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How to cite: Aksu, A. Two Opisthographs and Scribal Practices in the Ancient Near Eastern World: Thoughts on Use and Reuse. *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology*, 2022, 33(1): pp. 1–26. DOI: 10.14324/111.444.2041-9015.1374

Published: 29/04/2022

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the journal's standard double-blind review.

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CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS: ANCIENT LIVES, NEW STORIES: CURRENT RESEARCH ON THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST[2]

Two Opisthographs and Scribal Practices in the Ancient Near Eastern World: Thoughts on Use and Reuse[i]

Ayhan Aksu

Abstract: Recent scholarship has developed an increasing interest in the materiality of ancient manuscripts. Opisthographs, manuscripts that contain writing on both sides, are of special interest in this regard. This short study focuses on two papyrus opisthographs, originating from two different collections: the Oxyrhynchus Papyri and the Dead Sea Scrolls. These manuscripts each bear different compositions on the front side (the recto) and on the back side (the verso). The Greek Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 654 (dated to the third century CE) contains on its recto an unpublished survey-list of pieces of land. On the verso we find one of the three copies of the Greek version of the *Gospel of Thomas*. The Dead Sea Scroll 4Q509, *Festival Prayers*, is the recto of a Hebrew papyrus that bears copies of two compositions on its verso: the *War Scroll* (4Q496) and *Words of the Luminaries* (4Q506). These texts were dated to the first century BCE and the middle of the first century CE. By contextualizing these two manuscripts, I aim to explore the nature of opisthographs as a scribal phenomenon across different cultures in the region. This comparative research will be conducted by considering the materiality of these manuscripts from the perspective of both codicology and palaeography. Subsequently, I will investigate the intertextual relationships between the compositions on both sides of the manuscripts and address related issues such as the 'useful life' of these manuscripts and the possibility of personal copies.

[2] **Ancient Lives, New Stories: Current Research on the Ancient Near East** was a conference held at the British Museum in London between 1st and 2nd December 2018, organised by Xosé L. Hermoso-Buxán and Mathilde Touillon-Ricci. This paper is part of the proceedings of that conference and have been edited by the organisers, with the support of *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology*.

Introduction

Throughout the past decades, scholarship has developed a fundamentally different understanding of the scribal culture of the Ancient Near East. This has partly to do with the discovery of the great manuscript collections that shaped the study of the Ancient Near East since the late 19th century. At the same time a reorientation within the field accentuated different questions and redirected scholarly interest towards the investigation of writing media, instead of only focusing on the compositions they bear (Quenzer 2014). To put this differently: the material evidence that is the object of our investigation, whether it concerns a clay tablet, stele, ostracon or a scroll, was not a secondary vehicle anymore, but became rather in its own right an important artefact of the societies we study. This allows us to not only analyse the content of the text, but also the scribal practices that led to its formation, and through the interaction between the both, composition and materiality, we can shed new light on ancient societies.

This is the point of departure of this paper, in which I wish to foreground a type of manuscript that lends itself readily to these types of research questions: papyrus scrolls from the Hellenistic and Roman periods that contain writing on both sides of the manuscript. We call these scrolls 'opisthographs,' which is derived from Greek ὄπισθεν, (rear or behind) and γρᾰ́φειν (to write). The majority of leather and papyrus scrolls that passed down to us contain writing on only one side, which appears to have been the convention in antiquity, though it remains difficult to generalise about such a vast period (Kenyon 1951: 63; Haran 1982: 171-173). As far as I am aware, a cross-cultural comparison of opisthographs has not been previously attempted. This paper is the first attempt towards such a study through a case-study of two opisthographs originating from two different writing cultures.

I will start by closely inspecting the Greek Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 654, which contains a copy of the *Gospel of Thomas* that has been dated palaeographically to the third century CE. We know little about the deposition context of this particular manuscript, but the composition is traditionally assumed to have circulated within the Gnostic movement, because the best-preserved manuscript concerns a Coptic version that was discovered among the Nag Hammadi collection, a corpus of texts generally associated with this group (Emmel 2008).

In the following section, I will investigate a papyrus Dead Sea Scroll containing the Hebrew compositions 4Q509, 4Q496 and 4Q506, which were dated between the first century BCE and the first half of the first century CE. The Dead Sea Scrolls are a collection of roughly 900 reconstructed manuscripts that were discovered in the 1940s and 1950s in eleven caves around the ancient settlement of Qumran. Most scholars believe that the manuscripts belong to one or more Jewish religious movements that either occupied the Qumran settlement or were somehow related to it (Crawford & Wassen 2016). If and to what degree this movement behind the Qumran scrolls can be seen as a sect is still subject to debate. I will refrain from that discussion here but do adhere to the scholarly consensus that clusters of individual compositions within the wider collection can be understood within a sectarian framework (Dimant 1995; Collins 2010; Jokiranta 2010). In the following discussion I aim to demonstrate how a comparison of the two can mutually illuminate these manuscripts. For practical purposes I will refer to these papyri as scrolls, though both survived in such fragmentary condition that we cannot establish for certain if we are dealing with papyrus sheets that were folded or scrolls that were rolled up. Most of our evidence on papyrus production is based on Book 13 of Pliny the Elder's encyclopaedic work *Historia Naturalis*, in which he explains that papyrus is generally sold as a scroll of at most twenty sheets (Pliny 1945: 144-145). A scribe could either start writing directly on this scroll or cut off one or two sheets if he expected to need less writing material, which often seems to be the case with documentary texts (Diringer 1982: 113-169; Bülow-Jacobsen 2011: 19-23). In this way, the format of a papyrus manuscript can potentially give us an idea of its intended use.

Both of these scrolls have been dated to the Hellenistic and Roman periods, so this article aims to contribute to our understanding of the scribal culture during these times, which saw increasing contact and interaction between intellectual elites. I will start this endeavour with a brief physical description of the two manuscripts under scrutiny here and subsequently try to assess the following questions:

- What is the nature of the scribal context of the texts we find on the opisthograph?

- To what degree does the materiality of the manuscript allow us to hypothesize

about its function?

