QUMRAN HEBREW
To Robin, Lucy, and Oliver

אشرح איש שמח באחרית

ἐμακάρισα ... ἄνωθρωπος εὐφραινόμενος ἐπὶ τέκνοις

Happy is the person who rejoices in his children. (Sirach 25:7)
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Although often written by a single individual, a book also represents a collaborative effort between many people, some of whom (I am thinking of my young children) are just beginning to comprehend the challenges involved in sitting at a desk for hours at a time, typing, deleting, typing more. For the past three years, I have had the good fortune to teach Biblical Hebrew to students at Yale Divinity School, students whose goals range from ministry to doctoral study. I have enjoyed and continue to enjoy the intellectual stimulus afforded by the daily interactions with these students. The book, as explained below, has its original impetus in my attempt at teaching some of these students post-Biblical Hebrew. Also at YDS, I have enjoyed the warm collegiality of the entire faculty and have benefited from numerous conversations on matters relating to the Hebrew language and the scrolls with my Bible colleagues. I am also grateful to my friends outside YDS who have read and commented on different aspects of this work. In addition, the staff of the YDS library has been an essential aid in finding and obtaining books; I have made much work for them and am thankful for their earnest assistance.

My thanks go out, in particular, to James Nati, a doctoral candidate at Yale, who read through my manuscript several times, identifying errors of argument, logic, and spurious reference; Joel Baden, who has generously shared his store of articles and books on grammatical matters that I might have otherwise missed; Jeremy Hultin, who drew my attention to articles that have informed my study of the Hebrew guttural consonants.

I also want to thank the editors and staff at SBL for helping me work through the manuscript. I have appreciated their attention especially in the pointing of so many words and forms throughout the book. Furthermore, they have been patient at my slow pace and have spotted many errors that I missed.

Finally, my deepest and most profound appreciation belongs with my wife and children. They have been an ever-present source of encourage-
ment and inspiration, not only in the patience they have shown at my frequent absences but also in the concerted efforts they have made to afford me more time to bring this project to its completion.
# Abbreviations

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>Anchor Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>BASOR</td>
<td>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bib</td>
<td><em>Biblica</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>BSOAS</td>
<td>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</td>
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<td>BZAW</td>
<td>Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</td>
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<td>CBQ</td>
<td>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</td>
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<td>DJD</td>
<td>Discoveries in the Judean Desert</td>
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<td>DSD</td>
<td>Dead Sea Discoveries</td>
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<td>DSS</td>
<td>Dead Sea Scrolls</td>
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ABBREVIATIONS

HAR  Hebrew Annual Review
HSS  Harvard Semitic Studies
HUCA  Hebrew Union College Annual
IPA  International Phonetic Alphabet
JAOS  Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL  Journal of Biblical Literature
JJS  Journal of Jewish Studies
JNES  Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JNSL  Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages
JSJ  Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSPSup  Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series
LBH  Late Biblical Hebrew
LSAWS  Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
MT  Masoretic Text, specifically the Leningrad Codex, as represented in BHS3
RB  Revue Biblique
RevQ  Revue de Qumran
RH  Rabbinic Hebrew
RH1  Rabbinic Hebrew of the Mishnah, Tosefta, etc.
RH2  Rabbinic Hebrew of the Talmuds, etc.
SBH  Standard Biblical Hebrew
SBL  Studies in Biblical Literature
Sem  Semitica
STDJ  Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
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<tr>
<td>VT</td>
<td><em>Vetus Testamentum</em></td>
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<td>VTSup</td>
<td><em>Vetus Testamentum Supplement Series</em></td>
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<td>ZAH</td>
<td><em>Zeitschrift für die Althebraistik</em></td>
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<td>ZAW</td>
<td><em>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>3ms</td>
<td>third masculine singular</td>
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<td>3fs</td>
<td>third feminine singular</td>
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<tr>
<td>2ms</td>
<td>second masculine singular</td>
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<tr>
<td>2fs</td>
<td>second feminine singular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1cs</td>
<td>first common singular</td>
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<tr>
<td>3mp</td>
<td>third masculine plural</td>
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<tr>
<td>3fp</td>
<td>third feminine plural</td>
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<td>2mp</td>
<td>second masculine plural</td>
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<tr>
<td>2fp</td>
<td>second feminine plural</td>
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<tr>
<td>1cp</td>
<td>first common plural</td>
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A Note on Transliteration, Etymological Bases, and Manuscript Identification

