**Variants due to Graphical Similarity Evidencing a Bisection of 1QIsaa**

1QIsaa was one of the first scrolls discovered at Qumran. For this reason, and also because of its relative antiquity and the fact that it includes an almost-complete biblical book, 1QIsaa is one of the most-studied Dead Sea scrolls. One of the key questions that have been studied and which is also the focus of this lecture is the question of the scroll’s bisection; in other words: can we distinguish clearly between two of its parts: columns 1-27 (chapters 1-33) and columns 28-54 (chapters 33-66)? Most scholars who have studied the scroll distinguished between the two sections, first and foremost in light of a three-line gap at the end of column 27 – a unique occurrence which may be intended to demarcate two distinct sections of the scroll. As evidence supporting the scroll’s bisection, Abegg pointed to the width of the leather sheets at the end of each of the two sections of the scroll. These sheets are narrower than the other parchments in the scroll – each one contains two columns only (columns 26-27 appear on one, and 53-54 on the second), as opposed to the rest of the scroll’s sheets which each have three or four columns. Moreover, columns 27 and 28 are narrower than the other columns in the scroll, which could indicate that the scribe made a deliberate effort to conclude the first section of the scroll at the end of column 27.[[1]](#footnote-2)

The scroll’s text also points to its bisection: first, there is an orthographic shift between the scroll’s two sections. Although the shift is gradual, and does not appear drastically in column 28, an in-depth look at the scroll reveals a growing tendency to use plene spelling in its second half. Martin, for instance, has pointed out that plene spelling for the word כל is used only 90 percent of the time in the first half of the scroll, versus the word’s appearances in the scroll’s second half, which are all in plene spelling. In the case of the word כי this tendency becomes more obvious: plene spelling is used in only 20 percent of the appearances of the word in the first half of the scroll, versus 100 percent of the appearances in the second half.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Giese offered additional evidence of the bisection suggestion by looking at the frequency of omissions of basic letters from words in the scroll (basic letters are letters that function as a necessary part of the lexical form of the word: letters that are part of the root of a verb or part of the lexical form of a noun), as well as the frequency of corrected omissions of gutturals and haplographies. His findings indicate that the relative frequency of these corrections is greater in the first half of the scroll than in the second. He therefore concluded that the scribe copied from two different sources, one of which included chapters 1-33, and the other chapters 33-66. The first source was apparently less clear or precise, and as a result, some of the corruptions in the first half of the scroll were either inadvertently transmitted from the source or resulted from the source’s lack of clarity.[[3]](#footnote-4)

Some scholars have opposed the bisection of the scroll. First, the fact that there is no change in script between the two sections led many to question the assumption that they were written by different scribes. Martin, for instance, examined the scroll’s script and determined that it is uniform, except for some minor inconsistencies between specific columns. These inconsistencies are a natural occurrence when copying such a long scroll, which is a lengthy process that is influenced by the scribe’s condition and by the writing tools available to him.[[4]](#footnote-5) In addition, Kutcher and Pulikottil refuted the theory of the scroll’s bisection itself, and not just the claim that it was written by two different scribes. They attributed the orthographic differences to an inconsistency on the part of the scribe, who adopted plene spelling during the period in which he was copying the scroll.[[5]](#footnote-6)

In this lecture I intend to establish the bisection of the scroll by examining the relative frequency of variants due to graphical similarity in each section. I will show that the relative frequency of these variants is considerably greater in the first part of the scroll, compared to their frequency in the second part, in a way that is consistent with Giese’s findings which were surveyed above.

At the outset, I'd like to define precisely what I mean by the term “variants to due graphical similarity”, which will serve here to assess the scroll’s bisection. Interchanges of letters due to graphical similarity have been known since the beginning of biblical textual criticism. These interchanges were committed unintentionally by the biblical scribes who copied the books as part of the transmission process. Occasionally, they misidentified a letter and interchanged it with a different letter that was graphically similar. The interchange of letters due to graphical similarity can occur under various circumstances: sometimes the shape of the letters in Paleo-Hebrew or square script is so similar that they are virtually indistinguishable, which in some cases even requires the scribe to consider the context when deciding between the letters. Other times, letters share one or more element, so that any change or minor damage to the scroll can result in their interchange.[[6]](#footnote-7)

