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*Thematic Issue:  
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**CONTEXTUALIZING 4QISA<sup>o</sup> (4Q68) IN THE  
TEXTUAL HISTORY OF ISAIAH: MATERIAL,  
ORTHOGRAPHIC, AND EXEGETICAL ASPECTS**

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## Abstract

4QIsa<sup>o</sup> or 4Q68 survives in a single—though composite—fragment that preserves Isa 14:28–15:2. The present paper discusses its material, scribal, orthographic, linguistic and text-critical aspects, attempting to contextualize this scroll fragment within the history of the book of Isaiah. Analysis of the material properties and scribal features suggests that they are incompatible with the assumption that the fragment originates in a full copy of the scriptural book. Rather, it may derive from a small-scale scroll containing only a subsection of the book, though its precise scope cannot be determined. A philological analysis of the textual variants witnessed by 4Q68 indicates that they are exegetically motivated, i.e., they reflect a scribal attempt to clarify or disambiguate interpretive cruxes inherent in its (Proto-Masoretic) *Vorlage*. If so, 4Q68 may contribute to the textual (and perhaps even compositional) history of the scriptural book as well as its interpretive reception in the late Second Temple period.



4QIsa<sup>o</sup> (ou 4Q68) est transmis sous la forme d'un fragment unique, bien que composite, qui préserve És 14,28–15,2. Cette contribution en examine les dimensions matérielle, scribale, orthographique, linguistique ainsi que les questions de critique textuelle et cherche à contextualiser ce fragment de rouleau dans l'histoire du livre d'Ésaïe. L'analyse des propriétés matérielles et des caractéristiques sribales indiquent qu'elles sont incompatibles avec l'hypothèse selon laquelle le fragment trouve son origine dans une copie entière du livre biblique. Il pourrait plutôt provenir d'un rouleau de petite taille qui ne contient qu'une sous-partie du livre, sans que l'on puisse en déterminer l'étendue exacte. Une analyse philologique des variantes textuelles attestée par 4Q68 indique qu'elles sont dépendantes de raisons exégétiques, c'est-à-dire qu'elles reflètent une tentative du scribe de clarifier ou de désambigüiser certaines difficultés interprétatives propres à sa *Vorlage* (proto-masorétique). Si c'est bien le cas, 4Q68 contribue à comprendre l'histoire textuelle (et peut-être même compositionnelle) du livre biblique ainsi que sa réception interprétative à la fin de la période du Second Temple.



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# CONTEXTUALIZING 4QISA<sup>o</sup> (4Q68) IN THE TEXTUAL HISTORY OF ISAIAH: MATERIAL, ORTHOGRAPHIC, AND EXEGETICAL ASPECTS<sup>1</sup>

*Noam Mizrahi*



## Introduction

According to the official count, eighteen copies of the book of Isaiah were identified among the fragments found in Qumran Cave 4 (4Q55–69b).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This study stems from the research project “Revealing the Sealed Document: Revisiting the Qumran Isaiah Scrolls,” which was generously supported by the Israel Science Foundation (ISF 1000/20). I am indebted to the members of my research group with whom I investigated the pertinent scrolls, including the one analyzed here: Dr. Asaf Gayer, Dr. Adi Amsterdam, Dr. Nevo Shimon Vaknin, Beatriz Riestra, Chananya Rothner, and Tomer Shani. An earlier version of this article was presented at a conference in honor of Professor Emanuel Tov’s 80th birthday, which was held at the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities in October 2021. I wish to thank the participants for their feedback.

<sup>2</sup> See Skehan and Ulrich 1997. Cf. the recent survey of manuscripts in Fuller 2017. An early survey of variant readings in the Isaiah scrolls from Qumran, based on

To be sure, the precise number of such scrolls and their exact scope are subject to change as research progresses (Tigchelaar 2020).<sup>3</sup> Still, about half of these manuscripts are represented by only one or two fragments; it is by no means certain that each such manuscript originates in a copy of the scriptural book. It is theoretically possible that at least some manuscripts originally contained only select passages of Isaiah as excerpts or quotations embedded within non-scriptural works.

The data that can be culled from single fragments is limited at best, making it difficult to hypothesize what the content of the original manuscript might have been. In some cases, though, material properties and textual information can supply circumstantial evidence in favor of one option. Forming such a hypothesis is useful not only in and of itself; it could also affect the general evaluation of textual variants recorded in such fragments, thereby allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the textual history of Isaiah in the late Second Temple period. From a purely text-critical point of view, each variant should be considered individually, so that its merits within the scriptural context can be weighed. Still, the typological characterization of any textual witness as a whole is an important factor in evaluating the likelihood that it preserves original readings or witnesses mostly secondary variants, which can then be better placed within the transmission and reception history of the book.

The present analysis focuses on a composite fragment published under the siglum of 4Q68 or 4QIsa<sup>o</sup> (Skehan and Ulrich 1997, 135–37, pl. XXIII).<sup>4</sup> The DJD edition includes two fragments under the siglum of 4Q68. However, the editor notes that the two fragments do not appear to belong to the same manuscript.<sup>5</sup>

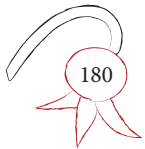
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Skehan's preliminary transcriptions, is provided by Morrow 1973; an updated discussion is provided by Parry 2020.

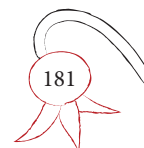
<sup>3</sup> Cf. Puech 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lange 2009, 274.

<sup>5</sup> The Museum Inventory of 4Q68 is Plate 261. Unfortunately, as the DJD edition reports, frag. 2 is no longer found on this plate, and its current location remains unknown. Accordingly, it is missing from the most recent image of Plate 261: IAA B-298222 (from January 2012), available at <https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/image/B-298222>. According to the plate's Treatment Card,

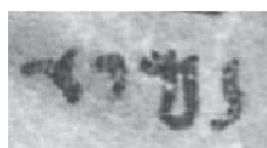


Admittedly, frag. 2 is very small, containing the remains of only four or five letters. But these scant remains indicate that its scribal hand is incompatible with that of frag. 1. The letters of frag. 2 are generally thinner than those of frag. 1, and the best-preserved letter on frag. 2, the final *mem*, is written differently compared to frag. 1. In frag. 1, the upper horizontal stroke of the *mem* is written as a straight line, sometimes with a tiny angular form at the left starting point, where the reed first touches the leather. In contrast, in frag. 2 the same stroke begins with a distinctive curl (Fig. 1). Furthermore, the scribe of frag. 1 began the left vertical stroke at a point above the upper horizontal stroke, and this vertical stroke is slightly curved to the right, whereas the scribe of frag. 2 wrote it as a straight line that begins at the meeting point with the upper horizontal one.

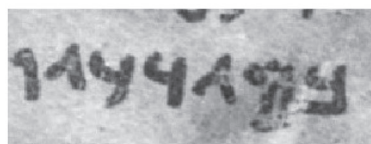


Frg. 1

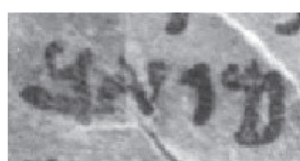
Line 5



Line 6



Line 8



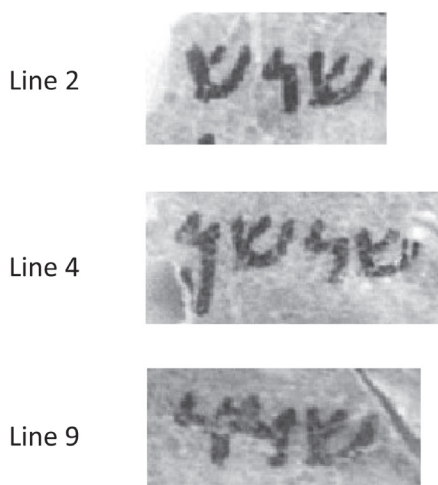
Frg. 2



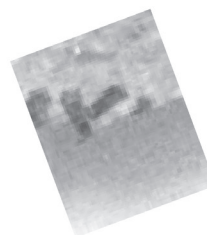
Figure 1: Shapes of *Mem*

opened by the restoration experts at the Israel Museum in December 1976, this was already the case when the plate was transferred to the Israel Museum in the 1970s (I am indebted to Beatriz Riestra for this information). Thus, frag. 2 was removed from the plate sometime between 1959 and 1976 (most likely in the early 1960s).

Frg. 1



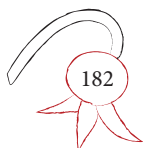
Frg. 2

Figure 2: Shapes of *Shin*

Although the *shin* of frag. 2 is not so well preserved, it appears to be written differently than frag. 1 concerning its middle vertical stroke. In the hand of frag. 1, it is short and sometimes of a triangular shape, suggesting that it was customarily done by pressing the reed at the upper point and gradually lifting it while descending leftward (Fig. 2). In contradistinction, in the hand of frag. 2 the middle stroke is an elongated straight line, consistent in its thickness all throughout its course.

Moreover, the reading of frag. 2 does not necessarily require its identification with the text of Isaiah. Patrick Skehan (1978) originally transcribed the text as [נבא]ים[ כי ]שדמ[ות] (Isa 16:7–8). But of the first word, only the plural ending survives; the last preserved trace of ink is minute and could fit several letters, while the preceding trace better fits כ than it does ט. Thus, the reading [שדמ]ות, on which the entire identification depends, is unlikely. Moreover, the lacuna between the final *mem* and the *shin* is of one to two letter spaces, which excludes Skehan's restoration; most probably, only a space should be restored following the final *mem*.

