



École Pratique des Hautes Études

The Opisthographs from Qumran in a Mediterranean Context

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Plan

- Definition of the opisthograph
- Trends among the non-Qumranic opisthographs
- Shared and specific elements



Definition

- Eric Turner: “ The true opisthographs are simple sheets or rolls of papyrus whose content starts on the front, then continues on the back”.
- Tiziano Dorandi: “In modern usage however, the term opisthographos is used only when a papyrus scroll or a fragment consisting of only one leaf had new text written on the verso shortly after the inscribing of the recto, usually without bearing any relation to the latter.”



Definition

Daniel Falk: “For the purposes of this study, I will not include the following cases of manuscripts inscribed on both sides. First, the writing of signatures or titles on the reverse, whose purpose is to be visible on the outside of the closed scroll, is not relevant to the present study. Second, a number of the *tefillin* found at Qumran are inscribed on both sides, but since these are not intended to be read as texts but are sealed up to be worn as amulets they represent a different phenomenon and will be treated separately as a special case.”



Trends among the Egyptian and Qumranic opisthographs

- CEDOPAL and the Leuven Database of Ancient Books
- Literary opisthographs with a *terminus ad quem* of 350 CE
- About 45 literary opisthographs from Egypt



	Number of Scrolls	Number of Opisthographs
Egypt (LDAB)	≈ 4151	≈ 45
Dead Sea Scrolls	≈ 1000	≈ 16



The “True” Opisthograph: BKT 1 (recto)



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The “True” Opisthograph: BKT 1 (verso)



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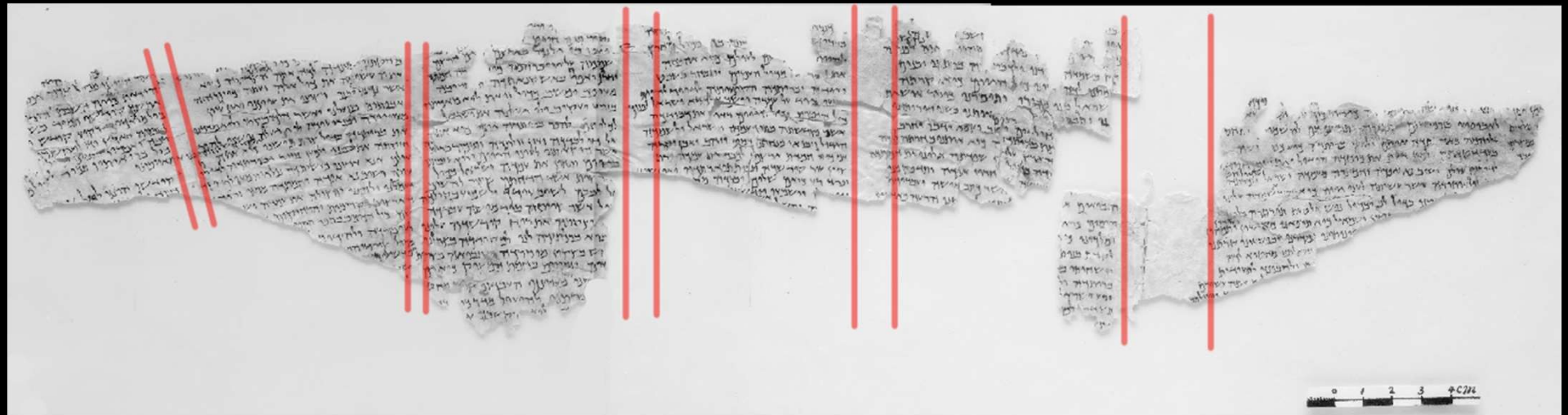
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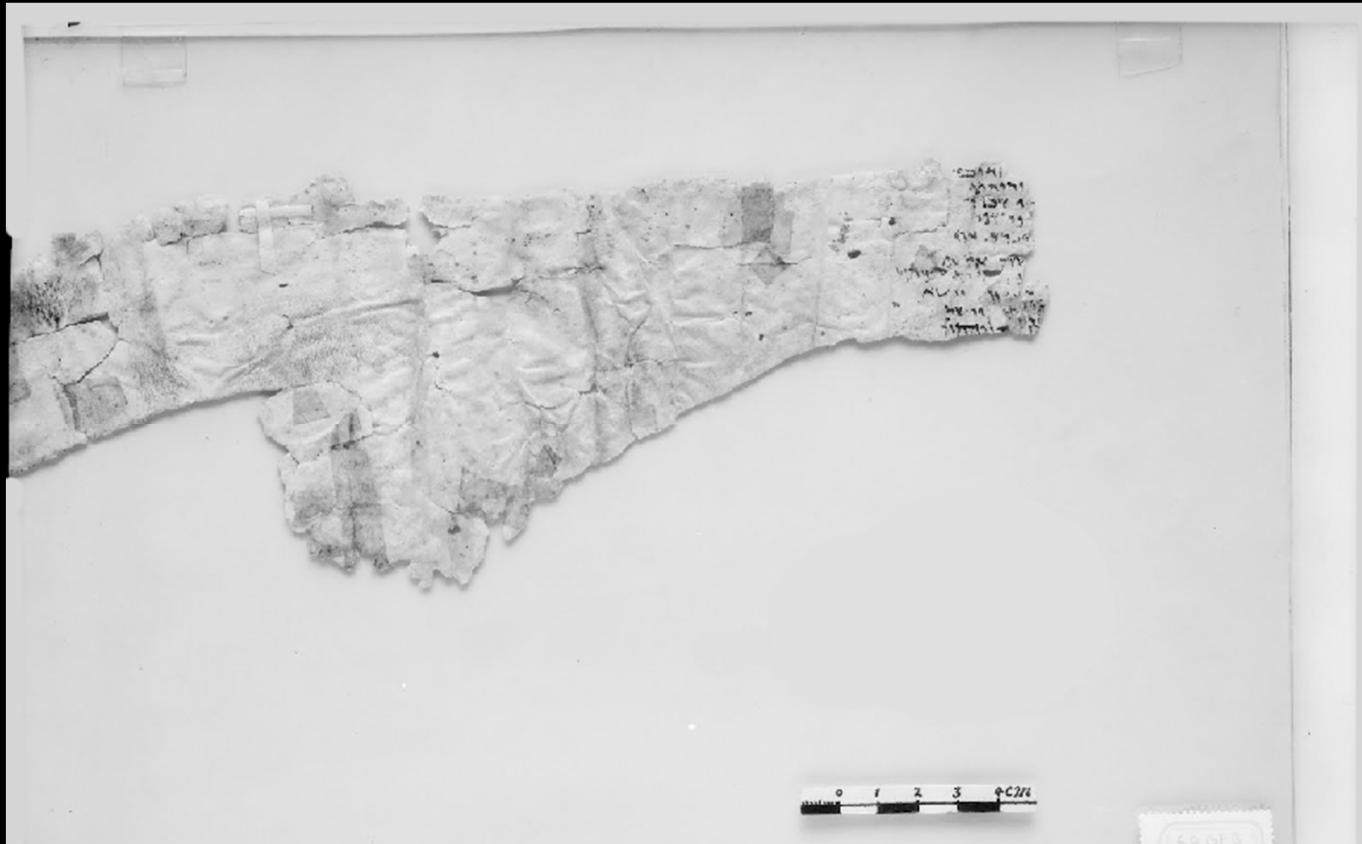
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The "True" Opisthograph: 4Q504 (recto)