My aim is not to offer an interpretation of the compositions encountered on these manuscripts, but rather to describe how we can understand these texts as the products of their scribal culture. With regard to the Dead Sea Scrolls and the *Gospel of Thomas* manuscripts, scholars hypothesize about a presumed Qumran community or a Thomasine tradition that would be reflected within the texts, but we have little tangible evidence that helps us envisage the relationships between the people behind these manuscripts and the collection as a whole (Marjanen 1998a; Uro 2006; Popović 2012). However, what we do know is that these people gathered around and engaged with texts on a high intellectual level. Building on the work by medievalist Brian Stock, Mladen Popović (2012: 591) has characterized the Qumran community as a 'textual community,' a community of people that was centred around a collection of texts that 'attracted people and shaped their thinking, while at the same time people shaped the collection, producing and gathering more texts.' It is through the study of the extant manuscripts that we can get closer to the reading and writing cultures of these societies and conceptualize how the scribal communities behind the collection interacted with their scrolls.

At the same time, this is also an exploratory study into the practice of comparative research, to map out under which circumstances it is fruitful to examine manuscripts from different origins collectively. This paper is intended to think through the boundaries of the comparative method, as I attempt to compare manuscripts in two different languages from two different archaeological contexts. What they share are similarities from a material perspective, and what makes these documents particularly interesting is that they provide an insight into the everyday interaction of ancient scribes with their writing material. Before we get to the level of manuscript analysis, it is instructive to take a step back to think about the type of manuscripts that is under consideration here from a broader perspective and briefly explore the terminology employed here.

The Opisthograph in the Ancient Mediterranean World

'Opisthograph' is one of the few codicological keywords still in use that has an

ancient origin. The first known use of the term opisthograph appears in the letter of Pliny the Younger to Baebius Macer, in which he remarks that the inheritance left to him by his uncle Pliny the Elder includes 160 notebooks containing extracts, written in a minute handwriting on both sides of the page (Pliny 1969: 178-179). Generalisations should not be made on the basis of one reference, however it provides some clues regarding ancient scribal practices. First, the context in which the term opisthograph is employed here refers to a personal collection. These documents are the private property of Pliny the Elder, passed on to his cousin. Second, there is an element of compactness to these opisthographs. Not only in the fact they contain writing on both sides, but also because they are written in a small script and consist of selected passages. This suggests that Pliny the Elder would have written these manuscripts for his own use, and not for further distribution.

The scholarly use of the term opisthograph has been inconsistent at best. Eric Turner has demonstrated that it traditionally was used for manuscripts on which the text on the front side, the recto, would continue on the back side, the verso (Turner 1978). The continuation of the text on the back of a manuscript is therefore what he calls 'a true opisthograph.' However, after the discovery of papyrus scrolls that contain different compositions on either side, the use of the term changed and by now it is common practice to refer to manuscripts of this type as opisthographs (Dorandi: 2006). This is the definition preferred by Manfredo Manfredi in his analysis of the ancient use of the term (Manfredi 1983: 53-54). Within the field of papyrology, the terms recto and verso generally refer to the side on which the papyrus fibres run in horizontal direction parallel with the text (the recto), or in vertical direction perpendicular to the direction of writing (the verso) (Turner 1978; Tov 2004: 68).

Cross-cultural investigations of this type of manuscript until now are missing in the extant literature. A full, comprehensive investigation is beyond the scope of this study. Rather, what I aim to do is to present a case study in which opisthographic practice in two different ancient contexts are compared. These contexts concern the site of Oxyrhynchus in Middle Egypt in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, and Hellenistic and Roman Judaea. A significant number of opisthographs from the ancient Mediterranean were passed down to the present day. A search in May 2019 using the advanced function of the online database Trismegistos results in 687 papyrus manuscripts written between 300 BCE and 200 CE, 130 of which concern

documents that interestingly have different languages on both the recto and verso of the manuscript (Depauw & Gheldof 2014). Among the papyri of Oxyrhynchus, there are at least 400 opisthographs in a variety of genres, such as the exercises of students, but also literary texts written in scribal bookhands (Krüger 1990: 161). About 180 of these contain literary texts on both the recto and verso. Many opisthographs from Oxyrhynchus are understood to be private copies of individuals. Located about 200 kilometres south of Cairo, Oxyrhynchus was the administrative centre of a district of about fifteen to thirty thousand inhabitants (Houston 2014: 130, n.1). Given the available data, this settlement has been chosen as a starting point for further analysis.

Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 654

The manuscript collection that was discovered in Oxyrhynchus in the late 19th century was identified early on as a rubbish dump for the disposal of used papyrus scrolls and sheets (Houston 2014: 130-179). The English papyrologists Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt, who excavated the Oxyrhynchus from 1896 to 1907, quickly realised that the site consisted of several collections of related manuscripts. Many contained mostly official documents, accounts and letters, but also a significant amount of literary texts was found at the site.

The Greek P. Oxyrhynchus 654 (British Library Papyrus 1531) was discovered by Grenfell and Hunt during the 1903 excavations at the site and subsequently published in 1904 in the fourth volume of the series (Grenfell & Hunt 1904). One side contains the second of the three Greek witnesses of the text that after the discovery of the Coptic version in Nag Hammadi in 1945 would be known as the *Gospel of Thomas* (Gathercole 2014: 3-4). To characterize this composition, which was published by Grenfell and Hunt as 'a collection of Sayings of Jesus' is not an easy task (Grenfell & Hunt 1904: 1). I will here follow Simon Gathercole (2014), who argued that the *Gospel of Thomas* is of mixed genre. First, there are strong indications to consider the text as belonging to the same genre as the New Testament gospels, with the main difference being that the *Gospel of Thomas* mostly consists of independent teachings, sayings or *sententiae*, contrary to the narrative structure of the New Testament gospels. This is the second genre Gathercole proposes: to read the composition as a 'chreia collection' or 'sentence collection' and position it within the

tradition of similar collections such as the *Kuriai doxai* by Epixurus (Gathercole 2014: 138, 141-42).

Furthermore, a key element of this text is its uncompromising stance towards competing movements and theologies, in particular non-Christian Judaism and non-Thomasine Christianity (Gathercole 2014: 163-175). In its condemnation of Jewish religious practices, we may think of fasting, prayer, almsgiving, dietary and purity regulations, observance of the Sabbath and circumcision (Marjanen 1998b). Concerning other Christian movements, the *Gospel of Thomas* in particular expresses criticism with regard to the disciples and in several sayings "implies a separatist stance" (Gathercole 2014: 165). Especially the very first saying, indicating that the adoption of this document is a requirement for salvation, leaves little room non-Thomasine movements or worldviews. The *Gospel of Thomas* seems to defy alignment with contemporary movements, but in general seems to be characterized by an isolated, 'world-rejecting' attitude (Patterson 1993; Gathercole 2014).

