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SCRIPTURES IN THE MAKING: TEXTS AND THEIR TRANSMISSION IN LATE SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

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JEWISH SCRIBES
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AND INTERPRETATION OF TEXTS

Catherine HEZSER

1. Introduction

When discussing the roles of scribes in the late Second Temple period, varieties between types of scribes and differences between the practices of composing, writing, and interpreting texts need to be taken into account. Some scribes would have been able to write in Hebrew or Greek only, while others were bilingual. Some specialised in the writing of documents and letters, while others wrote religious texts. Some would have written down what was dictated to them orally, whereas others copied written prototypes. Besides these variations in scribal specialisations and practices, the more fundamental differences between the composition and writing of texts and between copying and interpretation are crucial for a proper understanding of the development of ancient texts. With few exceptions, scribes were not authors, editors, or sages but paid professionals, whose skills were more or less limited to the (re)production of texts. In certain exceptional cases a scholar may have worked as a scribe, but such overlaps would have been scarce. Only when these roles and functions are properly distinguished can we gain a better understanding of the creation of the Jewish and Christian scriptural texts.

In past scholarship, such distinctions have often been blurred. For example, the creation of the Sayings Source (Q) has been attributed to Galilean village scribes by John Kloppenborg, William E. Arnal, and Giovanni B. Bazzana. Arnal even assumes that "village scribes involved in the administration" of Tiberias can be considered responsible for the creation of Q.[1] He argues that their social status as a "retainer class" is

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[1] William E. Arnal, *Jesus and the Village Scribes: Galilean Conflicts and the Setting of Q* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 172.

reflected in Q's theology: "There is a clear homology, or structured cor-
respondence, between this kind of (theological) language and the (social)
roles of the retainer class, to whom, of course, the village scribes belong";
the alleged emphasis on delegation "accords well with the experience
and perhaps worldview of the village scribe – a retainer who habitually
acts on behalf of the law, the state, and the powerful patrons".[2] Similarly,
Giovanni Bazzana identifies the authors of the Saying Source with
administrative scribes and goes so far as to hold them responsible for Q's
"political theology" of the "Kingdom of God".[3] Bazzana's theory of the
"Galilean village scribes" is uncritically accepted by Sarah E. Rollens,
who considers it "almost incontestable".[4] Both Arnal's and Bazzana's
works are based on John Kloppenborg's work on the formation of Q.
Kloppenborg combined two assumptions: (a) that the Q material had
a Galilean origin and (b) that Q is "a scribal creation".[5] From its incep-
tion, this theory has served a certain purpose, namely, to delimit Gerd
Theissen's theory of itinerant charismatics behind Q's radical ethos and
theology by delegating this radicalism to the earliest layer of the Q tra-
dition.[6] It was also meant as an alternative to Richard Horsley's location
of Q among the poor Galilean village population who allegedly com-
posed and performed the text orally.[7] Whereas Theissen talked about
tradents and Horsley about oral composers, Kloppenborg and his follow-
ers seem to hold scribes responsible for various stages of Q's creation.
In her support of the Galilean village scribe theory Rollens writes:
"… the village scribe hypothesis possesses one crucial explanatory

[2] Ibid. 171.

[3] Giovanni Bazzana, *Kingdom of Bureaucracy: The Political Theology of Village Scribes
in the Sayings Gospel Q* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015).

[4] See the reference to Bazzana's work in Sarah E. Rollens, *Framing Social Criticism in
the Jesus Movement: The Ideological Project in the Sayings Gospel Q* (Tübingen: Mohr
Siebeck, 2014), 6. Ibid. n. 8 she writes that Bazzana's "insights have been invaluable
for my thinking about not only Q, but also documentary papyri and scribal figures in
antiquity".

[5] John S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Trajectories in Ancient Wisdom Collections*
(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987; repr., Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999),
258.

[6] Gerd Theissen, "Wanderradikalismus. Literatursoziologische Aspekte der Überlieferung
von Worten Jesu im Urchristentum," in idem, *Studien zur Soziologie des Urchristentums*
(Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 79–105. Ibid. 83: "Die Wortüberlieferung ist durch
einen ethischen Radikalismus gekennzeichnet, der im Verzicht auf Wohnsitz, Familie
und Besitz am deutlichsten hervortritt".

[7] Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and the Politics of Roman Palestin*e (Columbia: University
of South Carolina Press, 2014), 5: "… there was no clear demarcation between oral
tradition and the composition and continuing oral performance of texts".

feature that Horsley's lacks: it is able to account for the apparent literary faculty that would have been required to produce a text such as Q".[8]

For the following reasons, the Galilean village scribe hypothesis is not persuasive. Firstly, the argumentation is circular. It starts with two assumptions, namely, that Q was created in Galilee and that scribes were responsible for its creation. While Kloppenborg searched for hints of literary creation within the textual units of Q, Arnal and Bazzana went even further and believed to be able to extract some kind of scribal theology from its contents and formulation. Taking Kloppenborg's Galilean village scribe theory for granted, they read the entire Sayings Source in the light of scribal ideology. The second major error is the conflation of distinct stages in the creation of a literary work. If one considers Jesus to be the originator of certain ideas and Jesus's early follower the tradents, all of this activity would have been conducted mostly or exclusively orally, perhaps in a mainly – but not exclusively – Galilean context. Which set of tradents actually composed Q and which scribes put this composition into writing are separate questions whose answers may lead away from the Galilean rural environment.

