Thinking Digitally About the Dead Sea Scrolls: Book History Before and Beyond the Book.

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Thinking Digitally About the Dead Sea Scrolls:
Book History Before and Beyond the Book*

Eva Mroczek (bio)

> The electronic representation of texts completely changes the text's status; for the materiality of the book, it substitutes the immateriality of texts without a unique location; against the relations of contiguity established in the print objects, it opposes the free composition of infinitely manipulable fragments; in place of the immediate apprehension of the whole work, made visible by the object that embodies it, it introduces a lengthy navigation in textual archipelagos that have neither shores nor borders.
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> Roger Chartier, "Representations of the Written Word," in *Forms and Meanings: Texts, Performances and Audiences from Codex to Computer* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 18.
>
> What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun. . . . Of making many books there is no end.
>
> Qohelet 1:9, 12:12

Electronic textuality has challenged scholars to revisit the categories in which we think about text, categories that had long been dominated by the printed book. Far from being a narrow subfield, digital text—with its much-discussed set of characteristics like fluidity and collective creation, discontinuity and segmentation, proliferation and ambitions to universality[1]—has broad conceptual implications for book historians. To be sure, notions of a less static, bounded textuality did not originate with electronic text—concepts of process and intertextuality expressed by theorists like Bakhtin, Barthes, and Kristeva; Foucault's problematization of the figure of **[End Page 241]** the author; and, more recently, investigations of textual instability and mutability in print by Jerome McGann have all served to challenge the notion of texts as static and bounded entities. But digital text has made such characteristics of textuality immediately palpable and ubiquitous, bringing them to the forefront of scholarly attention. Indeed, the penetration of electronic textuality into all areas of scholarship and daily life not only encourages us to reflect on what "book history" should include in its purview, but, as

N. Katherine Hayles has suggested, it also invites us to see texts of various kinds with fresh eyes.[2]

This article takes up Hayles's challenge by initiating a conversation between textual cultures from the present and from the distant past: digital texts and ancient scrolls, two areas that bookend the book historian's traditional subjects—print codices. While insights from digital text have been used to reflect on largely overlooked aspects of print—by Jerome McGann, for instance—little such work has been done on preprint, precodex textuality, which has not been of primary concern to book historians.[3] In addition, the scroll culture I want to examine is not of the Graeco-Roman world, the context most often invoked to illustrate the beginning of the history of reading in the West, but the Dead Sea Scrolls, a collection of Jewish manuscripts dating from between the third century B.C.E. and the first century C.E. While the Scrolls participate in the textual cultures of both the Ancient Near East and the Hellenistic world, they also reflect a distinct approach to the preservation and transmission of written traditions, which are understood to be divinely revealed or inspired, in the context of Jewish communities in antiquity.

Through a conversation between the digital world and this precodex textual culture, I would like to accomplish two overlapping goals. The first is related to the way we understand the textual culture of the Dead Sea Scrolls specifically. I show that as digital textuality helps us dismantle rigid, print-centered assumptions about books and authors, it also gives us new conceptual lenses for seeing this other nonprint textual culture, which has been poorly served by print-centered definitions. This is, in a sense, the flip side of Roger Chartier's call to understand the "digital revolution" in the context of a long history of change in the transmission of texts, with particular attention to the shift from the roll to the codex form. Chartier wrote in 1995 that examining the effects of that change in late antiquity can help us think about the shift to digital text in our own time: "understanding and...

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Book History Before and Beyond the Book*

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