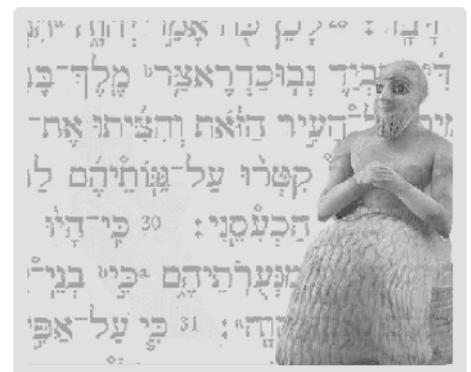


Literacy, Utopia and Memory: Is There a Public Teaching in Deuteronomy?

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INTRODUCTION: IS THERE A DIDACTIC PROGRAM IN DEUTERONOMY?

Let me start with the obvious: The society to which the Pentateuchal texts refer consisted of a small group of “intellectual” elites that mastered the art of writing and reading, and a vast majority of illiterate people. Some scholars estimate literacy to cover no more than five percent of the population.¹ This may have changed in Hellenistic times, but it applies to the whole period of the evolution of Deuteronomy, which stretches from late pre-exilic times through the exilic and possibly into the early Persian time.²

¹ For this estimation see K. van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 10–11. For the term “intellectuals” see P. R. Davies, *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (LAI; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 75–77. The difficulties related to the opposition orality-literacy in biblical time is discussed by Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (LAI; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 39–45, 110.

² The dating of the different stages of the relevant pieces of text does not have much impact on the argument of this article. Recent scholarship does not follow the early dating of the texts by Georg Braulik, “Das Deuteronomium und die Gedachtniskultur Israels. Redaktionsgeschichtliche Beobachtungen zur Verwendung von LMD,” in G. a.o. Braulik (ed.) *Biblische Theologie und gesellschaftlicher Wandel. FS Norbert Lohfink SJ* (Freiburg: Herder, 1993), 9–31 (6:6–9 are from Josiah’s time; vv. 20–25 are a pre-exilic dtr redaction; and even 31:9–13 are pre-exilic). The tendency in recent research is to regard all the passages as deuteronomistic, dating from the time of the exile or later. Braulik’s article is important however because it deals with the so-called “Lernparänese.” According to him, the place of the “Lernparänese” in 6:6–9 “ist nicht mehr die Schule, sondern die Familie;” and it is meant not for the elites but for the whole Israel (p. 12). This is the point that I will pursue in this article. That vv. 6–9 refer to the singular members of Israel, to their private life, pointing out the family

The book of Deuteronomy has often been conceived of as a didactic or catechetical book, basically because of the verbal root לָמַד (“teach, learn”), the injunctions that families teach their children in all the stipulations of “this law” (Deut 6), and the public reading of the book of the torah (Deut 31). Accordingly, some recent studies concentrate on the transmission of the written text through public readings.³ The relevant cases (e.g., 6:6–25; 31:9–13) are instances of what David Carr calls an oral-written literature: reflecting an oral-written, rather than strictly oral culture. All these have to do with teaching as a process of constant recitation of what is written.⁴

The kind of memory culture that appears here fits into the patterns relevant for studies like those of Carruthers and Yates, who study the antique and medieval aids and techniques of memorization, i.e., how to store texts—mostly written texts—in the “storage rooms” of the mind, the so-called mnemonic devices.⁵ This is what Yates calls “the art of memory.”

According to Karin Finsterbusch’s exegesis—so far the most comprehensive study of learning in the book—the way of learning

father as “Haupttradent des Gesetzes,” is noted also by Eckart Otto, *Das Deuteronomium: Politische Theologie und Rechtsreform in Juda und Assyrien* (BZAW, 284; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999), 362, who regards vv. 6–9 as late post-exilic. Thomas Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 176, argues that vv. 6–9 come from either exilic time (p. 130), or from a Persian time elite whose ancestors were in the Babylonian Golah, thus linking the text also to the final reworking of the account in 2 Kgs 22–23 (for this connection, see below). E. Blum, “Pentateuch-Hexateuch-Enneateuch?” in T. Dozeman, T. Römer, and K. Schmid (eds.), *Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch? Identifying Literary Works in Genesis through Kings* (SBLAIL, 8; Atlanta: SBL, 2011), 58–63, connects 31:9–13 with the king’s law in 17:18–20 and possibly with ch. 4, which definitely is a late dtr redaction. For the connection 31:9–13–Deut 4, see also E. Otto, “Das postdeuteronomistische Deuteronomium als integrierender Schlussstein der Tora,” in Markus Witte et al. (eds.), *Die deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerke: redaktions- und religionsgeschichtliche Perspektiven zur “Deuteronomismus”-Diskussion in Tora und Vorderen Propheten* (BZAW, 365; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 84–85 and earlier works. This indicates late redaction, but Blum is skeptical to E. Otto’s statement that it belongs to the Pentateuch-redaction. Most likely, the origin time of these redactions is in exilic or early post-exilic times.

³ See, e.g., James W. Watts, “Public readings and Pentateuchal law” *VT* 45 (1995), 540–557.

⁴ David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 133.

⁵ Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: a Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Pimlico, 1966; repr., 2006).

in Deuteronomy is twofold: ⁶ 1) Learning by heart through a word-by-word recitation and repetition, and 2) an interpretation or explanation of the meaning of the commandments. Her exegesis shows that teaching and “children’s catechesis” (Deut 6:20–5) are meant to take place in the homes; it is supposed to be something that belongs to and takes place in everyday life. So the deuteronomic program is definitely for all “Israel.” The individual families must learn the entire deuteronomic law (and its introduction) by heart *and* know its meaning (explanation).

