

David M. Carr

Writing That Dares Not Speak Its Name

Writing About Orality and Inscribed Amulet Practice in Ancient Israelite Educational Texts¹

Dedicated to Michael V. Fox

Learning in ancient Israel, as in most societies of its time, was first and foremost a process of internalization of traditional teaching, teaching that was hallowed by its antiquity and its authority. A main goal of such teaching was verbatim memorization such that the student was to take *into himself* (or sometimes herself) the most cherished wisdom of earlier generations.² Sometimes such teaching used written texts to facilitate such memorization of ancient wisdom, but very few explicitly refer to writing of any kind. This essay focuses on two sets of biblical texts, one in Proverbs and the other in Deuteronomy, that use the trope of “writing” to talk about the learning process, and even these textual references turn out to refer to a type of writing that has little to do with education – writing on jewelry and entryways.

1 Oral Authority in Ancient Educational Writings

Both biblical and other Near Eastern teaching texts, though clearly *written* texts, inclined toward metaphors associated with *orality* when describing the learning toward which they were aimed: “ear,” “heart,” “tongue,” etc. Take, for example, the following exhortation toward learning that occurs toward the outset of the ancient Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope:

¹ The title is a play on a phrase “love that dare not speak its name” that concludes a poem, “Two Loves,” by Lord Alfred Douglas published in 1894 and used in the trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895. I write with gratitude for the substantial stimulation and input by both Bible and Germanist colleagues at the discussion of an earlier draft of this paper in the Heidelberg conference “Praktiken schriftlicher Kommunikation.”

I dedicate this essay connecting wisdom and Torah to Michael V. Fox, who taught me so much about Song of Songs and wisdom writings. Michael Fox is, in my view, one of the most original and interesting scholars in study of Hebrew Bible, and he has been a wise and kind colleague to me and many others.

² Carr 2005.

Amenemope 3:9 Give your ears, hear the sayings,
 10 Give your heart to understand them;
 11 It profits to put them in your heart,
 12 Woe to him who neglects them!
 13 Let them rest in the casket of your belly,
 14 May they be bolted in your heart;
 15 When there rises a whirlwind of words,
 16 They'll be a mooring post for your tongue.
 17 If you make your life with these in your heart,
 18 You will find it a success.³

Thirty sections later, the same exhortation concludes with an exhortation that echoes the one with which it began, telling its reader:

Amenemope 27:13 Be filled with them, put them in your heart,
 14 And become a man who expounds them,
 15 One who expounds as a teacher.⁴

Nowhere do these exhortations in Amenemope more precisely specify exactly what “sayings” are meant to be “put on the heart.” Instead, the passages just quoted undergird the overall teaching represented by the written text by calling on its reader, the “son/student,” to “give ear,” “hear” and place its teaching on his “heart.” Standing at the outset and end of the text, these instructions urge upon its readers a certain kind of appropriation: internalization as part of adoption of the reading stance of “student.”

The Instruction of Amenemope is a good illustration of the more general ancient Near Eastern emphasis on “hearing” and placing on the “heart” in educational literature. Nevertheless, this specific Egyptian text also happens to have served as a model for a text inside the Bible that features similar tropes of orality and memorization. The “words of the wise” found in Prov 22:17–23:11 are generally recognized by biblical scholars to be (roughly) modelled on Amenemope, and these words begin with a prologue much like the one from Amenemope quoted above:⁵

Prov 22:17 Extend your ear and hear
 the words of the wise
 and set your heart to my knowledge.
 18 For it will be pleasant if you observe them in your belly
 if they are arranged together on your lips
 19 so that your trust will be in Yahweh
 I have made them known to you today, even you.
 20 Have I not written for you thirty things
 of counsel and knowledge?

³ Lichtheim 1976, 149.

⁴ Lichtheim 1976, 162.

⁵ Translations of the Hebrew in this essay are those of the author.

- 21 To make known to you sayings of truth
so that you may return words, truth, to the one who sent you?

These words in Prov 22:17–21 echo some of the central terms, associated with orality, seen above in Amenemope 3:9–18: “extend your ear,” “hear,” “tongue,” “belly.” The only reference to writing comes in Prov 22:20, where the implied author of the text rhetorically asks the reader “Have I not written for you thirty things of counsel and knowledge?” (הלֹא כִתַּבְתִּי לְךָ שְׁלוּשִׁים/שְׁלִישִׁים בְּמוֹעֵצַת וְדַעַת). Most scholars agree that this reference to “thirty things” is an implicit reference to the thirty written sections of the Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope, so that Prov 22:20 is not only a reference to the writing of the “words of the wise,” but also a reference to the dependence of this writing on another, non-biblical one, the Instruction of Amenemope.⁶

This reference to writing in Prov 22:20, however, is relatively uncommon in biblical texts explicitly associated with learning. For example, Proverbs, the Bible’s most prominent wisdom text, begins with a series of ten instructional speeches in chapters 1–9, each of which starts with a call to internalization/memorization of teaching:

- Prov 1:8 Hear my son, the discipline of your father; do not push away the instruction of your mother.
- 2:1–2 My son if you take my words, and store up my commands inside you, to attune your ear to wisdom and extend your heart to understanding ...
- 3:1 My son do not forget my instruction, and store my commands in your heart.
- 3:21 My son do not let them escape from your eyes, store insight and discretion.
- 4:1 Listen, sons, to the discipline of father, and pay attention in order to know insight.
- 4:10a Listen my son and take my sayings.
- 4:20 Pay attention, my son, to my words, to my words incline your ear.
- 5:1 My son, to my wisdom pay attention, to my understanding incline your ear.
- 6:20 Store up, my son, the command of your father, and do not push away the instruction of your mother.
- 7:1 My son, keep my words, and store my commands with you.

Though this is a written text, and the exhortations each open a separate section of the ten-part *writing*, tropes associated with orality predominate: שָׁמַע (“hear”), לְהַקְשִׁיב לַחֲכָמָה אֲזַנְךָ (“to attune your ear to wisdom” 2:2), הִטְאֲזַנְךָ (“incline your ear” 4:20; 5:1), etc.

Furthermore, this purportedly oral teaching is depicted, in Proverbs and other ancient wisdom writings, as occurring within the context of a family. Every one of the introductory exhortations quoted above interpellates the reader as a learning

⁶ It should be noted that scholars have not succeeded in reaching a consensus on how or whether Prov 22:17ff. can itself be divided into thirty sections. For an overview of this and other issues surrounding the probable dependence of Prov 22:17ff. on Amenemope, see Emerton 2001.