Skehan's reading and restoration might be partly explained by the slight—yet conclusive—difference between PAM 42.029 (April 1956) and PAM 43.013 (July 1959). Frag. 2 consists of an elongated part to the right (preserving the final *mem*) and an angular part to the left (preserving the next two letters), which are connected at a very narrow part



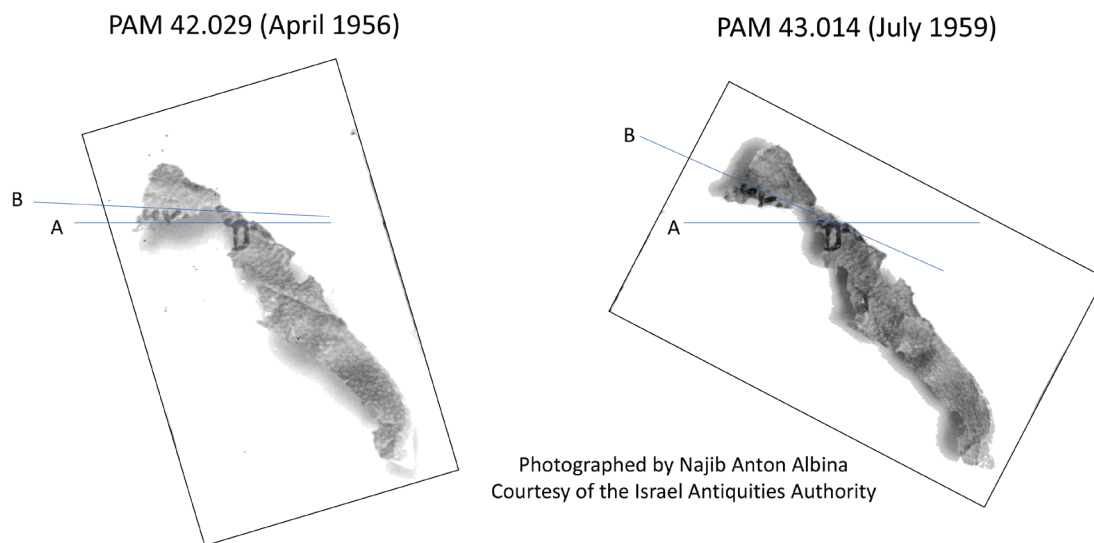


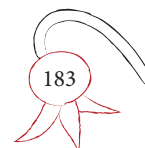
Figure 3: Photographs of Frag. 2

of the leather. In the early photograph, the two parts are connected in such a way that the general shape of the fragment is somewhat curved, allowing the restoration of only one to two letter spaces between the two words. In the later photograph, by contrast, the two parts have been straightened, which distances them from each other (Fig. 3). The latter arrangement, however, is probably wrong because the roofs of the letters confirm a straight line only in the early photograph. In contrast, the later photograph features a concave contour of the line.

The resulting alternative reading [...]<sup>o</sup>שב[ ]ים[...] could fit two other passages in Isaiah (Isa 14:5, [משלים] שבט[ ]ים[רשע]; Isa 24:8, [עליז]ים[ ]שבט[ ]משוש), but it could also fit various other passages both within the Hebrew Bible and outside of it, so there is no inherent reason to insist on its identification as a fragment of Isaiah.<sup>6</sup> Even if it is retained in the inventory list of the Qumran Isaiah scrolls, it should probably be divorced from frag. 1.

To the DJD report, one can add that the early photographs show that frag. 1 comprises three smaller pieces that were joined at the scrollerly

<sup>6</sup> This assessment is based on the fact that the sequence שב ים occurs 40 times within verses throughout the Hebrew Bible and 10 more times within lines of the non-scriptural Qumran scrolls. If verse or line boundaries are ignored, then these numbers might even grow.





(see below). Accordingly, they will be noted in the following discussion, from right to left, as frags. 1A, 1B, and 1C.

## Photographic History

The early photographic history of 4Q68 frag. 1 (Table 1) reveals two main stages in the process of its identification and sorting. The earliest photographs of 4Q68 are part of a series documenting fragments recovered from Qumran Cave 4 during the archeological excavation conducted there in September 1952: the E series (PAM 40.962–985), taken in February 1954 (see Tov and Pfann 1995: 80).<sup>7</sup> This means that the original place of deposition of 4Q68 frag. 1 is known for certain, unlike most of the other Qumran fragments, which were purchased from the Bedouins through antiquities dealers, thereby obscuring the precise loci of their discovery. The three small pieces now comprising frag. 1 were first recorded separately in different photographs of the E series: PAM 40.967 (frag. 1B),<sup>8</sup> PAM 40.975 (frag. 1C),<sup>9</sup> and PAM 40.979 (frag. 1A).<sup>10</sup> All three pieces comprising frag. 1, therefore, were undoubtedly found in Qumran Cave 4, but their relationship to each other was not yet identified in this first stage.



<sup>7</sup> The fragments excavated at Qumran Cave 4 were initially sorted by Frank Moore Cross in the summer of 1953. It was only in the summer of 1954 that Skehan joined the Cave 4 team, and Cross divided his lot, sharing it with his former epigraphy teacher (Fields 2009: 180, 506). Since PAM 40.962–985 were taken in February 1954, they likely reflect Cross's initial sorting done earlier. This is confirmed by the fact that the glass plate recorded in PAM 40.967 holds only fragments of scriptural texts, or what appeared as such at the time.

<sup>8</sup> IAA B-279113, available at <https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/image/B-279113> (bottom row, middle fragment).

<sup>9</sup> IAA B-279122, available at <https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/image/B-279122> (middle of the plate). This fragment was identified by Eibert Tigchelaar (and the information was provided by Asaf Gayer).

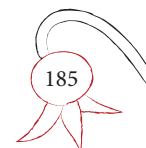
<sup>10</sup> IAA B-279126, available at <https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/image/B-279126> (fourth row from the bottom of the plate, fourth fragment from the left). This fragment too was identified by Eibert Tigchelaar.

**Table 1:** Photographic History of 4Q68

<b>PAM</b>	40.967	40.975	40.979	42.029	43.014		
<b>Date</b>	Feb. 1954	Feb. 1954	Feb. 1954	Apr. 1956	July 1959	June 2012	June 2012
<b>Series</b>	Series E	Series E	Series E	Skehan	Cross 29c	Color	IR
<b>IAA</b>	B-279113	B-279122	B-279126	B-280481	B-284255	B-362276	B-362277
<b>Content</b>	frag. 1B	frag. 1C	frag. 1A	frag. 1 frag. 2	frag. 1 frag. 2	frag. 1	frag. 1

The next photograph capturing 4Q68, comprising stage 2, is PAM 42.029, taken in April 1956<sup>11</sup> as part of a series of photographs documenting Skehan’s lot of 4Q fragments (PAM 42.012–029).<sup>12</sup> At that time, frag. 1 was joined from all three pieces and accompanied by frag. 2 (which was not included among the former group of fragments discovered by the archeologists in Qumran Cave 4).<sup>13</sup> Both fragments are also extant in the “final” photograph of PAM 43.014, which was taken in July 1959.<sup>14</sup> This photograph, which records the contents of Museum Plate 261 at the time it was taken, consists mostly of fragments of various Isaiah scrolls.<sup>15</sup>

That Skehan indeed grouped frags. 1 and 2 under the same siglum is further corroborated by two additional pieces of information. First, a survey of the scriptural scrolls published by Skehan in 1978 includes a list of the Isaiah scrolls, according to which 4QIsa<sup>o</sup> includes Isa 14:28–32; 15:1; and 16:7 (1978, 811). Second, Francis Morrow’s (1973,



<sup>11</sup> IAA B-280481, available at <https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/image/B-280481>.

<sup>12</sup> Tov and Pfann 1995, 86. Identificatory labels are attached to some of the fragments.

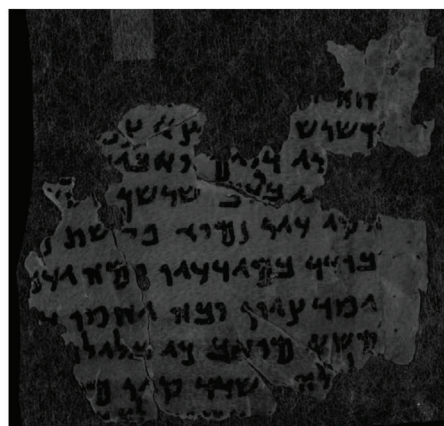
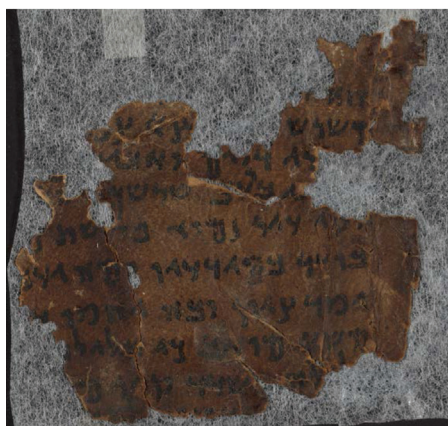
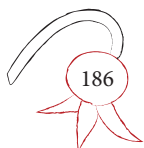
<sup>13</sup> To the best of my knowledge, this is the first recorded appearance of frag. 2 in the PAM photographs, suggesting that it arrived at the Rockefeller Museum separately from frags 1A–C.