In contrast to Kloppenborg *et alia*, Simon Joseph has argued for a Judaean context for the composition of Q and writes: "… this study has argued that there is very little evidence for Greek-literate scribes in first-century Galilee and no compelling evidence that Q originated in Galilee … Q should no longer be used to support the project of a Galilean Jesus movement constructed in opposition to a Judean/Jerusalem community".[9] Even if the tradents of some sayings were Galilean charismatics, this does not preclude the possibility that the Sayings Source was composed by Judaean followers of Jesus and dictated to Greek-language scribes in Jerusalem. I am not aware of any other ancient religious text whose composition has been attributed to rural scribes specialising in the writing of business documents. The issue of Jewish scribes in the late Second Temple period must be re-examined on the basis of the literary evidence and our current knowledge about ancient scribal activity.

In the following I shall start by investigating the various types of scribes: their Hebrew and/or Greek writing skills, their specialisations and technical abilities. In the second part I shall explain why it is

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[8] Rollens, *Framing*, 125.
[9] Simon J. Joseph, *Jesus, Q, and the Dead Sea Scrolls: A Judaic Approach to Q* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 187.

necessary to distinguish between composers, tradents, and writers of texts. In general, scribes were neither authors nor editors but writing technicians who were paid to write what others dictated to them or asked them to copy. The third and last chapter will argue that scribes were not sages. Scholars who interpreted, applied, and innovated the transmitted tradition possessed a different kind of expertise that they considered superior to mere scribal skills.

2. The Varieties of Scribal Expertise

Various types of scribes would have been active in late Hellenistic and early Roman Palestine. They would have differed from each other in many regards: the languages and types of texts they wrote; the writing materials they used; their ability to write from dictation, copy written prototypes, or merely fill in forms; their writing style, competence, and proneness to errors.

To some extent, the language writing skills and type of writing would have been interlinked. As Seth Schwartz has pointed out, we may assume that from Hellenistic times onwards, Hebrew was almost exclusively used for religious purposes and as a symbol of Jewish identity: "… the Hebrew language was closely associated with these two central symbols, Torah and temple, so came itself to have a certain symbolic force. It became not the national language of the Jews, but the language whose representation symbolised Jewish nationhood".[10] Hebrew was used by Temple priests and Torah scrolls were written in Hebrew. The Temple may have had a scribal school or scribal guilds associated with it.[11] Scribal schools are never explicitly mentioned, though.[12] Scribal guilds producing Torah scrolls were probably (priestly) families that trained

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[10] Seth Schwartz, "Language, Power and Identity in Ancient Palestine," *Past and Present* 148 (1995): 25.

[11] See the discussion in Philip R. Davies, *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (Louisville: Westminster John Know Press, 1998), 74-7. His assumption that scribes were responsible for the general education of the Jewish public is unfounded, though. As I have already argued elsewhere, there was no Jewish educational system in place in the Second Temple and early rabbinic period, see Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 40–109; eadem, "Private and Public Education," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 465–81.

[12] See Leo G. Perdue, "The Israelite and Early Jewish Family: Summary and Conclusions," in *Families in Ancient Israel*, ed. Leo G. Perdue et al. (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 173: "However, explicit archaeological and literary evidence for schools not only in the capitals Jerusalem and Samaria but also in local towns is extremely sparse".

their sons and other male relatives in the respective techniques and developed a family tradition in this craft.[13] Since other Temple requirements are also associated with particular families that allegedly guarded their expertise as a secret – rabbinic tradition holds the Garmu family responsible for the production of show bread and the Avtinas family for the incense used in the Temple[14] –, such an arrangement seems most likely.[15] For the copying of sacred texts priests would have been keen on employing scribes they could rely on, who were renowned for being the most competent in writing Hebrew in ink on parchment. This form of scribal activity, that is, the copying of biblical scrolls in Hebrew script, would have been carried out mainly or exclusively in Jerusalem before 70 C.E.

The only other place for which we have evidence of biblical scrolls being copied there was the Qumran community in the Judaean Desert. Although the *scriptorium* hypothesis has been questioned by some scholars, it remains plausible not only because of the great number of manuscript fragments found at Qumran but also on the basis of Steven Fraade's description of the community as a "studying community".[16] As Emanuel Tov has pointed out, "[t]he Hebrew manuscripts from Qumran reflect a variety of textual forms".[17] They seem to stem from different centuries and scribal traditions.[18] Some of them were produced outside of the community and brought to Qumran, by members or outsiders, for safekeeping purposes. Qumran scribes would also have produced the community's own writings that are preserved in a variety of literary forms. The sect's use of Hebrew supports Schwartz's theory of the symbolic function of Hebrew. While its members would have come from Aramaic- and Greek-speaking backgrounds, the group used Hebrew as the language of the Torah and Temple to claim its own legitimacy as proper interpreters of

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[13] See ibid.

[14] See *m. Sheqalim* 5:1 and *Yoma* 3:11; *t. Yoma* 2:5-6.

[15] See also James L. Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 107–8.

[16] Steven D. Fraade, "Interpretive Authority in the Studying Community at Qumran," *JJS* 44 (1993): 46–69. On the *scriptorium* see Jodi Magness, *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 60, 71, 74, 221, and Fig. 13; eadem, *Debating Qumran: Collected Essays on Its Archaeology* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 82: "… some sort of activity connected with the preparation or writing of scrolls appears to have been carried out in the 'scriptorium'".

[17] Emanuel Tov, *Hebrew Bible, Greek Bible and Qumran: Collected Essays* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 363.

[18] See Stephen Reed, "The Linguistic Diversity of the Texts Found at Qumran," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran and the Concept of a Library*, ed. Sidnie White Crawford and Cecilia Wassen (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 138–9.