In the following pages I will generally transliterate the letters of the scrolls into the Hebrew/Aramaic block script (e.g., נביא “prophet”). The hypothetical pronunciation of these words is rendered in Roman letters in italics, as is the pronunciation of words presumed by the Tiberian vocalization tradition. The indication of pronunciation differs in several ways from the standard transliteration of Biblical Hebrew. For example, due to the quiescence of aleph at syllable end, I will not represent aleph in a word such as נביא “prophet”; this word is represented as nābī. Also, due to the fact that the etymological lateral fricative phoneme (often transliterated as š and represented in the Tiberian text as ש) had merged with the sound of etymological samekh, I will render etymological /š/ as s. Thus מ masa “utterance” is represented as massā. When referring to individual phonemes, I indicate the respective symbol between slashes (e.g., /o/ and /s/).

Etymological forms and bases are, as is customary, preceded by an asterisk and are put in italics (e.g., *qul, *qufl). These forms may reflect different stages in the development of a given word or form; for example, the form preceded by an asterisk may reflect a stage of the language from circa 2000 B.C.E. or 1000 B.C.E. or 600 B.C.E. The precise dating is not crucial to the arguments presented below, so the hypothetical datings for specific forms are not given. The corresponding vocalizations of these forms in the Tiberian tradition are generally clear from the context and are sometimes explained by parenthetical comments. Nevertheless, to make clearer my presentation in the pages that follow, I wish to note three of the more common references to etymological forms and their realizations in Tiberian Hebrew. More complete explanations of such bases and their realizations in Tiberian Hebrew can be found in Joüon-Muraoka and HGHs.

III-yodh roots are realized in the qal perfect as in the examples of הבני “to build,” חז “to see,” כלשח “to do.” The heh in these forms is simply a
mater for the preceding vowel; the etymological yodh has disappeared. In the same way, the heh at the end of שָׂדֶה “field” is a mater; the root is III-yodh. Words from III-waw roots are comparatively less common; where these roots are attested and distinct morphologically from III-yodh roots, the waw consonant has often shifted to /ū/, as in בֹּהוּ “emptiness”; תֹּהוּ “formlessness.”

“Geminate” nouns or adjectives are those that etymologically had three root consonants the second and third of which were identical (*qall, *qill, *qull). The paradigm words for these in many Biblical Hebrew grammars are, respectively, עַם “people,” חֵץ “arrow,” חֹק “statute.” These generally show the gemination of the second and third root consonants and the emergence of the etymological vowel when any suffix is added to the lexical form: עַמִּי “my people,” חִצִּי “my arrow,” חֻקִּי “my statute.” Both masculine and feminine plural forms also show gemination and the emergence of the etymological vowel (e.g., עַמִּים, חִצִּים, חֻקִּים).

“Segholate” nouns or adjectives are those that etymologically had three distinct root consonants and only one vowel in their singular form (*qat, *qit, *qut). The paradigm words for these in many Biblical Hebrew grammars are, respectively, מֶלֶךְ “king,” ספר “book,” קֹדֶשׁ “holiness.” Sometimes, despite their name, these nouns do not attest a seghol, as in בַּﬠַל “master.” When suffixes are added to the lexical form, the etymological vowel (or /o/ in the case of *qut nouns) reemerges: מלכּי “my king,” ספרי “my book,” קָדְשִׁי “my holiness.” Most segholate nouns from II-waw/yodh roots have different vowel patterns in Tiberian Hebrew (*qat—פָּתִי “simple,” *qit—חֳלִי “sickness”). Segholate nouns/adjectives usually have two vowels in their plural absolute bases, both masculine (*qatalim—סְפָרִים, קֹדֶשֶׁים, מְלָכִים, מְלָכָה, מְלָכָה) and feminine (*qatalot—סְפָרִית, קָדְשִׁית, מְלָכָה, מְלָכָה).
to make the references to passages less cumbersome and the pages below less cluttered, I have not used the alternative designations for manuscripts such as 4QDa or 4QDamascus Document\(^a\) but have restricted myself to the numerical titles, 4Q266. This means that individuals unfamiliar with the numeral designations may sometimes not recognize the text that is being referred to. For the sake of clarity, I present below the most commonly cited texts that might occasion confusion. The list is not comprehensive but points to the most commonly cited texts (e.g., Jubilees is also attested in other scrolls, but 4Q216–228 are the ones most frequently cited).

