

"Before the Scrolls provides an important corrective to the scholarly tendency to import anachronistic assumptions about contemporary books into study of ancient biblical texts. An exciting entry in the emergent field of material historical study of the Bible, Mastnjak's work introduces a 'collection model' that has major implications for the interpretation of biblical books and study of their formation."

—DAVID M. CARR, Professor of Hebrew Bible, Union Theological Seminary

"Almost two centuries after biblical scholars began the conversation of hypothetical documents lying behind the present text, Mastnjak puts flesh on what those earlier texts looked like as objects, the organizational logic behind their collection, and the process by which these smaller scrolls were brought together in the large scrolls found at Qumran. This is an important volume for Hebrew Bible scholarship, which will in turn generate rich insights into the development of the biblical text."

—THOMAS BOLIN, Professor of Theology and Religious Studies,
St. Norbert College

"Mastnjak has produced a remarkable study that offers an elegant and convincing solution to the problem of the earliest material forms of biblical literature. His bold and convincing arguments combine recent discoveries about ancient technologies of writing with careful textual analysis and will change how scholars imagine the literary form of the earliest manuscripts of biblical texts."

—BRENNAN W. BREED, Associate Professor of Old Testament,
Columbia Theological Seminary

Before the Scrolls traces the media history of the biblical prophetic corpus to propose a material approach to biblical literature. Although scholars understand that the material of composition was the scroll rather than the codex, they persist in imagining the form as a single textual object. This assumption pervades centuries of scholarship and drives many of the questions asked about biblical composition.

Nathan Mastnjak raises the question of the original physical format of biblical texts and argues that many of the literary works that would eventually become the Bible's prophetic books were not written initially as books. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel were originally composed on loosely organized collections of multiple short papyrus scrolls and sheets. Though rarely considered in scholarship, the realia of a text's form, format, production, and material substance have a profound influence on the meaning of the text. Unlike works committed to single book-scrolls, these collections did not have predetermined orders of reading and were susceptible to multiple arrangements. Only in the Hellenistic era were these compositions edited, organized, and copied into single-volume book-scrolls such as those known from the Dead Sea.

By investigating the relationship between form and meaning and the transition from the collection to the book, Mastnjak suggests novel solutions to classic problems in biblical scholarship, such as the relationships between the MT and LXX

of Jeremiah and that between First and Second Isaiah. The failure to account for the materiality of the prophetic corpus has led scholarship to occasionally ask the wrong questions of these compositions and has blinded it to the vital role that Hellenistic bookmakers played in the creation of the Bible as we know it. Reconceiving much Judean literature on a collection model rather than book model has significant implications for our understanding of how the Bible itself was composed and read.

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