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XXIII

CANON AND HOLY SCRIPTURES

Editor

Yaacov Shavit

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Moshe Dorf

(June 2, 1907 — October 3, 1987)

Moshe Dorf was born in Poland and emigrated to Belgium at an early age.

Together with his brother, he founded a diamond processing enterprise.

The personality of Moshe Dorf reflects the embodiment of initiative and action which received their concrete expression in the industrial enterprise that he established and continued to cultivate throughout his life. Concurrently, he possessed an intense spiritual wealth as well as an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and wisdom from the rich sources of the Jewish heritage. He was an active participant in various study groups and conferences devoted to Jewish Studies, especially in the field of biblical research, and an avid member of the Israeli Society for Biblical Research as well as the World Jewish Society for the Study of Bible.

Moshe Dorf will be remembered by friends and relations for his congeniality and amiability, his unstinted devotion to his family, and his munificent philanthropy to numerous cultural and charitable institutions in the State of Israel.



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Foreword

Volume 23 of *Teuda* is devoted to a discussion of a central phenomenon in the history of religion and culture: sacred books and canonical writings. The chronological scope of the discussion is extremely broad, ranging from ancient Egypt to the present day. Nevertheless, the diverse papers in this volume share a methodological point of departure regarding the nature of the processes of canonization: All agree that the creation of a book with a special status or a distinct collection of sacred, authoritative, or select writings involves complex processes of selection and winnowing; determination of the final wording of the texts; and reception, sanctification, and interpretation. These complex processes determine the place of the canonical text.

By their very nature, the processes of canonization, which are important in shaping the world and identity of societies, also reflect the history of religion, culture, and society. This volume, therefore, sheds light on the multifaceted phenomenon of sanctification and canonization of diverse texts in diverse literary communities in different periods, and the struggles that accompany the establishment of sacred and canonical status, continuing even after it has been established. Herein lies the great interest of these papers.

As this volume appears, we must rethink the future of the *Teuda* series. The recent volumes have been published during the most difficult period in the tradition of printing that developed and became institutionalized between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries. At the turn of the twenty-first century, electronic publishing is taking over more and more publications, including in the academic sphere. The economic crisis of the past two years also requires a fresh look at how to maintain the annual publication

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of the School of Jewish Studies. *Teuda* has no canonical status, but it is well established in the tradition of the school. Let us hope that we will succeed in keeping it alive under the new conditions.

Yaron Tsur

Introduction

Volume 23 of *Teuda* is devoted to the theme of sacred and canonical writings. It is based in part on a lectures in a series entitled “The creation of a canon: Sacred books and foundational literature in diverse cultures,” The series was presented in the 2004–2005 academic year at the School of Jewish Studies of TAU. This volume presents several facets and aspects of a central phenomenon in the history of religion and the history of culture, from ancient times to the present day.

“Sacred writings,” “canonical literature,” “authoritative literature,” “formative literature,” “classics,” “collection of books,” “literary corpus,” “the bookshelf” — are all terms that attempt to define the special status and special role of a book, a collection of books, or a list of books, as part of a particular ensemble of written works. However, these terms are not synonymous, and they relate to different types of texts and to different principles of selection. Even the terms “sacred writings,” “sacred books,” and “canon,” as the papers in this volume show — and as we see from the diverse scholarship on this topic — have more than one meaning. But they all have in common a particular status that religion, society, and culture grant them or attribute to them.

“Sacred writings” is the most elevated and important status granted to a book or to books. It is granted because of the belief that they were transmitted through revelation, or were written with divine inspiration, or are considered ancient (“Extreme antiquity gives books authority,” wrote the church father Tertullian [*Apologeticus*, XIX]). They attained the status of foundational books of religion and thus were seen as atemporal. Many religions have writings that are considered sacred, and for those religions their writings are the source and foundation of faith, tradition, laws, rules

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of behavior. They represent the past, and are also a basis for interpretations, imitations, and future supplementations. The compilation, selection, and collection of these writings, and the determination of the status they will attain are the outcome of the process of canonization, that is, the process of winnowing, selecting, and establishing the final wording of the text (and in the case of translation, establishing the authoritative translation), on the one hand, and of rejecting and laying aside, on the other hand. They are also the outcome of a process of acceptance and sanctification in relation to the religious tradition. Not infrequently, this status is attained after an internal struggle, and therefore it is a crucial revelation of the history of religions and of the internal struggles for exclusivity, authority, and representation. Often books are considered sacred writings only by one faction, sect, or group; these are alternative sacred writings that are in competition with the sacred writings of the “official” religion.