Scripture. Raymond has noticed "dramatic differences between the language of the DSS and the Hebrew as evidenced in the MT".[19] The Hebrew of the sectarian scrolls seems to reflect an artificial literary language that is based on biblical Hebrew but has integrated elements of the Aramaic vernacular.[20] Those who composed the scrolls would have been familiar with biblical Hebrew and used this by then classical language in a creative way. Qumran cave 4 also contained various para-biblical and pseudo-prophetic texts in Hebrew, such as the book of Jubilees, Pseudo-Ezekiel, and the Apocryphon of Jeremiah, which stem from various time periods.[21] Most of these texts were probably composed and written in Jerusalem and deposited in the cave for similar reasons as the biblical texts brought in from outside the community.

Jerusalem seems to have also been the centre of Greek writing in the Land of Israel before 70 C.E. By the time of Herod, Jerusalem had become the most Hellenised city, where Greek was used extensively.[22] Members of the Jerusalem elite and all those who aspired to leadership positions would have been eager to flaunt their Greek *paideia* in encounters with high-standing Greeks and Romans.[23] Greek was not only the administrative language of Hellenistic and Roman Palestine but also the language of Greek culture and as such part of elite identity.[24]

Jerusalem would therefore have been the centre of Greek scribal activity. Greek-language scribes were primarily needed for the writing of documents. The majority of the post-70 Babatha and Salome Komaise

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[19] Eric D. Raymond, *Qumran Hebrew: An Overview of Orthography, Phonology, and Morphology* (Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 1–2.

[20] See ibid. 17. See also the discussion in Jan Joosten, *Collected Studies on the Septuagint: From Language to Interpretation and Beyond* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 113–4.

[21] On these texts see Devorah Dimant, *Qumran Cave 4: Parabiblical Texts. Pseudo-Prophetic Texts*. Volume 21, Part 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[22] See Seth Schwartz, "The Hellenization of Jerusalem and Shechem," in *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World*, ed. Martin Goodman, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 37, who calls Jerusalem (and Shechem) the "*loci classici* for the Hellenization of native cities".

[23] On these see Aryeh Kasher, *Jews and Hellenistic Cities in Eretz Israel: Relations of the Jews in Eretz Israel with the Hellenistic Cities during the Second Temple Period (332 BCE - 70 CE)* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), 5.

[24] Rebecca Preston, "Roman Questions, Greek Answers: Plutarch and the Construction of Identity," in *Being Greek Under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire*, ed. Simon Goldhill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 90; Richard Miles, "Communicating Culture, Identity, and Power," in *Experiencing Rome: Culture, Identity and Power in the Roman Empire*, ed. Janet Huskinson (London: Routledge, 2000), 48.

papyri are written in Greek, probably to make them official and ensure their enforceability in Greek-language courts.[25] What is important is that such scribes would have been highly specialised experts in a particular form of writing. Scribes who wrote sales documents and receipts would not have been trained in the writing of literary works. Those who wrote marriage contracts are unlikely to have written private letters or petitions to the government. The copying of a visual model was different from writing according to dictation. For documents, templates (*formulae*) were used into which names and other distinctive details were often merely filled in.[26]

What we know about ancient scribes and scribal training elsewhere may help us understand scribal roles and practices in Roman Palestine in the late Second Temple period. In their exploration of scribal practices in ancient Egypt, Niv Allon and Hannah Navratilova mention a papyrus (P. Anastasi IV) that they identify as "an instruction in writing", perhaps written by a scribe of the Treasury for his apprentice. The apprentice is said to have "dutifully copied model letters" and is provided with "model compliments to a high official".[27] There are also examples of "complaints and commands … in short an entire array of documents an administrator in the capital may have used".[28] Roger Bagnall refers to an Egyptian papyrus from the Byzantine period (P. Köln VII) which contains diverse types of secular writing such as "a list of goods, a surety, the start of an unidentified contract badly preserved, an adoption, an antichretic loan, and the sale of a house" and wonders "if it is the product of an advanced school for scribes".[29] The papyrus seems to provide a good overview of the types of texts an administrative scribe employed by a landowner or the owner of a large business enterprise might be asked to write. Leila Avrin assumes that an ancient scribe would have specialised in languages as well as in thematic areas such as "law, medicine, or technology": "He could take a job as an estate scribe, work for the government, serve as an army scribe, or provide his scribal services to the

[25] See Hannah Cotton, "The Rabbis and the Documents," in *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World,* ed. Martin Goodman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 169.

[26] Graham Barrett, Art. "formulae (formularies)," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*, vol. 1, ed. Oliver Nicholson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 607.

[27] Niv Allon and Hana Navratilova, *Ancient Egyptian Scribes: A Cultural Exploration* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 107–8.

[28] Ibid. 108.

[29] Roger S. Bagnall, *Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: Sources and Approaches* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 220.

illiterate of the city".[30] Similarly, Haines-Eitzen concludes that "scribes worked at every level of the administration of upper Egypt", from its highest to its lowest levels, a situation that would have been similar in Rome society.[31]

Late Second Temple Jerusalem would have offered plenty of work opportunities for Greek-language and bi-lingual scribes who specialised in these practical, secular forms of writing. The main employers would have been the royal court and the Temple. The Herodian family would have employed great numbers of royal scribes and secretaries for functions that ranged from personal letter-writing to official decrees. The second major employer, the Temple, would not only have needed Hebrew copyists but also Greek (and perhaps bi-lingual Greek/Aramaic) scribes. The latter would write sales documents, receipts, work contracts and the like, which were needed when purchasing sacrificial animals and commissioning building works. In Herodian times, when pilgrimages to Jerusalem were encouraged and the local pilgrimage economy thrived, Greek and bi-lingual scribes would have found work in and outside of the Temple to support the religious "tourist" industry.[32] In addition, courts and archives located in Jerusalem would have needed Greek-language scribes. Besides institutions, the owners of large-scale businesses employed scribes. Furthermore, individual scribes would have offered their services to illiterate Jews in the market-places of the city.

