

Archives, Libraries, and the Order of the Biblical Books

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Our earliest evidence concerning the order of the books of the Hebrew Bible is the following baraita in TB *Baba Batra* 14b:

Our Rabbis taught: The order of the Prophets is Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Twelve Minor Prophets . . . The order of the Hagiographa is Ruth, the Book of Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel, the Scroll of Esther, Ezra, and Chronicles.

Though many scholars have addressed the issue of the “order” of the biblical books, they have not always accounted for the specific, tangible conditions that would surely underlie the very possibility of “order.” Originally each book was written on a separate scroll, the size of which would be determined by the length of the work.¹ As long as the size of the material which was written upon was adapted to the individual book, and there was no framework in which a sequence of books would be included—it just did not make sense to speak of an “order” of books. The possibility of encompassing several books together was realized in the codex-form—the new type of book that eventually replaced the scroll. Indeed, one of the first modern scholars of the canonization of the Bible suggested that the issue of the order of the biblical books was first raised only when the codex replaced scrolls for teaching purposes.² However, that scholar could not as yet be aware that the problem of ordering of books was prompted by the codex-form only in Christian Europe. The Talmud has no knowledge of this type of book, which reached the Near East only after the Arab conquest. The aforementioned baraita cannot, therefore, be alluding to the codex-form.

This point was well sensed by my friend and colleague Nahum M. Sarna, who therefore concluded that the order of the books as specified in the above-mentioned baraita was determined by the requirements of storing books in the library, or the libraries, in which the copies of biblical books were held. The awareness that there should be a fixed order according to which the books could be set out on shelves in libraries and archives already came into existence in the ancient Near East, and from there it passed on to the Hellenistic world, the largest library of which was in Alexandria. Sarna assumes that the practices of libraries in the Near East must have had an impact on Jewish libraries. He thus posits that the order appearing in the baraita

1. See J. Černý, *Paper and Books in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1952), 8, 13, 21.

2. H. E. Ryle, *The Canon of the OT*, 2nd ed. (London, 1909), 236.

“simply reflected and preserved the order of shelving and cataloging current in the ancient Jewish libraries.” Subsequently, when the codex became prevalent among the Jews, the order taken up in books of the new form reflected that which had already been established in the Jewish libraries and archives of the talmudic period.³ From the very beginning, this explanation seemed quite difficult to me, and that because of the marked difference in scale: the libraries and archives of the ancient Near East held tens of thousands of items, the Alexandria library held hundreds of thousands, whereas the above-mentioned baraita refers to a mere twenty-four books (see further below). An examination of this problem, however, led me to a further conclusion, namely, that during the talmudic period the Jews hardly had any libraries in the strict sense of the word. These emerged only in the Gaonic period.

I

The historical origin of libraries has to do with their connection to archives. When the archaeological findings in Mesopotamia led to the discovery of the great library of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh, a major source of the ancient mesopotamian culture was revealed. Consequently, this library elicited such great awe that Assyriologists were hesitant to label other collections of documents by the name “library.” The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed an escalation in the debate between Assyriologists, on the one hand, and librarians and scholars of booklore, on the other, regarding the actual difference between a library and an archive. The librarians and scholars of booklore claimed that even if a semantic differentiation could be made between a library, which is based on a collection of literature, and an archive, which is in the main a collection of documents—an archive would still be a sub-type of library. It was the contention of these scholars that any collection of inscribed tablets should be defined within the same category, especially in view of the fact that collections of literary works developed out of archives. Moreover, they suggested that no sufficient awareness of the difference between literary works and documents existed in the ancient Near East since both were types of writing inscribed on clay tablets, employing the same technique, and were arranged and stored in the same manner.⁴

Yet, it subsequently became clear that that is not exactly the case, for, quite frequently, the two types of collections differed in more respects than content alone. The archival tablets were arranged according to their sort and date of writing, whereas in libraries the tablets were arranged in series according to subjects, and colophons were added to facilitate location of a tablet. In addition, in libraries use was made of catalogues; in archives it was not. The points of similarity be-

3. N. M. Sarna, “The Order of the Books,” in C. Berlin, ed., *Studies in Jewish Bibliography, History and Literature in honor of I. Edward Kiev* (New York, 1971), 410–11; idem, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 4:827–28.