In order for a text to become sacred, or canonical, it had to appear originally as a written text — on a stone tablet, on a papyrus scroll, or on a parchment scroll — and written literature must have an elevated status. The Chester Beatty Papyrus IV, written in the Ramses Period (1300–1100 BCE) in Egypt, is one of the earliest testimonies to such an attitude toward written literature (and toward the scribe’s profession). According to this text, learned scribes do not make themselves a name by building pyramids and monuments, but rather by writing “wisdom literature,” that is, books that formulate rules of ethical behavior [see the paper by Nili Shupak]. Whether the cultures of the ancient Near East had a canonical literary corpus has been discussed at length in the scholarly literature. Thus, for example, it is customary to argue that the acquisition policy for books and collections in the royal library of the Assyrian king Asurbanipal (668–627 BCE) does not represent what was considered the canonical literature of Mesopotamian culture, and that this library was, instead, a general collection of works on topics that the king was especially interested in. The measure of the importance attributed to certain texts in ancient literature is their distribution and references to them in later texts. In order for written literature to acquire value and

status beyond the elite groups of the priests, scribes, sages, or students in the schools for scribes, and in order for it to become foundational and educational literature, the society must be literate, and a single book, or several books, must be accepted by it as establishing and shaping its worldview, beliefs, behavioral norms, and identity. In order to fulfill this role, the content of the “book” must be familiar to the society through hearing it read or through individual reading.

The term “sacred writings” (βιβλία ἁγία) appears for the first time in the First Epistle to Timothy in the New Testament: “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching” (4:13). It also appears in the Second Epistle to Timothy: “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (3:15-16). The concept appears in the literature of the Sages in the discussion of which books “defile the hands” and should be included in the Scriptures; that is, defile the hands alone, and only slightly, making them “secondarily defiling”. This sanctity gives rise to the halachic rule which is intended to keep a person from touching them with his hands, and which books are apocryphal: “All the sacred writings defile the hands; the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes defile the hands,” (Mishnah, Yadayim 3, 4, and elsewhere). Their status as sacred texts is expressed in the fact that one saves them from fire: “All sacred writings are saved [on the Sabbath] from fire, whether one reads them or does not read them (Mishnah, Shabbat, 16: a). The process of editing the biblical canon and its acceptance, and of the extension of the term “sacred writings” from the Torah (the five books of the Torah) to Prophets and Writings are a central topic of scholarship [see here the papers of Giuseppe Velteri, Bilha Nitzan, Yoram Erder, and Meira Polliack].

The term “biblical canon” is borrowed from the Christian context and it is a late term that was adopted in scholarship. In any case, the Hebrew Bible became the model of a canon and of sacred writings; like the processes that led to its establishment, it is often compared to the sacred writings and canon of other cultures. Thus, for example, in the nineteenth

century the Homeric epics were often described as the “Bible of the Greeks,” and the anthology of religious and philosophical literature that includes, inter alia, works of the Far Eastern cultures is titled *The Bible of the World*.

The literature of the Sages contains discussions of whether the books attributed to Solomon — the Song of Songs, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes — are worthy of inclusion in the Bible. Yet the literature of the Sages rejects without argument those books that later came to be called external or apocryphal. A process of canonization also determined the status and the authority of the literature of the Sages [see the papers of G. Veltri and Robert Brody]. Yehuda Halevi was the first — as part of his polemic with the Karaites — to determine that the Mishnah was divinely inspired: “Behold, anyone who looks at all these with a true eye sees that no living creature is able to write anything like it without divine assistance” (*Kuzari*, 3: 67). External evidence for this status is the Christian argument that the Jews gave the Talmud (“one Torah called the Talmud”) a status of sanctity and authority equal to, or even greater than, that of the Bible. Over time, the broad term “sacred books” was applied to a variety of books.

It is important here to mention that the terms “canon” and “canonization” relate, both to the codification of laws and to the list of obligatory beliefs. The first use of the term “canon” in relation to religious literature was in the fourth century CE by Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, who in a letter in 367 referred to “the writings we collected in a canon,” and who decided after “research,” which would be the 39 books of the “Old Testament” (as opposed to the 24 books included in the “Hebrew Bible”) and the 27 books of the New Testament, which comprise the sacred writings of the Catholic Church. An important part of the process of canonization of Christianity’s sacred writings was the devastating struggle of the church against criticism of the canon and its authority, a struggle that included censorship and even the burning of books.

