Historical Criticism in Light of Documented Evidence : What Does Text-Critical and Other Documented Evidence Tell Us about the Early Transmission of the Hebrew Bible?

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HISTORICAL CRITICISM IN LIGHT OF DOCUMENTED EVIDENCE. WHAT DOES TEXT-CRITICAL AND OTHER DOCUMENTED EVIDENCE TELL US ABOUT THE EARLY TRANSMISSION OF THE HEBREW BIBLE?

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INTRODUCTION

The Hebrew Bible was the focus of intensive scribal activity for centuries, and therefore many of its texts are multilayered. Because the layers derive from different socio-historical contexts and times, the Hebrew Bible is an exceedingly difficult historical source. At the same time, it is a key source for many central questions regarding ancient Israel and the emergence of early Judaism. Much information would be lost without the Hebrew Bible, and for this reason, biblical studies has gone to great lengths to understand and reconstruct the literary development of the texts contained in it.

Historical criticism (or historical-critical method)[1] has been the classic method to unwind and reconstruct the complicated literary and redaction histories of the texts. Nevertheless, the method has never been universally recognized in biblical studies; in recent decades it has increasingly been sidelined. Although literary-critical theories still receive attention—especially Pentateuchal theories and the Deuteronomistic history— studies that focus on literary- and redaction-critical reconstructions have clearly declined from their historical position in earlier scholarship. At the background is, in part, skepticism about results achieved by this method. Too many theories have contradicted each other to the extent that the whole method may appear to be an uncertain basis to build on. Some scholars have also addressed weaknesses in historical criticism.[2] Overall, however, the criticism has been rather general and lacking in methodological depth. There are isolated attempts to question individual aspects and techniques of the method; for example, *Ray Person* and *Robert Rezetko* have criticized the use of a *Wiederaufnahme* as

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[1] An older term for historical criticism would be higher criticism (cf. lower criticism, i.e., textual criticism). Historical criticism roughly corresponds to *Literarkritik* and *Redaktionskritik*, and other methods connected to them, in the German-speaking scholarship. The German term *historisch-kritische Methode* usually includes textual criticism, while the English term historical criticism usually does not. Because of this difference, there is confusion about these terms. Among others, John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville & London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 1–3, calls the method biblical criticism. Many also use the terms literary and redaction criticism, which will also be used in this paper.

[2] Many names could be mentioned here, such as Stephen Kaufman, Ray Person, Ehud Ben Zvi, Niels Peter Lemche, and David Carr.

an indicator of later additions.[3] More commonly, historical criticism is merely neglected without any apparent necessity to justify this position, or its results are only used sporadically. The lack of methodological reflection is apparent even in studies that use historical criticism,[4] and this may have contributed to its decline in biblical studies. The methodological silence is problematic when multilayered texts are used as historical sources. If scribes repeatedly changed the texts in their transmission, any theory that uses them for historical conclusions is directly affected depending on how one relates methodologically to these changes. The implementation of the method thus necessitates a conception of how the texts evolved and what kind of changes the scribes could make.

This paper seeks to evaluate historical criticism in light of documented evidence and especially intentional scribal changes observable in text-critical variants. What do these changes tell us about the potential usefulness of historical criticism? Text-critical evidence shows how scribes actually changed the texts, while historical criticism seeks to detect and reconstruct the changes by using only text internal signs, such as inconsistencies, tensions, contradictions, syntactic problems, and grammatical mistakes. Are the basic assumptions of historical criticism *in principle* correct? Can one detect scribal changes reliably without text-critical evidence? Does the method reach scientifically viable results?

Text-critical variants in the Hebrew Bible and its versions bear witness to intentional scribal changes especially in the last centuries BCE, and to some extent even in the first centuries CE. Nonetheless, it is fair to assume that these variants are representative of the earlier transmission as well. A huge number of variants are preserved in the Hebrew Bible so that one can gain a good picture of the scribal changes before the texts were frozen for changes, and there is no reason to assume a fundamental difference between the documented later transmission in the last centuries BCE and the earlier

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[3] Ray Person and Robert Rezetko, in *Empirical Models Challenging Biblical Criticism* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 25–30.

[4] Many recent commentaries, for example, sporadically refer to a section being a later addition, but there is rarely a methodological discussion as to when and to what extent possible additions should be taken into account when there is no text-critical evidence to support the assumed addition. Older commentaries, especially those from the 19th and early 20th centuries were more consistent in asking which sections could be later additions, but there are also good examples from more recent research, such as Timo Veijola, *Das fünfte Buch Mose (Deuteronomium) Kapitel 1,1–16,17*; ATD 8/1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004); Ernst Würthwein, *1.Kön 17–2.Kön 25*; ATD 11/2 (Göttingen, 1984); and to some extent also Andrew D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy*; NCBC (London, 1979). Some commentaries, such as Richard Nelson, *Deuteronomy* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 7–8, acknowledge that the texts were repeatedly revised, but assume that the redaction history can no longer be reconstructed.

transmission in the immediately preceding centuries. At least some constancy of scribal processes has to be assumed for the formative period of transmission when the texts were still evolving. The textual transmission of the Hebrew Bible can roughly be divided into four phases:

1) Creation of works, which may include the collection of sources and their early shaping. The formation differs from book to book, but it is mostly a brief period before the text became significant enough to be transmitted further as an authoritative, normative, or otherwise important document.

2) Undocumented early formative transmission, where the book gradually became the focus of intensive scribal and exegetical activity. The constant updating by scribes for some centuries created exceptionally multilayered texts.

3) Documented formative transmission generally followed the same rules of transmission as in phase 2, but the scribal changes of phase 3 are preserved in text-critical evidence. The vast majority of scribal changes in the Hebrew Bible were made in the formative transmission, or phases 2 and 3.

4) Transmission of canonical texts within the Hebrew Bible. In this transmission phase, the texts are frozen for any meaningful scribal changes. There may be some minor orthographic changes and corrections of mistakes, but it was no longer possible to make any substantive changes in the consonantal text.

