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*Diggers at the Well: Proceedings of a Third International Symposium on  
the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira*

Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 36

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The present volume comprises twenty studies focusing on various aspects of the respective Hebrew traditions—spelling, phonology, morphology, syntax, vocabulary—and covering different perspectives, such as historical and comparative linguistics and sociolinguistics. The book contains papers read at the symposium “The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Its Relationship to Other Contemporaneous Hebrew Dialects,” held in 1999 at Ben-Gurion University in Beer-Sheva. The editors arranged the studies alphabetically according to author, but since the topics are quite different, a thematic arrangement would perhaps have led to better orientation.

One of the most important topics in Qumran Hebrew (QH) research is the question of its status. This problem is the main concern of seven studies, three of which represent opposite positions with regard to the question whether QH was spoken.

In “A Conservative View of the Language of the Dead Sea Scrolls,” J. Blau argues in favor of QH as “the latest stage of biblical (literary) language, exposed to ... spoken vernaculars” (25). E. Qimron (“The Nature of DSS Hebrew and Its Relation to BH and MH”) takes the contrary position, according to which “most of the DSS ... should be considered as reflecting the spoken language of their scribes” (244). The intermediate position is represented by A. Hurvitz’s “Was QH a ‘Spoken’ Language? On Some Recent Views and Positions: Comments.” Hurvitz concludes that QH is a “composite language” containing various elements. However, this term seems to be somewhat misleading, because no linguistic corpus is entirely homogenous. Keeping in mind the background of the Qumranists, we should expect that their language was heavily influenced by Biblical Hebrew (BH). However, this concerns both literary and spoken language; therefore,

elements of BH in the texts from Qumran do not prove that QH was basically a literary language. The situation becomes even more complicated if we consider the fact that it was not primarily the written framework of the biblical texts that may have influenced the language of Qumran but these texts as *read* according to distinct oral reading traditions. It was only in the first century B.C.E. that a firm reading tradition started to emerge; therefore, the biblical text was read in Qumran according to the spoken language of that time.

These arguments strengthen the view of Qimron, who, however, seems to be too optimistic by supposing that both the consonantal framework of the biblical texts and the DSS reflect the Jerusalem dialect. His view is based only on historical considerations, while the linguistic evidence is sparse and even contradictory (cf. *re<sup>ʿ</sup>ô* in the Siloah Inscription as against MT *re<sup>ʿ</sup>ehû*).

W. M. Schniedewind considers the status of QH from a sociolinguistic point of view. In his “Linguistic Ideology in QH” he further elaborates his hypothesis that QH is an “antilanguage ... characterized by conscious choices that were intended to set the Qumran community and their language apart from others.” I share Schniedewind’s view, that every language is influenced by its social environment, but the basis for some of his assumptions seems to be very narrow: We cannot prove one of the most distinctive features of an “antilanguage,” namely, deliberate deviations from the standard, since we do not know enough about the standard. Forms such as *hæmmāh* or *yiqtolû* (against *hem* and *yiq<sup>ʿ</sup>lû*) correspond to the Samaritan tradition and, therefore, place QH within the framework of contemporaneous Hebrew dialects. Moreover, and in opposition to Schniedewind, the linguistic inconsistency of the documents should be regarded as an argument against the assumption of an ideology, because every ideology tends to establish strong rules. It is important to note that Schniedewind’s work fills a gap in Qumran research, where sociolinguistic approaches are still new. With the contribution of the late Shelomo Morag, the present volume contains one further study on this field (see below).

