

Tov, Emanuel: **Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible**. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992. xl + 456 pp. \$40.00 ISBN 0-8006-2687-7 (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, ISBN 90-232-2712-3).

This English translation/revision of the Hebrew version of this book (published in 1989), was greeted with great anticipation in the field of textual criticism. Those who waited eagerly have not been disappointed. There is much information in this book. In fact, it can be used as a ready-reference tool, it is so extensive and well organized. On the other hand, its style and presentation are accessible to the non-specialist, and while not always easy to read due to its technical subject matter, it is clear and straightforward, at times even deceptively simple. Tov knows text criticism is complex and difficult, and frequently reminds his readers of this fact. This must not be forgotten if the book is to be understood well and used profitably.

After some front matter and an introductory chapter, Tov deals with the textual witnesses of the Hebrew Bible in his second, the longest and most encyclopedic chapter in the book. It is a useful way to proceed, as so much of what is done in textual criticism depends on an understanding of what the witnesses are and what part they are presumed to have played in the history of the transmission of the text as a whole. Tov goes out of his way to stress that the MT is not to be found in any single Ms, but is a textual group or family which is evidenced in a number of Hebrew Mss as well as in other sources at times. The necessary changes having been made, the same principle holds for the LXX and the Old Greek, as well as the other versions. What is more, the MT is not the same thing as the Hebrew Bible which textual criticism seeks to reconstruct, but only a textual family witness (albeit the major one) alongside others which all must be evaluated in order to arrive at that goal.

Tov's third chapter concerns the history of the Biblical text. Here others have traced a clearer picture (e.g. Talmon, Barthélemy), but perhaps one should not be overly critical of Tov at this point. He limits himself largely to a discussion of the original arguments of de Lagarde and Kahle in light of recent developments (mainly the discoveries at Qumran), and attempts it in less than fifty pages. It is here that the book is the most abstract and philosophical, and while one must in principle decide these questions (of *Urtext* vs. a pluriformity of textual types from a very early stage) *a priori* to a certain degree, Tov himself admits elsewhere (*The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research*, p. 35) that the two traditional positions are not as mutually exclusive as one might think.

A helpful chapter (4) on the copying and transmitting of the Biblical text follows, followed in turn by two chapters on principles of evaluation of readings--one general, and one specific. It is the chapter (6) on the specific rules of evaluation of readings which will no doubt frustrate the greatest number of readers, specialists and non-specialists alike. Tov clearly states at various points that textual criticism cannot be rule-bound, but must instead be based on "common sense." Here Tov must mean that there are so many variables in textual criticism, and they so often require various weightings, that simple-minded following of individual rules will produce a bad result as often (or more) as a good one. His argument is vulnerable in that any time a text-critical judgment is made, it must be defensible, and that defense will include some reference to a system or systems which others can agree on (or not, as the case may be). In the end, all scholars follow rules (or are accused of being idiosyncratic and arbitrary--in effect, non-scholarly), though these rules may be complex and weighed and applied in unexpected ways.

The final three chapters (on literary criticism, conjectural emendation and critical editions), are all sober, informative, and in the mainstream of much of recent textual criticism. The book is a must for all those interested in the field. While one might find reason to fault it at points, at present it has no peer, and is not likely to have one for quite some time.

