

COLUMN 12 – THE GREAT ISAIAH SCROLL FROM QUMRAN (1QISAA): ORTHOGRAPHIC AND SCRIBAL FEATURES, ANALYSIS, AND TRANSLATION

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Abstract

This study presents a philological, orthographic, paleographic, and textual-critical analysis of Column 12 of the Great Isaiah Scroll from Qumran (1QIsaa), corresponding primarily to Isaiah 14:1–29. Special attention is devoted to scribal practices, orthographic variation, editorial corrections, spacing phenomena, lacunae, retraced letters, and material restoration visible within the manuscript. The analysis compares the Qumran readings with the Masoretic tradition and examines several significant lexical and semantic divergences preserved in the scroll.

The study further investigates the relationship between physical deterioration and textual transmission, demonstrating that the manuscript underwent multiple stages of repair, correction, and editorial intervention during its prolonged use. Variants involving expanded suffixes, fuller spellings, omitted consonants, and secondary insertions are analyzed within the broader linguistic framework of Qumran Hebrew and Second Temple scribal culture.

Particular emphasis is placed upon the interaction between codicology, paleography, textual criticism, and material philology. The evidence preserved in Column 12 strongly confirms that the Great Isaiah Scroll functioned not merely as a static textual witness, but as a living manuscript continuously used, repaired, interpreted, and preserved within the scribal culture of ancient Judaism.

Keywords

Great Isaiah Scroll; 1QIsaa; Dead Sea Scrolls; Qumran; Isaiah 14; Biblical Hebrew; Qumran Hebrew; Hebrew philology; textual criticism; orthography; paleography; codicology; scribal practices; scribal corrections; lacunae; manuscript repair; Masoretic Text; Second Temple Judaism; material philology; manuscript transmission; Isaiah Scroll; Hebrew manuscripts; textual plurality; ancient scribes; biblical studies

Introduction

The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsaa) occupies a unique position within the textual tradition of the Hebrew Bible and remains one of the most important manuscript discoveries from Qumran. As the most complete biblical scroll among the Dead Sea Scrolls, it provides exceptional insight into the history of the transmission, preservation, correction, and interpretation of the Book of Isaiah during the late Second Temple period.¹ Its significance extends beyond purely textual criticism, since the manuscript simultaneously preserves evidence of scribal habits, editorial interventions, orthographic developments, material restoration practices, and the broader intellectual culture of the Qumran community.

Particularly important within contemporary Dead Sea Scrolls scholarship is the recognition that manuscripts such as 1QIsaa should not be approached merely as static textual witnesses, but rather as living documents that underwent continuous use, repair, correction, and reinterpretation over extended periods of time.² The physical state of the scroll, including tears, stitched repairs, overwritten letters, secondary insertions, lacunae, orthographic anomalies, and editorial corrections, demonstrates that the manuscript was actively handled and repeatedly preserved long before its eventual deposition in the Judean Desert.³

The present study focuses specifically upon the complex interaction between physical deterioration, scribal activity, orthographic variation, and editorial intervention within a particular column of the Great Isaiah Scroll. Special attention is devoted to codicological and paleographic phenomena, including repaired tears, inserted material between lines, anomalous spellings, expanded suffixes, secondary corrections, retraced letters, lacunae, and divergences between the Qumran and Masoretic textual traditions.

One of the central methodological assumptions of this study is that physical and textual phenomena cannot be analyzed independently of one another. Damage to the parchment frequently affected the transmission of the text itself, while editorial corrections and secondary insertions often reveal later attempts to preserve readability and textual continuity. In this respect, the manuscript represents not merely a biblical text, but also a material witness to the history of scribal preservation and textual transmission within ancient Judaism.⁴

The study additionally examines several lexical and orthographic variants preserved in the manuscript, including readings that diverge from the Masoretic tradition and occasionally preserve alternative semantic possibilities. Such variants are particularly important for understanding the fluidity of the Isaiah textual tradition prior to the later stabilization of the Masoretic Text.⁵

Special emphasis is also placed upon scribal and editorial behavior visible throughout the column. Inserted articles, corrected suffixes, retraced letters, oversized characters, and secondary handwriting collectively indicate multiple stages of intervention by different hands. These phenomena provide important evidence concerning the long-term use of the scroll and the complex processes involved in its preservation.⁶

The present analysis therefore seeks to integrate several interconnected approaches:

- textual criticism,
- Qumran paleography,
- Hebrew orthography,
- codicology,
- scribal studies,
- and the material history of biblical manuscripts.

