

# DIGGERS AT THE WELL

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## LINGUISTIC IDEOLOGY IN QUMRAN HEBREW

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The place of Qumran Hebrew<sup>1</sup> within the history of the Hebrew language is tied to the hotly debated linguistic question on the nature of language. Are languages intrinsic, closed systems, or are they a part of a larger system of culture and society? I am inclined to the position of the social and anthropological linguists. Namely, language is integrally tied to its role in society. I begin with the classic Saussurian linguistic premise that "language is a complex social fact" (Irvine, 1989:250). Consequently, the sectarian religious beliefs of the Qumran community would have influenced Qumran Hebrew.<sup>2</sup>

In a recent paper (Schniedewind 1999), I already argued that Qumran Hebrew is an "antilinguistic." In other words, Qumran Hebrew is characterized by conscious choices that were intended to set the Qumran community and their language apart from others. If I am correct, then we can no longer simply explain the anomalies in Qumran grammar and orthography on the basis of historical grammar. The present paper elaborates upon the specific nature of Qumran's linguistic ideology and how it may have worked itself out in the linguistic code. The Qumran community patterned their language after what they perceived to be the very language of God used in the creation of the world. However, God's primordial language was not necessarily the language of the Hebrew Bible. Poetic linguistic register and its presumably archaic forms were a linguistic pattern for their language, although many Qumran forms are apparently pre-classical, pseudo-classicisms, or hyper-classicisms.

### *I. Language and Linguistic Ideology*

Linguistic ideology takes on exaggerated importance among

<sup>1</sup> I distinguish Qumran Hebrew from Dead Sea Scrolls Hebrew. The former is the language of the sect and the texts it composed and copied (about 140 texts according to Tov). The latter is a much larger group, which would reflect more generally the Hebrew of the late Second Temple Period.

<sup>2</sup> Conceptual aspects of the special sectarian nature of the Qumran community as reflected by their lexicon were developed by the late Shelomo Morag in his paper for this conference.



groups that are "exclusive and sharply bounded" like the Qumran community. An anthropological analogy can illustrate this point. In Puritan England dissenting religious sects like the Quakers actually cultivated both oral and written idiosyncrasies (Ormsby-Lennon, 1991; Smith, 1991). The Quakers' speech was most notably characterized by the use of "thee" and "thou" (which happens to compare nicely with the Qumran use of pronouns תָּוּ and תָּוּהָ for כִּי and כִּיָּה). The Quakers' linguistic choices were religiously motivated by their desire to cultivate a kind of "God-talk." Still, anthropologists find their reference point in the normative code, as the linguistic anthropologist Judith Irvine notes,

the [antlanguage] code's origin in counter-societies is reflected in many aspects of their linguistic form, for instance in their elaboration of lexicon and metaphor relevant to their special activities and their attitudes toward the normative society .... Both functionally and formally it is derived from the normative code, just as its speakers define their social role in opposition to the normative society (1989:253).

While Qumran Hebrew derives from the normative linguistic code, which was the vernacular spoken in Jerusalem by the opponents of the Qumran community, the privileged place of biblical literature in Qumran literature also points to a written or literary background to Qumran Hebrew that generated many of the peculiar forms found in Qumran literature.

## II. *Language Ideology in the Qumran Community*

The ideological role of language at Qumran touched upon in my former article warrants further elaboration. Chaim Rabin (1958:146) has suggested that the Scrolls allude to vernacular Hebrew, which the community regarded as "another language" (לְשׁוֹן אַחֵרָה) (1QH 2[10]:19; 4[12]:16), "a halting language" (לְשׁוֹן קוֹרְבָּנִים), "a blasphemous language" (לְשׁוֹן שׁוֹמֵרִים), CD 5:11-12; 1QS 4:11) and "an uncircumcised language" (לְשׁוֹן עֵרֵל שׁוֹמֵרִים), 1QH 2[10]:7, 18-19). The Qumran critique of vernacular Hebrew apparently reacted against the Oral Law, which, according to CD 5:11-12, was not fixed:

וְהָאֵת רוּחַ קְדֻשָׁתָם שֶׁמָּא וּבְלִשָׁן גְּדוּפִים פָּחַדוּ פֶּה עַל חוּקֵי בְרִית אֵל לֹא־לֹא נִכְתָּו

Also they have corrupted their holy spirit, and with blasphemous language they have reviled the statutes of God's covenant, saying, "They are not fixed."