Clearly, these phases are abstractions of a very complicated development and the transitions between the phases were not abrupt. They mainly refer to intentional scribal changes, while scribal mistakes took place in all these phases. With the available documented evidence, we thus gain a relatively good understanding of the scribal processes during the formative transmission, while phase 1 may be more challenging.[5]

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[5] This is merely a rough division of the transmission for the purposes of this paper. Many aspects of the transmission can be discussed in much more detail.
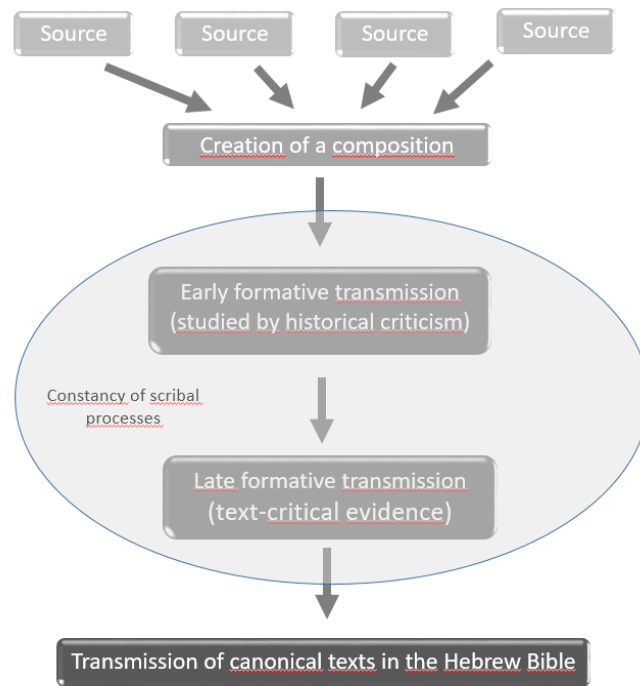
DOCUMENTED EVIDENCE[6]

Documented evidence for scribal changes, which can be observed when text-critical variants are compared, shows that the texts in the Hebrew Bible were very heavily edited. Although many scholars imply that the Hebrew Bible was only lightly edited,[7] the multilayered nature of most texts in the Hebrew Bible can be shown. To be sure, this includes the Masoretic text (MT). In fact, documented evidence suggests even heavier editing than most *historical critics* assume, let alone what biblical scholars at large assume.[8] One example illustrates this: A short account of Gedaliah's murder is preserved in three versions, MT Jer 41:1–3, LXX Jer 48:1–3, and 2 Kgs 25:25, which provide three glimpses into the development of the account.[9] The oldest text is preserved in 2 Kgs 25:25

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[6] My observations today are essentially based on my previous methodological studies on omissions (see Pakkala, *God's Word Omitted* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013]) as well as a review of hundreds of text-critical variants throughout the Hebrew Bible, which Reinhard Müller and I have analyzed for our upcoming book on the future possibilities of historical criticism, to be published in 2020 by the SBL Press. See also Müller, Pakkala & ter Haar Romeny, *Evidence of Editing. Growth and Change of Texts in the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014).

[7] Light editing is often merely implied, but this position is evident in a number of studies where the Hebrew Bible is used as a historical source as it is preserved in its "final" form (mostly the MT).

[8] This seems to be the case for the Pentateuch, the historical books, the prophetic books, and the Psalms, while slight editing would be an exception.

[9] For details of this passage and arguments for the development suggested here, see Juha Pakkala, "Gedaliah's Murder in 2 Kgs 25:25 and Jer 41:1–3," in Anssi Voitila and Jutta Jokiranta (ed.), *Scripture*

(normal text below), the second phase is witnessed by LXX Jer 48:1–3 (underlined), and the youngest text in MT Jer 41:1–3 (bold).[10]

ויהי בחדש השביעי בא ישמעאל בן־נתניה בן־אלישמע מזרע המלוכה

<u>ורבי המלך</u> ועשרה אנשים אתו <u>אל־גדליהו</u> **בן־אחיקם** <u>המצפתה ויאכלו שם לחם</u>

<u>יחדו במצפה</u> <u>ויקם</u> ישמעאל **בן־נתניה** <u>ועשרה אנשים אשר־היו אתו</u> ויכו את־

גדליהו **בן־אחיקם בן־שפן** בחרב *וימת* אתו <u>אשר־הפקיד מלך־בשל בארץ</u> ואת <u>כל־</u>

<u>היהודים ואת־הכשדים</u>[11] אשר־היו אתו את־גדליהו במצפה <u>ואת־הכשדים אשר</u>

<u>נמצאו־שם</u> את אנשי המלחמה הכה ישמעאל

> In the seventh month Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, who was of royal seed **and one of the king's high officers**,[12] came with ten men <u>to Gedaliah</u>, **son of Ahiqam**, <u>to Mizpah</u>. <u>When they were eating a meal together</u> **at Mizpah**, <u>Ishmael</u>, **son of Nethaniah**, <u>and the ten men who were with him, stood up</u> and struck down Gedaliah, **the son of Ahiqam, the son of Shaphan**, **with the sword** *so that he died* (killing) **him**, <u>whom the king of Babylon had appointed as governor over the land</u>, and <u>all</u> the Judeans and Chaldeans who were with him, **with Gedaliah**, at Mizpah, <u>and the Chaldeans who were found there</u>, **the soldiers, Ishmael struck down**.

The oldest text consists of 22 words (124 characters), the second phase 39 words (225 characters), and the youngest text 54 words (308 characters), which shows that the text was inflated by almost 2.5 times. Since these phases are coincidentally preserved glimpses of random points in time, the whole development is likely to be more complicated. Other examples from different parts of the Hebrew Bible could be brought up to show a similar picture, which implies constant editing by scribes for some centuries before the texts were frozen for changes.[13]

Another prominent feature that arises from the documented evidence is the size of the additions. The vast majority of additions were very small, as we can see in the example text above. There are repeated additions of details, such as names, patronyms (son of Ahiqam), titles (רבי המלך), locations (Mizpah), and clarifications (את־גדליהו). They also

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in Transition. Essays on Septuagint, Hebrew Bible, and Dead Seas Scrolls in Honour of Raija Sollamo, FS Raija Sollamo; SJSJ 126 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 401–411.