The use of “canon” to define a selection from the secular literature

(belles lettres or philosophy) of the ancient (Greco-Roman) world, which itself was not familiar with the term “canonical literature,” appeared in the eighteenth century. Such a collection also was termed “classic,” and this definition eventually denoted what was defined as the finest secular literature, chosen and representing a school, a literary genre, or a particular historical period and culture, and sometimes the finest ever. Like the sacred writings or authoritative books, which were subject to various interpretations, so too the canon of secular literature is open to struggles and changes made by various social and cultural mechanisms. Such, for example, was the controversy in France and England between the *anciens* and the *modernes* in the seventeenth century, which turned on around the status and value of contemporary literature in relation to the status and value of classic literature, as defined in the Renaissance (a struggle described in Jonathan Swift’s satire *Full Account of the Battle fought [...] between the Ancient and the Modern Books*).

So, also, was the attempt at the end of the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century to distinguish clearly between “high” (quality, or canonic) literature and “low” or “popular” literature on the basis of their content and their “literary value.” An attempt in the nineteenth century to demarcate the boundary between “good” (“canonical”) and “bad” (“not canonical”) literature by preparing a consensual anthology of literature for school pupils, or by calling upon the cultural elite to intervene in setting the standards for literary quality (as Matthew Arnold proposed in his article “The Literary Influence of Academies”), stirred up a controversy, and a similar one has been raging in Western culture since the 1980s [see the paper by Rakefet Sela–Sheffy]. The “hegemonic canon” has been attacked as expressing the imperious position of “Western culture,” and critics demanded that the canon be broadened, or that its status even be abolished. Very recently, a similar argument has erupted in Israel in response to the appearance of the *Am Hasefer* (People of the Book) series published by *Yedioth Aharonoth*. In this case, too, critics have claimed that the selection of books deemed worthy of inclusion in the canon (“the bookshelf”) of Jewish literature throughout the ages (including books that

are not texts that are studied or quoted by the majority of the readers and scholars of this literature) was tendentious. According to the critics, it is a selection made by a self-appointed tribunal that excluded books that do not represent what it deems “the hegemonic literature,” and thus are not worthy of being considered the shared asset of all Jews.

A broad, comparative historical view of the phenomenon of the canon, of the processes of canonization, and of the struggle and the controversy surrounding them was recently described in several collections.¹ This volume of *Teuda* joins them; yet the analysis herein presented can only be selective, and cannot hope to provide a full picture of this multifaceted and complex phenomenon. We are aware of the fact that for various reasons many important “cases” are absent. However, even this selection, we hope, will provide the reader not only with an analysis of several central and important cases, but also contribute historical and comparative background for a better understanding of the universal phenomenon, and the attendant scholarship. Ultimately, it is impossible not to agree with the words of Van Horn Melton to the effect that the argument over the identity of the canon, the attempts to add books to it, or the attempt to replace it with a different canon, merely confirm that a “multicultural” society sees itself as being in need of a canon [see James Van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 119].

It is a pleasurable duty to thank the participants in the **בימת החוקר** who prepared their papers for publication and the authors who responded willingly to our request to allow us to include papers that were published elsewhere. Our thanks go to the Zalman Shazar Center for permission to include in this volume the paper of Nili Shupak to Yeshiva University New-York, for its permission publish Robert Brody’s article, and to Kinneret Zmora Bitan for permission to publish the story of Etgar Keret.

1 Gillis J. Dorleign and Herman L.J. Vanstiphout (eds.), *Cultural Repertoires: Structure, Function and Dynamics*, Leuven 2003; Margalit Finkelberg and Guy G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World*, Leiden 2003.

Thanks also to Mr. Aharon Berger for copyediting the papers; to Sarah Vered, the secretary of the School of Jewish Studies, for her devoted work throughout; to Prof. Dina Porat, who served as the chair of the School of Jewish Studies and organized **בימת החוקר** on this topic; and to Prof. Yaron Tsur, the current chair of the school.

Yaacov shavit

ABSTRACTS

Rakefet Sela-Sheffy

Struggles over the Canon: Culture Preservation and Culture Transformation

The Anglo-American canon debate reflects a social transformation in the academic and intellectual fields. The theoretical conceptualization of the canon it provides, however, seems to be too predictable and limited a framework for the study of processes of culture formation and culture change. Being confined to the battle over cultural values and intended to empower the culture of the repressed, this discourse nevertheless fails to exceed the limits of the same reductive, normative notion of (highbrow) Culture, which it seeks to challenge. Moreover, focusing on short-term transformations, it fails to deal with the long-term persistence of cultures.

