

# WHICH HEBREW BIBLE?

REVIEW OF BIBLIA HEBRAICA QUINTA, HEBREW UNIVERSITY  
BIBLE, OXFORD HEBREW BIBLE, AND OTHER MODERN  
EDITIONS

David L. Baker

## Summary

*Three major critical editions of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament are in preparation at present: Biblia Hebraica Quinta (BHQ), the Hebrew University Bible (HUB), and the Oxford Hebrew Bible (OHB). This article is a comparative review of these three editions, followed by a briefer review of six other modern editions: British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS), NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament, Jewish Publication Society (JPS), Jerusalem Crown (JC), Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia (BHL), and the Reader's Hebrew Bible (RHB). Finally, there is a brief discussion of implicit editions and electronic editions, followed by concluding remarks on the usefulness of the various editions.*

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1 The Biblia Hebraica Series*

It is just over a hundred years since the first edition of the series entitled *Biblia Hebraica* ('Hebrew Bible') was published, edited by Rudolf Kittel (1906). This used the sixteenth-century text of the second 'Rabbinic Bible', which remained the standard text of the Hebrew Bible until the beginning of the Twentieth Century.<sup>1</sup> It also included a

---

<sup>1</sup> On which, see Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein, 'Editions of the Hebrew Bible—Past and Future' in *Sha'arei Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Michael Fishbane and Emanuel Tov (Talmon Festschrift; Winona Lake, IN:

brief critical apparatus (notes on variant readings in ancient manuscripts and translations). A corrected second edition was published in 1913.

The third edition was published from 1929 to 1937, with three major innovations. First, the printed text was that of a single Hebrew manuscript from the early Eleventh Century, the Leningrad Codex (abbreviated L, kept in the National Library of St Petersburg).<sup>2</sup> This manuscript is generally considered the earliest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible in existence. Second, the shorter Masoretic notes (*masora parva*) were included in the margins. Third, there was a much more substantial critical apparatus, with many proposals for emending the text where it was deemed corrupt. Albrecht Alt, Otto Eissfeldt, and Paul Kahle were very much involved in the production of this third edition, but the reputation of Kittel was such that it continued to be known as the 'Kittel Bible', and commonly abbreviated BHK. This became the standard critical edition for a generation of scholars, though many of the more speculative proposals were rightly treated with a pinch of salt.

Four decades later a fourth edition appeared, between 1967 and 1977. The names of the editors (Elliger and Rudolph) were less prominent, and the edition was called *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, after the city where the German Bible Society published the work. Corrected editions have been published intermittently, the fifth and latest in 1997. Like the third edition, BHS uses the Leningrad text, checking with photographic copies of the manuscript and copying it as precisely as possibly, even when there are 'obvious scribal errors'. There are also three significant differences. First, all the Masoretic notes are included, though the longer notes (*masora magna*) are printed in a separate volume with cross-references in the margins and notes of the main volume. Since few people have access to the extra volume, these cross-references cause extra clutter on an already complex page, with no benefit to the majority of readers. Second, the critical apparatus of BHK is completely revised, and many of the more speculative proposals are removed. This is a notable improvement, though the

---

Eisenbrauns, 1992): 221-42, esp. 221-28; Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (2nd edn; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001): 77-79.

<sup>2</sup> A beautifully printed facsimile is now available in print, together with introductory articles: *The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

continued use of Latin and Gothic abbreviations makes it no easier to understand and use. Third, the critical apparatus is supplemented with references to biblical texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls, designated simply Q (Qumran). This is important since these texts are a thousand years older than L, even though they are fragmentary and it is difficult to be sure how far they represent the text of mainstream Judaism at that time. Like its predecessor, BHS has become the standard critical edition of the Hebrew Bible for a generation. However, while a notable improvement for scholars, it is still far from being a practical edition for students since it is unnecessarily difficult to use.

Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, publication has begun of the fifth edition—*Biblia Hebraica Quinta*—also by the German Bible Society in Stuttgart. Four volumes (fascicles) have appeared so far: General Introduction and Megilloth (2004), Ezra and Nehemiah (2006), Deuteronomy (2007), and Proverbs (2008).<sup>3</sup> A fifth volume on the twelve Minor Prophets is forthcoming (2010), to be followed by Judges and Genesis.<sup>4</sup> It is anticipated that the whole project will reach completion by 2020. According to the general introduction, the edition ‘is intended as a *Handausgabe* (‘manual edition’) for use by scholars, clergy, translators, and students who are not necessarily specialists in textual criticism’ (p. VIII).<sup>5</sup> In the absence of a major critical edition, it is expected that it will also be used by specialists, and may contribute towards the eventual publication of a major edition. It is worth noting that earlier editions were prepared by

---

<sup>3</sup> *General Introduction and Megilloth, with Introductions and Commentaries on the Megilloth*, ed. Adrian Schenker et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2004); *Ezra and Nehemiah, with Introduction and Commentaries*, ed. David Marcus (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006); *Deuteronomy, with Introduction and Commentaries*, ed. Carmel McCarthy (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007); *Proverbs, with Introduction and Commentaries*, ed. Jan de Waard (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> According to an e-mail from the publisher, January 2010. Some introductory notes to the volume on Ezekiel have been published by the editor: Johan Lust, ‘The Ezekiel Text’ in *Söfer Mahir* (Schenker Festschrift; VTSup, 110; Leiden: Brill, 2006): 153-67.

<sup>5</sup> On textual criticism, the following handbooks may be consulted: D. R. Ap-Thomas, *A Primer of Old Testament Text Criticism* (2nd edn; Oxford: Blackwell, 1964); P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *Textual Criticism: Recovering the Text of the Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995; tr. from German, 5th edn, 1988); Ellis R. Brotzman, *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994); Tov, *Textual Criticism*.

European Protestants, but the editorial team for this twenty-first century edition is international, interfaith, and ecumenical.<sup>6</sup>

### ***1.2 Text***

BHQ follows the pattern set by previous editions of the *Biblia Hebraica* in reproducing the text of a single edition or manuscript. This is often called a ‘diplomatic’ edition by scholars, which is somewhat confusing since it aims to reproduce exactly the chosen manuscript rather than negotiate between several options as might be assumed from the meaning of the term ‘diplomatic’ in common usage. Like the third and fourth editions, the manuscript chosen is L, partly because it is the earliest complete manuscript available, and partly because this text was already available to the German Bible Society in both typeset and electronic form. For the purposes of this edition, the electronic form is being systematically checked against the latest photographs of the manuscript.

Three reasons are given for continuing to reproduce a single manuscript, rather than presenting an eclectic text.<sup>7</sup> First, the committee judged that the development of the Hebrew text is not yet sufficiently understood to give a sound basis for constructing an eclectic text. Second, an eclectic text must attempt a reconstruction at a specific point in the development, and there is no consensus concerning which point would be appropriate or feasible. Third, it was considered that an eclectic text should be based on a more comprehensive presentation of the variants than is possible in a one-volume edition.