The “True” Opisthograph: 4Q504 (verso)

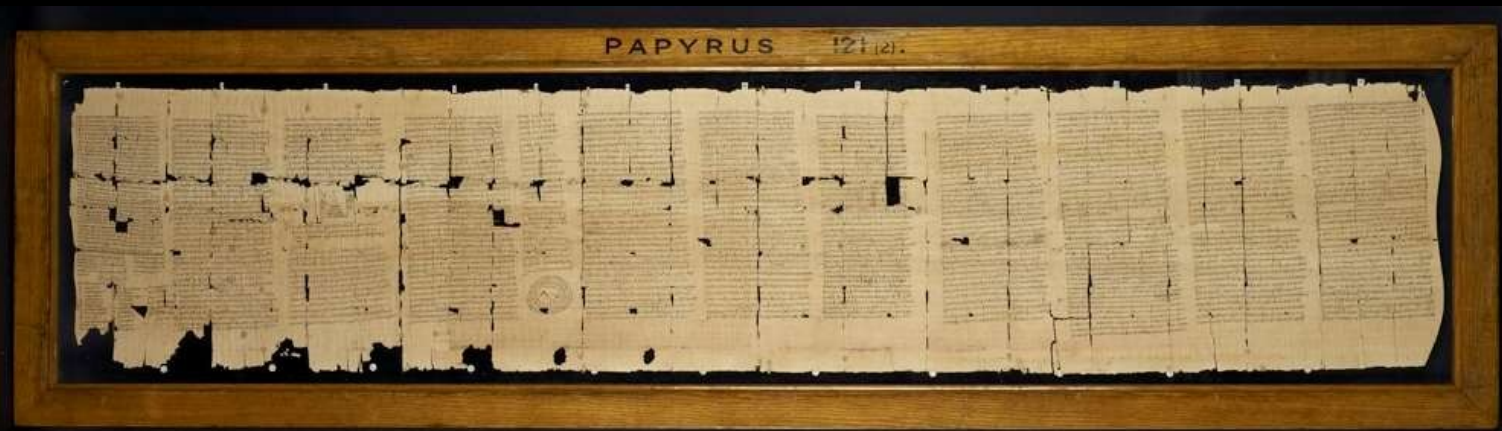


Egypt: arrangement of the verso *vis-à-vis* the recto

- 30 manuscripts arranged horizontally
 - 2/3: same content on the recto and the verso (true opisthograph)
- 15 manuscripts arranged vertically (upside-down)



Vertical Orientation



Arrangement of the verso vis-à-vis the recto

- 30 manuscripts arranged horizontally
 - 2/3: same content on the recto and the verso
- 15 manuscripts arranged vertically (upside-down)
 - 13 manuscripts: different content on the recto and the verso

The more a manuscript has to be manipulated to read both sides, the less likely it is that both sides were read continuously.