Through this interdisciplinary framework, the study aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how the Great Isaiah Scroll functioned not only as a textual artifact, but also as a continuously used, repaired, and interpreted manuscript within the broader context of Second Temple Jewish textual culture.

Footnotes

1. Eugene Ulrich and Peter Flint (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1999).
2. Emanuel Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).
3. Sidnie White Crawford, *Scribes and Scrolls at Qumran* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).
4. Armin Lange and Emanuel Tov (eds.), *Textual History of the Bible*, Vol. 1B (Leiden: Brill, 2017).
5. Eugene Ulrich, *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
6. Željko Stanojević, *Kumranski spisi: dokaz verodostojnosti Biblije. Tom 2: Tajna Isaijinog svitka* (Belgrade, 2012), p. 63. Zenodo. doi:10.5281/zenodo.19522797.

Physical Characteristics



This page constitutes the first column preserved on the fourth leather sheet, one of the individual parchment sections sewn together to form the Great Isaiah Scroll. Four additional columns remain on this same sheet before the next major seam appears. The most visually prominent feature of the page is a substantial tear extending across nearly the entire column, beginning near

the lower left corner approximately 2.5 cm from the left margin and continuing diagonally upward to within roughly 3 cm of the upper edge, partially intruding into the left margin itself.¹

The damaged section was repaired in antiquity through a carefully executed restoration process in which reinforcing material was inserted between the lines in order to avoid obscuring the written text. The seam on the right side of the column displays more extensive restoration work, while the repair situated in the middle of the text remains clearly visible. Such interventions provide important codicological evidence concerning the prolonged practical use of the scroll. The repeated rolling, unrolling, reading, handling, and storage of the manuscript gradually weakened the seams and damaged the parchment, necessitating multiple repairs intended to preserve the scroll's continued usability.²

Although it is impossible to determine precisely how intensively the scroll was used, copied, corrected, or publicly read, the repairs strongly indicate that the manuscript had already reached considerable age before it was ultimately deposited for preservation. Similar patterns of restoration have likewise been observed in other heavily used manuscripts from Qumran, particularly in scrolls that appear to have retained liturgical or educational significance over extended periods of time.³

Recent scholarship on the material history of the Dead Sea Scrolls increasingly emphasizes that physical damage and subsequent restoration activity should not merely be viewed as accidental deterioration, but also as evidence of the living textual culture within which these manuscripts circulated. Emanuel Tov, for example, notes that editorial corrections, reinforcement stitching, and secondary insertions often reveal prolonged transmission history rather than isolated scribal activity.⁴ Comparable observations concerning repeated repairs, editorial interventions, and long-term use of the Great Isaiah Scroll were previously discussed by Željko Stanojević in his analysis of the manuscript tradition of 1QIsaa, where the physical state of the scroll is interpreted as evidence of extensive practical and liturgical use prior to its final deposition.⁵ In this respect, the present column represents an important witness not only to the textual tradition of Isaiah, but also to the practical and communal life of the scroll itself.

