Preface

Biblical Hebrew is studied worldwide by university students, seminarians, and the educated public. It is also studied, almost universally, through a single prism—that of the Tiberian Masoretic tradition, which is the best attested and most widely available tradition of Biblical Hebrew. Thanks in large part to its endorsement by Maimonides, it also became the most prestigious vocalization tradition in the Middle Ages. For most, Biblical Hebrew is synonymous with Tiberian Biblical Hebrew.

There are, however, other vocalization traditions. The Babylonian tradition was widespread among Jews around the close of the first millennium CE; the tenth-century Karaite scholar al-Qirqisāni reports that the Babylonian pronunciation was in use in Babylonia, Iran, the Arabian peninsula, and Yemen. And despite the fact that Yemenite Jews continued using Babylonian manuscripts without interruption from generation to generation, European scholars learned of them only toward the middle of the nineteenth century. Decades later, manuscripts pointed with the Palestinian vocalization system were rediscovered in the Cairo Genizah. Thereafter came the discovery of manuscripts written according to the Tiberian-Palestinian system and, perhaps most importantly, the texts found in caves alongside the Dead Sea. The ingathering of Jewish exiles in Palestine in the last century also initiated intensive investigation into the different oral traditions of Biblical Hebrew. For example, in the 1930s, Ze'ev Ben-Ḥayyim began to study the Samaritan oral tradition of Hebrew; and in the 1970s, Shelomo Morag inaugurated the important series Eda ve-Lashon.

With the exception of the Dead Sea Scrolls, students are unfamiliar with these other, authentic traditions of Biblical Hebrew. Even though early scholarship quickly noted non-Tiberian traditions—for example, Böttcher, *Ausführliches Lehrbuch* (1866) §81 n. 2 and, especially, Ewald, *Ausführliches Lehrbuch* (8th ed., 1870) §20e—it has still been slow to incorporate these traditions in major grammatical works. In the 1910 edition of *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, Babylonian and Palestinian traditions

are mentioned in a single long footnote (§8g n. 3). Bergsträsser, whose *Hebräische Grammatik* (1918 [vol. 1]) began as an update of the 28th German edition of Gesenius' grammar, was the first to incorporate in a more extensive manner the non-Tiberian traditions (including Greek and Latin transcriptions and even mention of the Yemenite oral tradition). Thereafter followed Bauer and Leander's *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache* (1922), which contained a lengthy excursus on the Babylonian and Palestinian vocalization systems but only occasionally mentioned the Babylonian tradition in the sections on phonology and morphology. Among grammatical works, Muraoka's revision of Joüon's *Grammaire de l'hébreu biblique* (1991 [1st ed.], 2006–11 [2d ed.]) goes further than previous grammars in referring to non-Tiberian traditions (including Samaritan Hebrew), epigraphic material, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and even an occasional reference to Tannaitic Hebrew. Regretfully, the most thorough comparative discussion of the Hebrew vocalization systems today remains a chapter that appeared in Shelomo Morag's 1962 monograph, *The Vocalization Systems of Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic.*

This gap has been partly filled by three works. Kutscher's posthumous *A History of the Hebrew Language* (1982) discusses several Second-Temple varieties of Biblical Hebrew. Sáenz-Badillo's *A History of the Hebrew Language* (1993; 2007 [rev. Italian ed.]) goes into greater depth and adds information on Palestinian, Babylonian, and even Tiberian-Palestinian traditions. But the 2007 edition of Sáenz-Badillo's *History* indirectly exemplifies another problem surrounding discussions of non-Tiberian traditions: many of the fundamental studies are written in languages inaccessible to most English-speaking students—principally Modern Hebrew and German. The recently published *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics* (2013) makes significant strides in rectifying that situation by providing readers with English entries on a wide array of subjects, including many related to Biblical Hebrew.

What is still lacking, however, is a comprehensive and systematic overview of the different periods, sources, and traditions of Biblical Hebrew. We decided to construct a handbook that would provide students and the public with easily accessible, reliable, and current information in English concerning the multi-faceted nature of Biblical Hebrew. We divided the biblical corpus into its different constituent phases (Archaic, Standard, Transitional, and Late). We isolated contemporary corpora (epigraphic,

Qumran, and Ben Sira). We added a number of ancient and medieval reading traditions (Greek and Latin transcriptions, Samaritan, Babylonian, Karaite, Palestinian, and Tiberian-Palestinian). Finally, we included three topics that are often omitted in discussions of Biblical Hebrew: the Tiberian tradition and Masorah, the light shed by Tannaitic Hebrew on its Biblical Hebrew antecedent, and modern reading traditions of Biblical Hebrew.

To accomplish this task, we asked noted scholars in each field to contribute their expertise. The result is the present two-volume work. The first contains in-depth introductions that orient the reader to handling the particular traditions and follow, when the subject matter allowed, a similar template: speakers, sources, editions, orthography, phonological sketch, morphological sketch, syntactic issues, and bibliography. The second volume presents sample accompanying texts that exemplify the descriptions of applicable introductory chapters. In the case of the oral traditions of Biblical Hebrew, we have also included recordings, which may be downloaded from the website associated with this book (http://www.eisenbrauns.com/item/GARHANDBO/).

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