THE TETRAGRAMMATON IN THE PSALMS SCROLL

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Among the noteworthy features of the Dead Sea Psalms Scroll (11QPs) is the fact that the tetragrammaton is written throughout in the Paleo-Hebrew script, while the rest of the text is written in the Aramaic square script. If we include fragmentary occurrences, then the Psalms Scroll contains no fewer than 145 instances of the tetragrammaton written in this archaic alphabet.

A careful examination of these instances of the tetragrammata shows: (1) that the scribe who wrote the main text originally left blank spaces which were filled afterwards with the tetragrammaton in Paleo-Hebrew script, (2) that the subsequent filling-in procedure gave rise to a number of scribal errors in the biblical text of 11QPs, and (3) that in all likelihood it was not the original scribe who later inserted the tetragrammata into the blank spaces. This article will be mainly devoted to establishing each of these points. Two concluding sections will deal briefly with paleography and possible reasons for the procedure described.

The tetragrammaton as later insertion

A survey of the reviews of Sanders’ two editions of 11QPs (DJD IV and DSTR) reveals that the Paleo-Hebrew writing of the tetragrammaton in this scroll has attracted very little attention. After all, scholars had been familiar with this phenomenon for some time, since it also occurs in a number of previously published Qumran manuscripts. To my knowledge, the only reviewer who paid special

1 J. A. Sanders, The Psalms Scroll of Qumran Cave 11 (11QPs) (DJD IV; Oxford 1965).
2 J. A. Sanders, The Dead Sea Psalms Scroll (Ithaca 1967).
4 E. g. 1QpHab and 4QpPs.
attention to the Paleo-Hebrew tetragrammaton in 11QPs⁴ was S. Talmon, who made the following observation in his review of DJD IV in *Tarbiz*:

It is noteworthy that the tetragrammata in Paleo-Hebrew script in our scroll were apparently added after the writing of the text in square characters was complete. This is clear from the difference in the spaces between the tetragrammata and the words adjoining it. Sometimes the former is actually attached to the word before it (IV,1,8,10; V,8; XXIV,4), or to the one after it (I,6; XV,3), and sometimes a clear space is left between it and the adjoining words (II,2; III,2; IV,3; VI,10; VII,5; IX,7).⁵

This observation does not seem to have been noted or followed up in the literature of the Qumran Scrolls.⁶ Although many of Talmon’s references are mistaken,⁷ the present writer, having arrived at the same conclusion independently before coming upon Talmon’s remark, proposes to show that a systematic review of the evidence corroborates Talmon’s overall conclusion.

An examination of the tetragrammata in 11QPs⁴ shows that the spaces which they occupy in the text vary significantly in size. If we select only those cases where the tetragrammaton is flanked on both sides by words in the regular square script (leaving aside those tetragrammata which are only partially preserved or which occur next to a margin), a valid comparison can be made of the distances which separate the words before and after these cases of the tetragrammaton. Measurements made on the published photographs of 11QPs⁵ (including Fragment E published by Yadin)⁶ yield the following results:

16 millimeters: 1 instance⁹
17 millimeters: 5 instances¹⁰
18 millimeters: 9 instances¹¹

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⁶The lines XXIV,4; I,6; VI,10 do not have a tetragrammaton, whereas IV,1,8; XV,3 do not illustrate the precise kind of attachment for which Talmon adduces them.
⁷Y. Yadin, “Another Fragment (E) of the Psalms Scroll from Qumran Cave 11 (11QPs⁶),” *Textus* 5 (1966) 1–10.
⁸III,4.
⁹III,13; V,1; XV,6; XVII,3; XXVIII,5.
¹⁰III,2,5,8; XIII,11; XVI,1; XVII,3,13; XXVI,9; XXVIII,2a.
19 millimeters: 10 instances
20 millimeters: 20 instances
21 millimeters: 18 instances
22 millimeters: 11 instances
23 millimeters: 8 instances
24 millimeters: 6 instances
25 millimeters: 2 instances
26 millimeters: 2 instances
30 millimeters: 1 instance

Plotted on a graph, these figures would approximate a regular bell curve. The wide range of variation, from 16 mm to almost double that, appears to be the result, not of one or two wild anomalies, but of a statistically normal distribution.