<sup>14</sup> IAA B-284255, available at <https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/image/B-284255> (Tov and Pfann 1995, 90).

<sup>15</sup> According to Tov and Pfann’s (1995) data, this photograph is included in a series of 4Q manuscripts assigned to Cross (43.004–016). However, the glass plate bears a label that reads “29<sup>c</sup>,” which better fits Skehan’s lot.

7) earlier dissertation from 1973, written under Skehan’s supervision, explicitly notes “4Q<sup>o</sup>” next to the passages of Isa 14:23–32; 15:1; and 16:7–8, though the last one is followed by a question mark.

To summarize, the photographic evidence indicates that frags. 1A–C were discovered during the archeological excavation of Qumran Cave 4, thereby ensuring their depositional context. They were joined sometime between early 1954 and mid-1956. By April 1956, frag. 2 was grouped with frag. 1. This grouping was maintained in the official publication from 1997, although Eugene Ulrich—who assumed the editorial responsibility for the 4Q Isaiah fragments after the passing of Patrick Skehan—acknowledged that the two fragments were unrelated and that the textual identification of frag. 2 remained dubious. The Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library also contains two more recent, multispectral, images of frag. 1, which were taken in June 2012.<sup>16</sup>



Color and IR images of 4Q68 were photographed by Shai Halevi (June 2012).  
Courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

Figure 4: 4Q68

<sup>16</sup> Full color: IAA B-362276, available at <https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/image/B-362276>; infra-red: IAA B-362277, available at <https://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/image/B-362277>. Note that 4Q68, frag. 1 is marked there as Plate 261, frag. 2.

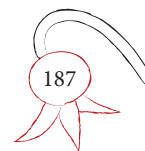
## Transcription

Examination of all the photographs, including the most recent ones, allows one to slightly improve the transcription of the text written on the fragment (Fig. 4), though it generally confirms the DJD readings.

4Q68, frag. 1: Isa 14:28–15:2

*top margin*

הַזֶּה 14:29 אֵל [ל תש] מִן [חי פלשת כלך כי נשבר שבט מכך כי]	1'
מִשְׂרַשׁ [נחש] יֵצֵא צִפְעִי [ופריו שרף מעופף 30 ורעו]	2'
[בכו] רֵי דְלִיִּם וּאֲבִיָּו [ני] סֵם [לבטח ירבצו vacat]	3'
[והמ] תִּי בִרְעֵב שְׂרַשֵּׁד וְשֵׂא [ריתך יהרג 31 הילילי שער]	4'
זִעְקֵי עִיר נִמּוּג פִּלְשֶׁת כֹּל [לך כי מצפון עשן בא ואין]	5'
בּוֹדֵד בְּמִידְעָיו 32 וְמָה יַעֲנֶה [ה מלאכי גוי כי יהוה]	6'
יִסַּד צִיּוֹן וְבָה יִחְסוּ עַל [ני עמו vacat]	7'
15:1 מִשָּׂא מוֹאֵב כִּי בְלִילָה [שדד ער מואב נדמה כי]	8'
[ב] לִילָה שְׂדֵד קִיר מוֹ [אב נדמה 2 עלה הבית]	9'
[ודיבן] הַבְּמוֹת [לבכ] י על נבו ועל מידבא]	10'



Restoration of the missing text, following the MT, suggests that two blank spaces should be reconstructed in lines 3' and 7'. The latter corresponds to the MT's "open" paragraph preceding Isa 15:1 (see further below). The former is more difficult to explain, since it occurs in the middle of Isa 14:30. To be sure, the reconstruction is merely conjectural, and other possibilities can be entertained; for instance, the scribe might have erred while copying and deleted the miscopied text in such a way that nothing else could be written over it.<sup>17</sup>

Still, if the proposed reconstruction of a blank space is plausible, at least as a working hypothesis, then it is worthwhile to note its correspondence with the literary transition that takes place within the

<sup>17</sup> Compare, for example, 4QQoh<sup>a</sup> (4Q109) iii 1 (Ulrich, DJD 16: 225, pl. XXVI).

passage: v. 30a is a divine promise that likens the poor and needy ones to a flock that will graze in safety, whereas v. 30b turns into a threat that God will smite Philistia by famine, likening it to a root that will dry up.<sup>18</sup> The sudden shift from a positive promise to a negative threat and the change of imagery from fauna to flora could both be served by dividing the two versets by a blank space. If so, the scribe—or the tradition his copy represents—did not act mechanically; rather, the scribal work betrays sensitivity to the content of the text, as its format is adapted accordingly. This conclusion is in line with the results of the textual analysis of 4Q68 as detailed below.

## Material Properties



Some material properties of 4Q68 make one wonder about the nature and function of the scroll from which this single fragment derives.

### *Layout*

The fragment preserves the top and right margins. In the right margin, guide dots (*points jalons*) marking the line ruling are discernible and possibly also stitching holes. Thus, 4Q68 derives from the first column of a leather sheet, which must have been preceded by at least one previous sheet (or more). The column width is conspicuously narrow with only about 7–9 words per line.<sup>19</sup> By comparison, the corresponding col. XIII in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> contains 9–13 words per line. Since this fragment is all that remains from 4Q68, it is impossible to know whether this column was exceptionally narrow or whether it was standard in its width. But if the latter option is assumed, then one would need to assume further unusually high columns for containing the full text of a long book such

<sup>18</sup> The mixed imagery used in this prophecy (beginning with v. 29) may betray reliance on practices of protective magic, as suggested by Ronnie Goldstein (2013: 10–11) based on a Neo-Assyrian prophetic parallel. For a different perspective, see Kotzé 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Since the width of the extant fragment of 4Q68 is 5.3 cm (Skehan and Ulrich 1997, 135), the restored column width can be estimated to be c. 10–10.5 cm.

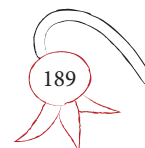
as Isaiah. While not completely impossible, this would be an uncommon format, leading one to doubt whether the scroll from which 4Q68 derives was indeed a copy of the entire book of Isaiah.<sup>20</sup>

Could 4Q68 come from a non-scriptural scroll, such as an exegetical work? Interestingly, Peshar Isaiah C (4Q163, frags 8–10) quotes and interprets select passages of the oracles against the nations, particularly the ones dealing with Babylonia (Isa 14:8, quoted in lines 1'–4'; Isa 14:26–27, quoted and interpreted in lines 4'–10') and Philistia (Isa 14:28–30, quoted in lines 11'–13'), as well as Egypt (Isa 19:9–12, quoted in frag. 11 ii). Unfortunately, the last quotation breaks in the middle of Isa 14:30, and the fragmentary state of preservation precludes knowing whether the work continued into a quotation of the oracle against Moab (beginning with Isa 15:1) or moved to another passage. Very fragmentary remains of quotes from the oracles against Babylonia (Isa 14:19), Moab (Isa 15:4–5), and Dumah (Isa 21:10–15) survive in Peshar Isaiah E (4Q165): frags 3, 4, and 5, respectively. Thus, the Isaiah Pesharim testify to an interest, on the part of sectarian exegetes, in the oracles against the nations as part of their treatment of (select portions of) the book of Isaiah.

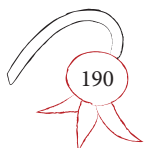
On the other hand, the content and format of 4Q68 are not easily compatible with the hypothesis that it originates in a non-scriptural work that merely quoted from Isaiah. The text copied in 4Q68 consists of two consecutive yet different prophetic units: the oracle against Philistia (Isa 14:28–32) and the opening of the oracles against Moab (Isa 15–16). It would be strange for an exegetical work not to treat these two units separately, as they differ in content and reference. Their sequential quotation, therefore, is less likely to be found in an exegetical

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<sup>20</sup> Such a consideration, of course, can only be very schematic at best in light of the variability in column size exhibited by the Qumran scrolls, including the scriptural ones (Tov 2004, 82–99). The above hypothesis is based on the common practice that “the wider columns often occur at the beginning of sheets ... By the same token, narrow columns often were positioned at the end of sheets” (Tov 2004, 83, with reference to examples in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, 1QM, and 11QPs<sup>a</sup>), but an opposite trend is also recorded: “Narrow columns are often drawn at the beginning of sheets in an attempt to conserve space” (Tov 2004, 84, though with no reference to specific examples).



work. Moreover, the restoration of the missing text requires the reconstruction of a blank space in line 7', namely, one that separates the two units, in correlation with the MT's "closed" paragraph placed at this very point. Such paragraphing may be expected in a copy of the scriptural text but perhaps less so in a quotation embedded within a work of another kind. Although the evidence is too scanty to allow us to reach a safe conclusion, one should at least take into consideration the theoretical possibility that 4Q68 is a scriptural scroll, but not of the entire book of Isaiah. It could be a scroll covering a subsection of it, such as its first half (chapters 1–33),<sup>21</sup> or the collection of oracles against the nations (chapters 13–23, which form a compositional unit), or merely select excerpts (cf. 4Q176).



