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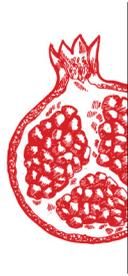
*Thematic Issue:  
Material and Scribal  
Scrolls Approaches to the  
Hebrew Bible*



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## THE MATERIALITY OF ANCIENT HEBREW PSALM COLLECTIONS

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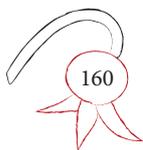
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## Abstract

The Dead Sea Psalm scrolls have played a crucial role in ongoing scholarly debates about textual pluriformity, the nature of Hebrew psalmody, and ancient Hebrew book culture. In this article, I argue that the materiality of ancient Hebrew Psalm collections provides important clues for rightly interpreting textual diversity and resolving critical questions in the field. First, I propose two examples of how material limitations placed constraints on the compilation of Psalm collections. Second, I provide examples for how manuscript form and layout can yield valuable information for interpreting the intended functions of the Psalm scrolls and for reconstructing their production processes. And third, I argue that paleographic evidence offers further tools for classifying different types of manuscripts and how they functioned in textual history. The combination of this evidence recommends an explanation of the diverse Dead Sea Psalm scrolls that is thoroughly grounded in the material realia and the conventions evident in ancient Hebrew material book culture.



Les rouleaux des Psaumes découverts à Qumran ont joué un rôle crucial dans les discussions actuelles à propos de la pluriformité textuelle, de la nature de la psalmodie hébraïque et de la culture hébraïque du livre dans l'Antiquité. Cette contribution affirme que la matérialité des recueils de Psaumes en hébreu datant de l'Antiquité fournit des indications importantes pour interpréter correctement la diversité textuelle et résout des questions importantes dans ce domaine. Tout d'abord, je propose deux exemples qui montrent les limitations matérielles imposées à la compilation des collections de Psaumes. Ensuite, je donne des exemples quant à la façon dont la forme et la disposition des manuscrits fournissent des informations précieuses pour interpréter les fonctions attribuées aux rouleaux des Psaumes et pour reconstruire leurs processus de production. Enfin, je montre que les indices paléographiques offrent des outils supplémentaires pour classer les différents types de manuscrits et comment ces derniers ont fonctionné dans l'histoire textuelle. La mise en commun de ces éléments favorise une explication des divers rouleaux des Psaumes à Qumran fondée sur les realia matérielles et sur les conventions qui apparaissent dans la culture hébraïque du livre dans l'Antiquité.



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## THE MATERIALITY OF ANCIENT HEBREW PSALM COLLECTIONS<sup>1</sup>

*Drew Longacre*



### Introduction

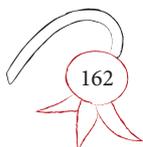
The significance of the diverse Dead Sea Psalm scrolls for writing the early history of the Hebrew Psalter has been fraught, to say the least. Countless scholars have weighed in with opinions ranging from complete fixity and canonization in the Persian period to complete indeterminacy into the common era. These vastly different perspectives on such a central question to the field of biblical studies as the formation and reception of the Psalter highlights both the crucial importance and frustrating ambiguity of the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls. It is my contention that careful attention to the materiality of ancient Hebrew Psalm collections—particularly, but not exclusively, those closely related to the

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<sup>1</sup> The research for this article was carried out under the ERC Starting Grant of the European Research Council (EU Horizon 2020): The Hands that Wrote the Bible: Digital Palaeography and Scribal Culture of the Dead Sea Scrolls (HandsandBible #640497).

traditional Hebrew Psalter<sup>2</sup>—may provide crucial additional evidence to complement literary arguments and help resolve this longstanding impasse.

Recent discussions on the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls have emphasized the need to account for the function of each individual manuscript in order to explain the textual diversity evident in the corpus.<sup>3</sup> A number of scholars have begun to investigate the relationship between material form and function, yielding mixed results.<sup>4</sup> In this short survey article, I will highlight some of the most significant developments in the material study of the Psalm scrolls that I argue have a bearing on literary-critical questions about the formation and nature of Hebrew Psalm collections.<sup>5</sup> These include how material factors affect the compilation of Psalm collections, as well as how manuscript format and paleography contribute to determining the function and proper interpretation of individual witnesses.



