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# Scribal Production and Literacy at Qumran

## Considerations of Page Layout and Style

The study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the site of Qumran entails at times a narrative of a “poor intellectual community” of wise and pious scribes and sages—in other words, a scribal centre humming primarily with manuscript production, study, and even composition of new texts.<sup>1</sup> The creators of the Scrolls are regarded as a collective society, still bordering somewhere near the proto-monastic, characterised by exceptional levels of literacy. The unusually high literacy attributed to the Qumran community is reminiscent of that attributed to other social pockets whose written outpourings were preserved by the accident of history such as the workman’s village of Deir al-Medina in Egypt. The Scrolls are a collection of between 700 and 900 manuscripts, dating from the mid-third century BCE to mid-first century CE. The scrolls tell us about the activities of writing and reading in early Judaism, about religious thought, biblical interpretation, and the early Jewish literary spirit.<sup>2</sup> The collection is associated with the archaeological site of Khirbet Qumran on the western shore of the Dead Sea due to the geographical and chronological proximity of the twelve caves in which the Scrolls were found and inhabitation of the site during the same era. Locating the provenance of the Scrolls with Qumran is not beyond dispute, but it is close to scholarly consensus.<sup>3</sup> The Scrolls present some of the earliest manuscript witnesses to the Hebrew Bible, offering a glimpse into the life of an early Jewish movement living along the Dead Sea. These manuscripts present a useful material-textual example of the rich religious and literary variety of Judaism before the destruction of the Second Temple of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE.

The interpretation of the manuscripts as a whole is based partly on how scholars interpret the Khirbet Qumran archaeological site and its nearby marl caves. One such argument—the Golb hypothesis—describes the deposit of the caves as entirely the result of the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE.<sup>4</sup> This theory presents challenges because of the proximity of most of the caves to Khirbet Qumran: the main caves are but a stone’s throw from the site, and one (Cave 4) is even found on an outcropping of the plateau on which we find the archaeological site. Alternatives to the community hypothesis such as a villa, fortress, or commercial centre, have presented major problems in critical interpretation. With the major operative interpretation of the site of Qumran as the home of a functioning religious community who were responsible

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1 Cf. Lange 2008.

2 Cf. Mroczek 2016.

3 Cf. Stökl Ben Ezra 2007; Baumgarten 2004; Dimant 1995.

4 Golb 1995.

in some way for the Scrolls, recent studies have developed ways in which we can better describe the scrolls collection and its role within the community of Qumran: as a library, a genizah or intentional burial of retired manuscripts, or perhaps a combination of both.<sup>5</sup> Scholars argue for the most part that the *yachad*, or Congregation, deposited most if not all of the scrolls into the caves, and were responsible for their production and maintenance. The overtly literary, philosophical, and religious character of the collection, nearly devoid of documentary (i.e. non-literary) texts, certainly lends weight to the argument that this is a library, purpose-built collection, or purposeful deposit, rather than an accidental deposit preceding the threat of disaster and displacement. The nature of manuscript industry and production, however, has remained a challenge for the study of the Scrolls though, given the small size of the community.

The function and status of scribes at Qumran is often raised to the level of intellectual sages, forming a humble literary community of isolated scholars. Scholarly focus has been on the generation of new texts at Qumran, of innovation and distinctive religious thought. However, recent studies on literacy in antiquity indicate that most scribes had a low or middling socioeconomic status and engaged primarily in administrative functions, and that the copying of literary manuscripts was a low-status task, not the job of a sage or scholar. To do a lot of low-status administrative tasks you need many hands, and the reproduction and maintenance of manuscripts was time-consuming. It was not an envied task, and would not be the responsibility of “higher” thinkers and writers in antiquity.<sup>6</sup> Casting doubt on the consensus of a purely scholarly gathering of souls residing at Qumran, Charlotte Hempel has written on the question of ordinary daily responsibilities at Qumran such as laundry, cooking, cleaning, and trade, questioning the idea that all members of the community were primarily engaged in spiritual or studious activity.<sup>7</sup> Revealingly, and perhaps suspiciously, even Ben Sira advertises the “high” life of a scribe as one who spends his time learning rather than copying texts (Sir 38–39).<sup>8</sup> Our mental picture of the