4. This point was very strongly emphasized by C. Wendel, *Die griechisch-römische Buchbeschreibung verglichen mit der des vorderen Orients* (Halle-Saale, 1949), 11–12; cf. the survey by M. Weitemeyer, “Archive and Library Technique in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *Libri* 6 (1955–56), 217–19, 225–26, 233–34.

tween the two types of collections were caused by similar methods of storage, not by rules of arrangement of the tablets.⁵ Recently, scholars have again taken to emphasizing the basic difference between the two types of collections, though it is not denied that small institutions could store administrative documents together with "school texts." This could also happen in places outside of Mesopotamia, wherever Babylonian scribes were employed to make use of the cuneiform writing (such was the case in room L.2769 in palace G of Ebla of the Early Bronze Age, where professional scribes were few and the authorities employed them as teachers as well). It also became evident that, at times, documents of an archival character would be placed in royal libraries because of their historic value, where they would be studied and copied. Accordingly, in such cases the documents turned into literary works and could reach libraries which were not necessarily small. This would explain the appearance of archival documents even in the Nineveh libraries, so that even this fact should by no means blur the difference between libraries and archives.⁶

In any case, it is clear that the two institutions differed in their unique historical backgrounds and in their *raison d'être*. The archive derives from lists made of the contents of storerooms. It is an archaic institution that existed at the roots of any organized regime.⁷ The establishment of libraries, by contrast, came about under special circumstances. In the classical world this was a result of growing literacy and the phenomena connected with it—a growing eagerness to read books and a general

5. Weitemeyer (*ibid.*, 220–32), a librarian as well as an Assyriologist, contributed significantly to this issue. Posner, an archivist, also emphasizes the need to distinguish between archives and libraries, both in Mesopotamia and in Pharaonic and Roman Egypt. See E. Posner, *Archives in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), 12–15, 27–28, 74, 154. Sarna, however ("Order of the Books," 409), expressed himself differently on this point, even though he also relied on Weitemeyer. For the chronological arrangement in archives see, in addition, K. R. Veenhof, in *idem*, ed., "Cuneiform Archives: An Introduction," *Cuneiform Archives and Libraries, Papers Read at the 30e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale, Leiden 4–9 July 1983* (Leiden, 1986), 12, 18.

6. For a summary of this point, see Veenhof, "Cuneiform Archives," 3–7. For the possible preservation of archival documents from the time of Sargon II due to their historical and literary value, see S. Parpola's important article, "The Royal Archives of Nineveh," in Veenhof, ed., *Cuneiform Archives and Libraries*, 221–36 (esp. 231–34; on the basic distinction between libraries and archives, despite the inclusion of documents in a library, see 234). H. Otten, "Archive und Bibliotheken in Hattuša," *ibid.*, 184–90, emphasizes that the tablet collection at Boghazkeui is more of the nature of a library than of an archive. For royal palace G in Ebla, see P. Matthiae, "The Archives of the Royal Palace G of Ebla . . .," *ibid.*, 53–71 (on room L.2769 see 57–66).

7. Explicit mention of royal archives in Babylonia and Ecbatana, the capital of Media, appears in Ezra 6:1–2. It is stated there that Cyrus' proclamation was not found in Babylonia and it was searched for in Ecbatana. However, what was found in Ecbatana was not the original proclamation, but its memorandum (דכרונה), containing the gist of the proclamation. The memorandum was a part of the ordinary registration of all decisions and actions taken by the ruler. Such registrations were carried out in the royal courts of Egypt, Babylonia and Assyria, as well as in Israel and Judea (see below, section II). "The book of records, of annals" of the King of Persia is mentioned in Est. 6:1 (cf. Mal. 3:17). The Greeks called such books ἐφημερίδες, "diaries." Documents and announcements were authenticated by being registered in "the book of chronicles" (cf. Posner, *Archives in the Ancient World*, 125–26 and the references there). See also J. C. Greenfield, "Aspects of Archives in the Achaemenid Period," in Veenhof, ed., *Cuneiform Archives and Libraries*, 290–94.

