OLD TESTAMENT TEXTUAL CRITICISM: ITS PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

Apropos of Recent English Versions

By D. F. PAYNE

The publication of *The Hebrew Text of the Old Testament* by L. H. Brockington (Oxford University Press/Cambridge University Press, 1973, 269 pp., £4·50) gives opportunity for a brief reconsideration of some of the general problems and issues in Old Testament textual criticism. The practice of textual criticism revolves round the twin poles of evidence and criteria. It is doubtful if the criteria themselves have changed a great deal of recent years; but there have been important developments where evidence is concerned, first and foremost the discovery of the Qumran scrolls. The attitudes adopted towards criteria have also developed and altered over the last generation or two. To these various changes the recent scholarly English translations of the Old Testament are heirs: within the last decade the *Jerusalem Bible* (JB, 1966), the *New English Bible* (NEB, O.T. 1970) and the *New American Bible* (NAB, 1970). Probably the *Revised Standard Version* (RSV) may still be classed as 'recent', since a slightly revised edition of it, under a new title (the *Common Bible*), appeared as recently as 1973.[1]

But first, the book. The sub-title of Brockington's volume on the Old Testament text reads as follows: *The Readings adopted by the Translators of the New English Bible.* In its own fashion, then, the book serves the same function for the Old Testament that R. V. G. Tasker's *The Greek New Testament* (Oxford and Cambridge, 1964) performed for the New. It invites comparison and contrast with two other works as well: the NAB appendix offering textual notes on the Old Testament, and B. M. Metzger's *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London and New York, 1971). It must of course be recognized that there are major differences between the two Testaments as regards textual criticism. Whereas Tasker's text, like any modern one, is eclectic, there is no way in which editions of the Hebrew Bible can abandon the Massoretic Text

[1] It is perhaps rather early yet to survey the textual treatment of the Old Testament in *Today's English Version*, of which few sections have as yet been published.

(*MT*). It is therefore unnecessary for the NEB to publish its own Hebrew *text*; only its occasional variant readings require to be laid before the public. The Library edition of the NEB already offers brief textual notes, citing the sources of its choices and preferences, but it is useful to have now the greater detail and precision of Brockington's book; all the more so, in view of the fact that the NEB is rather more paraphrastic than, say, the RSV.

It is nevertheless astonishing how little information Brockington gives us—not even a list of abbreviations and *sigla*! There is no extraneous material whatever: no introduction, no notes, no index. The most serious omission, however, is that of argumentation. No reasoning is given for the textual decisions taken. This is in complete contrast to Metzger; Tasker's book discusses the major textual problems; and even the NAB appendix, brief as it is, finds room to mention 'haplography', 'dittography', and references to other Old Testament passages thought relevant. (Brockington sometimes refers to other passages, but as a rule only to fully parallel texts.) Another omission of some importance is that of any lexicographical notes. Lexicography and textual criticism have become so interrelated nowadays that a volume on the latter which ignores the former leaves the reader inadequately informed.

Let Isaiah 51:6 serve as an example. Here the phrase כמו־כן ('in like manner'?) has long invited reinterpretation or amendment, a favourite suggestion being that כן may be the word 'gnat' used collectively (so *e.g.* RSV). D. Winton Thomas in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* noted that 1 Q Isaiah B reads the phrase as a single word, כמוכן, and he interprets it as 'locusta'. The NEB, however, renders by 'maggots', but does not favour the reader with any note; nor does Brockington in *HTOT* now offer any information. Presumably the absence of a note means that the NEB translation does not represent an emendation; but beyond that one is given no guidance as to the origin of the rendering. The absence of a note can scarcely be called a satisfactory guide!

Genesis 49:4 offers an even better example of the inadequacy of the *HTOT* information. The *MT* phrase יְצוּעֵי עָלָה has often been emended, and NEB is no exception: *HTOT* proffers יְצוּעֵי עֶלֶה, and the rendering is 'his concubine's couch'. But

the student will look in vain for the word עֲלָה in the Hebrew lexicons; it is a new meaning, drawn from Arabic.[2] Some indication of this fact should surely have been given the reader.

