

Diplomatic or eclectic critical editions of the Hebrew Bible? Considering a third alternative

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Ever since the publication of the third edition of Rudolph Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica* (BHK3) to the present gradual production of the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (BHQ) so-called editiones criticae minores of the Hebrew Bible are diplomatic editions. The Codex Leningradensis, dating from 1008/9 CE, is used as the base text, and the *Biblia Hebraica* text editors note significant variants in other Hebrew manuscripts and/or the ancient versions in eclectic fashion in a text-critical apparatus. The *Hebrew University Bible Project* (HUPB) also publishes a diplomatic text based on the Codex Aleppo but with a more detailed text-critical apparatus. *The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Edition* (HBCE) follows a different route, traditionally more familiar in the production of critical editions of the Septuagint and New Testament, namely to publish an eclectic edition. The text editors produce a theoretical, reconstructed text of what they regard as the 'correct' reading after careful consideration and weighing of variants in all available textual witnesses. I argue that critical editions of the Hebrew at the disposal of Hebrew Bible scholars, whether based on a diplomatic or eclectic text, have two inherent weaknesses, namely eclecticism and lack of context. Taken together, these shortcomings might be classified as subjectivism. I propose at least considering the alternative of a synoptic text-critical approach beyond the diplomatic-eclectic dichotomy.

Contribution: This research critically reviews the current diplomatic/eclectic approaches in the production of scholarly Hebrew Bibles and proposes at least considering a third alternative, namely a synoptic approach.

Keywords: textual criticism; Masoretic Text; diplomatic edition; eclectic edition; Synoptic edition; text-critical apparatus; *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*; *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*; *Hebrew University Bible Project*; *Hebrew Bible: A Critical Edition*.

Introduction

In sum, the text of the Bible is represented by the totality of its textual witnesses, and not primarily by one of them. Each Hebrew manuscript and ancient version represents a segment of the abstract entity that we call 'the text of the Bible'. One finds the 'text of the Bible' everywhere and nowhere. (Tov 2002:251)

This study is no treatise on text-critical theory and practice (Knoppers 2014:355–362), but a critical reflection on the advantages and shortcomings of the standard tools biblical scholars have at their disposal when they engage in textual and exegetical studies of the Hebrew Bible. I focus on the text-critical tools readily available to the *average* Hebrew Bible scholar when she or he engages in a comparative study of the texts (note the deliberate use of the plural) of the Hebrew Bible.¹ The study will not address the controversial question on *which* Hebrew Bible text should be reconstructed via text-critical methodology and *how* it should be done (Brooke 2013:1–17) and certainly does not argue in favour of the reconstruction of an *Urtext* of some kind. On the contrary, the study embraces the pluriformity of available textual material for the Second Temple Period (Ulrich 2000:67–87) and, beyond, as indicated in the quote of Tov's study above. It advocates utilising exactly that pluriformity in our academic study of the text(s) of the Hebrew Bible.²

The aim of the study is modest. It critically addresses the current tools readily available to biblical scholars when they engage in a textual study of the Hebrew Bible. The most prominent tool at

1. My critical remarks are also applicable to the tools available in Septuagint and New Testament Studies. These textual editions cannot be discussed due to the limited scope of the current study. Note my emphasis on textual studies undertaken by the 'average' Hebrew Bible scholar. Specialists in the field of Hebrew Bible textual criticism often forget that Hebrew Bible scholars interested in translation studies, the writing of a commentary or any in-depth study of a Hebrew Bible text do not necessarily have access to the wealth of textual witnesses specialists in the field take for granted. They have to rely on the information provided in a critical edition of the Hebrew Bible (Deist 1988:82–83).

2. For an overview of the long history of scholarly conversation about critical editions of the Hebrew Bible, cf. Hendel (2014:392–423).

Note: Special Collection: Septuagint and Textual Studies, sub-edited by Johann Cook (Stellenbosch University).

