Introduction

The Ongoing Study of Hebrew in the Qumran Literature and Ben Sira

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This thematic issue of *Dead Sea Discoveries* grew out of the 9th International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira, co-organized by Daniel Machiela and Robert Holmstedt at McMaster University and the University of Toronto, April 9–11, 2019. The 9th Symposium was part of a series of symposia founded in 1995 by Takamitsu Muraoka and Elisha Qimron, with the first meeting being held at the University of Leiden and subsequent symposia alternating between universities in Europe and Israel. The 9th meeting was the first to be held in North America. The proceedings of previous symposia have been published in Brill's *Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah* (STDJ) series. Since its founding by professors Muraoka and Qimron, the symposium series has provided a forum for international experts in Hebrew language and linguistics, Dead Sea Scrolls, and the book of Ben Sira to present and discuss cutting-edge research focused on Hebrew language during the Second Temple period. Consequently, the articles in this issue present one further iteration in the larger project of describing how our available sources attest to linguistic continuity and change over the course of that period. I wish to thank and recognize all of the scholars who took part in the 9th Symposium, and so helped to shape the articles published in this issue through their questions and discussion.

The many differences between Biblical Hebrew and Mishnaic (or Rabbinic) Hebrew—each of which has its own variations—had been a topic of scholarly interest since well before the manuscript discoveries of the Judean Desert came to light and received sustained attention. A central problem in comparing Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew was how to imagine their historical relationship, and what kind of linguistic developments had taken place in the intervening centuries between these two dialects. Was Mishnaic Hebrew of the Tannaitic period a *Gelehrtensprache*, invented for scholarly discourse and restricted to small circles of the learned elite (alongside the vernacular Aramaic), as Abraham Geiger argued in the late 19th century, or was it rather a natural outgrowth of a continuing, living, vernacular Hebrew, as Moses Segal famously objected in

the early 20th century? This question gained significance because of its possible pertinence for the use of Hebrew in modern Jewish liturgy, the social origins of rabbinic literature, and the languages of Jesus and his early followers, an issue brought into mainstream discussions of ancient Christianity by the likes of Gustav Dalman and Matthew Black. The manuscript discoveries of the Cairo Geniza and, especially, the Judean Desert brought an unexpected flood of new textual evidence to the table in investigating this question, and related ones. Most scholars working on Hebrew during the Second Temple period in light of these discoveries have sided more with Segal than Geiger, but at the same time it has become clear that the situation was far from simple. Scholars still debate the extent to which the Hebrew dialects attested in the Qumran scrolls and Ben Sira represent a vernacular, spoken dialect of the language or a more artificial, literary language. The symposia have seen scholars supporting both of these options in various ways, demonstrating that—as we might have expected—*both* vernacular *and* “classicizing,” “archaizing,” or “biblicizing” elements are present in the texts. There are also lingering questions over the extent to which the Qumran texts and Ben Sira support a diachronic model of development for Hebrew during the Second Temple period (Biblical Hebrew → Second Temple Hebrew → Mishnaic Hebrew). Most members of the symposia either assume or explicitly argue for diachronic models of the language, though often acknowledging that such development was obviously not a simple, linear process, and in various ways accounting for the complicating factors of geography, social location (or linguistic register), and the genre in which a text was written.

This thematic issue includes eight articles that touch on a number of the issues listed above, each shedding more light on its respective topic. More than half of the articles represent detailed investigations of linguistic phenomena relating to specific lexemes in Qumran texts, always discussing them within a broader diachronic perspective. **Adina Moshavi** and **Cynthia Miller-Naudé** and **Jacobus A. Naudé** treat negative polarity items (NPIs) for specific lexemes: Moshavi for the noun דָּבָר and Miller-Naudé and Naudé for the multi-purpose word כָּל. Moshavi observes that the Qumran texts somewhat curiously present a developmental stage of negative polarity for דָּבָר earlier than we find in Classical Biblical Hebrew, explaining this situation as a “pseudo-classicism” that may be viewed as part of a broader penchant for linguistic classicizing in the Qumran scrolls. Miller-Naudé and Naudé, on the other hand, argue for innovation in the ways authors of the scrolls treated כָּל as an NPI relative to Biblical Hebrew, showing that, with respect to negative polarity, different lexical items were treated in distinctive ways by Second Temple scribes, as we might expect.