“son” (בן) while the speaking “I” is a teaching “father.”⁷ Yet, this textual “father” twice urges the son to attend to the “mother’s” instruction (תורה; 1:8; 6:20). This is distinctive. Other ancient Hamito-Semitic teaching texts speak of teacher and student as “father” and “son,” without presuming that this father-son relationship is a literal, biological one. Instead, the teaching “father” in these non-biblical instructions could be a non-relative teacher. The mention of a teaching “mother” in Prov 1:8 and 6:20, however, places this textualized teaching relationship of Proverbs more explicitly in the context of an envisioned family, a family where the “son” must attend to the wisdom of both parents.⁸

Prov 1–9, thus, is a writing that stages an interaction between the parents of the past and the “son” of the future, presenting itself as the oral instruction/command/discipline/words/sayings that a “father” addresses to the reading “son.” This “son” is to “hear” the “father’s” instruction. If he does, the “father” promises the “son” that these teachings will be a “headdress of grace on your head, and pendants for your neck” (1:9), “they will give you length of days” (3:2; see also 4:10), “they will invigorate your life strength” (3:22), “[wisdom] will guard you” (4:6), “you will find knowledge of God” (2:5), etc. Such promises of benefits are also typical of ancient Near Eastern teaching texts, a crucial way that such texts motivated their readers to take their contents seriously.

In sum, Amenemope, the “words of the wise” in Prov 22:17ff. (modelled on Amenemope), and the series of ten instructional speeches in Prov 1–9 rarely speak of *writing*, and instead represent a predominantly *oral*, family-oriented teaching situation, using the medium of writing to convey a purportedly oral speech of a “father” to a reading “son,” who will enjoy many benefits if he “listens” to the teaching in the text. These ancient educational texts, in Egypt and Israel, draw on the authority channeled orally through familial relationships, even as they are teachings conveyed on written media. As such, these written texts reflect a world dominated by structures of oral authority.

2 Writing and Regulation of Learning in Proverbs 3:1–3; 6:20–22 and 7:1–3

Prov 1–9, however, *does* include some reflections of writing in the process of exhorting its reading student to absorb its wisdom. These reflections of writing in Proverbs, however, indirectly reveal a predominantly oral world as well. For, as we

⁷ The concept of interpellation here from Althusser 1970 available in accessible English form in Althusser 1971.

⁸ For discussion of mothers’ teaching and Prov 1:8, see Fox 2000, 82f.

will see, these references to writing in Prov 1–9 reflect the semi-magical qualities that written copies of texts are often seem to have in oral-primary societies.

The third of the ten speeches, Prov 3:1–20, is the first to intimate some kind of connection to writing, albeit a tenuous one. After an initial exhortation to learning (“my son do not forget my instruction, and store my commands in your heart” 3:1) and promise of benefits (“they will give you length of days, and years of life and wellbeing” 3:2), this introductory exhortation goes on to use apparel imagery to stress the constancy with which the son/student should keep the teaching with him: “do not let loyalty and truth abandon you, bind them on your neck” (3:3a).⁹

There is some question about *what* the student is supposed to bind to his neck here. On the surface, many assume that he is supposed to bind “loyalty and truth” to his neck, but Michael Fox (among others) has argued persuasively that this couplet is urging the student to bind his father’s instructions and command (3:1) to his neck. This then is a way to have loyalty and truth not “abandon” him, as was stressed in the first part of the couplet. In favor of this reading is the fact that the first speech of Prov 1 spoke of the father’s discipline and mother’s instruction as a “headdress of grace on your head, and pendants for your neck” (1:9) and the one following Prov 3:1–20 promises that insight and discretion will be “a charm for your neck” (3:22). In sum, Prov 3:3a is an initial call for the student to bind – in some way – his father’s *teachings* to his neck.

We hear no more in Prov 3 about what this “binding to your neck” means, but the introductory exhortation in Prov 6:20–22 returns to this theme, after an initial exhortation to “store up, my son, the command of your father, and do not push away the instruction of your mother” (6:20). The teaching “I” of the text then implicitly refers to written textual copies of texts, calling on the son/student to: “bind them [your father’s commandment and mother’s instruction] on your heart always, tie them on your neck” (6:21). This is followed by promises of benefits: “when you walk [your father’s commandment and mother’s instruction] will lead you, when you lie down she will guard you, and when you awaken, she will converse with you” (6:22). The sudden interruption of a protecting “she” in these promises of benefits indicates that wisdom, envisioned as a female figure, is being invoked as a protective presence for the student. Through “binding” the father’s and mother’s teaching on his heart, and on his neck, the student will gain wisdom’s constant protection, both when awake (“when you walk”) and asleep (“when you lie

⁹ Most versions go on to include another command to “write them on the tablet of your heart” (3:3b), but this exhortation is missing in good Old Greek witnesses (B and S). Fox 2000, 377 argues that the Greek witnesses are an error from homeoteleuton (jumping from ך in גרגריותיך to the ך in לבך), while some others (e.g. McKane 1970, 36; Clifford 1999, 50) see the plus in non-Old Greek traditions as a harmonization with the similar saying in Prov 7:3. Fox believes the plus is necessary to complete the parallelism, but this line could also function as the third line of a triplet beginning at the outset of Prov 7:3. Given the trend toward harmonization in Proverbs and other ancient educational traditions, the non-harmonized Old Greek reading is likely the earlier one.

down”). The rest of the introductory exhortation then develops this theme of protection, describing the parental commandment and instruction as a “light,” and “reproofs of discipline” a “road to life,” that will preserve the son/student from a disastrous liaison with an adulterous woman (6:23–24). The son/student thematized here as the recipient of the text is thus asked to wear it in order to get the constant – day and night – protection of female wisdom, a female figure who then stands as a protective counterpart to the threatening “strange woman/adulterous” from whom the son/student is to steer clear.