In the above text, the writer apparently refers to the way the Pharisees interpreted the law of intermarriage. The Damascus Document here cites Lev 18:13 emphasizing that "Moses said" (מֹשֶׁה אָמַר, CD 5:8). Certainly, the legitimacy of the Oral Law was a hot topic in the late Second Temple period. The charge that language as reflected in a particular interpretation of Torah was "not fixed" arises out of the Qumran doctrine of predestination, which apparently opposed the fluidity of the Oral Law.<sup>3</sup> The Oral Torah implied an ongoing interpretative process that the Qumran community would not have been able to accept.

This rigidity stems from the community's predestinarian views and extended to other areas of Qumran life and thought. Everything was fixed before creation itself. It applies, for instance, to liturgy at Qumran, which was fixed in contrast to the fluid liturgy of rabbinic Judaism (cf. *m. Ber* 4:4; *b. Ber* 29b; Talmon 1989). This issue also underlies code terminology applied to the sect's opponents—phrases like "those who move the boundary" (עֲגָרֵי, CD 5:20; 19:15-16; also see 1:16) or "seekers of easy interpretations" (cf. דְּרֹשְׁי דְּהַלְקוּתָא; CD 1:18; 1QH 10:32). The Qumran ideology seems to be that both the Oral Law and its linguistic register—i.e., vernacular Hebrew—were blasphemous. Certainly, there is also a linguistic ideology that underlies the relationship between the Mishnah and its literary register. The intentional use of vernacular Hebrew in the Mishnah likewise arises out of the literary content, namely, *Oral Law* (cf. Schwartz 1995).

Qumran Hebrew was evidently understood to be akin to the primordial language of creation. Jewish tradition holds that "the one language and one speech" referred to in Gen 11:1 was Hebrew (Rubin 1998; also see Janowitz 1993). The notion that Hebrew was the language of creation is already evident in the book of Jubilees (12:25-27), a text well attested among the Qumran manuscripts. Josephus (*Ant.* 1, 4) and Philo of Alexandria (*Questions in Genesis* 1, 32) also suggest that the language of creation was Hebrew. And, a fragmentary new text from Qumran also seems to indicate that Hebrew was the pre-Babel language that remained only with Abraham (Eshel and Stone, 1992/1993). In this light, it may be helpful to revisit 1QH 1[9]:27-29,

אַתָּה בְּרֵאתָה רוּחַ בְּלִשָׁן וְהָתָּה דְבַרְיָהּ. וְהָכֵן פְּרִי שְׂפָתַימ בְּשֵׂרָם הַיְיָתָם. וְהָשֵׁם דְּבַרְיָם עַל קוֹ וְהַבֵּע רוּחַ שְׂפָתַימ בְּמִדָּה. וְהִצָּא קוֹיִם לְיִזְרְיָם וּבְנֵי רוּחָהּ

<sup>3</sup> Such a belief would lend more support to Schiffman's argument for the proto-Sadduceean origins of the Qumran community (Schiffman, 1994:83-89).



לחשבותם לחודייע

(27) ׀ ׀ You created (28) spirit in language, and You know its words. You determined the fruit of the lips before they came about. You appointed words by archetype (29) and the utterance of the breath of the lips by calculation. You sent forth archetypes for their mysteries, and the utterances of spirits for their plan ...

We see in this passage that a pattern for language was established at creation (i.e., אהות-בראתא). Language follows an ordained pattern as we would expect, given the Qumran theology of predestination. Critical to this predetermined pattern for language is the relexicalization of the term Qav (ק) discussed in my former article. In Qumran Hebrew Qav becomes the primordial pattern or archetype for language and speech. The translation of Qav as "pattern" would be sufficient, except that it is clear that the sectarian theology of predestination colors their use of the term. For example, in Qumran literature the Qav is engraved (ק) on the tablet engraved according to the Qav," 1QH 18[23]:11; cp. 1QpHab 7:13-14). Elsewhere in the "Thanksgiving Hymns, Qav is paralleled with a "secret (מרה)" etched in stone (1QH 6[14]:26). Qav is also a metaphorical source (מקור) from which proper judgment derives (1QH 8[16]:21). The Community Rule speaks of the "law which is determined by the archetype of the ages" (ל-לילה יהות-דיעת אין-אמר ואין דבריהם בלי נשבת קולם בכלל-דאריין יצא קום וברקאה תבל בליהם