[10] וימת is an addition in 2 Kgs 25:25 and MT Jer 41:2 (italics).

[11] The sentence was slightly reformulated in the Jeremiah versions: ואת־הכשדים became part of the next sentence.

[12] An alternative reading would be 'and officials of the king.' Both readings are represented in research as well as Bible translations. Although both readings are grammatically possible, officials of the king do not play any role in the rest of the passage, so a reference to them would be unmotivated. Moreover, the idea that Ishmael was an official of the king may be a later editor's attempt to increase his standing.

[13] See a discussion of 15 documented cases of expanded texts in Müller, Pakkala & ter Haar Romeny, *Evidence of Editing*.

show that the development was particularly fragmentary. Quantitatively the most typical additions are single words, word-clusters, and short sentences.

For evaluating historical criticism, this is important, because most literary-critical analyses and redaction-critical models assume a less fragmentary development. The reconstructed scribal changes tend to be larger sentences, sentence clusters, and entire blocks of text.[14] Although there are larger additions among the text-critical variants as well, they are overwhelmed in number by smaller additions. In this regard, there seems to be an inconsistency between what we can see in the documented text-critical evidence and what historical critics, who reconstruct the older development, usually assume.

Moreover, typical redaction-critical reconstructions assume theologically motivated redactions that would span entire compositions.[15] It is difficult to find any documented evidence for redactions where several additions would form an interconnected stage in the development of a composition. The redactions are also assumed to have revised a composition towards a certain theological perspective, but this finds no match in the documented evidence. For example, in his commentary on Deuteronomy, Timo Veijola assumed successive redactional layers that would have developed the book in a specific theological direction.[16] Although the documented evidence does not prove that such redactions could not have existed, the contrast between what is assumed of the undocumented earlier transmission and what is documented in the later transmission is evident.

Perhaps the closest documented example of something that has some similarities to a classic redaction can be found in Jeremiah. The MT version of this book adds dozens of references to Babylonia, its king, Babylonian chronology, or something else about the

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[14] For example, the redactional layers reconstructed in Veijola, *Das fünfte Buch Mose*; Würthwein, *1.Kön 17–2.Kön 25*; Christoph Levin, *Der Sturz der Königin Atalja. Ein Kapitel zur Geschichte Judas im 9. Jahrhundert v. Chr.*; SBS 105 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1982); Juha Pakkala, *Ezra the Scribe: The Development of* Ezra *7-10 and Nehemia 8*; BZAW 347 (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004); Thilo A. Rudnig, *Davids Thron: Redaktionskritische Studien zur Geschichte von der Thronnachfolge Davids*; BZAW 358 (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006).

[15] Thus, for example, Würthwein, *1.Kön 17–2.Kön 25*; Veijola, *Das fünfte Buch Mose*; Rudnig, *Davids Thron*; Pakkala, *Ezra the Scribe*. This is especially typical of continental European scholarship, but a similar assumption of an overarching redaction can also be found in the so-called Double Redaction Models of the Deuteronomistic History, e.g., Richard D. Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985).

[16] See Veijola, *Das fünfte Buch Mose*, 4–5. For example, he assumed that the so-called DtrB (or *bundestheologische Redaktion*) would have revised the book with a specific focus on the Law, the First Commandment, and the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. Similarly Würthwein, *1.Kön 17–2.Kön 25*, who assumed DtrN throughout Kings, and Nelson, *The Double Redaction*.

Babylonians.[17] Although the similarity between the additions implies a connection and perhaps even a systematic attempt to add the Babylonians to the book,[18] it is difficult to see a clear ideological or theological reason why they were inserted. The additions are not systematically negative or positive towards the Babylonians.[19] In this respect, this evidence does not correspond to the typical redaction assumed in redaction criticism. Another potentially interconnected layer of scribal changes can be found in the Greek Esther (both versions, the LXX and the Alpha text), which systematically softens the aggression towards non-Jews that can be seen in the MT (see for example, Esth 8:11 and 9:1–5). The Greek versions also add references to God and his involvement, which are completely lacking in the MT version (e.g., Esth 2:20, and especially the large additions A to F). Although one cannot entirely exclude the possibility that the changes already took place in the Hebrew *Vorlage*, it is more likely that they were made in the translation process. The motive to do this was to accommodate the nationalistic tones of the Hebrew version to the heterogeneous Greek speaking audience in Alexandria and to make the book more acceptable as a religious document and part of the emerging Hebrew canon. It should also be noted that the revision of Esther is far more extensive and text-invasive than redaction-critical models assume, for many passages have been comprehensively rewritten, which is very untypical of the documented evidence that can be traced back to the Hebrew transmission with certainly. In any case, these examples from Jeremiah and Esther are exceptions in the text-critical evidence from the Hebrew Bible. The vast majority of text-critically documented additions are isolated, while clearly interconnected additions from the same scribe seem to be infrequent, and parallels to classic redactions are completely missing.

TYPES OF ADDITIONS

The types of documented additions are particularly interesting when evaluating historical criticism. Most of the additions arise directly out of the older text and seek to

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[17] For example, in Jer 25:1 the MT adds a reference to the Babylonian chronology; in v. 8 the MT additionally refers to Nebuchadnezzar as Yahweh's servant; in v. 11 the MT introduces the idea that the nations will serve the king of Babylon; and in v. 12 the MT has specified that the one to be punished is the king of Babylon. Similar additions can be found throughout the MT of Jeremiah.

[18] Although it is not clear that the "Babylonian" additions were written by the same scribe, it seems likely that many of them are from one scribe or a related scribal group.