There are other factors too which should have invited some comment in *HTOT*. It was Sir Godfrey Driver, to whom the NEB owes so much, who argued that early scribes utilized a number of abbreviations, some of which led in due course to textual problems. One of his examples occurs as early in the Bible as Genesis 2:2; here the Samaritan Pentateuch, together with Septuagint and Peshitta, has השׁשׁי ('the sixth') instead of השׁביעי ('the seventh') of *MT*, and Driver suggested that an original abbreviation (השׁ) led to the variant.[3] It is interesting to observe that the NEB is alone among recent English Versions in prefering 'sixth' to 'seventh'. *HTOT* mentions that the NEB reading is that of the Samaritan Pentateuch, but no reference is made to the possibility of an original abbreviation, even though that may well have influenced the textual decision of the NEB.[4]

Perhaps for reasons of economy, then, *HTOT* offers minimal textual information; a pity. Inevitably, however, it is the textual decisions of the NEB which are of greatest interest; even though one would have appreciated more information about these decisions, they do up to a point speak for themselves. It is at this juncture that it becomes helpful to make comparisons with the other English Versions (EVV). In the survey which follows, virtually all the examples have been drawn from Genesis; it is recognized that to restrict oneself thus inevitably limits the perspectives possible, but it is hoped that sufficient data are nevertheless provided by which to illustrate the major facts, factors and issues involved. It is possible, of course, that the textual treatment of Genesis is not necessarily representative of any one Version as a whole.

The Hebrew text of Genesis seems to have been well preserved, and the number of textual cruces is relatively small. There are no more than approximately 25 places in the whole of Genesis where a consensus (rarely unanimous) of EVV departs from the *MT* reading. Each individual Version, on the other hand,

[2] *Cf.* J. Reider, *VT* 4 (1954) 276.

[3] *Cf.* G. R. Driver, *Textus* 1 (1960) 112–131, *Textus* 4 (1964) 76–94. The reference to Gn. 2:2 is in *Textus* 4, 82, but it is given as Gn. 7:11, due to a misprint.

[4] Gn. 2:2 also serves to draw attention to another unfortunate feature of *HTOT*. Only the Samaritan evidence is given, with no mention of LXX or Peshitta. This omission is characteristic; the policy is to name only a single witness for each variant.

presents more deviations from the *MT* than a mere 25. In other words, there is a considerable area of textual disagreement between the EVV. Indeed, it is difficult to find a single verse in Genesis where the *MT* Hebrew is beyond dispute erroneous or corrupt.

One must beware, of course, of treating the *MT* as sacrosanct. However great its general superiority, it remains but one line of evidence, and it may be wrong at any individual point; each textual problem must be assessed on its own merits. This basic principle seems so obvious that it should not need reiterating; yet its importance can even today be obscured, not so much by ulta-conservatives who view the *MT* of the Old Testament in the same light as the Textus Receptus of the New, as by a number of textual critics who in theory (though rarely in practice) place the consonantal text of the *MT* on something of a pedestal, even though they are apt to combine a high view of the consonantal text with a remarkably low view—and cavalier treatment—of the *MT* vocalization.[5] This return to the *MT* has been a healthy reaction against the wholesale textual 'surgery' so frequent a couple of generations ago (Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica* was positively cautious at one time!), but it is all too easy for a reaction to turn into a prejudice. The *MT* is demonstrably faulty in many places; while a comparison of the synoptic passages of the Old Testament (*e.g.* 2 Sa. 22:2–51/Ps. 18:2–50; 1 Ki 22:1–35/2 Ch. 18:1–34) shows plainly that the consonants (to say no more) of the Hebrew text were not at all immutable in the period when the Old Testament documents were still being written. It is good method, undoubtedly, to seek to make sense of the *MT*; that is to say, to establish how the Massoretes themselves understood any particular passage. (One will not, however, establish even that much by discarding their vocalization.) But to proceed to view the consonants of that text as an almost infallible guide to the original text is nothing but a prejudice.