5 Cf. Taylor 2012; Wassen/White Crawford (eds.) 2015; Popović 2015; Golb 1990, 1995.

6 Cicero, *Att.* 4.10.1; 4.14.1; 8.11.7; 8.12.6; 9.9.2; 13.31.2, Casson 2001, 73, 157.

7 Hempel 2012.

8 Sir 38:24: “The wisdom of the scribe depends on the opportunity of leisure, and he who has little business may become wise.” Sir 38:33: “Yet they [craftsmen and farmers] are not sought out for the council of the people [...] and they are not found using proverbs.” Sir 39:1–2, 4: “1 On the other hand, he who devotes himself to the study of the Law of the Most High will seek out the wisdom of all the ancient, and will be concerned with prophecies. 2 He will preserve the discourse of notable men and penetrate the subtleties of parables. 4 He will serve among great men and appear before rulers, he will travel through the lands of foreign nations, for he tests the good and the evil among men.” Sir 39:9–11: “9 Many will praise his understanding, and it will never be blotted out; his memory will not disappear, and his name will live through all generations. 10 Nations will declare his wisdom, and the congregation will proclaim his praise. 11 If he lives long, he will leave a name greater than a thousand, and if he goes to rest, it is enough for him.” (Revised Standard Version)

average Qumran scribe is rather similar to Ben Sira's celebrated scribe who spends his days at leisure studying wisdom and being widely respected in his community (Sir 38–39). In the Community Rule, at least one member of the community is meant to be studying and interpreting Torah and blessing the community “day and night,” with participants relieving each other's study vigils in shifts (1QS 6:6–8). A similar rule is found in the Damascus Document (CD 14:6–8). The rule requires therefore that there are enough members with sufficient ability to carry out these tasks, while at the same time taking for granted the practical maintenance of a dedicated sage's surroundings and sustenance. The “home economics” of Qumran is a topic that makes some rather uncomfortable. Yet the theory of an intellectual scholarly Qumran community, consisting of numerous exegetes, is still in tension with the argument for a vast amount of manuscript production taking place at Qumran itself, alongside considerations of wealth at Qumran.

Studies on literacy in antiquity indicate that scribes' primary functions were accounting and administration, and that the copying of literary manuscripts was usually an occasional, low-status task.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the ownership of large book collections is associated with high economic status; such readers would be elite literati such as Ben Sira, not copyist scribes.<sup>10</sup> Other collections such as those of Masada, Wadi Muraba't, Babatha, and Salome Komaise can provide some context of the size and nature of Jewish text archives during this time.<sup>11</sup>

This study, therefore, is a reflection on the question of the character of literacy at Qumran: whether the scribes of Qumran sages are mostly engaged in studying Torah, or sages who are sometimes copyists, or if they are mainly copyists. Or perhaps, does the study of Torah in some way include a high level of copying manuscripts?

In order to delve meaningfully into the idea of Qumran as a scribal lab or scribal centre of manuscript production, we must necessarily begin with the big picture: many scrolls for a tiny group, and a group prefers to identify itself as mainly scholarly in nature, rather than as copyist scribes. From this perspective, we can think about the purpose of the scrolls as a collection and conduct a holistic analysis: considering elements of style, location, number, size, and quality. Thinking about the scrolls as being most likely the possession or under the protection of the Qumran community, we might ask: why did so many scrolls belong to a single community, if they did? How could, and why would, a small group produce so many books, and why would they keep them all? How many scrolls of Deuteronomy or Psalms does one small community require in a century and a half? Is there anything in the distinctiveness or quality of the scrolls, their layout and style for example, that reflects their purpose and provenance in relation to manuscripts in the rest of the Mediterranean? If we consider the

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Carr 1996; Cribiore 1996, 2001; Harris 1989; Johnson 2004; Johnson/Parker (eds.) 2009; Small 1997; van der Toorn 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Casson (ed.) 2001; Johnson/Parker (eds.) 2009; Sawyer 1982; Thomas 1992.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Cotton/Yardeni 1997; Yadin 1971, 1999.

Scrolls' presentations of themselves as physical manuscripts, their page layouts or *mise en page*, alongside archaeological and socioeconomic factors, we might contend better with the proposal of Qumran as a centre for highly literate sages, an industrious scribal centre, as well as questions of provenance and belonging.