Such a range is much greater than is normal for the spaces occupied by a single word in the regular handwriting of the scribe who wrote 11QPs. This can be shown by comparison with other frequent words in 11QPs. The three-letter word וַיְ, for example, occurs 28 times between other words in a line, and the space it occupies is between 9 and 12 mm wide. The word יְהוּ occurs 23 times under the same conditions, and the space it occupies measures from 8 to 11 mm across—the one apparent exception (13 mm at XIX,4) is due to an erasure of he before the subsequent word. For these two words the range of variation (calculated by taking...
the difference between the longest and shortest measurements and expressing this as a percentage of the latter) is roughly 33% and 38% respectively. We would expect this percentage to be lower in the case of four-letter words like the tetragrammaton, but this is more difficult to check, since these are much less frequent in the Psalms Scroll. Perhaps the most common one, apart from the tetragrammaton itself, is יִשְׂרָאֵל, which occurs 13 times in the required position. The spaces it occupies measure from 13 to 16 mm across, yielding a 23% range of variation, which is indeed significantly lower than that of the three-letter words. Given these statistics, it is particularly striking that the corresponding figure for the tetragrammaton is no less than 88%.

In other words, the spaces occupied by the tetragrammaton in 11QPs show differences in size which are over three times as great as the normal handwriting of its scribe would lead us to expect. This would seem to indicate that those differences are not the result of the scribe’s normal variation in leaving spaces between letters and words, but rather of his leaving word-length blanks. If no objective measuring device is used to mark off the appropriate length, it is quite difficult for a scribe to leave a series of blank spaces of roughly equal size. He will tend to make some significantly larger than others.

If this hypothesis is correct, then the tetragrammaton which was later written into the blank spaces provided by the scribe would show signs of being fitted into spaces which sometimes were too small or too large for it. As Talmon recognized, such signs can indeed be observed in many instances of the tetragrammaton in 11QPs.

In cases where the blank left was too small, the tetragrammaton is sometimes squeezed in so that it touches (or almost touches) the word before or after it. Such cases are the tetragrammata at XIII,11; XVII,3 and XXVI,9, all of which are crowded into a space of 18 mm. On the other hand, spaces which are too large are not adequately filled by the tetragrammaton, leaving noticeable gaps on either side of it. Clear instances of this are found at VI,11; VIII,5, and XXIV,8.

Of course another way for the scribe to cope with the problem of variously sized spaces for the tetragrammaton is to adjust the size of his handwriting. It is therefore

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23 Fragment C,II,12; V,13; VII,6,14; XIV,5; XIX,8; XXI,16; XXII,15; XXIII,5; XXIV,5; XXV,4,9,12.
24 We must distinguish cases of (near) touching due to crowding from those due to an attached preposition. For the latter, see for example IV,3,10; VI,5,6; XXVIII,5. Talmon’s reference to IV,10 shows that he fails to allow for this difference.
quite striking that, while the square script of the main text is quite regular throughout the Psalms Scroll, there are significant differences in size in the Paleo-Hebrew script of the tetragrammaton. We find a cramped version of this hand at XVI, 10b; XVII, 14; XVIII, 3 and XXVIII, 2a (in spaces measuring 17 to 20 mm), and a sprawling version at XII, 10; XVI, 4a and XXI, 9b (in spaces measuring 23 to 24 mm). As a result, the script of the tetragrammaton frequently does not match the size of the surrounding square script.

**Resulting scribal errors**

All of the above may be said to be circumstantial evidence supporting Talmon’s suggestion that the tetragrammaton was added to 11QPS after the body of the text had been written. However, a more decisive argument for this hypothesis is found in the *scribal errors* which resulted when the tetragrammaton was added to the Psalms Scroll. These account for a number of features of 11QPS which have not been explained before.

In order to understand the scribal errors we must realize that the scribe who initially copied the body of the text left two kinds of gaps in the manuscript. The one kind, as we have seen, was meant to be filled later by the tetragrammaton. But the other kind was due to imperfections in the tanned animal skin on which the scribe was writing, and was not meant to be filled. As Sanders writes: “There are fourteen *loci* in the text where the scribe avoided writing on the leather either because of poor tanning preparation or because of scar tissue in the skin. Some areas are quite small and some quite large (e.g. col. xviii).”

