

## THE RELEVANCE OF TEXTUAL THEORIES FOR THE PRAXIS OF TEXTUAL CRITICISM

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General (textual) theories such as speculation about “the original text(s) of the Bible” or the theory of local texts are abstract entities. Parallel to these textual theories are other abstract entities, named “rules,” which are used for the evaluation of readings, such as that of the *lectio difficilior*. In this study, we ask ourselves whether the use of these textual theories and rules is necessary for textual praxis, that is, for the comparison of readings and their evaluation.

Every biblical scholar, especially those who write commentaries, is involved to some degree in the textual decision-making process. Commentators ordinarily use the apparatus of the *BH* series, and while their commentaries are usually based on MT, now and then they prefer readings found in other sources. When quoting these other readings, they are actively engaged in textual praxis, since they are forming an opinion on the comparative merits of the readings. Students do the same, as they are encouraged from the beginning of their studies to compare variant readings, despite the fact that they are not experts in textual criticism. I name this procedure “textual praxis level 1,” involving persons who are not necessarily experts in textual criticism. Indeed, most authors of commentaries limit themselves to general statements, such as “reading X is preferable to reading Y because it better suits the style of the author, his language, or the Hebrew language in general.”<sup>1</sup>

In order to better exemplify my intentions, let me indicate what I mean by textual praxis. I refer to the procedure of determining which reading is original, better suits the context, or best explains the development of the other readings. For example:

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the formulation of rules six (“*Lectio, quae cum stylo scriptoris convenit, melior est*”) and seven (“*Ea lectio vera et genuina esse nequit, quae nullo modo contextui apta aut consilio scriptoris prorsus contraria est*”) by P. G. Borbone, *Il libro del profeta Osea, Edizione critica del testo ebraico* (Quaderni di Henoch 2; Torino: Zamorani, 1990), 26–32.

Isa 45:2a	MT	(MT <sup>Q</sup> אִישֵׁר, MT <sup>K</sup> אוֹשֵׁר) וְהִדְרִים (אלך) (אני לפניך אלך) (I will go before you) and (I shall level) <i>hadurim</i>
	1QIsa <sup>a</sup>	וְהַרְרִים = LXX καὶ ὄρη ≈ S and mountains

Most scholars prefer the reading of 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> LXX (≈ S). The prophet describes God's ability to accomplish the impossible (v. 2b: "I will shatter doors of bronze and cut down iron bars") and in light of v. 2b, a reading "I will level the mountains" (1QIsa<sup>a</sup> LXX) would be appropriate.<sup>2</sup>

When referring to textual praxis, I have such considerations in mind. The involvement in what I would call "textual praxis level 2," or "advanced textual praxis" requires the textual expertise of specialists. Such specialists write textual commentaries or monographs, and some of them prepare textual editions that in today's world are published in the *BHQ*, *HUB*, and *OHB* series. These scholars are greatly involved in textual praxis and by necessity are expected to employ appropriate arguments for their decisions.

The issue I am addressing in this study is what kind of arguments are used in the course of textual praxis levels 1 and 2, if at all, and, in general, which textual theories and arguments are relevant or useful when one is involved in textual praxis. We now turn to a brief review of the textual arguments and theories. They are described and exemplified in handbooks to textual criticism, theoretical papers, and introductions to both the literature of Hebrew Scripture and the methodology of biblical research.

Theoretical help for textual praxis *may* derive from two areas:

- (1) Textual theories about the origin and development of the biblical text;
- (2) "Rules" guiding the evaluation of textual readings.

In order to examine the possible guidance of these theories and guidelines, we will define first what the area of textual criticism involves.

<sup>2</sup> When the word became corrupted by a *daleth/resh* interchange, a *waw* was added as an internal vowel letter, giving the resulting word וְהִדְרִים the appearance of a passive participle. Other scholars connect the word with הָדָר, "glory" (cf. Vulg *gloriosos terrae*) and the root הָדָר ("to honor"); accordingly BDB *s.v.* records the word as "swelling places" (cf. NEB: "swelling hills"). At the same time, C. H. Southwood ("The Problematic *h'durim* of Isaiah XLV 2," VT 25 [1975]: 801–2) holds on to MT suggesting that it reflects an Akkadian loan word *dūru*, "city walls," which could fit the context.