Among the letters that are interchanged due to graphical similarity, between the Masoretic text (MT) and 1QIsaa, one should mention the pairs of letters *wāw-yôd*, *bet-mem*, and *mem-nun*, which share another similarity in addition to the graphical one: in the case of *bet-mem* and *mem-nun* there is a phonetic similarity between the consonants they represent, and/or a semantic similarity between the prefixes (in the case of *bet* and *mem*) or suffixes (in the case of *mem* and *nun*) that they represent. Interchanges of the letters *wāw* and *yôd* could even result from an interchange in their roles as *matres lectionis*. In cases in which these letters are interchanged, it is hard – sometimes impossible – to determine the specific cause. Nonetheless, these cases are included in the corpus of variants due to graphical similarity to be discussed because I claim that the graphical similarity between the letters had an effect on their interchange, along with the other causes. Based on a similar theory advanced by Tov in reference to the Septuagint, I would like to make the claim – as I did extensively in an article in Textus 27 – that each of the secondary versions in these cases emerged first and foremost due to the difficulty in identifying letters that are graphically similar to one another.[[7]](#footnote-8) Under these circumstances, the copyist would require paleographic exegesis to identify the letter, and would have to take contextual consideration into account in order to do so. In these cases, the copyist needs to make an intuitive decision, subjective by nature, on the basis of the recognizable phonetic or semantic background. Thus, although the phonetic similarity between the consonants or the semantic similarity between the prepositions that the letters represent can serve as a basis for generating new versions, the primary source of the variants is the graphical similarity between the letters, which initially generates an uncertain identification on the part of the scribe.

I will demonstrate this general claim through one interchange of the letters *wāw* and *yôd* in the book of Isaiah, in the name “Ariel” in the MT. In each of the five appearances of the name (all of them in chapter 29), the MT reads “אריאל” whereas 1QIsaa reads ארואל (slide). Beegle and Kutcher offered a linguistic explanation for the variant, proposing that it is the result of separate orthographic traditions that reflect different linguistic traditions – in the Masoretic tradition the vowel *ī* served as a vowel connected to personal names, while in 1QIsaa the scribe preserved the tradition in which the vowel *ū* served in this capacity.[[8]](#footnote-9)By the way, a similar orthographic difference between variants of the MT and the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) has also been documented, where the SP seems to reflect the same tradition as the scroll: In Genesis 32:31, the MT reads פניאל whereas the SP reads פנואל; similarly, in Numbers 26:31 the MT reads אשריאל whereas the SP reads אשרואל (slide). All of these names are theophoric, including within them the component *el*, together with the connecting vowel *ī* in the MT and *ū* in 1QIsaa as well as the SP. Indeed, it may be that the variants are due to an interchange of the connecting vowel. At the same time, the interchange between the letters *wāw* and *yôd* in this case may also be due to the graphical similarity between them. These letters are graphically similar in square script beginning in the Hasmonean period, and they become more and more similar to the point where they are virtually indistinguishable in some Qumran scrolls (slide).

An examination of Herodian scrolls reveals how easy it can be to interchange the letters. We see this, for instance, in the words בוגדים and בגויים, in Pesher Habakkuk and 11QPsa, respectively, in which the letters appear adjacently. In Pesher Habakkuk, the *wāw*’s “leg” is just marginally longer than the *yôd*’s leg and the difference between them is hardly noticeable. In the word בגויים in 11QPsa, the letters are identical so that there is no graphical difference between the *wāw* and the two *yôd*s alongside it:[[9]](#footnote-10)

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|  |  |
| 'בוגדים' בפשר חבקוק  (עמודה 5, שורה 8)[[10]](#footnote-11) | 'בגויים' ב-11QPsa  (עמודה 4, שורה 11)[[11]](#footnote-12) |

The shape of these letters is nearly identical for a long period of time, up until the first century CE, when they grew different from one another once again, distinguished by the length of their leg – the *wāw* with a long leg and the *yôd* with a shorter one.

Without rejecting the suggestions presented above, I wish to make the claim that the graphic element is connected to this variant, and that it is interwoven with the morphological one: The scribe was uncertain with regards to the letter before him and could not determine whether it was a *wāw* or a *yôd*, which led him to decide according to the orthographic tradition known to him. In these cases, even though there was no simple graphical interchange, the graphical element likely exercised a decisive influence.

We shall now examine the number of instances in which there are variants due to graphical similarity throughout the scroll and show that they bisect it. In the slide before us, you can see the distribution of the variants due to graphical similarity between the book of Isaiah in the MT and 1QIsaa, by column (slide).