Jubilees and texts related to Jubilees: 4Q216–228  
Damascus Document: 4Q266–273  
4QMMT: 4Q394–399  
Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: 4Q400–407  
Instruction of the Maven (4QInstruction): 4Q415–418  
Temple Scroll: 11Q19–20

In order to highlight the biblical DSS and to indicate the texts to which they correspond, the simple numerical title as well as their nonnumerical title are given together (e.g., 4Q88 [4QPs\(^f\)]). Specific passages in these texts are indicated by reference to scriptural passage; this succinctly provides reference to a location in a scroll (since almost all editions of DSS biblical texts indicate scripture verses along with column and line numbers), as well as to a location in the Bible.
Introduction

The following pages began as a handout on the grammar of the Dead Sea Scrolls (= DSS). While preparing to teach a class on Post-Biblical Hebrew, I found that the descriptions of the Hebrew of the DSS in Qimron’s *Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (= HDSS) and Kutscher’s *The Language and Linguistic Background of the Complete Isaiah Scroll* did not suit the needs of students.¹ Although Kutscher’s treatment is thorough, careful, and nuanced, it treats a text that exhibits numerous idiosyncrasies not shared by other texts; as such it cannot easily be used to introduce students to the language of the DSS as a whole. Qimron’s book, on the other hand, does assess the (non-biblical) scrolls as a whole; nevertheless, it too has some shortcomings. What I find problematic about Qimron’s HDSS are the following: (1) The book presumes that many linguistic idiosyncrasies witnessed in the scrolls reflect a single vernacular dialect.² (2) The book proposes dramatic

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² Qimron refers throughout the book to the language of the DSS as though the texts (with few exceptions) reflect a common dialect. That the idiosyncrasies of the scrolls’ language are, in part, attributable to a spoken idiom is suggested by Qimron in the final paragraph of his concluding chapter, where he refers to (among other things) the pronouns יָאָה and יָאָה and yqwl + suffix verb forms: “These unique features show that DSS Hebrew is not merely a mixture of BH, MH and Aramaic, but also draws on a distinct spoken dialect” (*HDSS*, 117–18). More recently Qimron writes: “It is my contention that the grammar of the DSS reflects the Hebrew of the period spoken in Jerusalem or its vicinity” (Elisha Qimron, “The Nature of the DSS Hebrew and Its Relation to BH and MH,” in *Diggers at the Well: Proceedings of a Third International Symposium on the Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Ben Sira* [ed. T.
differences between the language of the DSS and the Hebrew as evidenced in the MT, though the evidence for these differences is sometimes tenuous (based on a single example) and often ambiguous.  

(3) The book does not sufficiently discuss the ambiguities inherent in many of its examples and sometimes does not entertain other possible explanations.  

(4) The book is sometimes imprecise in its description; for example, it refers to the “weakening” of gutturals without a more precise description of where and when specific phonemes “weaken.”  

(5) The book, although it has recently been reprinted in 2008, contains no references to recently published texts or secondary literature (including Qimron’s own numerous publications).

Of course, the study of the Hebrew of the DSS is not limited to these two books. There are a plethora of studies and sketches on the languages of the scrolls. Nevertheless, these other sketches often give only an overview of the main features of the languages and do not present the background necessary for a student to understand the respective phenomena in Hebrew. For these reasons, I felt compelled to create my own descriptions and explanations, commenting especially where I disagreed with Qimron’s HDSS.

In reference to the above-listed criticisms, I should explain briefly my approach. (1) I have taken a broader view of the linguistic phenomena and assume that the linguistic peculiarities found in the scrolls are potentially due to a wide spectrum of causes, only one of which is the underlying spoken idiom of the sectarian writers and scribes. Moreover, I am not concerned with isolating the vernacular idiom of the writers; it


