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# A Palaeographic and Codicological (Re)assessment of the Opisthograph 4Q433a/4Q255

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## Abstract

A consideration of both the palaeographic and material features of a scroll provides scholars the opportunity to investigate the scribal culture in which a particular manuscript emerged. This article examines the papyrus opisthograph from Qumran containing 4QpapHodayot-like Text B, 4Q433a, and 4QpapSerekh ha-Yahad<sup>a</sup>, 4Q255, on either side. There has been scholarly disagreement about this opisthograph with regard to a number of questions: (1) which of the two compositions was inscribed on the recto, (2) how the two compositions should be dated, and (3) which of the two texts was written first. This article looks at both compositions by means of palaeography and codicology. From this combined approach I deduce that 4Q433a was written first, on the recto of this papyrus manuscript. 4Q255 was added later, on the verso. Both compositions can be dated to the early first century BCE. This reconstruction makes it plausible that 4Q255 was a personal copy.

## Keywords

Dead Sea Scrolls – opisthograph – scribal practices – palaeography – codicology – personal copy

## 1 Introduction

The examination of manuscript evidence provides a fruitful approach to reconstructing the practices of ancient scribes.\* This article is intended as a case

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\* 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:

study to demonstrate how a combined palaeographical and codicological approach can lead to a better understanding of ancient scribal interaction with individual texts, such as in the case of an opisthograph.

The manuscript that is central to this paper concerns a rather coarse, beige coloured papyrus document of which four fragments have survived. Each fragment contains the remains of two different compositions. One side consists of 4QpapHodayot-like Text B, 4Q433a, published by Eileen Schuller in DJD 29.<sup>1</sup> On the other side we find 4QpapSerekh ha-Yahad<sup>a</sup>, 4Q255, published by Philip Alexander and Géza Vermes in DJD 26.<sup>2</sup> This manuscript is an opisthograph, a term that is not used in either of the two publications. The DJD volumes are published by composition, not by manuscript. For most scrolls this makes little difference, but in the case of an opisthograph it does compel the editors to view the two or more texts on the scroll in question in isolation. 4Q255 was dated palaeographically by Alexander to the second half of the second century BCE. He also examined the papyrus and concluded that 4Q255 was written on the verso, presumably after 4Q433a had been written on the recto.<sup>3</sup> Schuller, however, dated the hand of 4Q433a to around 75 BCE and asserts that this composition must have been written after 4Q255, which leads to a problematic situation that is worthy of reassessment here.<sup>4</sup> I will first examine the materiality of the papyrus, in the subsequent sections engage in the discussion on the datings of these compositions on the basis of palaeography and codicology, and finally explore how these considerations can help scholars gain insights into some aspects of the context of use of this manuscript.

## 2 Recto and Verso

The terms *recto* and *verso* have been used in different ways to describe the two sides of a manuscript.<sup>5</sup> In the field of papyrology, the *recto* is considered to be the side on which the fibres of the papyrus plant run horizontally, parallel to the text. On the *verso* we find vertical fibres perpendicular to the text,

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1 Schuller, DJD 29:237–45.

2 Alexander and Vermes, DJD 26:27–38.

3 Alexander and Vermes, DJD 26:28.

4 Schuller, “The Classification Hodayot and Hodayot-like,” 190.

5 The main difference in scholarly use occurs where the terms are defined by the content of the texts or by the physical properties of the material: Turner, “The Terms Recto and Verso.”

because the layers of the papyrus plant with the fibres running in opposite directions would be pressed together to solidify the manuscript. It is a widely shared observation that in antiquity the (first) scribe of an opisthograph would generally start writing on the recto. In the case of an opisthograph with different texts on either side, establishing on which side the fibres are running in a horizontal direction is therefore the first step in the relative dating of the two or more texts found on the manuscript.

