

Ignoring, Engaging, or Incorporating Non-Provenanced Aramaic Fragments in Secondary Source Publications and Research Projects

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Sifting Souvenirs from Authentic Fragments

The surge of “new” texts said to be associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls seventy years after the initial Qumran discoveries has provided both exciting prospects for new research on select authentic artefacts as well as underscored ethical and theoretical problems related to how we identify fraudulent items in modern collections and their associated published editions. This task requires an openness to asking difficult questions, entertaining potentially unsettling answers, and scholarly dialogue. These materials, however, also present challenges for knowledge uptake and mobilizing the textual data in question. Simply put, where can we locate opportunities for fresh lines of inquiry or spaces for discovery and which objects would we be wise to acknowledge yet sidestep so as not to compromise the integrity of the analyses and syntheses undergirding our academic projects?

This is precisely the situation in which I find myself. I am in the thick of a research project culminating in a commentary on a cross-section of Aramaic texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls, some of which are known by non-provenanced fragments in private and institutional collections. While I had hoped this paper would provide an opportunity to draft a simple excursus on the texts in question—that is, the approach of merely pointing to the elephant in the room before exiting the side door to start the real tour through the Qumran material—as I waded further into this issue and the slowly rising bibliography on the topic it became apparent that such a synthesis was premature. At present, there remain too many unresolved issues or unknown details to permit a clean delineation and clear summary. For the moment, the elephant seems to have blocked my escape route! It strikes me that we need far more conversations such

as those we're having today and high-level evaluative publications before that type of trickle-down effect is possible. To that end, I will retain the focus of my paper as advertised but direct it a tier above my original target. I have spent the last several months drafting a journal article that takes the pulse on the attendant textual, material, and ethical issues that converge on the non-provenanced Aramaic texts that moves toward assigning degrees of confidence on the origins and authenticity of individual items. The goal is to create a resource for my colleagues working on ancient Jewish Aramaic literature as well as to establish a foundation for my own eventual summary of issues, texts, and outcomes geared towards the broad readership of a commentary.

This paper provides a snapshot of this article in process. Following a short survey of the state and scope of Aramaic fragments in the private or institutional collections, I will present the salient points of two brief case studies that represent the broad spectrum of potential outcomes from plausibly authentic and reasonably provenanced to suspicious items of questionable content and origin. At the close of the study, I will highlight critical issues entailed in finding a reasonable way forward for engaging these non-provenanced texts in ongoing studies.

The Representation of Aramaic Texts in Private or Institutional Collections

The most elusive and fabled Aramaic item in our conversation is an alleged scroll of *I Enoch* reported by John Strugnell in a controversial 1994 interview with *Biblical Archaeology Review*.¹ Strugnell said the full tale would be told in his memoir—at the time, all he disclosed to *BAR* Editor Hershel Shanks was at one point being shown an “Enoch microfilm” by a prostitute and his subsequent attempts to acquire it during the Kuwait crisis.² This drama-laden hint to the existence of an Enochic scroll fueled subsequent references to the so-called “Angel Scroll”

¹ Hershel Shanks, “An Interview with John Strugnell: Ousted Chief Scroll Editor Makes His Case,” *BAR* 20/4 (1994).

² Shanks, “An Interview with John Strugnell,” 46-47.

reported to exist in select journalistic outlets in 1999. Once again, however, the fabled item is shrouded in mystery. One might even call it “fake news”—as a Canadian, I am able to make that pun! So far, chasing these unicorns across the Judean Desert has not netted firm results or details —although, I was surprised to find the “Aramaic Enoch Scroll” benefits from its very own page on Wikipedia.³

More recently and reservedly, Emanuel Tov summarized the state of Aramaic texts in private and institutional collections. He wrote, “The Museum of the Bible collection of thirteen fragments contains no Aramaic texts, which is not exceptional, considering that the Qumran caves contain only fourteen percent of such texts alongside a majority of Hebrew texts (86%). By comparison, the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary collection of eight texts contains one Aramaic text (Daniel), and The Schøyen Collection of thirty-three contains at least two such texts. The other collections contain no Aramaic texts.”⁴

This observation points in the right direction yet may be tailored and improved in many respects. Of those collections that have been published (Schøyen and MOTB) or the general contents of which have been disclosed in advance of full publication (SWBTS, Azusa Pacific University, and other reports of private collections), there are a total of 16 non-provenanced fragments of relevance here. These include texts of Daniel (5 frgs.), *I Enoch* (3 frgs.), Tobit (2 frgs.), and *Genesis Apocryphon* (4 frgs. constituting a single wad), with an additional 2 fragments of unknown or unidentifiable works. Note also that I include fragments identified with Hebrew Daniel and Nehemiah, since they relate to the study of hybrid Hebrew/Aramaic compositions or sets of works (3 items). As is evident from this table, the data is in many places incomplete: some items are yet to see full publication, others are known items in private

³ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aramaic_Enoch_Scroll

⁴ Tov, “Introduction, Text Editions, Collection,” *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fragments in the Museum Collection*, 10.

collections yet were pulled from final publication, and still others persist in their pseudo-unicorn mythical existence with little known information on their content or character.