[19] Cf. the idea that the Babylonian king is the servant of Yahweh in Jer 25:8 and the idea that Yahweh will punish the Babylonian king in 25:12.

explain/clarify it in some way, or they are written in close dialogue with it: The following types of changes can be found:[20]

- Added titles, professions, patronyms, epithets, etc.[21]
- Added sentence constituents, such as subjects, objects, etc.[22]
- Implicit is made explicit/filled gaps[23]
- Clarifications and explanations[24]
- Harmonizations between passages[25]
- Added detail[26]
- Exegetical expansions[27]
- Added involvement of persons or groups[28]
- Updating of texts to correspond with the current social order
- Theological interpretations
- Theological changes

These types are presented in very rough order of frequency as they appear in text-critical evidence. Particularly common are the first three, whereas the introduction of something entirely new is not common—the last ones in the list. Although only a short text, the account of Gedaliah's murder contains most of the common types of changes. Some of the consequential types of changes that also introduce additional substance to the text will be illustrated with examples.

A harmonization between the books of Samuel and Kings is found in the MT 1 Kgs 15:5, and this addition also introduces a theological change:

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[20] Clearly, categories are always abstractions of a complicated reality. It is also evident that the categories overlap and they could be subdivided.

[21] For examples, see MT Jer 41:1–3, LXX Jer 48:1–3, and 2 Kgs 25:25 above.

[22] Later editors often added subjects and objects, which the older text implied but did not express because they were mentioned earlier or are evident. A typical example can be found in Jer 41:3 where the older text refers to him (אתו), while the MT version has added "with Gedaliah" (את־גדליהו) thus creating a redundancy ("… who were with him, with Gedaliah").

[23] These types of additions mostly do not add new information, although making the implicit explicit may contain an interpretation of what was meant. For example, Jer 41:3 refers to the Chaldeans who were with Gedaliah, who most probably would have been soldiers. The MT makes this explicit by specifying that they were soldiers, although this is not inevitably the case.

[24] In the example text above, 2 Kgs 25:25 and MT Jer 41:2 clarify that Gedaliah was killed when Ishmael struck him, while LXX Jer 48:2 is not explicit.

[25] The Jeremiah versions specify that Gedaliah was, "whom the king of Babylon had appointed as governor over the land," which is a reference to the appointment in 2 Kgs 25:22 and Jer 40:5, 7, 11. This addition can be seen as a clarification and a harmonization with the other passages.

[26] For example, MT Jer 41:2 adds that Gedaliah was killed "with the sword" (בחרב).

[27] The reference to Ishmael as "and one of the king's high officers" (ורבי המלך) can be regarded as an exegetical expansion. The information probably combines the idea that Ishmael was of royal blood and led a party of ten men. The addition may seek to strengthen the impression that the murder was commissioned by the remnants of the deposed royal house.

[28] For example, the involvement of a priest is often added in later expansions, as in the MT version of 1 Kgs 8:4 (cf. LXX).

MT	LXX
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה דָוִד אֶת־הַיָּשָׁר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה	ὡς ἐποίησεν Δαυιδ τὸ εὐθὲς ἐνώπιον κυρίου,
וְלֹא־סָר מִכֹּל	οὐκ ἐξέκλινεν ἀπὸ πάντων,
אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּהוּ	ὧν ἐνετείλατο αὐτῷ,
כֹּל יְמֵי חַיָּיו	πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ζωῆς αὐτοῦ.
רַק בִּדְבַר אוּרִיָּה הַחִתִּי	

For David did what was right	For David did what was right
in the sight of Yahweh,	in the sight of the Lord,
and did not turn aside from anything that he	and did not turn aside from anything that he
commanded him all the days of his life,	commanded him all the days of his life.
except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.	

In both versions David is first portrayed as an impeccable king who sets the standard for other kings, but the MT mentions an exception at the very end. The LXX version is consistent, while the MT contains a peculiar tension between the מִכֹּל, "from anything" and the exception. The reference to David's whole life in כֹּל יְמֵי חַיָּיו also implies that there would be no exceptions, and the connection of the sentence beginning with רַק with the preceding is also syntactically loose. It is thus very likely that the LXX version is more original in this variant. The tension probably arose when Kings, with a very idealistic view of David, was merged with Samuel, which contained a passage that could only be interpreted as a sin (2 Sam 11). A scribe in the transmission of the MT version sought to harmonize the contradictory images.

First Kings 8, which describes the inauguration of the temple, provides a number of documented cases of additions. At the beginning of the scene, after the competition of the temple, Solomon assembles key people to bring up the ark to the temple, but the MT and LXX of 1 Kgs 8:1 differ as to who the key people are:[29]

MT	LXX^B
אָז יַקְהֵל שְׁלֹמֹה אֶת־זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל **אֶת־כָּל־רָאשֵׁי**	τότε ἐξεκκλησίασεν ὁ **βασιλεὺς** Σαλωμων
הַמַּטּוֹת נְשִׂיאֵי הָאָבוֹת לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ	**πάντας** τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους Ισραηλ **ἐν Σιων** τοῦ
שְׁלֹמֹה יְרוּשָׁלָ͏ִם לְהַעֲלוֹת אֶת־אֲרוֹן בְּרִית־יְהוָה	ἀνενεγκεῖν τὴν κιβωτὸν διαθήκης κυρίου ἐκ
מֵעִיר דָּוִד הִיא צִיּוֹן	πόλεως Δαυιδ αὕτη ἐστὶν Σιων

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[29] Many LXX manuscripts, such as A, follow the MT plus, but this is probably due to a later recension towards a proto-MT type, while the minus more likely represents the Old Greek. Note that the verse numbers between the MT and LXX are slightly different here; the LXX 1 Kgs 8:1 corresponds to MT 1 Kgs 7:51–8:1; here only MT 8:1.

Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel **and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites**, **before King Solomon in Jerusalem**, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Zion.	Then **King** Salomon assembled **all** the elders of Israel **in Sion** to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Sion.

It is very likely that the congested and longer MT is the result of a later addition and that the LXX is more original in the large plus (but not necessarily in the smaller variants).[30] The addition was probably motivated by changes in the social structure, for the elders of Israel may have been central in earlier stages, while the heads of tribes and especially the leaders of ancestral houses became more important in the later Second Temple period. A scribe appears to have updated the text to correspond to the current social order and its hierarchies.