The materiality of 4Q433a/4Q255 appears to have been the object of scholarly disagreement in this regard. This manuscript was preserved in a poor condition, but Sarianna Metso did state that 4Q255 was written on the recto of the papyrus manuscript.<sup>6</sup> She did not elaborate on her understanding of this term, but one may assume that she refers to the direction of the fibres of the papyrus plant. Józef Milik's position on this seems to be the cause of some confusion. Both Eileen Schuller and George Brooke present Milik as claiming that 4Q255 is written on the recto.<sup>7</sup> The descriptions of each of the scrolls that were printed in the Preliminary Concordance do indeed state this.<sup>8</sup> However, elsewhere it seems that Milik was declaring the direct opposite: that we find 4Q255 on the verso of the manuscript in question.<sup>9</sup>

Alexander inspected the manuscript and arrived at the conclusion that 4Q255 would have been written on the verso, that is with the fibres running vertically.<sup>10</sup> Close inspection of the most recent photographs published by the Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) allows for little doubt that 4Q433a is written on the recto and 4Q255 on the verso of the scroll. In particular in line 4 of the first fragment of 4Q433a deterioration is visible along the horizontal fibres. Furthermore, the second fragment is in such a poor state that on the side of 4Q255 one can clearly spot loose fibres running vertically and crossing over the horizontal fibres of the recto.

What this signifies in relation to the scribal practices of the scribe or scribes of the manuscript is not entirely clear. Schuller assures us that "in the view of many papyrologists the vertical or horizontal direction of the fibres has little to do with which side was written first, and so the terminology of recto and verso is perhaps not very helpful in understanding how the two sides of the papyrus

6 Metso, *Textual Development*, 19.

7 Schuller, "The Classification Hodayot and Hodayot-like," 190; Brooke, "Between Scroll and Codex?" 130.

8 Brown, *A Preliminary Concordance*, 7–8.

9 "Deux mss. sont écrits sur papyrus, dont un réutilisé, c'est-à-dire au verso d'un autre ms." See "Le Travail d'Édition des Fragments," 61.

10 Alexander and Vermes, DJD 26:28.

are related.”<sup>11</sup> It is true that establishing the direction of the fibres cannot be used on its own as a decisive (relative) dating method, but it is at least a clear indication that can be used alongside other evidence. This is apparent from comparative evidence. In his study on the time interval between writing on both sides of Greek papyri, Eric Turner concluded that the verso was usually inscribed between 1 and 100 years after the text on the recto had been written down, with the majority occurring within the first 25 years.<sup>12</sup> This inquiry was based on 40 papyrus opisthographs from a variety of collections (15 of which originated from Oxyrhynchus), each containing an official document on the recto.

Usually ancient scribes would start writing on the side with fibres in horizontal direction, which seems to have made it so easy to write straight that additional ruling was not necessary.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, among the opisthographs found at Qumran we do not find a single manuscript other than 4Q433a/4Q255 where the composition on the verso was dated palaeographically before the one on the recto, which makes it even more compelling to reassess the handwriting on both sides of this opisthograph together.

### 3 Palaeographic Reconsideration

The focal point of this paragraph is the palaeographic relation between 4Q255 and 4Q433a. The main question that will be dealt with here is how close in time the scribal hands that wrote these two texts are in relation to each other. In anticipation of this discussion, it is necessary to briefly reflect on the methodology of palaeographic dating and to explicate what it is palaeographers do when they compare two or more manuscripts. The obvious point that nonetheless needs emphasis here is that manuscripts cannot at random be compared with each other. In pursuit of a fruitful comparison, the scribal hands that wrote individual manuscripts should be examined in relation to hands that stand in a comparable stylistic tradition, because the development of a scribal hand is dependent on the script style a manuscript is written in. The notion of style employed here is what Frank Moore Cross characterized

11 Schuller, “The Classification Hodayot and Hodayot-like,” 190.

12 Turner, “Recto and Verso,” 102–6.

13 Tov, “Corpus of the Qumran Papyri,” 97. Turner is not familiar with any horizontal or vertical ruling in literary papyri from Egypt, except occasionally in school exercises: Turner, *Greek Manuscripts*, 6. William A. Johnson however has identified a group of 13 papyri from Oxyrhynchus for which he argued that dots were used to arrange column alignment: *Bookrolls and Scribes in Oxyrhynchus*, 93–99.

as “a cluster of typological elements which have mutually influenced one another.”<sup>14</sup> Within the palaeography of the Dead Sea Scrolls, it is common practice to distinguish between formal and cursive traditions, with the semiformal character functioning as a subtype of the formal hand, and the semicursive as an “intermediate script.”<sup>15</sup> This means that scribal hands should be analyzed within their particular development and compared with manuscripts that stand in a comparable typological tradition. The two hands that are under scrutiny here belong to different traditions, but are parallel in time.