The need for scribes would have been much lower elsewhere, especially in the Galilee, which was largely rural throughout Second Temple times. Until the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., Roman Palestine was centralised. Jerusalem constituted the political, economic, and religious centre while the rest of the country was the hinterland. The urbanization process began in Herodian times only and focused on Caesarea with its harbour and royal palace. Although Tiberias received city status in 54 C.E., real changes would not have occurred immediately. According to Martin Goodman, "Josephus and the Gospels give the impression that in the first century there was no great difference in the importance

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[30] Leila Avrin, *Scribes, Script, and Books: The Book Arts from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Chicago: American Library Association; London: The British Library, 1991), 77.

[31] Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 27.

[32] Martin Goodman, "The Pilgrimage Economy in Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period," in *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York: Continuum, 1999), 69–76, has argued that pilgrimage, especially from outside the Land of Israel, increased in Herodian times.

of the cities and the larger villages".[33] Jerusalem's central political, economic, and religious significance remained uncontested.

Before 70 C.E., the need for Greek-language administrative scribes would have been much lower in Tiberias and Sepphoris than in Jerusalem. Since these cities' administrations were only rudimentarily developed by that time, we may assume that before 70 C.E. only a few official bodies and owners of local villas would have employed scribes and secretaries for their writing needs. Although Herod Antipas had chosen Tiberias as his capital in 19 C.E., Josephus "offers no information concerning Tiberias's architectural appearance or public buildings" at that early time.[34] Later, in connection with the locals' reaction to the outbreak of the revolt, a city council, *archon*, and market supervisor, and a stadium and *proseuche* are mentioned.[35] In his reinvestigation of the architectural features (monumental arch, stadium, theatre) of Tiberias in the first century, Rick Bonnie concludes that "the evidence for such an early dating remains meager and uncertain… Only during the second and third centuries C.E., as in most cities in the Levant, did Tiberias' urban image receive a significant construction boom".[36] Concerning first-century Sepphoris, "[n]one of the Roman-style public buildings unearthed at the site so far is dated to the early first century C.E.; they seem to have been constructed when the city was expanded and completely remodeled as a Roman *polis* at the end of the first or early second century C.E, when the city's infrastructure in Lower Galilee was well established".[37] Without the proper establishment of Roman public buildings and institutions, few if any Greek-language administrative scribes would have been needed in cities such as Tiberias and Sepphoris and the even less developed small towns and villages of rural Galilee before 70 C.E.

To sum up: Major differences existed in the training and expertise of literary scribes, who mostly copied manuscripts, and administrative

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[33] Martin Goodman, *State and Society in Roman Galilee, AD 132-212* (Totowa: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), 27. On the early history of Tiberias from an archaeological perspective see Yizhar Hirschfeld and Katharina Galor, "New Excavations in Roman, Byzantine, and Early Islamic Tiberias," in *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in Ancient Galilee*, ed. Jürgen Zangenberg et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 209–10.

[34] Zeev Weiss, "Josephus and Archaeology on the Cities of the Galilee," in *Making History: Josephus And Historical Method*, ed. Zuleika Rodgers (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 387.

[35] See ibid. 387–8, with references.

[36] Rick Bonnie, "How 'Urban' Was Tiberias in the First Century C.E.?," in *The Role of Texts and Archaeology in the Study of New Testament Backgrounds. Essays in Honor of James E. Strange*, ed. C.T. McCollough and J.R. Strange (Atlanta: SBL Press, Forthcoming).

[37] Weiss, "Josephus," 397.

scribes employed by institutions and private people to write various types of documents and letters needed in daily life. Both types of scribal activity, the copying of Hebrew Torah scrolls and mainly Greek document writing, would have been concentrated in Jerusalem in late Second Temple times. Herodian-period Jerusalem would have offered ample employment opportunities for scribes, in contrast to the largely rural and rather undeveloped Galilean hinterland, whose Jewish population must be assumed to have been largely illiterate, especially as far as writing is concerned.

3. Differences Between Authors and Scribes

Scribes were experts in the technicalities of writing rather than creative minds who authored or edited texts. They were paid craftsmen rather than scholars and intellectuals. Throughout antiquity and into the Middle Ages this distinction is maintained. Authors and editors used scribes to put in writing what they created in their minds. They considered scribes inferior to themselves and looked down on them, even if they were copyists of sacred texts. Since authors/editors and scribes cooperated in the creation of literary works, in hindsight the scribes' contributions are impossible to determine. Scribes may be responsible for certain formulations, they may have made errors and misunderstood arguments, but they could also improve the style. The very phenomenon of variant manuscript versions of ancient texts indicates that there was not one correct and original version but many variant versions that circulated at one and the same time.[38]

In his Charmides, Plato distinguishes between the speaker and writer of the phrase "temperance is doing one's own business" (161d). Allegedly, the speaker "did not mean them [i.e. the words] quite as he spoke them" and asks: "Or do you consider that the scribe does nothing when he writes or reads?" This is a rhetorical question: of course, the scribe is not entirely passive, but uses his own mind in the transformation of speech into text. Similarly, Strabo, in his comment on a formulation in the Odyssey (12.105: "Each day she thrice disgorges, and again thrice drinks, insatiate, the deluge down"), is uncertain whether "the assertion of thrice, instead of twice, is either an error of the author, or a blunder of the scribe" (Strabo, *Geogr*. 1.1).

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[38] See also Daniel Wakelin, *Scribal Correction and Literary Craft. English Manuscripts 1375-1510* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 7: only the later Italian humanists and textual critics "fetishized 'the correct form of the text'".