### *Script*

The script is "Hasmonaeen, thick and bold, with semicursive tendencies," datable "roughly to the first half of the first century BCE" (Skehan and Ulrich 1997, 135)—that is, c. 100–50 BCE.<sup>22</sup> The semicursive tendencies notwithstanding, the scribal hand appears to be well trained. The writing meticulously follows both the horizontal ruling of the lines as well as the vertical ruling of the column, indicating careful preparation of the leather sheet for writing and adherence to professional norms while copying.<sup>23</sup> This aspect aligns with understanding 4Q68 as

<sup>21</sup> This possibility rests upon the evidence that during the Second Temple period the textual transmission of the book of Isaiah could take the form of a scribal bisection of the book into two portions of equal length (chapters 1–33 and chapters 34–66), each of which could have been copied independently. See especially Brooke 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the most peculiar feature of the scribal hand of 4Q68 is its employment of only one form of *mem*, similar to the word-final variant found in other varieties of the Jewish script. This is also the case in the semicursive hand of 4QDan<sup>c</sup> (4Q114), which is dated to the late second century BCE. However, since it is not patently used for marking a word-final variant, it is transcribed above as ם.

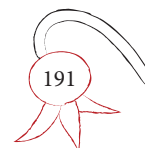
<sup>23</sup> Contrast the case of 4QIsa<sup>n</sup> (4Q67), also represented by a single fragment, whose script was similarly characterized as Hasmonean "with semicursive tendencies" (Skehan and Ulrich 1997, 133). Its general impression, however, is much less orderly: the hand is highly inconsistent, and the lines are anything but

a scriptural scroll, one that is a carefully produced copy of a sacred text held to be important and worthy of prudent scribal treatment.

### *Scribal Intervention*

The scribe's work, albeit generally thoughtful, is not without fault. In line 4' (Isa 14:31), he mistakenly omitted the *resh* in בערב ("by famine"), adding it supralinearly. The error was probably phonetically motivated, as other Qumran scrolls witness the omission of /r/ in various phonetic environments, indicating a weakening of its pronunciation in the Hellenistic-Roman period (Qimron 2018, 110–12, §B3).<sup>24</sup>

At the same time, the scribe's otherwise fine work allows one to consider the possibility that his original reading was not entirely senseless, as the lexical influence of a nearby passage may have facilitated it.<sup>25</sup> 4Q68 may have originally contained other oracles against the nations, several of which use the noun עב "cloud." And the same may have especially been the case in the preceding oracle against Babylonia (Isa 14:14), as well as in the following oracles against "the land of whirring wings" (18:4) and Egypt (19:1). To be sure, in the context of Isa 14:30 the term רעב "hunger, famine" is more appropriate than עב "cloud" (NRSV: "But



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straight, apparently not following any ruling. In my opinion, 4Q67 is less likely to have been a copy of Isaiah (Mizrahi 2021). [After the submission of this paper in January 2022, a new analysis of the scribal features of the Isaiah scrolls was published by Mladen Popović (2023). According to his classification, the scribal hands of 4Q62–4Q68 all fall under the category of “substandard script” (Popović 2023, 221, 224–226). In addition, he independently entertains the possibility that 4Q68 was “a collection of excerpts, not meant for trade but for private circulation” (225).]

<sup>24</sup> Elisha Qimron notes that “it was omitted far more than any other non-guttural root-consonant (though in most cases it was inserted above the line). Such omissions occur for the most part near a guttural” (110), which is indeed the case here, as the *resh* is omitted in the vicinity of *‘ayin*. One wonders whether this state of affairs is suggestive that the *resh* was pronounced as a pharyngealized consonant [r<sup>h</sup>]—a realization that is also known from the Tiberian reading tradition, though there it is conditioned by very specific phonetic environments (Khan 2020, 1.223–234, §I.1.20), which do not match those recorded in Qumran Hebrew.

<sup>25</sup> This point develops an observation made by Chananya Rothner.



I will make your root die *of famine*, and your remnant I [MT: he] will kill”). However, the scribe could still have been influenced by the word כַּעַב that he had copied one or two columns beforehand.

## Orthography

The term “orthography” is sometimes used in scholarly discussions in different ways, requiring an explanation of exactly how I understand it.

### *General Considerations*

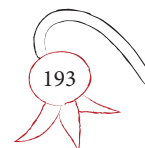
The inherited writing system of Hebrew famously gives precedence to the orthographic representation of consonants. Vowels are only partially marked, mostly in the word-final position, while word-medial vowels are less often marked. This feature is rooted in the grammatical architecture of Hebrew as a Semitic language, in which the bi- or triconsonantal root is the main carrier of lexical meaning. In contrast, vowels and uniconsonantal affirmatives more commonly express grammatical distinctions. Since most words are spelled “defectively,” with little or no marking of their vowels, the spellings of many of them—especially content words—are inherently ambiguous and could be vocalized in more than one way. Admittedly, the context plays a crucial role in disambiguating many cases, but much room remains for conflicting interpretations. Accordingly, different vocalizations are reflected in the ancient versions and sometimes by the medieval notations of oral reading traditions.

The versions show that some of the diversity in vocalization goes back to the Second Temple period. But when it comes to the scriptural scrolls from the Judean Desert, it is very difficult to discern differences in vocalization as long as the scribe copied the scriptural text conservatively, that is, by sticking to its traditional, very imperfect marking of the vowels. In the late Second Temple period, however, some scribal schools no longer considered this situation viable and sought ways to enhance the marking of vowels both qualitatively (i.e., explicitly marking different vowels) and positionally (i.e., not only in the word-final but also in the word-medial position). This was achieved by extending



the secondary use of some letters as vowel markers (*matres lectionis*). Such orthographic means had their roots already in the monarchic period. Both inscriptions and various scrolls testify that vowel marking had spread into the word-medial position. However, this was still more common with some vowels (especially the rounded ones; i.e., /u/ and /o/) than with others. In even more developed orthographies, vowels could be pleonastically marked by two or three vowel letters (digraphs and trigraphs) to render the vowel and its quality explicit.

Such extended orthographies, however, were not universally accepted. Among the Qumran Isaiah scrolls, 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> appears to be the only one applying—more-or-less consistently—a system that extensively uses digraphs and trigraphs. The reason for this rarity seems to be the cultural value attached to orthographic profiles as markers of religious reverence toward the scriptural text. On the one hand, adding letters to the inherited scriptural text reflects a less conservative approach to its textual transmission. On the other hand, *matres lectionis* only render explicit vowels that any reader must supply in any case. Thus, in theory, the orthographical adaptation of the scriptural text represents a relatively low-ranked intervention: it makes the transmission of the linguistic utterance more intelligible while minimally tampering with the so-called “consonantal text.” In reality, however, the preference for an extended orthography was socially and culturally marked as less conservative when it came to scribal approach.



### *Orthographic Profiles*

The orthography employed in MT Isa 14:28–15:2 (or, rather, in the Proto-Masoretic tradition represented by the so-called “consonantal text” of the MT) is not particularly “defective” (Table 2). Still, in several instances it does avoid the explicit marking of vowels, which can be classified according to the vowel quality (rounded vs. non-rounded) and the vowel’s position in the word (medial or final). In virtually all such instances, 4Q68 adheres to the “defective” spelling, whereas 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> prefers a *plene* spelling:

A closer linguistic examination of these cases indicates that a distinction should be made between two groups of cases. First, rounded, word-medial vowels originating in historically short \**u* are not

**Table 2:** Orthographic Variants

		MT	4Q68	1QIsa <sup>a</sup>
<i>Rounded vowels</i>				
word-medial:	Isa 14:29	כָּלֶךְ מְשָׁרֵשׁ	---	כולך משורש
	Isa 14:30	שָׁרֵשׁךְ יְהַרְגֶׁה	שרשך ---	שורשך אהרוג
	Isa 14:31	כָּלֶךְ (בְּמוֹעֲדָיו)	[כֶּלֶךְ]	כולך במודעיו
	Isa 15:1	שָׂדֵד <sub>1</sub> שָׂדֵד <sub>2</sub>	---	שודד שודד
<i>Non-rounded vowels</i>				
word-medial:	Isa 15:2	הַבְּמוֹת	הַבְּמוֹת	הבִּמֹּת
word-final:	Isa 14:29	(מִכָּךְ)	---	מככה
	Isa 15:1	(בְּלִילָה <sub>1</sub> ) (בְּלִילָה <sub>2</sub> )	בלילה [בִּ]לִילָה	בלילה בלילה



orthographically represented in the Proto-Masoretic tradition and 4Q68, whereas 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> marks them with a *waw*, thus applying to nouns whose historical nominal pattern is *\*qutl* (i.e., *\*šurš* > Tiberian *šóreš*; *\*kull* > Tiberian *kol*); verbs of the prefix conjugation whose historical form is *\*yaqtul* > Tiberian *yiqtol*; and the thematic /u/ vowel of verbs in the passive stems (e.g., שָׂדֵד in the passive G or D stems and probably also מִידְעִי, assuming that it should be parsed as a plural participle of the passive D stem; 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>'s מוֹדְעִי appears to be a plural participle of the passive C stem).<sup>26</sup>

By contrast, the spelling of rounded vowels originating in other vocalic qualities (historically long *\*ā* and *\*ū*, and the diphthong *\*aw*) is also *plene* in the MT and 4Q68, such as the active participle of the G stem (*\*qātil* > Tiberian *qotel*, e.g., בּוֹדֵד), or the plural ending (*\*-āt* > *-ot*, e.g., בְּמוֹת).

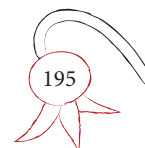
<sup>26</sup> Note that this analysis makes no premise about the actual phonetic realization of the vowel—that is, whether the scribes realized it as [u] or [o] (as in Tiberian Hebrew).