Though the influence of this text on our understanding of Gnosticism and Early Christianity in general can hardly be overstated, the study of the textual witnesses as actual manuscripts is rather limited. What raises our particular attention here is the fact that this copy of the text was written on the verso of another composition. This means that the *Gospel of Thomas* was written on the side of the scroll that has the fibres running in vertical direction. The text on the recto is unpublished but concerns a 'survey-list of various pieces of land,' (Grenfell & Hunt 1904: 1). This land register functions in scholarly literature as the terminus post quem of the *Gospel of Thomas* exemplar. The palaeography of this text was described by Grenfell and Hunt (1904: 1) as 'a cursive hand of the end of the second or early part of the third century'. They characterized the hand of the *Gospel of Thomas* on the verso as 'an upright informal uncial of medium size,' and dated to the middle or end of the third century CE (Grenfell & Hunt 1904: 1). Harold Attridge (1989: 97) supports this assessment and calls the script a 'common informal literary type of the third century'. Our dating of the *Gospel of Thomas* exemplar after the land survey is therefore based on three factors: (1) it is written on the papyrological verso, (2) the scribal hand seems palaeographically younger, and (3) the practice to write a literary composition on the back of a documentary text is widely attested in Greek papyri (Turner 1954).

The most comprehensive material study of this opisthograph was performed by Larry Hurtado (2018: 174), who expressed a less positive appraisal of the scribal hand and assumes that the papyrus was inscribed by a scribe with either very limited skill or little interest. In his view, it seemed unlikely that this manuscript (or the two other Greek Thomas papyri) functioned as scripture (Hurtado 2018: 180). Eventually he concludes that it's likely that the manuscript was 'intended for private study,' an assessment that is based on a number of features (Hurtado 2018: 175). First, the scribe is incapable of bilinear writing, with many inconsistencies in both letter size and form. Hurtado also points at a few spelling errors and the interlinear insertion of omitted words. Furthermore, the absence of punctuation and the misplacement of the arrow-shaped 'coronis' mark in line 28 are indications of a personal copy. Hurtado hypothesizes that 'the carelessness or limited skill of the copyist may suggest either that the intended user was unable to afford a better quality copy or was simply not sufficiently concerned to have one,' (Hurtado 2018: 175). The initial hesitation was abandoned later on in this article, where he argues that opisthographs should be considered as economic copies for private study and states that 'this is no doubt what we have in P. Oxy 654,' (Hurtado 2018: 179). This personal usage, Hurtado observes, 'fits well with the emphasis in this text on the individual and on personal spiritual fulfilment,' (Hurtado 2018: 180). We should, however, be careful with drawing rapid conclusions in this regard, especially since the first manuscript of the *Gospel of Thomas* (P. Oxy. 1) was written in a nicer hand. Hurtado keeps the possibility of a personal copy open, but Annemarie Luijendijk (2011: 257) has argued that the manuscript could have been read publicly, or perhaps as part of a Christian library.

Since Luijendijk's (2011) article is the most thorough study that touches on these questions, closer examination is necessary. Her findings are clear and concise: she concludes that 'in one Egyptian city in the third century, the *Gospel of Thomas* was read in a private setting and may also have been recited in Christian worship,' (Luijendijk 2011: 242). Luijendijk argues that though writing on the back of another composition on itself might not be concluding evidence for its intended use, it does point towards a number of possibilities. First, we may think of public reading, which is indicated by scrolls with a layout that eases reading with interruptions like 'clear handwriting and/or reader's aids such as punctuation and spacing,' (Luijendijk 2011: 250). Small handwriting and the absence of such lectional aids might be indicative of personal reading, while the reuse of writing material can also suggest that the

manuscript belonged to a scholar. The layout of P. Oxy 654 provides additional evidence including the occurrence of diaeresis, dots placed over a vowel in a cluster of vowels to emphasize that it should be pronounced separately, not together with the preceding vowel (Luijendijk 2011: 253). What is particularly striking about this manuscript is the presence of the paragraphus sign, the horizontal lines that indicate the beginning of a saying, which protrude from the left margin in the lines 6, 10, 22, 28 and 32, as indicated in the image below.

Hurtado (2018: 175) remarked that these lines appear to be an addition by a second scribe. A private copy does not necessarily mean use by strictly one person. Another especially interesting feature of this manuscript is the fact that the *nomina sacra* form is used in three occasions (in the lines 2, 27 and 36). From the combined observation of these features, Luijendijk (2011) concludes that the layout of the manuscript assisted the reader in pronunciation of words and in finding the right passages, which indicates that the scroll was intended for declamation. We may think here of private recital, but also of public reading in a liturgical setting. If we follow Luijendijk's line of reasoning, we conclude that P. Oxy 654 was a personal copy and its intended use is revealed through the design or papyrological features of the manuscript.

