4QSam\textsuperscript{a} is known for its textual affinity with the Septuagint,\textsuperscript{1} Josephus,\textsuperscript{2} and parallel passages in Chronicles,\textsuperscript{3} but less known, perhaps, for its unique readings, i.e., those readings that are not attested in other ancient textual witnesses. A large cluster of the unique readings of 4QSam\textsuperscript{a}—eight in number—is located in a

I extend sincere appreciation to Alexander Rofé and Michael Segal, both of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, for their careful review of this article; and to Elisha Qimron and Chaim Cohen, both of Ben-Gurion University, for our engaging discussion (held at Ben-Gurion University, April 13, 2000) of David’s lament of Abner.


\textsuperscript{2} E. Ulrich, \textit{The Qumran Text of Samuel and Josephus}, especially pp. 165–191. This significant monograph features a comprehensive approach to 4QSam\textsuperscript{a}, as it deals with relationships between the Qumran Samuel text and the Greek version, the book of Chronicles, and Josephus.

\textsuperscript{3} For parallel passages in Chronicles, see Cross, Frank Moore, Jr., “The History of the Biblical Text in the Light of Discoveries in the Judaean Desert,” \textit{HTR} 57 (1964) 293; idem, “The Contribution of Qumran Discoveries to the Study of the Biblical Text,” \textit{IEJ} 16 (1966) 88; and Werner Lemke, “The Synoptic Problem in the Chronicler’s History,” \textit{HTR} 58 (1965) 349–363. Steven L. McKenzie, \textit{The Chronicler’s Use of the Deuteronomic History} (HSM 33; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholar’s Press, 1985), presents the most complete treatment on textual affinities between Chronicles and 4QSam\textsuperscript{a}.

[\textit{Textus} 20 (2000) 83–96]
pericope⁴ that comprises David’s lament of Abner (2 Sam 3:30–38). Most of these unique readings are relatively insignificant, producing minor variant readings; two readings, however, have consequence to one’s understanding of David’s lament of Abner. These two readings are (1) בְּכֵלָּה which has been reconstructed to read אֶלָּה יִדּוּר בּוֹקֵשׁ אֲלֵי אֲבָרֹתָה בּוֹקֵשׁ אַרְפּוֹת יִדּוּר לֹא בּוֹקֵשׁ בּוֹקֵשׁ אַרְפּוֹת יִדּוּר לֹא בּוֹקֵשׁ, which likely reads a hiphil perfect, higgisi. Regardless of how these two readings are reconstructed, they deviate from all other ancient witnesses of the books of Samuel, which unanimously have וַיֶּלֶד הָאָדָם for the first expression, and וַיֶּלֶד הָאָדָם for the second.

This paper is divided into two parts: Part 1 presents the 4QSam⁵ photograph (PAM 43.115; Plate 1198), transcriptions, and variant readings of the literary unit under discussion (2 Sam 3:30–38). The eight unique readings will be briefly examined in the section that deals with variant readings. Part 1 introduces the greater context in which to understand the two unique readings that are examined in Part 2. Part 2 features a discussion of two unique readings from David’s lament—בְּכֵלָּה and הָנִּשָּׁה—both of which belong to 4QSam⁵ 2 Sam 3:34.

I. 4QSam⁵: Photograph, Transcriptions, and Variant Readings (2 Sam 3:30–38)

I will begin with a description of the fragments. This description pertains only to the fragments belonging to the text under discussion, i.e., 2 Sam 3:30–38. The column consists of four fragments. Two of the fragments are aligned on the left side of the column; the left margin itself is visible at lines 14–31. The other two fragments are located on the right side of the column; the right margin is visible at lines 17–20. The right half of the top margin of the column is also present. The left hand, lower fragment manifests a vertical ruling indicating for the scribe the column’s left hand margin; horizontal rulings are also evident on the same fragment.

Some characters from each of the thirty-four lines of the column are extant, although the number of characters from each line varies. For instance, 42 characters exist on line 10, as compared to 12 extant characters on line 3.

⁴ Due to space constraints, I will not deal with the entire pericope that describes Joab’s murder of Abner (beginning with v. 22).
4Q51. 4QSamuel₄ (2 Sam 3:30–38)
PAM 43.115; Plate 1198
2 Sam 3:29–39 can be reconstructed as follows: 5

The arrangement of fragments—two on the right side and two on the left—creates a long vertical gap down the middle of the column that requires a mid-line reconstruction of all lines in the column. The average number of reconstructed and extant characters/intervals per line in the column (with the exception of the lines that have a *vacat*) is 51. This line count is essential to understanding some of the challenges associated with line 17 (see below), which presents part of David’s lament of Abner’s death.