Thus, for Second Temple readers—who were not historical linguists—the Proto-Masoretic tradition and 4Q68 evince the lack of orthographic consistency: some rounded vowels are explicitly marked by a *waw*, whereas others are not. A scribal dilemma, therefore, presented itself as a function of the extended systems of spelling: scribal conservatism comes at the cost of orthographic inconsistency, whereas orthographic consistency can only be achieved by diverging from the inherited, more “defective” orthography. This problem is amplified because certain vocalizations—lexical or grammatical interpretations of ambiguous spellings—can only be made explicit by resorting to *plene* orthography. As a result, even conservative scribes, who generally preferred to stick to their *Vorlage* over applying a *plene* orthography more consistently, were still forced to face the dilemma for each case of potential ambiguity: should it be explicated orthographically or be left as it is?

If the Proto-Masoretic text—which represents a relatively conservative orthography in the book of Isaiah—is taken as a benchmark, 4Q68 and 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> represent two opposing approaches. 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> levels out the orthographic representation of all rounded vowels by marking them with a *waw* across the board. Therefore, its preference for orthographic consistency translates into a less conservative approach. In contradistinction, 4Q68 generally maintains the inherited orthography, retaining the “defective” spelling of only the historically short \**u* vowel. It can therefore be classified as more conservative in its scribal approach.<sup>27</sup> In either case, the representation of the rounded vowels in general and the historically short \**u* vowel in particular are indeed purely orthographical—namely, it only pertains to the explicit marking (or non-marking) of an underlying vowel.

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<sup>27</sup> This conclusion may be taken as indirectly supporting the characterization of 4Q68 as a scriptural scroll. To be sure, the relation between a scroll’s particular orthography and its content is by no means simple. As demonstrated by 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, a scriptural scroll can exhibit a (highly) extended orthography. Nonetheless, the inherited, “defective” orthography is more likely to be retained when producing a copy of the scriptural text, whereas quotations embedded in works of other kinds are more easily adapted in terms of their orthography.



Second, the cases of non-rounded, word-final vowels are fundamentally different because the final vowels marked in **מכבה** (only in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>) and **לילה** (in both 4Q68 and 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>) are absent from the corresponding forms in the MT (**מִכְבֶּה** and **לַיִל**, respectively). This means that these two cases are not essentially orthographic. Rather, they reflect a difference in the level of morphology. The forms **לֵיל** and **לִילָה** are morphological variants of the same lexeme, differing in their grammatical ending. Similarly, the spelling **כֶּה** testifies to the existence of a final vowel that is absent from the MT's **כֶּה**; whether the two spellings represent allomorphs of the same pronominal suffix (2f. sg.)<sup>28</sup> or different morphemes marking a contrast in gender (2f. sg. in the MT, 2m. sg. in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>) can be debated, but, at any rate, they cannot be taken as witnesses of the same grammatical form. Thus, both cases stand for another kind of scribal intervention, which goes beyond the mere orthographic explication of the underlying vocalization.<sup>29</sup>



## Philological Analysis

Although only a little amount of text survives in 4Q68, it witnesses a few intriguing variants vis-à-vis the other textual witnesses. Upon first glance, they might appear to pertain to relatively small details. Moreover, each such variant can be explained individually as reflecting a distinct

<sup>28</sup> A sporadic use of the spelling **כֶּה** for the 2f. sg. Pronominal suffix was first suggested by Hannah Cotton and Elisha Qimron (1998, 110–11). Cf. Qimron 2018, 139–40, §B12.1. But note the counterarguments of Steven Fassberg (2012, 98–100; I am indebted to Dr. Chanan Ariel for this reference).

<sup>29</sup> This appears to be true also for the single case of a *plene* spelling for a non-rounded, word-medial vowel, namely, the *aleph* in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>'s **הבִּמֹת**. The fact that the *aleph* was added supralinearly indicates that the scribe or a later corrector took particular care in explicating that the word-medial vowel is /ā/. This would make sense only if an alternative vocalization was possible. Kutscher (1974, 368–69, no. 12) hypothesizes that the corrector wanted to clarify that the underlying form of the noun is **בִּמָּה** rather than **בִּמֹת**. Intriguingly, the latter form is reflected in other places in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>. See especially XII 16, **בומתי עב** (MT Isa 14:14, **בִּמְתִי עָב**); XLVIII 11, **בומתי ארץ** (MT Isa 58:14, **במותי ק**, **בִּמְתִי**).

phenomenon, the like of which can be found elsewhere in the Qumran scriptural scrolls or other textual witnesses.<sup>30</sup> But if one reflects on the question of *why* these variants occur *where* they do, then it would make more sense to view them holistically as sharing a fundamental common denominator: they can all be explained as being exegetically motivated. Put differently: every variant can be viewed as attempting to solve an inherent interpretive difficulty that was present in the scribe's *Vorlage*.<sup>31</sup> Explicating one's interpretation of a passage often takes the form of interference with the text being transmitted, necessarily distancing the product from its master copy.<sup>32</sup>

In the first case to be discussed (Isa 15:1), this means the disambiguation of a clause or phrase that could be parsed in multiple ways. I propose that the scribe—or the interpretive tradition he represents—wishes to clarify which construal is to be preferred. In the second case (Isa 14:31), the interpretive task is more complex: the crucial word is



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<sup>30</sup> This is the approach taken by Donald Parry (2020), as demonstrated by his presentation of the material in apparatus form, which necessarily treats each lemma and variant separately.

<sup>31</sup> By “exegetical variants,” I refer to the (potentially) interpretive motivation of individual readings in localized contexts (Mizrahi 2016, 29–31). For different approaches, which attempt to identify overarching tendencies that go throughout an entire scroll (1QIsa<sup>a</sup>), see Koenig 1982, section II; Pulikottil 2001. Neither Jean Koenig nor Paulson Pulikottil discuss Isa 14:31 and 15:1, which are the focus of the present discussion. See also the detailed typology of Tov 2012, chapter 4, “Copying and Transmitting the Biblical Text.” Tov classifies “exegetical changes” (together with “theological changes”) among “readings reflecting content changes” (240–262), which stand together with “differences created in the course of the textual transmission” (221–239). While this distinction is conceptually and didactically helpful, it seems to me that exegesis motivates much of the “mechanical” variants as well; indeed, exegetically motivated variants are a necessary function of the cognitive mechanisms underlying the psycholinguistic processing of text while copying it, on the one hand, and of the cultural mechanisms entailed in the handing down of sacred literature by scribal tradition, on the other hand. Various modes of interpretation are inextricably infused into the acts of reading and writing, affecting even the most technical, inadvertent minutiae of copying. [See now Einav Fleck (2022 and 2023).]

<sup>32</sup> Cf. the seminal observations of Shemaryahu Talmon (1989).

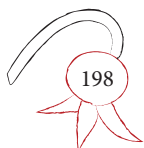
lexically ambiguous and semantically out of context in whatever lexical sense one prefers.

#### 4Q68, Lines 8'–9' = Isa 15:1

A repeated variant occurs in Isa 15:1 (4Q68, lines 8'–9'). Following the superscription of the oracle against Moab (משא מואב), the verse breaks into two parallel, nearly identical, hemistichs, which the Proto-Masoretic text reads as follows:<sup>33</sup>

- v. 1a כי בליל שדד ער מואב נדמה  
v. 1b כי בליל שדד קיר מואב נדמה

The syntax of each such verset, though, is anything but clear.<sup>34</sup> How should one construe and parse their internal structure into clauses and phrases? The problem becomes immediately apparent with the second word בליל: should one take the noun to be in the absolute state, that is, take the prepositional phrase בליל to be an independent adverbial



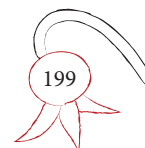
<sup>33</sup> The only difference between the two versets is the interchange between the forms ער (v. 1a) and קיר (v. 1b). Historically, both are dialectal forms of common nouns meaning “town, city”: ער is akin to עיר (and translated accordingly by Aquila and Symmachus), and קיר is a masculine biform of קריה (both are etymologically related to the common noun קיר “wall”; cf. the ancient versions *ad loc.*); it is the standard word for “town, city” in Moabite (see the Mesha Stele, lines 11–13, 24, where it is spelled “defectively” as קר). The two forms are formalized as proper nouns, the names of major cities in Moab: Ar is mentioned in Num 21:15; Deut 2:9, 18, 29, and Kir is sometimes assumed to be an abbreviated form of the toponym קיר חרש (Isa 16:11; Jer 48:31, 36) or 2) קיר חרשת Kgs 3:25; Isa 16:7). For these names, and for the conflicting interpretations of their mention in Isa 15:1, see Weippert 1998. The semantic gap between the two usages is played at in Num 21:27–29. For the poetic effect of the rhetorical devices employed in our passage, see Couey 2015: 21–22, 26–27.

<sup>34</sup> For a detailed exploration of the various difficulties encountered in Isa 15:1, including the linguistic ones, see Jones 1996, 163–75. But I remain skeptical of his solution, which revocalizes key terms (נדמה < נדמה; שדד < שדד) to produce the following translation: “Indeed, in the night of the destroyer the cities [Israelite term] of Moab lament. Indeed, in the night of the destroyer the cities [Moabite term] of Moab lament” (174, 203).

expression: “At night, Ar/Kir was robbed; Moab was laid waste”?<sup>35</sup> Or is it in the construct state, with the following nominalized relative clause functioning as the *nomen rectum*: “In the night in which Ar/Kir was robbed, Moab was laid waste”?

