

Maximizing Literacy as a Protective Strategy

Redescribing Evangelical Inerrantist Scholarship on Israelite Literacy

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Abstract

Evangelical Christian inerrantist scholars consistently maximize the extent of literary reading and writing abilities in ancient Israel, especially beyond scribes, priests, and other elites or professionals. How they frame the issues, handle the data, represent their work as academic historical research, and engage in certain recurring patterns of argumentation invites analysis. This article analyzes the publications of inerrantist scholars on Israelite literacy, in particular Alan Millard and Richard Hess, as examples of inerrantist discourse and argues that their scholarship on Israelite literacy is characterized by protective strategies that privilege biblical claims. The article thus aims to explore part of the historiography of scholarship on Israelite literacy, to provide an accurate account of what precisely inerrantist scholars are doing in their publications on the topic, and to reframe inerrantist scholarship on Israelite literacy as data for the study of religion.

Keywords

Israelite Literacy – inerrantist biblical scholarship – protective strategies – practice theory – scribes

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Introduction

In this article I critically examine publications on Israelite literacy by inerrantist Evangelical Christian scholars and redescribe these publications as a fruitful opportunity for studying contemporary religiosity. Though my article will advance the scholarly conversation about Israelite literacy through both exploring significant problems in certain recent contributions on the topic and using that exploration to clarify some fruitful analytical concerns for studying Israelite literacy, my main goal resides elsewhere. I will analyze inerrantist scholarship on Israelite literacy with a view to advancing our understanding of the social contexts of their work and religiosity. In other words, I pursue a kind of historiography of inerrantist scholarship on this area of Israelite history and religion. I will argue that we can productively redescribe inerrantist scholarship on Israelite literacy in terms of the broader religious studies rubric of “protective strategies” that privilege “insider” or “informant” claims, with the “informant” in this case being (their understanding of) the Bible.

This study follows up on my article in the preceding issue of *Biblical Interpretation* in which I redescribe the ways inerrantist scholars theorize both their views about the Bible’s inerrancy and the relationship of their work to the broader academy (Young 2015). There I identify two core characteristics of such inerrantist theorizing. First, inerrantists vigorously represent their work as legitimate academic scholarship. Second, they methodologically enshrine a preference for interpretive options that maintain the Bible’s inerrancy. I then redescribe these features of inerrantist scholarly discourse as “protective strategies.” Certain religious studies scholars have developed the classification of “protective strategies” or “protectionism” to designate the practice of collapsing the distinction between *describing* a religious actor’s (or text’s) claims and *analyzing* or *explaining* those claims in ways that do not privilege them by reinscribing them in the analysis.

Protective collapsing of the distinction between *describing* the meaning and claims of a text and *analyzing* or *explaining* such claims is a hallmark of apologetic approaches that block analysis of a text in terms of models or options that may not uphold that text’s own claims about itself. By privileging their understandings of the Bible’s claims about its divine nature, inerrancy, and essential unity, inerrantists theorize the necessity of approaching the Bible in ways that do not permit analysis that could cut across the Bible’s own claims. They invalidate such non-privileging approaches with, among other things, the rhetoric of failing to “respect” the Bible or refusing to approach the Bible “on its own terms.” Inerrantists thus collapse the difference between describing a biblical writing’s meaning or claims and analyzing that writing’s

claims. For example, if a biblical writing's genre implies that it is in some way reporting historical events, then the events happened and denying they happened "distorts a correct understanding" of the text and does not "pay due hermeneutical respect to the conscious genre signals by biblical writers" (Beale 2006: 305; 2007: 21). In this way inerrantists engage in the protective strategy of denying or obscuring the distinction between description and analysis. I will argue that certain characteristics of inerrantist scholarship on Israelite literacy are best explained in terms of a protective commitment to privileging their understandings of biblical claims about both the composition of biblical writings and the extent of Israelite literacy. Their scholarship about Israelite literacy serves to uphold the requisite historical conditions for biblical claims to be accurate.

As my previous article illustrates, many inerrantists explicitly orient their scholarship at the outset by stating their commitment to inerrancy. They, accordingly, often contrast their supernatural presuppositions with the illegitimate anti-supernatural presuppositions of non-inerrantist scholars and clarify that their historical methodologies presume the inerrancy of the Bible. But the two inerrantist scholars on whom I focus in the following pages, Alan Millard and Richard Hess, do not frame their work on Israelite literacy in this way.¹ Their publications thus afford an opportunity to extend my redescription of inerrantist scholarship by examining a kind of inerrantist discourse not covered in my previous article. As evidenced by Millard and Hess, some inerrantist scholars do not present their work as distinctively inerrantist scholarship that presumes the inerrancy of the Bible and modifies historical methods to prefer analyses of the Bible that uphold inerrancy. They simply represent their arguments as standing on the strength of their mastery of relevant ancient data.²

1 Though I have no reason to think that either Millard or Hess would object to being labeled as an inerrantist, I will note a few points that suggest the plausibility of approaching them as such. Both contributed essays to a volume explicitly devoted to defending inerrancy against detractors from within the Evangelical Christian world (Hess 2012; Millard 2012; the volume in question is Hoffmeier and Magary 2012 – see its "Preface" [pp. 19–24] for confirmation of its purpose). One can also note that Denver Seminary, where Hess serves on faculty, has a doctrinal statement that all faculty members must annually "affirm and sign ... without mental reservation." Its section on "The Word of God" stipulates believing that "the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the inspired Word of God, inerrant in the original writings" (<http://www.denverseminary.edu/about-us/what-we-believe/> [accessed 1/12/2013]).

2 See, for example, Kitchen 2003: 3, 296, 497–500. I choose Kitchen's *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (2003) from the many possible examples since Hess commends it as a "work that represents one of the finest examples of applying ancient Near Eastern studies

To focus specifically on Millard and Hess and their scholarship on Israelite literacy, their work consistently maximizes the extent of *literary* reading and writing abilities in ancient Israel.³ Furthermore, they pursue their research on Israelite literacy ostensibly as historians and situate their projects within the arena of critical historical inquiry. I will demonstrate, however, that analysis of their work invites hypothesizing about the operation of factors and considerations beyond those of academic historical study.⁴

I argue that these factors and considerations relate to the methodological constraints on biblical scholarship that are characteristic of the inerrantist fields that Hess and Millard inhabit. To the extent that my suggestion is accurate, the variance of their positions and arguments from those of other critical-historical scholars does not simply reflect expected kinds of disagreement among academics addressing complex issues through standard investigative

to the Bible" (Hess 2011: 668 n. 6; see also Hess 2014: 16). Some inerrantists even deny that their inerrancy-upholding work is shaped by presumptions of inerrancy and associated special interpretive methods; see, for instance, Waltke 2009a: 83–84, 93–94; 2009b: 115–18, 127–28.