The poor writing surfaces which occasioned this second kind of blank space are often clearly visible on the photographs of 11QPS.

Now there are two places where the tetragrammaton was mistakenly inserted in the latter kind of blank space. After the scribe had written them, the mistake was detected and dots were placed above and below each of the four letters to indicate deletion. The letters themselves were left intact, since it was not lawful for the tetragrammaton to be erased. The two places in question are found at XVI, 7 and

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25 DJD IV, 14.

26 On these “scribal error dots” see DJD IV, 13 and the apparatus on XVI, 7 and XXI, 2.

27 See Siegel, “The Employment of Palaeo-Hebrew,” 166–168. The scribe of 11QPS had no compunction about erasing other words. Sanders lists 28 cases of erasure in the text (DJD IV, 14).
XXI, 2.

The first of these affects the text of Ps 145:1, immediately after the title. The MT here has אֲרוֹםָּם אֲלֹהִים הָמֶלֶךְ, “I will extol thee, my God and King” (RSV). It appears that the consonantal text of 11QPs² originally agreed with the MT at this point, but that the scribe left a space due to a poor writing surface after the initial word: אֲרוֹםָּם. As Sanders notes in his apparatus on XVI,6f., “N.B.: poor writing surfaces avoided.” Indeed, the evidence of what seems to be scarring in the leather is clearly visible on the photographs at this point. The space left in the line measures 25 mm across, and could therefore be readily construed as a space left for the tetragrammaton. As we have seen, such a space was quite commonly from 24 to 26 mm wide. Moreover, the insertion of the divine name makes perfectly good sense in the context, so that the scribe who wrote in the Paleo-Hebrew characters was easily misled into filling the space with the tetragrammaton. As a result, the text read: “I will extol thee, O Lord my God and King.” Subsequent to this mistaken insertion the error was discovered (either by the inserting scribe or someone else) and the tetragrammaton was marked with the deletion dots.

It is worth noting that the erroneous tetragrammaton at XVI,7 is a particularly clear example of what we have called the “sprawling” variant of the Paleo-Hebrew hand. This is no doubt due not only to the large size of the space which it filled, but also to the unevenness of the surface on which it was written. Another point worth observing, to which we shall return below, is that the scribe of the Paleo-Hebrew script here wrote on a surface which the scribe of the square script thought best to avoid.

We find a closely analogous case at XXI,2, where the text is that of Ps 138:1b. In the MT this reads נַנְדָּם אֲלֹהִים אָמֹרֶךְ, “before the gods I sing thy praise” (RSV). In 11QPs³, a space was apparently originally left after נַנְדָּם, and this space was later mistakenly filled by the tetragrammaton, yielding the meaning “before the Lord God I sing thy praise.” Although the photographs here do not show evidence of a scarred or otherwise imperfect writing surface, the gap in which the tetragrammaton is written is contiguous with a blank space in the previous line, which does perhaps indicate such an imperfection in this area of the parchment.³⁸ This would account for the nature of the Paleo-Hebrew script at this point, which is again of the “sprawl-

³⁸ Another explanation would be that this space serves to separate Ps 137 from Ps 138. Perhaps the space fulfills both functions.
ing” variety, and which in this case cannot be explained by the size of the space it fills, since this measures only 20 mm.

The erroneous insertion of the tetragrammaton at XXI,2b was an easy mistake to make, since the space which it filled came three words after another space in the same line (also of 20 mm) which did call for the insertion (XXI,2a). The error was subsequently detected, and was again marked by the deletion dots reserved for the tetragrammaton.