While recognising the difficulties in presenting an eclectic text, and understanding the reasons why the committee responsible for BHQ decided against attempting this, the policy of reproducing exactly the text of L ‘even when this shows obvious errors’ (General Introduction: p. X) should be questioned. For specialists in textual criticism, this policy may be appropriate, and for them to continually consult the

---

<sup>6</sup> Members of the team are listed by James A. Sanders, review of *Biblia Hebraica Quinta: General Introduction and Megilloth* (2004) in *Review of Biblical Literature* (2005): [http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/4725\\_867.pdf](http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/4725_867.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> ‘Eclectic’ means to borrow freely from various sources; an eclectic text is a text constructed by scholars on the basis of ancient manuscripts which aims to present the ‘original’ or ‘earliest’ text of a work, so far as that is feasible. Most modern editions of the Greek New Testament are eclectic (cf. Peter M. Head, ‘Editio Critica Maior: An Introduction and Assessment’, *Tyndale Bulletin* 61.1 (2010): 131-52), as are those of many other ancient texts.

critical apparatus for corrections and alternative readings is no doubt a routine part of their day's work. In view of the intended readership of the edition, however, it would be a greater service to ordinary 'scholars, clergy, translators, and students' if the specialists who prepared the edition corrected these 'obvious errors' on the basis of other manuscripts, when that is possible, with explanatory notes in the critical apparatus. This would result in a more readable text for the majority of readers, saving time in going to and fro between the text and the apparatus, and enabling them to focus their attention on actually reading, interpreting, translating, and studying the Bible.

There is of course scope for disagreement about what is an 'obvious error', but the editors who prepare critical editions are in a better position to make such judgements than ordinary readers, and to put these corrections in the text rather than the apparatus would be more appropriate in view of the stated aim of the edition. I should emphasise that I am not proposing extensive corrections on the basis of ancient versions, let alone on the basis of speculation. Such corrections belong in the apparatus, except in an eclectic edition. But where 'obvious errors' can be corrected from other comparable Hebrew manuscripts (e.g. the Aleppo Codex), it seems unnecessarily purist to insist on reproducing the errors in the chosen manuscript, then to expect readers to find the correct readings in the apparatus without even a marker in the text to indicate that there is a problem.

In any case, the aim of BHQ to reproduce the text of L exactly is not pursued consistently. First, there are a few places where L is damaged and therefore illegible. To be consistent, BHQ would leave a blank in these places, but instead it gives a reconstructed reading in the text on the basis of other Hebrew manuscripts, together with an explanation in the apparatus. Second, there are places where corrections are visible in L itself. Here BHQ does not attempt to reproduce the double reading of the manuscript, but chooses the reading judged to be 'valid' and reports the relevant data in the apparatus. Third, BHQ does not follow the page layout of L, which has mostly two or three columns.<sup>8</sup> Fourth, the section divisions are marked by the letters **Ⓛ** and **Ⓜ**, whereas in L they are marked by spaces. If these changes to the manuscript are acceptable, to make a more usable edition, why not correct 'obvious

---

<sup>8</sup> The presentation of poetry is somewhat closer to L in BHQ than in BHS, making more use of the Masoretic accents and less of modern poetic analysis.

errors' when they are discovered, as in critical editions of other ancient works?

### ***1.3 Masorah***

The full Masorah is printed in BHQ, alongside (*masora parva*) and underneath (*masora magna*) the biblical text, and at the end of each book (*masora finalis*). This is an improvement compared with BHS, with its endless cross-references that mean nothing unless one has the companion volume. Another change is that the Masorah is presented 'diplomatically', consistent with the principle used for the text, whereas in BHS scribal errors and inconsistencies were corrected.

However, it is debatable whether it is necessary to include the Masorah at all in a 'manual edition'. On the one hand, it is good to be aware that the Masoretic Bibles include this material, and to be reminded of the extraordinary labours of these Jewish scholars who preserved the Hebrew Bible for us with such accuracy. On the other hand, I suspect the vast majority of 'scholars, clergy, translators, and students' will never consult this material. It would be more helpful to omit the Masorah altogether, putting the *ktiv/queré* readings and other significant matters from the Masorah in the critical apparatus, with appropriate explanations in English, as is already done in most cases. In this way the volume would be smaller, thus more affordable and portable. Readers would be able to find the material they need more easily, without the complexity of materials they are unlikely to use. In a day when a decreasing number of theological students are studying Hebrew, and the number of lecture hours allocated for exegesis is very limited, it would be more realistic to focus on providing the essentials for reading the biblical text.

### ***1.4 Critical Apparatus***

The critical apparatus aims to present 'a selection of textual cases, emphasizing those that are of substance for translation and exegesis' (General Introduction: p. XII). This is a worthy aim, and clearly accords with the intended readership of the edition. There are notable changes in the apparatus compared with that of BHS, most of which represent a substantial improvement.

First, the apparatus incorporates the results of the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project (HOTTP), undertaken by a group of six

scholars under the auspices of the United Bible Societies.<sup>9</sup> This project has done a thorough review of Old Testament textual problems for the use of Bible translators and exegetes, focusing on problems that involve significant differences of meaning.

Second, the editors have collated readings from a few key Tiberian Hebrew manuscripts, together with all earlier Hebrew manuscripts and all ancient versions that are considered to show independent knowledge of a Hebrew text. The variations in these witnesses are noted when they meet two criteria:

- significant for textual criticism, indicating a Hebrew text different from L; *and*
- significant for translation or exegesis.

This is a notable (and welcome) departure from previous practice, where emendations were sometimes proposed purely for exegetical reasons, without any evidence from manuscripts or versions. For example, the word דל ('poor') in Exodus 23:3 is found in all the manuscripts and versions, and is perfectly intelligible, but the critical apparatus of BHS suggests emendation to גדל ('great') on the basis of comparison with Leviticus 19:15. On the basis of the stated criteria, it is to be hoped that such speculative emendations will be avoided in BHQ, though it is intended that some long-standing cases that do not fit the criteria will also be included so as to enter into conversation with earlier discussions.

In addition to these two general criteria, three other principles affect the choice of cases to be included in the apparatus, all of which serve to give priority to the oldest Hebrew manuscripts:

- all variants from the Dead Sea Scrolls and Samaritan Pentateuch, and all cases of *ketiv/queré* to be included where they affect the meaning of the text
- variants from the Cairo Geniza to be limited to those dated earlier than 1000 BC and already published
- medieval manuscripts not to be cited.

---

<sup>9</sup> The project began in 1969, and the five volumes of the *Preliminary and Interim Report* were published by the United Bible Societies in New York between 1973 and 1980, with a revised edition of the first volume in 1979. Four volumes of the final report have appeared so far, edited by Dominique Barthélemy, entitled *Critique textuelle de l'Ancien Testament* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982–2005). An English translation is promised, but to my knowledge is not yet available. On HOTTP, see Harold P. Scanlin, 'The Presuppositions of HOTTP and the Translator', *Bible Translator* 43 (1992): 101-116.

Third, the editors of BHQ have access to published editions of all the biblical manuscripts among the Dead Sea Scrolls, together with new critical editions of the Peshitta, Septuagint, and Vulgate. This should ensure more reliable citations of these important ancient witnesses.