- 3 I emphasize *literary* literacy since, as various studies of "ancient literacy" (e.g. Thomas 2009; the other essays in Johnson and Parker 2009) now favor, one must specify the kinds of "literacy" skills in question – and, as will be shown, inerrantist scholars are primarily interested in the ability to read, and sometimes write, the complex intertextual literary texts in the Hebrew Bible. The importance of such specification is evident even in recent studies that argue for the "ubiquity of everyday writing" in parts of the ancient Mediterranean (e.g. Bagnall 2011) since they examine in detail specific kinds of reading and writing and their differing social, demographic, and institutional locations. Even my specification of *literary* literacy oversimplifies matters, as the current trend is also to contextualize specific types of "literacy" relative to their various potential significances and functions in different social contexts (e.g. Habinek 1998; Thomas 2009; Johnson 2010: 3–16).
- 4 I am not claiming that some historians approach their tasks in a purely objective manner – separate from their social locations, inherited practices and assumptions, ideological commitments and interests, and so on. Rather, I am highlighting what should be a mundane point: especially by participating in the mutually critical communal-social arena of scholarship, we can delineate the aspects of our and others' scholarly practices that operate according to the conventions of, for example, evidentially oriented academic-historical methodology versus the aspects where considerations from other fields of discourse production and consumption operate. For a recent explication of how such critical communal-social characteristics define an academic arena capable, on the whole, of ever more accurate grasps of data in question, though with a focus on science, see McCauley 2011: 83–143. Inerrantist scholars not infrequently deny the possibility of delineating a non-theologically constrained arena of empirical historical study. For a recent example, see Kruger 2012: 22–23, 71, 77–81.

methods. Instead, Millard and Hess protectively privilege the claims of biblical texts and consistently orient their scholarship around arguing for historical conditions that permit privileging biblical claims. I will argue in particular that their representations of widespread Israelite literacy serve to uphold what they take to be biblical depictions of *literary* literacy as a “normal,” or normative, Israelite ability. Sometimes they make this point relatively explicitly. Other times this privileging commitment remains unstated but is still a plausible explanation for the specific shape of their high assessments of Israelite literacy. Accordingly, in my analysis I will focus in particular upon details of Hess’ and Millard’s publications that signal various kinds of protective commitments to the Bible.

One of the upshots of this study is that in analyzing and redescribing part of the variegated landscape of inerrancy it lends further support to some of the Practice Theory highlighted observations about inerrantist religiosity with which I conclude my previous article.⁵ To summarize those observations, inerrantist scholarship provides evidence that their religiosity is, in many ways, highly intellectualized. It involves specialized intellectual practices within an (or several overlapping) inerrantist field(s) of discourse production and consumption. Producers and consumers within these inerrantist fields greatly value the prestige of academic and historical mastery but, at the same time, only recognize as legitimate those products characterized by protective strategies that analytically privilege biblical claims. These apologetic rules and interests of inerrantist fields differentiate them from non-inerrantist academic-historical fields about the Bible that *do not* recognize such protectionist practices. Finally, though participants in these inerrantist fields value academic legitimacy, consumers lack the requisite training, knowledge, or interest to critically assess the relevant sources and issues for the topics in question. In the rest of this study I will analyze Millard’s and Hess’ work with a view toward these Practice Theory focalized considerations. Before moving on, I should address a common misunderstanding associated with examining people and their practices in terms of the interests and authorizing loci that structure their fields. In thus analyzing Millard and Hess I am not accusing them of insincerity in their scholarship. Practice Theory directs attention to, among other things, the material and symbolic interests bound up with practices, the associated social dynamics of recognition and attraction to them, and their associated fields and participants, but precisely without speculation about deep motives or suspicions about insincerity.

5 For these observations as well as an introductory discussion of the relevant aspects of Practice Theory, see Young 2015: 24–29.

Analysis of Inerrantist Scholarship on Israelite Literacy

Before I analyze the specifics of inerrantist arguments about Israelite literacy, I will examine some of their claims. I have selected two quotes that, together, provide an overall impression of the kinds of claims Millard and Hess make:

The epigraphic discoveries of recent decades have shown beyond any doubt that writing was well-known in Palestine during the period of Israelite rule And as far wider circles than the professional scribes could understand the writing, they could read any such texts to which they had access, the last being the controlling factor ... the conclusion that both Canaanites and Israelites had the means to record and read anything they wanted, from brief receipt to lengthy victory poem, from a private letter to a state treaty ... show[s] simply that writing was theoretically within the competence of any ancient Israelite, not the prerogative of an elite professional class alone, and ... show[s] that it was, in fact, quite widely practiced. (Millard 1972: 98, 111)

Such a find as this [the Tel Zayit Abecedary] adds to a growing body of epigraphic evidence that serves to emphasize the presence of numerous writers and readers of Hebrew, and perhaps other neighboring scripts. The effect is to increase the evidence for the presence of a literacy that could be found in rural areas as well as in state capitals and administrative contexts The third point concerns the continually increasing evidence for a wide variety of people from all walks of life who could read and write ... there is evidence that throughout Iron Age II, and extending back to Iron Age I, every region and every level of society had its writers and readers The whole picture is consistent with a variety of classes and groups, not merely a few elites. (Hess 2006b: 342–43, 345)

Inerrantists direct part of their exceedingly high estimations of Israelite literacy against the so-called Israelite history “minimalists” and their claims that Israel and Judah could not have produced texts prior to the seventh century BCE.⁶ To a certain extent their work thus aligns with assessments by various non-inerrantist scholars who also consider evidence of Israelite literacy to exist back to the ninth or tenth centuries (e.g. Schniedewind 2004; Tappy et al. 2006; Carr 2008; Rollston 2010). Inerrantists, however, push further than such scholars and tend to stress the supposed evidence for Israelite literacy in the

6 For example, Millard 1995: 211–12, 215, 217; Hess 2002: 83, 95; 2009d: 418. See also Hess' recent appendix in an Evangelical inerrantist “Apologetics” book (Hess 2011: 668–69).

early Iron Age, even back to the thirteenth century (e.g. Hess 2002: 83–88, 95). Also, while some inerrantist arguments for Israelite literacy earlier than the seventh century are not exceptional relative to the claims of many broader scholars, the rhetoric of their articulations differs significantly. It is not simply that inerrantists stress “widespread,” “well known,” or “pervasive” Israelite literacy. Rather, and as I illustrate below, they deploy their terminology of, for example, “widespread literacy” in conveniently ambiguous ways that permit implying that *literary* literacy was much more widespread (and at an earlier time) than other contemporary scholars allow.

That inerrantists push the evidence of Israelite textual production back to the thirteenth century BCE may begin to illustrate their biblical privileging commitments. Many inerrantists synthesize their understandings of the claims of biblical accounts and the significance of archaeological findings to locate Moses and the Exodus in the thirteenth century.⁷ Inerrantist insistence on possible evidence for thirteenth-century Israelite literacy may thus serve to uphold the requisite historical conditions for Exodus people and events to have been recorded in the mid-second millennium for inclusion in biblical accounts – and perhaps even for Moses to have been a figure who could have written some of these biblical writings, which is what many inerrantists understand biblical claims to necessitate about the “authorship” of the Pentateuch.⁸ For example, Hess highlights supposed evidence for Israelite literacy in the thirteenth century (Hess 2002: 83–88, 95). He also consistently emphasizes supposed evidence and arguments for a mid-second millennium context of Deuteronomy.⁹ Even so, Hess’ 2002 publication on Israelite literacy does not

7 For example, Kitchen 2003: 241–74, 307–12. It should be noted that many other inerrantists follow a more “straightforward” reading of certain biblical passages and, in conjunction with their assessments of archaeological and other historical data, locate the Exodus in the fifteenth century (e.g. Petrovich 2006).

8 The “essential Mosaic authorship” of the Pentateuch (i.e. holding that Moses wrote most but not all of it, or that the Pentateuch somehow originated substantially with Moses) remains a widespread inerrantist position: see, for example, Christensen and Narucki 1989; Garrett 1991; Block 2001; Averbeck 2012: 152–58. For examples of inerrantist defenses of the actual Mosaic authorship of all of the Pentateuch, see Barrick 2001; 2009.