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hand will (almost of necessity, cf. below) be a so-called *editio critica minor* or 'pocket' edition of the Hebrew Bible (Deist 1978:87).³ I will briefly reflect on two diverging traditions prevalent in the production of critical editions of the Hebrew Bible, namely *using* a diplomatic (i.e. existing) base text or *creating* a theoretical eclectic base text, discuss the shortcomings of these particular text-critical tools and argue that the diverging traditions ironically lead unsuspecting students of the text of the Hebrew Bible into exactly the same text-critical trap. Finally, the study contains some reflections on considering a third alternative for the current tools at hand, namely a synoptic approach. I illustrate my misgivings about currently available 'average' text-critical tools with two brief examples from Habakkuk 3.

Critical editions of the Hebrew Bible: A brief overview

The field of textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible finds itself in a remarkable situation in that three scholarly editions of the text of the Hebrew Bible, each with its distinct character, are now under way at the same time... This is a rare and important opportunity for reflection on the making of text editions. (Weis 2002)

As indicated in the quote above, in the production of critical editions of the Hebrew Bible, three scholarly editions, based on different principles and expecting different outcomes, are simultaneously in various stages of production (Weis 2002), namely the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (BHQ) published by the German Bible Society, the *Hebrew University Bible Project* (HUBP) published by Magness Press and the *Hebrew Bible: A Critical Edition* (HBCE) published by the Society of Biblical Literature.

Schenker (1996:59) provides scientific terminology to distinguish between the type of critical Hebrew Bible editions produced by the German Bible Society on the one hand and the HUBP and the HBCE on the other hand. Schenker calls the former an *editio critica minor*, while the latter two are *editiones criticae maiores*. The difference lies mainly in the nature of the text-critical apparatus(es). The German Bible Society editions contain a less detailed text-critical apparatus, reduced from the two apparatuses (one with 'less', the other with 'more' important variants) in BHK³ to a single apparatus in BHS and BHQ (cf. the discussion below). HUBP, on the other hand, contains a complex set of four text-critical apparatuses together with the editor's text-critical notes and textual commentary in two parallel columns, both English and Hebrew. For obvious reasons, this publication cannot be published as a single volume as was the case with BHK³ and BHS or the envisaged two-volume publication of BHQ, one volume for the text of the Hebrew Bible with its text-critical apparatus, the other containing textual commentary and the evaluation of so-called 'variants' by the various text editors (Weis 2002).

3.Tov (2002:234) argued that for most Hebrew Bible scholars the term 'Bible' is identical to the Hebrew Bible in its medieval Masoretic guise. This assumption needs critical reflection, but as a matter of practicality the Masoretic Text is usually used 'as the point of departure for describing textual variations because it contains the *textus receptus* of the Bible, but this decision does not imply any particular preference for its contents' (Tov 2001:291).

The focus of the current study is not on the *nature* of these critical editions of the Hebrew Bible but rather on the *type of critical text* produced in each case and its usefulness as a text-critical tool. The BHQ is an *editio critica minor* and represents the latest scholarly edition in a long *Biblia Hebraica* tradition. As was the case with BHK³ and BHS, it is a *diplomatic edition* based on *Codex Leningradensis*, the oldest complete medieval text in the Ben Asher Masoretic tradition. It is an edition intended for 'persons who are not specialists in the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible but who need a scholarly, not to say critical, edition of its text' (Weis 2002). Such students of the Hebrew Bible need an edition that is 'portable and affordable' (Weis 2002). The purpose of the edition is to provide its readers:

[W]ith a clear statement of what the BHQ editor judges to be the earliest attainable form of the Hebrew/Aramaic text that can be discerned on the basis of the surviving manuscript evidence, and that is useful for translation and exegesis, and also to provide them with a basis for criticizing the editor's judgment.

The first volume published in this edition was the *Five Megilloth* (cf. eds. De Waard et al. 2004). Subsequently, another seven volumes appeared (Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Judges, Twelve Prophets, Proverbs, Ezra and Nehemiah).⁴

The HUBP is an *editio critica maior*. Moshe Goshen-Gottstein established the project in 1956. It 'is intended to be more comprehensive than any previous edition, and includes the widest range of textual evidence, spanning almost 2000 years of written sources' (Segal 2013:38–62). It is also a *diplomatic edition*, but based on the *Codex Aleppo*, according to many 'the most precise version of the Masoretic Text, vocalized and proofread by Aaron ben Asher (c. 925 c.e.)' (Segal 2013:40). The purpose of this project is not to 'reconstruct an "original" *Urtext* of the biblical books or to delineate multiple literary stages within their transmission history' (Segal 2013:39). It:

[A]bstains from promoting a global theory regarding the development of the text. Instead, the exhaustive presentation of textual information, accompanied by explanatory notes, allows the reader to use and assess the data in his or her own research. (p. 39)

The first volume published in this project was the book of Isaiah (cf. Goshen-Gottstein 1965). Another two volumes followed (Jeremiah and Ezekiel).