Notes on Readings

L. 12 The paragraphing of 4QSam coincides with the δ of MT.
L. 15 (3:32) The letters are traces on the bottom of the fragment.

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5 In this article I have included only lines 11–25 of the column, those that pertain directly to David’s lament. Lines 1–10, 26–34, which are also part of the column, have largely been excluded from the discussion due to space constraints.
L. 17 (3:34) A long space separates the name of Abner and the 'alep before the gap between the fragments. Presumably the long space was intentional on the part of the scribe, designed to introduce the poetic verse.

L. 18 (3:34) מזרזא Computer enhancement and magnification of a digitized image of the fragment reveals traces of the top half of a yod. It is unknown whether the copyist or a subsequent scribe voluntarily erased the yod, or if the leather suffered worm damage at this point. As points of comparison, see the surface damage by worms at the end of line 18, where the ωΝ and ταύ no longer exist ( '&'ע), and line 19, where the bet is no longer visible, and the sin has suffered damage (רֶשֶׁת)." כולה Presumably the third character is a pe or a bet, represented by a short horizontal base stroke (see fragment 4.4 of PAM 43-124). See further below in the Variant Readings section. With computer magnification, a trace of ink representing the lowest part of the lamed’s curved down stroke is visible on the same fragment.

L. 22 (3:37) The surface has been eaten by worms, destroying ידוע of ורֶשֶׁת.

Variant Readings

3:30 (11) מזרזא הרן MT S; LXX διειπαρατηροῦντο (διειπαρατηρεομαι)
A computer enhancement of two visible letters on the fragment indicates that they are ‘ayin and waw (reconstructed as מזרזא) — the ‘ayin has the same slanted foot as the ‘ain in the word immediately above, but does not have a horizontal foot, as does the nun in the word following (לְבַד). This rules out the reading of MT (הדנה), and the readings מזרזא and אָנָן מזרזא. Note that the verb מזרזא is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible with the sense of “smite” (see, for example, Judg 8:21; 15:12; 1 Sam 22:17-18; 2 Sam 1:15), although its usage here with the preposition lamed is highly irregular.


7 Edward D. Herbert, Reconstructing Biblical Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Method Applied to the Reconstruction of 4QSam (STDJ 22; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 95.
3:31 (14) MT LXX\textsuperscript{BAO} S T \ | \ לְפַנֶּיהָאֵת בָּוִאָרִי LXX\textsuperscript{I}
LXX\textsuperscript{I}, influenced by the preposition found five words previously, has David walking before, and not after, the funeral bier.

3:32 (15) אָתַּא קַוְּלִמָּא קְרָבַּר מַעְרָא MT
3:32 (16) קָרָבָּר [אָתַּא] קַוְּלִמָּא MT LXX\textsuperscript{I} S T \ | \ LXX\textsuperscript{BAO}; cf. Jos., Ant. VII.42
In v. 32b the Hebrew witnesses read קָרָבָּר אָתַּא קַוְּלִמָּא, whereas LXX reflects קָרָבָּר אָתַּא קַוְּלִמָּא. The original reading was probably קָרָבָּר קָרָבָּר אָתַּא קַוְּלִמָּא, with אָתַּא added as an explicating plus. So McCarter, p. 110.

3:32 (16) מַעְרָא התַּהֲלֵךְ בָּלָה תַּבָּרִי LXX See the note immediately above.

3:33 (16) לָנָּא S \ | \ לא MT
One of the two Hebrew witnesses, MT or 4QSam\textsuperscript{a}, at times confuse these prepositions due, perhaps, to Aramaic influence.

3:34 (17) מַעְרָא מַרְדַּר אֲשֶׁר LXX S T V
On this expression, see the discussion below.

3:34 (17) מַרְדַּר מְגִילִיל LXX
In biblical Hebrew the conjunction waw is uncommon in older poetic units.\textsuperscript{8}

3:34 (18) מַרְדַּר מַעְרָא לְפַנֶּיהָאֵת בָּוִאָרִי MT; ὀμοὶ Ναβαλ εὐφόρου υἱῶν (ὑοὶς LXX\textsuperscript{I}) ἴδιακά εἰπεν ἔρξασθαι LXX\textsuperscript{BAO}; סָמַךְ לַמְגִילִיל הָנִּירָא מָזָּא לְמָזָּא S.
Note that מַרְדַּר is also a possible if less likely reading.
Space considerations suggest that מַעְרָא לְפַנֶּיהָאֵת בָּוִאָרִי should be omitted, the result of a dittography anticipating הבין.