9 Hess repeatedly stresses parallels between Hittite treaties and Deuteronomy to argue for a mid-second-millennium origin for the biblical book (Hess 2009a; 2009d: 419, 421), in addition to his consistent articulation of other data and arguments favoring a relatively early date for Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic History materials (e.g. Hess 2009d: 420–22). See also Hess’ commentary on Leviticus, in which he similarly adduces “parallels” and “comparative evidence” between Leviticus and various second-millennium sources and practices to argue for the “ultimate origin for many details [of Leviticus] in

explicitly indicate the privileging motive of early literacy for enhancing the plausibility of a mid-second millennium production of Deuteronomy or the rest of the Pentateuch, and thus my suggestion must remain speculative when it comes to his work on Israelite literacy.¹⁰ This conjecture may, however, gain greater traction when considered alongside the evidence I will adduce below for Hess' privileging of biblical claims in his treatments of Israelite literacy.

Other inerrantist scholars, however, are more explicit about the purpose of their recourse to evidence for literacy in mid-second-millennium-BCE Canaan. For these inerrantist scholars, such wider-Levant and even Egyptian mid-second-millennium literacy establishes the plausibility (even probability) of Israelite literacy at this time – an early-enough Israelite literacy for (someone like) Moses to have recorded both Exodus events and the God of Israel's associated revelation and laws, not to mention the other parts of the Pentateuch. Daniel Block, for example, makes precisely this use of not only evidence for literacy in mid-second-millennium Canaan, but also Millard's publications about early Israelite literacy:

A previous generation of scholars objected to the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch on the grounds that it required a level of literacy inaccessible to him But what is often overlooked by students of culture is that 'in the fullness of time,' in the middle of the second millennium BC, at precisely the right time, the Canaanites were developing a system of writing whereby all the sounds of their language could be represented in writing by two dozen symbols Millard concludes, 'There was literary activity in the Levant covering a wide range of texts and the scribes were clearly capable of producing books.' Is this not remarkable? God was using the Canaanites to prepare the way for his appearance at Sinai and for Moses' scribal work. By an act of uncommon grace Yahweh, Israel's 'uniquely communicative Deity,' chose the very people the Israelites were to destroy to be the agents that would make possible the transcription

the Mosaic era" and thus "a second-millennium BC origin for the call to holiness as defined by the book of Leviticus" (Hess 2008: 566–67).

- 10 While not an example of Hess writing about early literacy and the potential Mosaic origins of Deuteronomy, in an Evangelical "Apologetics" book Hess emphasizes that "narrative writing of events such as found in Genesis 12–36 was known in the patriarchs' world of the second millennium" (2011: 668). In context, such claims about early literacy serve to assure Hess' readers of the great antiquity, and therefore possible historicity, of the Patriarchal narratives in Genesis or its sources (Hess 2011: 667–68).

and mass communication of his revelation and Moses' interpretation. (Block 2001: 406-407)¹¹

Millard similarly deploys evidence for literacy around Canaan in the mid-second millennium (Millard 1978; 1998a: 175–79; see also Millard 1994). Emphasizing repeatedly that Exodus through Deuteronomy imply their mid-second-millennium origins (e.g. Millard 1998a: 175–76, 178), Millard argues that the evidence for scribal literacy in the Levant at that time makes it “easier to treat the content of Exodus to Deuteronomy as products of that period ... and that the biblical writings should be considered, in essence, Late Bronze Age books” (Millard 1998a: 179). In a different publication Millard even specifies Moses as the author of these writings that record what “God ... had spoken to [Israel's] leader Moses, giving them rules for their life in the new land as His people” (Millard 1978: 70). Various inerrantist scholars thus illustrate the biblical-privileging significance of their arguments for mid-second-millennium Israelite literacy: their arguments uphold the requisite historical conditions for biblical claims about the authorship, historical context, and historical events depicted in the Pentateuch to be accurate.

As the two quotes with which I began this section of the article make clear, inerrantists consistently and vigorously extend literacy in ancient Israel beyond scribes, priest, elites, professionals, and administrators. It is difficult to overstress the importance of this claim for inerrantists. It appears, often as a primary point, in almost all their publications on Israelite literacy, and many of their arguments are oriented around establishing it.¹² For example, in his 2002 discussion of Israelite literacy Hess summarizes his overall conclusions by saying, “[I]t is not possible to limit those who wrote and read to specific classes or places There is no evidence from the epigraphy to assume that members of any class could not learn how to read and write” (Hess 2002: 95). To the extent one can pin down the content of inerrantist rhetoric about “more” and “wide-spread” literacy in ancient Israel, this claim of potential literacy for any Israelite of any social or geographic location seems to be the point.

11 See also Kitchen 2003: 297–99, 304–306. Also of note, Bruce Waltke uses the Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions and arguments for “widespread literacy” among “Northwest Semitic cultures” in the mid-second millennium to claim that we have “strong reason to think that Abraham's descendants, though lowly slaves in Egypt, were literate” (Waltke 1988: 128).

12 Millard 1972: 102–103, 105, 108, 111; 1978: 68–70; 1985: 303, 306, 308; 1995: 207, 211, 212; 1998b: 701–702, 704; Hess 2002: 82–83, 95; 2006a: 146; 2006b: 344–45; 2009a; 2009b: 595–96; 2009c: 5, 8–9; see also Waltke 1988: 128–29.

It is worth noting the superfluous nature of this claim relative to inerrantist goals of countering those who restrict Israelite literacy to the seventh century BCE and later. One only needs a few scribes at any time to produce the biblical writings in periods amenable to inerrantists. Furthermore, as Ian Young demonstrates, the Hebrew Bible mostly associates such reading and writing practices with scribes, priests, and other professionals or elites (Young 1998a; 1998b). Nevertheless, this claim about the non-restriction of literacy to scribal figures remains a major emphasis in inerrantist publications about Israelite literacy.

What do inerrantists mean by their consistent stress on broadly available literacy in ancient Israel, beyond scribes and other professionals? Despite occasionally noting different levels of literacy and reading or writing competence (e.g. Hess 2002: 92; 2009c: 8–9), inerrantists ultimately associate what they term “literacy” in ancient Israel with the ability to read, and sometimes write, complex literary texts. When it comes down to it, the contemporary discursive significance of “Israelite literacy” for inerrantists has to do with the extent to which they can represent all kinds of non-scribe/professional ancient Israelites as having the ability to read, and sometimes write, biblical texts. Hess’ response to Christopher Rollston offers a helpful illustration (Hess 2009b: 595–96).¹³ Hess singles out for attention Rollston’s typology of Israelite literacy that distinguishes (1) the ability to read and write with “substantial facility in a writing system”¹⁴ from (2) the simple ability to write one’s name on a contract¹⁵ and also (3) the ability to read “the most remedial texts with at least a modest level of comprehension and often the ability to pen some of the most common and simple words.”¹⁶ Hess criticizes Rollston’s distinctions, implying that Rollston has illegitimately just made up “his own distinctive definition of Israelite literacy” (Hess 2009b: 595–96). In contrast, Hess has simply “accepted the wider ranging understandings of ‘functional literacy’ and ‘broader literacy’ as propounded by other scholars, rather than inventing [his] own [definition]” (2009b: 596). Denying the usefulness of Rollston’s typology for Israelite literacy, Hess instead re-emphasizes how “degree of literacy” varies from person to person in every culture (Hess 2009b: 595).