This article discusses two central aspects of the canon as a factor of culture dynamics: (1) *The inertia of the canon* (in contrast with the transitoriness of culture *fashions*): the view of the canon as relative and negotiable overlooks the weight of established canons as accumulative, widely perpetuated, and persistent cultural reservoirs (“pantheons”), which endure the vicissitudes of tastes and values promoted by different groups in different times. The formation of the canon is hence a long-term process, that occurs in addition to the short-term process of shifting trends and that lags behind the latter. (2) *The question of generativeness*: the valorization of artifacts is not dependent on their dissemination in the current cultural market. Often, the preservation of items through canonization rituals suspends their availability as active models for the generation of actual cultural production. The canon thus operates as a cultural “stabilizer,” being equally invoked by all the rival parties in the ongoing cultural battlefields.

Consequently, we argue that while all cultural practices have “canonical

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rules” (in the sense of *accepted standards*), not all have canons in the full sense of a *tangible pantheon*. The making of such a pantheon depends on the existence of an autonomous field of production with authorized consecrating agencies. The formation of a canon of an (as yet) “canonless” culture production happens when the canonizers act as authorized agents in yet another, highly established field, and impose the categories of this field to model and sanction new bodies of cultural production. The canonizers’ strategies oscillate between *perpetuating* an existing canonized repertoire and *prefiguring* a new one as canonical from the outset. The latter strategy is usually observed after a prolonged phase of conformity with an existing canon.

Nili Shupak

Canon and Canonization in Ancient Egypt

The “canon” of ancient Egypt is a collection of wisdom literature that includes instructions of didactic wisdom and theoretical works. Actually, it comprises a list of the corpus studied in the schools that was written in the Ramses period (1300–1100 BCE), that was copied in later generations in dozens and, at times, hundreds of copies. The works that were copied and studied were the selected compositions of authors regarded as authoritative figures from the past and as exemplary individuals worthy of emulation. These works, that were intended mainly for the educated elite, were based in the worldview that the world was established on the principles of justice and integrity (*ma’ath*), and consisted mainly of reproofs and advice meant to guide man on the proper path.

Margalit Finkelberg

Canon-Replacement versus Canon-Appropriation: The Case of Homer

The article begins with a critique of Pierre Bourdieu’s influential thesis that any large-scale social transformation necessarily implies replacement of the

dominant cultural canon by an alternative one capable of answering the social needs of the formerly underprivileged groups or classes that come to power as a result of such a transformation. I use the history of the cultural reception of Homer's *Iliad* from the 8th century BCE to the 14th century CE as a case study. My main argument is that the mechanism of cultural change is characterized by canon-appropriation, rather than by canon-replacement. Namely, as the history of canonical texts repeatedly shows, in periods of social transition the cultural canon is normally not discarded but, rather, reused in accordance with the needs of the new groups that rise to social and cultural prominence. The article also discusses various methods of cultural appropriation of the canonical text, such as its social recontextualization, allegorical interpretation, and didactic and exegetical techniques that affect its adaptation to the changing historical, social, and cultural circumstances.

Bilhah Nitzan

The Biblical Canonization Process during the Second Temple Period according to the Evidence of the Judean Desert Scrolls

The biblical findings from the Judean Desert that were discovered during the middle of the 20th century in the Qumran caves, Masada, and the Bar Kokhba caves shed new light on the canonizational process of the Hebrew Bible. The investigation of this process distinguishes between two stages: (A) the determination of the books defined Biblical; (B) the determination of the canonical version.

According to the evidence from the Second Temple period, the books of the Torah and the Prophets were canonized first, and those of the Hagiographa later. The Biblical findings from Qumran testify to the entire Hebrew Bible except for the book of Esther, but in variegated versions.

We examine three issues concerning the origin of the Hebrew Biblical version and its canonization: (1) Did the Biblical versions originate from one *urtext*? (2) Did the Biblical books originate, from the outset, in variegated versions? (3) The time and circumstances of the canonization of the variegated versions — the pretraditional Jewish version, the old Greek version (*Septuagint*), and the pre-Samaritan version — which were considered legitimate Land of Israel versions during the Second Temple period.