Altogether, there are 158 variants due to graphical similarity when comparing Isaiah in the MT and 1QIsaa. In the first half of the scroll there are 103 such variants, and only 55 in the second half. On average, there are 3.8 variants per column in the first half, and only two per column on average in the second half. Hence, we are talking about a significant difference in the frequency of variants due to graphical similarity between the two parts of the scroll: in the first half the frequency of these variants is almost double the frequency in the second half

(slide graphs) In the following slide the data is presented graphically, demonstrating the disparity in the frequency of the variants throughout the scroll. If we briefly ignore column 40, which has an unusually high number of interchanges of letters due to graphical similarity compared to the rest of the second half of the scroll, the difference between the parts of the scroll becomes even more apparent.

Now let us examine the data before us, in relation to the data compiled by Giese on the high frequency of omissions of basic letters, gutturals and haplographies in the first half of the scroll, compared to its second half. Does the disparity in the number of interchanges of letters due to graphical similarity between the two parts of the scroll support Giese’s hypothesis that the scroll was in fact copied from two different sources, the first of which was less reliable and precise than the second, which was of better quality?

To show the connections between my findings and Giese’s findings, we must assume that, when it comes to variants due to graphical similarity, all versions of the MT are more reliable, whereas all of the versions of the scroll are secondary. Indeed, Burrows made the sweeping claim that the MT is superior to 1QIsaa, in all instances of variants due to graphical similarity between letters.[[12]](#footnote-13) However, Burrows made a similar claim regarding most of the other variants between the MT and 1QIsaa, and he seems to have been influenced by the diminished textual value associated with the scroll in the first years after its discovery. Indeed, the assumption that the variants in 1QIsaa were the result of scribal errors was dominant in the first years in which it was studied. This approach attributed imprecision and ineptitude to the scribe who copied 1QIsaa or to the source from which it was copied. In addition to Burrows, this was also the opinion of Brownlee and Orlinsky. In a series of publications dating from 1950 onwards, Orlinsky refuted attempts to reconstruct the original text of the book of Isaiah with the aid of variant scrolls. He argued that any deviation from the MT were due to imprecision on the part of the scribe of the scroll.[[13]](#footnote-14) Although later scholars recognized the possibility of interpretive changes, they still attributed many variants in the scroll to unintentional scribal errors.[[14]](#footnote-15) The prevailing view of the scroll’s inferiority became less pervasive the more it was studied. Talmon, for instance, criticized the extreme skepticism expressed by some scholars towards the scroll and called for it to be reevaluated on several occasions.[[15]](#footnote-16) Nonetheless, the low evaluation of the scroll’s reliability and the skeptical attitude towards its textual value are still prevalent among scholars today.[[16]](#footnote-17)

In order to examine the connection between the findings I presented above and Giese’s findings, the variants due to graphical similarity between the MT and 1QIsaa must be evaluated in a balanced manner, and the question of the original reading must be addressed in each case. I have therefore divided the variants into four categories:

1. Cases in which the MT’s version is primary and the scroll’s secondary (A): (slide with examples) Included in this category are clear-cut cases in which the scroll’s version is etymologically unacceptable, such as “בל תלב בו” in Isaiah 33:21 as opposed to “בל תלך בו” in the MT; “מדבר בעדקה” in Isaiah 63:1 vs “מדבר בצדקה” in the MT.   
   Similarly, there are cases in which the scroll’s version cannot be reconciled with the context, such as Isaiah 49:10: “'לֹא יִרְעָבוּ וְלֹא יִצְמָאוּ וְלֹא־יַכֵּם **שָׁרָב** וָשָׁמֶשׁ כִּי־מְרַחֲמָם יְנַהֲגֵם וְעַל־מַבּוּעֵי מַיִם יְנַהֲלֵם” in the MT vs “ולא יכם שוב” in the scroll. This verse describes people who are returning from exile and assures them that they shall not be afflicted by hunger, thirst, “sharav” – the burning heat of the desert,[[17]](#footnote-18) or the sun.

Included in this category are also cases in which the scroll’s version is secondary due to Aramaic influence or the graphical similarity between the letters *mem* and *nun*: (Kutcher) 'ידים'/'ידין' (יג 7); 'לציים'/'לציין' (כג 13); 'שבעים'/'שבעין' (כג 17).