The two mistakes we have discussed so far are cases where the tetragrammaton was inserted in spaces where it did not belong. However, there is also at least one example in 11QPs of the tetragrammaton not being inserted where it did belong. This is a particularly significant example, because the error was in this case not corrected or marked, and has consequently given rise to some text-critical confusion. The place I am referring to is III,4, where we find the words of Ps 121:5. In the MT, the relevant wording is יוהיו שמה יוהיו צלך, “the Lord is your keeper, the Lord is your shade” (RSV). In 11QPs, however, the text reads בלאילה יוהיו שמהראנה צלך, adding the words “in the night” and omitting the second occurrence of the divine name. This omission is duly recorded as a textual variant in BHS, and has even been adopted in some versions, and in at least one commentary, as reflecting a text which is preferable to the MT at this point.29

It is a mistake, however, to read 11QPs as witness to a superior text at this point. Not only does a single occurrence of the divine name in verse 5 disturb a noteworthy poetic pattern in the psalm,30 but it is easily explained as a scribal error. The omission of the second tetragrammaton must be seen in the light of the blank space found at precisely the point where the divine name is missing. Apparently the scribe who wrote the tetragrammata failed to insert one in the space provided at III,4. This could easily have happened through parablepsis, since the next line looks very similar (בלאילה יוהיו שמהראנה) but contains only one tetragrammaton.31

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29 See the NEB, TEV, REB and Louis Jacquet, Les psaumes et le coeur de l’homme. Étude textuelle, littérale et doctrinale. Tome 3: Psalms 101 à 150 (Gembloux 1979) 418. Jacquet writes on Ps 121:5a: “Qumran...supprime le 2° ‘Yahve’ de TM. Ce dernier est certainement fautif: à la place du waw copulatif, il y a yod, les scribes ont à tort répété le Nom divin…” (my emphasis).


31 I owe this point to Stephen Dempster of Atlantic Baptist College.
Oddly enough, Sanders does mention the gap in III,4 as one which needs special explanation (it is not due to an inferior writing surface in this case\textsuperscript{32}), but he fails to connect it with the missing tetragrammaton, probably because of its reduced size. In fact he does not account for it at all. In his apparatus on III,4 he writes simply: "N.B.: space left blank."\textsuperscript{33}

The space left is indeed quite small (12 mm), but we must bear in mind that of all the other blanks which were left for the tetragrammaton, the shortest (16 mm) is found in precisely this line of column III. In fact, all the tetragrammata in column III are written in short spaces: one of 16 mm, one of 17 mm, three of 18 mm and one of 19 mm. Moreover, the 12 mm size is consistent with the normal distribution of sizes which we noted earlier. A single instance of 12 mm fits at one end of the bell curve as counterpart of the single instance of 30 mm at the other end. In other words, it is to be expected, statistically speaking, that the scribe would leave one blank space no larger than about 12 mm.

The failure to insert a tetragrammaton into a blank space can also be documented elsewhere in the Qumran documents. Fragment 6 of 4Q165, dated by Skehan as "early Herodian," quotes Isa 32:6, but "leaves for the name Yhwh a space that was never filled."\textsuperscript{34} Apparently the scribe who was to fill in the tetragrammaton in this space (either the original scribe or someone else) never in fact did so, perhaps through simple inadvertence. This is a case which seems to be exactly analogous to the unfilled blank at III,4 in the Psalms Scroll.

**The tetragrammaton not inserted by the original scribe**

I take it that the hypothesis of blank spaces which were later filled in with Paleo-Hebrew tetragrammata can be said to be securely established by the foregoing discussion, since it accounts not only for the varying spaces occupied by the latter (as well as their positioning and size), but also for the three scribal errors which we have discussed. It now remains for us to address the third point announced above: the identity of the scribe who inserted the tetragrammaton.

It seems to be generally assumed that a single scribe wrote 11QPs\textsuperscript{3a} in its entirety, including the tetragrammata. This assumption appears to be shared also by Talmont,

\textsuperscript{32}DJD IV, 14.

\textsuperscript{33}DJD IV, 24.

\textsuperscript{34}P. W. Skehan, "The Divine Name at Qumran, in the Masada Scroll, and in the Septuagint," BIOSCS 13 (1980) 27. The fragment in question is published in DJD V, 30.
who had noted that the divine name was inserted later. However, there are a number of considerations which count against this supposition.

1. If a single scribe had been involved, it would have been much simpler and more efficient to write the tetragrammata in the course of the first writing.

2. The mistakes which we have noticed would be much less likely to occur if the same scribe had done the later inserting. For example, it is not probable that the original scribe would have written the tetragrammata at XVI,7 if he himself had created the space there, and had done so not to make room for the name, but to avoid a poor writing surface.

