CHAPTER TWO

OUTLINING THE WAR SCROLL

Whatever the relationship of these various manuscripts may be to one another, even the broader relationship between the two compositions Serekh haMilḥamah and Sefer haMilḥamah, all of them are dependent upon the longest and most complete of the above compositions: M. In light of the fact that this text from Cave 1 is the lynch pin for a proper understanding of all War Texts, it is crucial to begin with it.

Any attempt to understand the content, structure, and history of this composition must begin with a proper examination of the text as it has reached us. Like many ancient compositions, it is not one long continuous text. Rather, the author/editor of M divided it into sections, a practice coined today as “sense division” or “unit delimitation.” From the very beginning of the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls, these kinds of divisions were noted. However, while most scholars acknowledge them, even comment upon them, the importance they give to these divisions varies, so that the matter needs to be examined anew.

Sense division or unit delimitation is the technique by which an author, editor, or scribe, divided his text into units of meaning. In recent years, there has been an increased emphasis on the study of these divisions and their significance for understanding a text. Most of the research has focused on the biblical material, owing principally to the sudden increase in manuscripts from the various dis-

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1 It is obviously impossible to know who is responsible for the sense divisions in M, the author himself or some editor after him, or a combination of both. As a reminder of this fact, I use the term “author/editor” throughout this chapter.

2 Already Sukenik noted these division markers and offered some initial thoughts (I, 12).
coveries in the Judean Wilderness.\(^3\) It is believed that these delimiters were an integral part of the composition and transmission of a text,\(^4\) and must therefore be taken into consideration when exegeting the text. As John Olley pointed out, delimiters “provide clues not merely to the form of the text, but also to understanding and use of the text,” so that when they are ignored, the reader “sometimes overlooks or actively criticizes traditional divisions.”\(^5\) While originally the practice of utilizing and preserving unit delimiters was believed to be characteristic of the transmission of the Hebrew Bible only, it is now evident that it was used for other texts, both sacred and non-sacred, even in different languages.\(^6\) Thus the importance of taking a close look at these sense divisions in M.

1. SENSE DIVISION IN THE WAR SCROLL

Already in the first column does one notice a method by which the author/editor of M divided his text into paragraphs: at line 7, after just a couple words, he left the rest of the line blank, and started the

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\(^3\) It has been suggested to call this field “delimitation criticism.” For a brief history of research, see Marjo C. A. Korpel, “Introduction to the Series Pericope,” in Delimitation Criticism: A New Tool in Biblical Scholarship, ed. Marjo C. A. Korpel and Josef M. Oesch, Pericope 1 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2000), 1–50. For a bibliography of work done on unit delimitations in the Dead Sea Scrolls, see her note 10 on page 4. However, it must be pointed out that very little research has focused on the non-biblical material.

