

## Scribal Practices Reflected in the Paleo-Hebrew Texts from the Judean Desert

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At Qumran, fragments of eleven to fourteen biblical texts written in the paleo-Hebrew script have been found, in addition to a few paleo-Hebrew texts of uncertain nature:<sup>1</sup> 1QpaleoLev, 1QpaleoNum (same scroll as 1QpaleoLev?; frgs. 16-24 possibly derived from different scrolls yet again); 2QpaleoLev; 4QpaleoGen-Exod<sup>l</sup>, 4QpaleoGen<sup>m</sup>, 4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup>, 4Qpaleo-Deut<sup>r,s</sup>, 4QpaleoJob<sup>c</sup>; 6QpaleoGen, 6QpaleoLev; 11Qpaleo-Lev<sup>a</sup>. Two fragments from cave 4 (4Q124–125) are still unidentified. Although 4QpaleoParaJosh contains parts of Joshua 21, it probably is not a biblical text.

Beyond Qumran, the two texts written on both sides of the enigmatic nonbiblical papyrus fragment found in Masada, pap paleoMas 1o (Mas1039-320), are also written in paleo-Hebrew characters.<sup>2</sup>

These texts, rather than preceding the use of the square script, were actually written at a relatively late period, possibly but not necessarily as a natural continuation of the earlier tradition of writing in the “early” Hebrew script. They were concurrent with the use of the square script, as can also be proved by a paleographical examination of the paleo-Hebrew script.<sup>3</sup> It is tacitly assumed by most scholars that with the revival of the paleo-Hebrew script in the Hasmonean period, texts were transformed from the square to the paleo-Hebrew script,<sup>4</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> See M.D. McLean, *The Use and Development of Palaeo-Hebrew in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*, unpubl. diss., Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 1982, 41-47 (University Microfilms); D.N. Freedman and K.A. Mathews, *The Paleo-Hebrew Leviticus Scroll (11QpaleoLev)*, 1985; P.W. Skehan, E. Ulrich, J.E. Sanderson, *DJD IX*, 1992. See further the relevant *DJD* volumes for the texts from caves 1, 2 and 6.

<sup>2</sup> For the content of the two texts see S. Talmon, “Fragments of Scrolls from Masada”, *EI* 20, 1989, 278-286.

<sup>3</sup> See M.D. McLean, *loc. cit.*; R.S. Hanson *apud* Freedman and Mathews, *11QpaleoLev<sup>a</sup>*, 20-23; *idem*, “Paleo-Hebrew Scripts in the Hasmonean Age”, *BASOR* 175, 1964, 26-42. For an earlier discussion, see L. Blau, “Wie lange stand die althebräische Schrift bei den Juden im Gebrauch?”, *Gedenkbuch zur Erinnerung an David Kaufmann*, edd. M. Brann und F. Rosenthal, 1900, 44-57.

<sup>4</sup> Thus Mathews, *op.cit.*

this is probably correct, although it is not impossible that the habit of writing in the paleo-Hebrew script had never ceased.

The fragments written in the paleo-Hebrew script contain only texts of the Torah and Job, both of which are traditionally ascribed to Moses (cf. manuscripts and editions of the Peshitta in which Job follows the Torah).<sup>5</sup> The longest preserved texts written in the paleo-Hebrew script are 4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup> and 11QpaleoLev<sup>a</sup>.

Texts written in the square and paleo-Hebrew scripts share many scribal features since both types of texts are exponents of the same Hebrew writing tradition, as visible in the following common features:

- a. The materials used. Most of the texts from the Judean Desert, and certainly from Qumran are written on parchment — no paleo-Hebrew biblical fragments on papyrus are known, while we do know of a few papyri of biblical texts written in the square script.
- b. The writing in scrolls, consisting of sheets of leather, and in columns.
- c. Most Qumran parchment texts written in the square script (*not* the *tefillin*) and in the paleo-Hebrew script were ruled horizontally (indicating lines) as well as vertically (indicating the beginnings and usually also the ends of columns).
- d. The written text is suspended from the horizontal lines.
- e. Content units were separated from each other by two main spacing systems, that is, a space in the middle of the line and a space from the last word in the line until the very end of the line. These paragraphs were not subdivided into still smaller units (verses) such as are known from the later Masoretic tradition.
- f. A special layout of the text in poetical units pertains to texts written in square characters as well as to 4QpaleoDeut<sup>r</sup> (Deuteronomy 32) and probably 4QpaleoJob<sup>c</sup>.
- g. In both types of texts words were separated from each other, albeit in different ways.
- h. There are no characteristic differences between the two types of writing concerning the content of the text. Texts belonging to the Masoretic family were written in both scripts, and this pertains also to the so-called pre-Samaritan texts (e.g., 4QNum<sup>b</sup> and 4QExod-Lev<sup>f</sup> on the one hand and 4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup> on the other).

However, there are also differences between the scribal habits reflected in the texts written in the two types of script. Certain differences between these texts are inherent with the traditions of writing in these scripts, and therefore cause no surprise. This pertains to the following two details:

<sup>5</sup> One explanation for the writing of a text of Job in paleo-Hebrew would be to assume that Job was ascribed to patriarchal times. But it is probably more sound to assume that Mosaic authorship was ascribed to that text, cf. *b.BB* 14b-15a.

- a. The nondistinction between medial and final letters in the texts written in the paleo-Hebrew script.
- b. The splitting-up of words in the paleo-Hebrew script at the ends of a line and their continuation in the next line, as was customary in texts written in that script (as well as in classical texts).<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, the two groups of texts also differ from each other in several scribal features which are not connected with the writing in these particular scripts. These differences are the focus of the present analysis.

1. While words were separated by spacing in the texts written in the square script, in the texts from the Judean Desert written in the paleo-Hebrew script most words were separated by dots, while sometimes similar graphic dividers were used. These dots were written on the line from which the letters were suspended (see, e.g., 4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup> and 11QpaleoLev<sup>a</sup>), so that they were positioned at the same level as the tops of the letters. The word dividers in 2QpaleoLev and 6QpaleoGen were shaped like little diagonal strokes, while in the enigmatic paleo-Hebrew text pap paleoMas 1o (Mas1039-320) the word dividers were shaped as small triangles. Some of these word dividers were simply forgotten by the scribes. At the ends of the lines they were usually left out (see 4QpaleoExod<sup>l,m</sup>, 4QpaleoDeut<sup>s</sup>, and 11QpaleoLev<sup>a</sup>), but they were included in 2QpaleoLev. Possibly they were left out at the ends of lines by some scribes since in the last column of the sheet they would have coincided with the guide dots. On the other hand, the scribe of 2QpaleoLev placed at the end of the lines both the dots serving as word dividers and short diagonal lines guiding the drawing of the horizontal lines. The only known text in which words were not separated by any signs but by spacing is 4QpaleoDeut<sup>r</sup>.
2. No scribal signs of any kind, written either in the margins or between the lines of the text, such as were inserted in the texts written in the square script or in classical texts, are known from the texts written in the paleo-Hebrew script. This pertains to the signs indicating new paragraphs, to various types of marginal notes possibly indicating remarkable details, and to line-fillers. The meaning of several signs in the texts written in the square script is not clear, and in this context it should be remarked that some of the signs are letters of the paleo-Hebrew and Cryptic A alphabet and were therefore intentionally vague.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *inter alia*, the Mesha inscription, the Lakhish ostraca and see M. Lidzbarski, *Handbuch der Nordsemitischen Epigraphik nebst ausgewählten Inschriften*, 1898, 126-127. For the classical texts, see E.G. Turner, *Green Manuscripts of the Ancient World*<sup>2</sup>, 1987, 19-20.

<sup>7</sup> See my article, "Letters of the Cryptic A Script and Paleo-Hebrew Letters Used as Scribal Marks in Some Qumran Scrolls", *Dead Sea Discoveries* 2, 1995, in press.