3. There is some evidence that the tetragrammata in 11QPs⁴ was written in two distinct hands. We will elaborate on this point when we discuss the paleography of the Paleo-Hebrew writing below. If two hands are involved, then at least one did not belong to the original scribe.

Furthermore, the use of a second scribe to write the tetragrammata in an alphabet different from that of the body of the text is not without parallel in the Judaism of the time. L. Koenen, the most recent editor of the LXX fragment designated Rahlf’s 848 (dated ca. 50 BCE), has argued that its scribe left spaces in the Greek for another scribe to insert the tetragrammata in Hebrew characters (in this case the regular Aramaic script):

Where [the tetragrammata] was to occur the original scribe left a blank equal to 5–6 letters (i.e. about the size of χριστός written in full) and marked it by a high dot at its beginning. A second scribe filled in the Hebrew letters. They cover only the middle of the blank, usually the space of 2 1/2–3 letters.⁵⁵

Both the dot marking the blanks and their disproportionate size with respect to the tetragrammata written in them indicate that Koenen is right in postulating a second scribe.⁶⁶ Except for the alphabets involved, this case is a precise parallel to the procedure which we submit was followed in writing 11QPs⁴.

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⁶⁶See also H. Stegemann, “Religionsgeschichtliche Erwägungen zu den Gottesbezeichnungen in den Qumranteexten,” *Qumran. Sa piété, sa théologie et son milieu* (ed. M. Delcor; Paris/Leuven 1978) 204, note 32. Stegemann speaks of a “Gottesnamenschreiber” in connection with this papyrus (=Fouad 266). (I am indebted to Eileen Schuller of McMaster University for this reference.)
Paleographical remarks

At this point a word needs to be said about paleographical features of the tetragrammaton in 11QPs. This is a topic which is not discussed in Sanders' section on paleography in DJD IV, since he limits himself to a consideration of the square script of the original scribe. Yet an examination of the Paleo-Hebrew script proves to be quite instructive.

Although the characters in which the tetragrammaton is written differ quite markedly in size, so that "cramped" and "sprawling" varieties can be distinguished, it is quite striking that the basic shape of the letters is very consistent throughout the scroll. Especially noteworthy is the fact that the downstroke of the waw and yod is consistently closer to the vertical than the downstrokes of the two he's (which are usually closely parallel to each other). Furthermore, the top crossbar of the he's always extends slightly beyond the downstroke, whereas the other two crossbars of the he's (as well as those of the yod) never do this. This unvarying pattern, which holds good throughout the scroll, seems to indicate a very practised and steady hand.

There are also differences, however. Apart from the variations in size and spacing which we have already noted, the tetragrammaton as a whole is positioned at different heights relative to the horizontal line of writing. Often it extends well below the lower edge of the line written in square script (for example at VIII,5; XI,3 and XII,10). At other times this feature is less marked, or altogether absent. There are also differences in the relationship of the two components of the waw (diagonal line and "reverse Z" at its top), and in the length of the crossbars of the he. But all of these would seem to fall well within the normal range of variation of a single hand.

There is one variant feature, however, which seems to call for a different explanation. Sometimes the downstroke of the waw is markedly thinner than the downstrokes of the two he's, but at other times it is of the same thickness. In itself, this might be interpreted as a trivial variant. But the striking fact is that the thinner downstroke appears consistently in all cases up to VI,11, and the thicker one appears consistently thereafter. Such a clearcut distribution can hardly be the result of chance variation. Either the scribe self-consciously decided to begin writing his Paleo-Hebrew waw with a bolder downstroke after column VI, or else we must assume that two different scribes were involved in the work of inserting the tetragrammaton. (A change in writing instrument would not account for the bolder line, since a downstroke of
the same thickness is used for the he's from the beginning.) In that case, one scribe included in all the tetragrammata of Fragments A–E and the first six columns of the extant scroll, and another scribe did all the rest.