One is tempted to ask how the individual family fathers and mothers—of a mostly illiterate population—initially learn all this material. How could an illiterate populace learn all this and transmit it word-by-word and even know its meaning (explanation)?

This has led some scholars, e.g., Beate Ego, to suggest that this is an ideal and a program, not a realistic picture of the teaching process in Israel. I think this is more than correct.⁷ The Deuteronomistic picture is an ideal, a utopia, and this is the issue I will deal with in this paper.

TEACHING AND THE BOOK

It should be noticed that with few exceptions, the root **למד** is linked to Moses’ teaching the people on the plains of Moab. The point is that in the majority of occurrences, teaching in Deuteronomy is the message given by Moses. It refers to the origin of what was written down and later on transmitted verbally by reading the textual corpus, the written Law of Moses. Accordingly, the term’s first function is to provide the stipulations of the written “book of the Torah of Moses”—now to be found in Deuteronomy—with its authority and legitimacy as just this: It is “Moses’ teaching.”

As J-P Sonnet has noted, all the protagonists in the Deuteronomic story appear at some point in the role of the scribes. This also applies to the people.⁸

Sonnet shows that Deuteronomy focuses on the Torah “book.” It is this book that is communicated by Moses. This book itself is not singled out in Deuteronomy. On the other hand, the content of this Torah Book of Moses is not accessible elsewhere other than within Deuteronomy.⁹

⁶ Karin Finsterbusch, *Weisung für Israel. Studien zu religiösem Lehren und Lernen im Deuteronomium und in seinem Umfeld*, (FAT, 44; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

⁷ “Zwischen Gabe und Aufgabe,” in B. Ego and H. Merkel (eds.), *Religiöses Lernen in der biblischen, frühjüdischen und frühchristlichen Überlieferung*, (WUNT, 180; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 1–15.

⁸ Jean-Pierre Sonnet, *The Book within the Book: Writing in Deuteronomy*, (Biblical Interpretation, 14; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 262–63.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 259–60. So also E. Blum in Dozeman, Römer, and Schmid, *Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch?*, 58–59.

The phrases **הַדְּבָרִים** (words, etc.) in 6:6 and in 6:20, **וְהַעֲדוֹת וְהַמְשָׁפְטִים** (witnesses and stipulations etc.) which are to be learned and taught, refer to the complete “Torah Book of Moses.”¹⁰ That is, it is the Torah as spoken by Moses on that day, which is then put into writing, and which is now accessible to the readers only through the book of Deuteronomy. The didactic program for teaching the children, and the words to be written **עַל־מְזוֹזוֹת בַּיְתָד** and in the gates, are simply this “book within the book.” It is the same as is to be written on the stones when they enter the land, in 27:3–8. The point of the writer is that the spoken words of Moses are to be *found in the book* as their only source.

The book is not much about performance at all; the notices about teaching, speaking and reading are basically meant to confirm the authority of the written book. The point is this: Be careful to do *all* the words in *this torah!* This is repeated again and again for the people, the king, and Joshua; and is to be written on the doorposts in Deut 6 and 11. So this book stresses the completeness of the Mosaic Torah, and its authority is stressed as the written version of the oral legislation that Moses gave on the other side of the river.

MEMORY AND IDENTITY: UNEQUAL SYMBOLIC CAPITAL

With regard to interpretation of the past in the ancient Near East, there was definitely an unequal distribution of symbolic capital. The so-called Heidelberg Cultural Memory Theory (J. and A. Assmann a.o.) states that collective memory “haftet an seinen Trägern und ist nicht beliebig übertragbar.”¹¹ The social construction of the past is what Jan Assmann calls *identitätskonkret*. “Das bedeutet, dass es ausschliesslich auf den Standpunkt einer wirklichen und lebendigen Gruppe bezogen ist.”

In hierarchic societies, there exists a polarity between specialists in cultural memory and the populace. I regard it as one of the most important questions in the study of cultural memory of the Hebrew bible to investigate the relation between the elite and the

¹⁰ See also E. Blum, “Historiographie oder Dichtung?” in E. Blum, W. Johnstone, and C. Marksches (eds.), *Das Alte Testament - ein Geschichtsbuch? Beiträge des Symposiums “Das Alte Testament und die Kultur der Moderne” anlässlich des 100. Geburtstags Gerhard von Rads (1901-1971), Heidelberg, 18.-21. Oktober 2001* (Altes Testament und Moderne, 10; Münster: LIT, 2005), 83, and C. Hardmeier, “‘Geschichten’ und ‘Geschichte’ in der hebräischen Bibel,” in *ibid.*, 5, footnote 19. He holds that “der unbezweifelbare exegetische Befund in Dtn 1,5 und 31,9 die *ganze* Mose-Rede von Dtn 1,6–30,20 als ‘diese Tora’ ... ausweist.” Blum simply states that the deuteronomistic Deuteronomy speaks about itself in Deut 1:5; 31:9, 11, 12, 24.

¹¹ Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, (2 ed., München: Beck, 1997; repr., 1999), 39. See especially pp. 70–74.

populace with regard to cultural memory and identity formation: How did the elite form their world view and how did they implement it—or intend to do so—in the public?

In his description of the so-called agrarian societies, the anthropologist Ernest Gellner states that in this kind of society, “there are no factors making for linguistic and cultural homogeneity, but there are on the contrary various factors making for diversity.”¹² However, Gellner does point out that sometimes societies such as this experience clerisy-led and inspired campaigns for religious unification. They wished to affirm its monopoly of magic, ritual, and salvation, and to eliminate freelance shamanism.