In Genesis, at any rate, it would seem on the evidence that the *MT* is unlikely to lead us astray very frequently. Here we should pause to take account of a powerful modern *Tendenz vis-à-vis* the text of the Old Testament: I refer to the conviction in many quarters that the 'original text' is a chimera, and

[5] See J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament*, Oxford (1968) 194–217.

that all we can hope to do is to isolate a number of textual layers, in each of which text and interpretation are inseparable.[6]

The ultimate logic of this position, it seems to me, is that a modern Version should content itself with translating the *MT*, since the *MT* is the only complete Hebrew text we possess; any other procedure would result in a potpourri, a potentially ludicrous hybrid of the text-cum-interpretations of widely differing eras and localities. Alternatively, a more scientific translation could offer in English what Kittel did in Hebrew (up to but not including *BHS*), namely the *MT* in the text with an apparatus to indicate such deviations from it as are extant in other texts—Qumran scrolls, Septuagint, etc. In neither technique would conjectural emendation have a valid place.

The plain fact is, however, that none of the EVV has followed either course; each offers an eclectic text, sometimes preferring one textual tradition, sometimes another, and sometimes opting for an emendation. And for Genesis, at least, such a course of action seems fully justified. Special, at times major, problems arise elsewhere, to be sure; notoriously, the Septuagint edition of Jeremiah is not that of the *MT*. But when all is said and done, the fact is that in a very large proportion of instances where the various witnesses to the Old Testament text diverge, it is at least possible to apply the normal canons of textual criticisms. Time and time again it is possible to demonstrate, or at least posit, a relationship between the variant readings, and to form a judgement as to the priority of this or that reading. The very fact that the exercise is possible argues for its legitimacy; and if the exercise is legitimate, it is worthwhile. As for Genesis, the degree of textual consensus between the EVV, when the size of the book is taken into consideration, is not unimpressive. Perhaps the *Tendenz* is something of an exaggeration.

When the *MT* has been used as a basis, decisions to depart from it are normally brought about by one or more of the following three considerations: (a) the obscurity or unintelligibility of the *MT*; (b) the presence of variants in other witnesses to the text; (c) the attractiveness of some conjectural emendation. Other factors may occasionally play a part; translators may be influenced by other passages, or by literary-critical judgments. For example, some EVV have corrected the 'wrong'

[6] See most recently P. R. Ackroyd in *ExpT* 85 (1973–1974) 374–377.

name for God, on the basis of the documentary hypothesis, at several points in Genesis (*e.g.* 20:18, 30:27)—though usually with some textual support.

Faced with a choice, the translator must apply the proper text-critical criteria. Admittedly there is no golden rule about the correct use of criteria, and subjective decisions are inevitable; but the attempt to retain objectivity is essential; above all one's own preconceptions or prejudices should be carefully controlled. A study of the EVV, however, leads the present writer to the conclusion that (a) text-critical canons have not always been carefully applied, (b) the translator's preferences and prejudices can occasionally be seen, (c) the laudable desire to present readable and smoothly-flowing English has here and there led the translators to give priority to these desiderata, and so to neglect probable originality: in other words, *lectio facilior potior!*

(a) TEXT-CRITICAL CANONS

Three general principles are of primary importance:

(i) The preferability of the more difficult reading—*lectio difficilior potior*
(ii) The preferability of the shorter reading—*lectio brevior potior*
(iii) The importance of weighing the evidence

In the light of these, let us consider some textual decisions of the EVV.

(i) *Lectio Difficilior*

Genesis 2:2	*MT*	השביעי
	Sam (LXX Pesh)	הששי

The general sense of the passage is quite clear; the activities of Creation were completed on the sixth day, and on the seventh day 'God rested'. God did no work on the seventh day; the *MT* is thus undoubtedly the *lectio difficilior*, since it is in itself somewhat ambiguous (it is the context which removes the ambiguity). The variant is surely secondary, a pedantic alteration of rabbinic type, to put a fence round the Sabbath day.