rise in the standard of living.⁸ These conditions emerged only at a relatively late stage in the history of Greece and Rome, so that public and private libraries appeared there only at that stage. We cannot tell when exactly the first private libraries in Athens were established; for the testimony of Athenaeus (*Deipnosoph.* I, 3a), informing us that Polycrates, tyrant of Samos, and Pisistratos, tyrant of Athens, as well as some other figures, all possessed private libraries, is apparently an anachronistic retrojection from the time of the writer, who lived in Rome at the beginning of the third century C.E. The first public library in Athens was established only in the second century B.C.E. through a donation by one of the Ptolemaic kings of Egypt. In this respect, Alexandria preceded Athens. The founder of the Alexandrian library, which was a royal possession and considered one of the jewels of the ancient world, was evidently Ptolemy I Soter (proclaimed king in 305 B.C.E.), while Ptolemy II Philadelphos (283–245 B.C.E.) expanded it. In Rome, libraries appeared only in the first century B.C.E.; public libraries were not established there until the time of Augustus, and they increased in number during the period of the Caesars. During that same period, a vast number of private libraries also arose there, so much so that Seneca commented (*De Tranquillitate Animi*, IX, 5, 7) that books were no longer used for studying, only for decorating dining-halls. In every respectable home, he added, books became *de rigueur*, just like bathrooms.⁹

In ancient Mesopotamia, where literacy was restricted to a small elite of professional scribes and there was never a significant audience of readers, the establishment of libraries could not have been related to any "consumer-demand" for books. There, too, the libraries were the property of the ruler. They were attached to the temples, or to the temple schools, and were instituted by order of the king or by his scribes and officials. The reason for establishing libraries may have been the dwindling and near-loss of bodies of literature, and the desire to collect and save them. It also could have been the encounter with a powerful culture and the adoption of its works, which were found worthy of being collected under one roof. In the period following the fall of the third dynasty of Ur (1931 B.C.E.), when the Sumerian language was replaced by Akkadian, the need was felt to put many works in writing, especially in Sumerian, and it was then that the first libraries appeared. When the Assyrians were overwhelmed by Babylonian culture, many Akkadian works were put into writing, and in the era of Tiglat-pileser I there was established in Kalah (Tel-Nimrud) the temple library of Assur, a library which later was transferred to Nineveh. During the flourishing reign of the Assyrian kings from Sargon II to Assurbanipal, many Akkadian works were copied and eventually housed in the Nineveh library. During the decline of Babylonian culture, from the time of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty until Macedonian rule, Babylonian priests made an urgent effort

8. For the second and third centuries C.E. as the period when reading books reached its peak in Hellenistic Egypt, and for the validity of this conclusion for the entire Hellenistic world, see F. G. Kenyon, *Books and Readers in Ancient Greece and Rome*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1970), 36–39.

9. For a general survey of the libraries in Greece and Rome. See F. G. Kenyon-C. H. Roberts, *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford, 1970), 607–8. For certain aspects of this matter cf. K. Dziatzko, s.v. "Bibliotheken," *PW* 3:409–23; J. W. Clark, *The Care of Books* (Cambridge, 1902; London, 1975), 5–28. E. A. Parson's *Alexandrian Library* (London, 1952) suffers from a sentimental and pompous presentation and lacks critical treatment of the sources.

to preserve their literary heritage, the remnants of which were collected in libraries.¹⁰ The libraries of Alexandria and Pergamon, as well as some other libraries of the classical world, were also probably royal institutions, to which the public at large had no access.¹¹ In this respect, they were analogous to the libraries of Mesopotamia.

II

It cannot be denied that, at times, collections of books could simultaneously exhibit features of a library and of an archive, housed under one roof. This was so both east and west. The library in the Trajan Forum in Rome, for instance, called "Bibliotheca Ulpia," doubled as a private archive, and the library in the palace of Tiberius contained public records as well. In Mesopotamia, too, where the large majority of the clay tablets discovered were archival documents, literary elements turned up frequently among them. The custodians of the institution, however, could control and distinguish between the items in the collection.¹² Consequently, all this does not negate the basic difference between the two institutions, and any proper treatment of the matter should not link the two together. The distinction between archive and library becomes even more pronounced when they are viewed from the perspective of Jewish reality in the time following the canonization of the Hebrew Bible until the end of the talmudic period. As in any organized society, the use of archives in those days was common practice among Jews—but, as they had only few books, Jewish libraries were practically non-existent.