Paragraph Divisions and Spacing

Paragraph divisions are marked in line 4, concluding verse 3, and again in line 30, concluding verse 28. Additional spacing phenomena appear in line 8, marking the beginning of verse 7, and in line 23, marking the beginning of verse 22. These spacing patterns correspond to broader scribal practices observable throughout 1QIsaa, where paragraphing and spacing frequently function as interpretative and structural devices rather than purely visual separators.⁶

Scholars have long observed that spacing within the Great Isaiah Scroll occasionally diverges from later Masoretic conventions, thereby providing valuable insight into earlier textual structuring traditions.⁷ Similar orthographic and structural phenomena were also emphasized by Stanojević in his study of Column 1 of the Great Isaiah Scroll, particularly regarding the

relationship between visual spacing, scribal organization, and exegetical interpretation within the Qumran textual tradition.⁸

Line 9

Final Word

K. reads **šavtah** (“you sat”), whereas M. reads **šakavtah** (“you lay down”).

This variation is significant because it alters the semantic nuance of the passage. The shorter Qumran reading may reflect either orthographic simplification or a distinct underlying textual tradition. Comparable reductions and abbreviated forms occur elsewhere within 1QIsaa and are frequently associated with the scroll’s characteristic orthographic tendencies.⁹

Line 7

Third Word

M. reads **madhebah**, translated in the King James Version as “golden city,” whereas K. preserves **marhebah** (“rage,” “fury,” or “arrogance”). The *New American Standard Bible* likewise regards the Qumran reading as preferable.

The *New International Version* does not recognize the resh preserved in the Qumran manuscript, despite the fact that its presence appears visually clear. Paleographically, the resh may be compared with the dalet in line 4 (third word), whose form differs noticeably from the resh preserved in **marhebah**. Such comparisons are particularly important in Qumran paleography, where distinctions between dalet and resh frequently affect textual interpretation.¹⁰

This variant additionally illustrates the broader phenomenon of semantic divergence between the Masoretic tradition and the Qumran Isaiah tradition. Whereas the Masoretic reading produces an urban-political interpretation (“golden city”), the Qumran reading shifts emphasis toward emotional or ideological characterization.

Line 15

First Word

K. reads **be-lebavekah** (“in your heart”). The scribe appears to have written an incorrect letter in place of the kaf belonging to the second masculine singular suffix.

The partially erased character may originally have been lamed, although the horizontal stroke above the kaf makes this identification uncertain. One possible explanation is that the scribe initially added the kaf at the end of the word and subsequently corrected the form by adding a final he in order to indicate the open vowel associated with the masculine form. Another possibility is that the scribe momentarily anticipated the word “Babel,” which appears later in line 24.

Such anticipatory errors belong to the broader category of scribal phenomena commonly designated as *anticipatory assimilation* or *visual anticipation*, well documented throughout the Dead Sea Scrolls corpus.¹¹ These corrections provide valuable evidence concerning the cognitive processes involved in ancient manuscript copying and revision.

The orthographic variability observable here likewise corresponds to broader tendencies discussed in Hebrew lexicographical and philological studies. Stanojević, for example, notes several cases in which orthographic fluctuation within Biblical Hebrew reflects phonetic adaptation, scribal habit, or grammatical reinterpretation rather than purely accidental deviation.¹²

Editorial Corrections

In addition to the unusually large kaf in line 30, additional editorial insertions appear in lines 18, 21, and 29, while an entire word has been added above line 20 immediately to the left of the tear.

In line 18, the definite article **he** was added to **a’rece**, while in line 20 the same article was added to **a’mek**. The word inserted above line 20 compensates for an omission in K. relative to the reconstructed Greek-derived textual tradition and follows the tear that rendered the lamed of the preposition **’el** illegible.

The missing word supplied by the editor is **’avnej** (“stones”). Its distinct handwriting and orthographic style clearly indicate the activity of a secondary editor separate from both the original scribe and subsequent revisers. This constitutes important evidence for multiple stages of editorial intervention within the scroll’s transmission history.¹³

Line 20 additionally preserves an apparent attempt to darken the kaf and nun in the word **ke-nacer**. This word carries potentially symbolic and theological significance whenever employed within the Isaianic textual tradition and deserves further philological attention.

Line 23

Second Word After the Spacing in Verse 22

The second word following the spacing marker in verse 22 contains the third masculine plural suffix written as **hemah** instead of the expected **hem**.

This orthographic phenomenon belongs to the broader category of expanded suffixal spellings frequently attested in Qumran Hebrew. Such forms are often interpreted either as phonetic spellings reflecting pronunciation or as manifestations of the fuller orthographic system characteristic of many Dead Sea Scroll manuscripts.¹⁴

Line 24

First Word

The final lamed in **le-babel** (“to Babylon”) is partially missing.