While each item listed in the table could be the subject of its own case study—which is the nature of the project I am undertaking—in the time available I want to explore two published fragments of Daniel from the Schøyen and MOTB collections that relate to this larger enterprise. In the course of the descriptions, I will pursue two guiding questions to measure the fragments against a set of essential criteria. First, does the modern backstory of the fragment contain sufficient reliable details to reconstruct a plausible and traceable journey from discovery, to acquisition, to eventual publication? Here the concern is for positing *provenance*, or at least degrees of certainty regarding reported origins. Second, does the material evidence exhibit features that indicate its antique character or hint that it may be a modern forgery? Here, the criteria is of authenticity.

MS 1926/4a (Daniel 2:4-5) MS 1926/4b (Daniel 3:26-27) in the Schøyen Collection

Our first set of fragments are among the Schøyen collection and I believe were authentically penned in antiquity, were likely part of the original wave of modern discoveries in the Judaean Desert, and have a highly plausible chain of custody that suggests their provenance is close to, or on par with, the other original finds of the Dead Sea Scrolls. In short, these “new” fragments are in fact very old. I will argue that they make a tandem impact: they at once add textual data for the continued study of the Daniel tradition as well as perhaps provide new details on our discovery narratives of the Qumran finds, particularly cave one.

From the details recovered from Trever’s publications in the 1960s and the information related in the *Gleanings from the Caves* volume, it is possible to reconstruct a fairly reliable chain of custody for the fragments. In the briefest of terms, this involves correlating the following five pieces of information in a timeline. (1) Schøyen acquired what were thought to be

blank scroll fragments from the Trever family in 1994. (2) In a letter from Trever to Schøyen dated 11 February 1995, Trever indicates receiving such fragments as a reward from the Syrian Archbishop for his assistance in working with and photographing the scrolls. (3) Schøyen also claims the lot came with an inscription by Trever indicating the original receipt of the gift on 21 February 1948. This is where things get potentially interesting. (4) This date (February 21, 1948) does not coincide with that of Trever's imaging of 1QDan^{a-b} (which took place in April 7-9, 1949 at Yale); rather, it coincides with his historic photographing of the "Great Isaiah" and 1QS scroll from cave one (which took place in the ASOR building in Jerusalem). (5) Eventually, in March of 1995 Bruce Zuckerman and Marilyn Lindberg identified text of Daniel in this seemingly uninscribed wad of fragments.

While I have provided but a synopsis of essential points here for the sake of time, what I want to draw attention to is that while Trever did not know it at the time, the fragments he acquired for his assistance at ASOR were from 1QDan^{a-b}. If this connection is correct, and the dates provided in the documentation and reports are reliable—and therein lies the challenge of testimony—this would make the Schøyen Daniel fragment technically part of the first wave of scrolls recovered from the Judean Desert. If this proposal is accepted, we may have not only recovered new fragments for study but a new angle on our discovery narratives. This would suggest that the initial cave one finds included the remains of nine scrolls, not seven as is traditionally accepted, two of them being unrecognized though limited fragments of 1QDan^{a-b}.

Textually and materially, the Schøyen fragments of 1QDan^{a-b} also exhibit at least three important features suggesting their authenticity. First, the conditions and configuration of the fragments in a matted cluster associates the Schøyen texts with 1QDan^a and 1QDan^b, since these were found in an analogous state of being stacked together. Furthermore, the fact that the already

known Daniel materials were matted and clustered together with fragments of 1QLiturgical Prayers^b puts the Schøyen fragments within a degree of another known composition from cave one. Second, while the amount of text available for MS 1926/4a and MS 1926/4b is admittedly small, there is very little that would distinguish the scribal hands of the Schøyen fragments from their counterparts in 1QDan^a and 1QDan^b. Third, with respect to MS 1926/4b, the text in question can be reasonably positioned and correlated with a larger known fragment of 1QDan^b. As Davis and Elgvin demonstrated in the edition, the fragment benefits from an instructive, albeit minor, partial character overlap.

