4QTAÑHUMIM (4Q176): BETWEEN EXEGESIS AND TREATISE?

Jesper Høgenhaven
University of Copenhagen

Within the context of Qumran literature, to describe any particular text (such as 4Q176) as “strange” or unusual or indeed as a unique document may seem either a commonplace or an exaggeration. Yet the fact remains that this manuscript does exhibit a number of features which make it stand out among the many manuscripts from Cave 4. This has to do with the scribal character of the manuscript—4Q176 bears the marks of two different scribal hands—and, above all, with its contents. 4Q176 is composed in part from an extensive series of scriptural quotations, most of which—if indeed all—are derived from the Book of Isaiah, and in part from non-scriptural passages. The literary nature of the latter and the relation to the scriptural quotations raise a number of intriguing and to a large extent unanswered questions. This study attempts to examine some of these questions and to suggest some tentative answers. A brief presentation of the manuscript precedes the analysis.

The Manuscript

4Q176 (as published in DJD V by Allegro) comprises 57 fragments. Fragments 1 and 2 can be joined with material certainty to form one large composite, preserving substantial remains of two consecutive columns of text. This composite shows two different and clearly distinguishable scribal hands. The first is found only in the extant parts of the first column. The second hand is found in frags. 1–2 col. II as well as in the rest of the manuscript.

From the remaining fragments, it is possible with a high degree of plausibility to reconstruct five columns of the original scroll. Of these five columns, some of col. I, all of column II and the greater part of col. III are made up of text known to us from the Book of Isaiah. In other words, a very considerable portion of the extant text is made up by a long apparently uninterrupted series of quotations which we can without much difficulty identify as passages from Isaiah 40; 41; 43; 44; 49; 51; 52; and 54.
Whether all the fragments Allegro assigned to 4Q176 do in fact belong to the same manuscript, has been a matter of some dispute. Menahem Kister has identified fragments 19–21 as belonging to a Hebrew copy of the Book of Jubilees. Kister’s identification, which is based on the material quality, the handwriting, and the palaeography of the fragments mentioned, has gained widespread acceptance among Qumran scholars.

4QTanhûumim exhibits two different scribal hands. The first of these (hand A) is confined to the preserved parts of frags. 1–2 col. I, while the second hand (hand B) is found in frags. 1–2 col. II and in the rest of the scroll. The combination of fragments 1–2 into one large composite with two consecutive columns is materially certain, so the occurrence of both types of handwriting within the same manuscript is not to be doubted. Both scribal hands may be characterized as belonging to a Hasmonean “semiformal” tradition with a number of “semicursive” elements. The number of “semicursive” elements is greater in hand B than in hand A, and in hand B they occur with increasing frequency in the later parts of the scroll. The palaeographical findings point to a tentative dating of the scroll in the first half or possibly the middle of the first century BCE.

---


3 In hand A we note the simplified, “semicursive” forms of the letters alef, šade and qof. In hand B we find cursive forms of gimel (which is curved, the left leg connecting near the middle of the right), tet (with a sharp angle at the bottom, and the right down-stroke curling into the base-stroke), and tav (which occasionally has the left down-stroke and the upper part of the right leg crossing). Strugnell described hand A as an “imitation” of the formal script carried out by a scribe used to the “semicursive” style. Hand B, according to Strugnell, is another “semiformal” script with “semicursive” elements, which becomes, in the later part of the scroll when the citations from Isaiah have ended, a standard “semicursive” (Strugnell, “Notes en marge,” 229). A more objective description of both hands would be to speak of “semiformal” styles with elements of “semicursive.” On the Hasmonean cursives and semicursives, see Frank M. Cross, “The Development of the Jewish Scripts,” in The Bible and the Ancient Near East (ed. G. E. Wright; Garden City: Doubleday, 1961), 133–202; Cross, “Palaeography and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years. A Comprehensive Assessment. Volume 1 (ed. Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 379–402, esp. 390–401.