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

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 Uttext 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

¹My 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).


Note: Special Collection: Septuagint and Textual Studies, sub-edited by Johann Cook (Stellenbosch University).
hand will (almost of necessity, cf. below) be a so-called editio critica minor or ‘pocket’ edition of the Hebrew Bible (Deist 1978:87). 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 (HUPB) published by Magnes 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 HUPB and the HBCE on the other hand. Schenker calls the former an editio critica minor, while the latter two are editiones criticae maioris. 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 BHK to a single apparatus in BHS and BHQ (cf. the discussion below). HUPB, 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 BHK 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).

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 BHK 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 Megillot (cf. eds. De Waard et al. 2004). Subsequently, another seven volumes appeared (Genesis, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Judges, Twelve Prophets, Proverbs, Ezra and Nehemiah).

The HUPB 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” Utext 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 (HUPB), 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
eclectic text of the Hebrew Bible. 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
have been published.  

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 contradicton in terminus.
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 (BHK); cf. Kittel 1937) produced under the auspices
of the Württembergische Bibelanstalt in Stuttgart, Germany in
1937; second, the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS; cf. eds.

Elliger & Rudolph 1997) produced under the auspices of the
Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft in 1977, also in Stuttgart. To these
two editions, we can add the BHUB 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 יָבַשׁ
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:

http://www.hts.org.za
surely you will stretch your bow and sceptres, says the Lord'. 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). 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',7 which – in the case of the Old Testament – is purportedly the Masoretic Text. Habakkuk 3:9b (ךִּישׁבֵּעָתָ֥ו מַטְּוֹת אֹ֣מֶר 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'.

In Die Bybel 2020-vertaling the colon is translated by ‘sewe knuppels!’ was die bevel’ = ‘seven cudgels!’ was the command. For this die '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’ (Day 1979:146). This claim and translation need closer examination. In Ziegler’s (eclectic) text of the Septuagint, Habakkuk 3:9ab reads as follows (Ziegler 1984:270): ἐντείνων 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 ḥם צלות שבעה '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 שבעה to שבעה, 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 Rahlfis’ (eclectic) edition of the Septuagint, Habakkuk 3:9ab reads as follows (Rahlfis 1979:536): ἐντείνων ἐντενεῖς τὸ τόξον σου ἑπτὰ 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): ἐντείνων ἐντενεῖς τὸ τόξον σου ἑπτὰ 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 ἐντείνων ἐντενεῖς τὸ τόξον σου ἑπτὰ σκῆπτρα λέγει κύριος ‘surely you will stretch your bow against sceptres, says the Lord’. Codex Sinaiticus has ἐντείνων ἐντενεῖς τὸ τόξον σου ἑπτὰ σκῆπτρα λέγει κύριος ‘surely you will stretch your bow against sceptres, says the Lord’. Ziegler’s ἑπτὰ σκῆπτρα rests upon the presupposition that ἑπτὰ τοῦ κύριο (cf. Codex Alexandrinus, but not present in Codex Vaticanus or Codex Sinaiticus) is a scribal error for ἑπτὰ ‘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: השבעה | Mur V | ἕπτα G (differ-vocal) | ἐχόρτασας Barb (differ-vocal) | ἐχόρτασας 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 שבעה ‘oaths’ may be read as שבעה ‘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 שבעה as שבעה, he points to Ziegler’s eclectic text but acknowledges that Rahlfis’ edition contains a different reading (2018:284). He admits that the translation of שבעה as ‘arrows’ is problematic, as the noun usually indicates ‘maces’ (2018:284) but argues that his translation makes sense in the context (2018:209). Furthermore, he proposes that שבעה can be emended to שבעה ‘you said’, and proposes that a scribe erroneously omitted the seven through haplography because of the similar consonant occurring at the end of the preceding שבעה (2018:284). Jeremias (2022:189) translates Habakkuk 3:9b as ‘sieben’ ‘Stäbe’ hast du geordert’. Jeremias states without any indication

7 Cf. Tov (2000:193–211) for an argument against the tacit reconstruction of an Utter text 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); Fitzer (2020:27–33).
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.
of inner-Septuagint variant readings that ‘G liest 흔히 und versteht darunter die Zahl »siezweh«’ (Jeremias 2022:237). He seeks support for his translation in Ugaritic mythology (Jeremias 2022:237–238). Jeremias refrains from translating 흔히 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.12 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 3:9b 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 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: [7]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),"
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). 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 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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