13 Responding to Rollston 2008 in which, among other things, Rollston criticizes Hess’ earlier publications.

14 Rollston labels this as “literacy” in his typology: “substantial facility in a writing system, that is, the ability to write and read, using and understanding a standard script, a standard orthography, a standard numeric system, conventional formatting and terminology, and with minimal errors (of composition or comprehension)” (Rollston 2008: 61).

15 Which Rollston denies is literacy or even a “functional literacy” (Rollston 2008: 61–62).

16 Rollston terms this category of people “semiliterates” (Rollston 2008: 62).

One would think that Hess' acceptance of diversity in levels of literacy should quell his opposition to Rollston's typology, which identifies relatively basic distinctions in kinds of reading and writing competencies. In his own detailed treatment of the epigraphic data Hess himself even distinguishes between the ability to scribble one's name and recognize it on a seal versus "the ability to read or write" (Hess 2002: 92). This maps well onto Rollston's categories of non-literate (the ability to write one's name) versus semiliterate or literate. Being consistent with some of his own findings and working with categories such as Rollston's, however, would militate against Hess' ability to represent such epigraphic data as evidence for widespread "literacy" in ancient Israel.¹⁷ Hess' claim that "many Israelites could read and write" (Hess 2009b: 596) is his rhetorical goal in discussing literacy.¹⁸

Hess makes a point of anchoring his widespread representation of Israelite *literary* literacy in the broader scholarly credentials of William Dever's category of "functional literacy." In the case analyzed above Hess uses the category and highlights its basis in the work of other scholars to furnish his assessment of matters with the legitimacy of validation by other scholars, something he denies to Rollston's relatively more minimal estimation of Israelite literacy. Elsewhere Hess likewise draws upon "functional literacy" to argue, for example, that "a variety of people from all walks of life ... could read and write," and that "every region and every level of society had its writers and readers Whether as Schniedewind's 'broader literacy' or Dever's 'functional literacy,'

17 Given recent approaches to studying ancient literacy outlined above (see n. 3) – in particular the stress on distinguishing between different kinds of reading and writing abilities, and even the call to move beyond imprecise uses of categories like "functional literacy" (e.g. Thomas 2009: 15, 16–17, 18, 23, 30) – Rollston's approach in fact aligns somewhat with broader scholarship, despite Hess' presentation of Rollston as adopting an idiosyncratic position.

18 Provan, Long, and Longman (2003: 58–59) provide further evidence for the plausibility of reading Hess as advocating widespread *literary* literacy beyond elites, scribes, and other professionals. They include a brief discussion of Israelite literacy, spanning two pages (2003: 58–59), and indicate that Hess' "argument [in Hess 2002] forms the basis of our whole paragraph [on Israelite literacy]" (Provan, Long, Longman 2003: 313 n. 18). How does their paragraph show them understanding Hess' argument? They explain that "the evidence [does not] justify recent attempts to limit literacy to specific classes of people (such as priests, scribes, or administrators); rather, apparently 'many individuals ... could write the simpler alphabetic script and ... did so for a variety of purposes and reasons'" (Provan, Long, Longman 2003: 59; quoting Hess 2002: 95). They go on to clarify further that the widespread literacy they have in mind is the *literary* literacy bound up with writing the "written historical tradition" used in producing biblical texts and also the writing of the biblical texts themselves (Provan, Long, Longman 2003: 59).

the epigraphic evidence continues to grow" (Hess 2006b: 345). "Functional literacy" makes another appearance in Hess' points about Israelite literacy in his later book on Israelite religion (Hess 2007: 233–34). He also continues to emphasize the potential ubiquity of "functional literacy" in two later publications touching upon Israelite literacy (Hess 2009a; 2009b: 595–96).

Given both Hess' self-representation as a producer of academic historical research that draws upon broader scholarship and the significance "functional literacy" has for him, one would expect to find some measure of support for his widespread *literary* literacy position in Dever's arguments for "functional literacy." After all, Hess explicitly anchors his use of the category in Dever's work. Instead, however, one finds nothing of the sort in Dever's *What Did the Biblical Authors Know and When Did They Know It?* In each case where Dever introduces the category and adduces evidence for it, he covers practices such as the ability to write one's name on a contract, seal, jar handle, or game board or basic writing exercises such as an abecedary (Dever 2001: 114, 143, 203). Dever furthermore explicitly contrasts such abilities with anything like the skills necessary to produce a "literary text" (Dever 2001: 114) or anything else "literary" like the Hebrew Bible (Dever 2001: 203). He explicates "functional literacy" as a decidedly "rudimentary" phenomenon (Dever 2001: 209), not a skilled literary-associated ability. In this way Dever's "functional literacy" aligns, for example, with Rollston's non-literate or semi-literate categories, which, as already discussed, Hess emphatically rejects.

As seen above, Hess also invokes William Schniedewind's category of "broader literacy" (Hess 2006b: 345; see also Hess 2009b: 596). Schniedewind's work similarly does not provide support for the significance "broader literacy" has in Hess' arguments. Schniedewind brings up this category in a review of several publications on Israelite literacy and says the following:

Obviously, literacy was concentrated in certain social strata as among bureaucrats, the military, priests, and merchants. While we should not overstate literacy, neither should we underestimate it. Two army officers (as in Lachish 3) would not have been discussing their ability to read in Egypt or Mesopotamia. Lachish 3 is one of many pieces of evidence that literacy broadened beyond narrow scribal schools. This was a revolutionary development. It may be wrong to speak of "widespread" literacy, but there is a shift toward a broader literacy. (Schniedewind 2000a: 331)

It is important to note Schniedewind's circumspect claims about several relevant matters. First, he specifies that the literacy in question was "obviously ... concentrated in certain social strata as among bureaucrats, the military, priests,

and merchants.” Second, he clarifies that there was not “widespread” literacy. Third, the kind of literacy evidenced by Lachish letter 3 exemplifies the “broader literacy” he has in mind. Schniedewind elsewhere clarifies the level of literacy he finds in Lachish 3. He argues that the “linguistic idiosyncrasies” and “very content” displayed in the letter “should [raise] the question of the linguistic competence of the author,” whom he specifies as having “rudimentary linguistic skills” (Schniedewind 2000b: 162). Furthermore,

The Lachish Letters most likely represent the mundane literacy of the late Judaeen administrative infrastructure. We should reasonably expect a much lower level of linguistic competence by the authors of these letters when compared to the authors of biblical literature This letter of the literate soldier is powerful evidence pointing to seminal changes in the social fabric of society during the late Judaeen monarchy – even if the level of this soldier’s literacy was quite basic and needed a scribe to help him. (Schniedewind 2000b: 163)

Schniedewind thus contrasts the “rudimentary” literacy skills constitutive of his category “broader literacy” with the complex *literary* literacy skills associated with many biblical writings. If one takes Schniedewind’s circumspect claims on these three points into account, it becomes clear that when Hess enlists Schniedewind’s “broader literacy” as support for his own representations of widespread Israelite *literary* literacy beyond scribes, administrators, and other elites or professionals, he has attributed content to Schniedewind’s work that Schniedewind himself explicitly denies.¹⁹ Hess’ invoking of Dever’s “functional literacy” and Schniedewind’s “broader literacy” as support for widespread Israelite *literary* literacy thus appears to be an attempt to bolster the scholarly credentials of his position, but in a way that demonstrably falls short of accurate interaction.²⁰

19 Note that Schniedewind elsewhere in the same publication characterizes some of the “broader literacy” in question as “diffuse, if mundane, literacy” (2000a: 328).