Whether or not there were two scribes involved in inserting the tetragrammaton, it is clear that the Paleo-Hebrew script that was used has its own characteristic style. The hand is paleographically quite distinct, for example, from the Paleo-Hebrew hand used for the tetragrammaton in the Habakkuk commentary, though it often shows striking affinities with the script of 11QpaleoLev. It is especially the shape of the waw which links the Psalms Scroll with the Levitical Scroll.39 The form used is quite rare, and appears to be attested elsewhere only on coins of the Hasmonaean period and the First Jewish War. Other shapes of the Paleo-Hebrew letter are much more common and widely attested.40

Conclusions and further hypotheses

The picture which emerges as the result of the entire foregoing discussion is the following. The body of the Psalms Scroll was written in the square script by a single scribe who left blank spaces wherever a tetragrammaton was required. Subsequent to this another scribe, who was able to write a regular and distinctive Paleo-Hebrew hand, inserted the tetragrammaton in the blank spaces up to VI,11, omitting only to fill in the small blank at III,4. After this the remaining spaces were also filled in, possibly by yet another scribe who had mastered the distinctive script required. During this process gaps of another sort (at XVI,7 and XXI,2) were inadvertently supplied with a tetragrammaton as well. Finally, these last two errors were detected and marked with scribal dots indicating deletion.

Finally, we must briefly consider the question why this whole procedure was followed. We know that the tetragrammaton was associated with a number of strict taboos in the Judaism of the early centuries of our era. It was on no account to


39 See the paleographical contribution by R. S. Hanson in Freedman and Mathews, Levitical Scroll, 15–23, especially the script charts on p. 16.

40 See S. A. Birnbaum, The Hebrew Scripts. Part One: The Text (Leiden 1971), which has a discussion of "the Neo-Paleo-Hebrew script" on pp. 75–103. The Paleo-Hebrew waw used in 11QPs is pictured in Charts 48 (No. 2), 49 (No. 1), 51 (No. 2), 54 (No. 3) and 63 (No. 1).
be pronounced, and the penalties for breaking this rule were severe. In the Qumran sect it meant summary expulsion from the community.\textsuperscript{41} The religious awe with which the ineffable name was treated also extended to its written form. As we have seen, the tetragrammaton could not be erased once it was copied down,\textsuperscript{42} and it was often written in an alphabet different from that of the surrounding text (Paleo-Hebrew in square Hebrew texts, or either one of the two Hebrew alphabets in Greek texts). In a careful study which sketches the origin and development of this practice, Patrick Skehan has suggested that the use of an unfamiliar alphabet may have been designed to prevent the reader from inadvertently pronouncing the tetragrammaton.\textsuperscript{43} This hypothesis seems preferable to that of Jonathan Siegel, who argues that its purpose was to forestall erasure,\textsuperscript{44} although the one reason does not rule out the other. Whatever the case may be, it is clear that the divine name was surrounded by a religious mystique which led to ever more elaborate precautions against profaning it. No doubt it was considered a mark of piety to go to great lengths in observing these precautions.

In the light of this, it is not improbable that within a strict sect such as that of the Qumran community some scribes would not even write (or would not be permitted to write) the tetragrammaton. According to Skehan, such an attitude probably accounts for manuscripts (such as 1QS) which represent the tetragrammaton by four dots.\textsuperscript{45} If this is correct, then the man who initially copied 11QPs\textsuperscript{a} may have been a scribe who himself had such an attitude.

Another hypothesis to be considered is that the man or men who did write the tetragrammaton in the Psalms Scroll belonged to a higher echelon within the Qumran hierarchy than the original scribe. Just as at an earlier stage of Judaism only the high priest was permitted to pronounce the divine name,\textsuperscript{46} so it may be that only certain scribes within the Qumran community were permitted (that is, were considered sufficiently advanced in piety) to put it down in writing. Such a regulation

\textsuperscript{42}See note 27 above.
\textsuperscript{43}Skehan, “the Divine Name,” 28.
\textsuperscript{44}Siegel, “The Employment of Palaeo-Hebrew,” 169.
\textsuperscript{45}Skehan, “The Divine Name,” 15–16.
\textsuperscript{46}Skehan, “The Divine Name,” 20.
would be consistent with what we know of the scrupulous outward piety and strict hierarchical ranking which was observed in the Qumran community.