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Bureaucracy in the Bible: Attitudes toward Document-mediated Interaction in the Deuteronomistic History and Ancient Israel

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Bureaucracy in the Bible:

Attitudes toward Document-mediated Interaction

in the Deuteronomistic History and Ancient Israel

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

by

Jason Ryan Price

2020

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Bureaucracy in the Bible:

Attitudes toward Document-mediated Interaction

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by

Jason Ryan Price

Doctor of Philosophy in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor William M. Schniedewind, Chair

During the 8th-7th centuries BCE, Israelite and Judahite society witnessed expanded

applications of writing as a communication technology. In particular, the epigraphic record

shows a stark rise in the usage of writing by state and military bureaucracies to manage bodies

and economic matters across time and space. Previous scholarship has rarely considered how

sectors of society may have perceived writing's expansion in these administrative contexts. How

did Israelites and Judahites think about and talk about the increase in bureaucratic writing? This

dissertation seeks to answer this question by investigating administrative writing as depicted in

biblical literature. It assesses the historical value of three biblical narratives where administrative

documents mediate interaction between sovereign figures and other sectors of society. The three

narratives include Gideon's use of a name-list (Judg 8:14), David's census (2 Sam 24:1-25), and

Jehoash's fiscal reforms (2 Kgs 12:4-16). Each narrative's portrayal of writing is situated in its literary and historical contexts while also considered in the light of the epigraphic record, other biblical depictions of writing, the anthropology of documents and bureaucracy, and comparative ancient Near Eastern texts and artistic depictions of bureaucratic writing. Typically, such biblical portrayals of writing are valued in scholarship for what they might say about the extent of literacy in ancient Israel and Judah. This dissertation differs from previous scholarship by instead valuing these depictions for what they might say about attitudes towards document-mediated interaction. When the depictions of writing analyzed here are examined with a full consideration of the evidence, it can be argued that they reveal suspicious and anxious attitudes towards state-sponsored writing. Ultimately, it is argued that such negative attitudes stemmed from West Semitic political culture, which placed an emphasis on political action rooted in negotiation and persuasion. In this sociopolitical landscape, administrative documents could function as powerful symbols of coercion and domination. The three biblical narratives examined here suggest that writing's increased usage in bureaucratic contexts of the 8th-7th centuries BCE thus generated distrust among some factions who had reservations about the growing centralization of the Judahite and Israelite states.

The dissertation of Jason Ryan Price is approved.

Seth Sanders

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Aaron Alexander Burke

William M. Schniedewind, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2020

Dedicated to the memory of Marvin J. Gress

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My dissertation grew out of the interdisciplinary mindset that characterizes the department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures at UCLA. This mindset is especially embodied in my teacher and advisor, Professor William M. Schniedewind. I owe him special thanks for his support, direction, and continual encouragement. For any reader initiated in the field of biblical studies, it will be easy to spot his influence on this project. Special thanks are also due to the members of my dissertation committee, Professors Aaron Burke, Catherine Bonesho, and Seth Sanders. This project greatly benefitted from Seth Sanders' keen eye for methodological and theoretical precision as well as his vast bibliographic knowledge. Aaron Burke provided crucial feedback for improving argumentation and for integrating archaeological sources. Finally, if there is any depth to my understanding and use of materiality, it is thanks in large part to Catherine Bonesho. But these are mere highlights. Their contributions to making my work more readable and defensible are too numerous to list.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF SCHOLARSHIP

Beginning in the latter half of the 8th century B.C.E. and in the first half of the 7th,

Israelite and Judahite society witnessed rapid change. One of the most significant changes was

the accelerated use of writing. Based on concentrations of ostraca, seals and their impressions, as

well as public displays of writing that date to this period, Israelites and Judahites at this time

encountered the technology of writing on more mundane and frequent levels than ever before.

Who used writing and how they used it also changed. Before the 8th-7th centuries, West Semitic

alphabetic inscriptions were mostly "about the objects they were written on," comprising of

labels for bowls, arrowheads, storage jars, and votive inscriptions, for instance.[1] But the seals,

lists, accounts, and administrative correspondence typical of the 8th-7th centuries show an

increased interest in writing's capacities to enact economic and political control. Written objects

from this period evoke the surveillance of civil transactions and the monitoring of state property

and human subjects, as well as the conscription of labor and military service from the general

public. Documents were mediating interaction on unprecedented levels, particularly interactions

of an official nature.

The present dissertation seeks to answer the question of how Israelite and Judahite

society perceived the stark changes in the uses of writing during the 8th-7th centuries B.C.E. How

useful did society find documents? How trustworthy? How did uses and experiences of

documents overlap with culturally shaped notions of society and political leadership? Did

document-mediated interaction have negative or positive connotations or was it considered a

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[1] S.L. Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 77.

neutral technology? To answer these questions, I investigate biblical narratives that depict the use of lists, letters, and accounts, viewing these in light of contemporary bureaucratic documents from ancient Israel and Judah as well as in the light of anthropological literature on the ethnography of documentation. Where applicable, I also consider applications of administrative writing, as well as artistic and literary depictions of such applications from the broader ancient Near East.

By looking at the biblical narrative, I seek to discover the Israelite and Judahite discursive narratives that circulated around uses of writing. People use technologies, but they also view these uses within the bounds of culturally determined narratives about the technologies. Biblical texts that depict writing provide a window into how Israelites and Judahites might have thought about and talked about writing. What do the narrative contexts of writing's depictions suggest about attitudes towards the technology? Typically, depictions of writing in biblical literature are investigated for what they might say about the demographic extent of literacy. The present dissertation largely sets aside that discussion in order to investigate what these depictions might say about the various cultural narratives that mediated uses of writing, especially bureaucratic writing.

At first glance, understanding how administrative documents were experienced and perceived may seem unimportant. In studying the ancient world in particular, it has generally been an unspoken assumption that the use of documents was either passively accepted or universally valued. But such a dismissive view is diseased with an untheorized understanding of writing at best and a culturally biased view of writing at worst. As anthropology on literacy has shown, even the most mundane uses of writing are bound up with "quite profound levels of

belief" about cultural values and the social order.[2]

In its most distilled form, my main argument is that depictions of writing in biblical literature suggest that the administrative surge of writing in the 8th-7th centuries was an unsettling experience for some. Based on these depictions, the making of lists and accounts in ancient Israel must have, at times, in specific social contexts, been perceived as a sign of social decay. I further argue that these attitudes towards document-mediated interaction were informed by West Semitic political culture, which viewed political decision-making through the tribal lens of negotiation and persuasion rather than the coercion and control associated with traditional monarchies. Israelites and Judahites thus thought about and talked about administrative writing as part of a larger cultural discourse concerned with changes in the sociopolitical landscape, one where monarchy was perceived as a corrosive force, eating away at the old West Semitic tribal structure. My conclusions about this are based on how ancient Israelite and Judahite literature depicts the use of administrative writing in the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH). Whenever DtrH depicts a sovereign writing a mundane document, or depicts a person perceived to have political authority as granted to them by a sovereign doing the same, it often sets off a chain of events wherein some core element of ancient Israel's kinship system is unjustly undermined. Usually, those elements are either the ideal of egalitarianism or local political autonomy. Thus, some biblical authors depict administrative writing against the backdrop of cultural discourse concerning the perceived invasion of the monarchy into traditional village life, a theme that finds play elsewhere in DtrH. Based on these depictions, I argue that the sight of a written object had the power to activate beliefs about overextended political control in ancient Israel's tribal

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[2] B.V. Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 114.

structure.

To offer an analogy, negative perceptions of administrative writing in early Israel would not entirely be unlike cultural discourse in the United States, or abroad, surrounding communication technologies. We readily accept the way technology can make our lives easier. At the same time, our cultural ethic of rugged individualism and personal freedom makes us prone to believing that new technologies, or new applications of old technologies, can be used as weapons of intrusive surveillance by government entities. In its most extreme, this belief takes the form of dystopian futures depicted in art and literature, such as George Orwell's *1984*, where the government eroded personal freedom by weaponizing communication technologies as tools of omnipotence and omnipresence.[3] That, however, is only one way we perceive technology to undermine our social fabric. We also view the communication technologies that make us more socially connected as tools that can ironically make us more disconnected. Consider the proverbial teenager at the dinner table too engrossed in their phone to socially engage with the family. Writing too is a communication technology. Its adoption or application in order to mechanize and make more efficient the centralizing of political power in the early Iron Age could solicit similar dystopian and distrustful ideas, even while it was valued for making life easier.

Our modern fears about technology might be a clear enough analogy, but it is also important to recognize that even in our own highly literate society, we have a checkered relationship with written documents, particularly documents associated with state power. We find something unsafe about them. Our unease with document-mediated interaction is demonstrated in how we use the word "bureaucracy," a word implying frustration at best and

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[3] For a scholarly investigation on this topic, see D. Dinello, *Technophobia!: Science Fiction Visions of Post-human Technology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

corruption at worst. Our stories about "bureaucracy" frequently feature distrust. They show how documents expose us to dehumanized interaction, to the frustration of lost or incorrect documents, to the injustice of forged and doctored documents, and to the anxiety of authentic documents whose veracity is questioned. So even for us, mediation by writing can be a source of unease. Scholars have seldom asked whether a similar unease factored into how ancient societies experienced their documents. Narratives that depict writing in the Hebrew Bible can be used as tools for assessing whether such unease with writing was experienced in ancient Israel.

To be clear, from the perspective of biblical authors, most forms of writing were assessed as positive and, at worst, neutral. Heuristically, one could say that biblical literature most commonly depicts writing in four social contexts with certain applications being found across these.[4] The first three contexts are cultic, prophetic, and legal. Regarding the cultic, applications include labeling (Exod 39:30), liturgical (2 Sam 1:18; Is 38), legislative (Exod 24:3-4), procedural (Leviticus), monumental (Deut 27:2-3; Josh 8:32), magico-religious (Num 5:11-31), and administrative records and accounting (Exod 38:21-31). A second context is prophetic. Sometimes the biblical text credits prophets with recording their words in writing for dissemination (Jer 36; Hab 2:2). At other times, prophets use writing as a prop or symbol that complements their message (Ezek 37:16). A third context for writing in biblical literature is the legal sphere. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 assumes that a husband displeased with his wife will "write for her a certificate of divorce" (כתב לה ספר כריתת). In another legal proceeding, Jeremiah purchases the patrimonial estate of his nephew, having the transaction recorded in one sealed and one unsealed document, which are then signed by witnesses and archived (Jer 32:6-15).

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[4] These contexts are partly based on the categorization in I.M. Young "Israelite Literacy: Interpreting the Evidence, Part II," *VT* 48, no. 3 (1998): 408-422.

Elsewhere, Job mentions a document (ספר) written by an adversary (ריב), presumably a reference to a judicial indictment (Job 31:35). In these three contexts (cultic, prophetic, legal), the attitude toward diverse applications of writing ranges from celebrated to useful to benign. Thus, it is not writing in general that was experienced with unease in ancient Israel.

Attitudes toward writing become more complicated in a fourth commonly depicted context for document-mediated interaction in biblical literature, which is a royal context. More specifically, writing in the context of royal administration sometimes facilitates injustice. The type of administrative document involved can vary. Adam Miglio has already observed that biblical portraits of administrative correspondence put letter-writing to sinister ends.[5] But letter-writing does not exhaust the range of administrative genres in biblical literature that are viewed suspiciously. For example, on the rare occasion a royal figure creates a name-list, ominous consequences ensue (Judg 8:14; 2 Sam 24). In a different episode, a king's administrative reforms are idealized by the notion that accounting documents were expressly not used, hinting that their royal use was sometimes experienced as other than ideal (2 Kgs 12:15). These depictions suggest that the application of writing for royal administration, which comprises a majority of our documentary evidence from the 8th-7th centuries BCE, was sometimes experienced with suspicion. In light of the inscriptional evidence, these biblical portrayals suggest that, for some, increased use of writing in royal contexts materialized wider changes in society, particularly the increasing, and perhaps unwanted, centralized power of the crown.

When speaking of social contexts for writing, it might help to visualize the people who were writing, namely, scribes. Most often, scribalism thrived when it was attached to and

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[5] A. Miglio, "The Literary Connotations of Letter-Writing in Syro-Mesopotamia and in Samuel and Kings," *Biblische Notizen* 162 (2014): 33-46.

supported by an institution. In particular, when a state adopted writing, it had the resources for

promoting the development of scribalism, which in turn encouraged the growth of a political and

military bureaucracy. Given the state's monopoly on resources, the state could thus easily exploit

writing and make the technology central to the goals of political control. As the agents of

writing, scribes could therefore be viewed as agents of the state. It is thus the activities of *state*

scribes that, according to biblical literature, were sometimes subject to suspicion. Scribes

supported by and attached to other institutions, the cult for example, escaped such scrutiny as

their activities were less associated with coercion and control. This might seem like a rather

obvious conclusion. But previous work on literacy in ancient Israel and Judah has not discussed

attitudes toward different types of writing. Past work has therefore largely assumed that the

nature of literacy's growth in the 8th-7th centuries BCE was accepted without much reflection. As

the following investigation of the biblical text demonstrates, such growth generated discourse in

society.

1.1 Theoretical Underpinnings

Chapter Two explores in detail some finer theoretical points underlying my investigation

of administrative writing in biblical literature. But it will be helpful to introduce here at the

beginning two major theoretical underpinnings. The first is that people talk about media. They

try to make sense of its mediation and they do so in different ways. Just because communication

technologies mediate the exchange of information does not mean that people only talk about

them with reference to the information they exchange. They talk about media as things in their

own right. According to Dominic Boyer, there are three primary ways people have understood

and talked about media throughout history.[6] The first, and most obvious, is that people

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[6] D. Boyer, *Understanding Media: A Popular Philosophy* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm

understand media as "instruments of human creative powers."[7] Put more simply, people understand and talk about media as tools for communication. As I hope to show in the review of scholarship below, scholars have primarily understood and talked about administrative writing in ancient Israel in this way, as a tool. We have thought singularly about writing, and in doing so, we have thought that Israelites and Judahites thought and talked about writing singularly too. But this understanding belies how we think about media. It also denies that ancient Israelites and Judahites had alternative ways of thinking about it.

As Boyer outlines, one major alternative way people have understood media is as an autonomous force capable of reconfiguring society. When people talk about media in this way, they variously interpret the perceived social reconfiguration. They can interpret the perceived work of media on a fluid spectrum between good and bad. In whatever ways communities interpret the perceived forces of media, the interpretation is always historically, culturally, and socially contingent. Even within a given society, how and if media are interpreted as a positive or negative force is likely to vary depending on social location. To take an example from the ways people talk about literacy, most global, political elites currently understand reading and writing as skills capable of emancipating individuals from poverty. In these social and cultural contexts, writing is talked about as a positive media. Yet, as I will discuss more below, some cultures and societies have rejected literacy or only accepted limited uses of it due to fears about how it might reconfigure the social landscape in harmful ways. These communities take such fearful views of writing for various social, cultural, and historical reasons. The point is that societies tend to understand and talk about communication technologies as more than just tools. And, sometimes,

Press, 2007).

7 Ibid., 48.

communication technologies, including writing, are even understood as unsettling forces.

To be clear, this is not to say that writing fundamentally changes society. This view, popularized by Jack Goody and Walter Ong in the 1970s-1980s, has not withstood modern critical inquiry.[8] This is only to say that sometimes writing is perceived to have such a power. In a way, the work of Ong and Goody illustrates this fact. Writing may not do much to change society, or even the brain as they argued, but there is a tendency to *perceive* that it does, a tendency to be so impacted by written mediation that one thinks the world is made different by it. The physicality of writtenness influenced even these venerable scholars in this way, who attributed to writing a great power. This tendency to view writing as something capable of instigating monumental change—even though it may in reality not change anything— demonstrates how people talk about media as more than simple tools, and particularly, how they talk about it as having an autonomous force of its own.

The word "bureaucracy" illustrates how document-mediated governance in particular can be understood and talked about as an autonomous and unsettling force.[9] The word was coined in

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[8] J. Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); W.J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 1982).

[9] I use "bureaucracy" here in its most raw sense: the use of documents to govern. Because bureaucracy in its modern usage denotes administration by specialized officials arranged in a fixed hierarchy, it is in many ways unfit for the ancient world. On this definition, see M. Weber, "Bureaucracy," in *Economy and Society* (New York, NY: Bedminster Press, 1968), 956-1005. The depersonalization and specialization of modern bureaucracies were not the *modus operandi* of ancient Near Eastern governance. The unfitness of this modern denotation stems from the fact that in the ancient Near East the lines between person and professional office were often blurred as especially manifested in the hereditary nature of officialdom and in the storing of private and public documents alongside each other in private and public archives alike. See the collected essays in M. Brosius (ed.), *Ancient Archives and Archival Traditions: Concepts of Record Keeping in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Based on these records, it is difficult to assess when individuals were acting as representatives of the state and when they were acting as individuals embedded in more socially defined roles. Moreover, there were often no fixed rules governing the use of documents. Even in large bureaucratic structures like the Ur

satire. In an 18th century letter to a colleague, Jacques Claude Marie Vincent de Gournay, a

French economist, derided "rule by writing desk," the literal translation of bureaucracy, as a

comically deplorable form of governance.[10] The word mocked an absurd reliance on writing. Its

satirical connotations dominated its usage for the first hundred years of its existence. Time and

again, authors throughout the 19th century employed it as a pejorative. In the word's absurdity,

political commentators found a biting critique that captured their disdain for bloated and

intrusive governance materialized in written records. It acutely caricatured writing's overuse and

the government overreach it facilitated, an overreach that in their minds was also prone to

corruption. Decrying bureaucracy, Karl Marx wrote that, "As for the individual bureaucrat, the

purpose of the state becomes his private purpose."[11] For Marx, governance by writing

depersonalized and this depersonalization resulted in a lack of social concern that, at best, bred

comedic incompetence and, at worst, promoted injustice. The word bureaucracy and its history

thus nicely capture how people have talked about writing as something more than a tool. In

particular, it illustrates how the use of documents for political control can be understood as a

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III state apparatus (ca. 2100-1940 BCE), documentary practice often appears as *ad hoc* and
inconsistent. On this, see S.J. Garfinkle, "Was the Ur III State Bureaucratic? Patrimonialism and
Bureaucracy in the Ur III Period," in *The Growth of an Early State in Mesopotamia: Studies in
Ur III Administration: Proceedings of the First and Second Ur III Workshops at the 49th and
51st Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, London July 10, 2003 and Chicago July 19, 2005*,
eds. S. Garfinkle and J.C. Johnson (Madrid: CSIC Press, 2008), 55-62. The same would have
been especially true for ancient Israel, where the epigraphic record also indicates that officials
kept records in private abodes and where the use of documents also veers more towards *ad-hoc*
applications. For more on this, see Chapter Three. Where used in this dissertation then,
bureaucracy broadly denotes document-mediated communication for purposes of governance,
rather than its modern usage connoting hierarchy and specialization.

[10] F.W. Riggs, "Évolution sémantique du terme 'bureaucratie': Introduction," *Revue
Internationale des sciences sociales* 31, no. 4 (1979): 605-62

[11] This quote came to my attention via B. Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: Powers and
Failures of Paperwork* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2012), 119.

negative form of mediation.

Bureaucracy's satirical meanings still define how the word is used today, further illustrating written mediation's potential to be perceived as something negative. The perceived abilities of document-mediated interaction to evoke incompetence and corruption have persisted.[12] Many of us can supply anecdotes about our bureaucratic encounters, which instead of featuring an efficient machine more often feature an endless maze of paperwork that produced un-machinelike emotions such as humor, anger, and bewilderment. Perhaps more subtly, filling out documents can make us feel dehumanized. Our darker encounters with bureaucracy showcase forged, counterfeited, and manipulated documents, illustrating the fears of hapless citizens and suspicions of secretive acts committed by crooked officials in dimly lit rooms. As the origin of "bureaucracy" and its continued use demonstrate, document-mediated communication has an affordance that allows it to be understood as unsettling. Many of these attitudes towards bureaucracy are comedically and disturbingly distilled in the work of Franz Kafka, especially his *The Castle*. Even if documents are a tool that result in a "vast proliferation" of the amount of administration that is accomplished, fixing the word in written form can engender powerful emotions, ones sometimes anchored in distrust and fear. Such written mediation for administrative purposes is talked about as more than a tool.[13]

A second theoretical underpinning that relates to the first is that documents "are things too."[14] One of the reasons we talk about documents as things in their own right is because they

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[12] D. Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (Brooklyn: Melville House Publishing, 2015).

[13] For writing's effect on increasing administrative capacity, see J. Baines, "Literacy and Ancient Egyptian Society," *Man* 18 (1983): 575.

[14] I use the quote here from Webb Keane who applied it more broadly to any material mediator. See W. Keane, *Signs of Recognition* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997), 8.

are material. Because documents mediate mundane activities, there is a tendency in scholarly

analysis to believe that their value stems solely from those things they mediate. This is to view

documents as simple *aide mémoires* or mirrors only capable of reflecting realities that exist

outside of the documents themselves. But documents do not just represent things, at least that is

not how most people talk about and experience them. Rather, people experience them as bringing

those things into being.[15] As things in their own right, documents are also able to do other things

and to communicate other messages even beyond the things and messages encoded in them. That

is, they have meaning outside of the words physically inscribed upon them. In terms of this

dissertation's argument, this means that documents were highly loaded symbolically in ancient

Israel and Judah, capable of conveying meaning that centered around unwanted changes in

society, whether those changes were real or imagined. More specifically, I argue that the

physicality of documents afforded them the opportunity to materialize fears about monarchic

rule. The fixed nature of bureaucratic documents provided a physical target on which beliefs

about society could be pinned.

Writing's affordances to be understood as a disturbing force has been illustrated in

several societies. As I refer to throughout Chapters Two and Three, historical and

anthropological literature are filled with episodes of cultural resistance to writing because some

pockets of societies perceived it as a corrupting force. The most famous examples come from

Greek literature and are discussed more in Chapter Two. But negative attitudes towards some

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For how this applies to documents, see M.S. Hull, "Documents and Bureaucracy," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (2012): 251-267.

[15] B. Frohmann, "Documentary Ethics, Ontology, and Politics," *Archival Science* 8, no. 3 (2008): 291-303.

forms of writing are also found in early rabbinic literature.[16] The fact that some rabbis considered

certain applications of writing to be sources of heresy illustrates that distrustful attitudes towards

the technology existed in southern Levantine culture during later periods. The extent to which

this belief obtained in ancient Israel and the form it took, however, has yet to be systematically

discussed. A goal of this dissertation is thus to situate biblical depictions of writing within an

intellectual history that evaluates writing's perceived effects on society and bureaucracy's effect

on governance. Whether those effects are real or imagined is beside the point.

To this point, I have relied on several analogies in an effort to help the reader

conceptualize how the growth of document-mediated interaction in Israel and Judah during the

8th-7th centuries BCE could have been experienced and talked about as an unsettling

development. I have pointed to our own experiences with communication technologies, to how

the word bureaucracy is used, and I have briefly referred to other cultures that experienced

certain manifestations of writing in a similar negative fashion. By offering these analogies, I do

not mean to say that all media at all times and in all places generate anxiety. Neither do I mean to

say that when media does generate anxiety, it does so for the same reasons in all contexts and

therefore looks the same across social and cultural boundaries. Rather, people tend to experience

media as a nefarious, autonomous force due to the particular historical experiences of their own

society and culture, not because of anything inherent in a given media. Moreover, attitudes

towards media can vary greatly within a given society and it is not always the media itself that

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[16] A. Demsky, *Literacy in Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 2012), 314-316 (Hebrew); D. Boyarin, "Placing Reading: Ancient Israel and Medieval Europe," in *The Ethnography of Reading*, ed. J. Boyarin (Berkley: University of California Press, 1993), 10-37; R.S. Wollenberg, "The Dangers of Reading as We Know It: Sight Reading As a Source of Heresy in Early Rabbinic Traditions," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 85, no. 3 (2017): 709-745.

engenders critique, but rather particular applications of it. Media can be understood as negative forces for vastly different reasons. Resistance to it always looks different depending on context. For some in ancient Israel, I argue that West Semitic decentralized tribal politics influenced negative assessments of document-mediated interaction.

1.2 Tribal Politics and Writing

Chapter Four discusses in more detail the tribal politics that I argue informed negative depictions of administrative writing in biblical literature. But it will be helpful here at the outset to offer a brief introduction so the reader can begin to think about how some members of a tribal structure might find the use of documents problematic. There are problems with the label "tribal,"—to be discussed more below—but it remains a heuristically useful term for defining people groups who organize themselves primarily through kinship, whether real kinship bonds or fictive ones, or a mix of both.[17] A tribal structure like the one glimpsed in biblical literature values the political autonomy and independent identity of groups comprising a given kinship unit. This autonomy often means that political action between kinship units requires negotiation, persuasion, and the building of consensus. From a political perspective, this structure can be considered horizontal as opposed to vertical. A tribal structure tends to distribute political power rather than centralizing it in individuals or small, elite groups. Tribal structures can, nevertheless, have centralized ruling figures like a king. Even so, the structure typically constrains the power of such individuals and their rule is unstable.

The reality that tribes are often not at odds with centralized rule means that one should

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[17] In two separate works, Daniel Fleming offers perhaps the most theoretically precise and thorough discussion of the source material on tribal structures in the ancient Near East. See his *Democracy's Ancient Ancestors: Mari and Early Collective Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012),

not establish a false dichotomy between monarchy and kinship structures. States can be, and often are, tribal in structure. After all, the biblical record claims the very desire for the installment of kingship came from the tribes themselves (1 Sam 8-10). As will be discussed more in Chapter Four, several scholars drawing on recent anthropological work have shown how kinship structures existed alongside centralized monarchic authority in the ancient Near East and how the two often complemented one another. But what I am interested in here is the *perception* some factions in ancient Israel had about monarchy and its bureaucratic procedures. Some more conservative factions had reservations about the monarchy and different ideas about what it should look like. Kinship ties may well have persisted and functioned at a high level alongside monarchic forms of governance even through the time of the exile. But biblical literature critiquing the monarchy illustrates that there was certainly a *perceived* conflict between the two among some factions. In addition, the structure of tribalism created an outlet for factions to challenge rule and coopt it for themselves, as biblical literature critiquing particular dynasties illustrates. Based on the evidence, document-mediated exchange sometimes brought these real and perceived conflicts to the surface because they symbolized political overreach.

Perhaps the clearest example of tribal politics is in how such groups make decisions about violence. When one kin group supports a fellow group in war, they imagine their support as more socially voluntary than politically compulsory. Persuasion, not force, governs the decision to participate in war. Seth Sanders, in his reading of the military correspondence from West Semitic Mari (ca. 18th century BCE), notes "Power in this form of politics depended on one's ability to persuade others in assembly," adding further, "Political autonomy flowed from these decisions made in military assembly."[18] A kin group who abstains from supporting other

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[18] Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew*, 73.

kin groups in battle against a common enemy might face social consequences, but they typically would not face threats of violence for their failure.

One famous biblical example will highlight the politically decentralized ethos of a tribal structure, thereby setting the stage for a better understanding of how some forms of bureaucratic writing could conflict with tribal politics. The example comes from Judges 5, an ancient poem recounting how a confederation of West Semitic tribes, evidently bound by kinship, won a decisive battle against an alliance of Canaanite kings. The coalition comprises of distinct groups such as Ephraim, Benjamin, and Zebulun (5:14). Daniel Fleming notes that the descriptions of the groups who join the battle "are plural and emphasize collective action, yet the variety of terminology communicates individuality as opposed to a standard representation demanded by some central authority or institution."[19] According to the poem, distinct social groups come together for political action, but they do so voluntarily and maintain their own identities. A centralized authority does not compel them to fight together by force.

Judges 5 illustrates the decentralized and non-compulsory nature of tribal politics in another way. In the midst of lauding those tribes who participated, the poem shames other affiliated tribes who evidently abstained from joining the battle. Among these no-shows are Reuben, Dan, and Asher (5:15-17). Clearly, these groups were expected to participate in the battle on the basis of some fictive kinship association with the groups who did participate. However, even though they abstained, it must not have affected their kinship bonds with the other groups because, judging from biblical literature, all three of these no-shows maintained membership in the larger kinship unit of "Israel," the name of a revered ancestor from whom each tribe traced their genealogy. The no-shows face no repercussions outside of some mild

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[19] Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel*, 65.

social shaming. They are not subject to forced participation, fines, imprisonment, or expulsion from the larger group. This example highlights the political autonomy that tribal structures grant to their members, especially as it regards military decision-making.

In the decentralized political landscape of a tribal structure, administrative documents can be highly loaded symbols of political coercion. More centralized structures use documents to mediate coercive acts like taxation and conscription. Such compulsory acts conflict with the political ethos of a tribal structure, which permits the autonomy of smaller groups and organizes political action through persuasion. Tribal organizations, of course, utilize documents and bureaucratic structures. But some factions may, nevertheless, have qualms about this. For example, Zimri-Lim (18th century BCE) belonged to a tribe but nevertheless became king of Mari and enacted an abundance of administration through documents, some of which make evident that he conducted a census. However, according to Daniel Fleming, these documents lack any indication that he made his own tribe, the Binu Simʾal, subject to census-taking.[20] Letters indicate that he instead negotiated their military support. This example suggests that some tribal constituencies can consider certain administrative procedures mediated by documents to conflict with assumptions about the social order.

Given ancient Israel's tradition of decentralized rule, it is unsurprising that much of the discourse about documents in biblical literature revolves, often unfavorably, around the monarchy, a political structure that veers more towards compulsion, where subjects serve in an army because they have to, not because they agreed to through the rubric of kinship ideology. When biblical authors place lists and accounts in the hands of kings or those connected to them, they at times emphasize kingly power, but they sometimes also spotlight a dark underbelly of

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[20] Fleming, *Democracy's Ancient Ancestors*, 74.

monarchy's coercive tendencies. Bureaucratic documents function in these biblical texts as monarchic "instruments of violence."[21] Thus, the specter of monarchical coercion haunts the use of documents in biblical literature. Lists, accounts, and letters—the stuff of bureaucracy— are sources of dread and anxiety in some biblical texts because they symbolized how monarchy overstepped traditional modes of power rooted in the tribal structure.

1.3 Defining Literacy in Ancient Israel

My work is geared towards questions besides the demographic extent of literacy. But because I use the terms "literate" and "illiterate" herein, it is necessary to define what I imagine these labels to mean. Christopher Rollston's work on literacy has become the standard reference work on the topic in ancient Israel, so I will use his definition as a foil for describing my own. To begin, I agree with Rollston that the label "illiterate" should be applied even to those who have an ability to "scrawl" and recognize their own name in writing.[22] I apply "literate," on the other hand, only to those with an ability to enunciate and comprehend a string of written grammatical clauses alongside a complementary ability to formulate and write multiple grammatical clauses that are intelligible to other literates. In this respect, I think Rollston's definition of "literate" is perhaps too restrictive or, at the very least, prone to being applied too restrictively. He remarks that literacy includes the ability to use "conventional formatting and terminology...with minimal

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[21] Ancient Israelite perceptions of documentary practice share this characterization with some perceptions of the state's use of writing in the French Revolution. See Kafka, *The Demon of Writing,* 39. On bureaucracy and coercion in the ancient Near East, see S.L. Sanders, "Writing and Early Iron Age Israel: Before National Scripts, Beyond Nations and States," in *Literate Culture and Tenth-Century Canaan: The Tel Zayit Abecedary in Context*, eds. R.E. Tappy and P.K. McCarter (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 97-112, especially 100.

[22] C. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2010), 127.

errors of composition or comprehension."[23] I would favor a more flexible definition that emphasizes the intelligibility of a written product rather than the conventions of formatting and terminology. Exactly what would count as "minimal" errors seems too nebulous. Furthermore, while one may deviate from conventional formatting, spellings, and terminologies, this does not necessarily imply a lack of facility in relating the writing system to a spoken language.

The example of Lachish letter 3 illustrates why I prefer emphasizing intelligibility over errors of convention. The letter, dating to the early 6th century BCE, is penned by a junior Judahite military officer and sent to his superior. The junior officer protests the contents of a previous letter sent by his superior, in which the superior officer evidently accused the junior of being illiterate. As Schniedewind has shown, while Lachish 3 is overall intelligible, it ironically exhibits several "spelling errors, grammatical errors, and the use of nonstandard formula."[24] For example, the letter begins with a violation of epistolary convention where the author mentions himself first rather than his superior. It also includes an idiosyncratic use of *mater lectionis* where the author spells the 2ms verbal suffix with a final consonantal *h* (ה) to indicate vocalic *ā* multiple times (ידעתה/שלחתה). Other idiosyncratic features include a non-standard contraction of "Yahweh lives" (חי יהוה < חיהוה) and a problematic doubling of *n* (נ) in the form "I can repeat it" (אתננהו), a form that also displays a more vernacular, unconventional spelling of the root "repeat" (שנה). While these idiosyncracies deviate from convention, they show a remarkable

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[23] Ibid., 127.

[24] W. Schniedewind, "Sociolinguistic Reflections on the Letter of a Literate Soldier," *Zeitschrift für Altehebraistik* 13 (2000): 157-167. There have been several attempts to explain these idiosyncratic features individually. But when considered together, the most compelling explanation for their peculiar nature is that they reflect limited training in scribal conventions.

facility in relating the writing system to spoken language. In this specific case, Rollston would undoubtedly agree that the author is literate, with these errors being only "minimal." Nevertheless, this example illustrates the potential for Rollston's definition to be applied too strictly and exclude those who could understand and formulate texts longer than a single grammatical clause though they may use unconventional or even incorrect forms.

Concerning the bureaucratic material on which I focus, my definition of literate largely refers to state scribes and military officers with adequate, albeit less refined writing abilities than their scribal counterparts. This class of literates was the main producer of the bureaucratic name-lists, accounts, and letters found in the inscriptional corpus and the biblical depictions that are examined here. However, those who qualify as illiterate undoubtedly witnessed the production and use of such bureaucratic texts on multiple occasions. For example, as Chapter Three will discuss, some Hebrew inscriptions appear to have mediated the conscription of labor and taxation from the general public or, at the very least, they mediated the management of low-class workers and personnel, where illiteracy was likely to be the norm. It is safe to assume that an illiterate person experiencing these coercive processes would understand the political implications of having their name recorded in or read aloud from a document in such a context, even if they could not read the name themselves. In fact, as Chapter Two will discuss, ethnographic research has shown that illiteracy can generate a heightened sense of anxiety and tension when documents mediate interaction between a political authority and illiterate subjects. Moreover, monumental depictions of mundane writing throughout the ancient Near East, discussed in Chapter Four, suggests that the sight of a state scribe holding writing utensils was symbolically powerful. Thus, those lacking literacy were witnesses to the bureaucratic texts I discuss. They were able to "read" and comprehend the act of bureaucratic inscription despite

their facility in a writing system.[25] They experienced the performance of bureaucratic literacy and thus contributed as much as literates to the cultural discourse about bureaucratic writing that influenced DtrH's depictions of administrative documents.

At the same time, those who qualify as literate according to my definition were not immune from experiencing writing's use and spread with discomfort, a sociological fact discussed in Chapter Two. Literate individuals who may have been among the general public would have also experienced coercive acts of governance mediated by documents. They would have been no less likely to find the inscribing of their names as symbolically evocative of their subjected state. But beyond interactions between state authorities and the general public, bureaucratic texts written deep inside the walls of officialdom could likewise solicit powerful emotions among literate, professional groups. For example, the depiction of accounting texts in 1 Kings 12, as Chapter Six will argue, suggests that the use of documents by the crown to facilitate administrative oversight of temple finances generated resentment from the temple bureaucracy. The examples given here are acts of documentation that can spawn resentment in many cultural and social contexts, but as I will argue, West Semitic political ideals made the experience of documents, among the literate and illiterate alike, especially fraught in ancient Israel and Judah. Because writing was associated with more coercive forms and processes of leadership, it had the potential to symbolize the subversion of West Semitic political culture, where authority ideally derived from processes of negotiation and persuasion rather than force.

1.4 Using Biblical Literature

To demonstrate administrative writing's negative connotations in ancient Israel and

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[25] This expanded understanding of "reading" is examined more fully in Chapter Two's section on materiality.

Judah, the dissertation focuses on three test-cases in DtrH: 1) Gideon's list (Judg 8:14), 2) David's census (2 Sam 24), and Jehoash's fiscal reforms (2 Kgs 12). While the focus is on these three portrayals, the dissertation pulls from other biblical texts where appropriate. Each of these three test cases, in conjunction with other portrayals, encapsulates how notions of administrative writing overlapped with notions of monarchic oppression in ancient Israel. In using these texts to illustrate that point, the dissertation is largely a synchronic study, concerned broadly with attitudes towards administrative writing in the monarchic period (ca. 1000-586 BCE). A synchronic approach is appropriate for this topic, given that attitudes towards writing, or towards any technology for that matter, do not generally evolve in linear fashion. The choice of these three texts illustrates the same point. They each remember moments of administrative inscription at vastly different periods in Israel's history. But despite their different settings, they reflect a similar distrust for the technology. Nevertheless, while largely synchronic, each chapter discusses diachronic issues when it might more narrowly inform our understanding of writing's distinct depiction in each particular text.

In their uniqueness, each test-case also allows us to explore a different theoretical insight offered by the anthropology of documents and bureaucracy. Each text employs a different type of administrative writing and they do it in distinct social contexts. Examining Gideon's list, Chapter Four is especially interested in what can be called the "affective" power of documents. The chapter draws on anthropology that shows how documents, even the mere sight of them, can solicit emotional reactions because of their symbolic capacities. The Gideon narrative can be understood to attribute to writing a symbolic capacity of sovereign power. In the text, writing facilitates targeted brutality, what Michel Foucault would call the "most spectacular display" of

sovereign power.[26] By aligning a written list with this sort of political violence, the text intimates that administrative lists in ancient Israel could convey messages of political domination, carrying a powerful affect. This seems especially true because the narrative features writing in an episode typically understood as a polemic against the monarchy. This discussion lays the groundwork for examining other passages where writing facilitates violence. It also presents an opportunity to examine iconographic portrayals of writing in ancient Near Eastern art, which pair scenes of violence with ephemeral documentation by state scribes.

Chapter Five focuses on David's census in 2 Samuel 24. It also draws on the affective power of documents but goes beyond this by arguing that one reason documents may have been so affective is because of their "constitutive" capacities. The chapter draws on a wealth of ethnographic fieldwork showing how communities understand documents as objects that structure relationships on a permanent level. Through this understanding, the chapter offers a fresh solution for the problematic depiction of the census in biblical literature as well as in Akkadian correspondence from Mari. Namely, it argues that because writing mediated the census, the tribal societies of Israel and Mari understood their participation in it as a binding military allegiance to the crown. Such permanence, materialized by writing, conflicted with the flexibility of a tribal covenantal model of leadership rooted in kin-based politics. In addition to anthropology, these arguments are supported by the fact that a concern for the dissolving of kinship ties permeates both biblical literature on the census and the Mari correspondence. It is further argued that the administrative reforms of Hezekiah, structured as they were around political centralization in Jerusalem, provides the most compelling historical context for the

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[26] M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1995), 3-72.

Davidic census. The text thus gives voice to the social unease that accompanied bureaucratic writing's increased use in the 8th-7th centuries BCE.

Chapter Six turns to the topic of accounting texts. It examines Jehoash's accounting reforms in 2 Kings 12, looking at these in the light of accounting theory with a special emphasis on the topics of transparency and opacity. On the surface, bureaucracies evaluate writing practices as positive because they engender accountability and make the decisions of subordinates transparent to their overseers. But on a deeper level, writing's claim on transparency opens it up to opacity. The books can get cooked. I argue that 2 Kings 12 shows an awareness of writing's opacity in its conclusion that only men of integrity are the surest barrier to corruption. Furthermore, it is not insignificant that the reception history of this story paints Jehoash as a monarch who overstepped his bounds by intruding on temple's autonomy with his accounting reforms. This episode thus also associates documentation with monarchic overreach.

Chapters Two, Three and Seven build a frame around the three biblical depictions of administrative writing discussed in this dissertation. In Chapter Two, the theoretical underpinnings are examined in more detail with a look towards both the anthropology of technology and the anthropology of documents and bureaucracy. The chapter seeks to provide better language and categories with which to examine the biblical depictions of writing discussed here. It further provides analogies for understanding how written administrative artifacts can function as a means of symbolic power. The chapter also situates the anthropology of technology in documents in the broader filed of materiality studies, largely because a materiality framework acknowledges how societies use physical objects to frame interaction. This means that writing's physicality can communicate messages alongside the linguistic content recorded in a written object. Chapters Three and Seven build a frame by examining the epigraphic remains from

ancient Israel and Judah. In Chapter Three, I discuss major features and trends in the epigraphic record with an eye towards how certain usages of writing conflicted with West Semitic political ideals. Namely, the majority of the epigraphic remains from the 8th-7th centuries BCE show a primary application of writing for purposes of bureaucratic control. The unease this application could generate is compounded by writing's history in the southern Levant, where its use as a bureaucratic medium was primarily associated with Egyptian domination while locals tended largely to wield writing for other purposes, especially the votive and artistic. This chapter also examines how material features of writing could evoke unwanted foreign influence, further compounding uneasy attitudes towards the technology. Thus, Chapter Three allows a more informed explanation of the texts I examine in the Hebrew Bible, providing context for how and why these narratives give administrative writing an ominous connotation. Whereas chapter Three establishes broad trends in the epigraphic record that may have informed biblical depictions of writing, Chapter Seven examines a single archive, the Samaria Ostraca (SO). It seeks to illustrate how insights from the previous chapters might help broaden scholarly analyses of ancient bureaucratic inscriptions. In particular, it argues that West Semitic political ideals of decentralization impinged upon how the SO were used and the formal features they bear.

Because this dissertation focuses on DtrH, it is necessary to discuss the value of the source material for illuminating attitudes towards writing in the 8th-7th centuries BCE. DtrH consists of a number of originally distinct textual units that only coalesced into a unified DtrH composition after a long and complex transmission history, one that probably entailed the gradual combination of traditions into ever larger literary units. That is, there were likely middle stages when individual traditions were combined to form larger Pre-Deuteronomistic (Pre-D) literary units before ultimately being combined and edited into a unified DtrH with an

overarching Deuteronomic theological *tendenz*.[27] The dates scholars assign to the initial DtrH

compilation vary greatly, a topic that will be discussed more below. However, there is wide

agreement that the individual blocks of traditions comprising DtrH found their genesis in the

monarchic period and that the unified DtrH subsequently underwent major revisions in later

periods.[28] Given this agreement, it remains possible to isolate individual units with a plausible

monarchic date without concluding that they date to the period of DtrH's initial compilation or

subsequent periods of revision. Nevertheless, because some DtrH material was inevitably created

at the time of compilation or during times of revision, each narrative merits a careful analysis in

order to assess its plausible monarchic dating on its own terms. As such, I seek to define a

narrower historical context for each case study examined here. It is my contention, as each

chapter will argue, that each narrative I examine has a plausible origin in the 8th-7th centuries

BCE and thus each narrative's depiction of administrative writing is useful for assessing attitudes

towards document-mediated interaction during this time period.

     The possibility for individual narratives to date to periods prior to DtrH's compilation is

important to acknowledge because there is major disagreement on when the initial version of

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[27] I agree with David Carr that though these stages existed, they are difficult to isolate due to the complicated nature of scribal transmission. See D. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For attempts to isolate the combination of individual traditions into larger Pre-D units, see A.F. Campbell, *Of Prophets and Kings: A Late Ninth Century Document (1 Samuel 1—2 Kings 10)* (Washington D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1986) and J. Hutton, *The Transjordanian Palimpsest: The Overwritten Texts of Personal Exile and Transformation in the Deuteronomistic History* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009). These works are useful in how they illustrate the isolation of individual traditions and in how they illustrate the types of processes that led to their combination into larger literary units, though one may disagree with their specifics.

[28] The classic formulation of DtrH is M. Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1991). While Noth believed that the stringing together of those traditions into a unified DtrH did not take place until the exilic period, he maintained that the individual traditions had their origins in pre-exilic times.

DtrH was compiled and when the periods of subsequent revisions took place. Two major schools of thought have dominated the discussion. The first school of thought, whose architect is Martin Noth, argues that DtrH was initially composed after 587 BCE as a reflection on the Babylonian exile of Judah, with revisions taking place after this exilic date.[29] The second major school of thought, founded by Frank Moore Cross, argues that the initial version of DtrH was compiled during the reign of Josiah (ca.640-609 BCE) as propaganda for his cult centralization, with a major revision taking place in the exile whose purpose was to explain Judah's downfall.[30] Despite the popularity of the exilic and Josianic models, a third school of thought has emerged that places DtrH's initial composition earlier, in the period of Hezekiah (ca. 729-687 BCE).[31] This Hezekian model is the one I adopt. A Hezekian date for an initial DtrH composition is

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[29] Ibid. His viewpoints have been expanded by the Göttingen school, which maintains that DtrH is a post-exilic work that underwent reworking in even later periods. See R. Smend, "Das Gesetz und die Völker: Ein Beitrag zur deuteronomistischen Redaktionsgeschichte," in *Probleme biblischer Theologie*, ed. H.W. Wolff (Munich: Kaiser, 1971), 494-509; W. Dietrich, *Prophetie und Geschichte: Eine Redaktiongeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1972). One may also include in this category scholarship that claims all biblical literature was written in periods after the exile. See T.L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000) and P.R. Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel: A Study of Biblical Origins* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015).

[30] F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); R.D. Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1981). One recent argument for an initial DtrH compilation in the time of Josiah is T. Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical, and Literary Introduction* (New York: T & T Clark, 2005). Unlike the Harvard school of Cross, Römer argues for a third revision taking place in the Persian period.

[31] H. Weippert, "'Die deuteronomistichen' von Israel und Juda Beurteilungen der Könige von Israel und Juda und das Problem der Redaktion der Königsbücher," *Biblica* 53 (1972): 301-339; B. Halpern and D. Vanderhooft, "The Editions of Kings in the 7th-6th Centuries B.C.E." *HUCA* 62 (1991): 179-244; W. Schniedewind, "The Problem with Kings: Recent Studies of the Deuteronomistic History," *Religious Studies Review* 22, no. 1 (1996): 22-27; idem., *How the Bible Became a Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

compelling for a number of literary, historical, ideological, and epigraphic reasons. From a literary perspective, analyses of the regnal accession, death, and evaluation formulas in the books of Kings has revealed that the formulas remain relatively consistent through Hezekiah, but display innovation for kings listed after him, suggesting that his reign formed an original end to a history of Israelite and Judahite kings and potentially an early version of DtrH.[32] The ideology of the regnal evaluations, which is constructed on the premise of Jerusalem's cultic superiority and the Davidic dynasty's political superiority, fits the context of Hezekiah's reign since the biblical text credits him with a cultic reform aimed at centralizing worship in Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18:4). Two historical matters also make the reign of Hezekiah a fitting context for an ideology based on the preeminence of Jerusalem and the Davidic dynasty. First, Hezekiah witnessed the Assyrian destruction of the kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE, an event that led to Judah's absorption of Israelite refugees and consequently the doubling of Jerusalem's population.[33] Regarding a second historical matter, unlike its northern counterpart based in Samaria, Jerusalem survived an Assyrian invasion in 701 BCE. Taken together, the fall of the northern Hebrew kingdom, Jerusalem's demographic growth, and its survival of an Assyrian siege provide the most compelling historical backdrop for DtrH's assertion that Yahweh favored Jerusalem and the Davidic dynasty over the defunct Israelite monarchy and its vacated cultic centers.[34] These

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[32] Halpern and Vanderhooft, "The Editions of Kings." A more recent argument that these formulae indicate a Hezekian composition is B.D. Thomas, *Hezekiah and the Compositional History of the Book of Kings* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). However, Thomas believes a Hezekiah History is Pre-D.

[33] M. Broshi, "The Expansion of Jerusalem in the reigns of Hezekiah and Manasseh," *IEJ 24* (1974): 21-26; A.A. Burke, "An Anthropological Model for the Investigation of the Archaeology of Refugees in Iron Age Judah and Its Environs," in *Interpreting Exile: Interdisciplinary Studies of Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, eds. B. E. Kelle, F. R. Ames, and J. Wright, (AIIL 10; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 41-56.

[34] This ideology was not necessarily adversarial, but instead represented one part of a

ideological, historical, and literary matters converge in DtrH's assessment of Hezekiah, who 2 Kgs 18:5 regards as so perfectly obedient that "there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah after him, or among those who were before him." The most obvious explanation for such an unrivaled glowing assessment is that it, along with the assessment of the kings before him, was written during his reign. On top of these literary, historical, and ideological matters, it should not go unnoticed that the 8th-7th centuries is precisely the period when literacy expanded, according to the epigraphic record. The growth of literacy provides a suggestive environment for the type of literary activity that led to the compilation of DtrH.[35] Thus, while I will argue that each test case I examine has a plausible origin in the 8th-7th centuries, the initial compilation of the larger literary unit in which they are embedded likewise appears to stem from the same period, further suggesting their usefulness for illuminating contemporaneous attitudes towards writing.

The complex transmission history of DtrH presents the possibility that some depictions of administrative writing could be later insertions into earlier pre-exilic traditions. However, a comparison with securely dated post-exilic literature mitigates these fears since the use of documents is much more effusive in these post-exilic texts. Take for instance the book of Esther, where nothing, even the most trivial administrative matter, can be accomplished without first

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wider ideological program that sought to incorporate northern refugees in a pan-Hebrew kingdom under the leadership of Hezekiah. On Hezekiah's attempt to incorporate northern constituents, see Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*, 73-75, 94-96. For more on the biblical ideology that views Jerusalem and the Davidic dynasty as divinely ordained and protected as well as how the reign of Hezekiah is most fitting for such an ideology, see C.R. Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny: The Development of the Book of Isaiah: A Reassessment of Isaiah 36-39* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

[35] K. Schmid, *The Old Testament: A Literary History* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 65-104; Schniedewind, *How the Bible*, 64-117.

writing it down. This is in stark contrast to DtrH, where examples of recording administrative action are comparatively small. Chronicles' late version of Israel's history also mentions a use of written records more often than is found in DtrH. Perhaps more significantly, the post-exilic work of Ezra-Nehemiah (EN) depicts an abundance of administrative writing in the form of imperial edicts as well as official letters sent between the empire's center and its western colonized territories in Yehud and Samaria (Ezra 1:1-5, 4:8-16, 4:17-22, 5:6-17, 6:2-5, 6:6-12, 7:11-26; Neh 2:7-9, 6:6). Ezra's narrative repeatedly portrays a world where every request from the colonies was sent via letter with the corresponding imperial directive likewise being mediated through writing. The representation of these documents "is intensely textual—meaning that their written-ness is emphasized within the narrative."[36] The effusive and foregrounded use of letters in Ezra gives the impression that Persian overlords strictly preferred to manage administrative matters through written mediation. While the authenticity of EN's edicts and letters has been a matter of fierce debate, this depiction of the Persian empire as heavily mediated by documentation resonates with historical data. The Persians indeed sought to intensify administrative writing and to bureaucratize their vast empire. Consider the textual remains uncovered at the empire's center in Persepolis. The Persian fortification there boasts multiple administrative archives whose texts number some 18,000 although they cover only a short period of time.[37] Scholars generally agree that the preference for written mediation and increased bureaucratization illustrated in the Persepolis archives is also illustrated in historical

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[36] E. Stern, "Royal Letters and Torah Scrolls: The Place of Ezra-Nehemiah in Scholarly Narratives of Scripturalization," in *Contextualizing Israel's Sacred Writing: Ancient Literacy, Oralitiy, and Literary Production*, ed. B. Schmidt (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 243.

[37] M. van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East ca. 3000-323 BC* (3rd edition; Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 336.

sources from the empire's margins, including Yehud.[38] For instance, throughout their imperial holdings, the Persians had agents known as the "Eyes and Ears" of the king and "there are clear indications in various sources that contacts in writing were intense" between these agents and the crown.[39] As Chris Jones articulates, "we can surmise that written documents from Persian kings and the bureaucratic proxies were among the preeminent ways in which Achaemenid power was made manifest throughout imperial territories."[40] The bureaucratized world of the Persian empire, which intensified the circulation of information through writing, explains why depictions of administrative writing are more frequent in securely dated post-exilic biblical literature.

While post-exilic biblical texts appear to accurately portray the reality of a more document-mediated existence under the Persian empire, DtrH portrays royal administrative writing only a handful of times (Judg 8:14; 2 Sam 11:14-15, 24:1-24; 1 Kgs 21:8-11; 2 Kgs 5:5-7, 10:1-7, 12:15).[41] This disparity suggests that later tradents, outside the Chronicler's revised version of Israel's history, found little interest in projecting the more heavily document-mediated aspect of their society onto the pre-exilic narratives found in their received texts. Otherwise, more examples for the use of documents would populate DtrH, being consistent with their more frequent mention in post-exilic literature.

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[38] J. Schaper, "The Jerusalem Temple as an Instrument of the Achaemenid Fiscal Administration," *VT* 45 (1995): 528-539; L.S Fried, *The Priest and the Great King: Temple-Palace Relations in the Persian Empire* (BJS 10; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004).

[39] Van de Mieroop, *A History*, 331-332; J. Maxwell Miller and J.H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 523.

[40] C. Jones, "Embedded Written Documents as Colonial Mimicry in Ezra-Nehemiah," *BI* 26 (2018): 168.

[41] I include here Gideon's list in Judg 8:14 because many have understood the text to portray him as a proto-monarchic figure, which will be discussed more in Chapter Four.

The comparatively small number of examples for the use of administrative documents in pre-exilic texts suggests an intentionality behind their depictions. Their infrequent appearance implies that when they do appear, they are foregrounded, serving the author some particular purpose. This dissertation seeks to uncover those particular purposes. Unfortunately, having been dulled by an existence heavily mediated by bureaucratic documents, the modern sensibilities of scholars have caused us to consider the inscribing of administrative action in DtrH as mere off-handed comments. But there is good reason to think these depictions consciously reflect on the use of documents in monarchic Israel. Precisely during the 8th-7th centuries B.C.E., the formative period of much biblical literature and DtrH in particular, the epigraphic record witnesses a surge in the use of documents.[42] This increase in governance by inscription would have solicited reflection. History attests that any emerging technology does the same, particularly when it is used to administer control.[43]

The Hebrew Bible is of particular value in shedding light on how the use of documents may have been perceived. It provides a window into how people thought about administrative inscription, a window the epigraphic record is less equipped to offer. In this sense, small details of historical accuracy do not interest us. Whether or not a king named David actually dispatched a private letter to his military commander in order to facilitate the murder of a loyal soldier named Uriah makes no difference to this study (2 Sam 11:14). This text is of value because (1)

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[42] See Schniedewind, *How the Bible*, 65-117.

[43] A famous modern example would be critiques of the internet, on which, see N. Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Co., 2011). A well-read eye will perceive that critiques like Carr's have an intriguing similarity with ancient Greek critiques of the written word famously attributed to Socrates. Examples like Socrates and other critiques directed at writing will be discussed in Chapter Two. Perhaps some of the most poignant reflections on the dangers of using technology to enforce control can be found in science fiction. See, Dinello, *Technophobia*

broadly it says that the royal bureaucracy communicated some matters through letters and (2)

ideologically, it says that such communiques may have generated anxiety and suspicion. Jehu's

letters encouraging a coup and blood purge are similarly instructive (2 Kgs 10:1). They overtly

associate the technology with intrigue and violence.

Regarding the ideological value of biblical depictions, it is of note that the majority of

these pre-exilic literary depictions come from DtrH. Scholars have stressed that a central goal of

DtrH is to offer an ideological assessment of kingship in ancient Israel.[44] The use of documents

appears to have been one trope authors utilized to accomplish that assessment, particularly when

they wanted to emphasize the more abusive capacities of monarchy. As we will see, the

historical memory of imperialism under Egyptian rule and the reality of such imperialism under

Neo-Assyrian hegemony also shaped the perceptions of such abuses.

1.5 Review of Scholarship

There is no systematic study devoted to the use of documents in ancient Israel, especially

with regard to biblical depictions of and attitudes towards administrative writing. While some

may point to problems in the source material to explain the lack of such studies, it likely also

stems from a tragic disinterest in the topic, one informed by uncritical assumptions about

documents and bureaucracy. As we will see, one major assumption casting a shadow over the

question of record-keeping in ancient Israel is that the work of bureaucracy is obvious and thus

its documents do not merit special scrutiny. Informing this assumption is an additional

assumption that writing in bureaucratic contexts is universally valued for its functionality and

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[44] This is discussed in the critical works cited above for DtrH. The assessment of
monarchy has been deemed so critical to the nature of DtrH that since the time of Wellhausen,
there have been attempts to divide swathes of DtrH between pro and anti-monarchical authors.
This topic and the corresponding scholarship are discussed in Chapter Four.

thus passively experienced.

Works that do touch on administrative documents in ancient Israel can be divided into four categories, mostly dealing with the epigraphic remains: 1) Studies of individual caches and documents; 2) Studies devoted to questions of literacy and, by relation, the textualization of biblical literature; 3) General overviews and topical studies on the use of documents; 4) A few studies on attitudes towards documents in specific portrayals of administrative writing. Works in each category have made contributions, but also have shortcomings with respect to the interests of this dissertation. In particular, they suffer from a lack of interest in theoretical insights from documents and bureaucracy, which has caused them to miss some of the emotional aspects of bureaucracy and the unexpected symbolic capacities of documents in Israelite culture. That is, biblical scholars heavily emphasize the efficient, machinelike function of documents, how they are practically effective, but not how they might be unexpectedly affective.

First are studies that analyze specific documents and caches. Most notable among these are works investigating the Samaria Ostraca (SO) and administrative inscriptions from sites in the Negeb and Shephelah, especially Arad, Lachish, and Horvat 'Uza.[45] We can also include in

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[45] For the most involved study of the SO, see I.T. Kaufman, "The Samaria Ostraca: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Paleography," (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1966). Other important studies of the SO deal with the social setting that stands behind the SO as well as other chronological and interpretive matters. These will be discussed in Chapter Seven. For Arad, see Y. Aharoni, *Arad Inscriptions*, trans. Judith Ben-Or, ed. A.F. Rainey (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981). For Lachish, see H. Torczyner, *Lachish I: The Lachish Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938). For Horvat 'Uza, see, I. Beit-Arieh, *Horvat 'Uza and Horvat Radum: Two Fortresses in the Biblical Negeb* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2007), 122-187. There are a handful of administrative ostraca from Jerusalem. On these, see J. Naveh, "Hebrew and Aramaic Inscriptions," in *Excavations at the City of David 1978-1985 VI: Inscriptions,* ed. T.D. Ariel*, Qedem* 41 (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 2000), 2-4; A. Lemaire, "Les ostraca paléo-hebreux des fouilles de l'Ophel," *Levant* 10 (1978): 156-161. Several administrative texts that have come to light through the antiquities market. Given that these resulted from illicit digging and are unprovenanced, they should be treated with caution. It has been proposed that many originate from Makkedah (Khirbet el-Qom). Because many are administrative and as a result numbingly mundane, there is little reason to doubt their

this category reference works on the epigraphic remains of the biblical period.[46] Both types in

this category prioritize paleography, linguistics, and interpretation. As such, they offer only

superficial treatment of how documents functioned in a bureaucratic apparatus, not addressing

why their contents should have been written down in the first place. Deserving special mention, a

small subset of this category that does engage with the function of documents more overtly are

Nadav Na'aman's studies of the Horvat 'Uza and Lachish remains and Matthew Suriano's

typological analysis of the SO.[47] Each offers more involved comments on the uses to which

documents were put in Israelite administration. As part of this subset that foregrounds the

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authenticity. Some of the more interesting ones will be briefly discussed in this dissertation. For a collection of these, see R. Deutsch and M. Heltzer, *New Epigraphic Evidence from the Biblical Period* (Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Archaeological Center Publication, 1995).

[46] The most thorough reference work, including the most extensive discussion of individual administrative inscriptions is J. Renz and W. Röllig, *Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik*, 4 vols. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995-2003). Predating this volume, the standard reference work was H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1966-1969). The authoritative French reference is A. Lemaire, *Inscriptions hébraïque*s I: *Les Ostraca* (Paris: Cerf, 1977). There are two primary collections of the epigraphic material in English which provide commentary on various administrative inscriptions. The most comprehensive of these is F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005). A second collection, especially useful for its photographs, renditions, and transcriptions is S. Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008). While not as comprehensive, Ahituv does provide more in-depth commentary on some administrative records. Administrative letters have generated their own set of monograph-length collections. These are mostly devoted to questions of translation and letter forms. See in order of appearance, D. Pardee et al., *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Letters* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982); J.M. Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters*, Writings from the Ancient World 14 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2003); D. Schwiderski, *Handbuch des nordwestsemitischen Briefformulars: ein Beitrag zur Echtheitsfrage der aramäischen Briefe des Esrabuches*, BZAW 295 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000).

[47] N. Na'aman, "A New Look at the Epigraphic Finds from Horvat 'Uza," *TA* 39 (2012): 84-101; idem., "The Distribution of Messages in the Kingdom of Judah in Light of the Lachish Ostraca," *VT* 53, no. 2 (2003): 169-180; M. Suriano, "Wine Shipments to Samaria from Royal Vineyards," *TA* 43, no. 1 (2016): 99-110.

function of documents, we might also include studies on individual inscriptions. Particular

documents that have generated interest in this respect are the *mpqd* and Ahiqam ostraca.[48]

However, none of these works offer a systematic treatment of administrative writing since they

analyze only individual caches and specific documents. Consequently, they demonstrate little

concern for the use and meanings of name-lists and ration-lists. Furthermore, with the exception

of Suriano's work on the SO, none acknowledge the symbolic capacities of documents, the way

administrative writing communicates beyond its content.[49]

Turning to the second category, studies that prioritize the question of literacy and its

implications for the literary development of the Hebrew Bible touch on the use of administrative

documents.[50] Because these studies fixate on the development of cultic and prophetic writings,

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[48] These will be dealt with in Chapter Three. See their treatment there for bibliography.

[49] Suriano argues that the written types of the SO work to create royal privilege, see Suriano, "Wine Shipments," 108.

[50] I group these two categories because they thematically overlap. The literacy studies have as their central goal to shed light on the textualization of biblical literature. Likewise, works more devoted to textualization make necessary comments about literacy. Much of these works depend on a narrow definition of literacy. But as the previous section intimated, non-literates engage with and "read" textual artifacts in a broader sense. This issue is discussed more in the next chapter's section on materiality. The bibliography is extensive. The first attempt at a comprehensive study on the topic of literacy in ancient Israel could be attributed to D. Diringer, "Early Hebrew Writing," *Biblical Archaeology* 13, no. 4 (1950): 74-95. Since that time, some of the more important studies that argue for a limited literacy in ancient Israel are M. Haran, "On the Diffusion of Literacy and Schools in Ancient Israel," in *Congress Volume Jerusalem* 1986, ed. J.A. Emerton, VTSup 40 (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 81-95; S. Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Orality and Literacy in Ancient Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996); I.M. Young, "Israelite Literacy: Interpreting the Evidence, Part I," *VT* 48, no. 2 (1998): 239-253; idem., "Israelite Literacy: Interpreting the Evidence, Part II"; C. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2010). Arguing for a more widespread literacy are R. Hess, "Literacy in Iron Age Israel," in *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of "Biblical Israel,"* ed. V.P. Long, et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 82-102; Demsky, *Literacy in Ancient Israel*. See also, Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*, which more overtly prioritizes how literacy affected the production of biblical literature. For a work that challenges whether asking about literacy levels is the most important question and that examines how questions about it have been caught in particular

they only value the inscribing of mundane documents for what such acts imply about the demographic extent of literacy. They offer little in the way of systematic analysis regarding the tasks documents mediated. Perhaps unexpectedly, however, some of these works illuminate the subliminal, auxiliary messages documents conveyed in ancient Israel. William Schniedewind, for instance, discusses how mundane writing projected power, because of writing's association with both political as well as numinous forces.[51] This is a useful observation since scholars readily acknowledge writing's numinous aura in other contexts, but neuter it of this feature in administrative settings. Schniedewind's point highlights the fact that documents were objects and processes that people experienced in real-world circumstances. Undoubtedly, cultural perceptions about writing's links to the supernatural world affected how people perceived having their names inscribed, even or especially in administrative settings.

In a similar vein, Seth Sanders shows how early alphabetic writing contrasted with uses

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hermeneutical agendas, see S.L. Young, "Maximizing Literacy as a Protective Strategy: Redescribing Evangelical Inerrantist Scholarship on Israelite Literacy," *BI* 23 (2015): 145-173. Less interested in the extent of literacy and offering a treatment of the epigraphic evidence with a view towards how culture influenced the production of literature is Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew*. Approaching literacy through the more specific question of scribal schools and practice, especially with an eye towards how they relate to the formation of biblical literature are A. Lemaire, *Les écoles et la formation de la Bible dans l'ancien* Israël, OBO 49 (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981); D.W. Jamieson-Drake, *Scribes and Schools in Monarchic Judah: A Socio-Archaeological Approach,* JSOTSup 109 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1991); J.L. Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence,* Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1998); D.M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) K. van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); W. Schniedewind, *The Finger of the Scribe: How Scribes Learned to Write the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). For a recent collection of essays touching on literacy and the formation of biblical texts, see B. B. Schmidt (ed.), *Contextualizing Israel's Sacred Writings: Ancient Literacy, Orality, and Literary Production,* SBLAIL 22 (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2015).

[51] Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*, 24-34. See also his newer monograph exploring the scribal curriculum, Schniedewind, *The Finger of the Scribe*.

of cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphic.[52] These latter were the de facto administrative writing

systems of the southern Levant. Conversely, the early alphabet functioned in religious contexts

for politically decentralized West Semitic groups. His work, discussed more in-depth in Chapter

Three, is particularly useful for illustrating how cultural norms shape attitudes towards writing.

The alphabet's early uses and its numinous associations would influence how its adoption and

use in administrative contexts were perceived and experienced during the monarchic period.

Outside of Sanders and Schniedewind, works on literacy and textuality as a whole treat

administrative documents in an off-handed manner. These studies bear a much greater interest in

the *who* of administrative documents rather than the *what*. By answering questions of who wrote

documents, they hope to shed light on the composition of biblical literature. Exactly what was

written in a bureaucratic context and why are of less interest, the assumption being that the

answers to these questions are obvious. The treatment of documents in this scholarly context

recalls a critique raised by the cultural historian and media theorist Ben Kafka who claims that

historians have "discovered all sorts of important and interesting things looking through

documents, but they have seldom paused to look at them."[53] Shedding light on Israelite literacy,

scribal training, and biblical literature, most biblical scholars have looked through documents

rather than at them.[54] To be sure, the questions they prioritize are significant ones for the field of

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[52] Sanders, The Invention of Hebrew, 86.

[53] B. Kafka, "Paperwork: The State of the Discipline," *Book History* 12 (2009): 341.

[54] A good recent example of how administrative ostraca are looked through for what they imply about literacy and the formation of biblical literature is S. Faigenbaum-Golovin, et al., "Algorithmic Handwriting of Judah's Military Correspondence Sheds Light on Composition of Biblical Texts," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113, no. 17 (2016): 4664-4669. In my opinion, uses of these letters say more about expected levels of literacy in the military than they do about the formation of biblical literature.

biblical studies. My intention is not to fault them for having other interests. I only mean to illustrate that the topic of record-keeping and attitudes towards it have largely been treated in an ancillary fashion. The question of how documents were used and perceived has only been valued for its ability to illuminate other questions, chiefly related to the composition of biblical literature.

Two studies concerned with literacy and textuality do touch on negative attitudes towards writing. Both Schniedewind's work on textuality and Aaron Demsky's monograph on literacy discuss how the technology of writing can be experienced as a sign of social decay.[55] Citing Jer 8:8, which accuses the scribal class of wielding a "lying pen" (עט שקר) for their personal gain, Demsky and Schniedewind view the prophet's words in light of Greek philosophical critiques aimed at writing. Demsky further considers this critique in the light of similar attitudes expressed in early rabbinic literature, a topic that has since been more fully examined.[56] These studies make an important contribution by challenging us to consider the ways negative attitudes towards writing and cultural text may have shaped literacy's spread as well as the development of biblical and rabbinic literature. I use these studies as a springboard to consider how such attitudes may have influenced how society perceived more mundane manifestations of writing. Both Demsky and Schniedewind largely consider critiques of writing to be aimed at the book. That is, the critiques often come from elite rivalries in learned circles, having to do with a society's traditional institutions and means of education, which the growing influence of book-learning may upset. The newer anthropology of documents and bureaucracy allows us to consider the way

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[55] Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*, 114-117; Demsky, *Literacy in Ancient Israel*, 310-317.

[56] See n. 11.

more mundane acts of writing may have been the target of similar, but different critiques.

The third category of scholarship reviewed here comprises a few articles that prioritize the use of documents as it relates to administration. Articles by Alan Millard, John Dearman, and Graham Davies provide general overviews of the evidence concerning this question, while a few other articles provide overviews more topical in nature, mostly devoted to issues of accounting.[57] In large part, these studies survey the epigraphic remains in order to illuminate the ethos of Judahite and Israelite bureaucratic culture. What types of records did they keep and what does this imply about the contexts in which they found written records useful? Such studies also show an interest in how ancient notions of archives and accounting align with more modern ones.

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[57] A. Millard, "An Assessment of the Evidence for Writing in Ancient Israel," in *Biblical Archaeology Today. Proceedings of the International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem, April 1984*, ed. J. Amitai (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1985), 301-312; J.A. Dearman, "On Record-Keeping and the Preservation of Documents in Ancient Israel (1000-587 B.C.E.)," *Libraries & Culture* 24, no. 3 (1989): 344-356; G. Davies, "Some Uses of Writing in Ancient Israel in the Light of Some Recently Published Inscriptions," in *Writing and Ancient Near Eastern Society: Papers in Honour of Alan R. Millard*, eds. P. Bienkowski, C. Mee, and E. Slater (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2005), 155-174. There are other works that analyze administration, but they have little if no discussion on the role of documents. The material remains they do look at tend to be the bullae because of the clues they offer about official titles. See T.T.D. Mettinger, *Solomonic State Officials: A Study of the Civil Government Officials of the Israelite Monarchy* (Lund: Gleerup, 1971); N.S. Fox, *In the Service of the King: Officialdom in Ancient Israel and Judah* (Los Angeles, CA: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000); Y. Avishur and M. Heltzer, *Studies on the Royal Administration in Ancient Israel in the Light of Epigraphic Sources* (Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Archaeological Center Publication, 2000). On accounting, see A. Lyavdanksy, "Economic Administration in the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah (ca. 931-587 BCE): Epigraphic Sources and their Interpretations," *Camptabilités* 8 (2016): 1-17; L. Cornelius, "Accounting Processes in Palestine During the Tenth-Eighth Centuries B.C.E." *Journal for Semitics* 26, no. 1 (2017): 251-274; B.A. Levine, "Tracing the Biblical Accounting Register: Terminology and the Signification of Quantity," in *Commerce and Monetary Systems in the Ancient World: Means of Transmission and Cultural Interaction*, ed. R. Rollinger and C. Ulf (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2004), 420-433. R.L. Hagerman, "Accounting in the Bible," *Accounting Historians Journal* 7, no. 2 (1980): 71-76. See most recently A. Mendel, "Epigraphic Lists in Israel and its Neighbors in the First Temple Period," (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2014) [Hebrew] and Y. Garfinkel and A. Mendel-Geberovich, "The Administration of Judah in Light of the Geographical Distribution of Epigraphic Finds," *Eretz-Israel* 32 (2016): 33-44 [Hebrew].