In the third edition of my *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, I describe the task of the textual criticism of Hebrew-Aramaic Scripture as follows:

Textual criticism deals with the nature and origin of all the witnesses of a composition or text, in our case the biblical books. This analysis often involves an attempt to discover the original form of details in a composition, or even of large stretches of text, although what exactly constitutes (an) “original text(s)” is subject to much debate. . . . Those scholars who express a view on the originality of readings do so while evaluating their comparative value. This comparison—the central area of the textual praxis—refers to. . . . One of the practical results of the analysis of textual data is that it creates tools for the exegesis of Hebrew-Aramaic Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

This general and abstract description, subjective as it is, provides a good starting point for our thinking about the usefulness of guidelines such as mentioned above.

It seems almost impossible to be involved in textual criticism without a proper introduction to the field, training in the tools needed, and use of appropriate guidelines. Indeed, Kyle McCarter provides some very practical advice at the beginning of his introduction to textual criticism that is not given in other handbooks: “Be sure you are competently trained in the skills.”<sup>4</sup> A minimal list of these skills, according to McCarter, includes knowledge of Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, Syriac, Latin, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, and Arabic, as well as the historical grammar, orthography, and paleography of Hebrew. It includes the rule that McCarter names the “one great rule” (*lectio difficilior praeferenda est*) and suggests that the text critic “sit at the feet of a master,” “keep a clear image of the scribe in mind,” “know the personalities of your witnesses,” “treat each case as if it were unique,” “beware of prejudices,” and “apply thought to textual criticism.” These pieces of advice are helpful, but one wonders to what extent they provide sufficient, practical guidance.

Several guidelines for textual criticism in general and for textual evaluation are described in the literature, sometimes with examples.

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<sup>3</sup> Quotation from *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (3d rev. ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress; Assen: Van Gorcum, 2012), 1–2.

<sup>4</sup> P. K. McCarter, *Textual Criticism: Recovering the Text of the Hebrew Bible* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship, Old Testament Series 11; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 22–25.

Some of these introductions are completely theoretical, such as that of Barth–Steck, which in its thirteen editions is influential in the German-speaking world.<sup>5</sup> Some of these formulations are based on textual experience, while others were simply copied from earlier monographs.

The area of our investigation is the evaluation of readings, which is the central area of textual praxis. This process involves the comparison of details found in the textual witnesses with an eye to their comparative merits. We now examine the relevance of textual theories and guidelines to textual praxis.

## I. TEXTUAL THEORIES

1. *Original text.* Foremost among the textual theories is the assumption of (an) “original text(s).” By way of convention, this idea is often expressed as the theory of de Lagarde as opposed to that of Kahle. In concise, abstract terms, de Lagarde proposed that all of the manuscripts of MT derived from one source that served as the archetype of what he called the “recension” of MT.

On the other side of the spectrum we find Kahle, who dealt with the original form of both the individual textual witnesses and the biblical text in its entirety. In his opinion, none of these textual witnesses were created in a single act, but rather through a process of editing and revising.<sup>6</sup> According to Kahle, these texts developed from a textual plurality into a unity, whereas de Lagarde had maintained that the unity preceded the textual plurality. Kahle’s approach is in many aspects opposed to that of de Lagarde, but one cannot appropriately define the differences between them, since de Lagarde’s exposition was very brief and, in addition, the textual information on which Kahle based his opinions was not known in the time of de Lagarde.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> H. Barth and O. H. Steck, *Exegese des Alten Testaments, Leitfaden der Methodik—Ein Arbeitsbuch für Proseminare, Seminare und Vorlesungen* (13th ed.; Neukirchen/Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1993) = O. H. Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis—A Guide to the Methodology* (trans. J. D. Nogalski; SBLRBS 33; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> With regard to the Hebrew Bible in its entirety, Kahle did not reject the assumption of one original text but emphasized that the textual sources known to us were created from an intermediary source that he originally (1915) named *Vulgartext* (“vulgar” text) and later (1951) referred to in the plural as *Vulgärtexte*, that is, texts created to facilitate the reading. He described both SP and LXX as such texts, and also MT, although, in his opinion, the latter passed through a stage of refinement at the end of the first century C.E.

