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*Studia Biblica Slovaca* je recenzovaný vedecký časopis zameraný na skúmanie Svätého písma Starého a Nového zákona predovšetkým zo stránky filologickej, historickej, exegetickej a teologickej.

Ročník VIII (2016), číslo 2

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Články časopisu sú abstrahované v troch svetových periodikách: *Old Testament Abstracts* ISSN 0364-8591, *New Testament Abstracts* ISSN 0028-6877 a *Elenchus of Biblica*.

S povolením Arcibiskupského úradu v Bratislave zo dňa 3. júna 2014

Prot. N. 2229/2014

***Studia Biblica Slovaca***

Printed in Slovakia, 12/2016.

Vychádza dvakrát do roka.

Cena: 6 €

**ISSN 1338-0141**

**EV 3744/09**

# Manuscripts and Authors of the Psalms

*Ian Young*

What are we reading when we pick up a copy of the Book of Psalms? It is natural for readers, accustomed to modern literature, to talk of the authors of the Psalms, and to discuss the way the language is used by the author of each psalm to express their thoughts. In this paper I will argue that while this is not completely wrong, understanding the nature of biblical books frames our understanding of the Book of Psalms in a different way.

## 1 Peculiarities in Manuscripts: 4QPs<sup>f</sup>

It is a well known phenomenon, when studying pre-modern manuscripts, that individual manuscripts have individual peculiarities. As one example, among Qumran manuscripts of the Book of Psalms, note the case of 4QPs<sup>f</sup>.

As is typical of Qumran Psalms manuscripts, 4QPs<sup>f</sup> has many variants when compared to the Masoretic Text (MT) of the Hebrew Bible. However, even in that group of highly variant manuscripts, it stands out. First, like other Qumran Psalms manuscripts, it includes psalms not found in the MT 150-psalm Psalter. Second, in the sections parallel to the MT Psalter, it has 88 complete words (graphic units) preserved and 75 partially preserved words, giving a total (halving broken words) of 125.5 words. There are 37 attested non-orthographic variants<sup>1</sup> or one variant every 3.4 words!<sup>2</sup> These variants involve 44 individual graphic units, meaning that 35.06%, or more than one in three, of the graphic units in sections shared with the MT are variant. This makes it one of the Qumran biblical manuscripts that vary the most from the MT.

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<sup>1</sup> Which might themselves involve more than one graphic unit. As we shall soon discuss, in this manuscript there are some other variants that arguably involve orthography, beyond the usual ones involving the letters *he*, *waw*, and *yod*.

<sup>2</sup> This is a modified version of statistics given in YOUNG, *Biblical Scrolls*, 98-99, 104-105, which did not halve broken words. Halving broken words, given that they range from one letter preserved to one letter missing, is a much more sensible procedure.

Among these many variants is a set that is, to my knowledge, unique to this manuscript. The occasional interchange of the sibilant letters, *samekh* and *sin*, is well known, and discussed further below. However, the preserved sections of this manuscript have six examples:

Text Reference	Manuscript Location	4QPs <sup>f</sup> Form	Regular Form <sup>3</sup>
Ps 22:15	Frgs. 1–2, 21	נ[מ]ש	נָמַס “it is melted”
Ps 107:29	Col. III, 21	שערה	סְעָרָה “storm”
Ps 109:4	Col. VI, 1	יסטמוני	יִשְׁטְמוּנִי “they accuse me” <sup>4</sup>
Ps 109:5	Col. VI, 1	יסי[מו]	וַיְשִׁימוּ “so they reward”
Ap Zion <sup>5</sup> 13	Col. VIII, 7	מסנאיך	מִשְׁנֵאֶיךָ “your adversaries”
Ap Zion 16	Col. VIII, 11	תסיגי	תִּשְׁגִּי “may you attain”

These forms involve both *samekh* to *sin* interchanges and the reverse, *sin* to *samekh*. Furthermore they are mixed in with forms which display the expected form of the sibilants:

Text Reference	Manuscript Location	4QPs <sup>f</sup> Form	Proximity to Interchanged Forms
Ps 107:10	Col. II, 10	אסיר[י]	In same psalm
Ps 107:15	Col. II, 19	חסידו	In same psalm
Ps 109:5	Col. VI, 2	ושנאה	Same verse; one line in manuscript from two interchanged <i>sin</i> to <i>samekh</i> forms
Ps 109:6	Col. VI, 3	ושוט[ן]	Next verse; two lines in manuscript from two interchanged <i>sin</i> to <i>samekh</i> forms <sup>6</sup>
Ap Zion 13	Col. VIII, 6	סביב	Same verse as interchanged <i>samekh</i> to <i>sin</i> form
Eschatological Hymn	Col. IX, 14	וישבעו	Different composition
Apostrophe to Judah	Col. X, 7	שמחה	Different composition
Apostrophe to Judah	Col. X, 7	שמחתכה	Different composition
Apostrophe to Judah	Col. X, 8	שמחה	Different composition
Apostrophe to Judah	Col. X, 8	שמחתכה	Different composition

<sup>3</sup> This is either the form in the MT, or of 11QPs<sup>a</sup> for the non-MT text involved. The English glosses reflect the NRSV translation of biblical verses, or the translations of non-biblical texts in SKEHAN et al., Psalms.

<sup>4</sup> Note that the scroll has a variant root שטם “to bear animosity against,” while still exhibiting the sibilant interchange.

<sup>5</sup> *Apostrophe to Zion*, also known from 11QPs<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> The appearance of the *waw* in this word means that this word is registered as a variant in DJD (MT: וַשְׁטָן), but the root seems to be the same.

The abovementioned data mean that well over a third of the forms with *samekh* and *śin* in 4QPs<sup>f</sup> exhibit an interchange between the two sibilants (6/16 = 37.5%, three out of every eight). Perhaps significant is that the interchanges are only found in certain works, psalms found in the MT, and the *Apostrophe to Zion*, also attested on 11QPs<sup>a</sup>. The other two works mentioned in the table consistently spell the *śin* correctly. However, the significance of this is unclear, especially given the repetition of the same word in the *Apostrophe to Judah*. Nevertheless, it is possible that the interchanges were found only in some compositions included on this scroll. If we just take into account the compositions with attested interchanges, then the interchanged forms are actually in the majority (6/11 = 54.55%).

Such interchanged forms have sometimes been considered very significant by scholars. Thus, in E. Y. Kutscher's classic *A History of the Hebrew Language*, he describes the merger of *śin* with *samekh*, pointing to the form סְכָרִים (for שְׁכָרִים) "they hire" in Ezra 4:5 as evidence that we "know when this process came to an end because especially in the later books of the Bible there appear several roots containing an original /ś/ spelled with a /s/"<sup>7</sup>.

This comment by Kutscher raises a number of issues. First, it seems to be based on insufficient data. In a preliminary survey of the attestation of the interchange in the MT, I found that a large proportion of the examples were in compositions that Kutscher would consider "early," such as the first part of Isaiah<sup>8</sup>. Apart from the example cited from Ezra, very few seem to be attested in the core so-called "Late Biblical Hebrew" books of Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles<sup>9</sup>. Perhaps Kutscher was influenced by the more common occurrence of this phenomenon in manuscripts of the Mishnah, which Kutscher mentions immediately following this quote, with the assumption that

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<sup>7</sup> KUTSCHER, *History*, 14. So too RENDSBURG, *Phonology*, 73, states that the interchange is "quite common in the exilic and post-exilic books. Thus we may conclude that the merger of /ś/ and /s/ occurred in Late Biblical Hebrew and continued in still later phases of the language". Rendsburg is in turn cited by REYMOND, *Qumran Hebrew*, 68-69 as the authority for the dating of the merger of *samekh* and *śin* in "exilic and postexilic books of the Bible". Neither scholar presents any evidence to back up this statement. Although Kutscher is not cited, perhaps Rendsburg's view derives from him.

<sup>8</sup> YOUNG, *Diversity*, 190-191.

<sup>9</sup> Several do come from the chronologically questionable and/or dialectally divergent Job and Song of Songs, and perhaps this has influenced Kutscher? Nevertheless, the point remains that there are more examples in Isaiah than in Ezra.

Biblical Hebrew was developing towards the form of language known in rabbinic sources.

Second, and more important for the current discussion, Kutscher's comment indicates his assumption that the details of the MT reflect the exact details of the language used by the author of the composition, in this case, the Book of Ezra<sup>10</sup>. If this were not the case, he could not use the text to date the termination of the sound change he is discussing<sup>11</sup>. However, consideration of this assumption in the light of the data from 4QPs<sup>f</sup> raises some problems. If we assume that *śin/samekh* interchange is a sign of late Hebrew, should we follow Kutscher's logic and argue that all the psalms evidencing the *śin/samekh* interchange in 4QPs<sup>f</sup> are therefore late? An obvious response to that suggestion is that, in light of other manuscripts of those psalms that do not have those features, the unusual linguistic forms in 4QPs<sup>f</sup> are simply peculiarities of that manuscript, and tell us nothing of the language and date of an original author.

