

Ph.D./M.A. Seminar: Textual Traditions of the Old Testament
OT 6R1100
McMaster Divinity College

Fall Semester 2026
Wednesdays 9:00 – 10:50 am

Mark J. Boda, Ph.D.
Professor of Old Testament
(905) 525-9140^{x24095}
mjboda@mcmaster.ca

Faculty web page: <http://www.mcmasterdivinity.ca/faculty/core/mark-j-boda>

I. Description

A study of the various scribal traditions which preserved the Old Testament with attention to the disciplines of textual, redaction and canonical criticism. The variety of ancient witnesses to Old Testament texts will be analyzed and evaluated for their contribution to the establishment of the original text of the Old Testament, to the elucidation of the development of the texts of the Old Testament, and to the role of particular texts and manuscripts as canonical texts.

II. Purpose

A. Knowing: To have a thorough knowledge of the character and development of the full spectrum of ancient scribal traditions which preserved the Old Testament text with special attention to Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, and Latin sources; To have a thorough knowledge of the historical and social contexts in and for which the various works were originally translated; To know the canons of lower (textual) criticism; To understand the relationship between lower and higher criticism and identify the ambiguity in the distinction between them.

B. Being: To gain a deeper appreciation for the role of scribes and translators in the preservation of the Bible; To locate oneself within this enduring tradition; To appreciate the impact of ancient textual forms on communities of faith.

C. Doing: To learn how to access the textual witnesses to the Old Testament text; To refine one's ability to work sensitively with the ancient scribal traditions, for the purposes of textual, redaction, and canonical criticism; To develop clear and creative presentations (written and oral form) of the textual traditions of the Old Testament.

III. Reading Resources

Jobes, Karen H., and Moisés Silva. *Invitation to the Septuagint* (2nd edition). Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015.

McCarter, P. Kyle. *Textual Criticism: Recovering the text of the Hebrew Bible*. Guides to Biblical scholarship. Old Testament Guides. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.

Tov, Emanuel. *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (4th edition). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2022.

Ulrich, Eugene C. *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*. Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature. Grand Rapids/Leiden: Eerdmans/Brill, 1999.

Articles distributed in class and on course website.

OPTIONAL: Würthwein, Ernst. *The Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Biblia Hebraica*. Revised and expanded by Alexander Achilles Fischer. Translated by Erroll F. Rhodes. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014.

All required and recommended books for this class are available from the Hurlburt Family Bookstore located beside the entrance to the Nathaniel H. Parker Memorial Chapel of McMaster Divinity College. To purchase in advance, you may contact the bookstore manager, Bernice Quek, by phone at 416.620.2934 or 416.668.3434 (mobile); or by email at books@readon.ca. The Hurlburt Family Bookstore also carries other books and merchandise and is open throughout the academic year during posted hours.

IV. Schedule

A. Phase 1: Orientation to Textual Criticism

The first phase of this course is a combination of reading and discussion to orient students to the relationship between the textual traditions of the Old Testament and the traditional practice of textual criticism. This phase will culminate with a paper by each student which will provide an orientation to the textual traditions available for their particular project and provide a text critical analysis of key passages.

B. Phase 2: Orientation to Textual Tradition Research

The second phase of this course is a combination of reading, discussion and presentation to orient students to the stream of textual tradition research on the Old Testament. This phase will culminate with a paper by each student which will present an example of the shape of particular textual traditions related to their corpus within the Old Testament.

C. Phase 3: Reflection on Textual Traditions and Canon

The final phase of this course encourages reflection on the impact of textual traditions research on the canonical shape of the Old Testament with reference to canonical approaches to the Old Testament.