These studies contribute to the work here by foregrounding the question of how documents were used and by making an effort to consolidate the evidence. But a lack of both thoroughness and an integration of sources plagues them. Naturally circumscribed by their article-length treatment, they tend to rely heavily on one of either the epigraphic or biblical data to the detriment of the other. In some cases, meaningful data are absent altogether. For example, none of these works mention three short notes in the Arad and Lachish ostraca referring to master documents on which the disbursements of rations were to be recorded.[58] As will be discussed in more detail later, because these notes imply a master ledger, archival reference, scheduled planning, and centralized oversight, they are important evidence for how records were kept and thus experienced in Judahite administration.

One characteristic of the third category reviewed here merits special mention because it highlights the treatment (or non-treatment) of administrative documentary practice in ancient Israel. Many of the works cited in the previous paragraphs appear in journals and collections outside the purview of biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies. Some of them were even authored by scholars specializing in external fields. This explains the shortcomings mentioned above, but it also demonstrates the extent of the disinterest in the topic among scholars working within the orbit of ancient Israel. As previously alluded to, part of this disinterest stems from the ways documents are "analytically invisible" because their functions seem obvious.[59] Scholars believe that documents function in a universal manner and carry a universal functional meaning across diverse cultural contexts, which leads to a judgment that mundane Israelite records will

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[58] Lachish 4 and Arad 7. See their discussion in Chapter Three.

[59] D. Brenneis, "Reforming Promise," in *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge*, ed. A. Riles (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 42.

fail to reveal anything uniquely Israelite. But ethnography, as well as historical research in other fields, have pulled back this superficial film of obviousness that governs our surface understanding of documents. They have shown that documents are objects which are created, experienced, circulated, and destroyed in surprising ways. As part of this dissertation, the anthropologically informed analysis on this surprising nature of documents hopes to be a major contribution to the study of administration in the ancient world.

Another reason for the disinterest in the study of administrative documents is their familiarity to scholars. With documents mediating much of our modern existence, from store receipts and grocery lists to legal contracts and financial agreements, our own experiences with them make them un-foreign and of little interest. In contrast to this disinterest, biblical scholars and archaeologists alike have displayed a deep affection for religious, monumental, and magical texts because their content preserves a cultural exoticism that appeals to our curiosity. But as the ethnographer Matthew Hull states, the use of documents can be just as "complex, variable, and illuminating as more traditional anthropological subjects such as ritual and myth."[60] This is partially because documents are not universal, disembodied entities being used and experienced in a vacuum. Rather their use intersects with the social, religious, and even magical components that we find so appealing.

The final category of scholarship reviewed here includes a few works assessing biblical portrayals of administrative documents. Three studies in this group foreground the depiction of documents in Ezra-Nehemiah (EN), considering the work's attitudes toward royal administrative writing. As mentioned in the previous section, EN spotlights a number of royal edicts and letters

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[60] M.S. Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 5.

sent between the Persian king and his subjects in Yehud. Many of these letters are even

recounted verbatim within the text and incorporated into the surrounding narrative structure. In

her seminal work on EN, Tamara Eskenazi has made an enduring contribution by appreciating

these narratively embedded documents not as the result of a "clumsy splicing job," but as an

attempt to make documents "one of the book's central themes."[61] She further articulates that

depictions of documents in EN "demonstrate the power or propriety of documents as causative

principles and significant forces in human events."[62] With this understanding, Eskenazi

distinguishes her analysis from typical analyses of the documents in EN, which tend to focus on

questions concerning the letters' authenticity and their linguistic features, thereby looking

through the documents rather than at them. She instead focuses on how the depiction of

documents demonstrates attitudes towards them, concluding that EN is the work of people who

experienced imperial documents not as objects that reflected reality, but instead as objects that

shaped it.

Daniel Smith-Christopher uses Eskenazi's work as a springboard to propose that

documents in EN function as "symbols of dominance."[63] He likens their depiction in EN to the

sociological reality of having to "carry papers" under an authoritarian regime. Some of the letters

in EN are even written in Imperial Aramaic, a linguistic code switch from Hebrew that can be

understood as a literary device aimed at highlighting the subjected state of the Jewish

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[61] T. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 41.

[62] Ibid, 42.

[63] D. Smith-Christopher, "Resistance in a 'Culture of Permission': Sociological Readings of the Correspondence with Persian Authorities in Ezra 1-7," in *Truth's Bright Embrace: Essays and Poems in Honor of Arthur O. Roberts*, eds. P. Anderson and H. Macy (Newberg, OR: George Fox University Press, 1996), 15-35.

community. According to Smith-Christopher, the documents materialize a "culture of permission" where the colonized are obligated to seek approval from their colonizers, who authoritatively mediate every aspect of the colonized life. Thus, oppression and political dominance permeate depictions of royal writing in EN. This understanding allows Smith-Christopher to conclude that the narrative's authors employed their effusive use of documents to offer a critical commentary on the oppressive conditions of the bureaucratic Persian empire. In this way, Smith-Christopher aligns the depiction of documents in EN with other scholars who have increasingly questioned whether the Persian empire was universally accepted as the benevolent savior of Judah as some biblical literature would have readers believe.[64]

In a study informed by postcolonial theory, Chris Jones likewise argues that the documents of royal correspondence in EN function as part of a discourse concerning empire.[65] Rather than viewing them collectively as symbols of dominance, however, Jones proposes that the letters in Ezra 7 and Nehemiah 10 are instances of colonial mimicry that subvert Persian rule. According to his argument, the authors use the imperial letter format as a vector for "promoting indigenous interest" and for resisting colonial rule.[66] Through the lens of colonial mimicry, this means for him that the colonized appropriated the tools of empire and redeployed them as a strategy for elevating Judean ideology. Jones productively models how a consideration of documents beyond their capacity to relay information can open up fresh interpretive possibilities. By foregrounding the question of attitudes towards documents, Eskenazi, Smith-Christopher, and

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[64] K. Hoglund, *Achaemenid Imperial Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); Fried, *The Priest and the Great King*.

[65] Jones, "Embedded Documents."

[66] Ibid., 180.

Jones shed light on an under-studied aspect of Judean culture. But they also illustrate how taking up the question of documents can contribute to wider scholarly debates concerning our understanding of the Hebrew Bible and the society that produced it. These studies encourage further work on attitudes towards documents depicted in biblical texts, particularly in pre-exilic literature where the depictions of documents may be fewer, but are likely to be no less meaningful.

Two works explicitly acknowledge attitudes towards writing in earlier biblical texts with the first being Adam Miglio's study of letter-writing in DtrH.[67] He notes that sinister motives taint the use of letters in most of these depictions. Pointing towards Mesopotamian analogs, he argues that a widespread perception of letter-writing's ability to foment court intrigue influenced these sinister portrayals of letter-writing in biblical literature. Biblical authors, he claims, used this trope to critique the political complexity of monarchy. In his analysis of letter-writing in biblical literature, Miglio lays stable groundwork. He claims that biblical authors portray letter-writing as a deceptive tool in order to critique sociopolitical complexity. But while he broadly categorizes this critique as directed at the "religio-political moral failings of monarchy," I argue that this critique was more rooted in the collaborative, tribal politics endemic to the West Semitic world. It was this cultural landscape of decentralization that provided the ingredients for a negative experience of documents. Additionally, whereas Miglio considers the use of letters, the three biblical case studies in this dissertation focus on lists and accounts. Throwing Miglio's conclusions into doubt, the biblical text attributes pernicious acts to these other administrative forms of writing besides letters. They seem to be critiquing more than letter-writing alone and instead look to all forms of administrative writing as signs of social decay. In fact, literary

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[67] Miglio, "The Literary Connotations of Letter-Writing."

depictions of list-making foreground critiques of monarchy far more overtly than portrayals of letter-writing. Finally, I add two more distinctions relative to Miglio that characterize this study. Miglio, who focuses on Jehu's use of letters, lacked the room for a more involved analysis of other DtrH narratives featuring letter-writing. I see this as an invitation to elaborate on his brief remarks about the other depictions. Furthermore, my treatment of these narratives will be anchored in theoretical work derived not just from the anthropology of technology but also materiality studies and, most significantly, the ethnography of documents. This work will provide a grid for explaining why writing could become such an effective symbol for critiquing the failings of monarchy.

In a separate article, the accounting scholar Benzion Barlev looks at Exod 38:21-31, which totals the amount of silver used in the tabernacle construction and accounts for its distribution across varying tasks.[68] He labels this an accounting statement. Contrasting this use of accounting with its use in Mesopotamia and Egypt, Barlev concludes that ExodUS 38's statement of accountability is unique in the ancient Near East. Whereas accounting was typically used to police subordinates, he argues that ExodUS 38 demonstrates a use of accounting working in the other direction. Here, the authoritative figure of Moses uses the technology to make himself accountable to a public. Barlev is one of the few scholars who has used accounting theory to illustrate the multi-dimensionality of administrative writing and the way it can be reflected in Israelite and Judahite literature. His work encourages us to realize that the making of documents can be motivated by far more than a desire to extend memory.

The above scholarship will be discussed more in separate chapters. For now, it is

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[68] B. Barlev, "A Biblical Statement of Accountability," *Accounting History* 11, no. 2 (2006): 173-197.

sufficient to point out how they demonstrate the potential productivity of analyzing biblical depictions of record-keeping. By placing the use of documents in their cultural and narrative contexts, Miglio and Barlev demonstrate that "paperwork" was more than a thoughtless, universal, mundane technology in ancient Israel. Documents were instead unavoidably refracted through the prism of culture. It is through such refraction that documents transmitted non-linguistic messages, which sometimes eclipsed their surface intention to serve as mere memory aids. As these studies demonstrate, biblical literature preserves a residue of how this refraction worked in ancient Israel. The present study views these works as an invitation to examine other biblical portrayals of documents in order to elucidate both the rational and seemingly irrational things documents accomplished in ancient Israel.

To summarize the review of scholarship, we might say that previous work has established a solid foundation, but there are two shortcomings. First, there is no exhaustive, systematic study on the topic of administrative documents in ancient Israel. Among works attempting comprehensive overviews, there is little synthesis of the source material. This is in large part because scholars use documents to reconstruct other topics rather than bureaucratic practice itself. Second, and perhaps influencing the first shortcoming, is that an assumption about the obvious work of documents afflicts the analysis that does exist. The perception of documents as streamlined, mnemonic, communicative aids permeates the analysis of previous scholarship. Despite this, a few have offered comments on the non-obvious ways documents function, the ways they are tied up with other cultural beliefs besides the banal information that is immediately available within their contents. But most of these lack theoretical underpinnings. By incorporating anthropological literature, the present study provides more robust language and categories through which to analyze the many "doings of documents," especially with respect to

the way they intersect with deeply held beliefs about culture and the social order.

1.6 Conclusion

We stand to gain much by looking more closely at bureaucratic documentation from the perspective of DtrH. As stated at the outset, the main goal of this dissertation is to use the biblical material in order elucidate how Israelites and Judahites thought about and talked about bureaucratic writing, specifically during the 8th-7th centuries BCE. Previous scholarship has used biblical depictions of administrative writing to answer questions about literacy levels. I use these depictions to ask questions instead about the Israelite and Judahite experience of documents, what attitudes did they have towards them? Attitudes toward the usage of documents is an aspect of any culture and society that merits examination. People do not experience writing, especially forms of administrative documentation, in universal ways. Their experience of it is shaped by a number of factors, including social location and cultural expectations. In the end, I argue that some Israelite and Judahite social circles experienced bureaucratic writing through culturally encoded notions of West Semitic social norms and political leadership. DtrH depicts accounting and list-making, alongside royal correspondence, as acts that characters experienced with anxiety and resentment, suggesting that the surge of administrative writing in the 8th-7th centuries BCE was sometimes interpreted as a disturbing trend with the potential to overturn traditional ideals about society. In particular, administrative documents materialized a level of political control and complexity that confounded West Semitic notions of political organization, notions that viewed political leadership as earned through negotiation and persuasion rather than taken through force.

In the end, this study can shed light on literacy's arc in the southern Levant. There, writing took an inverted history compared to Mesopotamia and Egypt, where it was born out of administration. Conversely, the administrative genre appears as a relative late comer in the West

Semitic alphabetic corpus. It is generally assumed that this arc is the result of the fact that southern Levantine polities were not complex enough to use it earlier in their histories. But as Chapter Two will discuss and Chapter Seven will apply, complexity is an overly functionalistic and inadequate explanation for why polities and organizations turn to administrative writing. Some complex societies have dropped it or rejected it, sometimes even because it made things too complex and complicated. Conversely, rather simple societies and organizations have chosen to use the "bureaucratic medium" despite the absence of complexity, having no true need for its mnemonic capacities. This attests to the powerful symbolic potentialities of ephemeral documents, to their penchant for conveying messages outside of the mundane words inscribed within them. I argue that West Semitic political culture influenced how administrative writing was experienced and helps account for the shape literacy took in the southern Levant. From a wider perspective then, this investigation of attitudes towards writing can illuminate the question of literacy in ancient Israel. Culturally informed attitudes can shape the rate of literacy's spread and the uses to which it is put. The question of attitudes has only marginally entered into scholarly discussions on the topic of literacy in ancient Israel, a lacuna this dissertation hopes to fill.

Beyond questions regarding the social history of literacy, a fresh look at textual portrayals of bureaucratic documents can contribute to our understanding of selected texts. Rather than looking past these portrayals for what they say about literacy or simply considering them as off-handed comments, we can also look at them and see how understanding documents as "things too" might open our eyes to how acts of mundane writing make meaning within their narrative contexts. What literary role does administrative documentation play in the rhetoric of a text? For DtrH specifically, the following analysis hopes to demonstrate that evaluating the

literary role of documents can sharpen our understanding of how DtrH conceptualizes political leadership. Dtr ideology partly seeks to constrain royal power and to criticize culturally and religiously unlicensed manifestations of it (e.g. Deut 17:14-20). I analyze how redactors used the portrayal of documents to achieve this end. Because documents had such loaded meaning in West Semitic political culture, DtrH redactors found royal administrative writing a useful trope for picturing and criticizing the abusive capacities of monarchy. My work in the DtrH also hopefully validates the examination of documents in Ezra-Nehemiah by Eskenazi and Smith-Christopher, encouraging future work on the more numerous depictions of documents in post-exilic biblical literature.

In addition to illuminating social history and biblical literature, my analysis hopes to open up new avenues of research in the field of epigraphy. By being more theoretically aware of documents as things in their own right, ones that are bound up with attitudes about society, we can shine new light on old inscriptions, as Chapter Seven seeks to illustrate. The formal qualities of documents and their applications take cues from the culturally determined attitudes that people have about administrative writing. West Semitic attitudes towards bureaucracy could impinge upon and therefore explain some forms and qualities of extant administrative inscriptions. But a consideration of how this was done first requires an overview of the theory employed here, a topic taken up in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORIZING DOCUMENTS AS A MATERIAL TECHNOLOGY

Documents do much more than the mundane, explicit jobs for which we employ them. At the same time, they often fail to fulfill those mundane, explicit jobs. This is, in a nutshell, a simplified version of the major theoretical point informing my examination of documents and attitudes towards them. Though they pose as universal tools of efficiency and authentication, documents can ironically become roadblocks to productivity and vehicles of dishonesty. They can proliferate, subverting their alleged claim on efficiency. They can be doctored, forged, and counterfeited, subverting their alleged claim on truth. Simultaneously, they accomplish other tasks that, on the surface, seem unrelated to their stated function as *aide-mémoires* facilitating productivity and offering proof. Chief among these other, ulterior tasks is a potential for documents to seem as if they have a magical ability to legitimize and materialize political power when used in certain social contexts. Because of this, their use can generate impassioned, culturally informed attitudes.

Before getting too deep into theoretical matters specific to documents, this Chapter takes the anthropology of technology as a departure point. Writing is often framed as a technology, but accompanying that characterization is a tendency to conceptualize writing as a simple tool that people engage with passively, outside of social and cultural assumptions. The anthropology of technology challenges this tendency by showing that tools and technologies are discursively bound up with notions of culture and society. This discussion lays the foundation for key principles emerging from the anthropology of documents and bureaucracy, which is largely geared towards overturning the notion that documents are singularly experienced as passive transmitters of linguistic information. Because anthropological work on technology and documents is rooted in the larger field of materiality studies, the middle section of this Chapter

reviews some of the central theoretical points emerging from work on materiality. A framework rooted in materiality is especially helpful for the aims of my argument, because it acknowledges how written objects communicate messages beyond the linguistic information encoded in the writing system they use. People can thus have attitudes towards the use of documents and contribute to cultural discourse about them whether or not those people are capable of reading them.

2.1 The Technology of Documents

Scholars have largely understood administrative documents in ancient Israel as objects that extend memory. In their capacities to expand mnemonic storage, documents are thought to optimize, streamline, and enhance the management of resources and people. A recent treatment of literacy in the Iron II illustrates this largely functional understanding of administrative documents by stating that "It is difficult to imagine that Israel could have effectively managed its resources and administer its conquered territories without the active participation of a scribal community engaged in writing letters and military dispatches, and ensuring that the flow of goods from the peripheral regions to the state's center moved smoothly."[1] Phrases here like "effectively manage" and "moved smoothly" nicely represent the typical scholarly understanding of administrative documents as tools of memory and optimization. This is the obviousness of documents. To be sure, there is nothing wrong with such an understanding. Israelite and Judahite scribes in the royal administrations found writing useful for how it allowed them to amass information and therefore streamline processes. But, as the work of Dominic Boyer articulates

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[1] J. Whisenant, "Let the Stones Speak: Document Production by Iron Age West Semitic Scribal Institutions and the Question of Biblical Sources," in *Contextualizing Israel's Sacred Writings: Ancient Literacy, Orality, and Literary Production*, ed. B. Schmidt (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 141-142.

and as I will discuss more below, this is not the only way communities talk about bureaucratic

writing.

When we singularly characterize administrative writing as a mnemonic and optimizing

tool, we are largely influenced by a superficial understanding of Max Weber's work on

bureaucracy. In his famed treatment, Weber emphasized the perceived benefits of a governing

system that relies on written records. Likening bureaucracy to a machine, Weber lauded the

superiority of document-mediated transaction. For him, documents make governance more

objective, optimal, and rational.[2] This notion of bureaucracy as a machine has immeasurably

influenced our understanding of document-mediated transaction today. But I label this influence

as "superficial" because Weber was more nuanced than this. For example, he claimed, "The

mere fact of bureaucratic organization does not unambiguously tell us about the concrete

direction of its economic benefits...bureaucratization as such is a precision instrument which can

put itself at the disposal of quite varied interests."[3] Despite his nuanced views, scholars have

only selectively, and somewhat passively, taken from his basic definition of documents as tools

that make governance more efficient. This is illustrated in the work of Jack Goody, who sums up

his own understanding of record-keeping through the following quote from Egyptologist John

Baines: "writing results in a vast proliferation in the amount done, allowing improved central

control of economic activity, as well as a more precisely monitored distribution of royal

largesse."[4] For Goody, written records make possible a voluminous scale of social and economic

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[2] Max Weber, "Bureaucracy," in *Economy and Society* (New York, NY: Bedminster Press, 1968), 956-1005.

[3] Ibid., 990.

[4] Jack Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 54. The original quote can be found in J. Baines, "Literacy

interaction that drives, almost deterministically, towards complexity.[5]

To be clear, documents can do the many efficient and rational things outlined by Weber and Goody. But they are not one-dimensional. They are not dispassionate tools impervious to cultural influence and thus prone to taking universal forms wherever they are adopted. More than this, while Weber and Goody each emphasize the efficient nature of documents, recent anthropological work demonstrates that written records are instead often experienced as irrational, opaque, and ineffective. To be fair, the singularized "efficient tool" model which scholars apply to the use of documents in ancient Israel stems from a superficial understanding of Weber and Goody. Each nuanced their views on bureaucratic writing and sowed the seeds for the current boom in the ethnography of documents. Goody himself provides some of the first ethnographic examples of how documents are perceived as conveying messages other than the data in the documents themselves. Ironically, Weber would not label the use of documents that manifested in ancient Israel as "bureaucracy." But this has not stopped us from applying his views to the material.

Our depthless characterization of administrative documents is revealed in the way we rely on nouns like "technology," "tool," and "device" to talk about them. For example, in her foundational treatment of orality and literacy in ancient Israel, one of the only times Susan Niditch applies the label "technology" directly to Hebrew writing is when she refers to record-keeping.[6] Usually, these descriptors disappear in analysis focused on other uses of writing in the

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and Ancient Egyptian Society," *Man* 18 (1983): 575.

[5] Though he disclaims determinism. ibid., 100.

[6] S. Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 89.

ancient world such as the monumental, literary, or magical. Among work on these genres, writing tends to be much more anchored in social scientific analysis in order to demonstrate how written language does other things besides store data. Those other things include but are not limited to creating communities, transmitting emotion, and offering spiritual protection. For genres other than record-keeping, writing is understood as much more than a banal technology. Unfortunately, such nuanced and anthropologically grounded understandings have yet to inform our approach to administrative documents.

If we choose to view record-keeping as a machine-like technology, the social sciences challenge us to change how we think about uses and perceptions of technology. Beneath the tendency to define administrative documents as simple tools of data storage lies an assumption that people engage with tools for strictly rational purposes. Some social anthropologists refer to this naïve understanding of technology as somnambulism.[7] In other words, this view assumes that people think about technology as socio-culturally neutral tools and essentially engage with them in a manner defined by sleepwalking, only thinking of them in purely functionalistic terms. Work in the anthropology of technology demonstrates that this somnambulistic approach fails to account for the ways disparate societies tailor technologies to their distinct cultural norms.[8] The approach also fails to explain instances where societies reject certain tools altogether because of

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[7] B. Pfaffenberger, "Fetishised Objects and Humanised Nature: Towards an Anthropology of Technology," *Man* 24, no. 2 (1988): 236-252.

[8] Donald Mackenzie and Judy Wajcman, *The Social Shaping of Technology* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999); Bryan Pfaffenberger. "Social Anthropology of Technology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21, no. 1 (1992): 491–516; P. Lemonnier, *Elements for an Anthropology of Technology*, Anthropological Papers 88 (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The Museum of Anthropology, 1992); W.E. Bijker, T.P. Hughes, and T. Pinch (eds.), *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012).

anxieties that they will alter social customs.[9] In sum, nothing is ever just a tool. The physical

objects of technology come loaded with social, cultural, and political implications.

As a technology, writing, even in administrative contexts, should be similarly understood.

Though it is a tool, people do not engage with it as if they were sleepwalking. It intersects with

cultural norms in surprising ways. Current trends in literacy studies center on the ways societies

shape writing and reading to fit cultural values.[10] Such studies have even made room to account

for instances when societies reject writing, if not altogether, then at least in certain forms.[11] Thus,

the tendency to discuss Israelite bureaucratic writing as a simple tool for data storage perpetuates

an outmoded understanding of technology broadly and writing more specifically.

For the aims here, perhaps the most pertinent theoretical supposition emerging from the

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[9] The famous example is Luddites. For a treatment situated within their larger legacy, see Steven E. Jones, *Against Technology: From the Luddites to Neo-Luddism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006).

[10] B. Street, Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Development, Ethnography and Education. (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2014); D. Barton, M. Hamilton, and R. Ivanič, (eds.), Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context (London, UK Psychology Press, 2000). This is in contrast to what Street calls the "autonomous model" of literacy, which espouses that literacy comes bundled with prepackaged changes that influence cognition and society. The autonomous model is most notably associated with the work of Ong, Havelock, and some earlier works of Goody, though the latter has reformulated some of his original assessments. See, W. J. Ong, Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (New York: Routledge, 1982); E. Havelock, The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988); and J. Goody, Jack and I. Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," Comparative Studies in Society and History 5, no. 3 (1963): 304-345.

[11] J. Fishman, "Ethnocultural issues in the creation, substitution, and revision of writing systems," in *The Social Construction of Written Communication,* eds. B. Rafoth and D. Rubin (New York: Ablex, 1988), 273-86. For an interesting case study on a segment of Christians in Zimbabwe who reject biblical literacy on the grounds that texts impede direct, experiential revelation from God, see M. Engelke, *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church* (Berkley, CA: UC Press, 2009).

social anthropology of technology is that technologies may be likened to literary genres.[12] By

this, anthropologists mean that societies "read" technologies as if they were a text in need of

interpretation. Societies construct narratives around technologies and their different applications

in order to make sense of them. Prominently featuring politics, these narratives reveal that

societies view technologies as something more than functional tools providing a means to an

end. Rather, they tether the objects of technology to their own unique, culturally rooted

paradigms. Easy modern examples are the number of fictional works in both literature and film

that play on the greatest fears of democratic societies by portraying a rogue government's

effusive use of surveillance technologies to constrict freedom.[13] To offer an ancient example, one

that features writing, we could turn to diatribes against the written word found in Greek

philosophy. Plato, partly with reference to the teachings of Socrates, rails against the written

word. He frames writing as a crutch that deteriorates the mind, accusing the Egyptian scribal god

Thoth of inventing "an elixir not of memory, but of reminding."[14] For these Greek philosophers,

writing was also problematic because it is static. Its fixed nature means that when a reader needs

clarification, writing is unable to respond to personalized questions. These critiques are

recognizably Greek. More than that, they reflect the social location of Socrates and Plato as

philosophers. The storage capacities of writing make it a repository for knowledge, threatening

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[12] S. Woolgar, "The Turn to Technology in Social Studies of Science," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 16 (1991): 20-49. A more nuanced version of technology as text is the technical drama model proposed by B. Pfaffenberger, "Technological Dramas," *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 17, no.3 (1992): 282-312.

[13] Most famously in G. Orwell, *1984* (New York, NY: New American Library, 2015). Consider also the critically acclaimed television series *Black Mirror*.

[14] Found in Plato's *Phaedrus* (274a-277b). Of course, technologies do not only invite narratives that are critical of them. They also invite narratives that illustrate their benefits, particularly from those who gain power from the production and distribution of technologies.

the need for and social standing of teachers. As William Schniedewind remarks, "Writing locates authority in a text and its reader instead of in tradition and its community."[15] While this Greek example illustrates writing's potential to be understood broadly as a negative form of mediation, it more narrowly illustrates how cultural and social context conditions that negative understanding.

What narratives did the use of documents inspire in ancient Israel? Here, the biblical *narrative* has a double meaning for our purposes. While itself a narrative depicting particular uses of administrative documents, it is through such narratives that we may glimpse the discursively mediated narratives about writing that circulated in Israelite society. As already alluded to, the biblical text remains an untapped resource in this regard. Typically, depictions of administrative documents are excised from their narrative contexts in order to reconstruct the demographic spread of literacy, the focus being on who was writing rather than what or why they were writing. Once such depictions are valued within their narrative contexts, they can illuminate the ways society thought about the use of documents and the cultural narratives to which they attached writing.

2.2 The Materiality of Documents

While rooted in the anthropology of technology, I also tether my analysis of documents to materiality studies. Materiality, as a theoretical discipline, seeks to move beyond an approach of "getting at the system behind the artifact," and instead views the artifact as the system itself.[16] People do not use artifacts as simply representations. They often employ them as tools that shape

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[15] Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*, 114.

[16] R.M. Van Dyke, "Materiality in Practice: An Introduction," in *Practicing Materiality*, ed. idem. (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2015), 6.

culture and belonging. Without objects, we would be unable to classify ourselves and others in

non-linguistic ways, incapable of situating ourselves and others in social, economic, political,

and cultural landscapes without recourse to language. So we use clothes, pots, houses, jewelry,

tools, food, weapons, and texts to help us do the work of situating.

Bruno Latour captures the essence of an approach rooted in materiality when he remarks

that viewing objects as mere symbols "is unable to explain why artifacts enter our stream of

relations, why we so incessantly recruit and socialize nonhumans. It is not to mirror, congeal,

crystallize, or hide social relations, but to remake these very relations through fresh and

unexpected sources of action."[17] In this framework, documents are much more than ephemeral

recording devices that represent administration. Rather, they are the administration. They are

objects employed to make and remake status and power.

In recent years, the framework of materiality has opened up fresh avenues of research for

epigraphers. It has encouraged researchers to examine written artifacts and acts of writing in a

way that gives priority "not to the linguistic and semantic meaning of graphical marks, but to

their physicality, and the ways in which this relates to creators and users."[18] As Jeremy Smoak

and Alice Mandell put it, a focus on materiality allows one to think about the ways writing

"communicates beyond mere words."[19] The medium, form, size, material, color, script, social

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[17] B. Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UPress, 1999), 197.

[18] K. Piquette and R. Whitehouse, "Introduction: Developing an Approach to Writing as Material Practice," *Writing as Material Practice: Substance, Surface and Medium*, eds. K. Piquette and R. Whitehouse (London: Ubiquity Press, 2013), 1.

[19] J. Smoak and A. Mandell, "Reading Beyond Literacy, Writing Beyond Epigraphy: Multimodality and the Monumental Inscriptions at Ekron and Dan," *Maarav* 22 (2018): 79-112. Smoak and Mandell have been at the forefront of materiality analysis on Northwest Semitic epigraphic remains. See their additional work in idem., "Reconsidering the Function of Tomb Inscriptions in Ancient Judah: Khirbet Beit Lei as a Test Case," *JANER* 16 (2016): 192-245;

setting, and cultural associations of a written object give it particular affordances in how it is handled, viewed, and experienced.

The way materiality emphasizes physicality is useful because it acknowledges that those with little or no literacy still experience writing and give it meaning. The physicality of a written object materializes meaning that can be "read" by participants whether they are literate or not.[20] For an ancient royal bureaucratic context, this means that the physicality of administrative documents had the affordance to give material expression to the ideas of hierarchy, coercion, and subordination. The ability of the texts to physically express these ideas is readily comprehended by those who are witness to the transactions the texts mediate, regardless of their ability to access the linguistic information encoded in the texts. Think of an ancient census, a topic discussed in Chapter Five. Those coercively enrolled in the government's registers may not have been able to

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idem., "Reading and Writing in the Dark at Khirbet el-Qom: The Literacies of Subterranean Judah," *NEA* 80, no. 2 (2017): 188-192; J. Smoak, "Inscribing Temple Space: The Ekron Dedication as Monumental Text," *JNES* 76, no. 2 (2017): 319-336; idem. "Holy Bowls: Inscribing Holiness in Ancient Israel," *Maarav* 23 (2019). For a study of how considering materiality can illuminate bilingual inscriptions, see C.E. Bonesho, "Aesthetics of Empire: The Importance of Material Presentation in Palmyrene and Latin Bilingual Inscriptions," *Maarav* 23 (2019): 207-228. Similarly, for how multiple scripts can convey visual code-switching, see A. Berlejung, "Identity Performances in Multilinguistic Contexts: The Cases of Yarih-ʿ from Amman and Ikausu/Achish from Ekron," *Die Welt des Orients* 49 (2019): 252-287. Other important recent studies that focus on how material realities of Northwest Semitic inscriptions make meaning, especially with regard to how those realities influenced the visual features of inscriptions, include R.G. Lehmann, "Space Syntax and Metre in the Inscription of Yahawmilk King of Byblos," in *Proceedings of the Yarmouk Second Annual Colloquium on Epigraphy and Ancient Writings*, *7th–9th October 2003*, ed. O. Al-Ghul (Irbid: Yarmouk University, 2005), 69-98; K. Keimer, "The Impact of Ductus on Script Form and Development in Northwest Semitic Inscriptions," *UF* 46 (2015): 189-212.

[20] Piquette and Whitehouse, "Introduction," 6; Smoak and Mandell, "Reading Beyond Literacy," 83-86. For theoretical discussions on the ability of non-literates to "read" and engage written artifacts, see R.A. Braden, "Visual Literacy," *Journal of Visual Literacy* 16 (1996): 9-83; M. Sebba, "Iconisation, Attribution and Branding in Orthography," *Written Language & Literacy* 18 (2015): 208-227.

write, read, or even see their names in the document. Nevertheless, the document's state as a physical object in the hands of the official could relay messages of political power and the seriousness of the situation. In such a context, the document's existence as a physical thing is a material manifestation of political power. The inscribed name physically marks the subjection of the name's referent. This meaning could be comprehended without any facility in a writing system.

As Chapter Four will show, artistic depictions of writing from the ancient Near East illustrate that administrative writing carried a widely understood message of political dominance. Assyrian, Egyptian, and West Semitic monumental reliefs picture scribes recording mundane information in ephemeral documents alongside other representations of political power, especially violence. The reliefs are only pictorial representations of scribes and their implements. They show no interest in offering "readers" of the reliefs specific linguistic information the scribes may have been recording. The image of the bureaucratic text is enough. We can conclude from these representations that the real-life sight or image of state scribes recording information was "read" by participants as a display of political sovereignty. These depictions also suggest that while the state bureaucracy was the intended audience for administrative inscriptions, there was an awareness that unintended audiences among the general public found these acts of writing meaningful articulations of state power. The depictions I examine in DtrH suggest the same.

Materiality studies also prioritize the ways written objects might be associated with particular cultures. The material properties of writing give the technology an affordance to "locate people in culturally defined landscapes."[21] This line of inquiry opens up the question of

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[21] Jackson, Sarah E. "Writing as Material Technology: Orientation within Landscapes of

whether or not bureaucratic writing solicited suspicion in ancient Israel and Judah because its material qualities were associated with unwanted, foreign influence. As I will argue, the affordance of bureaucratic texts to be "read" or experienced as materializations of sovereignty was irrespective of any foreign cultural association. DtrH problematizes the bureaucratic mode of writing in general. As an analogy, we could consider again the Neo-Assyrian artistic reliefs depicting scribes in scenes aimed at conveying political dominance. The scribes usually appear in pairs with an ethnically marked Aramean scribe holding materials associated with alphabetic writing alongside an ethnically marked Assyrian holding materials associated with cuneiform. While this reflects the realities of scribal practice in the Neo-Assyrian Empire, it also suggests that throughout the ancient Near East, it was the social context of the state bureaucracy that lent administrative documents their affordance to be "read" as symbols of dominance and not any association with a particular culture.

With that said, for ancient Israel and Judah, certain material features of administrative documents could compound already existing aversions to the bureaucratic mode of writing by suggesting foreign influence. Chapter Three thus analyzes papyrus and the iconography of seals to this end. These material features evoke strong Egypto-Phoenician influence that those who witnessed acts of administrative inscription could "read" as foreign and dangerous even if they were illiterate. Additionally, for those more initiated into the arts of writing, the two versions of the alphabetic script used in the southern Levant during the early part of the Iron Age had the affordance to evoke foreign influence as well. Also discussed in Chapter Three, the polities of Israel and Judah adopted a script that was recognizably Phoenician. But a handful of inscriptions from the early Iron Age are written in the so-called Proto-Sinaitic script whose signs

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the Classic Maya World," in *Writing as Material Practice*, 46.

transparently draw on the Egyptian hieroglyphic repertoire. The stark Egyptian character of Proto-Sinaitic presents the possibility that both the initiated and uninitiated could "read" objects written in the script as having a foreign cultural association, one with the affordance to be interpreted as ominous given Egypt's past imperial hegemony in the land of Canaan. As materiality studies have demonstrated, script functions not just as text but also as image. In the salient words of Mark Sebba, script has a "look" that is "perceivable to some extent by non-users," who can then associate foreignness with the script and its users.[22] Whether the "look" of the Hebrew script in the 8th-7th centuries BCE allowed it to have foreign associations would largely depend on whether collective memory kept alive the notion that writing was a technology originally adopted from Egyptian and Phoenician channels.

The above discussion highlights one fruitful feature of an approach to writing that is rooted in materiality. Namely, materiality foregrounds the social context in which written objects were produced and consumed. This is an especially important observation for my argument about bureaucratic texts in ancient Israel. The significance of these texts stemmed not necessarily from the specifics of their content or material characteristics but from the social processes of control they appeared to mediate. They kept track of others and this charged them with a visual "grammar" of meaning, not just a linguistic one, characterized by the idea of political control.[23] Social context is sometimes absent from the analyses of epigraphers because of the tendency to

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[22] Sebba, "Iconsiation," 218.

[23] On visual grammar, see G. Kress and Th. van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (London: Routledge, 1996). The idea of visual grammars and "reading images" has given birth to the idea of iconographic literacy in the ancient Near East. See especially I.J. de Hulster, B. Strawn, and R. Bonfligio (eds.), *Iconographic Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: An Introduction* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2015); R. Bonfiglio, *Reading Images, Seeing Texts: Towards a Visual Hermeneutics for Biblical Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Academic Press, 2016).

focus on content. Biblicists and epigraphers tend to approach inscriptions with a primary interest in "languages, scripts, and the semantic meanings of texts," which often translates to a disregard for how the "written is bound up in individual and group interactions and perceived cultural norms."[24] When administrative inscriptions are considered within their specific social contexts, it can also open new interpretive possibilities regarding their function. For example, Chapter Seven argues that when the Samaria Ostraca are viewed within the sociopolitics of Samaria in the 8th century BCE, they may have not simply functioned as *aide-mémoires*, but also as transparency devices that assuaged fears concerning economic injustice. Similarly, materiality also encourages us to consider more fully the narrative contexts of administrative writing in DtrH. Much like inscriptions, these depictions are usually studied without a concern for the cultural norms and specific webs of social relations the text assumes for writing. Thus, while I seek to restore administrative epigraphic remains to their social contexts as objects that people experienced in particular times, spaces, and formats, I also seek to restore biblical depictions of writing to their narrative contexts in an attempt to ascertain what they might say about cultural assumptions governing the use of bureaucratic texts.

2.3 The Anthropology of Documents

Informed by materiality studies and instigated by our era's ever-increasing digitization of data, the social sciences have witnessed a surge in empirical studies that analyze the use of paper and other hard media. These anthropological works examining the "doings of documents"

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[24] Piquette and Whitehouse, "Introduction," 2-3. The lack of concern for the context stems from a long-standing disciplinary divide between philology and archaeology. On this divide, see especially J. Moreland, "Archaeology and Texts: Subservience or Enlightenment?" *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35 (2006): 135-151.

comprise an extensive bibliography.[25] In this study, I rely on three primary theoretical

observations from these works to help outline how documents may have been experienced in

ancient Israel. They may be summarized by stating that documents are often experienced as 1)

constitutive, 2) affective, and 3) unpredictable.

2.3.1 The Constitutive Capacities of Documents

To say that documents have a constitutive capacity is to say that they do more than

simply reflect a world out there.[26] They do not merely represent the relationships, quantities, and

information encoded within them. Rather, those who use documents grant them the capacity to

make, reshape, and constitute these subjects. Awareness for the constitutive capacity of

documents makes room for explaining the various events that can occur in the life of a

document, especially when it is counterfeited or destroyed. Such acts show that documents are

perceived to create new realities and bring an end to others. In many ways, this observation about

documents aligns with the way historians approach monumental inscriptions and literary

production in the ancient world. These forms of writing have been understood as texts that

communities employ to help do the work of creating and constituting culture. Cultural ideologies

of certain media forms intersect with the way a given culture uses that media. A culture can

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[25] For an overview, see M. Hull, "Documents and Bureaucracy," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (2012): 251-267. See also, Kafka, "Paperwork." Much of this work sees as its starting point the previously cited works of Weber and Goody. Another seminal theoretical work informing these studies is J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1974). A foundational work often credited as the genesis of the turn towards valuing documents as a legitimate source of inquiry is J. Yates, *Control through Communication: The Rise of System in American Management* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1989).

[26] A. Gupta, *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 143; M. Hull, Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan (Berkley, CA: UC Press, 2012), 5–36.

exploit that intersection, using the media to help "locate people in socially defined landscapes."[27] An administrative list of names achieves such tasks just as overtly.

But whereas monuments and literature tend to constitute communities through ideology, the use of administrative documents can differ by prioritizing constitution through force.[28] To that end, the constitutive effects of documents are most evident in the realm of statehood. Recent anthropological writings discuss the political state as an imagined concept.[29] That is, there is no single physical thing we can point to and say, "this is the state." The state instead relies on a multitude of objects and agents to actualize and reproduce itself in the lives of subjects. These disparate parts congeal, transforming the apparition of the state into a corporeal, touchable reality. Much of the anthropological work emphasizing this at once ghostly yet physical quality of the state has argued that one significant way political sovereignties become material is through documents. In their work on the anthropology of borders, Deborah Poole and Veena Das refer to documents as a "double sign of the state's distance and penetration."[30] Documents are an

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[27] S.E. Jackson, "Writing as Material Technology: Orientation within Landscapes of the Classic Maya World," in *Writing as Material Practice: Substance, Surface and Medium*, eds. K.E. Piquette and R.D. Whitehouse (London: Ubiquity Press, 2013), 45-64. For similar arguments about biblical literature and inscriptions in the ancient Semitic world, see Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew*. Regarding how the Hebrew language and script functioned in ancient Israel, Schniedewind makes a similar argument to Jackson's treatment of Mayan script. See W.M. Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew: Its Origins through the Rabbinic Period* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

[28] Some monuments and literature do use coercion as a means of constitution as especially represented in stele that threaten wrongdoers and covenant breakers, so for example, Hammurabi.

[29] For discussion and literature, see the introduction in Mateusz Laszczkowski and Madeleine Reeves (eds.), *Affective States: Entanglements, Suspicions, and Suspensions* (New York, NY: Berghahn, 2015).

[30] See the introduction in Veena Das and Deborah Poole (eds.), *Anthropology in the Margins of the State* (Sante Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research, 2004), 13.

intimate, tangible encounter with the distant, immaterial state. They make the state a physical thing. Because of this, they generate meaning and even passions just as much as they record mundane acts.

Two examples, referred to throughout this dissertation, are particularly helpful in illuminating the constitutive powers of administrative texts. The first comes from Medieval England. When William the Conqueror invaded England and assumed control, one of his first acts was to conduct a thorough survey of land, wealth, and personages. The results of this survey were recorded in what Anglo-Saxon contemporaries famously referred to as the Domesday Book, a title that was meant to evoke the final apocalyptic judgment described in the New Testament. Historians have noted that administratively, it is unclear whether anything ever became of these records, but what is clear is that Anglo-Saxons viewed the book as the physical constitution of their subjected state. The book came to materialize William's conquering, setting a "shameful mark on a humiliated people."[31] Administrative records were thought to carry a similar constitutive capacity during the French Revolution. But here it was their destruction rather than their creation that realized a new political reality. Alongside attacks on architecture and decapitations of political elite, resisters also found the burning of state documents to be a helpful way of realizing their casting off of tyranny.[32] Paul Connerton has understood the public execution of Louis XVI as a "ritual process through which the aura of inviolability surrounding

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[31] M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 6, 32.

[32] Kafka, Th*e Demon of Writing*, 38-40. The French philosopher Georges Bataille reasoned that architecture is one of the greatest images of authority and thus provokes physical attacks. During the French Revolution, documents seem to have provoked similar attacks because they too were thought of as a central representation of authority. On Bataille, see D. Hollier, *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

kingship could be explicitly repudiated" and as a "ceremony to exorcise the memory of a prior ceremony" in his coronation.[33] In the same way, the burning of documents can be understood as a ritual process that repudiated and exorcised the memory of the subjection of those inscribed within them to the crown. According to Connerton's analysis, both the execution and the burning of documents were public performances that marked the end of the old order and the beginning of the new. These examples show that both the formation and destruction of documents can be more than symbolic. These acts with documents are perceived to shape the world and constitute new realities.

When it comes to ancient Israel, most scholars consider documents as simple epiphenomena of state administration. Anthropological work on documents and political power challenges us to reconsider documents as more than just epiphenomena. We should view them as everyday objects that "work as resources for the establishment, maintenance, and regeneration of power and status differentials."[34] In the words of Ann Stoler, written records are "monuments to configurations of state power."[35] For these reasons, we should especially reconsider the timing of the epigraphic windfall during the monarchic period. Had the economy and political organization become so much more complex that it suddenly required the mnemonic capacities of writing where it was previously unneeded? Because administrative writing appears alongside other monumental markers of power, bureaucratic documents can be understood as a performance of

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[33] P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 8-9.

[34] P. Vannini, "Material Culture Studies and the Sociology and Anthropology of Technology," in *Material Culture and Technology in Everyday Life*, ed. idem. (New York, NY: Peter Lang Inc., 2009), 19.

[35] A. Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87-109.

that power. The growing Israelite and especially Judahite kingdoms mobilized documents as a

means to materialize their penetration into the lives of subjects. Of course, they undoubtedly

benefitted from record-keeping's mnemonic capacities, but such a purely functional view fails to

explain features of the epigraphic corpus as well as attitudes towards administrative writing

found in biblical literature. The formal and material qualities of administrative inscriptions point

to their role in forming a complex of monumentality that communicated kingship. While the

materiality of documents is not monumental, their functions are.

2.3.2 The Affective Capacities of Documents

Perhaps the most significant theoretical consideration about documents informing this

dissertation comes from the world of affect theory. I borrow affect theory from the social

sciences in order to talk about the way documents can generate emotion in their users. In its most

simplified form, affect theory acknowledges that particular emotions result from a person's

interactions with people and things.[36] There are no emotionally neutral interactions, as

acknowledged by critiques of technological somnambulism, and this includes a person's

interaction with documents. In fact, anthropologists have noted that a chief feature of ephemeral

documents is the way they can solicit varying emotional responses. This is a central aspect of

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[36] Certain purists of affect theory would object to my use of "emotions." Some working with affect theory claim that its principles are most useful for analyzing the pre-linguistic energies the human body feels before the mind sorts it into a linguistically defined emotion. But the intricacies of this purist approach are beyond our interests here. Plenty of others working with affect theory acknowledge its usefulness to refer to "energies" or "emotions." In this dissertation, I use affect theory as defined by Wetherell, who argues that the unit of analysis in affect theory is the affective-discursive practice of interpreting interactions as emotion. See M. Wetherell, "Trends in the Turn Towards Affect: A Social Psychological Critique," *Body & Society* 21, no. 2 (2015): 139-166. It should also be noted that the field of affect theory implies an approach that is flexible, as there is no one single affect theory, but rather a plethora of iterations. On the diverse definitions of affect theory, see M. Gregg and G.J. Seigworth, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, eds. idem. (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2010), 1-28.

what documents do and how they are experienced.

To illustrate the affective potential of documents, I would like to cite a famous example of administrative writing from the anthropological work of Claude Lévi-Strauss.[37] While traveling with the Nambikwara tribe to meet a fellow kinship group, Lévi-Strauss gave paper and pencils to each member. Eventually, most of the group began to mimic the writing motion of Lévi-Strauss, drawing wavy lines on their pages. Over the course of some days, however, the tribal members became disinterested and ceased using the pencils and paper. However, the chief, as a sign of his chiefhood, continued this practice of making wavy lines. In fact, the chief began using his pages of lines to mediate the exchange of goods. Lévi-Strauss recounts one public meeting where the chief read from his lines for a two-hour period, taking instructions from the page in order to allot various goods. Many have turned to this example when discussing writing's capacity to be emblematic of authority. Lévi-Strauss himself uses it to assert that writing's primary function is to administer slavery, famously quipping, "It [writing] seems rather to favor the exploitation than the enlightenment of mankind."[38] Derrida in particular has critiqued this formulation, arguing that it is a gross oversimplification based on a false binary of "speech is good" and "writing is bad."[39] According to Derrida, the violence and hierarchization Lévi-Strauss attributes to writing are already manifested in certain forms of speech and in communities without writing, while writing itself can also have socially positive effects. For our

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[37] For the full recounting of the example, see C. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. J. Cape (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2012), 294-304.

[38] Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropique*, 298.

[39] Derrida uses this episode to deconstruct what he sees as the greater oversimplified binary in Lévi-Strauss's work, namely, the nature/culture opposition in which nature is privileged against culture, leading to the exoticization of perceived "innocent" and "pristine" societies like the Nambikwara. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 118-140.

purposes, the most illustrative aspect of this episode is how some tribal members chose to respond to the chief's continued use of writing. In a brief note, Lévi-Strauss recounts that some among the tribe perceived the chief's use of writing as a performance of his power. In response, they became annoyed and departed the group for a number of days. This is perhaps the earliest ethnographic example of the affective power of documents. Even if they contain linguistic information only intelligible to the writer, their use in particular social and cultural contexts still discharges energies and messages about power that people can internalize as abject emotion. Because documents can imply and materialize the invasion of power into the lives of subjects, that emotion often takes the shape of anxiety, fear, and paranoia. While Lévi-Strauss's controversial view that writing facilitates an imbalance of power and inequality has generated considerable debate, what cannot be denied is that many at least perceive writing as doing just that.

The "affective underside" of documents has received its most explicit treatment in the ethnographic work of Yael Navaro-Yashin.[40] Observing the use and experience of documents in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), she proposes that documents "be studied as affectively loaded phenomena…as capable of carrying, containing, and inciting affective energies when transacted or put to use in specific webs of social relation."[41] She points out that documents are experienced as more than socially and politically neutral technologies. Their contexts give documents subliminal meaning and imbue them with the capacity to provoke emotion. For purposes of this study, her most elucidating example comes from a Turkish-Cypriot

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[40] Y. Navaro-Yashin, "Make-believe Papers, Legal Forms, and the Counterfeit: Affective Interactions between Documents and People in Britain and Cyprus," *Anthropological Theory* 7, no. 1 (2007): 79-98.

[41] ibid., 81.

citizen residing in London. The citizen, named Fuat, maintained a practice of depositing his British documents in the local Cypriot community center, refusing to bring them home. After lengthy conversations with Fuat, Navaro-Yashin concludes that his experiences with British documents were defined by anxiety. She remarks, "Those pieces of paper produced, as if by magic, such powerful physical effects in Fuat's subjective experience of the British state apparatus that he did not dare bring them back home," they were instead "filed away in the community centre to pacify their phantasmatic power."[42]

Two components of Navaro-Yashin's work highlight the usefulness of affect theory for an examination of administrative writing depicted in the Hebrew Bible. For one, it shows that the affective potential of documents is primarily informed by the way they constitute power. Documents imply authority. They position bodies within hierarchical chains. Naturally, those bodies do not feel indifferent about it. Prompting annoyance or anxiety, accounting texts, for instance, remind those managing resources that they are being surveilled by superiors. Depending on the context, name-lists remind their inscribed subjects that their goods and ultimately their bodies belong to someone else. Even divorce bills imply a judicial body with the power to decide one's fate in society (Deut 24:1). Because they are reminders of power and subjugation, documents can incite emotionally rooted responses. Documents produced through Israelite and Judahite statecraft were no different. They too generated an affect in their subjects that was grounded in political realities and expectations. Given West Semitic traditions of decentralized governance, documents in ancient Israel and Judah were particularly charged with

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[42] ibid., 82. She details other examples, demonstrating the varied experience of documents that depends on the social situation. For example, TRNC agents interact with TRNC documents in humor because of the documents "make-believeness." That is, the TRNC is not a real state, so their documents are meaningless.

affective potential. As my analysis of DtrH seeks to reveal, even *ad-hoc* instances of administrative inscription were loaded with cultural narratives and feelings about political security, corruption, and morality. In addition to managing tasks, this is part of what documents did in ancient Israel and Judah. They generated stories and feelings.

Second, affect theory provides a means of studying writing that is not dependent on literacy. Document mediated interaction creates unease in the literate and illiterate alike. Two of the major theoretical works on which this dissertation draws come from the ethnographic field notes of two scholars who examined the documentary practices of government agencies in India and Pakistan. It is of note that when each first began their fieldwork, they encountered resistance from the lower level bureaucrats they were observing.[43] In each case, these lower-level bureaucrats found great discomfort with the idea that someone was keeping records of their own record-keeping. Here, highly literate individuals experienced the affect of being recorded.

But literacy is not needed to interact with the documents of statecraft. As discussed in the previous section on materiality, individuals lacking facility in a writing system can "read" bureaucratic texts as a performance of power. Being illiterate can, in fact, exacerbate the affective energies of documents. To revisit Navaro-Yashin's example, Faut's limited abilities in reading English contributed to the anxiety he experienced when interacting with documents produced by the British government. Although not geared towards the affectivity of documents, a separate study on the way illiteracy affected unemployment in England during the 1990s further illustrates this theoretical point. Researchers concluded that when those who were illiterate interacted with the government's Employment Service department, it "was a source of great anxiety and tension, as their relationship with Employment Service staff, at least at the

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[43] Hull, *Government of Paper*, 31; Gupta, *Red Tape*, 144.

formal level, was based on forms, a medium of communication about which they felt anxious."[44] The staff provided the necessary help for filling the forms, but this did not mitigate the anxiety felt by the subjects. Already existing anxiety over whether the staff would trick them out of benefits became more profound because of the physical, written objects of documentation used to mediate a relationship where one side was illiterate. For ancient Israel, given the number of simple documents like name-lists and the fact that many of them appear to have been inscribed by a single hand, it is likely that illiterate Israelites experienced documents in a similar manner. My investigation of DtrH seeks to confirm this suspicion.

2.3.3 The Unpredictable Capacities of Documents

The third theoretical principle about documents featured in this dissertation is that they are unpredictable. Their unpredictably stems from some of their more obvious assumed capacities. First, while documents are thought to uniformly make the management of tasks more efficient, they can oftentimes promote inefficiency instead.[45] Writing usually demands more writing. By nature, it proliferates, and the proliferation can create administrative backlog. In *The Castle*, Franz Kafka provides some humorous commentary on this aspect of writing. The novel traces the fate of a poor wayfarer, Kay, who gets caught up in the administrative apparatus of a particular village where every affair is mediated by a plethora of documents. Failing to resolve

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[44] P. Davies, "Longterm Unemployment and Literacy: A Case-study of the Restart Interview" in *Worlds of Literacy*, eds. M. Hamilton, D. Barton, and R. Ivanič, (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 1994) 42.

[45] See especially Kafka, *The Demon of Writing*. For a particular case study, see N. Mathur, "Transparent-making Documents and the Crisis of Implementation: A Rural Employment Law and Development Bureaucracy in India," *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 35, no. 2 (2012): 167-185. The inefficiency of documents is also discussed in Clanchy, From *Memory to Written Record*, 63. Some Assyriologists have posited that certain dumps of so-called "dead" archives resulted from the realization that a use of documents for certain tasks had become unwieldy. See G. van Driel, "The Eanna Archive," *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 55 (1998): 64.

perceived injustices done to him, Kay discovers a major reason why when he visits a clerk of middle rank. The clerk is unable to locate the document needed in order to send Kay's plea up the administrative ladder. Frantically his assistants pilfer through drawer after drawer and chest after chest filled with documents. Each time they come up empty, they also fail to put the documents back in their respective place. Incapable of closing from the sheer volume of documents, the drawers and chests spit all of their contents back out into the room. Kay departs in frustration. In a material expression of the village's monolithic bureaucratic system, an imposing castle, inaccessible to the villagers, casts a looming shadow over the village.

For a historically rooted example of writing's inefficiency, we can turn to another Kafka, the cultural historian Ben Kafka who has analyzed the use of documents during the French Revolution. He adduces that much of the discourse about writing during this time was governed by a belief that its proliferation inhibited progress. Kafka cites a speech given by the politician Saint-Just before the National Convention. In the speech, Saint-Just bemoaned that "the prolixity of the government's correspondence and orders is a sign of its inertia…The demon of writing is waging war against us; we are unable to govern."[46] While life in ancient Israel was certainly less mediated by documents than this and the above fictional example, the penchant for writing to at times be ironically perceived as inefficient is something to keep in mind. The notion touches on the ways participants can think of writing as something that depersonalizes and undermines the social fabric.

Besides proliferation, there are other reasons why administrative writing might become or at least be unpredictably perceived as inefficient. These other reasons seem to be more at play in

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[46] B. Kafka, "The Demon of Writing: Paperwork, Public Safety, and the Reign of Terror," Representations 98, no. 1 (2007): 3.

our source material from ancient Israel. They relate to writing's claims on clarity and transparency. Put another way, documents in their document-ness claim to provide accuracy and proof, or what we could sum up as the truth. But recent anthropological work demonstrates that in contradiction to these claims, documents are often experienced as opaque and illegible.[47] By these terms, anthropologists mean that for their users, documents often fail to bear the truth to which they lay claim. Their very appeal to truth makes them vehicles of lies. In other words, documents are prone to forgery, counterfeiting, interpretive misunderstandings, and the falsification of data. For their own benefit, accountants cook the books that claim to provide accountability against corruption. On their own whims, state bureaucrats doubt the authenticity of a document that should guarantee a citizen particular rights. Elsewhere, a lower-level bureaucrat may fumble an administrative matter because of failure to understand the written instructions of the superior. Believing the instructions to be clear, the superior fails to anticipate the potential ways written instruction could be misinterpreted. The document, taking the place of face to face instruction, is incapable of offering clarification. Its claim to accuracy is subverted. Because of these issues, the question of whether writing can be trusted at all attracts considerable dialogue in society, especially when it is first adopted. The same question is latent within a few biblical depictions of documents outlined in this dissertation. Most notable among them are Jezebel's forged letters (1 Kgs 21), the temple restorations of Jehoash (2 Kgs 12), and Isaiah's critique of legal documents (Is 10:1), all of which will be discussed later. We could also add an example like the so-called "letter of a literate soldier" (Lachish 3) from Lachish, which preserves an illustration of the unpredictable problems created by document-mediated communication. In

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[47] V. Das, "The Signature of the State: The Paradox of Illegibility," in *Anthropology in the Margins*, 225-252; Hull, *Government of Paper*, 166; Gupta, *Red Tape*, 226.

the ostracon, written during the early 6th century BCE, a junior officer defends himself against

the accusations of his superior that he is unable to read. Evidently the junior failed to follow

through on some command written in a previous letter, prompting the superior to insult him with

the line "you do not how to read," to which the junior took great offense, swearing that "no one

has ever had to read me a letter" and stating "my heart has been sick" about the matter.[48] These,

among others, illustrate that part of the dialogue about documents in ancient Israel probably

comprised of distrust over the claim of documents on truth.

2.4 Conclusion

The potential constitutive, affective, and unpredictable capacities of documents are

dependent on social, political, and cultural contexts. The ethnographer and media theorist

Matthew Hull argues that these contexts create graphic ideologies that regulate how people

perceive documents. Here, Hull adapts Webb Keane's "semiotic ideologies," which are

"assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world."[49] Hull contends that

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[48] On the letter, see S. Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), 62-69 and W. Schniedewind, "Sociolinguistic Reflections on the Letter of a Literate Soldier," *Zeitschrift für Altehebraistik* 13 (2000): 157-167. An alternative translation of the line "you do not know how to read" (לא ידעתה קרא ספר) reads instead as "you do not understand. Call a scribe!" This alternative reading is based on a different understanding of the line's syntax, one revolving around the final ה in ידעתה, which could be understood as a *mater lectionis* or an object suffix. Understanding it as an object suffix makes it possible to render ספר as "scribe" rather than "letter," in which case קרא could mean "call" instead of "read." Regardless of the specific translation, the gist of the accusation is an inability to read.

[49] Webb Keane, "Semiotics and the Social Analysis of Material Things," *Language & Communication* 23 (2003): 419. For applications of Keane's semiotic ideologies to ancient Near Eastern texts and artifacts, see Smoak and Mandell, "Reconsidering the Function of Tomb Inscriptions"; idem., "The Material Turn in the Study of Israelite Religions: Spaces, Things, and the Body," *JHS* 19 (2019): 1-42; S.L. Sanders, "Words, Things, and Death: The Rise of Iron Age Literary Monuments," in *Language and Religion*, eds. R. Yelle, C. Handman, and C. Lehrich (Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2019), 327-349.

bureaucratically written artifacts come bundled with "sets of conceptions" about the material, format, agents, and contexts that comprise their creation and use.[50] These conceptions govern the understanding of participants involved in bureaucratic processes and inform their perception about the proper as well as improper use of graphic artifacts. Depending on these graphic ideologies, subjects of bureaucratic artifacts will experience particular affects. To get at the potential affects of documents portrayed in ancient Israelite literature, we must first understand the graphic ideologies that informed them. This requires framing those portrayals within what we know of Israelite and Judahite documentary practices from the epigraphic record and how it relates to the longer history of literacy in the southern Levant. The next chapter takes up this topic.

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[50] Hull, Government of Paper, 14.

CHAPTER THREE: FRAMING BIBLICAL DEPICTIONS OF ADMINISTRATIVE WRITING WITH THE EPIGRAPHIC SOURCES

A brief description of the epigraphic record from ancient Israel will help frame my analysis of writing's depiction in biblical literature. It will illustrate the material world that informed these depictions. Both inscribed artifacts and seals provide direct evidence of the practice of bureaucratic writing in ancient Israel and Judah. Most of the inscribed evidence comes in the form of ostraca, broken potsherds bearing either ink or incised writing. Seals also left behind their corresponding impressions in clay, called bullae, which sealed papyrus and parchment documents. This section examines trends in the dating, materiality, administrative genres, and archaeological contexts of this evidence for bureaucratic writing. It makes no claim to being comprehensive, as such an endeavor would require a separate dissertation. But an examination of broad trends in the epigraphic record will illustrate how the growth of writing in the 8th-7th centuries BCE could have been experienced as social distress. In particular, the uses, materials, and contexts of Israelite and Judahite writing discussed here evoke bodily coercion, foreign influence, and social stratification. By examining these features, this chapter will lay the groundwork for the biblical evidence examined in the following chapters.

The chapter begins by describing the limitations of the epigraphic record, but acknowledges that extant remains provide a well-rounded enough picture to assess the primary genres of administrative documents that comprised Israelite and Judahite bureaucratic practice during the 8th-7th centuries BCE. The Chapter's second section then turns to an examination of these administrative genres. Looking at name-lists, letters, and the evidence for accounting, this section concludes that these genres demonstrate written documentation's primary function as a tool to enact political control in the contexts of conscripting service, managing labor, facilitating

taxation, and surveilling subordinates. The Chapter then situates these epigraphic remains in their archaeological contexts, which manifest administrative writing's deep attachments to the military and state bureaucracies during the 8th-7th centuries BCE. Examining chronological trends in the epigraphic record, the next section considers how the southern Levant's experiences with writing in the Bronze Ages could have influenced later Iron Age perceptions of the technology. Namely, it considers how the Egyptian empire wielded writing to manage their colonial holdings abroad and how this context largely defined Levantine experiences with the technology in periods preceding the formation of the Israelite and Judahite states. This section also emphasizes that when these Iron Age states increased their use of bureaucratic writing in the 8th-7th centuries BCE, they did so in the context of a wider process of political centralization, a trend that could further charge writing with a symbolic capacity of domination that many could "read." Finally, the Chapter considers material features of administrative writing in the 8th-7th centuries BCE, arguing that bureaucratic inscriptions had physical properties that messaged physical control to "readers" alongside their already clear use to manage contexts of control. This final section will also discuss how other material properties gave writing the further affordance to be experienced as a dangerous source of foreign influence. Taken together, these features of the epigraphic record serve as a frame through which to better contextualize and understand administrative writing's depiction in DtrH, where the technology appears in contexts that criticize the coercive capacities of monarchy.

3.1 Challenges in Using the Epigraphic Record

There are some inherent challenges in using the epigraphic corpus to reconstruct beliefs about administrative writing. The spotty nature of the remains means that we only have a blurry portrait of how documents were used. As already mentioned, extant remains of administrative

documents only come to us in the form of ostraca. But it is clear from seals and their sealings

that papyrus documents now lost to us comprised a significant portion of written artifacts from

the Israelite and Judahite bureaucracies. Due to the southern Levant's humid climate, these seals

and their impressions are nearly all that remains from Israelite papyrus documents, many of

which were customarily rolled up and bound with a string. A wet lump of clay was then placed

over the string's knot, fastening the document shut. While wet, the clay was stamped with a

personal or official seal. It is certain that bullae sealed documents specifically made of papyrus

because hundreds of extant bullae preserve the impression of papyrus fibers on their reverse.[1]

Elsewhere, the Wadi Murabba'at Papyrus, a 7th century BCE palimpsest consisting of a letter

overwritten with a ration list, provides firm evidence that Hebrew scribes used papyrus for

administrative purposes.[2] Unlike other papyrus documents from the monarchic period, this

document survived because it was placed in a cave near the arid climate of the Dead Sea. Of

course, the climate was only able to ravage less fortunate documents if they at first survived the

region's violent history. Some charred bullae from Jerusalem, for instance, tell us that their

corresponding documents were lost to a fire stemming from the Babylonian invasion.[3]

      Besides papyrus, leather was also used to record writing. However, the evidence indicates

that this media was hardly ever used in administrative settings during the monarchic period. The

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[1] For an example of seals bearing the impression of papyrus fibers, see J. Hardin, C. Rollston, and J. Blakely, "Iron Age Bullae from Officialdom's Periphery: Khirbet Summeily in Broader Context," *NEA* 77, no. 4 (2014): 299-301

[2] F.M. Cross, "Epigraphic Notes on Hebrew Documents from the Eight-Sixth Centuries B.C. II: The Murabbaʿat Papyrus and the Letter Found near Yabneh-Yam," *BASOR* 165 (1962): 34-42.

[3] Y. Shiloh, "A Group of Hebrew Bullae from the City of David," *IEJ* 36, no. 1 (1986): 16-38.

epigraphic record lacks direct evidence of leather's use for writing in monarchic Israel, but because some of the earliest surviving Dead Sea Scrolls (ca. 385 BCE) are made of processed animal skin, most scholars suggest that the practice of using leather for writing was in use in earlier periods.[4] Supporting this conclusion, Egypt has produced exemplars of inscribed leather from periods as early as the 4th dynasty (ca. 2550-2450 BCE).[5] Given Egypt's now well-known influence on Israelite scribal practice, leather scrolls were probably used for writing in monarchic Israel. However, the production process of leather scrolls made them expensive writing options and thus unlikely candidates for recording administrative information. Papyrus was more easily and cheaply acquired.[6] More importantly, the philological evidence overwhelming points to the dominance of papyrus in the monarchic period with a subsequent shift to parchment only in the fifth century BCE when the influence of Aramaic scribal practice reached a peak.[7] Still, if any administrative documentation was recorded on leather, unlikely as it may have been, it would have fared no better than papyrus in the southern Levant's climate.

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[4] P. Zhakevich, "The Tools of an Israelite Scribe: A Semantic Study of the Terms Signifying the Tools and Materials of Writing in Biblical Hebrew," (PhD diss., University of Texas, 2016),107.

[5] David Diringer, *The Hand-Produced Book* (London: Hutchinson's Scientific and Technical Publications, 1953), 172; Zhakevich, "The Tools of an Israelite Scribe," 106.

[6] Ibid., 9-12. On the relative accessibility of papyrus, see K. Donker van Heel and B.J.J. Haring, *Writing in a Workmen's Village: Scribal Practice in Ramesside Deir el-Medinah* (Leiden: The Netherlands Institute for the Near East, 2003) and associated bibliography.

[7] On the dominance of papyrus in the monarchic period and the dominance of parchment in the post-exilic period, see the two-part study M. Haran, "Book-scrolls in Israel in Pre-exilic Times," *JJS* 33 (1982): 161-173 and idem., "Book-scrolls at the Beginning of the Second Temple Period: The Transition from Papyrus to Skins," *HUCA* 54 (1983): 111-122. For an overview, synthesis and comparison with media in Babylon see S.L. Sanders, *From Adapa to Enoch: Scribal Culture and Religious Vision in Judea and Babylonia* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 231-233.

One additional written medium, certainly used in monarchic administration, has been lost as well: writing boards. Mostly made of wood and sometimes covered in wax, writing boards were used throughout the ancient Near East in administrative contexts.[8] Because they were cheap and easy to erase, particularly the wax-covered variety, writing boards were valued for accounting purposes and for writing drafts whose final editions were destined for more durable or prestigious media. The use of writing boards in the Levant is confirmed as early as the Late Bronze Age.[9] But the famous example comes from the middle of the 8th century by way of the Bar-Rakib inscription (*KAI* 218). The iconographic portion of this Aramaic inscription depicts a scribe standing before the Aramean king Bar-Rakib. Tucked beneath the scribe's arm is a polytyptich writing board, suggesting that by this time, royal bureaucracies in the west were utilizing this medium.

From the early 6th century, Lachish Letter 4 suggests that writing boards were used in Judahite administration. The letter's author, Hoshaiah, informs his superior that "I have written upon the palette (דלת) according to all that you requested of me."[10] While some have interpreted

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[8] For writing boards in Middle-Assyrian administration, see J.N. Postgate, *Bronze Age Bureaucracy: Writing and the Practice of Government in Assyria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2013), 64. For other uses of writing boards in the Late Bronze Age, see D. Symington, "Late Bronze Age Writing Boards and their Uses: Textual Evidence from Anatolia and Syria," *Anatolian Studies* 41 (1991): 111-123. For Neo-Assyrian uses, see D.J. Wiseman, "Assyrian Writing Boards," *Iraq* 17 (1955): 3-13. For Neo-Babylonian uses, see J. Macginnis, "The Use of Writing Boards in the Neo-Babylonian Temple Administration at Sippar," *Iraq* 64 (2002): 217-236. For Egypt, see F. Hagen, "An Eighteenth Dynasty Writing Board Ashmolean (1948.91) and the Hymn to the Nile," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 49 (2013): 73-91.

[9] Syrian polities employed them. See Symington, "Late Bronze Age Writing Boards," who treats references to writing boards from the administrative texts of Emar and Ugarit.

