Long before the modern discussion of orality and literacy, the talmudic rabbis discussed the role of these factors in the transmission of the Jewish tradition. They argued that Jewish tradition was made up of components originally composed or revealed in written form, and also of material that had originated orally and been transmitted by memory and not by manuscript. Some of this material the rabbis saw as originating in a divine oral revelation. Although the Pharisees before them had been aware of an oral body of tradition, they did not make a claim of divine revelation, only of authority via oral transmission. When the rabbis prescribed that what in their view had been revealed in writing was to be passed down in writing, and what had been revealed orally was to be transmitted orally, they essentially asserted that to some extent the medium was closely connected to the message. Mode of transmission was an essential aspect of accuracy, in their view.
This approach is in marked contrast to that found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and also with that attributed to the Sadducees in our sources. Regarding the Qumran corpus, we seem to be dealing with a group that places authority in written texts, rather than in both written and oral traditions. To the sectarians of Qumran, there was a written text that transmitted God's revealed word, and it was accompanied by exegetical teachings; but whether in the halakhic sphere or the aggadic—to borrow the rabbinic terms—these interpretations were closely based on the written word, and they themselves were always written, even if they may have emerged from discussion—an oral activity to be sure. While the sectarians recognized נwrites, the hidden teachings derived from their interpretation, and while this category has a degree of commonality with the rabbinic oral law in that they are both supplements to the written Torah, the nistar knows no oral authority. Authority derives from inspired sectarian interpretation, not from some chain of tradition. Indeed, the sect asserts that the link of tradition was broken, and they alone have recovered the true teachings. They reject the Pharisaic view of the "traditions of the elders."5

That the sect subscribes to a written culture is clear not only from their collection of so many books, but also from the mention of detailed record-keeping. There were to be lists of members in accord with rank, lists of property brought into the sect, lists of military units, and even dockets of reproof offered before the mevaqger, an official of the sect.6

Given the role of text and manuscript as the only medium for memory among the sectarians, it seems appropriate to dedicate a study to the mentions of scroll, book, and text in the Qumran documents themselves. But such a study requires context, so I will begin with the background set by the Hebrew Bible, then proceed to the Scrolls