September

16 Class: Orientation

23 Class: Textual Criticism

- Read: McCarter ch. 1 (pp. 11–25); Tov ch. 1 (pp. 1–18)
- Qumran Tradition: Tov ch. 5 (pp. 109–70); *Optional*: Würthwein pp. 54–78
- Independent Work: make progress on gathering witnesses, identify at least one issue in your passage

30 Class: Scribal Tendencies and Text-Critical Goal

- Read: McCarter ch. 2 (pp. 26–61); Tov chs. 10, 12, 13.3.4 (pp. 277–322, 335–86, 396–98); Waltke, “Aims of OT Textual Criticism”; cf. McCarter p. 12
- Masoretic Tradition: Tov ch. 3 (pp. 35–86); *Optional*: Würthwein pp. 15–53
- Independent Work: provide initial overview of text traditions for one OT book, what they are and how to access them

October

7 Class: Text-Critical Procedure

- Read: McCarter ch. 3 (pp. 62–75); optional: Würthwein pp. 155–206
- Old Greek Tradition and Its Revisions: Tov ch. 7–8 (pp. 205–62); Jobes-Silva intro + chs. 1–2, 4, 7–8 (pp. 1–62, 84–110, 156–99); *Optional*: Würthwein pp. 95–129
- Independent Work: provide initial text critical example from your OT book

14 NO CLASS: Reading Week

21 Class: Text-Critical Procedure

- Read: Tov ch. 13.1–4 (pp. 387–406); Hendel, “Epistemology of Textual Criticism”
- Samaritan, Aramaic, Syriac, Latin, and Arabic Traditions: Tov chs. 6, 9 (pp. 171–204, 263–74); Flesher-Chilton chs. 1–5 (pp. 1–89); Weitzman chs. 1–3 (pp. 15–163); *Optional*: Würthwein pp. 79–92, 130–54
- Independent Work: provide another text critical example from your OT book

Text Critical papers due by Saturday, Oct 24 at 11:59pm on Avenue 2 Learn (discussion, assignment hand in)

28 Class: Text Traditions

- Read: Bodner, “Crime Scene Investigation”; Sweeney, “Targum Jonathan’s Reading of Zechariah 3”; Walters, “Hannah and Anna”; Tov ch. 11 (pp. 323–33); Ulrich chs. 1–8 (pp. 3–162)
- Independent Work: provide choice for passage to trace text tradition differences and their social contexts

November

5 Class (with Steve Delamarter): Text Traditions

- Exercise #1 Orientation to Ethiopic manuscripts

12 Class (with Steve Delamarter): Text Traditions

- Exercise #2 with Steve Delamarter on Ethiopic manuscripts

18 NO CLASS: ETS Annual Meetings

25 NO CLASS: SBL Annual Meetings

Text Tradition papers due by Saturday, Nov 28 at 11:59pm on Avenue 2 Learn (discussion, assignment hand in)

December

2 Class: Review Text Tradition papers

9 Class: Review Text Tradition papers

16 Class: Review Text Tradition Papers

Canonical Reflections essays due by Thursday, Dec 17 at 11:59pm on Avenue 2 Learn (assignment hand in)

V. Digital Resources

We will be using Avenue 2 Learn (A2L) this semester for sharing resources for reading as well as distributing papers for evaluation. For a guide to other key resources related to the study of OT text traditions, see the document posted on A2L titled "Online & Digital Resources for OT Text Traditions." The bibliography below also includes links to works available via .

VI. Learning Experiences

A. Class Experiences

This is a graduate seminar style class of collaborative learning in which professor and students are engaged in active learning together. Learning to critically (in its positive sense) engage material is essential to functioning in a graduate program and is expected of all students in our MA/PhD. It is expected that all students will not only attend these sessions, but also that they will assume responsibility for contributing to and learning from the experience. This means that readings will be completed prior to arrival in class and that student and presenter alike will pursue the acquisition of knowledge in the learning environment. It is expected that ALL members of the class will ask questions and contribute insights whenever opportunity is given, during and following presentations by professor or student alike. Students are graded on their level of preparation and contribution. When reading is assigned, each student must post a minimum 2-page reflection on their reading to Avenue 2 Learn prior to class time.