[10] The pertinent lines of the inscription are 3-4. For treatment, see S. Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), 69-76.

the use of דלת here to denote either a door or a column in a scroll, the "philological, inscriptional, and graphic evidence" from the ancient Near East advocates that the reference is to a writing board.[11] Their profusion in ancient Near Eastern administration and their accessibility couple with this off-handed mention in an Israelite administrative letter to confirm their use in the monarchic period. Much like documents made of papyrus and leather, however, writing boards were unable to survive history in the southern Levant.

But the loss of documents on papyrus, leather, and writing boards does not mean that we are unable to gain a good sense of the major Hebrew administrative genres. Good evidence suggests that uses of these perishable media overlapped with uses found in extant ostraca. This means that, by looking at the ostraca, we can acquire a well-rounded enough picture of the uses to which perishable media were put.

Based on both comparative and internal evidence, the overlap between ostraca and more perishable media took two forms. On the one hand, ostraca operated in a subservient role to papyrus and writing boards. These more perishable media functioned in an archival role, keeping master lists and tracking running accounts. The ostraca functioned in this case as a go-between, transferring information to and from the archival copies kept on the papyrus and writing boards. Here, ostraca were valued for daily *ad-hoc* uses, whereas papyrus and writing boards were valued for more long-term functions. On the other hand, rather than ostraca functioning in a subservient role, some papyrus and writing boards mirrored uses of ostraca, there being no

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[11] R.L. Hicks, "*delet* and *megillāh*: A Fresh Approach to Jeremiah XXXVI," *VT* 33, no. 1 (1983): 52-53. See also Zhakevich, "The Tools of an Israelite Scribe," 118-119. Zhakevich remarks that the collective evidence suggests that *delet* did carry a secondary meaning of 'writing board, tablet.'" The use of *dlt* could denote any general four-sided object made of wood, including a writing board. In Ezek 41:24 we read, "the doors (*dltwt*) had two leaves (*dltwt*) apiece." Further supporting this denotational range, 2 Kgs 12:10 refers to the lid of a chest as *dlt*.

hierarchy between the different media. That is, some papyrus documents and writing boards bore the same type of laconic name-lists and ration-lists that we now find on ostraca. And vice-versa, ostraca were sometimes employed for use as primary archival copies. In either case, this means ostraca provide a decent sample of the types of administrative matters recorded on perished media.

Comparative material from the ancient Near East offers examples for both forms of overlap between ostraca and their less durable counterparts.[12] More importantly, evidence from ancient Israel shows signs of both as well. For example, the previously mentioned Lachish 4 letter illustrates how papyrus or writing boards served more archival roles. Hoshiah's commander sent information via ostraca and, Hoshiah kept records of this information at the site's archive in a דלת, denoting something akin to a daybook used by Egyptian scribes to document the comgings and goings of resources and people at the site where the scribe was stationed. This understanding of Hoshiah's דלת is supported by Arad 7, which likewise refers to some sort of central archival document. In this letter, a subordinate named Eliashib is informed

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[12] In addition to the previously cited Mesopotamian examples on writing boards, see especially M. Jursa, "Accounting in Neo-Babylonian Archives: Structure, Usage, Implications," in *Record-Keeping, Standardization, and the Development of Accounting in the Ancient Near East*, eds. M. Hudson and C. Wunsch (Potomac, MD: Capital Decisions Ltd., 2004), 145-198. For a discussion on master lists, ledgers, and copies in conjunction with ostraca in ancient Egypt, see Donker van Heel and Haring, *Writing in a Workmen's Village*. As will be discussed in Chapter Seven, the way ostraca potentially relate to more perishable, yet prestigious forms of media such as papyrus has been discussed largely in connection to the Samaria Ostraca. Only one study has discussed in depth the way other Hebrew name-lists and ration lists imply the same situation. That study is Alan Millard, "An Assessment of the Evidence for Writing in Ancient Israel," in *Biblical Archaeology Today: Proceedings of the International Congress on Biblical Archaeology, Jerusalem April 1984*, J. Amitai et al. (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1985), 301-312. Millard had reservations about the relationship of ostraca to other media based on comparative evidence. However, the comparative evidence is much broader and more clearly understood today than when Millard completed his study.

by his superior to make regular deliveries of grain to a group identified as the Kittim. The superior informs Eliashib to "write it before you" (כתבת לפניך). Both the Arad and Lachish letters thus suggest that running accounts of administrative tasks lost to us were kept at military outposts. As Hoshiah's letter articulates, these longer, archival accounts were most likely kept on perishable media. But as Eliashib's letter suggests, the tabulated information in these archival accounts was an accumulation of matters already recorded on ostraca. It is thus likely that the short name-lists and ration lists discovered at these sites related in some way to the implied archival books of Hoshiah and Eliashib. The use of laconic ostraca makes more sense if they are viewed as information inputted to or outputted from archival books of this type. The takeaway is that by piecing together ostraca, we are able to grasp, albeit only broadly, at the uses of perishable media and to reconstruct some of the information they contained. Their loss need not discourage us from valuing ostraca as a good barometer for how writing was used, which would shape and be shaped by how it was perceived.

Additionally, rather than ostraca operating in a subservient role as implied in Arad 7 and Lachish 4, we also have direct evidence that perishable media simply served identical purposes to ostraca. Returning to the Wadi Murabba'at palimpsest, we see that it was used for a letter and subsequently re-appropriated for a short ration list. These contents suggest that this piece of papyrus functioned no differently than extant ostraca. Its reuse as a palimpsest also suggests that papyrus may have been scarce, the implication being that ostraca were more frequently deployed for administrative purposes. While it is difficult to draw conclusions from this one example, the comparative evidence couples with Wadi Murabba'at to indicate that extant ostraca represent a fair picture of how papyrus and writing boards were utilized.

It is telling that across the range of ostraca, there is a fairly uniform picture. Whether

10th-9th century Arad or 7th century Lachish and Horvat 'Uza or more random finds at Tell Beit Misrim and Tel 'Ira, we find either letters managing crises or laconic ration lists and name-lists. This was the essence of Israelite and Judahite administration. It might be meager compared to other ancient Near Eastern cultures, but the epigraphic evidence at hand unites to give a general picture of the uses to which writing was put in monarchic Israel.

Despite the admitted shortcomings of the epigraphic record, an adequate dataset remains with which to capture the essence of what documents were used for in Israelite administration. Fifteen years ago, Graham Davies estimated that over 2,000 inscriptions from the period of the monarchic have been unearthed, with the majority being administrative.[13] The number has only grown since then. Such a dataset is well-equipped to support general conclusions about the uses and perceptions of documents in the biblical period. Given the evidence, documents on papyrus and writing boards functioned similarly to ostraca. Moreover, aside from the contents of documents, their date, material nature, extant administrative genres, and archaeological contexts can tell us much about who used writing and for what purposes. This is even true of the seals that now lack their corresponding documents. Their iconography, materiality, and archaeological contexts each supply important pieces of the frame through which this dissertation will examine biblical depictions of administrative writing.

3.2 Administrative Genres of Writing

Regarding administrative genres, extant Hebrew texts from the 8th-7th centuries BCE can be divided into three major categories: name-lists, accounting texts, and correspondence. As will be discussed in this section, each of these uses shows a primary concern for policing behavior, a

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[13] G. Davies, "Some Uses of Writing in Ancient Israel in the Light of Some Recently Published Inscriptions," in *Writing and Ancient Near Eastern Society: Papers in Honour of Alan R. Millard*, eds. P. Bienkowski, C. Mee, and E. Slater (New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2005), 155.

concern that could be experienced with unease in a tribal setting. Perhaps the most common as well as ambiguous genre is the name-list.[14] Examples of such lists come from a range of sites, including Arad, Lachish, Samaria, Jerusalem, Horvat ʿUza, and more. Some list the name of as a few as two people while one exemplar lists up to eighteen. But the general rule seems to be less than ten and most often, less than five. Their laconic nature makes it difficult to understand their function, but it is safe to assume that they connote force or subordination in some way. Such is the fundamental nature of name-lists. Considering that they mostly come from military contexts, it is likely that they deal with military enrollment or the management of labor, likely both the contracted and conscripted variety. The most suggestive parallels for laconic name-lists on ostraca come from Egyptian administrative practice where they frequently served as devices for recording absentee laborers.[15] One of the more suggestive exemplars from ancient Judah is an ostracon from Tel 'Ira with the label *mpqd* "register." The ostracon, which lists a few personal names attached to this label, is thought to relate to military enlistment since the word *mpqd* is the biblical term for a military census.[16] Even if this were not the case, the *mpqd* ostracon and name-lists like it still broadly connote the surveillance or subordination of the individuals they list for some purpose.

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[14] For a recent and thorough treatment of these lists, see A. Mendel-Geberovich, "Epigraphic Lists in Israel and Its Neighbors During in the First Temple Period," (Phd Diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2014) [Hebrew].

[15] See Donker van Heel and Haring, *Writing in a Workmen's Village*, 144-145; C. Erye, *The Use of Documents in Pharaonic Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 236.

[16] I. Beit-Arieh, "A First Temple Period Census Document," *PEQ* 115, no. 2 (1983): 105-108. Recent interpretations have argued against this as an enlistment document, but still view the use of *pqd* as pertaining to a military context. See Y. Garfinkel, "The Meaning of the Word MPQD in the Tel Ira Ostracon," *PEQ* 119, no. 1 (1987): 19-23; A. Demsky, "The MPQD Ostracon from Tel ʿIra: A New Reading," *BASOR* 345, no. 1 (2007): 33-38.

One variation of the name-list includes numerals and notations written out next to the names, relating to a second major category of bureaucratic documents from ancient Israel, namely, accounting texts. The Kadesh Barnea ostraca, which appear to be scribal exercises, suggest that Hebrew scribes were expected to perform complex accounting procedures.[17] There are a few types of what could be called accounting texts, but most of them appear to be either receipts or ration-lists. Some ration-lists might alternatively document the payment of tax or obligatory gifts. Regarding receipts, the Samaria Ostraca and the so-called fiscal bullae are two of the more famous examples.[18]

Like their Mesopotamian and Egyptian counterparts, Hebrew accounting texts show little interest in forecasting profits and instead are more interested in policing a subordinate's access to government property.[19] That is, rather than calling them "accounting" texts, it is more accurate to

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[17] A. Lemaire and P. Vernus, "Les ostraca paléo-hébreux de Qadesh-Barnéa," *Orientalia* 49, no. 4 (1980): 341-345. For a recent discussion of the Hebrew accounting as it relates to the Hebrew scribal curriculum, see W.M. Schniedewind, *The Finger of the Scribe: How Scribes Learned to Write the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 34-35.

[18] The Samaria Ostraca will be dealt with more in Chapter Seven. For the fiscal bullae, see N. Avigad, "Two Hebrew 'Fiscal' Bullae," *IEJ* 40, no. 4 (1990): 262-266; G. Barkay, "A Fiscal Bulla from the Slopes of the Temple Mount—Evidence for the Taxation System of the Judean Kingdom," *New Studies on Jerusalem* 17 (2011): 151-178 (Hebrew); R. Reich, "A Fiscal Bulla from the City of David," *IEJ* 62, no. 2 (2012): 200-205.

[19] On the distinction between profit and policing in accounting texts, see M. Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1999). This distinction has influenced Mesopotamian scholars of several periods. For Ur III, see P. Steinkeller, "The Function of Written Documentation in the Administrative Praxis of Early Babylonia, in *Creating Economic Order: Record-keeping, Standardization, and the Development of Accounting in the Ancient Near East*, eds. M. Hudson and C. Wunsch (Bethesda: Capital Decisions Ltd., 2004), 65-88. For the Neo-Babylonian period, see M. Jursa, "Accounting in Neo-Babylonian." See also S. Carmona and M. Ezzamel, Carmona, Salvador and Mahmoud Ezzamel, "Accounting and Forms of Accountability in Ancient Civilizations: Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt." *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability* 20 (2007): 177-209.

call them "accountability" texts. They attest to the keeping of records in order to hold subordinates accountable for their actions, actions usually regarding the individual's access to government supply caches such as granaries.

Hebrew texts manifest a number of different ways accounting texts were used to police behavior. One of the more interesting examples comes from what can be called "letter-orders," in which a superior officer orders his inferior to deliver grain, wine, or oil rations. For instance, dating to the early 6th century, the previously mentioned Arad 7 is of the letter-order type in which an unnamed commander orders his subordinate, Eliashib, to schedule regular deliveries of grain.[20] Regarding his instructions for the disbursement, the commander tells Eliashib, "you will write it in your records on day two of the month in the tenth month."[21] The specificity of the measurement and its time span, as well as the mandate to record the transfer on a particular day, assure that the commander is referring to a central ledger Eliashib keeps for his records. Presumably, such a central ledger was kept so that Eliashib's use of military supplies could be audited in the event of suspicious shortages. This practice thus attests to the way accounting was used for a policing function.

Other evidence for accounting suggests the use of writing to police taxation or conscripted labor. The fiscal bullae have been understood as such.[22] Attached to either a delivery

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[20] Unfortunately, the Lachish letters do not yield a letter-order like we find in Arad 7. But this is due to the fact that whereas the Arad letters are from a superior, the Lachish letters are from the subordinate. If we had copies of the letters issued from Lachish, they would undoubtedly contain letter orders similar to Arad 7. It has been suggested that the Lachish letters originated from Mareshah, meaning the letters actually dispatched from Lachish are likely somewhere at this site. See Z.B. Begin and A. Grushka, "Where was Ostracon Lachish 4 Written?" *EI* 26 (1999): 13-24; J.A. Emerton, "Were the Lachish Letters Sent to or from Lachish?" *PEQ* 133, no.1 (2001): 2-15.

[21] Translation from Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 108.

[22] Rather than pure taxation, they might attest to more socially embedded modes of

document or directly to goods in kind, these bullae bear three lines of writing that inform a reader of the regnal year, the origin of the commodities, and the phrase למלך "for the king." This information presumably provided the crown with a way of tracking taxes or obligatory gifts. The year, location, and amount could be entered into a central ledger, allowing a way for authorities to police delinquent payments.

The fiscal bullae possibly developed from another use of writing related to taxation—the למלך stamped jar handles. Large storage jars first appear with למלך stamps, marking them "for the king," during the late 8th and early 7th centuries BCE. Exemplars number approximately 2,000.[23] Geographically, they are concentrated in highland administrative centers at Jerusalem and Ramat Raḥel as well as in the Shephelah, especially at Lachish. They have also been discovered outside the heartland of Judah, including sites in the Beersheba Valley and near the Dead Sea. Their royal designation and sudden appearance along with their numbers and geographic range suggest an intensive centralized effort to procure agricultural goods for the Judahite crown. Typically, scholars understand them as evidence of a taxation system mobilized by Hezekiah to prepare for an impending Assyrian invasion, realized in 701 BCE, with their use after this date being understood as Hezekiah's system for funding continued indemnity payments

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exchange. But as Na'aman suggests, many forms of "gifts" in such a social context can be more obligatory than voluntary. Nadav Na'aman, "Notes on the Temple 'Restorations' of Jehoash and Josiah," *VT* 63 (2013): 647.

[23] See the helpful table at the end of O. Lipschits, O. Sergi, and I. Koch, "Judahite Stamped and Incised Jar Handles: A Tool for Studying the History of Late Monarchic Judah," *TA* 38 (2011): 5-41. Since this publication, more seal impressions continue to come to light, adding to this number, see for example O. Lipschits, "The *lmlk* and 'Private' Stamp Impressions from Tel Beth-Shemesh: An Added Dimensions to the Late 8th and Early 7th Century BCE History of the Site," *TA* 46 (2019): 102-107 and R Kletter, "*LMLK* and Concentric Stamp Impressions," in *The Qishle Excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem*, ed. A. Reem (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2018), 212-218.

to Assyria.[24] In this case, the already coercive act of taxation was newly marked with a written symbol of power. Undoubtedly, such taxation had been a normal state of affairs in Judah for some time. But now, the royal administration innovated a new use of the king's insignia to label it, suggesting that administrative writing was valued for its symbolic import and not only for its ability to encourage functionality and efficiency. In fact, features of the most common type of למלך stamp illustrate the way writing can bundle administrative efficiency with messages of power. In addition to the phrase למלך, most stamps also bear one of four geographic designations, Ziph (זיף), Hebron (חברן), Socoh (שוכה), and the ambiguous *mmšt* (ממשת). The labels evidently designate regional collection or distribution centers of the administrative system. They are functionally useful, making the system more efficient, able to track the extraction of goods from separate regions. But they appear alongside the royal designation למלך and with the royal symbols of two- and four-winged scarabs. The crown thus bundled writing's functional capacity with propagandistic images, illustrating that in administrative contexts, the two are different sides of the same coin. Thus, the stamps illustrate writing's increased use in the 8th-7th centuries to manage royal compulsory acts like taxation. Writing's appearance with royal insignias further demonstrates how such applications of writing carried symbolic weight.

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[24] Most vocally and recently argued for by N. Na'aman, "The *lmlk* Seal Impressions Reconsidered," *TA* 43 (2016): 111-125. See also Kletter, "*LMLK* and Concentric Stamp." An alternative view understands them as evidence for the management of royal estates rather than taxation, on which see Lipschits et al., "Judahite Stamped and Incised"; I. Koch and O. Lipschits, "The Rosette Stamped Jar Handle System and the Kingdom of Judah at the End of the First Temple Period," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* 129 (2013): 55-78. This interpretation still allows for the למלך inscriptions to be understood as symbols of the crown's penetration. According to biblical literature, the crown's expanding ownership of land was viewed as conflicting with traditional ideals. This is especially illustrated in the narrative recounting Ahab's coopting of Naboth's patrimonial estate (1 Kgs 21), to be discussed more in Chapter Four. Consider also Samuel's outlining of royal customs in 1 Sam 8:14 when he warns that a king will wrongfully "take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers."

Perhaps even more evocative of policing taxation is an ostracon recently discovered near Beth Shemesh.[25] This text uses the area of a field and a specified volume of seed in order to estimate expected crop yields. The text's discoverers argue that these equations are suggestive of Judah's ancient tax system wherein an individual was expected to pay a certain amount based on the field's size. But it might be more nuanced than that. Temple and palatial authorities in Egypt and Mesopotamia frequently employed such texts to monitor work output in both the context of conscripted labor as well as land leased to private contractors.[26] But even in the case of the latter, shortfalls meant dire consequences for the contractor including the enslavement of family members.[27] Whether taxation or something more akin to contracted labor, the Beth Shemesh ostracon nevertheless illustrates how writing was used as a policing or accountability device to monitor the performance or expected contribution of individuals answerable to a higher political authority.

Much like name-lists and accounting texts, the third major category of Hebrew documents from the monarchic period, letters, also speaks to surveillance and accountability. Coming mostly from Arad, Lachish, and Horvat ʿUza, extant Hebrew letters mostly deal with logistical concerns of the Judean military. They include information about the centralized monitoring of goods and bodies across time and space. Lachish 4 exemplifies this well enough.

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[25] I. Milevski and J. Naveh, "The Hebrew Ostraca from Site 94/21, Cave A-2, at Ramat Bet Shemesh," ʿAtiqot 50 (2005): 19-25; A. Mendel-Geberovich, S. Faigenbaum Golovin, A. Shaus, B. Sober, M. Cordonsky, E. Piasetzky, I. Finkelstein, and I. Milevski, "A Renewed Reading of Hebrew Ostraca from Cave A-2 at Ramat Beit Shemesh (Naḥal Yarmut), Based on Multispectral Imaging," VT 69 (2019): 682-701.

[26] For an example, see R.K. Englund, "Hard Work—Where Will It Get You? Labor Management in Ur III Mesopotamia," JNES 50, no. 4 (1991): 255-280.

[27] Ibid.

In the letter, a subordinate reports to his superior on the status of a geographic locale named בת הרפד as well as the whereabouts of two individuals. These are typical matters found in Hebrew letters from the monarchic period. Alongside the name-lists and accounting texts, the letters thus illustrate that a major function of documents was to maintain internal control of subaltern officials in the military. As we will see in Chapter Seven, the biblical narrative about Jehoash's administrative reforms illustrates that such surveillance through documentation sometimes inspired bitterness. While that is something we might expect, it is not something that has been discussed with reference to writing in ancient Israel and Judah. It remains possible that such usage of letters extended surveillance over private citizens, but we are lacking good evidence for this. Regardless, documents were used to police private citizens in the more coercive acts of governance such as taxation and conscripted labor. Of course, this interpretation about administrative genres relies entirely on ostraca. But as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, good evidence suggests that perishable media either mirrored or extended these same uses.

3.3 Archaeological Context

The potential for administrative forms of writing to be experienced as symbols of coercion and tribal erosion becomes more likely when considering the contexts from which most administrative writing emerges. It is generally accepted that the largest portion of inscriptions from the 9th-6th centuries BCE in Israel and Judah come from military contexts. Forts at Arad, Lachish, and Tel ʿIra, for example, have yielded a multitude of seals and sealings alongside lists and communiques detailing the surveillance of human activity and state property, whether that property was biological or agricultural.[28] An 8th century military and trading fort at Kuntillet

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[28] ibid.; N. Na'aman, "Literacy in the Negev in the Late Monarchical Period," in *Contextualizing Israel's Sacred Writings: Ancient Literacy, Orality, and Literary Production*, ed. B.B. Schmidt (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 47-70. The Judean Military appears to have valued

ʾAjrud boasts the gamut of a scribal curriculum, illustrating a close connection between the army and writing.[29] There, as William Schniedewind has convincingly argued, an apprentice scribe practiced writing names, towns, and numbers to prepare for a career in the military.

The close association of Hebrew writing with the military in the 8th-7th centuries is probably not an accident of discovery. For instance, the Egyptian text Papyrus Anastasi I all but equates the ancient Near Eastern scribal profession with military service.[30] In the text, the author describes the scribal profession as a martial to-do list, including tracking military rations, gauging the number of men a given military task will require, and calculating the amount of building materials needed for the construction of military outposts. Moreover, this association makes sense from a historical perspective, given that militaries have been hotbeds for cultivating communication technologies throughout history.[31] Significantly, it is this association of surveillance technologies with the military that often lays at the heart of modern anxieties about technology, frequently featured in film and literature. Writing's deep roots in the military could solicit the same discomforts in ancient Israel's day as military technologies do in ours. The biblical texts examined in this dissertation seem to confirm this since they frequently depict

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literacy skills, showing how closely the technology was associated with the military in this period. On this, see S. Faigenbaum-Golovin et al., "Algorithmic Handwriting Analysis of Judah's Military Correspondence Sheds Light on the Composition of Biblical Texts," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113, no. 17 (2016): 4664-4669 and Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew,* 105-110.

[29] W.M. Schniedewind, "Understanding Scribal Education in Ancient Israel: A View from Kuntillet ʿAjrud," *Maarav* 21, no. 2 (2014): 271-293. Some maintain this is a religious site, but Schniedewind's understanding of the site as a military and trading outpost is more compelling from both a geographical and archaeological perspective.

[30] *COS* 3, §3.2.

[31] P.J. Hugill, *Global Communications since 1844: Geopolitics and Technology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

writing as facilitators of unjust violence and monarchic force.

The above conclusion is not to deny non-military and private uses of writing. The presence of personal seals illustrates such civilian uses. In fact, Nadav Na'aman reads one ostracon from Horvat ʿUza as private correspondence discussing evasion from state authorities.[32] According to his reading, a Judahite merchant informs his partner that a mutual acquaintance has successfully found a "hiding place" (מחבא) and is safe from the eyes of the "king's army" (מצבא המלך). Even if one contends with Na'aman's reading of the Horvat ʿUza letter, a broad range of inscriptional genres nevertheless suggests that not all writing was universally viewed as suspicious and was instead valued outside of royal and military circles. Besides the administrative genres discussed above, Hebrew inscriptions from the 8th-6th centuries BCE run a wide gamut, including labels on vessels (קדש bowls), prophylactic amulets (Ketef Hinnom), non-royal display (Siloam Tunnel), and numerous examples of cave/tomb graffiti (Khirbet el Qom).[33] These genres demonstrate that individuals working in non-official capacities had literate

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[32] N. Na'aman, "A New Look at the Epigraphic Finds from Horvat ʿUza," *TA* 39 (2012): 88-89

[33] On the קדש bowls, see G. Barkay, "A Bowl with the Hebrew Inscription ק ד ש," *IEJ* 40 (1990): 124-129; J. Smoak, "Holy Bowls: Inscribing Holiness in Ancient Israel," *Maarav* 23 (2019). Many labels on vessels bear personal names. For example, see the inscriptions from Tel Rehov in A. Mazar and S. Ahituv, "Inscriptions from Tel Rehov and Their Contribution to the Study of Writing and Literacy in the Iron Age IIA," *EI* 30 (2011): 300-316. On the Ketef Hinnom amulets and other examples of prophylactic inscriptions from the Levant in the Iron Age, see J. Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Scripture and Inscription: The Early History of Numbers 6:24-26* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). On the Siloam Tunnel, see V. Sasson, "The Siloam Tunnel Inscription," *PEQ* 114 (1982): 111-117; G. Rendsburg and W. Schniedewind, "The Siloam Tunnel: Historical and Linguistic Perspectives," *IEJ* 60 (2010): 188-203. On cave and tomb inscriptions, see J. Smoak and A. Mandell, "Reconsidering the Function of Tomb Inscriptions in Ancient Judah: Khirbet Beit Lei as a Test Case," *JANER* 16 (2016): 192-245. Notably, a few fragments of apparent royal monumental inscriptions have come to light. On these, see F.M. Cross, "A Fragment of a Monumental Inscription from the City of David," *IEJ* 51 (2001): 44-47; E.L. Sukenik, "Note on a fragment of an Israelite Stele Found at Samaria," *PEQ* 68 (1936): 156; J. Smoak and A. Mandell, "Texts in the City: Monumental Inscriptions in

skill and valued a variety of uses for writing.

But the above uses are more in line with traditional applications of the alphabetic script that West Semitic populations employed, uses that fall outside of state administration, a matter to be discussed more below. In fact, the Siloam Tunnel inscription can be understood as an application of writing that challenged the state. The inscription commemorates the moment workmen completed the tunnel. It lacks any mention of the king, polity, or state deity and it was placed inside the tunnel, out of site. Aaron Burke has understood these features as representative of the workmen's marginalized place in society.[34] The inscription thus reflects solidarity outside of the state and licenses a use of writing for this purpose. Most of the other applications mentioned above can be broadly construed as religious.

However, the existence of these many inscriptional genres does not mean that all forms of writing were universally valued or welcomed in every context. As the next chapter details, recent anthropological work has shown that societies tailor uses of writing to cultural ideals. This means that a given society deems some uses of writing as more culturally permissible and other uses less so. To reiterate a point made in the Introduction, it was the activity of state scribes that could generate suspicion. The density of administrative writing in military contexts could have

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Jerusalem's Urban Landscape," in *Size Matters: Understanding Monumentality Across Ancient Civilizations*, eds. F. Buccellati, S. Hageneuer, S. van der Heyden, and F. Levenson (Berlin: Transcript, 2019), 309-343. The paucity of monumental inscriptions in Israel and Judah relative to their neighbors has prompted at least one scholar to suggest that cultural decorum in the Hebrew kingdoms found such inscriptions unseemly. On this, see G. Rendsburg, "No Stelae, No Queens: Two Issues Concerning the Kings of Israel and Judah," in *The Archaeology of Difference: Gender, Ethnicity, Class, and the "Other" in Antiquity: Studies in Honor of Eric M. Meyers* (Boston: ASOR, 2007), 95-107.

[34] A.A. Burke, "An Anthropological Model for the Investigation of the Archaeology of Refugees in Iron Age Judah and Its Environs," in *Interpreting Exile: Interdisciplinary Studies of Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, eds. B. E. Kelle, F. R. Ames, and J. Wright, (AIIL 10; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2011), 51-52.

encouraged this to be the case.

3.4 Chronological Trends

The epigraphic record in the southern Levant demonstrates two chronological trends that could have further shaped writing into a technology some Israelites and Judahites found unsettling. Number one, much of the region's experience with writing in periods predating the 8th-7th centuries BCE revolved around its political subjugation to foreign powers, especially Egypt. Number two, native forms of bureaucratic writing in the Iron Age peaked during the 8th-7th centuries, concomitant with unprecedented political centralization. Both of these chronological trends could encourage a given community to associate writing with unwanted political coercion. Moreover, both trends could be viewed as linked. The use of writing to expand local governance in the later parts of the Iron Age could have activated the cultural memory of writing as a tool of subjugation during earlier periods of Egyptian hegemony.

According to some estimations, bureaucratic writing in Israel and Judah began by the 10th century BCE. Such early estimations largely rest on the oldest possible dating of some Arad ostraca and on the assumption that the Khirbet Summeily seals, found in an archaeological layer dating to the middle of the 10th century, were produced by the Hebrew kingdoms.[35] While it remains difficult to fix a starting point for bureaucratic writing in Israel and Judah, it is quite clear that the technology accelerated in the last half of the 8th century and beginning of the 7th. This trend is perhaps best exemplified by the largest administrative archive uncovered in Judah, the Arad ostraca. The archive contains over one hundred incised and ink-inscribed ostraca whose contents are of a bureaucratic nature, including name-lists, receipts, ration lists, and

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[35] Hardin, Rollston, and Blakely, "Iron Age Bullae from Officialdom's Periphery." Given that Khirbet Summeily is located in the coastal plain between Gaza and Tel el-Hesi, it is possible that the site could have been under Philistine control during the period of the seals usage.

administrative correspondence. According to the site's excavator, the dates of the ostraca span the 10th through 6th centuries BCE on archaeological as well as paleographic grounds.[36] Despite this broad range, the largest number of the ostraca, some eighty or so, date to the 8th-7th centuries.[37] A concentration of writing at the site during this span aligns with the wider epigraphic picture from Israel and Judah. Most Hebrew epigraphic/aniconic seals and ostraca date archaeologically and paleographically to the same period.[38] For instance, the largest cache of administrative documents from the northern kingdom of Israel, a group of receipts from Samaria, comes from the middle of the 8th century.[39]

As the earlier Arad ostraca suggest, Judahite and Israelite administrative writing was

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[36] Y. Aharoni, *Arad Inscriptions* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981). Some have questioned whether the dating of texts to this earlier period is secure and prefer to move them down either a full or half-century. David Ussishkin challenges the stratigraphic dating of Arad, ultimately casting doubt on the dating of ostraca discovered in earlier strata. He proposes that strata X-VIII are so similar they could very well date to the same period, meaning the Arad ostraca from level X, thought to be coterminous with the 9th century could actually be from the 8th century at the earliest. See D. Ussishkin, "The Date of the Judean Shrine at Arad," *IEJ* 38 (1988): 142-157.

[37] See the discussion in Naaman, "Literacy in the Negev."

[38] Notably, however, seals dating from the 10th through the early 8th century and their bullae outnumber their late 8th and early 7th century counterparts. However, as Sanders mentions, some of these sealings were likely stamped on commodities rather than written artifacts. See S.L. Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 211-212, nn. 5-7. For seals, the authoritative catalog is N. Avigad and B. Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1997) with additions to the corpus in F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, J.J.M. Roberts, C.L. Seow, and R.E. Whitaker, *Hebrew Inscriptions: Texts from the Biblical Period of the Monarchy with Concordance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 639-654. For an in-depth discussion of writing's surge in the 8th-7th century, see W.M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 64-117.

[39] For the date, see A. Lemaire, *Inscriptions hebraïques: Introduction*, *traduction*, *commentaire*, vol. 1 (Cerf: Paris, 1977), 39-43; M. Suriano, "Wine Shipments to Samaria from Royal Vineyards," *TA* 43, no. 1 (2016): 99-110.

around earlier, possibly as early as the 10th century, but certainly by the 9th. The six bullae from Khirbeit Summeily, a few of which show signs suggesting that they were attached to papyrus documents, can be understood to imply that these polities employed administrative writing by the middle of the 10th century given their archaeological context.[40] Such an understanding would depend on how one views the site's political affiliations. It is also quite possible that the papyrus documents attached to the seals were missives from Phoenicia.[41] If so, it is nevertheless reasonable to assume that the polity controlling the site used writing to return correspondence, though this too would have likely been written in Phoenician. On the basis of these seals alone, it is thus difficult to conclude for certain that Israel or Judah utilized bureaucratic writing at such an early date.

Evidence from the 9th century is less ambiguous. By this time, administrations in Israel and Judah used bureaucratic writing. One important example comes from a recently discovered repository of seals and bullae found in Jerusalem dating to the 9th century. [42] Their location and context, which will be discussed more below, are highly suggestive of an administrative and commercial center. Israel and Judah clearly used writing for administrative matters prior to the 8th-7th centuries. But the epigraphic evidence makes clear that there was an accelerated growth of such bureaucratic activity in the latter part of the 8th century and over the course of the 7th. Such growth in a relatively short amount of time would have been a noticeable change.

The possibility for writing to create social distress in ancient Israel becomes particularly

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[40] Hardin et al., "Iron Age Bullae."

[41] On the likely Phoenician origin of early seals at Israelite and Judahite sites, see Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew*, 108.

[42] R. Reich, E. Shukron, and O. Lernau, "Recent Discoveries in the City of David, Jerusalem," *IEJ* 57 (2007): 153-169.

suggestive when considering the southern Levant's longer history with the technology. From an early period, southern Levantine culture appears to have maintained an uneasy relationship with writing. In fact, Joe Uziel and Itzick Shai argue that indigenous southern Levantine polities might have rejected writing altogether in the Early Bronze Age (EBA).[43] The archaeology of this period shows intermittent spells of economic complexity and political hierarchy, the type of complexity and hierarchy that often accompanies the adoption of writing systems. While there are some traces of "para-writing" techniques in this material culture, Shai and Uziel point out that these local polities show little trace of utilizing a fully blossomed writing system, despite an undeniable awareness of the technology due to clear cultural contacts with Mesopotamia and Egypt. They propose that EBA Canaanite culture deliberately rejected writing as a symbolic act of resistance against cultural and political intrusion, especially on the part of Egypt, which began to obtain a politically dominant position over the southern Levant during the EBA. This potential rejection would be far earlier than the earliest possible date the formation of texts from the Hebrew Bible. But it would provide a cultural analogy for the arguments of this dissertation. More importantly, it would give historically deep roots to the memory of an uneasy relationship with writing, one that may have informed later Levantine perceptions of the technology.

While Shai and Uziel's proposal is suggestive in light of the evidence, it is difficult to corroborate. Nevertheless, it is significant that theirs is not the only proposal for a rejection of writing in ancient Near Eastern history. C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky notes a suspicious absence of writing in occupation layers of northern Mesopotamian colonial sites post-dating the withdrawal of the expanding Uruk administration at the beginning of the third millennium.[44] Although signs

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[43] I. Shai and J. Uziel, "The Whys and Why Nots of Writing: Literacy and Illiteracy in the Southern Levant during the Bronze Ages," *Kaskal* 7, no. 7 (2010): 67–83.

[44] C.C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, "To Write or Not to Write," in *Culture through Objects:*

of economic complexity remained at these sites, writing seems to have disappeared. Lamberg-Karlovsky posits that the local population negatively associated the technology with their Uruk colonizers. This association resulted in a reluctance to adopt writing, just as the southern Levant may have rejected it because of its foreign associations with Egypt in the Early Bronze Age.

While both of the above proposals for rejections of writing rely almost entirely on the anthropology of resistance, there are modern anthropological examples for the rejection of writing systems that lend further credence to their argument. Theorizing a wealth of ethnographic data, Joshua Fishman states that because writing has the perceived potential to alter the norms of society, the adoption or creation of writing systems "will inevitably not be interpreted universally as positive."[45] He goes on to point out that even after writing achieves a foothold in society, it often continues to elicit pushback from elites and non-elites alike since it may have unforeseen consequences on the distribution of social rewards.[46] Most germane, however, to the arguments of Shai, Uziel, and Karlovsky is Fishman's observation that societies often reject first writing systems (FWS) because they associate it with political domination. Fishman states,

> FWSs associated with (if not imposed by) authorities from outside the indigenous
> ethnocultural system constantly evoke their outside regulatory and punitive origins.
> Those individuals or social strata who utilize these FWSs are, therefore, by implication,
> perceived as collaborating to one degree or another with such outside powers.
> Accordingly, the creation and introduction/imposition of FWSs are never viewed as

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Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honour of PRS Moorey, eds. T. Potts, M. Roaf, and D. Stein (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 2003), 59-75.

[45] J.A. Fishman, "Ethnocultural Issues in the Creation, Substitution, and Revision of Writing Systems," in *The Social Construction of Written Communication*, eds. B.A. Rafoth and D.L. Rubin (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 1988), 273-286. For more recent work on ways cultures manipulate and even reject writing systems for ideological reasons, see P. Unseth, "Sociolinguistic Parallels between Choosing Scripts and Languages," *Written Language & Literacy* 8, no. 1 (2005): 19-42 and M. Sebba, "Sociolinguistic Approaches to Writing Systems research," *Writing Systems Research* 1, no. 1 (2009).

[46] Fishman, "Ethnocultural Issues," 274-275.

enthno-culturally dispassionate or apolitical acts, neither by those who foster them nor by those upon whom they are imposed.[47]

Fishman's words nicely describe the contexts Shai, Uziel, and Karlovsky propose for rejections of writing in the ancient Near East. Both the southern Levant in the EBA and northern Mesopotamia at the end of the Uruk period could have easily associated writing with colonial subjugation and thus rejected it as a form of resistance. But even if we dismiss this argument as too extreme, Fishman's analysis at least broadly illuminates that writing systems are rarely created, adopted, or expanded without controversy. Even if southern Levantine polities never outwardly rejected writing for ideological reasons, whether that writing was Egyptian hieroglyphic in earlier periods or cuneiform in later ones, it is still justifiable to assume on anthropological grounds that at some points in history, pockets of society would have felt uneasy about the technology. I propose that a memory of such uneasiness from earlier periods could have influenced how southern Levantine societies experienced the adoption and use of writing for bureaucratic purposes by local sovereigns in the early Iron Age. The same goes for writing's dramatic spread in the 8th-7th centuries.

Writing's use in the Levant during the Late Bronze Age (LBA), in a time closer to the formation of some texts comprising the Hebrew Bible, especially evokes the possibility that later local communities could see in writing something foreign and dangerous. The region's experience with writing in this period is largely characterized by political subjugation to Egypt. Lists of bodies and goods owed to imperial Egypt and letters swearing obeisance to the Egyptian crown serve as our primary material witnesses of writing's use in the region during this time.[48]

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[47] Ibid., 274

[48] See the chart in W. Horowitz, T. Oshima, and S. Sanders, *Cuneiform in Canaan: Cuneiform Sources from the Land of Israel in Ancient Times* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2006), 15-19.

The best example of writing's use for domination is the Amarna archive, texts sent to the

Egyptian crown from Levantine subjects. The archive's documents mediate Levantine

obligations to the Egyptian empire, including the "payment of tribute, meeting other exactions of

goods and personnel, furnishing corvée labor on crown lands, supplying Egyptian troops in

transit and reinforcing them, and protecting caravans."[49] As Fishman proposes, such subjugation

carried out by writing would undoubtedly give rise to a situation where the technology evoked

the "regulatory and punitive" condition of colonial rule.[50] Indeed, the memory of subjugation to

Egypt permeates the Hebrew Bible. Freedom from Egypt becomes the very foundation of Israel's

political charter. The LBA thus seems to have left a lasting imprint on the region's cultural

memory. In light of Fishman's ethnographically informed theory, administrative writing's

complicity in this subjugation likely also left a lasting impression. It could have given some

communities pause when their own local powers adopted it and especially when the technology's

use for administration expanded in later periods.

Of course, the indigenous West Semitic population of Canaan did eventually adopt

writing. But the system they adopted further reflects an unease regarding administrative forms of

the technology. Despite the vast influence of cuneiform culture, local populations adopted a

marginal alphabetic script. Based on Fishman's observations, this choice may have been

influenced by their negative colonial experience with cuneiform.[51] Schniedewind has recently

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[49] W.L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), xvii.

[50] Fishman, "Ethnocultural Issues," 274.

[51] The idea that cuneiform was used primarily for bureaucracy in contrast with early alphabet usage in the LBA in the southern Levant is developed fully in Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew*, 76-103.

come to the same conclusion, arguing that when the emerging polities of the southern Levant chose the alphabet over cuneiform, the change in writing systems "should also be understood as a linguistic choice, with the cuneiform system being associated with the old colonial regime and the alphabetic system being adopted as a local innovation. There were likely elements of both utility and ideology intertwined in this shift."[52]

In addition to the alphabet's status as a writing system different from cuneiform, early patterns of its usage suggest an ongoing uneasiness for wielding the technology to accomplish bureaucratic tasks. As Seth Sanders puts it, for quite some time, most alphabetic inscriptions were educational or simply "about the objects they were written on."[53] Abecedaries and votive inscriptions comprise the bulk of early alphabetic writing in the southern Levant, not administrative lists and letters.[54] This distribution might point to a lack of need for the technology in administrative contexts, that is, there was little economic complexity among those using the alphabet. But by way of reminder from Chapter Two, complexity is only one of many factors that can motivate the adoption of bureaucratic writing. These non-official roots of the alphabet illustrate that West Semitic populations at least early on envisioned writing in their own

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[52] Schniedewind, *Finger of the Scribe*, 166.

[53] ibid., 77. For a helpful catalog of alphabetic inscriptions from the latter part of the LBA, see I. Finkelstein and B. Sass, "The West Semitic Alphabetic Inscriptions, Late Bronze II to Iron IIA: Archaeological Context, Distribution, and Chronology," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 2, no. 2 (2013): 149-220.

[54] The previously cited Khirbet Summeily bullae as well as a recently deciphered jar inscription from Lachish deviate from this picture. Administrative usage of the alphabet in the southern Levant was probably ongoing by the 10th century BCE. But these examplars pale in comparison to the number of extant alphabetic inscriptions that are non-administrative. On the Summeily bullae, see Hardin et al., "Iron Age Bullae." On the Lachish jar inscription, see W. Schniedewind, "The Alphabetic Scribe of the Lachish Jar Inscription and the Hieratic Tradition in the Early Iron Age," *BASOR* 383 (2020).

cultural context for reasons other than political subjugation, an idea Sanders develops at length. Furthermore, such roots would have the potential to influence how later applications of the alphabet would be perceived.

According to Sanders, when complex West Semitic polities did expand applications of the alphabet, cultural attitudes shaped how it was used and experienced. He argues that these polities wrote in the vernacular language of their people and directed their writings at a general public. Significantly, he claims that this political rhetoric found in West Semitic inscriptions, a rhetoric based on "talking directly with peoples, as opposed to giving orders to territories," is rooted in the politically decentralized ethos of tribal ideology.[55] Sanders characterizes tribal organization as "politics by persuasion" and even pits this ethic against the coercion of empires materialized in administrative cuneiform documents.[56] Thus, Sanders argues that literacy in the southern Levant was shaped by West Semitic culture with writing taking on the form of tribal politics. Such an understanding aligns with recent trends in the anthropology of literacy by showing how cultural assumptions may impinge upon how writing is used and perceived.

The same culture of "politics by persuasion" that shaped West Semitic applications of writing could likewise shape the experience of administrative writing as a negative literacy event. While Sanders directs his attention at how West Semitic political culture led to the creation of Hebrew biblical literature, it is implicit in his discussion that the same West Semitic decentralized political ethos could cause administrative forms of writing in early Israel to be perceived as going against "politics by persuasion," having the potential to carry a quite negative affect. If "a tribesman readily agrees to persuasion, but never accepts a command," then there is

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[55] Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew*, 118.

[56] Ibid., 73-74.

reason to assume that the same tribesman would find problematic the idea that he is compelled to serve in the military or pay taxes because his name appears in a written list.[57] As already discussed, administrative documents are loaded with symbolic power, among the most significant material symbols of political control. Those who wield them assume the right to command. If those whom they are wielded upon assume a political landscape that opposes the coercion implied in documents, the ingredients are there for the shaping of a negative literacy event. Of course, any person living in any social structure is likely to experience administrative documents in this way. Regardless of social context, coercion is usually not an enjoyed experience. But this would be especially true for the southern Levant, given writing's historical associations with imperial subjugation by outsiders and society's traditional preference for collective governance.

To be sure, as already discussed, signs of administrative writing appear in Israel as early as the 9th century and possibly the 10th. The Khirbet Summeily seals, the Arad archive, and the cache of seals from the city of David attest to this. Uneasiness with administrative writing would not equate to a universal rejection, as Shai and Uziel propose for the southern Levant in the EBA. Israelite and Judahite governments clearly found the technology useful. But usefulness would likewise not equate to widespread acceptance. When an emerging polity began to list people and goods or mediate directives via letters, this move would unlikely be hailed as a universal sign of progress. Given the southern Levant's tribal landscape and its previous experience with writing as a tool that promoted political subjugation to Egypt, the use of the technology for administration could have been perceived by some as a sign of social and cultural

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[57] S. Caton, "Power, Persuasion, and Language: A Critique of the Segmentary Model in the Middle East," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (1987): 77-101; quoted in Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew*, 74.

disintegration.

In addition to associating writing with the memory of coercive Egyptian rule, Judahites and Israelites of the 8th-7th centuries could have also viewed writing as a symbol of unwanted social and political change. During these centuries, when writing accelerated, society also transformed rapidly. With the expansion of the Assyrian empire in the late 8th century, both Israel and Judah grew in size and political importance. The once rural countryside witnessed economic growth and a concomitant political centralization with its entrance into the more global Assyrian economy.[58] After Assyria colonized surrounding Levantine kingdoms, including Israel, Judah grew even greater, becoming a regional power. A vast number of refugees flooded and urbanized Judah and especially its capital, Jerusalem.[59] The countryside became more developed with villages blossoming into towns. Jerusalem's population more than doubled.[60] Judah was

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[58] J. Holladay, "The Kingdoms of Israel and Judah: Political and Economic Centralization in the Iron IIA-B (ca. 1000-750 BCE)," in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, ed. T. Levy (New York: Facts on File, 1995), 368-398; I. Finkelstein and N. Na'aman, "The Judahite Shephelah in the Late 8th and Early 7th Centuries BCE," *TA* 31 (2004): 60-79; A. Faust, "The Shephelah in the Iron Age: A New Look on the Settlement of Judah," *PEQ* 145, no. 3 (2013): 203-219.

[59] M. Broshi, "The Expansion of Jerusalem in the reigns of Hezekiah and Manasseh," *IEJ* 24 (1974): 21-26; K. Van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Ugarit and Israel: Continuity and Changes in the Forms of Religious Life* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 339-372; I. Finkelstein, "The Settlement History of Jerusalem in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries BC." *RB* 115 (2008): 499-515; W. M. Schniedewind, "Jerusalem, the Late Judahite Monarchy, and the Composition of the Biblical Texts," in *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple* Period, eds. A. G. Vaughn and A. E. Killebrew (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2003), 375-394. Contra this view, see N. Na'aman, "Dismissing the Myth of a Flood of Israelite Refugees in the Late Eighth Century BCE," *ZAW* 126, no. 1 (2014): 1-14.

[60] Burke, "An Anthropological Model," 41-56; idem., "Coping with the Effects of War: Refugees in the Levant during the Bronze and Iron Ages," in *Disaster and Relief Management*, ed. A. Berlejung, (FZAT 81; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 263–287. Burke convincingly challenges both those who downplay Jerusalem's growth and those who see a much larger estimate for Jerusalem's growth. On larger estimates, see M. Broshi, "The Expansion of Jerusalem,"; R. Reich and E. Shukron, "The Urban Development of Jerusalem in the Late Eighth Century B.C.E.," in *Jerusalem in the Bible*, 209-218; Y. Gadot, "In the Valley of the King:

entering a new era of prosperity. The once-rural kingdom was reaching a new peak of power. But with this new prosperity would come drastic changes.

Archaeology shows the extent to which Judah's social landscape changed over the course of the 8th-7th century. As society became more urbanized, extended family compounds, the unit lying at the base of the Israelite kinship structure, began to disappear. These larger compounds were replaced by structures housing smaller nuclear families. Indicating this shift, the size of both houses and cooking pots shrink in the archaeological record, as demonstrated by Baruch Halpern.[61] This could have created social disintegration. As Halpern and others have argued, smaller, urbanized families might have had a more difficult time maintaining clan and tribal affiliations.[62] Such difficulty would benefit the centralized crown, which sought to emphasize national identity over such smaller kinship affiliations. Writing's increased usage should be viewed within these wider social changes.

Judah's expanding, urbanized society required increasing political centralization to manage its economic potential. The emergence of standardized weights, often inscribed, is one clear example that the political center of Judah saw the need to increase regulatory control over its surging population.[63] Furthermore, on Judah's southern border, new fortifications and

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Jerusalem's Rural Hinterland in the 8th-4th Centuries BCE," *TA* 42, no. 1 (2015): 3-26.

[61] Not to say that these affiliations did not continue, but the rapid changes may have at least strained them. B. Halpern, "Jerusalem and the Lineages in the Seventh Century BCE: Kinship and the Rise of Individual Moral Liability," in *Law and Ideology in Monarchic Israel*, eds. B. Halpern and D.W. Hobson (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 11-107.

[62] See the summary of such a view in S. Bendor, *The Social Structure of Ancient Israel: The Institution of the Family* (beit ʾab) *from the Settlement to the End of the Monarchy* (Jerusalem: Simor, 1996), 207-215.

[63] R. Kletter, *Economic Keystones: The Weight System of the Kingdom of Judah* (London: A&C Black, 1998)

carefully planned storage facilities populate the Negev, while sites in the Shephelah likewise display substantial government-sponsored construction.[64] These synchronized building efforts indicate a powerful center having the capacity to organize and support large workforces and the procurement of monumental building materials, likely in the form of taxation and conscripted labor. Judah had not only become more urbanized but also more regulated. Based on the archaeological record, the small kingdom of the 8th-7th centuries witnessed an unprecedented level of political centralization.

Prophetic literature remembers Judah's urbanization and increased political control during the 8th-7th centuries as a time of rampant social injustice. The prophet Isaiah, for instance, decries the social stratification encouraged by urbanized society when he exhorts Judah to "seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow" (Is 1:16). While care for these marginalized classes is a common ancient Near Eastern trope, it is still true that such groups would be particularly vulnerable in an urbanized society where the safety net of extended kin was weakened. In fact, that seems to be the assumption of the prophet Micah. Complementing Isaiah's critiques and implicating urbanization, Micah excoriates those "who build Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with wrong" (Mic 3:10). The changing society of the 8th-7th centuries was not universally lauded.

One prophecy attributed to Isaiah even links the technology of writing to centralization and its perceived social ills during the 8th-7th century. In Is 10:1-2, the prophet condemns those who "inscribe (חקק) iniquitous decrees, who write (כתב) oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice, and to rob the poor of my people their right, that widows may be your spoil,

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[64] M. Haimam, "The Iron Age II Sites of the Western Negev Highlands," *IEJ* 44, no. 1 (1994): 36-61; I. Finkelstein and N.A. Silberman, *David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible's Sacred Kings and the Roots of Western Tradition* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 130-131.

and that you may make orphans your prey." According to this text, writing was viewed as complicit in the social disintegration created by Judah's newly urbanized and centralized world. Just as Fishman theorizes, the text perceives that the written word in bureaucratic form was negatively affecting the distribution of social rewards. By linking the technology with "decrees" and "statutes," the text also hints that writing was viewed as a regulatory tool. The Isaiah prophecy illustrates that the mundane, written artifacts of the 8th-7th centuries were viewed as much more than passive tools or reflections of centralization and social stratification. Some groups rather understood these as actively affecting unwanted change.

Alongside Judah's dramatically shifting social structure and concomitant increase in political control, issues railed against by the prophets, bureaucratic writing swelled. In this context, it stands to reason that the technology carried a new symbolic weight, one that materialized the new reality Judah found itself in. As discussed in Chapter Two and again with reference to Fishman's anthropological work, surges in new forms of writing, or any technology, are rarely viewed passively. Even in modern scholarly circles, it is common to consider the emergence and spread of writing as a benchmark of civilization, a material sign that a society has passed into a new era. While Judahite society already knew writing, Judahites undoubtedly viewed the technology's dramatic spread in the context of a rapidly centralizing society as a similar symbol of social change. The new pervasiveness of writing gave material expression to the idea that Judahites were entering a new world. In this new world, writing provided a tool for the government to more effectively control bodies and commodities across time and space. Such control was likely unwanted by many factions, especially those preferring more collective forms of governance.

3.5 Materiality

Hebrew administrative inscriptions from monarchic Israel and Judah also display material features that some could experience as unsettling. In particular, the physical implements and techniques of Israelite and Judahite bureaucratic writing had the potential to evoke Egyptian and Phoenician influence.[65] According to texts from the Hebrew Bible, cited below, some Israelites and Judahites viewed such cultural influence critically. In addition, writing appears in archaeological contexts that may have conjured tribal and biblical fears about political centralization as well as excess and wealth disparity. Conclusions in this section are largely conjectural since there is nothing in the material record to tell us how Israelites and Judahites viewed these features of writing. But an investigation of the affordances allowed by features of writing in the Iron Age will help shed light on the analysis of biblical texts depicting administrative writing in the following chapters.

As already mentioned, most of the features examined below had the potential to be associated with either Egypt or Phoenicia, or perhaps both. The technology of alphabetic writing had its origins in Egypt. The so-called "Proto-Sinaitic" script is generally considered the starting point of the West Semitic alphabetic system with its earliest exemplars found scribbled on objects and walls in the mines of Serabit el-Khadim and on a rock face at Wadi el-Hol.[66] In large part, the script appropriates Egyptian hieroglyphic symbols and re-deploys them with West

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[65] This proposal raises the question of foreign to whom? At certain points in history, some Israelites might have had more in common with Phoenicians or Egyptians than they did with other Israelites. But at least some Israelites likely maintained a view that Phoenician and Egyptian culture was foreign.

[66] The most recent in-depth treatment is G. Hamilton, *The Origins of the West Semitic Alphabet in Egyptian Scripts* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 2006). For Wadi el-Hol specifically, see J.C. Darnell, F.W. Dobbs-Allsopp, M.J. Lundberg, P.K. McCarter, and B. Zuckerman, *Two Early Alphabetic Inscriptions from the Wadi el-Hôl* (Boston: ASOR, 2005).

Semitic phonetic values using the acrophonic principle. Early and late versions of this script were used in the southern Levant throughout the second millennium BCE.[67] Most significantly for our purposes, an abecedary from Izbet Sarteh and an enigmatic ostracon from Khirbeit Qeiyafa demonstrate an Iron Age use of the script, as late as the 10th century in the case of the latter, within the geographic parameters of what would become the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.[68] The Egyptian iconicity of the script well illustrates its potential to evoke foreign influence in the region.

Nevertheless, when the Hebrew kingdoms adopted writing, it was transmitted to them through Phoenicia. This Phoenician vector of transmission can be seen as early as the 10th century. Dating to this period, both the Gezer calendar and the Tel Zayit abecedary use the Phoenician script.[69] Moreover, what would become the Hebrew script clearly developed from Phoenician as illustrated by the twenty-two consonant inventory of Hebrew and its internal paleographic development.[70] Due to this Phoenician vector, features of writing's materiality examined below could just as easily evoke Phoenician influence as Egyptian, even though the technologies of alphabetic writing had their origins in Egypt. In either case, as will be discussed,

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[67] The earliest exemplars include the Lachish Dagger and the Tell en-Nagila sherd. For these and others see Hamilton, *The Origins of the West Semitic Alphabet*, 390-399.

[68] For Izbet Sarteh, see A. Demsky, "A Proto-Canaanite Abecedary Dating from the Period of the Judges and Its Implications for the History of the Alphabet," *TA* 4 (1977): 14-27. For the Qeiyafa ostracon, see H. Misgav, Y. Garfinkel, and S. Ganor, "The Ostracon," in *Khirbet Qeiyafa Vol. I: Excavation Report 2007-2008*, eds. Y. Garfinkel and S. Ganor (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2009), 243-257.

[69] C. Rollston, *Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2010), 29-35.

[70] Ibid., 29; J. Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet: An Introduction to West Semitic Epigraphy and Paleography* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1987).

these geographic associations gave writing the affordance to be viewed as a form of negative

foreign influence in Israelite and Judahite social contexts.

3.5.1 Ostraca

The clearest evidence for Israelite and Judahite administrative writing comes from ink-

inscribed ostraca. This technology originated in Egypt. A profusion of ceramic vessels in the

ancient world meant that potsherds were readily available as a writing device. Their availability

provided an economical means for recording banal administrative matters. Early on, Egyptian

scribes noticed the utility of potsherds for writing. They adapted their hieroglyphic writing

system to a type of shorthand called Hieratic, which could be quickly recorded in ink on the

broken sherds or on papyrus. Ostraca served a number of purposes in Egyptian administrative

practice.[71] Sometimes they were used to draft copies whose more important duplicates were

written on papyrus. At other times, they could be used as *aide-mémoires* bearing some sort of

relationship to a master list or ledger, usually kept on papyrus or a wooden writing board

sometimes covered with wax. That is, ostraca bore information either inputted to or outputted

from a master document. Evidence from ancient Israel, discussed in this chapter's first section,

shows that Hebrew scribes adopted these same broad uses for ostraca. But again, given the

Phoenician vector of transmission, this form of writing could have also been associated with

Phoenicia.

The Hieratic accounting system, sometimes employed in Hebrew ostraca and on weights,

illustrates the potential of Israelite and Judahite bureaucratic documents to evoke a more

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[71] For the most in-depth discussion of ostraca's usage, see Donker van Heel and Haring, *Writing in a Workmen's Village.* See also C. Eyre, *The Use of Documents in Pharaonic Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 17-54.

specifically Egyptian influence.[72] Developed by Egyptian scribes, Hieratic is the previously

mentioned administrative shorthand of hieroglyphs. Several Hebrew ostraca from the monarchic

period contain Hieratic numerals and measurements, further stamping the practice of

bureaucratic writing in Israel with an Egyptian appearance.[73] The Israelite use of ink-inscribed

ostraca, particularly ones that employed Hieratic, had the potential to recall the southern

Levant's subjugation to Egypt. It was mentioned above that writing from the LBA primarily

consisted of cuneiform documents used by the Egyptian crown to manage their imperial holdings

in the region. But other noteworthy examples of writing from this earlier period include Hieratic

ostraca cataloging tribute paid to the Egyptian crown by local Semitic populations.[74] It is thus

easy to see how later Hebrew administrative writing on ostraca could have activated the memory

of Egypt's punitive and regulatory use of writing during a prior period of colonization.

3.5.2 Papyrus

The use of papyrus is another feature of Hebrew writing that could have evoked Egypto-

Phoenician influence. Given the Phoenician vector of transmission for the alphabet, Hebrew

scribes adopted this technique from Phoenicia. But they were probably also aware, perhaps even

through their contact with Phoenicia, that the media had an Egyptian association. The Egyptians

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[72] The most recent and thorough discussion of the influence of Egyptian scribal and administrative practices on Israel is Zhakevich, "The Tools of an Israelite Scribe." See also W.M. Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew: Its Origins through the Rabbinic Period* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 56-60.

[73] Y. Aharoni, "The Use of Hieratic Numerals in Hebrew Ostraca and Shekel Weights," *BASOR* 184 (1966): 13-19.

[74] O. Goldwasser, "An Egyptian Scribe from Lachish and the Hieratic Tradition of the Hebrew Kingdoms," *Tel Aviv* 26, no. 2 (1991): 248-253; O. Goldwasser and S. Wimmer, "Hieratic Fragments from Tell el-Far'ah (South)," *BASOR* 313 (1999): 39-42; Schniedewind, "The Alphabetic Scribe of the Lachish," *BASOR* 383, no. 1 (2020).

invented and perfected the manufacture of papyrus as a writing surface.[75] As a marshland sedge, the papyrus plant thrived in the Nile Delta. The Egyptians used this ecological advantage to establish a near monopoly over the production and trade of papyrus throughout the ancient Near East. Seals and their corresponding bullae from Israelite and Judahite sites dating from the 9th-6th centuries attest to the widespread use of papyrus among Hebrew scribes.[76] However, knowledge of its Egyptian origins would depend on a complementary knowledge of the wider economic processes that brought papyrus from Egypt. While this knowledge is possible, it is not a given.

3.5.3 Seals

While we cannot read the contents of lost papyrus documents from Israel and Judah, the seals they left behind bear a further quality attesting to how the technology of writing could have been associated with Egypt and Phoenicia. Among anepigraphic seals from the monarchic period, that is, seals bearing only iconography and no text, many bear Egypto-Phoenician artistic motifs. Consider the previously mentioned cache of 9th-century seals uncovered in Jerusalem. Several depict sphinxes, winged griffins, and the winged sun disk, all classic Egyptian and Phoenician iconographic themes.[77] A similar concentration of Egypto-Phoenician themed seals

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[75] For the use of papyrus throughout the ancient Near East and its manufacture, see B. Leach and J. Tait, "Papyrus," in *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology*, eds. P.T. Nicholson and I. Shaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 227-253; Zhakevich, "The Tools of an Israelite Scribe."

[76] The definitive volume on seals and clay bullae is Avigad and Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*. Regarding the biblical evidence for the use of papyrus, the text provides only implicit evidence. It generally refers to documents with the generic label ספר which can denote a wide range of meanings, including scroll, document, or message. Notably, the Hebrew word for papyrus (גמא) is an Egyptian loanword but is most commonly utilized in biblical literature to denote the raw marsh plant or its manufactured use for baskets. See Zhakevich, "Tools of an Israelite Scribe," 42-52.

[77] Reich, Shukron, and Lernau, "Recent Discoveries," 156.

and bullae dating to the 8th century has been uncovered at Samaria.[78] Some seals among these caches that do bear writing employ Egyptian hieroglyphs placed inside cartouches. Others bear more specifically Phoenician motifs including a "stylized palmette" popularly featured in architecture throughout the Levant in the Iron II.[79] One seal impression from Jerusalem even features a Phoenician ship.[80] It is also likely that the papyrus documents accompanied by these seal impressions were written in Phoenician.[81]

Like the use of papyrus and ostraca, the seals illustrate how early bureaucratic writing could have been understood as a foreign technology, whether Egyptian or Phoenician. Of course, it is clear that many exploited this association as a means of creating prestige. But as the anthropology of both technology and writing systems suggests, not everyone in Israelite society would have viewed this as something to be proud of. Foreign features of bureaucratic writing could have loaded the technology with controversy.

The potential for writing to convey Egyptian influence recalls the anthropological work mentioned above, where it was discussed that some groups resist writing because of the role it played in a previous political subjugation by outside powers. For ancient Israel, Egyptian features of scribal technology could cause some to recall Egypt's long history of domination over West Semitic groups. The use of alphabetic technologies could potentially suggest to some that local rulers were reanimating the coercive systems of government associated with Egyptian

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[78] J.W. Crowfoot, "Scarabs, Seals, and Seal Impressions," in *The Objects from Samaria*, eds. J.W. Crowfoot, G.M. Crowfoot, and K.M. Kenyon (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1957), 85-89.

[79] Reich, Shukron, and Lernau, "Recent Discoveries," 156.

[80] Ibid., 157.

[81] Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew*, 108.

imperialism. Others might have even interpreted the use of this Egyptian technology as a sign

that local authorities were collaborating with the enemy.

Texts from DtrH illustrate that fears about foreign, coercive forms of government were a

part of Israel's ancient political discourse. Fueled by the cultural memory of Egyptian

oppression, some Israelites feared their own bureaucracy would transform into a similar

oppressive regime that exploited the native populous through taxation and conscription. This fear

is perhaps most overtly articulated in how the language of Exodus 1 and 1 Kings 9 aligns

Solomon's building projects with that of the Egyptian pharaohs. The texts respectively claim that

the Egyptian pharaoh (Exodus 1) and Solomon (1 Kings 9) used "conscripted labor gangs" (מס)

to build "storage cities" (ערי מסכנות). Notably, these are foreign terms. Outside of Chronicles,

these are the only two places in the Hebrew Bible that employ them. Scholars have understood

this lexographic connection to be a veiled scribal critique against either Solomon or more

generally against the conscription system of the Judahite monarchy.[82] These texts do not mention

bureaucratic writing. But it is justifiable to assume that writing formed part of the complex of

bureaucratic activity implicated in this negative attitude towards coercive governance. In light of

the anthropological work on the affective power of writing, Hebrew writing's Egyptian

materiality could have activated the types of fears portrayed in Exodus 1 and 1 Kings 9.

Given that the Hebrew kingdoms adopted alphabetic writing from the Phoenicians,

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[82] R. Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, trans. J. Bowden (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 141-143; J.J. Collins, "The Development of the Exodus Tradition," in *Religious Identity and the Invention of Tradition*, eds. J. W. Van Henten and A. Houtenpen (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2001), 150-152; K. Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible*, Siphrut 3 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 127-129; M. Leuchter, *The Levites and the Boundaries of Israelite Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 120-125.

however, the materiality of writing could also evoke an unwanted foreign connection to Phoenicia. According to some texts in the Hebrew Bible, Phoenician influence provoked some criticism in ancient Israelite discourse. Consider for example, the luxury items found near the cache of seals and their impressions in Jerusalem and Samaria. The items speak to a political and economic relationship with Phoenicia that enriched the upper echelons of Israelite and Judahite society, a picture supported by biblical depictions of Solomon's relationship with Phoenicia. But like the Egyptian influence mentioned above, it is clear from DtrH that not all in Israelite society celebrated this foreign connection. 1 Kings 9, for instance, seems to address critiques of economic exchange between the two polities. The text admits that Solomon "gave to Hiram twenty cities in the Galilee" (9:11). It seems likely that some Israelite constituents viewed this exchange unfavorably since the text offers an apology of it by claiming that Hiram was disappointed in the cities (לא בעיניו ישרו). Elsewhere, DtrH depicts the Phoenician queen Jezebel as an unwelcomed foreigner who sought to pervert Israelite ways. DtrH thus illustrates a complex attitude towards ancient Israel's connection with Phoenician culture. Given that early Israelite writing bears strong connections to Phoenicia, the technology had the potential to be viewed as a Trojan horse for unwanted foreign influence, compounding other potential problematic associations with Egyptian culture.

Beyond unwanted foreign influence, the archaeological context of the early seals has a further association that may have caused some groups to link the technology of writing to moral and social decay. Based on materials found with the 9th-8th century hoards of seals at Samaria and Jerusalem, it seems clear that nascent forms of bureaucratic writing were largely geared towards promoting economic exchange and the acquisition of luxury goods. Seals at Samaria, for

instance, appear alongside a collection of ivory objects.[83] The seals at Jerusalem appear

alongside the faunal remains of imported fish, fine cuisine for anyone living in the Judahite

steppe.[84] The consumption of such food and luxury items attests to social prestige and, therefore,

social stratification.

Just as with the uneasiness towards Egypto-Phoenician influence, the Hebrew Bible also

suggests that some in Israelite society viewed the increasing social stratification of the 9th-7th

centuries as a form of moral and social rot. In fact, literature attributed to the prophet Amos

condemns Samaria's prestigious use of ivory as a symbol of economic injustice (Amos 3:15;

6:4). The consumption of fine goods in the face of want and poverty is a commonly cited trope in

Hebrew prophetic literature. One reason for this interest in social equality might have stemmed

from ancient Israel's kinship structure, which would have valued the ideal of egalitarianism even

if it was a reality rarely achieved in practice.[85] The consumption of luxury goods could have

prompted considerable discourse across Israel's social landscape, as demonstrated by prophetic

literature in particular. Writing's associations with these behaviors could implicate it in the

perceived erosion of traditional values.

Even the seal itself came to be viewed as a status symbol, a fact that further links writing

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[83] Crowfoot, "Scarabs," 85-89. Concerning other early seals from Khirbet Summeily, it is difficult to discern the exact purpose of the documents that would have been attached to them. They do seem to be associated with other signs of political complexity, such as centralized storage, so their documents may have concerned matters related to the extraction of resources. Such extraction, related as it is to coercive governance, may have solicited a different form of resistance, as already discussed.

[84] Reich, Shukron, and Lernau, "Recent Discoveries," 157-160.

[85] A. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis: Settlement, Interaction, Expansion and Resistance* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 92-100; P. McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999) 74, 82-87.

to prestige and social stratification.[86] One sign that seals imparted social status to their owners in ancient Israel is found in the workmanship and precious materials out of which some seals were manufactured. For example, perhaps the most famous seal to come from ancient Israel is the jasper seal bearing the image of a lion and inscribed with the words "Belonging to Shema, Servant of Jeroboam." The seal's imagery, material, and fine workmanship suggest its owner wore it on the body as a social emblem, as was likely customary in ancient Israel.[87] In contradistinction to the Shema seal, but nevertheless further evoking the social value imparted to writing, ancient Israel has produced a number of poorly crafted seals. Scholars typically understand their poor craftsmanship to reflect the reality that some viewed the possession of seals as a form of social capital but lacked the economic means to acquire them, a situation that created a "knock-off" market. These knockoffs and the seals they imitated, like the one owned by Shema, thus suggest that writing was linked with prestige. Such a link may have encouraged more conservative factions to view writing as a source of social disruption and the dissolution of tribal ideals.

But prestige is not the only lens through which to understand the presence of poorly crafted seals. They might also indicate a legal landscape increasingly mediated by documents. But this, too, could have been viewed as an unwanted change. That is, individuals felt pressure to acquire personal seals because legal and economic interaction in writing was becoming more frequent. To be sure, the use of documents is unlikely to have ever been mandatory in ancient Israel.[88] But if individuals thought it would more securely grant them some right in a personal or

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[86] L. Gorelick and A.J. Gwinnett, "The Ancient Near Eastern Cylinder Seal as Social Emblem and Status Symbol," *JNES* 49, no. 1 (1990): 45-56.

[87] Avigad and Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic*, 49.

[88] This seems to have been the case in Mesopotamia. It is reasonable to assume that a

proprietary matter, they would have undoubtedly found ways to authenticate their participation

in the relevant legal and economic proceedings by stamping their personal seal on a document

that recorded the issue at hand. In this case, the production of seals would be more motivated by

necessity than prestige, thus offering a different explanation for seals of subpar quality. But this

explanation could likewise be experienced as negative, a sign that some who lacked economic

means were being further disenfranchised by writing's increased use.

Whether or not Israelites made seals out of legal necessity, the increased presence of

seals and bullae in the 8th-7th century speaks to one final issue that may have caused writing to be

viewed as a social ill. Namely, the seals attest to the establishment of a government bureaucracy

with the growing ability to use coercive force on a general public. Several Hebrew seals and

bullae from this time period contain the names of individuals bearing official titles of the royal

court. One even attests to the official in charge of labor conscription.[89] These seals and bullae

illustrate that the royal bureaucracy increasingly leaned on writing to manage its governance and

surveillance of society, a situation that likely charged documents with an affective force, one that

symbolized increasing levels of political control.