<sup>7</sup> For a fuller discussion and references, see Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 170–73.

The basic dichotomy between de Lagarde and Kahle pertains to the question of whether at the beginning of the textual transmission there was one original text (de Lagarde) or several texts (Kahle). The texts presupposed by Kahle may be named original texts, although he did not use that term.

To what extent are these theories relevant to textual praxis? In other words, in the evaluation of textual variation, do we have to take a stand with regard to these theories or is it possible to proceed without referring to them?

These are difficult questions, so difficult in fact that many scholars prefer to leave them unanswered.<sup>8</sup> Further, some scholars say expressly that the problem of an original text cannot be resolved.<sup>9</sup> However, in our view, the praxis of textual criticism is not possible without taking a stand on the issue of the original text. For example, the *BH* series does express an implied view about the original text of Hebrew Scripture. For the instructions given by that tool (e.g., “change X”, “delete Y,” or “add Z”) are only valid if the underlying principle of an original text is accepted. Those who claim, as does the *BH* series, that reading X is preferable to reading Y necessarily presuppose an original text in this detail, since they claim that the preferred reading better reflects the original composition from the point of view of the language, vocabulary, ideas, or meaning.<sup>10</sup> If, with Kahle, one does not adhere to the idea of an original text, there would be no need to prefer this or that detail. In such a case, we would be able to accept the co-existence of any two readings without feeling the need to prefer one of them. In sum, it seems to me that all those who are involved in textual praxis, except for those who prepare the *HUB*, implicitly express a view on the

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<sup>8</sup> E.g., B. J. Roberts, *The Old Testament Text and Versions—The Hebrew Text in Transmission and the History of the Ancient Versions* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1951); the authors of various introductions to the Bible, e.g. S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (9th ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1913); R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: A. and C. Black, 1953), 71–126; E. Sellin and G. Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (trans. D. E. Green; Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 489–515; R. Smend, *Die Entstehung des Alten Testaments* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1978), 13–32; J. Weingreen, *Introduction to the Critical Study of the Text of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> B. Lemmelijn, “What Are We Looking for in Doing Old Testament Text-Critical Research,” *JNWSL* 23 (1997): 69–80 (77): “... I would rather start from the observation that at a certain moment in history several texts have indeed been current... without positing anything about their origin and the phases of their prior textual history.”

<sup>10</sup> At the same time, one often has the feeling that not all users of the *BH* series are sufficiently aware of its underlying assumptions.

existence of an original text. Therefore, taking a stand on the original text is a necessary part of textual praxis.

2. *Parallel readings or traditions.* Beyond Kahle and his supporters who developed their views mainly at the theoretical level, four scholars rejected the assumption of an original text on the basis of the existence of certain types of readings.

Basing himself upon the occurrence of synonymous readings as variants in textual witnesses, Shemaryahu Talmon claimed that such pairs as יד // כף (both: “hand”) and אדמה // ארץ (both: “land”) reflect components that are equally early and original and that neither one should be preferred to the other.<sup>11</sup> He expanded this claim in reference to additional groups of readings in a later study.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, Greenberg, basing himself upon a comparison of details in MT and LXX of Ezekiel, suggested that various details in both texts are equally valid in the context.<sup>13</sup> In Greenberg’s view these details are original to the same extent. Goshen-Gottstein claimed that if any two readings cannot be described as primary as opposed to secondary, or original as opposed to corrupt, both of them should be considered to be alternative and original readings.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Walters tried to show that in 1 Samuel 1, MT and LXX reflect two parallel stories slightly differing from each other.<sup>15</sup> These four views pertain to details in the theory of an original text, and therefore for those who accept these views they provide a form of guidance for textual praxis even though they refer to a very small number of instances. For example, Hendel accepts the notion of synonymous readings for his eclectic edition (*OHB*) and therefore does not decide on the preference of one of a pair of such readings.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> S. Talmon, “Synonymous Readings in the Textual Traditions of the Old Testament,” *ScrHier* 8 (1961): 335–83.