This corresponds to the view of the society of the Bible presented by M. Brett a number of years ago. Brett, who thinks that literacy even in monarchic Israel was not the prerogative of an elite professional class alone, doubts that biblical historiography was an effective instrument of social control in this ancient society. The ideology of the privileged strata can best be understood as reinforcing the social coherence of the *dominant* classes rather than controlling the subordinate classes.¹³ Brett cites Abercrombie et al., who state that “[h]istorical evidence on feudal societies does not allow us to claim that religion was a dominant ideology which had the consequence of successfully incorporating the peasantry.”¹⁴

I will argue that this fits very well with Deuteronomy. The case of Deut 31:24–29 indicates that the book served this function: “This passage suggests that the Book of the Law was to function as a ‘witness’ against all those who were in authority.”¹⁵ Accordingly, this may be a program meant for the reading elite rather than for the public. If Gellner’s and others’ view of agrarian societies are relevant to the biblical society, one should *not* regard the book as intended for the populace, that is, the subordinate classes, as they were probably not in the focus at all. This is not a book about education for individual families of the people of Israel.

DEUTERONOMY AND UTOPIA

To claim that Deuteronomy presents an ideal program, a utopia, is not breaking news in scholarly research. It has the relevant features: Moses is presented as the greatest of all the prophets (Deut 34:10)

¹² Ernest Gellner, “Nationalism and the Two Forms of Cohesion in Complex Societies,” in *ibid* (ed.), *Culture, Identity and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 14, 27.

¹³ M. G. Brett, “Literacy and Domination: G. A. Herion’s Sociology of History Writing,” *JSOT* 37(1987), 27, the succeeding citation is from the same page.

¹⁴ N. Abercrombie, S. Hill, and B. S. Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1980), 94, 128.

¹⁵ Brett, “Literacy and Domination: G. A. Herion’s Sociology of History Writing,” 29.

and he speaks to the people outside of the promised land, the land on the other side of Jordan, אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֵלֶב וְדָבָשׁ “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Deut 6:3; 11:9; 26:9, 15; 27:3; 31:20; see also Josh 5:6). Most importantly, he struggles with the people to get them follow the commandments and stipulations of the law, promising them the good land if they follow it, but proclaiming exile and extinction if they neglect it.

Scholars have convincingly argued that Deuteronomy is a *polity* for an Israelite community.¹⁶ That is, it creates an ethnic identity for a political entity, a social group; it is “a constitution for an Israelite state.” However, is this really a polity for an *actual* Israelite community, e.g., in the time between Hezekiah and Josiah, as e.g., Robert R. Wilson argues? The methodological problem is that one reads the cultural construct directly into a supposed historical situation. By reading it as a symbolization of actual social power, as a theological power language for immediate political control, one fails to reflect on the possibility that this may be the symbolization of dreams, or wished-for thinking, even by groups without significant political position. It is impossible to move from this cultural construct directly to a supposed social setting.

UTOPIA AND GROUP MENTALITY: VISION AND HOPE

This leads me back to the word “utopia” as a proper term for the presentation of in the book. Utopia in this sense is no definition of genre; rather, it is a scholarly category. It is, as the editors of the book *Utopia/Dystopia* write, a “historically grounded analytical category with which to understand how individuals and groups ... have interpreted their present tense with an eye to the future.”¹⁷ It is both a desire and “a technique used by historical actors for understanding their particular contemporary circumstances.”¹⁸ I will discuss the word “desire” below, but I adopt the view that utopia is a practice by which “historically situated actors seek to reimagine their present and transform it into a plausible future,” and by definition, utopias and their correlate *dystopias* “seek to alter the social order on a fundamental, systemic level.”¹⁹ It is, as K. Mannheim states, a style or mode of thought, “a quest for reality.”²⁰ These

¹⁶ See S. Dean McBride, Jr., “Polity of the Covenant People. The Book of Deuteronomy,” *Int* 41 (1987), 229–44, and more recently, J. T. Strong and S. S. Tuell (eds.), *Constituting the Community. Studies on the Polity of Ancient Israel in Honor of S. Dean McBride Jr.* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2005). See especially R. R. Wilson’s article in the same volume.

¹⁷ M. D. Gordin, H. Tilley, and G. Prakash (eds.), *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁰ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: an Introduction to the Sociology of*

authors see utopia as an impulse drawn directly from the sociological settings. They understand it as a socially located desire for societal change. This is a systematic sentence, not a historical concept of utopia. Its basic element is a *dream* for a better life. It is this element of group mentality, expressed through its hopes and purposes, which is our main concern in this study. Utopia (and ideology) is a way of expressing the group's identity. As Ernst Bloch states, identity is the fundamental supposition of anticipatory consciousness.²¹ Identity becomes a matter of consciousness when it is threatened. Ideology is mostly connected with majority groups, while utopia refers to the thinking of minorities. It is the utopian elements, says Mannheim, i.e. the nature of the dominant wish, which is the organizing principle that molds the way in which we experience time.²²

The editors of the book *Utopia/Dystopia* state that utopia is a "style of imagination," and not simply assessment of "ambitious plans for social engineering that have positive (utopic) or negative (dystopic) results."²³

It is a matter of discussion whether the term is usable for the concept of didacticism in Deuteronomy. There is no doubt that the given concept in Deuteronomy is wishful thinking; it expresses future possibility. But is it utopian? Is there some kind of social critique of the present historical situation, elements of dialectics, estrangement, or contradiction between the possible future presented in the text and the present world?²⁴ And what does our use of the term contribute to our understanding of didacticism in Deuteronomy?

Knowledge (London: Routledge, 1991), 87.

²¹ See Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* (trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight; 3 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), part V, and Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: the Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), 2. Is Deuteronomy a case of utopia in what Jameson calls unsuspected places (p. 3), or is it a deliberate and fully self-conscious utopian program as such (systemic)? Or is it "to be taken as unconscious expressions of something even deeper and more primordial?"

²² Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: an Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, 188: "The innermost structure of the mentality of a group can never be as clearly grasped as when we attempt to understand its conception of time in the light of its hopes, yearnings, and purposes." It is on this basis that a mentality orders not only future but also the past.

²³ Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash, *Utopia/Dystopia*, 5.

²⁴ S.J. Schweitzer, "Utopia and Utopian Literary Theory," in Ehud Ben Zvi (ed.), *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature* (PFES, 92; Helsinki and Göttingen: Finnish Exegetical Society and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 16–20, presents this as the most important element in utopian literature.

A group of researchers has used the concept of utopia (and dystopia) to describe the critical prophecies in the Prophets.²⁵ On the background of the evaluative understanding of ideology and utopia by Mannheim and other social scientists, this is relevant because we can clearly see the process of societal conflict that is presupposed in this systemic use of the terms: The prophetic message appears as a clear critique of the ruling social order, while at the same time the prophets, at least in some cases, are criticized by representatives of the present social order (see, e.g. Amos 7:10–17 and the story in Jer 26). But in Deuteronomy—is it utopia or “merely the ideology of dominant as well as ascendant classes?” to cite Mannheim again.²⁶

The kind of utopia in the book of Deuteronomy is not the subjective idealism and imagination of the Romanticist impossible, nor the politically unrealistic.²⁷ It is the surplus of thinking about the past (to use Bloch’s word), the surplus of the remembrance of the *אֶל-תִּירָא וְאֶל-תַּחַת* (Deut 1:21); the *לֹא-תַעֲרֹצוּן וְלֹא-תִירְאוּן* (1:29; see also 3:22), of the admonitions from God, whom they did not trust (*אֵינְכֶם מֵאֲמִינִים*, 1:32); see Deut 28:59: Now the fear of God is related to “all the words of this Torah that are written *in this book*,” and 31:12–13: The fear of God is connected to the listening to *the reading of the book*.²⁸ What do I mean by *surplus*? It is the vision of a reading community, based on the explication of the Book of the Torah of Moses. The memory of the disobedience of the past is replaced by the vision of a reading community of families reciting and explicating “all these words that I am commanding you today” all the time (Deut 6:4).²⁹ As I have written above, this is the content of the book later to be written down and put into the ark, and the impression is that it refers just to the writings of the book. It is, again with a term from Bloch, the “re-function” of the material of the past, now re-modeled in the concept of the Torah (ch. 4) and the Book (chs. 6 and 31). This notion of a Torah piety based on a reading community centered on the Book meets, so to speak, Bloch’s the “Not-Yet-Conscious” or the *pre-conscious*. It is not simply a reinstallation of the former obedience to the laws of God; it is a new form of piety, a *book religion*. This is the surplus of the

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 184. And p. 185: “We regard as utopian all situationally transcendent ideas . . . which in any way have a transforming effect upon the existing historical-social order.”

²⁷ These two categories are used by Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*. He finds the origin of the second one in Napoleon’s critique of his adversaries.

²⁸ For the reference to Bloch, see the translator’s introduction to vol. 1 (p. xxvii).

²⁹ Ego in Ego and Merkel, *Religiöses Lernen*, 1: “Auswendiglernen des Gebotes, das aber sicherlich mit seiner existenziellen Aneignung einhergeht.”

past, an idea not having been conscious before. How far this goes appears also from the position of the rituals in Deuteronomy. While teaching in Exodus is closely related to a specific practice—the practice of Pesah and Maṣṣot—there is no such connection in Deuteronomy.

Bloch distinguishes between wishful thinking or mere fantasizing on the one hand, and utopia on the other, which has a relation to the real-possible.³⁰ So, it is real but only insofar as the real elements lie in the anticipation itself; there is what he calls a solid subject behind it and an objectively real possibility, that is, the property of the real which contains the future. The pillar of fire, which he uses as a picture of the utopia, shows that the hoped-for Not-Yet-Become-Good is not yet definable. It shows the direction of the process; there is a “dawning,” but it only shows the direction. What the action will bring for the future is still open.

The didacticism in Deuteronomy is a dream, but the dream is strikingly realistic because it is fixed on time/space coordinates (the land they are heading at), and there is what Bloch called “a solid subject,” i.e. the Levite priests, who are charged in Deut 31 to read the Book of the Law to the *whole* Israel—men, women, children and the resident aliens. There is a concrete subject, but the program is visionary (*all* Israel ...). It is made up of social practices known from the literati’s own world: covenant making and book religion. But the reading society of the whole Israel is real only insofar as it is anticipated in the (prescribed) practice of the literati themselves. It is located to the land of the future, separated from the present by the river Jordan. It is the utopian Homeland, the location of the dream of a better life in “the land flowing with milk and honey.” Furthermore, as F. Jameson remarks in his book about utopia, Moses “dies before resettlement to the Promised Land and thus cannot be suspected of any personal complicity in its later organization and institutionalization.”³¹ Moses remains a vision, a figure of the past, elevated above the practical decisions of daily life.

Accordingly, the realism does not mean that the book’s didacticism is a political or social program for teaching children. It is practical, but exceeds the possibilities of the authors’ society. A community centered on the reading of the Torah, the way Deuteronomy’s didacticism presents it, is only possible within the small circle of literati themselves. It is a “forward dawning” (Bloch) of

³⁰ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 144–45. Bloch even uses the biblical picture of the pillar of fire (p. 146). In his Marxist model, the pillar represents the concreteness and functionality in the dream (what he calls the cloud in our dreams, which is driven further forward); the element that sets the dreamers in motion. Thus, there is a vision and a concreteness of process and action in Utopia. There is what he calls an “act-content” of hope.