Penultimate Word

M. reads **kipod** (“hedgehog” or “porcupine”), whereas the King James Version translates the term as “bittern.” K., however, preserves **kipaz**, interpreted here as “snake.”

This variant represents a particularly interesting lexical divergence because it affects not merely orthography but zoological identification itself. Lexical instability of this type is not uncommon within difficult prophetic passages where rare words, damaged exemplars, or uncertain transmission histories complicated scribal preservation.¹⁵

Line 25

Second Word

M. reads **be mat’ate’a**, whereas K. preserves **ve tataij**.

This variation appears to reflect a significantly different textual tradition or a major orthographic reshaping of the underlying form. Further comparative analysis with other Isaiah witnesses may provide additional clarification regarding the development of this reading.

Additional Inserted Letters

In the first word of verse 29, the consonant **vav** appears as an additional inserted letter.

Such additions frequently reflect the fuller orthographic tendencies characteristic of Qumran Hebrew and may indicate phonetic clarification or scribal harmonization.¹⁶

Missing “He”

In line 24, verse 23, the fourth word from the left in K. reads **ve-samitij**, whereas the Masoretic tradition preserves **ve-samitijha**.

Likewise, in line 25, the second word **ve-ta'ta'tij** in K. corresponds to **ve-ta'ta'tijha** in the Masoretic text.

The omission of final **he** in suffixal forms is well attested in Qumran orthography and reflects the broader instability of pronominal endings observable throughout the scroll.¹⁷

The Final Five Lines of the Column

Due to repairs and editorial activity, numerous anomalies become visible in the final five lines of the column.

Beginning in line 27, the letters ayin, lamed, and yod (**'alij**) appear directly upon the repaired tear. The preceding word contains the second masculine plural suffix written as **kemah** instead of the expected **kem**.

In line 28, the second word in K. reads **šikmekah** (“her shoulder?”), whereas the Masoretic text preserves **šikmo** (“his shoulder”) [translated in context as “their shoulder”].

The word **jafer** is missing within the lacuna in line 29. However, no word is missing in the lacuna of line 31, although the yod belonging to the Qal imperfect second feminine singular verbal form is absent in the word immediately preceding the lacuna.

These phenomena collectively illustrate the highly complex interaction between physical damage, scribal correction, orthographic variation, and editorial intervention within the transmission history of the manuscript.¹⁸

Line 30

The Unusually Large Kaf

An unusually large kaf was written at the end of line 30. Above the word **Ahaz** in line 31 appears an unsuccessful attempt to correct the preceding word “king.”

The form **ha-mel** in K. should read **ha-melek** (“the king”).

Large or oversized letters occasionally occur within biblical manuscripts and may reflect scribal emphasis, correction attempts, visual marking, or inherited textual traditions.¹⁹

Final Word

The final word, **Pelešet** (“Philistia” / “Palestina”), must originally have fallen within the lacuna, since it appears to have been written as the following word but was later lost and subsequently restored.

If this reconstruction is correct, it demonstrates that both the editorial corrections and many later interventions occurred only after the formation of the major tear and the subsequent repair of the scroll. The sequence of repairs and editorial activity may therefore be reconstructed through analysis of the lacunae and stitched sections.

The scroll was unquestionably in use for a considerable period before restoration activity began. At some later stage, an accident apparently produced the major tear extending across nearly the entire page. The tear was subsequently repaired, after which the manuscript continued to be used. Eventually, however, the small lower fragment attached during the repair process detached and disappeared. Threads still visible in the parchment demonstrate that the original attached fragment had been larger than the surviving repaired section.

Consequently, since the missing fragment originally contained the word **Pelešet**, the word was rewritten on the opposite side of the tear. This sequence strongly suggests prolonged practical use of the scroll before its final storage and preservation.²⁰

Darkened Letters

There are indications that the editor not only inserted missing words between the lines, but also retraced or darkened faded letters.