Value: 15%

Submission: PDF submitted to Avenue 2 Learn (discussion)

B. Textual Criticism Paper

For this paper the student will choose a particular corpus in the Old Testament that is related to their thesis/dissertation topic. They will then write a minimum 15-page research essay which first of all provides an overview of the main textual witnesses for this corpus, including Hebrew (e.g., MT, Samaritan Pentateuch, Qumran manuscripts, Nash Papyrus),

Greek (OG, OG revisions), Aramaic (Targums, Peshitta), Latin (Old Latin, Vulgate), and Arabic. Identify the main traditions and extant witnesses then provide an initial description of the character and development of each tradition and their temporal, spatial, and sociological provenance. Secondly, the paper will identify key text critical issues within their corpus and, following text critical methodology which includes an expression of the goal of the text critical enterprise, make appropriate decisions on the best reading. Papers are due in .pdf format by Oct 12 at 11:59pm. Submit through Avenue 2 Learn.

Value: 30%

Due: October 24, 2026 by 11:59pm

Submission: PDF submitted to Avenue 2 Learn (assignment & discussion)

C. Textual Traditions Paper

For this learning experience the student will write a minimum 25-page research paper comparing and contrasting at least the Hebrew and Greek traditions of their chosen corpus in the Old Testament. The concern in this paper is not with text critical issues but rather on the way the Hebrew and Greek traditions (and others if needed) function as texts in their own right and were used within particular sociological contexts. Submit to assignments in .pdf format to Avenue 2 Learn and post to the appropriate discussion there as well. Discussions on papers will be on Dec 2, 9, and 16 with reviews from colleagues posted to Avenue 2 Learn following the session it is presented.

Value: 40%

Due: November 28, 2026 by 11:59pm

Submission: PDF submitted to Avenue 2 Learn (assignment & review discussion)

D. Canonical Reflections Essay

In a final written reflection essay (minimum 5 pages) the student will provide reflection on the impact of the course and research on the student's view of canon with reference to canonical approaches, especially streams of research beginning with Brevard Childs and James Sanders (for resources, see the course bibliography and articles available on A2L).

Value: 15%

Due: December 17, 2026 by 11:59pm

VII. Format and Evaluation

So I can properly evaluate your work the following guide is to be used for papers in this class. See further: <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/rules-regulations/>.

- **Medium for Submission:** All material in this class is to be submitted in .pdf format through Avenue 2 Learn.
- **Style:** All stylistic considerations (including but not limited to questions of formatting, footnotes, and bibliographic references) must conform to the MDC Style Guidelines for Essays and Theses: see <https://mcmasterdivinity.ca/resources-forms/>. Failure to observe appropriate form will result in grade reductions. Title page, footnoting where appropriate, and bibliography are not included in the length required. Material should be written in excellent modern literary English with proper grammar, spelling, punctuation, and rhetoric (including an introduction, conclusion, and logical flow of argument). If it helps, an outline may accompany the paper, but this is not included in the length of the "paper." Secondary and primary sources should be used, cited, and footnoted appropriately.

- **Gender Inclusive Language:** McMaster Divinity College uses inclusive language for human beings in worship services, student written materials, and all its publications. It is expected that inclusive language will be used in chapel services and all MDC assignments. In reference to biblical texts, the integrity of the original expressions and the names of God should be respected, but you will need to use gender-inclusive language for humans, and you will need to quote from a gender-inclusive version such as the following: NRSVue (2022), TEV/GNB/GNT (1976), CEV (1995), NLT (1996), NIV (2011), and CEB (2011).
- **Citations:** You must cite the source of your material very carefully, not only when quoting from a section, but also when drawing from it as a resource. Quotations should be kept to a minimum as I favour summary and integration of secondary literature (footnoted).
- **Academic Honesty:** Academic dishonesty is not qualitatively different from other types of dishonesty. It consists of misrepresenting the ownership of written work by deception or by other fraudulent means. In an academic setting this may include any number of forms such as: copying or using unauthorized aids in tests, examinations; plagiarism, i.e., submitting work that is not one's own (regardless of the means of its production, including AI) but passing it off as if it is; submitting work for credit in a course for which credit is being or has already been given, unless the previously submitted work was presented as such to the instructor of the second course and has been deemed acceptable for credit by the instructor of that course; aiding and abetting another student's dishonesty; giving false information for the purposes of gaining admission or credit; giving false information for the purposes of obtaining deferred examinations or extension of deadlines; forging or falsifying McMaster University or McMaster Divinity College documents.