In all of these ways, the Schøyen Daniel fragments offer what is arguably our best case for both criteria: textually and materially they cohere with verifiably authentic items among the Qumran collection, their backstory has a plausible trajectory situating them alongside our earliest finds, and the reconstructed narrative of their chain of custody is beneficially informed by published accounts on related texts by a first generation scrolls scholar.

MOTB.SCR.003170 (Daniel 10:18-20) in the MOTB Collection

The second case for consideration moves across the spectrum to a fragment for which we know almost nothing of its origins and acquisition. Added to this, close inspection of its textual character and material quality raises several red flags of features that challenge its authenticity.

At the outset of the MOTB volume, Emanuel Tov lists the Daniel fragment among a lot of seven texts acquired for the Green Collection in May 2010. A single bullet point stating this is all that is provided. The text's editors (Robert Duke, Daniel Holt, and Skyler Russell) add the following comment and qualification in their own introduction to the fragment: "According to the seller, the fragment was purchased from the Ta'amirah Bedouin and its provenance was Qumran Cave 4. While this is not an unreasonable identification since many fragments were recovered by the Bedouin from Cave 4, its connection to this specific cave and to Qumran cannot

be made with any surety.”⁵ This note of caution is indeed well-warranted, yet perhaps not stated strongly enough. Unlike our previous case study that benefited from dates, names, correspondence, and a statement—albeit an apologetic one—from the collector himself, the backstory of the MOTB Daniel fragment is simply unstated and indeterminate in the edition.

The problematic nature of the fragment is amplified on account of several textual and material peculiarities that point towards its likely forged nature. These items are explained in greater detail in the draft of my article—indeed our colleagues today have already touched on some phenomena I will note. For the present purposes, I hope brief summaries will give a sense of the gamut of suspicious features inherent to the text that lead me to this conclusion.

First, the script of the fragment exhibits oddities in character formation. Following a palaeographic description, Ada Yardeni located the hand in the “first half to the mid-first century B.C.E.”⁶ Within this description, however, Yardeni also noted that the letters throughout exhibit “unequal tilt.” Some lean forward, others stand erect, and others are inclined backwards. This inconsistency and apparent “rudimentary [scribal] skills” is echoed by my colleague Kipp Davis summary of materials qualities of the MOTB fragments.⁷

Second, the fragment has irregular word spacing and inconsistent orientation to reasonably imagined horizontal lines. Note, for example, the awkwardly mashed together forms at the end of line two (עמי הַתְּחִזְקִתִּי) or the similarly economical placement of consecutive words beginning line three (הַיִּדְעַת לְמָה).

⁵ Duke with Holt and Russell, eds., “Daniel 10:18-20 (INV. MOTB.SCR.003170),” *Dead Sea Scrolls in the Museum Collection*, 200-209.

⁶ Yardeni, “Palaeography and Date,” *Dead Sea Scrolls in the Museum Collection*, 202.

⁷ Davis, “Palaeographical and Physical Features of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Museum of the Bible Collection: A Synopsis,” *Dead Sea Scrolls in the Museum Collection*, 26.

Third, related to word spacing, the convenient placement of a full-bodied and complete medial *mem* in the peninsular extension of the fragment in line 1 is certainly possible yet highly fortuitous (see form כְּמֵרָא]. This is indeed a feature we see in other questionable fragments such as Schøyen Deuteronomy (specifically MS 5214), Schøyen Tobit, and MOTB Jonah, to name a few.

Fourth, the relation of ink to surface damage is instructive. Regarding the partial form הַתְּחִזְקֵתִי at the left edge of line 2, the editors commented, “Its position is possibly problematic because it appears in a space where the surface is better preserved at the edge of the fragment and above lighter colored sections of damage where the line would be expected. *This could suggest a secondary hand sometime in history, including the modern era.*”⁸ In this same line, Kipp Davis observed “bleeding letters” (e.g., עַמִּיה in line 2), which is the effect of ink strokes seeping outside their frame due to being penned on poor quality or significant aged surfaces—potentially ones that remained uninscribed for the better part of two millennia.

