of the Psalter. He thinks of Levitical singers because of shared key topics, such as Zion, joy and singing, YHWH's kingship, and foreign people's inclusion.[35]

For Susan Gillingham, it is not enough to identify those compiling the five books of the Psalter just with sages or scribes within the wisdom tradi-

32. Hengel, "Schriftauslegung," 32, believes the Pentateuch already had its final form by then.

33. Erich Zenger and Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, "Das Buch der Psalmen," in *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, ed. Christian Frevel, 9th ed., KStTh 1.1 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016), 451.

34. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, Johannes Bremer, and Till Magnus Steiner, eds., *Trägerkreise in den Psalmen*, BBB 178 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017).

35. Ulrich Berges, "'Singt dem Herrn ein neues Lied': Zu den Trägerkreisen von Jesajabuch und Psalter," in Hossfeld, *Trägerkreise in den Psalmen*, 31.

tion or with writers interested in prophetic traditions and concerned with the imminent establishment of God's kingdom, as both "cater for only a small proportion of Psalms."[36] Her "Levitical-singer-hypothesis" is based in part on the Chronicler's view of the Levitical singers. As she summarizes her arguments:

> So in these six ways—the liturgical presentation of David, the interest in the Torah (and the king's status as it relates to the Torah), the more general didactic emphases, the redefining of cultic practice as (essentially) sacred song, the emphasis on the poor and needy, and the interest in prophecy—we might identify those who collected and edited the Psalter as Levites whose particular role was to provide music, singing and teaching for Second Temple liturgy.[37]

By means of this collection, Levites were able to link their authority back to the First Temple, David, and even Moses.[38]

Bernd Janowski is more cautious about ascribing everything to Levitical groups. The genuine theology of the Psalter receives and transforms prophetic, Deuteronomistic, and wisdom traditions. Responsible groups—like Levitical temple singers—cannot be recognized throughout, he believes, but could be assumed "here and there."[39] He emphasizes the long process of writing, editing, and archiving. It is striking, though, that psalms transform priestly theology and use cultic terms metaphorically. He considers them an amalgamation of cultic prophecy and interpretation of scripture at the temple.[40]

Levites Everywhere?

Levitical authorship could even extend to Hebrews and the Revelation of John, as Torleif Elgvin argues. The authors "may derive from priestly milieus that were able to produce both theological treatises and apoca-

36. Susan Gillingham, "The Levitical Singers and the Compilation of the Psalter," in Hossfeld, *Trägerkreise in den Psalmen*, 36.

37. Gillingham, "Levitical Singers," 47.

38. Cf. Gillingham, "Levitical Singers," 56.

39. Bernd Janowski, "Auf dem Weg zur Buchreligion: Transformationen des Kultischen im Psalter," in Hossfeld, *Trägerkreise in den Psalmen*, 253–54.

40. Janowski, "Auf dem Weg," 255.

lyptic visions."[41] Forms of mantic wisdom and wisdom traditions in the stricter sense seem to connect prophetic and wisdom literature as well as later apocalyptical writings.

Karel van der Toorn made a case for a Levitical setting of the scribal education in Jerusalem tracing its roots back to preexilic times.[42] Extrabiblical sources such as the Aramaic Levi Document (ALD 13:4–7), Jubilees (Jub 45:15), or the Testament of Qahat (4Q542) also hint at a Levitical scribal education.[43] Responsibility for the education would encompass the curation and archival of the texts that served as a basis for the scribal curriculum and hence the canon.[44] "In addition, it appears that the entire curriculum was increasingly depicted in prophetic ways."[45] As part of their education, young scribes would also learn how to interpret these texts.

After the exile, scribal education and literacy were centered in the temple where priests and Levites handled, interpreted, and taught scripture.[46] As mainly priests and Levites were educated, their curriculum started with the Mosaic Torah and continued with prophetic texts and the Psalter.[47] "This does not mean that the Torah now served as a priestly how-to manual to a group of cultic professionals. Rather, it means that the

41. Torleif Elgvin, "Priests on Earth as in Heaven: Jewish Light on the Book of Revelation," in *Echoes from the Caves: Qumran and the New Testament*, ed. Florentino García Martínez, STDJ 85 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 278.

42. Cf. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, esp. 89–96, 101–104. William M. Schniedewind assumes there was a break in the educational system with the destruction of the temple: "A new scribal infrastructure would be built in the Persian period, but it was a new system complete with a different alphabet … and presumably a new curriculum." (Schniedewind, *The Finger of the Scribe: How Scribes Learned to Write the Bible* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2019], 166).