³¹ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, 86.

the writers' identity and ideals and a "principle of hope," which they see as the only way to avoid the same guilt as their forefathers.

The "realism" of this utopia appears from the appeal to human freedom (to choose blessing and life, chs. 27–28), and from the appeal to join the covenant with God, who already swore to the fathers that he would give them the Land.³² As an admonition to join the covenant with God, it is open-ended and we do not know what the people (or the listeners) will do; it is all linked to their relationship to the Book of the Torah of Moses. The historical memory is presented in chs. 1–3 as a penitential confession; and the remedy to avoid a similar fate is to adhere to the Torah of God, ch. 4. Bloch sees fear, not memory, as the opposite to utopia. I will discuss the notion of fear below, but this corresponds to this redactional stage of Deuteronomy: The people's fear of the past corresponds to the admonition to work for the realization of the utopia of the future, the Torah piety in the Homeland. The simplicity which Jameson finds in modern utopias appears also here. Jameson writes about the utopian creation:³³

But such creation must be motivated: it must respond to specific dilemmas and offer to solve fundamental social problems to which the Utopian believes himself to hold the key. The Utopian vocation can be identified by this certainty, and by the persistent and obsessive search for a simple, a single-shot solution to all our ills. And this must be a solution so obvious and self-explanatory that every reasonable person will grasp it ... The view that opens out onto history from a particular social situation must encourage such oversimplifications; the miseries and injustices thus visible must seem to shape and organize themselves around one specific ill or wrong. For the Utopian remedy must at first be a fundamentally negative one, and stand as a clarion call to remove and to extirpate this specific root of all evil from which all the others spring.

There is a clear distinction between (religious) friend and enemy in Deuteronomy, a distinction that at least in its consequences (Deut

³² Bloch combines utopian aspirations with freedom movements; they are intrinsically linked together. He comments on the Thomas More concept of "Utopia" (p. 15): "But to limit the utopian to the Thomas More variety, or simply to orientate it in that direction, would be like trying to reduce electricity to the amber from which it gets its Greek name and in which it was first noticed. Indeed, the utopian coincides so little with the novel of an ideal state that the whole totality of philosophy becomes necessary ... to do justice to the content of that designated by utopia." Bloch thus declares that the *content* designated by "Utopia" is much wider than the *word* Utopia, coined by Thomas More, and can certainly not be restricted to a novel of an ideal state. Instead, it needs a whole philosophy.

³³ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, 11–12.

7:1–6) shows no sign of political adjustments to practical relations between neighbors. The root of all the ills that hit the people is easily definable and the remedy is easy: Just learn the Book of the Torah, ponder on it and do not turn away from it! The description of the Canaanites and the commandments about how to interact with—or rather destroy—their culture and society is utopian and filled with clichés; it does not correspond to any realistic picture of neighbor relations.

So, we may describe the utopia of Deuteronomy as “the interplay between life, with its unpredictability, and the social systems we construct upon this ever-changing world” (the words of the editors of *Utopia/Dystopia*).³⁴ The unpredictability is the reactions of “the real Israel” of the past and present, the uncertainty about their decisions between trust and distrust. The social system is the vision of a society of scribes that ponder on the word of Torah and teach their family about it.

Summing up thus far: How relevant is the use of Bloch’s “forward dawning” and “Not-Yet-Conscious/Not-Yet-Become” to the didacticism of Deuteronomy? Clearly, his description of the pre-conscious through the three stages of incubation, inspiration/genius, and explication, does not fit this. But something new is coming up in Deuteronomy, which may be labeled as Bloch’s “Not-Yet-Conscious,” which also is similar to his “Not-Yet-Become.” There is something that was not already there in the past. That is the Book of the Torah of Moses. The interest shifts from the memory of the events at the Mountain, into the book now written down by Moses and put into the ark. It is a shift from ritual religion to book religion. The words of Bloch also fit the didactic vision of Deuteronomy:³⁵

The real venturing beyond never goes into the mere vacuum of an In-Front-of-Us, merely fantastically, merely visualizing abstractions. It grasps the New as something that is mediated in what exists and is in motion, although to be revealed the New *demands the most extreme effort of will.*

In Deuteronomy, there is something allegorical in the model of the life in the land on the other side of the river: The land floats with milk and honey, the festival rituals shall take place in a temple which is never described, and the rituals themselves seem to be more abstract representations.

That this is a reasonable analysis of Deuteronomy appears from the fact that the book is no eschatological book like the “classical” prophets; it draws a plausible picture of the future as something that can come to pass when they enter the borders of the land; all the institutions and laws are given for the life in the land,

³⁴ Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash, *Utopia/Dystopia*, 6.

³⁵ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 10–11.

and even when the land appears as a “paradise,” it is not altogether out of this world. But it is plausible only to the scribes, not to the population as a whole. It also provides the typical categories of space and time. The following passage from the introduction to *Utopia/Dystopia* illustrates the point:³⁶

The concept of utopian thinking reflects the opposite discovery of the political struggle, namely that certain oppressed groups are intellectually so strongly interested in the destruction and transformation of a given condition of the society that they unwittingly see only those elements in the situation which tend to negate it. Their thinking is incapable of correctly diagnosing an existing condition of society. They are not at all concerned with what really exists; rather in their thinking they already seek to change the situation that exists. Their thought is never a diagnosis of the situation; it can be used only as a direction for action.

Far from being a different concept from Bloch’s, this is just another side of his notion of Utopia. It is still connected to the practical and “realistic,” but has a realism that transcends the present. This would explain the completely unrealistic view of the whole people of Israel as a community of scribes; not only all the individual families, but also the king is depicted as a scribe, reading from a copy of “this law” kept by the Levite priests. Some of these features are not quite unparalleled in Oriental literature.