The HBCE is also an *editio critica maior*. However, it follows a different route in the production of a critical edition of the Hebrew Bible. The 'traditional' route in the production of scholarly Hebrew Bibles is to publish *diplomatic* editions utilising a medieval Masoretic manuscript, either the *Codex Leningradensis* (BHQ) or the *Codex Aleppo* (HUBP), as base text. *The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Edition* follows a route quite familiar in the production of scholarly editions of the Septuagint and the New Testament, namely to publish an

4.It falls outside the scope of the current study to discuss the nature of these critical editions and the slightly different underlying presuppositions and practices regarding the text-critical 'reconstruction' of the text of the Hebrew Bible. For a brief overview of the history and nature of the scholarly editions of the Hebrew Bible produced by the German Bible Society, cf. Schäfer and Voss (2008:4–15).

eclectic text of the Hebrew Bible.⁵ Initially, the project was known as the *Oxford Hebrew Bible* (OHB). The editor-in-chief of the project, Ronald Hendel, describes this eclectic edition as ‘a critical text with an apparatus presenting the evidence and justifying the editorial decisions’ and regards it as ‘a complement to these diplomatic editions’ (Hendel 2008:325). The ‘practical goal for the OHB is to approximate in its critical text the textual “archetype,” by which I mean the “earliest inferable textual state”’ (Hendel 2008:329). To date, only the volume on Proverbs (cf. Fox 2015) and a number of sample texts (Crawford, Joosten & Ulrich 2008:352–366; Hendel 1998) have been published.⁶

An *editio critica minor* in the *Biblia Hebraica* tradition as inevitable ‘average’ text-critical tool

Finally, recall that the foregoing discussion is intended to illustrate the way in which one should examine *any* pocket edition before adopting *any* of the emendations proposed by its editors. It is clear that thorough textual study cannot rely on such an edition as the final reference. Anyone wishing to engage in thorough textual study is obliged to consult the actual manuscripts. (Deist 1978:94–95; emphasis original)

For the ‘average’ student of the text of the Hebrew Bible, an *editio critica minor* will probably remain the preferred text-critical tool for both economical and practical reasons. As will become clear below, whether an *editio critica minor* or an *editio critica maior*, and whether it represents a *diplomatic* or *eclectic* text, my reservations about such editions’ value for a comprehensive and informed study of the text of the Hebrew Bible’s rich and variegated history and its diverging guises in various locations and at different times remain equally valid.

For an *editio critica minor*, Deist (1978:94–95) coined the term ‘pocket edition’. The use of the term for any of the critical editions of the Hebrew Bible is a *contradictio in terminis*. Strictly speaking, in the world of book production, a ‘pocket edition’ is exactly what the name implies – a much-abbreviated edition of a more voluminous publication that can (almost) fit into a reader’s pocket. Naturally, no critical edition of the Hebrew Bible fits this description. Deist (1978:87) used the term as a convenient reference to the successive and widely used critical editions of the Hebrew Bible in the *Biblia Hebraica* tradition. Deist discussed two such editions: First, the third edition of Rudolph Kittel’s *Biblia Hebraica* (BHK³; cf. Kittel 1937) produced under the auspices of the Württembergische Bibelanstalt in Stuttgart, Germany in 1937; second, the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS; cf. eds.

5.Hendel (2008:325) indicates that a similar situation exists in Septuagint Studies. Rahlfs (1979, first published 1935) is an eclectic *editio critica minor*, while the *Göttingen Septuaginta-Unternehmen*, founded by Alfred Rahlfs in 1908, published an eclectic *editio critica maior* in 30 volumes up to 2015, when the project was officially concluded (Albrecht 2020:202–203). On the other hand, Swete (1909) produced a diplomatic *editio critica minor* based on the text of the *Codex Vaticanus*, while the *Cambridge Septuagint Project* published nine fascicles between 1909 and 1940 as a diplomatic edition based on the *Codex Vaticanus*.