The profusion of personal seals, that is, seals bearing personal names without official

titles, similarly suggests increased government penetration. Given the way social and political

roles were likely mixed in Israelite society, a personal (non-official) seal might have nevertheless

been utilized for official business.[90] On the other hand, seals used to mediate private business

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similar situation obtained in ancient Israel. See J. Renger, "Legal Aspects of Sealing in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Seals and Sealing in the Ancient Near East*, eds. M. Gibson and R.D. Biggs, Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 6 (Malibu: Undena, 1977), 75-88.

[89] Avigad and Sass, *Corpus of West Semitic*, 49-59, 170-176; Dobbs-Allsopp et al., *Hebrew Inscriptions*, 640; N. Avigad, "The Chief of the Corvée," *IEJ* 30, no. 3 (1980): 170-173.

[90] On the blurry lines between personal and official state business in the ancient Near

between two individuals can also be understood as a testament to increased government control. As Nicholas Postgate points out, the use of personal seals on documents relating to private affairs implies the presence of state authorities. This is because the documents and their use of seals would be "drawn up according to the conventions which [would] make it a valid document under public law."[91] If individuals increased their use of documents in private affairs, it may have been because authorities increasingly required this or increasingly gave favorable rulings to the side who had documents. Thus, both official and personal seals can be understood to attest to increased governmental control.

Of course, increased use of writing to manage legal matters might have also been out of necessity because of wider changes in society. With the continuing nuclearization of the family and the breakdown of the extended family, it may have been increasingly difficult to find witnesses for legal transactions who were known to the parties involved.[92] Alienated from long-lived clan relations, individuals may have been forced to appeal to non-kin who could serve as legal witnesses. Such a context would require signatures so less well-known individuals could later be found in the event of a dispute. This would make writing functionally useful, maybe even as a tool that protected certain rights. Nevertheless, this context could give legal writing the affordance to remind individuals about potentially unwanted changes in society as it related to the deterioration of the extended family structure.

Whether the increase in personal seals is understood as increased political control or as a

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East, see the literature cited in Chapter One on p. 10, n. 9.

[91] Postgate, *Bronze Age Bureaucracy,* 80.

[92] I thank Aaron Burke for pointing this line of reasoning out to me (personal communication).

change necessitated by wider social transformations, the use of seals still had the potential to activate negative thoughts. Both understandings touch on issues related to the traditional social structure. If seals suggest increased political control, then their use would run counter to Israel's endemic tribal structure, where "a centralized monopoly of power" would go against the grain "of segmentary tribal organization insofar as a distinctiveness and a certain degree of autonomy are basic features of any tribe."[93] In this sociopolitical landscape, writing's use to manage political and economic interaction could cause the technology to be viewed as a symbol of an increasingly larger and unwanted central government. In the case of wider social transformations, the necessity to use seals could have generated discourse over the continuing erosion of extended family relations.

In sum, several features of writing's materiality from ancient Israel suggest the technology's spread could have been experienced as unsettling. First, the implements of Israelite and Judahite administrative writing had a strong Egyptian flavor. In light of anthropological work on writing systems, this Egyptian flavor could have resulted in pushback against writing. It could have too easily awakened memories of foreign and punitive regulation. Further tainting the technology, these same aspects of writing illustrate Phoenician influence, an influence that seems to have been controversial in ancient Israel. Beyond foreign influence, evidence for early uses of writing suggests it was used to promote the consumption of luxury goods, a practice some considered morally dangerous, if biblical literature is to be believed. Finally, increased writing suggests increased social control by a centralized government. This could have been experienced as unsettling in Israel's tribal structure. Chronological indicators do, in fact, suggest that the

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[93] B. Tibi, "The Simultaneity of the Unsimultaneous: Old Tribes and Imposed Nation-States in the Modern Middle East," in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, eds. P.S. Khoury and J. Kostiner (Berkley: University of California Press, 1990), 130.

technology increased alongside other signs of political centralization, as discussed in the previous section.

Before concluding this chapter, one caveat needs to be made. I have argued that administrative writing in ancient Israel shows signs suggesting that the technology could have been experienced as a powerful symbol of political coercion and unwanted change in society. This may seem to be at odds with some trends in understanding bureaucracy and society in the ancient Near East, trends that are particularly popular in a patrimonial framework. For instance, David Schloen has argued that the Ugaritic bureaucracy operated largely upon kinship relations and corresponding kinship idioms.[94] That is, the crown's increasing centralization and its pervasive use of documents did little to reshape how power was understood and maintained in traditional Ugaritic kin-based society. Likewise, Steven Garfinkle has presented a formidable argument that the Ur III state was, in fact, not a bureaucratic state, despite its infamously profuse application of documents.[95] More relevant for this dissertation, Lawrence Stager also argues that documents like the Samaria Ostraca do not conceal the fact that Israel likely never had a true bureaucracy and instead always maintained its kinship structure.[96]

Garfinkle, Schloen, and Stager challenge a common scholarly impulse to equate the use of documents with the socially disembedded nature of a true bureaucratic system. But by

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[94] D. Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2001).

[95] S.J. Garfinkle, "Was the Ur III State Bureaucratic? Patrimonialism and Bureaucracy in the Ur III Period," in *The Growth of an Early State in Mesopotamia: Studies in Ur III Administration: Proceedings of the First and Second Ur III Workshops at the 49th and 51st Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, London July 10, 2003 and Chicago July 19, 2005*, eds. S. Garfinkle and J.C. Johnson (Madrid: CSIC Press, 2008), 55-62.

[96] L.E. Stager, "The Patrimonial Kingdom of Solomon," in *Symbiosis, Symbolism and the Power of the Past*, eds. W.G. Dever and S. Gitin (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 63-73.

acknowledging this scholarly impulse, they implicitly acknowledge the wider human tendency to give documents a symbolic power. Scholars believe that these societies were becoming more centralized and the government more coercive *because* they see increased documentary usage in the epigraphic record. The material documents themselves make us think this. The anthropology discussed in the previous chapter demonstrates that this scholarly impulse to see documents as something with the power to erode culture or society can be a wider human impulse. It stands to reason that even if Israelite or Ugaritic kinship structures maintained in the face of a centralized bureaucracy, some would have still imbued the increasing pervasiveness of document-mediated interaction as socially or culturally undermining—even if it was not. This is what many societies and cultures have done and it is also what scholarship critiqued by Garfinkle, Schloen, and Stager has unwittingly done too. To be clear, there is some truth to their broader argument that signs of a centralized bureaucracy in a tribal society does not *de facto* mean that kin-based ways of organizing were no longer in practice. But document-mediated interaction can still attract negative social discourse in this setting. A tribal society can still perceive some uses of documents as symbols of coercion even if their use does little to alter the structure of that society and even while they might be valued in other contexts for other purposes.

Consider the recent work of Emanuel Pfoh, who, within the framework of patrimonialism, advocates for labeling monarchic Israel as a "patronage kingdom" as opposed to a coercive state.[97] Much like Stager, Schloen, and Garfinkle, he argues that administrative writing in ancient Israel does not preclude understanding the society through a patrimonial lens. The movement of goods and people documented by Hebrew administrative inscriptions, he

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[97] E. Pfoh, *The Emergence of Israel in Ancient Palestine: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (London: Equinox, 2009).

argues, likely functioned through traditional tribal channels. But he acknowledges that the use of bureaucratic writing still needs to be explained, stating "the use of writing in this realm may be linked more to the emulation of foreign practices (Egyptian, Assyrian) as a means of presenting signs of power and prestige rather than to strictly administrative usage."[98] According to this understanding, administrative writing did not mean that the fundamentals of society were changing. But it did mean that society imbued administrative writing with a symbolic force. It is this symbolic force of writing, the technology's status as a sign of power, that could be experienced as unsettling. Even if the traditional kinship system maintained, writing's symbolic capacities could cause it to be perceived as a sign of unwanted centralized power and change.

On another level, my examination of biblical attitudes towards documents challenges some aspects of a unitary patrimonial model for understanding ancient Israel. Namely, nefarious depictions of administrative writing in biblical literature suggest that some aspects of centralized rule were experienced and understood as coercive, fundamentally falling outside the bounds of kinship. A strict application of patrimonialism does not allow for monarchies to be viewed outside of kinship idioms and symbols in this way. It seems to me that some, though certainly not all, unnuanced applications of a patrimonial model avoid discussion of biblical literature whose viewpoint is antagonistic towards centralized rule. Jeremy Hutton directed such a critique at Pfoh, saying he "has opted out" of discussing the clear biblical ambivalence towards the monarchy that was rooted in "competing ideologies—prodynastic versus segmentary acephalism—at work in the tenth and ninth centuries."[99] I suspect that less nuanced applications

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[98] ibid., 99.

[99] J. Hutton, review of *The Emergence of Israel in Ancient Palestine: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* by Emanuel Pfoh, *RBL* 11 (2011). For a more nuanced application of patrimonialism that allows for the competing ideologies of prodynasty and segmentary lineage, see D. Master, "State Formation Theory and the Kingdom of Ancient Israel," *JNES* 60

of patrimonialism avoid discussion of these textually preserved "competing ideologies" because they assume if Israelite society was organized according to the principle of patrimonialism then there would be little room for ideologies opposed to the monarchy. According to a pristine patrimonial model, kin-based societies allow increased centralization because the idioms and symbols of kinship are maintained in the face of that centralization. Put differently, no one objected to kingship because no one saw it as anything different from or a threat to the norms of the traditional tribal society. Biblical literature ambivalent towards the monarchy, most famously parts of 1 Samuel 8-10 and Judges 8-9, challenge this view. They suggest some indeed viewed increased political centralization as a threat to kinship. The biblical texts I examine further suggest that certain acts mediated by documents were viewed as averse to the kinship system as well.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed major features of the epigraphic corpus from ancient Israel, including chronological trends, elements of writing's materiality, administrative genres of writing, and the archaeological contexts of inscriptions. In doing so, it has pointed out that administrative writing in ancient Israel had the ingredients to be experienced as an unsettling development. Bureaucratic uses of writing increased dramatically during a period of rapid social change concomitant with political centralization. The Hebrew Bible shows that some perceived these changes as unwanted. Writing's associations with these social changes could have charged it with a negative affective force. This seems all the more likely since writing's materiality evoked strong Egyptian and Phoenician cultural influences while also appearing in contexts associated with social stratification. The Hebrew Bible illustrates that such foreign influence,

(2001): 117-131.

political centralization, and material excess could discomfort more conservative factions. When looking at administrative genres of writing in particular, it was further suggested that administrative writing could come to symbolize coercive forms of governance that many viewed as opposed to the traditional kinship system. Hebrew writing's close associations with the military underscore this point.

Of course, as stated at the outset, the arguments to this point have largely been theoretical conjecture. On the theoretical basis established in the previous chapter, features of Israelite writing from the monarchic period *merely suggest* the likelihood that the technology carried a negative affective charge, perhaps at times being experienced as unsettling. But, is there direct evidence that this was the case? In this chapter, I have cited some biblical literature that suggests this, the most overt of which was Isaiah 10's charge that the social and political elite used writing to perpetrate acts of injustice. The rest of this study now turns to other evidence found in DtrH. An examination of the following biblical passages demonstrates that the features of writing outlined in this chapter were indeed thought by some to signal unsettling changes in society during the 8th-7th centuries BCE.

CHAPTER FOUR: GIDEON'S NAME-LIST AND THE VIOLENCE OF

ADMINISTRATIVE WRITING IN EARLY ISRAEL

One of the most widely cited instances of administrative writing in the Hebrew Bible is

Gideon's use of a name-list in Judg 8:14 when a local "listed for him the officials and elders of

Succoth" (ויכתב אליו את שרי סכות ואת זקניה). The present chapter seeks to understand how

Gideon's list makes meaning in its literary, historical, and cultural contexts. When so

contextualized, I will argue that fears about administrative writing are manifested in this

portrayal of writing. More specifically, I will argue that the portrayal illustrates how ancient

Israel's West Semitic political ideals made the production and use of bureaucratic name-lists an

ominous experience for those enlisted. This reading largely depends on understanding the

Gideon narrative as a critique of monarchy that is historically situated in ancient Israel's

experience of increased political centralization.

To make my argument, the chapter opens with an anthropological analogy from Papua

New Guinea, which highlights how the simple act of writing names can be viewed as an affront

to the assumptions of a social structure that veers towards political decentralization. Next, I will

review how Israelite social structure, which was predicated on circumscribing the power of

centralized rulers, contained the necessary ingredients for viewing name-lists in a way similar to

that seen in the anthropological analogy. This review of social structure will pave the way for the

following section, which demonstrates how discourse about social structure permeates the

Gideon narrative. More specifically, the Gideon narrative pits tribal elders against an emerging

monarchy embodied in the figure of Gideon. The chapter thus situates Gideon's name-list in a

literary unit aimed at criticizing the invasive politics of monarchy. In such a narrative context,

the name-list functions as a symbol of Gideon's pseudo-royal status, one that facilitates unjust

violence against local leadership. I then argue that this view of writing as a tool of monarchic

violence is supported by other relevant depictions of royal administrative writing in DtrH as well

as ancient Near Eastern monumental reliefs that associate scribal activity with violence and

political control. Finally, the chapter considers the potential historical contexts for the depiction

of Gideon's name-list, assessing how the two most likely contexts offer compelling backdrops

for how the text associates writing with monarchic power.

Even though Gideon is not a monarch, the latter half of his narrative allows one to

understand him as a proto-royal figure because it portrays him in a manner unlike other leaders

in the Judges cycle. It envisions him not as another in a line of temporary charismatic leaders,

but instead as the forerunner to a royal dynasty. This interest in Gideon as a sovereign figure

distinct from other judges is most clearly articulated in Judg 8:22, when the Israelites request that

Gideon establish a dynasty to rule over them, remarking "rule over us, you and your son and

your grandson also." Another clear articulation of Gideon's status as a proto-monarch is that one

of his sons, unabashedly named "My-father-is-king" (אבימלך, Abimelek), seeks to be sole ruler

(Judg 9:2). As will be discussed more below, the royal flavor of the Gideon-Abimelek unit has

been understood as a means of working out cultural discourse concerning ancient Israel's

transition to a dynastic monarchic. Judges 8-9 appears to offer that discourse a cautionary tale

regarding the abusive and violent capacities of unchecked monarchies. I will analyze Gideon's

use of a name-list within this context of his portrayal as the negative manifestation of a royal

figure. Accordingly, I will argue that the episode suggests that those who experienced having

their names recorded by agents of Israelite governance sometimes did so with anxiety and

resentment. This episode suggests that such forms of writing carried a negative affect, being

closely associated with coercive forms of governance that were at odds with traditionally

idealized forms of decentralized political organization. Gideon's list conveys these attitudes

particularly because it facilitates brutality against a body of elders, the traditional node of local

power in the tribal structure. He uses the list to inscribe violence upon the bodies of unwilling

subjects. As theorized by Foucault, violence upon the body is the pinnacle of sovereign power.[1]

The Judges 8 narrative marries this violence of sovereign power to writing. The latter facilitates

the former, illustrating the dark overtones that such forms of writing could carry in early Israel.

While the portrayal of Gideon as a royal figure, one who utilizes a name-list, comes at the

end of his narrative, the beginning of his narrative portrays him in the typical fashion of a judge

readers of the book come to expect. Israel turns away from Yahweh and, as a consequence, they

endure oppression from the Midianites and Amalekites (Judg 6:1-6). After the Israelites petition

Yahweh for deliverance from their oppressors, Yahweh sends a messenger who appoints Gideon

as Israel's deliverer (Judg 6:11-12). Gideon is an unwilling participant in this scheme of

deliverance due to a lack of self-confidence, and so he continually seeks divine affirmation for

the acts he is called to do in the remainder of Judges 6. Out of fear, he even chooses to

accomplish one divinely appointed task under the cover of darkness (6:27). Over the course of

Judges 7, Gideon leads a small company of men to an unlikely victory over the Midianites.

During this victory, the text's characterization of Gideon pivots. By the beginning of Judges 8,

the once frightened, unassuming leader finds the courage to rebuff criticism from the powerful

tribe of Ephraim. The name-list appears in the episode following this conflict with Ephraim,

when the text begins dressing Gideon with an increasing amount of royal trappings. In this

section of the narrative, Gideon crosses the Jordan along with a three-hundred-man militia in hot

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[1] M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1995), 3-72.

pursuit of a Midianite detachment. As he passes by the city of Succoth, Gideon requests

provisions from its inhabitants. The city's elders and officials, in antagonistic fashion, refuse

Gideon's request. Responding in 8:7, Gideon vows "I will trample [the officials'] flesh on the

thorns of the wilderness and on the briars," (הברקנים ודשתי את בשרכם את קוצי המדבר ואת). After

a similar encounter with Penuel, Gideon continues his pursuit of the Midianites, eventually

vanquishing their force. Having captured two Midianite kings in the process, Gideon returns to

Succoth as promised. Outside the city, he captures a נער, commonly translated "young lad."[2]

Gideon then interrogates him. During this interrogation, a list of the names of Succoth's officials

(שרים) and elders (זקנים) is written for Gideon (8:14). He then punishes those named in the list in

the manner promised.

The meaning Gideon's list makes in its narrative context and the implications of this for

understanding attitudes towards literacy in ancient Israel have received little attention. This is

surprising given that this instance of writing has received an enormous amount of scholarly

consideration. Typically, scholars direct their interest at the question of *who* writes in the

passage, as the subject of the verb כתב "to write" is made somewhat ambiguous by the syntax of

8:14. The thinking goes that if it was the נער who wrote the list, then perhaps the passage attests

to a demographically broad distribution of literacy in ancient Israel, much broader than most

scholars on the topic would be willing to admit. For these reasons, the passage has been at the

center of a maximalist-minimalist debate concerning literacy in ancient Israel. The passage is

especially invoked by those who ascribe to biblical inerrancy because they often use arguments

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[2] For an argument that the title denotes "military apprentice," see W. Schniedewind, "The Commander of the Fortress? Understanding an Ancient Military Title," *BAR* 45, no. 1 (2019): 39-44.

for widespread literacy to undergird their position that biblical narratives were written during the times they claim to recount.[3] If a simple boy could write, these innerantist scholars take this to mean that literacy was widespread enough in the early Iron Age to support the production of the Hebrew Bible in the times it claims to recount. However, the problems with using this passage to understand the demographic spread of literacy are many and varied.[4] Moreover, this focus on who writes has excised the passage from its literary context. By asking questions about how the passage might reflect the spread of literacy, scholars have not considered how the act of writing makes meaning within the narrative and what this might, in turn, say about attitudes towards literacy rather than its demographic spread. The disinterest in attitudes towards literacy betrays a cultural bias, one that assumes all societies value reading and writing and consequently use these skills in a universal manner.[5] Generally, scholars treat the appearance of this name-list as a happy accident useful for illustrating that Israelites were aware of writing's technological advantages. But as the following anthropological analogy demonstrates, administrative forms of writing are rarely understood neutrally, especially when they conflict with assumptions about

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[3] S. Young, "Protective Strategies and the Prestige of the 'Academic': A Religious Studies and Practice Theory Redescription of Evangelical Inerrantist Scholarship," *BI* 23 (2015): 1-35; idem., "Maximizing Literacy as a Protective Strategy: Redescribing Evangelical Inerrantist Scholarship on Israelite Literacy," *BI* 23 (2015): 145-173.

[4] Understanding the story's implication for literacy is especially embodied in the problem of what Hebrew means by נער, as differing interpretations of this word allow one to argue in favor of both high and low literacy levels. In addition to the ambiguity of the passage regarding who writes, there is also the problem of how scholars understand the text to fit within the epigraphic corpus. Even outside of biblical depictions of writing, there is wide debate about how the epigraphic corpus should be interpreted regarding literacy's demographic distribution. For more on the problems of using the passage to discuss literacy levels, see I.M. Young, "Israelite Literacy: Interpreting the Evidence, Part I," *VT* 48 (1998): 239-253.

[5] For theoretical approaches advocating against universal understandings of literacy, see B.V. Street, *Social Literacies* (Routledge: New York, 1995).

social structure or when they witness increased use, regardless of the social backdrop.

4.1 The Anthropology of Negative Literacy Events

To demonstrate the viability of my proposal for Judges 8, I will begin with an anthropological analogy. The analogy focuses on how writing is used and experienced in a small village from the lower Sepik region of Papua New Guinea. I choose this example because it starkly illustrates how notions about the listing of names can intersect with assumptions about social structure in a society where literacy is newly expanding. This context makes the analogy particularly helpful for understanding my argument about negative attitudes towards writing that underlay the Gideon episode, attitudes which I suggest stem from assumptions about social structure in a society witnessing expanded applications of writing. My intentions are not to argue for a one-to-one correspondence between ancient Israel and the village discussed here, a proposal that is fraught with difficulty. But broadly, the anthropological example I cite plainly illustrates how literacy is bound up with "quite profound levels of belief and the fundamental concepts through which a society creates order and design in the world."[6] Furthermore, it is worth noting, as I hoped was clarified in Chapter Two, that such attitudes towards administrative writing are not so different in Western society.[7] But given that the village in this anthropological example prefers political power to be decentralized and negotiated, it offers a helpful analogy for how name-lists could potentially have been experienced in ancient Israel when applications of the

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[6] B.V. Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 114.

[7] A helpful pop culture illustration of anxious attitudes towards name-lists can be found in episode 8:1 of the acclaimed television sitcom, *The Office*, titled "The List." In it, a corporate executive arrives at one of the company's local paper supply branches in order to reorganize management of the office. Workers discover a list of names written by the executive. The episode traces the comical level of anxiety the name-list generates among workers, who instinctively assume those named in the list will face ominous news.

technology began to expand.

In the village, cultural norms governing traditional political organization shape the particular uses to which writing is put and perceived. Some manifestations of writing are experienced as disturbing and disrupting events. While villagers mostly utilize their literate skills for *reading* religious literature, they use their *writing* skills for a single purpose—small letters often taking the form of requests that are based on "social cohesion, ideals of reciprocity, and conciliatory behavior."[8] The reason these values manifest so strongly in the uses to which writing is put is because the village is an acephalous society where leadership is horizontal. Villagers prioritize the building of consensus in political decision-making. While the village does have certain "big men," even these cannot give direct orders to community members as doing so would be considered "the grossest of provocations" in light of cultural norms regarding individual independence.[9] These facets of society shape how writing is primarily used, which almost entirely takes the form of personal letters meant to maintain the social equilibrium.

The village's cultural norms also shape how other uses of writing can be experienced as negative events. Most notably, on occasion, a village member who has been appointed as a liaison to the state government will write a list of names. Anthropologists note that these lists serve no other purpose than to convey "dark overtones" to those who are listed.[10] Such lists fall outside common uses of writing partly because they materialize a direct affront to the village's

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[8] D. Kulick and C. Stroud, "Conceptions and Uses of Literacy in Papua New Guinuean Village," in *Cross-Cultural Approaches to Literacy*, ed. Brian V. Street (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 30-61.

[9] Ibid., 43.

[10] Ibid., 35.

social structure. The list implies the writer's control of the listed, giving material expression to a hierarchical social situation that opposes the village's acephalous organization. Coupling with the writer's link to state authorities, this opposition to normative social relations results in the anxiety and dark overtones experienced by those named in the list.

The above analogy lends anthropological credibility to what I argue about the potential meanings of writing in Judg 8:14. Much like how lists are experienced in the above village, I argue that traditional values and social organization mediated how some forms of administrative writing, name-lists in particular, were experienced as negative events in early Israel. Gideon's list, when contextualized literarily, culturally, and historically, reflects such attitudes. Of course, it is necessary to stress that a comparison between Israelite and Papua New Guinean literacy is merely an analogy. The way such beliefs about society are bound up with literacy is a line of inquiry biblical scholars have seldom considered when looking at biblical passages that mention mundane acts of reading and writing. Passages portraying literacy can be understood as more than off-handed comments about innocuous actions that are only useful for illuminating literacy's demographic spread. They are also useful for illustrating how Israelite beliefs about society shaped literate and illiterate experiences and expressions.

4.2 Gideon's List in Its Social Context

Similar to the Papua New Guinea village mentioned above, ancient Israel seems to have likewise originated out of a horizontal social structure, otherwise referred to as "tribal."[11] This

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[11] On the use of the problematic label "tribes," see D. Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 183. The major problem with the label is how it is often used to frame a false dichotomy between tribe and state. The term has also been used as a pejorative. On this, especially as it pertains to ancient Israel, see Fleming's work and P. McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 164.

tribal structure, or at least as it is remembered in biblical literature, generated antagonism towards monarchical forms of governance, since the latter veered towards centralizing power in a single individual. In Judges 8, a struggle between the centralized monarchy and decentralized tribes takes center stage. Administrative writing is assigned a role in that struggle. It is depicted as a tool from which a proto-monarchic figure profits. Gideon's efforts to subjugate local elders, a foundational piece of Israel's tribal structure, are made more efficient through writing. Judges 8 thus provides a window for viewing the types of profound beliefs about society with which writing was bound in ancient Israel. To better appreciate how beliefs about the tribes and monarchy influenced beliefs about writing, and how these beliefs are present in Judges 8, it is necessary to review the extent of Israel's tribal structure and the antagonism it appears to have created towards monarchy.

Ancient Israel's political ethos of decentralization seems to have partly stemmed from the people's historical roots in the southern Levant, a region with geography that lends itself to decentralized, horizontal modes of political organization. The land that would become Israel is hemmed in on its eastern and western sides by the Arabian desert and the Mediterranean Sea, while the Sinai desert and the Anti-Lebanon mountain range create formidable boundaries to the south and the north. These boundaries forge a small arena whose landscape is itself carved up by frequent and extreme natural features such as the Judean steppe, the Mount Hermon massif, the Jordan River Valley, and several other naturally occurring east-west drainage basins. These features create geographically separated zones, facilitating the rise of smaller, geographically bound political entities.[12]

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[12] G.A. Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1931); Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979), 21-42; M. Suriano, "Historical Geography and the Ancient Levant," in the *Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Levant: ca. 8000-332*, eds. A.

The Amarna Letters, a corpus of texts written by Canaanite vassals of the Egyptian empire in the period preceding the rise of Israel, illustrate the region's typically distributed rather than centralized political organization. Several letters detail squabbles between the minor city-states comprising the southern Levant. None of these appear capable of centralizing political control. As a political power extending its influence from "Dan to Beer-Sheba" (1 Kgs 5:5), ancient Israel would have represented an atypical political situation for the southern Levant. Partly owing to geography, Israel's ethos of political decentralization seems to have been influenced by a tribal social structure. Though an imperfect label, I agree with Daniel Fleming that "tribe" is nevertheless an efficient term for referring to people groups who base their social organization and political decision-making on kinship ties as ancient Israel seems to have done.[13] The tribe encompasses "a set of social relationships based on idioms and/or practices of kinship and as the means through which people understand their place in society and the nature of their relationships with others."[14] Such a social system rooted in the idioms of kinship lends itself to distributed political power where units of kinship value the horizontal building of consensus rather than top-down political authority. Social cohesion among these kinship groups typically relies upon negotiation and persuasion rather than the use of force.[15] Moreover, kinship systems

Killebrew and M. Steiner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 9-23.

[13] See note 8.

[14] This is from an unpublished manuscript written by Anne Porter and is quoted in Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel*, 184. For an important summary of Porter's work on kin-based modes of political decision making as it intersects with the rise of polities, see A. Porter, "From Kin to Class—And Back Again! Changing Paradigms of the Early Polity," in *Development of Pre-State Communities in the Near East*, eds. D. Bolger and L.C. Maguire (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010), 72-78.

[15] S.L. Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 72-75; McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society*, 79.

often value the idea of egalitarianism. Though actual practice may oppose such an ethic, the idea

of egalitarianism typically comprises a significant part of social and political discourse among

such groups.[16]

The tribal politics of ancient Israel most frequently enter the fray of the biblical narrative

when the topic of kingship arises. Often, the tribes are seen as constraining royal power. This is

unsurprising given that, as Tina Thurston puts it, "traditional, horizontally organized institutions"

akin to the biblical tribes have "an antagonistic resistance" to political centralization.[17] Tribal

groups sometimes view political institutions that centralize power, like a monarchy, as a

challenge to the norms of the traditional kinship system. Such centralization openly challenges

egalitarianism, makes top-down authority permanent, and can replace negotiation and persuasion

with force through the building of a professionalized military and the institution of mandatory

taxes. An antagonistic resistance of tribal politics to centralization likely informs Deut 17:14-20,

which stipulates a "law of the king" directed at curbing high levels of monarchic centralization.

The tribal politics of ancient Israel, rooted in kinship and labeled by Daniel Fleming as

"collaborative politics," frequently emerge elsewhere in the biblical narrative.[18] Consider the

story of Abimelek in Judges 9, which comes on the heels of the Gideon pericope. Abimelek is

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[16] A. Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis: Settlement, Interaction, Expansion and Resistance* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 92-100; McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society*, 74, 82-87.

[17] T. Thurston, *Landscapes of Power, Landscapes of Conflict: State Formation in the South Scandinavian Iron Age* (New York: Kluwer Academic, 2001), 6. This quote came to my attention from reading Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel*, 199.

[18] Ibid. 179-192. Fleming's is the most extensive discussion of these issues. But for a concise collection of biblical texts portraying Israel's memory of a decentralized past, see B. Halpern, "The Uneasy Compromise: Israel Between League and Monarchy," in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith*, eds. B. Halpern and J.D. Levenson (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 59-96.

unable to declare himself king through force but instead is obligated to rely on the approval of a corporate political body. Despite his insatiable thirst for violence and disregard for traditional decorum, Abimelek feels compelled to appeal to a political institution at Shechem comprised of "lords" (בעלים) who must ceremoniously ratify him as king. This institution of "lords" illustrates how political power was traditionally distributed across a group at the local level rather than centralized in a single individual. It also illustrates how smaller localities maintained a great deal of autonomy. Any political decision-making across localities required negotiation and the collaboration of multiple individuals. This is not to say that West Semitic tribal society was a peaceful, democratic utopia. By nature, the decentralized tribal structure allows factions to compete for power, often to fatal ends. The book of Judges depicts tribal society as a time of violent competition with Judg 20:48, for example, claiming that internecine warfare nearly resulted in the extinction of the Benjaminites. As depicted in biblical literature, "collaborative politics" allowed for the building of consensus and mass action across tribal factions, but it also allowed for violent competition between factions.

Judges 9 also relates that to appeal to the "lords," בעלים, Abimelek uses the backchannel of kinship. He deems it necessary to persuade the kin of his mother (אחי אמו) to support him politically. This group must, in turn, convince the lords of Shechem that Abimelek is their "bone and flesh" (Judg 9:2), an idiomatic phrase loaded with kinship ideology. Further, when the "lords" agree to lend Abimelek their political support, they do so by declaring, "He is our brother" (Judg 9:3). As a kinship idiom, "brother" conveys a political relationship of equals, suggesting that even though he is declared king, Abimelek must nevertheless realize that his rule remains dependent upon his collaboration with the "lords."[19] At two levels, through the political

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[19] D. Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit*

institution of the lords which distributed power horizontally at the local level and through the use of kinship idioms, this passage reflects ancient Israel's tendency towards decentralized political power.

As Judges 9 implies, the tribes and their constituent parts had the power to be kingmakers and king-breakers. The tribes placed constraints on the monarchy from its inception. When Samuel installs Saul as king, tribal politics mediate the entire process. 1 Samuel 10 implicitly reveals the inner workings of political decision-making in a tribal league. The chapter details that Samuel chooses a king through the casting of lots. The first round of lots decides from which tribe (שבט) the king will be chosen, a second round decides from which clan (משפחה) among the chosen tribe, and a final third round decides which man among the chosen clan (1 Sam 10:20-21). Along the way, representatives from the excluded tribes and clans acquiesce to the process. The ultimate choice must then be ratified by the entire assembly (10:24). Such a depiction reflects the political realia of people groups veering more towards "corporate politics" than systems that concentrate power in the hands of an individual. Furthermore, as Jeremy Hutton has shown, the mechanism for choosing a king in 1 Samuel 10—the casting of lots—has anthropological parallels among segmented lineage systems adverse to political centralization.[20] Through such mechanisms of chance or divination, these groups emphasize that leadership roles are temporary and based on factors other than wealth or lineage, thus avoiding the potential for permanent centralized rule in the form of dynastic succession.

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and the Ancient Near East (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 255; E. Pfoh, "Some Remarks on Patronage in Syria-Palestine during the Late Bronze Age," *JESHO* 52, no. 3 (2009): 363-381.

[20] J. Hutton, "'Long Live the King!': Deuteronomism in 1 Sam 10:17-27a in Light of Ahansali Intratribal Mediation," in *Is Samuel Among the Deuteronomists*, eds. C. Edenburg and J. Pakkala (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013), 275-324.

While 1 Samuel 10 reveals how tribal politics allowed kinship units to be kingmakers, other parts of biblical literature show how they could likewise be king breakers. It was incumbent on any would-be king to court various kin groups and to maintain positive relations with each. The Book of Kings faults Rehoboam for the split of the United Monarchy for just this reason. The northern tribes secede from Judah because of their discomfort with the level of executive power attained by the Jerusalem dynasty. Rehoboam fails to assuage these concerns (1 Kgs 12). Their secession is foreshadowed multiple times during David's reign. His very installment rested on the northern tribes withdrawing their support from the Saulide dynasty (2 Sam 5). Later, both Absalom and Sheba foment revolt against David by appealing to tribal sentiments, claiming that David's rule fails to serve their interests (2 Sam 15:2-6; 2 Sam 20:1-2).[21] In a recent article, Seth Sanders has analyzed how the depiction of Absalom's rebellion draws on specifically West Semitic tribal ideals.[22] Standing on a major thoroughfare, Absalom appeals to a public for support, engages them in dialogue rather than commanding them, opts for the old West Semitic term for ruler by invoking judge (שפט) rather than king (מלך), symbolically utilizes egalitarian body language, and, in general, taps into an "old West Semitic mythic theme about how justice confers sovereignty."[23] These examples show how kings were obligated to work within the tribal structure and how, at times, the centralizing tendencies of monarchy pulled against the decentralized ethos of tribal politics.

The tribal structure also provided an outlet for some more conservative factions to

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[21] W. Schniedewind, *Society and the Promise to David: The Reception History of 2 Sam 7:1-17* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 47-48.

[22] S.L. Sanders, "Absalom's Audience (2 Samuel 15-19)," *JBL* 138 (2019): 513-536.

[23] Ibid., 528.

question the institution of monarchy altogether, at least among more conservative factions. The

most famous example of direct antagonism towards monarchy's centralized rule comes from 1

Samuel 8 when Samuel warns the tribal leaders of how a newly minted monarchy would oppress

society.[24] After the tribes clamor for a king, Samuel criticizes the idea of kingship, claiming that

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[24] Some have questioned the authenticity of biblical literature's antagonism towards the monarchy, especially by questioning the date of 1 Samuel 8, the most overt critique of kingship. Since the time of Wellhausen, it has been popular in scholarly circles to assign the "anti-monarchical" portions of 1 Sam 8 to late authors writing at the time of the exile or after it. See J. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994) 245-256; M. Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, JSOTSup 15 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), 49-53. For similar late views of the "anti-monarchical" strand, see Karl-Heinz Bernhard, *Das Problem der alt-orientalischen Königsideologie im Alten Testament*, VTSup 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1961), 149-152; R. Martin-Archard, "L'institution de la royauté en Israel: Quelques remarque sur 1 Samuel 8," *BCPE* 29 (1977): 49. L. Eslinger, "Viewpoints and Point of View in 1 Samuel 8-12," *JSOT* 26 (1983): 61-76. Others see the task of dividing 1 Sam 8 into pro- and anti-monarchic strands as too fraught with difficulty, choosing instead to view the chapter as synchronous and nuanced view of the monarchy. On this, see M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). Others find the same nuanced view but, like Wellhausen, they believe the text is a composite though unlike Wellhausen they find a more complex literary history with anti-monarchical attitudes also stemming from earlier layers. For this view, see J. Hutton, *The Transjordanian Palimpsest: The Overwritten Texts of Personal Exile and Transformation in the Deuteronomistic History*, BZAW 396 (New York: de Gruyter, 2009), 122-123; idem., "'Long Live the King!'." For a recent review of scholarship on dating 1 Sam 8, see R. Gilmour, *Representing the Past: A Literary Analysis of Narrative Historiography in the Book of Samuel* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 168-172. For a broad range of pre-exilic dates for 1 Sam 8, see I. Mendelsohn, "Samuel's Denunciation of Kingship in the light of Akkadian Documents from Ugarit," *BASOR* 143 (1956): 17-18; R.E. Clements, "The Deuteronomistic Interpretation of the Founding of the Monarchy in 1 Sam VIII," *VT* 24 (1974): 408-409; T. Veijola, *Das Königtum in der Beurteilung der deuteronomistischen Historiographie: eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1977), 62-63; R. Klein, *1 Samuel*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 74; M. Leuchter, "A King Like All the Nations: The Composition of 1 Samuel 8,1-11," *ZAW* 117 (2006): 547-548. Regardless of a precise date for 1 Sam 8, there is good reason to believe that attitudes critical of monarchy were around from Israel's earliest days and likely persisted throughout its long history, being informed by Israel's tribal structure. Consider the early date of other passages that appear openly critical of the monarchy, such as Judg 9. Baruch Halpern argues that the Abimelek narrative intends to portray kingship as potentially at odds with a tribal, egalitarian ethos in an early period. See B. Halpern, "The Rise of Abimelek Ben-Jerubbaal," *HAR* 2 (1978): 94-95. Several other scholars also interpret Abimelek as a pre-exilic and potentially early polemic against monarchy. See W. Richter, *Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Richterbook* (Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1963), 285-286; J. Alberto Soggin, *Judges*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 176-177; S. Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary*,

kings will take the sons of Israelites to serve in his military, the daughters of Israelites to serve in

his palace, and the best land and produce of the Israelites to provision his own lavish lifestyle

and that of his courtiers (1 Sam 8:11-18). The passage further displays antagonism towards

kingship by depicting the institution as not only foreign (8:20) but also as antithetical to a society

governed by Yahweh and, therefore, a treasonous rejection of the deity (8:7). While clearly

theologized and placed in the mouth of Samuel, it is reasonable to assume that these words gave

voice to the concerns of a more conservative faction who resented the practical aspects of

centralized governance, especially taxation and military conscription, even while other factions

provided the motivation for more centralized governance.[25] Such resentment would only be

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OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 114-116. On the likelihood that resistance to monarchy was around from Israel's earliest days, regardless of 1 Sam 8's date, see M. Noth, *The History of Israel*, (London: Black, 1960), 164-165; F. Crüsemann, *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum. Die antikönigliche Texte des Alten Testamentes und der Kampf um den frühe israelitischen Staat* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978); T. Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel: A Study on the Formation and Development of Royal-Dynastic Ideology* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1977); K. Whitelam, "Israelite Kingship: The Royal Ideology and its Opponents," in *The World of Ancient Israel: Sociological, Anthropological and Political Perspectives*, ed. R.E. Clements (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 123; Halpern, "The Uneasy Compromise."

[25] It is important to point out that ancient Israel in no way monopolized the ancient Near Eastern market on criticizing monarchs. Jonathan Kaplan, for instance, provides an elucidating study that compares 1 Sam 8 to Akkadian literature aimed at restraining the royal power of Mesopotamian monarchs. See J. Kaplan, "1 Samuel 8:11-18 as 'A Mirror for Princes,'" *JBL* 131, no. 4 (2012): 625-642. He does not mention it, but Egyptian wisdom texts are also interesting in this respect. Consider Merykare, who is told not to destroy ancient buildings, among other acts of hubris. This is exactly what Gideon, a monarchic figure, does at Penuel. However, while it is true that other ancient Near Eastern kings were not immune to criticism, there is still something to be said about the brand and relative volume of criticism biblical literature directs at the Israelite monarchy. While the idea of royal restraint might not be unique to ancient Israel, it seems to be a much more central topic of discussion in biblical literature than other ancient Near Eastern corpora. Ancient Israel's tribal make-up, which valued distributed power, explains why the idea of royal constraint may have been more of a cultural touchstone for biblical authors than their ancient Near Eastern peers.

heightened when informed by tribal politics.[26]

The Hebrew Bible thus appears to preserve a genuine memory of a tribal structure. For

some groups within that structure, the political assumptions of a tribal system were viewed as at

odds with the institution of monarchy. Whereas monarchies veer toward centralizing power in a

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[26] Whether or not the monarchy and tribal system were so opposed in ancient Israel is a matter of debate. According to some scholars, as the monarchy grew, it unavoidably eroded the tribal structure. Most but not all of these works center on how the "state" used cult centralization as a political ruse for undercutting kinship ties. The classic formulation of this is M. Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, trans. and eds. H.H. Gerth and D. Martindale (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1952), 65-66. For biblical scholars who argue the state naturally weakened the clan system, see N. Steinberg, "The Deuteronomic Law Code and the Politics of State Centralization," in *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Norman K. Gottwald on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, eds. D. Jobling, P.L. Day, and G.T. Sheppard (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1991), 161-170; J. Blenkinsopp, "Deuteronomy and the Politics of Post-Mortem Existence," *VT* 45, no.1 (1995): 1-16. S. Ackerman, "Cult Centralization, the Erosion of Kin-Based Communities, and the Implications for Women's Religious Practice," in *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion: Essays in Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. S.M. Olyan (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2012), 19-40. For a summary of earlier scholarly views on the belief that the monarchy deteriorated the tribal structure, see S. Bendor, *The Social Structure of Ancient Israel: The Institution of the Family* (beit ʾab) *from the Settlement to the End of the Monarchy* (Jerusalem: Simor, 1996), 207-215. More recently, however, scholars have shown that understanding the tribes and monarchy as locked in a zero-sum game for power is perhaps too simple. Lawrence Stager, for example, argued that ancient Israelite society was based on patrimonialism, and as a result, the monarchy could exist without straining the tribal structure. See Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 260 (1985): 1-35. This idea is pursued further in the work of his students, see especially Schloen, *The House of the Father*, and D. Master, "State Formation Theory and the Kingdom of Ancient Israel," *JNES* 60, no. 2 (2001): 117-131; D. S. Vanderhooft, "The Israelite mišpāḥâ, the Priestly Writings, and Changing Valences in Israel's Kinship Terminology," in *Exploring the Longue Durée: Essays in Honor of Lawrence E. Stager*, ed. J.D. Schloen (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 485-496. For other biblicists who argue Israel maintained the kinship system throughout its history, see C. Meyers, "The Family in Early Israel," in *Families in Ancient Israel*, ed. L.G. Perdue (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 1-47 and B. Halpern, "Jerusalem and the Lineages in the Seventh Century B.C.E: Kinship and the Rise of Individual Moral Liability," in *Law and Ideology in Monarchic Israel*, eds. B. Halpern and D.W. Hobson (JSOTSup 124; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 11-107, though Halpern admits that maintaining these days would have been more challenging in the urbanized, centralized society of the 7th century. As these scholars show, political centralization does not de facto lead to the erosion of kin-based social structures. Nevertheless, while in reality, the tribal structure may have been unthreatened by monarchy, biblical literature demonstrates that there was at least a perception that this was the case. Attitudes towards administrative writing appear to have been tied to this perception.

single person, tribal structures typically distribute political power across multiple individuals and groups. Such a distribution ensures a great deal of local autonomy. Israel's tribal structure and its perceived antagonism towards monarchy provide one piece of a social and cultural backdrop against which literacy would have been viewed. From an anthropological perspective, it has been observed that social and political organization impinges upon the way certain societies experience administrative writing. In the case of the Papua New Guinea village cited at the beginning of this chapter, the horizontal social structure caused the listing of names to be viewed as an ominous activity, less culturally permissible than other forms of writing. It is my contention that similar social and cultural values in ancient Israel charged the performance of administrative writing with anxiety and resentment on the part of those who were enlisted or surveilled through the technology. Such acts were viewed against the backdrop of the monarchy's perceived erosion of traditional tribal culture. Judges 8, in particular, pairs writing with reservations about the monarchy, illustrating how literacy was bound up with beliefs about society.

4.3 Gideon's List in Its Immediate Literary Context

4.3.1 The King and the Tribes: Judges 8 as Negative Assessment of Monarchy

In DtrH, writing occurs in monarchical contexts for non-religious purposes of secular administration five times, including Judges 8. The other four instances include David's census (2 Sam 24), David's letter to Joab (2 Sam 11:14), Jezebel's forgery and conspiracy against Naboth (1 Kgs 21:8), and Jehu's letters encouraging a *coup d'etat* and blood purge (2 Kgs 10).[27] Each of

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[27] Royal administrative writing is implied in the fiscal reforms of Jehoash (2 Kgs 12), which will be examined in Chapter Six. But this is a unique case compared to what I have listed here because the text explicitly states documents were *not* used.

these instances connotes the monarchical abuse of power, involving violence and dishonesty to various degrees. In each case, writing does more than simply relay bad news. It creates the bad news.

Gideon's use of a name-list should be understood in light of the Judges 8's primary narrative interest. As many have noted, that primary interest is in how the institution of monarchy intersects with tribal ideals. The latter half of the Gideon narrative characterizes Gideon as a proto-monarchic figure who behaves in every way as a king, though in the end, he refuses the title. Jack Sasson, for instance, views Gideon's behavior in light of Akkadian texts from Mari, arguing that Gideon's actions display an understanding of himself as a political ruler.[28] Though admittedly a chronologically distant example, Sasson shows some productive parallels to illustrate how the Gideon narrative draws on cultural expressions of leadership. Sasson cites examples from the Mari correspondence, demonstrating that the punishment of elders and officials, as well as the destruction of monumental architecture, an act Gideon performs at Penuel (8:17), are actions solely reserved for those who fancy themselves as sovereigns. Furthermore, Gideon requests a greater share of war spoils (8:24) while also co-opting the regalia of foreign rulers (8:21), activities only becoming of a king. In the words of Robin Baker, Gideon indirectly claims the kingship because he "named his son Abimelek, 'my father is king'" (8:31) and "the size of his harem, the number of his sons (seventy), and the wealth implicit in their support betray a regal modus vivendi."[29] These actions betray a primary textual interest in the symbols of monarchy. Gideon's use of writing should be understood in the

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[28] J. Sasson, *Judges 1-12*, AB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 368.

[29] R. Baker, "'A Dream Carries much Implication': The Midianites Dream (Judges VII), Its Role and Meanings," *VT* 68, no. 3 (2018): 351.

light of these monarchic symbols.

It is significant for our understanding of Gideon's name-list that the passage appears to assess Gideon's assumption of royal power in a critical light. Alongside 1 Samuel 8, Judges 8 is widely regarded as a clear critique of the monarchic institution. As many commentators have noted, the Gideon of Judges 8 seems to function not simply as a manifestation of kingship, but more specifically as a negative manifestation of it, one where the monarch uses his power for personal gain and recognition while others suffer as a result. Regarding the Gideon narrative, Jacobus Marais claims that "the monarchy is being explored and evaluated negatively throughout."[30] Marais is not alone in this understanding. Scholars have long found reasons to believe that the book of Judges presents Gideon in at least a partially disapproving light as a commentary on kingship. In fact, Marc Brettler argues that the biblical portrayal of Gideon altogether serves as a negative model for the corrupt northern monarchy from the point of view of Judahite authors.[31] Brettler lists such activities as failing to notice a divine messenger (6:12-17), reluctance to believe prophetic oracles (6:36), and the construction of an illicit shrine (8:27) as a few things that frame Gideon as a paradigmatic manifestation of royal corruption.

Scholars before Brettler noticed that out of the entire Gideon pericope, Judges 8 seems particularly dedicated to castigating Gideon's behavior as a king. Boling, for instance, suggested that Succoth's and Penuel's refusal to provision Gideon is a response to his culturally taboo use of the confederate militia for a *personal* blood feud with the Midianites.[32] The taboo and

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[30] J. Marais, *Representation in Old Testament Narrative Texts* (Boston: Brill, 1998), 112.

[31] M. Brettler, *The Book of Judges* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

[32] R.G. Boling, *Judges*, AYB (Garden City, NY: Double Day, 1975), 153-158. The relevant text is Judg 8:18-19.

personal nature of Gideon's military maneuvers in this passage is further underscored by a total

absence of the deity in contrast to Gideon's previous campaigns where Yahweh played a major

role.[33] More recently, Elie Assis has elucidated the ways Gideon's actions at Succoth and Penuel

represent a negative inversion of his humble behavior at the beginning of the narrative.[34] Earlier,

chapters 6 and 7 portray Gideon as a passively weak character afraid to use force. The Gideon of

chapter 8 appears now to enjoy the use of force for his own gain and honor.[35] According to such

a reading, the very institution of monarchy is a corrupting power, capable of turning the most

humble into the most bloodthirsty. Gideon's actions in Judges 8 further this understanding since

he uses his power to inflict torture on the elders of Succoth, a type of torture that is perhaps

incommensurate with the crime since it is not clear why the town needs to provision him.

Other commentators point out that chapter 8 not only links with earlier portions of the

story through a negative inversion but that the narrative also links with the later Abimelek

account in a similar negative fashion.[36] Through this link, Gideon's behavior functions as a

precursor to the fully negative manifestation of a monarchic figure in the person of Abimelek.

For example, Gideon punishes the leaders of Succoth with thorns and briars. In the Abimelek

account, thorns and briars are Jotham's representation for kingship in a parable that

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[33] E. Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest: An Ideology of Leadership in the Gideon, Abimelech and Jephtah Narratives (Judg 6-12)* (Boston: Brill, 2005), 97-98.

[34] Assis, *Self-Interest*, 91-112. For example, in the episode immediately preceding Succoth, the Ephraimites come to Gideon seeking honor. He acquiesces by downplaying his own accomplishments and highlighting the actions of the Ephraimites. In contrast, Gideon later demands honor from Succoth and Penuel, acting impetuously when they refuse.

[35] Marais, *Representation*, 113. Marais goes so far as to call the Gideon of chapter 8 a bully.

[36] J.A. Soggin, *Judges: A Commentary*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM, 1987), xx, 309; T. Schneider, *Judges*, BO (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press), 200.

unequivocally critiques monarchical authority in response to Shechem making the scoundrel Abimelek king (9:20).

It must be admitted that understanding the Gideon-Abimelech complex as a critique of kingship presents some problems with the surrounding Judges cycle into which it has been incorporated. The final composition of Judges, contrary to Gideon-Abimelech, advocates in favor of kingship. It presents kingless Israel as a wild west where "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25). A number of theories explain this tension between the anti-monarchical flavor of Gideon-Abimelech and the pro-monarchical flavor of the rest of Judges. The most popular theory has been to understand the tension from a southern Judahite perspective in which Gideon-Abimelech critiques the failed northern monarchy, advocating for the more piously constrained monarchy manifested in Judah.[37] Alternatively, these characters could be understood as negative models of kingship in general, warning kings about proper behavior. More specifically, Robin Baker argues that Gideon's moral descent voices the concerns of factions opposed to Manasseh in the early 7th century BCE.[38] In a different, however, Sara Milstein argues that the tension is simply a result of scribal protocol which aimed to preserve older traditions. In this case, feeling the pressure of tradition, later scribes integrated a preexisting Gideon-Abimelech complex into the pro-monarchic cycle of Judges by fronting it with introductory material that softened its monarchic critiques.[39] Either way, the apparent anti-

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[37] M. Brettler, "The Book of Judges: Literature as Politics," *JBL* 108, no. 3 (1989): 395-418; M. Sweeney, "Davidic Polemics in the Book of Judges," *VT* 47, no. 4 (1997): 517-529; cf. Richter, *Traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*, 340.

[38] Baker, "A Dream," 372-374.

[39] S. Milstein *Tracking the Master Scribe: Revision through Introduction in Biblical and Mesopotamian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 147-173.

monarchical leanings of an original Gideon-Abimelek composition seem clear, despite its current literary position. In that composition, Gideon engages in bad behavior that typified fears about centralized rule.

In the midst of his bad kingly behavior, Gideon writes a list. He later punishes and perhaps even executes the individuals named in the list. How this list might contribute to Gideon's portrayal as a nefarious sovereign figure has gone unnoticed among scholars. This is largely because they excise the list from its narrative context, choosing instead to focus on the question of what a נער "apprentice," capable of writing might suggest about literacy's demographic spread. Other scholars who have examined the Gideon pericope from a literary perspective have likewise little to say about Gideon's name-list. They often pass over it, understanding it as an off-handed comment or minor literary detail. This lack of consideration for the list is, in my opinion, the result of cultural bias, one that favors literacy and assumes it as a matter-of-fact aspect of everyday life. But in light of Gideon's other actions and the culture of writing in the ancient Near East, the list makes a contribution to the passage's portrayal of Gideon as a sovereign figure. It comprises part of an assembly of royal power. By assigning it a role in the domination of bodies, the text places administrative writing at the center of that royal power.

4.3.2 The Pen and the Sword: Violence, Writing, and Sovereign Power in Judges 8

In Judg 8:14, the central literary function of Gideon's *ad-hoc* list is how it facilitates violence. The list determines whom Gideon will punish. How the text describes this targeted violence is significant for how we understand the act of writing with which it is linked. The violence is not a standard variety of biblical violence. The typical weapon of biblical violence is the sword or dagger and sometimes the arrow. But in Judges 8, the text memorably relates that

Gideon employs "desert briers and thorns" (ברק, קוץ), with which he "threshes" (דוש) the elders of the city. The language of "threshing" recalls the retributive violence of gods in both biblical and ancient Near Eastern literature and iconography that utilize winepress imagery to express how deities "thresh" their opponents.[40] Gideon's use of thorns seems to lack a fully congruous parallel both in the Hebrew Bible and more broadly in ancient Near Eastern literature and iconography. Additionally, the text remains ambiguous about whether or not Gideon actually executes his victims. But this uniqueness and ambiguity seem to be the point. While there might be a metaphorical meaning behind his use of thorns, on the surface, this type of violence is a cruel and unusual punishment that grabs the reader's attention. The text seems to aim at describing a particular kind of violence, namely, bodily torture. Trampling or threshing bodies under thorns is an inefficient way of executing opponents. But if inflicting pain to teach a lesson is the end as well as the means, then Gideon's method seems appropriate. What many have failed to appreciate is how the text links this torture to writing, portraying a name-list as a mechanism that can facilitate power over the bodies of others. This has profound implications for understanding how some communities in ancient Israel might have interpreted bureaucratic literacy events.

To demonstrate how writing can enter the same field of meaning as violence in that it demonstrates power over bodies, it might help to theorize violence a little more fully. Few have done this more profoundly than Foucault, who claimed that the physical punishment of social deviants provides a spectacle through which sovereign powers symbolically enact their right to rule. Foucault claims that for much of history, public torture and execution served as a spectacle

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[40] See I.J. de Hulster, B. Strawn, and R. Bonfligio, "Iconographic Exegesis: Method and Practice," in *Iconographic Exegesis of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: An Introduction*, eds. I.J. de Hulster, B. Strawn, R. Bonfligio (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2015), 26-32.

similar to other public displays of power such as coronations. For Foucault, the broken and beaten bodies of resisters manifest sovereign power "at its most spectacular."[41] He understands torture as a theater that "made the body of the condemned man the place where the vengeance of the sovereign was applied, the anchoring point for a manifestation of power, an opportunity of affirming the dissymmetry of forces."[42] This understanding of violence fits well with how scholars have understood Judges 8, a narrative that places kingship, and therefore sovereign power, at its core. As "the most spectacular" display of sovereign power, Gideon's torture or execution of other bodies plays a pivotal role in framing him as a proto-monarchic figure.

On a theoretical level, writing has similarly been understood as a display of sovereign power, one that clearly overlaps with notions of bodily control. This is true even in our own highly literate society, where documents have been said to "materialize the spectral presence" of state power.[43] Consider also the example from Medieval England discussed in Chapter Two. In England at the time, literacy levels were low, similar to ancient Israel. Perhaps because of that, the newly subjected Anglo-Saxons viewed the writing practices of their Norman conquerors as practices that embodied their subjugation. The Domesday Book, mythically recording the names

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[41] Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 48.

[42] ibid., 55. Understanding torture as an effective, though brutal, means of teaching could potentially explain a textual problem in Judges 8. While Gideon threatens to "thresh" (דוש) the elders and chiefs with thorns in the MT of 8:7, 8:16 of the MT relates that he "made them know" (ידע) with the thorns, which some editions have translated as "punish." Other textual witnesses contain the variant דוש, parallel with the threat in 8:7. This is somewhat tantalizing since all the scribe would need to do is confuse the last consonant of the word. But it is difficult to see how a learned scribe would confuse a *shin* and *ayin*, though it is theoretically more possible in later periods when the two letters appear more similar. Nevertheless, given the theoretical associations with punishment and a sovereign making known or teaching his sovereignty, there does exist a parallel meaning between physical punishment and making known.

[43] V. Das and D. Poole, "Introduction," in *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, eds. V. Das and D. Poole (Sante Fe, NM: School for Advanced Research, 2004), 1.

and properties of every villager in England, became one of the most productive, awe-inspiring symbols of Norman control. Similarly, while the decapitations of nobles served as powerful symbols for shifting political power during the French Revolution, it is noteworthy that the burning of government documents was also an action that received great fanfare as a symbol of the same shift in political power. [44] These examples show that in diverse societies, the written documents of sovereigns have been understood as objects invested with political power alongside acts of violence. The same pairing of violence and writing found in the French Revolution appears in the Gideon narrative, where they complement one another as symbols of political power. Gideon's list can be understood as more than a mediator standing between his power and his subjects. It is a thing in its own right. Its capacity for manifesting his sovereign power is especially illustrated in how it expedites the most spectacular display of sovereign power—bodily violence. His use of writing then should be understood within the matrix of his royal actions, all of which are framed negatively, as the previous section discussed.

Name-lists in the ancient world would have overtly given material expression of sovereign power. Throughout the ancient Near East, simple name-lists represent one of our largest groups of extant texts. It is clear from their contents and from details in written correspondence that most such lists were used either to surveil subordinates or to mediate the conscription of labor and military service.[45] This is significant since surveillance, compulsory

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[44] B. Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2012), 38-40.

[45] The surveillance of subordinates who were working for the crown largely characterizes uses of writing in early Mesopotamia. For an overview, see P. Steinkeller, "The Function of Written Documentation in the Administrative Praxis of Early Babylonia," in *Creating Economic Order: Record-Keeping, Standardization, and the Development of Accounting in the Ancient Near East*, eds. M. Hudson and C. Wunsch (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2004): 65-88. During the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, writing maintains its function of surveillance while also expanding exponentially towards conscription. On this, see N. Postgate, *Bronze Age*

labor, and military service, in a way similar to bodily torture, also represent a sovereign's power

to control the bodies of subjects. While not as "spectacular" as torture and execution, the ability

to make the bodies of others a productive force against their will is another central sign of

sovereign political power.[46] Almost certainly then, communities experienced the physicality of

accounts and conscription lists, which were held by representatives of political authority, as a

visual cue of their own subjection, just as the Domesday book was considered a symbol of

Anglo-Saxon subjection. It is my contention that Gideon's list in Judges 8 reflects that such

beliefs about writing were operative in ancient Israel. In the passage, Gideon's name-list appears

alongside other symbols and actions of sovereign power. Moreover, it facilitates the "most

spectacular" of all acts of sovereign power in bodily torture.

    In sum, I side with the numerous scholars who understand Gideon to be "an essentially

negative figure" of kingship.[47] But I add to these arguments by suggesting that Gideon's use of a

name-list functions as a central component of this royal critique. This case would suggest a way

in which acts of administrative writing in ancient Israel could carry a latent negative affect, one

that intersected with culturally informed reservations about the institution of kingship. Allowing

for ancient diversity of opinion, such a negative affect would have been unevenly experienced.

But because this name-list appears in an episode aimed at critiquing the monarchy, it attests that

at least for some in ancient Israel, administrative writing embodied fears about the perceived

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Bureaucracy: Writing and the Practice of Government in Assyria (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2014). These uses also dominate in Egyptian administrative writing practices.
See the chapter titled "Writing and Society in Early Egypt," in John Baines, *Visual and Written
Culture in Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

    [46] Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*, 25-26.

    [47] Baker, "A Dream Carries," 358.

dangers of centralized governance. According to the depiction in Judges 8, such forms of writing were thought to materialize coercive bodily control and were only one step removed from physical violence. This view becomes even more suggestive when considering the nature of the individuals listed and punished.

4.3.3 The Crown and the Beard: The Elders as Victims of Royal Violence and Writing

Gideon's use of violence and writing against the elders (זקנים) of Succoth further portrays writing as a weapon that some perceived was changing the sociopolitical landscape. By attacking this body of local leaders, the narrative gives voice to concerns over how a growing monarchy might invade autonomous village life and disenfranchise traditional kin-based political organization. Writing is given a role in that invasion. The elders were the foundation of power at the local level in the southern Levant. Such local institutions were most prone to feeling disenfranchised by the rise of monarchy. The body of elders in the passage is a clear nod to horizontal modes of political organization since the elders comprised of a settlement's רש בת אבות "heads of the fathers' houses."[48] These were the patriarchal leaders of the smallest Israelite social unit at the level of the family compound. In kin-based societies, such leaders represent local autonomy. Based on their depiction in biblical literature, elders had the final say in judicial and executive matters at the local level.[49] It is this traditional, autonomous locus of power that gives way to Gideon's increasing power in Judg 8, embodied in his use of writing and torture against them.

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[48] McNutt, *Reconstructing the Social World*, 101.

[49] See the following non-exhaustive selection of examples: Deut 21:4-8; 22:13-21; Josh 9:11; 20:1-9; 1 Sam 11:8; 16:4; 2 Sam 3:17; 5:1-3. For a treatment of the elders' role in society, see H. Reviv, *The Elders in Ancient Israel: A Study of a Biblical Institution* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1989).

Some biblical passages suggest the institution of the elders indeed conceded political influence to the crown, especially in the form of royally appointed judges (שפטים) and officers (שטרים) (Deut 16:18, 17:8, 2 Chr 19:5).[50] The disenfranchisement of elders to the benefit of royal appointees takes center stage when the prophet Jeremiah's trial pits the elders of the land against the officials and judges of Judah (Jer 26). In this literary representation, the elders defend Jeremiah while the royally appointed officials advocate for his imprisonment. The royal appointees win the day, a series of events that seem to give voice to the growing power of the crown at the expense of local leaders. If kings installed their own appointed bureaucrats at the local level, it could have easily been viewed as a monarchic intrusion. The story of Jeremiah seems to attest to this. Other narratives do the same. For example, according to 1 Kgs 4:7-19, Solomon presided over a redistricting reform where he placed crown officials throughout the tribal territories. It is impossible to confirm whether such a redistricting ever took place in the 10th century BCE as the text claims. But the literary representation of such an administrative maneuver demonstrates that later authors envisioned the possibility for at least their own time. If such a redistricting ever did take place, it could have been perceived as disenfranchising local leadership groups and, therefore, a form of monarchic overreach. A professionalized class of officers benefitting from the institution of monarchy to the detriment of the tribes is at the heart of many other biblical critiques against the monarchy. In 1 Sam 8:14, for example, Samuel warns

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[50] For our purposes, it is significant that one group of royal appointees who siphoned power away from the council of elders bears a title with potential scribal connections. The *šṭrm*, translated from Hebrew as "officials," is a potential loanword from the Akkadian *šaṭāru* "to write." Because the Hebrew use of the root only appears in participle form, some have reasoned that Hebrew borrowed the root from Akkadian to designate officials whose officialdom stemmed from their associations with writing. It is nevertheless a difficult, if tantalizing position to prove. Notably, the root in Aramaic denotes "document." See P. Mankowski, *Akkadian Loanwords in Biblical Hebrew*, HSS 47 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 142-144, especially fn. 534.

that the king will "take the best of your fields and vineyards and give them to his courtiers."

Judges 8 likewise plays on such local disenfranchisement by having Gideon attack the most

elemental unit of traditional Israelite political decision-making in the elders.

The trope of bodily torture against the elders potentially signals a sociopolitical struggle

between the competing power nodes of the tribes and monarchy. According to Tracy Lemos,

scenes of brutality akin to Judges 8 often signify regime change in biblical, as well as ancient

Near Eastern art and literature. Narrative and artistic scenes of mutilation, whether in the form of

torture or corpse abuse, function primarily to "materialize a newly established power dynamic."[51]

As an example, only needs to skim Neo-Assyrian palace reliefs where the mutilation of defeated

political enemies is a common trope, perhaps the most common.[52] Biblically, we could look to an

example like Jehu's coup, where the most powerful matriarch of the ousted Omride dynasty,

Jezebel, suffers a memorably gruesome fate, being cast down from a tower and then eaten by

dogs (2 Kgs 9:30-37). Her mutilation couples with an equally brutal scene involving the

decapitation of seventy Omride princes (2 Kgs 10:1-11). The princes' heads are piled outside the

city gates, an act of "mortuary landscaping" that horrifyingly announced a shift in sociopolitical

control.[53] Similarly, Esther 7 uses Haman's body, which hangs from a gratuitously high position,

to serve as a grim sign of the power reversal between Haman and Mordecai. These examples

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[51] T.M. Lemos, "Shame and Mutilation of Enemies in the Hebrew Bible," *JBL* 125, no. 2 (2012): 225-241.

[52] E. Bleibtreu, "Grisly Assyrian Record of Torture and Death," *BAR* 17, no. 1 (1991).

[53] For mortuary landscaping, see F. Stavrakopoulou, "Gog's Grave and the Use and Abuse of Corpses in Ezekiel 39:11-20," *JBL* 129, no. 1 (2010): 67-84.

demonstrate how "negotiations of power and status lie at the heart of mutilation's efficacy."[54] Gideon's use of brutality against the elders can be understood to carry a similar meaning concerning regime change. But instead of materializing imperial subjugation or the rise of a new dynasty, it instead materializes a royal eclipsing of local autonomy and the tribal structure.

For the Gideon episode, a nascent monarchy commits violent acts against the elders, a foundational institution of the tribes, one that represents the ideal of local autonomy. When brutality is understood as a manifestation of a shift in power dynamics, Gideon's violence signals a shift in the sociopolitical landscape with the old decentralized ethos of the tribes being reoriented beneath the new realities of centralized monarchic authority in the figure of Gideon.[55] Through the spectacle of bodily torture, the episode illustrates how the monarchy's "claim on the living body as an object of punishment deeply underlies" the newly established political reality of kingship.[56] In Judges 8, the smallest political unit, one rooted in kinship and representing autonomy at the local level, is now answerable to a single individual whose relationship with the elders is characterized by force.

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[54] Lemos, "Shame and Mutilation," 241.

[55] That such a regime change lies at the heart of Judg 8 might also be suggested by the number of elders and chiefs Gideon tortures: seventy-seven. Robin Baker has shown that the number seven is woven throughout the Gideon pericope in an esoteric manner. While the number seven is considered mystical in biblical and ancient Near Eastern thought, it and its units also have royal connotations. Though he does not discuss the seventy-seven elders punished by Gideon, a royal understanding of the number is fitting, given the rest of the text's interest in the monarchy. See, Baker, "A Dream Carries," 365. Alternatively, the specific number seventy-seven might signify the idea of disproportionate vengeance given that it appears, perhaps surprisingly, only one other time in biblical literature where it is connected with the figure of Lamech and a homicide (Gen 4:23-24).

[56] S. Richardson, "Death and Dismemberment in Mesopotamia: Discorporation between the Body and the Body Politic," in *Performing Death: Social Analyses of Funerary Traditions in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*, ed. Nicola Laneri, OIS 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 190

But the new realities of a political reorientation in Judges 8 can be understood as expressed in more than violent acts alone. The symbolically loaded violence of the passage was expedited by a written list. According to recent anthropological work, writing can be understood as expressing the same types of regime change and political reorientation attributed to scenes of brutality. In fact, one theorist suggests that "text objects provide a particularly powerful communicative avenue" for locating "people in culturally defined landscapes, and in particular in sociopolitical landscapes."[57] Administrative writing in the form of mundane documents has been shown to be particularly charged with this capacity of orienting people in political landscapes. Documents have increasingly been understood as objects that people experience as creating and constituting political realities rather than objects that merely reflect those realities. Documents are often experienced as not just representations but as objects that "make things come into being."[58] Administrative writing can be understood as a generative force whose textual artifacts "transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry."[59] According to these theoretical underpinnings, Gideon's name-list materially relocates the local body of leadership within the new landscape of the monarchy. A proto-monarchic figure wields a complete list of their names, signaling a power-shift. Writing's ability to

[57] S.E. Jackson, "Writing as Material Technology: Orientation within Landscapes of the Classic Maya World," in *Writing as Material Practice: Substance, Surface, and Medium*, eds. K.E. Piquette and R.D. Whitehouse (London: Ubiquity Press, 2013), 46.

[58] B. Frohmann, "Documentary Ethics, Ontology, and Politics," *Archival Science* 8, no. 3 (2008), 291-303. For more on documents as more than simple representations, see M.S. Hull, "Documents and Bureaucracy," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (2012): 254

[59] Hull quotes this from Latour in order to illustrate how this thinking about documents is influenced by materiality studies. See ibid., 253. For the original, see B. Latour, *Reassembling the Social* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 39.

accomplish this in the passage is especially manifested in how the list expedites brutality, which itself signals regime change and the emerging' monarchy's assumption of dominance over traditional power structures. Judges 8 brings together two of the most powerful symbols of political power. Writing and the violence it facilitates work in conjunction with one another to materialize a newly established power dynamic in which the monarchy subjugates and penetrates into the most basic level of kin-based politics. But Judges 8 is not the only place in biblical literature where writing can be understood to send this message.

4.4 Gideon's List in the Deuteronomistic History: Other Depictions of Violence and Administrative Writing

Critics might contend that the above interpretation overreads Gideon's name-list, arguing that it exoticizes a simple act. On the contrary, one must consider that explicit depictions of administrative writing in DtrH are relatively rare. While the use of letters is often implied, it is rare for them to be explicitly mentioned and therefore foregrounded.[60] The appearance of lists is even more rare, with the verbal root כתב explicating the writing of a name-list only in Judg 8:14. The relative infrequency of explicit administrative documents in DtrH seems to attest to a biblical memory of a time when such writing was less matter of fact and potentially more loaded with meaning. Of course, as we have seen in the anthropological literature, the loaded affect of administrative documents persists even in societies and cultures heavily mediated by writing. But from a literary perspective, the fact that episodes of administrative writing are less populous in DtrH makes them more conspicuous in this literature.