The term Qav appears only a few times in the Hebrew Bible, but these texts nevertheless provide the framework for the Qumran development of the meaning of Qav. The connection between Qav and the language or words of God in creation is already clear in Psa 19:2-5:

תשמים מסתרים כבוד-אל ותעשה ידיי בגודי הרקיע יום ליום אמר אליה ללילה יהות-דיעת אין-אמר ואין דבריהם בלי נשבת קולם בכלל-דאריין יצא קום וברקאה תבל בליהם

The heavens recount the glory of God, the sky proclaims the work of his hands.

Day to day makes utterance, night to night utters knowledge.

There is no utterance, there are no words, without their voice being heard.

Their Qav carries throughout the earth, their words to the end of the world.

Psalm 19 ties the Qav with the creation, "the work of God's hands." A cluster of terms from 1QH 1[9]:27-29 draw upon this psalm including ק, רביע/רבע, and רברי"ק. The Qumran use of the term Qav is even more heavily influenced by the most tantalizing and enigmatic occurrence of Qav in Isa 28:10-14:

כי צי לצי צו לצי קו לקו קו לקו זעיר שם זעיר שם  
כי בלעני שפח נבלשון אחורא ידבר אלדום הוא :::  
קו לקו קו לקו זיר שם זיר שם לקון לכו וכשילו אחור ונשברו ונקשו ונלכדו  
והיה לזום דבר-ל'יהודה צו לצי צו לצי  
לקו שמעו דבר-יהודה אשון לצון משלי דעם הזה אשר בירר-ושלם

For it is "babble after babble, gabble after gabble, a little here, a little there!" Truly, he speaks to that people with foreign speech and another language .... To them the word of the LORD is: "babble after babble, gabble after gabble, a little here, a little there." So they will march, but they shall fall backward, and be injured and snared and captured. Hear now the word of the LORD, you men of mockery, who govern that people in Jerusalem!

In this passage Qav is the word of the LORD (יהוה) that those who babble in another language (אחורא) cannot understand. It is important to remember that the poet refers to other Israelites who spoke Hebrew, just as the Qumran sect also refers to other Jews in Jerusalem who spoke Hebrew. The expression "another" language certainly carries a pejorative undertone. This is suggested by the term "another" (אחורא), which is elsewhere associated with "other gods" or the "other" woman in the sense of an adulterous relationship.<sup>44</sup> The poet adds a further pejorative sense to this other language by the pun using ל' "language" alongside לצון "mockery" to refer to those who speak with another language. In verse 11 we read, "and in another language he speaks to this people" and in verse 14 he writes, "Hear now the word of the LORD, you men of mockery, who govern this people in Jerusalem." The latter text was undoubtedly particularly significant to the Qumran sect precisely because it was directed at those who governed in Jerusalem. The Qumran description of their adversaries as those who speak "another language" apparently derives from this passage. It is noteworthy that the Damascus Document also uses the term Tzav (צו) from Isaiah 28 (CD 4:19), identifying the Tzav with the spouting of false teaching. Apparently, Qumranites interpreted Isa 28:10 in two parts, with Qav being the divine word and Tzav, false precepts. The use of this particular code terminology further underscores

<sup>4</sup> The pejorative sense of the term תרמק was pointed out to me by Professor T. Muraoka.



the importance of Isaiah 28 to the Qumran linguistic ideology.

As anthropological linguists have shown, orthography and script are also ideologically loaded (cf. Eira 1998). Emanuel Tov (1986, 1996, 1998, 1999) has argued that the orthography of Qumran Hebrew reflects a system which must be considered unique and peculiar to the Qumran community. The experimentation with paleo-Hebrew and cryptic scripts were also socially marked uses of script. It is noteworthy, for example, that the revival of palaeo-Hebrew script appears on Jewish coins of the Second Temple period reflecting nationalistic movements (cf. Hanson 1964). The use of cryptic scripts now appears to be much more extensive than initially thought with perhaps more than eighty fragmentary manuscripts including several copies of the Rule of the Community.<sup>5</sup> One can only speculate concerning the rationale for cryptic script. It may have arisen from a rejection of the "foreign" Aramaic script or it may have been an attempt to recover the written alphabet from creation. In any case, the cryptic script socially marked off the community even more stringently than the Qumran scribal practice. It certainly reflects the highly charged linguistic ideology of the Qumran sect.