6.Talshir (2012:33–60) provides a critical evaluation of these sample texts and then provides her own samples of an eclectic text with reference to selected examples from 1 Samuel. Cook (2018:502–507) provides a critical review of Fox’s volume on Proverbs.

Elliger & Rudolph 1997) produced under the auspices of the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft in 1977, also in Stuttgart. To these two editions, we can add the BHQ project produced under the auspices of the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft with Adrian Schenker as general editor. In a revised edition of his book on the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible, Deist (1988:71) called the critical editions in the *Biblia Hebraica* tradition ‘hand editions’. He indicated that such critical editions can only contain ‘restricted sources of information’ (Deist 1988:71) regarding the text(s) of the Hebrew Bible represented in the wealth of Hebrew manuscripts and ancient versions currently available to students of the Hebrew Bible’s rich and variegated textual history.

A critical evaluation of eclectic and/or diplomatic editions of the Hebrew Bible

Although textual criticism follows certain well-established guidelines and has various principles or rules which should always be considered, the fact is that there is an inevitable subjective element which means that scholars will almost always disagree with one another at this point or that. (Williamson 2009:171)

In a recent publication (Prinsloo 2022:358), I criticised the approach to Hebrew Bible textual criticism tacitly implied in successive editions of *Biblia Hebraica*. The HUBP and the HBCE, although not ‘pocket’ editions of the Hebrew Bible and possibly never to be generally available to *average* students of the Hebrew Bible, can be included in my critical remarks. Whether a critical edition of the Hebrew Bible is based on an existing manuscript and thus can be described as a *diplomatic* edition, or whether the critical edition *produces* an *eclectic* text, the editions produced ‘are fundamentally not as far apart from each other as is usually claimed’ (Segal 2017:45). In both types of editions, the text-critical apparatus supports two implicit presuppositions. Firstly, consideration of the listed text-critical ‘variants’ will aid users of the critical edition to reconstruct a ‘correct’ reading of the Masoretic Text. Whether that elusive text is defined as an *Urtext*, the earliest possible manifestation of the Hebrew text or the archetype that lies behind the numerous possible ‘variants’ of any specific reading of the Hebrew text in that particular edition, the underlying assumption remains the same, namely that it is possible to reconstruct a ‘correct’ reading of some kind (Deist 1988:81). Second, perceived variants of the Masoretic Text are dependent on the modern text editor’s subjective evaluation of the textual evidence at hand. The text editor decides which of the many textual variants at his or her disposal should be regarded as significant enough to merit mention in the text-critical apparatus (Deist 1988:78–81).

To name but one simple example, for the phrase לְהַבְרִיקָה הַנְּבִיאַ in Habakkuk 3:1, Karl Elliger found no need to record any textual variant when he edited the text of *Codex Leningradensis* for BHS in 1970. Anthony Gelston, however, included the following note when he edited the same text for BHQ in 2010:

‘Mur G V S T | > Barb’. Gelston speculates on a possible reason for the omission of Habakkuk’s ‘occupation’ in the so-called Barberini Greek version of Habakkuk 3:1 (Gelston 2010:122*), namely that the verse was regarded ‘as a title rather than as part of the text’.

This innocuous example is compounded when we consider that not only the Hebrew Bible text editor, but also the commentary writer and translator are tacitly *creating* an *eclectic* text based on the cryptic information in a text-critical note, even when it is expressly claimed that the translation and/or commentary is working with the Masoretic Text as base text (Tov 2001:372 n. 2).⁷ A brief example will suffice, taken from the recently published Afrikaans translation of the Bible (*Die Bybel 2020-vertaling* 2020). The translation claims to remain as close as possible to the ‘source text’,⁸ which – in the case of the Old Testament – is purportedly the Masoretic Text. Habakkuk 3:9b (שְׁבַע מִטּוֹת אֶמְרָה; literally ‘oaths, staffs, saying’) is notoriously difficult and has indeed been described as untranslatable (Hulst 1960:251). Jeremias (2022:193) claims that the Masoretic Text ‘ist deutlich fehlerhaft überliefert werden’.⁹