When we do find people writing in the earlier contexts of DtrH, the act is usually related

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[60] On the implied use of letters in DtrH, see W. Schniedewind, *The Finger of the Scribe: How Scribes Learned to Write the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 109-116.

to the inscribing of monuments or the recording of authoritative religious texts. Significantly,

many such religious and monumental depictions of writing in biblical literature are considered to

be late interpolations.[61] But given the rarity of administrative writing, these late interpolators

seem to have lacked a similar interest in adding explicit depictions of ephemeral, administrative

writing. If depictions of administrative writing were more numerous in earlier contexts, we might

either suggest that they are off-handed comments, representative of how effusive in society the

technology was, or that later writers inserted them just as they did with religious and

monumental depictions of writing. But neither seems to be the case, based on the few instances

of ephemeral, bureaucratic writing in DtrH. Thus, when it does appear to explicitly frame an

interaction, there is good reason to suspect that the historian, or more likely the writers or

narrators of the traditions he borrows, expect the depiction to make an important contribution to

the story. In this case, explicit attitudes towards writing's administrative usage would be present

within the depiction.

More importantly, the handful of other DtrH passages where lists, accounts, and

(explicitly mentioned) letters are depicted support the conclusions I offer for the Gideon episode.

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[61] See treatments of Joshua 24's inscribed steles in C. Nihan, "The Torah Between Samaria and Judah: Shechem and Gerizim in Deuteronomy and Joshua," in *The Pentateuch as Torah: New Models for Understanding Its Promulgation and Acceptance*, eds. G.N. Knoppers and B.M. Levinson (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 187-223 and D. Polaski, "What Mean These Stones? Inscriptions, Textuality, and Power in Persia and Yehud," in *Approaching Yehud: New Approaches to the Study of the Persian Period*, ed. J.L. Berquist (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2007), 37-48. However, it would be wrong to consider all biblical depictions of monumental and religious writings as late interpolations. Many of these boast an awareness of earlier Iron Age inscriptional traditions. On this, see T. Hogue, "The Monumentality of the Sinaitic Decalogue: Reading Exodus 20 in Light of Northwest-Semitic Monument-Making Practices," *JBL* 138, no. 1 (2019): 79-99. This is true, especially considering the Ketef Hinnom amulets, which attest to the practice of inscribing religious texts in the 7th century B.C.E., well before the period Nihan and Polaski claim Joshua's depiction of monumental writing was written. On the Ketef Hinnom amulets, see J.D. Smoak, *The Priestly Blessing in Inscription and Scripture: The Early History of Numbers 6:24-26* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

These other depictions not coincidentally also put the technology of writing to sinister ends. Given the clear associations of Gideon with the monarchy, it makes sense to compare the act of writing in Judg 8:14 with other instances of writing in contexts of monarchical administration.

Because it involves listing names, one significant parallel to the story of Gideon is David's census (2 Sam 24). This passage will be dealt with extensively in the following chapter, but it is appropriate to highlight it here. The text relates that David's counting (מנה) and registering (פקד) of the Israelites results in a devastating plague. Notions of writing clearly underlie the story. Both the Gideon and David accounts concern the written name in list-form. Both appear to have disastrous consequences for the persons whose names are listed. Furthermore, the language, narrative context, and literary history of 2 Samuel 24 all evoke the same anxiety about political centralization as found in the Gideon narrative, once again positioning administrative writing in the context of social and political changes, changes that some perceived as a deterioration of traditional culture.

The biblical text attributes an administrative act of writing to David one other time. This instance likewise reflects a distrustful attitude towards monarchical uses of the technology by using it to facilitate unjust violence. In 2 Sam 11:14, David sends a letter to Joab commanding him to place Uriah at the front lines, thus manufacturing his death and clearing the way for him to pursue Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. While the text's negative portrayal of David is universally recognized, the fact that writing contributes to David's negative character has received less attention. Notably, this is the only time David is said to have sent a letter. By relating that David cruelly made Uriah carry the letter which sealed his fate, the text seems to foreground the idea of writtenness (2 Sam 11:14b). According to Adam Miglio, letter-writing in DtrH symbolizes the idea of sociopolitical complexity and thus serves as a means by which the writers critique the

failings of the Israelite monarchy.[62] Regarding David's use of a letter to manufacture Uriah's murder, Miglio claims that the letter serves "as a literary symbol that called attention to [David's] abuse of power and sharpened the narrator's indictment of the newly founded monarchy for its religio-political failings."[63] This understanding of 2 Samuel 11 aligns with my argument for Judges 8, where writing is implicated in a violent physical attack perpetrated by a monarchical figure.

In a narrative that once again associates writing with violence, Jehu uses letters to carry out a violent coup (2 Kgs 10:1-8). The letters expedite the execution and mutilation of Omride descendants, a topic Miglio discusses at length. More relevant to the depiction of writing in Judges 8 is Jezebel's use of the technology to circumvent Israelite legal traditions through forgery, intimidation, and murder (1 Kings 21). Once Jezebel learns that her husband, Ahab, covets prime real estate owned by Naboth, a local villager, she sets in motion a devious chain of events carried out by writing. Forging Ahab's signature, she sends threatening letters to local elders and nobles. In the letters, she commands them to manufacture a court case against Naboth in which two witnesses are to perjure by claiming Naboth cursed Yahweh and the king. Naboth is summarily condemned to death. Because he is executed for a high crime, the crown is able to take possession of his patrimonial estate. Just as in Gideon's use of writing, Jezebel wields the technology to violate a foundational component of the tribal system. She uses it to illicitly transfer ancestral land to the crown.

The depiction of writing in the Naboth episode is loaded with commentary on the

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[62] A. Miglio, "The Literary Connotations of Letter-Writing in Syro-Mesopotamia and in Samuel and Kings," *Biblische Notizen* 162 (2014): 33-46.

[63] ibid., 39.

potential negative effects of document-mediated interaction. First, the Naboth episode displays

an awareness of how the technology is prone to dishonesty in the form of forgeries and fake

documents. Jezebel "wrote letter's in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal" (1 Kgs 21:8).

This awareness of the falsehood writing allows will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Six

of this dissertation. More important for the arguments of the present chapter is how the text

attributes blind obedience to the elders and nobles who receive the forged letters. Jezebel orders

them to initiate a public trial on false pretenses and accuse Naboth of blasphemy and treason

through the testimony of two "scoundrels" in an effort to have Naboth executed (21:9-10). The

text relates that the recipients of the letters "did just as it was written in the letters she had sent"

(21:11) A reader is struck by how the recipients unquestioningly complete an unjust ruse they

know will lead to the murder of one of their own. They obey simply because the directive is

sealed with the king's seal, a fact that seems to critique both sovereign authority as well as

writing. There is here a veiled critique in the dangers of investing too much power in written

directives, a potential topic of discourse in societies where administrative uses of writing are

relatively young.[64]

Even more significant, however, is how Jezebel's ruse, mediated by writing, centers on

the conversion of ancestral land to crown property. According to the Hebrew Bible, working and

protecting the ownership of ancestral lands comprised the major social function of the tribe at the

level of the "house of the father" (בת אב) and "clan" (משפחה), a notion that resonates with

anthropological theory.[65] Maintenance of the patrimonial estate ensured the economic survival

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[64] M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

[65] Mcnutt, *Reconstructing the Society*, 90-91; Bendor, *The Social Structure of Ancient Israel*, 118, 202-203; Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family."

and social cohesion of these kinship units. Loss of the estate would economically devastate one's lineage and ultimately could jeopardize "the old cohesiveness and joint liability of the sib."[66] Ownership of the patrimonial estate was also ideologically and religiously charged as it generally meant ensuring access to the family tomb and facilitating participation in the ancestral cult. This access allowed kinship units to maintain connections with deceased ancestors, a connection that constituted "an important integrative element of the social, religious, and emotional bond of kinship."[67] The alienation of the patrimonial estate could thus put a strain on kinship bonds. Additionally, ownership of the patrimonial estate also comprised a major ideological sticking point centered around the egalitarian ethos of tribal organization. Although there can be great disparities of wealth among tribal societies, the ideal of egalitarianism is valued. Alienation from family land would be viewed through such a lens.[68] It should come as no surprise then that DtrH foregrounds the issue of land ownership in negative assessments of the early monarchy (1 Sam 8:14; 22:7). The story of Naboth then realizes deeply held suspicions about the potential for monarchy to erode the backbone of traditional society. And like Judges 8, the text refracts these suspicions through the technology of writing with Jezebel's forged letters serving as objects that carry out the erosion. Naboth's life and patrimonial estate are lost because of written royal directives.

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[66] Halpern, "Jerusalem and the Lineages," 27.

[67] Blenkinsopp, "Deuteronomy and the Politics of Post-Mortem Existence," 3. On the connection between the patrimonial estate and the family tomb, see also Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family," 24; Halpern, "Jerusalem and the Lineages"; Ackerman, "Cult Centralization."

[68] See fn. 13.

Judges 8 is thus not alone among biblical narratives that tie together writing, violence, and culturally-shaped attitudes about political organization. The interpretation I offer for Gideon's name-list should be understood within this wider Deuteronomistic tendency to highlight the failings of monarchy with the material symbol of written lists and letters. My interpretation of writing in Judges 8 is thus far from exoticizing. It fits into a wider pattern, especially represented in 1 Kings 21, where the written paraphernalia of administration frames the monarchy's violation of traditional culture. Together, these passages attest that moments and objects of administrative writing materialized a perceived and unwanted monarchic encroachment on village life. Judges 8's depiction of writing as a tool of violence fits within both its immediate literary context and a broader literary scope at the level of DtrH. As the following section shows, it also fits within a broader cultural context.

4.5 Gideon's List in Its Cultural Context

Israel was not the only society in the ancient Near East that found the materiality of lists and accounts to be productive symbols of political domination. Neo-Assyrian monumental reliefs bring scenes of violence and scenes of writing together in order to convey messages of regime change and political domination. From a wider cultural perspective, lending such a powerful affect to writing in Judges 8 is justified by these art-historical depictions of writing from Assyria and by additional depictions from Egypt. Here too, writing powerfully distills the idea of domination over bodies, being brought into close alignment with physical violence. These depictions also illustrate how biblical narratives that cast administrative writing as an act of terror could continue to be meaningful in new contexts, especially in the world of Neo-Assyrian imperial domination.

Neo-Assyrian reliefs assign writing a prominent role in scenes of bodily mutilation. The

foregrounded appearance of writing in these scenes suggests administrative writing was

understood as one part of a constellation of acts and symbols that expressed Assyrian imperial

hegemony. Thanks to Irene Winter, it is now well known that in the 8th century, Assyrian palace

reliefs made a decided thematic shift away from the heavily symbolic world of ritual towards the

world of historical narrative.[69] From this time onwards, most palace reliefs narrate scenes of

battle, siege, capture, and deportation. But they especially favor depictions of the execution and

mutilation of captured enemies. What is significant for our purposes is that in the entire corpus of

Assyrian reliefs, Julian Reade counts thirty-five representations of scribes, nearly all of which

appear in scenes after the thematic shift to historical narrative.[70] While Reade makes few

comments about the scenes in which they appear, a survey of these representations reveals that

the vast majority of scribes appear in reliefs aimed at representing violence and social

dislocation. More to the point, most Assyrian artistic depictions of writing involve scribes

counting heads, whether of captives or decapitated enemies.[71] Similar to what I propose for the

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[69] I. Winter, "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs," *Studies in Visual Communication* 7, no. 2 (1981): 2-38.

[70] J. Reade, "Visual Evidence for the Status and Activities of Assyrian Scribes," in *Leggo! Studies Presented to Frederick Mario Fales on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, eds. G. Lanfranchi, D. Bonacossi, C. Pappi, and S. Ponchia (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012) 699-718.

[71] For scribes enlisting captives, see BM 102079 BM 124910, BM 124931; R. Barnett, E. Bleibtreu, and G. Turner, *Sculptures from the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh* (London: British Museum Press, 1998), pls. 143, 186, 453; P. Albenda, *The Palace of Sargon, King of Assyria* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1986), pl. 137; R. Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh* (London: British Museum Publications, 1976), pl. LXVII. For scribes enumerating decapitated heads, see BM 124801, BM 124903, BM 124786, BM 124825, BM 124774, BM 124782, BM 124955; Barnett et al., *Sculptures from the Southwest Palace*, pls. 56, 83, 132, 363. Scenes depicting writing as more tangentially connected to violence usually involve scribes taking dictation during or after the capture of a city. For these, see BM 118882, AO 19892; Albenda, *The Palace of Sargon*, pls. 111, 136.

Gideon narrative, these Assyrian depictions, attest to clear associations between violence and the employment of administrative writing, particularly the acts of listing and counting. While it could be argued that this distribution has more to do with the nature of Neo-Assyrian depictions, being as they are mostly concerned with violence, this fact by itself does not explain why scenes of writing should appear so frequently alongside this obsession. The Gideon narrative thus seems to fit within a wider ancient Near Eastern backdrop that understood violence and writing as actions that neatly distilled the same idea—political domination.

In their pairing of writing and violence, the Neo-Assyrian reliefs recall Foucauldian notions of power, where power is fundamentally understood as the ability to control the bodies of others. Such control of bodies is the dominant theme of Neo-Assyrian reliefs. For instance, the Assyrians variously bind bodies and deport them. However, if control of bodies represents the pinnacle of power, then the pinnacle of this pinnacle is represented by violence, the ability to inscribe pain on the bodies of others, especially the ability to dismember those bodies. Thus, the Assyrians relied on scenes of torture, execution, and post-mortem mutilation to compliment scenes of binding and deportation in order to convey their unrivaled political dominance through the motif of bodily control.[72] Writing appears most frequently in the Assyrian relief corpus alongside other motifs of bodily control. Scribes even sometimes appear at the very focal point of the reliefs depicting violence, as we will see. How violence conveys power is clear enough. But administrative writing conveys the same notions. It, too, evokes bodily control. The written list is the apparatus by which living bodies are counted, sorted, moved, and deported. Just as portrayed in the Gideon narrative, this Neo-Assyrian iconography reflects a coginitive overlap

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[72] Z. Bahrani, *Rituals of War: The Body and Violence in Mesopotamia* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008). Her work was influential in my understanding of violence as depicted in Judg 8.

between writing and violence.

The prominent role writing played in broadcasting terror within the Assyrian imagination is perhaps best exemplified in one of the more famous Assyrian depictions of scribes. Coming from Tiglath Pileser III's central palace at Nimrud, the two scribes in relief BM 118882 often appear on the cover of books or in articles about scribal practice in the ancient Near East (Figure 4.1). But within these modern scholarly works, the scribes are usually uncontextualized, the surrounding scene having been cropped out. The scene comes from a massive relief that depicts the deportation of a city in Babylonia. The scribes dominate the center of the relief. They are larger than the captives, the herded animals, and even the city itself. Here, a scene of writing does not just complement but dominates a depiction of the violent, dehumanizing, and socially disruptive experience of deportation. In the Assyrian imagination betrayed by the relief, one of the most efficient means of symbolizing control was through the materiality of writing. The dominance of the scribes in the scene suggests that the Assyrians understood fleeting moments of administrative inscription as an unforgettable part of the public spectacle of political domination.

Figure 4.1

(BM 118882) Assyrian scribes take dictation after the overthrow of a Babylonian city. Booty, especially in the form of livestock, is carried away.

Among Assyrian images of violence, writing appears most frequently alongside decapitation. Typically in these scenes, an Akkadian and Aramaic scribe stand side by side over a pile of dismembered heads, tallying the total with the Assyrian king sometimes looking on in approval (see figure 4.2). Writing's close association with these scenes of violence is significant since decapitation seems to have formed the most productive symbol of domination for the Assyrians. Dismembered heads take bodily control to its most extreme. In the words of Rita Dolce, decapitation was understood in the ancient Near East as "a unique act, not comparable to other types of mutilation, and therefore charged with a special symbolic and communicative significance."[73] Furthermore, Francesca Stavrakapoulou notes that decapitation alongside other forms of corpse abuse often "appears to demonstrate the extension of state authority into the post-mortem world."[74] Because writing frequently complements these symbolically loaded scenes of decapitation, this suggests that it too carried a closely aligned communicative significance, one that easily overlapped with cultural notions of state authority. Much like the Gideon narrative, these Assyrian reliefs give the performance of writing a prominent place among the most overt cultural symbols of domination.

In Neo-Assyrian representations, writing and violence do not only overlap in conveying notions of bodily control. They also overlap in conveying dehumanization. In a recent monograph, Tracy Lemos argues that conceptions of violence in the ancient Near East were inseparable from conceptions of personhood, meaning that acts of violence were fundamentally understood to dehumanize the victim. She states that "Israelites and many other groups in the

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[73] R. Dolce, *Losing One's Head in the Ancient Near East: Decapitation and Interpretation of Meaning* (London: Routledge, 2017), 1-2.

[74] Stavrakapoulou, "Gog's Grave," 73. On this notion, also see Richardson, "Death and Dismemberment," 191.

ancient world utilized violence to demarcate lines of personhood, to shift the status of a human being from that of person to that of non-person, and to highlight the superior status and claim to personhood of the one inflicting the violence upon someone else."[75] According to this understanding, one reason violence so powerfully conveys the idea of domination is that it illustrates the power of the perpetrator to remove personhood from the victim, the power to dehumanize the other.

Figure 4.2
(BM 124955) From Sennacherib's Southwest palace at Nineveh, Room XXVIII, panel 9. Aramaic and Akkadian scribes tally a pile of decapitated heads at their feet.
© Trustees of the British Museum

The ability of violence to dehumanize reaches a zenith in post-mortem mutilation. Thus, regarding decapitation, Dolce remarks that it was "the exemplary way of reducing the other to inanimate object."[76] Decapitation seems to have partially accomplished this extreme dehumanization because of ancient Near Eastern notions of the afterlife. The act was understood to "render the deceased somehow socially unidentifiable, disabled, displaced, or distressed in the

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[75] T.M. Lemos, *Violence and Personhood in Ancient Israel and Comparative Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 4.

[76] Dolce, *Losing One's Head*, 7.

post-mortem state."[77] In short, it could jeopardize the victim's capacity to maintain social contact with living kin, a belief foundational to ancient Near Eastern conceptions of society and religion. Social dislocation was thus part and parcel with dehumanization. Both ideas governed how the act of decapitation was perceived. The frequent appearance of scribes in Assyrian depictions of violence should be understood within this context.

When examining the anthropological literature, one finds that dehumanization and social dislocation are additional places where conceptions of writing have been shown to enter the same field of meaning as violence. The very idea of dehumanization underlies bureaucratic governance. In the words of Weber, "bureaucracy develops more perfectly the more it is 'dehumanized,' the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements."[78] Of course, as Weber shows, a little dehumanization can be a good thing. Documents provide accountability and can help remove bias that is capable of corrupting government decisions. But the dehumanization latent within the use of documents is nonetheless not always experienced as a positive virtue. Many choose instead to only see the dark side of documents. For example, in Norway, the government's strict immigration policies coupled with the institutional culture of viewing immigration applications as "a case...materialized in a set of documents" rather than "an individual or life story" has been variously characterized by critics as "bureaucratic barbarism," "bureaucratic inhumanity," "inherent brutality," and "a particularly evil form of heartlessness."[79]

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[77] Stavrakopoulou, "Gog's Grave," 73.

[78] M. Weber, *Economy & Society* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1978), 975.

[79] O. Fuglerud, "Constructing Exclusion: The Micro-Sociology of an Immigration Department," *Social Anthropology* 12, no. 1 (2004): 25-40.

These characterizations align document-mediated interaction with brutality. This same alignment appears in Neo-Assyrian reliefs, which use scenes of written enlistment to complement scenes of mutilation.

The socially dislocating force of dehumanization attributed to violence can also be perceived in administrative writing. Those who are surveilled by writing have described it as a dehumanizing and socially disembedding experience. Those documented can perceive the act as "the lifting out of their social relations from their local contexts of interactions and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time and space."[80] This attitude speaks to how bureaucratic writing takes personal information about people, information as laconic as their names, and brings it into the orbit of the wider economic and political structures of those possessing the documents, structures that sometimes those who are documented do not wish to participate in. This disembedding brings a sense of reduction in social value, often described in dehumanizing terms such as "becoming just another name or number" in writing.[81] On theoretical grounds then, writing's ability to convey a message of dehumanization helps explain its frequent appearance alongside images of decapitation in Neo-Assyrian reliefs.

Of course, one might say the ability of documentation to dehumanize is only typical of our modern bureaucratic experience, a world heavily mediated by documents. But it is important to point out that such suspicious attitudes towards writing are often magnified in illiterate contexts, as discussed in the theory section of this dissertation. The mostly illiterate society of

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[80] K. Jones, "Becoming Just Another Alphanumeric Code: Farmers' Encounters with the Literacy and Discourse Practices of Agricultural Bureaucracy at the Livestock Auction," in *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*, eds. D. Barton, M. Hamilton, and R. Ivanič (London/New York: Routledge, 2000), 73.

[81] This idea is distilled in the very title of the previously cited article.

the ancient Near East provided a backdrop where literacy events would be highly loaded symbolically. Given the Assyrian association of writing with the highest symbol of dehumanization in the form of public beheadings, it seems likely that a similar dehumanizing capacity was attributed to the inscribing and counting of victims and prisoners. Indeed, the second most common depiction of writing in Neo-Assyrian reliefs involves the enlisting of prisoners, a type-scene where lines of captives are herded before scribes like unhuman livestock.[82] These scenes of enslavement thus produce a dehumanizing affect similar to the affect Lemos adduces for scenes of violence. Writing features in both, suggesting that the Assyrians likewise understood it to possess a dehumanizing affect.

The clearest example of an Assyrian belief that writing conveyed messages of dehumanization comes from Sennacherib's southwestern palace at Nineveh. I have cited one panel of this relief from room XVIII depicting the characteristic scene of two soldiers standing over and enumerating a pile of enemy heads (figure 4.2). But in the register below this panel and just to the right, there are two more scribes also standing side by side and enumerating (see figure 4.3). Instead of heads, however, these latter scribes enumerate booty, a cornucopia of inanimate furniture. In close proximity, these murals treat furniture and severed heads of humans as the same, as things to be counted and possessed, as inanimate objects. It is the writing in both that helps articulate the message. Their proximity calls a viewer to interpret that the beheaded humans in the first scene have passed out of the realm of humanity and entered into the realm of object.

The symbolic weight Neo-Assyrian reliefs accord to writing show that moments of administrative inscription could carry a terrorizing affect in the ancient Near East. Through the

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[82] See n. 62 for examples.

motifs of dehumanization and bodily control, depictions of writing complement the reliefs'
messages of domination. In the real world that these reliefs may reflect, Assyrian siege tactics
and their aftermath would have created a horror-filled spectacle. The images, smells, and sounds
of kinsmen hanging from spikes and being flayed undoubtedly haunted the memories of
survivors. Among this coterie of violent sights, piles of dismembered heads perhaps more than
any other were a source of unforgettable torment. The enduring effect such violent experiences
have on the memory are well known from modern survivors of war and other atrocities. At least
according to how the Assyrians saw such events, the presence of Assyrian scribes enlisting
captives and counting the dead also formed a memorable part of these violent moments,
suggesting that performances of such writing carried a negative affect which was akin to
violence. Just as decapitated heads created a spectacle, the wielding of documents seems to also
have been viewed as a public spectacle.

Figure 4.3
(BM 124955) From Sennacherib's Southwest
Palace at Nineveh, room XVIII, panel 9. An
Aramaic and Akkadian scribe register war spoil.
© The Trustees of the British Museum.

Of course, it is up for debate whether or not Assyrians were as violent as they depicted
themselves in art and literature. While they undoubtedly implemented the forms of torture and
execution monumentalized in their reliefs, it is possible that their actual violent practices failed
to match the scale depicted in their art. It is sometimes argued that this art exaggerated violence

as a form of propaganda. By doing so, it encouraged submission by foreign delegations or, alternatively, invited and encouraged Assyrian elites to participate in an ideology of political control through intimidation.[83] But even if these depictions are characterized as more imaginative, the affect attributed to writing in them loses none of its power. Whether real or embellished, the Assyrians were looking to populate their art with symbols of domination. They found scenes of writing to be particularly productive for this, suggesting that moments of real bureaucratic inscription made the idea of political control palpable, nearly as palpable as violence.

To Israel's south, ancient Egyptian art also contains scenes that express the overlap between writing, violence, and dehumanization. Perhaps the clearest expression of this overlap comes from scenes depicting the severed hands of enemies, a practice confirmed by archaeology.[84] By severing the right hands of enemies, Egyptians soldiers symbolized how their victory neutered an enemy of his strength. In two reliefs attributed to Ramses III depicting this practice (20th Dynasty), scribes stand over a pile of severed hands and take notations, not unlike how Assyrian scribes are depicted with piles of decapitated heads.[85] From murals like Horemheb's tomb (18th Dynasty), comes the less violent but still traumatic enlistment of captives, where scribes materialize the new social realities of captured Nubians by recording

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[83] On the function of violence in Neo-Assyrian reliefs and their potential audience, see Richardson, "Death and Dismemberment,"; L. Bersani and U. Dutoit, *The Forms of Violence: Narrative in Assyrian Art and Modern Culture* (New York: Schocken, 1985); Bahrani, *Rituals of War*.

[84] M. Bietak, "The Archaeology of the 'Gold of Valour,'" *Egyptian Archaeology* 40 (2012): 32-33.

[85] Both examples come from Medinet Habu.

them in administrative registries.[86] The dehumanization such scenes convey is suggested by similar scenes where the objects counted by scribes are not humans, but animals and other inanimate objects.[87] Just as in Assyrian art and in Judges 8, these scenes show that Egyptian society also viewed the performance of administrative enlistment as a powerful symbol of domination. There, writing was viewed as a sign of terror, as an unforgettable part of the socially disruptive experience of capture and torture.

The depiction of writing in Judges 8 thus fits within a wider cultural perspective. Both there and in artistic representations from Egypt and especially Assyria, writing is associated with violence, complementing messages of political domination. This is not to say that the Gideon narrative directly draws on these cross-cultural representations. Rather, each work draws on a common cultural stock of perceptions about writing. Each display how moments of administrative inscription could serve as a means of terror in their respective societies, and each show how such forms of writing were tightly bound up with notions of sovereign power. If this was true for Assyria and Egypt, societies more heavily mediated by writing and permeated with royal ideology, then it is safe to assume that it was even more true for ancient Israel, a society where such forms of writing arose relatively late and where royal ideology was more constrained by tribal politics. Furthermore, writing was likely more charged with these notions in ancient Israel, given the southern Levant's checkered past with the technology.

4.6 Gideon's List in Its Historical Context

The loaded meaning I attribute to the name-list in Judg 8:14 is compelling when the

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[86] Horemheb's tomb is located at the Saqqara necropolis, west of Memphis.

[87] One example comes from the tomb of Userhat at the necropolis of Sheikh abd el Gurna in Thebes (18th Dynasty). On the wall mural, scribes tally wine production.

passage is considered in the light of the historical contexts that most plausibly could have produced it. Judges 8:4-21 is generally considered to have been an independent unit, pre-dating the material that fronts it.[88] Some scholars contend that the unit has a credible origin in ancient, pre-Israelite lore. Others place it firmly in the 8th-7th centuries BCE. Those that are of the more ancient opinion base their view in large part on the political landscape assumed by the story, one that is characterized by a complete absence of "group identities," especially underlined by no mention of Israel or its associated tribes.[89] Lacking these, the world of the passage forms a clear break from the themes explored in the rest of the Gideon complex, where Israel and tribal relations take center stage. This passage is instead concerned with a small number of people in a delimited geographic scope on the eastern side of the Jordan with locations only identified by settlement names. Neither the figure of Gideon nor the towns of Succoth and Penuel are affiliated with any larger group such as Israel or even more narrowly Manasseh, as people and sites typically are in the rest of Judges. For these scholars, Judg 8:4-21 thus seems to narrate a story about local leadership in the southern Levant at a time before Israel, making the depiction of Gideon's list quite early relative to most of biblical literature.

An early date for the sinister portrayal of writing in Judg 8:14 is interesting to consider in light of the southern Levant's epigraphic record discussed in the previous chapter. The passage would stem from a period subsequent to Egypt's withdrawal from the southern Levant. In such a historical context, the use of a name-list to mete out punitive regulation would conjure images of

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[88] I. de Castelbajac, "Le cycle de Gédéon ou la condemnation du refus de la royauté," *VT* 57 (2007): 145-161; W. Gross, *Richter* (Freiburg: Herder, 2009), 487. For a list of thematic differences that set Judg 8:4-21 apart from its surrounding narrative context, see Milstein, *Tracking the Master Scribe*, 160-164.

[89] Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel*, 63, see also 60-61.

Egypt's imperial hegemony. Furthermore, such an early date would illustrate how notions of administrative writing could have functioned as powerful symbols of political centralization on the eve of Israel's rise, a development unwanted by some since Gideon is portrayed in a negative light. The pre-Israelite date would thus illustrate how some considered bureaucratic applications of writing as taboo from an early period.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to base the dating of the passage on the depiction of the political landscape alone. The absence of "Israel" or other tribes in the passage might be due to other factors, especially since group identities undoubtedly existed in the region prior to Israel's rise. Still, however, while one may disagree with this early dating, it is significant that biblical literature places the memory of this nefarious use of writing in the period of the Judges. If the passage indeed dates later, its later authors still clearly grappled with proper manifestations of monarchy and they considered an earlier tribal history to be a productive time of reflection for this. Furthermore, they viewed administrative writing as an important matter to reflect on when thinking about the increased political centralization inherently related to monarchy. It is significant in that respect that many scholars attribute the passage not to pre-Israelite lore, but instead to the 8th-7th centuries BCE, the period of interest here due to writing's contemporary increase.[90] As a technology closely associated with force in the passage, the depiction of writing in Judges 8 would also have had profound meaning in this later Iron Age II context, when the Judahite state and military bureaucracy expanded its use of the technology in the service of increased political centralization. In this case, the passage would reflect the affective powers of writing that many attributed to it during a time of rapid change in Judah.

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[90] For this date of Judges and the Gideon episode, see A. Logan, "Rehabilitating Jephthah," *JBL* 128 (2009): 665-685; Baker, "A Dream," 372-374.

4.7 Conclusion

In sum, Judg 8:14 provides a memory of how Israel's tribal structure influenced the way administrative inscription was perceived by many in early Israel. The depiction of writing in Judges 8, contextualized as it is in a narrative about the centralization of political power, seems to give voice to dystopic attitudes towards administrative writing, with a proto-monarchic figure wielding it in order to enact political domination over a body of local elders, the traditional locus of distributed power. The text portrays writing as a technology that effectuates the monarchic erosion of kin-based politics. Whether such fears about the monarchy and writing's capabilities were justified is beside the point. They were at least imagined. And while these fears were rooted in Israel's tribal politics, they also were likely influenced by the region's history with writing. For long periods, Egypt used the technology to imperialize the southern Levant. The epigraphic record illustrates how local West Semitic polities may have been uneasy about using the technology for similar means of political control. Egypt and especially Assyria seem to have also picked up on administrative writing's symbolic import. From the perspective of their artistic representations, ephemeral moments of bureaucratic inscription served as a productive symbol of political domination, one that complemented notions of violence. Writing's associations with violence and political domination would carry an especially heavy symbolic weight in Israel, where traditional society and culture valued a decentralized political landscape and distrusted more authoritarian forms of kingship. This loaded symbolic weight of administrative writing is remembered anew and with even greater potency during a famous episode of king David's reign, discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DAVID'S CENSUS AND THE DISEASE OF ADMINISTRATIVE

WRITING IN MONARCHIC ISRAEL

The literary representation in Gideon suggests that even small-scale, *ad-hoc* list-making in ancient Israel could be experienced as an attack against traditional society. Given this suggestion, how might DtrH present a large-scale bureaucratic program? This chapter explores that question by looking at DtrH's depiction of the census in 2 Samuel 24. I will argue that this representation of the census can likewise be understood to suggest that among the diversity of discursive narratives about administrative writing that circulated in ancient Israel and Judah, one included a perception that bound the technology to unwanted changes in society. One of the more perplexing passages in all of the Hebrew Bible stems from the taking of a census in 2 Samuel 24, which in conjunction with Exodus 30, depicts the census as a bureaucratic program capable of infecting individuals enrolled in the census with disease. On the basis of literary analysis and anthropological parallels, I argue that these passages use the diseased physical bodies of Israelites to express concerns over the diseased tribal body, a social and political unit that many perceived was suffering, and potentially dying, with the onset of monarchy. The census summoned such evocative beliefs because it was mediated through extensive writing practices, a highly symbolic mode of political control, one that gave material expression to the perceived decay of tribal autonomy brought on by centralized, dynastic rule.

My view of the census in 2 Samuel 24 as a challenge to monarchy conflicts with the dominant pro-monarchic stance found throughout much of DtrH. However, we should expect that there were differing views about political leadership in ancient Israel and Judah at different times and in different social contexts. These invariably made their way into the text due to its complicated prehistory and transmission. While a reader might see opposing ideologies about

kingship as textually disjunctive at first glance, the final edition of DtrH rather gives the impression of a literary dialectic that mirrors on-going factional conversations about political leadership.

After introducing 2 Samuel 24's attitude towards the census in the light of other historical examples of census-taking, this chapter reviews the most common scholarly explanations for why the census is linked to plague. This discussion lays the foundation for my argument that concerns about the "health" of society undergird the biblical association between census and plague. The chapter then turns to the material from ancient Mari, which provides a clear example of how West Semitic notions of political organization were thought to be jeopardized by census-taking. The example also illustrates how the physicality of written mediation encouraged this belief about the socially disruptive power of the census, an illustration that the chapter situates in theoretical discussions about the constitutive capacities diverse societies attribute to writing. After considering the Mari material in this light, the chapter turns to an examination of Hebrew biblical texts on the census, with a particular focus on 2 Samuel 24. I will argue that these texts show a sustained interest in the social structure, one that views the census as establishing a political competition between tribal and monarchic authorities. I will further argue that it was the written mediation of census-taking that brought this competition to bare. Finally, the chapter will argue that 2 Samuel 24 and its beliefs about the census, writing, and society stem from the reign of Hezekiah or shortly thereafter. This king's administrative reforms and increased use of writing thus informed the unease with political centralization found in 2 Samuel 24's depiction of the census.

5.1 Aversion to the Census in 2 Samuel 24 and in History

Regarding an ancient Israelite unease for census procedures, the most suggestive biblical

text is 2 Samuel 24. This text recounts that in anger, Yahweh "incited" (סות) David to count the people of Israel and Judah (24:1). By establishing the census as a consequence of divine anger, the narrative invests census-taking with a nefarious connotation. Yahweh depends on the census having a disastrous consequence, a dependence that assumes an existing aversion to census-taking in Israelite society. If this were not enough, even Joab, who is hardly a model for morality in biblical literature, hesitates to undertake the census, questioning David's motives (24:3). Joab, a man who once manufactured the death of his own soldier at the king's behest without any objections (2 Sam 11), has finally met a task he believes is too indecent. Nevertheless, David wins the day and Joab obeys orders. Over the course of nine months, he conducts a census of Israel. The end results are disastrous. In the text's most overt critique of the census, it relates that the enumeration of the people triggers divine judgment in the form of plague, and 70,000 Israelites perish as a result (24:15).[1]

From 2 Samuel 24, many scholars have deduced that census-taking was viewed contentiously in Israelite society. It is impossible to say whether the text reflects a historical correlation between a real census and a plague. Even if it does, it might only reflect the belief of a single author that the events were linked with the census causing the plague because of some evil inherent in the act of enumeration. Nevertheless, we can assume on historical and comparative grounds that if a king ever did conduct a census in ancient Israel or Judah, it likely received at least some pushback. Afterall, resistance to census-taking is not unique. The recording of names in a census can overtly express unwanted political coercion in any society.

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[1] According to MT, the prophet Gad offers David three vehicles for receiving his punishment: three years of famine, three months of flight before enemies, or three days of plague. However, as will be discussed more below, this Gad episode appears to be secondary to the passage. The original core made a clear link between census and plague.

This was particularly the case in antiquity since census-taking confirmed the dominion of a

political order over individuals whose bodies, through the census, were made subject to labor and

even death in the context of military conscription. The census also provided polities the ability to

facilitate taxation. In recent times, census-taking has transformed from a tool of conscription into

a mechanism for collecting data meant to cultivate more informed governance.[2] Although

different than a tool for extracting goods and labor, this new use of the census to make governed

subjects more known or "legible" still illustrates the census' union with the unwanted penetration

of state authority. The right to harvest information about households symbolizes the power a

government has to intrude upon the everyday lives of its subjects. The Domesday Book of

Medieval England remains a productive example in this respect.[3] Such political penetration

brings questions of authority, autonomy, and belonging to a boiling point, thus possibly

generating unrest.

Historical literature is populated with examples of census-taking's ability to provoke

resentment. The census has been viewed as a site of resistance in societies as diverse as colonial

India, Victorian England, and modern Egypt.[4] Cases in India illustrate how census-taking raises

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[2] On this language to describe the documentary practices of political power, see J.C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 64-65.

[3] M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 6, 32.

[4] For India, see A. Appadurai, "Number in the Colonial Imagination," in *Orientalism and the Post-Colonial Predicament*, eds. C.A. Breckenridge and P van der Veer (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 315-339. For England, see M. Stieg, "The Nineteenth Century Information Revolution," *The Journal of Library History* 15, no. 1 (1980): 46-48. For French resistance to the census in the 18th century, see P. Starr, "The Sociology of Official Statistics," in *The Politics of Numbers*, eds. W. Alonso and P. Starr (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1987), 12. For modern Egypt, see T. Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2002), 111.

questions of identity and legitimate authority in a colonial context. Cases like Victorian England, on the other hand, illustrate how a census can generate suspicions of corruption and administrative overreach. Thus, even more modern populations have often experienced census-taking with the same suspicious and distrusting spirit as those historical populations who experienced it as a means of economic and military coercion. Ancient Israel was likely no different in these respects. But due to long-engrained forms of decentralized political organization, ancient Israel experienced census-taking as a particularly profound assault on its traditional life, giving rise to the rather peculiar idea that the census could harm individuals on metaphysical levels.

In line with the social setting of ancient Israel, many of the more iconic anthropological examples of census resistance are found when tribal groups live within the boundaries of a territorial polity. First Nations tribes in Canada and Bedouin tribes in the southern Levant of the 18th-20th centuries provide some anthropological examples of this phenomenon.[5] Here, kin-based decentralized forms of sociopolitical organization oppose the census not only because of its coercive element that conflicts with more traditional forms of collective governance but also because of its perceived foreign element. Such tribal groups view themselves as independent from territorial polities. Thus, they often reject any political obligations imposed upon them by centralized authorities. Ancient Israel, then, provides a context where several reasons for resisting a census converge. There, the census was naturally resented because it was a means to

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[5] For Canada, see B.E. Hubner, "'This is the Whiteman's Law': Aboriginal Resistance, Bureaucratic Change, and the Census of Canada, 1830-2006," *Archival Science* 7, no. 3 (2003): 195-206. For Bedouin, see D.H.K. Amiran, "'Nomadic' and 'Beduin' Population in the Census Returns of Mandatory Palestine," *IEJ* 13, no. 3 (1963): 247-252. For an example from Africa, see P. Uvin, "On Counting, Categorizing, and Violence in Burundi and Rwanda," in *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Censuses*, eds. D. Kertzer, D. Arel, and D. Hogan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 148-175.

facilitate taxation and military conscription. But additionally, it brought these coercive issues to bear in a context where an emerging territorial polity clashed with historically kin-based forms of political organization. This convergence of political compulsion and social organization helps explain the census' unusual depiction in biblical literature.

As I will argue, a primary reason census-taking has attracted such negative political discourse across societies, and in ancient Israel in particular, is because of the way it makes governance tangible through written artifacts. As discussed in the last chapter, written objects possess a symbolic and affective quality. They give material expression to dominance and subjugation, consequently giving them the ability to solicit powerful emotional responses. This chapter will explore an additional dimension of written objects that compounds their affectivity, namely, the perceived belief that writing constitutes. As discussed in Chapter Two, when I say writing constitutes, I mean that those who use documents to mediate relationships impart to the written word a certain power, one they believe can create new realities or end old ones. Documents are believed to concretize relationships. For instance, when my uncle adopted my now cousin, their relationship as father and son was not officially cemented until the papers went through. This was the case even though in many aspects, my uncle had been a father to my now cousin for quite some time. Of course, they had a real lived relationship irrespective of the papers required by the bureaucracy. But adoptive parents and children nevertheless often experience such official inscription with a great deal of emotion, despite the realities of their lived past. The papers can be experienced as making matters real in a fresh way.

It may be objected that the constitutive power of documents is only found in developed societies with relatively high levels of literacy. But as I will discuss in more detail, societies can attribute to writing an even higher ability to fix reality when they first adopt it or when they have

already adopted it, but witness a growth in its spread. Some societies with no, low, or emerging

levels of literacy, like early Israel, have shown a tendency to grant writing a constitutive power

that can exceed the power highly literate societies grant it. At the same time, however, it should

be acknowledged that some societies who have newly adopted bureaucratic writing lend it no

constitutive powers.[6] Moreover, when a society allows writing to constitute, this does not

usually, if ever, mean that speech or action cannot constitute at the same time. For instance,

according to Melissa Ramos, Deuteronomy 27-28 attributes constitutive powers to the uttering of

curses and the performance of rituals.[7] Thus, I argue that it was the specific circumstances of

census-taking which allowed its use of writing to be viewed as constitutive. This is not to say

that the technology was viewed as constitutive in every context or even in every administrative

context.

The constitutive powers communities can impart to documents particularly come to the

fore when dealing with political power. Documents are one of the most tangible expressions of a

polity's existence. In the words of Ann Stoler, the written records a polity keeps on its subjects

are "monuments to configurations of state power."[8] In that sense, they constitute the state and

make it a real physical thing. They represent one of the central modes of interaction between a

political power and its subjects. This is no small thing. Our identity is intimately related to the

political powers who have claim on us, whether we perceive this positively or negatively. When

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[6] R. Thomas, *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[7] M. Ramos, "Spoken Word and Ritual Performance: The Oath and Curse in Deuteronomy 27-28," (PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2015).

[8] A. Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 87-109.

a polity records information on its subjects in writing, the affective responses can thus range from pride to utter resentment, illustrating how the constitutive power of writing compounds its affectivity. These powers of writing come to a head in the census. The written artifacts mediating the census are perceived to solidify the dominion of polities over those included in the census-taking, giving rise to the types of rumors, resentment, and resistance common to census procedures.

When texts from the Hebrew Bible on the census are examined in conjunction with cuneiform literature from Mari, I contend that census-taking was resisted in these societies because of how its written procedures were believed to solidify political and social belonging. Writing's constitutional effects were taken quite literally. For some ancient Near Eastern societies with historical ties to tribal structures, the census fixed political action and social belonging in a way that was at odds with kinship systems, traditionally preferred because of their fluidity. Not only did the written census make possible the type of taxation, forced labor, and military conscription decried in DtrH critiquing the monarchy (1 Sam 8), but it also made participation in that system binding because of the constitutive powers the community granted to writing. It thus violated the delicate balance of "collaborative politics," making participation in war politically compulsory instead of socially voluntary.[9] The name in the register was a binding obligation. This is why out of all the symbols of monarchy and political centralization, the census attracted such powerfully negative discourse associating it with disease.

5.2 Scholarship: Explaining the Census-Epidemic link

2 Samuel 24's rationale for associating the census with plague has troubled scholars.

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[9] D. Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); see also S.L. Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

What is so bad about a census that it summoned divine punishment in the form of a plague? Is there any specific relationship with the census and plague or is the choice of this punishment random? These questions have invited a number of explanations. One solution is explained by social change. The national census represented a shift in the political landscape of ancient Israel, one that confounded tribal organization. But this argument has mostly fallen out of favor, in large part because those who proposed it in the past have failed to marshal convincing evidence. Thus, I seek to thoroughly analyze the evidence to this end.

My analysis also overlaps with a separate interpretation of the census-epidemic link that some scholars have offered, namely, that the census was resisted because of taboos about writing. But I differ from these in one significant respect. Whereas they have argued magico-supernatural beliefs about writing inform 2 Samuel 24 and Exodus 30, I argue that the beliefs are less superstitious and instead are more mundane. My understanding of the evidence suggests that beliefs about the constitutive powers of writing informed these passages more than supernatural beliefs. These constitutive beliefs are much closer to the powers our own society lends writing. The strengths of my argument become apparent when analyzing these previous interpretations of the census-epidemic link in detail.

To explain 2 Samuel 24's zealous aversion to the census, scholars have typically offered the following three solutions: (1) Failure to pay the poll tax atonement stipulated in Exod 30:11-16 or what can be called the "ritual breach" interpretation, (2) Davidic or military hubris, or (3) an ancient counting/writing taboo.[10] These solutions argue that ancient Israel found the census

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[10] For a similar list, see K.R. Greenwood, "Labor Pains: The Relationship between David's Census and Corvee Labor," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* (2010): 467-477. I have not used his list here because it is both incomplete and yet includes marginal proposals more unconvincing than the ones listed here. Several other explanations have been brought forth, but these fail to have the same appeal as the three just mentioned, which tend to dominate the scholarly literature. These more ancillary explanations are generally only held by the individual

problematic for reasons other than social change. While these common solutions have their strengths, they also have significant weaknesses. The following analysis exposes these weaknesses and calls for a fresh interpretation of the evidence.

5.2.1 The Ritual Breach Interpretation

Those favoring the ritual breach interpretation anchor their argument to Exod 30:11-16, which stipulates that registered individuals must pay a half-shekel poll tax in the event of a census.[11] According to this rite, the poll tax serves an apotropaic function "so that no plague shall come upon them for being registered" (30:12). Because 2 Samuel 24 omits any mention of such an offering during David's census, it is concluded that a plague was summoned to punish his ritual breach.

But a few problems weaken Exodus 30's usefulness for understanding 2 Samuel 24. First, the interpretation relies on a canonical reading that assumes 2 Samuel 24 depends on Exodus 30. This direction of dependency is questionable. It may well be the other way around. Exodus 30 is sometimes understood as a late post-exilic text because its position within the tabernacle material suggests it is an addendum, tacked onto an already internally coherent unit.[12] Of course, just

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scholars who offer them. See Greenwood for these

[11] In some ways, this interpretation relying on Exodus 30 overlaps with arguments that attribute the problem of the census to a taboo. On this see, M. Weinfeld, "The Census in Mari, in Ancient Israel, and in Rome," in *Storia e Tradizioni ee Israele: Scritti in Onore Di J. Alberto Soggin*, eds. J.A. Soggin and D. Garrone, and F. Israel (Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 1991), 291-298. This is the rationale supplied by Josephus in *Antiquities* 7.13.1 §318. One unique variation of this comes from P. Kyle McCarter, who argues that military participation was governed by ritual purity. See McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, YAB (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 513-514.

[12] For this argument and for features of the addendum, see B.S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 529-535; J. Vermeylen, *La loi du plus fort: Histoire de la redaction des récits davidiques de 1 Samuel 8 à 1 Rois* 2, BETL 154 (Leuven: University Press and Peeters, 2000), n. 124 Cf. J. Liver, "The Half-Shekel Offering in Biblical and Post-Biblical Literature," *HTR* 56, no. 3 (1963): 173-198; C. Meyers, *Exodus*,

because something is tacked on, does not necessarily make it late. It could simply be from a different, even older, source. This is just to say that the direction of dependency between Exodus 30 and 2 Samuel 24 is not clear and presents a potential roadblock for arguing that David's census resulted in a plague because of ritual malfeasance. 2 Samuel 24 may have had no awareness of the atonement ritual in Exodus 30. Indeed, while David averts the plague with a ritual, it is one of a completely different nature than the half-shekel offering stipulated in Exodus 30.

In addition to the issue of dependency, Kyle Greenwood has pointed out that the poll tax in Exodus 30 makes more sense contextually as a one-time stipulation whose proceeds were used to construct the tabernacle. [13] In his estimation, the text does not legislate a permanent institution, rather it calls for an *ad hoc* census with the specific purpose of funding the materials for the tabernacle. This argument is convincing in light of the many other places in the Hebrew Bible that mention a census without any reference to the poll tax.[14] Why Israel should be punished for not upholding the poll tax in 2 Samuel 24, but not in these many other instances is a major problem for interpreters who use Exodus 30 to explain the sin of David's census. Thus, while Exodus 30 is appealing on intertextual grounds, the above problems make it partly unsatisfactory for illuminating 2 Samuel 24.

5.2.2 Davidic and Military Hubris

A second theory blames hubris for why 2 Samuel 24 depicts the census as a national

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NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 250-252.

[13] Greenwood, "Labor Pains," 469.

[14] See Num 1, 26, 31; Judg 21:9; 1 Sam 11:8, 13:15, 14:17, 15:42; 2 Sam 2:30.

sin.[15] Popular among conservative theological interpreters, this theory surmises that the census was an affront to Yahweh because it demonstrated David's pride and his misplaced trust in military prowess. According to these interpreters, when David desired to "know how many there are" in his kingdom who are "able to draw the sword" (24:2, 9), he not only betrayed a lack of faith in Yahweh to defend his people, but he also manifested an unbecoming hubris, using the census as an excuse to puff his chest over his vast kingdom. Such an interpretation partially aligns with the words of Joab, who in protest of the census states, "May the Lord increase the number of his people a hundredfold!...Why does my lord want to do this thing?" (2 Sam 24:3). By stating a blessing for a populous nation, Joab hints that the problem with the census was David's pride.

But these words of Joab alone are not enough on which to base an argument. The hubristic understanding requires one to theologize 2 Samuel 24 by reading a moral component into the text. The reading is based more on the theological constructs of later readers than it is based on supporting textual material. Much like the previous proposal for the apotropaic offering of Exodus 30, the hubristic explanation fails to adequately contend with the several other biblical texts where a census is permitted without any hint that it is a conceitful act worthy of divine punishment.[16] The usefulness of Joab's words is further complicated by the fact that some

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[15] See, for example, A.A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 284; M.J. Evans, *1 and 2* Samuel, NIBCOT (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 245.

[16] In addition to the instances listed in n. 14, see also 2 Chr. 17:12-19; 24; 25:5; 26:11-13. These examples from Chronicles are a significant problem for proponents of the hubristic explanation because they often cite the Chronicler's interpretation of the event in 2 Sam 24 without explaining why the Chronicler seems fine with these other instances of census-taking in the same book.

scholars using tradition-criticism have suspected 24:3 is a later interpolation.[17]

5.2.3 Counting/Writing Taboo

Other scholars offer a third, more widely followed explanation for 2 Samuel 24's negative depiction of the census—a counting or writing taboo.[18] Using anthropological parallels, proponents of the counting taboo have argued that 2 Samuel 24 reflects a world where counting was prohibited because it violated cultural decorum. Based on comparative evidence from societies as diverse as Polynesia and early modern England, interpreters have suggested that the census narrative superstitiously views counting as a pretentious act begging for the catastrophic loss of whatever things were counted. To count is to tempt fate.

Others use different anthropological parallels to suggest David may have imposed upon the sacred realm when he counted. In some societies, counting is taboo not because of a superstition, but rather because it is considered a sacred act reserved for deities and their authorized ritual specialists on earth. By counting, one oversteps social boundaries, imposing on the religious prerogatives of ritual specialists at best, but at worst, one may overstep mortal boundaries and presume equality with the gods. To count is to control, and only the gods are qualified to do that. Citing biblical texts that portray Yahweh as a counter (Ps 74), many interpreters find these parallels a compelling explanation for 2 Samuel 24. This interpretation also aligns with the notion that the people belong to Yahweh and that they are innumerable (Gen. 22:17). When he enumerated Israel, David assumed Yahweh's role as controller of the people, an act that summoned a hefty consequence. As might clear from this explanation, just as with the

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[17] W. Fuss, "II Samuel 24," *ZAW* 33 (1962): 155-156. See his bibliography for more.

[18] For the most thorough, up to date treatment on this approach, see S.M.S Park, "Census and Censure: Sacred Threshing Floors and Counting Taboos in 2 Samuel 24," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 35 (2013): 21-41.

hubristic interpretation, it requires a great deal of theologizing.

Conceptually, the taboo explanation overlaps with the two other proposals discussed above, perhaps explaining its popularity among scholars. It overlaps with the half-shekel ransom interpretation because if counting was taboo, it would require the type of ritual mediation outlined in Exodos 30's apotropaic offering, a ritual that David bypassed. It also overlaps with the hubristic interpretation by equating enumeration with the prideful assumption of a divine role. Thus, the taboo interpretation's flexibility and its ubiquity in anthropological examples make it an appealing explanation for the problem of the census in 2 Samuel 24.

Despite its benefits, the counting taboo interpretation suffers from one major issue, an issue also besetting the ritual and hubristic interpretations with which it overlaps. In particular, it fails to account for the many other instances in the Hebrew Bible where individuals are enumerated without divine repercussions. Indeed, this explanation is weakened more by these instances than the other two interpretations. Interpreters favoring ritual negligence or hubris can argue that scale and context make 2 Samuel 24 problematic compared to these other instances of enumeration. For example, they might say 1 Sam 11:8, when Saul mustered all of Israel and Judah, is unproblematic because the context is a voluntary muster in wartime. This differs from the peacetime census of David. This context has no need for ritual. There is also no hint of pride. However, interpreters favoring the taboo explanation cannot make this same argument. If counting is taboo outside the ritual sphere, then it is taboo regardless of scale or context. Saul would have sinned in 1 Sam 11:8 as much as David in 2 Samuel 24. Both enumerated Yahweh's people, imposing on a divine role without the protection of ritual mediation. Yet Saul receives no judgment for his counting, as is the case in the numerous other passages where individuals are enumerated.

Other scholars argue that while census-taking was taboo, this was so not because of counting, but rather because West Asian populations feared having their names put into writing. According to E.A. Speiser, the nomadic population of Old Babylonian Mari feared writing so much that they required a purification ritual before they were willing to have their names recorded in a census.[19] He believed similar fears lay behind 2 Samuel 24 and that these fears were allayed by the expiation ritual outlined in Exodus 30. Pointing to mythological Akkadian literature, Speiser asserted that these fears stemmed from a belief in the existence of divine name registers, which had the numinous power to fix the eternal fate of individuals. In Speiser's interpretation, census name-registers evoked fear because they resembled such divine lists and therefore possessed the capacity to alter the fate of enrolled individuals.

Some have critically pointed out that Speiser reads mythological beliefs into the census, saying that nothing in 2 Samuel 24, Exodus 30, or cuneiform sources on the census refers to the mythology of divine name registers, such as "the book of life" in the Hebrew Bible (Exod 32:32).[20] However, I think these criticisms unnecessarily assume too fine a distinction between religious thought and social reality. Israel often modeled its conceptions of Yahweh and heavenly realities on the basis of their own social and political experiences, particularly as it relates to ideas of kingship.[21] The idea of a divine name-list was undoubtedly informed by and overlapped with the cognitive experience of name registers in everyday life. Where I disagree

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[19] E.A. Speiser, "Census and Ritual Expiation in Mari and Israel," *BASOR* 149, no. 1 (1958): 17-25.

[20] S.C. Russell, *The King and the Land: A Geography of Royal Power in the Biblical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 21.

[21] M. Brettler, *God Is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2009).

with Speiser is in his argument that such name-lists were feared because they were thought to jeopardize the fate of the individual. As outlined below, I think the evidence suggests more specifically that the written list was thought to constitute political obligation in a way that conflicts with tribal ideals.

William Schniedewind also argues that biblical literature problematizes the census because of a taboo against listing names.[22] His argument rests on more compelling comparative evidence than Speiser. While he similarly considers the possibility that some communities considered writing a prerogative of the divine, Schniedewind also views the census material in light of effacement curses and rituals, such as the Execration Texts from Egypt, illuminating how West Asian populations equated the written name with the essence of its referent.[23] Effacement curses and rituals were governed by a type of sympathetic magic. If the written name suffered damage, it jeopardized its referent's well-being. Because inscribed names possessed such great power, handing it over to others subordinated the name's referent to the person who possessed it. Thus, writing an individual's name in census procedures conjured fear because it subjected the individual to potential harm. By focusing on the writtenness of the census, both Speiser and Schniedewind make an important contribution. Undoubtedly, such prevalent beliefs would have compounded other problems with the census. But we are still left wondering why other moments of census receive no pushback in the Hebrew Bible. Why these texts would distinguish David's census as something especially nefarious requires further explanation.

The problem of the census in the Hebrew Bible is so puzzling that it has attracted several

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[22] W.M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 30-31.

[23] For more on this idea throughout the ancient Near East, see the collected essays in N.N. May (ed.), *Iconoclasm and Text Destruction in the Ancient Near East and Beyond*, OIS 8 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2012).

more marginal explanations in addition to the common ones outlined above. In a recent article, Kyle Greenwood lists the above explanations along with others. His list includes (1) pride in military strength, (2) trespassing the offering stipulated in Exodus 30, (3) a counting taboo, (4) a health epidemic resulting from the living conditions of armies, (5) a failure to capture Mt. Moriah from the Jebusites, (6) and his own explanation which claims the census resulted in a plague because it allowed David to acquire a labor force for building the Temple, a task which Yahweh prohibited earlier in Samuel.[24] The diversity of this list illustrates just how unsatisfactory most treatments of the problem have been.

Greenwood's list lacks one other explanation popular among early exegetes, illustrating how it has fallen out of favor in more recent work. Gerhard von Rad, Frank Moore Cross, and George Mendenhall each explain that the Hebrew Bible problematizes the census because early Israel viewed it as an assault on traditional social organization. For von Rad, conducting a census during peacetime violated the tribal rules of holy war.[25] Cross and Mendenhall, however, see an even greater violation in the census. They propose that a national census did not simply violate the rules of holy war, but also undermined the fabric of tribal organization.[26] For them, resistance to the census is best explained as resistance to monarchy and the perceived unwanted changes it would bring to society. Despite its popularity among such venerable scholars, Greenwood might have left this explanation out of his list for two reasons. First, as P. Kyle McCarter notes, this

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[24] For these treatments and bibliography, see Greenwood, "Labor Pains."

[25] G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. Stalker (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), p. 59.

[26] F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 227; G. Mendenhall, "The Census Lists of Numbers 1 and 26," *JBL* 77, no. 1 (1958): 52-66.

explanation fails more than the others to satisfactorily account for a conceptual link between plague and census.[27] Second, these scholars offer the explanation in a brief, mostly off-handed format without supplying much evidence.

As I will show, contra McCarter, an analysis of the Hebrew Bible and the comparative Mari material reveals that a sociopolitical explanation of the census' problematic depiction possesses a high degree of rationality. And, as a careful review of the evidence suggests, what laid at the heart of the social friction caused by the census was a belief in the constitutive powers of writing. The name on the census roll bound an individual to the framework of rule by a monarch. In doing so, it eroded the old tribal network and undermined the kin-based relations comprising it. A closer look at how this played out at Mari will set the stage for a fresh evaluation of the census in biblical literature.

5.3 Comparative Material: The Sociopolitics of Census-taking at Mari

To better understand the biblical aversion to the census, scholars have compared 2 Samuel 24 and Exodus 30 with Akkadian texts. Our central source of information on census procedures in the ancient Near East comes from the Mari archive and dates to the Old Babylonian period during the reigns of Šamši-Addu (1809-1776 BCE) and Zimri-Lim (1775-1761 BCE). Both rulers conducted censuses throughout upper Mesopotamia. The archives they left behind consist of correspondence detailing the instructions of each ruler for conducting the census as well as reports from their subordinates on problems encountered during its execution. The corpus has also produced the tablets used to record the names of enrolled individuals. From the correspondence, it is clear that these rulers used the census for military purposes. The name tablets produced by each census allowed the ruler to take stock of the fighting force available to

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[27] McCarter, *II Samuel*, 513.

him if there was impending conflict. During a muster, officials would carry the tablets to their designated geographic locales and round up the individuals named in the registers.

The Mari material is useful for illuminating the Hebrew Bible because it offers several examples of resistance to the census from a cognate culture and similar social structure. At Mari, a centralized monarchy ruled over settled and nomadic social elements, each with diverse tribal affiliations. When particular tribal elements were included in the census, problems abounded. In ARM I 87, for instance, Šamši-Addu relates to his son Yasmaḫ-Addu that "Regarding the census of the tent dwellers (ḫana), it presented many difficulties because they showed great reluctance to being counted and I could not do it."[28] It is not uncommon to find similar cases of resistance to the census in the Mari correspondence, especially resistance in the form of hiding family members to avoid their being listed on the name tablets (ARM I 6; XXIV 61, 62). Resistance was so strong that administrators often delayed or refused to conduct the census to avoid the headache (ARM I 36, 42, 82; III 20; IV 83). If reasons for this profound resistance among Mari's tribal elements can be uncovered, then this might illuminate by analogy the aversion to the census we find in the Hebrew Bible.

When scholars utilize the Mari census texts to illuminate the Hebrew Bible, they frequently argue that resistance to the census stemmed from fear, fear of either armed conflict or of being counted/listed. This latter fear is based on the idea that counting or listing names was taboo in Mari's tribal culture. The taboo argument rests on a shaky translation of the Akkadian word used in the Mari texts for census: *tēbibtum*. Among biblical scholars, it is common to translate this word as "purification" since it derives from *ebēbu* "to be clean, clear, pure." Using

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[28] Translation from LAPO 17. For a transcription and French translation, see A. Parrot and G. Dossin, *Archives Royales de Mari: Correspondance de Šamši Addu et de ses Fils*, ARM I (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1951), 30-35.

this translation, scholars have argued that the census in Mari required a lustration ceremony that would allay the fears of those enrolled, whether those fears stemmed from the possibility of death or from superstitious beliefs about being counted/listed.[29] Having been purified and therefore protected by the alleged ritual, soldiers could be exposed to the counting/listing and then march into battle with confidence and a clean conscience. This interpretation of the Mari material conveniently aligns with the taboo explanation that some biblical scholars suggest for understanding 2 Samuel 24 and Exodus 30.

But there are several problems with assuming that a lustration ceremony was practiced during the census at Mari. The only evidence for such a ceremony comes from this very translation of *tēbibtum* itself. No ritual texts from Mari or from the entire cuneiform corpus of Mesopotamia refers to such a ritual.[30] The many letters referring to census-taking give no indication of the census being anything other than the mundane inscription of names onto tablets. Furthermore, "purification" is only one of several possible translations for *tēbibtum*. Derivations of the root *ebēbu* can range from personal cleanliness to carrying a technical legal meaning of "clear" or "free" in Akkadian literature.[31] Given that enrollment in the census was a legal obligation, it is quite possible that *tēbibtum* carried such a legal connotation at Mari. Alternatively, Jean-Marie Durand has proposed that *tēbibtum* is the result of a non-lexical

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[29] Most famously in Speiser, "Census and Ritual Expiation," and Weinfeld, "Census in Mari."

[30] LAPO 17, 332-33.

[31] CAD IV, 4-8. For *tēbibtu*m itself, see CAD XVIII, 304-305, where the dictionary gives the possible meanings of "purification, cleansing, clearing" with the latter referring to the legal clearing of accusation, claims, and accounts. The dictionary files examples from Mari census texts among the "clearing" category, often translating *tēbibtum* in those examples as "registration."

derivation, simply meaning "to count." He likens this phenomenon to *epēšu*, which came to have a non-lexical derivation of "to establish numeric equivalencies."[32] As Durand shows, the best evidence for this is the fact that those conducting the census are referred to as *ebbum*, and the only action ascribed to them is that they recorded (*šušturum*) names. They nowhere are said to perform any kind of ritual. In the absence of any evidence outside the tenuous translation of *tēbibtum* as purification, Assyriologists have largely abandoned the idea that the Mari census was conducted alongside purification rites.[33] Nevertheless, this misguided obsession over the meaning of *tēbibtum* has maintained in biblical studies. It has overshadowed other ways the Mari material might contribute to our understanding of the census in biblical literature.

Among scholars who have turned to Mari when studying the census, Mendenhall offers a more productive way forward. He posits that constituencies in both Mari and ancient Israel found the census problematic because it conflicted with the tribal structure endemic to these societies. Mendenhall claims that the problem with the census "consists specifically in the fact that the decision as to who shall go to war rests in the hands of the tribal authorities. It is the tribal leader himself who is responsible for gathering his men, and no coercive power is exercised directly by the government against the individual."[34] For Mendenhall, these ancient constituencies resisted the census because it involved the central government penetrating the household level of society while bypassing traditional tribal channels of leadership. "It was a direct invasion of the tribes and villages by the officials of the central government," an invasion that infringed upon the

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[32] LAPO 17, 333-334.

[33] B. Lafont, "Sacrifices et rituels a Mari et dans la Bible," *RA* 93, no. 1 (1999): 67.

[34] Mendenhall, "The Census Lists of Numbers," 56.

autonomy of individual tribes and, therefore, the social structure.[35]

Mendenhall does not offer any biblical evidence for his conclusion, but instead uses the Mari material to make an argument by analogy. In particular, he cites ARM I 6, a letter from Šamši-Addu (1809-1776 BCE), the ruler of upper Mesopotamia, to his son whom he had installed as puppet king over the region of Mari, Yasmaḫ-Addu. In the letter, Šamši-Addu discourages his son from taking a census among a group identified as the Binu-Yamina. These Binu-Yamina, or "sons of the left," were a tribal component of ancient Mari, living in the steppe and largely consisting of transient herders which the Mari texts sometimes include in a larger social category called ḫana, "tent dwellers." But some settled communities also identified as members of the tribe.[36] Šamši-Addu is stern in his discouragement to not include them in a census, exclaiming, "the Binu-Yamina are unsuitable for a census...whatever you do, do not take their census!"[37] For emphasis, Šamši-Addu repeats this latter phrase verbatim a few lines later. Why did Šamši-Addu believe a census of the Binu-Yamina was so problematic? To answer this question, Mendenhall points to the ruler's alternative instructions for his son. Instead of taking a census, Yasmaḫ-Addu should "give them an edict as follows: 'The king is going on a military expedition. Let all, including the young, be gathered. The šugāgum whose troops are not complete and exempts one man, will taste the wrath of the king.' Give them this edict."[38] By going through the tribal leaders here called "šugāgum," and letting them be responsible for the

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[35] ibid., 56.

[36] For the Ḫana and their place within the heterogeneous social configuration of Mari's society, see Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel*, 208-219.

[37] ARM I 6:7-8, 13. *DUMU.MEŠ-ia-mi-in a-na ub-bu-bi-im u-úl i-ri-id-du-ú...mi-im-ma la tu-ub-ba-ab-šu-nu-ti*. This latter phrase is repeated verbatim in line 21.

[38] ARM I 6:14-20. I have used the translation from Mendenhall, "The Census Lists."

mustering, Mendenhall claims that Yasmaḫ-Addu conducted the muster by tribal protocol and avoided any perceived government intrusion on the individual.

Mendenhall offers a more promising explanation for why the census was so problematic in Mari. The evidence he cites suggests that the census was resisted because it caused sociopolitical friction, not because the Binu-Yamina feared death or being listed/counted. His evidence is firmer than the evidence of those who allege that a numinous taboo governed how the Mari population experienced the census. With ARM I 6, Mendenhall shows that census aversion arose not just at the seams of where the mundane met the supernatural in writing, but also at the seams of where monarchic administration met tribal autonomy. A contest between tribal authority and monarchic authority was at play.

However, the finer points of Mendenhall's argument are unsatisfying, and his evidence is thin, illustrated by the fact that attempts to explain census aversion since him have not engaged with his proposal. First, whether Yasmaḫ-Addu used the tribal leaders for mustering or did it through the census, it is still government intrusion. After all, he threatens them with pain of punishment. Second, it does not directly follow from the Mari material that the problem with the census stemmed from its bypassing of tribal leaders. In fact, other letters detailing census procedures make clear that the *šugāgum* played a central role even when a census was conducted among tribal constituencies. For example, in ARM III 21, Kibri-Dagan, the governor of Terqa, informs king Zimri-Lim (1775-1761 BCE) that he summoned the *šugāgum* of the local Binu-Yamina and assigned each leader a scribe who then enrolled the men of each *šugāgum* in the census. Based on this and other letters, it is clear that the crown recruited *šugāgum* to assist in the census rather than bypassing them.[39] If bypassing their authority were the issue, Šamši-Addu

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[39] ARM XXIV 65 also relates that the crown recruited *šugāgū* for assistance in enrolling

could have simply directed Yasmah-Addu to include the *šugāgum* in the census-taking process

as done elsewhere rather than ordering him not to do a census at all. Thus, Mendenhall's

proposal does not adequately explain all of the evidence.

    In fact, ARM I 6, the very letter Mendenhall cites, gives a more explicit reason as to why

Yasmaḫ-Addu should not take a census among the Binu-Yamina, a reason that while unrelated to

the *šugāgum*, is still deeply rooted in tribal socio-politics. According to lines 9-13 of the letter,

the census should not be conducted because it might upset kinship bonds and alliances between

tribes. These lines appear between Šamšu-Addu's stern warning to not enroll the Binu-Yamina

and his alternative solution to simply give them an edict. They read as follows:

> If you take their census, their brothers (*aḫīšunu*) the Rabbû who dwell across the river in the land of Yamḫad will hear of it and become incensed at them. They (the enumerated Binu-Yamina) will not be allowed to return to their land. Whatever you do, do not take their census![40]

The Rabbû comprised one of five smaller kinship groups that comprised the larger confederation

of Binu-Yamina, along with the Yahrurû, Yarihû, Amnanû, and Uprapû.[41] These five groups

were indiscriminately referred to as Binu-Yamina by outsiders like Šamši-Addu. Thus, it could

be that Šamši-Addu informs Yasmaḫ-Addu to not enumerate a contingent of Rabbû currently

residing within Mari's realm who have kinship ties to other Rabbû living across the Euphrates. It

might also be the case that he is referring to one of the other five subsets of Binu-Yamina whose

relationship with the Rabbû would be jeopardized under the larger banner of the Binu-Yamina.

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the tribes rather than bypassing.

    [40] (9) *tu-ba-ab-šu-nu-ti-ma a-ḫu-šu-nu LU.MEŠ ra-ab-ba-ya* (10) *ša i-na e-bi-ir-tim i-na ma-a-at ia-am-ḫa-ad(KI)* (11) *wa-aš-bu i-še-em-mu-ú-ma i-ma-ra-sú-nu-ši-im-ma*. Transcription from ARM I 6.