Authors would usually dictate their thoughts to scribes. Plutarch relates that Caesar was always accompanied by a "slave who was accustomed to write from dictation as he travelled sitting by his side" (Plutarch, *Caes.* 17). According to Eusebius, Origen used various types of scribes to put his ideas in writing:

"As [Origen] dictated there were ready at hand more than seven short-hand-writers [ταχυγράφοι], who relieved each other at fixed times, and as many copyists [βιβλιογράφοι], as well as girls trained for beautiful writing [καλλιγραφεῖν]" (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.23).

Shorthand writers would have created a rough written version of Origen's ideas, copyists would formulate the actual text, and female calligraphers were responsible for beautifully hand-written copies. The quote suggests that literary scribes were experts in specific writing techniques and that the creation of literary texts required the collaboration of more than one type of scribe. Not every author and editor would have been as fortunate as Origen, though, and have an entire scribal set available. It seems that Origen "was extremely prolific, and therefore required a secretarial staff around the clock".[39]

Authors, who usually belonged to the upper strata of society, employed scribes or used servile secretaries. As paid or servile craftsmen, scribes had a lower socio-economic status than their employers, who were part of the so-called "leisured classes". Yet authors also considered themselves intellectuals in contrast to scribes as paid professionals. This is evident, for example, in Diogenes Laertius's reference to Epicurus, who allegedly slandered Protagoras and called him "a pack-carrier and the scribe of Democritus and village schoolmaster" (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 10.1). The statement makes clear that philosophers were keen on distinguishing themselves from the various types of lowly hirelings, to whom scribes and village teachers belonged. The mere knowledge of the alphabet and technical ability to copy letters was not considered equivalent to the higher intellectual pursuits of scholars who discussed matters orally and used their voice in dictation, usually without lifting a finger to create a written text.[40]

Whether ancient authors used written notes in their compositions is disputed amongst scholars. Some have argued that literary composition was an oral process in which authors (and editors) relied on their memory

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[39] Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians*, 90.
[40] Loveday Alexander, "The Living Voice: Scepticism Towards the Written Word in Early Christian and in Graeco-Roman Texts," JSOTSup 87 (1990): 221–47.

only. Roberts has argued, however, that Pliny the Elder used notebooks to record his thoughts.[41] These notes could be used later when he prepared a larger literary work. They would have been written on waxed wooden tablets in contrast to literary writing on papyrus. Like Caesar who, according to Plutarch, was always accompanied by a scribe, Pliny would likewise not have written the notes himself but had a *notarius* or note taker at hand.[42] This was probably common practice for authors of the upper strata of society, who had slave secretaries available at home and on their travels. When they decided to compose larger literary texts, a process that would have been accomplished in several stages, they would formulate orally, based on memorized traditions, written notes, and their own ideas. It is likely that they also created the general structure beforehand, dictating it to a scribe who wrote on a wax tablet that could later be used as a memory aid.

Like Graeco-Roman authors, Philo, Josephus, and Paul would have used Greek-language scribes for their various writing purposes. Although Philo never directly refers to a scribe, for an urban upper-class Jewish author the use of secretaries would have been self-evident. At the very end of Antiquities Josephus notes that his knowledge of literary Greek was rudimentary: "I cannot pronounce Greek with sufficient exactness" (*A.J.* 20.11.2). In the same passage he associates expertise in the Greek language with slaves, probably alluding to the servile scribes he used to polish his Greek formulations. He may have used a bi-lingual scribe to help him translate the Jewish War from Aramaic into Greek (*B.J.* 1.1.1).[43] He mentions that he endeavoured "to translate those books into the Greek tongue, which I formerly composed in the language of our country" (ibid.). The initial composition may have been a rough version dictated to scribes or stenographers, which Josephus would then have translated into Greek orally before it was put into idiomatic Greek by his secretary. Josephus was obviously keen on showing off his erudition in Greek

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[41] Colin H. Roberts, "Books in the Graeco-Roman World and in the New Testament," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, ed. P.R. Ackroyd and C.F. Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 54.

[42] E. Randolph Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 64–5.

[43] James Aitken considers Jewish scribes in Egypt, who were trained in Greek, responsible for the creation of the Septuagint, the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek in Ptolemaic times, see idem, "The Language of the Septuagint and Jewish-Greek Identity," in *The Jewish-Greek Tradition in Antiquity and the Byzantine Empire*, ed. James K. Aitken and James Carleton Paget (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 133.

historical and geographical literature. As Seth Schwartz has already pointed out, he was eager "to make himself into a Greek writer, a status with both social, and intellectual or artistic components".[44] Whether he succeeded in this regard remains an open question.

Paul would have dictated his letters to scribes. In his study of Paul's large letters, Steven Reese asks to what extent the scribes would have been involved in the composition of the letters but he is unable to answer the question with any certainty.[45] This uncertainty is partly based on our lack of knowledge about the identity of his scribes: "Did he hire unknown professionals on a case-by-case basis, or did he rely on the skills of some of his regular companions", with whom he might have discussed theological issues?[46] Only Tertius explicitly identifies himself as his scribe at the end of his letter to the Romans (Rom 16:22). Others such as Timothy, Silvanus, and Sosthenes are presented as Paul's co-workers, who send their greetings. There is no evidence that they could write or were professional scribes. Unlike Josephus, Paul was a native speaker of Greek who would have been familiar with linguistic subtleties. He would therefore have been less in need of scribes for improving his literary style. It is therefore likely that Paul's letters are a better reflection of Paul's own style than the *Jewish War* reflects Josephus's formulations.