In *Die Bybel 2020-vertaling* the colon is translated by “sewe knuppels!” was die bevel’ = “seven cudgels!” was the command’. For this creative ‘fictional’ (Deist 1988:81) manifestation of the translator’s imaginary prowess, a footnote claims ‘Die Septuagint word hier gedeeltelik gevolg’ = ‘The Septuagint is here partially followed’.¹⁰ This claim *and* translation need closer examination. In Ziegler’s (eclectic) text of the Septuagint, Habakkuk 3:9ab reads as follows (Ziegler 1984:270): ἐντείων ἐντενεῖς τὸ τόξον σου ἑπτα σκῆπτρα λέγει κύριος ‘surely you will stretch your bow, “seven cudgels!” says the Lord’. Retroverted to Hebrew, the Masoretic Text is emended to שְׁבַע מִטּוֹת אֶמְרָה ‘seven cudgels (with) a word’. Day (1979:143–14151) argues that the background of Habakkuk 3:9b lies in Ugaritic Baal mythology and specifically in ‘the sevenfold manifestation of the deity in thunder’ (1979:141). He proposes the following translation for Habakkuk 3:9ab: ‘Utterly laid bare are your bow (and) seven arrows with a word’ (1979:147). As support for the emendation of שְׁבַע מִטּוֹת אֶמְרָה, he calls upon Ziegler’s eclectic Septuagint text (1979:146).

However, this argument is built on a text that does not exist (and probably never existed) in reality. In Rahlfs’ (eclectic) edition of the Septuagint, Habakkuk 3:9ab reads as follows

7.Cf. Tov (2000:193–211) for an argument against the tacit reconstruction of an *Urtext* in commentaries and translations.

8.In its foreword, the editors of *Die Bybel 2020-vertaling* claim that the aim of the translation is to remain ‘so getrou moontlik aan die bronteks’ (= ‘as true as possible to the source text’; emphasis original).

9.It falls outside the scope of the current study to address the virtually insurmountable text-critical riddles of Habakkuk 3:9 in detail. See in this regard Barré (2006:75–84); Filiz (2020:27–31).

10.As so-called ‘source text specialist’, I was responsible for the initial literal translation of Habakkuk. Against my express advice and detailed motivation in a set of explanatory notes, this translation was unfortunately accepted in the final publication and is now read by users of the translation as *the* text of Habakkuk 3:9. The general readership takes it for granted that the translation is supposedly as *close as possible* to the *source text*. The reality is that the translation reflects a fictional, imaginary, reconstructed text, but certainly not *the* ‘source text’ (if by that elusive term the *Masoretic Text* is implied)! Such examples from this recent translation can be multiplied.

(Rahlfs 1979:536): ἐντείων ἐντενεῖς τὸ τόξον σου ἐπὶ τὰ σκῆπτρα λέγει κύριος ‘surely you will stretch your bow against the sceptres, says the Lord’. Swete, in his (diplomatic) edition of the Septuagint, presents the text as follows (Swete 1909:62): ἐντείων ἐντενεῖς τὸ τόξον σου ἐπὶ σκῆπτρα λέγει κύριος ‘surely you will stretch your bow against sceptres, says the Lord’. It is illuminating to follow Deist’s advice and ‘consult the actual manuscripts’ (Deist 1978:95). For illustrative purposes, I confine my discussion to three major uncial manuscripts, *Codex Vaticanus*, *Codex Sinaiticus* and *Codex Alexandrinus*. *Codex Vaticanus* reads ἐντείων ἐντενεῖς τὸ τόξον σου ἐπὶ σκῆπτρα λέγει κύριος ‘surely you did stretch your bow against sceptres, says the Lord’. *Codex Sinaiticus* has ἐντίων ἐντίνας τὸξον σου ἐπὶ σκῆπτρα λέγει κύριος ‘surely you will stretch your bow against sceptres, says the Lord’, while *Codex Alexandrinus* reads ἐντείων ἐντενεῖς τὸ τόξον σου ἐπὶ τὰ σκῆπτρα λέγει κύριος ‘surely you will stretch your bow against the sceptres, says the Lord’. Ziegler’s ἑπτα σκῆπτρα rests upon the presupposition that ἐπὶ τὰ (cf. *Codex Alexandrinus*, but not present in *Codex Vaticanus* or *Codex Sinaiticus*) is a scribal error for ἑπτα ‘seven’ (Day 1979:146).