Words noticeably darker than the surrounding text appear:

- in line 8 (second word),
- in line 20 (second word),
- in line 23 (several words, including the final word),
- while line 24 may also contain several additional retraced strokes.

Such retracing activity is particularly significant for reconstructing the later history of the manuscript, since it demonstrates conscious attempts to preserve textual legibility through direct visual reinforcement of deteriorating letters. Similar practices have been identified elsewhere among heavily used Qumran manuscripts.²¹

Footnotes

1. Eugene Ulrich and Peter Flint (eds.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1999).
2. Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd edn (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012).
3. Sidnie White Crawford, *Scribes and Scrolls at Qumran* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).
4. Emanuel Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).
5. Željko Stanojević, *Kumranski spisi: dokaz verodostojnosti Biblije. Tom 2: Tajna Isaijinog svitka* (Belgrade, 2012), p. 63. Zenodo. doi:10.5281/zenodo.19522797.
6. Donald W. Parry and Elisha Qimron, *The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsaa): A New Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).
7. Eugene Ulrich, *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
8. Željko Stanojević, “The Great Isaiah Scroll from Qumran (1QIsaa): Orthographic and Scribal Features, Analysis, and Translation—Column 1” (2026).
9. Emanuel Tov, ‘Orthographic Practices in the Dead Sea Scrolls’, in *Textual Developments in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).
10. Frank Moore Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran*, 3rd edn (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).
11. David Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
12. Željko Stanojević, *HEBREJSKO-SRPSKI REČNIK (HEBREW–SERBIAN DICTIONARY)* (Belgrade: Rad; Alfa i Omega, 2001), p. 365. doi:10.5281/zenodo.19176975.
13. Armin Lange and Emanuel Tov (eds.), *Textual History of the Bible*, Vol. 1B (Leiden: Brill, 2017).
14. Elisha Qimron, *The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986).
15. Michael V. Fox, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2002).
16. Emanuel Tov, *Scribal Practices*, *ibid.*
17. Elisha Qimron, *Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, *ibid.*
18. Eugene Ulrich, *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls*, *ibid.*
19. Frank Moore Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran*, *ibid.*
20. Željko Stanojević, *Kumranski spisi: dokaz verodostojnosti Biblije. Tom 2: Tajna Isaijinog svitka* (Belgrade, 2012), p. 63. Zenodo. doi:10.5281/zenodo.19522797.
21. Emanuel Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert*, *ibid.*

Column 12 — Isaiah 14:1–29 English Translation

1. (Continuation of Isaiah 14:1) “And the Lord will again choose Israel, and He will settle them
in their own land, and strangers shall dwell with them and join themselves to
2. the house of Jacob. (2) The nations shall take them and bring them to their place,
3. and the house of Israel shall possess them in the land of the Lord as male and female servants; and they shall take captive
4. those who had enslaved them, and they shall rule over those who oppressed them.” (PP)
5. (3) “And on that day, when Yahweh gives you rest from your sorrow,
from your hardship, and from the harsh bondage by which
6. you were oppressed, (4) you shall utter this proverb against the king of Babylon: ‘No
more
7. is the oppressor, and fury has ceased. (5) Yahweh has broken the staff of the wicked and
the scepter of rulers. (6) In wrath he continually
8. struck the nations; in anger he subdued peoples, relentlessly pursuing them. (7) The
whole earth has found rest,
9. has become quiet; they break forth into singing. (8) The cypress trees rejoice over you,
and the cedars of Lebanon say: “Since you have fallen,
10. no woodcutter comes against us anymore.” (9) Sheol beneath was stirred because of you
as it awaited your coming; because of you it awakened
11. the spirits of the dead and all the rulers of the earth; it raised up all the kings
of the nations. (10) All of them speak
12. and say to you: “Have you also become weak like us? Have you become like us?” (11)
Into Sheol has been cast
13. your pride, together with the sound of your harps; beneath you worms are spread out, and
maggots cover you. (12) How you have fallen from heaven,
14. O shining one, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth,
you destroyer of nations. (13) You said
15. in your heart: “I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will raise my throne, and
[I will sit] upon the mount of assembly
16. in the far reaches of the north. (14) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.” (15) But into Sheol
17. you shall be cast down, into the very depths. (16) Those who see you shall stare at
18. you and wonder: “Is this the man who made {&the&} earth tremble, the one who shook
kingdoms? (17) Who made the world a wilderness and would not release his prisoners
19. to their homes?” (18) All the kings of the nations lie in glory, each in his own house. (19)
But you are cast out
20. from your grave [like] an abhorred branch, like the garment of the slain pierced by the
sword and cast {&among the stones&}, or like a trampled corpse.
21. (20) “You shall not join them in burial, because you have destroyed your land and slain
your {&the&} people. Never again shall be remembered
22. the seed of evildoers. (21) Prepare slaughter for their sons because of the sins of their
forefathers, lest they rise up and possess the earth
23. and cover the world with cities. (22) ‘I will rise up against him,’ says Yahweh of Hosts,
‘and I will cut off