3:34 (18) לְפַנֶּיהָאֵת בָּוִאָרִי MT LXX seems to enclose “by fetters” with negative particles, conflating the texts of 4QSam\textsuperscript{a} and MT. As for the preposition, however, 4QSam\textsuperscript{a} LXX is equivalent in meaning to MT. Note that


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*bet* is used by 4QSam* in the previous cola, attached to יָרָם, an argument for its being secondary here.

3:34 (18)  

See above Notes on Reading. LXXBA (προσόγαγέν) is the result of wrong division, the subject presumably being Abner. However, the MT correctly takes עָלָיו as the subject.

3:34 (18)  

4QSam* and MT have the preferred reading. V. 32 explains that “all the people” (גָּלְלוֹ הָעָם) wept over Abner; now in v. 34 “all the people” do not “gather” to weep (see LXX), but they “continue” to weep.

3:34 (18)  

BHS in the apparatus incorrectly registers that 4QSam* lacks כל. The expression כל הָעָם is a prominent expression in this section regarding Abner’s funeral (vv. 31–38), appearing six times. In 34b 4QSam* omits although it appears after כל הָעָם just six words later in 35b. Perhaps the scribe’s eye skipped from יָרָם to יָרָם.

3:35 (20)  

Omit according to PAM 43.124, fragment 4.4.

3:35 (20)  

The 4QSam* reading qualifies as the lectio difficilior. In any case, the graphic similarity is responsible for the variant readings.

3:35 (21)  

The Greek texts reflect MT. A 4QSam* scribe perhaps failed to properly divide the words.

3:36 (22)  

MT and LXXO add “תָּמִים” to כל הָעָם, perhaps shaped by ... in the same verse.

3:38 (24)  

The noun and modifier of LXXBO is expressed in the form of a hendiadys in the Hebrew texts.
II. Two Unique Readings: בקָרֶץ [ָd and מִניָנָה (4QSam* 2 Sam 3:34)

As noted above in the section on variant readings, the MT reading of the phrase מִניָנָה אל אָסָרָה is reflected in all ancient witnesses except for 4QSam*; hence the formula, 4QSam* ≠ MT=LXX S T V. It is quite apparent that 4QSam* has a variant reading, as its phrase begins with an 'aleph instead of the yod (from מִניָנָה), which is expected by the reader; and after the gap in the leather the text of 4QSam* resumes with בָּקָרֶץ, a plus that is extant only in the Qumran scroll.9 The gap that exists between the two fragments (see discussion above) makes it impossible to determine with complete assurance the characters that once existed on the leather. Despite the difficulty in reconstructing a unique text, there exist three published reconstructions of this phrase. I will examine these in this section, and afterward offer two equally feasible reconstructions.

1. Ulrich published this reconstruction in The Qumran Text of Samuel and Josephus (1978). He presents the reconstruction, along with the variant reading of the Masoretic Text, Targum, Peshitta, and the Septuagint, and then concludes by writing “in this plus, 4Q ≠ M G.”10 Customarily, when presenting a reading from 4QSam*, Ulrich offers comments or explanation. But in this instance he is silent regarding how he reconstructed 4QSam*; nor does he discuss its disagreement with the other ancient witnesses to Samuel. D. Barthélemy’s apparatus in Critique textuelle de l’Ancien Testament,11 accepts Ulrich’s reconstruction without qualification. He explains that he follows “the photographs and the indications given by Ulrich.” P. Kyle McCarter embraces the same reconstruction.12

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9 The verses under discussion in this paper are not extant in either 4QSamb or 4QSamc.