43. For the Aramaic Levi Document, see the edition of Jonas C. Greenfield, Michael E. Stone, and Esther Eshel, *The Aramaic Levi Document: Edition, Translation, Commentary*, SVTP 19 (Leiden: Brill, 2004). Cf. Horsley, *Scribes*, 80. See also David Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 205–6.

44. Cf. Nogalski, "How Does," 206.

45. Carr, *Tablet of the Heart*, 167.

46. Cf. David Carr, "The Rise of Torah," in *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance*, ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Bernard M. Levinson (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 45; William M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 199–200.

47. Cf. Nogalski, "How Does," 208.

Torah was the kind of oral-written literature that was used to enculturate and shape *various sorts of students* in Second Temple Judah."[48]

Indeed, not all Levites were scribes, and there were probably other scribes as well.[49] But Levites and priests formed the literary elite in the late Persian and more clearly in the Hellenistic era.[50] Their unique role conveyed power to the Levites on several levels: the power to shape society by educating the elites, the power to interpret authoritative texts, even the power to define which texts were authoritative and the texts themselves. Powerful were "those who had the texts and could read them."[51] More and more this became the remit of the Levites.[52]

The texts give us insight into their self-concept: The Levites are tasked to keep the authoritative copy of the Torah of Moses, to interpret it, and to teach it to the people who will not listen and part quickly from the way (Deut 31:28; Judg 2:17) as history has shown. A future can be found only in the Torah according to the ending of the Deuteronomistic history.[53] The Levites have assumed the duty of the prophets of reminding Israel of the Torah. The "former prophets" weren't successful in preventing the people from forgetting and transgressing it. Israel should not be like their ancestors (Zech 1:4) but remember the Torah (Mal 3:22). Moses cannot act anymore as the mediator of divine revelation. God's will can hence only be learned from the Torah. The Levites are here to help.

This sociohistorical view facilitates the understanding of common traits and traditions within different texts and genres. It is not necessary to resort to direct literary dependencies or to overstate inner-biblical allusions. We hazily see a unifying force that leads to the canon. Differ-

48. Carr, "Rise of Torah," 45, emphasis added.

49. Cf. Horsley, *Scribes*, 80; *pace* Kyung-jin Min, *The Levitical Authorship of Ezra-Nehemiah*, JSOTSup 409 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 44.

50. Cf. Carr, "Rise of Torah," 44; Schniedewind, *How the Bible*, 194; Mark Leuchter, "From Levite to Maśkîl in the Persian and Hellenistic Eras," in *Levites and Priests in Biblical History and Tradition*, ed. Mark A. Leuchter and Jeremy M. Hutton, AIL 9 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 219.

51. Schniedewind, *How the Bible*, 197.

52. Cf. Schaper, *Priester und Leviten*, 305–6; Mark A. Christian, "Middle-Tier Levites and the Plenary Reception of Revelation," in Leuchter and Hutton, *Levites and Priests*, 194; Leuchter, "From Levite to Maśkîl," 230.

53. Cf. Dominik Markl, "No Future without Moses: The Disastrous End of 2 Kings 22–25 and the Chance of the Moab Covenant (Deuteronomy 29–30)," *JBL* 133 (2014): 711–28.

ing groups are obviously excluded like the Enochic tradition that depicts Enoch as scribe (1 En. 18).[54]

On the other hand, an indiscriminate ascription of a vast majority of texts to Levites keeps us from seeing and understanding divergent currents and interests. If "Levitical authorship" means little more than "written by Jerusalem scribes" it is void and useless. Differences in the texts can point us to groups and factions within the Levitical scribes as well as to other relevant groups with political or religious interests and should, therefore, be scrutinized.[55]

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54. Cf. Carr, *Tablet of the Heart*, 203–6. The case is more difficult with Jubilees.

55. Cf. Eckart Otto, "Scribal Scholarship in the Formation of Torah and Prophets," in Knoppers and Levinson, *Pentateuch as Torah*, 178: "The post exilic Priestly and 'prophetic' circles were as close to each other in their use of the same scribal techniques as they were different from each other in their hermeneutical approaches." Carr's notion of "small-scale, family-oriented forms of textuality and education" also emphasizes the diversity of scribal education (*Tablet of the Heart*, 206).

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