Two studies are dedicated to the features common to QH and other Hebrew traditions. J. Joosten’s “The Knowledge and Use of Hebrew in the Hellenistic Period: Qumran and the Septuagint” is the first systematic study of the relations between QH and the Hebrew language known by the translators of the Septuagint. He concludes that both witnesses have in common widespread linguistic phenomena but no exclusive relationship. M. Bar-Asher’s contribution (“A Few Remarks on Mishnaic Hebrew and Aramaic in Qumran Hebrew”) has two parts. The first reconsiders some forms of QH shedding light on Mishnaic Hebrew (MH), while the second tries to find evidence that the biblical texts were extant in Aramaic and that the Qumranists were influenced by this source. This idea

seems to be worthy of further consideration, but the evidence found thus far is not convincing. The first example is a free citation of Nah 3:9. Since Aramaisms are abundant in QH, the citation is perhaps simply influenced by the vernacular. The second example consists of a single word and is even less decisive. One further reference is discussed by M. Kister and referred to by Bar-Asher (17 n. 19), but the expression *‘am ḥābīb* (against *‘am s<sup>e</sup>gullāh*) is a *terminus technicus* and therefore not necessarily related to a translation of Deuteronomy.

Ch. Cohen's "A Philological Reevaluation of some Significant DSS Variants of the MT in Isa 1–5" shows that a complete reevaluation of the variants in the biblical manuscripts from Qumran would be most desirable. However, the aim should not be to determine the more original reading at the present state of research but rather to learn more about the different traditions. For example, in Isa 2:18 MT has clearly the *lectio difficilior*, and its syntax is well attested in this tradition. On the other hand, the evaluation of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> should consider that the word *kālīl* might have the meaning "crown," as attested in Qumran and the LXX (see Joosten on p. 124).

A second cluster of studies focuses on semantical questions. "On Some Concepts in the World of Qumran: Polysemy and Semantic Development" by Shelomo Morag is a further important contribution of this excellent scholar, whose death prevented his participation at the conference. Morag analyzes "evidence words" by which the sect distinguished itself from other Jewish groups. It seems that this semantical perspective is the most suitable approach to find traces of a distinct Qumran ideology.

M. Kister in "Some Observations on Vocabulary and Style in the DSS" shows how complicated are the interconnections between Classical BH, Late BH, QH, and MH, touching, among others, questions of lexicon, theological concepts, style, and Aramaic influence. P.-I. Kirtchuk ("Some Cognitive and Typological Semantic Remarks on the Language of 4QMMT<sup>A</sup>") considers some of the questions raised by Kister from the perspective of typological and cognitive semantics. Many of his notes are inspiring, but the diachronic dimension of Hebrew has been neglected almost entirely. For example, the term *Classical Hebrew* ignores some of the most important problems, and Kirtchuk's belief that *šb* "to swear" and *šbh* "to praise" represent one and the same root is right only in a diachronically and synchronically extremely restricted sense.

The studies of J. F. Elwolde ("RWQMH in the Damascus Document and Ps 139:15") and J. Kugel ("Biblical Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha and the Hebrew of the Second Temple Period") are dedicated to the meaning of certain expressions and their occurrence in different witnesses.

A third cluster of studies focuses on syntax. M. F. J. Baasten (“Existential Clauses in QH”) and W. T. van Peursen (“Conditional Sentences with ׀ in the Protasis in QH”) provide analyses of topics in QH syntax, while M. S. Smith (“The Infinitive Absolute As Predicative Verb in Ben Sira and the DSS: A Preliminary Survey”) includes Ben Sira as well. M. Eshkult’s “Verbal Syntax in Late BH” is the only study that is solely dedicated to problems outside of QH and Ben Sira.

A more diachronical approach to syntax is taken by three authors. A. Borg’s “Some Observations on the ׀ Syndrome in the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls” show that this construction is very old. H. Dihi analyzes “Non-biblical Verbal Usages in the Book of Ben Sira,” showing that most of the different verbal inflections have parallels in QH, MH, or Aramaic. T. Muraoka (“An Approach to the Morphosyntax and Syntax of QH”) and St. E. Fassberg (“The Syntax of the Biblical Documents from the Judean Desert As Reflected in a Comparison of Multiple Copies of Biblical Texts”) elaborate the distinct nature of QH syntax by analyzing the variants of biblical manuscripts from Qumran.

The volume is introduced by a preface, has different indices, and includes a unified bibliography. It provides the reader with excellent insight into the present state of research and the ongoing discussions in QH research.