

## Gleanings from the Caves? Really?

On the likelihood of Dead Sea Scrolls forgeries in The Schøyen Collection

Eibert Tigchelaar, KU Leuven, Aug 14, 2016

One month ago, finally the edition of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Artefacts from the Norwegian Schøyen Collection was published.<sup>1</sup> The impressive volume of more than 500 pages includes not only a textual edition of Dead Sea Scrolls fragments from The Schøyen Collection (pp. 139-319), and a publication of artefacts (pp. 321-465), but also a material and a palaeographical analysis of the fragments (pp. 61-128 by respectively Ira Rabin and Michael Langlois). However, in spite of this voluminous edition, not all the Dead Sea Scrolls fragments from The Schøyen Collection were included. This only becomes clear to those insiders who are aware of the extent of The Schøyen Collection, and carefully read the book.

### 1. Missing fragments.

In 2005 Esther and Hanan Eshel published a papyrus fragment “preserving five lines identifiable as the end of *1 En.* 1 and the beginning of *1 En.* 9 (8:4-9:3).”<sup>2</sup> The editors simply state that “though undoubtedly found at Qumran, as we cannot identify the cave, we suggest labelling this fragment XQpapEnoch.”<sup>3</sup> For some years, this fragment seemed to be one of the top Dead Sea Scroll items in the Schøyen Collection. In *Gleanings from the Caves*, however, only once an explicit reference is made to this fragment, namely in a survey which was written years ago by Hanan Eshel and which

---

<sup>1</sup>Torleif Elgvin, Michael Langlois, and Kipp Davis, eds., *Gleanings from the Caves: Dead Sea Scrolls and Artefacts from the Schøyen Collection* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016).

<sup>2</sup>“New Fragments from Qumran: 4QGen<sup>f</sup>, 4QIsa<sup>b</sup>, 4Q226, 8QGen, and XQpapEnoch,” *DSD* 12 (2005): 134-57, esp. 146-57.

<sup>3</sup>“New Fragments,” 146.

still refers to the XQpapEnoch fragment.<sup>4</sup> A few times there is a reference to this fragment by its manuscript number, namely 4612/12. Most notably, a footnote simply mentions: “The edition of some of the Schøyen fragments analyzed here has been postponed to a later publication (MS 4612/2abc, MS 4612/6, MS 4612/8, MS 4612/10, MS 4612/12, MS 5234, MS 5426).” Given the fact that the fragment had already been published extensively in 2005, one wonders why the edition of the fragment was not included in the *Gleanings* volume. The two other references to the fragment in the volume are of no help to answer that question. The material analysis mentions “Infrared spectra show presence of calcite in MS 4612/6, MS 4612/12, and MS 5234,” but does not indicate what that implies.<sup>5</sup> None of those three fragments has been included in the *Gleanings* volume. One of those is the Tobit fragment, which was both featured on the Schøyen collection website, and published in *Revue de Qumran*.<sup>6</sup> Here again, there is no mention at all in the volume why this fragment is not incorporated, and the fragment also does not appear anymore on the website. Also MS 5426 has been known to scholarship to some time, as being the first Dead Sea Scrolls fragment of Nehemiah (3:14-15).<sup>7</sup> Here again, there is neither reference to the presence of the fragment in The Schøyen Collection, nor to its omission from the volume.

When Charlesworth announced that Nehemiah fragment, it still belonged to Lee Biondi from Santa Barbara, who also depicted part of the fragment on the cover of his book.<sup>8</sup> Like several other fragments procured by Biondi, this one has a remarkable variety of letter forms, with

---

<sup>4</sup>“The Fate of Scrolls and Fragments: A Survey from 1946 to the Present,” in *Gleanings*, 33-49, at 43.

<sup>5</sup>*Gleanings*, 74.

<sup>6</sup>Michaela Hallermayer and Torlief Elgvin, “Schøyen Ms. 5234: Ein neues Tobit-Fragment vom Toten Meer,” *RevQ* 22/87 (2006): 451-61.

<sup>7</sup>Published on the internet by James H. Charlesworth, “Announcing a Dead Sea Scrolls Fragment of Nehemiah.” See <http://web.archive.org/web/20130829163116/http://foundationjudaismchristianorigins.org/ftp/pages/dead-sea-scrolls/unpub/nehemiah.html>

<sup>8</sup>Lee Biondi, *From the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Bible in America* (Legacy Ministries International, 2009).

all kinds of unusual ways in which the letters and even the strokes are written. I will give two examples. First, line 2 contains two *shins*. The first, of שלום, does not raise questions. The second, of שר, writes the right arm of *shin* as if it were a *nun* with an extended basestroke. It is not impossible that exactly this happened. Occasionally we do find examples in the scrolls where a scribe started to write one letter, realized the mistake, and then incorporated the already written letter, sometimes with modifications, in another letter. Second, the *taws* in דלתתיו in line 1 are largely common, and only differ with respect to the different forms of the foot of the *taw*. Not so, however, with the two *taws* in דלתתיו in line 3. The first still looks much like the ones in line 1, be it with a slightly angular, rather than rounded, shoulder. The second however is written entirely differently. The shoulder is very angular, and the left leg of *taw* is not written with one, but with two strokes in a manner which is entirely uncommon to the Dead Sea Scrolls. I get the impression that the top left of the *taw* was first written as the crown of the headstroke. Apart from those examples, everyone who has experience with reading the letters of the Dead Sea Scrolls will see strange elements. See, e.g., the curve in the tick of the *resh* of שר, the different stance of the *yods*, etc.