The syntax could affect the historical conceptualization of Moab as portrayed in the passage. According to the former option, the passage could describe a continuous process of deterioration leading to destruction: the Moabite cities surrender, one by one, to robbers operating in the dark, eventually leading to Moab’s downfall. By contrast, according to the latter option the downfall of Moab seems to be understood as happening in a short period, resulting from one cataclysmic event, namely, the destruction of its capital cities.

A grammatical factor complicates this problem. The Tiberian vocalization of the MT generally distinguishes between the two states: לַיַּל in the absolute (e.g., Isa 16:3) vs. לַיַּל in the construct (e.g., Isa 30:29). However, the form לַיַּל is also found once in the clause-final position, necessitating its interpretation as being in the absolute state (Isa 21:11, in parallelism with the biform לַיַּלְהָ). Thus, the form לַיַּל is both morphologically and syntactically ambiguous, and its contradictory linguistic interpretations yield different syntactic construals of the prepositional phrase בַּלַּיַּל in the context of both versets.<sup>36</sup>



<sup>35</sup> Some commentators take בַּלַּיַּל to mean “in a night,” that is, within a single night (e.g., Kaiser 1974, 57; Childs 2001, 128; cf. Smothers 1996, 70, 73, “overnight”). This sense, however, is more transparently conveyed by the phrase בֵּן לַיַּלְהָ (Jon 4:10).

<sup>36</sup> This ambiguity persists in the MT, as the parsing implied by the cantillation tradition is similarly equivocal. Although the word בַּלַּיַּל has disjunctive accents in both versets, they are low-ranked (בְּיַיִל, *gershaim*, and בְּיַיִל, *tevir*), and it remains unclear whether the word is to be read as an independent adverbial complement or rather as the *nomen regens*, which is bound to the following words. This was indeed a matter of debate among some medieval Jewish commentators, such as David Qimhi (‘בליל פלוני’). ואמר ‘בליל’ בדרך הסמיכות – אולי חסר הנסמך, רוצה לומר: בליל פלוני. ‘and he said *ba-lêl*, in the construct form; either the *nomen rectum* is missing, as if he were to say, ‘at the night of so and so’, or that the construct replaces an absolute form, as in the case



The solution of 4Q68 for this problem is employing the biform *לילה*, which is morphologically unambiguous, as it can only mark the absolute state:

- v. 1a [שדד ער מואב נדמה] **כי בלילה**  
 v. 1b [כי ב] **לילה** שדד קיר מו[אב נדמה]

The substitution of *בליל* for *בלילה* clarifies the syntax of the verse, as it requires the reader to construe it as having a pre-posed adverbial expression: “*At night*, Ar/Kir was robbed; Moab was laid waste.”

Significantly, the syntactic implication of this particular variant is not peculiar to 4Q68 but rather represents a broader interpretive tradition. Not only is it in agreement with the renditions offered by all the ancient versions (LXX, Vulgate, Peshitta, and Targum Jonathan),<sup>37</sup> but the same variant, with the same effect, is also recorded in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> XIII 6–7:

- v. 1a **כי בלילה** שודד עיר מואב ונדמה  
 v. 1b **כי בלילה** שודד עיר מואב נדמה

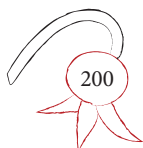
Eduard Kutscher explained 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> differently: “*לילה* is the standard prose form, and *ליל* the poetical one. Thus, the commoner form replaced the rarer one in xv 1” (1974, 377, no. 38). Admittedly, this stylistic factor could have been operative as well, though the adverbial expression “by night” always takes the form *בלילה* and not *בליל*, and this is so even in poetry (e.g., Isa 26:9; Jer 6:5, 49:9; Job 24:14).<sup>38</sup> But the fact that the same replacement is found in another scroll (of which Kutscher could not be aware when writing his book) favors identifying a deeper motivation, namely, the syntactic disambiguation described above.<sup>39</sup>

of *hêl* [for *hayil*] in 2 Kgs 18:17”) and Joseph Kaspi (‘בליל’ אינו סמוך, “*bə-lêl* is not a construct form”). See Cohen 1996, 110–11.

<sup>37</sup> According to Goshen-Gottstein 1975, נח, all the versional readings presuppose *בְּלִיל* rather than *בְּלִיל*, but this reconstruction disregards the aforementioned fact that *לִיל* can also be an absolute form.

<sup>38</sup> As observed by Arnold Ehrlich (1912, 58). But Ehrlich himself preferred to emend the text to *בְּלִיל* “wholly.”

<sup>39</sup> 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> also witnesses other variants in this verse, at least one of which similarly attempts to disambiguate its syntax. By introducing the second verb



Finally, the substitution of בליל for בלילה is found elsewhere within the Masoretic tradition in the form of a *ketib/qere* interchange in Prov 31:18 and Lam 2:19. In both cases, the written (*ketib*) form בליל is morphologically ambiguous, as it could also function as the allomorph marking the construct state, whereas the context requires the absolute state. Hence, the reading tradition (*qere*) replaced it with בלילה.<sup>40</sup>

Thus, 4Q68's and 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>'s בלילה might appear to be merely stylistic variants, but they differ in terms of their grammatical marking of the nominal state and, as such, they imply different syntactic construals. While ליל is grammatically ambiguous, לילה is not; by preferring the latter over the former, Second Temple scribes could explicate their interpretive tradition regarding the syntax of the verse and hence its historical image of the downfall of Moab. This tradition is shared with the ancient versions, even though it is not self-evident and is by no means the only conceivable way of parsing the underlying text.

Despite the difference in their grammatical transparency, however, both ליל and לילה are still morphological variants of the same lexeme. Their lexical identity is crucial, since this aspect allowed ancient copyists to act as latent exegetes. Various scribes (using different scribal approaches) differed from one another in terms of the freedom they



with conjunction (ונדמה), it forces the reader to construe עיר מואב as a construct phrase that functions as the subject of the verb שודד: “At night, the towns of Moab were robbed, and it was laid waste” (עיר מואב is to be taken as a collective singular, referring to all Moabite towns). In contradistinction, and despite the lack of grammatical agreement in gender, the Proto-Masoretic text might be construed differently, separating ער and קיר (as the subject of שדד) on the one hand and מואב (as the subject of נדמה) on the other: “At night, Ar/Kir was robbed; Moab is/was laid waste.” Interestingly, the Tiberian cantillation tradition agrees with the syntactic construal of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, though by different means: it places conjunctive accents on ער (*mahpach*) and קיר- (*maqeph*), and a disjunctive accent on both occurrences of מואב (מואָב *pashta*, and מואָב *tifcha*).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Gordis 1971, 126 (List 42: “Miscellaneous Variations in Nouns”) with 180, n. 224. That the *ketib* בליל (vocalized as either בְּלִיל or בַּלִּיל) in Prov 31:18 is more original than the *qere* בלילה is assumed by many critical commentators of Proverbs (e.g., Toy 1908, 546; Fox 2009, 1066). This is also implied by some commentators of Lamentations (e.g., Salters 2010, 172).

allowed themselves in injecting their interpretive traditions into the transmitted text. But even those who adhered to a relatively minimalist approach (like the one represented by the extant fragment of 4Q68) would have found it difficult to resist the temptation to explicate the text by making such a slight grammatical adjustment as replacing one form of a word with an otherwise semantically equivalent biform, thereby surgically removing a syntactic obstacle that hampers the comprehension of the passage.

#### 4Q68, Line 6' = Isa 14:31

A more complicated challenge is posed by the concluding clause of Isa 14:31 within the oracle against Philistia. The passage first describes the pending destruction of Philistine cities, urging Philistia—personified as a wailing woman—to lament her devastated urban centers and city gates that have presumably been broken open (הילילי שער זעקי עיר נמוג), פלשת כלך, “Wail: ‘O gate!’ Cry: ‘O city!’; melting in fear, O Philistia, all of you!”).<sup>41</sup> The power inflicting this calamity, though, is only hinted at metonymically in v. 31b by referring to the smoke that comes out of the north (כי מצפון עשן בא), and even this subtle representation is made without explicating which army is referred to, the Judean or the Assyrian.<sup>42</sup>



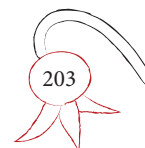
<sup>41</sup> The apparent lack of grammatical agreement in gender between the verbs and the nouns in the clause הילילי שער (f. sg. verb followed by a noun in the masculine) is most simply solved by assuming that שער “gate” and עיר “city” are not the grammatical subjects but rather the objects, namely, quotations of the words of laments pronounced by the bewailing Philistia. As for נמוג פלשת, as recognized by many, the verbal form נמוג should not be parsed as a finite verb but rather as an infinitive absolute (compare נסוג in Isa 59:13, which is contextually unambiguous because it is embedded within a list of other infinitives).

<sup>42</sup> This ambiguity is related to the problem of how to contextualize this oracle historically, which has been much discussed in scholarship. See, in addition to the critical commentaries, for example, Irwin 1928; Jenkins 1980; Vargon 2015. More recent scholarship tends to follow from the assumption that the prophecy (and the oracles against the nations more generally) is more theologically than politically oriented (e.g., Beuken 2006; Aster 2014).