10 Ulrich, The Qumran Text of Samuel and Josephus, 135.


12 McCarter, 1 Samuel, 110.
So too, David Noel Freedman. He presents a lengthy argument for the preference of reading ידך לא אסורה, in place of נמרד יהי לא בוקש, the reading of the MT.\textsuperscript{13} Freedman shows this reading of 4QSam\textsuperscript{a} to have a “perfectly balanced metrical pattern” as well as a sophisticated chiastic structure, the result of which makes David’s lament for Abner “a model of exquisite craftsmanship.”\textsuperscript{14} The following is Freedman’s reconstruction of the lament:


cכְמוֹתָה נֶנָּלוּ יִמְטָה אַבָּר
אֶפֶרֶת יִדְךָ לָא בּוֹקֶשׁ
רָגְלִי לָא בּוֹתְשֵׁתָה הָנָּשׁ
כְּנֵלָמָּנָל הַעֲלָלָה נְפַלָּה

Freedman points out the following chiastic elements of lines two and three as follows: the verb and participle (אסורה, והם) open and close the bicolon; in fact, the first two vowels of אסורה —“א” and “ע”— are chiastic with the first two vowels of והם, hence the vowels themselves are chiastic, reading a-u-u-a. Matching nouns (ידך, רגלי) exist in both lines. The prepositional phrase of line two (בעעש) corresponds with the prepositional phrase of line three (בשותה), both supplying plural nouns. And, not mentioned by Freedman perhaps due to its obvious nature, the negative that exists in each line (לָא, וְלָא) precedes the two prepositional phrases.

In order to read a balanced metrical scheme, Freedman uses the short form of the perfect, second masculine singular verbстал, reading נָפָלָת rather than נָפָלָה. He also reads the short form of two second masculine singular pronominal suffixes יָדֶכָּה and רָגְלוֹיָה. This creates a metrical structure with a syllable count of 10-9-9-10 for the four lines.

The reconstruction of 4QSam\textsuperscript{a}, אסורה ידך לא בוקש, accepted by Ulrich, Barthelemy, McCarter, and Freedman remains a persuasive possibility. The ‘alep that begins the plural passive participle (אסורה) accounts for the ‘alep that is visible on the lether of 4QSam\textsuperscript{a}; and the reconstructed words agree with the reading attested in the Masoretic Text, as the MT presents the same three words (ידך לא בוקש.


\textsuperscript{14} Freedman, “On the Death of Abner,” 127.
 notwithstanding the different word order. The character and interval count of this reconstruction—twelve total (א[א]סָרָה יִדֵּר אֵל) —approximates the number of characters needed to fill the space that remains between the two extant fragments that make up this part of the lament. But, on the precise number of characters needed to fill this gap, see below.

Notwithstanding the possibility of this reconstruction, uncertainties remain. The first uncertainty pertains to the exact count of letters and intervals in the gap located on line 17 between the 'alep, the last character on the right hand fragment before the gap, and the term בָּלָקָם, the first word located on the left hand margin after the gap. Line 17 attests twenty-six characters; of these, only four (of the first five characters on the line) require dots or circlets, the remaining characters may be identified with confidence (e.g., אֵל הָעָרֹת נְפָלָה יָרֵא אֵלָהָן). Although the left leg of the 'alep no longer exists on the leather, the identification of this character is certain, as the right leg, the right arm, and the slanting stroke are all clearly visible. Following the 'alep is a gap between the two fragments that extends for 14-16 characters/intervals, depending on the number of narrow (e.g., waw, final nun, yod) or wide characters (e.g., sin, final mem) that once existed on the scroll. The numbers 14-16 are determined not only by the characters that exist on line 17, but also, and perhaps more importantly, by the count and position of both the extant and reconstructed characters of lines 15-16 and 18-19, the lines that immediately precede and follow line 17. The positioning of both the extant and the reconstructed characters of lines 15-16 and 18-19 serve as directors for the understanding of the nature of line 17.

In addition, a count of the characters/intervals of the lines of the column yields understanding to line 17. Each line has an average of 51 characters; line 17 is required to have 17 characters/intervals in the gap in order to reach the average number of characters. With the reconstruction אֶל לָעָרֹת יִדֵּר אֵל, the number of characters and intervals falls five short of reaching the average.

15 Such an occurrence—a differing word order—is not uncommon between these two Hebrew witnesses.

16 For instance, on the leather fragment, the word בָּלָקָם (l. 17) is located directly below the word אֵל אֵלָהָן of l. 16 and directly above אֵל אֵל וָאָסָפָה of l. 18 (see reconstruction above). These facts help to determine the number of spaces in the gap of line 17.
Syntactically, the reconstruction אָמַרְתָּ יִדְרֵךְ לָא [בַּקְשָׁה] is somewhat awkward. The word-for-word translation is, “bound are your hands not with chains.” The attachment of a waw before אָמַרְתָּ, reading אָמַרְתָּ יִדְרֵךְ לָא [בַּקְשָׁה], would make the reading more acceptable, “your hands are bound, but not with chains.” The addition of a waw would also serve to lengthen the expression by one character, drawing slightly closer to the required 14-16 characters.