Archives no doubt already existed among the Israelites of biblical times, that is, during the United Kingdom and onwards, as this is called for by the very nature of centralized rule and royal administration. Clear evidence of their existence is the "Chronicles of the Kings of Israel and Judah" mentioned frequently in the Books of Kings (I Kgs. 14:19, 29; 15:7, 23, 31 et al.).¹³ In the early Second

10. This is how Weitemeyer ("Archive and Library Techniques," 224–25) explains the establishment of libraries in Mesopotamia, and it seems reasonable to me. See also A. L. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia* (Chicago, 1977), 243–44. For the library of Tiglat-pileser I, see E. Weidner, "Die Bibliothek Tiglatpilesers I," *AfO* 16 (1953), 198–211. S. Parpola, "Assyrian Library Records," *JNES* 42 (1983), 1–29, makes some interesting comments about a collection of tablets, which, following the fall of Babylonia, reached the library of Assurbanipal in Nineveh (either by confiscation, donation, or as spoils of war), and its contents were listed on three tablets, the shards of which were joined together. From this collection we can also obtain an inkling of private libraries in Mesopotamia. For royal libraries in Assyria, which were the private property of the king, see Parpola, "Royal Archives of Nineveh," 234, 236. See now, also, S. J. Lieberman, "Canonical and Official Cuneiform Texts: Towards an Understanding of Assurbanipal's Personal Tablet Collection," in Tzvi Abusch et al., eds., *Lingering Over Words: Studies . . . Moran* (Atlanta, 1990), 305–36. For a different view of "canonicity" in Mesopotamian literature, see W. W. Hallo, "The Concept of Canonicity in Cuneiform and Biblical Literature: A Comparative Appraisal," in K. Lawson Younger, Jr., et al., eds., *The Biblical Canon in Comparative Perspective*, Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies 11 (Lewiston, New York, 1991), 1–19.

11. In Alexandria, in fact, there were two libraries: one in the museum on the grounds of the royal palace, and the other attached to the temple of Serapis (Clark, *Care of Books*, 6–7). The Pergamon library was attached to the temple of Athene in that city (*ibid.*, 9, 21).

12. Cf. Clark, *ibid.*, 19; Posner, *Archives in the Ancient World*, 28. See also Parpola, "Royal Archives of Nineveh," 224–32 and above, sec. I.

13. Cf. above, n. 7.

Temple period the Persian governors in Palestine certainly kept local records. Under the Ptolemaic and Seleucid kings, the local records might have been housed in the administrative centers of those kingdoms, not necessarily in Palestine. The Roman governors in Palestine, however, would again need to have their archives located nearby. At the end of the Second Temple period and during talmudic times, explicit indications of the existence of archives in Palestine appear, and their use seems to have been more widespread.

Josephus tells us that when, before the Great Revolt and after giving Tiberias to Agrippas II, the Romans transferred the center of government administration of the Galilee to Sepphoris, they also moved the archives to that city (*Life*, 9). These are apparently the same archives referred to in the Mishnah as ערכי הישנה של ציפורי, "the old archive of Sepphoris" (*Qiddušin* 4:5).¹⁴ In Jerusalem the archives were located on the Temple Mount, near the Akra fortress and the "Chamber of the Unhewn Stones," and at the beginning of the Great Revolt they were burned (Josephus, *Wars* II, 12:6; VI, 6:3). The existence of archives in that period is proved, though indirectly, by references to the custom of investigating the genealogy of women betrothed to priests (Josephus, *Against Apion* I, 7; M. *Qiddušin* 4:4–5; T. *Hagigah* 2:9 et al.), reference to genealogical lists (M. *Yebamot* 4:13; TB *Pesahim* 62b), and to letters sent from the Temple Mount to "the south" and the Galilee, as well as to Babylonia (T. *Sanhedrin* 2:6).¹⁵ The Talmudic sources make frequent mention of "archives" (ערכאות), of "gentiles" (גויים), "foreigners" (נכרים), "pagans" (עכ"ם), Samaritans (M. *Gittin* 1:5; T. *Gittin* 1:4; TB *Gittin* 9b, 11a, 44a et al.), of "archives in Syria" (TB *Sanhedrin* 23a) and of depositing "documents" (שטרות) in those archives. From the modifiers qualifying the term "archive" we may conclude that an "archive" without qualification designated one which was not necessarily of non-Jews. The "national" character of an archive was probably determined, then, by the local population. At the same time, archaeological findings in Eretz-Israel have brought to light two archives, one of Bar Kokhba in the Judean Desert, and the other of the last governor of Samaria in Wadi Dāliyeh. The preservation of documents in such remote places, under conditions of siege and distress, is evidence of how vital the procedures related to the archives were.

