

From Scrolls to Scrolling: Sacred Texts, Materiality, and Dynamic Media Cultures

Bradford A. Anderson, Editor. *From Scrolls to Scrolling: Sacred Texts, Materiality, and Dynamic Media Cultures*. Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter, 2020. xvii, 307pp. \$104.99 Hardcover. ISBN 978-3110634440. Open Access eBook <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110634440>.

Born of a project and symposium funded by the Irish Research Council New Foundations Scheme, *From Scrolls to Scrolling: Sacred Texts, Materiality, and Dynamic Media Cultures* considers the effects of materiality and the digital shift upon sacred texts in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Editor Bradford A. Anderson notes that these three traditions tend to understand their sacred texts as “timeless,” which can lead to a disembodiment of the text from its material, temporal, and cultural contexts. Countering that tendency, this volume explores textual materiality as it has occurred through history, beginning with ancient scrolls, progressing through the codex, and extending into the digital sacred texts of the present. Beyond simply tracing the evolution of textual mediums, the chapters delve into the ways in which readers and media shape one another and the experience of reading and interacting with the texts.

The introduction (“Materiality, Liminality, and the Digital Turn: The Sacred Texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in Material Perspective”), written by editor Bradford A. Anderson, outlines the structure of the volume, reveals the goals of the project, and explores areas for future study. By considering the effects of materiality upon “the production, use, and interpretation of the scriptures,” the volume seeks to “resituate materiality, along with transitions between media forms, as significant for the academic study of sacred texts within and between these religious traditions” (2). To achieve this goal, *From Scrolls to Scrolling* is organized into two primary sections: “I: Sacred Texts and Material Contexts,” and “II: Sacred Texts and the Digital Turn.”

The first section, consisting of seven chapters, provides a predominantly historical perspective on the materiality of sacred texts. Anna Krauß and Friederike Schücking-Jungblut consider how the layout of the poetical units in some Psalms found in the Dead Sea Scrolls can be interpreted to tell us about how the texts were used in ancient Judaism. Next, Dan Batovici looks at paratextual elements found in early Christian papyri, arguing that the popular scholarly distinction between public- and private-use papyri may be oversimplifying the role of the texts in early and late-antique Christianity. Asma Hilali uses annotations in early Islamic fragments and manuscripts to identify evidence of textual transmission before the “scholastic transmission tradition which would later emerge” (59-60). Shifting ahead on the historical timeline, Ben Outhwaite explores sociocultural and political conditions emerging in the Jewish community under Islamic rule, attributing the adoption of the codex within Judaism to the conglomeration of these diverse issues. Following the same shift from scroll to codex in Judaism, Javier del Barco examines text-layout decisions made when transitioning between formats, suggesting they “have much to tell us about the functional dimensions of these formats, as well as the relationship between scroll and codex after the emergence of the latter” (6). Also considering text-layout, Eyal Poleg observes the repeated pattern of innovation being introduced in the printing of the Psalms and then being reversed in later editions, attributing these returns to traditional layouts to the “power of performance and mnemonics” (147). Finally, Amanda Dillon’s chapter begins to bridge the historical gap between the ancient texts of Part I and modern digital editions found in Part II. Dillon analyzes Bible journaling through the lens of social

semiotics, highlighting the importance, and indeed necessity, of the material form for this textual engagement.

The five chapters in the second section, “Sacred Texts and the Digital Turn,” focus on scholarship and the digital humanities, textual authority, and sociocultural elements in the transition from analog to digital scripture. Garrick Allen begins the section by considering the ways in which digital critical editions can account for rich interpretive details that are present in the manuscript traditions of Revelation 13, but missing from traditional critical editions. The multi-faceted nature of digital critical editions gives readers the opportunity, Allen argues, to “better reflect on the complex relationships between textual production, transmission, exegesis, and reception history” (7). Alba Fedeli looks at how the diversity of readings and interpretations that emerged from early Qur’ānic manuscripts parallels the interpretive actions made by scholars when coding and marking up these same manuscripts in digital scholarship projects. Next, Joshua Mann uses the YouVersion Bible App to explore paratextual elements in digital Bibles and their impact upon the user’s engagement with the text, regardless of whether they have consciously chosen to engage with the elements. Natalia Suit observes that electronic forms of the Qur’ān are shaping religious practices for Muslims in Egypt, sometimes spurring debate around textual authority and bodily concerns like ritual purity. In the final chapter, editor Bradford Anderson considers semantic and iconic uses of sacred texts, positing that, currently, the digital medium more readily lends itself to semantic uses, while in general society still relies upon physical items for iconic purposes.

With a wide breadth of analyses across three traditions and centuries of textual history, *From Scrolls to Scrolling* achieves its stated ambition of foregrounding the importance of materiality and transitions between media as significant for the academic study of sacred texts. Each of the chapters illustrates a distinct approach to studying materiality in the context of textual studies, offering, in some sense, a high-quality survey of the variety of scholarship we can expect to see as this field continues to emerge. This volume sets itself apart from existing scholarship by expanding the field of inquiry beyond the content of the texts to also consider the impacts of the chosen medium upon the religious experiences of readers and the subtler changes caused by shifts in media of sacred texts. Digital technology adds new dimensions to the already complex phenomenon of reading sacred texts, but the chapters in Part II of this volume create a foundation off of which more scholarship can build.

The same broadness that makes this volume valuable as a survey of sorts also limits it in important ways. By having such a large historical and multi-traditional coverage area, there is little opportunity for deep conversation between the scholarship. I agree with Anderson that there is ample room for further development in “exploring how the materiality of sacred texts is bound up with social and cultural factors,” something this volume introduces well (9). The purpose of including sacred texts from three traditions was to show intra- and inter-religious engagement between the texts through time. That interaction was less clear throughout this volume, but Anderson does acknowledge the need for further research in this area. There is also not any information about the chapter authors in the volume, a small but odd detail worth noting.

By being published open access, this volume makes itself extremely accessible as a downloadable PDF or ePUB document, in addition to having paperback and hardcover editions available for purchase. The content of the volume is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License, making it the perfect addition to a course reading list. I highly recommend *From Scrolls to Scrolling: Sacred Texts, Materiality, and Dynamic Media Cultures* for those working at the intersections of religious texts and technology, whether scholar, pastor, or student. Its broad topical coverage, variety of methods, unique avenues of inquiry, and

radical accessibility position this volume to be a foundational text in the area of textual studies, materiality, and the spaces between.

Elizabeth R. Miller
Emory University