The first stages of a discovery may sometimes give us a delusion about the character of the whole material. This can happen because the first finding may not be representative of the data about to be unearthed and published. As a case in point I would like to adduce the first scroll of Isaiah from Qumran (1QIsa⁴), published back in 1950 (portions of it were made known already by 1948).¹ As is well known, its scribal character, to begin with its orthography, is not at all representative of the Biblical scrolls from Qumran.² 1QIsa⁴ is an exception. By mere chance this atypical scroll appeared first in between the Qumran finds.

In my opinion, the same happened with 4Q51, usually termed 4QSam², with the aggravation that in this case its exceptional status was not so self-evident. The accepted name of the scroll tells it: it is the first scroll of Samuel to be deciphered and published; the first portions of it – in 1953, 55 years ago!³ But its character is dissimilar from the (other) 4QSamuel scrolls: it contains deviations from the MT and the LXX that do not obtain in any of the Samuel scrolls, perhaps do not show in any other Biblical scroll from Qumran.

Thus, let us not be too much impressed by the fact that for more than 50 years scholars call this particular scroll 4QSam or 4QSam².⁴ Let us try to make a new start. Let us ask in the first place, if what we have here is really a scroll of the Biblical book of Samuel or perhaps something else: a distinct composition which was based on the

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² The impact of Second Commonwealth Hebrew on the transmission of 1QIsa⁴ has been extensively studied by E. Y. Kutscher, The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa⁴), (STDJ 6; Leiden, 1974).


book of Samuel, but reworked it at times with novel intentions. If it intentionally elaborated the original material, this book should not be considered as a copy of Samuel, but rather as a kind of ancient commentary thereof.

I would like to suggest here that what has been termed up to now 4QSam is but a lost composition – *Midrash Sefer Shemuel*. The term *midrash* is used here according to its oldest Hebrew acceptation, present in the Book of Chronicles (2 Chr 13:22; 24:27): *midrash* there is a commentary⁵ that according to the fashion of those times rewrites older stories with the aim of restating the events to fit the concepts and taste of recent generations. This midrash on Samuel would be written towards the end of the Biblical period, about the fourth century B.C.E.; it preceded the Book of Chronicles, since it was used by the Chronicler in one point at least – the story of David’s census, the plague caused by it, and the building of an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah, 2 Sam 24.

We start right there, in 2 Samuel 24–1 Chronicles 21. Presently I reproduce the last reconstructed column from the publication of 4Q51 in the DJD series.⁶ This reconstructed column runs the story of the plague and the building of the altar, a story extant in 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21. I deviate from the reconstruction of the editors at a few points, yet these divergences do not affect the main argument presented below.

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⁵ Derived from the meaning of שָׁדַ֣דוֹ = to enquire, investigate, as in Deut 13:15; 17:4; 19:18; cf. Biblical Dictionaries. Isaac Heinemann (*Leshonenu* 14 [5706], 182–189), considered the development of the meaning שָׁדוֹ = ‘to interpret’ as relatively late.


⁷ 1 Chr 21:16–17.

⁸ 2 Sam 24:17a–b.