

Cross - Jewish Scripts Throughout History

Week 3 Exercise – From Paleo to Square Script

1. Learn how to read the Judean/early Jewish square script using either the **Great Isaiah Scroll** or the **Nash Papyrus** (discussed in the lecture). A digital edition of the Isaiah scroll can be found at <http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/isaiah>, and a full transcription of the scroll has been shared on Canvas. A digitized copy of the Nash Papyrus can be found at <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-OR-00233/2>, which includes several high resolution photographs (the second photograph, linked directly in the URL, is the easiest to read). You can also see the photograph published by F. C. Burkitt (1903) in the PDF linked on this week's module. This article also includes a full transcription of the papyrus (i.e. into the printed Hebrew square script) so you can check your work!

Here is one way to do this:

1. Using tracing paper or a tablet, trace a few lines from the text you have chosen and produce your own copy (a "hand copy"). This will force you to think about each letter really carefully. The PDF transcription of the Isaiah scroll and the Burkitt article include photographs that you can print if you want to trace by hand.
 2. Transcribe your copy of the text into the square script (either by hand or on your computer). Try to do this without looking at the transcription that has been provided, using the handout from week 1 on the printed square script. The forms of the letters are very close to modern printed Hebrew! Leave blank spaces in your transcription for letters you cannot figure out before you check the transcriptions.
2. Create a paleography of the square script, using either the Isaiah scroll or the Nash Papyrus, or any other papyrus linked on Canvas (see under Week 3's module). Build on what you did in #1. You could add a column to your paleography from last week,

or create a new one. If you want to try and track how the script evolves, compare the Great Isaiah Scroll with the War Scroll (which is later).

3. In anticipation of a demonstration video uploaded for Week 4, where we will look closely at the writing process of the square script and consider how it evolved from the paleo (and Aramaic) script, spend some time thinking about the letters themselves, paying close attention to the ones that have changed the most between the paleo and the square script. Try to devise ways in which the evolution occurred. Can you understand the evolution in a natural sense (as the habits of writers changing slowly across generations), or is there some kind of “quantum leap” that happened that suggests there was outside influence? Do you think there are some more fundamental changes that happened that led the script to take the “square” shape? Do any of the evolutions make sense? For example, some letters may be changed in order to ensure that they look different from other similar letters; or others may be changed to make them easier to write. There are multiple explanations at play for many if not all letters!