There is some disagreement among exegetes about how literally to interpret these exhortations in Prov 6:21–22; 3:3 and elsewhere (especially 7:2–3). Some, building on possible Egyptian practices of students wearing texts around their necks, see Prov 6:21–22 as envisioning a student wearing a copy of a teaching text around his neck, with it always at hand to guide his behavior.¹⁰ There is now doubt, however, about the existence of the Egyptian practices cited in comparison to these Proverbs texts, and indicators within Prov 6:20–22 suggest that the “wearing” pictured here is a metaphorical link to the well-documented Ancient Near Eastern practice of wearing inscribed jewelry – amulets, necklaces, pendants – to secure blessing for the wearer and ward off evil.¹¹

Excursus: Ancient Near Eastern Inscribed Jewelry – Character and Purpose

A detour is required at this point to describe these ancient Near Eastern practices surrounding inscribed jewelry, since they will be important throughout the balance of this essay.¹² Inscribed jewelry was one of the most widely distributed forms of written textuality in the ancient world, probably more common than the possession of literary-theological texts of the sort now found in the Bible. Most people in ancient Israel and Judah, as in the rest of the ancient Near East, were non-literate, with most use of written texts confined to a royal-priestly-military minority and specific social contexts of recording, education, and communication among elites. Writing has a numinous quality within such oral-primary contexts that is difficult to appreciate in the contemporary writing-saturated world. Within oral-primary contexts a written text represents something semi-magical, an inanimate object that could “speak,” at least for the minority who have/had the literacy to read it.

The practice of wearing inscribed jewelry built on that phenomenon, but linked more particularly to what is sometimes termed personal piety: sets of small-scale religious practices aimed at buttressing an individual’s link to a patron deity and securing that deity’s protection from evil and/or provision of goods for daily life. Multiple exemplars of such ancient inscribed jewelry show a consistent focus on the relationship between the wearer and a particular deity. An inscribed amulet from Tyre simply says: “protect, keep.”¹³ A more extensive inscription on a medallion from 500 BCE says: “Protect and keep the Eshmunyatton, son of Immay, prince Eshmun, day and night and

¹⁰ E.g. Couroyer 1983.

¹¹ See the discussion in Fox 2000, 146.

¹² The bulk of what follows draws on the excellent recent essay on the topic, Berlejung 2012, which explicitly builds on and modifies the classic older treatment by Othmar Keel 1981, while adding abundant new data and reflections.

¹³ Lemaire 2008, 526.

in all times.”¹⁴ By wearing this medallion round the clock, the wearer seeks the “day and night” protection asked for on its inscription. Or take an Aramaic inscription from the early seventh century, that says, “that you/she bring(s) wellbeing, that you/she drive(s) away catastrophe.” Together, these and other inscribed, wearable artifacts share a frequent focus on “protection” and “keeping.” And these themes also occur in the Ketef Hinnom silver amulets found in Jerusalem. A recent edition has the first reading:

YHW ... the great who keeps the covenant and loyalty to those who love, those who keep his commandments, the eternal ... the blessing more than any snare and more than evil. For redemption is in him. For YHWH is our restorer and rock. May YHWH bless you and keep you. May YHWH make his face shine ... (Ketef Hinnom I)¹⁵

The second Ketef Hinnom amulet is read as follows:

... May [wearer] be blessed by Yahweh, the helper and rebuker of evil. May Yahweh bless you, keep you. May Yahweh make his face shine on you and give you wellbeing. (Ketef Hinnom II)¹⁶

Though particularly famous because of the partial overlap of their wording with Num 6:24–26, these amulets are significant for this study as documentation, within pre-Hellenistic Jerusalem, of an inscribed-jewelry practice seen elsewhere in the ancient Near East. And these Iron Age Jerusalem silver amulets share with their counterparts elsewhere preservation on valuable media (silver), a focus on the provision of the deity (Yahweh) for the individual (“you”), and a featuring – in that context – of themes of “blessing” and “protection.”

One other common feature of most such inscribed jewelry is the fact that the items usually were unreadable. The Ketef Hinnom amulets were tightly rolled up scrolls. Worn inscriptions in Egypt often were minutely inscribed papyri rolled up and placed inside packets that could be strapped to the wearer. Mesopotamians wore their texts as small tablets inscribed with tiny signs. It was the exception rather than the rule that anyone, let alone the wearer, could actually read what was written on the worn text. The letters were too tiny, and the text itself was often hidden from view.

Now standing at a considerable chronological (and geographical) remove from the ancient producers and users of such pendants, we lack direct ethnographic data (e.g. participant interviews) to help us understand the purposes of these generally unreadable, inscribed and worn texts. Nevertheless, scholars studying them have suggested that they aimed at two purposes: a) having the text offer a constant prayer on behalf of the wearer, almost like the person with inscribed jewelry was wearing a digital player of a recorded prayer to the deity (only in this case the deity

¹⁴ Lemaire 2007.

¹⁵ Barkey et al. 2004, the translation given here is adapted from p. 61.

¹⁶ Adapted translation from Barkey et al. 2004, 68. These amulets have become particularly well known because the wording with which both conclude (“May Yahweh bless you and keep you. May Yahweh make his face shine [on you and give you wellbeing.]”) is close to that given as the Aaronide blessing in Num 6:24–26: “May Yahweh bless you and keep you, may Yahweh make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. May Yahweh lift up his face to you and grant you wellbeing.” They are not identical, however, to the biblical text, with the blessing given in the biblical text including elements not found in the amulets. Rather than assuming that the amulets cite the biblical text, perhaps it would be better instead to see the biblical text in Num 6:24–26 as building and expanding on a well-known and widely distributed amulet formula.

could “read” the text that was worn by the devotee); and b) the displayed fact of the text, as a sign to the wearer and others of their piety and/or attachment to a deity. The above-mentioned numinous quality of written texts (in oral-primary cultures) helped contribute to both aims, enhancing the numinous quality of the continual prayer and the luster of the displayed attachment to the deity.

Though much such inscribed jewelry was valuable (on valuable materials and/or produced by skilled artisans), this jewelry was probably the most widely distributed form, or at least one of the most widely distributed forms, of written textuality. Probably, many more people would have owned an inscribed piece of jewelry than would have owned a copy of a biblical book or analogous literary-theological work. Copies of books were generally communal property, while inscribed jewelry was highly personal: worn close to the body, indeed the parts of body seen as most important for character formation and cognition: the head, neck/throat, and breast/heart.

Prov 6:20–22 connects in multiple ways with these practices of wearing inscribed jewelry. To start, Prov 6:21 calls on the student, at least metaphorically, to “bind them [parental teachings] on your heart always, tie them on your neck.” The reference to wisdom’s round-the-clock protection of the student links to the implicit way in which wearable texts constituted a form of constant (day and night) textuality and explicitly parallels the emphasis in some inscribed texts on the deity’s provision for the wearer day and night. In this case, the emphasis on protection in the night in Prov 6:22 may implicitly relate to the promise two verses later that the parental teaching will preserve the son/student from the sexual dangers posed by the strange woman/adulterous (6:24), whose dangers may be particularly worrisome in the night hours (Prov 7:9).