<sup>12</sup> “The Old Testament Text,” in *The Cambridge History of the Bible* (ed. R. P. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans; 3 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 1.159–99.

<sup>13</sup> M. Greenberg, “The Use of the Ancient Versions for Interpreting the Hebrew Text,” *VTSup* 29 (1978): 131–48.

<sup>14</sup> M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, “The History of the Bible-Text and Comparative Semitics,” *VT* 7 (1957): 195–201. In his argumentation, he draws an analogy between procedures in linguistic reconstruction and the reconstruction of the text of the Bible.

<sup>15</sup> S. D. Walters, “Hannah and Anna—The Greek and Hebrew Texts of I Samuel 1,” *JBL* 107 (1988): 385–412.

<sup>16</sup> R. Hendel (“The Oxford Hebrew Bible; Prologue to a New Critical Edition,” *VT* 58 [2008]: 324–51 [346]) realizes that the textual critic cannot in all cases reach a verdict regarding the words to be included in the text, especially in “synonymous” and “alternative” readings. In these cases, the central text of the edition (the “copy

Even if one does not accept the views expressed in this paragraph, they remain relevant for those scholars who describe them as relating to their conception of the original text.

3. *The relation between the textual witnesses.* From the beginning of critical inquiry into the biblical text, scholars tried to solve the question of the relation between MT, LXX, SP, etc. Until some time after the discovery of the Qumran Scrolls, scholars adhered to the view that the textual witnesses are divided into three groups represented by MT, LXX, and SP. In more recent research, scholars have accepted the assumption of a plurality of texts.<sup>17</sup> In my view, these theories contribute little to the advancement of textual praxis.

4. *Local text traditions.* It is unclear to what extent scholars still adhere to the theory of local texts, which was developed mainly by American scholars. In the wake of a brief study by Albright a new textual theory developed, mainly in the United States, according to which all Hebrew textual witnesses represent three different groups, which were at first described as “recensions” and later as “families.” These groups were linked to particular areas: Babylon (MT), Palestine (SP, MT of Chronicles, several Qumran texts), and Egypt (the Hebrew *Vorlage* of LXX). This view was developed in particular in the studies of Cross.<sup>18</sup>

If the theory itself is problematic,<sup>19</sup> determining relations between readings on its basis<sup>20</sup> is even more difficult. McCarter provides brief characterizations of the various textual witnesses in the books of the

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text”) is left intact, while the apparatus includes another reading considered to be of “equal” value. E.g., in 1 Kgs 11:5, for קקש of MT the apparatus records a variant אלה reconstructed from the Peshitta and named “equal” by the editor, Joosten, in S. W. Crawford, J. Joosten, & E. Ulrich, “Sample Editions of the Oxford Hebrew Bible: Deuteronomy 32:1–9, 1 Kings 11:1–8, and Jeremiah 27:1–10 (34 G),” *VT* 58 (2008): 352–66, esp. 359.

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion, see Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 155–63.

<sup>18</sup> The principal argument in favor of this theory is abstract and logical and posits that texts developed in different ways in the locations in which they were preserved and/or copied. According to this view, the lack of contact between the centers in which the three families were developed created different textual characteristics. For example, the Palestinian recension is held to be expansionistic and full of glosses and harmonizing additions (cf. the features of SP), the Egyptian recension is considered to be full, and the Babylonian recension is conservative and short. The three families developed during the fifth to third centuries B.C.E.

<sup>19</sup> See Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 186–87.

<sup>20</sup> As suggested by F. M. Cross, Jr., “The History of the Biblical Text in the Light of Discoveries in the Judaean Desert,” *HTR* 57 (1964): 281–99, esp. 189–90 and Klein, *Textual Criticism*, 69–71.

Bible in accord with this theory, such as the expansionistic character of MT in most books.<sup>21</sup>

5. *Vulgar versus non-vulgar texts; precise versus imprecise texts.* Various scholars accepted from Kahle's writings the concept of "vulgar" as opposed to conservative or exact texts, albeit with certain changes.<sup>22</sup> The writers of these texts (e.g., 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> and SP) approached the biblical text in a free manner and inserted changes of various kinds, including orthography.