As for libraries, it is quite possible that, during the biblical period, even as biblical literature was still in formation, unconsolidated, they existed in Israel, though few and modest in size. There certainly were libraries in the two places which were most suitable for literary activity, the king's court and the Temple. Thus we find in the Bible explicit mention of literary activity at the royal court (Prov. 25:1) and of the availability of *tôrāh* scrolls in the Temple; one such scroll was found by Hilkiyah the high priest (2 Kgs. 22:8–10).¹⁶

14. ערכי and its alternative spelling ערכי ארכי derive from the Greek ἀρχή, ἀρχαῖον. The plural is ערכאות, which is also the plural of ערכאה (as it appears in the targum of 1 Chr. 2:17). See the appropriate entries in the Jastrow and Krauss dictionaries.

15. According to a tannaitic midrash to Deuteronomy (ed. D. Hoffmann [Berlin, 1909], 175–76), letters were sent from the Dung Gate in the upper marketplace of Jerusalem.

16. The words ספר התורה מצאתי (2 Kgs. 22:8) do not mean that the priest was looking for the book, according to the usual meaning of the verb מצא. Here it means "to come across accidentally, to stumble upon," as in Gen 4:14; 11:2; Exod. 22:5, and elsewhere. For this sense of the verb, see Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Lexicon*, 593, mng. 3a. This sense does not cancel out the possibility that another part of the

Among the four pentateuchal sources, the Priestly Source (P), which demonstrates a close tie to the Temple ritual, undoubtedly came into being against the background of the Jerusalem Temple (to my mind, the First Temple, during the last third of the period of its existence, not the Second Temple). The Priestly Source, despite its uniform literary mold and homogeneity is not without internal contradictions; it is an aggregate of scrolls.¹⁷ Before their inclusion in the Pentateuch, P's various scrolls were doubtless separate from each other but were apparently held in close proximity. This might have constituted part of the library, or one of the libraries, of the Jerusalem Temple.

Regarding Deuteronomy (that is, the D Source, the main part of which is Deut. 4:45–26:19 and chap. 28), we have explicit evidence of the *tôrāh* scroll's discovery by the high priest Hilkiah in the Temple at Jerusalem. This source, however, was contained in one scroll, and its size was larger than the usual, although according to 2 Kgs. 22:5–10 Shafan the scribe read it twice in the same day, once to himself and again to the king. The narrative of its finding in 2 Kgs. 22:3–23:24 speaks expressly of a single book, and D, too, refers to itself as one book: "this book of *tôrāh*" (Deut. 29:20; 30:10; 31:26; et al.), "this *tôrāh*" (ibid. 5:5; 17:18–19; 31:9, et al.), always in the singular.

III

Biblical literature underwent a complete change at the end of the first stage of the Second Temple period. At that time it ceased being a living entity, as what was preserved of it was sealed in a fixed and clearly defined series of canonized books. From that point on, and for a rather long period of time, the Jews would have only this fixed series of books. All the rest would be of no real significance, while any oral traditions, in the words of the sages, could "not be expressed in writing" (TB *Gittin* 60b; *Temurah* 14b). This eccentricity, which differentiated Jews from the Greeks, as well as from the Romans and all the civilized peoples of that time, was clearly articulated by Josephus, who says that his fellow Jews have not "innumerable multitude of books, disagreeing from and contradicting one another, but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times and which are rightly believed to be divine." In these twenty-two books the Jews find everything (*Against Apion*, I,8). The relative size of the reading public was no smaller among Jews than in Greece and Rome, but their few books were not enough to make up libraries.

By the end of the second century C.E. the entire Mishnah was consolidated, in written form, and by the end of the talmudic period the two Talmuds were put into writing. Subsequently, written translations of the Bible into Aramaic also received official recognition. However, all these could not raise the number of books the Jews possessed to an "innumerable multitude," not even to hundreds. True, up until the end of the Second Temple period there was a tiny flow of apocryphal books,

temple could house a collection of books. On the contrary, it supports the assumption that the Temple was an appropriate place to come across books of *tôrāh*.

17. See, for the present, my remarks in *Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Indiana, 1985), 146–47, on this matter.

but these could not possibly change the situation either. Let us not forget that for the rabbinic authorities, the apocryphal books were explicitly considered illegitimate (M. *Sanhedrin* 19:1; T. *Yadayim* 2:13; *Qohelet Rabbah* 12:12 et al.).