20 Schniedewind’s new book (2013) is now available. It is worth noting that his chapter “The Democratization of Hebrew” (2013: 99–125) aligns, in substance, with his earlier discussions of the nature of “broader literacy.” He repeatedly stresses that uses of writing had become “widespread” (e.g. 2013: 100, 103) and that, starting in the late eighth century, there was a “broadening of literacy” and “a decisive shift toward increasing literacy” (2013: 121). Furthermore, this “democratization” involved the spread of such reading and writing skills “to a variety of social classes” (2013: 101, see also 120), “through different classes of Judean society” (2013: 104), and “to nonscribal classes” (2013: 109, see also 112, 117, 119, 120). Nevertheless, and to continue the contrast with how Hess has invoked Schniedewind’s

Just as with Hess' criticisms of Rollston, his misuses of Dever's and Schniedewind's work have a consistent distribution to them. These misuses all work together with Hess' articulations of the significance of epigraphic data to broaden the extent of Israelite *literary* literacy. Hess accomplishes this presentation by, among other things, consistently treating evidence and other scholars' arguments for different kinds of reading and writing competencies as though they support his own picture of widespread "literacy," which, as we have seen, rhetorically amounts to widespread *literary* literacy in Hess' publications.

Millard's detailed discussions of epigraphic data also illustrate the rhetorical goal of associating literacy with the production and consumption of biblical texts. In his 1985 essay Millard demonstrates his command of specialized epigraphic evidence related to writing, showing meticulously the widespread attestation of various administrative, business, and personal writing practices (Millard 1985: 301–307). He notes that "undoubtedly the scribes were responsible for the majority of these ancient Hebrew texts" (1985: 303) and that "the Hebrew documents [he has surveyed] are all mundane survivors from daily life ... They reflect writing as primarily a utilitarian skill" (1985: 306). He then moves from such decidedly non-*literary* levels of literacy, with scribes plausibly responsible for most, to the claim that "passages in the Bible which mention writing [thus] gain credibility" (1985: 308). What kind of writing mentioned in the Bible does Millard have in mind? That of the king's copying and reading the book of the law and a similar "degree of literacy [permeating] society" (1985: 308). Millard continues:

The Israelites were to learn and teach the commands, always talk about them, and "write them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates" (Deuteronomy 11:20; c.f. 6:9). Is it credible that these words were written in a society which was totally incapable of performing them? The evidence of ancient Hebrew epigraphy suggests the answer is *no*; the law-giver's commands could be fulfilled to a large degree. (Millard 1985: 308; emphasis original)

earlier publications and claims about "broader literacy," Schniedewind clarifies the nature of the "widespread" uses of writing in question. He consistently stresses that "mundane" (2013: 102, 104, 122), "rudimentary" (2013: 105, 107, 109), and "signature" or "craft" or "craftsman" (2013: 105, 114) levels of writing skills are in view – indeed, kinds of reading/writing skills that are decidedly different from the *literary* types associated with the "scribes" who were "responsible for the composition and editing of the Hebrew Bible" (2013: 115–21).

Despite acknowledging different levels of writing abilities, including predominantly non-literary levels attested by the epigraphic evidence, Millard associates such evidence for literacy with the *literary* literacy of reading biblical texts. Millard has thus represented an extent and kind of literacy that far exceeds what his own evidence could support.

It is worth dwelling on this particular quote from Millard a bit more. Millard's epigraphic data demonstrably does not support his use of it in this passage. What is more, his own comments about the epigraphic evidence (see my discussion prior to the quote) indicate he is aware (at some level) of its inability to substantiate widespread Israelite *literary* literacy. Some other factor seems to operate here, which inclines Millard to (mis)use the epigraphic data to verify the historical possibility of the commands from Deuteronomy that he mentions. Millard's question, which he answers in the negative purportedly on the basis of epigraphic evidence, "Is it credible that these words were written in a society which was totally incapable of performing them?" thus starts to look more like a rhetorical question that offers a window into Millard's own commitments. It seems plausible to suggest that, for Millard, historical analysis *must* show that Deuteronomy and its commands reflect mid-second-millennium-BCE everyday Israelite reality – as opposed to the data from Deuteronomy suggesting other potential lines of analysis that do not necessarily involve holding that the text accurately reflects the historical reality of its claimed setting. As such, since Deuteronomy's commands, in Millard's reading,²¹ imply the ability of all kinds of Israelites everywhere to engage in *literary* reading, such a literacy situation must have been the case historically.

Millard's discussion of epigraphic data relevant for assessing literacy thus serves to uphold the historical conditions necessary for rendering Deuteronomy an accurate historical reflection of its claimed reality. We can accordingly redescribe Millard's treatment of the data in terms of a privileging approach to the biblical text that also highly values the demonstration of mastery over historical data (e.g. epigraphy and the biblical text in context). As discussed in my previous article, such a privileging approach characterizes inerrantist discourse, in which interpretive options that keep the Bible inerrant are methodologically preferred (Young 2015). Scholars who do not share Millard's apparent privileging commitments will not find his analysis of the epigraphic data credible. Such a privileging commitment seems necessary to account for how

21 I stress that we are talking about *Millard's understanding* of these commands and what they imply about the extent of literacy because, as Ian Young has argued, even these passages in Deuteronomy do not necessarily imply the kind of widespread literacy abilities that Millard claims (Young 1998a: 249–50).

Millard, an otherwise technically skilled and knowledgeable scholar, handles the evidence.

Before moving on I want to offer some preliminary observations, which anticipate my conclusions, about the preceding analysis of inerrantist claims about Israelite *literary* literacy beyond scribes and other professionals or elites. The above should suffice to illustrate how Millard and Hess demonstrably push their depictions of Israelite literacy beyond what the evidence and scholarship on which they draw could support. Millard and Hess repeatedly emphasize the widespread availability of a literacy they associate with *literary* textual production and consumption; specifically, widespread beyond scribes, priests, and other professionals or elites in ancient Israel. They do so, however, by painting an impressionistic picture that moves beyond the evidence and scholarship upon which they even claim to draw, particularly by treating evidence or arguments for any kind of reading or writing competence as evidence for “literacy,” thus obfuscating the differences between *literary* literacies and other kinds of reading and writing competencies. In terms of analyzing their discourse about Israelite literacy, it is difficult to take their arguments as, in fact, purposed to engage non-inerrantist historical scholarship. A competent reader with the requisite grasp of primary sources, the landscape of secondary literature, and the various issues attendant in examining Israelite literacy (or literacy in general, for that matter) would not consider their arguments serious contributions to the scholarly discussion – unless that reader already agrees with them.

What kinds of readers in what kinds of fields and social situations would find Millard’s and Hess’ arguments compelling? I would argue that, judging by the characteristics of their work, the field in which this discourse operates prizes the prestige of the academic and mastery of historical data. Such academic accouterments serve as a locus of authorization and legitimacy. The inerrantist scholars in question have both a command of tremendous amounts of historical data in specialized domains of inquiry (e.g. epigraphy) and the ability to demonstrate that command to others in a notionally academic setting. At the same time, however, it would seem that consumers in this field are either unable to or uninterested in critically assessing actual success in this academic and historical engagement. Put crassly, the impression of academic mastery matters, not the substance. Finally, some consideration beyond those of standard academic-historical methodology seems to operate on this point for inerrantists, a consideration that augments their historical scholarly practices. Such a consideration seems necessary to account for how Hess and Millard consistently handle the evidence, interact with other scholarship, and present the relevant issues. As I will continue arguing below, part of that consideration involves a basic commitment to privileging (their understanding of)

the claims of biblical writings. These points will prove important for attempts to redescribe such inerrantist discourse, especially as data for scholars of religion.