In spite of the shaky foundation of Ziegler’s eclectic text, in the *BHQ* text-critical apparatus the following note appears: ‘שְׁבַע Mur V | ἑπτα G (differ-vocal) | ἐχόρτασας Barb (differ-vocal) | سبعة S (differ-vocal) | T (indet)’. For my current argument, only the reference to the ‘variant’ reading of the Septuagint is applicable. Gelston (2010:124*) indicates that the reading in the Septuagint suggests that שְׁבַע ‘oaths’ may be read as שְׁבַע ‘seven’, exactly the ‘emendation’ accepted in *Die Bybel 2020-vertaling*. Gelston does *not* indicate that *the* Septuagint reading contained in his text-critical note is taken from Ziegler’s eclectic text. The entire constellation of arguments leading from a supposedly corrupt Masoretic Text, via a theoretical eclectic reconstruction of what the Septuagint *should* have looked like (but in reality does not), back to an emended Masoretic Text (which only exists in the translator’s imagination) amounts to nothing but circular reasoning.

A similar approach and tacit creation of a theoretical eclectic text in support of emending the (granted) difficult Masoretic reading of Habakkuk 3:9b is apparent in commentaries. I name two examples from recently published Habakkuk commentaries in the acclaimed commentary series. Fabry (2018:278) translates the colon as »sieben Pfeile« hast du gesagt’. He acknowledges the problematic nature of the emendation. For the reading of שְׁבַע as שְׁבַע, he points to Ziegler’s eclectic text but acknowledges that Rahlfs’ edition contains a different reading (2018:284). He admits that the translation of מִטּוֹת as ‘arrows’ is problematic, as the noun usually indicates ‘maces’ (2018:284) but argues that his translation makes sense in the context (2018:309). Furthermore, he proposes that אֶמְרָה can be emended to אָמַרְתָּ ‘you said’, and proposes that a scribe erroneously omitted the ך through haplography because of the similar consonant occurring at the end of the preceding מִטּוֹת (2018:284). Jeremias (2022:189) translates Habakkuk 3:9b as ‘sieben« »Stäbe« hast du geordert’. Jeremias states without any indication

of inner-Septuagint variant readings that 'G liest שבעת und versteht darunter die Zahl »sieben«' (Jeremias 2022:237). He seeks support for his translation in Ugaritic mythology (Jeremias 2022:237–238). Jeremias refrains from translating מִטְוֹת by 'arrows' as has become almost customary in modern translations but proposes that it refers to weapons comparable to Baal's 'lightning-tree' as depicted in the famous 'Baal au foudre' statue from the temple of Baal excavated at Ras Shamra (Ugarit) (Jeremias 2022:239).

These brief remarks expose the strengths and weaknesses of a text-critical apparatus in critical editions of the Hebrew Bible. An apparatus makes a student of the text aware of the existence of *possible* textual variants. As such, a text-critical apparatus is an invaluable *tool* for noting various textual traditions. It piques her or his interest to investigate the textual nature, history and transmission of the Masoretic Text *and* other Hebrew witnesses and ancient versions. It acts as a constant reminder that no one analysing and interpreting the Masoretic Text is working with *the* text of the Hebrew Bible, but with *a* manifestation of the text that became, through a long and complicated process, the standardised Hebrew Bible text used in Judaism and branches of Christianity. The Masoretic Text is but one of the texts of the Hebrew Bible whose origin can be traced back to the Second Temple period.

The text-critical apparatus in critical editions of the Hebrew Bible, be they diplomatic or eclectic, also contains an inherent weakness. It cannot provide anything but a 'snippet view' of the textual diversity of the Hebrew Bible from the Second Temple period to the end of the first millennium ad.¹¹ An apparatus does not necessarily list 'variant' readings of the Masoretic Text but manifestations of the texts of the Hebrew Bible through time and space.¹² The choice of information in an apparatus is per definition eclectic and subjective. It is *eclectic* because it is simply impossible to include the wealth of text-critical information in one edition of the Hebrew Bible, especially if it is an *edition critica minor* as in the *Biblia Hebraica* tradition. It is therefore of necessity also *subjective*, because choices must be made by the editor of any Hebrew Bible book regarding information that warrants inclusion in the apparatus and information that can be excluded. This, in turn, exposes another major shortcoming. An apparatus cannot provide *context* to the listing of possible textual variants.¹³ The discussion of the reading of the Septuagint in Habakkuk 3:9ab above is a case in point. If a student of the Biblical text takes the text-critical note in BHQ at face value, she or he will never realise that what is presented as *the* reading of *the* Septuagint is in fact an eclectic and theoretical construct reflecting the preferences of the Septuagint text editor and not of any existing major Septuagint manuscript. When the student of the Hebrew text's interest has been

