SACRED TEXTS IN AN ORAL CULTURE

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One of the difficulties of Bible translation is that many of the cultures that we work with are essentially oral. Stories, poetry and song are the ways in which information is conveyed, not the printed page. This makes for a real challenge when trying to get across the message of a rather large written document. The Luke Project which Sue is involved in is one attempt at an answer to this question, translating the Gospel of Luke and then producing the Jesus film. Onestory is an intermission partnership which also tries to present the message of Scripture in a way that is accessible to people from oral cultures.

However, one thing I hadn't considered was that the cultures that the Bible emerged from were also highly oral. This excellent (though long and scholarly - be warned) article by Ben Witherington takes a good look at the oral nature of the Christian Scriptures.

> *The literacy rate in those Biblical cultures seems to have ranged from about 5% to 20% depending on the culture and which sub group within the culture we are discussing. Not surprisingly then, all ancient peoples, whether literate or not, preferred the living word, which is to say the spoken word. Texts were enormously expensive to produceâ€"papyrus was expensive, ink was expensive, and scribes were ultra expensive. Being a secretary in Jesusâ€™ age could be a lucrative job indeed. No wonder Jesus said to his audiencesâ€"â€˜let those who have ears, listenâ€™. You notice he did not ever sayâ€"â€˜let those who have eyes, readâ€™. Most eyes could not read in the Biblical period.*