## Material Factors in Compiling Psalm Collections

The first set of material factors to consider relate to the editorial process of compiling Psalm collections. The contents of written Psalm collections are integrally connected to their physical forms, the textual artifacts that embody the texts. Physical forms entail both technological possibilities and limitations that constrain (or at least influence) producers' choices when compiling Psalm collections. Careful analysis and familiarity with ancient Jewish material book culture, therefore, ensure realistic controls on literary-critical speculation and at the same time

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<sup>2</sup> For further reflections on the materiality of other prayer manuscripts that may also be relevant, see especially Falk 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Fabry 1998, 159–60; Jain 2014; Pajunen 2014, 163; Mroczek 2016, 32; Willgren 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Jain 2014; Krauß 2018; Pajunen 2020; Longacre 2022a; 2022c.

<sup>5</sup> For a useful, expanded definition of “literary criticism” that encompasses both formative literary processes (*Literarkritik*) and the evaluation of resulting works as literature, see Hendel 2019.

invite new insights into formative processes. In recent articles, I have worked out two case studies where material constraints shed significant new light on the literary history of Psalm collections.

### *The Proto-Qumran (11Q5) Psalter*

In a recent article, I argued that material constraints and other pragmatic concerns had a major impact on the formation of the 11Q5 (11QPs<sup>a</sup>) Psalter (Longacre 2022a). After demonstrating that the 11Q5 Psalter (the underlying collection, not the manuscript 11Q5) was dependent upon a base text similar to the proto-MT Psalter,<sup>6</sup> I examined the formation of the 11Q5 Psalter as an empirical example of documented editorial work, namely a revised and expanded version of the written Psalter tradition. The processes required to create the 11Q5 Psalter from the proto-MT Psalter appear to have been conditioned both by the material constraints of the technology of scroll production and a limited set of conventional editorial techniques. Among the default modes of production, I identified a concern for efficiency, the consistent preservation of source material, linear progression through both the primary exemplar and the revised draft, the use of a limited number of exemplars, and an openness to rearranging an existing anthology. The four main editorial techniques include the expansion of Psalms, the insertion of new texts, the movement of Psalms, and the use of secondary appendices. The creation process of the 11Q5 Psalter, therefore, demonstrates how its compiler interacted with written sources and balanced both material and editorial concerns in determining the final product.

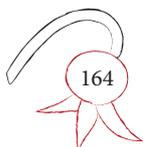
This profile of the 11Q5 Psalter has multiple ramifications for literary criticism. First, it provides documented examples of editorial techniques like the expansion, supplementation, and rearrangement of Psalms that have long been suspected for the undocumented prehistory of the proto-MT Psalter. Second, it suggests that material factors likely



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<sup>6</sup> “All of the major editorial features of the proto-MT psalter seem to be presupposed in the 11Q5 psalter, including: 1) all 150 MT psalms in their MT forms (including superscriptions, with very few exceptions), 2) in roughly the same general order, 3) with many of the same groups of psalms, 4) ending with Pss 149→150, and 5) with the book-dividing doxologies (cf. Ps 89:53 in 4Q87)” (Longacre 2022a, 88).

also constrained the earlier formation and structure of the Psalter, as in the question of book size mentioned below. And third, it demonstrates the dynamicity of the written Psalter tradition, which continued to be reformulated even after the completion of its proto-MT version. As I have assessed the 11Q5 Psalter, it cannot be adequately explained as a generically secondary liturgical collection (e.g., an incipient *siddur*), but appears rather to have been a revised and expanded version of the full Psalter that was predominant in circles associated with Qumran. Let us therefore call this henceforth the “proto-Qumran Psalter.” While the proto-Qumran Psalter clearly illustrates textual pluriformity in the tradition, its existence actually serves to reinforce the concrete material and textual reality of the written Psalter tradition against those who suppose a largely indeterminate body of psalmody in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Thus, the documented example of the proto-Qumran Psalter provides key fodder for many literary-critical questions about the early history of the Hebrew Psalter.