## Productivity and Protection

The most widely accepted theory in scholarship at present is that the community of Qumran was “highly productive” as a centre of textual production and learning.<sup>12</sup> This theory is based partly on the discovery of five inkwells at the site and the prevalence of literary texts over documentary sources in the caves. This interpretation—Qumran as an early pious Jewish community that can be thought of as composed of highly literate sages and scribes, or in other words, a “scribal centre”—is not without its own resulting challenges. For one thing, the production of the Scrolls is proposed to fit squarely within the period of inhabitation of the site (100 BCE to 70 CE). However, the size of the group outpaces the grand scale of the collection. The proposal of a genizah deposit centre is one way in which scholars have made sense of the scale of the collection versus the size of the community.<sup>13</sup> Estimating the population of Qumran, Jodi Magness theorises a continual population of around twenty people based on the quantity of bowls for dining—nearly 1000, covering a period of inhabitation over around a century and a half—found in the pantry (Locus 86).<sup>14</sup> Within this framework, the proposed scale of manufacture is difficult to determine, but it is estimated that the small group was “highly” active, even prolific. The provenance of these some nine hundred manuscripts is thought to have originated almost entirely within the hands of a very small close-knit community, working over a time period of around 150 years, with the majority of manuscripts datable to the Herodian period. An estimate of the rate of production would be challenging and contain too many variables, for example the idea that the number of scrolls in the original collection was not much larger than the extant number of scrolls uncovered today. Another variable would be years of intense production followed by less activity.

Judging by the number of different unique texts found in the collection, one can perhaps cautiously estimate a working library of perhaps 200–300 texts at any one time, perhaps more, given the lifespan of a scroll at approximately thirty to forty years from production to the obsolescence, damage, or deterioration that make “retirement” necessary for a manuscript.<sup>15</sup> Given the high number of certain popular

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Stökl Ben Ezra 2007; Wassen/White Crawford (eds.) 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Stökl Ben Ezra 2012; Taylor 2012; Brooke 2005; Stacey 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Magness 2002, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. van der Toorn 2007.

manuscripts—Psalms (36 copies); Deuteronomy (30); Genesis (20); Isaiah (21); Exodus (17); Leviticus (15); Numbers (8)—the library must have been either careless or richly funded.<sup>16</sup> The estimate of unique literary manuscripts over time may be somewhere between 500–600 different works, with many texts having only one or two copies. This is a conservative estimate with far too many variables to rest on a satisfactory figure—but nevertheless constitutes an astonishingly high quantity in Mediterranean antiquity. By comparison, a grand library of a Roman elite, such as the library found in the Villa dei Papiri of Herculaneum, preserved by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, held an estimated 1,100 manuscripts, mostly philosophical in nature, and dated between the third century BCE to first century CE. This library was most likely owned by the father-in-law of Julius Caesar, Lucius Calpurnius Piso, who is thought to have been the patron of a modest Epicurean teacher and philosopher called Philodemus.<sup>17</sup> Most individual book collections found in Egypt and at Herculaneum have surfaced private individual collections of manuscripts numbering anywhere between half a dozen to a dozen, with only a couple of private collections containing between fifty or a hundred rolls.<sup>18</sup> The assembly of a large collection, owned collectively by a group, maintaining about 200 or 300 manuscripts would require either large purchases or inheritance of scrolls, or a team of scribes constantly maintaining the number of texts. In sum, while there are variables that make precise estimates impossible, we are left with what is undeniable an unusually major and well-equipped book collection, the size of which was enviable in antiquity. Accounting for the sheer size and quality of this collection, in comparison to other ancient libraries, must be central to any theory concerning the characteristics and makeup of the Qumran community, and to theories concerning the accumulation and production of the Scrolls themselves.