In making their arguments about (*literary*) literacy beyond scribes and elites, inerrantists pick up on a claim put forward by many in the history of scholarship. Everyone seems to agree that learning and using a cuneiform writing system such as Akkadian would have been beyond the potential abilities of the average farmer in ancient Mesopotamia. With the advent of alphabetic writing, however, so the argument goes, literacy became a live option for people from “all walks of life.” Such claims about the ease of learning the alphabet, and thus the ability of people without time and resources for any kind of “education” to acquire literacy, recur throughout inerrantist discussions of Israelite literacy.²² Millard capitalizes on this argument as a key piece of evidence for his claims about very widespread Israelite literacy in his 1972 article (Millard 1972: 102-103, 108, 110).²³ When it comes to seeking analogies for understanding the extent of Israelite literacy, Millard writes, “For a society comparable with Israel in this aspect we should turn not to Babylon or to Egypt, but to classical Greece where the same script was the possession of every citizen” (Millard 1972: 108). A subsequent publication by Millard illustrates the relationship between this alphabet argument, his representation of widespread Israelite (*literary*) literacy, and his goal of establishing that non-scribe/professional Israelites could read biblical writings:

Consequently [i.e. due to the rise of the alphabet] any intelligent person could learn to read and write without making that their profession, and so the monopoly of the scribes could be broken It is far more likely that [Moses] used the alphabet, just arrived at its standard form. While there would always be need for the professional scribes, it was now possible for the ordinary Israelite to learn his letters and so to read the sacred Law, if he had access to a copy. (Millard 1978: 69–70)

22 See, for example, Millard 1972: 102–103, 108 110; 1978: 69–70; 1985: 305, 307; Hess 2009b: 596; 2009c: 6–8. See also Waltke 1988: 128; Block 2001: 406; Kitchen 2003: 305.

23 Millard reproduces what seems to have become an infamous claim by William F. Albright: “The 22 letter alphabet could be learned in a day or two by a bright student and in a week or two by the dullest; hence it could spread with great rapidity. I do not doubt for a moment that there were many urchins ... who could read and write as early as the time of the Judges” (quoted in Millard 1972: 102).

Between Millard's two 1970s articles discussed in the preceding paragraph and his 1995 article about literacy, much work appeared both on alphabets and literacy *and* on the extent of literacy in classical antiquity. In general such works criticized both the traditional optimistic assessments of literacy based upon the supposedly incredibly easy-to-learn alphabet and the relatively high estimations of literacy in classical Greece.²⁴ Of note is the fact that Millard's 1995 article does not draw upon the alphabet argument in its case for broader Israelite literacy. Another publication by Millard, however, reveals that he did not omit the alphabet argument from his 1995 article because he had nuanced or repudiated his earlier use of the argument in the light of new research on alphabets and literacy. In his monograph, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus*, Millard again deploys the alphabet argument to explain how literacy expanded far beyond scribes: "but the rise of the simple alphabet and its spread during the Iron Age opened the door to writing for anyone who was determined to learn and the results are evident in ancient Israel" (Millard 2000: 168). In a footnote to support "the results [which were] evident in ancient Israel," Millard references his 1995 article in which he avoids any alphabet arguments, but in which he again sets out a case for very broad literacy among ancient Israelites (Millard 2000: 168 n. 40). Thus, while Millard does not bring up the alphabet argument in his 1995 article in which he argues for a high estimation of literacy in ancient Israel, in a subsequent publication he represents the alphabet argument as a key reason for the widespread literacy for which he argues in the article. This would seem to indicate that Millard disagrees with the then-available research on alphabets and literacy, though he does not acknowledge or engage any of it in his 1995 publication that articulates an incredibly high view of Israelite literacy – apparently, again, with the alphabet understood by Millard as a key factor.²⁵

24 See, for example, Warner 1980, which takes aim specifically at Millard 1972 and its claims about the alphabet and broader Israelite literacy. See also William Harris' classic work (1989), which argued for relatively lower levels of literacy in Greece and the ancient world than are traditionally claimed. Numerous monographs and edited volumes have appeared that respond to, build upon, and criticize Harris. While a number of these studies contend that perhaps Harris overstressed the illiteracy of the general Mediterranean populous (e.g. Bagnall 2011), they nevertheless agree that when discussing literacy one must be careful to distinguish how kinds of *literary* literacy differ from kinds of competencies such as different "occupational literacies," and that, on the whole, levels of *literary* literacy were much lower than previously thought. The following volumes appeared before the publications by Millard discussed in this paragraph: Humphrey 1991; Thomas 1992; Bowman and Woolf 1994.

25 In his 2000 publication Millard does show awareness of Harris' work but demurs from Harris' views, instead "seek[ing] to establish a more positive view [of the extent of

Hess also draws upon the alphabet argument in his claims about widespread Israelite literacy (Hess 2009b: 596). He devotes several pages to this argument in his article “Questions of Reading and Writing in Ancient Israel” (Hess 2009c: 6–8). Hess opens the section by noting recent work, especially an article by Rollston, problematizing the claim that alphabets were learned quite easily and quickly (Hess 2009c: 6).²⁶ After acknowledging that such work would, in fact, problematize the widespread literacy position he advocates, Hess counters Rollston’s arguments, and the empirical research on which Rollston relies, with an anecdote from an article about literacy in an “oral environment” (Hess 2009c: 7–8).²⁷ Hess also makes un-theorized claims about the relative ease of learning an alphabet without vowels compared to an alphabet with vowels (Hess 2009c: 7–8). Critical analysis of the specifics of Hess’ anecdotal evidence is not necessary for the point I want to make here. One can note that Hess’ response to detailed arguments about alphabets and literacy, which draw upon peer-reviewed published empirical research, is to generalize from an anecdote about alphabet learning and to make un-theorized claims about gaining facility in using alphabets without vowels versus alphabets with vowels. This brings into focus a recurring theme in my analysis of inerrantist discourse. Hess represents his work on Israelite literacy and the alphabet as historical scholarship in interaction with other academics. Only people who already agree with Hess and/or lack the academic competence to assess these issues, however, would consider Hess’ (literally) anecdotal evidence to constitute appropriate engagement with Rollston’s points and the broader historical and anthropological issues. In sum, both Millard and Hess use the alphabet argument to add another notionally academic-historical prong to their case for widespread Israelite literacy, specifically literacy beyond scribes, priests, and other elites and professionals. In this case, just as with other examples examined above, both Millard and Hess demonstrably do not engage in critical historical investigation of the matter.²⁸

literacy]” (Millard 2000: 155). Millard also shows awareness of Warner’s article (1980) in his 1985 essay that does use the alphabet argument, though he does not engage Warner’s points about the alphabet (Millard 1985: 304, 306, 309 n. 9 and 20).

26 Hess has in mind mainly Rollston 2006, and the research referenced therein.

27 Referencing Macdonald 2005. The anecdote involves stories about how some people among the Bedoin and Tuareg learned alphabets in under a day.