11.Tov (2006:290) refers to 'the fragmented and often confusing information of a critical apparatus'.

12.Hendel (2008:327) argues that many 'types of variants ought not to be seen as mere "corruptions"... but rather as evidence of the process of scripturalization, i.e. the conceptual shifts by which texts became Scripture'.

13.Deist (1988:82) indicates that a text-critical apparatus in the *Biblia Hebraica* tradition 'exhibit signs of the concentration of orthodox theology on *words* rather than on *texts*' (emphasis original).

piqued by notes in the text-critical apparatus of a diplomatic or (preferably *and*) eclectic edition,¹⁴ more is needed. This *more* is reflected in the following section. Might a third alternative be considered beyond the diplomatic/eclectic dichotomy?

Considering a third alternative

Regardless of the objectives of a text-critical investigation, a text-critical edition can only be a proper tool if it is as free as possible of subjective and interpretative information. (Lange 2017:118)

The *third alternative* propagated for the diplomatic/eclectic dichotomy in this study is not intended as an alternative to *replace* the traditional critical editions of the Hebrew Bible but to *enhance* the critical study of the texts of the Hebrew Bible. The aim is to *embrace* the textual diversity of Hebrew Bible texts in circulation during the Second Temple period and the first centuries ad up to the standardisation of the Masoretic Text. I am certainly not the first (and hopefully I will not be the last) to emphasise a third route, namely the utilisation of a *synoptic* edition, which will enable students of the Hebrew Bible text to engage in the kind of unbiased, contextualised and informed study of the text(s) of the Hebrew Bible suggested in the quote from Lange's study above. Considering this alternative is, in fact, ancient. Origin's *Hexapla*, produced in the third-century ad, can be considered as the beginning of the critical study of the text(s) of the Hebrew Bible (Tov 2001:16). It contained, in the *synoptic* fashion propagated here, six columns, namely 'the Hebrew text, its transliteration into Greek characters, and four different Greek versions' (Tov 2001:16).¹⁵

Tov (2006) propagated reviving such a synoptic project:

[T]he purpose of a multi-column edition would be to educate the users towards an egalitarian approach to the textual witnesses which cannot be achieved with the present tools... Only by this means can future generations of scholars be expected to approach textual data in an unbiased way, without MT forming the basis of their thinking. (pp. 309–310)

Segal (2017:46) described such an edition as one that presents 'multiple versions in parallel' and 'explicitly records each of the witnesses' available in the study of the texts of the Hebrew Bible. A major disadvantage of such a synoptic edition 'is the practical matter of the space necessary to record all of the data included' (Segal 2017:46). A major advantage is the possibility a synoptic edition provides to clearly present texts where major differences exist between textual witnesses, such as the differences between the text of Jeremiah in the Masoretic Text and in the Septuagint (Segal 2017:47).

The first 'modern' critical editions of the Hebrew Bible 'were the Great Polyglots of Alcalá (1514–17), Antwerp (1569–72),

14.Hendel (2014:422) indicates that any critical edition of the Hebrew Bible 'is in dialogue with all other past and present editions'. The relationship between such editions should be seen as complementary. They are not in competition with each other but together stimulate research on the texts of the Hebrew Bible.

15.Unfortunately, only fragments of Origin's *Hexapla* survived (Tov 2001:147–148). The most extensive reconstruction of the document still remains the two-volume publication of Field (1875).