BETWEEN PRACTICE AND DREAM

In order to describe the understanding of utopia/hope that I apply to the didactical program of Deuteronomy as something that falls between practice and dream (roughly speaking), I move from the sociology of knowledge to the French existentialist Gabriel Marcel. A comparison with the Bible should be used with caution. There is a danger of being anachronistic at this point because modern existentialist hope may not be directly comparable with the pre-modern expressions of hope. Nevertheless, modern philosophy of hope may be suggestive of human sentiment, attitude, and feeling of hope even in pre-modern time.

Marcel writes:

Hope is not a kind of listless waiting; it underpins action or it runs before it, but it becomes degraded and lost once the action is spent. Hope seems to me, as it were, the prolongation into the unknown of an activity which is central—that is to say, rooted in being. Hence it has affinities, not with desire, but

³⁶ Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash, *Utopia/Dystopia*, 4.

with the will. The will implies the same refusal to calculate possibilities, or at any rate it suspends this calculation.³⁷

Hope lacks the concreteness implied in notions like wish, desire, appropriation, and covetousness. In a lecture from 1963, Marcel states that hope is indefatigable; it is directed towards Eternity; it is in a dimension of perpetual novelty. Marcel regards hope and desire as opposites. Desire implies a state of tension between a certain actual situation and the idea of an imagined satisfaction. It belongs to the domain of possession. The essential difference between desire and hope, according to Marcel, lies in their relation to *time*. Desire appears as essentially impatient; it rejects time. Objections are avoided because they are occasions for postponement, just what desire does not want. Hope, however, is what he calls “active waiting.” The notion of active waiting is “generative of action,” but it is action not in order to obtain or take into possession (an obsession), rather, it is one of community-creating. By this, he refers to examples like the personalities in prisoner of war camps, who are not driven into despair but who organize a cultural life of the camps and thus constitute a communion. Thus, Marcel explains, a “we” is constituted, which is not simply the functional we of the crew, but rather an interiorized, spiritualized expression of it.

In his presentation of hope, there is a vision of being released from captivity, but their activity is not directed towards this; it is directed towards the persons in the camp, and there is hope because there are people. It is an ontological quality linked to the notion of life itself. Hope is, according to Marcel, filled with the dimension of not knowing; it is the willingness to exclude consideration of cases that say that “it is impossible.” This he says with reference to a “hope against all hope that a person whom I love will recover from a disease which is said to be incurable.”³⁸ It is based on the belief that reality in its inward depth cannot be hostile to what one asserts as in itself a good, says Marcel. Hope is that I assert that the good order of reality will be re-established. This notion of hope brings forth the image of a river that cannot be stopped by a ditch; it always finds new ways.

Instead of talking about a didactical program in Deuteronomy, I think this understanding of hope is relevant to the book’s vision of didacticism and the reading of the book.

³⁷ Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism* (New York: Citadel Press, 1956), 33. I wish to thank my colleague Tone Sævi (Pedagogy Dept.) for drawing my attention to this work.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

THE BOOK AND THE ROLE OF LITERACY

My analysis of utopia implies that one should not read the Deuteronomic program as a concrete plan to make this utopia a reality; this idea could have developed over time as the books became more authoritative and scribes were in a position to try to implement some sort of educational system to make its contents more widely known.

One can compare the utopian aspect of Deuteronomy with the “found book” that appeared during a renovation of the temple in 2 Kings 22–23. This text is part of a genre to authorize change and give divine authorization to new ideas.³⁹ This story may also be analyzed as a utopian text, with the same perspective as Deuteronomy. It is commonly argued that there are a number of thematic correspondences.

In 2 Kings 22–23 a prophet is asked to inquire about the words in the book and explain it, just as Moses is asked by the people, according to Deuteronomy, to stand between God and themselves as the interpreter of the words of God. We have the same threat of chaos and extinction, and the king read the commandments, decrees, and statutes of the covenant in the presence of the whole population. On behalf of the people, the king made a covenant “to follow Yahweh, keeping his commandments, his decrees, and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book” (23:3).

Even when this is about the king, the whole people is also included, as he read in their hearing *אֶת־כָּל־דִּבְרֵי סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית* “all the words of the book of the covenant;” and it is the people who are blamed for having left Yahweh.

The relevant verses in the Kings’ story are, according to modern source criticism, exilic interpretations.⁴⁰ Likewise, it is reasonably clear that the so-called didactical passages in Deut 6 represent exilic (at least) parts of the book.⁴¹ I surmise that both texts—the (final version of) Deuteronomy including the didactical passages in chs. 6 and 11, and ch. 31, and the story of the reform of the cult in 2 Kgs 22–23—were shaped by the elites as utopian texts, as “sites of memory” where they could experience alternate “realities,” or rather the utopian past as a desire for the future, created by scribes that sought to “re-imagine the present and transform it into a plausible future.”

³⁹ See Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction*.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 161–62.

⁴¹ See above and, for instance, T. Veijola, *Moses Erben: Studien zum Dekalog, zum Deuteronomismus und zum Schriftgelehrtentum*, (BWANT, 149; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000), 87–89.

Deuteronomy and the story in 2 Kings 22–23 resemble each other in their combination of the past and the utopian, wished-for future. In these texts, the literate elite can visit the texts as “memorial sites” so as to experience alternate “realities.”⁴² So, the texts can be viewed as examples of cultural or social memory. Ehud Ben Zvi deals with this theme in an article about the memory of Abraham in late Persian and Early Hellenistic period Yehud.⁴³ Following him, Deuteronomy appears as a site of memory or a mental, utopian map for the ideal future. It exists only in the minds of those who read the authoritative text. Reading these texts again and again creates multiple images of a shared, construed past, which function as a node or a lens for interpreting the present and as a mental refuge for a literate elite that searches for an alternative world. Through reading these texts, the literati built up a utopian image of “whole Israel”—its identity, boundaries, and religious constitution as faithful scribes.