### *Book Size and the Compilation of the Psalter*

One of the critical questions in the formation of the Psalter is the nature of its five-book division and when and how this structure came into being. The Hebrew Psalter has often been considered small enough that there was no material need to subdivide it into five books (i.e., scrolls).<sup>7</sup> Indeed, in the formats of the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls of the Hellenistic period, the various “books” of the Psalter would have filled only very short scrolls around 1–2 meters in length, and the entire proto-MT Psalter would only have filled around 6–7 meters of scroll; this hardly indicates a material necessity for division. Neither is there any compelling evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls that the “books” of the Psalter were inscribed on separate scrolls during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.<sup>8</sup> As such, most scholars have supposed that the

<sup>7</sup> For example, Haran 1989, 494–97; 1990, 165–69.

<sup>8</sup> Jain (2014, 127–130, 152–58) suggests reconstructing 4Q94 as containing book 4 of the Psalter and 8Q2 as containing book 1, but I do not find either of these reconstructions sufficiently compelling. On the other hand, many of the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls transgress the book divisions.

five-book division is a late, secondary, immaterial subdivision of the full Psalter that was made in order to create a structural parallel with the Pentateuch.

But in light of recent developments in our understanding of material book culture, possible material factors need to be reconsidered. In an article on cross-cultural influences on the Hebrew/Aramaic writing tradition, I made the observation that Persian-period Hebrew and Aramaic scripts were made with rush brushes (rather than fine-tipped reed pens) and were thus generally much larger than the typical book scripts of the Hellenistic and Roman periods (Longacre 2021a, 12–20, 22–24). In a forthcoming article entitled “Size Does Matter,” I make the argument that this observation has crucial relevance for the study of book sizes in the formation history of the Bible, using as examples the books of the Pentateuch and the books of the Psalter. If we consider the Psalter’s book divisions in light of conventional formats evident in the formative Persian period (e.g., the Elephantine Aḥiqar manuscript), the larger scripts would have necessitated much larger surface areas than the Hellenistic-period Dead Sea Psalm scrolls mentioned above. In this situation, the books of the Psalter would each have required between 3 and 7 meters of scroll material, and the entire proto-MT Psalter would have been considerably longer than expected for a single scroll. Thus, the MT “book” sizes correspond well with expected scroll sizes for comparable material from the Persian period, which vary from about 3.5 to 7 meters in length.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, if the Persian period was indeed a crucial formative time in the early history of the Psalter,<sup>10</sup> then material factors may have played a

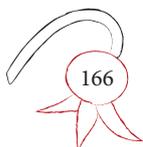
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<sup>9</sup> P. Amherst 63 is about 3.5 meters long, but the text continues on to cover about 60 percent of the back. The Aramaic copy of the Bisitun Inscription from Elephantine was also about 3.5 meters in length, plus around 1 meter of the text continued on the back. The Elephantine Aḥiqar may have been about 7 meters long.

<sup>10</sup> The critical importance of the Persian period seems inescapable, even if allowing for later editorial work. Some—particularly continental—scholars argue for late Hellenistic dates for some Psalms, and many scholars place the final form of the proto-MT Psalter in the Hellenistic period or later. But most of these scholars still recognize the importance of the Persian period.



significant role in the compilation of the Psalter. Based on this circumstantial evidence from material book culture and the observation that the book divisions align with editorial seams and prior subcollections, I argue that the five-book division of the Psalter was not a late and artificial division in imitation of the five-part Pentateuch, but rather an early remnant of the composite formation of the Psalter from smaller subcollections. The book divisions may have started out as material divisions in the form of separate volumes (i.e., scrolls), and only later in the Hellenistic period did it become feasible to include the entire Psalter on a single scroll. The book divisions would thus provide important evidence for the material compilation of the Psalter from smaller Psalm collections.



## Manuscript Format, Layout, and Functional Distinctions

While many scholars now agree on the need to assess the function of each Psalm scroll in its own right, only a few studies have actually attempted to do so, and most of these are concerned primarily with the textual contents of the scrolls. Those who have dedicated focused attention to material form have yet to achieve consensus on how to explain the relationship between form and function.