The NEB, however, has opted for the *lectio facilior*.[7]

[7] Driver's theory (see above), which may well have influenced the NEB here, is none too convincing as applied to the numerals. It is scarcely credible that both six and seven were symbolized by the initial *shin*.

Genesis 31:13 *MT* אנכי האל בית־אל
LXX *ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὀφθείς σοι ἐν τόπῳ θεοῦ*

LXX (*cf.* Targ) presents the easier reading: 'I am the God who appeared to you in Bethel'. *MT* appears to say 'I am the God Bethel', which is defensible but very improbable; but to understand the clause as 'I am the God *of* Bethel' does violence to the normal canons of Hebrew syntax. The question is, then, whether the *MT* is too difficult to be accepted; if it is acceptable, it should be viewed as original, as *lectio difficilior* and *brevior*. D. W. Goodwin has shown that the *MT* may well preserve a relic of earlier (specifically northern Israelite) usage.[8] Thus the *MT* may well be original; but both NEB and NAB have abandoned it.

Genesis 48:15 *MT* ויברך את־יוסף
LXX *καὶ ηὐλόγησεν αὐτούς*

That it was the sons of Joseph, and not Joseph himself, whom Jacob blessed is plain in the context. The *MT* is nevertheless perfectly intelligible; the blessing is really for the whole progeny of Joseph rather than for Ephraim and Manasseh as individuals. The LXX reading is plainly inferior and secondary; but NAB has accepted it.

Other verses where at least one of the EVV has opted for a *lectio facilior* are 21:16 36:24 37:4 41:9 43:14 45:7 46:28 48:15 49:25 49:26.

Of a not dissimilar character are variants clearly due to a desire on the part of a MS or Version to tidy up the *MT* reading —a tendency typical of popular texts. Thus:

Genesis 12:16

Property received by Abram is listed in *MT* as 'sheep, cattle, asses, slaves, maid-servants, she-asses and camels'. The Samaritan Pentateuch places the וחמרים immediately before their female counterpart, the ואתנת; surely the sign of a tidy mind rather than originality? The NAB, however, follows the Samaritan.

[8] *Cf.* D. W. Goodwin, *Text-restoration methods in contemporary biblical scholarship*. Naples (1969) 81.

Genesis 41:8	*MT*	'his dream . . . them'
	Sam	'his dreams . . . them'
	LXX	'his dream . . . it'

The lack of concord in *MT* is self-evident. It could easily enough have been accidental; a very slight scribal error could have caused it. On the other hand, *MT* is certainly not impossible, for the dramatic point is made by Joseph (verse 25) that Pharaoh's two dreams are 'one'. The very fact that Sam and LXX disagree suggests strongly that both are secondary, both seeking to tidy up the *MT* reading but doing so in different ways. In other words, the originality of the *MT* explains both the other readings. Here the NEB follows the Samaritan, while the RSV favours the LXX.

Genesis 46:23 *MT* ובני־דן חשים

If one chooses to be pedantic, there is lack of concord again here, since only one son of Dan is named; but the plural phrase "sons of X" is plainly formulaic in character. The singular reading (בן for בני) is therefore plainly secondary, an unnecessary and pedantic change, which, in spite of its very poor attestation, is adopted by NEB.

See also 13:18 (*etc.*), 15:21, 17:16, 19:12, 21:16, 21:33, 22:16, 30:10, 37:9f., 41:3, 4, 27, 44:31, 48:15, 48:20, 49:4.