28 One can instructively contrast Millard’s and Hess’ uses of the alphabet argument with Schniedewind’s (2013: 105; see also Sanders 2009: 6–7, 40–47). Schniedewind acknowledges some of Rollston’s critiques of the alphabet argument, but then points out that Rollston focused on the acquisition of “advanced proficiency [in reading and writing] and not the [craft literacy] ability to read a seal or write a receipt” (Schniedewind 2013: 105).

The rhetoric of inerrantist engagement with other scholars also provides a fruitful analytical opportunity. Hess not infrequently represents scholars whom he opposes as trading in “assumptions” on matters where they, in fact, offer arguments. For example, in some brief comments about Dever’s work Hess writes, “Dever appears to *assume* that ‘book religion’ ... occurred late in Israel’s religion ... and that during the Monarchy it remained known to a few elite leaders, priests, and other professionals in Jerusalem” (Hess 2006a: 146; emphasis mine). As Hess indicates awareness of in other publications, Dever, in fact, *argues* for his positions about literacy in ancient Israel, and does so with detailed examinations of ancient data.²⁹

Hess’ interaction with Rollston’s criticisms of his own work affords another glimpse at the rhetoric and dynamics of Hess’ engagement with other historians. Hess (2009b: 595–96) castigates Rollston (2008) for failing to note the supposedly obvious curricular functions of the Tel Zayit abecedary and implies that Rollston thus tries to minimize its relevance as evidence for literacy. According to Hess, Rollston at most “concede[s] its possible use for ‘curricular activities’” (Hess 2009b: 596). This demonstrably misrepresents Rollston’s points and illustrates Hess’ non-engagement with Rollston’s actual argument. Rollston does not “concede” anything. Instead he discusses a range of historically attested options for analyzing the abecedary, including potential divinatory significance, but still explicates its importance for treatments of literacy in Tel Zayit (Rollston 2008: 71–72). Hess, however, represents any discussion of the abecedary’s significance aside from attesting literacy in Tel Zayit as somehow an attempt to ignore the obvious. One can, however, plausibly analyze Hess as, in his drive to generalize anything having to do with writing into evidence for “literacy,” ignoring a broadly attested significance of writing in the ancient world; in this case, the notional authority and numinousness of writing and related practical religious possibilities.

The rhetoric and dynamic of Hess’ engagement with other scholars thus constitutes another invitation to analyze the specifics of his discourse, its field, and associated interests. He continues to position his work as academic study that interacts with other scholars, even engaging in the classic reflective

Schniedewind thus critically addresses a qualified validity of the alphabet argument and specifies what kinds of reading/writing skills are and are not in view.

29 Interestingly, in the following sentence Hess alters his rhetorical presentation of Dever: “Dever does *argue* for an earlier and more widely accepted ability to read and write in ancient Israel than many modern scholars would accept” (Hess 2006a: 146; emphasis mine). Whereas Dever’s discussions of literacy trade in *assumptions* when restricting *literary* literacy more than Hess would like, Dever’s treatments of literacy are composed of *arguments* when they advance views coinciding with Hess’ rhetorical goals.

scholarly practice of demonstrating awareness of the relevance of assumptions and the extent to which identifying an unexamined and faulty assumption undermines a position. Brief analysis, however, reveals that Hess' critical claims discernibly misrepresent the scholars with whom he purportedly engages. Again, it would thus seem likely that readers without the requisite training or interest to assess Hess' interaction make up the consumers in his discourse's field. At the same time, they recognize and are attracted to demonstrations of academic mastery, prizing them as markers of success and legitimacy.

I conclude my analysis of inerrantist scholarship on Israelite literacy by teasing out what seems to be an underlying consideration for inerrantists that pushes them towards their representations of widespread Israelite *literary* literacy. Millard repeatedly stresses how "the tenor of the Old Testament books is to treat reading and writing ability as an ordinary accomplishment" (Millard 1972: 108). He opens his 1995 article with a paragraph spelling out this claim in greater detail:

The Bible implies there was writing among the Israelites from the time of Moses onwards. The verb 'to write' first occurs when Moses wrote an account of the defeat of Amalek (Ex. 17:14), the verb is used of writing God's words, by Moses (Ex. 24:4) and by God himself (Ex. 34:1; Dt. 4:13, *etc.*). Thereafter it is a normal activity, with the king commanded to write himself a copy of the Law (Dt. 17:18), or the citizen a divorce deed (Dt. 24:1-3), then there are letters written (2 Sa. 11:14, *etc.*) and also registers (Nu. 11:26), legal deeds (Je. 32:10), chronicles (1 Ki. 14:19, *etc.*), prophecies (Je. 36) and advice (Pr. 22:20). That is the testimony of books preserved through generations of religious tradition. (Millard 1995: 207)

Millard makes the same claim again in his review of Susan Niditch's *Oral World and Written Word*: "Writing is present in the Hebrew Bible as a normal part of life; there is no hint that it was a rare skill or that reading was unusual" (Millard 1998b: 704). He further amplifies such positions by discussing how biblical commands for Israelites to know and obey the Law depend upon the conditions of widespread literacy, without which, according to Millard, the Bible's claims about writing would lack credibility (Millard 1985: 308).

In line with my argument above when discussing Millard's use of epigraphic evidence in his 1985 essay, I propose that such claims by Millard illustrate the animating consideration that helps explain his maximizing assessments of Israelite literacy. Upholding such conditions of literacy serves his commitment to privileging the claims of the biblical writings and reinscribing their

ideologies in his historical analysis. If biblical writings represent *literary* literacy as both normal and normative, then, for Millard as an inerrantist, that simply must have been the case. This kind of analysis is what many religious studies scholars have termed “protective strategies” that privilege the claims of a religious actor or text in the analysis of that actor or text. In this case, when it comes to why some biblical writings represent widespread *literary* literacy, Millard only entertains potential lines of explanation that necessarily involve privileging those writings’ claims. He does not treat options that fail to uphold biblical claims as possessing suitable explanatory power or accuracy.

For example, much work on the Hebrew Bible and “scribal culture” has analyzed the writings of the Hebrew Bible precisely as scribal products. This approach contextualizes them, their claims, and their content in terms of the social interests and matrices of the scribes who produced, edited, and transmitted these writings – not to mention mediated them to those who lacked the requisite skills to interpret complex intertextual literary texts, to the extent that these writings were thus mediated (e.g. Carr 2005; van der Toorn 2007; Noll 2008). Following one iteration of such an approach, we can fruitfully re-describe the writings of the Hebrew Bible as, among other things, part of the education-enculturation curriculum of scribes and elites (e.g. Carr 2005; van der Toorn 2007). These writings practically served to reinscribe and even naturalize the ideologies and conditions of such literate specialists’ position as loci of access to ancient wisdom, law, and knowledge of the gods and the cosmos – which, in turn, often served to legitimate and project the power and prestige of their royal or other benefactors. While not all the content of these writings directly reflects scribal ideology,³⁰ we can plausibly analyze some such writings’ prizing of scribal practices, and even representing them as normal or normative, in terms of scribes inscribing their own ideologies and even societal ideals into their textual products for a variety of reasons (e.g. Carr 2005; Noll 2008; Berge 2012). This approach, combined with the many arguments against widespread Israelite *literary* literacy,³¹ thus offers historical and social reasons for not taking the widespread literacy and textual-dissemination claims of some biblical writings at face value (e.g. Noll 2008).