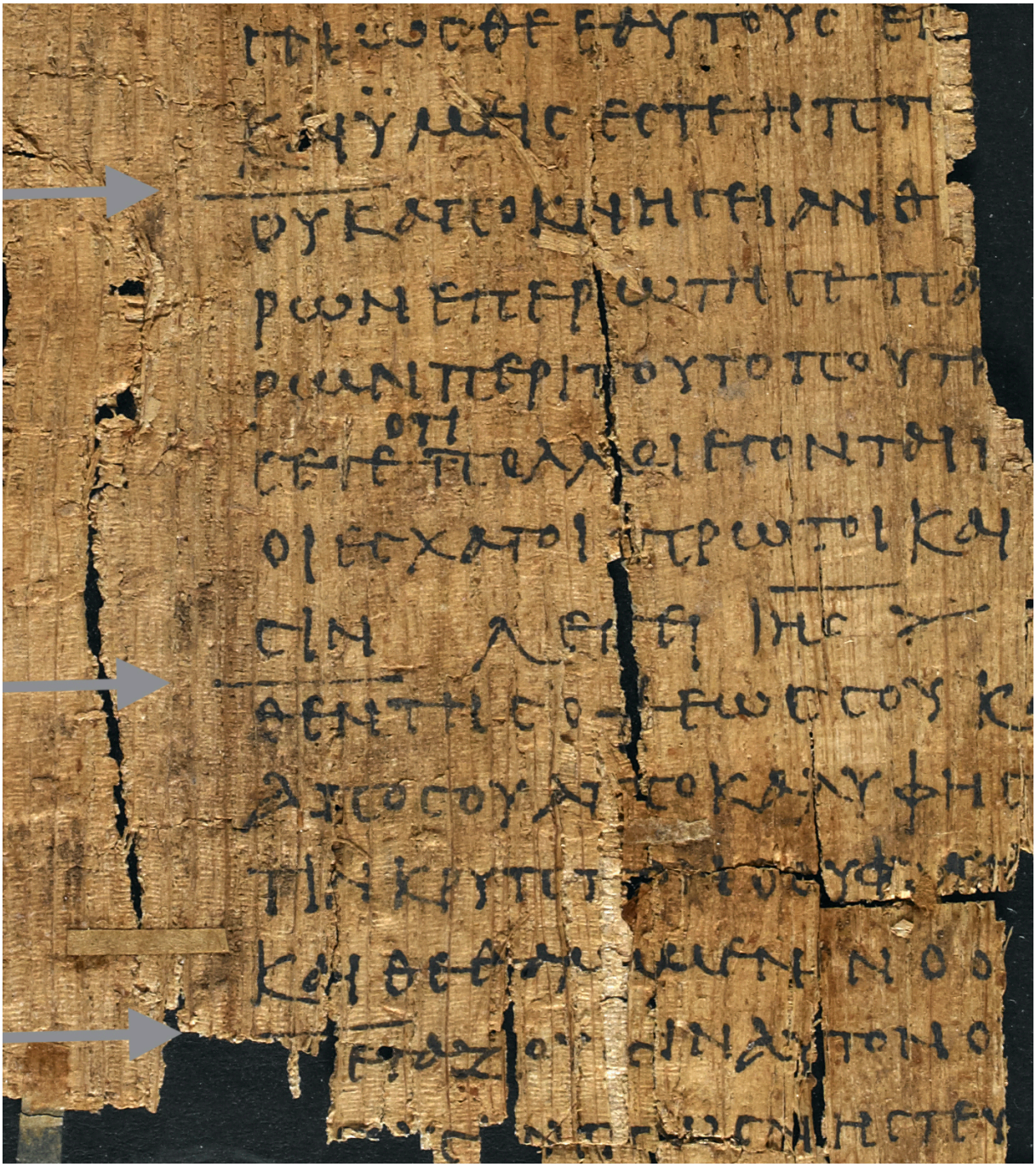

Figure 1: P. Oxy 654 © British Library Board Papyrus 1531

Qumran Opisthograph 4Q509/4Q496/4Q506

The second opisthograph that will be discussed more thoroughly here may not be the most obvious choice of comparison with an Oxyrhynchus papyrus. It concerns a papyrus manuscript that is part of the famous Dead Sea Scrolls that were discovered

in the Judaean Desert from about 1947 onwards. The compositions it bears are not found outside the Dead Sea Scrolls. In comparison with other Qumran scrolls it is an idiosyncratic manuscript and not a very typical example of what the Scrolls have to offer. This manuscript is one of the minority of scrolls that is written on papyrus instead of leather, the writing medium of about 90% of the scrolls (Tov 2003: 86). Furthermore, it is the only opisthograph preserved from Qumran that contains three different compositions (Brooke 2011: 126-127). Nevertheless, there is good reason to take these two manuscripts as the focal point of this comparative endeavour, as will be demonstrated below.

The Qumran opisthograph is a very fragmentary papyrus manuscript of which thus far no full material reconstruction has been attempted. Maurice Baillet (1982: 184-215), who was responsible for the editio princeps, suggested that the scroll would have been at least 28 cm high and contained about 41 lines per column. Daniel Falk (2014: 65) disagreed and proposed a reconstruction of about 22 cm high and about 30 lines per column.

On the recto of this scroll we find 4Q509, a composition that is called *Festival Prayers*, and that is passed down to us in at least three other witnesses. It is a cycle of prose prayers intended to be read during different festivals throughout the Jewish liturgical year, such as Yom Kippur, the New Year and Festival of Weeks. This text is written in Late Hasmonaean semi-formal from the first half of the first century BCE (Baillet 1982). There is also disagreement among scholars whether or not the recto also contains a small part of a *Words of the Luminaries* copy (García Martínez 1984; Falk 1998; Chazon 2011). The first text on the verso is written in a hand that seems contemporary with the recto and stylistically similar (Falk 2014: 53). This concerns 4Q496, one of at least 7 copies of the *War Scroll* (Schultz 2009), one of the scrolls that received the most attention in Qumran scholarship. This is an eschatological composition and offers a description of the final war between the forces of good and evil that precedes ultimate salvation. The *War Scroll* is one of the key texts of what has come to be known as the sectarian collection of Dead Sea Scrolls. The presupposition is that this manuscript collection consists of texts that reflect the particular worldview of the presumed community behind the Dead Sea Scrolls (Dimant 1995). This community would at one point have settled at Qumran and is often characterized by a sectarian outlook and appeal to separate from broader

Judaism. The *War Scroll* is the product of a complex redactional history, and the resulting composition seems, especially in the middle sections, to consist of a number of liturgical prayers (Falk 2015; Haigh: 2019). Falk (2015: 278-289) for example pointed towards the consistent use of blessing formulae, similarities in the structure of several of these prayers, and the repeated occurrence of military language in worship in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

But what makes this manuscript particularly noteworthy is that, substantially later, another scribe wrote parts of a third text, 4Q506, below this *War Scroll* copy (Baillet 1982). This concerns the composition known as *Words of the Luminaries*, another liturgical cycle consisting of prayers dedicated to different moments in time. This time devotion is not organized according to yearly festivals, but in line with days of the week. Esther Chazon (1992a) has demonstrated that the composition follows a clear, unitary structure and was most probably composed to form a weekly liturgy. This particular copy of *Words of the Luminaries* was written in a Late Herodian semi-formal hand and dated to the middle of the first century CE, quite a bit later than the recto (Baillet 1982: 170; Falk 2014: 53). Interestingly, the oldest copy of *Words of the Luminaries* is 4Q504, a large leather scroll that was dated to the first half of the second century BCE, which seems to suggest a continuation of liturgical practices for about two centuries. The palaeography of 4Q504 was extensively discussed by Frank Moore Cross (2003).