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The Biblical Qumranic finds, which are the ancient extant finds, reflect variegated versions of each book. E. Ulrich therefore maintains the variegated origin of the biblical books. His opinion is also based on literary variations of Biblical narratives in the pretraditional, Qumranic, and old Greek version of the book of Samuel. E. Tov, however, suggests that this variety is the result of exegetical activities and copying mistakes that occurred in the *urtext* of the Biblical books during the historical process of their transmission. Tov's opinion is based on the finds of the pretraditional version that is preserved in twelve biblical books from Qumran copied paleographically in the ancient Hebrew script, and on the pretraditional version reflected in other biblical books from Qumran, despite some orthographic and exegetical changes. This suggestion is evidenced as well in the shortest version of the book of Exodus (4QPaleo-Exodm), published by Judith Sanderson. Other testimonies for the existence of the pretraditional version during the Second Temple period were preserved in the Biblical findings from Masada, that was occupied by non-Qumranic Jews. Thus, Tov suggests that the phenomenon of variegated versions was not accepted by all the Jewish streams in the Second Temple period, but by the Qumranic one. The main Jewish stream of this period preferred one version, the pretraditional.

The canonization of one version, the pretraditional, as evidenced by the Biblical findings from the Bar Kokhba caves, was the outcome of the historical circumstances caused by the destruction of the Second Temple. The Qumran community disappeared, and the Pharisaic-Rabbinic stream became dominant. The old Greek version was adopted by the Christians, and the version which was characterized by harmonistic expansions became the canonical one of the Samaritans.

Giuseppe Veltri

(De)canonization and Deconstruction

The history of the process of biblical canonization has recently enjoyed great popularity in academic teaching and research around the world. Most contemporary publications are primarily concerned with the topic of the biblical canon, without scarcely relating to the more general problem of the "canonization" of Jewish-Hellenistic and Rabbinic texts, *i.e.* without treating

the Jewish Hellenistic idea of tradition/transmission — in the case of the Jewish Greek canon — and without focusing on the process of formation and increasingly pervasive assertion of the (mainly Babylonian) Talmud and related texts and traditions in the case of the Hebrew Bible.

Yet the “canonization” or “decanonization” of books and traditions of the Bible (biblia) cannot be separated from the fortunes of the literature as a whole among the communities in which these privileged corpora were produced. The literature of any ethnic and/or religious entity can be a confused hill or archive of manuscripts, books, written and oral traditions, where a small segment of these somehow “mysteriously” rise to the highest degree of authority and political, social, and religious influence. Pure coincidence cannot be invoked as an explanation for the growth, development and selection (inclusion/exclusion) of literary production, even if attributed to vanished libraries and archives. A priori we can adopt this kind of explanation with regard to the entire literary (oral and written) production of a people, which consists of a hierarchy of documents, traditions and texts composed and ordered according to precise rules. These rules, the object of every treatise on canon and canons, produce or are the product of a sharp differentiation on the one hand between works of the past and/or the present and their consequent use in liturgy, law, private reading, etc., and literary productions which did not have the same fortune on the other. Pure coincidence can scarcely be called the law of human experience in its historical dimension, and canon is *volens nolens*, always a law of experience and faith.

My contribution attempts to shape the rules of canonization in Christianity (accent on the books of the prophets, and change in language) and Judaism (conception of the Torah). Special attention is devoted to the concept of decanonization, described as a refusal, devaluating and exposing of past authorities in their explanation of texts and traditions as dependent on time and space. In Judaism, Canon means a hermeneutical and normative orientation to the Torah, in its double meaning of written and oral text. The real emphasis of rabbinic academies relies little on the “physical” transmission of the text, according to a common and alleged textual meaning of the so-called canon formula (“Do not add and do not subtract anything.”) in Deut. 4:2, but rather on the reception and hermeneutical adaptation of the Oral Torah. Only the Torah *she-be-al peh* is, according to a well-known rabbinic tradition, the clear-cut criterion of difference and distinction between Israel and the

“others”. Ben Sira’s position in the history or story of the canon attracted the attention of the Rabbis, for they had to decide whether this book should be considered a valid part of the tradition, or a commentary on it, or only a reflex of it, or even totally outside of it, like the mysterious book of ben La’aga.

The main assumption of my study is that the ascent and/or decline of books has something to do with the moving forces of community and leaders and little to do with polemical attitudes to other “confessions” and “sectarian” teaching. That is the story of the Jewish evaluation of decanonized texts, such as the Greek Torah, Aquila, and Ben Sira. These texts were once very important, then lost their importance and were substituted by other texts. Canon is not static, but a dynamic aspect of texts and traditions. According to both Christian and Jewish sources, canonization is not a product of literary or historical coincidence (such as the discoveries of Qumran and its documentary sources), but a historical process of conscious and effective influence on contemporary theology and the history of ideas.

