

PREFACE

The intent behind this book is to provide a general orientation to the languages of importance for the study of the Hebrew Bible for readers who have not had detailed exposure to those languages. We hope that the book will be particularly useful to students who are just beginning their academic careers in the study of the Hebrew Bible. But it should also find an audience among those who have not had detailed exposure to one or more of the languages discussed here and who would like to cultivate at least a rudimentary acquaintance with it or them. The chapters do presuppose familiarity with biblical Hebrew, although we have included a chapter on biblical and inscriptional Hebrew that situates this material within its broader linguistic context. Indeed, many readers may find it helpful to begin with this chapter before moving to less-familiar territory.

The languages treated here are those that, in our estimation, are the most significant for the study of the Hebrew Bible for purposes of comparative grammar and lexicography or for comparative history and literature, or both. Other languages might have been included. We considered including a chapter on Sumerian but ultimately decided that, given our readership, the linguistic and literary connections with the Hebrew Bible were not strong enough to warrant a separate chapter. Greek literature is increasingly cited in recent Hebrew Bible scholarship for its comparative value. However, we deemed it most appropriate to reserve it—along with other languages that are especially important in textual criticism (Syriac included)—for treatment in a potential companion volume dealing with the New Testament. Failing such a volume, and granted a second chance (or edition) of the present work, the addition of Greek and Sumerian, and possibly other languages, may be appropriate.

As authors for each chapter we sought specialists with proven records of publication in the language that is the subject of the chapter. We were most gratified by the gracious acceptance of those whom we contacted and are deeply grateful for their generosity and excellent work. In an effort to provide consistency between chapters, we proposed a three-part format for authors to follow: an overview of the language, its significance for the study of the Bible, and ancient sources and modern resources for study of the language and its literature. It will be immediately evident that this format is less suitable for some languages included in this volume than for others. Again we are most grateful to the contributors both for

their adherence to the format where possible and for their creativity in adapting it to the needs of their subject languages.

Finally, we are grateful to the Society of Biblical Literature for publishing this volume in the Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study series, to Rex Matthews and Leigh Andersen for shepherding it especially through the transition process from Scholars Press to SBL, and to Bob Buller for his copy editing and typesetting. We are particularly delighted that a simultaneous hardback edition published by Brill will make this volume easily available to a European readership.