30 Noll, for example, explains how, within this rubric, we can understand the situation of scribes “produc[ing] and read[ing] a great deal of literature that did not express their own religious or philosophical beliefs” (2008: 422–23).

31 See, for example, Carr 2005; Rollston 2006; 2008; 2010: 85–144; van der Toorn 2007: 1–108; Schniedewind 2013: 99–125. Though Sanders (2009) offers important criticisms of Carr’s and van der Toorn’s comparative ancient Near East education paradigm (e.g. Sanders 2009: 8–10; Schniedewind 2013: 69–70, 117–18), his work still limits the *literary* reading and writing skills associated with, for example, biblical literature to scribes and elites.

While I broadly agree with the focus of recent scholars on the agents of textual production/consumption and their social locations, positively arguing for this kind of approach is not my point here. What is significant is that such an approach provides a plausible analysis of the Israelite literacy situation in relation to the claims of certain biblical writings – but does so in manner that does not privilege those biblical claims. Biblical claims about normative or normal Israelite *literary* literacy are thus not simply taken at face value, but are themselves data requiring analysis – even if it were to turn out that they are accurate. For Millard and his protectionist approach, however, biblical writings make their claims about widespread *literary* literacy because, among other things, such a situation was simply, in fact, the case. His protective methods only countenance analysis that takes his understandings of biblical claims about literacy at face value. Millard's publications about Israelite literacy thus serve to uphold the historical conditions necessary for biblical writings' claims and general representations of reality to be accurate. In other words, Millard's publications facilitate a privileging approach to the Bible.

Hess does not make such a privileging consideration as explicit as Millard. It still, however, plausibly comes through both in how some such consideration seems necessary to account for the characteristics of his discourse and in some less overtly privileging statements he makes about biblical writings' claims. Reviewing the Hess publications covered in this article with an eye toward ways he privileges the Bible is instructive. Whenever Hess discusses a critical scholarly position about the Bible that does not privilege biblical claims (i.e. biblical claims about a biblical writing's authorship or historical context), he consistently adopts the rhetoric of: "these suggested common origins remain speculative" or "there is no sense in which an agreement has been reached on this subject" (Hess 2009a).³² Such discourse certainly reflects the conventions of academic study, especially noting degrees of speculation in hypotheses and positions that lack consensus. Hess, however, tends to invoke such cautionary tropes only for positions that militate against a privileging approach to the Bible. Conversely, when it comes to offering analytical options that privilege the biblical text, Hess contents himself with advancing possibilities that lack emphasis on circumspection and reminders of potential speculation, lack of con-

32 One can multiply such examples from other Hess publications. For example, he predictably stresses how "problems arise when one attempts to reconstruct the process by which editors worked" and "the speculative nature of multiple redactions" when discussing critical views about the composition of various biblical writings that do not uphold what he takes as the claims about origins/authorship in those writings (Hess 2009d: 418).

sensus, and so on.³³ This selective use of academic conventions in predictable ways supports the inference that Hess has a protectionist approach to the Bible, though one certainly pursued through academic practices.

Conclusions

In this article I have analyzed Millard's and Hess' publications on Israelite literacy and argued that they exemplify expected characteristics of inerrantist discourse. To review, both Hess and Millard represent their work as historical-academic study, characterized primarily by their mastery of specialized data sets and critical interaction with broader scholarship. Even so, the most plausible explanation for various recurring patterns of argumentation and handling of the data is that they privilege the claims of the biblical writings. Likely because they understand the biblical accounts to represent literacy as both normal and normative, for them a widespread estimation of Israelite *literary* literacy has become bound up with biblical claims that must be privileged. Many of their arguments and their handling of data do not seem intended for engagement with non-inerrantist scholars, who would note their formal and substantive shortcomings. Instead, and hypothesizing based on the characteristics of their publications and what kinds of readers would likely recognize their work as persuasive and academic, their consumers are people who already agree with them, presumably due to similar biblical privileging commitments, and/or who lack the requisite knowledge of data, issues, and the landscape of secondary literature to assess their claims.

All of the above can contribute to redescription of Millard's and Hess' discourse, its field, its social locations, and its associated religious practices. One can relate their valuing of historical mastery not only to their posts as specialized academic handlers of the Bible but also to their inerrantist field, which orients around the historical accuracy of the Bible. Given my analysis of Millard's and Hess' work, (notional) academic mastery is a locus of authorization and legitimacy within their inerrantist field(s). This remains the case even

33 For instance, Hess consistently emphasizes potential evidence, including possible parallels with Hittite treaties, that permits dating Deuteronomy and other biblical writings to the mid-second millennium (see n. 9), even stressing how the standard view of situating Deuteronomy alongside later neo-Assyrian treaties "is not without problems" (Hess 2009d: 421). However, Hess does not urge such caution about the proposed Hittite treaty parallels – despite the fact that using possible parallels with Hittite treaties to argue for a mid-second millennium Deuteronomy is a marginal position, at best, within the field of Hebrew Bible scholarship.

though many of the consumers in this field apparently lack academic and historical training themselves. Within this field, protectionist scholarship that constrains potential analysis of biblical writings, and associated historical matters, by those writings' own claims is both recognized by and attractive to consumers. Such observations, and various others stemming from my analysis, can contribute to framing inerrantist scholarship on Israelite literacy as an opportunity for the study of religion. In addition to aligning the redescription with research on privileging and protective strategies, these observations also orient sociological and anthropological expectations. In keeping with my earlier arguments about inerrantist scholarship (Young 2015), we can assess Hess' and Millard's work as part of a kind of religiosity whose participants greatly value the prestige and legitimacy of the academy and the associated mastery of specialized data. These participants accord both symbolic and economic capital to those who can serve as specialists in such practices. At the same time, the participants in this religiosity, who allocate such symbolic and economic capital, are incapable of or uninterested in critically adjudicating the actual academic success of their scholarly specialists, one of whose primary tasks seems to be upholding the notional academic legitimacy of protectionist approaches to their Bible.

My analysis offers a way forward for understanding part of the historiography of scholarship on Israelite literacy. It also illustrates and corroborates the findings of my previous article (Young 2015), which redescribes inerrantist theorizing about their scholarly projects. However, whereas my previous article focused on inerrantist theorizing about both inerrancy and the necessity of inerrancy-constrained historical methods for engaging the Bible, this article has focused on a selection of inerrantist scholarship that does not explicitly frame itself with presumptions of inerrancy and theorization of special inerrantist interpretive methods. Hess and Millard, instead, represent their work as standing on their historical handling of ancient data and their interactions with broader scholars. This article thus illustrates the operation of privileging and thus protectionist (at least in effect) approaches to the Bible among inerrantist scholars who do not frame their work with presumptions of inerrancy and preferences for interpretive and analytical options that uphold inerrancy. As I have argued, Hess' and Millard's handling of the relevant primary and secondary sources is most plausibly explained by biblical-privileging commitments and associated (at least tacit) methodological constraints on biblical scholarship that are characteristic of inerrantist fields. To the extent that my proposed redescription of this kind of inerrantist scholarship, at least in the cases of Millard and Hess, as a kind of protectionism is accurate, this article contributes to the study of religious protectionism. I contend that

studies focusing on other areas of inerrantist discourse will further nuance and illustrate my conclusions, as well as demonstrate the productivity of redescribing inerrantist scholarship as a rich and varied analytical opportunity for the study of religion.

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