Galia Patt-Shamir

Not Carved in Stone Tradition and Innovation in the Confucian Canon

The article introduces the Confucian Canon as a manifestation of the simple and yet revolutionary saying from the Confucian *Analects*: “It is the person can broaden the Way, but the Way does not broaden the person” (*Analects* 15:28). The saying introduces the human being as the only authority for the Confucian way. Yet, the Way (*dao*) is the doctrine, the method and perfection itself. In line with the above statement, not only a human power is the only power with which we may broaden the Way, moreover, human beings determine the standard for perfection. Hence, there is no “perfection” above human perfection, and evidently, there is no God. The humanly-broadened way is treated in the article from the perspective of the dynamism of the Confucian Canon. Referring to “Canon” in the Confucian sense, we do not discuss writings which are “sacred” in a religious sense, or as a universal law. We rather refer to borrowed senses of “Canon” as an organized body of works which establishes moral, cultural, or aesthetical standards of a tradition, and is established by them in turn. The Chinese term commonly

used as “Canon” is *Jing*, meaning a “weaving” and referring to classical texts which are intertwined with each other, to form together the body of the Confucian tradition.

In the article, we focus on two distinctive features of the Confucian Canon. First, it is multidimensional. Taking up from Tu Weiming’s idea I further show how each of the classical books reflects a different vision of the person, who can be fully understood only by means of the entire weaving. Second, the Canon is dynamic. Known already in 136 CE as the “Five Classics” (*wujing*), the Canon changed to six, nine, twelve, thirteen, and then, with Zhuxi (1130–1200 AD) to the “Four Books” (*sishu*). Both features of the Canon show a high degree of versatility, which never diminished the universal validity of the Canon as seen by its follower.

The last part of the article focuses on two classics which present opposing facets of the Canon, which build together its uniqueness. The *Books of Rites* (*Lijing*) introduce the person as a social being fixed and shaped by rites and tradition. The *Book of Change* (*Yijing*) introduces the person as an incessantly changing metaphysical being. The philosophy of *Change* is a philosophy of self-creation. Creation is a product of understandings that life is movement and movement is change. This vision of life as a Way which is ever changing, or of the person broadening the Way, is a vision of a commitment to broaden Canon too.

Robert Brody

The Talmud in the Geonic Period

In Jewish history, the Geonic period is named for the heads of the great Talmudic academies of Babylonia and Palestine who were known as Geonim. This period extended from approximately the mid-6th century to the mid-11th century CE and was the last pre-modern period in which the cultural and intellectual centers of the Jewish world were located in the area east of the Mediterranean. The Geonim did not see themselves as participants in the creation of the Talmud. Their role was to transmit, explicate, and apply it as a guide to Jewish life.

The Babylonian Talmud, studied together with the Mishnah, represented the core curriculum of the Babylonian academies, but little is known about the

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ways in which these texts were taught. Several sources reflect the importance attributed to individualized teaching and the master's familiarity with the student's abilities and limitations. The Mishnah and Talmud were treated primarily as oral texts in the Geonic milieu with written copies playing a decidedly secondary role.

Much of the prestige of the Babylonian Geonim derived from the perception that their academies represented a direct continuation of those which had produced the Babylonian Talmud, and that they and their colleagues were almost self-evidently the pre-eminent interpreters of the Talmud. For generations many exegetical traditions were transmitted in the Geonic milieu. Issues of Talmudic exegesis figure prominently among the questions addressed to the Geonim at least from the mid-8th century CE, but it is only in the 10th century that genuine Talmudic commentaries are first encountered. The latter part of the Geonic period also saw the beginnings of systematic activity in the field of Talmudic methodology.

The greatest contribution of the Geonim of Babylonia to the course of Jewish history was transforming "their" Talmud into the most authoritative embodiment of rabbinic tradition. It was their custodianship of the Talmud that made the Geonim what they were, and their stewardship that made the Talmud what it has been for the past millennium — the quintessential statement of rabbinic Judaism.