Fourth, when a textual issue is presented, *all* the relevant evidence is given. This means that manuscripts and versions which support L are cited, as well as those that differ, thus giving a clearer picture of the balance of evidence. In BHS only differing witnesses are cited, leaving readers to guess whether those not cited support L or simply have nothing to say on the issue.

Fifth, and especially significant for the intended readership, the critical apparatus is easier to use than in earlier editions. The notes are in English rather than Latin, and the antiquated Gothic symbols for manuscripts and versions used in BHK and BHS are replaced with roman type.

Sixth, references to the versions are given in their original languages and scripts, without translation into Hebrew or English. Scholars who know Aramaic, Syriac, Latin, and Greek will no doubt find this very helpful. Other readers will struggle with some of these languages, and with the Syriac script; while many other readers will simply ignore this material. In view of the intended readership of this edition, it would be more realistic to give these alternate readings in translation, whether or not accompanied by the original language.

Seventh, there are no markers in the text to point to the apparatus. On the one hand, this results in a slightly clearer and more attractive text. On the other hand, it means readers have to continually refer to the apparatus to discover whether there are problems in the text, rather than continue reading until alerted of a problem as in BHS. On this point, I am not convinced that the economy of omitting these markers is worth the extra effort required on the part of readers.

Eighth, alongside the critical apparatus there are notes of parallel passages in the Hebrew Bible for the purpose of comparison. This is a small but helpful addition.

### ***1.5 Other Material***

Each volume of BHQ includes an introduction to the textual resources and issues for the book under study, notes on the Masorah (including translation of the *masora magna*), a commentary on the critical



apparatus, and a bibliography of works cited. These extras are an extremely valuable contribution to scholarship. The introductions and commentaries will greatly facilitate textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible, while the notes will be helpful for those wishing to study the Masorah. All this material is to be gathered together into a separate volume after the project is complete, when the text of the whole Bible is printed in one volume (with the Masorah and critical apparatus).<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Hebrew University Bible (HUB)

### 2.1 *The Project*

Scholars associated with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem have been working on a quite different project since 1958. Their aim is to produce a new critical edition of the Hebrew Bible, making use of the entire range of evidence available. It is based on the Aleppo Codex, and refers exhaustively to other Masoretic manuscripts, other Hebrew traditions, and the ancient versions. This was originally proposed by Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, and he edited the first volume on Isaiah (1995). Two further volumes have been published, on Jeremiah (1997) and Ezekiel (2004).<sup>11</sup> It is a vast undertaking, and progress so far

---

<sup>10</sup> For further discussion of BHQ, see Richard D. Weis, 'Biblia Hebraica Quinta and the Making of Critical Editions of the Hebrew Bible', *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* 7 (2002): <http://rosetta.reltech.org/TC/vol07/Weis2002.html>; Sanders, 'Review of *BHQ: Introduction and Megilloth*'; David Marcus, 'How *BHQ* Differs from *BHS* in the Book of Ezra-Nehemiah' in *Sôfer Mahîr*, ed. Yohanan A. P. Goldman et al. (Schenker Festschrift; VTSup, 110; Leiden: Brill, 2006): 169-76; Emanuel Tov, 'Hebrew Scripture Editions: Philosophy and Praxis' in *From 4QMMT to Resurrection: Mélanges qumraniens en hommage à Émile Puech*, ed. Florentino García Martínez et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2006): 281-312, esp. 293-303; Carmel McCarthy, 'What's New in BHQ? Reflections on BHQ Deuteronomy', *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 30 (2007): 54-69; Mark McEntire, review of *Biblia Hebraica Quinta: Deuteronomy* (2007), *Review of Biblical Literature* (2009): [http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/6643\\_7199.pdf](http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/6643_7199.pdf); Andrew Steinmann, review of *Biblia Hebraica Quinta: Ezra and Nehemiah* (2006), *Review of Biblical Literature* (2009): [http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/6644\\_7200.pdf](http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/6644_7200.pdf); Francis Dalrymple-Hamilton, review of *Biblia Hebraica Quinta: Proverbs* (2008), *Review of Biblical Literature* (2010): [http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/7151\\_771.pdf](http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/7151_771.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> *The Book of Isaiah*, ed. Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1995; orig. publ. in three parts, 1975-92); *The Book of Jeremiah*, ed. Chaim Rabin et al. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1997); *The Book of Ezekiel*, ed. Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein and Shemaryahu Talmon (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2004).

suggests that it will be many years yet before the project reaches completion.

## 2.2 Text

The Aleppo Codex is considered to be the oldest and most authoritative extant manuscript of the Masoretic text, pointed and provided with Masorah in the Tenth Century by Aaron ben Asher, in Palestine. It had been preserved in the old synagogue at Aleppo in Syria, probably since the Fourteenth Century, but was damaged in an attack on the synagogue after the declaration of the state of Israel in 1948. For a decade it was hidden, then it was recovered and is now kept in the Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem. A facsimile is available both in print and online. About a quarter of the manuscript is missing, including most of the Pentateuch and several of the Minor Prophets and shorter writings. The HUB volumes published so far present books that are complete in the manuscript, and it is yet to be seen how the project will deal with those that are incomplete.<sup>12</sup>

HUB aims to reproduce the Aleppo text exactly, without emendations. It is set in an attractive font, which resembles that of the original manuscript. Nevertheless, a few changes are made for practical reasons, such as printing in one column rather than imitating the three columns of the manuscript. The manuscript is inconsistent with respect to end-of-verse punctuation, often omitting the double stop (:) after *silluq* (׀), and in these cases HUB adds a single raised stop where the double stop would be expected. Some corrections are made to 'obvious mistakes' in accents and other small details, with a corresponding note in the fourth apparatus (on which, see below).

## 2.3 Masorah

The Masorah of the Aleppo Codex is reproduced in full in HUB, with the large notes (*masora magna*) placed above the text as in the

---

<sup>12</sup> For the printed facsimile, see *The Aleppo Codex*, ed. Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1976; provided with Masoretic notes and pointed by Aaron ben Asher). A high quality facsimile is available at <http://www.aleppocodex.org>, together with various articles. Further information about the codex and its preservation is given by Izhak Ben-Zvi, 'The Codex of Ben Asher', *Textus* 1 (1960): 1-16; Hayim Tawil and Bernard Schneider, *Crown of Aleppo: The Mystery of the Oldest Hebrew Bible Codex* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2010). For the rationale underlying the use of the Aleppo Codex as the basis of the Hebrew University Bible, see Goshen-Gottstein, 'Editions', esp. 228-42.

manuscript. Incidentally, this serves to distinguish them from the critical apparatus.

### ***2.4 Critical Apparatus***

The critical apparatus contains six separate series of notes, distinguishing different kinds of evidence and comments on the evidence. First, there are variants from the ancient translations, including the Greek Septuagint, Aramaic Targum, Syriac Peshitta, Latin Vulgate, and Arabic *Tafsir*—in the original languages without retroversion into Hebrew. These are limited to ‘material’ variants, such as additions or omissions, which indicate a difference in the source text, not those resulting from differences of grammatical structure or which appear to be exegetical in nature (as is common in the Targum and also found in the Septuagint). There are also occasional references to quotations in the New Testament, and other early Jewish and Christian literature.