Summarizing this section, we realize that textual theories in general are of little relevance for the comparison of readings, their value being greater for the historian. The only theory that is relevant is the expression of a view on the original text of Hebrew Scripture. As we have seen, this view may take different forms. In our view, one cannot evaluate readings without expressing a stance on this issue.

## II. RULES FOR EVALUATION

Another area of textual theory is that of the "rules" used in the evaluation of readings. Seemingly, these rules would be very appropriate (see the various handbooks), but they are problematic.

In the evaluation of readings, a distinction is often made between external and internal criteria (considerations) relating to the evaluation of readings. External criteria pertain to the document in which the reading is found, whereas internal criteria bear on the intrinsic value of the reading itself.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> McCarter, *Textual Criticism*, 87–94 ("Textual characteristics of the books of the Hebrew Bible").

<sup>22</sup> For details, see Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 173.

<sup>23</sup> The following sources mention rules for the evaluation of readings and not textual theories: D. Barthélemy et al., *Preliminary and Interim Report on the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*, vols. 1–5 (2d ed.; New York: United Bible Societies, 1979–1980); Barth and Steck, *Exegese*, 37–44 = Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis*, 39–47; E. R. Brotzman, *Old Testament Textual Criticism—A Practical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 123–32; E. Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament—An Introduction to the Biblia Hebraica* (2d ed.; trans. E. F. Rhodes; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 113–22; J. Treballe Barrera, *The Jewish Bible and the Christian Bible, An Introduction to the History of the Bible* (trans. W. G. E. Watson; Leiden: Brill; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 370–404, esp. 380. For an analysis, see Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 270–82.

### A. *External rules*

1. *Preference for MT.* Many scholars make statements such as “all other things being equal, the reading of MT should be preferred.” Readings of MT are often preferable to those found in other texts, but this statistical information should not influence decisions in individual instances, because the exceptions to this situation are not predictable. When judgments are involved, statistical information should be considered less relevant, although it certainly influences scholars unconsciously. Furthermore, MT is no more reliable than LXX or certain Qumran texts. The application of this rule reflects an inappropriate preference for MT.

2. *Broad attestation.* It is often claimed that the trustworthiness of a reading is directly related to the breadth of its attestation. Sometimes a scholar will stress its wide or narrow geographical distribution. However, reliance on a broad attestation of textual evidence is profitable neither in the case of Hebrew manuscripts nor in that of the ancient versions, for it could have been created by a historical coincidence. Long ago it was recognized that *manuscripta ponderantur, non numerantur*. The same argument may be used with regard to the ancient versions.<sup>24</sup> Textual criticism does not proceed according to democratic rules.

3. *Age of witnesses.* Older witnesses are often preferable to more recent ones, because “the older one is likely to have been less exposed to textual corruption than the younger one.”<sup>25</sup> Reliance on the age of documents is seemingly desirable, because the closer the document is to the time of the autograph, the more likely it is that it has preserved the wording of that autograph.

However, some copyists or traditions preserved their source better than others. For example, the community that transmitted MT has left the biblical text virtually unchanged for more than two thousand years since the time of the Judean Desert texts, whereas the Qumran scribes modernized and changed the orthography, morphology, and content of the text. Thus 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>, dating from the first century B.C.E.,

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<sup>24</sup> Several versions may be interdependent, as in the case of the reliance of Jerome (Vulg) on LXX, Symmachus, Aquila, and Theodotion. Hebrew and retroverted readings should be judged on the basis of their intrinsic value, and consequently even minority readings may be preferable to well-attested variants.

<sup>25</sup> F. E. Deist, *Towards the Text of the Old Testament* (2d ed.; Pretoria: D. R. Church Booksellers, 1981), 232.

is further removed from the original text of Isaiah than a Masoretic manuscript written in the tenth century C.E. Given such exceptional cases, the fallacy of dependence upon the age of witnesses was recognized long ago.