(ii) *Lectio Brevior*

The EVV have not been unaware of the possibility of glosses in the *MT*, and a text shorter than *MT* has been preferred by one or more EVV at Genesis 7:14, 19:24, 31:18, 31:53, 37:5. The principle *lectio brevior potior* is a good one, but these examples are not all convincing. At Genesis 19:24, for instance, where JB deletes 'from heaven' as a gloss, all witnesses support *MT*. Genesis 31:18 is a more open question; but the longer text of *MT* can be supported as typical of the expansive style of the writers, while the shorter text of LXX MSS and Pesh can be explained as due to homoiarkton (so *BHS*, *e.g.*).

The EVV offer far more numerous examples, however, where a longer reading has been preferred to a shorter one. Thus:

Genesis 7:20 *MT* ויכסו ההרים

The LXX (Pesh) addition, making the mountains 'high' ones,

https://tyndalebulletin.org | https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.30638

is a dramatic touch, typical of a popular text: the Flood submerged even the highest mountains! It was a touch of drama which the NAB found itself unable to resist.

Genesis 21:9

Sarah observed Ishmael מצחק—and here *MT* ends, while LXX adds the explanatory *μετὰ Ισαακ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτῆς*. The absolute usage of the *MT* is both possible (see the lexicons) and effective, bringing the verse to a climax with the important root צחק, a latent pun on the name Isaac. The LXX addition, almost certainly an expansion of the Hebrew, is preferred by RSV, JB and NAB.

Genesis 34:27 *MT* בני יעקב

A good case can be made for prefixing *waw* to בני; the addition is well attested and stylistically probable. But the Vulgate goes further, prefixing 'and the rest of', a weakly attested and almost certainly secondary expansion. The NEB follows the Vulgate.

Genesis 41:22

To the *MT* 'and I saw in my dream' LXX Pesh Vg MSS prefix 'and I slept a second time'. The longer text certainly looks like an interpretative expansion typical of popular texts; but it has the support of the NEB.

Time and time again, a longer reading is best explained as an interpretative or expansive addition. But it is surprising how often longer readings have been preferred by one or other of the EVV. See 3:24, 14:10, 17:19, 19:37f., 20:11, 24:15, 25:5, 25:8, 31:1, 31:33, 35:22, 41:56, 44:4f.

(iii) *Weight of Evidence*

Some variant readings have stronger support today than previously; a famous instance is Isaiah 53:11, where the insertion of the word 'light', once evidenced by the LXX alone, can now command the separate support of both Isaiah scrolls from Qumran Cave I. For Genesis, Qumran evidence is rather scanty, but a Scroll reading is preferred to *MT* at 1:9 by NAB. At two other points (29:24, 37:4) the NAB has accepted a Cairo Genizah reading in preference to the *MT* (so also JB at 37:4).

The dictum that witnesses must be weighed, not counted, is

particularly relevant to New Testament textual criticism; nevertheless it holds an important truth for the Old Testament too. The addition of אור in Isaiah 53:11 is by no means established as original, for instance; it may be yet another case of interpretative expansion. There is one important difference between Old and New Testament textual criticism, however; while in New Testament studies a variant attested in a single MS or Version would rarely be seriously considered, in the Old Testament field the witnesses are relatively so few that every witness counts. Even so, weakness of attestation is an important factor to bear in mind, and one which may have been neglected at certain points in EVV; examples already discussed (above) are 34:27 and 46:23. Another example is 24:32, where NEB has elected to follow a reading of the Vulgate, a variant so poorly attested that Eissfeldt did not even record it in the *BHS* (as opposed to the *BH*^{3}) apparatus. Other instances are 30:10, 30:13, 36:6, 38:3, 41:45.

It seems appropriate at this point to recall that the readings of Versions are *ipso facto* weaker than Hebrew readings. It is true that a fair quantity of readings once attested only in Versions have now the support of Qumran MSS; and undoubtedly many more such readings do go back to genuine variants in Hebrew. But where the Hebrew witness is lacking, the question mark must remain. Genesis 4:15 may serve as an illustration. *MT* has לכן 'therefore' in a context where a negative is expected, and the Versions not unnaturally supply a negative. It is often said, accordingly, that the Versions presuppose לא כן; but it is equally possible that they are interpreting or correcting the Hebrew לכן—the suppression of an implied negative could well have been idiomatic in Hebrew. But RSV posits לא כן. Genesis 25:8 furnishes another example.