Interchanges of *śin* and *samekh* are in fact not confined to this manuscript among the Qumran scrolls<sup>12</sup>. What seems unusual in this manuscript is the high concentration of them. The Qumran forms "are generally considered spelling errors"<sup>13</sup>. However, it seems to me to strain credibility that even partly trained "scribes had simply become confused as to the etymology of the words"<sup>14</sup>, when we are often talking about very common words. It may be better to assume that some scribes had a more relaxed attitude on the

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<sup>10</sup> Documentation of this assumption in Kutscher's works can be found in: YOUNG, 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, 103-105; YOUNG, *Patterns*, 391-392; REZETKO – YOUNG, *Historical Linguistics*, 69-70. This assumption is far from unique to Kutscher, as we document in REZETKO – YOUNG, *Historical Linguistics*, 68-71, 83-110, and as I shall discuss further below, so much so that older style scholarship on the language of the Hebrew Bible can be labelled the "MT-only approach". For the label and further discussion see YOUNG, *Ancient Hebrew*, and YOUNG – REZETKO – EHRENSVÄRD, *Do We Really* [posted 2016-04-22].

<sup>11</sup> Note that it is not my intention to question that this sound change happened. My focus is rather on the methodological issue of how the manuscript evidence is used in discussing questions of historical development in ancient Hebrew.

<sup>12</sup> See the data in QIMRON, *Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 24, 28-29; ABEGG, *Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 327; REYMOND, *Qumran Hebrew*, 69.

<sup>13</sup> REYMOND, *Qumran Hebrew*, 69; cf. QIMRON, *Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 29. To his credit, Qimron avoids talking in terms of chronology and includes both "the Bible and DSS Hebrew" as examples of "scribal lapse".

<sup>14</sup> REYMOND, *Qumran Hebrew*, 69-70.

question of spelling these sibilants etymologically<sup>15</sup>. Whether technically errors, or evidence of a more relaxed scribe, nevertheless, the main point is that such sibilant interchanges in the Qumran scrolls are treated by scholars as being due to scribal peculiarities.

If the unusual linguistic forms in 4QPs<sup>f</sup> are simply peculiarities of that manuscript, however, the next obvious question is: why would we think that the linguistic forms of the MT, such as the *śin/samekh* interchange in Ezra 4:5, are not also simply the quirks of the manuscript behind the MT? Is the MT special in some way?

## 2 The Decentralization of the MT

It has long been established among scholars of the text of the Hebrew Bible that the MT cannot be treated as the true text of the Bible compared to which all other texts are deviations (Kutscher's assumption). Ulrich has referred to this as "the decentralization of the MT as *the* text of the Hebrew Bible"<sup>16</sup>. The standard handbook on the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible by Tov expresses at the outset: "However, one thing is clear, it should not be postulated that **MT** better or more frequently reflects the original text of the biblical books than any other text"<sup>17</sup>.

In fact, there is substantial agreement between experts on the main points of a model of the emergence of the biblical text, one which stresses the fluidity of the text of the Hebrew Bible in antiquity. We may illustrate this by further quoting the standard works of Tov and Ulrich<sup>18</sup>. Tov states: "Most of the biblical books were not written by one person nor at one particular time, but

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<sup>15</sup> ABEGG, *Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 327 is perhaps more in line with this approach, since he talks of "variance" and "spelling conventions," rather than using the language of "error".

<sup>16</sup> See ULRICH, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 20 (italics in original) with reference to earlier bibliography.

<sup>17</sup> TOV, *Textual Criticism*, 12-13.

<sup>18</sup> Tov and Ulrich are chosen because they are widely considered pre-eminent experts in the field, including by each other, see e.g., TOV, *Textual Criticism*, 174, 182 etc; ULRICH, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 312-313. There are of course many other fine works representing current scholarship on the text of the Hebrew Bible, such as, recently, among many, CARR, *Formation*; MÜLLER – PAKKALA – HAAR ROMENY, *Evidence of Editing*; PAKKALA, *God's Word Omitted*.

rather over many generations”<sup>19</sup>; “The assumption of textual plurality in that period [i.e., of the Qumran scrolls] is now accepted among scholars”<sup>20</sup>; “The textual diversity visible in the Qumran evidence from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE onwards is probably not representative of the textual situation in earlier periods, when the text must have been much more fluid”<sup>21</sup>; “[T]he textual evidence does not point to a single ‘original’ text, but a series of subsequent authoritative texts produced by the same or different authors ... the original texts(s) remain(s) an evasive entity that cannot be reconstructed ... Some biblical books, such as Jeremiah, reached a final state more than once ... the original text is far removed and can never be reconstructed”<sup>22</sup>; “When creating new copies, scribes altered the transmitted text, first as authors/editors-scribes, and later as copyists-scribes. Editorial freedom ... is also reflected in changes in orthography and morphology”<sup>23</sup>.