### 3.1 4Q255

We begin our analysis with 4Q255, a manuscript from the cursive tradition. Cross called the hand of 4Q255 a “crude early cursive script” and dated it to the second half of the second century BCE.<sup>16</sup> This date was supported by Metso and Annette Steudel, who both examined the handwriting of 4Q255.<sup>17</sup> Metso characterized the hand of 4Q255 as “very irregular” and pointed towards the great variety in distance between lines.<sup>18</sup> Daniel Falk accepted the view that 4Q255 was written down first, in the last quarter of the second century BCE, followed by 4Q433a about fifty years later.<sup>19</sup> Alexander does provide a palaeographic analysis of this hand, but reproduces Cross’s dating of 4Q255.<sup>20</sup> Ada Yardeni dated the manuscript to the first century BCE in her work on the documentary texts from the Judaean Desert.<sup>21</sup>

However, cursive hands are notoriously difficult to analyse and to place within a typological tradition. Alexander notes that the variety in the shapes of the *aleph* (see Appendix, section 1) shows similarity with the *alephs* found in the two Damascus Document manuscripts 4Q266 and 4Q273, which were dated by Yardeni to the first half or the middle of the first century BCE (4Q266) and to the end of the first century BCE (4Q273), up to a century later than Cross’s dating of 4Q255.<sup>22</sup> Milik considers 4Q266 part of the school of semicursive scripts, and suggests that the manuscript was written by a writer belonging to one of the next generations of scribes after 4Q98g, which he dates between

14 Cross, “Alphabets and Pots,” 349.

15 Cross, “Development of the Jewish Scripts,” 13.

16 Cross, “Paleographical Dates of the Manuscripts,” 57.

17 Metso, *Textual Development*, 19 n. 29.

18 Metso, *Textual Development*, 19.

19 Falk, “Material Aspects of Prayer Manuscripts,” 54 n. 76.

20 Alexander and Vermes, DJD 26:29.

21 Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic, Hebrew and Nabataean. Vol. A*, 251.

22 Baumgarten, DJD 18:26, 193. 4Q266 was radiocarbon dated by the Arizona AMS laboratory in 1994, which resulted to a calibrated age of 1σ: 5–80 CE and 2σ: 45 BCE–120 CE: Jull et al., “Radiocarbon Dating of Scrolls,” 11–19.

175 and 125 BCE.<sup>23</sup> This would probably be slightly earlier than Yardeni's dating, but still around the turn of the first century BCE. Be that as it may, the manuscripts that 4Q255 was compared with in previous scholarship were in majority dated to 100–50 BCE. This is indicative of the context in which the hand of 4Q255 can be located.

In addition to the *aleph*, it is instructive to also consider other letter forms. For comparison I will look at other manuscripts from the second and first centuries BCE that stand in a cursive or semicursive tradition, such as 4Q76, 4Q114, 4Q212, 4Q398, and 4Q448. Of special interest for our purposes here are the lower columns of the latter manuscript, which contains the prayer for a King Jonathan, who is thought to be Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BCE).<sup>24</sup> This identification led to the conclusion that this text was most probably written during Jannaeus's lifetime, early in the first century BCE.<sup>25</sup> This manuscript too was characterized as having been written "rapidly" and "carelessly," but it is especially the possibility of an internal dating, with 103 BCE functioning as a *terminus post quem*, that gives it a particular importance for the dating of the semicursive tradition.<sup>26</sup> The question is how the letter forms occurring in 4Q255 relate to those occurring in other semicursive manuscripts. The previously observed "crudeness" or "irregularity" of the hand of 4Q255 leads to a significant variety in letter forms, which frustrates this endeavour. Nevertheless, letters such as the *dalet* are written consistently enough to allow for comparison. Again, there is variety in its execution, but in lines 1, 4 and 6 of the second fragment we find *dalets* that are written in a typical '4'-shape, with a serif and the vertical and horizontal stroke touching each other at a right angle (see Appendix, section 1). This letter form already appears in 4Q76, which was dated to 150–125 BCE, but continues well into the first century, as may be observed in 4Q398 14, both in line 1 and 4 (see Appendix, section 2), and in 4Q114 2, in lines 2, 3

23 Milik, "Fragment d'une Source du Psautier," 102–3. Van der Ploeg, however, dated 4Q98g significantly later; to the second half of the first century BCE: Skehan et al., DJD 16:163.