Second, there are variants from early Hebrew witnesses, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, Samaritan Pentateuch, and biblical quotations in rabbinic literature (Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmud, Midrash). The collation of these quotations is one of the notable innovations of HUB as distinct from other critical editions of the Hebrew Bible.

Third, there are variants in the consonantal text from medieval Hebrew sources, primarily other Masoretic manuscripts, as well as manuscripts and fragments from the Cairo Geniza. The earliest of these sources date to the Ninth Century. Fourth, there are variants from the medieval sources concerning vowels and accents, which are relatively less important for determining the ‘original’ text.

The first four apparatuses simply record data, while the fifth and sixth contain critical comments on the data, including translation of Greek variants and transliteration of Syriac variants into Hebrew. These critical comments are presented in English and modern Hebrew, in two parallel columns. Compared with *Biblia Hebraica*, the editors are more cautious in proposing textual emendations.

All in all, this is a much more thorough presentation of evidence for the Hebrew text than in BHQ, and will be welcomed by text-critical scholars. For most readers of the Hebrew Bible, however, the extra material is of little value and so condensed that it is scarcely usable. As the saying goes, it is hard ‘to see the wood for the trees’.

### 2.5 Other Material

The journal *Textus* publishes studies relating to the project, as well as other textual studies. Apparently there are plans to publish text-critical commentaries to accompany HUB, but to my knowledge none have appeared yet.<sup>13</sup>

## 3. Oxford Hebrew Bible (OHB)

### 3.1 The Project

The third major project to be discussed is intentionally quite different in approach. The multi-volume Oxford Hebrew Bible, which takes its name from the publisher but is not linked to the university, is designed as an eclectic edition of the text to complement BHQ and HUB. This text is to be accompanied by a lengthy text-critical commentary. Sample editions of short texts are available, both in print and online, and the first full volume is expected to be published in the near future—on Proverbs.<sup>14</sup> There is no projected completion date, but it may be anticipated that it will take a good many years.

---

<sup>13</sup> For information about HUB, see ‘A Brief Report on the Hebrew University Bible Project’, *Textus* 1 (1960): 210-11; [http://jewish.huji.ac.il/research/Bible\\_Project.html](http://jewish.huji.ac.il/research/Bible_Project.html); introductions to the published volumes of HUB. For further discussion of the project, see P. A. H. de Boer, review of *Hebrew University Bible: The Book of Isaiah, Sample Edition with Introduction* (1965) in *VT* 16 (1966): 247-52; Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein, ‘Hebrew Biblical Manuscripts: Their History and their Place in the HUBP Edition’, *Biblica* 48 (1967): 243-90; E. J. Revell, review of *Hebrew University Bible: The Book of Isaiah, Parts 1 and 2* (1975) in *JBL* 96 (1977): 120-22; James A. Sanders, ‘The Hebrew University Bible and Biblia Hebraica Quinta’, *JBL* 118 (1999): 518-26; review of *Hebrew University Bible: The Book of Ezekiel* (2004) in *Review of Biblical Literature* (2005): [http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/4662\\_767.pdf](http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/4662_767.pdf); Tov, ‘Hebrew Scripture Editions’, esp. 292-93; Ronald S. Hendel, ‘The Oxford Hebrew Bible: Prologue to a New Critical Edition’, *VT* 58 (2008): 324-51, esp. 338-42.

<sup>14</sup> Michael V. Fox is editing this volume. For samples already available, see Sidnie White Crawford, ‘Sample Editions of the Oxford Hebrew Bible: Deuteronomy 32:1-9, 1 Kings 11:1-8, and Jeremiah 27:1-10 (34G)’, *VT* 58 (2008): 352-66; Ronald S. Hendel et al., ‘Samples of the Oxford Hebrew Bible’ (n.d.): <http://ohb.berkeley.edu/samples.htm>. There is also a precursor in the form of an edition of Genesis 1–11, that includes a discussion of the rationale for an eclectic edition: Ronald S. Hendel, *The Text of Genesis 1–11: Textual Studies and Critical Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

### 3.2 Text

OHB differs from both projects discussed above by presenting an eclectic text rather than reproducing one manuscript, with a critical apparatus that summarises the evidence and justifies the editor's decisions. Although this is standard practice in the publication of other ancient texts, including the New Testament, it is a significant innovation for study of the Hebrew Bible. Three advantages are claimed for this method, while noting some practical problems.<sup>15</sup>

First, an eclectic edition allows the editors to exercise their critical judgement concerning variant readings and text-critical problems, and to present a text to readers that incorporates their conclusions. In contrast, the editors of BHQ and HUB present their critical judgements in the apparatus without modifying the text, leaving readers to study these notes and incorporate the suggestions into a revised text if they so wish. The advantage of OHB, according to its editors, is that text-critical decisions are made by text-critical scholars rather than by readers who may have little or no expertise in textual criticism. The rationale for the decisions is provided in the apparatus, and is therefore open to discussion and revision by other scholars as required.

Second, this format allows the edition to present multiple texts where recoverable, for example in the case of Jeremiah where there are significant differences between the MT and LXX. These alternative texts will be printed in parallel columns to facilitate comparison. Where they are considered to derive from a common ancestor, an attempt will be made to reconstruct that ancestor.

Third, it is argued that the critical apparatus of an eclectic edition is more suitable than that of a 'diplomatic' edition for providing information on scribal hermeneutics. This apparatus will be designed to distinguish between primary readings (those considered earlier and text-critically preferable) and secondary readings (scribal errors and revisions), endeavouring to explain the latter. This should have a double benefit: to justify the decisions made in determining the eclectic text, and to illuminate the process of scribal interpretation in the pre-Masoretic period.

The chief problem with this approach is that much of the key evidence for understanding the textual history of the Hebrew Bible is only available in translation. LXX is the prime example of this

---

<sup>15</sup> Hendel, 'Oxford Hebrew Bible', esp. 325-28.

problem. While its translation technique has been studied in detail, and it is often possible to reconstruct the Hebrew text from which it has been translated, there is inevitably an element of uncertainty in the procedure.

There is also the practical problem of how to deal with vowels and accents. If the archetype differs from MT, it is artificial and speculative to provide vowels and accents, yet to omit them is also problematic. A similar problem concerns spelling, since to reconstruct the spelling of an archetype is inevitably conjectural. HUB deals with these problems by means of the concept of ‘copy-text’, taken from English literature, in which ‘substantives’ (words and sentences) are distinguished from ‘accidentals’ (spelling and punctuation).<sup>16</sup> On this basis, textual critics focus on establishing the archetype for substantive readings, and use one good manuscript as a copy-text to govern accidentals. The former are significant for meaning, and intended by the ‘original’ authors and editors; whereas the latter do not usually affect meaning and are often adapted to current practice in the process of transmission (as is the case with modern copy-editing). In the case of HUB, it is proposed to use L as the copy-text, since it is the earliest complete manuscript of the Hebrew Bible and its quality is generally recognised by scholars. However, it will not be followed slavishly, and obvious scribal errors will be corrected. When the eclectic text differs from the copy-text in a substantive reading, it will be printed according to the spelling and vocalisation conventions of the copy-text, but without accents.<sup>17</sup>

Thus the aim of OHB is to be ‘a reliable and circumspect critical eclectic edition’, not a final text but ‘a provisional work of scholarship’.<sup>18</sup> While it is the first major edition of the whole Hebrew Bible to attempt this, it is not entirely new since many translators and commentators have been doing something similar on a piecemeal basis, as discussed below (§4:7). The goal is not to present the ‘original’ text, however that may be conceived, but the more practical goal of approximating the textual ‘archetype’, the ‘earliest inferable textual

---

<sup>16</sup> Hendel, ‘Oxford Hebrew Bible’, esp. 343-46. The concept is explained at length by W. W. Greg, ‘The Rationale of Copy-Text’, *Studies in Bibliography* 3 (1950-51): 19-36.