In this light, the “highly productive scribal lab” argument requires a great of industriousness for such a small community that preferred to describe itself as a centre of learning and interpretation rather than of humble book-copying. The “scribal lab” argument also assumes a lack of periods of disaster and difficulty, inertia and turnover, pest damage, environmental erosion from Dead Sea air, or any break from continuous copying. A more reasonable estimate would be the proposal of medium to large donations of manuscripts over time, or perhaps a dependable trickle of a few manuscripts each year, a kind of honorarium or simply donation upon membership. The theory of donation would make sense in light of the community’s practice of common ownership, as initiates gave their possessions to the group (1QS 6:25).<sup>19</sup> Scholars such as Charlotte Hempel, George Brooke, and John J. Collins have argued for a plurality of interrelated book collections, the presence of multiple, merging, and

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. VanderKam/Flint 2002, 150.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Bowditch 2001; Gold 1987; Johnson/Parker (eds.) 2009; Nauta 2002; Sider 2005; Zarmakoupi (ed.) 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Houston 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Magness 2011, 98.

overlapping libraries over time.<sup>20</sup> Their argument is partly chronological, expressing the way in which we might describe the fluid and evolving ownership of the Scrolls by a community that is shifting and rotating in membership over time. Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra's argument of "old caves" and "young caves" lends to this framework of development and evolution.<sup>21</sup> Hempel's recent theory has put forward the tentative suggestion that Cave 4, in particular, could be characterised as the Restricted Section of the library, since it contained so many of the sectarian texts.<sup>22</sup> Whether arranged by time or theme, the overlapping or interweaving plurality of collections proposed for the Scrolls helps to make sense of the textual plurality of different variant editions of the same texts among the Scrolls, particularly the varying editions of the biblical texts. Plurality and perhaps a steady stream of donated manuscripts from ever-changing membership also permits us to interpret the overlapping book collections across the long lifespan of the community without imagining a rigid, near-constant re-production of books and the composition of new texts. The community might be interpreted even as being conscious of outward signs of wealth. Intentional modesty might therefore explain an overall absence of community wealth or excess is evidenced both by archaeological remains and literature such as 4QInstruction.<sup>23</sup>

While many of the sectarian texts are attributable to the Qumran community, others pre-date the inhabitation of Qumran by the community. Scientific analysis of ink by Ira Rabin and her team have shown that the Thanksgiving Scroll, at least, was most likely composed at Qumran itself. It was found that the chemical composition of its ink closely resembles the mineral composition of elements in the Dead Sea valley.<sup>24</sup> At this early stage, Rabin's analysis confirms the provenance only of the Thanksgiving Scroll (1QH<sup>a</sup>), found in Cave 1. The rest of the manuscripts, however, must be estimated by their location in the marl caves surrounding Qumran, as well as palaeographic and literary features.

If we maintain that most scrolls were produced at Qumran, or at least that they were under the care of the community there, what, then, was life like for the individuals caring for, and adding to, this library whose size compares with that of wealthy aristocratic collections? Many of the manuscripts among the Scrolls are what would be called *de luxe* or luxury quality (a great number are in Caves 4 and 11), written on excellent quality parchment with nice scripts and plenty of spacing. Such manuscripts in antiquity would be considered the proviso of the wealthy. From archaeological evidence, there appears to be a large discrepancy between the rich *de luxe* quality of some of the Scrolls and the absence of luxury goods and ornamentation at Khirbet Qumran. Dennis Mizzi has examined how the sparing use of imported red ink

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<sup>20</sup> Hempel 2013, 2017a, 2017b; Brooke 2011b; Collins 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Stökl Ben Ezra 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Hempel 2017b.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Goff 2016; Mizzi 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Rabin 2013; Hahn et al. 2009.

and almost total absence of luxury goods such as glass at Qumran pose limitations on how we imagine life at Qumran: economically, the community did not have very much in the way of luxury or comfort.<sup>25</sup> It has been suggested that other luxury goods were looted from Qumran over time. Nevertheless, the site's overall impression is that its inhabitants were, perhaps, industrious and self-sufficient somehow, through trade or patronage, but simply not "upper crust."<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Matthew Goff has shown how the intended readership of 4QInstruction, a fragmentary wisdom text, is aimed particularly at readers of a moderate to lower social status.<sup>27</sup> 4QInstruction probably has origins within the community due to its special attention to divine revelation and special knowledge, although some have argued that the text pre-dates Qumran. Goff highlights how this text gives advice on how to pay one's debts, rather than how to treat debtors, and lacks flourishes of nearness to wealth and power as found in a text such as Ben Sira, who almost revels in the idea of the "high life" of the successful and well-connected urban scribe.<sup>28</sup> Our question, then, is whether the manuscripts themselves as material artefacts and as a valuable and large book collection over the community's long lifespan of activity, resonates with the archaeological evidence of the community as either purposefully modest and frugal, or rather poor and at times struggling to maintain a reasonable level of comfort.

