Correlations might be enough for us, but it’s not evidence, you know—not enough to do anything with.
China Miéville, *The City & the City*

1. *Introduction*

Emanuel Tov’s assumption of a so-called “Qumran scribal practice” is largely inductive. Tov has collected many thousands, perhaps even tens of thousands, of small technical details pertaining to how the Dead Sea Scrolls and other texts from Antiquity were written. In his book *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert*, he explains the reason for collecting all these data:

These details are important in their own right for improving our understanding of these scribes and the compositions they copied. They should be added to the storehouse of knowledge relating to the biblical and nonbiblical compositions found in the Judean Desert.¹

The collection of all those data also enables the scholar to analyze possible correlations of different sets of data. Indeed, Tov’s work is full of observations, queries, and analyses of correlations. Sometimes these are simple observations, such as “that all the texts from Qumran written in the paleo-Hebrew script are inscribed on leather rather than papyrus.”² More often, one first needs to collect and analyze large sets of data before one can describe differences between scrolls, such as

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the varying size of the writing blocks of scrolls. With respect to this example, there are multiple correlations. There is a general correspondence between size of the composition and the height of a column. But some scrolls with a shorter column may have been used liturgically, which suggests that liturgical scrolls had a smaller format than other ones.3 Or one may correlate many different sets of data. For example, Tov studied in detail the character of the very large scrolls or *de luxe* editions, and analyzed relations between textual character, date, and number of corrections in the text. Tov’s work is full of analyses of such correlations, which shed light on the character of types of scrolls, but also on the practices of the scribes who wrote them. Some of those practices are related to the kinds of scrolls they wrote, for example, biblical texts or *tāfillin*. Other scribal practices may have been conventions of specific groups of scribes.

This paper addresses Tov’s construction and analysis of one such scribal practice, the one that he connects to the scribes at Qumran, who would have had a set of scribal conventions that was clearly distinct from that of other, nonsectarian, scribes. Tov refers to this scribal practice as the “Qumran scribal practice,” which is in part a statistical construction, based on analysis and reconstruction of correlations between many different sets of data, and in part an hypothesis or theory, inasmuch as it proposes an explanation of this construction. In fact, one can observe that even the statistical reconstruction itself is based on specific suppositions. I therefore call Tov’s “Qumran scribal practice” a scholarly construct, and, when we assess it, we can look both at the building blocks and at the way the building has been raised.

Tov’s “Qumran scribal practice” has been for many years a work in progress, gradually developing from its first tentative description in the 1980s4 to the more comprehensive formulation in his 2004 *Scribal Practices and Approaches*.5 This development was due to three factors. First, in the 1980s many scrolls, which during the 1990s and early 2000s

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5 This 2004 volume integrates more than thirty earlier published contributions, which have been edited to varying degrees. See idem, xx–xxi. See also my review of Tov’s volume in *DSD* 14 (2007): 368–72.