The papyrus 4Q509/4Q496/4Q506 survived in very fragmentary condition, which makes it difficult to state anything about the original dimension of the scroll and the size of the compositions it bears. 4Q509 for example passed down in around 300 fragments, many of which are hardly more than papyrus scraps with little legible writing. Michael Wise (1994) in his discussion of this scroll suggested that the scribe would have made extracts of the works of others on a papyrus document. This might very well have been the case. As indicated above, all three compositions encountered on this scroll are known from different manuscripts, which demonstrates that they were already in circulation. Furthermore, though we cannot reconstruct the length of the original manuscript, it does seem very unlikely to me that the complete *War Scroll* and the complete text of *Words of the Luminaries* were written out in its entirety on the side of one single scroll. This brings us to the question about intentionality: why would a scribe write parts of already circulating texts on one scroll? Before we

address this matter more extensively, we should briefly look at the nature of the compositions of the manuscript.

The similarities between the first and the third text are widely recognized among scholarship. Both *Festival Prayers* and *Words of the Luminaries* are collections of prayers to be recited at fixed moments in time and both make use of the repetition of similar formula such as the prayer opening 'Remember, Lord' and closure 'Amen Amen' (Falk 1998). Falk even wrote of a similar 'socio-liturgical' setting for both texts (Falk 1998: 157). All things considered, it would be hardly surprising to find exactly these two compositions together. What is intriguing though, is that we find a copy of the *War Scroll* that is palaeographically dated between the two prayer cycles. This means that this sectarian composition circulated in the same scribal community as *Festival Prayers* and *Words of the Luminaries*. Both compositions are not associated with a particular sectarian language or outlook. Furthermore, *Words of the Luminaries* is generally thought to be a pre-qumranic text, that would have been composed before the community settled in Qumran, the settlement close to the western shore of the Dead Sea, where the Scrolls were discovered (Chazon 1992b).

The Opisthograph as a Liturgical Document

In order to confront the two manuscripts from two different collections, it is important to determine what justifies comparison.

I would start with the observation that, in spite of their temporal and geographic differences, both manuscripts have a number of significant features in common. Both the *Gospel of Thomas* and the different compositions encountered on the Qumran scroll could have functioned in a liturgical context (Luijendijk 2011; Falk 1998; Falk 2015). This has been argued before in the case of the Qumran opisthographs, but not for the Greek opisthographs (Brooke 2011: 136; Brooke 2017: 122; Falk 2014: 50). There are however indications that especially the Oxyrhynchus papyri functioned in worship, as Luijendijk argued specifically in the case of this papyrus (Luijendijk 2011: 253-254). We can only hypothesize how such a ritual would have taken place, but it's imaginable that in particular the *logoi* of the *Gospel of Thomas* played a guiding role throughout such a service. They are

recognizably presented as the direct, written reflection of the saying of Jesus. It remains speculation, but it is possible of course that what at one point was oral communication, can become so again in the form of recitation. Of course, reciting and reading together meant something different in antiquity than it does today: public reading was often the only way to transmit a written text to a larger audience. Literacy rates were low, to the degree that reading a text together must have been an experience that was fundamentally different from our 21st century experience (Popović 2017). Among others, William Johnson (2010) pointed towards the social context of reading in antiquity. He sees the presence of scribal markings such as punctuation or word division, and textual variants as 'the result of repeated group discussion and analysis of the text,' (Johnson 2010: 192). Reading in antiquity was in that sense often a communal activity. In the case of the Dead Sea Scrolls, Charlotte Hempel (2017: 80) in a recent contribution tried to rethink the social dynamics of the people behind the scrolls and hypothesized how the scribal elites were 'accompanied and supported by a second tier of illiterate or semi-literate members'. These members would gain access to literature by reading together, turning the interaction with scripture into a social event. We see a similar reading experience described in Luke 4:14-20, according to which Jesus reads out from an Isaiah scroll. Among others Gathercole (2014: 142) has pointed towards a 'tendency in the second century to see Jesus as a teacher,' (Perkins 1990). Concerning the Qumran scroll, particularly *Festival Prayers* and *Words of the Luminaries* are usually characterized as liturgical compositions, as we have seen above. Falk arrived at a similar conclusion for the *War Scroll*, maintaining that the repeated use of prayer formulas and liturgical language suggest strongly that the composition functioned in a living liturgical context (Falk 2015). In support of Falk, Rebekah Haigh (2019) has recently argued that also the *War Scroll* could have functioned as a 'spoken text' that was to be performed before a community of hearers. This is not to say that the text was not also composed for written media, but in particular the prayer collection in the columns 10 to 14 give evidence of oral dissemination, as is visible in elements such as rubrications dedicating these prayers to specific times, and the presence of direct speech and dialogue (Haigh 2019: 191-198).

Both scrolls are examples of material reuse. In the case of Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 654, we find an unpublished land-survey on the recto, that at one point ended up in the hands of a scribe that took interest in the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*. The presence

of this administrative excerpt did not concern him enough to reject this scroll as writing medium, as vessel one could say, for his religious text. This suggests the status of these scrolls is as material artefacts. From later rabbinic sources we are aware of the prohibition on touching a Torah scroll with one's bare hands, though we have no direct evidence that this was the case in Qumran (Magness 2010). The authority of a text transferred to the material artefacts, which was to be treated as a relic. Such cases as Papyrus 654 demonstrate that this process towards the sanctification of the artefact had not taken off. The empty space on the back of an administrative document would suffice to pen down a religious text, which indeed seems to be text rather than manuscript oriented.

The same is true with the Qumran scroll, where we find a sectarian composition (4Q496) 'sandwiched' between two texts with a different outlook (4Q509 and 4Q506), the latter of which was written down roughly a century later. This indicates that we should be careful when hypothesizing about scribal communities. Both the Thomasine and the Qumran community reused writing material for their religious texts without minding the fact that it shares a scroll with a composition that on first sight adopts a different religious outlook.