24 Eshel, *Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hasmonean State*, 102–15; Eshel et al., DJD 11:404. Puech dated this hand palaeographically to around 50 BCE: Puech, "La Paléographie des Manuscrits," 100. Géza Vermes, however, identified the Jonathan of 4Q448 with Jonathan Maccabaeus and placed this manuscript in the second century BCE: Vermes, "The So-Called King Jonathan Fragment," 299–300. Yardeni leaves open the possibility that the prayer in the upper column was written by a different scribe. The analysis of the script of 4Q448 will for this reason be limited to the lower columns: Eshel, DJD 11:405.

25 Apart from the early first century BCE, 4Q448 was elsewhere also dated by Yardeni to the middle of the first century BCE: Qimron and Strugnell, DJD 10:29.

26 Eshel, 11:404–5.

and 4 (see Appendix, section 3).<sup>27</sup> We also find this form in the lower columns of 4Q448, though only two cases are readable there (see Appendix, section 4). The continuity of the letter form of the *dalet* over a number of manuscripts dated about a century from each other supports the position that the semicursive hand constitutes a distinct tradition. Within this tradition, the particular execution of certain letters demonstrates the individuality of the scribe.

The *he* we find in 4Q255 (see Appendix, section 1) is reminiscent of those encountered in the Nash papyrus and of one of the forms found in 4Q448.<sup>28</sup> Both 4Q255 and 4Q448 do not distinguish between final and medial *hes*, though several other semicursive manuscripts from the second and first century BCE do.<sup>29</sup> The *he* of 4Q255 has clear cursive elements, with the roof touching the right leg just below the top, and the left leg protruding downwards in a sharp angle. Cross evaluated this shape as an early form.<sup>30</sup> These semicursive *hes* however do endure in Qumran, as similar letter forms are also encountered well into the first century BCE, such as in the Aramaic Enoch fragment 4Q212, which was dated by Milik to the middle of the first century BCE (see Appendix, section 5).<sup>31</sup> Milik, however, does not provide a full palaeographic analysis. Cross places this hand slightly later, to 50–1 BCE.<sup>32</sup> Indicative for this dating of 4Q212 are *gimel*, which is written in one continuous stroke, the developed form of the *kaph*, the left downstroke of the *samek* that protrudes below the curving baseline, and the head and tail of the *qoph*, which are drawn in one movement and anticipate the open *qoph* of the later Herodian periods. Indeed, the letter forms of 4Q212 are in comparison to 4Q255 rather developed. A dating to the second half of the first century BCE is also accepted by Loren Stuckenbruck.<sup>33</sup>

27 4Q398 was dated by Yardeni to the transition from the Hasmonaean to the Herodian period, which is generally placed in the 2nd half of the 1st century BCE: Qimron and Strugnell, DJD 10:29. Puech dated this hand to around 50 BCE: Puech, "La Paléographie des Manuscrits," 100. Cross changed his mind on the dating of 4Q114 a few times. However, he returned to the dates of 100–50 BCE in the last edition of his study on the Jewish scripts, in which he places 4Q114 in the transitional period between the Hasmonaean and Herodian eras: Cross, "Development of the Jewish Scripts," 17, 31.

28 The Nash Papyrus is traditionally dated to the middle of the second century BCE: Puech, "La paléographie des manuscrits de la mer Morte," 100; Eshel, "Paleography of the Scrolls," 337; Cross, "Development of the Jewish Scripts," 15; Albright, "Biblical Fragment from the Maccabaeon Age," 149.

29 Eshel et al., "Qumran Composition Containing Part of Ps. 154," 224.

30 Cross, "Paleographical Dates of the Manuscripts," 57.

31 Milik, *The Books of Enoch*, 346.

32 Cross, "Development of the Jewish Scripts," 17.

33 Stuckenbruck, "The Early Traditions Related to 1 Enoch," 53.



Cross also remarked that the letter forms of *pe* and *shin* are developed. Indeed, the *pe* in both 4Q255 1 2 and 4Q255 2 3 is more angled and composed with a thickened head that seems to anticipate the curling of the head in later tradition (see Appendix, section 1). A similar form occurs in 4Q448 III 4 (see Appendix, section 4). The *shin* does miss the tick of the left stroke protruding below the base line that is present in most other manuscripts influenced by the cursive hands. 4Q255 also shares with 4Q448 the loop of both the *vav* and the *yod*, which according to Yardeni would become a typical feature of cursive manuscripts from the Herodian period.<sup>34</sup>