<sup>17</sup> See ‘The Oxford Hebrew Bible: Guide for Editors’ (2010): <http://ohb.berkeley.edu/Guide%20for%20Editors.pdf>: 3. This is a change from the previously-announced plan to print these readings without pointing.

<sup>18</sup> Hendel, ‘Oxford Hebrew Bible’, esp. 328-29.

state'.<sup>19</sup> This is intended as a step towards the 'original' text, and may even be close to it, depending on where the boundary is drawn between composition (writing and editing) and transmission (copying and translating).

A project which takes such a radically different approach to its predecessors is inevitably controversial.<sup>20</sup> In principle, it seems to me that the preparation of an eclectic edition of the Hebrew Bible is welcome, in view of the problems with the 'diplomatic' editions already reviewed. Nevertheless, three aspects of the project require further discussion.

First, it is true that the format of other critical editions means that those who make text-critical decisions are often poorly-equipped for the task, and it would be better if these decisions were made by scholars who are trained in the field. The most practical way of doing this, from the perspective of readers, would be for scholars to insert the 'correct' reading in the printed text, with an explanation and supporting evidence in the apparatus. This would make the text more readable and understandable, and avoid the need for those unskilled in textual criticism to consult the apparatus and draw conclusions about whether the information and recommendations it contains should be used to emend the text as printed. OHB proposes to do exactly this but—unlike BHQ—there are no plans to produce a one-volume edition, so it will not be accessible to most ordinary readers of the Hebrew Bible. As a result, the first advantage of an eclectic edition claimed by its editors (that it will be useful for readers untrained in textual criticism) seems unlikely to be realised.

Second, it is true that textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible is not essentially different in purpose from that of other ancient texts, including the New Testament, and in principle there can be no objection to the idea of an eclectic edition. Inevitably there are issues of whether there is sufficient evidence for particular readings, and the fundamental question of what 'original' or 'archetype' should realistically be aimed for, but the same is true in the study of most other ancient texts. However, there are particular difficulties in the case of the Hebrew Bible, especially relating to the nature of the evidence

---

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Hendel, *The Text of Genesis 1–11*: 112-15; Michael V. Fox, 'Editing Proverbs: The Challenge of the Oxford Hebrew Bible', *JNSL* 32 (2006): 1-22, esp. 5-10.

<sup>20</sup> See especially the recent critique by H. G. M. Williamson, 'Do We Need A New Bible? Reflections on the Proposed Oxford Hebrew Bible', *Biblica* 90 (2009): 153-75.

for variants. Probably the most important source of alternative readings to MT is LXX, but it is written in Greek and therefore only useful for determining an eclectic text if retroverted into Hebrew, a process that inevitably involves some degree of subjectivity. The Dead Sea Scrolls are another rich source of alternative readings. On the one hand, they have the merit of being written in Hebrew, a thousand years before the major Masoretic manuscripts. On the other hand, many of them are fragmentary and it is uncertain how far some of them can be considered biblical texts at all. Moreover, they originate outside mainstream Judaism, so it may be difficult to determine whether divergences from MT are to be explained by relative proximity to the original author or by their origin in a divergent tradition. The editors of OHB are no doubt aware of these difficulties, but it remains to be seen whether they will be able to convince other scholars that the evidence currently available is sufficient to prepare an eclectic edition that approximates to the archetype of the Hebrew Bible.

Third, the policy of incorporating ‘archetypal’ readings into a copy-text dating from more than a thousand years later creates a hybrid text. There is no simple and satisfactory solution to this problem.

One possibility is to print the entire text without pointing. This would look superficially authentic, according with the undisputed fact that the Hebrew Bible was originally written and edited without vowels or accents. However, it would be problematic since it is not only pointing that would have to be omitted from the copy-text but also many vowel letters if it was to resemble the form of the archetype, and this would involve considerable conjecture. Moreover, while it might be of interest to scholars, the resulting unpointed text would be virtually useless for most readers of the Hebrew Bible.

A second possibility is to incorporate the eclectic readings without pointing, while printing the copy-text with vowels and accents. This is the method used in the OHB samples published so far, but it creates an awkward mix of pointed and unpointed text. While it avoids the anachronism of adding Masoretic pointing to archetypal readings, it sidesteps the fact that the rest of the copy-text is printed without change because it is believed to be the same as the archetype. If the whole of an eclectic edition is aiming to represent the archetype, not just the parts where it differs from the copy-text, the decision whether to use pointing should be made for the whole rather than individual parts.



The third possibility is to add pointing to the eclectic readings so that they match the copy-text. From one perspective, it is anachronistic to add pointing to a text that is intended to represent an archetype and certainly never had these features. On the other hand, it is consistent with the principle of aiming for the archetype in terms of substantives and following the practice of the copy-text in terms of accidentals. I am pleased to see that the editors of OHB have now decided to follow this method, adding vowels but not accents.<sup>21</sup> This will certainly result in a much more useful eclectic edition than if it were to follow either of the other approaches. While it is true that the text thereby presented never existed in this form, and thus is not a pure archetype, the same is true for critical editions of other ancient texts. In the case of the New Testament, for example, the archetype would have been written without spaces between words, lower case letters, punctuation, breathing marks, or accents. Nevertheless, critical editions of the Greek New Testament include all these later innovations for the benefit of modern readers.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.3 *Masorah*

OHB does not include any of the Masorah, since this was obviously not part of the archetype. Cases of *ketiv/queré* are to be dealt with as variants, one of which will be chosen as the preferred reading and printed in the eclectic text. The *queré* is to be treated as the intended reading of the copy-text, and maintained unless there is a clear preference for the *ketiv*. If the *ketiv* is preferred, it will be marked as a non-copy-text reading in the eclectic text. In each case, presumably, the alternatives will be clarified in the apparatus.

---

<sup>21</sup> To add accents as well would be even more anachronistic. It is arguable that the vowels were implicit in the archetypal consonantal text, but that can scarcely be claimed for the Masoretic accents. Another possibility would be to omit the accents from the copy-text—while adding vowels to the eclectic readings—so that the whole text was consistent, but on the whole I think the present policy is a reasonable compromise.

<sup>22</sup> Another matter worth discussing—though beyond the scope of the present review—is the assumption of OHB, like BHQ and HUB, that the MT should be treated as the standard text of the Hebrew Bible. This is assumed by mainstream Judaism and Christianity, and the majority of modern critical commentaries, but questioned by Emanuel Tov, ‘The Status of the Masoretic Text in Modern Text Editions of the Hebrew Bible: The Relevance of Canon’ in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2002): 234–51.