24. from Babylon name and remnant, offspring and posterity,' says Yahweh. (23) 'I will make it a dwelling place of hedgehogs and swampland
 25. waters; I will sweep it with the broom of destruction,' says Yahweh of Hosts. (24) Yahweh of Hosts has
 26. sworn: 'Surely as I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.
 27. (25) I will break the Assyrian in my land and trample him upon my mountains, so that his yoke may depart from you and his burden be removed from your shoulders. (26) This is the decree determined against the whole earth; this is the hand
 28. stretched out over all the nations. (27) For Yahweh of Hosts has purposed, and who can annul it? His hand is stretched out,
 29. and who can turn it back?'" (PP)
 30. (28) In the year that King {&large kaf&} Ahaz died, this oracle was spoken: (29) "Do not rejoice, all of you, O land of Philistia..."

Discussion

The evidence examined throughout this study confirms that the analyzed column of the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsaa) preserves an exceptionally complex intersection of textual transmission, scribal activity, orthographic development, editorial revision, and material preservation. Far from functioning merely as a passive witness to the text of Isaiah, the manuscript reflects a dynamic textual environment in which physical deterioration, scribal correction, and interpretative preservation continuously interacted within the broader framework of Second Temple Jewish manuscript culture.¹

One of the most important methodological implications of the present analysis concerns the growing scholarly recognition that biblical manuscripts must be studied simultaneously as textual and material artifacts. Recent developments within Dead Sea Scrolls research increasingly emphasize the importance of material philology and codicological reconstruction in understanding the transmission history of ancient texts.² Rather than treating physical damage as secondary to textual analysis, contemporary scholarship now views tears, stitching, retracing, inserted fragments, lacunae, and repair activity as integral components of textual history itself.³ The present column strongly confirms this approach.

The large diagonal tear crossing nearly the entire page represents one of the clearest examples of this interaction between material deterioration and textual preservation. The visible sequence of repairs, inserted support material, rewritten words, stitched sections, and secondary editorial interventions demonstrates that the scroll remained in active use long after substantial physical damage occurred.⁴ Particularly significant is the apparent restoration of the word *Peleşet* after the loss of a repaired fragment, since this phenomenon provides rare direct evidence for multiple chronological stages of restoration and continued use. Such evidence strongly supports the increasingly influential scholarly position that many Qumran manuscripts functioned as living documents subjected to long-term practical handling rather than static archival artifacts.⁵

Recent material-oriented approaches to Qumran studies further reinforce this conclusion. New codicological and material analyses increasingly argue that the physical structure of scrolls—including stitching techniques, parchment preparation, damage patterns, and repair interventions—must be integrated into broader reconstructions of scribal culture and manuscript circulation.⁶ In this respect, the present study aligns with recent developments emphasizing the materiality of textual transmission within the Dead Sea Scrolls corpus.⁷