A typical theological addition that clearly changes the meaning and interpretation of a text can be found in the MT of Josh 1:7.

MT	LXX
רַק חֲזַק וֶאֱמַץ **מְאֹד** לִשְׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת **כְּכָל־הַתּוֹרָה**	ἴσχυε οὖν καὶ ἀνδρίζου φυλάσσεσθαι **καὶ** ποιεῖν
אֲשֶׁר צִוְּךָ מֹשֶׁה עַבְדִּי	καθότι ἐνετείλατό σοι Μωυσῆς ὁ παῖς μου,
אַל־תָּסוּר מִמֶּנּוּ יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאול	**καὶ** οὐκ ἐκκλινεῖς ἀπ' αὐτῶν εἰς δεξιὰ οὐδὲ εἰς
לְמַעַן תַּשְׂכִּיל בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ	ἀριστερά, ἵνα συνῇς ἐν πᾶσιν, οἷς ἐὰν πράσσῃς.

But be strong and **very** *courageous*, to observe (and) to do **in accordance with all the law** that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from *it* to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go.	*Therefore* be strong and *manly*, to observe **and** to do as Moses my servant commanded you; **and** do not turn from *them* to the right or to the left so that you may be perceptive in everything you do.

In the older text, which is preserved in the Greek, Yahweh commands Joshua to do as Moses commanded him, but the MT adds here כְּכָל־הַתּוֹרָה, "according to the whole law," which substantially changes the meaning. The older text refers to Moses's instruction on how to conquer the land (Deut 31:7–8 and/or 31:23), but in the MT the focus is turned to

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the Torah and its observance, which effectively diverts attention from the main subject of the passage (cf. v. 6).[31] Similar additions of one added word causing a substantial change in meaning can found in 1 Kgs 8:5 (added reference to the congregation of Israel, עדת ישראל; cf. LXX, which only refers to Israel); 18:18 (added reference to the commandments in the MT; cf. LXX); 19:10 and 14 (added reference to the covenant in the MT; cf. LXX), for instance.

Important for evaluating historical criticism, many of the theological expansions are very small, even one or two words, such as in Josh 1:7, while larger theological expansions are much less frequent. When we consider that theological expansions are already a minority among all the documented additions, the percentage of larger theological additions is exceedingly low. This contrasts with many redaction-critical reconstructions and other assumed additions in historical-critical approaches.[32]

ONLY ADDITIONS?

Historical-critical models typically assume only additions, and this is especially apparent in redaction-critical reconstructions of multilayered texts where the older layers are assumed to have been preserved in full. Many literary critics explicitly reject the existence of other types of scribal changes, that is, omissions and replacements/rewriting.[33] The implementation of literary criticism also partly builds on the assumption that nothing could have been omitted. The so-called *Gegenprobe* (or 'cross-check') is a case in point. After hypothesizing an addition, the older text should be fully consistent, for otherwise the reconstruction is assumed to be incorrect.[34] If scribes had omitted parts of the text, then this will not work in every instance for the reconstructed text should thus lack part of the text. Therefore, this assumption may even lead to erroneous conclusions.

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[31] For further discussion of this variant, see below.

[32] In some cases, nearly all reconstructed additions are theological and part of redaction layers (thus, e.g., Veijola, Würthwein; see above).

[33] Jean-Louis Ska, *Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 169–170; Christoph Levin, *The Old Testament: A Brief Introduction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 26–27; Uwe Becker, *Exegese des Alten Testaments*; UTB 2664 (Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 84; Reinhard Kratz, "Redaktionsgeschichte/Redaktionskritik I Altes Testament," in *TRE* 28: 367–378, here p. 370.

[34] E.g., Ludwig Schmidt, "Literarkritik I Altes Testament," *TRE* 21 (1991): 211–222, here p. 211, and Siegfried Kreuzer *et al.*, *Proseminar I Altes Testament: Ein Arbeitsbuch* (Stuttgart *et al.*: Kohlhammer, 1999), 60.

The documented evidence manifestly invalidates the assumption that nothing was omitted. I have dealt with this subject in a separate study,[35] and therefore one brief example will suffice here. A very typical omission is found in 2 Sam 15:8, where Absalom, after returning from exile in Geshur, speaks to David:

MT	LXX[L]
כִּי־נֵדֶר נָדַר עַבְדְּךָ	ὅτι εὐχὴν ηὔξατο ὁ δοῦλός σου
בְּשִׁבְתִּי בִגְשׁוּר בַּאֲרָם לֵאמֹר	ὅτε ἐκαθήμην ἐν Γεσσειρ ἐν Συρίᾳ λέγων
אִם־יָשִׁיב יְשִׁיבֵנִי יְהוָה יְרוּשָׁלַם	Ἐὰν ἐπιστρέφων ἐπιστρέψῃ με κύριος
וְעָבַדְתִּי אֶת־יְהוָה	εἰς Ιερουσαλημ, καὶ λατρεύσω τῷ κυρίῳ ~~εν χεβρων~~.
For your servant vowed a vow	For your servant vowed a vow
while I dwelt at Geshur in Aram,	while I dwelt at Geshur in Syria,
saying, "If Yahweh brings me back	saying, "If Yahweh brings me back
to Jerusalem, I will offer worship to	to Jerusalem, I will offer worship
Yahweh"	to Yahweh ~~in Hebron~~"

By omitting, the MT avoids the theologically offensive implication that Yahweh had a presence and temple in Hebron. The LXX preserves the more original reading, for it would be very unlikely that someone had added a reference that implies a temple in Hebron at a very late stage. This obviously breaks with the idea of cult centralization and contradicts the idea that Solomon built Yahweh's first temple. The context also clearly shows that Absalom indeed went to Hebron to worship Yahweh there (cf. v. 7 and 9). It would also be a coincidence if the word Hebron had accidentally fallen out in the verse that specifically shows a cultic connection with the city. The Old Greek is preserved in the Lucianic witnesses of the LXX, while the other Greek witnesses were very likely harmonized according to a proto-MT-type text.[36]

Although omissions are not frequent, documented evidence shows that the texts were not just expanded, which thus contradicts what is commonly assumed in literary criticism. Both omissions and replacements of sections of text with another are a clear challenge to the method, for it is exceedingly difficult to reconstruct what has been omitted.[37]

SHOULD HISTORICAL CRITICISM BE PRACTICED?