The imagery in Prov 6:20–22 then connects with the initial exhortation to “keep” the father’s commandment and “not push away” the mother’s instruction – keeping the parents’ teaching constantly close. The text does not seem interested here in literal practices, e.g. specifying whether the parent’s teaching is actually inscribed on a chest pendant or necklace. What is crucial is the idea that the constant (תמיד) “binding” of these teachings on the student’s heart, the “tying” them on his neck, will mean that they then constantly “lead” him, allowing female wisdom to “protect” him while lying down and converse with him upon awakening. The introduction of female wisdom as a protective figure, indeed even when the son is sleeping, is an indicator that the “son” is not benefiting because he constantly reads these worn texts. And indeed, as emphasized previously, most items of inscribed jewelry in the ancient Near East were unreadable. Instead, the “wearing” of the father’s command and mother’s instruction envisioned in 6:21–22 merely means that these parental teachings provide constant, amulet-like protection, day and night, for the student who “stores up” the father’s command and “does not push [the mother’s] instruction away” (6,20).

The introductory exhortation for the tenth and final teaching speech in Proverbs, Prov 7:1–3, connects yet again with this imagery of wearing inscribed texts. After an initial call for the son/student (7:1) to “keep my commandments, and live, and my instruction like the pupil of your eyes” (7:2) this last speech features a third

reference to writing in Proverbs: “bind them on your fingers, write them on the tablet of your heart” (7:3). The “bind them on your fingers” again invokes the image of wearing the teaching like a piece of inscribed jewelry, but the “write them on the tablet of your heart” is something different. The metaphor of “writing” on the “heart” is cross-culturally attested in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Greece as a trope for memorization of educational texts.¹⁷ As mentioned above, such ancient cultures often used writing as a support for learning systems focused on memorization, and thus “writing” served in these cultures as a metaphor to stress the *precision* of the memorization of wisdom or divine teaching. A similar set of associations with writing seems to lie as well behind the indirect use of this teaching-writing metaphor in Jer 31:33, where God reassures Israel and Judah that God will make a new covenant and “place my instruction [Torah] inside of them and write it on their hearts.” This promise of a new covenant is reassuring because the recipients of this promise can trust that a covenant *written* on their hearts by God will be accurately transferred and durably recorded. And it is precisely this sort of accurate transfer and durable recording that Prov 7:3 is asking of the reader of this text, that this “son” accurately and reliably “writes [the teacher’s/father’s commands and instruction] on the tablet of [his] heart.”

In sum, a mix of images are used in Prov 7:1–3, from the eye, to the fingers, to the heart, to evoke a picture of close, unbreakable attachment of the student to the teachings advocated by the parent, teachings ultimately inscribed on the heart of the student. The text’s emphasis on constant closeness of parental teaching to the student is then developed in a different way in Prov 7:4 where the son/student is told to address wisdom as his “sister,” an epithet that implies an intimate love relationship with her (see Song of Songs 4:9–5:2 and Egyptian love poetry), and this then is expanded in the following command for him to call insight his “intimate friend.” These calls to imagine intimacy with wisdom/insight in 7:4 evoke a different set of social practices from those in 7:2–3, but share a broader emphasis on the son forging an ongoing and intense *closeness* with the textual teaching/parent’s teachings. And, as in Prov 6:24, this constant closeness is seen as an antidote to ward off the dangers of the “strange woman,” who in this case is elaborately envisioned in the following speech (7:5–27).

In sum, Proverbs, though a written text, almost never itself refers to writing or reading. The main exceptions in Prov 1–9 come in three introductory exhortations (3:3a; 6:21–22; 7:3), and all three speak not of writing or reading literary texts, but instead evoke the process of wearing inscribed texts or internalizing the parent’s teachings, and the benefits that then come from such *constant* contact with the text’s teachings. These three exhortations in Prov 3:1–3; 6:20–22; and 7:1–3 aim to

17 From Mesopotamia, see the Edubba dialogue translated in Sjöberg 1975, 164; from Egypt Satiric Letter II,3 as translated in Fischer-Elfert 1986, 94; from Greece, Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound, 788. For discussion see Carr 2010.

regulate learning by way of imprinting it continuously on the son/student depicted as the recipient of the parental teaching of the text. The reader of Prov 3:1–3; 6:20–22; 7:1–3 and other parts of Prov 1–9 is thrust by the text into the stance of son/student, being addressed by a “father” identified with the written instruction, and this textual father urges the student not just to read the instruction, but to make it as constant and close a part of his life as a worn amulet would be, or a lover (in the case of Prov 7:4), or his own heart. If the reading student does this, the father/text promises that the “parental” teaching – embodied in this literary text – will provide a similar sort of constant protective/provision function that a worn text would, even from the nighttime dangers of the “strange woman” evoked by Prov 1–9 in the ninth and tenth teaching speeches. In this way, the teaching speeches of Proverbs lay a claim on their reading audience, attempting to insure the continued transmission of this parental teaching from generation to (reading) generation.

3 Deuteronomy 6:6–9 (and related texts)

I turn next to a biblical text with a very different implied setting, the book of Deuteronomy. This work presents itself largely as a series of speeches by Moses to the people on the edge of the promised land, rehearsing their past history in the wilderness and giving them laws to govern life in the land and help them flourish there. The generational divide that grounds the envisioned teaching relationship here is different. Moses is not the father, and the people are not his son. Instead, Moses, the founding/intermediary figure, is dying, and he is passing on *divine* instruction to the sons of Israel as his final testimony/teaching. Together Moses and the “sons of Israel” stand on the edge of an important geographic (edge of the land) and chronological (end of Moses’s life) boundary. The written text of Deuteronomy presents itself as Moses’s final words to the people who will survive him. And as in Prov 1–9, so also in Deuteronomy, the crucial benefits of the teaching are stressed. Where the teaching “father” of Prov 1–9 constantly promised life and success to the reading “son,” now Moses of Deuteronomy repeatedly stresses to the people that their long life in the land depends on hearing and observing the divine commands that he is conveying.

In addition to this more general comparison of Deuteronomy to the teaching situation of Proverbs, Deuteronomy features two texts, Deut 6:6–9 and 11:18–21 that use a similar set of images to those seen in Prov 3:1–3; 6:20–22 and 7:1–3. Interestingly, it uses shared images to envision the reinforcement of Moses’s teaching both to the Israelites hearing the message *and their children*. Thus Deuteronomy envisions a doubling of the teaching situation seen in Proverbs, where Moses teaches the people how to teach their children in turn. Deuteronomy is preoccupied, in other words, with transmission of its teaching across *multiple* generational boundaries: Moses and the Israelites, but the Israelites within their families, the latter

situation analogous to that staged in Prov 1–9. In this sense, Deuteronomy is a *meta*-teaching text, promoting itself as a text for the teaching parents.

