CHAPTER 1

Writing a Descriptive Grammar of 4Q252: The Noun Phrase

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1 Introduction

This study has its roots in two distinct sources. The first was the preparation of the Dead Sea Scrolls Concordance: The Biblical Texts from the Judaean Desert and the careful cataloguing of variants to MT so as to assure that no "cross-pol lination" occurred while creating the raw data. The second involved a graduate student assistant’s application to the University of Toronto and the fortuitous meeting with Robert Holmstedt in the process. The first “root source” made me aware of the fact that my text-critical training did not prepare me for the species of variants that the biblical manuscripts evidenced, while the second provided the stimulus to investigate them. When I met Robert Holmstedt he was in the midst of preparing a funding proposal to Canada’s Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for a project that intended to investigate the linguistic nature of Second Temple Hebrew. Seeing the opportunity to satisfy my own curiosity, I was able to convince him that we could build his proposed linguistic data on the back of my morphological data and thus—I argued—save an immense amount of time. He agreed, and shoe-horned me into his proposal in the final days before SSHRC’s deadline in the fall of 2008. Although it eventually took two attempts to convince SSHRC of the value of the project, we nonetheless began in earnest in the spring of 2009. Over the next several years we developed a tagging scheme and produced a workable database containing the analysis of CD, 1QS, 1QSa, 1QSB, 1QH, 4Q215a, 4Q256, 4Q298, 4Q383–4Q390, 4Q391–4Q399 and 11QTemple. In a parallel project Holmstedt also began analyzing the text of the Hebrew Bible (HB). For this paper, prepared in honor of my friend, Moshe Bernstein, I have added the text of 4Q252 to our database and present the fruit of this labor in what might be


best termed “Toward the Writing of a Descriptive Grammar of 4QCommentary on Genesis A (4Q252).”

First, a word about the need of such a study is appropriate. The preparation of the Discoveries in the Judaean Desert publications approached a fine art in the last ten years of production under the able editorship of Emanuel Tov. These volumes present a wealth of information founded on a scientific transcription, notes on the readings, textual notes, studies on paleography, orthography, morphology, and well-reasoned translations, but only in one volume of forty is there a focused attempt to describe the linguistic profile of the text. 3

In a couple of forays of my own into this arena 4 I have come to realize that a global approach is not the desiderative at the present time. We are yet infants in our understanding. And so, prodded by wise counsel of Jackie Naudé: “each grammar of QH must be looked at separately,” 5 it follows that a document by document approach is the preferred method of initial study. This was the motivation that led E. Qimron to include a prominent section on grammar as a part of his contribution to DJD 10:

In order to characterize the language of any given text from Qumran, we would have to analyze it as we have analyzed MMT, i.e., we would have to try to isolate those characteristics that are not common to all the phases of the history of Hebrew, and then identify the various components of the text’s language. 6

It thus seems clear that no other approach is defensible lest we miss the uniqueness of individual documents in our haste to understand the whole. It

3 Elisha Qimron and John Strugnell, Cave 4. V: Miqṣat Maʿaše Ha-Torah (DJD 10; Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).
6 Qimron, Cave 4. V, 106.