### B. *Internal rules*

The above discussion has shown that external criteria usually cannot be used profitably in the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible. We turn now to internal criteria, that is, criteria bearing on the intrinsic value and content of the readings.

1. *Lectio difficilior praeferenda/praevalet/praeestat*. This rule (“the more difficult reading is to be preferred”) has been phrased in different ways. For example: “When a text was particularly difficult, there was a tendency for ancient scribes and translators to simplify the text by employing contextually more fitting lexical, grammatical, and stylistic forms (these modifications are often spoken of as ‘facilitating’).”<sup>26</sup>

When textual variation is encountered, one of the readings is sometimes termed the “difficult” reading, and the other(s), the “easy” reading(s), with the implication that the former has a preferable (original) status. From a theoretical point of view, this rule is logical as some “difficult” readings were indeed replaced by scribes with simpler ones.

Although the basic validity of this rule cannot be denied, many scholars have recognized that the rule is problematic and impractical since it fails to take into consideration simple scribal errors.<sup>27</sup> By definition, often a scribal error creates a *lectio difficilior*. If there were a consensus with regard to the recognition of scribal errors, the rule would be more practical, but since it is often unclear whether or not a given reading reflects a scribal error, the rule of the *lectio difficilior*

<sup>26</sup> Barthélemy, *Report xi* (“factor 4”). For similar formulations, see A. Bentzen, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (7th ed.; Copenhagen: Gad, 1967), 1.97; R. W. Klein, *Textual Criticism of the Old Testament—The Septuagint after Qumran* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship, Old Testament Series 4; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 75; Deist, *Text of the Old Testament*, 244–45; idem, *Witnesses to the Old Testament—Introducing Old Testament Textual Criticism* (The Literature of the Old Testament 5; Pretoria: N. G. Kerkboekhandel Transvaal, 1988), 203; Barth and Steck, *Exegese*, 41. According to McCarter (*Textual Criticism*, 21) this is “the one great rule” for the evaluation of readings.

<sup>27</sup> See especially B. Albrektson, “*Difficilior Lectio Probabilior*,” in idem, *Text, Translation, Theology—Selected Essays on the Hebrew Bible* (SOTSM; Farnham/Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2010), 73–86.

cannot be effectively applied. Moreover, in many instances this rule has been applied so subjectively that it can hardly be called a textual rule. For what appears to be a linguistically or contextually difficult reading to one scholar may not necessarily be difficult to another. Furthermore, two readings may often be equally difficult and two others may be equally easy.

2. *Lectio brevior*. The logic behind the rule of the *lectio brevior/brevis potior* (“the shorter reading is to be preferred”) is that ancient scribes were more prone to add details than to omit them.<sup>28</sup> This rule seems perfectly logical, yet its *raison d’être* has often been criticized.<sup>29</sup>

3. *Assimilation to parallel passages (harmonization)*. This criterion was formulated by Barthélemy as follows:

Some variant forms of text arose because ancient editors, scribes, or translators, assimilated the text of one passage to that of a similar or proximate passage, usually with the apparent purpose of attaining greater consistency.<sup>30</sup>

This criterion can be taken as a subcategory of the *lectio difficilior*, for the assimilated reading is the “easier” one, and the other reading the more “difficult” one. Thus, when in two different texts some manuscripts of text *a* agree with text *b*, while other manuscripts of that text differ from *b*, the first mentioned group of manuscripts of *a* is suspected of having been assimilated to *b*. Assimilation to parallel passages is a valid rule for evaluation, but it pertains to a small number of instances.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

The aforementioned rules represent the most frequently used criteria for textual evaluation. In sum, the following faults are found in the application of the rules.

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<sup>28</sup> Klein, *Textual Criticism*, 75: “Unless there is clear evidence for homoioteleuton or some other form of haplography, a shorter text is probably better. The people who copied manuscripts expanded the text in several ways: they made subjects and objects of sentences explicit whereas they were often only implicit in the original text; they added glosses or comments to explain difficult words or ideas; and when faced with alternate readings in two or more manuscripts they were copying, they would include both of them (conflation) in a serious attempt to preserve the original. While some scribes may have abbreviated from time to time, we believe that the interpretation of a shorter reading as abbreviation should only be chosen as a last resort.”