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[35] Pakkala, *God's Word Omitted.*

[36] For further discussion of this variant, see Pakkala, *God's Word Omitted*, 221–222.

[37] There are methodological problems with transpositions as well, for the original location of a transposed text is very difficult to determine. Nevertheless, the problem is not as grave as with omissions and replacements.

Despite the difficulties of historical criticism addressed here, the method should not be abandoned. Some of the apparent and real problems should be put into perspective. Firstly, additions are overwhelmingly more common than omissions, replacements, and transpositions.[38] There appear to be at least a hundred additions for each of the other kinds of scribal change, which relativizes their significance for historical criticism. In fact, text-critical variants imply great respect for the text and a very careful transmission. The omissions and replacements are really the exception that took place in cases where the text was perceived to contradict certain theological conceptions of emerging Judaism. Many of the significant omissions relate to conceptions of the divine (e.g., ancient polytheistic conceptions were purged from the texts), cult centralization (references to the legitimate use of other cult sites), and similar issues central to later Judaism. Here the exception confirms the rule, which was the preservation and high regard for the text. Therefore, the scribes omitted parts of the text for very weighty reasons only.

High regard for the text and its preservation are also key factors in explaining the vast majority of additions. The most common types of additions (see the list above) do not really change the substance of the text but instead seek to conserve it. When a title or a patronym, for example, is added, it is usually taken from the immediate context, and the scribe mostly did not seek to change the text's meaning in any way. When what is implicit is made explicit, an evident gap in the text is filled, or something is clarified, the additional information is mostly limited, and the underlying principle seems to be the preservation and high regard for the text. There are certainly exceptions to this, and the intention to preserve and conserve may still entail change. For example, additions that seek to clarify the text for the reader bring along the scribe's understanding and interpretation of the text, and this is contingent on the scribe's socio-historical context. Despite their relative frequency, however, it is not crucial if historical criticism fails to detect additions that really do not introduce something new into the texts.

More important is the method's ability to detect significant additions that introduce substantive changes that imply or reflect changes in the socio-historical context where the texts were transmitted. This has been the core task of historical criticism and the rationale

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[38] Transpositions of parts of the text have not been discussed here, but they are a slightly less severe problem than omissions and replacements. See the discussion in Ville Mäkipelto, Timo Tekoniemi, and Miika Tucker, "Large-Scale Transposition as an Editorial Technique in the Textual History of the Hebrew Bible," *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* 22 (2017): 1–16.

with which it can justify the substantial labor put into reconstructing the literary history of texts. In other words, the method should have a realistic chance of detecting scribal interventions where conceptions of society, religion, and history were substantially changed.

There is a *correlation between detectability and the introduction of new ideas into the older text*. The more an addition changes a text, the less difficult it is to detect by text-internal considerations, and vice versa.[39] Partly, the reason for this may be obvious. If a scribe inserted something entirely new, it is often not in line with the older text and therefore easily protrudes from its context or is somehow in tension with it. An addition that primarily arises out of the older text is more in harmony with it (e.g., many of the small additions in the account of Gedaliah's murder), while additions that were made because of a theological motive may neglect the context. For example, the Torah and commandments may have been inserted irrespective of their suitability for the passage (e.g., Josh 1:7). The correlation is connected to the reluctance of the scribes to alter the older text and primarily make additions. If the scribes had frequently resorted to comprehensive revisions, omitting and rewriting sections of the text, the addition of new ideas could have been more easily integrated with the older text. Because the older text was mostly left untouched, the result was a congested text that contained tensions, contradictions, repetitions, and even syntactic and grammatical mistakes.

Joshua 1:7 is a prime example of such a short addition that could be detected even without the more original LXX version. The addition of כְּכָל־הַתּוֹרָה created problems in the consistency of the text and its logic as well as its grammar. The text uses the masc. sg. suffix in מִמֶּנּוּ (in reference to what Moses has instructed), but after the MT addition one would expect the fem. sg., since the obviously intended meaning of the addition is that one should not turn away from the Law, הַתּוֹרָה. The addition also led to the peculiar idea that one would need to be strong and courageous (even manly) to obey the Law, while in the older text, as preserved in the LXX, courage was logically needed to wrest the land from the powerful nations that inhabited it. One should also note that Moses never instructed Joshua to follow the commandments, while he did instruct Joshua to be

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[39] Clearly, there are exceptions to this; see discussion below.

strong and courageous to be able to conquer the land (in Deut 31:7).[40] Moreover, the speaker in the text is Yahweh, but after the addition the text describes how Yahweh instructs Joshua to follow Moses's instruction to follow Yahweh's Torah, which would be a very awkward and unlikely way to express the idea. The scribe who added the reference to the Torah forced a theological idea into the text irrespective of the various problems it caused. Here the literary critic would have a very good chance of detecting the addition, and this is very typical of such forced additions where an entirely new idea is introduced into the text.

First Kings 15:5 is a similarly detectable case. The MT is inconsistent, for first it states that David did not sin in anything all the days of his life, but this is undermined by the loose sub-sentence at the verse end that refers to his sin with Bathsheba. Here too, a careful critic would suspect that the MT is the result of a scribal intervention even if the LXX variant had not been preserved to confirm it. The introduction of new and even contradictory conceptions to the text often leaves traces.

There are also documented cases that contain classic signs for later expansions. Lev 17:4 is an exemplary case of a *Wiederaufnahme*, 'resumptive repetition.'