## Tablets and Ink?

Evidence of literacy and study can be found within Qumran's literature itself. The texts make frequent mentions of "books" (ספר, ספרים), and interpretation (פשר, דרש). Surprisingly though, the implements of writing—such as ink, inkwell, and pen—are far less common. The word for ink, דִּיּוֹ, is not found in the extant texts (only in Jer 36:18, "I wrote the words on the scroll with ink"). The term for inkstand or inkwell, קֶסֶת, is also absent. The word "jar" in general is found twice: 3Q15 (Copper Scroll) 3:4 (describing how in the corners of the Temple courtyard there are many vessels, cups, jars, vases, and how many), and 11Q19 (Temple Scroll) 33:13 (libations and jars). Likewise, עֵט (pen/stylus) is found only once in the non-biblical texts in a quotation and interpretation of Ps 45:1 (4Q171 3–10.iv.26–27: [סופר מהיר / ולשוני עט / "My tongue is the pen / of a ready scribe, its interpretation concerns the teacher of righteousness."]).<sup>29</sup> The tools of the scholar are found a few times by comparison, such as wooden "tablets"<sup>30</sup> (לוח, לוחות):

<sup>25</sup> Mizzi 2010; Mizzi 2016.

<sup>26</sup> For the likelihood of an honour/reciprocity culture in ancient Judaism, see Schwartz 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Goff 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Goff 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Allegro 1968, 45, 47.

<sup>30</sup> That the tablets in these passages are probably wooden can be inferred from the same term being used in the Temple Scroll describing planks of wood (11Q19 7:1; 7:3).

1QpHab 6:15 (citing Hab 2:2),<sup>31</sup> 4Q177 (Catena A) 4:12,<sup>32</sup> and 4Q364 26b,e ii lines 5, 8 (although this cites Deut 9:12–18).<sup>33</sup> It is interesting to note this tendency of Qumran non-biblical texts to avoid the discussion of tools of the scribe, in favour of more thoughtful words such as *interpret*, *discern*, *read*, and *study*.

Besides this, the distribution of documentary texts in the Dead Sea Scrolls is most puzzling. We have relatively few surviving documentary texts and “notebooks” or florilegia, collections of sayings: 4Q174 (4QFlorilegium), 4Q175 (4QTestimonia), 4Q234, 4Q258, 4Q339, 4Q340, 4Q341, 4Q343–359, 4Q360, and KhQ161.<sup>34</sup> There are no letters, but there are very few examples of documentary texts such as accounts of cereals and bookkeeping accounts: 4Q348, 4Q350–351, 4Q354–357, as well as deeds of sale (4Q477, 4Q345, 4Q346) and a document of debt acknowledgement (4Q344). Epistolary texts are scarce (4Q342, 4Q343). Given that documentary texts were important for archives and bookkeeping, their absence from the archives of Qumran gives us some indication of the community’s attitudes towards manuscript acquisition.

The question of a scriptorium at Qumran (Locus 30) is beyond the scope of this present study, but it is likely that new texts were indeed composed and copied at Qumran—whether this was in a scriptorium or not is a matter of debate.<sup>35</sup> The focus at Qumran, however, seems to be on the acquisition and maintenance of a primarily literary collection rather than accounts, letters, and archives—the features of household management and industry. Literacy at Qumran, then, seems to take the shape of literature and study, reading and writing, rather than consisting primarily of bookkeeping and copying manuscripts.<sup>36</sup>

## Page Layout and Style

Qumran scribal practices of manuscript copying and formatting have been catalogued extensively by Tov, revealing much about Qumran manuscript features such as script size, spacing variation, avoidance of sheet imperfections, the regularity of scribal marks, and overall use of space and balance across columns.<sup>37</sup> In the context

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31 “YHWH answered me and said write the vision, inscribe it on the tablets so that may run [the one who reads it ...]”; “God told Habakkuk to write what was going to happen [...]”, García Martínez/Tigheelaar (eds.) 1997, 1:16–17.

32 “Now behold everything is written on the tablets”, Allegro 1968, 67–68.