Of late, a prominent scholar has claimed that Josephus' above-mentioned remark about the paucity of Jewish books is polemical and inaccurate, since he compares Greek literature and philosophy with the Jewish Holy Scriptures. The argument is that Jews did in fact possess many more books than the twenty-two of the Bible. Alternatively, that scholar claims, Josephus should have compared the Jewish Holy Scriptures with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, or with the works of Plato.¹⁸ I am not certain that this argument is conclusive. To be sure, Josephus' statement has a polemic vein. Yet, it is also true that in the Second Temple period, and all the more so in the period of the Mishnah and Talmud, there was a quite restricted number of books written in Hebrew or Aramaic outside the biblical canon. This outer periphery does not seem to have consisted of even one hundred books, and many fewer have come down to us. Even though all these peripheral works are of a religious character, they would probably not have been set on a shelf alongside the Holy Writ; the Pharisees and the rabbis would certainly not have been inclined to do that.¹⁹ In any case, such books are not even hinted at in the aforementioned baraita. Moreover, it would be rather puzzling to reckon what would have motivated Josephus to claim that the Jewish books are few, had they in fact been many in number.

In this context, let us mention the Temple Court, which according to the talmudic tradition (based apparently on historical fact), housed books of the Bible—and most probably no others—and particularly scrolls of the Torah.²⁰ Here the books were corrected (M. *Mo'ed Qatan* 3:4; TY *Sanhedrin* 2:6 [20c]; TY *Sheqalim* 4:2). When the Babylonian Talmud says that those who corrected books in Jerusalem “received their wages from the Temple Treasury” (תרומת הלשכה; *Ketubbot* 106a), those charged with correcting books in the Temple Court are borne in mind. The Temple Court, however, was not a library; at best its holdings could be called an assemblage of books, few in number, though some may have existed in several copies. A concrete historical example of such an assemblage is Qumran. In fact, the number of books there was much larger than what could be conceived of at the Temple Court, since in Qumran there were quite a few books bordering on, and outside of, the Bible, and the books were dispersed there in eleven caves.

18. See J. Barr, *Holy Scripture—Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia, 1983), 58, n. 9.

19. E. Schürer's survey of Jewish literature in the time of Jesus, in its newly revised edition, §32, lists over 70 Hebrew and Aramaic works from the Second Temple period. Relatively short as this list is, it still includes apocalyptic writings, pseudepigraphic midrashim like the Book of Jubilees, and works of magic such as *Sefer Ha-Razim*, while about half the list is made up of works by the Qumran sect. For the religious nature of all the Jewish books from the Second Temple period, cf. *ibid.*, 178.

20. In some places in the Mishnah (*Mo'ed Qatan* 3:4; *Kelim* 15:6) and the Talmud (BT *Baba Batra* 14b; TY *Sheqalim* 4:2, et al.), “the book from the Temple Court” (ספר העזרה) is referred to. The correct reading, however, according to the manuscripts, is ספר עזרה, “a book from the Temple Court,” without the definite article, meaning “one of the books, any of the books, from the Temple Court.” See, for the present, my observations on this matter in *Shenaton* 10 (1989), 96–97 [in Hebrew].

The single item of ostensible evidence for the existence of a library explicitly referred to as such among Jews in the Second Temple period is a statement in the Hanukkah letter, sent presumably from Jerusalem to Alexandria and addressed to Aristobolus, tutor to king Ptolemy. This is the second of two letters quoted at the beginning of 2 Maccabees, and its original language is Greek. It relates that Nehemiah founded a library, as it were, and collected therein "books of the kings, and the prophets, and the books of David, and the epistles of the kings concerning the holy gifts" (2 Macc. 2:13). The division of the Bible into groups of books is here quite odd and vague. Whether this specification parallels the books of the Prophets and the Hagiographa in our Bible or whether it comprises less, we can only wonder at the confusion created by this scribe, in that there is no similarity between his terms and our Bible, neither in its Hebrew version nor in its Greek garb. In addition, seventeen or nineteen books (without the Pentateuch, which is not included in his list), or even fewer than that, became in his perception a library. Thus, the very assumption that Nehemiah founded a special library lacks any historical basis. It would appear that the author of 2 Maccabees, that is, the epitomizer of the work of Jason of Cyrene, or the author of the letter mentioning Nehemiah and his library, portrayed Nehemiah as an enlightened Hellenistic ruler of his own time. In this respect, he attributed to Nehemiah a feature typical of one of the Ptolemaic kings, the founders and owners of the Alexandrian library. Thus, the Jewish-Hellenistic writer did for Nehemiah what Athenaeus did for the tyrants of Athens and Samos.