In modern anthropology, Jennifer Wenzel has investigated the role of literacy and utopia as “conditions of imaginability,” as it appeared in the millennial dreaming among the Xhosa people of Southern Africa in the 19th cent. C.E.⁴⁴ She examines two competing millennial dreams: the one linked to Christian evangelization (and colonialism), and the second linked to local prophecies of the return of the ancestors if the people kill their cattle and abstain from agriculture. The hopes in play in this competition are linked to ideas of change: regeneration of the old world, restoration, renovation, and conversion. It is worth noting that the central setting of the “change” in the Bible’s account of Josiah’s reform (2 Kgs 22–23) is just this: a process of renovation.

The most intriguing aspect in Wenzel’s study is the role of literacy as prophecy in this competition. Religious conversion, she argues, was figured as a process of transformation into literacy, which was one of the crucial “engines” in this competition of utopias. There was a “transformative and pacifying effect (in the notorious colonial sense) of ‘the Word.’” Literacy, then, can be imagined as the afterlife of orality. In a reconfiguration of Walter Ong’s theory of the relation between orality and literacy, she concludes that the transition to literacy and the understanding of the book and the literary record (i.e. in court) are secondhand speech:⁴⁵

⁴² This use of “site of memory” comes from P. Nora (ed.), *Les Lieux de mémoire*, 7 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1992).

⁴³ Ehud Ben Zvi, “The Memory of Abraham in the Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Yehud/Judah,” in P. Carstens and Niels-Peter Lemche (eds.), *The Reception and Remembrance of Abraham* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2011), 13–60.

⁴⁴ “Literacy and Futurity,” in Gordin, Tilley, and Prakash, *Utopia/Dystopia*, 45–72.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

In “speaking” another’s words, the book is a medium, as the prophet is the inspired bearer of suprahuman utterance. In contemporary literary theory, the author may be figured more as dead ... than as divine; however, theorizing literacy in terms of prophecy and what I call the afterlives of textuality is particularly evocative in the context of killing cattle, where the dissemination of textuality ... are processes enmeshed within the project of colonial transformation against which the Xhosa prophecies were articulated.

Wenzel underscores that this view of literacy depends upon thinking about authorship in terms of *prophecy*; the book is the medium for the divinity that speaks through the words.

Interestingly, the Book of the Torah of Moses is presented in Deut 31 as secondhand speech. It is also claimed to be the superior prophecy. Hence, the material studied by Wenzel suggests that the use of the utopia theory is relevant as an analytical tool for a study of Deuteronomy and 2 Kings 22–23.

Let me also mention that in the biblical texts we have a similar competition between two different kinds of utopia among the Xhosa (rather than between Utopia and Dystopia): between the utopia of a wide and good land with the entire population reading the Book of the Torah of Moses, and the utopia of the chaos of people who opt for the opposite (see especially Deut 27 and 28). In the latter case, the Book of the Torah of Moses becomes a witness against them.

This understanding of utopia/hope, linked to a Torah piety centered on the Book, develops throughout younger parts of the Hebrew Bible. There are similarities between the hope or utopia described here and the picture of hope and desire in Psalm 119. The psalm is an individual lament, which contrasts chaos and trouble with a life filled with order and joy of the Torah. It seems clear that the psalm refers to the Torah as a sacred text; it is the authoritative, written revelation of God. The point of the psalm is that “a blessed, spotless life can be found only by immersing oneself in *torah*, by devoting oneself completely to it.”⁴⁶ There is no social or political program in it; it is simply the state of mind, the wished-for thinking about the virtue of being immersed in the Torah of God (possibly the Pentateuch) as a totality in its monolithic presence. There are large differences between Psalm 119 and Deuteronomy—it lacks references to the history of Israel, the exodus, the covenant or the temple—but its main difference is the individual and personal, not the national approach. In both cases however, we may regard this as a statement of identity through description of a wished-for life.

⁴⁶ See D. N. Freedman, J. C. Geoghegan, and A. Welch, *Psalm 119: The Exaltation of Torah* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 89.

It is well known that the didacticism of Deuteronomy has parallels in extra-biblical literature, but it is unclear how much the notion of utopia is relevant in relevant texts.⁴⁷ The so-called *naru* literature “depicts the king always in the same role: not as conqueror, administrator, or provider of social justice but as religious leader and teacher of wisdom.”⁴⁸ The *Naru* (stele-) literature was fictional accounts of the deeds of famous kings to instruct present and future generations written by scribes probably on their own initiative (the Cuthan Legend, Letter of Samsuiluna to Enlil-nadin-sumi). There seems to be some sort of didacticism in this literature, especially the one dealing with the so-called “Unheilskönige.”

DEUTERONOMY AND THE EXODUS STORY

Let me compare Deuteronomy with the Exodus story, so as to show how the memorial devices in the two books are very different.