Overall the hand of 4Q255 resembles the Murabba'at Ostrakon 72. In general some caution is required when comparing handwriting on papyri and ostraca, because it is possible that letter forms are influenced by writing material. However, in the case of cursive hands the scarcity of material obliges us to consider every source we do have. Particularly Mur 72 seems to be rather close to the cursive tradition. The ostrakon was dated by Milik, on the basis of observations by Jean Starcky, to the first half of the first century BCE.<sup>35</sup> However, Cross criticized the decision by Starcky and Milik to compare this ostrakon with Palmyrene and Nabataean inscriptions. Cross prefers comparison with the Nash papyrus and concluded with regard to Mur 72 that "no feature of the script requires a date later than ca. 100 BCE, and the ostrakon may be considerably earlier."<sup>36</sup> Yardeni dates the ostrakon to the late second or early first century BCE. Regarding the relation of the hand of 4Q255 to Mur 72, it is easy to get distracted by the cursive influences, but some letter forms of 4Q255 seem to be typologically more developed. The single occurrence of the final *mem* is smaller in size and also the *shin*, *he* and *ayin* encountered here can all be found in later manuscripts.<sup>37</sup>

In summary, I conclude that several features in 4Q255 allow for comparison with hands from the first century BCE: the semicursive manuscripts 4Q212, 4Q398 and 4Q448. Some reservation is appropriate regarding absolute dates, but this would place this hand rather at the far end of the time frame suggested by Cross of the second half of the second century BCE. A dating around 100 BCE seems therefore preferable.

34 Eshel et al., DJD 11:404–5.

35 Milik, DJD 2:172–73 and plate 52.

36 Cross, "Development of the Jewish Scripts," 39 n. 184.

37 As illustrated by the palaeographic charts in Yardeni: Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic, Hebrew and Nabataean*. Vol. B, 177, 199, and 209.

### 3.2 4Q433a

We now turn to the hand on the recto of this manuscript, the Hodayot-Like Text, 4Q433a. There has been little scholarly reflection on the palaeography of 4Q433a, but the hand was dated by Schuller to 75 BCE, without providing a full palaeographic analysis.<sup>38</sup> If we compare this hand to 4Q255, it is apparent that 4Q433a is written in a much more precise, one might even maintain elegant, hand that shows a certain waviness in curvy strokes that run diagonally. 4Q433a is written in a semiformal character, a style that is very distinct from the cursive script of 4Q255. The emergence of semiformal writings in the Jewish script is usually thought to have occurred in the early second century and can be recognised by the flowing, curvy writing style with influences from both formal and cursive characters. Admittedly, the presumed date of emergence of this script is influenced by the scarcity of material from the third century. 4Q109 (Qohelet<sup>a</sup>) and 4Q504 (Words of the Luminaries<sup>a</sup>) are considered to be the earliest semiformal hands.<sup>39</sup>

The majority of the letter forms are typically Hasmonaean: the *kaph* is written with a small head, the *nun* with a long base stroke, and the *gimel* with a curved right leg. Noticeable are furthermore the ends of the descenders of the *tav*, which both bend in, and the quite developed *shin* that curves in. There is inconsistency in the execution of the *shin*: in particular on the first fragment we notice a few examples in which the left stroke curves out below. The big *ayin* and long *qoph* seem to foreshadow later developments. It is very difficult to distinguish between the *yod* and *vav*. Most letters are fairly equally sized. There are several occurrences of letters touching each other, such as in frag. 1 5 and frag. 2 5, which creates a flowing line (see Appendix, section 6). Interestingly, the handwriting maintains big final *mems* and *tavs* (see Appendix, section 6), which is indicative of earlier hands. The final *mem* will shorten throughout the Hasmonaean period, but is here still long and with a curved base stroke that is reminiscent of the early semiformal hands of 4Q109 and 4Q504. The medial *mem* has curved corners, while the angles in later Hasmonaean *mems* are usually sharper and written with a straight downstroke.

Overall, the handwriting of 4Q433a is distinctly different from 4Q109 and 4Q504, which both were dated to the first half of the second century BCE. Schuller observed that this hand is very similar to the Hasmonaean semiformal papyrus manuscripts in the Baillet volume: 4Q485, 4Q487, 4Q500, 4Q503,

38 Schuller, DJD 29:238.

39 Cross, "Development of the Jewish Scripts," 22; Ulrich, DJD 16:221–26; Baillet, DJD 7:137–68.

4Q509 and 4Q512.<sup>40</sup> With some variety, all of these manuscripts were dated by Baillet within the first fifty years of the first century BCE. 4Q503 and 4Q512 were dated slightly earlier (4Q503 “qui peut dater de 100 à 75 avant J.C.” and 4Q512 “au début du 1<sup>er</sup> siècle avant J.C.”), while 4Q509 was dated a bit later (“environ 70–60 avant J.C.”).<sup>41</sup> I agree with Schuller that this Baillet volume group forms the time frame in which 4Q433a must be located, with the large final *mems* suggesting a date towards the turn of the first century.

