

WEB REVIEW: Working Virtually on the Texts and Manuscripts Behind the Document, II: Doing Jewish Bible/Old Testament Textual Criticism on the Web

by Thomas E. Phillips and Drew Baker

This article surveying freely accessible online resources for conducting textual criticism of the Jewish Bible/Old Testament (JB/OT) is a companion to an article published in the March 2015 issue of Theological Librarianship by Thomas Phillips and Mark Bilby about [doing New Testament textual criticism on the Web](#).

Most modern readers of the print Hebrew Bible read the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) published by the German Bible Society.¹ This text is [freely accessible to read online](#). The web also offers several resources for students and scholars who wish to move behind this modern document and back to the ancient textual and manuscript traditions. Both seasoned and beginning students of JB/OT textual criticism will gain great benefit from [Jim Darlack's bibliography of print resources](#) and [Emanuel Tov's bibliography of computer software and web-based electronic resources](#),² as well as from the crowd-sourced advice available through the [OTTC: A Blog for Old Testament Textual Criticism](#).

Textual criticism of the JB/OT is far more complex than textual criticism of the New Testament. NT textual criticism is a largely unified — though highly specialized — subdiscipline within New Testament studies. Textual criticism of the JB/OT is a much more diverse and even more highly specialized set of subdisciplines within JB/OT studies. Textual critics of the JB/OT are forced to contend with a more complex set of textual histories. Reflecting this fact, Elvira Martín-Contreras and Lorena Miralles-Maciá suggest textual criticism of the JB/OT is practiced as a subdiscipline within five different areas of expertise: Septuagintal studies, Qumranic (Dead Sea Scrolls) studies, Rabbinic studies, Targumic studies, and Masoretic studies.³ Of course, the JB/OT was written in Hebrew, but the text's history includes both Hebrew and Greek. The situation looks like this:

- The oldest complete physical copies of the contents of the JB/OT date from the fourth and fifth centuries CE, but these are Greek translations (Septuagint [LXX]) of the Hebrew.
- The oldest (though incomplete) Hebrew texts were contained among the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran and date from around the first century BCE.
- The earliest complete Hebrew texts of the JB/OT come from the Masoretic tradition and date from the tenth century CE and later.

¹ Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph, eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1997).

² "Electronic Tools for the Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible - 2013" posted on Lea Mazor's blog, Dr. Lea Mazor: the Bible, teaching and education, November 10, 2014 <http://mikrarevivim.blogspot.co.il/2013/10/i.html>. This is an update of his widely cited but now dated "[Electronic Resources Relevant to the Textual Criticism of Hebrew Scripture](#)," *TC: Textual Criticism* 8 (2003).

³ Elvira Martín-Contreras and Lorena Miralles-Maciá, "Interdisciplinary Perspectives for the Study of the Text of the Hebrew Bible: Open Questions," *The Text of the Hebrew Bible: From the Rabbis to the Masoretes*, Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements 13 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 17-34.

Thomas E. Phillips is Dean of the Library, Claremont School of Theology, and Drew Baker is Acquisitions Librarian and Head Cataloger, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, California.

Rabbinic and Targumic texts contain citations, paraphrases, and partial citations of the Hebrew texts, dating from the second to the seventh century CE. Rabbinic and Targumic texts are mainly studied by scholars of the history of Judaism.

Here we survey freely available/accessible online resources that relate to the three textual traditions most commonly studied by contemporary students of the Hebrew Bible in their text critical work on the JB/OT. These three sources are the Septuagint (LXX), Qumranic and Masoretic texts. The textual traditions preserved in the Rabbinic and Targumic writings will be left to scholars of Jewish history and will not be considered in this article.