1. Variants in which the scroll’s version is primary and MT’s is secondary (B): the most unambiguous case in this category appears in Isaiah 14: 4: 'וְנָשָׂאתָ הַמָּשָׁל הַזֶּה עַל־מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל וְאָמָרְתָּ אֵיךְ שָׁבַת נֹגֵשׂ שָׁבְתָה **מַדְהֵבָה** (MT)/ מרהבה (1QIsaa).[[18]](#footnote-19) The word מרהבה that appears in the scroll derives from the root רה"ב, which can mean to attack, and therefore the meaning of מרהבה in this case is to attack.[[19]](#footnote-20) The etymology of the word that appears in the MT, in comparison, is unknown. There are additional cases in which the scroll’s version is preferable, although there is no consensus among scholars in those cases.
2. Variants in which both the scroll’s version and the MT’s version are etymologically and contextually challenging, so that it is impossible to determine which is preferable (C): For example, in Isaiah 10:31: 'נָדְדָה **מַדְמֵנָה** יֹשְׁבֵי הַגֵּבִים הֵעִיזוּ' in MT and מרמנה in 1QIsaa. מדמנה/מרמנה is the name of a place near Jerusalem whose inhabitants will leave for fear of the approaching Assyrian army. מדמנה as the name of a place is not documented anywhere else in the MT, nor is מרמנה.[[20]](#footnote-21) Thus, it is impossible to determine the name’s original form.
3. Variants in which both versions are etymologically and contextually conceivable, so that it is impossible to determine which is primary (D): This category includes variants that could be related to the interchange of the letters *yôd* and *wāw*, and/or uses of perfect and imperfect forms of verbs that do not affect a word’s meaning at all such as ושאג/ישאג (5: 29) or ובושו/יבושו (19: 9), and uses of different patterns such as אסיר/אסור (10: 4), סיגים/סוגים (1: 22).

In the following slide you can see how the corpus of variants due to graphical similarity between the MT and 1QIsaa is distributed across the four categories. (slide)

Although the numbers are somewhat fluid, because the determination which version is primary and which is secondary is subjective by nature, the general picture revealed by our findings is clear. In most of the variants in which it possible to decide, the MT is preferable to the scroll. In these cases, the secondary version in the scroll is the result of a letter being interchanged for a graphically similar one, either by the scribe who copied the scroll, or in the source that he used.

This data points to a direct correlation between Giese’s findings and my own. We can now make the general claim that the number of scribal errors in the first half of the scroll is greater than in its second half – regardless of whether these errors are the result of interchanging graphically similar letters, omitting basic letters or gutturals, or haplographies. This data could indicate that the scroll was copied from two different sources: the first half from an exemplar that was textually inferior, and the second half from an exemplar that was of higher quality. This was Giese’s conclusion from the data he presented in his study, and this is the opinion held by most scholars who discussed the bisection of the scroll, such as Ulrich and Flint, Brownlee, Williamson, Talmon, Longcare, Martin, Kahle, and Cook.[[21]](#footnote-22) However, according to my own view the data presented here supports Noth and Tov’s claim that the scroll was copied by two different scribes: one of them copying the first half and the other copying the second.[[22]](#footnote-23) The first scribe’s work is careless and imprecise compared to the work of the second scribe.

To support the theory that the scribe was the one to interchange the letters with graphic similarities, I would like to cite a lecture that Tov gave at Haifa University this past May, entitled “The Scribes of Ancient Israel and their Attitude Towards the Bible: A View from Within the Qumran Scrolls”. Tov dealt with the textual meticulousness of the biblical scribes and addressed the question of whether the variants found in their copies are the result of their own errors, or whether they copied the errors from their sources. According to Tov, the answer to this question depends on the scribe’s approach: in the case of a meticulous scribe, we can assume that he copied his source precisely and that the variants documented in the scroll already existed in the source he copied from. However, in the case of a careless scribe, it is likely that any imprecisions in the text were the result of his own work. The scribe’s approach and how thorough he was in transmitting the text can be measured according to the number of interlinear emendations. I am referring to corrections that the scribe makes to his own work, throughout the process of copying, or once it is complete. We can assume that, if he is meticulous and precise, we will see a minimal number of corrections, and vice versa.

Tov, who studied the number of textual corrections in 1QIsaa, concluded that it reveals a large degree of intervention on the part of the scribe. In other words, the scribe did not make an exact copy the text before him, which required him to make many interlinear emendations. If we are indeed dealing with a careless scribe, then although we cannot be certain, it would seem that the interchanges of letters due to graphical similarity in the scroll were the result of the scribe’s own errors, and not errors that were already present in the sources of the scroll. Together with the quantitative data on the variants due to graphical similarity, the difference in the frequency of variants between the two parts of the scroll suggests that each part of the scroll was written by a different scribe, with a different level of skill.