Ulrich states: “[E]ach book is the product not of a single author, such as Plato or Shakespeare, but of multiple, anonymous bards, sages, religious leaders, compilers, or tradents. Unlike much classical and modern literature, produced by a single, named individual at a single point in time, the biblical books are constituted by earlier traditions being repeated, augmented, and reshaped by later authors, editors, or tradents, over the course of many centuries. Thus the text of each of the books is organic and developmental, a composition-by-multiple-stages, sometimes described as a rolling corpus”<sup>24</sup>. He states that it is an “undisputed fact” that “virtually all the books now recognized as the Hebrew Scriptures ... are the late literary results of a complex evolutionary process of composition”<sup>25</sup> and he states, “[w]ith a few possible minor exceptions, there is no non-rewritten Scripture”<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> TOV, *Textual Criticism*, 166.

<sup>20</sup> TOV, *Textual Criticism*, 186, n. 79.

<sup>21</sup> TOV, *Textual Criticism*, 166, n. 24.

<sup>22</sup> TOV, *Textual Criticism*, 167-169.

<sup>23</sup> TOV, *Textual Criticism*, 184.

<sup>24</sup> ULRICH, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 2.

<sup>25</sup> ULRICH, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 201.

<sup>26</sup> ULRICH, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 207.

### 3 Peculiarities in Psalm 103

Where does the current consensus on the history of the text of the Hebrew Bible leave us in regard to the distinctive features of the Psalms? I will illustrate the issues by looking again at a linguistic peculiarity. This time, however, the peculiarity is found in the MT.

The MT of Ps 103 is notable for having a clustering of the variant form of the second person singular feminine pronominal suffix יָךְ-. In this psalm, the longer form occurs five times, twice each in verses 3 and 4, and once in verse 5. The occurrence in verse 5, however, follows the one example in the psalm of the more common form יָךְ-. Just as we saw with Kutscher, many earlier scholars have taken these linguistic forms very seriously as evidence of the language of the original author of the psalm, which in turn may provide evidence of the author's date or background. Although it is not the only criterion, the "Aramaic" or "Aramaizing" suffixes in these verses are regularly the first (or only) forms cited when stating that "linguistic indications point to a late time" for the composition of Ps 103<sup>27</sup>. But how do we know that these peculiarities come from the "original author" and help to date the time of composition? The problem is brought to the fore clearly by another Qumran manuscript, 4QPs<sup>b</sup>.

4QPs<sup>b</sup> is one of the Qumran Psalms manuscripts with relatively more text preserved. It has 361 fully preserved, and 119 partially preserved graphic units to total 420.5 words. It is also one of the relatively less variant Psalms manuscripts, although still having 24 variants from the MT, to give one variant every 17.5 words<sup>28</sup>. It preserves all six of the second person feminine singular suffixes in Ps 103:3-5. However, in contrast to the MT, where five out of these six suffixes exhibit the less common form יָךְ-, in 4QPs<sup>b</sup> all six of the suffixes have the standard form<sup>29</sup>. Once we "decentralize" the MT, we cannot know which text preserves the earliest version of these textual details. Either Ps 103:3-5 had unusual suffixes which were subsequently deleted, or the

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<sup>27</sup> KRAUS, *Psalms 60–150*, 290; cf. e.g., BRIGGS – BRIGGS, *Psalms*, 324; DRIVER, *Introduction*, 374 n.; HURVITZ, *Transition Period*, 116-119. Even when not mentioned explicitly, these forms are undoubtedly in mind in more general statements such as that by FOHRER, *Introduction*, 291, in summarizing the date of Ps 103: "postexilic (presupposes Deutero-Isaiah, linguistic evidence)".

<sup>28</sup> Figures based on YOUNG, *Biblical Scrolls*, 98.