*This is a special issue for those pursuing second and third degrees in theology. It is understood that students will be building on earlier ideas and work, but it is expected that students will not hand in material that is merely "warmed over" previous work. If there is reason for concern, speak with the professor about this.

- **Special Note about Generative AI:** You are expected to do your own thinking and to write your own papers, etc. Generative AI is not to be used to do this work for you. Using AI to produce content for you and then submitting that content as if you produced it is considered plagiarism (i.e., submitting work that is not one's own as if it is one's own) and is a violation of the academic honesty policy. Additionally, although there may be value in using an AI tool to correct mistakes in English grammar, usage, and mechanics, Generative AI is not to be used for translating from your native language to English. All degree programs at MDC are taught in English language. Students are expected to be sufficiently proficient in English to engage fully in academic discourse in these programs.
- **Rubric:** The following evaluation guide should be kept in mind as you write:
 - **Presentation:** Is the spelling correct? Does the grammar/syntax reflect proper English? Is the paper laid out properly?
 - **Argumentation:** Is there a good introduction and conclusion? Does the argument flow with ample support? Is the question answered? Does the voice of the paper writer dominate the argument, rather than merely provide a string of quotations?
 - **Content:** Are all the points considered? Is there proper documentation of sources used? Is there appropriate use of secondary literature while providing engagement with data (often the biblical text) which proves the argument?

VIII. Policies

- **Absence Due to Illness:** If you must miss class due to an illness, you must contact me as soon as possible to let me know. Likewise, if I should become ill, I will communicate with you via A2L about how we will make up class sessions. Even if much of the course content will be made available via A2L, it would still be a good idea to have a friend take notes for you, if possible.
- **Inclement Weather:** If on a class meeting day MDC closes due to inclement weather, I reserve the right to move the lessons and, where possible, class activities for the week to A2L (asynchronous format). This will help to ensure that we stay on target in the course.
- **GuardMe Statement:** Students at McMaster Divinity College have access to the GuardMe Student Support Program (GMSSP), which offers free, confidential mental health and wellness support 24/7. Through the program, students can connect with counsellors, access helpful tools and resources, and receive support anytime, from anywhere. Support is available by phone (1-844-451-9700) or visit gmssp.org to download the Student Support App.
- **AODA:** In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), McMaster Divinity College (MDC) is committed to supporting a learning environment that is inclusive and accessible to all students, including those with disabilities. Students who require academic accommodations to participate fully in this course must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS) (<https://sas.mcmaster.ca/>) of McMaster University. SAS will work directly with the MDC Registrar to ensure reasonably appropriate accommodations are in place. Students with accommodations must use the SAS portal to activate the accommodations relevant to each course at the start of each term they are enrolled in. This will generate a notification to course instructors outlining the activated accommodations for the student in their course. Please note that accommodations must be requested in advance to allow sufficient time for implementation. Accommodations will be implemented once the faculty member has been notified. Accommodations are not retroactive and will not be applied to coursework or activities that have already concluded.