### 3.4 *Critical Apparatus*

The purpose of the apparatus is to provide the substantive textual evidence and text-critical reasoning that underlie the eclectic text. It is intended to focus on readings that reflect ancient variants of the Hebrew text. As a result, three other kinds of variant reading are generally not included: readings from LXX and other ancient translations that appear to be the result of the translation process rather than evidence of a different Hebrew text; variants from later Masoretic manuscripts that are unlikely to indicate a different ancient text; and spelling differences, which concern accidentals rather than substantives.

Major versions (MT, Samaritan Pentateuch, LXX, DSS) are treated differently from minor versions (Targums, Peshitta, Vulgate) in the apparatus. The reason given by Hendel for this is that ‘the latter in most instances reproduce the readings of M[T]’<sup>23</sup>—surely an anachronistic way of expressing the matter since all these versions are much earlier than MT. In any case, the evidence from the ‘minor’ versions is to be cited only when there is reason to believe they preserve readings different from MT, and readers are to assume they agree with MT when not listed in the apparatus. This is intended to reduce ‘clutter’, which is a worthy aim, but it is questionable whether these versions are of so little importance that their evidence can be sidelined whenever they agree with the dominant text. The extra space taken by adding single-letter abbreviations for these three versions would be minimal in a multi-volume edition like this. The policy of BHQ and HUB of listing all relevant evidence from ancient versions and manuscripts, rather than leaving readers to make assumptions about those not listed (as in BHS), seems more appropriate for a major critical edition.

Another difference from the critical apparatus of BHQ and HUB is that readings from ancient versions are given both in their original language and with retroversion into Hebrew. This is a definite advantage over the other editions because—even though the retroversion may be uncertain—it enables readers to see the issues more clearly and puts them in a better position to evaluate the likelihood of the reading being original, or at least older than that of MT.

---

<sup>23</sup> Hendel, ‘Oxford Hebrew Bible’, esp. 347.

Ancillary evidence from quotations in other ancient works will be included where it is considered significant for textual criticism, generally where it supports a reading of one of the ancient versions that is different from MT. This seems a reasonable approach, since to list all such evidence exhaustively would be neither feasible nor useful.

Readings which are different from the copy-text will be marked by half-brackets (⌈ and ⌋) to set them off from the main text.<sup>24</sup> This makes it easy to distinguish these readings, and alerts readers to consult the apparatus. The material in the apparatus is set out concisely but clearly, with straightforward abbreviations.

### **3.5 Other Material**

Each volume will begin with a text-critical introduction to the biblical text, followed by the critical text and apparatus, and concluded with a commentary in which the editor provides fuller arguments for the decisions presented in the text and apparatus. Without doubt, these materials will be a very valuable resource for scholars, whether or not they agree with the rationale of an eclectic edition.<sup>25</sup>

## **4. Other Modern Editions**

### **4.1 British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS)**

When I began my study of Hebrew I was presented by the British and Foreign Bible Society with a copy of their *Hebrew Old Testament* (1958),<sup>26</sup> which I read, studied, and annotated for many years. Until the

---

<sup>24</sup> See 'Guide for Editors', 4. This is a change—and improvement, in my view—from the method used in the previously published samples.

<sup>25</sup> For up-to-date information about OHB, see its helpful website: <http://ohb.berkeley.edu>. For further discussion of the project, see Harry van Rooy, 'A New Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible', *JNSL* 30 (2004): 139-50; Sidnie White Crawford, 'Textual Criticism of the Book of Deuteronomy and the *Oxford Hebrew Bible* Project' in *Seeking out the Wisdom of the Ancients*, ed. Ronald L. Troxel et al. (Fox Festschrift; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005): 315-26; Fox, 'Editing Proverbs'; Tov, 'Hebrew Scripture Editions', esp. 303-307; Hendel, 'Oxford Hebrew Bible'; Williamson, 'Do We Need A New Bible?'; Michael V. Fox, 'Text Criticism and Literary Criticism' (forthcoming): <http://ohb.berkeley.edu/MV%20Fox,%20Text%20Criticism%20and%20Literary%20Criticism.pdf>. I am grateful to Professor Ronald Hendel, the chief editor of the project, for several e-mails and a preview of a forthcoming article, which were helpful in writing my review.

<sup>26</sup> *Hebrew Old Testament*, ed. Norman Henry Snaith (London: British & Foreign Bible Society, 1958).

present day, it is still one of the most affordable and practical editions for students. It is based on a fifteenth-century Spanish manuscript, now kept in the British Museum (Or 2626-28). This manuscript was compared with a fifteenth-century Yemenite manuscript (Or 2375; British Museum) and a fourteenth-century Spanish manuscript (Shem Tob; David Sassoon Library, no. 82). The edition is therefore not an eclectic text, but essentially the text of Or 2626-28, with obvious errors corrected from the other two manuscripts. Though the methodology is quite different from that of *Biblia Hebraica*, the resulting text is very similar, thus confirming that both are good representations of the Ben Asher tradition of the Masoretic text.<sup>27</sup> There is a limited selection of Masorah, with a few footnotes (mostly concerning *ktiv/queré* readings) and the *masora finalis*. Unfortunately, there are a significant number of misprints in this edition, mostly relating to accents, but also including some consonants and vowels.<sup>28</sup>

#### **4.2 NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament**

Various interlinear Hebrew Bibles have been produced, designed it would seem for the benefit of readers who know little or no Hebrew but hope to have access to the original text. This 1987 Zondervan publication<sup>29</sup> is better than many of this genre, because it uses the text of BHS and has a relatively modern translation in parallel (NIV). However, I would not recommend it to any serious student of Hebrew. The words and lines of the text are spread out to make space for the interlinear translations, with the result that it is very difficult to read as a text. The volume begins from the ‘front’ rather than the back, and the biblical books are arranged in the order familiar to English readers, further confirming that the aim is to help those who want to find Hebrew equivalents for English words rather than to actually learn Hebrew. Most of the interlinear material is quite unnecessary for anyone who has a basic knowledge of Hebrew, and in any case to have it at all is distracting for someone who is struggling to come to grips with the language. Moreover, the idea of an interlinear edition is highly

---

<sup>27</sup> Norman Henry Snaith, ‘New Edition of the Hebrew Bible’, *VT* 7 (1957): 207-208.

<sup>28</sup> Miles B. Cohen and David B. Freedman, ‘The Snaith Bible: A Critical Examination of the Hebrew Bible Published in 1958 by the British and Foreign Bible Society’, *HUCA* 45 (1974): 97-132.

