

# EDITING THE BIBLE

ASSESSING THE TASK PAST AND PRESENT

*Edited by*

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*and*

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Atlanta

EDITING THE BIBLE  
Assessing the Task Past and Present

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*John S. Kloppenborg and Judith H. Newman*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Bible may be the most edited document of Western civilization, or even of world literature. The famous New Testament editions of Cardinal Ximenes in 1512 and Erasmus in 1516 were only among the most prominent—due to the invention of movable type—in a much longer process of copyists making what we might think of as editorial, or even authorial, decisions as they decided how to render their exemplars. The singular term *Bible* belies the complex nature of this compilation and masks the complicated processes by which it took shape. During the span of more than two and a half millennia in which the Bible has come into being, the cultural contexts for producing and copying those texts have changed dramatically. We move from a period of low literacy with a limited number of scribes serving as textual tradents to the current era of widespread access not only to education but to digital media and hypertext biblical editions. While we are familiar with the contemporary context for editing the Bible in the computer age, the historical reconstruction of scribal activities in antiquity continues to come into focus. In addition to the purely technical aspects of producing a critical edition of the Bible, understanding the theoretical dimension of editing biblical texts requires disciplined scholarly imagination, involving many implicit and explicit presuppositions.

Today the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament present distinctively different sets of problems for the editor. This volume offers a collection of essays that treat some of the major editorial and reconstructive challenges involved in making editions of the Bible, with attention both to the artifactual evidence and the methods used to construct such editions. The

aim of the two major critical editions discussed most fully in this volume, the *Oxford Hebrew Bible* and the *Novum Testamentum Graecum, Editio Critico Maior* is to reconstruct the archetypes of biblical manuscripts, that is, the earliest inferable state of the biblical text by means of an eclectic edition, drawing from many different manuscripts. What is implicit in this endeavor? The projects reify as entities a “Hebrew Bible” and a “New Testament” that in fact conceptually postdate the archetypes. Such abstract, theoretical modeling focuses on hypothetical earliest layers. Critical editions also necessitate a choice concerning relevant books to be included in such a reconstructed Bible. The current projects represent books related to the Protestant canon and Jewish Tanakh. Yet it is important to bear in mind that a second-century B.C.E. collection of Hebrew Scriptures might well have included the books of Jubilees, 1 Enoch, and Ben Sira. A first-century collection of Christian Scripture might have included the Wisdom of Solomon or the Apocalypse of Peter. Moreover, the resulting critical editions bracket social contexts and diachronic change related to the texts that are included. The essays in this volume address such issues in order to offer a fuller picture of the processes involved in editing the Bible and understanding the nature of the texts that it comprises.

## 2. SCRIBES AND EDITORS

In the case of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, the concept of the Bible cannot be fully disentangled from early modern practices of print and production and, indeed, the idea of a critical edition of a Bible itself. In the first essay of this volume, John Van Seters offers cautionary words about anachronism in biblical studies. He argues that scribes and other literary compilers of antiquity cannot be understood as serving the same functions as the editor of the early Modern period. To use the same term for both is potentially misleading. In the study of the Bible and classical texts, scribes and Renaissance editors worked with very different tools, almost completely different assumptions about the nature of their texts, and rather different purposes in mind. Moreover, the *Textus Receptus* used as the basis for the first critical editions of the New Testament does not reflect a standard “canonical” text from antiquity, but rather represents later manuscripts adopted for expedience en route to publication. With these qualifications in mind we can better contextualize the modern text-critical projects that are underway.

### 3. EDITING THE HEBREW BIBLE

The modern editor of the Hebrew Bible confronts a manuscript situation radically transformed from sixty years ago. The discovery and publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls have had a major impact on understanding the composition and textual evolution of the Hebrew Bible. The implications of the textual finds have not yet been fully disseminated and digested among biblical scholars, not to mention scholars from related fields and among the general public. Prior to their discovery, the earliest Hebrew manuscript of the Bible was the Aleppo codex (ca. 920 C.E.). Owing to its near destruction in a synagogue fire in 1947, only two-thirds of this manuscript is extant. The Leningrad codex B19A (1008/9 C.E.) remains the earliest complete manuscript of the Tanakh and still must form the basis of critical editions of the Hebrew Bible. The Dead Sea Scrolls offer no such single manuscript, but have yielded fragmentary texts of portions of all books found in the Tanakh except the book of Esther. Of these Hebrew texts, some stand closer to books in the Masoretic textual tradition, some to the Old Greek, others to the Samaritan Pentateuch, and many other seemingly “biblical” manuscripts do not align themselves to any of these three manuscript traditions. No single textual tradition shows dominance.