The Temple Scroll can illustrate a Qumran language ideology and its implications for understanding Qumran Hebrew. The Temple Scroll recasts the voice of Torah so that the book frames itself as the direct speech of God. The Temple Scroll draws most heavily on the biblical book of Deuteronomy as it reframes the third person report of Moses' speech in Deuteronomy into the first person voice of God. The peculiar language of the Temple Scroll is likely influenced by the change in voice. It seems difficult to sustain the argument that linguistic register would be unrelated to the change in voice. Naturally, God's speech is different from human speech. The Temple Scroll apparently parallels the presumed linguistic code of God when it uses forms like *וְהָיָה*, *וְהָיָה*, *וְהָיָה* "very," *הָיָה* "there," and *וְהָיָה* "his father/brother" (for BH *וְהָיָה*) that could be described as pseudo-classicisms or hyper-classicisms.

### III. Linguistic Ideology and Grammatical Aspects of Qumran

<sup>5</sup> See S. Pfann's forthcoming article, "The Writings in Esoteric Script from Qumran," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fifty Years after their Discovery—Proceedings of the Jerusalem Congress, July 20-25, 1997* (eds. Larry Schiffman, Emanuel Tov, and James C. VanderKam; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society). These manuscripts are being published for the DJD series by Pfann and are discussed in his dissertation at the Hebrew University (also see Pfann 1994).

#### Hebrew

While it is clear both from internal evidence and anthropological linguistic analogy that the Qumran sect had a strong language ideology, it is still quite difficult to move from this observation to the assessment of individual grammatical features. The counter-reality for the Qumran sect is its own identity as "the true root of Israel" and its linguistic ideology that understood their language as following a predetermined primordial pattern. We would expect the Qumran sect consciously and/or subconsciously to try to imitate this primordial language—the language God spoke during creation. Classicisms or pseudo-classicisms would therefore be particularly suspicious as reflecting linguistic ideology.<sup>6</sup> The most telling attempt to reconstruct primordial language would be hyper-classicisms—namely, the use of pre-classical forms such as *וְהָיָה* (MT Hebrew is *וְהָיָה*).

A consistent principle, namely the addition of *he*, underlies many of the anomalous forms in Qumran Hebrew. Some of these forms may actually preserve dialectal variations, but linguistic ideology offers a more comprehensive explanation than historical grammar. In any case, we should not be misled into thinking that spelling only encodes phonology and morphology; as sociolinguistics has taught us, spelling is often ideologically motivated and expresses cultural ideologies especially among sectarian groups (see Trudgill, 1995:136-145; Eira 1998). Rather than attempting to posit a hitherto unknown dialect and appealing to separate historical grammatical explanation for each form, it seems better to look for an explanations that account for a whole group. It may turn out in the end that a few of these forms are actually derived from a hitherto unknown dialect; however, an ideologically motivated explanation can account for a whole group of forms.

Since an antilanguage is marked by "conspicuous avoidance and violation of forms recognized as 'standard'" (Irvine 1989: 253), we need a precise understanding of the standard, both the vernacular and the literary standard, in order to accurately characterize the language of Qumran Hebrew. Unfortunately, we have a limited corpus by which to judge the standard. MMT and Ben Sira as well as Mishnaic Hebrew (although this is admittedly later) give us some basis to judge the standards, both vernacular and literary. To begin with, the recently published MMT does not fit the criteria for an antilanguage and may be taken as a point of departure for the vernacular of standard

<sup>6</sup> On Pseudo-classicisms see Joosten (1999).



language (cf. Schniedewind 1999). MMT is a pseudo-letter, which includes a detailed legal discussion and was addressed from the community to the Jerusalem leadership—apparently before the Khirbet Qumran was settled. Elisha Qimron and John Strugnell have summarized the linguistic situation in MMT (1985, 1994). Two factors account for differences between MMT and Qumran Hebrew. First of all, MMT was apparently sent to the Jerusalem aristocracy with a view to a rapprochement; hence, it used more of the vernacular. Second, from the content of MMT it is apparent that it was composed before the group separated itself from Jerusalem and moved to Khirbet Qumran, even though the copies in the library of Qumran mostly post-date the breakaway from Jerusalem. Thus, MMT reflects a period in the group's history before the development of the antilanguage. The attempt at rapprochement in MMT would not have been conducive to the use of an antilanguage.