Toward the end of the Letter to the Galatians Paul writes an interesting note that introduces his handwritten letter-ending: "See with how large letters I write unto you with my own hand" (Gal 6:11). The remark underlines the contrast between the body of the letter, written by a professional scribe, and the final words, added by Paul himself. The reference to his "large letters" seems to suggest that Paul lacked competence and confidence in his own writing skills.[47] Such lack of confidence would have been common for all those who relied on scribes for their writing needs. It highlights the difference between professional scribal practices and the handwritten signatures of lay people.

The examples discussed so far concern named authors who claim responsibility for their compositions. Can a similar distinction between

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[44] Seth Schwartz, *Josephus and Judaean Politics* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 56.

[45] Steven Reese, *Paul's Large Letters: Paul's Autographic Subscription in the Light of Ancient Epistolary Conventions* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 204–5.

[46] Ibid. 205.

[47] On Paul's postscript in Gal 6:11-18 see also Craig S. Keener, *Galatians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 279–80. For other handwritten salutations see 1 Cor 16:21, Col 4:18, 2 Thess 3:17, Phlm 19: in none of these references is the form of his handwriting specified, though. For various explanations of Paul's reference to his "large letters" see Keener, *Galatians*, 281.

composition and writing be assumed for anonymous compilations? Did the editing and writing of such compilations involve different processes and roles? Or should we assume that editors and scribes were identical? The hypothesis that scribes are responsible for the creation of the Sayings Source (Q), mentioned above, seems to be based on the common assumption that biblical and post-biblical wisdom literature is a scribal product. The formulations "scribal wisdom" or wisdom created by the so-called "scribal elite" are commonplace.[48] The underlying notion is that "literacy in the ancient Near East was largely confined in each culture to a particular class, which is commonly known as the 'scribal class', or 'scribal elite'" and that these groups were officially employed in the respective administrations.[49] This argument is a gross generalisation, however, and reduces the complex notion of literacy to the mere technical skill of writing. As Weeks has already pointed out: "The grounds for linking biblical wisdom literature to any identifiable and distinct social context within the scribal élite are slender, at best …".[50]

Rather, wisdom sayings would have accumulated over a long time-period. They would have mainly been transmitted orally. At some stage, one or more wisdom teachers would have decided to collect, arrange, and preserve in written form those sayings to which they had access. They would have hired scribes who wrote down what they dictated to them orally. Perhaps there were several stages of editing that involved different types of scribes. Individual sayings and (thematic?) collections may have been recorded by stenographers; preliminary scraps of written material could be collected and rearranged by editors, until the final set of editors decided on an overall structure and arrangement of the material. Scribes would then be tasked with creating a written prototype that could be recopied for those (upper-class) Jews who could afford to own a copy. To reduce such a complex process of development to the notion of "scribal wisdom" seems like a gross simplification of ancient literary creation. It is also based on a misunderstanding of what literacy meant in antiquity.[51] Scribes were mere writing technicians who were employed

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[48] See, for example, Christine Schams, *Jewish Scribes in the Second-Temple Period* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 101–2 with regard to Ben Sira.

[49] Stuart Weeks, *An Introduction to the Study of Wisdom Literature* (Edingburgh: T&T Clark, 2010), 130.

[50] Ibid. 134.

[51] This misunderstanding is also evident in Eva Mroczek's study, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). Mroczek refers to "scribes", "Jewish writers", and "composers" as if these terms were synonyms, see e.g. ibid. 4, 43, 75.

as secretaries by members of the upper strata of society. To be literate in antiquity meant to be able to read and discuss ideas, not to put letters on paper. Even the so-called "scribal élite" – the highest paid or most skilled scribes? – were looked down upon by the higher educated – and usually upper-class – intellectuals (see below).

The Sayings Source (Q), if it ever existed as a coherent collection, seems to be more structured than, for example, the biblical book of Proverbs. There are many open questions concerning its existence in one or more written forms, however. We know about it only through its use by the editors of the narrative gospels of Matthew and Luke, but the alleged Q texts these gospels share appear in different versions. It is possible that Q was compiled as a preliminary collection of Jesus-materials that existed in various recensions. Andreas Lindemann has already warned against turning a hypothesis about Q's written existence as a bounded text into an assumption from which further conclusions are derived.[52] Both the contents and the formulation of Q texts remain uncertain.[53] Obviously, the way in which one perceives the Sayings Source determines how one envisions its development. Kloppenborg and his followers have tried to reconstruct a text for which they then try to identify authors (Galilean village scribes), a social context (Galilee), and a particular (political) theology.[54]

This reconstruction seems much too neat and simple. If we view the development of Q in the context of the development of other anonymous collections such as, for example, the Mishnah (around 200 C.E,) and the Apophthegmata Patrum (5th c. C.E.), the following scenario seems more likely. At the beginning stands the oral transmission of materials by Jesus's followers. At some stage, some followers would have decided to collect materials, perhaps for missionising purposes and to preserve them for later generations. They would have asked their friends what they remembered. Perhaps small individual collections of traditions emerged at this stage. Eventually, an editor or editorial team would have brought all of this collected material together, decided on a structure, and dictated

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[52] Andreas Lindemann, "Introduction," in *The Sayings Source Q and the Historical Jesus*, ed. Andreas Lindemann (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), XIII.

[53] See Andreas Lindemann, "Die Logienquelle Q: Fragen an eine gut begründete Hypothese," in *The Sayings Source Q and the Historical Jesus*, ed. Andreas Lindemann (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 12.

[54] James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann, and John S. Kloppenborg, eds., *The Sayings Gospel of Q in Greek and English with Parallels from the Gospels of Mark and Thomas* (Leuven: Peeters, 2001). For the theological conclusions see Bazzana, *Kingdom*.

the text to scribes. The copying of this text would have resulted in various recensions. Alternatively, a continuous oral transmission of the Q text, without the creation of a written prototype and the involvement of scribes is possible. An oral transmission through memorization and recitation (cf. Liebermann's hypothesis of an oral transmission and publication of the much larger Mishnah) might account for variations in its written use in the gospels.[55] Yet the possibly written transmission of an edited collection also allows for a continuous accretion of materials and the circulation of variant versions.