The first of these texts in Deuteronomy, Deut 6:6–9, follows immediately on another text, Deut 6:4–5, that probably stood as the opening of an early version of the book of Deuteronomy.¹⁸ This text, called the “Shema” in Jewish tradition, emphasizes divine unity and calls on Israel to love God exclusively:

Deut 6:4 Hear, Oh Israel, Yahweh our God is one Yahweh,¹⁹
 5 you shall love Yahweh, your God with all your heart, your life breath,²⁰ and your strength.

These verses in Deut 6:4–5, again manifest a trope of orality (“hear”) seen above in the Proverbs texts, and they express the ideological superstructure that undergirds the rest of Deuteronomy. Over time this theological affirmation has become central far beyond Deuteronomy, in both Jewish and Christian traditions. The Shema contains the traditional words that Jewish martyrs recite in their final moments, and the Christian synoptic gospel tradition has Jesus affirm these words as the most important commandment (Mark 12:28–30; Matt 22:34–37; Luke 10:25–27).

The following verses, Deut 6:6–9, however, are those central for the purposes of this essay. These verses, along with related verses in Deut 6:12–25 a bit further on, are textual instructions about how to internalize Moses’s teaching:

18 Indeed, the Old Greek translation of Deuteronomy features a superscription here that may have opened the book: “These are the decrees and laws which Yahweh commanded the sons of Israel in the desert, having brought them out of the land of Egypt.” Such a superscription identifying the following speeches as divine would have contradicted the eventual reshaping of the law as a final speech of Moses, seen now in the chapters that precede (Deut 1:1; 4:44). This contradiction may have led to the elimination of the Old Greek superscription before Deut 6:4 in the other textual traditions for Deuteronomy. For more discussion, see Carr 2011, 147 note 110.

Also, it should be noted that a number of scholars believe that this text in Deut 6:4–9 is literarily complex, contrasting, for example, an address to the whole people in 6:4–5 with instruction to individual Israelites in 6:6–9. For an example and citation of earlier discussions, see Achenbach 1991, 104–110. Such literary-critical discussions are not relevant to the current investigation. In addition, in my view, the fine distinctions in fictional-setting and verbal formulation used as literary-critical indicators in Deut 6:4–9 can not bear the weight being put on them.

19 This verse has been traditionally rendered as “Hear, Oh Israel, Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one.” This rendering, however, does not make good sense of the repeated Yahweh in the clause. Moreover, the alternative rendering here links with inscriptional evidence that multiple “Yahweh’s” were worshipped in Syro-Palestine. Inscriptions call for blessings from a “Yahweh of Samaria” or “Yahweh of Teman” for example. This clause’s assertion that Yahweh is “One Yahweh” would contradict such practices and conform to Deuteronomy’s broader focus on worship of Yahweh at only one cult place – thus not worship at Samaria, Teman, etc.

20 This is a rendering of the Hebrew word נְפֶשׁ (*nephesh*), traditionally rendered “soul” (a concept alien to the Hebrew world), but which more properly renders the life breath that separates a living human being from a corpse.

- Deut 6:6 These words which I command you today shall be on your heart
- 7 And you shall inscribe/repeat them to your sons
and speak them during your sitting in your house
and your going on the road
during your lying down and your getting up.
- 8 And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand,
and they shall be a *totephet* between your eyes [on your forehead].
- 9 And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The translation given above divides the text between an initial call that Yahweh's commands "be on your heart" and three more specific commands on means by which these words shall be reinforced: through constant repetition, wearing copies of them, and inscribing them on home doorposts and gates.

Like the above-discussed texts in Proverbs, this passage in Deut 6:7–9 resonates with ancient Near Eastern practices surrounding inscribed jewelry. Yet the passage features an additional focus on *passing on* the teaching that did not appear in Prov 1–9. We see this already in the way Deut 6:6 – "these words ... shall be on your heart" – is followed by the command in 6:7, a command not regarding an inscribed object worn by the hearer, but regarding a constant *action* by the hearer: the repeating of "these words" (of command) to your sons at home and on the way, when lying down and getting up. This takes the constancy idea implicit in wearing an amulet and applies it to constant *speech* – the teaching of children ("sons") through continual recitation of the words at all times of day. Where usually an amulet helps a devotee constantly repeat a prayer to the deity, Deut 6:7 envisions its hearer as *actually* repeating Yahweh's words to his children day and night.²¹ This can be thought of on analogy to the sort of immersive language learning that happens in a family. Only now Deut 6:7 envisions its hearers' children as learning a "language" of exclusive Yahweh devotion and legal obedience rather than Hebrew or another language from the parent's constant recitation of "these words."

The focus on legal teaching children here is reinforced and built out by its parallel in Deut 6:20–25, a scene where the parent is to teach the child by answering his question.

[20] And when your son asks you later, "what are these obligations, decrees, and laws which Yahweh our God commanded you?," [21] you shall say to your son, "we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand, [22] Yahweh did before our eyes great and evil signs and wonders against Egypt, Pharaoh and his entire house. [23] But us he brought out from there so that he could bring us in to give us the land which he swore to our fathers. [24] And Yahweh commanded us to do all these statutes to fear Yahweh our God for our good all the days in order for us to live as to today. [25] And it is obligatory to us that we take care to do all of this law before Yahweh our God as he commanded us." (Deut 6:20–25)

²¹ Fischer/Lohfink 1987.

As Karen Finsterbusch has argued, this scene with sons in 6:20–25 concludes a broader section, Deut 6:12–25, that elaborates elements of Deut 6:4–7. This section is introduced by verses 6:10–11, which set the following laws in a future situation, well after Moses’s address to Israel on the edge of the land (“when Yahweh your God brings you to the land he swore to your fathers,” 6:10), and then elaborates elements of 6:4–7 with a view toward life in the land as follows:

Deut 6:4 proclamation of divine unity	Deut 6:12–13 call not to “forget” Yahweh, who led out of Egypt, only fear and serve him, swear only by his name
Deut 6:5 exclusive ‘love’ of Yahweh	Deut 6:14–15 not to commit adultery (“go after”) with other gods of surrounding nations, because Yahweh is a “jealous” god. 6:16 no “testing” of him
Deut 6:6 words of command on heart	Deut 6:17 not just memorize laws, but obey them
Deut 6:7 speaking words to sons always	Deut 6:20–25 a specific scene of teaching a son through telling the story of exodus, conquest and lawgiving