3. In two paleo-Hebrew texts (4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup> and 11QpaleoLev<sup>a</sup>), but not in other ones, large paleo-Hebrew *waws* were written in the spaces between the paragraphs, when the first word of the next paragraph would have started with this letter. This phenomenon is not known from texts written in the square script, but it is paralleled by the single occurrence of such a *waw* in the square script in 4QNum<sup>b</sup> col. XXI,28 in Num 27:22.<sup>8</sup> The background of this scribal habit is unclear. The *waw* in 11QpaleoLev<sup>a</sup> occurs only in some open sections, possibly indicating a major subdivision, while the practice of 4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup> cannot be analyzed well since the ends of most lines are missing. In that text the *waws* were written in some spaces between paragraphs, both in the scroll itself and in the patch in col. VIII.
4. The use of cancellation dots for the correction of mistakes, known from texts written in the square script as well as from classical texts,<sup>9</sup> is not known from texts written in the paleo-Hebrew script.
5. Whereas all the texts written in the square script show scribal intervention in different degrees,<sup>10</sup> including the carefully transmitted texts of the Masoretic family, the texts written in the paleo-Hebrew script show virtually no scribal intervention, either by the original scribes or by subsequent scribes or readers. It is not impossible that some letters or words in the text have been erased, but if that is the case, such erasures are no longer visible. The only instances of scribal intervention mentioned by the editors of the paleo-Hebrew texts are one erasure in 1QpaleoLev frgs. 3-4, l. 5, two supralinear additions by a later hand in 4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup> col. XVII,30,33, one supralinear correction (frg. 10 ii l. 2), one linear correction in 4QpaleoGen-Exod<sup>l</sup> (frgs. 24-29, l. 12), and two erasures in 11QpaleoLev<sup>a</sup> in frg. E,3 and col. VI,6. This situation implies that the texts written in the paleo-Hebrew script were transmitted more carefully than the manuscripts written in the square script. This carefulness must have been connected with the different milieu in which the texts were copied. This fact is unrelated to the content of the various paleo-Hebrew biblical manuscripts, since they reflect completely different textual traditions (see below).

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<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, variations of these paleo-Hebrew *waws* are also found in the margins of a few texts written in the square script: 4QPs<sup>b</sup>, 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> (col. VI,22), and in 1QS col. V,1. Cf. also the truncated *waw* in the paleo-Hebrew script in the bottom margin of 5QLam<sup>a</sup> col. II. In 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, 4QpIsa<sup>c</sup>, and in 1QS the sign is written in the margin between the columns, indicating the beginning of a new paragraph, while in 4QPs<sup>b</sup> and 5QLam<sup>a</sup> it was written in the bottom margin, without any context.

<sup>9</sup> See Turner, *op.cit.*, index.

<sup>10</sup> For an analysis, see my article, "The Textual Base of the Corrections in the Biblical Texts Found in Qumran", *The Dead Sea Scrolls — Forty Years of Research*, edd. D. Dimant and U. Rappaport, 1992, 299-314.

6. No inscribed patches written in the square script are known, and the only inscribed patch known from the texts from the Judean Desert was attached to a text written in the paleo-Hebrew script. It is unclear whether this difference between the two types of writing is a coincidental result of the fragmentary information about the texts from the Judean Desert. In 4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup>, an inscribed round patch once attached to col. VIII, displays a script and orthography different from the remainder of the scroll ('*hrn* is spelled defectively on the patch, but *plene* in the main text of the scroll). The patch was sewn onto the back of the manuscript, as is clear from the partially written words on the patch written within the stitching and blank rims of the patch. These partially written words were continued in the main text of the manuscript. This is the only known inscribed patch from Qumran, while similar ones are known from the scribal tradition of the Samaritan Pentateuch.<sup>11</sup>
7. The extant fragments of paleo-Hebrew texts show no instances of indentations, as opposed to the presence of such indentations in several texts written in the square script. In a single instance such an indentation was reconstructed by J.E. Sanderson for 4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup> in col. IX 30-31 (Exod 12:20-21),<sup>12</sup> but because of the lack of parallels for this practice, this reconstruction is unlikely.
8. As a result of the splitting of words in the paleo-Hebrew texts between two lines, almost straight left margins could be obtained (see, e.g., 4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup> cols. I, VI, IX and all columns of 11QpaleoLev<sup>a</sup>).