IV

It is our contention, then, that there is no evidence for the existence of Jewish libraries from Second Temple times through the talmudic period, while, on the other hand, the number of books the Jews had makes the existence of such libraries highly unlikely. However, even if we assume, for the sake of argument, that Jewish libraries did exist during the talmudic period, that still does not enable us to make any link between them and the baraita in *Baba Batra* 14b. The comparison of the presumed conditions underlying that baraita with the libraries of the ancient Near East and Alexandria is hardly valid. The library of Assurbanipal in Nineveh held some 25,000 clay tablets.²¹ In Alexandria's library, which seems to have grown continually, the number of books may have risen from 100,000 to about 700,000.²² Seneca (*De Tranquillitate Animi*, IX, 5) claimed that on only one occasion, when Julius Caesar conquered the city, 40,000 books were burned in that library. Plutarch (*Antonius*, LVIII, 5) reports that, when Antony gave Cleopatra the Pergamon

21. The main collection of tablets from Kuyunjik, the citadel on the site of ancient Nineveh, is in the British Museum and consists of 16,794 numbered tablets, prefixed by the letter K. To these, about 5,000 uncatalogued tablets should be added. There are also some secondary collections so that, all in all, the Kuyunjik collections consist of about 30,000 tablets and fragments. This material, however, includes a good few tablets that did not come originally from Kuyunjik. Cf. Parpola, "Royal Archives of Nineveh," 227-29.

22. Regarding these figures see Kenyon, *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 607. He comments that counting books is "known as a notoriously inexact science." In addition, one cannot know how many works in the Alexandria library and other libraries of the Hellenistic world were found in more than one copy.

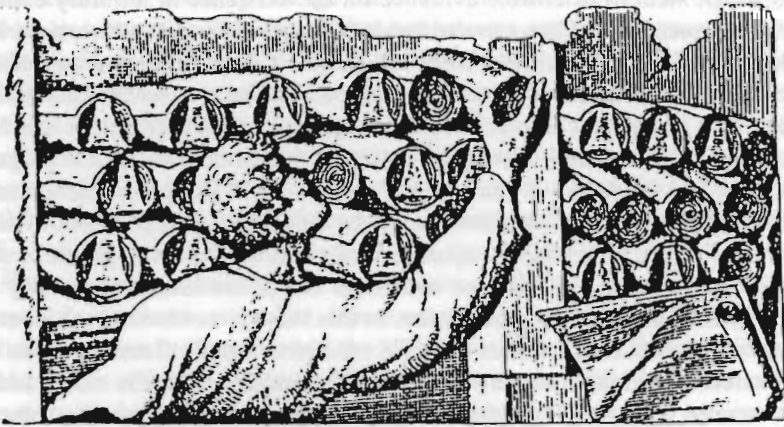


Fig. 1. A Roman replacing a scroll in a library; see n. 23.

library as a present, it held 200,000 books. Even if these figures are only a rough contemporary estimate, it is clear that the vast libraries of the ancient Near East and the Hellenistic world were altogether on a different scale in comparison with the twenty-two or twenty-four biblical books. In those libraries it was an absolute necessity to store the books in a strict order, since any laxness in this regard would have cast the entire collection into disarray. In the case of biblical books, by contrast, inasmuch as they were laid on shelves, there was no need for any fixed order, for in such a small collection any book could easily be retrieved and identified.

Moreover, the discussion of the order of biblical books in the baraita of *Baba Batra* 14b, cannot be explained by the conditions which prevailed in libraries because of the simple reason that, according to ancient custom, every scroll was identified from the outside by a tag attached to its rim. If the scrolls were relatively few, they would be put in a special box, *capsa*, Hebrew כַּסָּפִית. If there were many, they would be laid on shelves, divided by vertical wooded panels (see figure 1). In any case, the scrolls were identified by tags (σίλλυβι; sing. σίλλυβα, σίλλυβον), made of leather strips, as indicated in one of Cicero's letters (*Ad Atticus*, IV, 4a), or of papyrus. The tag was inscribed with the author's name.²³ Identification tags were already common practice in the libraries and archives of Mesopotamia, where they were used from the beginning of the second millennium B.C.E. In Mesopotamia, where writing was done on clay tablets, the tag would be attached to baskets containing the tablets, or to bundles of tablets, or would sim-