It is doubtful whether it is possible to date manuscripts on purely palaeographic grounds to timespans of ten years. The career of a scribe in the ancient world could have continued over a significantly longer period than a decade. In the current state of research it is unfeasible to date an individual manuscript to a particular period within the development of the scribe’s hand.<sup>42</sup> In the case of 4Q433a, a palaeographic dating to the early first century BCE is to be preferred to a dating to a particular year or decade.<sup>43</sup>

From this palaeographic analysis I conclude that 4Q255 and 4Q433a can both be dated to the early first century BCE. Since both texts are roughly contemporary it is therefore not possible to determine on the basis of handwriting alone which side of the opisthograph was penned first.

#### 4 Codicological Consideration

Palaeographic datings are not conclusive if we wish to establish the relationship between 4Q433a and 4Q255. When investigating how the two compositions are related, other characteristics have to be taken into account. Therefore I will assess the quality of the scribal hands of both compositions as well as codicological features that are specific to papyrus manuscripts. But before doing so, it is necessary to briefly recapitulate the discussions in the opening

40 The classification of 4Q505 as either a part of Festival Prayers (4Q509) or an independent copy of Words of the Luminaries is disputed and this manuscript is therefore left out here: Chazon, “The Classification of 4Q505.”

41 Baillet, DJD 7:105, 184, 262.

42 From the Elephantine papyri, for example, we are familiar with the scribal activities of Haggai son of Shemaiah (446–400 BCE), who first acted as a witness in a contract dating from 446 and in the years from 437 to 400 wrote six other documents. Haggai remains visible in the written record for a period of 46 years: Porten and Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents*, 189.

43 Even a palaeographer like Cross did not date to a specific decade: “... the palaeographer can often fix a characteristic book hand within fifty years in terms of absolute dates, or even to a generation in terms of relative (typological) relationships.” Cross, “Development of the Jewish Scripts,” 6.

sections of this article. In the first section I gave an overview of the scholarly disagreement as to which composition is written on what side and concluded that 4Q433a is undoubtedly written on the recto, with the papyrus fibres running in the horizontal direction. This side is normally reserved for the earlier text. Dating 4Q433a after the Serekh copy on the verso would make this the only such papyrus opisthograph from Qumran. In the case of all other Qumran opisthographs, either the recto was dated before the verso, or both texts were inscribed at the same time.

In the previous sections we have observed that, on the basis of palaeography, there are no secure grounds to date 4Q433a before 4Q255. Both sides of the opisthograph can be dated to the early first century BCE. Furthermore, the recto containing 4Q433a is written in a much more elegant hand than 4Q255, encountered on the verso. This fact on its own does not exclude the possibility that 4Q255 could have been written earlier than 4Q433a. However, this would present us with a scenario for which there is no precedent among the manuscripts of the Judaean Desert. In no other instance do we have a neat hand writing a text in a formal or semiformal character on the back of an earlier, crudely written text of a cursive or semicursive character.

This puts into question previous assessments of this manuscript claiming that 4Q255 would have been written on the recto of the scroll. According to this argument, the rather neat script of 4Q433a would have been written later on the verso of a text which had been written by a messy, crude or irregular hand. Over against this unconvincing reconstruction I would argue differently. That is, the combined palaeographic (examining both the date and quality of the scribal hands) and codicological approach (assessing which side is the recto) expounded on above suggests that 4Q433a was written on the recto of this manuscript before 4Q255 was penned on the verso.<sup>44</sup> It is not possible to establish how much time would have passed between the inscribing of the two sides. This is also important for our understanding of the scribal activity of the presumed community behind the Dead Sea Scrolls: the exemplar that was thought to be the oldest copy of a Serekh text was written in a careless, cursive hand on the back of a liturgical text.

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44 Alexander proposed the tentative suggestion that 4Q433a would have been written earlier, without assessing its palaeography: Alexander and Vermes, *DJD* 26:28.