Another useful criterion is linguistic inconsistency. The assumption is that if a form is standard in a language, then it is likely to be employed consistently. This is especially true of common words like pronouns and particles. Tov has documented some of the inconsistencies in Qumran scribal practice. It should be noted at this point that scribal corrections are toward Qumran scribal practice, not toward the standard. In studying scribal corrections, for example, Tov gives no examples of erasures of Qumran scribal practice (cf. Tov 1998). Normally inconsistencies in Qumran scribal practice are not corrected, but some superlinear scribal corrections were made so as to conform manuscripts toward Qumran scribal practice (e.g., \*ג, 1QH 7/15/7, 4/12/5, 12/20/21, 4Q267 frag. 9 v, 5; 75, 1QH 1/9/15; ע\*ג, 11QT<sup>a</sup> 51:19).<sup>7</sup> Inconsistency in grammatical forms and orthography should be regarded as arising from the difference between the vernacular standard and the linguistic register cultivated by the Qumran scribes.

Most illustrative is the use of תו and עו for "there" in 11QT and 1QS. 1QS uses עו three times and never uses תו. This is as we expect since the longer form is created by the addition of the directional ה. Yet, 11QT regularly employs תו (15 times) for the static "there" and uses עו only twice. The directional ה is a feature that disappears in later Hebrew, including Qumran. In other words, 11QT takes an intermittent feature of the language of Deuteronomy (תו "to there" with

<sup>7</sup> 1QpHab 4:6 is an interesting reading תו(1)תו, where the original copyist mistakenly adds the waw where the BH pausal form is actually תו, and consequently a later copyist corrects it (similarly note 1QIs<sup>a</sup> xv, 9 [=19:5]).

directional ה occurs 35 times out whereas עו "there" occurs 47 times). 11QT makes תו, ostensibly the particle עו + directional ה, into the regular static form. Qimron (1986:69) describes these forms as using a "locative termination," but notes that it has no syntactical function. This explanation assumes that the best approach to the problem is from the perspective of historical grammar. It seems more likely that the longer form was specifically chosen by the author/copyist of 11QT because it was the longer spelling and therefore appears to be more archaic—that is, closer to primordial pattern of language.

Another illustration may be gleaned from the forms תו and לו. Ostensibly, these are the cohortative and the 1cs imperfect, respectively. The cohortative, however, disappears in later Hebrew including (for the most part) Qumran Hebrew (cf. Qimron 1986:44). How then shall we understand the intermittent use of the form תו for the 1cs indicative imperfect in Qumran Hebrew (e.g., 1QS 10:10, 12, 16; 1QpHab 6:12; 1QH 7/15/13)? Obviously, there is a confusion between תו and לו. Results from the loss of the cohortative, but it is significant that the Qumran Hebrew frequently chooses to employ the final ה form לו. This certainly seems to be on analogy with other forms that employ a final ה in their spelling, unless one wishes to appeal to a hitherto unknown dialect of Hebrew. The analogical explanation would have its basis in language ideology, namely the apparent antiquity of longer forms. From this perspective, it would be quite irrelevant to the Qumran scribe that the ה in תו was morphological, whereas in לו the ה is supposedly a case of *scriptio plena*. However, if we accept the analogical argument for forms like תו or לו, then we should consider it for a whole range of forms (e.g., תו, תו, תו).

