THE LANGUAGES OF FIRST-CENTURY PALESTINE:
AN INTRODUCTION TO THREE PAPERS

The following three essays were all presented (at least in earlier form) in a single conference session dedicated to 'The Languages of First-Century Palestine' as part of the program of 'Forging Linguistic Identities: Language in the Nation, the Region and the World: An International Conference', held 16-18 March 2017, sponsored by the Foreign Languages Department at Towson University in Towson, Maryland, USA. The three essays were only one part of a much wider range of sociolinguistics papers presented during this conference by a variety of speakers from the United States, Canada, various nations of Europe and the Middle East. Topics treated at the conference included such areas as Language and Performance, Multilingualism and Multiculturalism, Minority Languages and Dialects, Language and Communication, Language and Education, North Africa and the Middle East, Language Policy, Discourse Analysis and Identity Formation and Historical Linguistics (all of these being session titles). The three papers presented here were unified in their discussion of the multilingualism of first-century Palestine, but overlapped with a number of the other topics included within the conference, such as multilingualism and multiculturalism, minority languages, language policy, identity formation and historical linguistics. As a result, there were numerous opportunities for further discussion of the ideas presented here in the context of the other papers of the conference. Nevertheless, a number of features of these papers distinguished them from the others. These features especially include the challenges presented by assessing the multilingualism of an ancient linguistic context in which we do not have native speakers or even representative evidence of language usage. As a result, much must be made of the limited linguistic artifacts that are available, using appropriate re-constructive methodologies. The three papers here address, therefore, three important overlapping areas of concern in assessing the multi-lingualism of first-century Palestine. The first paper focuses upon

defining an appropriate methodology for discussion of ancient multilingualism. In this essay, important terminology and concepts are presented that provide for a means of discussing the nature of ancient, and in particular, first-century Palestinian, multilingualism. The second paper is concerned with the Semitic language evidence. Within the context of rising current interest in the use of Hebrew in first-century Palestine, this paper addresses the nature of diglossia and code-switching in which the possibility of Semitic language differentiation may have been problematic. The third and final paper addresses the use of Greek within this ancient context. This paper relies on reconstructing both a diachronic trajectory and a synchronic slice of first-century language use to establish the pervasive use of Greek within multilingual first-century Palestine.