MT	SP/LXX/4QLev[d]
3 If anyone of the house of Israel slaughters an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or slaughters it outside the camp, … 4 and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting,	3 If anyone of the house of Israel slaughters an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or slaughters it outside the camp, 4 and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting (ואל פתח אהל מועד לא הביאו), **to make it a burnt offering or a peace offering to Yahweh, at your own will, for a sweet-smelling savor, and (who) slaughters it outside, and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting** (ואל פתח אהל מועד לא הביאו)
to present (it) as an offering to Yahweh before the tabernacle of Yahweh, he shall be held guilty of bloodshed; he has shed blood, and he shall be cut off from the people.	to present **it** as an offering to Yahweh before the tabernacle of Yahweh, he shall be held guilty of bloodshed; he has shed blood, and he shall be cut off from the people.

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[40] Deut 31:7: "Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel: "Be strong and bold, for you are the one who will go with this people into the land that Yahweh has sworn to their ancestors to give them; and you will put them in possession of it.""

The plus, which is found in SP, LXX, and 4QLev[d], is concluded by a sentence (פתח ואל

הביאו לא מועד אהל) identical to the one immediately preceding the expansion. The scribe

who made what is very likely a later addition tried to make the transition back to the older

text as smooth as possible, but this created a peculiar repetition that a careful critic would

notice. A somewhat similar example can be found in 1 Kgs 6:11–14. The end of the

addition in vv. 11–14, which are missing in LXX[AL] and are probably original in this

regard, repeats a sentence from v. 9: ויבן שלמה את הבית ויכלהו > ויבן את הבית ויכלהו.[41]

Nonetheless, there are cases where it would be challenging to detect even

significant theological changes without text-critical evidence, and many of them are very

small, of one or two words. In 1 Kgs 18:18 a scribe in the MT transmission added the

word מצות, "commandments." The older text, as preserved in the LXX version, refers to

Ahab and his house forsaking Yahweh, while the MT changes this to the idea that they

forsook Yahweh's commandments. Without the LXX version, it would be very difficult

to detect the addition, which does not disturb the context or syntax in any way,[42] but

which substantially influences the theological meaning of the text.[43] Many similar

examples could be mentioned (e.g., 1 Kgs 19:10, 14).

Consequently, the documented evidence runs in opposite directions. Some text-

critical variants suggest that literary criticism can detect additions, while it is also easy to

find examples that would be very challenging, if not impossible, to detect without an older

variant reading. Omissions (and replacements) further complicate the issue. A

methodologically justified position necessitates that all documented evidence be taken

into account when historical criticism is evaluated. The following diagram illustrates the

types of relevant evidence and their consequences for historical criticism:

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[41] Both additions contain several text-internal features such as inconsistencies and tensions which would suggest—also without the shorter and more original version—that we are dealing with an addition. For a more detailed discussion of Lev 17:4, see Müller, Pakkala & ter Haar Romeny, *Evidence of Editing*, 19–25, and of 1 Kgs 6:11–14, ibid., 101–108.

[42] וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא עָכַרְתִּי אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי אִם־אַתָּה וּבֵית אָבִיךָ בַּעֲזָבְכֶם אֶת־**מִצְוֹת** יְהוָה וַתֵּלֶךְ אַחֲרֵי הַבְּעָלִים, He said, "I have not ruined Israel, but you have and your father's house in forsaking (pl.) the commandments of the Lord and you (sg.) have followed the Baalim.

[43] This kind of Torahization of the Hebrew Bible is evident in many passages. Later scribes have gradually introduced the Torah and its commandments into the very center of Israel's religion, which effectively leads to a new religion, Judaism, which has very different conceptions from the ancient Israelite religion.
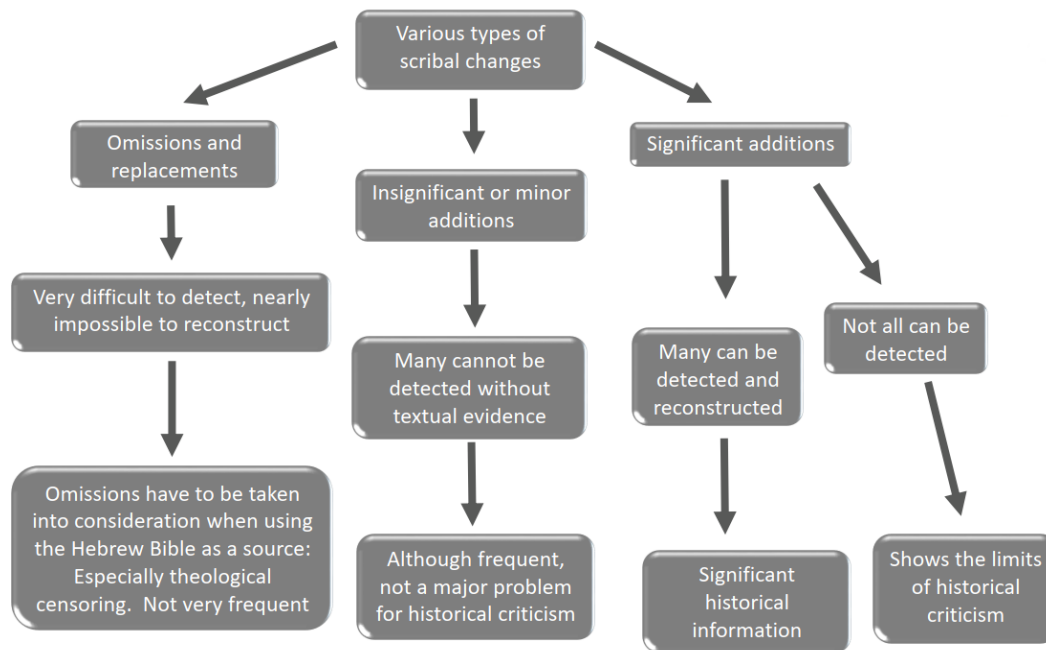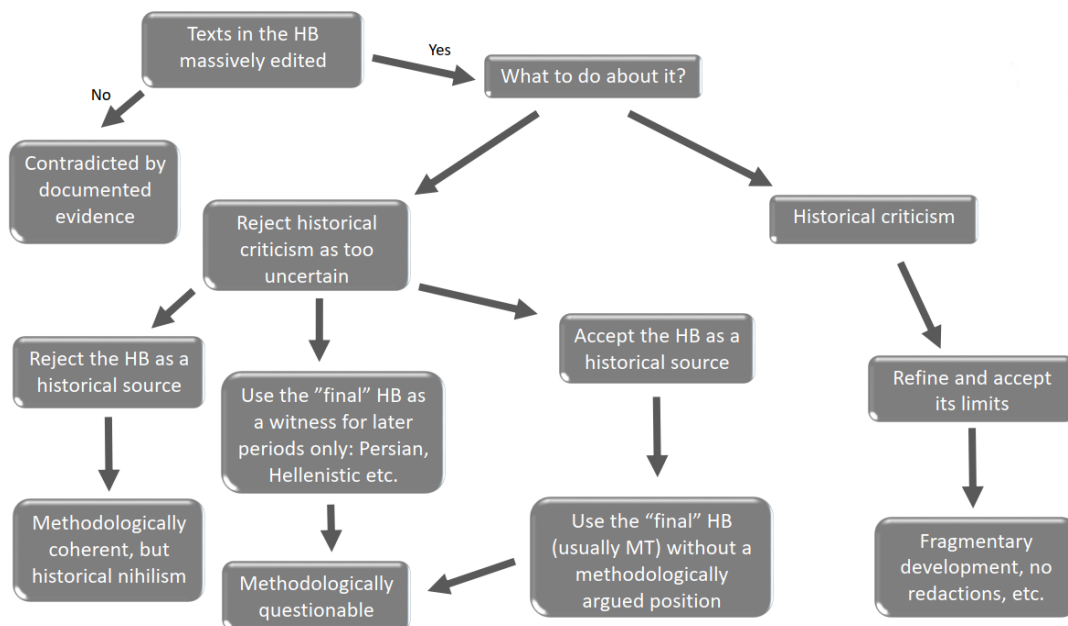
The limits and weaknesses are clear. For example, scribal omissions in the transmission of the Hebrew Bible mean that some theological censoring would go undetected and even lead to biased results. This is especially important for any reconstruction of Israel's monarchic religion because later scribes censored references to older religious conceptions when they clearly contradicted those of emerging Judaism. They also made small additions, some of which are undetectable, which emphasize the importance of the Torah and the commandments in Israel's religion. It is important that historical criticism recognize areas or topics where it may have difficulties.