Another point of correspondence that is worthy of note: as we have seen above, four of the in total five compositions we find on these manuscripts are known from other witnesses as well. All the texts on the Qumran scroll are passed down to us in different copies that survived in better condition than this opisthograph, which allows us to give a good estimation of their length. The *War Scroll* copy 1QM (18 columns on 5 sheets of leather, covering over 3m) and *Words of the Luminaries* copy 4Q504 are such extensive texts that it seems very unlikely that this opisthograph contained the full compositions. We simply do not have papyrus scrolls with a length of over three meters from any site in the Judaean Desert. Rather than a collection of complete compositions, we seem to be dealing with a manuscript consisting of excerpts or selected fragments from texts that for some reason were of interest to the scribes involved. Alternatively, this might be an example of note-taking that is reminiscent of Qumran scroll 4Q175 (Popović 2017: 449). This is an indication that this manuscript is a personal copy. However, we should not see this argument in isolation.

George Brooke (2017: 129-130) has remarked in this context that 'although penned in different generations the combination of texts on a single manuscript as some kind of liturgical corpus implies some kind of intentional collecting of compositions of a similar genre, perhaps for personal or again just as likely for archival use'. The diversity to be found among these compositions with regard to issues such as length, structure or sectarian outlook is a sign of the heterogeneity of the liturgical practices found in Qumran. The notion of intentionality proposed by Brooke is also relevant: it seems probable that these texts would have been written down together not only because they would have had an appeal to the same audience, but also because they would have performed a similar function. The distinction between these two factors is relevant and offers the opportunity to approach the manuscripts discussed above as some form of personal copies.

Opisthographs and Personal Copies

To assess the question if we can regard these two manuscripts as personal copies, we return to the materiality of the two scrolls. Above we have seen how scholarship in the past commented on the presence of scribal markings on the Thomas papyrus. Diaeresis, dots placed over the vowel, and the paragraphus signs are both seen as evidence that the text perhaps was recited in liturgy, or otherwise functioned in an oral context. If not in a religious context, we may think of educational purposes. Interestingly, these scribal markings can be compared to similar signs in the Qumran opisthograph.

A recent survey by Daniel Falk (2018) investigating these signs in the margins of the Dead Sea Scrolls led to a number of interesting conclusions. It seems that the repertoire of markings used is relatively small and, in many cases, not unknown from Greek corpora. We for example find the X-sign, which is generally thought to be a line filler to fill up a column when a sentence wouldn't reach the end of the line (Tov 2004: 208). In a specific set of manuscripts, we also encounter what has come to been known as the fish-hook, described by Tov as a 'straight or slightly curved line protruding into the margin with angular downstroke to the left,' (Tov 2004: 181). It does not fall within the scope of this paper to discuss all occurrences of this sign, but after overseeing the Dead Sea Scrolls where we do find this sign, we do note a

surprising amount of papyri. Only roughly 10% of the scrolls was written on papyrus, but on the list with scrolls on which the fish-hook sign appears 8 out of 16 manuscripts are papyrus (Tov 2004). This is relevant, because it is an indication that in antiquity there could be a relation between materiality and scribal practices. Papyri appear to be associated with a particular form of manuscript use: one that allows for scribal markings that hardly occur in other types of documents.

When we take a closer look to where these fishhooks occur on the Qumran opisthograph that is central to this paper, it strikes us first of all that the sign can be found in the margins of two of the three compositions on this scroll. This is particularly noteworthy because these are the only copies of these compositions that contain scribal markings. Indeed, the three other witnesses of *Festival Prayers* (1Q34, 4Q507 and 4Q508) and the seven other witnesses of the *War Scroll* (1QM, 4Q491-4Q497) do not contain scribal markings, which suggests that the fish hook signs on this opisthograph are an innovation of the scribe rather than belonging to the copying tradition of the composition.

The total number of fishhooks is five, but two of these survived in such poor conditions that we can say little about them apart from noticing their presence. *Festival Prayers*, the long text on the recto, has two fishhooks, the first of which survived partially in the margin of the second column of fragment 10[ii] (Figure 2). We can clearly see that the horizontal stroke is placed between the two columns, too far towards the right to be the starting point of a normal line. The place is also very interesting. In the line above the sign we read '**אדוני,**' 'the lord,' the closing formula of a prayer that started in the eighth fragment. Daniel Falk in particular has argued that this prayer was dedicated to Sukkot, also known as Tabernacles, the yearly festival to commemorate the 40 years the Israelites spend in the desert before entering the Promised Land (Falk 1998). The text on fragment 11, that can be placed immediately below this one, continues with '**תפלה למועד**,' 'prayer for the festival of…'. The remainder of this fragment is unfortunately broken off, but it is clear from the opening words that it is precisely at the start of a new prayer where we find the fishhook.

We unfortunately know even less about the second occurrence of the fishhook marking, which occurs in the 49th fragment (Figure 3).

