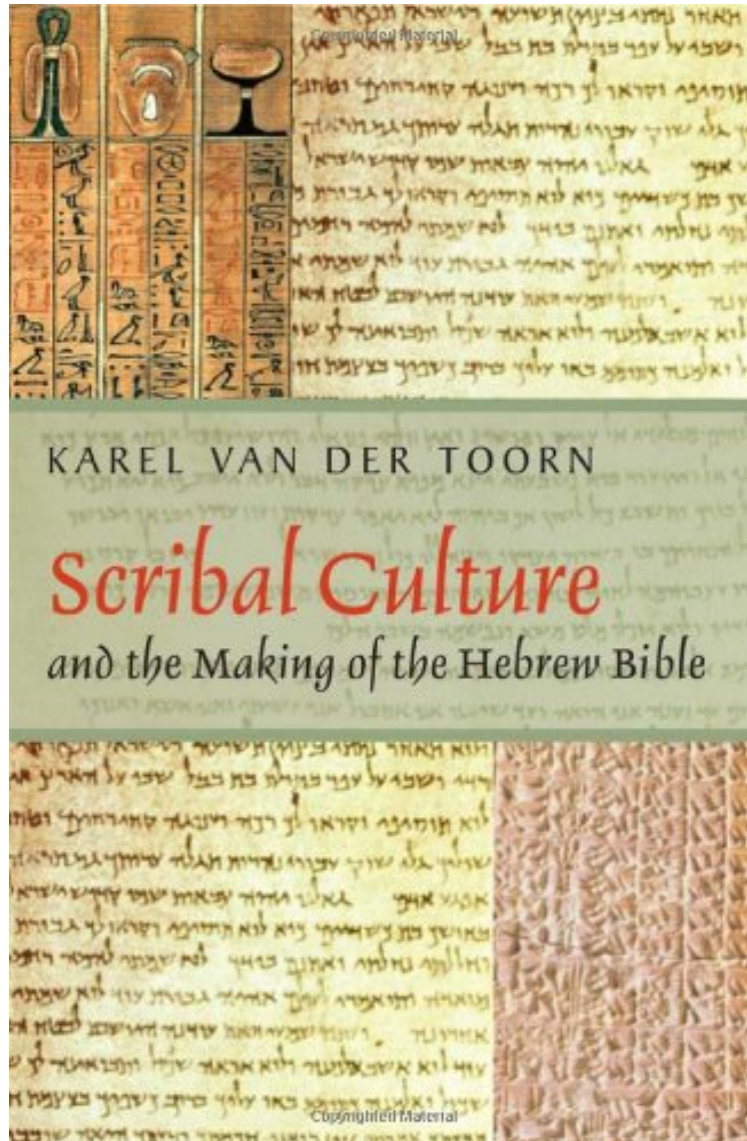


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Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible

Karel van der Toorn

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Karel van der Toorn : Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Scribal Culture for post-modern audiencesBy CustomerIt is difficult for a person living in our post-modern culture to understand the lives and point of view of people who lived just 100 years ago. Yet the majority of the bible was written by and for a priestly class in a pre-literate culture. Not only that, but a culture that pre-dates the Greco-Roman era. When we try to apply our post-modern ideas of authorship to

bible, we get some very strange results---like thinking Moses wrote the entire five books of Moses, when some were parts were clearly written after his death; like how we deal with scribal insertions in books where the divine inspiration of the single author is assumed. These issues and more are simply not a problem if we have a proper understanding of Scribal Culture.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Wow what a fantastic volumeBy ConsumerAnyone who wants to know anything about the origin of the Old Testament simply cannot afford to leave this book aside.2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. The book relies too heavily upon other ancient scribal practices and less on what intrinsic evidence exists in the Hebrew BibleBy John S. HarrisI chose this book because I was wanted to both understand scribal culture that Hebrew scribes were influenced in writing literature and what internal textual structures and devices exist within the Hebrew Bible itself that would assist me in my textual criticism study. While he greatly demonstrates the true nature of literature as it was understood in its own time and explains who and why texts were written, he didn't give enough examples from the Hebrew Bible itself that suggested "loose threads" and "seams" as he did for things like the Enuma Elish and so forth. So I felt that he did very well in demonstrating ancient scribal culture (as the title says) but could have done more for the rest of the title "the making of the Hebrew Bible" as he seems to run with his conclusions from documentary hypothesis and the like but didn't give enough of nitty gritty as I would have hoped. For example, it would have been very interesting to read he we could give exhaustive evidence within say, Isaiah, that shows it was written by multiple people by giving an analysis of change of themes, differences in style, changes in vocabulary, etc. But I would recommend this book for someone what to better understand the nature of scribal practice and culture in the ancient near east rather than recommend it on for study of Biblical criticism.