## 5 4Q255 as a Personal Copy

The reconstruction of opisthograph 4Q433a/4Q255 as put forward in the previous paragraphs indicates another aspect of this scroll: namely, that this is an indication of a personal copy. This corresponds to a more general observation in scholarship regarding ancient opisthographs as evidence for personal copies.<sup>45</sup> However, there are some caveats to bear in mind. One should not categorize all compositions encountered on opisthographs from Qumran a priori as personal copies.<sup>46</sup>

Michael Wise defined personal copies as “copies that did not ordinarily circulate publicly and that were not produced by scribes.”<sup>47</sup> Other characteristics put forward by Wise when identifying personal copies concern (1) the quality of the hand and (2) the quality of the writing material. With regard to the quality of the hand, Wise notes that it should neither be completely unskilled nor of the calibre of the calligraphic book hand. Concerning the quality of the material, Wise suggests that over the course of time relatively cheap papyrus leaves became the preferred material for personal documents.<sup>48</sup> The opisthograph of 4Q433a/4Q255 meets these criteria.

Falk argued that “the cursive script, the use of coarse papyrus, frequent lack of space between words, and lines of writing which are not straight, evenly spaced, or parallel to the fibres all suggest that this was a personal copy.”<sup>49</sup> I would suggest that, in addition to its cursive script, also the fact that the text is written on the back of a different composition, in this case a liturgical one, points towards a personal copy. The ease with which one could make extracts of a second text on the reverse side of an old manuscript makes the

45 As suggested by, for example, Falk, “Material Aspects of Prayer Manuscripts,” 50; Brooke, “Between Scroll and Codex?” 123; Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt*, 76; Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 57 n. 49; Wise, “Accidents and Accidence,” 130. The possibility that 4Q255 was a personal copy was already proposed in the official publication: Alexander and Vermes, DJD 26:30.

46 It seems, for example, problematic to classify the leather opisthograph 4Q460/4Q350 as a personal copy. 4Q460 is a narrative work or prayer written in a semiformal hand dated to the first half of the first century BCE. A fragment of this manuscript was torn off and inscribed with 4Q350, a barely readable Greek text that is thought to have been written during or after the revolt of 66–70: Cotton, DJD 36:294–95. See also Popović, “Roman Book Destruction,” 249.

47 Wise, “Accidents and Accidence,” 125.

48 Brooke, however, has recently argued that the motivation to choose papyrus as the medium for a literary text might have been more complicated: Brooke, “Choosing Between Papyrus and Skin,” 119–35.

49 Falk, “Material Aspects of Prayer Manuscripts,” 54.

opisthograph the manuscript form par excellence suitable in the context of personal use.

Falk in his discussion of different types of manuscript reuse distinguishes two main forms: (1) “Instances where the reuse signifies that the original text is defunct” and (2) “where it is a case of creating a collection of valued works.”<sup>50</sup> In the case of the second form of reuse, inscribing the verso does not mean that the recto was not in use anymore, but rather that the scribe intended to keep these texts together. This is indicated by similar/compatible genres and close dates of copying. Among the opisthographs, Falk identifies five such collections of valued writings, of which he considers 4Q503/4Q512 “the clearest example.”<sup>51</sup> Indeed, not only the structure and content of both texts are similar (including identical prayer formulae), but also their orthography, palaeography and scribal practices.

In Falk’s eyes, also 4Q433a/4Q255 is as an example of such a collection. This opisthograph however seems to be a less evident case than 4Q503/4Q512. Since Falk assumes 4Q433a is written “a generation or two” after 4Q255, he concludes that “It is difficult to imagine that the person who copied the second side would not equally value the account of the contents on the first side.”<sup>52</sup> George Brooke argued that for this opisthograph the presence of several liturgical compositions on one manuscript could be indicative of an intentional collection.<sup>53</sup> 4Q255 is usually not read as a liturgical composition, but Brooke notes that the combination of these two texts on one single scroll “might reflect a link of some sort; possibly both were texts for the *Maskil*.”<sup>54</sup> Falk also states that “the compositions on both sides are associated with the *Maskil*, the authoritative instructor and liturgical master of the community.”<sup>55</sup> However, it should be noted that the *Maskil* is not mentioned in 4Q255, which would make this association tentative.

The intertextual relations between 4Q433a/4Q255 are not as strong as those between 4Q503/4Q512. 4Q433a/4Q255 consists of two different texts of different genres. Schuller has classified 4Q433a as a “hymn” or as “some type

50 Falk, “Material Aspects of Prayer Manuscripts,” 51.

51 Falk, “Material Aspects of Prayer Manuscripts,” 52.

52 Falk, “Material Aspects of Prayer Manuscripts,” 55.

53 As remarked by Brooke: “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.” Brooke, “Choosing Between Papyrus and Skin,” 129–30.