### *Manuscript Format*

With regard to manuscript format, Eva Jain (2014) attempted reconstructions of all of the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls but was unable to discern general patterns in the relationship between form and function. Anna Krauß (2018) likewise found no correlation between format/layout and textual contents. Mika Pajunen (2020) considered spacing and legibility, noting that some manuscripts would have been more amenable to public reading.

In a recent article, I have argued for distinguishing between large copies of the Psalter and smaller, *ad hoc* Psalm collections based on generalizable patterns in form and function (Longacre 2022c). Script

formality, manuscript format, and textual contents seem to correlate in a meaningful way that suggests that these different types of manuscripts were in some sense conventional and recognized by their producers and readers. Large copies of conventional contents (i.e., a version of the Psalter or large portions thereof) were typically written with fine, professional calligraphy. On the other hand, smaller scrolls were often written less formally and frequently contained unique, customized selections and configurations of Psalms drawn from the Psalter.

This variegated interpretation helps explain both the diversity of the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls and the considerable manuscript and textual evidence for the early formation and transmission of the Psalter. The Dead Sea Psalm scrolls do indeed evince a bewildering variety of textual forms, but diversity of material form and function elegantly explain much of the textual diversity. This is fairly obvious for scrolls that seem to have contained only a single Psalm (e.g., 4Q89, 4Q90, 4Q93, 4Q98g, and 5Q5).<sup>11</sup> But most—if not all—of the Psalm collections varying from the proto-MT and proto-Qumran Psalters also appear to have been small, relatively informal, *ad hoc* productions that were never intended to serve as versions of the full Psalter for further transmission (e.g., 4Q84, 4Q86, 4Q88, and 4Q92). If this is the case, these small scrolls with diverse contents do not undermine the existence of an established Psalter tradition in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, contrary to what is now commonly supposed. They rather attest to dynamic reuse of the Psalms based on—or at the very least in parallel to—the full Psalter. Thus, material form is crucial for rightly sorting and interpreting the manuscript evidence for the early transmission of the Psalms and has dramatic literary-critical repercussions.



### *Stichometry*

One particularly noteworthy feature of layout is the stichometry visually indicated in several of the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls. Stichometric layouts in the Hebrew manuscripts have been discussed by several scholars without arriving at any consensus about the development of the

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<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Krauß 2018, 36–38.

tradition or its significance for literary-critical questions.<sup>12</sup> Some scholars have also extended this study to early Greek Psalm manuscripts, some of which share similar layouts to Hebrew scrolls and could have relevance for the history of the Hebrew text.<sup>13</sup>

The situation can be briefly summarized as follows. Most of the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls are not written stichometrically, except for Ps 119, which—as seems almost required by its size and structure—is exceptionally written stichometrically in all six surviving examples, even those that elsewhere use prose formats (1Q10, 4Q89, 4Q90, 5Q5, 11Q5, and 11Q6). Four scrolls have very narrow columns with one hemistich per line (4Q84[except Ps 118:1–24], 4Q86[Ps 104:14–15, 22–25, 33–35], 4Q93, and 4Q98h<sup>14</sup>). Five scrolls have stichometric arrangements that can generally (with exceptions) be described as two hemistichs per line separated by a blank interval (4Q85, 8Q2, 5/6Hev1b, and Mas1e; cf. 4Q84[Ps 118:1–24]), which apparently served as the model for later Masoretic codices (Gentry and Meade 2020). There are also minor differences between scrolls within these general categories (Miller 2017b), and Mas1f uniquely has a running text with space between each hemistich without respect to its position in the narrow columns.

Krauß has suggested a chronological development from early non-stichometric arrangements to the later tradition of stichometry, with the change influenced by the intermediary “prototypical” special layout of Ps 119.<sup>15</sup> I have suggested, rather, that the introduction of stichometric layouts may have been under the influence of contemporary Greco-Roman aesthetics for poetic layouts (Longacre 2021a, 42). With regard to the development of the tradition, all of the examples of the developed stichometric layout (two hemistichs per line with spaces between hemistichs) are from the first century BCE or later.<sup>16</sup>

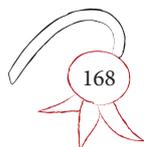
<sup>12</sup> Tov 1996, 2004, 2012; Miller 2015, 2017a, 2017b; Davis 2017; Krauß 2018; Gentry and Meade 2020; Krauß and Schücking-Jungblut 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Gentry and Meade 2020; Wasserman and Nilsson 2022.