The reference to this unnamed army concludes with an enigmatic clause, which the MT reads as וְאֵין בּוֹדֵד בְּמוֹעֲדָיו. The form בּוֹדֵד (an active participle of the G stem) is usually translated as “lonely” (see Hos 8:9; Ps 102:8).<sup>43</sup> Syntactically, an assertion that “there is no lone person” could perhaps be compared to similarly phrased statements in other oracles against the nations, such as the one concerning Babylonia: כְּצִבְי מְדָח וּכְצֹאן וְאֵין מְקַבֵּץ, “like a banished gazelle, and like sheep with no one to gather (them)” (Isa 13:14; cf. Jer 49:5; Nah 3:18). But within the context of Isa 14:30, one might have expected something closer to Isaiah’s depiction of the Assyrian army: אֵין עָיִף וְאֵין בּוֹשֵׁל בּוֹ לֹא יָנוּם וְלֹא יִשָּׁן, “Among it, there is no one who is weary and no one who stumbles; none slumbers or sleeps” (Isa 5:27).

Yet the most perplexing word is מוֹעֲדָיו for several reasons. The default reading of the unvocalized form מוועדיו could be expected to be מוֹעֲדָיו, “his festivals” (as indeed read by the Peshitta: וְאֵין בּוֹדֵד בְּמוֹעֲדָיו, “and there is no lonely at his festivals”), but this makes little sense in the immediate context. The Tiberian vocalization מוֹעֲדָיו is careful to notify the reader that a different noun is employed here: מוֹעֵד is a verbal noun related to the G stem (cf. מוֹרֵד “descent, downhill,” deriving from ירד “to descend, go down”). Its nominal pattern *\*maqtal* is very common for infinitival forms or for designating places and locations, leading lexicographers and commentators to interpret מוֹעֵד metaphorically as an “appointed place (of a soldier in the army) ... i.e., his ranks.”<sup>44</sup> This interpretation, however, remains doubtful, as the word is a *hapax legomenon*.

The doubts regarding its sense are well reflected in the ancient versions. The LXX represents the clause with καὶ οὐκ ἔστι τοῦ εἶναι, which is as perplexing as the Hebrew, but in any case it does not seem



<sup>43</sup> Cf. the adverb בְּדָד “alone” (e.g., Lev 13:46; Isa 27:10; Lam 1:1).

<sup>44</sup> So Brown–Driver–Briggs 418a. Cf. NRSV Isa 14:31, “and there is no straggler in its ranks.” It is sometimes connected to a feminine form recorded in Josh 20:9 in the phrase הַמּוֹעֲדָה, “the cities appointed (for refuge).” However, the /u/ vowel suggests a participle of the passive C stem, not a feminine counterpart of the verbal noun מוֹעֵד.

to reflect either בודד or מועדיו.<sup>45</sup> Targum Jonathan cleverly renders וְלִיִּת דְּמֵאָחַר בְּמִזְמִנְוֵהי “and there is none that delays in his assemblies” (Chilton 1987, 33), reading the word as מוֹעֲדִי, that is, a participle of the passive C stem, relating it to the verb יַעַד in the sense of “meet, assemble.” At the same time, it maintains an indirect trace of מוֹעֲדִי in the sense of “appointed times.”<sup>46</sup> A similar understanding is implied by the addition of συντεταγμένοις αὐτοῦ in Symmachus and Theodotion. This participial form is derived from συντάσσω, “put in order together, esp. as a military term; draw up, put in array” (Liddell–Scott–Jones).<sup>47</sup> Significantly, this form is employed elsewhere in the Greek Bible for rendering another derivative of יַעַד, namely, הַנוֹעֲדִים “those who assemble” (LXX<sup>A</sup> 1 Kgs [3 Kgdms] 8:5).<sup>48</sup> The Vulgate, *et non est qui effugiat agmen eius*, “and there is none that shall escape his troop” (Douay-Rheims-Challoner), follows the lead of the Greek revisions while adapting it even further to the context.<sup>49</sup> These renditions testify



<sup>45</sup> Richard Ottley (1904–1906, 1.121, 2.183) translates “and there is no means to continue,” explaining that “some words seem to have dropped out from the Greek, in rendering or in transmission,” further speculating about the original text of the Old Greek. Moisés Silva (2007, 836) translates “and there is no way to live,” but notes that this rendition is “uncertain.” Ken Penner (2020) translates it literally: “and there is nothing for being” (115), noting that “as the text stands, it expresses the absence of τοῦ εἶναι, which if understood as something that has to be as its purpose, would mean what aims at existence does not exist. In context, it would probably be understood that what is needed for existence is not there” (450).

<sup>46</sup> For בְּמִזְמִנְוֵהי, see Ribera Florit 1988, 108. Alexander Sperber (1962, 32) reads בְּמִזְמִנְוֵהי, though he mentions בְּמִזְמִנְוֵהי in his apparatus. בְּמִזְמִנְוֵהי is likely the original reading, whereas בְּמִזְמִנְוֵהי is a later adjustment to the MT. Cf. Speier 1965.

<sup>47</sup> Aquila’s συντετα[ρα]γμένοις αὐτοῦ may be an inner-Greek corruption; συνταράσσω means “to throw (or be thrown) into confusion,” which is less fitting for the context here.

<sup>48</sup> Brooke, McLean, and St. John Thackeray 1930, 234 (apparatus for v. 5).

<sup>49</sup> Benjamin Kedar-Kopfstein (1960) considers the possibility that the Vulgate witnesses the reading בְּנוֹעֲדִי נוֹדָד וְאִין, noting that *fugiens* stands for נוֹדָד in Isa 16:1 and that 1QM XV 3 employs נוֹעֲדִים as a military term designating the soldiers assembled into troops for war. In his opinion, this retroverted reading is linked—either phonetically or graphically—to 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>’s בְּמוֹעֲדִי מוֹדָד וְאִין. An alternative understanding, at least of the final word of the verse, is indicated by Jerome’s

to the exegetical difficulty inherent in the concluding clause of v. 31 in general and in the obscure word מועדיו in particular.<sup>50</sup>

This exegetical dissensus supplies an essential background for understanding the variant readings witnessed by 4Q68 and 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>. 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> witnesses two interrelated variants: ואין מודד במודעיו as against the Proto-Masoretic ואין בודד במועדיו. The replacement of בודד “lonely one” with מודד “one who measures” may well have a phonetic background, as both /b/ and /m/ are labial consonants that can easily alternate.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, this peculiar reading might have been introduced, by alliteration (so Kutscher 1974, 511, no. 3), under the influence of the following word, which similarly contains /b/, /m/, and /d/. The meaning of מודד in the present context, however, is elusive. The graphic link between the MT’s מועדיו (a verbal noun derived from יעד) and 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>’s מודעיו (presumably מודעיו, a passive C participle derived from ידע, literally “those that were made known”) is clear enough, as one reading could have developed from the other by way of simple metathesis.<sup>52</sup> But



commentary on this passage of Isaiah, which suggests that the term *agmen* relates to the column of the “smoke coming from the north” (Scheck 2015, 321–22). Although this usage of the term *agmen* is rare, it is well rooted in Classical Latin: Vergil employs it for describing the “clouds of dust following any thing in rapid motion as men, animals, etc.” (Lewis and Short 1879: 72c, with a reference to Vergil, *Aeneid* 4.154). One might be tempted to speculate that underlying the Vulgate at this point is the variant reading עמודי, but this is not borne out by the fact that *agmen* never translates עמוד elsewhere in the Vulgate, not even in the related phrase עמוד הענן “the pillar of cloud” (e.g., Exod 13:21–22).

<sup>50</sup> This difficulty also begged conjectural emendations on the part of critical scholars and modern commentators. See, for example, the proposals surveyed by Hans Wildberger (1997, 89).

<sup>51</sup> Compare, for example, the inner-Masoretic variant for the name of one of the two chief rivers of Damascus: K אבנה, Q אֶמְנָה (2 Kgs 5:12).

<sup>52</sup> Note the paleographic observation in Skehan and Ulrich 1997, 136: “Comparison of the *dalet* and *ayin* ... makes the transposition readily understandable.” Cf. Parry 2020, 130: “or a scroll belonging to the 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> tradition accidentally transposed the *dālet* and *yōd* to read במודעיו.” The formal difference in the second letter of מידעיו and מודעיו, that is, the alternation between *waw* and *yod*, would have posed only a little, if any, difficulty to scribes of the late Second Temple. These letters alternate not only graphically (depending on the precise paleographic profile of

again, commentators have struggled with understanding what it means in the present context.

4Q68 not only fits into this complicated picture but also helps to clarify it. Although it reads בּוּדָד in agreement with the MT, it diverges from it in reading מִיִּדְעִי, which is best explained as a participle of the passive D stem. An identical spelling is found in 2 Kgs 10:11: “Jehu killed all who were left of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, all its senior officials (גְּדֹלָיו), *those known to be related to it* (מִיִּדְעִי, literally, “its known ones”), and its priests until he left it no survivor.” Semantically, מִיִּדְעִי denotes here a *person* who is well known (i.e., a political or social celebrity)—probably for his relation to the royal dynasty or court. 4Q68’s מִיִּדְעִי is very close to 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>’s מוֹדְעִי: both are derived from יָדַע (rather than the MT’s יָעַד), and both are participles of passive verbal stems. The semantics of both forms is so close that they alternate even within the MT as *ketib/qere* readings: “Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; this is made known (K מִיִּדְעִי, Q מוֹדְעִי) in all the earth” (Isa 12:5). Semantically, מוֹדְעִי refers not to persons but rather to *things*, that is, to God’s deeds, which have become well known throughout the world.<sup>53</sup>



the scribal hand) but also in various grammatical functions to the extent that they could be seen as essentially interchangeable variants of each other.