Yoram Erder and Meira Polliack

The Karaite Canon in the Ninth to the Eleventh Centuries

The Karaites' role in undermining the Rabbanite (normative) Jewish canon, and in particular, the centrality this canon gives to "oral law" including its varied literary manifestations (in the Mishnah, Talmud, etc.), has often been discussed by modern Jewish historiographers. This article discusses the alternative Jewish canon established by the medieval Karaites, which is based on their belief that the Hebrew Bible alone, in its 24 books, is the sole source of divine revelation given to the Jewish people; hence, it stands at the center of the Karaite canon. In this article the term "Karaite canon" signifies not only the focus on the Biblical text *per se* (excluding "oral law"), it also includes various branches of Karaite literature which appeared in the

Karaite scholarly and educational discourse. Most of the literature discussed here was written in Judaeo-Arabic, in the formative “classical” period of Near Eastern Karaism. It was mainly composed between the 9th and 11th centuries, by the members of the Karaite community of Jerusalem, known as “the Mourners of Zion.” Whereas the Jerusalem Karaites were critical of those considered the founding figures of their movement, Anan ben David and Benjamin Nahawendi, it is noteworthy that they cite these individuals’ works and deemed them worthy of study; hence, one can say that Anan and Benjamin’s halakhic works do form part of the Karaite canon.

The main branches of canonical Karaite literature examined in this article include:

1. The study of the Tiberian Massorah as the only Massorah of the Hebrew Bible, emphasizing that it is not part of some “oral law” as claimed by the Rabbanites.
2. Arabic Bible translation.
3. Biblical exegesis: the Karaites applied grammatical methods in Biblical study; they also composed grammatical and lexical works on the Bible. Special effort was invested in studying the Bible as a whole, with the Pentateuch not given any special standing above the Prophets and Hagiographa (as was customary in Rabbanite tradition); halakhah was legitimately deduced from the Prophets and Hagiographa, as well as from the Torah. These collections also served as sources for realistic and messianic forms of interpretation.
4. Philosophical works, influenced by the Islamic Muʿtazilite Kalam.
5. Books of precepts, in which halakhot were arranged by topic to facilitate their implementation.
6. Prayer books. In the early phases, however, Karaite prayer was based solely on Biblical texts from the Torah and Psalms.

Ran HaCohen

Canonization, the Ethiopian Version: “The Glory of Kings” (Kebra Nagast)

“Canon” is a secularized Western religious concept. This article begins by demonstrating the difficulties in applying the term, even in its narrow

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Christian sense, to Ethiopian culture. Although Christianity has been dominant in Ethiopia since the 4th century, its religious textual canon has never been clearly defined, though the (unusually high) number of canonic books is generally agreed (81 books). However, there are various ways to arrive at this number, and the books included are by no means clear.

Today, “The Glory of Kings” or *Kebrā Nagast*, a (presumably) 14th century Ethiopic text is considered as the major canonical text of Ethiopia in the secularized sense of the term, as its “national epic”, with the number of its translations into Western languages rapidly growing. Following a short description of the text (its core being the meeting of the Queen of Sheba with King Solomon) and of its problematic dating (with theories ranging from the 6th to the 16th century), the article discusses the main factors in its canonization. The canonicity of the *Kebrā Nagast* appears to derive from a complex setting, both internal and external to Ethiopia.

Within Ethiopia, a major aspect was the epic’s role as an ideological basis of the Solomonic Dynasty, which reigned from the 13th century until 1974. It was not a coincidence that one of the earliest known manuscripts of the epic was bound together with the biblical historiographies of *Kings* and *Chronicles*, presumably perceived as their direct continuation. However, the fact that this Ge’ez (classical Ethiopic) text, written in a language dead for about a millennium, was printed in Germany for the first time in 1905, and had to wait almost a century to be printed in Ethiopia with a modern Amharic translation (2001/2), implies that the canonization of the *Kebrā Nagast* cannot be divorced from the romantic desire in the West to give Ethiopia its own “national epic”, a “representative” piece of literature that every “ancient nation” is expected to have.

Yehuda Friedlander

Is Hebrew *Haskalah* Literature Canonical?

The canonization of literary works is a very complicated enterprise, being a result of various reasons such as: aesthetic standard, special historical events, spiritual influence, an original breakthrough of method, style and taste, and the like. T.S. Eliot argued that “the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the

whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order” (Tradition and the Individual Talent).

The article examines the literary substance of Hebrew Haskalah poetry and fiction, their historical background, contemporary literary influence from European literature, and impact on following generations. It discusses in detail the poetry of M. H. Luzzatto (1707–1747) as the first canonical poet who was afforded this status by H. N. Bialik, N. H. Wessely (1725–1805), S. Loewisohn (1789–1821), M. J. Lebensohn (Mikhal — 1828–1852), and Y. L. Gordon (Yalag — 1830–1892); the satires of J. Perl (1773–1839) and I. Erter (1791–1851); and the novels of A. Mapu (1807– 1867) and S. J. Abramowitsch (Mendele Mokher Seforim — 1836–1917). Each writer is analyzed in order to evaluate his literary status as a candidate for canonization.