Forms like the 3mp imperfect verbs, לו, with the accent on the penultimate syllable, find parallels most frequently in biblical poetry. This results simply because such pausal forms appear only with verb final syntax found most regularly in biblical poetry. For example, I could find only four cases of the pausal form לו (לו in MT orthography) in the prose passages of the entire Pentateuch (out of a total of 333 Qal 3mp impf verbs).<sup>8</sup> Such forms are, however, found regularly in poetic books like Psalms (e.g., 10:8; 18:46; 35:20, 26; 38:12; 56:7; 78:7; 83:6; 89:32; 94:3, 6; 102:27, 29; 104:9, 28; 105:45; 107:30; 126:5) or Isaiah (18 examples out of 222 Qal 3mp impf verbs) simply

<sup>8</sup> The majority of these 333 verbs are weak verbs and could not take the pausal form לו. I only give the total number of verbs for statistical comparison.



because poetry has so many verb final constructions. In general, the freer syntax of poetry lent itself to more variability in verb final constructions and consequently, to the preservation of these apparently more archaic pausal forms. In addition, poetry has shorter lines than prose and consequently more pausal forms per line. Other pausal forms, like the 3mp pronoun pausal form,  $\text{לָמָּה}$ , are also found more typically in poetry. This may be illustrated by the fact that  $\text{לָמָּה}$  occurs 25 times in Psalms, but  $\text{לָמָּה}$  appears only 3 times; in contrast,  $\text{לָמָּה}$  occurs 48 times in the narratives of the Book of Kings, but  $\text{לָמָּה}$  appears only 15 times. Thus, Qumran Hebrew regularly employs forms that are more typically poetic or pausal. Now we may ask: was there a hitherto unknown Hebrew dialect that preferred pausal forms or does their use reflect language ideology? We have no direct evidence so we can only make inferences from the data and the social context of late Second Temple Judaism.

More difficult to assess are forms like  $\text{לָמָּה}$  and  $\text{לָמָּה}$ .  $\text{לָמָּה}$  is an exception in its relatively consistent use of these forms ( $\text{לָמָּה}$ , 15 times;  $\text{לָמָּה}$ , 0 times;  $\text{לָמָּה}$ , 35 times;  $\text{לָמָּה}$ , 1 time).<sup>9</sup> More typical is the inconsistency illustrated when we examine these forms in the larger sectarian scrolls from Cave 1 ( $\text{לָמָּה}$ , 23 times;  $\text{לָמָּה}$ , 20 times;  $\text{לָמָּה}$  25 times;  $\text{לָמָּה}$  6 times).<sup>10</sup> Inconsistency can be found both within many scrolls and from sectarian scroll to scroll. Given this, we must suspect that the longer forms  $\text{לָמָּה}$  and  $\text{לָמָּה}$  were peculiar to Qumran Hebrew and generated by the linguistic ideology of the sect.

The Qumran scribes apparently recognized that long forms tended to represent the older stage of the language and attempted to restore the forms, even to the point of hyper-classicisms like  $\text{לָמָּה}$ . Qumran Hebrew also merges separate forms like the static  $\text{לָמָּה}$  "there" and the dynamic  $\text{לָמָּה}$  "to there" as well as the 1cs imperfect indicative and cohortative and not surprisingly chose the longer form. There also seems to be a preference for pausal forms, which often do preserve earlier stages of the language. Given the language ideology which traced their speech patterns to the primordial language of creation, we must seriously question whether such longer forms are dialectal, or whether they were simply thought to be more archaic to the sectarians at Qumran.

<sup>9</sup> MMT is slightly less consistent ( $\text{לָמָּה}$ , 5 times;  $\text{לָמָּה}$ , 2 times;  $\text{לָמָּה}$  3 times;  $\text{לָמָּה}$  1 time).  $\text{לָמָּה}$  appears in 4Q394 frg. 3-7ii:17, 4Q396 frg. 1-2 iii:3, 4, iv:3; 4Q398 frg. 11-13:4.  $\text{לָמָּה}$ , appears in 4Q396 frg. 1-2 iii:10; 4Q397 frg. 6-13:8. Some of this variability may be accounted for by the different manuscripts and scribes, but there is also internal variability.

<sup>10</sup> Statistics come from IQS, IQSa, IQSb, IQM, IQH, IQpHab.

In sum, if language is an integral part of society and not a closed system, then the Qumran sect's belief that the pattern of language was ordained from the very creation of the world must have shaped their linguistic choices.<sup>11</sup> And this may provide the key to a whole range of different forms in Qumran Hebrew.

<sup>11</sup> I wish to thank the participants of the workshop on Qumran Hebrew for their comments on my hypothesis, particularly Steve Fassberg, Victor Hurowitz, Avi Hurvitz, Jan Joosten, Takamitsu Muraoka, and Mark Smith. Their comments helped sharpen the written version of this paper.