Paris (1628–45), and London (1653–57)’ (Hendel 2014:394).¹⁶ The Polyglots ‘were the most ambitious – and costly – scholarly projects of their time’ and the aims and motivations for publishing these Bible ‘were always complicated, involving the interplay of politics, theology, and scholarship’ (Hendel 2014:394).¹⁷ Whatever the complicated reasons behind their production, they provided students of the Hebrew Bible with tools to engage in a full comparative study of the textual witnesses available for text-critical study at the time. In the modern guise, the *Biblia Qumranica* project published by Brill in Leiden with Beate Ego, Armin Lange and Kristin De Troyer as editors presents readers with a synoptic edition of textual evidence available from the Dead Sea Scrolls together with the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint in parallel columns. To date, one volume in the series has been published (Ego et al. 2005).

In the era of digital editions of the Bible (Tov 2017:86–104), it is, at least in theory, possible to produce a (or even to create one’s own) *digital polyglot* of the Hebrew Bible by using existing Bible software such as *Accordance* or *Logos*. Tov (2017:87) argues that, although these electronic editions are not ‘critical’ editions *per se*, they provide two advantages in the study of the Biblical text. They allow for convenient ‘searches of words, combinations of words, and grammatical structures’. Another great advantage is that they allow – in the Polyglot tradition – for the complete presentation of several textual witnesses *at the same time*. Tov (2017:95) remarks: ‘The presentation of the text in parallel columns would enable literary analysis, exegesis, and textual analysis’. De Troyer (2017:330–346) argues that for a biblical book like Joshua, which clearly displays textual plurality, the production of a *Digital Complutensian Polyglot Bible* would have great advantages. In Joshua:

[T]here are some pages where something special is happening. I think it is time to make that ‘something special’ visible in an even broader sense. The study of the textual plurality of the Book of Joshua would benefit from a modern digital Polyglot. (De Troyer 2017:342)

De Hoop (2007:185–214) argues that the wealth of textual information on the Hebrew Bible makes the ‘presentation of a single tradition... not appropriate anymore’ (De Hoop 2007:190). An edition of the Hebrew Bible containing multiple parallel columns would enable scholars to compare data regarding unit delimitation and provide them with ‘a text-critical tool, which enables scholars to compare the text at one glance in its context’ (De Hoop 2007:192). He provides an extensive example of what such an edition could look like with reference to Jeremiah 27:1–28:3 (in the Masoretic Text, the Peshitta and the Vulgate = 34:1–35:3 in the Septuagint) (De Hoop 2007:199–205). He does the same for Jeremiah 29 (in the Masoretic Text = Jr 36 in the Septuagint) (De Hoop 2009:50–54). Prinsloo provides examples of such synoptic overviews for Habakkuk 2:5 (Prinsloo 2016) and Habakkuk 2:1–4 (Prinsloo 2022:391–395). These studies illustrate the

16.Tov (2017:96) quite rightly remarks: ‘The first Polyglot Bible was Origin’s Hexapla in 240 CE by juxtaposing six columns in two languages’.

17.Cf. also the discussion in Marcos (2017:3–18).

advantages of being able to avoid the fragmented and confusing information (Tov 2006:290) usually present in a critical apparatus and compare the texts of the Hebrew Bible at a glance in context.

Conclusion

It would widen our scope considerably, especially when the goal of our research work is of an exegetical and/or theological nature, if we focused our attention on *each* of these witnesses separately, rather than on one eclectically reconstructed text that had in any case not existed in that form at any one time in the course of history, and that is therefore either a new creation or a fiction. (Deist 1988:81; emphasis original)

This study provided a number of critical remarks regarding the presentation and use of a text-critical apparatus in scholarly editions of the Hebrew Bible, be they diplomatic or eclectic, and irrespective of the fact that it might be an *editio critica maior* or *editio critica minor*. Such editions are bound to produce an eclectic text reflecting the subjective choices of the text editor of any given Hebrew Bible book in any given critical edition of the Hebrew Bible. The text-critical apparatus can only provide a ‘snippet view’ of the Hebrew Bible’s textual pluriformity during the Second Temple period and the first centuries ad. It has been argued that the textual pluriformity should be embraced, not masked. Beyond the diplomatic/eclectic dichotomy of current critical Hebrew Bible editions, it should inspire serious students of the texts of the Hebrew Bible to seek out, even produce for themselves, a third alternative – that of a synoptic edition that will allow them to compare any given Hebrew Bible text in all its manifestations at one glance and in context.

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G.P. is the sole author of this article.

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