A fortiori, decisions that the text has suffered some displacement, or that consecutive words or sentences should be redivided, would normally have to be reckoned as supported by minimal attestation, if by any at all. But such decisions are frequently found in EVV; see Genesis 14:6, 23:1, 23:5f., 24:29f., 24:67, 47:5f., 49:19f.

Again, revocalization of the *MT* consonants, unless on the basis of MSS or Versions, has no attestation worth mentioning. The Massoretes were handing down not only a method of pronouncing Hebrew, but a pronunciation reflecting and

incorporating a traditional meaning. Examples of revocalized Hebrew are very common in EVV: see Genesis 3:16, 4:7, 9:19, 10:10, 14:15, 15:1, 15:11, 23:5f., 23:11, 24:27, 24:32, 27:18, 29:34, 33:11, 34:9, 36:30, 41:56, 43:30, 45:24, 46:2, 46:22, 49:6, 49:21, 49:27, 49:29.

A fortissimo, the whole category of conjectural emendations is lacking weight of evidence. That some are essential nobody would deny; but since they are the product of imagination and not evidence, they should be accepted only when they are compelling. In Genesis, none the less, the number of conjectural emendations in our EVV is far from small: 8:4, 8:8, 9:5, 9:15, 9:26, 16:11, 20:16, 24:50, 27:33, 30:31, 31:25, 33:4, 37:14, 42:14. How many of these are compelling? The answer can only be subjective, no doubt; but it is interesting, to say the least, that *not one on this list* has the support of all four EVV.[9]

(b) POSSIBLE PREJUDICES?

Are any preferences or prejudices discernible in the textual decisions of the EVV? It may be tentatively suggested that certain tendencies, at least, can be observed, especially when one compares one Version with another.

The RSV might be classed as cautious, or traditional. It seems more willing to follow the *MT* when in doubt than any of the other Versions. It acknowledges that it has departed from the *MT* only 26 times in the whole of Genesis; whereas JB admits to twice that number of divergences from the *MT*, while NEB has well over 100 and NAB rather more than 200.[10] The RSV may perhaps be criticized for adhering too closely to the *MT*, 'warts and all'. But when it does abandon the *MT*, it shows no particular preferences discernible to the present writer.

The JB shows a distinct leaning towards the Versions, especially the Septuagint. This preference may be due to the Catholic background, or perhaps to the Continental background, of this Version. At any rate, in this respect the JB textual approach may be contrasted with the greater regard

[9] The list is not exhaustive; in particular, it omits minor emendations where haplography or dittography have been suggested.

[10] These figures are intentionally only approximate. In any case, deviations from the *MT* are not always acknowledged, especially in JB.

for the *MT* apparent in the RSV, and with the quest for 'new meanings' evidenced by the NEB.

The NAB too draws many of its textual choices from the Versions; the Septuagint again takes pride of place, supplying about 75 out of its 200+ deviations from the *MT*. Of its 40 conjectural emendations in Genesis, many are based on a belief in scribal carelessness, evidently. The NAB notes rarely in Genesis state simply 'conj', but usually claim 'haplog' or 'dittog', or else refer to some other passages considered relevant. The statistics suggest that the NAB is much too ready to amend the Hebrew text on a minimum of solid evidence.

As for the NEB, one feels that its prejudice is for novelty. Quite apart from its proudly acclaimed new meanings, one has the distinct impression at times that it sets out to be different. Its acceptance of the reading 'sixth' in Genesis 2:2 (discussed above) may well be due to Driver's recent treatment of scribal abbreviations. Its treatment of Genesis 2:3 is another instance of its novel approach: NEB is alone here in amending *MT* בָּרָא ('created') to בָּדָא (translated 'set himself'). The only basis for the change is the LXX ἤρξατο ('began'), which is more probably an attempt to render the Hebrew idiom intelligible than a witness to a genuine variant reading. The linguistic basis for בדא is weak, moreover, as the lexicons show.[11] The choice may testify to Driver's proclivity towards Arabic etymologies for Hebrew vocabulary.