Together, these two texts in Deut 6:7 and 20–25 develop a picture of the hearer teaching a son, whether through constant recitation of “these words” (6:6) or through answering that son’s question “what are these rules, decrees and laws which Yahweh our God commanded you?” (6:20).²²

Deut 6:8 then resumes the echo of ancient Near Eastern inscribed jewelry practices in Deut 6, commanding its hearer to “bind [these words] as a sign on your hand, and they will become a *totephet* between your eyes.” Many parts of this command remain unclear. To begin, interpreters are not agreed on the meaning of תַּפֻּט, vocalized as a plural תַּפֻּטִּים in traditional Hebrew manuscripts (and in one Qumran manuscript 4Q43), but interpreted by most as a singular noun, תַּפֻּט of unclear meaning. Judging from context, “between your eyes,” it appears to be some kind of frontlet worn on the forehead, for which we have many exemplars in the amulet culture of the ancient Near East. Such inscribed frontlets, like pendants on necklaces, were highly visible and also brought the words of the devotee’s petition into constant and nearby contact with his or her brain.²³

More broadly, exegetes do not agree on whether this language in Deut 6:8 was originally literal or figurative. Within Jewish tradition, this command came to be understood literally, first with inscribed tefillin, marking the particularly devoted *haver* in the early centuries of the common era, and then later with tefillin being understood by many Jews to be obligatory for adult males to wear during prayer.

²² Finsterbusch 2002.

²³ An early discussion of possible parallels is in Keel 1981, 193–212. Now see also Berlejung 2012, 133–141.

The Samaritan tradition, however, understood this command in Deut 6:8 to be figurative, in contrast to the following command in Deut 6:9 to “write [these words] on the doorposts of your house and on your gates,” and this figurative understanding of Deut 6:8 has characterized Christian readings as well. Interpreters advocating a figurative understanding of Deut 6:8 often point to more evident figurative implications of analogous commands in Exod 13 and Prov 3, 6 and 7. Advocates of a literal interpretation of Deut 6:8 have argued that any figurative understandings of Exod 13 or passages in Proverbs should not be imported into Deut 6.

Few interpreters approach this question without some influence from one of these interpretive traditions, thus complicating historical inquiry into the original intent of the command in Deut 6:8 to “bind [these words] as a sign on your hand, and they will become a *totephet* between your eyes.” With that qualification, I am convinced by arguments that the Jewish practice of wearing *tefillin* (often referred to as phylacteries, more on this shortly) represents a literalization of Torah commands originally meant to more metaphorically evoke the practice of wearing inscribed texts. We first see clear evidence for Jewish *tefillin* in the late Second Temple period, and it post-dates the Jewish-Samaritan split. Our first references to wearing *tefillin* come from the Letter of Aristeas, the Gospel of Matthew, Josephus and Philo, and our earliest copies of *tefillin* texts likewise date from the last centuries of the Second Temple period.²⁴

Moreover, the features of these early copies of Jewish *tefillin* texts suggest that they were selected and produced to focus on Torah texts promising long life or other blessing as a consequence of wearing the texts in question. Cohn even suggests that several striking gaps in early Second Temple *tefillin* texts can be explained as removals from those texts of portions that imply that obedience of *all* of Yahweh’s commands are required to receive long life in the land and other blessings. Instead, Cohn suggests, the range of texts used in early Jewish *tefillin* seem to concentrate on sections implying a command just to wear a text (e.g. Exod 13:9, 16; Deut 6:8; 11:18), as well as sections such as Deut 11:14–15 that promise divine blessing. In the wake of the destruction of the Second Temple, this set of texts was standardized within rabbinic Judaism to include a set group of four, Exod 13:1–10, 11–16; Deut 6:4–9; 11:13–21, that were written on tiny scrolls and inserted into leather packets worn on the body – initially by unusually devout *haverim*, and eventually (at least in theory) by all adult Jewish males in prayer.²⁵

This focus in Jewish *tefillin* practice on wearing a combination of Torah texts commanding wearing and promising blessing connect with themes seen already in the above discussion of ancient near eastern practices surrounding inscribed texts. The fact that most such *tefillin* included the Shema, enjoining its hearers to recognize Yahweh’s unity and love only Yahweh, connects with the focus of ancient

²⁴ For an excellent recent survey of the data, see Reed 2009.

²⁵ Cohn 2008.

amulet practice on undergirding the devotee's close relationship with the patron deity. And the inclusion, whether in the broader spread of early tefillin texts or the standardized set later adopted by rabbinic Judaism, of Torah texts promising blessing, links with more ancient beliefs about inscribed jewelry securing blessing for the believer. Finally, some of our earliest references to Jewish tefillin (e.g. Aristeas 159, Matt 23:5 and Josephus Antiquities 4.213) call them by the Greek term φυλακτήριον (phylactery), which designates an object worn to ward off malevolent forces. This would imply a warding function for tefillin similar to those of other inscribed texts in the ancient Near East.

Turning now to Deut 6:8 itself, there are several features of this verse and its relation to its context that suggest this late Second temple Jewish practice of wearing tefillin is a result of a shift from the text's original metaphoric invocation of amulet practice to a literalization of that metaphoric invocation. As recent work by Angelica Berlejung has stressed, the command to wear texts in Deut 6:8 does not conform with practices of wearing inscribed jewelry in several ways. Ancient Near Eastern inscribed jewelry items bore prayers on behalf of the believer, and their goal was to change the behavior of the deity in the believer's favor. Deut 6:8, in contrast, bears some kind of command directed toward the believer, and its wearing is aimed at reinforcing *that believer's* belief and obedience. Put another way: the ancient practice of wearing inscribed jewelry to secure blessing and ward off evil from the wearer is understood in Deut 6 as a form of memory technology: where the believer's constant wearing and display of central texts reinforces that believer's devotion to and obedience of Israel's one true deity. There remains a focus in Deut 6:8 on the relationship of the believer to the deity, but the stress has shifted. Whereas traditional amulets aimed to secure the god's attachment to and provision for the believer, the inscribed-amulet practice invoked in Deut 6:8 aims to secure the believer's attachment to and devotion to Yahweh.²⁶

The text then moves to Deut 6:9, the first and only explicit reference to *writing* in the chapter: "write [these words] on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." Within the Ancient Near East such inscriptions on doorposts served particularly to ward evil influences for impinging on the insides of dwellings. Other narratives in the Old Testament know of such doorway wards, such as the narrative of the Passover in Exodus (12:13, 23). Nevertheless, again the purpose of the inscription seems different in Deut 6. Following on the early emphasis on having "these words ... on your heart" (6:6), teaching them to children through constant recitation (6:7), and fastening them to the hand and forehead (6:8), this final command in 6:9 to inscribe the commands on doorposts seems yet another way to reinforce the hearer's continual consciousness of Yahweh's holy commandments. This teaching/display function of this "writing" may be reinforced by the addition of "your gates" to the loci where laws are to be inscribed. A town's gates were its most

²⁶ See particularly Berlejung 2008 and Berlejung 2012.

public space, where legal proceedings and meetings were conducted. The depicted inscribing of “these words” represents a vision of community life where Yahweh’s most central words stand before it at all times.