Avner Holtzman

Contemporary Hebrew Fiction: Toward the Formation of a Canon?

The article delineates the fundamental debate conducted between approximately 1896 and 1914 among the major creators and spokesmen of the emerging modern Hebrew literary culture, such as H. N. Bialik, Ahad Ha-Am, M. J. Berdyczewski, D. Frischmann, and J. H. Brenner. During this debate, the basic assumptions underlying the modern secular Hebrew literary canon were formulated, according to the following concepts:

1. Modern Hebrew fiction is profoundly involved in the historical experience of the Jewish people in recent generations, mainly by constantly examining the basic Zionist mythos of the return to the Land of Israel as a redeeming process.
2. Hebrew fiction is strongly inclined to depict individual lives, which contain concentrated metonymic representations of general attributes typical of the national group as a whole.
3. Hebrew narrative fiction is not a simple illustration of chapters from Jewish or Zionist history, it rather reshapes historical realities by the critical models it imposes upon them and, being created by many individual writers, is a polyphonic discourse.

4. The canonic place of a certain work owes a great deal to its inner aesthetic values, namely: its integral artistic coherence. Aesthetic judgments may differ from one critic to another, but prominent works are characterized by a wide critical consensus, which is reaffirmed by the accumulative critical tradition.
5. The complex landscape of modern Hebrew fiction can be schematically described as a polarized structure, based on a constant tension between mimetic and nonmimetic trends. On the one hand, we find the realistic-metonymic aim to represent reality, and, on the other, all manner of self-reflexive literary methods, that tend to stress expression itself, namely, the aesthetic-linguistic dimension.
6. The center of the canon is constituted by a chain of outstanding writers who intensively embody all the previous points. They are deeply involved in the core of the national experience. They shape it by creating individual, yet representational, protagonists; they build complex literary models in tense relations with the historical reality; they produce highly integrated artifacts from the historical raw materials; and they are connected to one another as significant links in a chain of a multigenerational literary tradition.

Having characterized the main features of the modern Hebrew canon, the article asks whether these basic concepts are still valid in the contemporary literary reality, which seems extremely pluralistic or even chaotic. thus rejecting any attempt at canonic conceptualization. A detailed analysis of Etgar Keret's story "Rabin Died" (1999) serves as a starting point for revalidating the traditional canonic concepts, by identifying a group of contemporary Israeli writers who seem to inherit the classical canonic role of their literary predecessors.

Yael Darr

From Canon to Canon: Key Poets for Adults generate Change and Set the Taste in the Literary Canon for Children, 1930's–1970's

The article presents two critical stages in the consolidation of Hebrew children's literature as a separate cultural field. It examines the way in which

two consecutive groups of canonical writers for children, who had arrived from an “outside” field, literature for adults, acted beginning in the 1930s and continuing for the next four decades.

The first group includes major modernist poets headed by N. Alterman, L. Goldberg, and A. Shlonsky. During their years as writers who set the tone in the field of children’s literature, starting in the 1930s, the intergenerational struggle they had conducted against the poets of the “revival generation” in poetry for adults (“*Pulmus haMishmarot*” — the generational polemic) had already been determined in their favor. From a passionate and revolutionary marginal group of youth, they became members of the literary establishment itself. Now the group transferred its strength, literary preferences, and methods of generational poetic struggle from this arena to that of children’s literature, and acted as generators of change who dictated a new taste.

The next group we discuss includes significant poets for adults, from the next literary wave, known as the “poets of the State generation,” who were active in the field of children’s literature during the 1950s, and mainly in the 1960s and 1970s. The leading figures among them are: T. Atar, A. Gilboa, O. Hillel, T. Carmi, Y. Amihai, D. Pagis, D. Ravikovitch, and H. Shenhav. Like their predecessors, these poets, too, perceived themselves as agents of change and taste setters in children’s literature, and they, too, defied the old hegemony and attempted to shape a new “beautiful” in literature. Yet, the methods of change and struggle for the canon that the young “State generation” members used in the early decades of statehood were very different from those used by members of the earlier generation. The root of this fundamental difference lies in the establishment of children’s literature as a distinct field in Israeli culture and its declining dependency on the literary field for adults and its canon.