Beyond the comparison between the texts written in the paleo-Hebrew script, one notices differences between the individual paleo-Hebrew texts. These texts reflect a similar scribal approach, but the scribes of these texts often displayed their individuality in specific features:

- (1) In only two paleo-Hebrew texts (4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup> and 11QpaleoLev<sup>a</sup>) were large paleo-Hebrew *waws* written in the spaces between the paragraphs, when the first word of the following paragraph would have started with this letter. See above (3). In other paleo-Hebrew texts this system was not used.
- (2) 4QpaleoDeut<sup>r</sup> is the only paleo-Hebrew text not using dots as word dividers (it uses spacing instead). The word dividers in 2QpaleoLev and 6QpaleoGen were shaped like little diagonal strokes rather than dots. See above (1).
- (3) In two paleo-Hebrew texts little diagonal strokes or apostrophes were written at the ends of sheets for the drawing of straight lines (2QpaleoLev and 4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup>), in the latter case at the end of the sheet (col. I), but not at

<sup>11</sup> See T. Anderson, *Studies in Samaritan Manuscripts and Artifacts — The Chamberlain-Warren Collection* (= American Schools of Oriental Research Monograph Series 1), 1978, 24.

<sup>12</sup> P.W. Skehan, E. Ulrich, and J.E. Sanderson, *Qumran Cave 4.IV, Palaeo-Hebrew and Greek Biblical Manuscripts* (= DJD IX), 1992, 60.

the beginning of sheets (cols. II, XIX, XLV). In two other texts they were not used (4QpaleoGen-Exod<sup>l</sup>, 11QpaleoLev<sup>a</sup>). At the same time, in a large group of texts written in square characters guide dots are used for this purpose.

- (4) Most texts arrange the sense units in paragraphs, separated by spacing at the end of the paragraph after the last word in the line, and subdivided by smaller spaces in the middle of the line. This pertains also to the texts written in paleo-Hebrew characters. In addition, 4QpaleoGen-Exod<sup>l</sup> (e.g., frg. 7 col. i, 5-6; frg. 16, 3-4; frg. 19, 5-6) used a spacing system for a still greater subdivision extending from the last word in the line to the end of the line and *in addition* a completely empty line.
- (5) As in texts written in the square script, most texts written in the paleo-Hebrew script use spacing in the middle of the line as a means of subdividing the paragraphs (see 1QpaleoLev, 4QpaleoExod<sup>l,m</sup>, 4QpaleoDeut<sup>r</sup> for clear evidence). On the other hand, the well-preserved text 11QpaleoLev<sup>a</sup> did not use this device.
- (6) The only known text in which word-dividers were written also at the ends of lines is 2QpaleoLev.
- (7) By the same token, the only text in which a scribe wrote both word dividers and guide dots at the ends of lines is the same 2QpaleoLev.

That the writing of texts in different scripts represents different scribal schools is a likely, but still unproven assumption. At the same time, the differences between the texts written in the paleo-Hebrew and square scripts described above are characteristic enough in order to support that assumption. The different texts indeed belong to different scribal centers or scribal schools, although the nature of these schools is a matter of some speculation. As shown above, within the school which produced the paleo-Hebrew texts there was also room for some personal features. There is no reason to assume that the Qumranites themselves wrote complete texts in paleo-Hebrew characters. It has been suggested cautiously by the present author that these texts were written by Sadducees,<sup>13</sup> although the correctness of that assumption is not a necessary element in the chain of our arguments. It is more important to stress that different scribal schools were involved.

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<sup>13</sup> "The Socio-Religious Background of the Paleo-Hebrew Biblical Texts Found at Qumran", *Festschrift M. Hengel*, in press.