Finally, it should be noted that major themes from Deut 6:4–9 are reprised several chapters later in Deut 11:18–21:

[18] And you shall set these, my words on your heart, and on your life-strength/throat, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they will become *totephet* between your eyes. [19] And you shall teach them to your sons, speaking them in your sitting in your house and your going in the road, and in your lying down and your getting up. [20] And you will write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates [21] so that your days and the days of your children will be multiplied in the land which Yahweh swore to your fathers to give them, as the days of the heaven above the earth. (Deut 11:18–21)

In contrast to Deut 6:4–9, the “you” addressed here is consistently a plural group, one among several signs that this text is a probable later echo of themes of Deut 6:4–9, perhaps one of its first interpretations. At the same time, Deut 11:18–21 provides significant evidence that the vision of internalized textuality given in Deut 6:4–9 was continued and extended over broader text blocks, so that it now stands not just toward the outset of Deuteronomy’s call to obedience before giving the law (Deut 6:4–9), but also toward its end, just before the giving of the law in Deut 12 and following (Deut 11:18–21). Apparently this textualized vision of repeating, wearing and inscribing Yahweh’s words on entryways had some *ongoing* cogency among the authors of Deuteronomy. Notably in this case, Deut 11:18–21 reorganizes the themes of Deut 6:4–9 so that metaphors of wearing are now grouped together – “set these, my words on your heart, on your throat, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they will become a *totephet* between your eyes” (11:18) – before then moving to the trope of teaching (11:19) and inscribing on entryways (11:20). Perhaps the writer here does take the call in Deut 6:6 to have “these words on your heart” as a form of amulet practice like that of “binding” them on the hand and wearing them between the eyes. He even adds a reference to a possible inscribed necklace – on your throat (*nepshesh*) – from amulet practice in an echo of the call in Deut 6:5 to love God with all your heart, life-strength (*nepshesh*), and strength. In this sense, Deut 11:18–21 represents a rereading of Deut 6:4–9 that binds its themes yet more closely to the amulet practice that Deut 6 already echoed and transformed, even as Deut 11:18–21 continues the focus of Deut 6:4–9 on such amulet practice as a means of enforcing the believer’s relationship to and devotion to Yahweh (as opposed to the usual amulet practice focus on influence of the deity’s relationship to and provision for the believer).

One striking feature of both texts, and often noted by interpreters, is their relative vagueness about the precise contents of “these words” that are supposed to be on the believer’s heart, etc. So much is focused in Deut 6:6–9 and 11:18–21 on what is to be done with “these words”/[them], and so little said about the exact

extent of these words.²⁷ Perhaps such clarity was not necessary when Deut 6:4–9 (or parts of it) stood originally at the outset of a set of legal stipulations, one comprising parts of Deut 12 and following. “These words” in that case meant the call to divine unity in Deut 6:4–5 and legal stipulations in Deut 12 and following that followed from that call. The relative vagueness of the reference-point for these exhortations was no more problematic than a similar vagueness typical of similar exhortations at the outset (and sometimes conclusion) of Amenemope, Prov 22:17ff., and the exhortations that introduce the ten teaching speeches of Prov 1–9.

Nevertheless, as the book of Deuteronomy grew, the potential reference for “these words” in Deut 6:6 following also grew, to include, for example, the ten commandments that precede it (Deut 5) or the paranetic divine speeches that follow and are then capped by echoes of Deut 6:6–9 in 11:18–21. The scribes who added new materials to Deuteronomy had no interest in clarifying or narrowing the potential reference of “these words” in the calls to repeat, wear and inscribe in Deut 6:6–9 and 11:18–21. If they attended at all to the implications of Deut 6:6–9 and 11:18–21, these scribes probably were happy to have their new materials potentially be included among “these words” that – as per Deut 6:6–9; 11:18–21; etc. – were to be constantly before each individual and the community as a whole.

As a result, whatever the possibly more limited original reference of “these words” in Deut 6:6–9 (to 6:4 or 6:4–5), and despite later Jewish stipulations that “these words” to be bound onto the body or inscribed on doorposts encompassed only those Torah texts commanding inscription and repetition (Exod 13:1–10, 11–16; Deut 6:4–9; 11:13–21), the potential semantic field of “these words” is left unspecified in Deut 6:6–9 itself. It could encompass as little as the theological affirmations in Deut 6:4–5 that immediately precede it, and as much as Yahweh’s Torah law as a whole. To be sure, the more the potential textual scope of Deut 6:6–9 is widened, the less feasible it becomes to literally interpret its calls to wear these words and inscribe them on doorposts. Nevertheless, the broader Jewish practice of memorization of the entire Pentateuch may stand as one testimony to a broader understanding of what it means to “have these words on your heart,” being able to sing any part of Torah while sitting at home or on the way, lying down or getting up.

Looking back, Deut 6:6–9 (along with related texts such as 11:18–21) is an unusually rich example of a textualized vision for relating to texts that has been acted on by historical communities, indeed in different ways by different communities. At one end of the continuum, rabbinic Judaism has developed a fairly literal understanding of most aspects of Deut 6:6–9, from memorization and teaching of commands to children and placing inscribed texts in mezzuzah boxes on doorways, to turning Deut 6:6–9; 11:18–21 and nearby texts *themselves into inscribed wearable*

²⁷ For an overview of various possible interpretations of the scope, see Berlejung 2012, 149.

texts of the sort these texts once just metaphorically invoked. The early Samaritan community represents somewhat of a middle way, taking the call in Deut 6:8 to wear texts as metaphorical, but the call in Deut 6:9 to “write” texts on entryways to be literal. Meanwhile, Christianity – at least the Christian communities we have documentation for – followed a thoroughly metaphoric understanding of Deut 6:6–9, seeing the whole text as a call to constant devotion to God and God’s commands, without any particular inscribing practices required.