Content of the Opisthographs from Egypt

Epos (Homer and Hesiod)	13
Anthologies	10
Science	9
Drama (comedies and tragedies)	7
Biblical texts	7
Prayers and hymns	7
Commentaries	6
History	4
Philosophy	4



Conclusion

- Several features of the opisthograph are common to Egypt and Qumran:
 - It is a very rare phenomenon
 - It remains a scroll of second rank and most of the time used for personal collections
 - It is used in the same way (physical arrangement, using, handling, reading)



Conclusion

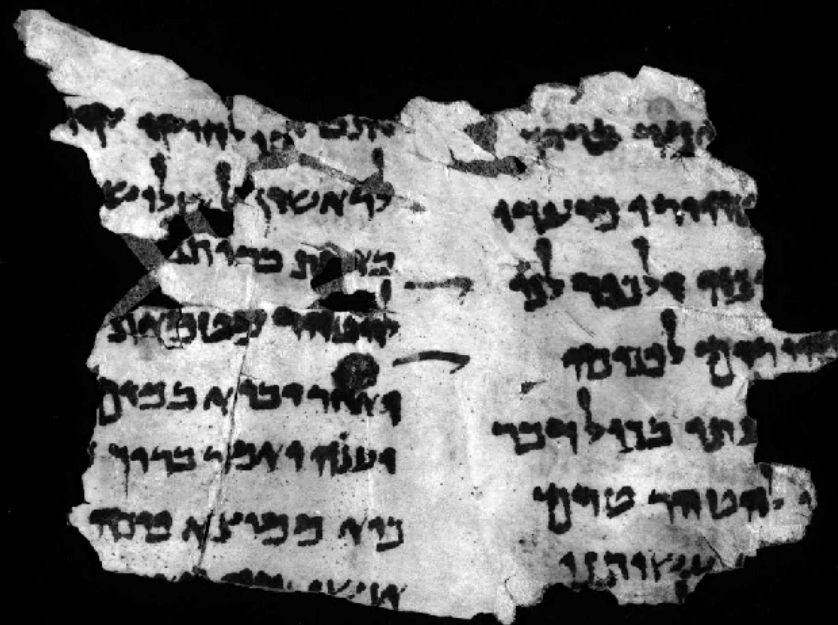
- On the other hand, *la raison d'être* of the opisthograph seems different at Qumran:
 - The “true opisthograph” is very rare in Qumran and has been replaced by a “mixed opisthograph”, planned to gather more than one text into one scroll.
 - George Brooke: “opisthographs from the period when the codex was gradually beginning to emerge need to be considered as part of the data that might have prompted, influenced or encouraged the move from scroll to codex”



The case of 4Q415/4Q414

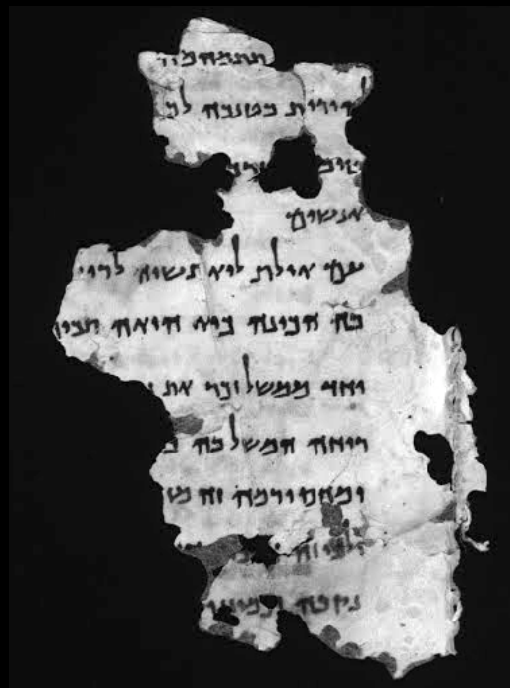
4Q415 (4Q Instruction^a)

4Q414 (Ritual of Purification A)



The case of 4Q415/4Q414

4Q415 (4Q Instruction^a)



4Q414 (Ritual of Purification A)



The case of 4Q415/4Q414

4Q415 (4Q Instruction^a)



4Q414 (Ritual of Purification A)



Thank you!

All images from Qumran are courtesy of the Leon Levy Dead Sea
Scrolls Digital Library