<sup>14</sup> For 4Q98h, see Tigchelaar 2020a.

<sup>15</sup> Krauß 2018, 113–15; Krauß and Schücking-Jungblut 2020, 21–25.

<sup>16</sup> Gentry and Meade (2020) suggest tracing the tradition even further back in time to the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the Old Greek translation, which may have shared many stichometric features in common with the Greek tradition.



Furthermore, all copies from outside of Qumran and the medieval Masoretic tradition have or presuppose this arrangement, whereas no copies of what I have above termed the “proto-Qumran Psalter” do.<sup>17</sup> This may suggest a relationship between form and textual tradition and that stichometric arrangement was more common around the turn of the era than the Qumran evidence illustrates.

In one further way, I argue that the stichometric layouts may provide indirect clues for the production processes of Psalm collections. Of the four unique Psalm collections that differ from both the proto-MT and the proto-Qumran Psalters (i.e., 4Q84, 4Q86, 4Q88, and 4Q92), two of them have awkward layout anomalies that may suggest they were copied from large-format scrolls. Most of 4Q84 is written in narrow columns, but in column XXXIV and the first part of column XXXV it follows the stichometric format characteristic of many of the largest scrolls. This suggests to me that the scribe was consciously departing from the format of his exemplar in favor of the small-format arrangement chosen for his new manuscript but temporarily messed up the system due to interference from the exemplar, which presented the text in the typical large format of two hemistichs per line. The switch from prose to narrow stichometric arrangement in 4Q86 should probably be similarly explained. These inconsistencies not only highlight the relative informality of these manuscripts, but also hint that they were produced based on large, written exemplars of the Psalter. The odd hybrid form of Mas1f likely indicates that it too was taken from a large manuscript with stichometric layout, which was not fully adopted in the narrow columns of the new copy.<sup>18</sup> All of this suggests to me that the Psalm scrolls reveal a highly text-based context for the production of Psalm excerpts and small Psalm collections from large written repositories of Psalms, as opposed to drawing on Psalms from a largely ethereal body of Hebrew psalmody (*contra* Mroczek 2016).



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<sup>17</sup> In my assessment, the combined witnesses to the “proto-Qumran” Psalter include 4Q83, 4Q87, 4Q98, 11Q5, and 11Q6 (Longacre 2020).

<sup>18</sup> Tigchelaar (2021) has recently argued (probably correctly) that Mas1f was a small manuscript containing only Ps 150. The narrow columns and unusual layout support this suggestion.

## Paleographic Evidence

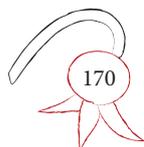
If, as I have suggested, material form and function are closely related and jointly illuminating for textual interpretation, the handwriting on a manuscript can be particularly informative. The script can reveal important information about who wrote a manuscript and when and how it was written, which in turn helps situate the manuscript and its text responsibly within the broader tradition.

### *Dating*

Gerald Wilson (1985, 116–22) famously argued that the dates of the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls may indicate a certain diachronic trajectory of increasing stability and conformity to the proto-MT. Peter Flint (1997, 135–49), on the other hand, saw little relationship between the dates of the documents and their contents, instead arguing for a diachronic development whereby the earlier parts of the Psalter stabilized earlier. While I question the use of the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls to support both of these diachronic arguments, the material evidence for the dates of the scrolls has a direct bearing on Wilson’s hypothesis.