Seen within this horizon Deut 6:6–9 can be viewed as a textual analogy to the reproductive system of a plant or animal. Surrounding it are “these words” “which [Yahweh] is commanding today,” words conveyed on written media, probably scroll media at the time of original writing. Deut 6:6–9, also conveyed on such scroll media, makes a call to transport those words into other arenas of discourse: constant oral recitation to “sons” at home and on the way (6:7), wearing of “these words” constantly on hand and forehead wherever one goes (6:8), and inscription of “these words” at immovable, but strategic points of entry (doorposts of your house) and entry/gathering (your gates). This is a form of global textual practice to correspond to the global dimension of the initial claim that “Yahweh, our God, is one Yahweh” (6:4) and “you shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, life-strength, and strength.” (6:5) Where other texts – say treaty texts – might call for their own copying and periodic reading, or others – say inscriptions – might pronounce curses on those who efface, change or destroy them, Deut 6:6–9 envisions a world where “these words” take over the entire mental space of the reading/hearing audience: forming the content of their constant speech (sitting and going, lying down and getting up), accompanying them everywhere (as worn amulets), and prominently and permanently displayed at the most strategic architectural loci possible for everyday life (doorposts and gates). This sounds like a viral explosion of Deuteronomic theology into the consciousness of the audience, an explosion envisioned *and indeed effected* by Deut 6:6–9 and related texts as they have traveled through time.

4 Concluding Discussion of Proverbs and Deuteronomy in Relation

This study would be incomplete without at least some mention of how these two sets of texts, remarkably parallel to one another, might be related. As indicated in the chart below, the introductory exhortation in Deut 6:6–9 (and its later parallel in 11:18–21) shares a number of features with the above-discussed introductory exhortations in Prov 1–9, especially 6:20–22, but also elements of 3:1–3a and 7:1–3, a focus on attending to the teacher’s “command,” placing it on the “heart,” keeping it present while “walking”-“lying down”-“getting up,” “binding” the teaching on

the body, and “writing” it – whether on doorposts (Deut 6:9) or the tablet of the heart (Prov 7:3b).

Proverbs	Deut 6:6–9
נצר בני מצות אביך 6:20 ואל־תטש תורת אמך	6:6 והיו הדברים האלה אשר אנכי מצוך היום
בני תורתי אל־תשכה 3:1 ומצותי יצר לבך	על־לבבך
בני שמר אמרי 7:1 ומצותי תצפן אתך	
	6:7 ושננתם לבניך ודברת בם בשבתך בביתך ובלכתך בדרך ובשכבך ובקומך
בהתהלך תנחה אתך 6:22 בשכבך תשמר עליך והקיצות היא תשיחך	6:8 וקשרתם לאות על־ידיך והיו לטטפת בין עיניך
קשרם על־לבך תמיד 6:21 ענדם על־גרגרתך	
קשרם על־גרגרותיך 3:3aβ קשרם על־אצבעתיך 7:3 כתבם על־לוח לבך	6:9 וכתבתם על־מזוזות ביתך ובשעריך
6:20 Observe, my son, the commandment of your father, and do not leave unheeded the instruction of your mother.	6:6 May these words which I command you today
3:1 My son, do not forget my instruction, and may my commands be stored in your heart .	be on your heart.
7:1 My son, keep my words, and store my commands with you.	
6:22 In your walking around she will lead you. In your lying down she will guard you. When you awake , she will talk with you.	6:7 Recite them to your sons and speak them in your sitting in your house, in your walking in the way, in your lying down and in your getting up .
6:21 Bind them on your heart always. Tie them around your neck.	6:8 Bind them as a sign on your hand. Make them a frontlet between your eyes.
3:3aβ Bind them on your neck.	
7:3 Bind them on your fingers, write them on the tablet of your heart .	6:9 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

There are enough specific similarities in both overall function (introductory exhortation to a teaching) and wording between these passages that most scholars agree

that there is some kind of genetic relationship between Deut 6:6–9 and its parallels in Proverbs. Partly because Proverbs is commonly dated later than Deut 6:6–9, the general tendency has been to see Proverbs as dependent on Deuteronomy, rather than the other way around. For a variety of reasons, however, I am inclined to see the introductory exhortation in Deut 6:6–9 as based on Proverbs instead. This essay is already long, so I will not go deeply into the reasoning. Briefly: the language of reinforcement and internalization in Prov 1–9 are at home in ancient Near Eastern teaching literature, while Deuteronomy represents an extension of that teaching imagery into an envisioned fictional situation of transition from the Moses period into occupation of the land. I find it much more likely that the author of this envisioned fictional situation drew on multiple loci in Prov 1–9, even expanding on it (with immersive learning for children and doorpost/gate inscription), than that the author of Prov 1–9 drew selectively on motifs in Deut 6:6–8 (leaving out 6:9) and scattered those elements across a few of the introductory exhortations. In particular, I find it highly unlikely that a late post-exilic author of Proverbs would have drawn on Deut 6:6–8, while stripping it of any mention of the Mosaic/divine Torah.²⁸

If I am right about the dependence of Deut 6:6–9 on the speeches in Proverbs, then the exhortation in Deut 6:6–9 represents an outgrowth of the textual reproductive system already implicit in ancient wisdom instructions (e.g. Amenemope and its imitator in Prov 22:17ff.) and especially the exhortations in Prov 1–9. Indeed, it proved an effective enough adaptation of that reproductive system that we biblical scholars are still studying it, and the corpus it urged us to “put on our hearts,” thousands of years later.

Written in an oral-primary environment, these texts in the Hebrew Bible testify to the particularly charged character of writing as a symbol in largely non-literate cultures like ancient Israel. There can be an ambivalence about writing in such contexts, such that tropes of oral education and transmission are privileged and images of literacy are avoided, even in written texts focused on education. At the same time writing, as a technology accessible to a minority in an oral-primary setting, also can have a numinous character in such contexts, which means that inscribed amulets and other objects are seen to have a semi-magical power to effect/embody the presence of a deity and/or push away malevolent forces. The literalization of invocations of amulet practice in Deut 6 and 11 during the Roman period testifies to the fact that these texts continued to be transmitted in cultural contexts, still largely non-literate, where writing bore this semi-magical power. It was only far later that these ancient Israelite educational texts would find their way into a writing-saturated media context like that seen frequently today. Within this writing-saturated context, the numinous associations of writing in more ancient cultures require highlighting, as does the relative absence in ancient educational liter-

²⁸ I discuss this case in more detail in Carr 2011, 418–419.

atures of tropes of literary writing and the (written) invocation in such texts, instead, of ancient practices featuring orality and inscribed amulets.

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