2. אָמַרְתָּ יִדְרֵךְ לָא אֶסַּרְתָּ [בַּקְשָׁה]. Edward D. Herbert’s new scientific method for reconstructing the text of biblical scrolls demonstrates that the reconstruction shown in number 1 above does not adequately fill the gap found in the 4QSam* fragments. He writes, “Ulrich’s suggestion (135; followed by McCarter, 110 and Barthélemy, 1982, 236-7) that the elements within 4QSam* should be rearranged so as to yield results in a reconstructed width for 17cd of only 32.0mm, which is too short to be likely.”17 Herbert offers two alternative readings, one of which is אָמַרְתָּ יִדְרֵךְ לָא אֶסַּרְתָּ [בַּקְשָׁה]. This reconstruction has a count (between the brackets) of 15 characters/Intervals, thus fitting the requirements of space.

3. אָמַרְתָּ יִדְרֵךְ לָא אֶסַּרְתָּ [בַּקְשָׁה]. Herbert’s second reconstruction has sixteen characters/Intervals, which also fit the space requirements, although it is highly irregular to begin a parallelism with אָמַרְתָּ.

4. אָמַרְתָּ יִדְרֵךְ אֵסַּרְתָּ [בַּקְשָׁה]. I will present two separate reconstructions. This reconstruction uses two of the words supplied by the Masoretic Text (יִדְרֵךְ, אֶסַּרְתָּ), but employs the particle of non-existence כל in place of אָמַרְתָּ. More to the point, כל is to be expected because אָמַרְתָּ יִדְרֵךְ אֶסַּרְתָּ [בַּקְשָׁה] is an equational sentence, not a verbal construction. In the following two examples of כל and אָמַרְתָּ in parallel constructions, כל appears with the verbal form, כֹּל, with the non-verbal: כֹּל רָאשֵׁי יִשָּׁרָיו אָמַרְתָּ (Isa 66:4) and כֹּל אָמַרְתָּ הָיָה לָא חָשֵׁב הָיָה לוֹ כֹּל אָמַרְתָּ הָיָה (Ps 32:2).

The reconstruction אָמַרְתָּ יִדְרֵךְ אֶסַּרְתָּ [בַּקְשָׁה] falls one character short of the number of characters/Intervals needed for the gap, having only thirteen. But the shortfall is even greater considering that five of the letters (three yods, final nun, and waw) are narrower than the average width of characters.

All four of the reconstructions presented above have been shaped by the reading of the MT, as the words—אָמַרְתָּ, יִדְרֵךְ, אֶסַּרְתָּ, לָא, אֶסַּרְתָּ, אֶסַּרְתָּ, אֶסַּרְתָּ—regardless of word order—were made part of the 4QSam* reconstructions. Certainly text critics are prudent to first seek

17 Herbert, Reconstructing Biblical Dead Sea Scrolls, 113.
the extant Hebrew text, as well as other ancient witnesses, when attempting to determine or establish reconstructed texts. None of these reconstructions, however, attempts to solve the problem that exists in lines 17–18 that pertains to the non-agreement in 4QSam\textsuperscript{a} between the apparent subject רגלים and the verb הגיש, both attested on the fragment.

The Verb הגיש

Although the verb גיש agrees in number with the subject רַדֶּךָ, both belonging to the first colon of the bicolon, there remain challenges in 4QSam\textsuperscript{a} with the pairing of הגיש and רגלים, both of the second colon. Critics have tried to solve this discrepancy by reading 4QSam\textsuperscript{a} as hop'al infinitive absolute, הָגִיש, or by correcting 4QSam\textsuperscript{a} to agree with the Masoretic Text reading the plural הגיש.\textsuperscript{19}

However, as noted above, a trace of ink remaining on the leather seems to represent the remains of a yod, hence reading הגיש. Herbert's apparatus also accounts for the yod. He writes, "This can be read with confidence, followed by S LXX, rather than McCarter's הגיש (111), since the large gap between the י and the ש definitely requires a letter, and there may even be faint traces of the head of this י."\textsuperscript{20} Rather than reading הגיש as hop'al infinitive absolute, or correcting this reading towards the MT, I propose the following reconstruction that will solve the challenge of space, conform to the extant characters that remain on the leather, and solve the agreement problem in 4QSam\textsuperscript{a} through acceptance of what 4QSam\textsuperscript{a} attests.