33 Cf. Attridge 1994.

34 There is some debate about whether 4Q343–359 originated at Qumran.

35 For a discussion of the scriptorium at Qumran and the probability of writing “furniture” such as tables, please see below; cf. Cribiore 1996, 2001; de Vaux 1961; Metzger 1959; Reich 1995; Skeat 1981.

36 Cf. Hempel 2012; Hempel 2017a.

37 Tov 2004.



of other Mediterranean manuscripts of this period, Qumran manuscripts are similar in terms of technique, style, and strategy.

Looking closer at the page layout and professionalism in examples of Qumran manuscript, typical scribal practices of competent scribes with professional abilities are visible. In the War Scroll (1QM), Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa<sup>a</sup>), and the Temple Scroll (11Q19), for example, one can notice the measuring of scroll seams,<sup>38</sup> the tracing of lines,<sup>39</sup> and the measurement of columns overall to fit per sheet. In 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> 52, for example, there is an unusually slim column that can be interpreted either as a lack of measurement or simply a scribe copying with the imperfections of an unusually shorter sheet of parchment within the scroll. Additionally, there is the presence of a blank end sheet for the protection of the scroll text, given that the beginning and end sheets of a scroll were usually the first to bear the results of damage from use and the first to fall apart (1QIsa<sup>a</sup> 67). Above all, there are similarities of page layout, the average top and bottom blank spacing resting about an inch above and below, and the style of single-sided justification (where the *beginning* of a line is justified, but not the *end* of that line) as in other Mediterranean manuscripts.<sup>40</sup> This last feature in particular indicates auditory copying rather than visual line-by-line “imprinting” as practiced by scribes in the Middle Ages, where each column was identically measured to begin with the same line. As shown by William A. Johnson, the uneven edges of the lines and particularities of each scroll measuring just slightly differently meant that scribes made every manuscript to measure: no two scrolls of Deuteronomy, or two scrolls of Homer, would begin each column with exactly the same words.<sup>41</sup> Auditory copying indicates the presence of a pair or a team of scribes, and the characteristics of this type of scribal activity as naturally social and cooperative. It is not possible to be certain of whether a scribal mistake is due to visual or oral error, regardless of whether the scribe dictating is reading aloud or reciting from memory. Scribal errors and variants can be the result of hearing incorrectly (oral error), from a scribe disagreeing with the dictated manuscript, or from reading aloud incorrectly (visual error such as parablepsis); furthermore, the scribe reciting might also later check the work of the scribe taking dictation, noticing a mistake or two. There are several opportunities for a mistake to enter a manuscript, just as there are opportunities for it to be corrected. In this way, oral/visual error cannot be distinguished with great precision.

Above all, the features of professional copying practices are visible throughout Qumran manuscripts, indicating the high level of competence among their contemporaries in the Mediterranean. Given this professionalism, the manuscripts of Qumran are not crafted in a way that is less professional or distinct from other manuscripts of their time. Additionally, although the orthography of Qumran manuscripts has been

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<sup>38</sup> For example, the seams between columns in 1QM 4–5, 10–11, 14–15.

<sup>39</sup> For example, 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Johnson 2004, 39–84.

<sup>41</sup> Johnson 2004, 39–84.

given attention in scholarship, the presence of distinctive local orthographies characterises book production in pre-print, pre-industrial cultures. Although it is possible to infer something about the economic level of the community from the absence of red ink in the scrolls, this practice too may be the result of preference over necessity. As argued by Brooke, the choice of parchment over papyrus, for example—perhaps the most distinctive trait of the Qumran scrolls—may simply be a matter of cultural preference rather than economy.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, studies on the cost and expense of papyrus have shown that papyrus was not unreasonably expensive.<sup>43</sup> While it was certainly a luxury good beyond the budget of a poor labourer, the cost of a manuscript seems to be mainly in the time and expense spent in having a scribe sit and copy it, rather than the materials themselves.

The neat and uncluttered spacing of so many Qumran scrolls, again, seem to be based on the importance of the text. Important texts such as the War Scroll and Temple Scroll, as well as many of the biblical scrolls (particularly Psalms, Deuteronomy, and Isaiah) display larger spacious text and uncluttered layouts, with orderly columns and lines that are not squeezed together. By comparison, less important texts display smaller script size, and some are even written on papyrus, perhaps indicating draft copies.<sup>44</sup> In sum, the signs of poverty or low socioeconomic status cannot be easily found in the features of the Qumran manuscripts themselves.