Given the relatively few manuscripts available on which to base text-critical analysis, qualitative work on the texts is necessitated because quantitative work such as is being done in New Testament text criticism is not possible. The Dead Sea Scrolls with their pluriform scriptural texts have made apparent how important the Old Greek and Samaritan Pentateuch are as witnesses to the early development of the Hebrew Bible. In the second essay, Eugene Ulrich argues for a paradigm shift in de-centering the Masoretic Text from its current privileged place in textual reconstruction in favor of taking the pluriform Hebrew textual forms into account as reflecting the earliest stages of the Hebrew Bible. In reviewing the history of the composition of the Hebrew Bible from its compositional stages onward, Ulrich argues that the MT is not a single text, but a collection of different books each with its own textual history, albeit the only collection that has been preserved in the original language since the second century C.E.

Eibert Tigchelaar’s essay provides a detailed assessment of three major Hebrew Bible critical editions that are underway (the *Hebrew University Bible*, *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, and the *Oxford Hebrew Bible*). His essay raises two issues arising from the textual record. The first regards what some have termed variant “literary editions” in light of the nature of the

Qumran texts. How does one assess so-called “para-biblical” literature, that is, pluriform texts that contain material very much like that found in later biblical texts, but with significant variations, such as 4QpaleoExod<sup>m</sup> or 4QRP (Reworked Pentateuch)? Are they to be considered “scriptural” and thus to be factored into a critical apparatus of the Bible, or should they be understood as nonscriptural because they do not accord with the MT? A second issue is the use of Walter Greg’s theory of “copy texts” appropriated from the study of Renaissance literature. The editor of the *Oxford Hebrew Bible* project proposes to use the orthographics, vocalization, and accents of the Masoretic Text in order to reconstruct the biblical archetype. This raises the theoretical issue of whether the tradition should be included as a normative part of the text even at its incipient stages. In discussing the future of how the Hebrew Bible might be edited, Tigchelaar also envisions electronic publication and hypertexts as the inevitable evolution of the future. Such publication might easily provide the necessary flexibility to present various archetypes of the biblical manuscripts.

In light of such considerations, two essays offer case studies in text-critical work. Sarianna Metso focuses on the process by which the book of Leviticus took shape, from a body of cultic instructions to priests to a gradually stabilizing text. Like the book of Isaiah, the Leviticus textual tradition at Qumran shows more textual stability than is the case with such books as Exodus, Numbers, and Jeremiah. What becomes clear from her analysis is that the Old Greek preserves an alternative Hebrew version of Leviticus.

Whereas Metso focuses on the implications of the Hebrew texts of Leviticus found at Qumran to illuminate the development of the book, Kristin De Troyer focuses on Greek witnesses to Joshua and Leviticus. They reflect two tendencies, both variant from and with corrections toward the MT. Like the MT, the Septuagint must be understood as a collection of discrete books, not a seamless, uniform whole. By describing the scribal work evident in the Schøyen Papyri she points to their pluriform character and illuminates important aspects of both the history of the Old Greek text and the Hebrew texts.

#### 4. A CRITICAL EDITION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Issues relating to the editing of the New Testament contrast considerably with those relating to the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew Bible presents comparatively few manuscripts. But for the New Testament, the sheer volume and complexity of manuscript witnesses create a problem for editors: 5,300

Greek manuscripts from the late second to fourteenth centuries C.E., along with a large number of manuscripts of early versions in Coptic, Syriac, Latin, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic, and Gothic. These offer daunting problems that require special techniques for sorting and collating manuscripts, classifying variant readings, and reconstructing an archetype that accounts for subsequent textual transformation. Not only are there thousands of points where the available manuscripts differ from one another—it has been estimated that there are 250,000 to 350,000 variation points—but the complex relationships among manuscripts and cross-fertilizations have made it impossible to establish simple stemma diagrams to establish genealogical relationships. The situation is comparable in complexity to that of the Human Genome Project, in which any individual can share characteristics with multiple identity groups. Indeed, mathematical modeling developed for the genome project has now been employed in the analysis of New Testament manuscripts.

