In the meaningfully-titled book, *The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, William Hallo classifies ancient Near Eastern literature in three great blocks: literature about gods, about kings and about individuals. The last one would be more or less equivalent to wisdom literature. Generally speaking, biblical literature may also be ascribed to the three large spheres of temple, palace and prophets’ and sages’ schools. Canonical literature of the Bible receives its authority from these three sources: the sacred authority of priests, the royal authority and the wisdom or academic authority of scribal schools. A comparative model for the study of the relationship between canon and textual transmission in the Bible is that of “canonical” literature of the Ancient East.

In the Mesopotamian world a royal *nihil obstat* was a precondition of canonization. Not only religious authority, but also imperial Persian authority during the period of Ezra–Nehemiah and that of

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Professor Florentino García Martínez has acquired from many the authority as *amicus et magister*. Let this be my testimony of homage and gratitude.

I would like to thank Dr Andrés Piquer Otero, researcher at Universidad Complutense de Madrid, for the translation of the Spanish original.


Ptolemaic kings in the case of the version of the Seventy Sages, and, similarly, the Roman imperial power in the Christian councils, had a word to say on the authority of books acknowledged as sacred and official. But the process of writing, edition and textual transmission of authorized books was a matter of scribes, of specialized staff or of true scholars. It would be enough to remember the figure of Erasmus and his crucial role in the establishing of the textus receptus of the New Testament, independently of any political or religious authority. The same happened with the Alcalá Polyglot, produced by Hebrew and Greek scholars and sanctioned by papal and royal authority only in a later phase.

The books in the Torah, Prophets and Writings were primarily seen as authoritative since a given moment in the Second Temple period, especially because they transmitted the lists and traditions which furnished evidence—in many cases creating the impression of going back to the earliest days of Israelite history—for the succession order of the Israelite priesthood, of patriarchs, judges and kings of Israel and Judah and of prophets and sages in Israel. The many genealogical lists and Israelite historiography altogether followed in this the models of Sumerian and Akkadian kings lists and apkallû lists. The books of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah further extended the lists, genealogies and traditions of Israel into the Persian period. Soon after, sacred character was accorded to books which could prove a Mosaic or prophetic origin, going back to a period before “the failure of the exact succession of prophets” (C. Ap. 1.37–43).

Nevertheless, the Jewish tradition attested in ’Abot 1:1 continued to state an unbroken transmission of authoritative tradition from Moses to Joshua to the elders, the prophets, and thence to the immediate predecessors of the rabbis. Similarly, Christian tradition acknowledged canonical authority for New Testament books when they could be traced back to the authority of an apostle or one of his associates. At the same time, succession after the apostles implied authority in the apostolic centres of the Christian church. Both synagogue and church established a closed canon of sacred books, thus acknowledging a cut in the tradition of prophets or apostles, but at the same time they gave the utmost importance to the legitimate succession of rabbis or popes.

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6 G. Veltri, Libraries, Translations, and ‘Canonic’ Texts: The Septuagint, Aquila and Ben Sira in the Jewish and Christian Traditions (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 225: “[The Septuagint] was (only) a written text for the King Ptolemy.”