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## PREFACE

In 1961 William L. Moran published “The Hebrew Language in Its Northwest Semitic Background” (*The Bible and the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, ed. G. Ernest Wright [New York]). In it Moran presented a state-of-the-art description of the linguistic milieu out of which Biblical Hebrew developed. He stressed the features found in earlier Northwest Semitic languages that are similar to Hebrew and he demonstrated how the study of those languages sheds light on Biblical Hebrew. More than forty years have passed since the publication of Moran’s now classic description of Hebrew in the light of Northwest Semitic. Since the late 1950’s when the article was written, our knowledge of both Northwest Semitic and the Hebrew of the Biblical period has increased considerably. The study of the Canaanite and Aramaic dialects that existed alongside Hebrew in Syria–Palestine has been revolutionized. Epigraphic finds such as the Deir Alla plaster text or the Tell Fekherye bilingual have significantly changed our perception of the dialect geography of this area during the first half of the first millennium B.C.E. Moreover, our knowledge of the Hebrew of the first millennium B.C.E. has been enriched by a continually growing corpus of Hebrew inscriptions from the First Temple period (e.g., Yavneh Yam, Arad, Kuntillet Ajrud), as well as from later times (the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bar Kosiba letters).

In the light of the significant advances in the study of Biblical Hebrew and Northwest Semitic in the past four decades, an international research group on the subject of Biblical Hebrew in its Northwest Semitic setting was convened at the Institute for Advanced Studies of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem during the 2001–2002 academic year. Members of the group included Steven E. Fassberg (Jerusalem), W. Randall Garr (Santa Barbara), Edward L. Greenstein (Tel Aviv), Jo Ann Hackett (Cambridge, Mass.), John Huehnergard (Cambridge, Mass.), Avi Hurvitz (Jerusalem), Jan Joosten (Strasbourg), André Lemaire (Paris), and Elisha Qimron (Beer Sheva). John A. Emerton (Cambridge, UK) and Gary A. Rendsburg (New Brunswick, NJ) joined the group for a short period of time, and Geoffrey Khan (Cambridge, UK) and M. O’Connor (Washington, D.C.) participated in the end of the year conference held at the Institute in June, 2002. In addition, the members of the group also benefited from guest lectures by several Israeli scholars

who participated in the weekly symposia and final conference.

The present volume presents the fruits of our year long collaboration. The articles are based on the lectures that were given during the year. As can be seen from the Table of Contents, a wide array of subjects is discussed, all of which have implications for the study of Biblical Hebrew, Northwest Semitic, or Semitic in general. We thank the members of the group and the guest lecturers for a memorable year. We hope that this volume will contribute to the ongoing study of Biblical Hebrew in its Northwest Semitic setting.

Finally, we wish to express our gratitude to the Institute for Advanced Studies and its director, Professor Benjamin Z. Kedar, and to the Magnes Press and its former director, Mr. Dan Benovici, and to Mr. Ram Goldberg and Ms. Hanna Levi, and to the employees of Art Plus.

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