<sup>53</sup> A related—though not identical—interchange is attested for the derived noun מוֹדְעִי: “And Naomi had a *kinsman* (K מִיִּדְעִי, Q מוֹדְעִי) on her husband’s side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz” (Ruth 2:1; cf. 3:2). The *ketib* appears to reflect the passive D participle מִיִּדְעִי, but the *qere* is vocalized מוֹדְעִי (rather than the expected מִיִּדְעִי, i.e., a passive C participle, for which compare, e.g., מוֹצֵק in 1 Kgs 7:23 || 2 Chr 4:2, derived from יָצַק “to pour, cast”), and should thus be analyzed as a verbal noun (cf. מוֹצֵק, מוֹרֵד, מוֹשֵׁב, etc.). In terms of its nominal pattern, מוֹדְעִי is comparable to מוֹעֵד, the form underlying MT Isa 14:31. Semantically, though, מוֹדְעִי in Ruth 2:1 refers to a *person* (Elimelech’s kinsman), rather than to a *place* (as in מוֹשֵׁב “seat, place of inhabitation,” from יָשַׁב) or *state* (as in מוֹרֵא “fear,” from יָרָא), which are the more common uses of the \**maqal* pattern (but compare מְלִאָךְ “messenger,” from לָאָךְ). Parry (2020: 130) hesitantly suggests that “perhaps the Qumran scrolls read ‘kinsman,’ based on ‘your root’ and ‘your remnant’ of v. 30b.” But this makes little sense in the implied military context of v. 31b.

The fact that the two participial forms of the passive stems interchange with one another enables us to surmise that 4Q68 and 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> share a common tradition, which interpreted the curious מועדיו by applying the technique of anagram, turning it into מודעיו (1QIsa<sup>a</sup>) or its related variant מידעיו (4Q68), both of which mean “his/its<sup>54</sup> known ones.” Contextually, the “known ones” could refer either to things (implying notorious atrocities committed by this army) or to people (implying the soldiers enlisted into this army, famous for their victories or infamous for the havoc they bring) described within the immediate context.

In this respect, both scrolls went one further step beyond the exegetical treatment one finds in most of the ancient versions: except for the LXX, which does not reflect the wording known from other witnesses, the versions—like the Proto-Masoretic text—presuppose מועדיו, differing from each other only in their vocalization of the word. The Qumran Isaiah scrolls, by contrast, exercise a slightly more daring approach by allowing themselves to transpose the letters within the confines of a single graphic word.

On top of this exegetical technique, 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> took an additional step further by changing the enigmatic בודד to the similarly sounding מודד. The latter can be interpreted in the light of one of two conspicuous usages of either the derived noun מדה “measurement” or the verb מדד “to measure.”

1QIsa<sup>a</sup>’s assertion that “there is none who measures” (ואין מודד) could perhaps be understood in light of the phrase לאין מדה (literally, “to no measurement”; but more idiomatically, “immeasurably”), which is thrice employed in the Thanksgiving Scroll for expressing the superlative:<sup>55</sup>

1QH<sup>a</sup> XIII 22–23: כי גבורתכה לאין [ק] וְכבודכה לאין מדה  
 “for your strength is witho[ut en]d and your glory *without measure*”

<sup>54</sup> The 3m. sg. pronominal suffix could refer either to the “smoke” in the preceding verset (v. 31: עָשָׁן), which signifies the enemy’s army, or to “the one who strikes you” mentioned earlier (v. 29: מַכֶּד), referring to the nation that is hostile to Philistia (or its king).

<sup>55</sup> Stegemann, Schuller, and Newsom 2009, 168 and 180, 182 and 196, 226 and 232, respectively.





1QH<sup>a</sup> XIV 6: [וְהוּוּ לְאִין חֶקֶר וְכֹלָה לְאִין מִדָּה]

“and destruction without limit and annihilation *without measu[re]*”

1QH<sup>a</sup> XVII 16–17: וְכִגְבוֹרֹתֶיךָ אֵין בְּכֹחַ וְלִכְבוֹדְךָ אֵין [וְ...]

אֵין מִדָּה

“But compared with your st[ren]gth there is none (equal) in power, and your glory has no [... and] your wisdom *has no measure*”

All three passages describe qualities that exceed measurement: God’s glory and wisdom on the one hand and the pending destruction on the other. The notion of immeasurability can thus function as an expression of immense, overwhelming power—a usage that fits well the approaching army alluded to in Isa 14:31. According to 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, then, the enormous order of battle is so enormous that no one can measure it (וְאֵין מוֹדֵד).<sup>56</sup>



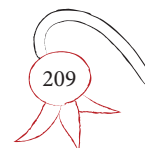
Alternatively, the phrase וְאֵין מוֹדֵד could be illuminated by the pragmatics of the verb מָדַד. The verb is generally employed (in the G stem) in neutral contexts, denoting the act of taking a measurement, usually of length or volume. But, once in biblical literature, it is also found in a patently military context: “He (David) also defeated the Moabites and, making them lie down on the ground, measured them off (וַיִּמְדֵּד) with a cord; he measured (וַיִּמְדֵּד) two lengths of cord for those who were to be put to death, and one length for those who were to be spared. And the Moabites became servants to David and brought tribute” (2 Sam 8:2). The verb still has its lexical sense of “to measure,” though it is uncommonly inflected here in the D stem to highlight the multiplicity of objects (cf. Waltke and O’Connor 1990, 409–10, §24.3.3). Pragmatically, however, measuring the length occupied by the lying, defeated Moabites is equivalent to deciding their fate: most are about to be executed, while only a minority is spared. Seen against this background, 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>’s reading of Isa 14:31 can be interpreted as predicting an even harsher fate for the Philistines: in the case of David’s war with the Moabites, a third of the prisoners were spared while the other two-thirds were sentenced to death. In the case of the pending war against Philistia, there will be

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Kaiser 1974, 55: “The sense of the Hebrew text of the great Qumran manuscript is that the army is so numerous that no one can count it.”

no one to “measure,” implying that all Philistines are doomed and that none will survive.

To sum up this case, the Proto-Masoretic reading וַאִין בּוֹדֵד בְּמוֹעֲדָיו was incomprehensible to ancient readers and translators. 4Q68, in essential agreement with 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, employs a slightly more invasive exegetical technique than the one encountered in the above-mentioned case. It more-or-less maintains the letters of the word מוֹעֲדָיו while transposing them into מִידְעָיו (1QIsa<sup>a</sup> מוֹדְעָיו), thereby producing a term that is a bit more comprehensible, perhaps under the influence of the occurrence of an akin form earlier in Isa 12:5 (though outside the oracles against the nations).

1QIsa<sup>a</sup> represents an even more extensive degree of embedding interpretation within the transmission of the scriptural text. It further intervenes with the preceding word בּוֹדֵד, substituting a single letter with another, which stands for a phonetically similar sound: מוֹדֵד. The lexical meanings of בּוֹדֵד (“lonely”) and מוֹדֵד (“one who measures”) are very different. Still, within this particular context and as part of a negative expression (אַיִן בּוֹדֵד/מוֹדֵד) they come close to each other: “there is no lonely one” and “there is no one to measure” can both describe a huge, cohesive army, all soldiers of which march together, with no apparent stragglers.



## Conclusion

4Q68 is a composite fragment preserving a portion of Isa 14:28–15:2. But despite its modest size, its analysis in comparative perspective vis-à-vis the other textual witnesses of Isaiah sheds light on the textual history of this prophetic book in antiquity, illuminating its development through the embedding of interpretation within the transmitted text during the process of copying.

Scrutiny of the material properties of 4Q68 supports its classification as a scriptural scroll in the sense that it originally contained a continuous text of Isaiah. At the same time, evidence suggests that the scroll originally encompassed only a subsection of the book, though its precise scope remains unknown. At any rate, the scribe’s work—as

demonstrated by the scroll's script, layout, and manuscript format—appears to reflect both respect and sensitivity to its content. These same features align with the scribal attempt to clarify exegetically ambiguous or unintelligible passages by surgically adapting the inherited text at particular points. Such interventions were executed with precision. While they target specific words or even morphemes, they affect the interpretation of the entire clause or verse. Thus, the preference for one morphological variant of the word for “night” over another disambiguates the otherwise baffling syntax of the two parallel versets of Isa 15:1. And the transposition of two letters in one participial form in Isa 14:31—taking it as the result of purposeful anagram rather than a case of inadvertent metathesis—results with replacing an enigmatic word with a term that could be fit into the context.



It is possible to consider each scroll as a unique exemplar of a particular scribe's personal or *ad hoc* interpretation. But I prefer to assume that the scribal activity was regulated on a broader, social basis. Even if one leaves room for idiosyncratic exceptions, it is likely that the professional production of scriptural literature was generally constrained by a range of social norms and cultural conventions introduced in the course of scribal education and initiation into the art and perpetuated by the expectations of peers and customers. In this light, agreements between different textual witnesses in exegetically motivated readings could be taken as evidence of broader interpretive traditions or trajectories.

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