Scholarly attempts to date the Dead Sea Scrolls paleographically have a long history (Tigchelaar 2020b). The ERC project “The Hands that Wrote the Bible: Digital Palaeography and Scribal Culture of the Dead Sea Scrolls” at the Qumran Institute of the University of Groningen has used new radiocarbon dates and digital paleographic tools to assess the influential paleographic typology of Frank Moore Cross (1961). Preliminary date predictions using this tool sometimes align with Cross’s typology, but they also differ at points.<sup>19</sup> In a recent presentation, I reevaluated the dates of the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls in light of this digital approach (Longacre 2021b). One interesting observation is that 4Q83—the oldest Psalm scroll—may actually be somewhat older than commonly supposed, perhaps from the late third or early second century BCE. Otherwise, it seems to me that most of the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls are roughly contemporary (within tolerable margins of error), and so diachrony does not explain the diversity of the Psalm scrolls well

<sup>19</sup> For example, Dhali et al. 2020; Popović 2021.



at all (Longacre 2022c, 83–84). This state of affairs forces scholars to look for synchronic explanations for the diversity of the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls, and it reinforces my argument for functional differentiation.

### *Script Formality and Professionalism*

The relative formality of manuscript production is evident especially in the script inscribed on the manuscript. This important indication of manuscript context and function has been underutilized in previous scholarship and provides substantial additional support to my argument above based on format for different modes of manuscript production that entail different functions and significances for textual history.

I have devoted considerable attention to the stylistic classification of different types and levels of Hebrew script (Longacre 2019). As noted above, I detect a correlation between manuscript format, script formality, and textual contents (Longacre 2022c). Large copies of the Psalter are almost always written in fine calligraphy, whereas smaller, *ad hoc* manuscripts are often written less formally. Based on a survey of all the Ornate Rectilinear formal hands in the Dead Sea Scrolls (i.e., the highest quality of Cross’s Herodian “formal” hands), I suspect increasing professionalism and standardization in the Roman period (Longacre 2022b). This seems to fit well with the large, beautiful copies of the Psalter known from the period, whereas the smaller, informal manuscripts often do not attain to the same high professional standards. The sheer time, effort, and narrowly focused attention required to produce high-quality scrolls seem to discourage high-level cognitive engagement with the contents that would be required for composing or revising texts, suggesting rather a more mechanical approach to text copying. The less formal productions, on the other hand, are easier, quicker, and cheaper to produce and are more appropriate for manuscript contexts that require creative engagement with the texts. Paleography, therefore, is a primary indication for the context of production and intended function of a manuscript, even if it is not the only one.



### *Writer Identification*

And finally, one of the greatest limitations to the study of texts and scribal practices is lack of comparative material to control analyses of

individual documents. An important avenue for future material research is the identification of different manuscripts written by the same individual, which can then be used to refine studies of the contributions of individual writers in relation to their exemplars, broader traditions, and personal working habits.

The “Hands that Wrote the Bible” project has developed sophisticated tools for data-mining the Dead Sea Scrolls corpus for matches in handwriting across different fragments and scrolls.<sup>20</sup> Using these tools and surveying the principal editions, I have identified several other manuscripts that I believe to have been written by the same writer as one of the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls. As a result of this research, Brent Strawn and I (2022) have identified the fragment of 4Q98c as part of the same manuscript as 4Q85, which decreases the number of Psalm scrolls by one, but expands the scope of preserved fragments from this important manuscript. And in a forthcoming monograph on the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls and the formation of the Psalter, I will demonstrate several new identifications and use the expanded oeuvres of these scribes to better profile their working practices and the contributions they made to the traditions they copied. Thus, yet again, careful micro-historical study of the material artifacts can yield considerable new insight into the history of the texts.



## Conclusion

This brief article has only touched on some of the key issues in the study of the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls and the development of the Hebrew Psalter tradition. Nevertheless, bringing together into one place the many assorted ways that material studies of ancient manuscripts can contribute to literary criticism of the Psalter is in itself an important synthesis with relevance for the study of other manuscript and textual traditions. The resulting picture—I contend—is a highly developed and differentiated textual culture with conventions (if not strict standards) that guided manuscript production and the use of manuscripts. By

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<sup>20</sup> Dhali et al. 2017; Popović, Dhali, and Schomaker 2021.

placing the Dead Sea Psalm scrolls and the formation of the Psalter into this material book culture, we can now explain the diverse manuscript evidence better than we have been in able to in the past.

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