In the case of the New Testament, there has been no hesitation to reconstruct an eclectic archetype from the available manuscripts. But the problems in constructing such an archetype derive from several factors: (1) The earliest attestations of New Testament writings are from the late second century or early third, but are in the form of highly fragmentary papyri. These already show considerable variation from later fourth-century parchment codices (Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus) and evidence a stage in the transmission of the text that was less “supervised” than later copying. (2) The sheer volume of New Testament manuscripts presents a problem for editors, a problem that is only now being addressed at a practical and theoretical level. At a practical level, the digitization of all available manuscripts has been undertaken by the Institut für neutestamentliche Textforschung (Münster), which has allowed for electronic collation through sampling of pre-selected variant locations. At a theoretical level sorting and classification methods developed in the sciences for large-scale multi-variant sorting have been applied to New Testament manuscripts. Klaus Wachtel and Holger Strutwolf provide thorough accounts of this new project.

##### 5. WHAT NEW TESTAMENT TEXT IS BEING EDITED?

Another set of problems that has not been addressed in a consistent way derives from the fact that many of the individual books of the New Testament putatively belong to the first century C.E. but in fact represent early collections from the early second century. 2 Corinthians is almost

universally regarded as a letter collection; 1 Corinthians and Philippians may be collections, and in any event, the earliest Pauline canon (P46) has already associated Hebrews, a non-Pauline writing, with ten Pauline letters (excluding the Pastoral Epistles). This raises the question, what text is actually being edited and presented in a critical edition of the New Testament: the putative first-century letter of Paul or a second-century compilation? Is the text of Mark that is edited in a Bible a putative text circa 70 C.E. or a mid-second century archetype that accounts for all later manuscripts?

In other books of the New Testament there are a large number of recognized interpolations and modifications—the longer ending of Mark, the Johannine “comma” (1 John 5:7–8), the Johannine story of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53–8:11), and possibly Luke 22:43–44—interpolations that might represent the state of the New Testament text in the mid- to late second century. Should these be included or excluded? How early can we imagine the idea of a collection of Christian Scriptures being formulated, *how* was such a collection imagined, and what belonged to it? David Trobisch argues that the New Testament is the product of a careful and deliberate editorial process and was complete as early as the middle of the second century C.E.

## 6. CONJECTURAL EMENDATION

Although accepted in the editing of classical texts as a valid principle, and accepted at least in theory in the editing of the Bible, conjectural emendation is employed very rarely by biblical text critics. Yet in the case of books of the Bible where we lack a continuous or complete set of witnesses and where there are intractable grammatical or lexicographic problems, conjectural emendation seems a viable option. Erasmus engaged in some emendations of letters such as James where the received text is nonsensical or highly problematic. Yet more recent critics usually prefer elaborate exegetical solutions to what may be a matter of textual corruption. The reticence to employ emendation might be a function of the canonical status of the writings involved, or the result of the disconnection of the editing of the Bible from the practice of editing of ancient manuscripts more generally (or both). In any event, this is an issue that deserves investigation. Ryan Wettlaufer’s paper is on this topic.

One common element is reflected in the material evidence underlying both Hebrew Bible and New Testament editions. The critical text, that is, the earliest layer of text that can be reconstructed, is at some historical

remove from the beginning of the text's existence, that is, its composition. The gap would seem to be a matter of centuries in the case of the Hebrew Bible; in the New Testament, this might for some books be a matter of decades. The textual situation in the case of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament reflect a mixture of both fluidity and stability at early stages of textual transmission, though how this might be characterized differs markedly even among the Hebrew texts or Greek texts themselves. In his overview essay, Michael Holmes thus characterizes the New Testament situation as suggesting "a combination of what might be termed macro-level stability (from the paragraph level on up) and micro-level fluidity (from the sentence level on down)."

The collection of essays in this volume point in balance to a consensus that the editorial task of biblical criticism is to reconstruct, where possible, the history of the text without privileging as normative any particular stage in its development. In any case, laying bare what "text" is being edited and articulating the presuppositions entailed in that commitment are imperative to sound biblical scholarship. To the degree that the essays of this volume have contributed to that endeavor, they have succeeded.