<sup>29</sup> Note that elsewhere in the manuscript, Ps 116:19 shares the less common suffix form with the MT (יָךְךָ "in your midst").

unusual suffixes were added later in the textual transmission of the chapter. The longer form of the suffix is typologically older, but also preserved as a regular form in Aramaic, so we cannot suggest whether one form or another argues for an earlier or later date. The unusual suffixes could be from an early dialect, a later dialect, or are due to (early or) late Aramaic influence as older scholars often suggested<sup>30</sup>.

Uncertainty in regards to whether unusual features of the text go back to the earliest phase of composition is not unique to this example. It is in fact the rule. The fluidity of the biblical text in the BCE period leads to the general expectation that less significant features of the text, such as linguistic features, were not transmitted with a high regard for accuracy. This expectation has been established as correct by recent work by Robert Rezetko and myself<sup>31</sup>. We have already seen examples in this article of cases where unusual textual features are not found in non-MT texts. Even within the MT itself, however, there is a very low proportion of cases where less common linguistic features are shared between two parallel texts. When we have a third parallel, as in 2 Kings 25:1-12 // Jeremiah 39:1-10 // Jeremiah 52:4-16, the number of shared unusual linguistic features drops to zero<sup>32</sup>. Although our research has focused on linguistic features, it seems likely to me that also in regard to a wider range of unusual poetic features of the psalms, features that mark individual poems as unique, we are not in contact with the earliest form of the text, never mind what left the pen of the “original author”. This topic deserves further investigation by scholars working on the Psalms. Among the very many variants in Psalms manuscripts, which things are most variable, and which are less variable?

We seem to have reached the point where I should lament the late and fragmentary nature of our textual evidence for the Hebrew Bible. It might be expected that I will next say: if only we had earlier manuscripts, we could know what the original autographs of the biblical books looked like. In fact, however, I am now going to suggest that to make this statement would be to miss the nature of the biblical books as ancient books.

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<sup>30</sup> Thus, not all scholars view these suffixes as Aramaisms in the strict sense of being due to Aramaic influence, see e.g., WAGNER, *Aramaismen*, 130.

<sup>31</sup> REZETKO – YOUNG, *Historical Linguistics*, 59-210, 413-591.

<sup>32</sup> YOUNG, *Ancient Hebrew*.

#### 4 “Authors” and “Scribes” of Biblical Poetry

In several recent publications, I have argued that each manuscript of a biblical book in antiquity was a performance of a community tradition where the exact wording was not as important as the effective conveying of what was understood to be the meaning of the tradition<sup>33</sup>. Thus, ancient literary manuscripts were not the repositories of fixed texts of compositions. Rather, each one of them contained a re-presentation of what was understood to be the essential meaning of the tradition as reflected in the written composition.

In formulating this approach, I have been very strongly influenced by recent work by scholars such as David Carr<sup>34</sup> and especially Raymond F. Person, Jr.<sup>35</sup> Person is himself influenced by an array of scholarship in fields ranging from ancient Egypt, Homer, and early Christian literature, to medieval literature such as the manuscripts of Old English compositions. In regard to Old English poetry, for example, Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe describes the situation thus: “Surviving Old English verse texts, whatever the circumstances of their composition, are collaborative products whose scribes have not merely transmitted the texts but have actually taken part in shaping them”<sup>36</sup>. Person points out the similarities between the way Israelite scribes seem to have treated the biblical text, and the way oral performers are documented to view the nature of language. He notes that for people (like us) with a literate mindset, a “word” usually means a specific graphic unit with a specific form. Thus, we consider the graphic units discussed earlier with variant spellings of sibilants, or different forms of suffixes, to be variants. However, it is documented that oral poets and people with an oral mindset see a “word” as a unit of meaning, and hence different grammatical forms or different formulations of poetic lines

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<sup>33</sup> YOUNG, *Dead Sea Scrolls*; YOUNG, *Original*; YOUNG, *Literature*. These comments apply to the situation before the emergence of more stable biblical texts, which I have argued occurred in the Hebrew tradition by the end of the first century CE, as shown by the biblical manuscripts from Masada, the Wadi Murabba’at, etc, see YOUNG, *Stabilization*; YOUNG, *Biblical Scrolls*; YOUNG, *Contrast*.

<sup>34</sup> CARR, *Writing*; CARR, *Formation*.

<sup>35</sup> PERSON, *Scribe as Performer*; PERSON, *Rolling Corpus*; PERSON, *Deuteronomical School*, 83-101; PERSON, *Deuteronomical History*, 41-68; PERSON, *Orality Studies*; PERSON, *Text Criticism*.