On the basis of the writing, one wonders whether the team of Schøyen editors came to the conclusion that the Nehemiah fragment was a forgery, and therefore did not include this fragment in the volume. But then, did they also have misgivings about the other missing fragments? The lack of any explanation of the absence of the Enoch and the Tobit fragments is remarkable and should be a case for concern. If there are indications or even evidence of possible forgery, one would wish to know the nature of these indication, and likewise, the status of the other fragments that are incorporated in the volume.

## 2. MS 5480 (1 Sam 5:10-11)

One of the published fragments is MS 5480, a tiny fragment with a few words that correspond to 1 Sam 5:10-11, and which the editor, Torleif Elgvin, tentatively titles 4Q(?)Sam.<sup>9</sup> The palaeographic

---

<sup>9</sup>Edition in *Gleanings*, 203-5.

analysis is provided separately by Michael Langlois.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, the pictures of the fragments are not always clear, so that one cannot easily see the details of the writing. More helpful than figure 22.1 on p. 203 are the letter samples provided on p. 86. (cf. also images at end of this file)

Langlois's palaeographical analysis characterizes the hand as "hesitant" and refers to the inconsistency of the letters *ayin* and *qoph*. I would wish to add the following comments.

Langlois mentions that the ך (l. 1) "exhibits a wide and thick protrusion that develops in the Hasmonaean period." From the drawing provided on p. 86 it appears quite clearly that is not just a wide and thick protrusion. Rather, we have here at the left a separate stroke that forms a loop, in a manner I do not recall to have seen in the Qumran scrolls. Langlois also refers to the roughness of the parchment. Perhaps this roughness is responsible for the small twist in the right downstroke. Remarkably, the editor, in contrast, declares the surface to be smooth.

The text provides four samples of *waw*. Langlois presents images of all four, and describes: "ו is tall, straight, with an open hook at its head." However, apart from the the correspondence with 1 Sam 5:10, how can one read that first letter (Langlois's most right sample) as a *waw*? The downstroke is not straight, but made in at least two strokes, in such a manner that the top inclines towards the right. There is an additional strange stroke at the right (which Elgvin declares to be a spill of ink, ignoring the other difficulties with the letter), and the hook at the head is neither a hook, nor placed at the head. Out of context one would not read this as a *waw*.

In line two there are the remnants of what Elgvin reads, on the basis of 1 Sam 5:11 as the *het* of וישלחו. One sees remnants of two downstrokes and a headbar. Langlois does not describe the letter because it is largely damaged. One can see, however, that the downstrokes are not straight but strongly slanting, and that the horizontal stroke hardly forms a headbar. Out of context, these traces would not have been read as *kheth*.

Langlois implies in his description of *zayin*, that its form does not conform to the samples we know, and tentatively suggests "it might thus be an early attempt at making the curled head angular."

---

<sup>10</sup>*Gleanings*, 86-87.

On the photographs, the *lamed* has an additional diagonal dark stroke, not mentioned by Langlois, creating a triangle, rather than a hook. Normally one would ignore this stroke as probably not ink, but given the other irregularities in the fragment, this may be too generous to the scribe.

In his description Langlois comments on the inconsistencies in the writing of the *ayins* and *qoph*s. One should add to Langlois's correct descriptions that the hook of the first *qoph* in ויזעקו is hardly rounded. It consists of a very short downstroke at the right side of the headbar or traverse, and what seems to be a separate small horizontal stroke to complete the small hook.

Remarkable is also the different height of the letters. Whereas the left upward-curving end of the traverse of the first *qoph* is at the same height as that of most other letters (though note that in ויזעקו the *zayin* starts much higher than the surrounding letters), the traverse of *qoph* is much lower than the ceiling-level of the other letters. This simply may be another example of the inconsistency of the hand. I am tempted to consider the low writing of the traverse of *qoph* to have been induced by an irregularity of the material (suggested to me by Corrado Martone), but the editor claims there are no such irregularities.

### 3. Assessing the evidence

Throughout the palaeographical discussion Langlois refers to hesitant hands, often on rough parchment, inconsistencies both in the execution of the same letters in one hand, and in the mix of features which we ascribe, on the basis of the Qumran scrolls, to different periods. For each of these features explanations may be given. Writing on rough parchment can result in occasionally strange strokes. Hesitance and inconsistency in general could result from unskilled hands, even though one would rather expect unskilled hands in scribal exercises than in copies of biblical works. The mix of different styles rightly cautions us that the categories constructed on the basis of the Qumran material do not need to fit every single manuscript of every scribe. The result, however, of all those different features is that we have fragments which at first examination are reminiscent of the Qumran fragments, but sometimes are entirely different in their scribal execution.

In spite of the tentative 4Q name, there is nothing, apart from the involvement of the Kando family, that links these fragments to Qumran Cave 4. Rather, one should assume a different provenance (also for the so-called 4QpapEnoch fragment!). This could be one (or multiple?) different find-place(s) where multiple small fragments of biblical books and an occasional pseudepigraphic work, many written in those hesitant and inconsistent hands, were preserved. Or, one can hypothesize the involvement of modern forgers, trying to produce on small fragments Hebrew text in an ancient hand. This hypothesis, in my opinion, gives a better explanation for the hesitant and inconsistent writing.



line 1



line 2