It is not imperative to detect inconsequential changes which repeat something from the older text or which are essentially clarifications. The goal of historical criticism should not be to reconstruct every possible detail in the transmission history of biblical texts, but instead, it should pursue the recognition of significant scribal changes and thus improve our understanding of historically important developments in the context of the Hebrew Bible. Historical criticism thereby improves our use of the Hebrew Bible as a historical source, which was also the method's original purpose.

Although it is easy to criticize historical criticism by pointing out some of its limits, it is important to acknowledge that the method (or biblical studies at large) is not a natural science where one can reach proven theories and bulletproof results. Some of the recent criticism expects that unless the method's conclusions are certain and somehow "objective," it is a problematic method. For example, Person and Rezetko expect "completely objective evidence" and "some sort of *objective* means for identifying

sources and redactional layers,"[44] but since it is hardly possible in historical criticism, it is easy to point out cases that fall short of these expectations. Human sciences need to be recognized as non-empirical sciences where we are dealing with theories which seek to explain a very complicated reality, but which can never be proven. If the same kind of "objectivity" were to be expected from other fields of human sciences, not many would stand the test, and it is unclear what would remain of biblical studies at large. The limits of all human sciences are evident, and we are always dealing with probabilities and theories based on a variety of considerations. Documented evidence shows that historical criticism has a very good chance of gaining significant historical information in many texts, but no reconstruction should ever be regarded as 100% certain. This should not distract us from the historically significant observations and results, which may be used to build our conception of Israel's history, society, and religion. Furthermore, we should also be conscious of the alternatives to historical criticism, which are illustrated in the following diagram:

Texts in the HB massively edited
— Yes → What to do about it?
— No → Contradicted by documented evidence

What to do about it?
→ Reject historical criticism as too uncertain
→ Historical criticism

Reject historical criticism as too uncertain
→ Reject the HB as a historical source → Methodologically coherent, but historical nihilism
→ Use the "final" HB as a witness for later periods only: Persian, Hellenistic etc. → Methodologically questionable
→ Accept the HB as a historical source → Use the "final" HB (usually MT) without a methodologically argued position → Methodologically questionable

Historical criticism
→ Refine and accept its limits → Fragmentary development, no redactions, etc.

Historical nihilism may be a comfortable position because one does not need to be concerned with the uncertainties implied in all historical reconstructions. If this position is adopted, for consistency's sake it should then be applied to other fields of biblical studies and eventually to the entire study of history as well.

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[44] Person and Rezetko, *Empirical Models*, 25.

Another position is the use of the Hebrew Bible as a historical source *without* historical criticism, but this is methodologically questionable, or at least the position should be methodologically justified. If one accepts that the Hebrew Bible was massively edited, it inevitably leads to the question of which period it is a historical source for. This is also connected to the different versions of the text: Which text (the MT, LXX, SP, etc.) is to be used as the basis? For when one compares the variants between the versions, which can be seen throughout the Hebrew Bible in nearly every verse, one is immediately faced with an evolving text and its complexities that need to be addressed. This makes the use of the "final" versions, such as the MT or LXX, problematic if one is using them as historical sources for the formative period when the texts were still evolving, that is, in the monarchic and most of the Second Temple period.[45] Consequently, when all the alternatives are placed side by side and their implications are understood, historical criticism, with all its limits, may be methodologically most justified. This does not mean that the method should not be improved. The lack of classic redactions and the exceedingly fragmentary development, as suggested by the documented evidence, especially need to be taken into account in any future models that utilize historical criticism.

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[45] Clearly, it is a different issue if one uses the already canonical and relatively fixed Hebrew Bible as a source for later reception history or how it was used in the later Jewish and Christian communities. On the other hand, even for the later reception history one needs to acknowledge that many different and variant versions were circulating, although the changes made to the *Hebrew* text were very limited in the Masoretic transmission in the Common Era.