The most important difference is between Deut 6:6–25 and 11:18–20 on the one hand, and Exod 12:24–27 and 13:7–10 on the other. This is the list of differences significant to this study:

- The Exodus text refers to a ritual to be performed (the זְבַח־פֶּסַח and the מִצְוֹת). In Deuteronomy, the words of Moses (and Yahweh) are formed as commandments and laws.
- In Exod 12:22, the blood is to be applied to the door-posts and the lintel; in Deut 6:9 and 11:20, they shall write on the same door-posts and their gates “these” words of Moses (6:6; 11:18) which they also have to put on their hearts and soul, and make into a sign on their hand and there forehead.
- In Exod 12, they have to stay inside the house, not going through the door; in Deuteronomy, it is presupposed that they walk through the doors, speaking the words inside and outside the homes.
- In Deuteronomy, the words of Moses have to be put as a sign on the hand and between the eyes; in Exod 13:9, it is unclear what serves as a sign on the hand and a זִכָּרוֹן to be put between the eyes; the back-reference is unclear. It seems to be the Maṣṣot ritual as a whole.
- In Exod 12:26, the children ask about the practice (ritual) and get a reference to God’s acts; Exod 13:8–9 is similar, except that it has an addition about the ritual (probably) as a sign so as

⁴⁷ G. Claeys and L. Tower Sargent (idem, [eds.], *The Utopia Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1999) have included a number of examples from Antiquity dealing with the Golden Age and earthly Paradises under the aspect of Utopia. It remains to see if some of them also include the didactical aspect.

⁴⁸ M. Heinz and M. H. Feldman (eds.), *Representations of Political Power: Case Histories from Times of Change and Dissolving Order in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 142.

to make the torah be on their mouth. In Deuteronomy, the children ask for the עֲדָת and הַקִּיּוֹם etc. (commandments and stipulations) that are presented in the teaching of Moses.

It is clear that Deuteronomy differs radically from Exodus in the fact that its only focus is the words—even the written words, not ritual and practice. Deuteronomy shows no signs of interest in an illiterate community. The final notice about the recitation of the book every seven years does not suffice to teach an illiterate populace the necessities for teaching their own children or even for writing on the walls of their homes.

In Deut 6, the didactical dialogue is about words, and they are somehow related to literacy. There is no written text referred to in Exodus as material for education and memorization until we come to Exod 24:12—with the exception of 17:14. The most immediate explanation for this difference is the tendency in the Pentateuch to connect writing with the laws.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: LITERACY AND RELIGION

The anthropologist Jack Goody distinguishes between oral performance in literate cultures, i.e. word-for-word memorizing and recall, and what he calls the more flexible traditions in purely oral, i.e. pre-literate cultures.⁴⁹ It seems clear that the Deuteronomic view of transmission and teaching falls perfectly into the oral-written group of Goody.⁵⁰

According to Goody, in all transmission of verbal elements in *oral* culture, there is a directness of relationship between symbol and referent. There can be no reference to “dictionary definitions,” says Goody; indeed, the meaning of each word is ratified in a succession of concrete situations: What the individual members remember tends to be what is of critical importance in his experience of the main social relationships.

⁴⁹ Jack Goody, *The Power of the Written Tradition* (Washington & London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000), 26–40. (“Memory in Oral Tradition,” originally from 1989 and 1998).

⁵⁰ Since the 1960s, a central figure in this research has been Jack Goody, whose results admittedly have been challenged and discussed by a number of scholars. However, keeping the serious modifications in mind, it is still worth asking if Goody’s model is apt for the biblical examples treated in this paper. To my knowledge, a final evaluation appeared in David R. Olson and Michael Cole (eds.), *Technology, Literacy, and the Evolution of Society: Implications of the Work of Jack Goody* (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), especially by R. Finnegan (“Relocating the ‘oral’”) and M. & J. Cole (“Rethinking the Goody Myth”). In biblical studies, M. Botha has reviewed a number of anthropological studies in literacy-orality and mental differences (Botha, “Cognition, Orality-Literacy, and Approaches to First-Century Writings,” in J. A. Draper [ed.], *Orality, Literacy, and Colonialism in Antiquity*, [SemeiaSt, 47; Atlanta: SBL, 2004], 37–64).

Most important to our subject is his conclusion about religion. Religious systems of societies without writing lack the concept of religion, and a society with heavy oral residue will lack the experience of “religious conversion” as a function of the boundaries that the written word creates, or rather defines.⁵¹

It is a matter of discussion whether this description of illiterate or heavily oral societies fits the society in which these biblical books were written. It goes without saying that the written books reflect a literate society.⁵²

Deuteronomy comes closest to what Goody calls the concept of *religious conversion* in terms of a religious delimitation of Israelite worship against “the others.” In the Exodus story prior to the Sinai texts, religious and ethnic borders do appear, but they are less vehement than in Deuteronomy, and definitely less theoretically defined. They also lack the notional character that is linked to the idea in Deuteronomy, which circles around important abstract terms like הַבְּרִית (“covenant”) and הַחֶסֶד (“grace”). In the Exodus narrative that leads up to and makes the foundation of the Pesach-Maṣṣot rituals, such terms appear only in the Priestly text (Exod 2:23–25), not in the non-Priestly text including the probably late redactions to which the didactic passages in Exod 12–13 belong. The so-called commemorative master-narrative of national cultural memory focuses on the group’s social identity.⁵³ Cultural memory celebrates the *birth* of nations rather than the more abstract notion of their origins to articulate a sense of historical discontinuity. In the historical summaries of Deuteronomy however, there is only one really distinct and epoch-making event, the one of the breaking of the covenant and the making of the stone tablets in chs. 9–10, and eventually the writing down of the Book of Torah in ch. 31. Not even the prescription of the Pesach in ch. 16 points out the escape from Egypt as a unique and special event. This is not meant for the populace; this is meant for internal scribal concern.

⁵¹ Jack Goody (ed.), *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 30–31.

⁵² J. Schaper, “The living word engraved in stone,” in L. T. Stuckenbruck, S. C. Barton, and B. G. Wold (eds.), *Memory in the Bible and Antiquity. The Fifth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium (Durham, September 2004)* (WUNT, 212; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 9–23.

⁵³ Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 7, 9.