23. Note, in fig. 1, the tags at the top of the rolls. This illustration is based on a relief found in the 17th century at Neumagen, near the city of Trier in Germany, in the ruins of a camp that was attributed to Constantine the Great. All the ruins there were destroyed before the end of the 17th century (see Clark, *Care of Books*, 36, note). The man placing a roll at the top of the heap is apparently the librarian. For a "box" filled with tagged rolls, see Kenyon, *Books and Readers*, 62. For tags attached to the tops of *umbilici* (that is, the projecting ends of the cylinders on which ancient books were rolled), see J. B. Ward-Perkins and A. Claridge, *Pompeii A.D. 79* (Boston, 1978), 77, no. 243b. Sarna ("Order of the Books," 410), refers to the use of tags in the Hellenistic libraries, but this point leaves no impression on his conclusions.

ply be put on the shelf. On the tag, identification formulas of different kinds were written. About three hundred such identification tags have so far turned up in Mesopotamia; of these, some 180 come from Lagaš, and several samples were also found in Boghazkeui.²⁴ Identification tags, sewn to the first column of the scroll, inscribed with the names of the works, were also found in Qumran. However, in Qumran the identifying words were sometimes written, alternatively, on the scroll's reverse side.²⁵

Jewish libraries began to appear only in the Gaonic period, when manuscripts of parts of the Bible and its translations into Aramaic and Arabic increased somewhat, while manuscripts of the Mishnah and Talmud and the newly-emerging rabbinic literature came to the fore. Evidence of these libraries are the lists of books from the Genizah. Some 120 such lists have been found, and only a small part of them have been published.²⁶ The majority of the lists refer to private libraries, a small part represent synagogue libraries, and the two groups differ in content. The size of a private library was about 100 units; usually one-fifth of these would be translations of biblical texts into Arabic (*tafsîr*). Synagogue libraries held, as a rule, only books of the Bible or parts thereof, in the Hebrew original or in Aramaic translation.

How, then, can we explain the baraita specifying the order of the Prophets and Hagiographa? It is my profound conviction that the baraita is based on the assumption that it is already possible to use longer *scrolls* to comprise series of books—the whole Pentateuch, all the Prophets, all the Hagiographa (infrequently, even more than one series on the same scroll). Clear evidence of the use of large scrolls for copying parts of the Bible appears in several tannaitic texts in TB (*Baba Batra* 13b–14b: “Our Rabbis taught: It is permissible to fasten the Torah, the Prophets, and the Hagiographa together,” etc.; “Our Rabbis taught: If a man desires to fasten the Torah, the Prophets, and the Hagiographa together, he may do so,” etc.); and in TY (*Megillah* 1:11: “The space of four blank lines must be left between one book and the next,” etc.; and 3:1: “The Torah and Prophets may be written together on one scroll,” etc.). There is no reason to doubt the reliability of this evidence,²⁷ but it can be substantiated in several ways. What is more, a tangible remainder of those large scrolls, containing, as they do, the whole of the Pentateuch, has been preserved in the Torah scrolls used in the synagogue service to this day. Thus, we must perforce assume that sometime during the period of the Mishnah, when Qumran (whose people knew no scrolls of this sort) lay already in ruins, an innovation took place: the scrolls that previously were cut according to the size of the individual work were partially replaced and were joined by large rolls containing entire series of books. The baraita dealing with the order of books in the Prophets and Hagiographa is itself one of the proofs of that change.

24. See Veenhof, “Cuneiform Archives,” 16–19.

25. See D. Barthelemy and J. T. Milik, *Qumran Cave I*, DJD 1 (Oxford, 1955), 107, pl. XXII; R. de Vaux, J. Carswell, et al., *Qumran Grotte 4, II*, DJD 6 (Oxford, 1977), 24, n. 3; M. Baillet, *Qumran Grotte 4, III*, DJD 7 (Oxford, 1982), 137, pl. XLIX, 8.

26. For the general contents of those 120 lists, which will perhaps be published in the future, see provisionally M. Sokolow, in M. J. Chiat and K. L. Reyerson, eds., *The Medieval Mediterranean* (St. Cloud, Minnesota, 1988), 96–100.

27. Sarna (“Order of the Books,” 407–8), too, does not acknowledge their validity.