<sup>29</sup> *The NIV Interlinear Hebrew-English Old Testament*, ed. John R. Kohlenberger, III (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987).

questionable in view of the different structures of Hebrew and English, and in my opinion the use of such works should be discouraged. Students should rather be encouraged to read one of the standard editions of the Hebrew text, making use of dictionaries, translations, commentaries, and other aids as necessary.<sup>30</sup>

### 4.3 *Jewish Publication Society (JPS)*

Much more helpful than an interlinear edition is a diglot, which gives a complete Hebrew text in parallel with a complete translation. This makes it possible to read the Hebrew text without distraction, with the option of easy comparison with the translation when required; or alternatively to read the translation, with easy reference to the original. Probably the most useful and attractive diglot available at present is that of the Jewish Publication Society (1999).<sup>31</sup> The Hebrew text is based on the standard electronic version of L (Michigan-C Claremont-Westminster), with corrections on the basis of comparison with the 1998 facsimile edition. One very helpful innovation in this electronic version, reproduced in the printed edition, is that each *qeré* reading is inserted in the text with pointing, immediately after its unpointed *ketiv* equivalent. This makes comparison of the two much easier and quicker than when the *qeré* is placed in a footnote, as in most printed editions. The English text is a second edition of the New JPS Translation (first edition, 1985).

The printed edition also makes a number of other changes in order to produce a more practical text. First, Hebrew prose is divided into paragraphs according to meaning, matching the parallel English translation, in addition to the traditional Masoretic section markers (Ⓜ and Ⓝ). Second, Hebrew poetry is divided with line breaks, matching the English translation as far as possible, rather than with gaps as in ancient manuscripts. Third, the spelling of twenty-nine words in the Torah is corrected on the basis of marginal notes; while a larger number of marginal corrections are ignored because they are judged not to affect meaning or pronunciation, or unlikely to be more original

---

<sup>30</sup> One aid they might consider, which is much more helpful than an interlinear edition, analyses all the words of the Hebrew Bible in canonical order: John Joseph Owens, *Analytical Key to the Old Testament* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989–92).

<sup>31</sup> *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation—Second Edition*, ed. David E. Sulommm Stein (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999).

than the reading in the text. No corrections are made in the Prophets and Writings, because the spelling of the L text in these sections is judged to be closer to that of the Masoretic tradition than the marginal corrections. Fourth, about two hundred scribal errors are corrected, mostly concerning pointing, both on the grounds of textual consistency and with reference to manuscripts and editions cited by BHS. Fifth, there are about six hundred Hebrew footnotes with a selection of material from the Masorah; and the footnotes to the English translation refer to a significant number of textual issues, especially when the translation is based on an alternative reading or emendation.

#### **4.4 *Jerusalem Crown (JC)***

Another Jewish edition of the Hebrew Bible is the *Jerusalem Crown* (2000).<sup>32</sup> This is based on the incomplete Aleppo Codex, supplemented and corrected by comparison with L and other manuscripts. The Masorah is omitted, except for the *ketiv/queré* readings, as is common in Rabbinic Bibles. It is not a critical edition, and will not significantly advance textual criticism, but it is attractively presented and offers Jewish students a good alternative to the older editions with which they are familiar.

#### **4.5 *Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia (BHL)***

A third recent Jewish edition is based on L, and called the *Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia* (2001).<sup>33</sup> The editors follow L closely in reproducing its letters, pointing, and accents, more closely in some details than BHS and BHQ. However, they make a few corrections to the text where there are ‘obvious mistakes’, standardise pointing of proper nouns, and smooth various inconsistencies in L (e.g. by inserting a pair of dots at the end of a verse where this is omitted in the manuscript). There are also some adaptations to make the edition suitable for use in Jewish worship.

---

<sup>32</sup> *Jerusalem Crown: The Bible of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem*, ed. Nahum Ben-Zvi (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi, 2000). The subtitle is confusing, because it is entirely different from the Hebrew University Bible discussed above, and the team who produced it are not associated with the Hebrew University. This edition was not available to me, and my summary is based on James A. Sanders, review of *Jerusalem Crown: The Bible of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem* (2000) in *Review of Biblical Literature* (2004): [http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/4090\\_3973.pdf](http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/4090_3973.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> *Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia: Prepared according to the Vocalization, Accents, and Masora of Aaron ben Moses ben Asher in the Leningrad Codex*, ed. Aron Dotan (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001).

The Masorah is limited to the *masora finalis* and the *ketiv/queré* readings, which are presented by printing the *ketiv* without pointing in the text and the *queré* with pointing in the margin. This is a divergence from the practice of L, imitated by BHS and BHQ, of printing the consonants of the *ketiv* with the vowels of the *queré* in the text, while the consonants of the *queré* are printed in the margin. The same presentation is found in the popular Koren Bible (1962), and has the advantage of avoiding the kind of misreading that led to the name ‘Jehovah’, which still persists in some circles.

There are no critical footnotes, but Appendix A lists ‘Manuscript Variants’, including corrections to the text made by the editors, and differences between the text and Masorah of L. Other appendices deal with ‘Petuchot and Setumot in the Manuscript’, ‘Shape of the Songs in the Manuscript’, ‘Deviation in Gemination in the Tiberian Vocalization’, and ‘Scripture Readings’.<sup>34</sup>

#### **4.6 Reader’s Hebrew Bible (RHB)**

Most students of Hebrew appreciate help in improving their fluency in the language, and the recently published *Reader’s Hebrew Bible* (2008)<sup>35</sup> is therefore a welcome addition to the editions available. The Leningrad text is used, for the pragmatic reasons that it is readily available in electronic format and is the one most widely used by scholars and students today. The text is beautifully printed in a large font which is practical for reading. There is no Masorah, except that *queré* readings are inserted in the text with pointing, immediately after their unpointed *ketiv* equivalents. Verse numbers are clearly marked at the beginning of each verse, rather than in the margin, which makes it easy to find one’s way around.

Apart from its attractive presentation, however, the most important distinctive of this edition is that glosses are provided in footnotes for all Hebrew words occurring fewer than one hundred times in the Bible, and Aramaic words occurring fewer than twenty-five times. These glosses are clearly marked with superscript Arabic numerals in the text and footnotes. A glossary of Hebrew words occurring one hundred

---

<sup>34</sup> For further discussion of BHL, see Timothy G. Crawford, review of *Biblia Hebraica Leningradensia* (2001), *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* 6 (2001): <http://rosetta.reltech.org/TC/vol06/Dotan-ed2001rev.html>.

<sup>35</sup> *A Reader’s Hebrew Bible*, ed. A. Philip Brown, II and Bryan W. Smith (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008).

times or more is provided at the end of the book, though strangely there is no equivalent for the common Aramaic words. The glosses are taken from *HALOT* and *BDB*, occasionally supplemented from Holladay, *DCH*, and other sources.<sup>36</sup> To save space, proper nouns are not glossed, but all except the most well-known names are printed in grey type to alert the reader. The glosses do not seem to have been systematically checked in context, so there are occasional oddities and errors. Nevertheless, most of the glosses are helpful and can save readers many hours of time consulting dictionaries. Unlike the explanatory material in an interlinear edition, which creates a permanent intrusion, the footnote glosses here can be increasingly ignored as readers gain confidence and fluency in the language, but they are still there in time of need.

A list of twenty-seven words where the Westminster electronic text of L differs from BHS is provided, but otherwise there are no corrections or textual notes. It is not designed as a critical edition, and students of textual criticism will need to consult BHQ, HUB, or OHB. Translators and exegetes will need to use the standard dictionaries to supplement the glosses. But for all who are learning Hebrew, or wanting simply to read the Bible in Hebrew, this is an excellent edition at a very modest price. Christian readers may be interested in a leather-bound volume that combines this Hebrew Old Testament with a similar edition of the Greek New Testament.