Moreover, sampling the number of interlinear textual emendations (not including the lengthy additions in the margins) from the first five columns of each part of the scroll reveals a disparity between the two parts according to this measure of textual meticulousness as well: (slide)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Number of corrections between the lines** | **Column Number** |
| 10 | 1 |
| 1 | 2 |
| 7 | 3 |
| 2 | 4 |
| 4 | 5 |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Number of corrections between the lines** | **Column Number** |
| 3 | 28 |
| - | 29 |
| 1 | 30 |
| 2 | 31 |
| 1 | 32 |

As we can see, in columns 1-5 there are 24 interlinear emendations, whereas in columns 28-32 there are 7 interlinear emendations. That is to say, the extent of the scribe’s intervention changes from part to part – there are three times as many emendations in the first half than in the second. In fact, the difference may be even greater, given that the first columns of the scroll are damaged and some of their text is missing.

I contend that this disparity is no coincidence, and that it complements the rest of the evidence presented throughout this lecture. It could support the theory that the scroll was written by two different scribes: a first scribe who copied columns 1-27 and a second scribe who copied columns 28-54. A comparison of the two copies produced by the two scribes reveals that the first scribe copied his source somewhat carelessly, which resulted in many errors: omissions of basic letters and gutturals, haplographies, interchanges of letters due graphical similarity, and additional interchanges and omissions of letters that required interlinear scribal emendations. The second scribe, on the other hand, was more meticulous in his work, copying his source relatively more reliably. As a result, the textual phenomena listed above are far less frequent in his work.

In summary, there is a disparity in the rate of interchanges of letters due to graphical similarity between the two parts of the scroll. The frequency of such interchanges is almost double in the first half of the scroll, compared to their frequency in the second half. Moreover, in most of the cases in which we can determine which version is preferable, the scroll’s versions are secondary. My findings are consistent with Giese’s research, which also points to more scribal errors in the first half of the scroll. I claim that the explanation for the difference in the number of scribal errors between the two parts of the scroll is that it was written by two different scribes. The criterion of the number of textual emendations introduced by Tov to measure the meticulousness of the scribe supports my claim. According to this criterion a different pattern of textual precision can be identified in each part of the scroll: there are many more emendations documented in the work of the first scribe compared to a significantly smaller number of corrections in the second part. This data is compatible with the large number of scribal errors committed by the first scribe that were examined in this lecture, compared to a much smaller number of errors in the work of the second scribe.

1. Abegg 2010, p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Martin, 1958, pp. 17-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Giese, 1988, pp. 65-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Martin, 1958, p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Pulikottil, 2001, p. 19. Kutcher, 1959, pp. 451-452. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Hanson 1964, p. 568; Kennedy 1928, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Tov, 2015, p. 178; Dayfani, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Beegle, BASOR, p. 178; Dayfani, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Yardeni, 1991, p. 156; Henson, 1976, p. 568; Ofer, 2004, p. 69; Cross, 1961, p. 189. Cameron, 1973, discusses the interchanges of *wāw* and *yôd* due to their graphical similarity. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. For a discussion of the scroll’s dating to the 1st century and select bibliography see Nitzan 1986, pp. 128 – 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. For a dating of the scroll to the Hasmonean period see Sanders, 1965, pp. 7 – 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Burrows, 1945 pp. 25 – 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Orlinsky, 1950, particularly p. 165; Orlinsky 1951; Orlinsky, 1952; Orlinsky 1953; Orlinsky, 1954a; Orlinsky 1954b; Brownly, 1952; Burrows, 1948; Burrows, 1949. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Hoegenhaven, 1984; Van der Coy, 1981, p. 89; Cf., Pulikottil; Rosenblum, 1970, p. 81who viewed the scroll as an interpretive text; a copy of the book in language that is accessible to people who are not fluent in Hebrew. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Talmon, 1975b, p. 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Gonçalves, 1992; Tov, 2008, p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. HALOT 4:1651 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. For a more complete review of the different views and bibliographical references see Mizrahi 2013b, pp. 433-440. Kutcher לשי"ט agrees that the scroll’s version is superior in this case. Mizrahi, 2013, p. 94 lists the appearances of the word מדהבה in non-biblical Qumran scrolls, which led him to conclude that it was later integrated into Qumranic Hebrew. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. For instance HALOT 2:1192 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. מדמנה appears again in Isaiah 25:10, not as the name of a place but as a pile of rubbish (דומן) see BDB, 199; HALOT 2:549. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Ulrich and Flint 2010, p. 63; Brownlee, 1952, p. 20; Giese, 1988; Williamson, 2012, p. 330; Talmon, 1989, p. 73 onward; Longcare 2013, p. 48; Martin, 1958, p. 65; Kahle, 1951, p. 72 onward; Cook, 1992, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Tov, 2004, p. 21 (confirm); Noth 1951, p. ###. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)