<sup>36</sup> O’BRIEN O’KEEFFE, *Visible Song*, 193.

are not variant as we, with our literate mindset, view them<sup>37</sup>. It is evident that the biblical authors viewed “words” as “units of meaning” in this way. For example, the ten commandments are actually, in Hebrew, called the ten “words” (Exod 34:28; Deut 4:13; 10:4).

We have already seen how the text-critical consensus, represented by scholars such as Tov and Ulrich, sees the biblical text as fluid in the BCE period, and understands the composition of the books as we now have them to be a complex process involving many hands. Person’s approach refines that, and emphasizes the role of each scribe as a performer of the community tradition. What this means is that each psalm does not have an author in the sense of one person who composed the exact form we have now before us, say in the MT. It is likely that many hands were involved in shaping and reshaping the texts.

What does this mean for the individual peculiarities of each of the psalms? On the one hand, we cannot understand them as giving us evidence of the form of the text that left the pen of an “original author”. While it is possible that some may have persisted, it is in general most unlikely that the specific details of the text are original. This rules out, for example, using the linguistic features of the MT as evidence to date the origin of the psalm in question, as we saw that scholars have tried to do in the past.

On the other hand, the individual peculiarities of our manuscripts do retain a high interest for us. Each manuscript is a different performance of the tradition. The particular way each text is presented, with certain peculiarities, represents what the scribe performers who last handed down the text thought was important. Thus, we still need to pay close attention to the details of the texts we have. We just should not consider any one textual performance to be the one, definitive one, nor should we imagine that any one manuscript represents the intentions of an “original author”. Such an approach will allow us to appreciate the artistry of not only one text of the psalms, but each text we are fortunate to have.

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<sup>37</sup> The presentation of a dichotomy between an “oral mindset” and a “literate mindset” in this paragraph is artificial, of course. We are talking about different ways of understanding written texts, with the help of observations of oral performers, not claiming a “great divide” between orality and literacy.

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### *Zhrnutie*

O starovekých rukopisoch je dobre známe, že spôsob, akým boli napísané, vykazuje svoje osobitosti. Dva takéto príklady sú rozobraté v článku. Ide o rozličné používanie dvoch sibilantných spoluhlások *samekh* a *šin* v Kumránskom rukopise 4QPs<sup>f</sup> a nezvyčajné používanie prípony ׀- pre druhú osobu ženského rodu v singulári v tradičnom masorétskom texte (MT) Žalmu 103. Oba prípady sú nezvyčajnými formami, ktoré nie sú doložené v kópii daného žalmového textu 4QPs<sup>b</sup>. Odborníci si všimli, že zatiaľčo sa uznáva, že rukopisy ako Kumránske zvitky majú svoje zvláštnosti, osobitosti MT sa vo všeobecnosti vnímajú, akoby pochádzali od „pôvodného autora“ kompozície. Ak vezmeme do úvahy decentralizáciu MT v súčasnom bádání textu Hebrejskej Biblie, bude lepšie chápať aj tieto formy ako jednoducho veľmi pravdepodobne predstavujúce písárske zvláštnosti. Takáto fluidnosť lingvistických črt je súčasťou širšieho fenoménu. V staroveku každý rukopis biblickej knihy bol produktom istej tradície komunity, kde presná formulácia nebola až natoľko dôležitá ako skôr efektívne vyjadrenie toho, čo sa považovalo za zmysel tradície.

*Kľúčové slová:* Žalmy, textová kritika, Kumrán.

### *Summary*

It is well known that pre-modern manuscripts have individual scribal peculiarities. Two examples discussed here are the distinctive treatments of the sibilants *samekh* and *šin* in the Qumran manuscript 4QPs<sup>f</sup>, and the unusual second person feminine singular suffix ׀- in the traditional Masoretic Text (MT) of Psalm 103, the unusual forms not being attested in the 4QPs<sup>b</sup> copy of the text. It is noted that while it is acknowledged that manuscripts such as the Qumran scrolls have individual peculiarities, in general the peculiarities of the MT have been treated as if they stem from the “original author” of the composition. Given the decentralization of the MT in recent scholarship on the text of the Hebrew Bible, it is better to treat these forms also as most likely simply representing scribal peculiarities. This fluidity of linguistic features is part of a broader phenomenon where each manuscript of a biblical book in antiquity was a performance of a community tradition where the exact wording was not as important as the effective conveying of what was understood to be the meaning of the tradition.

*Keywords:* Psalms, Textual Criticism, Qumran.

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