    [41] See Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel*, 213

Whatever the specific case, the important thing for Šamši-Addu is that the census in some way would upset kinship relations. Šamši-Addu expresses the relationship between the two groups with the term *aḫu* "brother," kinship language that evokes how social relationships determined political action in the West Semitic world.[42] Here, the census is problematic among tribal groups not because of a magico-supernatural belief about counting or writing that required ritual mediation. Rather, it is problematic because it would somehow be viewed as conflicting with, upending, or otherwise deteriorating the authority of tribal relations. Of course, populations of the Binu-Yamina were subject to census-taking elsewhere, even with the help of their own tribal leaders. But as ARM I 6 illustrates, the process was not always smooth and had the potential to complicate tribal relations. As a formal procedure of monarchy, a census could bring the question of authority to a boiling point, causing tribal allegiances to clash. While the Mari material does not refract these perceived sociopolitical issues through disease, it nevertheless illustrates how West Semitic tribal groups could find the census to be a source of social disruption.

A natural question becomes why the census was felt to be such a powerful source of social disruption. What about it would have caused the Rabbû to view the census as an affront to their relationship with other Binu-Yamina? This question becomes more important when we realize that for all of the resistance that Šamši-Addu anticipates the census will raise, the outcome of the situation was the same as if the Binu-Yamina had been registered anyway. They are still forced to serve in Šamši-Addu's military. The Binu-Yamina's obligation is the same as those who were registered during Mari's census. But what is different is how that obligation is

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[42] Schloen, *The House of the Father*, 255; E. Pfoh, "Some Remarks on Patronage in Syria-Palestine during the Late Bronze Age," *JESHO* 52, no. 3 (2009): 363-381.

expressed—oral edict instead of written census.

5.4 The Constitutive Powers of Writing and the Census

By reading between the lines of ARM I 6, it becomes clear that there was something about the written procedures of the census that caused groups like the Binu-Yamina to believe participation in it violated traditional kin-based forms of political action. The tribe is still compelled to do Šamši-Addu's fighting, apparently without concern that it will affect their relations with the Rabbû, who would only find fault with the Binu-Yaminu if they passed into the written registers of Mari's kingdom and then fought. What seems to be at play here is a belief that writing constitutes. In this case, the circumstances of census-taking, which involved the physical enlistment of names into documents possessed by crown authorities, was viewed as constituting political allegiance. To pass into the written rolls of the census was to pass into the political order of those conducting it. For the Binu-Yamina, this also meant passing out of their kinship relations with the Rabbû and fixing what was meant to be fluid according to tribal ideology. Writtenness reflected political subservience. To be listed in the census was to make one subject to the kingdom rather than to local tribal structures of authority.

Anthropological work demonstrates that a broad range of cultures and societies invest writing with constitutive power. That is, many imbue bureaucratic writing with the power to concretize new relationships, to absolve old ones, to fix identities, and to create new realities. In our own society, where so many interactions are mediated by formal writing, we especially lend this constitutive, binding capacity to the written word. In legal, political, and economic contexts, we frequently encounter the thinking of "if it's not in writing, it didn't happen." We need the correct identification document to drive a car and board an airplane. We have to supply the correct financial documents in a myriad of contexts. In so many instances, the actual realities of

our legal and financial status mean little without the support of written evidence. For us, writing makes it real in a legal sense. It gives events and relationships a finality and permanence. This is a chief trait of how we cognitively engage with documents.

Some might object that this constitutive power of writing is something only found in highly literate societies. But anthropological evidence shows that this belief is just at home in cultures either maintaining a low literacy rate or experiencing rapid growth in literacy. Perhaps the most iconic example of this comes from the work of Jack Goody. When modern writing practices entered West Africa, Goody notes that some groups without writing imbued written documents, or "notes" as they called them, with a constitutive power that far exceeded how groups with writing were using the documents. Speaking of the Asante tribe, Goody states

> soon [they] became firmly attached to this new mode of communication and tended to give its products a greater permanency, concreteness, and generality than the originators had intended, for the 'notes' were regarded as subject to exchange or acquisition. If the Asante conquered a neighboring power, they took over its 'books' and expected the literate makers of the treaty to continue to observe the same stipulations that had held for the group they had conquered. Much misunderstanding arose from this tendency to equate the paper with its contents, the medium with the message.[43]

Although the Asante were an illiterate culture, they infused writing with a constitutive power of mythic proportions. For them, writing was so concrete, so permanently binding, that the contents of written political objects applied for whoever possessed the tangible, written objects. When literacy first spread in medieval England, M.T. Clanchy notes that locals similarly overestimated the binding capacity of written documentation compared to their conquerors, the Normans.[44] These examples are intended to illustrate that writing has an affordance to be perceived as a

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[43] J. Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 101

[44] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 323.

constitutive force and societies with limited literacy can experience this affordance. This is not to say that all societies universally experience writing as constitutive. As already mentioned, many societies that newly adopt writing can also avoid attributing any such power to it, such as mainland ancient Greece. But the example in ARM I 6 can be understood to suggest that some populations in Mari may have perceived writing in a way more akin to medieval England and the Asante than to ancient Greece, at least when it came to the specific context of census-taking.

Some recent anthropological studies show that many cultures view census-taking as politically constitutive because of its formal, written nature. I have already mentioned how this played out in Canadian censuses, which attempted to enumerate First Nations communities. They resisted the census because they believed it formally placed them in the realm of a government to which they did not belong.[45] Similar attitudes arose among the population of colonial India when English colonizers conducted a census.[46] If locals participated in the census, they felt it was tacit acceptance of England's sovereignty. Of course, both of those communities were at the mercy of their respective colonizers already, just as the Binu-Yamina were subject to physical harm if they did not comply with the muster. But in all three of these cases, foregoing entrance into the written registers of their subjugators served as a powerful symbol of their independence.

Sociologically closer to the Mari and biblical material are cases of Bedouin resistance to Palestinian and Jordanian censuses of the 19th-20th centuries. Here, beliefs about writing were also at play. The Bedouin feared their participation would result in military service or taxation, but even when they were assured this was not the case, they still resisted. It seems their resistance stemmed from anxiety brought on by the written nature of census-taking. J.B. Barron

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[45] See fn. 4.

[46] Appadurai, "Number in the Colonial Imagination."

reports that even after assuaging their political fears, the tribes "could not be induced to fill in an amended form of schedule designed to suit the special requirements of the Bedouin."[47] Something about pen meeting paper discomforted them. Significantly, an indirect census via tithe rolls was allowed to be conducted, a situation bearing some resemblance to Exodus 30, which also mediates the census through a tithe. There is present in these events a permanence granted to writing. The tribes believed their written information would subjugate them to the demands of a territorial state. No amount of oral assurance convinced them otherwise. In their view, written objects superseded oral pleadings and determined political belonging.

The constitutive power that communities grant to writing helps explain the issue encountered with the census at Mari. The Binu-Yamina had no issue being coerced by an oral edict. But they and those with whom they shared kinship had great issue with committing to a census. Both the oral edict and the census sought to obligate military service. But there was something about obligating that service via the census that made the situation disquieting to those involved. Somehow entering those obligations via the census constituted the issue. Because a major difference between an oral edict and the census is the written procedures of the latter, it is appropriate to find in writing the cause of this unease. Based on how Samši-Addu describes his reasoning, this unease with the written census does not come from magico-supernatural beliefs about the powers of writing. Instead, the constitutive powers with which communities imbue writing better explain the root of Samši-Addu's concerns, which again are governed by upsetting kinship ties. The writtenness of the census would not just obligate the Binu-Yamina to military service. It would also physically inscribe them into servitude under Samši-Addu, making

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[47] J.B. Barron, *Palestine*: *Report and General Abstracts of the Census of 1922* (Jerusalem: Greek Convent Press, 1922), 4.

them effectively permanent subjects of Mari and absolving the authority of tribal structures. Consequently, their participation in the written procedures of the census would be viewed by the Rabbû as a voiding of the kinship bonds they previously shared. The hostilities this would create was evidently a headache Šamši-Addu was unwilling to bear.

One other Akkadian example suggests the written procedures of census-taking were thought to constitute social and political belonging. It comes from the prism of Tukukani, an inscription belonging to King Tunip-Teššup from northern Mesopotamia and dating to the late 17th or early 16th century BCE.[48] Tunip-Teššup's prism appears to be a census document or to have been derived from one since it lists by name three separate groups of men who are labeled as ʿapiru and who served as a military force for the king. According to Daniel Fleming, these men lived within Tunip-Tessup's domain, but their listing as ʿapiru implies that they have refused to be categorized within the bounds of "other defined communities," having instead "committed themselves to leaders without accepting the framework of census by settlement."[49] This understanding of Tunip-Tessup's ʿapiru highlights similar issues encountered in the Mari and biblical censuses. At Tukukani, census-taking also seemed to have raised the issue of whether groups were politically organized by social bonds or by the physical boundaries of a territorial polity. Judging by this prism, groups organized by social bonds were listed together under a separate census category even when they lived within a particular territory. Though these ʿapiru may have fought alongside settled communities in the service of Tunip-Tessup, their census procedures were governed by different rules. Categorization in writing mattered.

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[48] M. Salvini, *The Ḫabiru Prism of King Tunip-Teššup of Tikunani* (Rome: Instituti Editoriale e Poligrafici Internazionali, 1996.

[49] Fleming, *Legacy of Israel*, 265.

5.5 Writing, the Census, and Social Friction in the Hebrew Bible

The Mari material discussed above provides evidence from a culture and society analogous to ancient Israel. If resistance to the census in Mari arose because the writtenness of census-taking made it incompatible with tribal politics, then we must ask whether similar factors explain the negative depictions of the census found in biblical literature. We indeed find evidence suggesting that the census in ancient Israel was envisioned as a sociopolitical disruption of the tribal structure and that it was viewed as such because of a similar constitutive power Israelites lent to writing. To commit to a written census was to commit to the ruler conducting it on a permanent level. This clashed with traditional tribal decision-making modes, thus threatening to erase tribal autonomy.

5.5.1 2 Samuel 24

A clash between the monarchy and tribal authority is apparent from the beginning of 2 Samuel 24, which uses language that frames the census in social and political categories. David initiates his national enumeration by commanding Joab to wander through "all the tribes of Israel (כל שבטי ישראל)...and take a census (ופקדו את העם)" (24:2).[50] David's use of the word "tribes," (שבטי) frames the census in sociopolitical terms. While "all the tribes of Israel" (כל שבטי ישראל) as an all-encompassing moniker is not uncharacteristic in biblical literature, it is important to note that it is much more infrequent in DtrH broadly and 2 Samuel more narrowly than one might think. When referring to the body politic of Israel in totality, 2 Samuel only uses "all the tribes of Israel" (כל שבטי ישראל) a total of six times. Conversely, it uses "all Israel" (כל ישראל),

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[50] The text uses the root *pqd* to denote the census. For an analysis of this root in the Semitic languages, see S. Creason, "PQD Revisited," in *Studies in Semitic and Afroasiatic Linguistics Presented to Gene B. Gragg*, ed. C. Miller, SAOC 60 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2007), 27-42.

leaving out "tribes" (שבטי) a total of almost thirty times. By using the more infrequent "tribes"

(שבטי) "tribes," the text hints that the following narrative is to be understood through the lens of

tribal politics.

More significant than the few number of times "tribes" (שבטי) is used, however, is the

politically charged nature of the episodes where the moniker does appear. In the five other

passages that utilize the all-encompassing "tribes" (שבטי) "tribes" in 2 Samuel, contested

political power and the political autonomy of the tribes are foregrounded.[51] These passages

recount when the northern tribes forsook Saul's dynasty and made David king at Hebron (5:1),

and when both Absalom and Sheba separately contested David's kingship by appealing to

individual tribes (15:2, 10; 19:10; 20:14). Thus, in 2 Samuel, "all the tribes of Israel" (כל שבטי

ישראל) appears in episodes showcasing the power struggle between the centralization of

monarchy and the decentralization of tribal politics. This use of "tribes" elsewhere suggests that

2 Samuel 24 should be understood similarly. It is a warning to the careful reader that in what

follows, a sociopolitical contest between king and tribes plays the leading role.

A second way 2 Samuel 24 emphasizes sociopolitical struggle is through the repetition of

the phrase "commanders of the army" (שרי החיל) "commanders of the army." Within the first

four verses of the chapter, this phrase appears three times, two of which come in verse four and

are only separated by a single a *wayyiqtol* form.[52] Notably, this is the first time in DtrH where the

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[51] This is significant since the northern tribes appear more rooted in decentralized forms
of leadership than Judah. On this, see Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel*.

[52] The first instance of this phrase has received much attention because of apparent
textual corruption. The MT reads, "Joab, commander of the army." But several Greek and Syriac
manuscripts read "Joab and the commanders of the army." Given that the textual witnesses all
agree that the two phrases in verse four are to be read "Joab and the commanders of the army," it
is most probable that the first instance in verse two should be read likewise, as seen in the Greek

phrase "commanders of the army" (שרי החיל) appears. From this point forward in the biblical

narrative, the phrase refers narrowly to commanders of a professional army at the national level.

Here, the writer does not just use, but emphasizes through repetition a new phrase that signals the

professionalization and bureaucratization of the fighting force. Such an institution contrasts with

the sociopolitical organization of the tribes, where participation in the fighting force was

motivated by kinship ideology and was often flexible, as discussed above. A professional army

backed by a king and going tribe to tribe to conscript "men able to draw the sword" (24:9)

implies that government coercion, made possible by a professionalized army, now regulates

participation in war. Paired with the suggestive use of "all the tribes," the phrase's repetition

spotlights two competing political structures. A political contest between king and tribes is the

stage on which the census occurs.

    2 Samuel 24's current literary context offers even more evidence that its census episode

was understood in ancient Israel as a commentary on perceived threats against the tribal

structure. The chapter forms a bookend to the so-called Samuel appendix, a unit that provides a

summative assessment of dynastic monarchy on the eve of David's crown passing to Solomon.[53]

Beginning with 2 Samuel 21, the appendix bears a chiastic structure with narrative accounts of

and Syriac versions.

[53] Identified as an appendix because it interrupts the narrative flow of Solomon's
accession to the throne with a conglomeration of diverse materials, the narratives of which feel
out of place chronologically in Samuel. The nature of the chapters as an interruption to the
narrative flow of Samuel was noted as early as A. Keunen, *De Boeken des Ouden Verbonds:
Eerste Deel: De thora en de Historische Boken des Ouden* Verbonds (Amsterdam, 1884). See
also the classic treatment of K. Budde, *Die Bücher Samuel* (Tübingen/Leipzig: Mohr, 1902);
Fuss, "II Samuel 24." More recently, see R. Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist* (Bloomington,
IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 202. For the most thorough treatments of the chapters and a
full review of scholarship, see H. Klements, *II Samuel 21-24: Context, Structure and Meaning in
the Samuel Conclusion* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000).

two national disasters, famine (2 Sam 21) and plague (2 Sam 24), forming an outer ring around

two inner chiastic rings. The middle ring of the appendix consists of two passages naming

David's closest confidants and listing their heroic deeds (2 Sam 21:15-22; 23:8-39). Within this

middle ring stands the appendix's innermost components, a final chiastic pair entailing two

Davidic poems in praise of Yahweh (2 Sam 22:1-51; 23:1-7). It has long been noted that the

appendix's tight structural unity hints at a thematic unity. Most frequently, it is understood that

the appendix's heterogenous parts form a whole unit whose primary purpose is to assess the

institution of monarchy.

Although many scholars agree that the Samuel appendix assesses the monarchy, they

disagree on the particular disposition towards the monarchy found in that assessment.

Interpretations of the appendix range from a positive assessment of the monarchy, to an

ambivalent one, and even a negative one. Taking the most aggressive negative interpretation,

Walter Brueggemann claims the appendix asserts that the new monarchic era of "imperial wars

and bureaucratic power will lead to death," and thus within the appendix, "a return is urged to

kinship relations, wars of defense, and tribal religion."[54] Although Brueggemann might find the

appendix more negative than the specifics of the evidence allow, he demonstrates how its

individual elements can be easily read as a commentary on the institution of monarchy. The

census could have been included in this unit because it epitomized the type of "bureaucratic

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[54] W. Brueggemann, "2 Samuel 21-24: An Appendix of Deconstruction?" *CBQ* 50, no. 3
(1988): 383-397. Others are more reserved, claiming that while the appendix assesses monarchy,
it is largely ambivalent about it. See *McCarter*, II Samuel, 512-518; A.F. Campbell, "2 Samuel
21-24: The Enigma Factor," in *For and Against David: Story and History in the Books of
Samuel*, eds. A.G. Auld and E. Eynikel (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 347-358. Knoppers claims the
depiction of monarchy is positive and shows how the institution can promptly respond to
national disaster. Even still, the text relies on the disaster being a census. Even if the depiction is
positive, it does not license the use of a census, constraining monarchy in this way. See G.N.
Knoppers, *I Chronicles 10–29*, YAB (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 742-764.

terrorism" a king could unleash on his subjects.[55]

Even when the Samuel appendix is understood as a positive assessment of monarchy, contra Brueggemann, the census still appears as a nefarious act that runs roughshod over social custom. Gary Knoppers, for instance, finds that the appendix makes an argument in favor of monarchy by illustrating how a devout king can rescue the land from peril.[56] According to his reading, David ritually intervenes for the sins of the nation, chasing away both famine and plague in chapters 21 and 24 through cultic initiative and penitent behavior. Such ritual intervention at the national level is only possible through a centralized monarchy. For Knoppers, the Samuel appendix implicitly recalls the pro-monarchic argument made by the book of Judges. There, without a monarch telling the Israelites otherwise, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg 17:6; 21:25), a phrase used to paint tribal Israel as a lawless wild west. In the Samuel appendix, with a righteous king, lawless behavior could be both punished and ritually repaired. But even if the appendix implicitly approves of monarchy, as Knoppers argues, this does not change the fact that census-taking plays the role of villain. It is the misstep from which the nation needs saving. The census is the mischief that creates space for the king to act righteously. Thus, even in Knoppers' interpretation, the census still features as the dark underbelly of monarchic rule.[57]

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[55] Brueggemann, 2 Samuel 21-24," 392.

[56] Knoppers, *I Chronicles 10–29*, 742-764.

[57] Most scholars who study the literary form of the Samuel appendix fall between Knoppers and Brueggemann, arguing that the unit conveys an ambivalent attitude towards monarchy. According to these scholars, the appendix's individual parts coalesce to argue that monarchy is acceptable as long as the reigning king subjugates himself beneath the cosmic rule of Yahweh. Here too, however, the same logic applies. The unit relies on the perceived offense of a census. See Klement, *II Samuel 21-14*, 174-184, Campbell, "2 Samuel 21-24: The Enigma Factor."

Thus, 2 Samuel 24's wider literary setting provides little evidence that the census was resisted because of a taboo, hubris, or bad hygiene. Rather, the literary position of the census leads a careful reader to believe that sectors of Israelite society viewed national enumerations negatively because they somehow threatened the tribal structure. This literary position is complemented by the episode's language, which likewise emphasizes the contrast between monarchy and the tribes.

On the surface, 2 Samuel 24 does not as clearly link the census' disruption of the social structure to the constitutive powers of writing, as does the Mari material. But the cultural and social similarities between ancient Israel and Mari would make it unsurprising if this were the case. This is especially true given that we have already seen how bureaucratic writing carried serious overtones in early Israel's political landscape. That Israelites viewed the writtenness of census-taking as socially binding becomes clearer when considering other places in biblical literature dealing with the census.

5.5.2 Exodus 30

Exodus 30:11-16 can also be understood as a text that depicts the census in terms of a challenge to the traditional social system of kinship. The pericope details a divine command that states when the Israelites take a census, each person registered must pay a half-shekel offering. While the economic value of the offering is used to make repairs to the tent of meeting, it also has a spiritual value wherein it atones for the lives of those registered, guaranteeing that a plague will not break out against them. Most analyses of Exodus 30 that focus on the relation between the census and plague have failed to anchor their understanding of this atonement ritual to any sort of theoretical model for ritual and religion. One of the most enduring contributions from the theoretical study of religion is the Durkheimian notion that religion, its beliefs, and its rituals

often loosely correspond to social structure, with society and religion mutually reflecting features of the other. Arnold van Gennep, one of Durkheim's contemporaries, postulated that rituals are frequently a means for a community to mediate changes in the social system. Summing up his view, Catherine Bell describes how ritual licenses a breach in the social order while simultaneously affirming that very social order it violated.[58] Religious beliefs are generally not things that are snatched out of the sky for no reason. Instead, they are often anchored to conceptions of the social order. In the Durkheimian sense, Exodus 30 can be understood as prescribing an atonement for the census because it is seen to violate the assumptions of the Israelite social structure.

The same logic applies if we label the problem with the census as a "taboo." A culture's taboos often relate to that given culture's social structure. As Mary Douglas poignantly states, "prohibitions trace the cosmic outlines and the ideal social order."[59] If counting heads or writing names were indeed taboo in ancient Israel, this was likely so because something about these actions violated a clearly articulated social barrier. Ancient Israel's decentralized tribal ethos forms a suggestive social barrier in this respect. Given the tribes' politically decentralized default, sectors of society would likely find it a violation if one person collected enough power to assume the control latent within a census. But Exodus 30 provides an outlet that circumvents this taboo. The count is conducted indirectly through donation, and it occurs within the protective parameters of religion rather than the more secular setting of armed conscription. Moreover, by directing the count through the tithe, this instance of census-taking seems to avoid the inscription

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[58] C. Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 78.

[59] M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 90.

of names, hinting that it was the census' writtenness which may have caused it to be viewed as a violation of the social structure.

5.5.3 Numbers 1

The census in Numbers 1 more overtly links the social friction caused by the census to its writtenness. But contrary to 2 Samuel 24 and Exodus 30, the authors of Numbers seem to enjoy census-taking very much. One reason for this difference is that Numbers 1 is much more likely to be a later literary fabrication than 2 Samuel 24. However, even if it is a total fabrication, the authors would have based their depiction of census-taking on cultural ideals. The text can thus provide a window into how its ancient authors expected a census to function. The census in Numbers 1 takes place in Sinai after the Israelites have received their body of law from Yahweh. It is a census ordered by Yahweh with the goal of numbering every male in Israel "able to go to war" (Num 1:3). But the text does not simply list the total number of such males. Rather, it lists them according to their tribal affiliations. It is a military census that organizes the Israelites into tribal camps and prepares them for armed conflict with the peoples they will encounter on their journey to take possession of Canaan.

When examining the cultural expectations of Numbers 1, we still find an unease towards census-taking that can be explained by tribal politics. That unease is averted through careful inscriptional practices. The chapter's depiction of the census overtly acknowledges the tribal structure and carefully articulates the kinship ties and the nested layers of identity comprising a segmented kinship system. Yahweh stipulates that Moses must enlist the help of an elder from each tribe (Num 1:4), a procedure that sharply contrasts with 2 Samuel 24 where David only dispatches the army officials. More than that, during the enumeration in Numbers, we are told that each man must be recorded within his tribe (מטה), lineage (תולדה), clan (משפחה), and

ancestral house (אב בית). By carefully articulating this nested kinship system, it is almost as if the text admits that a census contradicts such a system, and thus care should be taken to preserve it in the event of census procedures. As stated at the outset, the goal of this divinely ordered census is not just to provide a total number of male warriors. Its purpose is also to establish an organization for the Israelites based on tribal affiliation. The people might belong to a larger social body under the name "Israel," but the census is just as interested in affirming the smaller tribal identity to which each registered male is attached. Through careful inscriptional practices, the registered individuals are depicted as more beholden to their kin affiliations than to a monarch.

The genealogical nature of the Numbers census becomes more peculiar when it is placed next to census texts from Mari. Often, Mari census texts have little interest in the type of identity affiliations carefully outlined in Numbers. Mari texts usually record the minimum amount of information required to identify persons. The only essential question of identity was whether or not individuals fell within the territorial jurisdiction of the respective monarch. These texts most often consist of a personal name and a geographic location, sometimes adding occupation and only rarely a patronym.[60] Contrastingly, the census texts of Numbers show no interest in geography or occupation but demonstrate a unique interest in kinship categories. In this way, the census in Numbers recalls the unique situation of census-taking at Tukukani, where ʿapiru were listed according to their social affiliations instead of their geographic ones.

Unlike Numbers 1, the malignant census in 2 Samuel 24 bears a much closer resemblance to Mesopotamian censuses. In 2 Samuel 24, professional soldiers go throughout the land,

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[60] See Durand's treatment of the Mari census in LAPO 17, 332-337. In ARM III 19, for instance, the official reports that alongside names, he inscribed each individual's locality "village by village" (ālišam).

registering the Israelites. When the text describes this census, it offers precise geographic details, much like the standard census in Mesopotamia. The text mentions multiple regions and their respective population centers. The book of Numbers differs from both this Davidic census and its Mesopotamian counterparts in its disregard for geography and its focus on kinship. The registering of individuals by their genealogy instead of their geography suggests that written categorization mattered. The focus on maintaining tribal affiliations instead of erasing them for a permanent larger affiliation based on geography perhaps explains why the census in Numbers is so benign compared to the one in 2 Samuel 24. Numbers 1 bases political obligation on who people are. 2 Samuel 24 and ARM I 6 base it on where they are. In that sense, the census strikes at the heart of how a community organizes itself along political lines, whether territorially or according to kin. The reason for this is found in the assumptions of census-taking. The ones doing the registering assume the power to coerce those who are registered. The geographic censuses of Mesopotamia and 2 Sam 24 assume that power based on location. Conversely, Numbers appeals to kinship ties, essentially leaving intact the tribal channels for making wartime decisions.

In how Numbers deals with the Levites, we find another example of how the census' written practices were thought to affect society and politics. Yahweh prohibits Moses from taking a census of the Levites, stating that "only the tribe of Levi you shall not register. You shall not take their census in the midst of the Israelites!" (1:49). The tone and language of this double injunction are strikingly similar to Samši-Addu's double warnings about taking a census of the Binu-Yamina at Mari. Yahweh's prohibition is interesting when considering the anomalous social location of the Levites, who were landless cultic functionaries. The origin of the Levites has created much debate, often centering around the etymology of their tribal name, which

derives from the verb meaning "to be attached." Some have taken this to mean that the Levites were a community of foreign ethnic stock who attached themselves to the Israelites.[61] Others argue that they were disenfranchised sons or other displaced social elements who attached themselves to cultic service as a means of subsistence.[62] Either origin story highlights their unusual social location. That unusual location is further underscored by their landlessness and designated role as cultic functionaries. Their occupation of a peculiar place in the Israelite social system makes their exemption from the Israelite census correlate with the argument offered so far. There seems to be a fear that including them in the census would obligate them to something that would violate their social position, similar to the concerns Šamši-Addu expressed about the Binu-Yamina if they were included in a census at Mari.

Of course, one might argue that that the Levites are simply not listed because they are absolved from military service. But this argument does not account for the fact that Moses eventually does take a census of the Levites (Num 3). However, it is stipulated that they must be listed separately and not "in the midst of the sons of Israel," בתוך בני ישראל (Num 1:49). This recalls Tunip-Tessup's separate lists of ʿapiru. Like the lists there, the separate Levitical lists in Numbers indicate that beliefs about the constitutive powers of writing were a central part of how

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[61] R.E. Friedman, *The Exodus* (New York: HarperOne, 2017).

[62] A.H.J. Gunneweg, *Leviten und Priester: Hauptlinien der Traditionsbildung und Geschichte des israelitisch-jüdischen Kultpersonals*, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965); L. Stager, "The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel," *BASOR* 285 (1985): 28; J. Hutton, "The Levitical Diaspora (I): A Sociological Comparison with Morocco's Ahansal," in *Exploring the Longue Durée: Essays in Honor of Lawrence E Stager*, ed. J.D. Schloen (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 223-234; M. Leuchter, *The Levites and the Boundaries of Israelite Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Others maintain that the Levites were an original tribe of Israel. On this see, A. Cody, *A History of Old Testament Priesthood* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 29-38; J. Bray, *Sacred Dan: Religious Tradition and Cultic Practice in Judges 17-18* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 145-147.

census-taking was cognitively experienced. How a group was materially labeled in writing was thought not simply to reflect social and political obligations, but rather but to determine them. Writing was given a constitutive force.

5.5.4 Divine Name Registers

Examples of divine writing in biblical literature affirm that ancient Israelites attributed a constitutive force to the act of inscription. Some of these examples draw on the imagery of name-lists, hinting that conceptions of census-taking might underlie their rationale (Is 4:3; Jer 17:13; Ps 87:6). One even associates social belonging with a written name register. In Ezek 13:9, the text condemns false prophets, claiming "they shall not be in the council of people, nor be enrolled (יכתבו) in the register (בכתב) of the house of Israel." The text correlates belonging in a written list with belonging in a people. This ability of writing to constitute reality arises repeatedly in biblical literature and is valued for a number of different purposes. In Jeremiah 22:30, Yahweh condemns the priesthood, personified in an individual, by commanding that he be recorded (כתב) in the divine books as childless. His written status determines his reality, just as appears to be the case with biblical depictions of the census. As already discussed, previous scholarship has applied these depictions of divine writing to the census in order to argue that the numinous power of writing made inscribing names, and therefore the census, a dangerous and taboo act. I understand these depictions more narrowly to illustrate the constitutive powers of writing as it relates to social and political belonging. The power these texts attribute to writing affords the census an opportunity to be cognitively experienced as fixing political belonging in a way that violated the tribal ideals of autonomy and flexibility.

5.6 The Date of 2 Samuel 24 and the Historical Context for Beliefs about the Written

Powers of Census-taking

5.6.1 Previous Scholarship

The analysis to this point has shown that an assortment of texts from the Hebrew Bible

concerning the census can be understood as foregrounding a competition between monarchical

and tribal nodes of authority. The text that most clearly foregrounds this competition, however, is

2 Samuel 24. It portrays a specifically monarchical census as an invasion of the tribal body and a

national catastrophe. What historical context would provide the most fertile soil for such anxiety

about a written, monarchical census? The Samuel appendix in which the Davidic census is

situated took shape quite late, perhaps even after the time of the Chronicler since the latter shows

no awareness of the appendix's chiastic elements. Moreover, although it took shape as a unit

quite late, its parts are chronologically heterogeneous.[63] The material in chapter 24 most likely

formed at a time and place independent of the appendix's other elements. Traditional scholarship

understood that time and place in conjunction with an early pre-exilic History of David's Rise

and Solomonic Succession, arguing that chapter 24 was originally situated somewhere between 2

Samuel 9-20.[64] There, the census would have fomented northern political resistance against

David. More recent analysis pushes in the opposite direction. For example, Jacques Vermeylen

offers a detailed argument advocating for an exilic date.[65] He finds in the narrative an abundance

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[63] See, for example, the opening remarks in M. Leonard-Fleckman, "Utterance of David, the Anointed of the God of Jacob (2 Samuel 23:1-7)," *JBL* 137, no. 3 (2018): 667-683.

[64] See Budde, *Die Bücher Samuel*; O. Eissfeldt, *Einleitung in das Alte Testamente* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1964), 334; Fuss, "II Samuel 24," 146-147. F. Crüsemann, *Der Widerstand gegen das Königtum: die antiköniglichten Text des Alte Testamente und der Kampf um den frühen israelitischen Staat*, WMANT 39 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1978).

[65] Vermeylen, *La loi du plus fort,* 145-148. His view is supported by T. Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical, and Literary Introduction* (New

of Deuteronomistic language. Relying on Noth's model, he argues that the exilic DtrH compiler crafted *ex nihilo* the base layer of the census story to function as a beacon of hope in dark times. The narrative brings hope, in his eyes, because Yahweh at least partially spares Jerusalem. For him, this is the only foreseeable way such a story would maintain significance as part of a larger narrative.

Contra traditional scholarship that places the narrative in the early monarchy and more recent arguments that place it in the exilic period, I will argue in the following that several features of the Davidic census episode suggest a date during or after the reign of Hezekiah in the early 7th century BCE. This is significant for the broader arguments of this dissertation. Precisely during this time, the epigraphic record shows that Judah witnessed an explosion of literacy that correlated with sweeping social changes. The 7th century provides a compelling backdrop for the unease generated by the written census in 2 Samuel 24.

5.6.2 Problems with an Exilic Dating

Although Vermeylen's analysis is thorough and impressive, I find a number of logical and literary problems with his exilic dating for 2 Samuel 24. I fail to see how a plague instigated by census-taking would make a good analogy for the exile. It strikes me as an odd choice for an author to invent such an analogy in the context of 587 BCE. On 2 Samuel 24's side of the analogy, Jerusalem is untouched by a plague compared to the rest of the country. On the exile's side, Jerusalem is laid waste by an invading army along with the rest of the country. Of course, Vermeylen seems to depend on the so-called "myth of the empty land" to make the analogy more believable, arguing that Jerusalem was only partially touched and ultimately spared during the

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York: T & T Clark, 2007), 146.

Babylonian invasion.[66] But this is problematic. For one, the plain sense of 2 Samuel 24 is that

Jerusalem went completely untouched. Implying that Jerusalem escaped all harm, the text relates

that the angel was stopped "when he reached his hand towards Jerusalem" (24:16). On the other

side of the coin, archaeological evidence indicates that Jerusalem suffered greatly at the hands of

the Babylonians.[67] Thus, the details of the census story offer a poor analogy for the context of

587 BCE. Certainly, later tradents might have appropriated such a narrative, seeing potential

conceptual links, but it seems logically doubtful they would create such a narrative *ex nihilo* for

this purpose.

  More than the weakness of the analogy, Vermeylen's argument is beset with some

literary problems. For example, Graeme Auld argues that the Samuel appendix, in fact, lacks

Deuteronomistic language and contains many elements that potentially predate the rest of the

books of Samuel. [68] The Deuteronomistic nature of 2 Samuel 24 is thus far from consensus.

Adding to the doubt Auld casts on Vermeylen's dating, two features of the census narrative's

opening verse disagree with placing the narrative in the exilic and later periods. There is a wide

consensus that 24:1, which claims Yahweh incited the census because he was angry with Israel,

is an editorial note that postdates the base narrative of the census and brings it into a literary

relationship with chapter 21, thus forming the bookends of the Samuel appendix. Vermeylen's

exilic dating of the core census narrative causes him to push this later editorial note into the

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[66] Vermeylen, *La loi du plus fort*, 147.

[67] O. Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah under Babylonian Rule* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005); A. Faust, *Judah in the Neo-Babylonian Period: The Archaeology of Desolation* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2012).

[68] See A.G. Auld, "A Factored Response to an Enigma," in *For and Against David*, 359-368.

Persian period. But as illustrated by the Chronicler, who likely worked in the Persian period, the theological assumptions of 24:1 are problematic for such a late dating.[69] The idea that Yahweh would incite a devotee to commit a damnable act threatened the theological conceptions of the Chronicler's world, who instead credits שטן "adversary" with inciting David to take the census (1 Chr. 21:1). The editorial note of 2 Sam 24:1 thus seems theologically problematic for the Persian period, which would push the core narrative even earlier.

There is a second issue with assigning the secondary material of 24:1 to the Persian period. The editor here uses the phrase "Israel and Judah" (את ישראל ואת יהודה), distinguishing between the two kingdoms, but referring to them as a collective unit. This designation best fits a time when both kingdoms existed or shortly after the fall of Samaria to the Assyrians in the late 8th century BCE or early 7th, when memory of the northern kingdom would have been fresh in the minds of Judah.[70] The phrase does not fit a post-exilic date and especially not one as late as the Persian period. Indeed, in Chronicles, Joab is told to simply number "Israel," with no mention of Judah (1 Chr. 21:1-2). Vermeylen attempts to account for this problem by proposing that "Israel and Judah" in 2 Samuel 24 is a veiled reference to the schism between Judean returnees and the northern Samaritan community in the Persian period. But the logic of this argument is flawed. A core tenet of Judean returnee ideology was the adoption of northern

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[69] The dating of Chronicles is somewhat contentious, but I find a Persian period setting convincing for a number of reasons. These are most concisely and convincingly summed up in W.M. Schniedewind, *Society and the Promise to David: The Reception History of 2 Samuel 7:1-17* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 125-128. The following non-exhaustive factors favor an early Persian dating: 1) lack of Persian loanwords, 2) an obsession over the Temple that fits a period when society was in dialogue about its rebuilding, and 3) the narrative account of Chronicles itself ends in the 6th century.

[70] See discussion in Fleming, *Legacy of Israel*, passim.

traditions, especially illustrated in the returnee community's reflex to designate itself as simply

"all Israel," excluding the identifier Judah. The label "all Israel" provided the returnees with an

ideological means of identifying themselves as the true heirs of Israelite tradition, justifying their

claim to the land. Identifying the northern Samaritans as "Israel" would confound the

fundamentals of this returnee ideology. It would concede that the northern Samaritans were

genuine heirs to Yahweh's land grant. Post-exilic biblical literature, as especially illustrated by

Chronicles, lacks almost any use of the pair "Israel and Judah" for just this reason.[71] Thus,

arguments placing 24:1 in the Persian period are doubtful. It is important to emphasize again that

this note is secondary to the core census narrative. If uses of "Israel and Judah" are most likely a

feature of literature from a time when both kingdoms existed or at the latest from a time shortly

following the north's fall to the Assyrians, as seems most plausible, then this would push the

core census narrative even earlier.

The map traced by Joab and the commanders of the army can be understood as an

additional feature that precludes a late dating, a feature that, as far as I can tell, has yet to receive

proper consideration. When compared to other maps in the Hebrew Bible, discussed below,

many of its details defy an exilic or later dating. Most significantly, it shows a detailed interest in

the Transjordanian region. The text recounts that those conducting the census immediately

crossed the Jordan, visiting Aroer, the territory of Gad, Jazer, and Gilead (24:5-6). Such interest

in the region east of the Jordan is not found in other maps firmly dated to a time after the exile.

Ezekiel, for instance, locates tribal allotments entirely on the West side of the Jordan.[72] Indeed,

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[71] See S. Japhet, *The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009).

[72] See also Numbers 34:12, which delimits the promised land at the Jordan. The verses following v. 12, which mention the Transjordanian tribes, appear to be an even later addition

exilic editors largely shaped the narrative of the Pentateuch around the idea that the true

inheritance of Israel lies singularly west of the Jordan.[73]

Some clearly late texts do incorporate traditions featuring Transjordanian tribal

allotments. But even here, they bear details which conflict with the geographic understanding of

2 Samuel 24. For instance, the tribal allotments of Joshua 13-19, a late priestly text, locate the

tribe of Reuben in the southernmost portion of Transjordan Israel, with Gad to the north.[74] 2 Sam

24:5, however, refers to the wadi Arnon near Aroer, that is, the southernmost border of

Transjordan Israel, as the "wadi of Gad" (הנחל הגד). This detail locates the tribe of Gad in the

southernmost region rather than Reuben. Other Deuteronomic texts are of little help in clarifying

this mapping issue. Deuteronomy 3 claims simply that the region from Aroer up to the southern

outskirts of Gilead was given to both the Reubenites and Gadites, failing to distinguish who

resided where. An extra-biblical text may be of assistance here. Similar to the geography of 2

Samuel 24, the early 9th-century Moabite stele portrays Gad as Moab's border rival. Mesha

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aimed at harmonizing the chapter with the rest of biblical literature.

[73] Fleming, *Legacy of Israel*, 113-132; M. Weinfeld, "The Extent of the Promised Land: That Status of Transjordan," in *Das Land israel in biblischer Zeit*, ed. G. Strecker (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 59-75; M.G. Seleznev, "The Origins of the Tribal Boundaries in Joshua: Administrative Documents or Sacral Geography?" in *Babel und Bibel 2: Memoriae Igor M Diakonoff*, vol. 2, eds. L. Kogan, N. Koslva, S. Loesov, and S. Tishchenko (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 331-364; R. Havrelock, *River Jordan: The Mythology of a Dividing Line* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). The various attitudes towards Transjordan in DtrH and their respective chronological horizons are thoroughly discussed in J. Hutton, *The Transjordanian Palimpsest: The Overwritten Texts of Personal Exile and Transformation in the Deuteronomistic History*, BZAW 396 (New York: de Gruyter, 2009).

[74] Numbers 32, however, also a priestly text aligns with 2 Sam 24 by assigning Aroer and Ataroth along with Dibon to the tribe of Gad. Commentators largely agree, though, that the chapter incorporates older traditions as especially illustrated by Gad's southern position in contradistinction to the priestly text of Joshua 13:19. On this, see G.B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 426; J. Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPS (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 270, 274.

claims that "from long ago the man of Gad inhabited Ataroth," a town several kilometers west of

Aroer and only slightly north of it identified as modern Khirbet ʿAttarus.[75] By associating Gad

with this toponym, Mesha locates Gad in the southernmost region of what biblical literature

conceives as Transjordan Israel. According to Mesha, Gad was long established in this

southernmost strip. The tribe formed his most proximal Israelite adversary. As far as the

evidence is concerned, this detail about the location of Gad means that the geography of 2

Samuel 24 is closer to a 9th century extra-biblical inscription than to post-exilic biblical mapping

ideologies.[76]

Some might contend that rather than reflecting chronological horizons, the details of 2

Samuel 24's geography instead reflect the ideologies of Deuteronomic (D) maps as opposed to

priestly ones (P). The difference between these biblical mapping ideologies has received

renewed attention in the work of Rachel Havrelock.[77] According to her work, features of 2

Samuel 24 do not accord with D conceptualizations of the land. Although she does not treat the

Davidic census, I here cite a couple of her more important D mapping ideologies, which are

lacking in 2 Samuel 24. For starters, with respect to the location of Gad, D maps are of no help,

as already mentioned. But more significantly, Havrelock argues throughout that although D maps

conceptualize a greater Israel incorporating Transjordan, they tend to exclude population groups

located there from national ethnic membership in Israel. 2 Samuel 24 seems to rather include the

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[75] Line 10 of the Mesha inscription reads *wʾš gd yšb bʾrṣ ʿṭrt mʿlm*, "The man of Gad dwelt in Ataroth as of old." Transcriptions and translation from S. Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), 392-394.

[76] In a brief note, Israel Finkelstein likewise sees 9th-century realities behind 2 Sam 24's census map. See I. Finkelstein and N.A. Silberman, *David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible's Sacred Kings and the Roots of Western Tradition* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 110-111.

[77] Havrelock, *River Jordan*.

Transjordanian territories in Israelite ethnic membership. Beyond issues of national inclusion, 2 Samuel 24's map is minimalistic compared to the boundaries of D maps. Whereas the latter include Philistia and stretch all the way to the Euphrates, 2 Samuel 24 excludes Philistia and ventures no further northeast than *possibly* the Orontes. More than likely, depending on how the difficult "Tahtim Hodshi" (תחתים חדשי) is understood (24:6), 2 Samuel 24's northeast boundary does not even go that far. While many have designated תחתים חדשי as a corrupt form of Qadesh of the Hittites on the Orontes, such a designation conflicts with the "from Dan to Beersheba" (מדן ועד באר שבע) geographic parameters stipulated in David's announcement of the census (24:2). That geographic span, appearing in five places outside of 2 Samuel 24, does not imply locations as far north as Qadesh. Thus, the authors of 2 Samuel 24 likely conceptualized northeast boundaries that stopped well short of that. This comparatively minimalistic picture is especially notable given that early in the reign of Solomon, David's immediate successor, DtrH portrays Israel as a vast kingdom stretching from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates (1 Kgs 5:1). 2 Samuel 24 thus does not accord with major features of D maps and seems to reflect minimal ideals that more closely mirror monarchic realities.

So far, I have argued that elements of the core census narrative preclude a setting in the exilic or Persian period, meaning that the text's anxiety about a written census stems from an earlier time.[78] On a literary level, details of the secondary editorial note in 24:1 diverge both theologically and politically from such late settings. Crediting Yahweh with inciting evil is

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[78] It must be conceded that the story has attracted later tradents, but it should not be concluded that the core of the narrative is late altogether on this basis. As already mentioned, Gad's role is considered almost universally late and secondary. The Araunah episode is also late and secondary. There are two endings to the plague, one in v. 16 and one in v. 25, which also illustrate how the text attracted later tradents. On these issues, see McCarter, *II Samuel*, 514 and Anthony F. Campbell, *2 Samuel*, FOTL 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 208.

theologically problematic in these periods. Additionally, by bifurcating Judah and Israel as two politically distinct entities, the editorial note is more at home in a period following the fall of the north to the Assyrians in 722 BCE than it would be in later exilic periods which show a preference for the ideological use of "Israel" to subsume both kingdoms. The geography of the narrative similarly reflects earlier periods. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine the census as an analogy for the exile. These features suggest a *terminus ante quem* for the core census narrative in the late Judahite monarchy.

5.6.3 A Proposal for the Late Judahite Monarchy

If literary signs suggest the core census narrative is unlikely to be exilic or post-exilic, what historical context fits? Contrary to Vermeylen and Römer, Graeme Auld proposes that portions of the Samuel Appendix, including the census narrative, are among the earliest material in Samuel.[79] This proposal is in line with early exegetes who suggested the census narrative derived from early court records of the United Monarchy.[80] However, it is difficult to find literary and thematic support for this, especially given that the kernel of the story attributes a negative act to David.

Of the many models proposed for the DtrH, one that would thematically fit 2 Samuel 24's negative depiction of David would be the model that finds a northern pro-Jeroboam strand in Deuteronomic material. Finding positive parallels between Jeroboam and Moses, this model proposes that early Deuteronomic material served as an exodus charter for northern Israel's secession from the Davidic dynasty.[81] A core census narrative finding fault with David's

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[79] Auld, "A Factored Response."

[80] Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology I,* 59.

[81] K. Van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel: Continuity and*

centralization through the census fits neatly alongside other material attributed to this pro-Jeroboam strand, not least of which is 1 Kings 11 where the authors linguistically align Solomon's forced labor and building projects with the plight of the Israelites under the forced labor policies of the pharaohs in Egypt (Exod 1-2).[82] Providing ammunition for a northern secession, a Davidic census could be viewed as the seed from which Solomon's unfavorable forced labor policies grew.

There are, however, issues that complicate an attribution of the census narrative to an early pro-Jeroboam exodus charter. The primary issue with such a model involves how the plague resolves. The narrative's resolution seems to have in some way centered around Jerusalem's sanctity and centrality, a theme unlikely to have been developed in northern circles. While it remains possible that the Jerusalem material in 2 Samuel 24 is secondary, it seems more likely that sacral ideas about Jerusalem formed the original story's end with the most likely candidate being the note in verse 16a, which reports Yahweh's command to the angel to spare Jerusalem and cease the plague. As noted by Vermeylen, the Araunah story (24:16b, 19-24) forms an alternate ending with details that situate it in a late editorial stratum.[83] Without those verses, the plague narrative has no ending other than the note in 16a that the angel stayed his hand. Given that this note centers around the sanctity and centrality of Jerusalem, the story best

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Change in the Forms of Religious Life (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 300; R. Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period* OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 141-143; J.J. Collins, "The Development of the Exodus Tradition," in *Religious Identity and the Invention of Tradition*, eds. J. W. Van Henten and A. Houtenpen (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2001), 150-152; K. Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible*, Siphrut 3 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 127-129; Leuchter, *The Levites*, 120-125.

[82] See the works in the previous note for details of this comparison.

[83] Vermeylen, *La loi du plus fort*, 147-148.

fits a historical moment when Judah witnessed political and religious centralization focused on the city.

5.6.3.1 The Census and the Reign of Hezekiah

One such historical moment was the reign of Hezekiah. Indeed, elements of the census narrative fit the theological, historical, and social settings of Hezekiah's time in the late 8th and early 7th centuries. While it is difficult to say for sure that 2 Samuel 24 was written during this period, the links between the narrative and the context of Hezekiah's reign are too strong to ignore. At the very least, a pre-existing census narrative would have been remembered in the context of the 8th-7th centuries as a story that captured and gave expression to the changing times Judah found itself in. Alternatively, the period could have served as inspiration for later authors to fashion such a story. Whatever the exact relationship, the following analysis finds it likely that this time period and the story of David's census are linked in some way. Most importantly, for the purposes of this dissertation, both the context of Hezekiah's reign and the census narrative illustrate the ability of administrative writing to serve as a prominent symbol of change in society, change that some perceived as unwanted.

5.6.3.2 Historical Setting

The most obvious parallel between the Davidic census and the reign of Hezekiah concerns the historical fate of Jerusalem at the end of the 8th century. In both 2 Samuel 24 and Hezekiah's time, the city miraculously survived a scourge while the rest of Judah suffered greatly. During Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib and his Assyrian armies leveled the Judahite countryside as a response to Judah's rebellion, an event recounted in both the biblical record and Assyrian sources. In one of his royal inscriptions, Sennacherib claims to have destroyed forty-six

of Hezekiah's Judahite cities.[84] He also monumentalized his terror of Judah with a large palace relief in Nineveh recounting his siege, capture, and slaughter of Lachish, a key Judahite stronghold in the Shephelah. This picture of devastation in the countryside aligns with archaeology. Several sites in the Shephelah attest to a catastrophic destruction at the end of the 8th century along with a monumental reduction in the number of sites in the following period.[85] But according to both the biblical record and the Assyrian sources, Jerusalem was merely besieged and ultimately evaded capture and destruction, though not without a heavy indemnity. This historical event serves as a compelling backdrop for 2 Samuel 24, where Jerusalem is depicted as also miraculously surviving a national catastrophe in contradistinction to the rest of the land.

5.6.3.3 Theological Setting

The core of 2 Samuel 24 also shares telling theological motifs typical of literature produced in the wake of Assyria's invasion. When Jerusalem survived Sennacherib's wrath, the event spawned an "unrelenting Zionist ideology" that viewed the city as Yahweh's favored and impregnable abode.[86] Such an ideology is most clearly articulated in the so-called Psalms of Zion (e.g., Ps 46, 48). But similar Zionist themes permeate 2 Samuel 24. There, just as in Zionist

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[84] *ANET* 287-288; M. Cogan, *The Raging Torrent: Historical Inscriptions from Assyria and Babylonia Relating to Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), 110-115.

[85] D. Ussishkin, *The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1980); I. Finkelstein, "The Archaeology of the Days of Manasseh," in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King*, eds. M. Coogan, J. Cheryl Exum, and L. Stager (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 169-187; S. Bunimovitz and Z. Lederman, "The Final Destruction of Beth Shemesh and the Pax Assyriaca in the Judean Shephelah," *TA* 30, no. 1 (2003): 3-26; H. Katz and A. Faust, "The Assyrian Destruction Layer at Tel ʿEton," *IEJ* 62, no. 1 (2012): 22-53.

[86] On Zion Theology, see C.R. Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny: The Development of the Book of Isaiah: A Reassessment of Isaiah 36-39* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

literature, Jerusalem made an unlikely escape entirely dependent on divine protection. Implying that the city enjoyed a special relationship with the deity, Yahweh ordered his angel of death to stop before touching Jerusalem. Such a story would be at home in the time following Sennacherib's campaign, when Jerusalem's repute as an impregnable abode protected by Yahweh reverberated throughout the land.

Other branded elements of Hezekian Zionist theology are at the heart of 2 Samuel 24. For example, Zionist theology featured a sacred triad of deity, pious king, and impenetrable city. In his analysis of Zionistic themes in Isaiah 36-38, Christopher Seitz shows that Hezekiah is presented as a pious king who seeks the approval of Yahweh and who does penance when required.[87] Seitz convincingly argues that this idea of pious and penitent kingship flourished in the wake of 701 BCE. According to this theology, the inviolability of Jerusalem depended on a pious and penitent king. The portrayal of David in the core census narrative accords with this element of Zionist theology. As many have noted, the David of 2 Samuel 24 exemplifies how a pious king should respond to national catastrophe as well as moral and spiritual miscalculations.[88] He recognizes his guilt and immediately seeks forgiveness (24:10), even requesting that the punishment only be placed upon him and his dynasty rather than the people (24:17). Much like this presentation of David, Hezekiah also acted piously in the midst of a national catastrophe (2 Kgs 19:1,15). This presentation of David seems especially Zionistic, given that the narrative pairs it with the impermeability of Jerusalem.

Hezekian Zionism also provides fertile soil for the pan-Hebrew kingdom envisioned by the geography of the Davidic census. Biblical literature attributed to Hezekiah shows concern for

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[87] ibid., 101, 105-106.

[88] Knoppers, *1 Chronicles*; Klement, *2 Samuel 21-24*, 174-180.

establishing a renewed Golden Age with the northern and southern territories united under a

Davidic ruler in Jerusalem.[89] 2 Samuel 24's geography bears marks of having grown in such

intellectual soil. The map traced by the census-takers constructs a national Israelite identity that

incorporates central locales in the south, north, and Transjordanian regions. While later exilic

communities held similar aspirations for a renewed Golden Age, they had little regard for the

Transjordanian territories, as already discussed. Conversely, the census narrative prioritizes these

eastern locales just as Hezekiah must have, given their recent status as Israelite territory during

the 8th century.

The Zionist theology of Hezekiah's reign is credited with providing the inspiration for

much biblical literature. Given the correspondences between the context of his reign and 2

Samuel 24, the census narrative could have formed part of an early version of the

Deuteronomistic History.[90] The authors or editors of this work could have manipulated an

independent tradition about a census from the time of David or Jeroboam, but the earliest

retrievable version of the story, which centers around the sanctity of Jerusalem, fits an early 7th-

century date in the time after Jerusalem survived the Assyrian siege of Sennacherib. Within this

work, the story would function as a narrative that aligns Hezekiah with David. The pious

portrayal of David in the midst of national catastrophe foreshadows Hezekiah's pious actions in

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[89] Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book*, 64-90; R.A. Young, *Hezekiah in History and Tradition*, VTSup 156 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 109-119; K. Schmid, *The Old Testament: A Literary History* (trans. L.M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 65-104.

[90] Such a work would align with the view of a triple redaction. The most recent and thorough argument for a Hezekian Deuteronomistic History is B.D. Thomas, *Hezekiah and the Compositional History of the Book of Kings* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). The view was earlier popularized by H. Weippert, "Die 'deuteronomistischen' Beurteilungen der Könige von Israel und Juda und das Problem der Redaktion der Königsbücher." *Biblica* 53, no. 3 (1972): 301-339. See also, I. Provan, *Hezekiah in the Book of Kings*, BZAW 172 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1988).

the midst of a later national catastrophe involving an Assyrian campaign. In each case, their piety

and penance influence Yahweh to spare Jerusalem, a series of events whose individual parts

comprise the Zionistic formula: pious and penitent king equals a holy city protected by Yahweh.

5.6.3.4 Social Setting

To this point, the Hezekian elements of 2 Samuel 24 I have discussed center around

positive assessments of Hezekiah's kingship. But 2 Samuel 24 has a more complex attitude

towards the monarchy. While David emerges righteous in the end, the text still credits him with a

grave blunder in his census. The question becomes whether such a complex attitude, one with an

undercurrent of criticism, also fits the reign of Hezekiah. In fact, Hezekiah's reign does provide a

suggestive setting for the anxieties expressed about centralization and rapid social change in the

story of the Davidic census. Much like what is depicted in 2 Samuel 24, Judahite society rapidly

changed and became more centralized during the 8th-7th centuries BCE, as discussed in Chapter

Three. Groups experiencing this rapid social change and political control would have found

meaning in the census narrative of 2 Samuel 24, a narrative focused on unseen levels of

centralized administrative power.

Both the census narrative and Hezekiah's reign position Jerusalem as the navel of power.

The city was the center coordinating public works and political centralization in the 8th-7th

centuries. This fact is evident based on Jerusalem's size and its monumental public architecture

from this period in the form of a complex water system and massive fortifications.[91] The city

covered an area of approximately 150 acres and boasted a population over 10,000, easily making

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[91] N. Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1980), 26-31; R. Reich and E. Shukron, "The Urban Development of Jerusalem in the Late Eighth Century B.C.E.," in *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period*, eds. A. G. Vaughn and A. E. Killebrew (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2003), 219-218.

it the region's power center. 2 Samuel 24 likewise positions Jerusalem at the center of massive

changes in Judahite society. David's minions "go out" and "return" to Jerusalem, his fortified

political center, as the base of operations for their census. The growth of Jerusalem and its

domination of the Judahite countryside during Hezekiah's reign make this time period a

suggestive setting for the theme of centralization around Jerusalem developed in 2 Samuel 24.

In both the census narrative and the policies of Hezekiah's rule, Jerusalem's political

significance is underscored by an increased religious significance. 2 Kings 18:4 relates that

Hezekiah decommissioned cult places outside of the temple, a move that effectively established

Jerusalem as the state-sanctioned place of worship. Evidence from archaeology aligns with the

reforms credited to Hezekiah in the biblical text. Beersheba, Lachish, and Arad all boast the

remains of 8th to 7th century decommissioned cultic areas.[92] This centralization of religion in

Jerusalem would have ultimately promoted political centralization. As Robb Andrew Young puts

it, funneling cult practices to Jerusalem was also a way of "ensuring that more revenue streamed

into the capital city."[93] 2 Samuel 24 likewise establishes Jerusalem as a newfound place of cultic

superiority. Jerusalem avoids the destruction reserved for the rest of the country simply because

Yahweh favors it (24:16). A special site in the city is then marked as sacred due to the

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[92] Y. Aharoni, "The Horned Altar at Beersheba," *BA* 37 (1974): 2-23; Z. Herzog, "The Date of the Temple at Arad: Reassessment of the Stratigraphy and the Implications for the History of Religion in Judah," in *Studies in the Archaeology of the Iron Age in Israel and Jordan*, ed. A. Mazar (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 156-178; D. Ussishkin, "The Level V 'Sanctuary' and 'High Place" at Lachish," in *Saxa Loquentur: Studien zur Archäologie Palästinas/Israels, Festschrift für Volkmar Fritz*, eds. C.G. den Hertog, U. Hübner, and S. Münger (Münster: Ugarit Verlag, 2003), 205-211. There is some debate about whether the decommissioning of these cult sites stemmed from the reforms of Hezekiah or instead from Egyptian and Assyrian military invasions. See L. Fried, "The High Places (Bamôt) and the Reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah: An Archaeological Investigation," *JAOS* 122 (2002): 1-29.

[93] Young, *Hezekiah in History and Tradition*, 114.

supernatural appearance of an angel. The site is later consecrated by David, the founder and most venerable ancestor of the dynasty, with the construction of an altar (24:18-25). In the narrative, the events leading up to Jerusalem's newly found religious significance were concerned with political centralization in the form of a national census. Much like the circumstances of Hezekiah's reign, then, the Jerusalem of the census narrative achieves a heightened status as a religious center in the context of political centralization. Hezekiah's religious reforms, which centralized worship in Jerusalem, thus form a fitting backdrop for the cultic superiority Jerusalem gained in the census narrative.

While most of the Hebrew Bible lauds Hezekiah, the drastic changes in Judahite society would have unnerved many. For example, the prophet Micah decries Judah's urbanization as a source of injustice and social fragmentation (Mic 2:2; 3:9-11). It is likely that even Hezekiah's religious reforms witnessed some pushback. This chapter has already covered how the census narrative views centralized political administration as an opponent to decentralized tribal politics. In a similar manner, Judah's urbanization in the 8th-7th centuries and Hezekiah's centralizing policies have also been understood as change that infringed on the tribal structure. Alongside these changes brought about by urbanization, Hezekiah's reforms, whether intentionally or unintentionally, would have undermined clan identity. When he decommissioned local cult practices to privilege the temple, it was a blow to ancestor veneration, a key component of kin-based identity maintenance. Closing rural cultic spaces would have thus deteriorated decentralized politics rooted in clan identity.[94] Such changes are at the center of the census

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[94] N. Steinberg, "The Deuteronomic Law Code and the Politics of State Centralization," in *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Norman K. Gottwald on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, eds. D. Jobling, P.L. Day, and G.T. Sheppard (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1991), 161-170. For more on this topic, see n. 19 in Chapter Four.

narrative, where a more centralized political structure that favored Jerusalem was viewed as a change capable of undermining the traditional social order. The story of 2 Samuel 24 could easily serve as an outlet of the social tensions during Hezekiah's time, despite the largely positive biblical evaluation of this king.

5.6.3.5 Bureaucratic Writing in Hezekiah's Reign and the Census Narrative

The Hebrew Bible is openly critical of policies connected to Hezekiah in one place. Significantly, the taking of a census is involved. Isaiah 22 preserves a veiled prophetic critique against some of Hezekiah's reforms. The text recounts Hezekiah's building of fortifications and water systems in the context of a foreign invasion. In the end, it offers a negative assessment of these building efforts, stating that the engineers "did not look to him who did it or have regard for him who planned it long ago" (22:11). The disregard for Yahweh here has been understood to mean that Judahites trusted in their own defense mechanisms rather than their god. One of those defense mechanisms negatively assessed is the statement that Hezekiah's administration "counted the houses of Jerusalem" (את בתי ירשלם ספרתם) as part of his planning (22:10a). It would make sense that Hezekiah took full stock of the population as part of his political reforms. But this must have been ill received given its place in this prophetic critique. Isaiah remembers the census as something new, but also as something negative, connected to other impious acts. Much like the Davidic census, this brief passage accuses Hezekiah of numbering the populace without consulting Yahweh. Hezekiah's enumeration would have preceded the city's survival of the Assyrian siege, just as David's preceded a national catastrophe that Jerusalem likewise survived. In both cases, distrust for increased administration was followed by a vindication of the dynasty and its capital at Jerusalem.

Social unrest for a written census credited to Hezekiah makes sense. During his reign,

literate activity exploded. Much of the explosion involved bureaucratic writing. For example, the Judahite bureaucracy created a new administrative provisioning system illustrated by concentrations of royal storage jars. The jars were stamped with a royal insignia which contained the winged scarab and the phrase "belonging to the king" (למלך) along with one of four geographic designators.[95] Though the exact use of the למלך jars is debated, it is clear that, in some capacity, they represent the regulatory control of commodities, most likely in the form of taxation.[96] Their standardized, written labels attest to increasing applications of writing in order to carry out social and economic control. It is also during the late 8th and early 7th centuries that we see rising concentrations of administrative lists and letters at government-controlled military fortresses, particularly in the countryside.[97] The government was using written communication as a technology to increase its control over larger swathes of land. At home-base, Jerusalem likewise witnessed new concentrations of writing, illustrated by an increase in the number of seals and seal impressions from this period.[98] Many individuals named in the seals and their impressions bear official titles of the Judahite bureaucracy. The government's use of writing to manage an urbanizing society and centralized economy was on the rise. On both theoretical grounds as well as depictions of writing elsewhere in biblical literature, it is reasonable to assume that this explosion of administrative writing received some pushback. Such resistance to

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[95] O. Lipschits, O. Sergi, and I. Koch, "Judahite Stamped and Incised Jar Handles: A Tool for Studying the History of Late Monarchic Judah," *TA* 38 (2011): 5-41.

[96] See the discussion in Chapter Three, pp. 72-73.

[97] N. Na'aman, "Literacy in the Negev in the Late Monarchical Period," in *Contextualizing Israel's Sacred Writings: Ancient Literacy, Orality, and Literary Production*, ed. B. Schmidt (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 47-70.

[98] See the discussion in W.M. Schniedewind, *A Social History of Hebrew: It's Origins through the Rabbinic Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 102-104.

rapid social change, partially materialized by administrative uses of writing, seems to be manifested in the story of David's census.

2 Samuel 24 is a story that uses written, bureaucratic artifacts to express anxiety about social change and political control. The explosive growth of writing around the time of Hezekiah provides a suggestive atmosphere for the creation or at least perpetuation of such a story. Just as the written census mechanized a new level of centralization in 2 Samuel 24, Hezekiah also achieved many of his centralizing policies through new applications of writing, as seen in the epigraphic record. In the census narrative, the written census and its message of political control caused social unrest. Prophetic literature indicates that a similar unrest accompanied Hezekiah's administrative reforms. The monarchy's ever-expanding use of writing would have symbolized the expanding political control of society, epitomized in acts such as Hezekiah's numbering of Jerusalem's houses. Some, longing for the good old days of greater independence, would have likely viewed the rising implementation of bureaucratic writing as a virus that plagued society.

5.7 Social Change and Disease

Thus far, I have argued that the Hebrew Bible' suspicion of the census, manifested in associating the act with plague, stems from a belief that the census conflicted with traditional, decentralized forms of political organization in the southern Levant. In particular, the census seems to have been a flashpoint for sociopolitical conflict because it utilizes writing, which gives material expression to political centralization and constitutes political belonging. I have supplied comparative, both ancient and anthropological, as well as biblical evidence supporting this understanding of the census. But I have not given a rationale that explains the logic behind biblical' literature's link between census and plague. Why is a plague in particular used to depict the census as a potentially nefarious act? While I have pointed out the weaknesses inherent in

other explanations for this link, I should note that P. Kyle McCarter critiques the sociopolitical explanation offered here, stating that such an argument "begs the question of the relationship between census and plague."[99] For McCarter, sociopolitical explanations fail to supply a satisfying rationale for this belief. Contra McCarter, it is my contention that the sociopolitical interpretation, in fact, accounts for a high degree of rationality. The rationale behind this explanation is illustrated in medical anthropology and the social theory of body symbolism. In 1987, Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Locke published a groundbreaking article in the *Medical Quarterly Review.* In this article, they devoted a major section to examining how the body is perceived not just as a physical body-self, but also as a social body. Or, as they put it, the body serves as a "natural symbol for thinking about relationships among nature, society, and culture."[100] Their thinking here is heavily influenced by the work of Mary Douglas, particularly her volume *Natural Symbols*, where she discusses how "the body is good to think with" and how it is used as a symbol on which to cognitively map the ideal society.[101] As Scheper-Hughes and Locke discuss in detail, medical anthropologists have frequently found this symbolic equation between the body and society when it comes to conceptions of health and sickness. They cite a growing number of anthropological cases in which the healthy body symbolizes the healthy society, while the diseased body symbolizes the malfunctioning society, where the ideal or traditional society is perceived to be deteriorating in the face of rapid social change.[102]

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[99] McCarter, *II Samuel*, 513

[100] N. Scheper-Hughes and M. Lock, "The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1987): 6-41.

[101] Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (3rd ed.; New York: Routledge, 2003).

[102] Anthropological examples of this thinking abound. See especially R. Lieban, "From Illness to Symbol and Symbol to Illness," *Social Science & Medicine* 35, no. 2 (1992): 183-188 and K. Kroeger, "AIDS Rumors, Imaginary Enemies, and the Body Politic in Indonesia,"

I find that the mindful body, that is, the body as a natural symbol for society, lends anthropological credibility to the sociopolitical explanation for the link the Hebrew Bible creates between census and plague. The stories I have cited here show a widely distributed human reflex to equate the diseased body with the malfunctioning society. This equation especially befits the biblical link between census and plague because 2 Samuel 24 depicts the national census as a novel event that originated with a newly centralized monarchy. The institution of monarchy is viewed with suspicion throughout biblical literature, most famously in 1 Samuel 8 and Judges 8 & 9, where it is depicted as not only foreign and corrupting, but also as at odds with the tribal structure. For its part, a census would be unfamiliar to those who were used to the political organization of a kinship system, which lent a great deal of autonomy to the smaller political units of the tribes.[103] This autonomy was especially expressed in war-time musters, which relied on a great deal of negotiation and flexibility. Due to apparent constitutive beliefs about writing, the census would bind tribal elements to compulsory service, erasing the old consensus-building channels of the tribes. The census and the coercion it implied could thus easily be viewed as a monarchic procedure that materialized a perceived breakdown in the tribal structure. In this way, it could generate similar concerns as those found in the anthropological examples I cited above, where the perceived erosion of traditional society was refracted through beliefs about diseased physical bodies. As I have argued, the comparative and biblical material on the census each convey discourse concerned with the social and political systems. An increased use of writing by political powers would serve as a physical symbol of increased political centralization and

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American Ethnologist 30, no. 2 (2003): 243-257.

[103] See D. Fleming, *Democracy's Ancient Ancestors: Mari and Early Collective Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); idem., *The Legacy of Israel*, and Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew*.

dramatic changes in society. Given the insights from medical anthropology and the social theory of body symbolism, it seems likely that the discourse over the census used diseased physical bodies as a powerful symbol for a dis-eased, malfunctioning tribal body.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter examined biblical passages on the census and argued that negative beliefs about the census were intimately related to beliefs about the materiality of writing. The census invited negative associations because it was mediated through written processes, which, as we have already seen, were highly symbolic of monarchic intrusion. In unrivaled fashion, the written practices of census-taking gave material expression to political control and centralization, ideas at odds with traditional political action rooted in the clan system. But based on the epigraphic remains, such largescale bureaucratic programs seem to have only been infrequently enacted in ancient Israel, if at all. The inscriptional corpus is rather most densely populated with evidence of the mundane keeping of accounts. Given that this use of writing seems to have been much more commonplace in ancient Israel, what type of perceptions did account-keeping engender? Could it ignite the same passions seen in the census? The next chapter takes up these questions by looking at the account of Jehoash's reform of temple finances (2 Kgs 12).

CHAPTER SIX: JEHOASH'S FISCAL REFORMS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS ADMINISTRATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

The previous two chapters discussed two rare instances of administrative writing in the Deuteronomistic History. In each, the use of name-lists was put to sinister ends, suggesting that such documents were charged with a negative affect in ancient Israel. The present chapter analyzes a biblical passage depicting a different type of document, one as old as writing itself: the fiscal account. Indeed, it was the need for accounting that led to the very development of writing in the ancient Near East.[1] The word for "scribe" in Hebrew even derives from a root meaning "count," illustrating how early West Semitic communities associated writing with the act of accounting.

Evidence for the keeping of financial accounts is relatively abundant among the epigraphic remains of ancient Israel and Judah. The depiction of such account-keeping in the biblical narrative, however, is a rare occurrence. While a handful of passages incorporate archive-style accounting texts, only one passage gives narrative shape to the idea of accounting and, therefore, elucidates specific attitudes towards this written practice. That passage is 2 Kings 12, Jehoash's fiscal reforms in the temple. It provides a rare snapshot of a Judahite administrative process that would have been governed by written records. Moreover, because the passage depicts bureaucratic reform, it outlines the types of problems ancient Israelite institutions thought the use of documents could solve. Most noteworthy, however, the narrative notes an administrative step when documents were specifically *not* used (12:16). The disuse of documents here can tell us just as much about attitudes towards administrative writing as their

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[1] D. Schmandt-Besserat, *From Counting to Cuneiform*, Before Writing vol. 1 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992).

use did in Judges 8 and 2 Samuel 24.