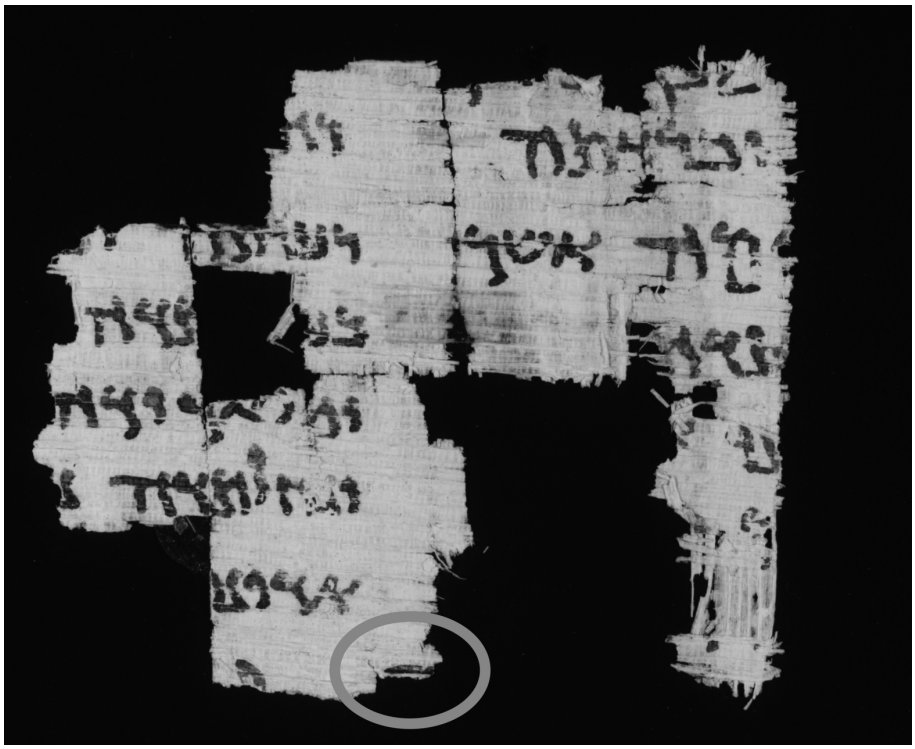

Figure 2: 4Q509, frag. 10

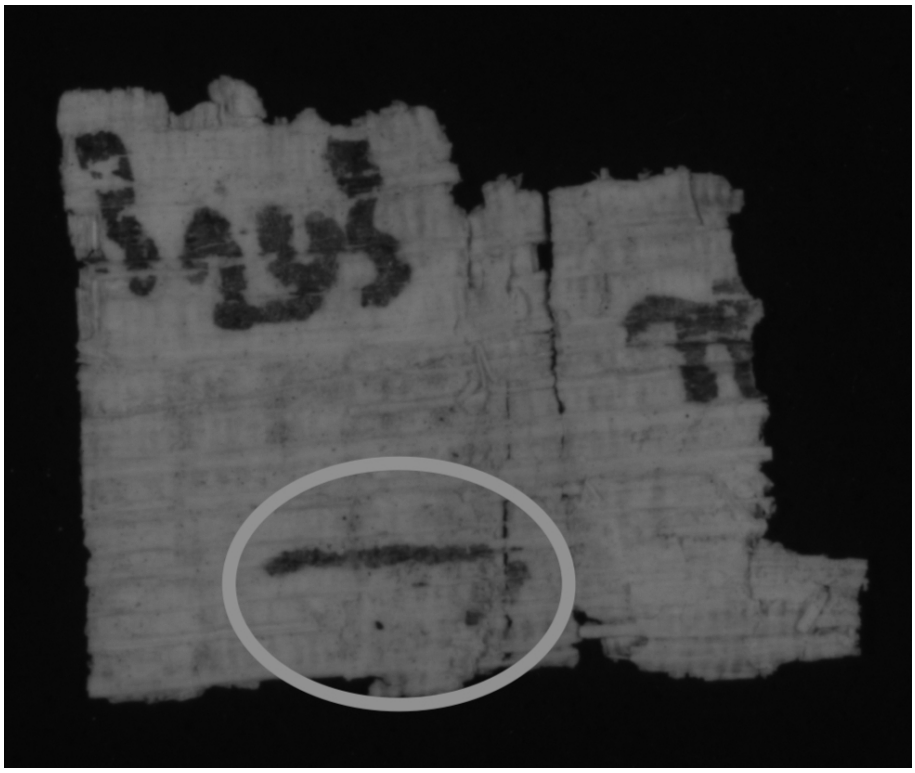

Figure 3: 4Q509, frag. 49

The sign immediately follows after the start of the statement '**לעולמי עד**,' 'forever and ever' or 'until eternity,' which we know from other compositions to be the end of a song or prayer (e.g. 4Q511, Songs of the Maskil). Just like the other occurrences, the fishhook precedes the start of a new section within the prayer cycle. The third fishhook sign to be discussed here is found on the verso, in the margin of the tenth fragment of the *War Scroll* exemplar 4Q496:

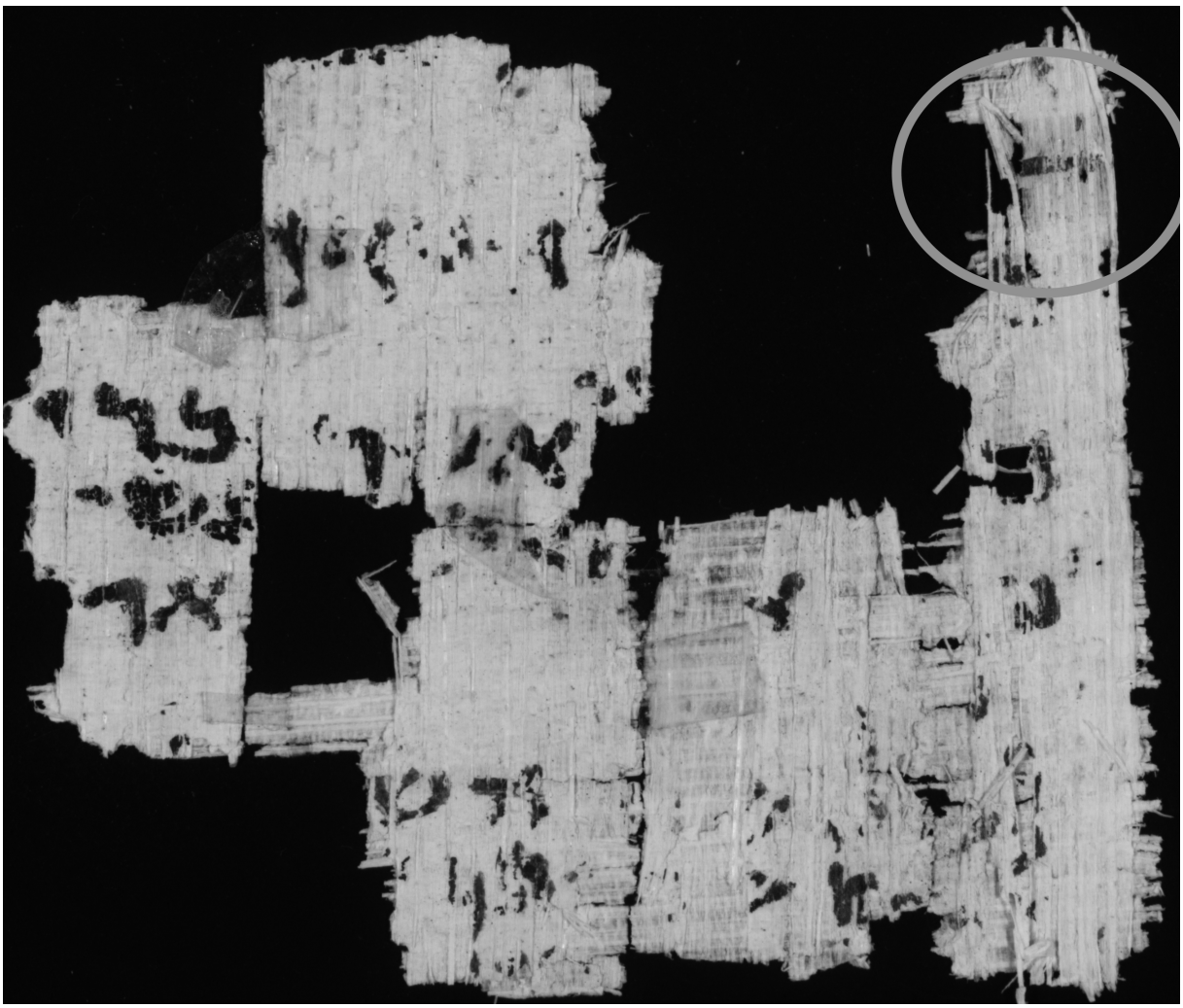

Figure 4: 4Q496, frag. 10

Also, in this case, we find the fishhook at the start of a specific section within the composition. In this case it precedes the part that concerns the rules regarding the banners that the sons of light would have to carry in the final, apocalyptic battle. This part corresponds with the third column of the great, leather *War Scroll* (1QM) from the first cave of Qumran. The scribe in this case also intervened to emphasize that we are dealing with a new division. Here however it is not a sign in the margin but a

blank space. To get a better understanding of the meaning of these marginal notes, we need to return to Luijendijk's (2011) remarks concerning the paragraphus' sign in the *Gospel of Thomas*, where she actually cites Johnson's hypothesis about the use of this sign when one is reading a scroll to an audience:

> As you look up at your audience, or pause in the reading of the lecture to add some parenthetic remark or entertain a comment, you need only recall, 'second paragraphus down'. Returning to your text, the paragraphus immediately reorients you to the start of the next sentence (Johnson 1994: 66).

So, what Johnson argues is that the paragraphus not only served as a reader's aid, to demarcate when different divisions were separated, but particularly as a tool to indicate when one would recite or perform a text before an audience. This is a very probable explanation for the scribal markings of these documents. One can imagine how easy it is to lose track when someone is reciting in front of an audience from an opisthograph that consists of extracts from different compositions that are tightly written together in small handwriting. Small notes in the margin are not a luxury if one wants to avoid confusion. We are reminded that the compositions *Words of the Luminaries* and *Festival Prayers* on the Qumran manuscript consist of different prayers dedicated to days of the week and to festivals throughout the Jewish liturgical year. They are therefore thought to have functioned in a liturgical setting, where the different prayers would be recited during their designated moment in time. For this purpose, scribal markings might be useful.

It is possible that these markings were circumstantial, so placed before an already existing text to indicate which parts would be read aloud. Or perhaps they were added the moment the scroll was written, so that the scribes had its performative function in mind from the very start. I do not consider it likely that the scroll was produced for one occasion: the fact that multiple scribes during different moments in time were involved in its production does suggest continued use over a longer period.

It also points towards manuscripts of personal use, that is, in opposition to exemplars that were meant for public display or that were part of communal property and to be consulted by different people. Another argument in favour of personal use of the Qumran opisthograph is that on fragment 98 of this manuscript we see how a scribe

accidently wrote the same word twice, after which he washed off the repeating word. The leftover ink remains visible however and such a rather careless type of scribal corrections is evidence that the scribe wrote for himself instead of for example a client.

We should continue to bear in mind that these manuscripts survived from two different cultures at two different locations in two different languages. Nevertheless, despite their diverging provenances, we are actually dealing with two rather similar documents.

Conclusion

If we oversee the evidence, we may first of all remark that these two scrolls are opisthographs that demonstrate the involvement of several scribes. This would be at least two or three, though palaeographic identification requires caution. The period of time that these scrolls continued to be in use, what George Houston (2011: 248-251) called the 'useful life of manuscripts,' seems to have been significant. In both cases did the manuscript continue to be in circulation for at least 50 years. Their codicological features furthermore suggest that we are dealing with personal copies that functioned in a liturgical setting. The fact that these conclusions apply to the both of them is significant: it tells us that in two different places in the Near East, scribes could engage with their manuscript in a similar fashion, using both sides of a scroll to inscribe different texts and adding scribal markings to increase its practicality. It also suggests reuse of a document by different scribes and different groups of scribes. This seems an evident conclusion for the *Gospel of Thomas* copy, where we find an administrative land survey on the recto. In the case of the Qumran manuscript we encounter a sectarian composition between two other texts that are not necessarily associated with a sectarian outlook. If we combine our analyses of the two papyri, we may conclude that two of the five compositions that the scrolls bear tend to be read as part of a community that separated itself from a wider religious movement: the *War Scroll* from other branches of Judaism, and the *Gospel of Thomas* from both Judaism and non-Thomasine Christianity.

And so, a picture emerges of how these manuscripts might have functioned. The

evidence from these manuscripts, especially material and content-related features, does suggest that we are dealing with two compact papyrus manuscripts, opisthographs, probably extracts of compositions that already were in circulation, containing scribal markings that are indicative of their use. In this way, comparative analysis from different scribal cultures can increase our understanding of different manuscripts and provide an insight into the liturgical practices of these communities.

[i] The research for this article was conducted as part of the NWO-FWO project Models of Textual Communities and Digital Palaeography of the Dead Sea Scrolls, principal investigators: Prof. Mladen Popović and Prof. Eibert Tigchelaar. I thank Drew Longacre, Mladen Popović, Eibert Tigchelaar, and the executive editors and reviewers of PIA for their helpful feedback.
[ii] The high-resolution multi-spectral images of the Dead Sea Scrolls were kindly provided to us by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA). The photos are courtesy of the Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library; Photographer: Shai Halevi. We are very grateful to the staff of the IAA Dead Sea Scrolls Unit for their help and support.

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