We think of the Hebrew Bible as the Book--and yet it was produced by a largely nonliterate culture in which writing, editing, copying, interpretation, and public reading were the work of a professional elite. The scribes of ancient Israel are indeed the main figures behind the Hebrew Bible, and in this book Karel van der Toorn tells their story for the first time. His book considers the Bible in very specific historical terms, as the output of the scribal workshop of the Second Temple active in the period 500-200 BCE. Drawing comparisons with the scribal practices of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, van der Toorn clearly details the methods, the assumptions, and the material means of production that gave rise to biblical texts; then he brings his observations to bear on two important texts, Deuteronomy and Jeremiah.Traditionally seen as the copycats of antiquity, the scribes emerge here as the literate elite who held the key to the production as well as the transmission of texts. Van der Toorn's account of scribal culture opens a new perspective on the origins of the Hebrew Bible, revealing how the individual books of the Bible and the authors associated with them were products of the social and intellectual world of the scribes. By taking us inside that world, this book yields a new and arresting appreciation of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Every decade we see the publication of only one or two works of scholarly excellence that fundamentally advance the understanding of the Hebrew Bible and change the intellectual contours of the biblical field. Karel van der Toorn has accomplished this rarest of intellectual achievements. Different branches of biblical studies, whether literary, theological or historical in orientation, will strongly benefit from this volume. (Mark S. Smith, Skirball Professor of Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Studies, New York University)Van der Toorn has made a masterful case that the Hebrew Bible is the product of the scribal culture of ancient Israel and Judaism. His argument is lucidly and elegantly plotted and relentlessly and convincingly logical. Particularly striking is his ability to bring evidence from other ancient Near Eastern cultures on the scribal craft, especially Mesopotamia, to a penetrating and nuanced elucidation of the Biblical case. In all, this is really a major contribution to Biblical studies and a triumph of the comparative approach to them. (Peter Machinist, Hancock Professor of Hebrew and Other Oriental Languages, Harvard University)Karel van der Toorn has truly swept away a number of improbable theories and at the same time has laid a firm foundation for future research. He cuts through much of the speculation of the recent scholarly debate and proposes new theories that will be controversial but are based on solid evidence. Future debates on this topic will need to take his contributions into account or risk being perceived to be out of touch with the reality of ancient literary practice. (Robert R. Wilson, Hooper Professor of Religious Studies and Professor of Old Testament, Yale University)This scrupulous study by the Dutch scholar Karel van der Toorn of how the Hebrew Bible was written and then evolved over time is in most respects finely instructive. Some of what Toorn has to say involves concepts long familiar to Biblical scholars, though even in this regard he provides many fresh insights. Nearly all the book's argument, moreover, offers a strong corrective to misconceptions about the Bible...Karel van der Toorn is the perfect--and bracing--antithesis to Harold Bloom...Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible is a salutary book based on the most formidable scholarly knowledge and analysis. It will compel readers to rethink their conceptions of literary production in ancient Israel, and it is a valuable reminder that in many respects those responsible for the biblical corpus were quite far from being early Iron Age equivalents of Flaubert or Henry James. (Robert Alter London of Books 2007-07-19)Building upon the growing recognition that the Hebrew Bible came into being as the Near East moved from an oral to a written cultureVan der Toorn...examines the central role ancient scribes played in shaping the biblical text. The author brings to bear his vast knowledge of scribal practices throughout the ancient Near

East, and thereby shows how the Bible's growth is illuminated when seen against this background. While at times speculative (e.g., his contention that Deuteronomy passed through four editions, which he neatly delineates), the author's research calls into question those who blithely dismiss source and redaction criticism; it also challenges the conclusions of historical minimalists who date the vast bulk of the Hebrew Bible to late in the Persian or early in the Hellenistic era. Furthermore, the portrait Van der Toorn draws of scribal training deals a devastating blow to critics who argue that J may have been a woman. Van der Toorn demonstrates that the scribes who produced the Hebrew Bible were part of a wider scribal culture and that those who ignore this fact end up misunderstanding the biblical text and its history. (J.S. Kaminsky Choice 2007-09-01) Van der Toorn covers considerable ground in this volume. He surveys literacy and authorship in the ancient world, the culture and vocation of scribes, production of the Moses and prophetic traditions, and the issues of revelation and canon... This volume is extremely valuable. Scribal Culture is a must-read for anyone interested in the issues of the formation, transmission, and standardization of the Hebrew Bible. (Charles Halton Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 2007-12-01) About the Author Karel van der Toorn is President of the University of Amsterdam.