The fiscal reforms of 2 Kings 12 are aimed at funding repair to the Jerusalem temple. As I will emphasize below, the repairs are contextualized in a narrative that portrays the monarchy and the temple as competing nodes of power. The previous chapter, 2 Kings 11, outlines the circumstances surrounding Jehoash's ascension to the throne, which involved a conspiracy hatched by the high priest Jehoiada to place the alleged Davidic heir, Jehoash, on the throne and thereby remove the Omride interloper Athaliah from power. 2 Kings 12 then assesses Jehoash's reign according to DtrH's standard formula for a Judahite king. The text then proceeds to list the most memorable events from his reign. The star of the show in chapter 12 is Jehoash's reform of temple finances, which were aimed at securing a perennial source of funds to be used for maintaining the temple's physical condition.

An analysis of 2 Kings 12 reveals that the text's attitude towards the fiscal account overlaps with themes from Gideon's name-list and David's census. Within the passage, the deployment of accounting documents is resented and symbolizes unwanted change instituted by the monarchy, change that subverts tradition and that intrudes upon the autonomy of a cultural institution. In Judges 8, the name-list symbolized the monarchy's intrusion into local decentralized politics. In 2 Samuel 24, this intrusion invaded the entire tribal system. But, in 2 Kings 12, documents symbolize an intrusion into the autonomy of the temple. In all of these texts, documents are employed to expand the surveillance of the crown. The passage's note about the disuse of documents at one particular administrative stage also spotlights a different problem that ancient Israel and Judah appear to have wrestled with during the demographic expansion of writing in the 8th-7th centuries. Namely, it shows an awareness of writing's capacity to create new opportunities for corruption through the practices of forgery and counterfeiting. Suspicion,

whether in the form of surveillance or in the form of forgery, is at the heart of 2 Kings 12's depiction of record-keeping.

In the first part of this chapter, I examine how assumptions about the use of documents underlie the fiscal reforms outlined in 2 Kings 12. Following this examination, I discuss how understanding DtrH's assessment of Jehoash's reforms has implications for understanding the text's attitudes towards document-mediated interaction. Previous scholarship largely discusses DtrH's assessment of the reforms in a positive light. However, I nuance this understanding by showing that features of the narrative allow a reader to view 1 Kigns 12 as an apology aimed at defending the basis of Jehoash's fiscal reforms, which suggests that some factions considered the reforms to be a violation of cultural decorum, an understanding that would have implications for how a reader interprets the narrative's attitudes towards administrative documentation. Having established the text as a defense of the reforms, I then examine the cultural expectations governing temple repair and construction, as reflected in both the Hebrew Bible and the broader ancient Near Eastern material, in order to elucidate what particular cultural violations the apology of 2 Kings 12 sought to address. It is determined that Jehoash's reforms sought to increase the crown's control of temple finances on unprecedented levels, a move that likely provoked resistance from urban elites who traditionally occupied administrative positions in the temple bureaucracy. The chapter then situates the use of documents within this context, arguing that they materialized the king's ambitious penetration into the temple bureaucracy and thus generated a powerful, negative affect. This context and the affective capacities of documents it generated help explain the note that the final stages of the reform did not require some members of the temple bureaucracy to keep written accounts (2 Kgs 12:15). The absence of documents attests to how their presence could create social tension or, in this case, exacerbate already

existing tensions. Finally, the chapter discusses how the framing of this note about the absence of documents illustrates the existence of discourse that pertained to writing's capacity for fraud. This provides the opportunity to view 2 Kgs 12:15 in the light of other passages from the Hebrew Bible that discuss writing as a tool prone to subterfuge.

6.1 Jehoash's Reforms and the Use of Documents

In the narrative, Jehoash, king of Judah, notes that the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem has come into a state of disrepair. The narrative logic suggests that the building deteriorated under the neglectful watch of Jehoash's predecessor, the apostate and usurper Athaliah, whose administration favored the cult of Baal. This is later made explicit by the Chronicler (2 Chr 24:7). To fund the temple repairs, Jehoash instructs the priests to earmark a portion of temple proceeds for building renovation. His instructions go unheeded. The text relates that after some time, Jehoash noticed no repairs had been made. In response, the king relieves the priests from administering the funds and from overseeing the renovation. The text then relates that Jehoash instituted a new bureaucratic process where a portion of the temple's silver revenues was to bypass the priests and be collected in a securely guarded bin. Once the bin was full, the royal scribe and the high priest were to jointly oversee the collection of the silver as well as its smelting and division into standardized units. Once standardized, the scribe and priest were to then deliver the silver to non-cultic temple administrators appointed to oversee the building renovations. These administrators then hire craftsmen who are charged with using the allocated funds to procure raw materials for making the repairs. In a collection of concluding notes, the text relates some unusual details. First, it states in 12:16 that the royal scribe and high priest did not ask the temple administrators to keep accounts of the funds handed over to them, because they "dealt honestly" (באמנה הם עשים) Secondly, the text notes that none of the funds were

earmarked for the manufacture of cultic utensils (12:14). Finally, the text relates that the priests received their prebendal salaries from a source of funds separate from those apportioned for the temple restoration (12:17).[2]

The use, or at least the expected use, of documents permeates Jehoash's administrative reforms. The presence of his personal scribe implies documentation throughout the process of emptying the collection bin and standardizing the units of smelted silver. Certainly, the royal scribe was a high ranking and trusted confidant of the king who could be involved in any significant administrative issue by simple matter of his high rank alone.[3] His presence need not necessarily imply the keeping of accounts. But his expertise in writing seems to be at play in 2 Kings 12 since he is responsible for tallying the total revenues from the collection bin. The note that the subaltern administrators were relieved of keeping accounts is certainly unusual, but it implies that the previous administrative steps, namely the joint oversight of the collection and valuation of the silver by the royal scribe and high priest, were governed by written records. Moreover, this very note that absolves the administrators of record-keeping suggests an administrative ethos where documentation was assumed and expected in such contexts. Thus, to alleviate the subaltern administrators of this requirement solicited special notation in the mind of the author. Later, in a near verbatim account found in 2 Kings 22, Josiah sends his scribe to collect the temple silver funds. In the process, 22:8 states the scribe discovers the written "scroll

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[2] A stone tablet of dubious origin mirrors the account of 2 Kings 12 and commemorates Jehoash's renovations. But problematic philological and paleographic features of the text strongly suggest it is a modern forgery. Scientific analyses of the object confirm this suspicion. See Y. Goren, A. Ayalon, M. Bar-Matthews, and B. Schilman, "Authenticity Examination of the Jehoash Inscription," *TA* 31, no. 1 (2004): 3-16.

[3] N.S. Fox, *In the Service of the King: Officialdom in Ancient Israel and Judah* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000), 101-102.

of the Torah" (ספר התורה). This discovery of a written object implies that the duties of collecting

the funds required the scribe to visit a temple archive, presumably because he kept written

accounts related to the collection box.

The assumed and expected use of record-keeping in 2 Kings 12 is underscored by the

work of Victor Hurowitz and Nadav Na'aman, who demonstrate that Jehoash's reforms mirror

wider ANE temple administrative practices known from cuneiform documents.[4] Hurowitz draws

on cuneiform correspondence and illustrates that the joint royal and clerical oversight of

collection boxes in Mesopotamian temples was common practice, exactly as it is described in 2

Kings 12. It seems clear from these Akkadian texts that both institutions, the palace and the

temple, kept routine accounts of temple revenues from a specially designated collection box. For

instance, in a letter dating to the reign of Esarhaddon, a royally appointed official by the name of

Mār-Ištar writes to the king that the collection box in the temple of Uruk is full and the funds are

ready to be allocated for temple repair. However, Mār-Ištar claims that he has "no authority to

check the gold" because the temple authorities are away, implying that just as in 1 Kings 12,

both temple and royal authorities must be present for calculating and tracking funds from a

specially designated collection box.[5] For his part, Na'aman draws on legal texts that explicitly

state temple administrators and craftsmen in their employ were required to keep accounts in

anticipation of periodic audits. This is the exact group of personnel 2 Kgs 12:15 exempts from

record-keeping. Thus, ancient Near Eastern parallels, the presence of the royal scribe and his

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[4] A.L. Oppenheim, "A Fiscal Practice of the Ancient Near East," *JNES* 42, no. 6 (1947): 116-120; V. Hurowitz, "Another Fiscal Practice in the Ancient Near East: 2 Kings 12:5-17 and a Letter to Esarhaddon (Las 277)," *JNES* 45, no. 4 (1986): 289-294; N. Na'aman, "Notes on the Temple 'Restoration' of Jehoash and Josiah," *VT* 63 (2013): 640-651.

[5] The text is *LAS* 277. For translation and discussion, see Hurowitz, "Another Fiscal Practice," 292.

actions, the note absolving temple administrators from keeping records, and the discovery of a

document under similar circumstances in 2 Kings 22 all demonstrate that documentary practice

plays a key role in the interests of 2 Kings 12. But what does the text convey about attitudes

towards such record-keeping practices?

6.2 The Evaluation of the Reforms and its Implication for Attitudes towards Documents

According to most scholars, the Deuteronomist has high esteem for Jehoash's

administrative reforms. After all, the text evaluates him as a king who "did right all of his days"

and who heeded instruction from Jehoiada, the high priest responsible for manufacturing the

court intrigue that, in conjunction with influence from "the people of the land" (עם הארץ),

placed Jehoash on the throne (2 Kgs 11). Jehoash's temple renovations, made possible by his

administrative reforms, are generally considered a manifestation of his devotion to Yahweh and

an illustration of why the Deuteronomist evaluates him so positively. By instituting documentary

practices that facilitate royal control of temple funds, Jehoash fulfilled a key role of his

monarchic office according to ancient Near Eastern expectations. Namely, he cared for the god's

house. Throughout the ancient Near East, the construction and maintenance of temples were

considered royal obligations.[6] Good kings built and repaired temples. Bad kings did not, or at

least were unable to because of difficult economic circumstances. Nevertheless, such difficult

economic circumstances were often pinned on the king, thought to reflect poorly on his

leadership. The economy was thus no excuse for royal laxity in the domain of temple repair and

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[6] H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 267; A.L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 108; V. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in the Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings*, JSOTSup 115 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

construction. According to this understanding, Jehoash's care for the temple of Yahweh,

exemplified in his administrative reforms, is a notch in his belt. A use of documents to this end

invites praise.

More than that, scholars also praise Jehoash's use of documents to usher in royal

oversight of temple funds because they see it as a savvy check against priestly negligence and

corruption.[7] The priests evidently ignored the king's initial charge to allocate temple revenue for

renovation as related in the note that by Jehoash's twenty-third year, they had failed to make any

repairs. This notice seemingly implicates them in embezzlement. Where were the stipulated

proceeds being funneled if not to repair the temple? By inserting his royal scribe into the early

stages of allocation, Jehoash ensures the ethical use of the temple funds that may have previously

been lining priestly pockets. The potential fraudulent use of funds by the priests appears to be

juxtaposed with the character of the temple administrators who oversee the building repairs.

These appointed administrators were not required to give an account of how they allocated the

funds because "they dealt honestly" (2 Kgs 12:16). Several scholars see this note as emphasizing

the priests' dishonesty. According to this understanding, Jehoash thwarts clerical fraud with his

fiscal reforms executed by the record-keeping practices of his royal scribe, earning the praise of

the Deuteronomist. Documents not only mechanize Jehoash's care for the temple, but they also

safeguard against the misappropriation of temple funds.

But despite the Deuteronomist's positive evaluation, two actions of Jehoash discomfort

the knowledgeable reader while also making clear that his reign was controversial and not

universally lauded. These actions call for a renewed look at how his documentary reforms would

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[7] Hurowitz, "Another Fiscal Practice," 290-291, n. 5; B.O. Long, *2 Kings*, FOTL 10 (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's, 1991).

have been received. According to Deuteronomistic ideology, Jehoash suffers a two-fold fate

typically reserved for the worst kings of Israel and Judah. First, he withdraws funds from the

temple treasury to pay off a foreign oppressor (12:17-18). Foreign oppression is often understood

by the biblical writers as a sign of divine disfavor while the defeat of or "rest" from enemies was

a sign of the opposite.[8] The royal use of temple funds to pay indemnities to foreign oppressors

stained a king's legacy. While a few kings, in addition to Jehoash, engage in this behavior, the

negative attitude towards this practice is perhaps best illustrated by the note that Hezekiah paid a

clerically financed indemnity to Sennacherib (2 Kgs 18:14-16). This note is generally considered

secondary, inserted or at least moved by a later author as a way of minimizing the text's

otherwise high praise for Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:15).[9] It is thought that by staining Hezekiah with a

clerically funded indemnity towards the beginning of his reign, the later author minimized

Hezekiah in order to magnify the later Josiah. His choice to minimize Hezekiah with this trope

demonstrates the negative connotations that the royal withdrawal of temple funds carried.

In addition to his foreign indemnity payment, Jehoash's controversial reign is also highlighted by

his assassination (12:21). Similar to foreign domination, assassination was perceived as a stain

on one's rulership. At the very least, it makes clear that Jehoash was unfavored in some circles.

In DtrH, assassination is a fate normally reserved for apostates or inept rulers *à la* Jehoash's

predecessor, Athaliah. Elsewhere, the Judahite king, Amon, is assassinated because he

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[8] David and Solomon were given rest from enemies (2 Sam 7:1; 1 Kgs 5:4). On the
opposite side, because Yahweh was angry with Jehoahaz of Israel, biblical literature relates that
he continually led Aram to oppress the nation (2 Kgs 13:4). In an elaborate note, the author is at
pains to explain why Yahweh freed Jeroboam II of the same Aramaic oppression typically
reserved for apostate northern kings (2 Kgs 14:23-29).

[9] For bibliography and discussion, see C. Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny: The Development
of the Book of Isaiah, A Reassessment of Isaiah 36-39* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 51-
61, esp. 59.

"abandoned the Lord" (2 Kgs 21:22-24). Jehoash suffers the same fate as these inglorious rulers. Coupled with his submission to Aram, which led to his clerically financed indemnity, his assassination marks his reign with controversy. While the Deuteronomist clearly wants to defend Jehoash, this king's unpopularity is ultimately inescapable. His policies were evidently not so well received outside of the Deuteronomist's circle.

Because the marquee feature of Jehoash's reign is his reform of temple finances, it is reasonable to assume that this reform holds the key to discovering at least one reason for his unpopularity. When his reform is reevaluated, several reasons indeed suggest that it likely alienated his base of support among the priestly class or other non-cultic temple functionaries in a social conflict that benefited an opposing base of support, "the people of the land" (עם הערץ). This conflict will be discussed more below. As mentioned above, scholars generally view Jehoash's care for the temple, realized in his fiscal reforms, as aligning with ancient Near Eastern notions of a good king. He sees to the physical upkeep of the god's house. But a closer look suggests that his reforms put a financial burden on the temple and may have been viewed as a violation of custom, one that expanded the king's centralization of power. If this were the case, it would provide another context where the royal use of documents produced by state scribes could be loaded with symbolic power.

As in the case of David's census, the fiscal documents that carried out Jehoash's centralization of power would have given material expression to Jehoash's violation of custom. The note that the last step of his reforms did not use documents concedes that their use in the previous steps likely carried some symbolic weight. Before examining that note and its implications for attitudes towards documents, however, it is necessary to explain just how Jehoash's reforms would have been controversial given that their unconventional nature has been

little discussed in scholarship. This will lay the groundwork for understanding the type of social decay the keeping of records could have symbolized in this particular instance.

6.3 Monarchic Meddling in Temple Finances

6.3.1 Appropriating Priestly Income

A potential violation of custom comes to the fore when the source of the funds for building repair is closely scrutinized. Namely, Jehoash meddles with priestly income. He commands that the priests pull from "all the sacred donations of silver brought into the Temple" (כל כסף הקדשים אשר יובא בית יהוה) in order to finance the building repairs (12:5). It is debated whether this designation applies to a specific type of temple revenue or if it is an all-encompassing category that includes the more specific funding sources Jehoash lists after it.[10] Regardless, the designation makes clear that the temple repairs would be funded largely by the temple itself by order of the king. In what follows, Jehoash lists three more categories of temple revenues, two of which belonged entirely to the priests. The first funding source is the "silver of passing" (כסף עובר). This appellation is debated, but it most likely refers to the poll tax mentioned in Exod 30:11-16.[11] In that passage, Moses stipulates that in the event of a census,

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[10] I largely follow the understanding of Michael Fishbane, who sees the description as listing four sources of income. But as little as two categories have been proposed. Where I disagree with Fishbane concerns the first category, which he designates as a separate category. I consider it an all-inclusive label of the three categories that follow. See Fishbane, "Census and Intercession in a Priestly Text (Exodus 30:11-16) and in Its Midrashic Transformation," in *Pomegranates & Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, eds. D.P. Wright, D.N. Freedman, A. Hurvitz (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 108. For other understandings of the income categories, see M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings*, YAB 11 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1989), 137. Many argue that the text defines only two categories, namely, obligatory taxes and voluntary offerings. See, P. Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art, Political Rhetoric: The Case of Athaliah and Joash*, JSOTSup 209 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 51. Opposed to this view and seeing four sources of income is T.R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, WCC 13 (Waco: Word Books, 1985), 152.

[11] Another common understanding is that based on Genesis 23:16, where the phrase is an

each Israelite male twenty years of age and up "who passes into the census" (כל העבר על הפקדים)

must pay a half-shekel tax of silver to the sanctuary. This poll tax had, at some point, become an

annual occurrence in pre-exilic Judah.[12] Significantly, according to Moses' stipulation, these

funds were specifically apportioned for the maintenance of the tent of meeting (Exod 30:16).

According to 2 Kings 12, this formed a precedent so that later iterations of the tax were to be

applied to the maintenance of the temple. Thus, nothing necessarily appears to be remiss about

Jehoash's command here. The poll tax of the "silver of passing" seems to have been traditionally

used for temple maintenance, so his command makes sense. But that is not the case for the

sources of income that follow.

In the two following categories of temple revenue, Jehoash appears to deviate from

tradition and to meddle in the priestly purse. The second source of funds is "silver equivalent to a

person's valuation" (איש כסף נפשות ערכו) This is a clear reference to votive offerings, as

described in Lev 27:2.[13] The third source of funds is "any silver that comes upon the heart of a

person to bring to the temple" (כל כסף אשר יעלה על לב איש) which refers to voluntary offerings

institutionalized by Exod 25:2 and 35:21. While the biblical text gives no indication of how the

priests typically utilized these two categories of temple revenue, it is reasonable to assume that

their use was traditionally at their discretion and, at times, comprised part of their income.

Although Jehoash may have been justified in funneling the "silver of passing" (כסף עובר) to

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ellipsis for silver assessed at the going price certified by merchants. For this understanding, see
Oppenheim, "A Fiscal Practice," and Hurowitz, "Another Fiscal Practice," 290, n. 3.

[12] J. Liver, "The Ransom of Half Shekel," in *Y. Kaufmann Jubilee Volume*, ed. M. Haran
(Jerusalem: Magnes, 1960), 54-67 (Hebrew); Fishbane, "Census and Intercession."

[13] ibid., 108.

temple renovation, biblical tradition offers him zero precedent for diverting the other sources of funds, which fundamentally belonged to the priests.

The text of 2 Kings 12 readily admits that redirecting proceeds from votive and voluntary offerings towards temple repairs was unconventional and caused some anxiety regarding the livelihood of the priests. In the concluding notes on the reform, the author states that "silver from guilt and sin offerings was not brought in the temple; it belonged to the priests" (12:17). With this note, the text offers two additional sources of income earmarked for the priests. By adding two new sources of funds and offering reassurance about priestly salaries, the text admits that a knowledgeable reader would view the reforms, which pulled from votive and freewill offerings, as a disenfranchisement of the priesthood.

Discomfort for Jehoash's appropriation of these monies is also illustrated in the Chronicler's account. The Chronicler relates that Jehoash funded temple repairs only through canvassing the countryside for donations (24:5) and through the "levy of Moses" (משאת משה) which can be equated with the "silver of passing" (2 Chr 24:6, 9). The Chronicler excludes the statements in 2 Kgs 12:4 that Jehoash commandeered votive and voluntary offerings. Coupled with the clarification about priestly salaries in 2 Kgs 12:17, Chronicles exclusion of the votive and voluntary offerings suggests an ancient understanding of Jehoash's reforms as not so much uprightly funneling monies towards temple repairs, but instead as siphoning the monies from priestly income in an administrative move that could be defined as monarchic overreach. The Chronicler must have only included the "silver passing" because of a belief that votive and voluntary offerings traditionally funded priestly salaries, not temple repair.

An editorial feature of the text further suggests that partisans viewed Jehoash's appropriation of the votive and freewill offerings as an unconventional intrusion of monarchic

power. This feature is the particle "then" (אָז) that introduces the note about the indemnity Jehoash paid to Aram, a note that immediately follows the description of his temple reforms. Grammarians generally agree that there two primary ways of understanding "then" (אָז) followed by an imperfect verb as we have in 2 Kgs 12:17, where it bridges Jehoash's fiscal reforms to the following account of the indemnity payment. Each understanding of the particle allows for a negative reading of the fiscal reforms. The most common understanding of אז followed by imperfect is that the construction conveys a logical consequence where the events occurring after the particle are understood as a consequence of the events preceding it.[14] According to this understanding, the text conveys that the Aramean oppression was a direct consequence of some misstep that occurred during the fiscal reforms. The foreign oppression was punishment for something misguided concerning Jehoash's use of temple funds.

A different understanding of the אז plus imperfect construction, but one that still frames the fiscal reforms negatively, is offered by Isaac Rabinowitz. He claims that in our case, the construction signals the work of a redactor who supplemented information he thought was relevant for the fiscal reforms. By using the construction, the redactor wanted to convey that the Aramean oppression happened concurrently with or even before the events of the fiscal reforms.[15] In this case, the redactor would be explaining why the reforms were necessary. Specifically, the redactor would be communicating that the Aramean oppression forced Jehoash to take unconventional measures. Due to the indemnity payment, the kingdom was low on funds

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[14] B. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §31.6.3

[15] Rabinowitz, "ʾAz Followed by Imperfect Verb Form in Preterite Contexts: A Redaction Device in Biblical Hebrew," *VT* 34 (1984): 53-62.

and therefore was unable to finance temple repairs through normal procedures. In this case, the redactor would have noticed the unconventional nature of the reforms and added a historical detail in an attempt to excuse Jehoash's taboo behavior. In this case, the taboo behavior would have been Jehoash's appropriation of priestly income. Both understandings of allow a reading that sees the reforms as a violation of custom. However, Rabonwitz's understanding of its use to mark redaction seems most compelling. It better explains the disjointed feel provided by the text's quick turn to Aramean oppression. Regardless, several features of the text suggest that these fiscal reforms, lauded by DtrH, in fact, surrounded Jehoash's reign with controversy and partisanship.

6.3.2 Cultural Decorum in the Financing of Temple Repairs

The unconventionality of Jehoash's use of temple funds becomes more pronounced when considered in the light of ancient Near Eastern ideology regarding temple construction and maintenance. In the ancient Near East, the ideal temple repair was funded by the royal coffers, not by temple revenue. The expectation that the king funded temple upkeep was well pronounced in Egypt. According to Lisbeth Fried, who cites the example of repairs made to an Amun sanctuary at Memphis, "money and resources went from the king's estates and treasuries to those of the temples."[16] In the Ahmose Tempest Stela, the king boasts of restoring multiple cult sites and even doubling the income of the temple personnel.[17] Hathshepsut likewise boasted of funding the renovation for several area temples.[18] Based on other steles dating from the 17th to

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[16] L.S. Fried, *The Priest and the Great King: Temple-Palace Relations in the Persian Empire*, BJS 10 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 62.

[17] R.K. Ritner and N. Moeller, "The Ahmose Tempest Stela, Thera and Comparative Chronology," *JNES* 73, no. 1 (2014): 1-19. I am grateful to my colleague, Danielle Candelora for pointing me towards these Egyptian examples.

[18] A.H. Gardiner, "Davies's Copy of the Great Speos Artemidos Inscription," *JEA* 32

the 26th dynasties, the pharaonic funding of temples and their restoration was a popular way for

kings to gain political currency in Egyptian society.[19] This appears to have been the case despite

the fact that Egyptian temples were, for the most part, their own, autonomous economic

institutions able to generate a great deal of wealth. No matter the status of the temple treasuries,

it was incumbent upon the pharaoh to fund temple repairs from his or her own sources of wealth.

Mesopotamian monarchs were likewise expected to finance temple repairs. This

conclusion is based on an abundance of inscriptions in which kings take credit for the building

and maintenance of temples.[20] The royal funding of temple maintenance is also made clear by

administrative correspondence. According to Kristin Kleber, an examination of the evidence

allows one to conclude that "the structural maintenance and equipment of the sanctuaries was on

the one hand a privilege and on the other hand a duty of the king."[21] She adds that "normally,

even in times of foreign rule, kings cared for the temples."[22] The details of her last statement

closely resemble the circumstances of Jehoash's reign when Judah was made subservient to

Aram. But in 2 Kings 12, the king only superficially cared for the temple, seeing to its upkeep

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(1946): 43-56.

[19] See Fried, *The Priest*, 62. Fried draws from D. Meeks, "Les donations aux temples dans l'Égypte du Ier millénaire avant J.-C.," in *State and Temple Economy in the Ancient Near East*, ed. E. Lipiński (Louvain: Departement Oriéntalistiek, 1979), 607.

[20] For the inscriptions, see Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House*. One informative example is the endowment or so-called "Autobiography" of the Kassite ruler Kurigalzu. In it, the author boasts of refurbishing and endowing a temple to Ištar. The endowment even includes a clause forbidding future rulers from converting the land endowment to "state" or crown lands. See C.J. Gadd, *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum* 36 (London: British Museum, 1921), pls. 6-7.

[21] K. Kleber, *Tempel und Palast: Die Beziehungen zwischen dem König und dem Eana-Tempel im spätbabylonischen Uruk*, AOAT 358 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2008), 256.

[22] ibid., 256.

but asking the temple itself to foot the bill.

The expectation of royal funding for Mesopotamian temples is perhaps made most clear by steles dubbed "pious frauds." Such inscriptions, the most famous of which is the so-called Cruciform Monument, are counterfeit entitlement *narûs*, steles that monumentalized a ruler's commitment to the perennial endowment of a temple.[23] The "pious frauds" attest to the practice of priests who, feeling disenfranchised, fabricated royal endowments. The inscriptions entail an elaborate laundry list of monies and goods that an ancient king promised to provide annually to the temple under solemn oath before the gods. So for example, the Cruciform Monument, deemed an ancient forgery on the basis of linguistic and paleographic features that routinely violate the conventions of the Old Akkadian period in which it purports have been authored, calls for regularly scheduled allowances of grain, livestock, and textiles while threatening future kings who fail to provide these goods.[24] These counterfeit steles would be "discovered" by the priests and shown to the present ruler as a way of compelling them to increase temple funds from the royal coffers, especially in times when the temple was in disrepair. Also discovered in Egypt, "pious frauds" illustrate a widespread cultural expectation that the king should care for the physical upkeep of temples out of his own pocket. Both the pious frauds and the real entitlement *narûs* they mimic suggest that when Jehoash ordered the priests to fund temple repairs from the "sacred donations," it must have been viewed as violating the ideal customs governing sacred renovation.

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[23] On these steles, see K.E. Slanski, *The Babylonian Entitlement narûs (kudurrus): A Study in Their Form and Function* (Boston: ASOR, 2003). On the cruciform monument, see most recently I. Finkel and A. Fletcher, "Thinking Outside the Box: The Case of the Sun God Tablet and the Cruciform Monument," *BASOR* 375, no. 1 (2016): 215-248.

[24] Finkel and Fletcher, "Thinking Outside the Box."

A few biblical texts seem to confirm that society expected the Israelite king to continually fund the temple treasury and the building's repair, much like what was expected of his ancient Near Eastern peers. The temple treasury itself is remembered as being created from pseudo-royal booty under the leadership of Joshua (Josh 6:19). His pious funding foreshadows the expectation that the king would do the same, an expectation later fulfilled by David in 2 Sam 8:11. Matthias Delcor argues that these texts illustrate how cultural decorum required the Israelite king to assure the maintenance of the temple and the funding of its treasury from the royal coffers.[25] To underscore this, he cites 1 Kgs 9:25b, which is generally understood to read "Thus he (Solomon) completed the house" (וישלם את הבית). But on contextual and linguistic grounds, Delcor shows that שלם would be better rendered here as "pay." The text thus remembers the expectation that the crown funded the temple and its maintenance. While these texts collectively provide little evidence, they indicate that the situation in ancient Israel was more than likely akin to that elsewhere in the ancient Near East. The king was expected to fund temple repairs. In biblical scholarship, Jehoash is typically understood as admirably fulfilling those expectations. But the source of his renovation funds, coming as it does from priestly income, makes that understanding look suspect. When the priests initially rebuffed Jehoash's command to repair the house, this perhaps indicates that they viewed his request as out of step with tradition rather than indicating that they were engaged in fraudulent activity.

Some scholars might contend that the above analysis relies on an unwarranted distinction between the royal and temple treasuries, arguing that the king's appropriation of temple funds was conventional. For instance, claiming there was no fine division between cultic and secular

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[25] M. Delcor, "La trésor de la maison de Yahweh des origines à l'exil," *VT* 12, no. 1 (1962): 364-365.

revenue, R.H. Lowery states that "just as the Davidic monarchs exercised practical authority over Yahweh's land, so the kings had practical authority over Yahweh's treasuries."[26] This is an important caution, especially given that a poll tax (כסף עובר), which can be understood as a secular tax, was channeled through the temple. Moreover, the many instances noting that kings drew from the temple treasuries to pay off foreign adversaries, a phenomenon not limited to ancient Israel, suggests that royal control of cultic finances was the default understanding. But I would agree here with Daniel Snell, who argues that just because kings could does not mean that they should.[27] The very fact that royal withdrawals from the temple were remembered so vividly might rather suggest that they were notable deviations from standard procedure. Again, the act in biblical literature is usually understood as a stain on royal legacies, which implies that decorum preferred for royal revenue to flow into the temple treasury, not out of it. Lowery and others rightly caution too fine a distinction between the two treasuries. There was certainly some overlap between them. But it is important not to overcorrect because there clearly was some distinction. After all, the biblical text acknowledges that the temple and palace treasuries were separate institutions.

The details of 2 Kings 12 also suggest that a distinction between royal and cultic finances was perhaps more pronounced in ancient Israel than R.H. Lowery and others would believe.

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[26] R.H. Lowery, *The Reforming Kings: Cults and Society in First Temple Judah*, JSOTSup 120 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 116. See also, Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, 163-165.

[27] D.C. Snell, *Life in the Ancient Near East: 3100-332 B.C.E.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 95. We could also quarrel with Lowery's assumption that the Israelite monarch was permitted to control land. The biblical evidence conflicts with this assumption. Royal control of land seems to have been rather controversial in ancient Israel. One only needs to consider that for all of Ahab's moral bankruptcy, the act which finally leads to his downfall is his commandeering of Naboth's ancestral land (1 Kgs 21).

Showing a granular awareness of financial categories, the text itemizes at least five separate sources of income: a poll tax, votive offerings, voluntary offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings with these latter two being allocated for the prebendal salaries of the priests. With an insider's knowledge, the text displays an awareness that distinct categories of revenues were allocated separately. Such a granularity might hint that the text is foregrounding the issue of proper allocation. While the king may have had discretion over the use of poll tax funds, even though biblical tradition apportions these to the maintenance of the sanctuary (Exod 30:11-16), there is no evidence that any ancient Near Eastern monarch ever controlled the allocation of votive and voluntary offerings. That was a priestly prerogative. More importantly, the view that the king had full purview of temple finances opposes the very premise of 2 Kings 12, which depicts Jehoash's increased control over temple revenue as a novel reformation, far from business as usual. Besides these details of the passage, it is important to reiterate that regardless of the relationship between cultic and secular revenue, the wider ancient Near Eastern evidence shows that it was the king's responsibility, not the temple's, to fund temple maintenance. Even if he had full control of the temple treasury, custom prescribed that the king not draw from it to renovate the sanctuary. But this appears to be exactly what Jehoash did. In doing so, he may have alienated temple personnel.

6.3.3 Temple Reforms and Temple-Palace Animosities in the Ancient Near East and Ancient Israel

Cultural analogs from Mesopotamia reveal that Jehoash's unconventional reforms of temple finances could have made him unpopular with temple factions. The closest analogies for the joint royal and cleric oversight of a silver collection bin stationed in the temple come from the Neo-Babylonian period, particularly during the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar II and

Nabonidus.[28] This joint oversight appears to have been part of a wider administrative reform aimed at increasing royal control of temple finances. In the most significant move to accomplish this increased control, these monarchs demoted and, during some periods, abolished the temple office of "chief temple administrator" (*šattamu*), a long-standing office endemic to the temple administration that oversaw its non-cultic administrative matters. Above the *šattamu*, the Neo-Babylonian kings placed the "royally appointed supervisor" (*ša rēši šarri bēl piqitti*). This latter official served as the eyes and ears of the king in the temple and had final say in all administrative matters, evidently much to the chagrin of the *šattamu* and other temple personnel unaccustomed to such royal oversight. Lisbeth Fried notes that later literary traditions credited to Babylonian priests display a marked animosity towards Nabonidus.[29] While these animosities may have partly stemmed from his cultic reforms aimed at replacing the cult of Marduk with Sîn, his administrative reforms undoubtedly assisted in creating the tension. In a recent monograph, Kristin Kleber reviews the administrative correspondence of the Eanna Temple at Uruk and shows how the increased control of the monarchy on temple finances, especially manifested in the appointment of the king's *ša rēši šarri bēl piqitti*, generated a great deal of conflict and resentment.[30] Kleber even goes so far as to hint that if there was treasonous Babylonian support for a Persian conquest by Cyrus, then Nabonidus' fiscal reforms would have been a better

[28] Oppenheim, "A Fiscal Practice"; Hurowitz, "Another Fiscal Practice"; Na'aman, "Notes on the Temple 'Restoration.'"

[29] Fried, *The Priest and the Great King*, 15, 20-24. The exact historical context of these alleged animosities is debated. Fried claims they were concocted by later Persian priests as a *post factum* condemnation of Nabonidus. But others say some animosity must have stemmed from his reign. On this latter view, see P. Machinist and H. Tadmor, "Heavenly Wisdom," in *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo*, eds. M. Cohen, D. Snell, and D. Weisberg (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1993), 146-151.

[30] Kleber, *Tempel und Palast*, 333, 342-343.

motivational source for such treason than his cultic reforms.[31] Jehoash's fiscal reforms align closely with those of Nabonidus. Both aim to usurp the autonomy of temple finances. It stands to reason that this would have created conflict with temple personnel in Jerusalem, just as it appears to have done in Uruk under Nabonidus.

Based on the Hebrew Bible, traditional Israelite society delimited royal control of the cult, imparting a degree of autonomy to the temple.[32] Jehoash's reforms would have raised new questions over this autonomy. To be sure, there was overlap between the cult and national politics with the cult often serving as an outlet for royal propaganda. And at times, the monarch could intervene in priestly politics by demoting or appointing certain families to the priesthood. But other biblical traditions warrant caution in concluding that these examples mean the palace was given complete authority over the temple.

The autonomy of the Israelite cult is perhaps best illustrated when Yahweh rebuffed David's proposal to build him a permanent sanctuary (2 Sam 7:5-7). William Schniedewind has convincingly argued that this rebuff illustrates how Israelite tribal politics felt uneasy about royal control of cultic matters.[33] Even if the rebuff is an *ex post facto* explanation for why David did

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[31] ibid, 344.

[32] Some scholarship has understood the two ancient Near Eastern institutions of palace and temple to have been at times locked in a rivalry with the temple seeking to wrest its own autonomy away from the palace which it had become subordinate to by the time of the Ur III period. This understanding is articulated in M. Dandamayev, "State and Temple in Babylonia in the First Millennium BCE," in *State and Temple Economy*, 589-596 and his more recent article "The Confrontation between State and Temple in Babylonia in the Sixth Century BCE," in *Le temple de lieu conflit: Actes du colloque de Cartigny 1991*, ed. P. Borgeaud (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 77-88. See also the bibliography in Kleber's review of the scholarship in *Tempel und Palast*, 1. The subordination of the temple to the crown seems clear in ancient Israel. On this, see M. Haran, *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985). Despite this subordination, the temple at times clearly sought to influence royal politics, illustrating a sense of autonomy.

[33] W.M. Schniedewind, *Society and the Promise to David: The Reception History of 2*

not build the temple, attitudes about royal centralization of the cult could still inform the reasoning offered. This same unease is illustrated in traditions associated with Saul and Uzziah, who are both royal figures punished for their assumption of cultic roles (1 Sam 13; 2 Chr 26:16-20). The distinction Israelite society made between royal and cultic roles, illustrating the autonomy it granted to the latter, seems to have grown even sharper in the post-exilic period when messianic traditions emerged that were built around the idea of dual messiahs in priest and king.[34] Given this cultural background that attributes a degree of autonomy to the temple, Jehoash's attempt at increased royal control over cultic income likely disturbed more conservative factions, just as Nabonidus had done in Babylonia.

In fact, the literary context of 2 Kings 12 suggests that temple-palace animosities lay at the heart of the passage's interest. The text even gives special consideration for the temple as an autonomous institution able to affect political change in the palace.[35] Jehoash's succession to the throne, recounted in 2 Kings 11, illustrates action taken by the temple clergy against the incumbent monarch. The high priest Jehoiada hatches a plot to remove Athaliah from the throne and to replace her with a young, malleable Jehoash. The plot works to perfection. With Athaliah's removal, the temple now has a controllable asset on the throne who adheres to priestly instruction (12:2). Throughout this plot, the priest Jehoiada is an assertive and autonomous leader, giving orders to the palace guard and subverting the wishes of the crown. Such assertiveness and autonomy spill over into chapter 12, where we are told that the young and

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Samuel 7:1-17 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 26-28.

[34] On dual messiahship, see W.M. Schniedewind, "King and Priest in the Book of Chronicles and the Duality of Qumran Messianism," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 49 (1994): 71-78.

[35] Dutcher-Walls, *Narrative Art*, 62.

newly minted king is impressionable to the instruction of Jehoiada. There is an additional hint of

the temple's autonomy early in Jehoash's reign when the priesthood initially rebuffs the

command of the king to fund the temple repairs. Unlike later in the narrative, Jehoiada takes no

initiative in the initial command by Jehoash to repair the house, evidently feeling no need to

obey royal orders. The narrative arc up to Jehoash's reforms thus depicts the temple as an

autonomous institution that sought to not only maintain its own independence, but also to go

beyond it by influencing royal politics.[36]

Jehoash's reforms mark a strange reversal of the power dynamic between temple and

palace. Instead of the priests controlling the young king, the now older king controls the priests

in the rest of chapter 12. By Jehoash's twenty-third year, a note that intentionally or otherwise

causes the reader to envision Jehoash as an adult male who has perhaps tipped the balance of

power in his favor, the king summons and commands the priests who now suddenly obey.

Contrasted with Jehoiada's depiction in chapter 11 and at the beginning of the reforms in chapter

12, the high priest now appears as a mute lackey, doing whatever the king commands. What

changed that Jehoiada, who ignored the initial command to repair the house, now complies

without question? A reader must fill in the blanks. But given the previous chapter's depiction of

the conflict between the palace and temple personnel, it is reasonable to understand that Jehoash

has by his twenty-third year broken free of the temple's control. Thus, like chapter 11, chapter 12

is interested in the dynamics of temple-palace relations. But over the course of these chapters,

the dynamic changes with the fiscal reforms representing a royal usurpation of temple finances

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[36] For more on this in ancient Israel, see H. Reviv, "Judean Monarchy and Priesthood in the Light of Biblical Historiography," in *Isac Leo Seeligmann Volume: Essays on the Bible and Ancient World*, 3 vols., eds. A. Rofé and Y. Zakovitch (Jerusalem: E. Rubinstein's Publishing House, 1983), 319-326 (Hebrew).

and thus a royal eclipsing of cultic power.

A few features in 2 Kings 12 hint that the new power dynamic manifested in the fiscal reforms likely generated temple animosity towards Jehoash, just as similar reforms generated temple-palace animosities in the Neo-Babylonian empire. First, Jehoash's unceremonious assassination contrasts sharply with the protection the priesthood afforded him at the time of his succession. The assassins execute Jehoash presumably in public, "on the way to the house of Millo" (12:21) The ease with which the assassination is achieved diverges from how the high priest had previously coordinated a 24-hour armed escort for Jehoash with a contingent of the palace guard bound by covenant who surrounded the king "on every side" (11:4-11). Surely, later in Jehoash's reign, urban factions remained opposed to the circumstances of his controversial succession, as hinted at in the note that after his anointing, "the city remained quiet" in contrast to "the people of the land" who rejoiced (11:20). But such coordinated protection from these opponents appears to be absent in the details of Jehoash's assassination, suggesting that he had lost favor with his once priestly protectors. By itself, this lack of protection might not suggest anything about potential animosities between Jehoash and the temple. But it becomes more suspicious when considering other traditions about Jehoash in the Hebrew Bible.

It is relevant that Chronicles indeed attributes the circumstances of Jehoash's assassination to animosities with the priesthood. According to the Chronicler, Jehoash broke free of priestly influence to the point that he supported illicit worship practices (2 Chr 24:17-18). When Zechariah, the priest and son of Jehoiada, speaks out against the king's declining morals, Jehoash orders his execution (24:21). The Chronicler goes on to confirm that Jehoash was assassinated in retaliation for "the blood of the son of the priest Jehoiada" (24:25). The details in

Chronicles mark a strong divergence from the author's source material of Kings, suggesting he had access to a separate tradition concerning the priestly animosities. And if not a separate tradition, it is nevertheless revealing that the Chronicler chooses to explain Jehoash's assassination as stemming from animosities with the priesthood. The explanation could have possibly stemmed from the Chronicler's own reading of the temple reforms in his source material. It is important to reiterate here that the Chronicler was seemingly uncomfortable with Jehoash's fiscal reforms as described in Kings, since he avoids mentioning the votive and voluntary offerings Jehoash drew from for temple restoration. While it is impossible to confirm the Chronicler's story, it at least broadly illustrates the existence of a tradition about Jehoash where he came to be at odds with the priesthood or, at the very least, how ancient readers of the temple reform narrative could find it possible that his policies created tension with the priesthood. Based on the details 2 Kings offers about his fiscal reforms, it is easy to see how the reforms could have created an initial rift with temple personnel, one that may or may not have blossomed into the more serious animosity akin to what is presented in Chronicles.

To this point, I have framed potential animosities between Jehoash and the temple in terms of the priesthood. But priests may not have been the only group attached to the temple who viewed the reforms as intrusive monarchical politics. There were likely non-cultic temple administrators who were disenfranchised by the reforms as well. Although we have little evidence for such administrators, it is safe to assume their presence in the Jerusalem temple on comparative grounds. Non-cultic administrative personnel permeate the records of both Egyptian and Mesopotamian temple archives. Biblical literature offers a few hints of their presence in Jerusalem, even in the current passage under discussion. Jehoash's reforms might have disenfranchised such groups even more than the priests. To return to Kleber's work, she shows

that most of the animosity towards Nabonidus' administrative reforms came not from the priesthood, but from non-cultic administrative functionaries.[37] Nabonidus' appointment of royal courtiers ultimately cut into the power share of offices endemic to the temple bureaucracy. In Jehoash's reforms, such groups would have either been completely cut out of the administrative picture or would have at least been demoted below the royal scribe. In either case, they lost power and potentially part of their income.

2 Kings 12 refer to at least one, if not two groups, of non-cultic personnel who Jehoash may have disenfranchised with his unconventional usurpation of temple funds. The first group is comprised of those mentioned in 12:11 "who had oversight of the house" (המפקדים בבית יהוה) to whom the high priest and royal scribe delivered the calculated silver to fund the repairs. These "overseers of the temple" were evidently a preexisting group of officials operating in non-cultic capacities. The gloss that they were "doers of the work" (עשי המלאכה) could refer to their responsibility in overseeing architectural maintenance, but it could also be understood as more generically defining their role as officials who handled the mundane "work" that invariably arose in temple administration so the priests would be free to go about with their cultic duties. The gloss also suggests that "the ones who had oversight of the house" (המפקדים בבית יהוה) was an official title. Under Jehoash's reforms, these were now subservient to the royal scribe. Funds they previously had free access to were moved behind a royal firewall. This situation resembles the reforms of Nabonidus, who caused animosity by demoting a similar group of temple administrators below royal courtiers.

A second group of non-cultic temple officials may have fared even worse under the new

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[37] Kleber, *Tempel und Palast*, 333, 342-343.

financial procedures. In a note that has generated much discussion, Jehoash instructs the priests

to no longer take silver from each one's מכר (12:7). The meaning of מכר here is debated, but I

find most satisfactory the argument that it refers to temple merchants.[38] This explanation has the

benefit of cultural parallels. There is abundant evidence for merchants attached to ancient Near

Eastern temples. Significantly they are identified using the same Semitic root as that of our

passage, *mkr* (Akk. > *tamkaru*). To borrow a parallel from Northwest Semitic, Ugaritic texts of

temple personnel frequently list *mkrm* alongside priests and other religious functionaries.[39] As

one of the great economic institutions of antiquity, temples benefitted from the presence of

merchants who could use their expertise to valuate and convert various types of temple revenue.

It is also clear from the evidence that temple-employed merchants ventured to marketplaces near

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[38] Early scholarship understood מכר as a nominal form of נכר "to recognize or disguise," which has traditionally been translated to "acquaintance." In this case, it would refer to those making donations with the donor now being an acquaintance of the priest, each being now able to recognize the other from their brief interaction. Coupled with the fact that such a form and use of נכר appears nowhere else in biblical Hebrew, the linguistic gymnastics required by this interpretation make it unsatisfactory. It has therefore become popular to associate the word not with the root נכר, but instead with מכר "to sell." A derivation from מכר presents two possibilities. The first is to see a loose connection between "sell" and "donate," which would present the possibility that it here denotes "donors" who hand over their silver to the priests whether as a poll tax, a votive offering, or a free-will offering. The problem with this explanation is that a root like נתן would seem to fit better if "donor" was intended. The root מכר carries a narrow meaning of economic exchange, usually expressing "sell" or sometimes more simply "barter." While priests could be understood to "sell" their services, this idea is unfitting for the context of votive and free-will offerings and even in the case of a poll tax payment. Nothing is sold or exchanged under these circumstances. For discussion and bibliography, see Long, *2 Kings*, 156. For an alternative understanding as "income," see Hobbs, *2 Kings*, 152. For a view that the word means "acquaintance," but refers to temple personnel broadly and not merchants specifically, see K.D. Fricke, *Das Zweite Buch von den Königen* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1972), 160. For an argument that sees the word denoting "merchants" specifically, see J.A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1951), 429; J. Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 586.

[39] See J. Gray, *The Legacy of Canaan, Ras Shamra Texts and Their Relevance to the Old Testament*, VTSup 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1957), 157; A.F. Rainey, "Business Agents at Ugarit," *IEJ* 13, no. 4 (1963): 313-321.

and far in order to exchange surplus for goods the temple treasury may have been lacking.[40] If

merchants are mentioned in 2 Kings 12, this would mean that they were usually responsible for

the collection of the silver donations, since it is from them whom the priests generally "receive"

(12:5, 7). This makes good sense. The merchants would have used their expertise to appraise and

weigh the silver before handing it over to the priests, something that the priests would have

surely appreciated. In that case, Jehoash's reforms would have completely cut them out of the

picture. He instructs the priests to divert silver donations away from the merchants (12:7).

Essentially, the collection bin takes the merchants' place with its funds being guarded by the

sentry priests. The high priest and royal scribe then do the work of assessing and standardizing

the silver.

The exclusion or demotion of non-cultic temple personnel could have led to strong

disapproval for Jehoash among one particular power base: the city aristocracy. Kleber has shown

that throughout much of the ancient Near East, non-cultic administrative positions in temples

were generally filled by local, urban elites with the offices being hereditary.[41] If this situation

attained in ancient Israel, it would connect Jehoash's administrative reforms to the intrigue

surrounding his succession and assassination, both of which are framed in terms of a social

conflict between the city aristocracy and "the people of the land" (עם הארץ), a term often

understood as a technical designation denoting some form of political body, usually rural

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[40] Temple employed merchants are a fixture of Mesopotamian society as early as the Ur III period. See J.F. Robertson, "The Social and Economic Organization of Ancient Mesopotamian Temples," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East: Volume I, part 4 Social Institutions*, ed. J. Sasson (New York: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 443-454; D.T. Potts, "Distant Shores: Ancient Near Eastern Trade with South Asia and Northeast Africa," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East: Volume III, part 6 Economy and Trade*, ed. J. Sasson (New York: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 1451-1463.

[41] Kleber, *Tempel und Palast*, 344-348.

aristocracy.[42] When Athaliah was assassinated and Jehoash the boy was anointed as king in her place, 2 Kgs 11:20 relates that the "the people of the land" rejoiced, but "the city was quiet" (והעיר שקטה). While the exact nature of "the people of the land" is debated, most scholars agree that this note establishes opposing political factions with the city on one side of the aisle and the "the people of the land" on the other, perhaps even denoting an urban-rural rivalry. Whoever the "the people of the land" were, their joy in Jehoash's accession to the throne was not shared by the city aristocracy, who must have favored the policies of Athaliah. If the Jerusalem temple's administrative roles were staffed by the city aristocracy, as appears to be the case elsewhere in the ancient Near East, then Jehoash's reforms could be understood as a manifestation of this political rivalry between these two groups. His new fiscal policies delimit the power of elites who comprised the city aristocracy. By implication, his royal control on this group would widen the influence of the "the people of the land" who supported him, fanning the flame of

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[42] For potential identities of the *ʿam haʾareṣ*, see E. Würthwein, *Der ʿamm haʾarez im Alten Testament*, BWANT (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1936); J.A. Soggin, "Der Judäische ʿAm Haʾareṣ und das Königtum in Juda: Ein Beitrag zum Studium der Deuteronomistischen Geschichtsschreibung," VT 13 (1963): 187-195; A.H.J. Genneweg, "עם הארץ —a Semantic Revolution," *ZAW* 95 (1983): 137-140; S. Talmon, "The Judean *ʿam haʾareṣ* in Historical Perspective," in *King, Cult, and Calendar in Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986), 68-78; L.S. Fried, "The *am hāʾāreṣ* in Ezra 4:4 and Persian Imperial Administration," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period*, eds. O. Lipschits, M. Oeming (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 123-146. D. Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 46-47. These generally understand the group as the landed aristocracy with the designation morphing into a pejorative label for the poor during the Second Temple period. For an argument that the phrase has no technical meaning, see E. Nicholson, "The Meaning of the Expression עם הארץ in the O.T.," *JSS* 10 (1956): 59-66. See also the argument that the phrase does not refer to a specific political body, but rather is a flexible term referring "everyone in a particular locality who is relevant to a particular set of circumstances" in J. Thames, "A New Discussion of the Meaning of the Phrase *ʿam haʾareṣ* in the Hebrew Bible," *JBL* 130 (2011): 109-125. In my opinion, these less technical understandings fail to explain adequately the instances like 2 Kings 11 where the group weilds considerable political influence. For a discussion of the group as depicted in 2 Kings 11 in particular, see W.M. Schniedewind, *Society and the Promise to David*, 78-80.

partisanship.

Just as the partisan rivalry framed the beginning of Jehoash's reign, it also framed the end. This is made clear because Jerusalem elites are implicated in his murder by a subtle note concerning the parentage of his son and successor, Amaziah. Amaziah's mother was from Jerusalem (14:2). Generally, the king had multiple wives whose marriages to the king were geopolitically motivated. The king's marriages helped him maintain diplomatic relations with various regions, both within and without the kingdom. These geopolitics especially come to bear in the choice of a successor. The choice appears to have been guided by the geographic ancestry of the potential queen mother whose natal village or town always implied something about the predecessor's geo-political policies.[43] Jehoash's mother, for instance, was from Beer-Sheba, which might explain why "the people of the land," a group probably associated with the countryside in some way, rejoiced when he was placed on the throne. Conversely, we see something about the political goals of those who conspired against Jehoash when they choose a son among his heirs whose mother is from Jerusalem. Such a choice signals that they aspired to have a king who would favor the city and its aristocracy, with the boy being influenced by his mother. Having been born in Jerusalem, she would inevitably steer him towards policies favoring the city's elites.[44] The fact that city-based factions sought to replace Jehoash with a Jerusalemite

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[43] This especially seems to be the case by the time the ʿam haʾareṣ are an established political group. See Ihromi, "Die Königsmutter und der ʿAm Haʾarez im Reich Judah," *VT* 24 (1974): 421-429; N.E.A. Andreasen, "Role of the Queen Mother in Israelite Society," *CBQ* 45, no. 2 (1983): 191. For more on the role and geopolitics of queen mothers, see Z. Ben-Barak, "The Status and Rite of the Gĕbîrâ," *JBL* 110, no. 1 (1991): 23-34; N.R. Bowen, "The Quest for the Historical Gĕbîrâ," *CBQ* 63, no. 4 (2003): 597-618; B.W. Cushman, "The Politics of the Royal Harem and the Case of Bat-Sheba," *JSOT* 30, no.3 (2006): 327-343.

[44] That this was the case is also hinted at in the way Amaziah's reign is described. We are told that "when the kingdom was firmly in his hand," he killed his father's assassins (14:5). The note implies that he was under the influence of a faction supporting the assassination of his father and had to wrest control away from this apparently Jerusalem-centric political group before

after the reforms suggests his administrative policies had only exacerbated resentment in aristocratic circles. The comparative evidence from Mesopotamia illustrates why this was the case—an important base of power for the aristocracy was the placement of their members in administrative temple roles. Jehoash's reforms had delimited such roles and increased royal surveillance over the aristocrats who held these offices.

To conclude this section, the evidence suggests that Jehoash's administrative reforms further alienated urban elites. There is also some evidence suggesting the reforms were likewise unfavored in priestly circles. Based on internal biblical as well as comparative evidence, the reforms were unfavorable because they represented an unconventional appropriation of temple revenue and royal oversight of temple personnel. The comparative evidence from Neo-Babylonia also supplies direct examples of resistance to similar administrative reforms. Such resistance is likely to have been intensified in an Israelite context, where according to the Hebrew Bible, there was a hyper-awareness of monarchic overreach, particularly as it related to traditional institutions like tribal leadership and tribal religion. Given the focus of this dissertation, how did this social backdrop shape perceptions of the documentary practices used in the reform?

6.4 Perceptions of Documents in Jehoash's Reforms

Resistance to administrative reforms constructs a landscape where the mundane documents enacting those reforms can be given symbolic weight. In such a landscape, documents materialize unwanted intrusion. In the case of Jehoash's reforms, they would have given material expression to an unconventional penetration of the crown into the political autonomy and economic affairs of the temple and urban elite. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, there is clear evidence that the initial steps required by Jehoash's reforms relied on

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bringing them to justice.

documentation. The presence of the royal scribe, his actions appraising and standardizing the

silver, as well as a later royal scribe's discovery of temple texts when conducting the procedures

of the reform, all demonstrate the use of documents. Furthermore, the special note that later steps

of the administrative reforms did not utilize documents also implies that the initial steps utilized

them. This note about the absence of documents is significant for several other reasons as well. It

is ultimately what suggests the negative symbolic capacities of documents in this specific

scenario and in the wider Israelite sociopolitical landscape. The note illuminates two negative

qualities of documents in the Israelite mind.

6.4.1 Policing Behavior

First, informing the reader that temple administrators were not obligated to keep

accounts, 2 Kgs 12:15 understands accounting texts as tools of human accountability. That is, it

shows how accounting texts, in this case, were thought of as weapons for policing behavior

rather than devices for forecasting profits.[45] The reason 12:15 gives for why crown authorities

did not ask the administrators to keep accounts (יחשבו) is because "they dealt honestly" (באמנה

הם עשים). This note associates documentation with behavior, implying that documents were

understood as tools of human accountability, tools that encouraged honest behavior. There is no

concern here for long-term planning, as in calculating the time it took for the collection box to

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[45] The original theoretical work discussing the difference between forecasting profits and policing behavior with accounting is M. Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1999). This distinction has influenced Mesopotamian scholars of several periods. For Ur III, see P. Steinkeller, "The Function of Written Documentation in the Administrative Praxis of Early Babylonia, in *Creating Economic Order: Record-keeping, Standardization, and the Development of Accounting in the Ancient Near East*, eds. M. Hudson and C. Wunsch (Bethesda: Capital Decisions Ltd., 2004), 65-88. For the Neo-Babylonian period, see M. Jursa, "Accounting in Neo-Babylonian Institutional Archives: Structure, Usage, Implications," in *Creating Economic Order*, 145-198.

become full in order to assess when authorities should expect the box to become full again, allowing them to budget repair expenditure accordingly. As they are depicted in 2 Kgs 12:15, documents do not function this way. They only function as tools of human accountability, tools meant to displace corruption. With such a note, 2 Kings 12 affirms the conclusions of Chapter Three. Namely, the Hebrew epigraphic remains suggest that writing was largely perceived as useful because it policed subaltern officials.

Of course, policing behavior and encouraging honesty is a good thing. But, the note also suggests that, in line with the rest of this dissertation, the policing function of written accounts could carry a negative affect in Israelite culture. As Na'aman notes, the disuse of documents at this latter stage of the reforms paints the temple renovations "in an ideal light."[46] By implication, their use would make matters less than ideal. Documents imply control and centralization, so their absence might be considered ideal in a context that viewed centralized power with suspicion. The negative affectivities of documents are particularly heightened in societies akin to ancient Israel, where cultural preferences resist the centralization of power. Thus, a general antagonism towards royal control may explain why the text sees the absence of documents as an idealistic trope.

In one sense, the aversion to centralization in the Jehoash narrative parallels a similar aversion generated by Hezekiah's reforms. Both involve discourse about documents. Both kings restructure the royal administration in ways that infringe upon the cult. And, as already mentioned, the biblical text claims both kings withdrew from the temple treasury to fund indemnity payments. Using Isaiah 22, the previous chapter illustrated that Hezekiah's reforms, which aimed at centralizing power, provoked some criticism. As I argued, the same criticism

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[46] Na'aman, "Notes on the Temple 'Restoration,'" 646.

seems to underlie 2 Samuel 24's depiction of the census. When viewed in light of cultural expectations governing temple renovations, 2 Kings 12's apology for Jehoash's reforms illustrate that his centralization, primarily aimed at controlling temple finances, provoked similar criticism. Both reforms had the potential to be perceived as conflicting with tribal ideals. The criticisms directed at both kings suggest that administrative matters policed by documents played a role in generating some of the political discourse surrounding both reforms. Isaiah 22 is critical of Hezekiah's written census, a criticism expounded on in 2 Samuel 24. 2 Kings 12 illustrates that some sectors must have criticized Jehoash when he inserted his royal scribe into the management of temple finances, which naturally involved the keeping of written accounts to police the allocation of funds. The latter stages of the reform, however, use the absence of documents as a way of softening and idealizing the reforms, a fact that further illustrates how the use of documents could generate discourse about power and centralization. Both reforms thus illustrate that, at times, parts of Israelite and Judahite society experienced document mediation with negative affectivities informed by cultural concerns about the centralization of power.

In light of the preceding analysis, the negative charge of documents could have easily materialized in the specific scenario described by 2 Kings 12. Jehoash's reforms were unconventional. They were a new type of royal usurpation, an unprecedented policing of temple finances. They also likely disenfranchised the administrators who, in the end, were exempted from keeping the accounts. Given these facts, it is easy to understand why Jehoash might have relieved them from documentary duties. This policy could be understood as a compromise of sorts, one that would lighten the blow of the unconventional royal oversight. Having already been demoted in the temple's economic affairs by the new fiscal procedures, the administrators may have considered it a grave offense that they also had to submit financial reports to their new

supervisor, the royal scribe. First, this procedure would materialize their subservience, creating a new arena where they relived their demotion. Second, the procedure might also imply that they were untrustworthy, either because they were inept or worse because they were immoral. This implication is what lies beneath the statement that the administrators "dealt honestly" (2 Kgs 12:15). The note about honest behavior suggests that the administrators would have understood a requirement to keep accounts as a condemnation of their character. Documents already carried a negative charge in the decentralized Israelite sociopolitical landscape. But that charge was liable to especially explode in this scenario given that it already involved the tightening of the royal grip on a traditionally autonomous institution, at least autonomous under ideal circumstances.

6.4.2 Forgery and the Counterfeit

The attitude towards documents in 2 Kings 12 also has something in common with more general attitudes towards documentary practices, attitudes found even in modern society. As a tool of accountability, documents make administrative action permanently visible. They are devices of transparency. Accounting keeps a spotlight on the use and location of funds, discouraging shady dealings under the table in dimly lit back rooms. However, recent anthropology has noted that this transparency function of documents counterintuitively often heightens anxiety about the potential for corrupt behavior. By their very nature, documents, and especially accounting practices, are anticipations of failure. They attempt to "alleviate uncertainty," but because moral failure is the reason for their very existence, they often "amplify" uncertainty instead and therefore generate a reverse affect of suspicion.[47] By removing documents from this stage of Jehoash's reforms and replacing them with the honest behavior of

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[47] P. Harvey, M. Reeves, and E. Ruppert. "Anticipating Failure: Transparency Devices and Their Effects," *Journal of Cultural Economy* 6, no. 3 (2013): 294-312.

administrators, the biblical text demonstrates an awareness of this reverse affect in ancient Israel.

Beneath an awareness of the way documents inspire suspicion lurks a fundamental critique of writing. If accounting documents aim to discourage corruption, then the natural question becomes whether or not they are effective in this function. Documents raise suspicion precisely because they are, in fact, not foolproof safeguards against corruption. It takes societies little time to figure out that written devices can encourage bad behavior rather than discourage it. Documents can be forged and counterfeited. The books can be cooked and the numbers can be fudged. Their very claim on transparency thus makes documents prone to opacity.[48] While the honest behavior of the administrators in the passage attracts the reader's attention, the implications of this description for beliefs about documents have gone unnoticed. The claim that honest behavior relieves the need for documentation does more than suggest that documents are useful for human accountability. It also highlights a belief that the only foolproof method of ethical administration is to have honest administrators. The implication for documents is that they can fail at promoting ethical behavior because writing is ultimately not the transparent tool it claims to be.

2 Kings 12:15 suggests then that part of ancient Israelite and Judahite discourse about writing concerned its abilities to be appropriated for falsehood. This understanding of the passage is supported by several other texts from the Hebrew Bible that correlate writing with falsehood. The readiest example is Jeremiah's critique of the "lying pen of the scribes" (עט שקר

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[48] M.S. Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2012), 166; A. Gupta, *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 226.

הספרים), which he claims made "the teaching of Yahweh into a lie" (Jer 8:8).[49] While this statement is not in reference to administrative documents, it illustrates how some communities can lend more credibility to claims made in writing. Jeremiah accuses the scribes of taking advantage of this sociological fact in order to obscure the teachings of Yahweh. For Jeremiah, writing was prone to opacity. If this was the case with sacred texts, then most sectors of society would have been aware of the potential for forgery and counterfeiting when it came to administrative documents, a potential that is assumed by the note in 2 Kgs 12:15 that documents are unneeded for protection against fraud.

Another episode in Jeremiah more directly attests to the belief that administrative documents were at risk of corruption. In Chapter Three, I referred to Jeremiah's purchase of his cousin's patrimonial estate in order to illustrate how the presence of documents such as land deeds implies the presence of state authorities (Jer 32). The documentary procedures of Jeremiah's purchase also illustrate a concern for forgery and counterfeiting. The text relates that two copies of the land deed must be kept, one sealed and one unsealed (32:11-12). Both are given to the scribe for safe-keeping. Additionally, both copies require the signatures of multiple witnesses (32:12). Alongside these witnesses, the text is careful to note that the transaction took place in public space "in the presence of all the Judahites who were sitting in the court of the guard" (לעיני כל היהודים הישבים בחצר המטרה) (32:12b). All of these details can be understood as safeguards against forgery and counterfeiting. A sealed copy is kept presumably in case the veracity of the open copy comes under question. Both copies are kept in a central location,

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[49] For more on this critique, see W.M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 114-117; A. Demsky, *Literacy in Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2012), 310-317 (Hebrew).

protecting them from tampering. Documents culled from a scribal archive would have more creditability than documents Jeremiah produced from his own person. The signed witnesses, of course, can be consulted if both copies generate suspicion. By introducing these measures, the text displays a distrust for the contents of documents. Documents alone were not enough to confirm ownership in ancient Israel. The procedures of the exchange make clear that this was so because Judahites understood that writing had the potential to create dishonesty. This same understanding of lying documents informs the note in 2 Kings 12 that administrators were relieved from accounting because they were honest. If documents can purvey lies, then the only sure safeguard against accounting corruption is honest handlers.

Other texts from the Hebrew Bible illustrate a fear that counterfeit documents could especially be used to perpetrate acts of injustice. The most famous of these examples entails the crown disenfranchising a commoner through forgery. In 1 Kings 17, Jezebel forges letters in Ahab's name, thereby wielding the power of the crown to coerce false testimony against the commoner Naboth, who is condemned to death as a result. Naboth's property then passes into royal possession. Here, documents created a new vehicle for injustice. The documents' claim on transparency, that they were orders from the king because they were inscribed with his insignia, opened them up to opacity. They were actually orders from a person other than the king, a person who used the power of the crown to murder and steal. Because of the weight given to written orders, Jezebel only needed the king's name in writing rather than the king himself in order to manufacture the false pretenses that led to Naboth losing his life and patrimonial estate. In the end, the misuse of writing in 1 Kings 17 accords with attitudes towards writing in 2 Kings 12. Both chapters illustrate how documents could be perceived as technologies wielded to circumvent tradition. In one case, the patrimonial estate was attacked, in the other, the autonomy

of the Temple.

Similar concerns for the injustice potentialized by writing are present when biblical literature discusses the weight system that mediated economic exchange. Several texts fret over the existence of false weights and balances used to generate an unjust economic system (Lev 19:36; Deut 25:15; Amos 8:5; Mic 6:10; Ezek 45:10-13). Archaeology has uncovered a number of these equivalency weights, with many of them bearing inscribed signs indicating their respective measurements. The inscriptions could have been added for the express purpose of transparency. Uninscribed weights illustrate that users could easily assess their value by relative size and shape without need for the inscriptions. This means that some inscriptions probably served as assertions of the weight's value rather than simply as reminders. But as we have seen, transparency measures can unexpectedly heighten a belief that corruption is afoot. The passages listed at the beginning of this paragraph indicate that inscribed weights did not bring an end to suspicion over the system. When the passages are considered together with the existence of inscribed weights, they show that writing was not always taken at face value. In this way, they show the same concern seen in 1 Kings 17 and 2 Kings 12, namely that writing's claim on transparency creates new avenues for corruption.

The suspicion for documents illustrated in 2 Kings 12 is part of a long intellectual history. Cultures far and wide have grappled with writing's ability to claim transparency while simultaneously creating new opportunities for opacity and dishonesty. The implied assertion in 2 Kings 12 that only honest men, not accounts, are reliable safeguards against corruption closely resembles a critique about bureaucratic bloat from the philosopher Rousseau who remarked that "The books and all the accounts of financial administrators serve less to detect their infidelities than to disguise them. So set aside the registers and papers and put the finances back in faithful

hands; this is the only way that they may be faithfully managed."[50] Similar to 2 Kings 12, Rousseau believed that accounting procedures were counter-productive to the truth and were unnecessary if you had honest handlers. Rousseau's quote demonstrates that suspicion for writing fails to fade even after a society has long used the technology. But this fact has had little bearing on scholarly discussions of literacy in ancient Israel. The attitude towards accounting documents in 2 Kings 12, where they are placed with "men who dealt honestly, shows that such suspicion formed part of the social discourse around Israelite uses of writing.

6.5 Conclusion

The attitude towards documents preserved in the account of Jehoash's reforms overlaps with attitudes towards the technology of writing in Judges 8 and 2 Samuel 24. In each narrative, documents materialized changes in society that some perceived as the rotting of traditional social values. It is instructive to consider distrust for writing in light of 2 Kings 12's potential historical contexts compared to the contexts discussed for the other two test cases. The narrative setting is Judah in the 8th century BCE. But, as already mentioned, the text shows signs of redactional work. Given that Jehoash's bureaucratic reforms find their closest parallels in Neo-Babylonian temples, it seems likely that the text gives voice to ideas about documents and bureaucracy from a later period. In fact, Benjamin Thomas excludes the fiscal reforms from Jehoash's reign in his reconstruction of an earlier Hezekian History.[51] This makes sense because, as already mentioned, a near verbatim account of the system behind the reforms precedes Josiah's discovery of the book of the law and his subsequent cultic reforms (2 Kgs 22:3-7). The system of checking the

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[50] Translation from B. Kafka, "The Demon of Writing: Paperwork, Public Safety, and the Reign of Terror," *Representations* 98, no. 1 (2007): 1-24.

[51] Thomas, *Hezekiah and the Compositional History.*

collection bin provides the stage on which the Josiah's administration discovers the book of the law. It seems likely that the policies mentioned in 2 Kgs 12 & 22 stemmed from Josiah's time, when the Neo-Babylonian Empire was on the rise. Jehoash's reforms could then potentially be a Josianic insertion, one that prepares the reader for the administrative contexts surrounding the discovery of the book of the law. If this understanding is correct, the text would illustrate distrust for accounting practices nearly two-hundred years after administrative writing in Hebrew began to proliferate in the 8th century. Similar to Rousseau's critique then, 2 Kings 12 would demonstrate that a long familiarity with writing increased distrust for it. This fact is interesting to consider in light of Clanchy's work on written records in Medieval England. He notes that writing is generally taken at face value when it is a relatively new technology.[52] Such a view seems fitting for the distrustful view of writing illustrated in 2 Kings 12 and the other passages cited above. Collectively, they show that adverse attitudes towards the technology persisted late into Judah's history and were not just a mark of early Israel's first experimentation with it.

Ultimately, this chapter has shown that ancient Israel could conceive of accounting texts as much more than simple tools. They were symbolically loaded. But this conclusion is based on a literary portrayal of writing. The following chapter looks at the features and social context of an administrative cache of documents from the epigraphic record in order to assess how attitudes toward documentation may have impinged upon how documents were used.