Perhaps this question of preference and prejudice should not be pressed; statistics may be misleading. Even so, it may be worthwhile to sound a warning. On balance, the writer considers that the *RSV* approach is the wisest. If it is at times open to the charge of escapism, we may at least concede that where difficulties and problems arise in the text, they may often be best left for the commentaries to deal with.

(c) SMOOTH TRANSLATION

If modern Versions have any strong preference, it is the desire to present good, effective English at all costs. The pressures to achieve this aim were probably less strong when the RSV was in the making; besides, the RSV was a revision of an earlier

[11] The sense of this rare verb, possibly an aramaism, is rather 'devise, invent' than simply 'begin' as in Arabic.

Version, and set out to do little more than eliminate archaisms, so far as the improvement of English was concerned.

The temptation to make textual choices which provide the smoothest translation must be difficult to resist. Instances where the EVV failed to resist such a temptation have already been listed under (a) (iii). It will suffice to add a brief further list of instances where—following the example set by the ancient Versions—one or more of the EVV has sought to tidy up the *MT*, in one fashion or another: Genesis 24:29f., 33:2, 42:25, 47:29. At 42:25, to take an example, the *MT* ויצו יוסף וַיְמַלְאוּ would require as a literal rendering, 'And Joseph commanded and they filled . . .'; this is a perfectly natural telescoping or ellipsis, but NEB felt obliged to revocalize, yielding וַיְמַלְאוּ which can claim a measure of support from the Septuagint. Plainly good modern English demands a less than literal translation of the *MT* here; but surely that requirement in no way necessitates a textual emendation. The NEB is the only recent Version to make the change; it is an example, incidentally, of the NEB's relatively greater readiness to revocalize the *MT*.

In all four of these examples, the English rendering adopted by the EVV concerned could have been justified as required by the needs of English and English readers, without any recourse to textual changes.

CONCLUSION

It seems to the writer that the most suspect area of text-critical practice as shown in the EVV is the criterion of weight of attestation and evidence. It is true that this criterion is much more easily handled in New Testament textual criticism, where so many MSS are available to the practitioner; but it is an exercise no less important in Old Testament studies, even if more difficult to practise. Various questions arise. How far, say, can Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint and Vulgate be viewed as offering separate support for a specific variant reading? How far can an apparent variant in a Version be relied upon as a genuine variant? By what criteria should 'new meanings' be assessed (both in general terms, and more specifically in their relation to textual problems)? How valid is the practice of conjectural emendation? What weight should be given to the

https://tyndalebulletin.org | https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.30638

Massoretic vowels? Methodology, as always, is all-important.

Other relatively neglected areas are those of Hebrew style and idiom. As we have seen, the NAB is apt to introduce textual changes on the basis of other passages; but there is such a thing as stylistic variation! However, the whole field of Hebrew stylistics is little explored as yet. As for the question of idiom, it seems to the writer that in no few cases where the EVV have deviated from the *MT*, the answer to the textual problem might well lie in the presence of some undetected idiom or idomatic usage (such as ellipsis), in the *MT* Hebrew. The following list of passages is relevant: 2:2, 7:14, 20:10, 20:16, 21:33, 25:8, 29:2, 30:15, 30:31, 33:2, 38:3, 41:40, 42:25, 44:31, 46:23, 47:29, 48:20, 49:28. In each of these verses there is some difficulty in the *MT* which has led one or more of the EVV to prefer another reading; but in each case it is at least possible (and in some cases highly probable) that the *MT* contains an idiom of some kind, and is original. Admittedly, there are much the same dangers in the quest for idioms as in the quest for new meanings—we may find them where none exist. But it is a field well worth exploring.