Femke Siebesma-Mannens introduces readers to the Eep Talstra Centre for Bible and Computer database, at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, using it

to investigate the valency patterns of the verb **נָתַן** in some sectarian Qumran scrolls, with reference to Biblical Hebrew. Delineating four valence patterns in the biblical texts, Siebesma-Mannens finds a narrower usage of valence patterns in the scrolls included in the database. This difference might be explained by the smaller corpus, by the specific textual genres used at Qumran, or by historical shifts in Hebrew usage during the Second Temple period. **John Screnock** also focuses on a specific verb lexeme, **יָצָא**, in the scrolls, but does so from the perspective of generative linguistics with an eye towards developments in syntax from earlier periods of Hebrew. The article serves as a useful introduction to the generative approach for those not familiar with it, and concludes that there is little change from Biblical Hebrew to the Qumran texts with respect to the syntax of **יָצָא**. He stresses that even a “negative” outcome like this one is very useful for those researching Hebrew language in the scrolls, and may be interpreted as positive evidence of the classicizing tendency already mentioned above.

Aaron Hornkohl's article serves as a pivot of sorts in this issue, still focused on a specific linguistic construction, but using it to illuminate broader historical issues in the development of Hebrew. Investigating the diachronic picture of formulations like **יּוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי** and **הַיּוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי**, Hornkohl demonstrates clear affinities between usage in Second Temple period texts and the significantly later Tiberian pronunciation tradition (the *qere*), as opposed to the Masoretic written tradition (the *ketiv*). This suggests a “historical depth” to the *qere* that often goes back at least to the Second Temple period, and perhaps, Hornkohl suggests, even earlier than that. This is something that can now be seen because of the Qumran texts. **Molly Zahn**'s article leverages a detailed investigation of the periphrastic construction (i.e., a finite verb of the lexeme **הָיָה** with a participle) to address issues of source- and redaction-criticism in a major text from Qumran, the Temple Scroll. Moving beyond the basic observation of an increase in use of the periphrastic construction during the Second Temple period, seen clearly in the Temple Scroll and elsewhere, Zahn challenges the commonly-accepted view that variation in usage within the Temple Scroll should be attributed to different compositional sources. Other factors, such as the generic constraints of a given section or the underlying biblical source material, ought also to be considered, opening up new ways of thinking about the periphrastic construction as linked with compositional techniques in the Temple Scroll and other texts.

The factors of genre and rhetoric for language use play an even more pronounced role in **Alec Kienzle**'s contribution. Kienzle explores the interplay between the different linguistic registers of the Damascus Document and MMT (or the Halakhic Letter) and their distinctive literary genres. Drawing on the

sociological study of language, he brings added depth and clarity to the claim that the linguistic profile of each text must be seen in light of its “functional domain.” In doing so, Kienzle reminds us of the nuances involved in studying diachronic change in Hebrew during the Second Temple period (or in any period, for that matter). The issue closes with **Eric Raymond**’s rich study of the prayer in Ben Sira 36:1–22. He carefully uncovers subtle, gradual changes in the manuscript tradition of Ben Sira, which progressively lend the prayer a more nationalistic and eschatological tone. Raymond shows us not only how the text of Ben Sira might change over the course of its transmission, but also how scribes placed the prayer in a dialectical conversation with biblical texts ripe for reuse and borrowing.

This brief, summative overview of the eight articles included in this issue speaks to the wide array of approaches adopted, topics addressed, and conclusions reached. Yet, each article in its own way treats a facet of how Hebrew was used during the Second Temple and adjacent periods, and so sheds new light on “the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira.”

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