<sup>29</sup> Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 278.

<sup>30</sup> Barthélemy, *Report*, xi (“factor 5”).

- (a) The logic underlying certain rules is questionable (*lectio difficilior, lectio brevior*).
- (b) The application of abstract rules cannot make the evaluation of readings objective. The procedure remains subjective.
- (c) Textual rules can be applied to only a small fraction of the readings that need to be evaluated.
- (d) Textual rules are limited to internal evidence. No commonly accepted or valid external rules exist in the textual criticism of Hebrew Scripture.

These criticisms pertain only to the application of textual rules and do not imply that such rules are incorrect or should be abandoned. The rules should be used sparingly and with full recognition of their subjective nature. Furthermore, it must be realized that even if there are objective aspects to the rules, the very selection of a particular rule remains subjective. For example, a given reading can be characterized as a *lectio difficilior*, a transcription error, or as an exegetical element; these evaluative options necessarily lead to different conclusions.

This judgment leads to some general reflections on the nature of textual evaluation and the use of guidelines within that framework. The quintessence of textual evaluation is the selection from among the different transmitted readings of the one that is the most appropriate to its context. Within the process of this selection, the concept of the “context” is taken in a broad sense, as referring to the language, style, and content of both the immediate context and of the whole literary unit in which the reading is found. This procedure necessarily allows the scholar great liberty and, at the same time, burdens him or her with the responsibility of finding a way through a labyrinth of data and considerations.

The upshot of this analysis, then, is that to a large extent textual evaluation cannot be bound by any fixed rules. It is an art in the full sense of the word, a faculty that can be developed, guided by intuition based on wide experience. Therefore, it is the choice of the contextually most appropriate reading that is the main task of the textual critic. This procedure is as subjective as can be. Common sense is the main guide, although abstract rules are sometimes also helpful.<sup>31</sup> In modern

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<sup>31</sup> A. E. Housman, “The Application of Thought to Textual Criticism,” *Proceedings of the Classical Association* 18 (1922): 67–84.

times, scholars are often reluctant to admit the subjective nature of textual evaluation and, as a consequence, an attempt is often made to create an artificial level of objectivity by the frequent application of abstract rules. For that reason, we often find such rules mentioned and exemplified in introductions. If these rules are of little help in textual praxis, textual theories are even less beneficial.<sup>32</sup> In the textual comparison of readings, our main guides are common sense, experience, and knowledge. Or, in the words of McCarter,<sup>33</sup> the textual critic needs training, experience, and a good master.

This leaves the assumption of the original text as the only theory relevant to textual praxis, not so much as an aid in the decision-making process, but as a theory on which we need to take a stand.

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<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, handbooks usually give an optimistic view of what can be achieved with the aid of the mentioned guidelines. For example, the influential book of Würthwein (*The Text of the Old Testament*, 76) notes: "There is no precisely defined method for Old Testament textual criticism. Further, it is indeed questionable whether one is possible, because the tradition is so varied, that an effective procedure for one problem would not be appropriate for another. But there are certain fundamental principles which are widely recognized, at least in theory if not in practice, and which are designed to keep textual criticism on a sound basis, avoiding the excesses of arbitrariness and subjectivity" (my italics). The same optimistic tone is heard in Steck, *Old Testament Exegesis*, 40–47 = Barth and Steck, *Exegese*, 37–44. This optimism is perpetuated in the influential introduction by Eissfeldt, who, when speaking about "the evaluation of the evidence for textual criticism," simply refers to BH and Würthwein rather than discussing the issues himself: O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament, An Introduction, Including the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and also the Works of Similar Type from Qumran: The History of the Formation of the Old Testament* (trans. P. R. Ackroyd; Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 721. O. Kaiser and W. G. Kümmel (*Exegetical Method: A Student's Handbook* [rev. ed.; New York: Seabury Press, 1981], 5–11) describe the procedure of textual criticism and textual evaluation as if the student and scholar can practice this discipline well with the guidance of a handbook.

<sup>33</sup> See n. 4 above.