5. אֵלַי אֲשֶׁר יֶדֶךָ בּוֹקֵם. The count of reconstructed characters/intervals in this reading is fourteen, which meets all of the space requirements, i.e., average line count as well as the number of characters to fill the gap between fragments. The reconstruction provides a solution to the agreement problem.

The word ישא serves as the subject of both cola, hence the reading:

אֵלַי אֲשֶׁר יֶדֶךָ בּוֹקֵם

רגלים בּוֹקֵם לְאַבָּתֵךְ

\textsuperscript{18} See McCarter, 1 Samuel, 111.


\textsuperscript{20} Herbert, Reconstructing Biblical Dead Sea Scrolls, 113.
The subject agrees in number with the singular reconstructed verb אֲשֶׁר as well as the attested verb אִשֶּׁר. There is scriptural precedence for using אִשֶּׁר as an impersonal in poetic parallelisms; see, for example, Isa 13:14; 19:2; 53:6; 57:1; Job 38:26; Prov 30:2.

The characters אֲשֶׁר and בּוּכִים form the expected collocation with ברווח; together these two words are used many times in the Hebrew Bible. See, for example, לָאָשֶׁר מַלְכָּה (Ps 149:8); ויה דַּקֹּר בּוּכִים (Jer 40:1). The verb אֲשֶׁר is also generally used with the expression “bronze fetters,” e.g., יֵאָסְרַהְוּ בּוּכִים (Judg 16:21); and, יִאָסְרַהְוּ בּוּכִים is a common formula (2 Kgs 25:7; Jer 39:7; Jer 52:11; 2 Chr 33:11; 36:6).

It is possible to substitute the verbal root אֲשֶׁר with רָחַב (e.g., רָחַב לָאָשֶׁר בּוּכִים [Nah 3:10]), thus reading אֲשֶׁר לָאָשֶׁר בּוּכִים, although אֲשֶׁר remains the verb of preference.

Conclusion

This paper presented the transcription for 2 Sam 3:30–38, lines 11–25 of a column from 4QSam⁴, followed by notes and a listing of nineteen variant readings. Eight of the nineteen were readings unique to 4QSam⁴, i.e., not attested in the other ancient witnesses. The eight unique readings are: (1) בּוּכִים (2 Sam 3:30, l. 11); (2)ocrates (2 Sam 3:32, l. 15); (3) omit מַלְכָּה from the expression מַלְכָּה בּוּכִים (2 Sam 3:34, l. 17); (4) omit לָאָשֶׁר מַלְכָּה from the expression מַלְכָּה בּוּכִים (2 Sam 3:34, l. 18); (5) omit מַלְכָּה from the expression מַלְכָּה בּוּכִים (2 Sam 3:34, l. 18); (7) omit מַלְכָּה from the expression מַלְכָּה בּוּכִים (2 Sam 3:35, l. 20); and (8) omit מַלְכָּה from the expression מַלְכָּה בּוּכִים (2 Sam 3:35, l. 20). Most of the unique readings are minor, possibly created by the scribes during the course of copying the text. The textual critic may often determine the mechanism for such unique readings.

I have examined three published reconstructions for the reading בּוּכִים, which is part of 2 Sam 3:34 of 4QSam⁴, followed by a presentation of two additional reconstructions. Numbers 2, 3, 4, 5 of the reconstructions above fit the space requirements, which requires 14–16 characters/intervals. Numbers 1, 2, and 3 are shaped by the reading of the MT, having three of its words (רְדֶר, אֵסֶרְתָה), albeit in different word order. Number 4 has two of the three words (רְדֶר, אֵסֶרְתָה) belonging to the Masoretic Text. And number 5 has the same two words, and a third word formed from the same root אֵסֶרְתָה (אֵסֶרְתָה) belonging to the MT. Only number 5 presents a subject and verb that are compatible with the singular,
attested verb (הנותן) of line two of the couplet (בוכימ והנולך). All five of the reconstructions are worthy of consideration and serve as possible candidates for what may have existed on the leather before its spoliation in Cave 4; but then again, all five must remain tentative and provisional.

It is quite apparent that there are many uncertainties attached to the task of reconstructing Qumran texts. The uncertainties become greater (1) when the gap between extant characters or words consists of multiple words, as is the case in line 17, בוכים [בוכים] 17 and 18 (The מות). Unique readings are difficult, in part, because none of the parallel witnesses (4QSam⁶, 4QSam⁷, MT) or the ancient translations (Greek, Syriac, Aramaic, Latin) offer adequate assistance in restoring the reading that once existed on the leather.