3. For example, Qimron notes that the single spelling of “Sheol” with a prothetic aleph (אשל), combined with the fact that the word is always spelled with a waw after the aleph is evidence that the word was always pronounced “eš’ol”; he also calls attention to the tendency in Samaritan Hebrew for the prothetic aleph to appear in the oral tradition but not in the written tradition (HDSS, 39). For more on this, see §5.1 below, “Prothetic Aleph.” In a similar way, he claims “For the contraction ḥey → ḥ, I was able to find only one instance הוה (=ויה)” from 1QIsa at Isa 1:24 (HDSS, 35). He also suggests that the word מבא in 4Q405 23 i, 9 is further evidence of this (or a similar) shift, though a far more pedestrian explanation is also available (see §4.10, “Diphthongs and Triphthongs”).
is more important, it seems to me, for students to understand the reading and writing register(s) of those copying the scrolls and composing their texts. (2) I attempt, wherever relevant, to point to examples of phenomena from the MT that are similar to the phenomena found in the DSS. It is assumed that the MT is made up of texts that reflect numerous dialects and registers of Hebrew; I assume a similar diversity in the DSS. Nevertheless, I also assume that the writers of the DSS were (at least at times) attempting to write in a register that approximated the writing/reading register reflected in the MT. (3) I try to explore the ambiguities inherent in the examples cited by Qimron, Kutscher, and others, in order to illustrate different possible explanations and to question some underlying assumptions. (4) I attempt to be as precise as possible in identifying the parameters of certain phonological shifts; for example, each guttural consonant is described separately and its specific “weakness” explored. (5) I provide further examples of the same phenomena described by Qimron and others from my own readings as well as from consulting Accordance software and the Dead Sea Scrolls Concordance; and I incorporate more recent insights from linguistics and philology of the DSS into my descriptions. Despite my best efforts at analyzing the following phenomena, I recognize that my observations do not represent the final word on these matters and in many ways remain preliminary.

It should be added that, although I disagree with Qimron’s book in many ways, it is also an incredibly rich source of information. Further, I do not entirely disagree with it. Many of the observations in it seem well-founded. The general approach of assessing the vernacular dialect(s) from

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4. One indication that at least some writers of the DSS were familiar with the form of the MT as we know it is suggested by the close correspondence in spelling between some biblical scrolls and the MT: e.g., הָנָה וַיִּהְיֶנָה (4Q70 [4QJer a] at Jer 18:21) for MT וַיִּהְיֶנָה; יִכְבְּדֵנִי “he will honor me” (4Q85 [4QPs 85] at Ps 50:23) for MT יְכַבדֵּנִי, which is what we would expect based on forms like תְּבָרֲכַנִּי "you will bless me" (Gen 27:19); also the defective orthography in יֵרְגְּמֻהו (4Q26a [4QLev a] at Lev 20:2) for MT יִרְגְּמֻהו וּבֶן (4Q35 [4QDeut b] at Deut 33:9) for MT וּבֶן; כִּדְרָכָו "according to his ways" (4Q70 [4QJer a] at Jer 17:10) for MT כִּדְרָכָו.

the written sources is also profitable and well worth considering. It seems likely that many aspects of the language he outlines were, in fact, features of a dialect spoken by some writers and readers of the texts.

Two other very helpful resources that students should consult are the synopses of the Hebrew language offered by Martin Abegg in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years* and in *Qumran Cave 1, II: The Isaiah Scrolls, Part 2: Introductions, Commentary, and Textual Variants*. Although for the first synopsis he could not draw on all the texts now available, and does not draw on the biblical scrolls, his statistics are still useful in getting a general idea for the frequency of certain forms and the basic outline of the language. The second synopsis offers observations not only on the Isaiah scrolls, but on all the scrolls in general. A third synopsis, that of Antoon Schoors, catalogs many forms and vocabulary, but only treats the texts considered part of the Wisdom tradition.

I have chosen to describe around twenty-five topics. These, in my estimation, are not addressed sufficiently in Abegg’s synopses (or in other synopses) and have not been treated adequately in Qimron’s *HDSS*. Some items that are covered sufficiently in Qimron’s *Grammar* and in his *HDSS* have not been addressed again here. This means, of course, that the following pages are not intended as a comprehensive grammar of DSS Hebrew.

As might already be obvious, the orthography, phonology, and morphology of the DSS are often intimately linked. Thus, I have tried not to repeat myself by addressing the same topic from the perspective of orthography, phonology, morphology, but have, instead, addressed topics where they are most relevant in the description of the language. Discussing the same features in three different sections would be needlessly repetitive and would obscure the explanations offered.

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8. For example, I have not provided a list of words found in the DSS according to their bases, as Qimron has done.