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[52] M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 323.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE SAMARIA OSTRACA AS ROYAL PERFORMANCE OF POWER AND MORALITY

One corpus that can be fruitfully explored for how attitudes towards document-mediated interaction may have influenced how documents were used is the Samaria Ostraca (SO), dating to the early 8th century BCE. The SO are extraordinary among our inscriptional corpus from monarchic Israel and Judah. Most ostraca from the 8th-7th centuries are letters and lists produced for an immediate need. Few are accounting texts bearing the type of formal characteristics we find on the Samaria Ostraca, which generally include a royal year, the personal name of an apparent recipient designated by a *lāmēd*, a commodity, and a place of origin designated by clan affiliation or settlement. Their formal characteristics show a level of concern for written-ness and archival practice that is unrivaled by other administrative documents from the period.[1] Compounding their concern for archival practice, the ostraca were discovered in a royal, administrative complex on the acropolis of Samaria, the capital of the Israelite kingdom. Most studies on the SO view this exceptional nature as an invitation to get a rare glimpse at the administrative and economic systems of ancient Israel that lay behind the ostraca. Consequently, outside of typological issues, few have asked questions about the SO's written-ness itself. Why should these transactions be recorded in the first place?

Such a question may ring trite and may seem to have an obvious answer. There is an assumption about administrative writing that views its production as being solely guided by a

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[1] This statement excludes the fiscal bullae, which are similar, but are a later development that appear to be modeled on the SO. They also illustrate the SO's uniqueness, because the bullae are so formal, formal enough to be created from a stamp. This means the form of the SO were later fixed, showing that this is an earlier stage in the use of this accounting form. On the fiscal bullae, see N. Avigad, "Two Hebrew 'Fiscal Bullae,'" *IEJ* 40, no. 4 (1990): 263-266 and R. Reich, "A Fiscal Bulla from the City of David," *IEJ* 62, no. 2 (2012): 200-205.

practical concern to extend memory. Writing constructs a bottomless memory bank. Administrators can use it to manage more people, more information, and more goods, thereby increasing efficiency. As this dissertation has examined, however, recent anthropological work calls into question such a purely functional understanding of documentation. In light of this anthropological work, I would like to discuss how functional and practical matters fail to fully explain the SO's novelty for their chronological and social settings, as well as many of their features.

My main proposal is two-fold. First, I propose that formal and material qualities of the SO suggest a use of writing best explained by an anthropological label called "bureaucratic mimicry." With this phrase, anthropologists identify documentary practices whose goal is not solely to enhance functionality. Rather, a central goal under this rubric is to mimic the practices of perceived successful organizations and governments, thereby granting the practitioners of the mimicking a degree of legitimacy or prestige. In the case of the SO, I argue that a significant component of their function was to mimic the administrative practices of royal palaces throughout the ancient Near East. As such, this cache of documents partly served to legitimize the Israelite monarchy to itself and to the tribal elites that circulated through the royal residence at Samaria and experienced such ephemeral forms of documentation. The SO can thus be understood as a performance of kingship. In the end, understanding them as bureaucratic mimicry helps explain some of the documents' features. As the first part of this chapter will outline, the ostraca collectively contain a low amount of information while also suggesting they were part of a system that recorded information on more than one written medium. Additionally, the chapter will explore how the royal year inscribed at the beginning of each ostraca can be understood as a type of logo conveying power. By examining these features, the chapter

encourages us to think about administrative documents as not just objects that were written and read, but also as acts that were experienced. Within the larger arguments of this dissertation, this understanding of the SO would illustrate that documents could be "read" as signs of power, a fact that further illustrates how they could be experienced with abject attitudes.

The second part of my proposal examined in this chapter's latter half is that while the SO broadcast power and legitimacy, they can also be understood to check that power in culturally coded ways. In short, they can be understood as communicating an assurance that the king was not taking more than his allotted share. Depending on how the system behind the documents is understood, this could mean one of two things. It could mean that the king was using his privileges to share wealth with other elites as West Semitic cultural expectations dictated. Alternatively, it could mean that the king was using documents to assure elites that he was not siphoning off wealth the elites already owned. In short, either scenario allows for understanding the documents as transparency-making technologies. They assure stakeholders that the king is acting with integrity in the distribution of goods. They build goodwill towards his rulership. Instead of using documents to aim downward and surveil subordinates, the documents are instead being aimed upward to shine a light on the king's behavior. To make these points, the second half of the chapter will examine the ostraca's typology and the specific social context they appear to reflect. As the second section of the chapter argues, an application of administrative writing for the purpose of "sousveillance" would be shaped by West Semitic cultural ideals, where power was distributed and the idea of equality was a key talking point when it came to political leadership. This use of documents would demonstrate cultural sensitivity, subverting the potential for document-mediated interaction to generate a negative affective charge, as discussed in the previous chapters, and replacing it with a positive charge.

7.1 The Socio-Economic Context of the SO

To better understand writing's purpose in the SO and how features of the corpus reflect attitudes toward documentation, it is necessary to briefly review the scholarly debate surrounding the system of exchange behind the ostraca. This will provide a framework that will be of heuristic value in elucidating the multiple communicative capabilities of administrative writing at Samaria. A typical ostracon from the cache contains four pieces of information: the year, a geographic locale, a personal name preceded by –ל, and the commodity. For example, SO 12 reads "In the ninth year, from Yaṣit, to ʾAdoniʿam: A jar of aged wine" (בשת התשעת יצת לאדנעם נבל ין ישן 1).[2] This formula can vary slightly, as seen in figure 7.2 later in the chapter, but the majority of the SO typically include these categories. An understanding of the exchange documented in the ostraca is reliant on scholars' interpretation of men whose name is preceded by a –ל preposition, in the case of SO 12, that man is ʾAdoniʿam. These men are referred to in scholarship as *lāmēd*-men. Most early inquiries assumed the ostraca documented taxes paid by these *lāmēd*-men to the crown.[3] Another derivation of the taxation framework argued that the *lāmēd*-men were not citizens, but instead collectors who levied the taxes on their respective territories.[4] For both of these understandings, this implied that the *lāmēd* preposition meant "to

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[2] Translation from S. Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past: Hebrew and Cognate Inscriptions from the Biblical Period* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2008), 271.

[3] Y. Yadin, "Recipients or Owners: A Note on the Samaria Ostraca," *IEJ* 9, no. 23 (1959): 184-187; F.M. Cross, "Ammonite Ostraca from Heshbon," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 13 (1975): 1-20; I.T. Kaufman, "The Samaria Ostraca: An Early Witness to Hebrew Writing," *BA* 45 (1982): 229-239; J. Renz, *Die Althebräischen Inschriften: Teil I: Text und Kommentar*, Handbuch der Althebräischen Epigraphik (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchsgesellschaft, 1995), 81-84.

[4] W. Shea, "The Date and Significance of the Samaria Ostraca," *IEJ* 27 (1977): 16-27.

the credit of."

Other studies found weaknesses in the taxation argument and proposed that the *lāmēd*-men were beneficiaries of royal grants.[5] Rainey in particular argued for this view on the basis of grammar, pointing out that the epigraphic and biblical materials offer little support for an interpretation of the *lāmēd* prefix as "to the credit of." He underscored his interpretation of the *lāmēd*-men as beneficiaries of royal grants by offering Ugaritic and biblical parallels. The view that the men were thus recipients of the commodities and the *lāmēd* simply denoted "to" has since largely held sway.

Building on the strength of the recipient theory, more recent work on the SO adduces the largely social nature of the ostraca's documentation. That is, the data in the SO attest to the movement of goods through existing social relationships as opposed to something defined as strictly economic or rationally bureaucratic akin to taxation. David Schloen, for instance, highlights the fact that the SO's scheme for defining the origin of the commodities is rooted in the Mannassite clan system outlined in biblical literature.[6] This suggests exchange based in kinship and social attachments as opposed to territories bureaucratically organized by the state.

Niemann and Nam both make further important contributions by highlighting ways the SO presume socially embedded exchange.[7] Niemann proposes that the geographic distribution

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[5] A. Rainey, "The Samaria Ostraca in the Light of Fresh Evidence," *PEQ* 99 (1967): 32-41; more recently, idem., "The *Sitz em Leben* of the Samaria Ostraca," *TA* 6 (1979): 91-94. See also, A. Lemaire, *Inscriptions hebraïques*, LAPO 9 (Paris: CERF, 1977).

[6] D. Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in the in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 163-164. This aspect is also emphasized in S.L. Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 124.

[7] H.M. Niemann, "A New Look at the Samaria Ostraca: The King-Clan Relationship," *TA* 35 (2008): 249-266; R.S. Nam, "Power Relations in the Samaria Ostraca," *PEQ* 144 (2012):

of place-names suggests a situation where the Israelite king hosted significant tribal figures at the royal residence in order to consolidate power in nearby regions immediately critical to Samaria's political success. This understanding situates the exchange in a context of collective governance, a more socially oriented method of rule that was historically the norm for the northern monarchy.[8] In addition, through an analysis of the names associated with each *lāmēd*-man, Niemann convincingly argues that the delivery of goods was based on a personal system where recipients knew deliverers. Nam further establishes the socially embedded nature of the exchange recorded in the SO. Through a focus on the prestigious nature of the "old wine" (ישן ין) and "washed oil" (שמן רחץ) in the dockets, Nam argues that the ostraca document competitive feasting. According to this formulation, fine commodities were exchanged for social and political capital.

While it is difficult to define some of the particulars, for instance, whether the recipients were royal officials or important tribal figures or both, or whether the commodities were royal grants or personally funded, the evidence strongly suggests that the SO document a movement of goods primarily grounded in social realities. This social framework raises important questions about the purpose and necessity of written documentation. After all, according to Jack Goody's

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155-163.

[8] Niemann gives a nice overview of this aspect. For a more detailed analysis of collaborative politics as it applied to the northern monarchy, see D. Fleming, *The Legacy of Israel in Judah's Bible: History, Politics, and the Reinscribing of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For similar discussions on how biblical literature reflects collaborative governance, see W. Schniedewind, *Society and the Promise to David: The Reception History of 2 Samuel 7:1-17* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Sanders, *The Invention of Hebrew*. The recent work on collective governance as a form of West Semitic political leadership was somewhat prefaced by Alt's use of "charismatic leadership" as a category for the politics of the northern monarchy. See A. Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, trans. R.A. Wilson (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1966).

classic work, societies with more oral orientations such as ancient Israel, generally keep track of

personal, socially embedded exchange without administrative writing.[9] The question of writing's

necessity in the SO is further intensified by the fact that the archaeology of the monarchical

period in ancient Israel has produced no comparable cache of commodity receipts. This is despite

the fact that similar exchange certainly predated and postdated the SO, whether at Samaria or

other nearby regions. The uniqueness of the SO calls for a contextualization of the period in

which they were written. What about this time and this place made bureaucratic inscription a

necessity? The answers to these questions pose challenges to the mnemonic function of

administrative writing presumed in most studies of the SO.

Of course, the above is not to say that the SO's recorders would not have benefited from

writing's mnemonic capacities. Instead, I seek to demonstrate that any employment of

bureaucratic writing is layered, as the ethnography of bureaucracy has convincingly shown.

When the stratified nature of bureaucratic writing is acknowledged, an analysis of ancient

Israel's administrative writing can generate insight into ancient state-building techniques in the

southern Levant as well as ways that seemingly mundane technologies interact with a host of

culturally determined notions about society, religion, and politics. This type of analysis can

further contribute to the burgeoning field of administrative documentation and its ability to

elucidate undiscussed aspects of state and society. In what follows, I propose two factors that

may have motivated the documentation represented by the SO. The first suggests that the SO

mimic bureaucratic practices as a way of creating royal legitimacy and broadcasting royal power.

The second suggests that the SO show traces of being written for use as a transparency device.

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[9] J. Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 104.

7.2 The Samaria Ostraca as Emblem of Power and Legitimacy

To make the argument that the SO mimic wider bureaucratic practices as a way of creating legitimacy and broadcasting power, I will discuss four issues. First, the SO evince a collectively negligible amount of information. Second, despite this, they also evince a system where writing proliferated through duplication and redundant information. Taken together, these two features point to a system that veered towards valuing writing for writing's sake, as will be discussed below. Finally, the royal year at the beginning of each ostraca betrays the cache's emblematic value in conveying kingship. First, however, it is necessary to provide some examples of bureaucratic mimicry and describe it in more detail.

7.2.1 The Anthropology of Bureaucratic Mimicry

A growing literature on the anthropology of documents and bureaucracy can illuminate the SO. As discussed throughout this dissertation, this literature has broadly examined the many "doings of documents," demonstrating that bureaucracies function in unexpected and diverse ways that do not always prioritize efficiency and memory, but instead often prioritize the symbolic value of recording mundane information. That is, many bureaucracies prioritize the ability of writing to materialize power and control. One setting where the symbolic value of writing seems to particularly be at play is in how emerging bureaucracies in developing countries evaluate novel documentary practices. The rubric of evaluating novelty and the literature on the topic provides a useful heuristic framework for thinking about the SO, because once again, the SO appear to have no antecedents in Israelite documentary practice. They, therefore, can be thought of as novel to the Israelite court. This literature encourages us to ask questions about what factors motivated the choice to record these transactions in the 8th century at the royal residence.

Scholars working in developing bureaucracies have argued that bureaucracies tend to evaluate the implementation of novel documentary practices somewhere on a spectrum between two poles. The first pole is agenda conformity and the second is enhanced functionality.[10] A concern for agenda conformity evaluates novel practices according to whether they conform to the appearance of other legitimate bureaucracies. In this framework, novel documentary practices are valued for optics and legitimacy. The new practices only matter if they make the state look like a state or the organization look like a successful organization according to cultural expectations. Whether or not the new practices impact efficiency and output is of secondary importance. Conversely, bureaucracies veering toward the other end, ones that evaluate novel practices through the lens of enhanced functionality, are largely concerned with how the new practices enhance the ability to carry out the organization's practical goals by increasing efficiency. Organizations veering towards enhanced functionality are said to have a culture of demonstrated success, while organizations veering towards agenda conformity are said to have a culture of bureaucratic mimicry.

Anthropological and historical literature has provided an abundance of examples of what can be called bureaucratic mimicry, where administrative writing was largely conducted for reasons of legitimation instead of practicality, and new writing practices were adopted for reasons of agenda conformity as opposed to enhanced functionality. The most iconic of these comes from the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss among an indigenous Brazilian tribe.[11] As

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[10] M. Andrews, L. Pritchett, and M. Woolcock, "Looking Like a State: The Seduction of Isomorphic Mimicry," in *Building State Capability: Evidence, Analysis, and Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 29-53.

[11] C. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. Jonathon Cape (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2012), 300.

discussed in Chapter Two, after some tribe members had stopped pretending to write, the chief

continued to mimic Lévi-Strauss' writing, making wavy lines on paper throughout the day. The

chief valued writing for its symbolic capacities. He believed it was a new and productive way to

emblematize his power. M.T. Clanchy argues for a similar understanding of how writing first

spread in some parts of Medieval England. He suggests local bishops began making superfluous

lists simply because this is what they saw the conquering Normans do.[12] In both cases, agenda

conformity superseded enhanced functionality. Mundane writing was valued for symbolic

reasons rather than practical ones.

More recent work on the anthropology of documents provides a modern example of

bureaucratic mimicry, showing how organizations find a source of legitimacy in ephemeral

forms of administrative writing. A powerful example comes from Yael Navaro-Yashin, who

worked among nationals of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, a state deemed "illegal" by

international governing bodies. Despite their label as a rogue state, the TRNC boasts all of the

trappings of a legitimate modern political body. This is especially true of the ephemeral

documents the state produces, which have become a central means for the government to project

its legitimacy. These documents allow the state to look like a state. As Navaro-Yashin puts it:

> In its sophisticated mimicry of other state practices, the 'TRNC' acts as governing body
> and sovereign power over a population of about 200,000 people. As in other state
> practices, transactions under this polity are verified by reference to documents...These
> documents are highly loaded symbolically because, at each instance of their use and
> exchange, they do not only represent specific identities and transactions, but also declare
> the legitimacy of the 'TRNC.'[13]

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[12] M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999), 76, 91.

[13] Y. Navaro-Yashin, "Make-believe Papers, Legal Forms, and the Counterfeit: Affective Interactions between Documents and People in Britain and Cyprus," *Anthropological Theory* 7, no. 1 (2007): 79-98.

Of course, internally, the TRNC benefits from the practical uses of documents. But in addition, these documents have a legitimating value. This is what real states do, so it is what the TRNC does too. While culturally disparate, the bureaucratic inscription of make-believe lists by the Brazilian tribal chief, the use of lists by Medieval bishops, and the production of documents by the TRNC all demonstrate how diverse societies may perceive mundane bureaucratic documentation as an emblematic transmitter of power and legitimacy. In each case, the grammatical information within the document is one level of meaning and the document's symbolic legitimizing information is another meaning of equal and sometimes even greater value. With regard to writing practices, these disparate societies felt the tug of agenda conformity as much as enhanced functionality.

When it comes to analyzing administrative writing in the ancient world, we tend to assume that enhanced functionality is the singular motivating factor behind novel forms of documentation. But these anthropological and historical examples challenge us to consider the role agenda conformity played in the decision to produce new forms of mundane writing on behalf of royal bureaucracies. After all, ephemeral documents in the ancient world seem to have also been particularly charged with symbolic political power. This is supported by the number of monumental depictions we have of ephemeral writing. These appear in Egyptian, Assyrian, and even West Semitic contexts, as discussed in Chapter Four.[14] The reliefs demonstrate that such

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[14] See Chapter Four. Significantly the Neo-Assyrian examples mostly appear after what Irene Winter defines as a transition to historical narratives in Assyrian art reliefs. Here, rulers moved away from fictive myths whose meaning was accessible to only a restricted circle of elites. Instead, they commissioned reliefs that would broadcast signature elements of kingship and coercive power. It is in this context we begin to see depictions of scribes making ephemeral lists and receipts of objects and people. See Irene Winter, "Royal Rhetoric and the Development of Historical Narrative in Neo-Assyrian Reliefs," *Studies in Visual Communication* 7(2) (1981): 2-38. To the depictions in Chapter Four, I would add Bar-rakib, a West Semitic example, because the scribe appears before the king with a diptych writing board. Based on Akkadian references to writing boards, these were not monumental and did not usually contain literature.

writing carried a performative value. Given ancient Israel's status as an emerging polity in the 8th century BCE, agenda conformity, that is looking like a royal bureaucracy, was likely a determining factor in the choice of what to write down, how to write it, and when to write it. The royal residence surely felt the tug of cultural expectations governing what legitimate kingship looked like. In what follows, I argue that in the SO's proliferation of documentation to track what looks like meager data, we find the makings of a system that heavily veered towards agenda conformity instead of a system solely governed by a concern for enhanced functionality. In that sense, the SO were performed and experienced as a component of royal regalia.

7.2.2 Low Information Density in the SO

It will be helpful to view the SO and their features through the lens of how bureaucratic writing is traditionally understood, that is, as a purely functional means to an end. In many ways, features of the SO exceed a utilitarian, functional need, demonstrating that their very written-ness was intended to do more than simply extend memory. To illustrate how they exceed a utilitarian need, we can heuristically turn to the classic formulation of Jack Goody, who proposed three primary factors that necessitate recording administrative action. These are: 1. Communication at a distance; 2. Storage of mass information; and 3. Depersonalization. The SO lack sufficient substance in all three of these categories. At a glimpse, we can dismiss category three. Scholars of the ancient Near East readily acknowledge that much of our administrative inscriptional corpora blur the lines between person and office, while also recognizing that administrative actions were often achieved through personal, socially embedded mechanisms.

Rather they were most frequently places to record master lists and master accounts—the stuff of mundane administration. In fact, if the SO's information wasn't kept on papyrus, it is likely that it would have been entered into such a writing board. The Arad and Lachish ostraca attest to the use of writing boards in ancient Israel, as discussed in Chapter Three.

This is especially evident for the Samaria Ostraca, which use the socially defined clan units of the tribe Manasseh as an organizing principle.

Regarding communication at a distance, the SO do demonstrate a concern for keeping tabs on geographic connections by recording the clan and village origins of the commodities. However, as Hermann Niemann has demonstrated, the locales mentioned in the ostraca comprise only a handful of neighboring places that already lay well within Samaria's orbit.[15] For example, the vast majority of the ostraca come from the territories of Helek and Shemida, which were within a 15 kilometer radius of Samaria. Communication at a distance thus appears to play only a small role in the SO.

Most importantly for our purposes, a tabulation of the total number of towns and clan regions moves the discussion to Goody's second category, the storage of mass information. By this standard, the ostraca also fail to qualify for Goody's definition of administrative necessity. Collectively, they record a negligible amount of data, only mentioning a dozen town names and fewer clan associations. Their negligible information is especially illustrated by the few number of *lāmēd*-man recipients and their restricted associations with the geographic locales. Over the course of three separate years, the seventy or so legible ostraca document no more than thirteen individual recipients. The most in any one year is nine, being generous. Furthermore, recipients generally associate with no more than three locales, and the general rule is one. It can be argued that just the name of the *lāmēd*-man recipient, then, implies a narrow set of associations that the writing makes redundant. For example, the year nine ostraca provide us with only nine exemplars. Four of these are designated for one Gaddiyahu, all four come from the same town,

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[15] Niemann, "A New Look," 257-259.

and all four are aged wine. We may further add Roger Nam's observation that the ostraca document only small amounts of commodities. Nam observes that *nbl* designates only small jars and each ostracon only records a single jar at that.[16] Paired with the refined nature of the commodities (aged wine and washed oil), these miniscule amounts are unfitting for a large redistributive system where writing tends to be used prolifically for the storage of mass information. It must be admitted that there are likely more documents and individuals we do not know about due to the vagaries of time destroying them. If more documents are ever discovered, it could change the picture currently represented by the SO.

Much larger systems of exchange and storage historically existed without recourse to writing's capabilities, even notably in this region of the southern Levant.[17] To illustrate the SO's comparatively low density of information, we could also compare it to the *daily* wine lists discovered at the NW Assyrian palace of Nimrud where administrative lists indicate that the palace sustained some 6,000 individuals on a daily basis. In contrast, the SO only document *nine total individuals in any one year*. This comparatively low number of individuals becomes even smaller next to the Nimrud lists when we consider that the SO only provide a general year number rather than a specific day. The lack of a day or even month likely indicates we are not dealing with some elaborate system of daily rations, but rather with a system of irregular

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[16] R.S. Nam, "Power Relations in the Samaria Ostraca," *PEQ* 144 (3) (2012): 155-163. Also, with but two possible exceptions, each inscription records the delivery of only a single jar. Contrast this paltry amount per ostraca, for instance, with Hieratic ostraca from the Southern Levant during the LBA, which record enormous sums of perishable goods on individual ostraca.

[17] See I. Shai and J. Uziel, "The Whys and Why Nots of Writing: Literacy and Illiteracy in the Southern Levant during the Bronze Ages," *Kaskal* 7, no. 7 (2010): 67-83. If writing can be rejected for ideological reasons, even if it is writing in its most practical manifestations, then the other side of that coin is that writing, even its practical forms, can be adopted for ideological reasons.

allotments for special occasions.[18] The meager amounts of refined commodities also suggest a special occasion rather than a large-scale daily system akin to the Nimrud lists. Would the small-scale, irregular system behind the SO require administrative writing with redundant formal components in the same way that the Nimrud palace would?

7.2.3 Proliferation of Writing

The ostraca's collectively negligible amount of information becomes even more suspicious when considering that despite this low information density, the SO imply a system where writing proliferated by including up to three separate places where relevant information was recorded. As Anson Rainey first noted long ago, it seems clear that the SO were consolidated on a master ledger elsewhere, meaning that they duplicated information. Rainey argues that the ostraca fit the profile of scratchpads.[19] By "scratchpads," he refers to temporary documents used throughout Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Ugarit that scribes utilized to scratch notes quickly during intake procedures. Later, this information was transferred to a centralized tablet, papyrus roll, or writing board, effectively collating everything into one master document. The scratchpads (ostraca) were then discarded. The medium of ostraca certainly fits the temporary, in the moment function of scratch pads. Although abundantly available and therefore inexpensive, the physical non-uniformity and relative bulk of ostraca would make them poor candidates for systems of long-term storage and retrieval. Furthermore, the archaeological context of the ostraca suggests a temporary function since they were found in a fill layer that seems to follow abruptly the date of their ceramic typology and paleography. The SO's rigid formulas also suggest they

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[18] Nam, "Power Relations." See also Niemann, "A New Look," 249-266.

[19] A. Rainey, "The Samaria Ostraca in the Light of Fresh Evidence," *PEQ* 99 (1967): 32-41; more recently, idem., "The *Sitz em Leben* of the Samaria Ostraca," *TA* 6 (1979): 91-94.

are guided by an external, master document. Thus, Rainey's argument for the SO as scratchpads is compelling. It is important here to emphasize again the number of recipients, commodities, and locales mentioned here are dwarfed by other systems that utilized scratch pads. We might be justified in questioning the necessity of this procedure, given that again we have only just over one hundred ostraca that were spread over the course of three years. This means an even fewer number of jars would have arrived simultaneously and required the need for scratchpads if we understand writing as only a simple tool to extend memory.

We should also consider the possibility that individual jars of commodities already included the names of their recipients, as suggested by Ivan Kaufman.[20] Remains from Samaria have produced exemplars of such jar inscriptions. Although none of these match names found in the SO, they attest to the reality of this practice at Samaria and similar jar inscriptions found throughout ancient Israel, especially in elite contexts, suggest the likelihood of name inscriptions on jars duplicating the information found in the SO and their corresponding master ledger. If so, the jar inscriptions create a third point of documentation. Such prolific documentation exceeds the practical needs of writing for memory's sake, especially in light of the low information density we are dealing with here. The recording of meager amounts designated for only a handful of recipients over the course of three years on two to three separate forms of documentation appears excessive. We could playfully say we have the kernel of a system that fits our pejorative use of the word bureaucracy—a comically extravagant amount of unnecessary writing that is more cumbersome than efficient.

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[20] Kaufman, "Samaria Ostraca," *ABD* V, 921-926.

7.2.4 The Royal Year as Emblem of Power

Ultimately, prioritizing the legitimating function of the SO helps explain the cache's data

density relative to the proliferation of the documenting system. But bureaucratic mimicry also

helps explain some formal components of the ostraca as well. While the ostraca bear multiple

formal typologies, each one invariably begins with the royal year in which the transaction was

conducted. To return to SO 12 from the beginning of this chapter, it begins with "in the ninth

year" (בשת התשעת). The appearance of the royal year on each ostraca is significant because time

is a highly ideological construct, having practical as well as politically charged qualities. The

decision to record the royal year can be understood as more than a reminder of when the

transaction took place. It also makes a claim on political legitimacy. Jack Goody captures the

loaded meaning of ordering time by remarking, "One is used to thinking of a political system

controlling space, a territory. But the control of time enters the same frame."[21]

Cultures across history have recognized the political import of timekeeping. For instance,

returning to Clanchy's study of Medieval scribes, he notes that most scribes chose to leave most

documents undated, even the most mundane ones, because it required them to commit to a

specific political or religious worldview, a life-endangering decision in times of instability.[22]

Similarly, for the ancient Near East, the decision to record times and name the years was a

politically loaded endeavor. Dominique Charpin and Nele Ziegler have pointed out instances

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[21] Goody, *The Logic of Writing*, 94-95. For a powerful example of this notion, see P.J. Kosmin, *Time and Its Adversaries in the Seleucid Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

[22] Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 301.

where conquered cities of the OB period were mandated to date their documents according to the system of their new overlords.[23] To record time is to record politics.

Most importantly for our purposes, Matthew Suriano has argued that the concept of royal time functioned as a significant component of meaning-making in NWS monumental inscriptions.[24] While his article focuses on dedicatory and memorial inscriptions, he does cite the Samaria Ostraca as an example of royal time in the West Semitic world. His article should challenge us to ask questions about the potential meaning royal time could make when reproduced in mundane administrative documentation. In light of Navaro-Yashin's work in the TRNC, I think it is appropriate to argue that the inscribing of royal time in the SO supplies these mundane records with a type of political logo.[25] Here Israelite kingship, in addition to creating more efficient administrative systems, seizes an opportunity to reproduce its legitimacy in everyday writing practices.

My point here might be illustrated by setting one of the ostraca next to an Egyptian administrative ostracon from Deir el-Medineh.[26] Egyptologists have uncovered several of the ostraca used there for governing a workforce that was tasked with building elite burials during the New Kingdom period. When looking at O. Göttingen AE 15 from Deir el-Medineh, there are

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[23] D. Charpin and N. Ziegler, "Masters of Time: Old Babylonian Kings and Calendars," in *Time and History in the ancient Near East*, eds. L. Feliu, J. Llop, A. Millet Albà, and J. Sanmartín (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 2013), 57-68.

[24] M. Suriano, "The Historicality of the King: An Exercise in Reading Royal Inscriptions from the Ancient Levant," *JANEH* 1 (2014): 95-118.

[25] Navaro-Yashin, "Make-believe Papers."

[26] For photo and discussion, see M. Gutgesell, "Ostrakon Göttingen AE 15," *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Alterthumskunde* 111 (1984): 3-6. For a more recent treatment, see K. Donker Van Heel and B.J.J. Haring, *Writing in a Workmen's Village: Scribal Practice in Rammeside Deir El-Medina* (Netherlands: Institut Voor het Nabije Oosten, 2003), 33.

obvious visual and formal likenesses to the SO, ones that are especially underscored by the year

fifteen SO, which record the royal date in Hieratic (See figure 7.1). Such similarity evokes the

idea of bureaucratic mimicry, but it especially speaks to the now well-known influence of

Egyptian scribal practices on ancient Israel. This is not to say that the SO were directly aware of

inscriptional practices from the New Kingdom period at Deir el-Medineh. It merely demonstrates

that the SO are aware of broader ancient Near Eastern inscription practices in a general sense.

Figure 7.1 – Author's rendering and comparison of O. Göttingen AE 15 and Samaria Ostracon 17a with translation.

O. Göttingen AE 15

Samaria Ostracon 17a

Regnal year 2 III akhet 18. Giving the copper to the coppersmith Ptahpahapi. Copper, deben 26, specification: one copper...makes 11, a washing bowl makes 12 deben, a bronze chisel, makes 3 deben. Total:26.

Translation from Van Heel & Haring, *A Workmen's Village*, 33.

In the 10th year, from ʾAzzah, to Gaddiyaw, a jar of washed oil

Translation from Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 278.

More important than the graphic similarities between AE 15 and the SO, however, is a telling

dissimilarity. This dissimilarity betrays an ethic of mimicry for the sake of legitimacy. The

Egyptian ostracon, most likely also some form of scratchpad, includes a royal year but also

specifies the day and month, whereas the SO only provide a general year number. The SO lack

the more specific dating system required by robust bureaucracies which are largely rooted in

functionality, as the Egyptian ostracon illustrates. From a practical standpoint, the inclusion of a

general year for the distribution of single, small jars can be understood as superfluous, especially

given that this information was most likely soon transferred to a master ledger and the ostraca then discarded. But given the ideologically charged nature of royal time, the general year's inclusion gives each document an official label that reproduces the rule of the king. Moreover, it does so by graphically positioning royal time over tribal information in the ostracon's bottom half. This dating form leans towards agenda conformity more than it does enhanced functionality.

In sum, the persistence of the royal year pairs with the low information density and the prolific writing density to suggest a value placed on administrative writing for its ability to perform power. These qualities of the document cache suggest a use of documentation that veers towards agenda conformity more than it did enhanced functionality, with the agenda being to conformity to culturally tailored ideas of power and kingship. Such types of mundane writing comprised a key component of looking like a legitimate monarchy. It was important to perform such acts not just for practical reasons, but also for reasons of optics.

7.3 The Samaria Ostraca as Emblem of Moral Transparency

Given administrative writing's diverse capacities, it would be foolish to suggest that the technology was only employed at Samaria for reasons so far discussed. To this point, I have proposed the SO served two primary purposes. First, the mnemonic function cannot be denied as something that administrators at Samaria found useful. However, the assumption that information storage singularly governed the choice to employ writing robs documentation of its other communicative powers. This observation, based on firm ethnographic footing, calls attention to elements of the SO that convey a second function of administrative writing. Namely, bureaucratic inscription was also recruited at Samaria for its capacity to broadcast power and legitimacy. This gets at the optics of documentation.

In this section, I suggest there is a second optical function the SO could have served. Namely, their typology and social context suggest they could have made the king's dealings with luxury goods transparent to an inner circle of tribal elites. Transparency essentially defines how power nodes assemble material technologies, especially literary ones, in order to alleviate suspicions about corruption and misappropriation. In doing so, transparency devices "constitute good governance and promote harmonious social relations."[27] To this point, we have largely considered documents to be a tool of surveillance. Officials in the ancient Near East seem to have mostly used documentation as a watchdog for subordinates. But by invoking transparency, this means we will consider the possibility that the SO attest to voluntary "sousveillance," or surveillance from beneath.[28] If Niemann's "tribal elite" model is to be believed, the king would certainly have a vested interest in broadcasting to this group that their luxury goods were not being misappropriated. But even if that model proves untrue, it still provides a heuristic framework for thinking about how social context in the ancient world would have influenced the use of documents, making them more than objects of memory storage. According to Niemann's model, this would be a case where administrative writing was employed because of the positive affect it could engender from subjects, not solely because it makes operations run smoother or extends memory.

The framework of transparency or sousveillance means that in some sense, the SO circumscribed the king's power. This suggestion might seem at odds with what was discussed in the previous section. But as with any human endeavor, few things have a binary nature, and

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[27] P. Harvey, M. Reeves, and E. Rupert, "Anticipating Failure: Transparency Devices and Their Effects," *Journal of Cultural Economy* 6, no. 3 (2013): 299.

[28] ibid., 297.

documentation has been shown to be one of those things. It is multifaceted, complex, and rich in meaning. Furthermore, transparency-making is an act of goodwill that can boost political legitimacy. Constituents tend to like rulers who are fair and who are willing to demonstrate such fairness through material means. The optics of fairness would be especially important in the tribal, West Semitic sociopolitical landscape of ancient Israel. The appearance of excess and injustice could generate revolt in this setting. Conversely, the appearance of fairness and measure could grant a ruler loyalty from subjects. The two uses of the SO proposed in this chapter are thus not so different. They both tap into political power, even if they do it in different ways.

Elements of the SO that suggest a use of writing for its claim on transparency are primarily twofold. First, the ostraca bear two broad forms that reflect a concern for keeping the king's goods separate from goods to which he had no claim. The second element has already been discussed, namely, the proliferation of documents. While the previous section discussed this feature as a potential means of performing power, such documentary proliferation is also characteristic of a concern for transparency. These elements display an attempt to project morality, thereby combatting narratives of corruption that typically arise in the discourse that takes place around emerging states.[29] As will be discussed, the application of transparency devices would be especially fitting for both the social context and the historical setting of the SO. Broadly, this use would reflect longstanding southern Levantine cynicisms towards kingship and the individual excess it was thought to facilitate. More historically narrow, Jehu's Nimshide dynastic line would have found transparency tools useful as a form of political communication since his dynasty was replacing an Omride dynasty which biblical texts unequivocally condemn as morally bankrupt. Thus, the use of transparency devices was a way of tapping into a different

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[29] Gupta, *Red Tape*, 111-114.

kind of political currency, one characterized by morality.

7.3.1 Documentation as Transparency in the SO

7.3.1.1 Formal Boundaries: Circumscribing the King in the SO

One significant characteristic of the SO that suggests a transparency-making effect is the difference in form between those documents that record the delivery of commodities to individual recipients (types I and II according to Kaufman's classic division) and other documents that record commodities reserved for the king (type III; See Figure 7.2).[30] Types I and II are only slightly dissimilar in form, but functionally they serve the same purposes. Type I generally records the commodity and town name, while type II omits the commodity, replaces the town name with the clan affiliation, and almost always includes secondary personal names, generally thought to be the initial deliverers. The difference in form might be explained by the fact that type I ostraca were overwhelmingly written in years 9 and 10, with the number spelled out as an ordinal. Type II were written in year 15, with the year signified in Hieratic. Despite these formal differences, types I and II share functional similarities in that they record deliveries to the *lāmēd*-men.

Figure 7.2 Samaria Ostraca Typologies

Type I: *Samr.* 12	Type II: *Samr.* 27	Type III: *Samr.* 53
בשת. התשעת. משפתן. לבעל זמר. נבל. ין. ישן	בשת. ד𐤀 מחלק. לאשא. אחמלך בעלא. בעלמעני.	בשת. העשרת. ין כרם. התל. בנבל. שמן רחץ.
In the ninth year From Śiptan, to Baʿal-zamar: A jar of aged wine	In the 15th year, from Ḥeleq, to ʾaśaʾ ʾAḥimelek Baʿalaʾ the Baʿalmeʿonite	In the tenth year, wine Of the vineyard Hattel in a jar of washed oil

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[30] For recent assessments of the typologies, see Niemann, "A New Look," and M. Suriano, "Wine Shipments from Samaria to Royal Vineyards," *TA* 43 (2016): 99-110.

Type III ostraca diverge significantly from types I and II in both form and function. Type III includes no *lāmēd*-man, so the recipient is only implied. Whereas types I and II record either a town or clan as the origin, type III designates the origin as one of two named vineyards. These are *krm yhw'ly* "vineyard of Yahawil" and *krm htl* "vineyard of the Tel." Type III bear many other small differences that create the distinctive nature of the transaction recorded in them.[31] It is universally accepted that the implied recipient of the type III ostraca is the king and that these record the delivery of commodities from royal vineyards. In his detailed analysis of the type III ostraca, Matthew Suriano concludes that these documents "stand out as primary sources for the study of royal practice. These ostraca differ from those of the larger corpus and their characteristics bear witness to the production of difference, that is, sociopolitical practices that create royal privilege."[32] As an aside, Suriano's analysis further demonstrates the constitutive effects of writing. The very choice to document the king's goods as formally different demonstrates that administrative writing was imbued with the power to materialize difference and privilege. Beyond this, Suriano's observations on the difference created through the ostraca's formal characteristics have some other implications that merit further analysis.

The sociopolitical difference created through the formal characteristics of Type I and II on one hand and Type III on the other does more than signal royal privilege. It also restricts that royal privilege. The boundary drawn by the Type III ostraca around the king's goods not only ensures protection around what belongs to the king, but this boundary also causes commodities to fall outside of royal entitlement. Boundaries always work in two directions. A system that builds difference in the allocation of commodities, by nature, contains elements of inclusion as

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[31] See ibid. Suriano's work is the fullest treatment of type III to date.

[32] ibid., 108.

well as exclusion for all involved parties. Types I and II generate their own distinct privilege for the *lāmēd*-men from which the king is excluded. For example in SO 27, found in the middle column of figure 7.2, the delivery comes from a a clan affiliation (Helek) and is designated for an individual named ʾAsaʾ, not for the king. While this recipients has no claim on the king's commodities arriving from royal vineyards, neither does the king have claim to the commodities of ʾAsaʾ, which are arriving from a clan territory. The SO is an administrative system that carefully articulates difference through formal typologies, clearly marking permission as well as prohibition. Even the king's privileges are circumscribed through such a system. The multi-directionality of the boundaries created through the ostraca's distinct typologies does more than articulate difference. It expresses transparency by carefully designating recipients and outwardly communicating that the king had no claim on Types I and II.

7.3.1.2 Proliferation of Documentation: Accuracy and Transparency in the SO System

The system of intake and delivery implied by the materiality of the SO are further suggestive of a transparency function. As discussed in the first part of this chapter, this system likely involved a proliferation of documents. While proliferation was understood above as suggesting the performance of power, this feature of the cache can also communicate transparency. Anthropology has revealed that a proliferation of literacy devices within a bureaucracy betrays a moral concern for alleviating fears about corruption.[33] The production of a master document means that the allocation of goods was carefully verified at the most critical junctures of the commodity's movement. The SO, serving as scratch pads, indicated the final destination of a commodity upon its immediate arrival. As a performative device of intake, the

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[33] On the proliferation of documents, see Gupta, *Red Tape*, 131 and M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*. For the accumulation of literary objects in service of transparency, see Penny Harvey et al., "Anticipating Failure."

ostraca deflected any potential for confusion during the moment that the commodities changed hands from the intended recipients' representatives (most likely the secondary names recorded on some ostraca) to the hands of administrators at Samaria. Then, the subsequent transfer of the information from the ostraca to the master ledger created a tool to govern the future delivery of items to the *lāmēd*-men. The pivotal moment that the administrators transferred the goods to the *lāmēd*-man could then be checked against the master ledger to ensure that each recipient received what rightfully belonged to him. Thus, the material characteristics of the ostraca imply a system of multiple documentation points that protect against misallocation during the most crucial periods of transaction.

Such a proliferation of documents can be understood as an intention to project transparency, highlighting a use of writing for its affective potential. At Samaria, both deliverers and recipients would experience documentation through an assemblage of material technologies when encountering the exchange of their goods. This system would inspire confidence in the integrity of those responsible for overseeing the storage and transfer. The system implied by the SO suggests that administrators employed writing not just because it was effective mnemonically, but also because it was affective emotionally. Documentation communicated accuracy and ethical behavior regarding the allocation of precious commodities and this assuaged fears over confusion and corruption. The aggregation of documents couples with the previously discussed distinctions in the ostraca's form to establish clear demarcations of ownership, thereby creating an aura of moral certitude around the movement of goods.

7.3.2 The Cultural and Social Context of the SO as Transparency Device

The above elements of the ostraca indicate that administrative inscription was in dialogue with and constrained by culturally determined notions of political leadership unique to the

southern Levant. These political notions can be summarized as collective governance, a topic

discussed in Chapter Four, which favors political decentralization and is therefore suspicious of

institutions where power is consolidated in a single figure. The landscape of collective

governance provides an ideal setting for the use of documents as a transparency device.

As recent assessments of the SO have demonstrated, the contents of the ostraca reveal a type of

interaction rooted in collective governance or collaborative politics. Niemann's understanding

that the king hosted tribal elites to promote cooperative sociopolitical relations that mutually

benefitted all involved parties is the most aggressive interpretation towards this end. In such a

context, many of the wine and oil disbursements likely originated from lands already possessed

by the tribal elites named in the ostraca.[34] This means the jars of refined goods belonged to the

elites, not the king. The placement of goods that did not belong to the king in the king's

storehouse would be a context very conducive for cultivating narratives of corruption, especially

considering the north's preference for decentralization. Thus, the projection of accuracy,

transparency, and morality would be immensely significant for ensuring the success of social

alliances. The employment of a robust documentation system involving notes on jars, intake

scratch pads, and a central ledger can be understood as a transparency device that assisted in

promoting harmonious social relations and legitimizing the king as moral in this context. But

even if Niemann's model is rejected, the SO could still be understood as constructing

transparency in the other models proposed.[35]

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[34] Niemann, "A New Look at the Samaria Ostraca."

[35] While Niemann's interpretation is perhaps the most grounded in collaborative politics and thus exhibits a fitting context for documentation's capacity to communicate transparency, such a function of bureaucratic inscription would still serve other contexts suggested for the SO. Rainey's understanding that the SO mirror biblical and Ugaritic examples of royal retainers benefitting from land grants is only one step removed from Niemann. For instance, Rainey points towards the biblical example of Mephibosheth, whom David invited to "eat at my table" (2 Sam

While most ANE regimes were probably unconcerned with creating goodwill among the public through transparency, they did at least broadly value the idea of justice as a means of gaining political currency. Mesopotamian kings, for instance, often issued orders known as *mīšarum* that attempted to restore social justice at the beginning of their reigns.[36] This act differentiated them from the perceived corruption of previous rulers. The Ugaritic Kirta epic offers a West Semitic example of morality's role in legitimation. Yassib, a son of the protagonist Kirta, challenges his father's right to the throne on the grounds that Kirta promotes corruption.[37] Biblical literature is

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9:10).[35] This act was funded through David's edict to allot all of Saul's landholdings to the latter's only surviving relative, Mephibosheth. While Mephibosheth technically benefited from a royal grant, the grant actually originated from Mephibosheth's ancestral landholdings—meaning the produce was rightfully his anyway. Nevertheless, even if the case of Mephibosheth is considered an anomaly, royal retainers without ancestral landholdings would still be interested in the integrity of the grants bestowed upon them by the king. The accurate fulfillment of what was promised would continue to grease the wheels of loyalty among royal retainers. As biblical narratives about northern coups demonstrate (not to mention other examples from the ancient Near East), dissatisfied retainers were often the source of insurrections. A king's ability to manage the happiness of such elite personages was imperative to ensuring a lengthy and peaceful reign. In the context of royal grants, documentation systems could be pulled into the orbit of a king's desire to satisfy retainers. Bureaucratic inscription could serve as a tool that ensured the continued integrity of royal grants, thereby promoting loyalty. As mentioned above, recent assessments well demonstrate the unlikelihood that the SO point towards a taxation system. Even if such were the case, transparency would still be at play in a taxation system since the formal typologies of the ostraca take careful note of which taxes would be destined for the king and which would be destined for other parts of the administration. The already emotionally charged context of taxation would create hypervigilant participants. Documentation could at least assuage some narratives of corruption in this context by demonstrating that no one person, specifically the king, was singularly benefitting from the system.

[36] In his seminal treatment on social justice in the ancient world, Moshe Weinfeld highlights the value kings placed upon such edicts as the *mīšarum* for their political potency, see M. Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995). For more on the *mīšarum*, see R. Westbrook, *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 407 and S. Greengus, "Legal and Social Institutions of Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, vol. 1, ed. Jack Sasson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 2000), 469-484.

[37] Tablet III, col. 3, lines 46—50.

also rife with admonitions concerning the high moral standards of kingship. Prophetic literature in particular often understands the failure of monarchic dynasties through the lens of moral shortcomings. Most importantly, Deut 17:15-20 warns against the excesses of monarchy. The SO can be considered documents that communicate a barrier to such excess.

Given Ancient Near Eastern conceptions of the idealized role of king as moral leader, we might expect the employment of some documentation to communicate ethical behavior. Certainly, much evidence suggests that monarchs participated in their fair share of socio-economic abuse, but the same monarchs would have always possessed a need to communicate incorruptibility to at least a certain audience, even if that audience was strictly elite retainers or the rural aristocracy comprising "the people of the land" (עם הארץ). This fact is demonstrated through the previously mentioned Kirta epic, where an elite prince undermines the rule of Kirta by tapping into a corruption narrative. What was likely true of the ancient Near East broadly in this sense was especially true for ancient Israel, whose long tribal history informed its gravitation towards more collective forms of governance.[38] A context of collaborative politics would be hypersensitive to narratives of corruption and thus would highly value transparency. Such political settings gravitate towards the type of sousveillance provided by documentation.

The political history of the northern monarchy centered around Samaria illustrates that the tug of collective governance was particularly powerful there. This is confirmed by biblical

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[38] For instance, it is precisely the idea of corruption in the context of collective governance that Absalom exploits in order to flame his insurrection against David. 2 Samuel 15 recounts that Absalom specifically targeted northern Israelites on their way to see the king in order to suggest to them that David was not concerned with their justice. Absalom justified this opinion by stating that King David had not appointed anyone to oversee judicial issues that northerners had. As Fleming has demonstrated, the idea of collaborative politics was much more potent in the northern territories. Thus, Absalom's decision to target northerners and play on this idea was politically savvy.

texts that elicit distrust of the monarchy and attribute corruption to its constitution. For example, when Israel comes to him clamoring for a king, Samuel warns that kingship will inherently result in the king taking what is not his. Among his warnings, Samuel offers some particular details that have direct relevance to the SO when he claims in 1 Sam 8:14–15 that the king will "take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers." This accusation forms a small part of things the king will take, according to Samuel. In the span of just a few verses, the prophet uses the verb "to take" (לקח) six times, making the denotation of "taking" the primary way a king relates to his subjects. This strong skepticism of kingship is rooted in tribal politics native to the southern Levant. 1 Samuel 8 speaks to a culture of "sousveillance," where power can be checked from below. The employment of voluntary accounting practices as a way of communicating that royal behavior is in line with cultural expectations can be one manifestation of such a culture.

Given writing's association with power and its capacity to mediate the type of privileged redistribution described in 1 Samuel 8, it is easy to see in the SO a realization of the biblical text's fears concerning kingship. Yet, a closer look at elements of the SO and their social setting suggests that writing may have been partially adopted at Samaria to assuage such fears. The ostraca bear formal and material techniques that reveal a great deal of concern for constraining the king's claim on commodities. This would make sense in the decentralized ethos of the northern tribes. While the bureaucratic inscription of the goods certainly communicated the state's power, these techniques suggest that the state was also aware of writing's capacity to serve as a transparency device. Through writing's claim to transparency, administrators at Samaria were able to combat cultural narratives of corruption that typically arise alongside state

formation, and that were likely to have especially arisen in the northern kingdom of Israel, given

its geopolitical history. In doing so, they cultivated trust among local, tribal elites, their most

important power base.

7.3.3 The Historical Context of the SO as Transparency Device

The chronological horizon of the SO is an additional factor that would fit the application

of bureaucratic inscription for its ability to convey ethical behavior. Transparency devices often

arise in the immediate wake of past ethical failings.[39] Such devices address previous abuses of

power and attempt to assure participants that past mistakes will be averted through the

application of material technologies that regulate the movement of goods. On archaeological and

paleographic grounds, the SO date securely to the Nimshide dynasty, which replaced the

Omrides.[40] This dynasty would be a fitting context for the creation of new documentation

procedures that guard against misappropriation. DtrH frequently discredits the Omrides as moral

and spiritual failures, a critique which reaches its zenith in the figure of Ahab. According to the

biblical text, Ahab's evil was unrivaled in all of history (1 Kgs 21:25). He is perhaps most

famously known for his role in the illegal coopting of Naboth's ancestral vineyard, culminating

in Naboth's murder. The biblical recounting of this event demonstrates the ways royal

prerogatives can supersede social custom. Royal desire converges with corruption, forgery,

manipulation, and murder to engineer the illicit expropriation of land and enrich the social

person of the king. Despite all of his moral shortcomings, the biblical authors credit this event as

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[39] Harvey et al., "Anticipating Failure," 294.

[40] The SO are attributed to the reigns of Joash (804-789) and Jeroboam II (788-748). See Lemaire, *Inscriptions hebraïques*, 39-43. There is some discussion as to whether or not the years of the ostraca overlapped as part of a coregency between Joash and Jeroboam. For the coregency model, see Kaufman, "The Samaria Ostraca," 233; A. Rainey and S. Notley, *The Sacred Bridge: Carta's Atlas of the Biblical World* (Carta: Jerusalem 2006), 221-222.

confirming the end of Ahab's dynasty (2 Kgs 9:26). Against the backdrop of the Naboth story,

the transparency element of the SO comes into fuller focus. The biblical account of Naboth

involves officials conspiring in the dark to bring about the royal misappropriation of a vineyard.

The SO, on the other hand, brings the allotment of vineyards and produce into a more public

light. Ownership and access rights were carefully regulated by the SO, so much so that they even

circumscribed royal claims.

The Nimshide Dynasty would not be the only historical circumstances where an Israelite

king may have found transparency useful. The SO's function in this regard do not have to be

limited to this precise context. It is impossible to confirm the details of the Naboth story and

directly associate the SO as addressing such a specific past moral failure. Nevertheless, in the

broadest sense, the Naboth story is itself a corruption narrative, demonstrating that such cultural

myths were a natural part of political dialogue in ancient Israel. The form and materiality of the

SO illustrate that Israelite kings employed documentation to address this particular type of

corruption narrative—one that viewed monarchies as inherently immoral and illicit confiscators

of ancestral lands and their produce. It is, however, significant that biblical literature broadly

attributes corruption to the Omride Dynasty. In contradistinction, biblical authors manifest some

interesting concessions of approval for members of the Nimshide Dynasty.[41] This approval is

uncharacteristic for biblical literature's typical evaluations of northern monarchs. Based on the

evidence we have, it may be broadly suggested that the two dynasties were associated with

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[41] 2 Kings 13:4-5 reports that Joash successfully intervened with Yahweh, promoting Israel's escape from Aramean oppression. 2 Kings 13:22-25 elaborates on this report, stating that Joash defeated Aram three times and recovered previously Aramean occupied towns for Israel. The text's final formulaic assessment of Joash admits to his "might" in 2 Kgs 14:5. The biblical text then takes great pains to explain the degree of success that Israel enjoyed under Jeroboam II, Joash's son and successor. We learn in 2 Kgs 14:25 that Jeroboam II recovered even more towns from the Arameans and extended Israel's borders.

varying degrees of ethical behavior. Situated in this context, the SO may be understood as devices that helped construct this moral distinction.

In sum, while the SO do the important work of marking royal privilege, they are very careful to mark royal restriction as well. Both the typology of the ostraca and the system of documentation implied by their materiality indicate a concern for communicating transparency. The distinct typologies exclude the king from claiming some goods which were reserved for the privileged consumption of tribal elites and/or royal retainers. The materiality of the ostraca hints at their use as intake scratchpads, which signifies multiple points of documentation. Such a system is designed for accuracy and transmits an associated affective response of moral certitude. This use of a transparency device creates its own type of power by tapping into cultural notions of the good king. Broadly, documentation's ability to convey morality befits the traditional sociopolitical context of the northern territories, defined by collective governance. More narrowly, the use of bureaucratic inscription to guard against misappropriation can be understood as an innovation of the Nimshide dynasty to combat the corruption narratives that naturally arose in ancient Israel's political dialogue regarding monarchy. Even more narrowly, the SO may evoke biblical impressions of the Omride dynasty as corrupt and thus they may be a direct response to more specific past moral failings. This demonstrates that bureaucratic writing was more than a mundane technology. Instead, it interacted with wider cultural norms and attitudes in meaningful ways.

7.4 Conclusion

The SO were much more than receipts that extended memory. They communicated power and transparency, serving as devices recruited by the state to help construct statehood. If the idea that the same documents could convey power and transparency together seems

contradictory, that is perhaps because it partially is. But such it is with documents. They are complex, surprising, and contradictory. On the other hand, transparency devices are often employed to construct political legitimation through a claim on ethical behavior. In that sense, the two major functions of the SO outlined here are not so different. These observations demonstrate that the act of documenting in ancient Israel was much more than a mundane, thoughtless activity. Instead, just as modern ethnographic studies of bureaucratic inscription have shown, administrative writing in ancient Israel was multiple and layered. Nevertheless, as described in the last chapter, the claim on truth and transparency opens documents up to opacity and untruth. Biblical depictions of the technology show an awareness of this opacity. Writing could never be fully trusted.

The act of administrative writing is not a universal technology neutral to the uniqueness of the southern Levant. It interacted with the specific myths, culture, and history of the region. The SO were a particular manifestation of bureaucratic inscription that tapped into cultural notions of kingship. They projected power, but they also show signs of limiting that power in a way that carefully navigates local conceptions of political leadership. These characteristics of the SO demonstrate administrative writing was never viewed dispassionately, but instead had an affective force.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS

Technologies are read and interpreted against the backdrop of a given society's cultural norms and belief systems. As a technology, the same is true for bureaucratic writing. Societies talk about and make sense of document-mediated interaction with a multitude of historically and culturally informed narratives. One narrative, for example, may lionize the efficiency of documents, while another, even in the very same society, may deride their corruptibility. Sometimes, the narratives may even manifest abject fears about how writing might undermine aspects of a particular social fabric.

In the case of ancient Israel and Judah, scholars have often thought about administrative writing as a tool that multiplied the number of tasks ancient governments could accomplish, one that made Israelite and Judahite bureaucracies more efficient. Scholars have scrutinized, typologized, and organized administrative documents in tables in order to adduce something of the efficient uses to which documents were put. Scholars have also used the epigraphic remains of bureaucracy to reconstruct other facets of Israelite society, such as language and the economy. Unwittingly, those who experienced documentation in Israelite society have been envisioned as robots or sleepwalkers who gave administrative writing no second thought because of how obviously useful it must have seemed to them. But is usefulness the only narrative about document-mediated interaction that circulated in ancient Israel and Judah?

My study has examined depictions of administrative writing in DtrH in order to assess the various other narratives that articulated beliefs about document-mediated interaction in ancient Israel and Judah as a response to the growth of documentation in the 8th-7th centuries BCE. A major argument throughout has been that corruption was perceived as a constant threat to documents and to those inscribed within them. Some texts in DtrH illustrate a distrust for the

written medium that was operative in ancient Israel, especially when it was used in bureaucratic contexts. Sometimes that distrust is characterized by a belief that documents are prone to corruption through forgery, counterfeiting, and falsification. At other times, distrust for the corruptibility of documents seems to have taken a more distinctly Israelite shape. Some sectors of society feared that an increasing amount of document-mediated communication would corrupt elements of the Israelite social fabric. DtrH tethers documents to coercion, violence, foreignness, and dehumanization. In doing so, it refracts distrust for administrative writing through the prism of the Israelite tribal structure and corresponding fears about increased political centralization. The technology of writing was pulled into a wider cultural discourse about rapid social change, a discourse characterized by fears about the potential of monarchy to erode kin-based values. Alongside narratives about writing's usefulness, at least some talked about administrative applications of the technology as potentially dangerous.

When the existing dataset of inscriptions is examined, the picture that emerges suggests writing was indeed put to uses that some more conservative Israelite factions could have interpreted as forms of social and cultural erosion against the backdrop of tribal ideals. The southern Levant appears to have historically kept a distance from administrative usages of writing. When it was used, it was used by Egypt for imperial domination. Thus, when southern Levantine polities began adopting the technology for administrative purposes, it had the potential to recall memories of Egyptian hegemony in the region. This is especially true given the Egyptian nature of writing's technological implements. The historical relationship of writing with Egyptian hegemony would also have loaded the technology with the potential to be perceived as a political tool that was at odds with the tribal structure, where coercive forms of governance were more unwelcome. Such attitudes would have persisted into later periods, given

writing's continued associations with the Judahite military. In addition to unwanted Egyptian influence, early iterations of Israelite and Judahite writing also bear signs of Phoenician influence. Because biblical literature often criticizes Phoenician influence on Israelite culture, it stands to reason that writing's Phoenician associations further marked the technology as a potential danger. Alongside its associations with political coercion and foreign influence, writing also appears in contexts related to the consumption of luxury goods. The social inequality implied by this had the potential to clash with tribal ideals of egalitarianism. Thus, the epigraphic record reveals that some in Israelite and Judahite society could have understood the technology of writing as a source of social stratification, unwanted foreign influence, and as a symbol of fading tribal autonomy.

To test the validity of my proposal about negative attitudes towards bureaucratic writing in ancient Israel, the dissertation analyzed three test cases from DtrH that depicted administrative usages of writing. The cases suggest that the suspicions implied by the epigraphic record indeed were part of the discourse about bureaucracy in ancient Israel and Judah. Each narrative assigns writing a role in violating tribal norms. Moreover, it is a sovereign figure in those narratives who violates those norms. This suggests administrative usages of writing were viewed in the light of cultural discourse about the pros and cons of monarchy.

In the Gideon narrative, a proto-monarchic figure assumes the right to override the ideal of local autonomy endemic to tribal structures. He uses the technology of writing to facilitate his brutality against the local elders, a group that embodied tribal notions of local autonomy and distributed power. In the Davidic census, a sovereign also uses writing to invade autonomous village life. He keeps written records in order to facilitate and obligate future military service, an idea that conflicted with the flexible and negotiable tribal model of persuading military service

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through kin-based channels. Finally, Jehoash increased royal surveillance over religious institutions. By doing so, he violated traditional religious norms governing tribal society, but he also touched on issues of local autonomy. The local elite, who most likely occupied temple administrative positions, would have been disenfranchised by Jehoash's fiscal reforms, which were mediated by documents. Additionally, the text's admission that the latter stages of the reforms were not governed by documents gives voice to a different kind of distrust for writing's effectiveness. All three test cases thus suggest that potential fears about writing intimated in the epigraphic record were realized in Israelite society. Some pinned their displeasure with a rapidly changing society, characterized by increased political centralization, on the material objects of bureaucratic writing.

In analyzing the test cases, the dissertation depended on three major theoretical points drawn from the anthropology of documents and bureaucracy. For the Gideon episode, the affectivity of documents came to the fore. Instances of administrative inscription have been found to generate powerful emotions, often of a dark and sinister nature. This lens of affect theory provided a way to understand Gideon's act of list-making as more than an off-handed comment. The narrative ties his act of writing to public torture. Work on the affectivity of documents suggests that this union between writing and torture made by the text is not a haphazard accident. Violence and administrative inscription can convey similar notions of dehumanization and hierarchical power differentials. Monumental inscriptions throughout the ancient Near East also couple displays of brutality with administrative inscription, suggesting that bureaucratic enlistment could be experienced as an ominous event. The tribal structure of ancient Israel provided fertile soil for experiencing documentation as a form of violence since it conveyed coercive and hierarchical forms of governance that violated tribal ideals.

The affective power of documents also seems to be at play in the Davidic census. But the peculiar depiction of writing there, as something with the power to summon divine retribution in the form of a plague, opens up the opportunity to discuss a different theoretical aspect of documents, namely, their constitutive capacities. Writing's material nature lends itself to the belief that it constitutes or makes things real and permanently binding, although this affordance is not a given in every society. Based on hints in the biblical record and the comparative material from Mari, administrative writing in the specific context of the census seems to have had such a powerful affect in these communities because they attributed to it a powerful constitutive force. Writing was binding. As such, participation in the written census had the power to absolve previously standing kin-based alliances. Indeed, it may have been viewed as having the power to corrode the tribal system, which was most overtly expressed in wartime, when military musters were voluntary and appealed to the ideology of kin as opposed to the ideology of a nation-state. If participation was fixed in writing before the muster, the flexibility, autonomy, and negotiation at the heart of the tribal structure could be perceived as absolved. An understanding of the census as a corrosion of the social structure makes sense in light of the way biblical literature attributes epidemic disease to it. Cultures often turn to the idiom of disease for help in expressing how rapid social change is perceived as undermining traditional culture and society. Because the census relies on written procedures prone to connoting coercion and binding obligation, the constitutive effects of writing are a likely explanation for why it was so strongly resisted in the tribal world of ancient Mari and Israel. This seems all the more likely given how the issue of kin-based politics permeates the census literature from each culture.

Jehoash's fiscal reforms also evoked the affectivity of documents. But this time, it was their non-use that evoked it rather than their use. The note that documents were not used implies

a negative perception of documents. Their absence portrays operations in the temple through an idealized light. Documents in this context might have been viewed as less than ideal for two reasons. One, the oversight and lack of trust they imply could have been experienced as undermining social cohesion. Two, the fact that they are replaced with "honest men" suggests that there was a belief that documents were prone to corruptibility. They could be forged or falsified. So, from the perspective of this text, documents are a poor accountability device, much less effective than men and women of integrity. This touches on a third major theoretical point about documents informing this dissertation. Documents can be experienced as opaque instead of transparent. This feature seems to have been well understood in ancient Israel.

From a synchronic perspective, the biblical test cases suggest that bureaucratic writing was experienced as a potentially unsettling occurrence during the monarchic period (1000-587 BCE). From a diachronic perspective, it is significant that our three test cases place the memory of a nefarious act of writing at three different points in Israel's and Judah's history. Gideon's list is placed in the pre-monarchic era, David's census is placed during the establishment of Judah's dynasty, and Jehoash's reforms are placed during the middle of the 8th century, arguably when Israel and Judah experienced their highest political achievements. This broad chronological spread suggests that even as writing became more popular, fears about what it might do to the social structure remained unassuaged. If this was indeed the case, it would be in line with an anthropologically informed understanding of technology. Attitudes towards technology do not develop linearly and fears about it maintain or, at the very least, take new forms as a technology's use continues. I have supplied some evidence that these depictions of writing most likely do, in fact, date to different periods, ranging from the early days of the monarchy, perhaps even before it, to the Neo-Babylonian period. From a narrower perspective, it is significant that,

according to a number of scholars, these narratives would have begun to take shape as part of a longer composition during the 8th-7th centuries BCE. During this time, writing, and especially administrative applications of it, accelerated rapidly alongside other social changes. It would make sense for reservations about these changes to be pinned on the materiality of writing and for this attitude to then seep into popular cultural narratives that came to comprise biblical literature.

The dissertation has revealed several advantages for looking more closely at the question of document-mediated interaction. For one, understanding documents as more than memory aids can open up new interpretive possibilities and strengthen old ones. Gideon's narrative, for example, has long been considered a critique of kingship. By scrutinizing his act of mundane writing as more than an off-handed comment, this dissertation has added value to traditional interpretations of the passage. Elsewhere, the dissertation used theoretical insights from the anthropology of documents in order to offer a new solution to the old problem of the census in biblical literature. This dissertation thus hopes to encourage more theoretically grounded considerations of written acts in biblical literature. Even mundane acts of writing can make meaning in the text. When taken seriously, these acts can open the door to new textual understandings while also expanding old ones.

The dissertation has also sought to expand how scholars understand the question of literacy in ancient Israel. Attitudes towards writing are an important component of how literacy spreads and the forms it takes. A society may welcome the technology of writing eagerly, but that eagerness is unlikely to be felt in every sector. A different society might reject it altogether. Others might permit some uses of the technology while considering certain other uses to be unlicensed breaches of cultural decorum.

Good evidence suggests that some in ancient Israel felt uneasy about writing's expansion in the 8th-7th centuries BCE. This has the potential to affect how we understand the spread of literacy. For scholars who argue that the demographic spread of literacy remained low in ancient Israel, they should consider whether or not fears about the technology undermining the social system informed its low demographic spread. It seems to me that most who take a view of low literacy believe this was so because the infrastructure for widespread education was lacking or because people were simply indifferent about writing, seeing little to no value in it. This is possible. But it is also possible that people, at times, saw in writing something dangerous, so they actively avoided it.

For scholars who argue for a broad demographic spread of literacy, they should consider ways the extant epigraphic corpus was shaped by a cultural unease for administrative writing. How might a distrust for administrative uses of writing have circumscribed its uses? If we had the many papyrus documents lost to us, to what degree would they reveal uses of writing for purposes of social cohesion rather than purposes of bureaucratic coercion? Are such tailored uses illustrated in the current epigraphic corpus? Furthermore, the relative lack of written artifacts from ancient Israel has long been bemoaned. Certainly, some archives and caches have escaped us. But it is possible that a cultural unease for writing limited its applications, meaning that what we have discovered so far is a representative picture of how and how much the technology was used. These, of course, are difficult questions to ask and no conclusive answers are offered here. They merely illustrate how this work can hopefully be considered when discussing the question of literacy in ancient Israel.

One important caution is worth repeating. I do not contend that discomfort characterized all or even most applications of writing in ancient Israel and Judah. Attitudes towards writing

were mixed. Clearly, several texts in biblical literature esteem writing as a good thing. Consider Josiah's discovery of the scroll (2 Kgs 22). The account considers writing a good thing. It allowed the preservation of religious teachings. Additionally, even at the level of the individual, some likely had their own complex view of writing defined by mixed feelings. Consider again our own experience of technology. I love letting my toddler watch television, but I am sometimes uneased by giving her too much. Unease certainly did not dominate how all of Israel and Judah experienced every instance of writing during their entire history. For the most part, it was probably assessed positively. My goal has simply been to demonstrate that views towards administrative usages of writing were more complicated than has been discussed in scholarship. It was not experienced as a passive tool. At times, those complicated views could have been at play in how other forms of writing were experienced as well.

In addition to illuminating the biblical text and the question of literacy in ancient Israel, the dissertation has also tried to illustrate how theoretically anchored approaches to administrative writing can illuminate the meaning of extant bureaucratic inscriptions from ancient Israel. This was especially done in Chapter Seven, which examined the Samaria Ostraca (SO). The proposal made in that chapter for the symbolic power of ephemeral writing is not new, not necessarily for the SO nor for other forms of administrative writing across various archives in the ancient Near East. For example, speaking on administrative writing in ancient Egypt, John Baines remarks that bureaucratic writing "created new institutions for information storage and accountability, forming something that probably had prestige and symbolism through its mere existence and that went beyond the communicative 'need' that is likely to have provided much of the stimulus for its creation."[1] As Baines points out, bureaucratic writing's very association with

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[1] J. Baines, "The Earliest Egyptian Writing: Development, Context, and Purpose," in *First Writing: Script Invention as History and Process*, ed. S. D. Houston (Cambridge:

control imbued its performance with symbolic power. Examples of this thinking abound.[2]

Nevertheless, I see three shortcomings in the field with how we talk about the royal, monumental, or prestigious function of administrative writing. First, this component of royal optics is generally discussed in scholarship as an incidental, convenient by-product. Second, as a result, it is often something we talk about in theory, but it does not make up part of our practice when approaching archives and documents. Third, the category of "symbolism" to describe how documents convey power is probably too broad and imprecise. The term "constitution" from the anthropology of documents and bureaucracy better describes how documents have an affordance to be used and perceived as a resource for making power, not simply for symbolizing it.

Perhaps we could better understand some features of our documentary corpora if we took more seriously the messages documentation communicated that went beyond the data immediately available within the documents. This analysis should affect how we understand new forms of administrative writing even when they appear in already robust bureaucratic systems, let alone when they accelerate on unprecedented levels in the administration of a new polity. New forms may be a response to a crisis of power, with the new documentation aiming to assert control as much or more than it aimed to assert functionality, notwithstanding the possibility that it actually inhibited functionality. That is, administrative writing may, in some cases, have been adopted because of the affect it generated, the power it broadcasted. This should furthermore shape the categories we use to define such writing. It would be more appropriate to consider this

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Cambridge University Press, 2004), 151, 171.

[2] B. Routledge, *Moab in the Iron Age: Hegemony, Polity, Archaeology* (Philadelphia, PA: UPenn Press, 2004), 154-155; W.M. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 58; C.Eyre, *The Use of Documents in Pharaonic Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6.

affective use of documents through the lens of constitution rather than symbol.

This dissertation thus encourages future work on the epigraphic remains, work that considers how cultural attitudes impinged upon the uses represented in corpora and the formal features of those corpora. At the same time, my work encourages closer scrutiny of writing's depiction in narratives of the Hebrew Bible, whether administrative or otherwise. How might these texts draw on culturally and socially informed attitudes toward writing in order to make meaning? Such questions would be especially fruitful when asked about securely dated post-exilic literature since the use of documents appears to have a been a central feature of Yehud's interaction with the Persian Empire. Ultimately, I hope I have provided some theoretical and anthropological tools that will stimulate more discussion on the many and surprising "doings of documents" both as depicted in the biblical text and as preserved for us in the epigraphic record. Documents did more than extend memory in ancient Israel and Judah.

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