The scrolls as a collection, it may be suggested, do reflect wealth and prosperity. The outward signs of moderation and frugality seem to be confined to goods and possessions, such as a lack of imported glass objects and a preference for cheaper, local goods.<sup>45</sup> The Scrolls collection therefore resist association with the idea of community members toiling away endlessly at manuscript production, or a majority of ascetic sages rejecting all outward signs of wealth in favour of study. Either of these theories would be problematic, reminiscent of European monastic communities of the Middle Ages. The act of study in a large library, it has been argued, is not easily compatible with poverty—whether by choice or necessity. The sheer quantity of the Scrolls makes this issue plain: a large book collection is itself a clear sign of expense and wealth. The maintenance of a large book collection is accompanied by a cost for security (such as *armoria* or locked chests), and the recurring costs of maintaining and replacing scrolls damaged by time, pests, or climate.

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<sup>42</sup> Brooke 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Skeat 1995.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Brooke 2011a.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Mizzi 2010.

## Conclusions

The price of acquiring, maintaining, and protecting a large library is food for thought. The question of literacy at Qumran recommends a closer look at the purpose of large-scale manuscript production: for whom, and how, and at what cost can a large collection of such a rich and diverse accumulation of books be kept? Regardless of the retirement of damaged scrolls in a genizah, even the retirement and safekeeping of old scrolls bears weight on the nature of this library as one that is both well-planned and well-maintained, thoughtfully organised and generously replenished over time.

At the heart of this debate, it is uncertain whether the average Qumran scribe is more labouring copyist (to keep pace with renewing a Scroll collection without external assistance, as widely imagined), or whether they are more thoughtful, pensive sage, full of ideas and interpretations, new compositions and teaching ability. It is certain that the size of the collection reflects a community that values study and interpretation above all. In addition to the preference for literary over documentary texts, this bookish tendency is also reflected in the vocabulary of reading, interpreting, and studying within Qumran literature itself. We must account somehow for the reticence of Qumran on the subject of scroll-copying activity, given the extraordinary size of the Dead Sea Scrolls as a book collection(s). The tension between the assumption of scribal activity, and the *yachad* community's self-presentation as a collection of pious studious sages occupied with learning rather than endless copying, is a problem that cannot be resolved by proposals of a quasi-monastic sociographic theory.

The material aspects of the manuscripts themselves are neither idiosyncratic nor amateurish. Rather, they reflect scribal practices witnessed in manuscripts throughout Egypt and the Mediterranean. The inhabitants of Qumran shared much in common with other sages and scribes of their time, but they clearly held themselves distinctive in certain ways. For one thing, they felt comfortable with the ownership of a library whose size was much larger than most individual libraries and can be better characterised as being of an institutional or public size, despite the small size of their community and their location on a small plateau within a remote valley on the edge of the Dead Sea. The location of the Scrolls, it may be suggested, is like moving the British Library to the Isle of Skye, or the Library of Congress to Alaska—and then cutting their vast numbers of invaluable staff by a significant percentage. Large libraries require equally large efforts and energies to remain so.

Based on the physical features of these scrolls, as well as their size and quantity, the accumulation of scrolls at Qumran was likely supported by acquisition and charitable donation, whether through the influx of new members contributing their books, or by distant pious patrons. The copying of manuscripts was an important, but not the epitomizing, activity of Qumran. Reading and studying Torah appear to have been more outwardly valued. It has been shown that copying and writing activity in general are rather curiously left out of *yachad* self-presentation, with preferences instead for study and learning. Equally central to the puzzle is the maintenance of a

book collection that would satisfy the idealised expectations of a scholarly output bent on the pious tasks of continuing study, steady composition, and the “increase of learning.” The textual aspects of Qumran, in a myriad of ways, extol the virtues of reading books, but not copying them. The acquisition of books did not seem to be a problem for the *yachad* community. The resulting problem for modern scholars is a tension between conflicting images: the modern interpretation of the poor, ever-copying scribe, and the self-stylised Qumran image of the focused, ever-studying sage. To resolve such a dilemma, there must be a more flexible re-evaluation of acquisition, maintenance, and production of books at Qumran.

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