How do scribes fit into this process? Editors would have been responsible for the composition of the (various stages of the) collection, whereas scribes were merely used as tools to put the oral traditions and compositions into writing. The development of the Mishnah can serve as a comparative model here.[56] No one would assume that the Mishnah or an individual tractate or earlier version was created by scribes. Rather, rabbinic scholars would have initiated the preservation of earlier – probably mostly orally transmitted – material for future generations. Rabbis to whom the editing of the Mishnah is attributed – traditionally, the patriarch R. Yehudah ha-Nasi is considered the editor of the Mishnah – would not have been the actual writers of the text. Neither would earlier preliminary versions or even collections of stories or sayings associated with a particular rabbi have been created by scribes. Rather, particular rabbis' disciples would have been responsible for creating such collections by either memorizing and reciting them or dictating them to scribes. We do not know anything about rabbinic disciples' writing skills. Rabbinic study did not require writing. In fact, rabbis clearly distinguish themselves from scribes, as I shall discuss in the next section.

The editing of a collection involved entirely different processes than the mere writing of a text. Editors would have been responsible for collecting earlier, mostly oral, traditions through network connections to their contemporaries, who would have preserved their teacher's and teacher's teacher's traditions through memorisation over several generations. Elizabeth Shanks Alexander has emphasised the "shaping influence of oral traditions" that circulated in various versions and were

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[55] Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 2nd ed. (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962), 83–99: "The Publication of the Mishnah".

[56] On the development of the Mishnah see Catherine Hezser, "The Mishnah and Ancient Book Production", in: *The Mishnah in Contemporary Perspective*, Part One, ed. Alan J. Avary-Peck and Jacob Neusner (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2002), 167-92.

constantly reformulated and adapted during the transmission process.[57] Since a leadership figure such as R. Yehudah ha-Nasi is likely to have had good network connections to other scholars, he could serve as a magnet for the accumulation of traditions. Yet other rabbis would have been involved in this process as well.

After the collection of traditions, another major step would have been the development of a rough concept of how to structure and organise the accumulated material. In the case of the Mishnah, this involved the division into orders and tractates. As Neusner has pointed out: "Internal evidence indicates beyond doubt that the division of Mishnah into orders, tractates, and chapters (intermediate divisions) is fundamental and integral to its structure, the datum of its character as a document".[58] Thirdly, on the level of individual tractates and sections within tractates, the received traditions had to be reformulated, abbreviated or expanded, and connected with each other to create a more or less logical sequence. For each division a sequence of argumentation was created that constituted a substantial transformation of the traditional material.[59] All of these processes required active intervention by groups of editors at different stages of the Mishnah's development. Such editors could not have been administrative clerks or even Torah scribes. They must have been rabbis familiar with rabbinic scholarship and argumentation.

If the Sayings Source (Q) is considered a deliberate composition that has a certain structure and underlying theology, then similar editorial processes must have taken place that go beyond the mere technical skills of writing experts.[60] Like the Mishnah, it is based on oral traditions that had to be collected, reformulated, connected, and arranged. Those who initiated this collection process and edited the material for oral or written transmission in a relatively bounded format are unlikely to have been Galilean administrative clerks. The combination of Galilean and Judaean Jesus-traditions points to Judaea and Jerusalem as the place where the editing (and possible writing) of the Sayings Source is most likely to

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[57] Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, *Transmitting Mishnah: The Shaping Influence of Oral Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 220.

[58] Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Mishnaic Law of Purities*, Part 21: *The Redaction and Formulation of the Order of Purities in Mishnah and Tosefta* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 23.

[59] See Ronen Reichmann, *Mishnah und Sifra. Ein literarkritischer Vergleich paralleler Überlieferungen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 241.

[60] On the structure of the Sayings Source see Alan Kirk, *The Composition of the Sayings Source: Genre, Synchrony, and Wisdom Redaction in Q* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 289–396.

have taken place.[61] As Joseph has already emphasised, "Q originated in a Greek-literate environment", an environment that existed only in Jerusalem in the middle of the first century C.E.[62] In Jerusalem, Aramaic-speaking followers of Jesus with Greek language skills would have found Greek-language scribes who could render their composition in idiomatic Greek, just like Josephus used secretaries to improve his literary language. Why they would have been interested in a Greek version of Jesus-material is another question that is probably related to missionising activities among Greek speakers.[63]

4. Differences Between Scribes and Scholars

Just as role-related differences existed between the editors and writers of literary texts, scribes must also be distinguished from scholars and sages who interpreted texts and applied them to new circumstances. The gospels repeatedly refer to "scribes and Pharisees". The use of different terms indicates the editors' awareness of distinct categories of Jewish experts from whom early Christians distinguished themselves. Yet at the same time the two groups are conflated.[64] Scribes and Pharisees are mentioned together as if they shared the same concerns and expertise. This conflation in the gospels may partly be the basis of the "Galilean village scribe" hypothesis with its lack of distinction between scribal skills and scholarship.

  Scribes and Pharisees would have shared a knowledge of the Hebrew Bible but differed in the type of expertise they possessed. Pharisees (and later rabbis) would have maintained their superiority over scribes as writing technicians, even if they were experts in the copying of sacred texts. Especially if Baumgarten's hypothesis of an urban upper-class background of Pharisees is correct, their social status and education would have distinguished them from scribes as paid professionals and craftsmen, who would have belonged to the middle and lower strata of society.[65]

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[61] See also Joseph, *Jesus,* 82, who points to other scholars who have located Q in Jerusalem.
[62] See ibid. 82-3.
[63] See ibid. 84: "The pre-70 C.E. Jerusalem community conducted an elaborate outreach network of missionary activity as far away as Antioch and Damascus".
[64] For Matthew see Mary Marshall, *The Portrayals of the Pharisees in the Gospels and Acts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 77.
[65] Albert I. Baumgarten, *The Flourishing of Jewish Sects in the Maccabean Era: An Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 137-8.