54 Brooke, “Choosing Between Papyrus and Skin,” 129.

55 Falk, “Material Aspects of Prayer Manuscripts,” 55.

of extended sapiential-type reflection or instruction.”<sup>56</sup> The four fragments of 4Q255 on the other hand seem of a different nature: the first two follow the general introduction of the first column and the description of the annual ceremony of the third column of 1QS very closely. Fragment three seems to be a different version of the treatise of the two spirits, while the fourth fragment remains unidentified.<sup>57</sup> The majority of the texts found on papyrus opisthographs from Qumran are associated with a liturgical function. 4Q255 is one of the few compositions where this is not the case, which makes it doubtful if we can still categorize this manuscript as a “collection.”

So how should we then understand this opisthograph? As far as analysis on the basis of content permits the reconstruction of the use of individual compositions, it seems that two forms of reuse occurred in relation to 4Q433a/4Q255: (1) scribal reuse of the scroll, and (2) functional reuse, which signifies reuse in a different context. The first form is clearly demonstrable: 4Q255 is written in a different style by a different scribal hand on the back of the papyrus scroll. The second form seems to be related to what Falk, as we have seen above, identifies as reuse signifying “that the original text is defunct.” While a liturgical background for 4Q433a is plausible, 4Q255 seems to have been a personal copy, which could be an indication that the text was (1) the object of personal study, (2) still in its phase of composition,<sup>58</sup> (3) the product of note-taking by scholarly readers of the scrolls,<sup>59</sup> or (4), as proposed by Brooke, was stored in an archive or perhaps a personal collection.<sup>60</sup>

More comparative investigation is required before we might be able to establish what personal use in the context of 4Q255 precisely entails. This, however, does not prevent us from concluding that the opisthograph 4Q433a/4Q255 provides a crucial insight into the process through which the scribes of the Dead Sea Scrolls interacted with their material and reused manuscripts with a different function in a different context.

56 Schuller, “The Classification Hodayot and Hodayot-like,” 193.

57 Metso, *Textual Development*, 18–21.

58 Charlotte Hempel proposed that 4Q255 could have been “an early draft of what we now find in the opening columns that was produced with the intention of supplementing existing Serekh material such as is preserved at the start of the short text in 4Q258 (S<sup>d</sup>):” Hempel, “The Long Text of the Serekh,” 11.

59 Popović, “Reading, Writing, and Memorizing Together.”

60 Brooke, “Choosing Between Papyrus and Skin,” 129–30.

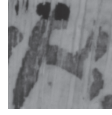
## Appendix: Letter Samples from Discussed Manuscripts<sup>61</sup>

### Section 1: 4Q255

Aleph



*Frag. 3 3*

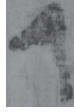


*Frag. 3 5*



*Frag. 3 8*

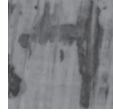
Dalet



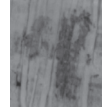
*Frag. 1 1*



*Frag. 3 1*



*Frag. 3 4*

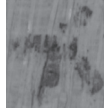


*Frag. 3 6*

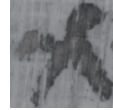
He



*Frag. 1 3*



*Frag. 3 4*



*Frag. 3 4*

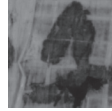


*Frag. 3 5*

Pe



*Frag. 1 2*



*Frag. 3 3*

### Section 2: 4Q398

Dalet



*Frag. 14 1*



*Frag. 14 2*

### Section 3: 4Q114

Dalet



*Frag. 2 2*



*Frag. 2 3*



*Frag. 2 4*

61 The images of individual letters were taken from the high-resolution multi-spectral images of the Dead Sea Scrolls that 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.



## Section 4: 4Q448

Dalet

*Col. III 4*

Pe

*Col. III 4*

## Section 5: 4Q212

He

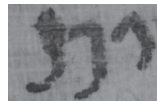
*Frag. 1 15**Frag. 1 20**Frag. 2 22**Frag. 2 25*

## Section 6: 4Q433a

Final Mem

*Frag. 3 1**Frag. 3 3**Frag. 3 6*

Final Tav

*Frag. 3 6**Frag. 4 6*

Flowing Line

*Frag. 3 5*

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