#### **4.7 *Implicit Editions***

In addition to the published editions of the Hebrew Bible, the most important of which have been discussed above, many modern translations and commentaries are based on ‘implicit editions’. These translators and commentators generally take a standard edition of the Masoretic text as a basis, then make decisions on certain text-critical issues, thus implicitly creating a new edited text that forms the basis of their translations and commentaries. Most translations provide brief

---

<sup>36</sup> *HALOT: The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ludwig Koehler et al. (5 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000; tr. from German, 1967–96, edited for translation); *BDB: A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Francis Brown et al. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907; repr. with corrections 1957); William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Based Upon the Lexical Work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971); *DCH: The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, ed. David J. A. Clines (projected 8 vols.; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993–).



footnotes to explain these decisions, whereas commentaries such as the International Critical Commentary, *Biblicher Kommentar*, and *Word Biblical Commentary* include a more detailed discussion. The former are designed primarily for ordinary readers and aim to express the meaning of the text in fluent English (or another modern language), sometimes exercising creativity to achieve this goal, but often deferring to a traditional rendering if there is uncertainty. The latter are primarily for scholars and tend to provide more literal translations, though they may make a conjecture or leave a gap where there is uncertainty, with discussion of the issues in a note.

In both translations and commentaries, the implicit text is eclectic in nature—following the Masoretic text most of the time, but choosing a different text or making a conjectural emendation when the Masoretic text is considered unclear or corrupt. Tov argues against this approach, which he considers subjective, suggesting that translators should ‘systematically and consistently translate either the MT, or Vulgate, or LXX, or any complete Hebrew scroll from the Judean Desert’.<sup>37</sup> Albrektson convincingly refutes this argument, showing that translators cannot evade making a choice when they are faced with imperfect manuscripts and versions; and even a choice to use the Masoretic text consistently is ‘subjective’ and in any case virtually impossible to implement without making some compromises.<sup>38</sup>

#### **4.8 Electronic Editions**

Undoubtedly electronic editions of the Hebrew Bible will play an increasingly important role in the years ahead, for scholars, students, and ordinary readers. My personal favourite is *Bible Works*, which offers the electronic version of L from the Groves-Wheeler Westminster Database, with linked morphology and lexicons, as well as LXX, Targum, and other ancient resources, plus a good selection of modern translations. It does not include Masorah or critical apparatus, and makes no pretence of being a critical edition, but it is very practical and incredibly fast. However, a printed journal like this is not the best

---

<sup>37</sup> Emanuel Tov, ‘The Textual Basis of Modern Translations of the Hebrew Bible: The Argument against Eclecticism’, *Textus* 20 (2000): 193-211, esp. 211.

<sup>38</sup> Bertil Albrektson, ‘Masoretic or Mixed: On Choosing a Textual Basis for a Translation of the Hebrew Bible’, *Textus* 23 (2007): 33-49. Cf. David F. Payne, ‘Old Testament Textual Criticism: Its Principles and Practice. Apropos of Recent English Versions’, *TynBul* 25 (1974): 99-112; Williamson, ‘Do We Need A New Bible?’, esp. n. 3.

place for discussion of electronic editions, since the field is growing and changing so rapidly. Interested readers should consult electronic resources that provide up-to-date details, many of which can be accessed from the Tyndale House website.<sup>39</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

I will not attempt a detailed comparison of each of the editions discussed above. Their respective merits and demerits have already been outlined, and my final remarks are limited to brief recommendations about their usefulness for prospective readers. Clearly there is no one 'best buy' that will suit everyone, because readers have very different needs.

Scholars of textual criticism will of course make their own evaluations of the different editions, and their conclusions will depend on whether they prefer a diplomatic edition of L (BHQ), a diplomatic edition of A (HUB), or an eclectic edition (OHB). For the foreseeable future, the choice will depend largely on which volumes are available in each edition. But even when they are complete, the three major editions will be complementary and each is likely to make a major contribution to understanding the textual history of the Hebrew Bible. Major biblical libraries will certainly need all three.

Other Bible teachers and students have a more difficult choice. Of the major editions, BHQ will be most readily available since the text and apparatus are to be published in one volume. It is a significant improvement on BHS, but suffers from the handicap of reproducing the text of L precisely, including obvious errors, and so can only be recommended to those who are willing to learn at least the basics of textual criticism and to consult the apparatus regularly. OHB is potentially the most useful to such readers, but will be difficult to access unless they live near to a major library. So most teachers and

---

<sup>39</sup> E.g. the recent survey of Bible software by David Instone-Brewer, 'New Ways to Study the Bible', *Tyndale Tech: Electronic Resources for Biblical Studies* (17 May 2010): <http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/index.php?page=tyndale-tech>. A helpful article on resources for textual criticism is provided by Emanuel Tov, 'Electronic Resources Relevant to the Textual Criticism of Hebrew Scripture', *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* 8 (2003): <http://rosetta.reltech.org/TC/vol08/Tov2003.html>, though this is old by internet standards.

students may be wise to consider one of the ‘minor’ editions. Three of the six discussed above may be recommended in particular:

- First, BFBS retains its usefulness as a pocket edition of MT, including *ketiv/queré* readings and with obvious errors corrected from other Hebrew manuscripts, though it is somewhat marred by misprints.
- Second, for those who would like a diglot, JPS presents MT with some obvious corrections and a few notes, helpfully printing the *ketiv* and *queré* together in the main text with pointing to distinguish the latter.
- Third, RHB is a beautifully-printed edition, that also prints the *ketiv* and *queré* next to each other in the main text. It has the disadvantage of reproducing L precisely, even when it is clearly wrong, without even footnotes to alert readers. But for those who are not fluent in Hebrew—which is probably the majority of readers—it has the great benefit of providing a running gloss of less frequently used words.

One final comment: As a teacher of the Hebrew Bible, I am encouraged to see the enormous effort being put into three major critical editions of the text which has been the basis for my life’s work. In the long term, this will benefit wider biblical scholarship, as the advances made filter down into translations and commentaries, and we should all be grateful to the teams of scholars involved in this painstaking work. On the other hand, I am frustrated to find that—in spite of all this effort at higher levels—there is still no practical edition that I can wholeheartedly recommend to my students. Hopefully someone, somewhere, sometime, will produce such an edition, focusing on the needs of students rather than scholars. Many students, translators, ministers, and lay people learn Hebrew in order to read the Bible in its original language, and thereby understand it better, but have no inclination or competence to engage in textual criticism. They need a practical and reliable edition for this purpose. Clearly it is too soon to produce an eclectic edition at present, though hopefully that may be possible after the completion of OHB and the debates that follow the publication of each volume. For the time being, it would be enormously helpful to have an edition of MT based on L, with obvious errors corrected on the basis of other manuscripts (as in BFBS and JPS), with *ketiv* and *queré* adjacent in the main text (as in JPS and RHB), and *without* the Masorah. Two extra features to make it even more useful would be a practical apparatus referring to major variants (perhaps based on the

notes of NRSV) and English glosses as in RHB. I hope my next review of a Hebrew Bible may be of an edition like this.