As Pieter Hartog has pointed out correctly, scribal training "need not imply a sustained degree of literacy: some scribes may have been barely able to recognise what they were writing …".[66] Even if we take differences in expertise into account, he notes that "scribes rarely belonged to the higher echelons of Greek society".[67] Scribes who copied literary texts are likely to have paid more attention to the correct writing of individual letters than to the meaning of a certain word, phrase, or sentence. They would have focused on the visual representation of the text rather than its proper interpretation. As technicians who worked with their hands, they were clearly distinguished from intellectuals in the Graeco-Roman world. Graeco-Roman intellectuals belonged to the upper strata of society. They had sufficient time and money to gain a higher education (*paideia*) and to discuss philosophical, literary, and legal issues with their peers. Their erudition would not have been based on their ability to write letters. It was rather based on their creative interpretation, development, and application of the cultural tradition in oral discourse.[68]

Post-70 rabbis presented themselves as intellectuals and as such distinguished themselves from scribes, whom they considered inferior to themselves.[69] This self-distinction from scribes was an aspect of rabbis' self-definition as scholars and purveyors of a higher type of Jewish learning and literacy. The most negative allusion to scribes appears in Avot de Rabbi Nathan: "There are seven who have no share in the world to come and they are the following: a secretary [לבלר], a scribe [סופר], the best among physicians, and [one who serves as] a judge for his town, a diviner, and a butcher" (*Avot de Rabbi Nathan* 36). All of the mentioned roles pertain to paid professionals. Perhaps rabbis criticised the high prices they charged for services that they considered essential. Or they considered these functions plebeian in contrast to the higher-level Torah knowledge and scholarship they themselves represented.

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[66] Pieter B. Hartog, *Pesher and Hypomnema: A Comparison of Two Commentary Traditions from the Hellenistic-Roman Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 44.

[67] Ibid.

[68] On intellectuals in antiquity see Kendra Eshleman, *The Social World of Intellectuals in the Roman Empire: Sophists, Philosophers, and Christians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[69] See the discussion of the relationship between rabbis and scribes in Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 467–75.

In rabbinic sources scribes are presented as writers of documents, letters, and Torah scrolls and as primary teachers of children.[70] Rabbis employed scribes for their own purposes. For example, R. Gamliel is said to have asked a scribe to write a letter for him (*t. Sanhedrin* 2:6). Rabbis are also said to have instructed scribes both with regard to Torah teaching and the writing of biblical scrolls. For example, elementary teachers are warned with regard to teaching children the story about David and Batsheva (*t. Megillah* 3:28). Rabbis also specified that sacred texts, that is, Torah scrolls, *tefillin*, *mezuzot*, and *sotah* scrolls should be written only in Hebrew with ink on parchment (*m. Sotah* 2:4; *m. Megillah* 2:2; *m. Shabbat* 8:3; *y. Megillah* 1:11, 71c-d). Individual rabbis may have worked as scribes. R. Huna is called "scribe of the [study]hall" (*y. Shabbat* 9:2, 12) and R. Shimon "scribe of Trachonitis" (*y. Megillah* 4:5, 75b). In the context of the rabbinic movement, their identity as fellow-scholars would have been determined by their recognition as rabbis rather than by their scribal profession, though. A statement in the Mishnah (which may be a later addition) implies a clear-cut hierarchy among religious functionaries: "From the day on which the Temple was destroyed, sages began to be like scribes, and scribes like prayer-leaders, and prayer-leaders like ordinary people" (*m. Sotah 9:15*). The text suggests that, especially before 70 C.E., clear distinctions between sages and scribes were maintained. It is meant to criticise the alleged lowering of standards after the destruction of the Temple. Those who formulated the saying were obviously in favour of maintaining hierarchical distinctions between sages, scribes, prayer-leaders, and ordinary people.

In late antiquity, that is, in the third and fourth centuries, the topography of the Galilee had changed. Tiberias and Sepphoris had now become urban centres with jurisdiction over the rural hinterland. They had theatres, amphitheatres, and a mixed Jewish and non-Jewish population. Their cultural and administrative significance had vastly increased. In this time period, a number of scribes and rabbis would have offered their services and advice in Galilean cities. From the perspective of ordinary Jews, both types of experts may have been considered learned in Torah. The Talmud Yerushalmi contains allusions to lay people asking scribes for halakhic advice (cf. y. *Taánit* 2:13, 66a par. y. *Megillah* 1:6, 70c),

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[70] See Martin Goodman, "Texts, Scribes, and Power in Roman Judaea," in *Literacy and Power in the Roman World*, ed. Alan K. Bowman and Gregg Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 105. See also Hezser, *Social Structure*, 468-9 for examples.

a phenomenon that rabbis were not pleased with. Rabbis reacted by telling scribes what to say or by objecting to the advice they gave and reprimanding them. In one story, a scribe is said to have differed from a rabbi concerning the ritual purity of Tiberias (*Genesis Rabbah* 79:5). As a punishment for disagreeing with him, the rabbi curses the scribe and the curse is said to have led to the scribe's immediate death (ibid.). These traditions show that rabbis' attempts to distinguish themselves from scribes and to present scribes as inferior to themselves were part of their self-presentation as scholars and intellectuals in late antiquity.

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