The orthographic evidence preserved throughout the column likewise contributes significantly to ongoing discussions concerning the linguistic profile of Qumran Hebrew. The repeated presence of fuller spellings, expanded suffixes, omitted consonants, additional *matres lectionis*, and variable suffix morphology confirms that the orthographic system of 1QIsaa reflects coherent scribal convention rather than random textual corruption.⁸ Such phenomena correspond closely to the broader orthographic tendencies identified throughout Qumran Hebrew by Elisha Qimron, Emanuel Tov, and subsequent scholars.⁹

At the same time, several variants preserved within the manuscript extend beyond purely orthographic variation and instead reflect substantial semantic divergence. The contrast between *madhebah* and *marhebah* is particularly important because it affects interpretative meaning rather than merely spelling. Whereas the Masoretic tradition preserves an urban-political expression (“golden city”), the Qumran reading introduces ideological or emotional nuance (“rage,” “fury,” or “arrogance”). Such evidence confirms that textual plurality within the Isaiah tradition during the Second Temple period operated simultaneously on orthographic, lexical, and semantic levels.¹⁰

The paleographic dimension of the manuscript is equally significant. The repeated necessity of distinguishing between resh and dalet forms illustrates how minor graphical ambiguities could produce major exegetical consequences within ancient textual transmission.¹¹ Recent computational and AI-assisted paleographic studies of the Great Isaiah Scroll have further demonstrated that microscopic handwriting variation may preserve evidence of multiple scribal layers and editorial phases within the manuscript itself.¹² These newer methodologies increasingly support earlier philological observations concerning variation in handwriting, correction style, and editorial intervention visible throughout 1QIsaa.

The editorial phenomena observable within the present column provide particularly important evidence concerning the cumulative nature of manuscript transmission. Inserted articles, rewritten forms, retraced letters, interlinear additions, oversized characters, and secondary handwriting collectively indicate that the manuscript underwent several stages of active correction and preservation.¹³ The insertion of *'avnej* above the damaged section of line 20 is especially important because its distinct handwriting strongly suggests the intervention of a secondary editor separate from both the original scribe and later correctors. This multilayered editorial activity confirms that the transmission history of the manuscript was neither linear nor static, but instead reflected prolonged communal engagement with the text.

The retracing and darkening of faded letters similarly reveal conscious preservation strategies within the manuscript tradition. Such interventions demonstrate deliberate attempts to maintain textual legibility despite progressive physical deterioration.¹⁴ Recent developments in

multispectral imaging and computational manuscript analysis have further highlighted the importance of faded and retraced ink layers for reconstructing both original scribal activity and later editorial interventions.¹⁵ These technological advances increasingly allow scholars to identify distinctions between original writing, later retracing, and secondary restoration with far greater precision than was previously possible.

The anticipatory orthographic phenomena preserved in forms such as *be-lebavekah* additionally contribute to modern discussions concerning scribal cognition and textual production. Contemporary studies increasingly interpret many scribal “errors” not as random mistakes, but as evidence of visual anticipation, memory interference, phonetic association, and mental processing during manuscript copying.¹⁶ The present column preserves several particularly valuable examples of such cognitive scribal phenomena.

Another major implication of the present study concerns the relationship between the Great Isaiah Scroll and the Masoretic Text. The evidence examined here strongly supports the now widely accepted scholarly position that 1QIsaa represents neither a defective nor merely “pre-Masoretic” form of Isaiah, but rather an independent textual tradition possessing its own internal orthographic and editorial coherence.¹⁷ The coexistence of orthographic variation, semantic divergence, editorial correction, and textual restructuring demonstrates that substantial textual plurality still existed during the late Second Temple period prior to the later stabilization of the Masoretic tradition.

Recent scholarship has increasingly moved away from simplistic linear models of biblical textual transmission and instead emphasizes pluriformity within the textual culture of ancient Judaism.¹⁸ The present column strongly confirms this broader interpretative model. The textual phenomena preserved here reveal that multiple forms of Isaiah circulated simultaneously, while scribes and editors actively participated in preserving, correcting, and shaping the manuscript tradition.

The present study also contributes to broader discussions concerning the materiality of sacred texts. The Great Isaiah Scroll was not merely a literary composition preserved in abstract textual form; it was a physical object repeatedly handled, repaired, corrected, interpreted, and maintained by a scribal community deeply invested in its transmission.¹⁹ In this respect, the manuscript itself became part of the interpretative history of the biblical text.