Fifth, while the text hews closely to MT in most respects, it departs from it in a single variant reading in the partially preserved text of Dan 10:19 in line 2. At this point, MT reads a pair of imperatives: “be strong and strengthen yourself (חֲזַק וְחַזְקֵךְ)” As Duke, Holt, and Russel note, here the Septuagint reads ἀνδρῖζου καὶ ἰσχυε (NETS: “Be courageous and strong”), which they infer “lends support to the presence of two different words in the Hebrew *Vorlage*.” In view of this possibility they reconstructed and rendered the MOTB phrase as “Be strong [and strengthen yourself (חֲזַק וְחַזְקֵךְ)].” Remarkably, this very reading was proposed previously on a

⁸ Duke, Holt, and Russel, “Daniel 10:18-20 (INV. MOTB.SCR.003170),” 204, emphasis mine.

hunch in the critical apparatus of *BHS* as well as in a German commentary on Daniel by Karl Marti in 1901.⁹ Since Torleif Elgvin already explored this trend in our earlier session, I won't belabor the point here.

On their own the features described here in the MOTB Daniel fragment may not tip the scales of authenticity—yet it is the concentration of peculiar features and their convergence on a single, tiny fragment that gives call for concern. Added to this, the fact that several seeming anomalies occur here and in other pairs or networks of non-provenanced fragments further suggests its (or better, their) spurious nature. As such, I conclude that the present fragment is of highly questionable character and should neither be included in studies on the representation of Daniel in the Dead Sea Scrolls nor looked to for text-critical insight.

Conclusion

What I have presented in short form are the most pressing concerns and potential contributions that I see in but two texts related to Hebrew/Aramaic Daniel. The nature of the materials demands that each case be treated independently yet as noted throughout there are some trends that seemingly obtain in pairs or sets of non-provenanced texts (both within and beyond the Aramaic data). These and other issues are ones we need collectively to identify and develop an awareness of when making our own evaluations of non-provenanced texts. Additionally, we need to develop comparative data to measure peculiarities, enabling us to discern ancient scribal anomaly from indicator of modern forgery (e.g., instances of *BHS* readings). But does all of this really matter to anyone outside of this room? To close I will offer two reflections in the affirmative and comment on the work that lies ahead.

⁹ The note reads: prp c pc Mss וְהַתְּחִיל וְהַתְּחִיל.

(1) *The significance of the textual data.* As my colleague Martin Abegg highlighted, the textual data within all of the non-provenanced texts statistically represents 0.17% of the morphological forms of the biblical scrolls and 0.02% of the forms for the non-biblical data.¹⁰ The slice of the pie is small, but I would argue not insignificant. While Abegg applied these statistics in defense of the accusation of the “pollution” of database information, it strikes me that a more pressing and problematic issue comes with the secondary application of the data in these fragments for textual-criticism. On the one hand, the Schøyen Daniel texts are reliable and enable fine-tuning. On the other hand, the MOTB Daniel fragment was highly suspicious yet was lauded for its potential text-critical significance in the published edition even after the editors expressed concern over problematic material features and details of acquisition. While “pollution” is a strong word, it is greatly concerning that without proper adjudication readings of such materials could be integrated into a variety of projects conceivable (e.g., critical editions, bible translations, or any degree of commentaries that entail text-critical notes).

(2) *What the textual remains signify.* While the philological data contained in non-provenanced fragments present certain challenges, the fragments themselves also impact our understanding of the literary landscape of Qumran and Second Temple Judaism. While it cannot be the sole gauge of a work’s popularity, circulation, or authority, I still think that manuscript count at Qumran is meaningful. If so, these non-provenanced texts stand to make a positive or negative impact on estimations of the representation of compositions among the Dead Sea Scrolls. This is particularly the case in the study of the Aramaic texts as we are already dealing with a smaller data set within the Qumran collection. To illustrate the point with another Aramaic work, *if* the two non-provenanced fragments of Tobit are deemed authentic, this would

¹⁰ Abegg, comment response in “The Post-2002 Dead Sea Scrolls-Like Fragments and Bible Study Software” on the *Lying Pen of Scribes* project blog.

increase our number of Aramaic Tobit manuscripts by a half, or from four to six. Conversely, *if* they are fraudulent this surge in the statistics is hugely problematic.

I close with these reflections because they present the sort of questions pursued in articles, essays, encyclopedia, and books, or in my case a commentary. While these are *secondary* sources, they more than likely represent the first point of contact for scholars and students beyond our immediate guild of Qumran studies who are looking to take the pulse on the status of a given text at Qumran. As such, I hope that our work from this point forward builds on the scholarly erudition evident in the to-date publications of these non-provenanced fragments and critically yet clearly communicates the issues and outcomes of advanced discussions on origins and authenticity that have played out in higher-level publications.