CHAPTER 2

A SURVEY OF THE PSALMS SCROLLS

This chapter introduces the real heroes of our book: the Psalms scrolls\(^1\) that have survived the ravages of time for some 2,000 years—though all too often, alas, in battered and fragmentary form. For each of these thirty-nine documents the following information is provided: the amount of text preserved, approximate date,\(^2\) format,\(^3\) orthographic character, and major differences in arrangement or content\(^4\) from the Masoretic Psalter (MT).\(^5\) For anyone dealing with ancient manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible, such data form a prerequisite for any serious research.

Four points may be noted at the outset. (a) Discussion takes place with frequent reference to the Map\(^6\) and Appendices 1–4,\(^7\) (b) The reader should also consult Plates I–X where appropriate; several of the photographs are published here for the first time.\(^8\) (b) The Psalms manuscripts are described in the following four groupings:\(^9\) Psalms Scrolls from Cave 1 and the Minor Caves at Qumran (2–3, 5–6, 8); those from Cave 4; those from Cave 11; and those found at other sites in the Judaean Desert.\(^10\) (c) Seven additional scrolls are described

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\(^1\) The term “Psalms scrolls” is used loosely, since some of the 39 manuscripts may not strictly qualify as such. In particular, the “Work with Place Names” (4Q522) contains Psalm 122 and at least one other composition whose overall theme is “Jerusalem, the Holy City.” Some may argue that this counts as a “manuscript containing a Psalm” rather than an actual “Psalms scroll.” The complex issue of what constitutes a Psalms manuscript will be examined further in Chapters 7–9; the more inclusive and general term is appropriate at this stage.

\(^2\) The date when the manuscript was copied, not the date of composition.

\(^3\) While one would expect manuscripts containing hymnic or poetic material like the Psalms to be written stichometrically, many are written in prose, and at least two preserve material in both formats (cf. section 8.6 below).

\(^4\) The most obvious differences between several Psalms scrolls and MT are variations in order of Psalms and variations in content (i.e. the presence or absence of entire compositions). These large-scale variants will feature prominently in the investigation of textual affiliations in Chapter 7. While individual verbal variants are also important (cf. Chapters 3 and 4), they will not be discussed here.

\(^5\) These large-scale variants, as well as the orthographic character of each manuscript, will largely be determined in relation to MT. While this is far from satisfactory on theoretical grounds, it is necessary because MT (as found in Codex Leningradensis B19\(^a\)) remains the practical standard for purposes of comparison (cf. the discussion of terminology in Chapter 1.4).

\(^6\) Preceding the Introduction.

\(^7\) “ ‘Apocryphal’ Psalms and Other Compositions” (APPENDIX 1); “Psalms Scrolls from the Judaean Desert” (APPENDIX 2); “Adjoining Compositions in the Psalms Scrolls” (APPENDIX 3); “Contents of the Psalms Scrolls by Manuscript” (APPENDIX 4).

\(^8\) The new photographs are 4QPs\(^a\) (pl. I), 4QPs\(^c\) (pl. III), 4QPs\(^d\) (pl. IV), and XHev/Se 4 (pl. VIII).

\(^9\) I have adopted this division because the great majority of the relevant manuscripts were found in Caves 4 and 11.

\(^10\) In addition to the Psalms scrolls from Qumran two were discovered at Masada and different sections of a third at Nahal Hever (Wadi Khabra). For discussion regarding this location and Nahal Še’elim (Wadi Seiyal), see 5.1 below.
under the heading “Other Relevant Manuscripts.” Even though no manuscript in this last group represents a Psalter, each is relevant since it quotes one or more verses from the Psalms. (d) Because they are so fragmentary, no indications of major differences from the Masoretic Psalter are evident for most of the smaller Psalms scrolls. However, this does not preclude the existence of such variation when these documents were complete. It is too readily assumed that every Psalms manuscript supports the arrangement found in the Received Text unless otherwise proven; but in the final analysis this procedure is unscientific and detrimental to research on the Dead Sea Scrolls and on the Book of Psalms.

1. Editions, Transcriptions, Listings, and Studies:


—. “Further Light on the History of the Qumran Sect,” *JBL* 75 (1956) 89–95, esp. 93–95 + plates III–VI.


Brooke, George J. *Exegesis at Qumran. 4QFlorilgeom in Its Jewish Context* (JSOT Sup 29; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985).


—. [For the editions of 4QPs²–⁹, see under Skehan.]


—. “Texts from Qumran Cave 11,” in Dimant and Rappaport (eds.), *Forty Years of Research*, 18–26. [see under Dimant]