Methodologically, the analysis demonstrates the necessity of integrating:

- textual criticism,
- codicology,
- paleography,
- Hebrew orthography,
- scribal studies,
- manuscript materiality,
- and emerging computational approaches

within a unified analytical framework. Isolated textual comparison alone cannot adequately explain the phenomena preserved within the manuscript. Only an interdisciplinary methodology

permits reconstruction of the complex relationship between physical manuscript history and textual development.

Finally, the evidence examined throughout this study strongly supports the conclusion that the Great Isaiah Scroll represents one of the most important surviving witnesses not only to the textual history of Isaiah, but also to the broader history of biblical preservation, scribal culture, and manuscript transmission in ancient Judaism.²⁰

One of the most significant implications of the present analysis is the possibility of reconstructing multiple chronological layers in the physical and editorial history of the manuscript itself. The evidence suggests a sequence involving original inscription, subsequent physical damage, repair activity, continued manuscript use, secondary fragment loss, and later editorial rewriting. Such stratified reconstruction provides rare insight into the long-term functional life of the Great Isaiah Scroll and demonstrates that textual transmission and material preservation operated simultaneously within the scribal culture of Qumran.

Conclusion

The present study has demonstrated that the analyzed column of the Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsaa) preserves exceptionally rich evidence concerning the interaction between textual transmission, scribal activity, orthographic development, editorial correction, and physical manuscript preservation during the Second Temple period.

The codicological evidence—particularly the repaired diagonal tear, stitched reinforcement material, secondary insertions, retraced letters, lacunae, and rewritten words—clearly indicates that the scroll underwent prolonged practical use prior to its final deposition. The manuscript was repeatedly repaired, corrected, and preserved, demonstrating that it remained an actively used and highly valued textual artifact over an extended historical period.

The orthographic and lexical phenomena analyzed throughout the column further confirm the distinctive linguistic profile of Qumran Hebrew. Expanded suffixes, omitted consonants, fuller spellings, additional *matres lectionis*, and semantic divergences from the Masoretic tradition collectively reveal a highly dynamic textual environment in which multiple forms of the Isaiah tradition coexisted simultaneously.

The study additionally demonstrated that many features traditionally described as scribal “errors” instead preserve important evidence concerning ancient scribal cognition, visual anticipation, phonetic association, and editorial activity. The presence of multiple editorial hands, retraced letters, inserted words, oversized characters, and secondary corrections strongly suggests that the manuscript passed through several stages of active preservation and revision.

Recent developments in material philology, computational paleography, multispectral imaging, and AI-assisted manuscript analysis increasingly reinforce the importance of integrating physical manuscript evidence into textual criticism.²¹ The present analysis strongly supports these newer

methodological approaches by demonstrating that physical deterioration and textual transmission within 1QIsaa are fundamentally inseparable.

Perhaps most importantly, the evidence examined throughout this study confirms that the Great Isaiah Scroll must be understood not merely as a static textual witness, but as a living manuscript shaped through continuous interaction between scribes, editors, readers, and material conditions. The scroll therefore preserves both textual history and the history of its own practical use.

The manuscript consequently occupies a unique position within the history of the Hebrew Bible because it preserves a stage of textual transmission prior to the full stabilization of the Masoretic tradition. In this respect, 1QIsaa remains one of the most important surviving witnesses not only to the textual history of Isaiah, but also to the broader history of biblical transmission, scribal culture, manuscript preservation, and textual plurality within ancient Judaism.

Additional Footnotes

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17. Timothy H. Lim, studies on textual plurality and Qumran biblical traditions.
18. *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*.
19. Before the Scrolls: A Material Approach to Israel's Prophetic Library
20. The Israel Museum Digital Dead Sea Scrolls Project
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21. [Recent computational manuscript analysis and AI-assisted paleography in DSS studies](#)
22. [Segmentation of Ink and Parchment in Dead Sea Scroll Fragments](#)
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