Studying the Septuagint (LXX)

Although the Septuagint (LXX) is a Greek translation of the earlier Hebrew manuscripts of the JB/OT, it remains very important for studies of the Hebrew Bible because of the age of the translation (the LXX was translated between the third and the first century BCE). Historically, the most commonly used version has been the critical edition assembled by [Sir Lancelot C. L. Brenton](#) (London, 1851), a text that is now being replaced by the second edition of Rahlfs and Hanhart's Septuaginta,⁴ which is also [available online](#).

Students and scholars who need guides to the best critical print editions of the LXX's rendition of the individual Biblical books (with complete critical apparatus) should consult the list maintained by the [International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies](#). John Barach maintains a site that offers [parsing and lexical assistance](#) for the entire LXX text (Brenton's edition). Scholars and students who want to move behind the modern critical editions of the LXX can easily view the most important ancient copies of the LXX in their entirety. The two most important fourth-century LXX manuscripts, the [Codex Vaticanus](#) and the [Codex Sinaiticus](#), are fully viewable online in high resolution scans, as is the most important fifth-century manuscript, [Codex Alexandrinus](#). [Dr. Joel Kalvesmaki](#) maintains an up-to-date list of the most important online resources for LXX study.

Studying the Qumranic (Dead Sea Scrolls) Texts

Textual criticism of the JB/OT took a radical turn in the last half of the twentieth century as Biblical texts from the 1947 discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DDS) started to become available. (At many points, the texts of the Hebrew Bible preserved in the DDS vary significantly from the Masoretic texts.⁵) Qumran, where the scrolls were found, has become a major tourist destination, prompting a swell of websites dedicated to the site. The [University of Jerusalem](#) offers one of the best virtual tours of the site. The [Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago](#) houses a significant collection of secondary resources on the scrolls. Images of the scrolls are available at the [Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library](#) (funded by the Israel Antiquities Authority) and the [Digital Dead Sea Scrolls](#) (funded by the Israel Museum).

Studying the Masoretic Texts

The standard critical edition of the Hebrew Bible, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), is based upon Masoretic texts (primarily the Leningrad Codex) with only minimal influence from other textual traditions. Although the oldest Masoretic manuscripts are barely more than a millennium old, dating back no further than 900 CE, for most people the Masoretic texts are — knowingly or unknowingly — the texts of their “Hebrew Bible.” ([BibliaHebraica.org](#) provides an excellent orientation to the Masoretic texts and the history of their critical editions.) The major Masoretic texts are now freely accessible online, including the [Aleppo Codex](#), a nearly complete early tenth-century manuscript, and the [Leningrad Codex](#) (PDF scan via SepforimOnline.org), a complete early eleventh-century manuscript. Although the majority of text critical work on the JB/OT focuses on these two texts, many scholars will also be interested in the [Samaritan Pentateuch](#) (from the early twelfth century) and the [Damascus Pentateuch](#) (from the early eleventh century). Persons who are interested in images of less prominent Masoretic texts should begin their search with the list of online manuscripts maintained by Dr. Charles Grebe at [AntimatedHebrew.com](#).

⁴ Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart, ed., *Septuaginta* (2nd ed.; New York: American Bible Society, 2006).

⁵ For a summary — and critique — of standard scholarly assessments of the differences between the Masoretic texts and the Qumranic texts, see: Emanuel Tov, “The Myth of the Stabilization of the Text of the Hebrew Scripture,” *The Text of the Hebrew Bible: From the Rabbis to the Masoretes*, Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements 13 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 37-45.

Conclusion

Overall, openly accessible online resources for textual criticism of the JB/OT have not advanced at the same pace as resources available for NT textual criticism. Online resources for textual criticism of the JB/OT are largely limited to images and scans of existing print editions and manuscripts, or online reading texts with basic search and lexical capabilities. These are very useful. But as yet, scholars of the JB/OT have produced no sites remotely comparable to the extraordinary technical innovations of Münster's [Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung](#). It is hoped that this deficiency can be corrected as the sophistication of web-based technologies increasingly enables the practice of biblical textual criticism online.