Contact Information:

- **Student Accessibility Services General Inquiries:** sas@mcmaster.ca
- **Roksana Sobota (SAS Representative for MDC):** sobotar@mcmaster.ca
- **MDC Registrar:** mdcreg@mcmaster.ca

IX. Accountability

- **Note on Timeliness of Submissions:** Since this is a seminar style course all participants must be timely in their submission of material. People will need to read the various submissions and once the schedule is set there is no room to switch dates. For that reason, there are considerable penalties for late materials in this course. Each *DAY* a paper is late will mean the loss of half a letter grade (5%). Take this into account when planning out your semester.
- **Note on Timeliness of Attendance:** From time to time, you may find that you are late for class. Late arrivals, hereafter called “tardies,” are unacceptable and will lead to a negative disposition in your professor and classmates. Such “tardies,” however, can be redeemed at the rate of Timbits for the entire class at the session following the tardy as well as a coffee for the professor.
- **Rule of the Timbits (הלכה התמבטים):** Because “tardies” raise the ire of the covenant community (bound by this covenantal syllabus document delivered here at the foot of the “Mountain”), those who are late for class must have a means by which to atone for such “accidental sins” (בשגגה, if they are defiant sins, ביד רמה, then the offender will be “cut off” from the community, see Num 15:27–31),¹ which means anyone late for class will need to bring Timbits for the entire class (מנחה) no later than the next class meeting plus a Tim Hortons coffee (נסך) for the professor (cream, no sugar). This מנחה and נסך will function simultaneously as both a sin offering (חטאת, Lev 4) atoning for the accidental sin of the offender and a peace offering (שלמים, Lev 3) enhancing the fellowship of the covenant community. See the high professor for further details and any torah-rulings (Hag 2:10–14) regarding specific situations.

Especially important is to take seriously the cry of Joel of old in 1:13:

חֲגֹרּוּ וְסָפְדוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים	Gird yourselves <i>with sackcloth</i>
וְהִלָּלוּ מִשְׁרְתֵי מִזְבֵּחַ	And lament, O priests;
בָּאוּ לִינוּ בַשָּׁקִים מִשְׁרְתֵי אֱלֹהֵי	Wail, O ministers of the altar!
כִּי נִמְנַע מִבֵּית אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מִנְחָה וְנֹסֶךְ:	Come, spend the night in sackcloth
	O ministers of my God,
	For <u>the grain offering and the drink offering</u>
	Are withheld from the house of your God.

And note his promise of a reward to those who repent in 2:14:

מִי יוֹדַע יִשׁוּב וְנַחֵם	Who knows whether He will turn and relent
וְהַשְׂאִיר אַחֲרָיו בְּרָכָה	And leave a blessing behind Him,
מִנְחָה וְנֹסֶךְ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	<u>Even a grain offering and a drink offering</u>
	For the LORD your God?

¹ Of course, see the “definitive” work on this: Mark J. Boda, *A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament*, Siphut 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 53–54.

X. Bibliography

For a far more extensive catalog of sources for the study of OT text traditions, see the document available on A2L titled “Bibliography for OT Text Traditions.” For a guide to other key resources related to the study of OT text traditions, see the document posted on A2L titled “Online & Digital Resources for OT Text Traditions.”

- Adair, J. R. “Light from Below: Canonical and Theological Implications of Textual Criticism.” *OTE* 11 (1998) 9–23.
- Aitken, James A., ed. *The T&T Clark Companion to the Septuagint*. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015. [Mills]
- Albrektson, Bertil. “*Difficillior Lectio Probabilior*: A Rule of Textual Criticism and Its Use in Old Testament Studies.” In *Remembering All the Way: A Collection of Old Testament Studies Published on the Occasion of the Fortieth Anniversary of the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap in Nederland*, 5–18. OTS 21. Leiden: Brill, 1981.
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- . *Studies in the Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Hebrew Old Testament Text Project*. Translated by Stephen Pisano et al. TCT 3. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012.
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- Bodner, Keith. "Crime Scene Investigation: A Text-Critical Mystery and the Strange Death of Ish-bosheth." *JHebS* 7 (2007) art. 13, pp. 2–18.
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- Brock, Sebastian P., Charles T. Fritsch, and Sidney Jellicoe. *A Classified Bibliography of the Septuagint*. ALGHJ 6. Leiden: Brill, 1973.
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