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BOOK REVIEW

Ernst Würthwein. *The Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to the Biblia Hebraica*. 3rd ed. Revised and expanded by Alexander Achilles Fischer. Translated by Erroll F. Rhodes. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014. 363 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-0-80286-680-6. \$30.00.

Würthwein's *The Text of the Old Testament* has served since 1952 as a standard beginner/intermediate textbook and reference manual for textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. Given that more than twenty years have passed since the second edition of Würthwein was produced, Fischer's work brings a time-honored classic update. Indisputably, the field of textual criticism is changing rapidly, and it is of course necessary in a review such as this to delineate precisely the exact nature of the rather extensive revisions and expansions that Fischer underwent to prepare a "new edition of 'Würthwein'" (xi).

Prior to doing so, however, it is prudent to assist the reader by providing an orientation to the Würthwein/Fischer text as a whole and to the nature of textual criticism in general. To begin, the book is nine chapters in length with three major headings: (A) "The Hebrew Text of the Bible," (B) "The Ancient Translations," and (C) "Textual Criticism." The book concludes with a series of plates, ninety-six pages in their entirety, which will be discussed more fully below.

Section A, "The Hebrew Text of the Bible," is by far the longest of the three units, ninety-one pages in total, and comprises four chapters: (1) "Language, Script, and Writing Materials," (2) "The Masoretic Text," (3) "The Qumran Scrolls," and (4) "The Samaritan Text." Section B, "The Ancient Translations," has only two chapters, (5) "The Septuagint," and (6) "Other Translations." It is sixty-two pages in length. Section

C, “Textual Criticism,” spans three chapters, (7) “The Goal and Task of Textual Criticism,” (8) “Textual Corruptions, Changes, and Variants,” and (9) “The Method of Textual Criticism”; it is fifty-two pages in length.

In brief, Würthwein’s *An Introduction to the Biblia Hebraica* invites the reader to probe the sources, methodology, and goals of Old Testament textual criticism. Admittedly, it is perhaps tempting for the fledging student or harried pastor to ignore complex matters such as the transmission/copying process of the Scriptures or the procedures for evaluating different textual readings. Let the reader be assured, however, that learning to do so effectively will unquestionably better equip and prepare the exegete to preach, teach, and understand God’s word more circumspcctly. As mentioned above, the book concludes with a series of plates. Comprising almost a third of the entire volume, the inclusion of over forty plates is something that is rather distinct (and most welcome!) to Würthwein as compared perhaps to other works of a similar nature.

With respect to Fischer’s revisions, the selection of plates remains almost the same as the second edition, although one plate (the *Izbet Sartah Abecedary*) has been removed and two plates have been changed. Plate 1 is now the *Tel Dan* inscription, which was discovered in 1996. Its mention of the “house of David” makes it one of the earliest non-biblical documentary evidences of the history of Israel alongside the *Merneptah Stele*. Plate 15 is a fragment of Ecclesiastes found at Qumran, in which later corrections of a manuscript may be clearly observed. Though not printed on glossy paper, the quality of the vast majority of the plates is superb, and the choice to replace some of the older plates with newer photographs was indeed a prudent decision and is to be commended. The most noticeable improvements with respect to image quality are detectable on Plate 6, the *Nash Papyrus*; Plate 9b, *A Fragment of the Song of Moses*; Plate 11, the *First Isaiah Scroll*; Plate 16, *The Minor Prophets Scroll*; Plate 24, *Codex Leningradensis*; and Plate 40, the *Constance Fragments of the Old Latin Prophets*. The newly prepared images are much more pleasing to the eye and far more conducive to study as the increased brightness and contrast,

along with less graininess as a whole, makes the letters immensely more pronounced and crisp than in former editions.

Alongside improved image quality, this third edition of Würthwein features a two-page reproduction of Plate 18, *A Haphtareh Fragment with Babylonian Pointing*, in place of the original one-page copy. One may also note (and appreciate) that the boundary lines and the edges of the actual manuscript on Plate 30, *A Greek Scroll of the Minor Prophets*, are more clearly defined. Such significant improvements notwithstanding, in certain instances the new photographs seem to make little, if any, noticeable difference to the observant eye or provide no obvious improvements to the former photographs that were chosen (e.g. Plate 7, the entrance to Qumran Cave 1). In one particular instance, however, Fischer should be especially commended for his keen eye and editorial revision skills (see Plate 5, the *Elephantine Papyrus*), as the image at long last has finally been reproduced correctly. To be clear, since at least the first English edition of Würthwein, the plate's image has actually been reproduced backwards, in obverse of the original! Fischer has indeed done the academy a great service for correcting such a not insignificant error.

In addition to the above, it is also worth noting that Würthwein's descriptions of the plates have often been edited, and sometimes expanded or adapted in the light of later research. Below the plate's caption is a brief identification of the manuscript or page shown (symbol, date, location, and sample of text). Source data as well as bibliographical and other information follow the descriptive text rather than appear as footnotes (xii). Although space does not permit a full recapitulation of the numerous editorial decisions made, even a casual reading of the plates' annotations should suffice to commend Fischer for his judiciousness and care with respect to these matters.

One should also mention that, although the "character" and basic outline of Würthwein's text have largely been retained (for example, his practice of italicizing keywords at the beginning of sections and paragraphs has been continued, making it simpler for students and interested readers to browse and review topics),

the text itself has been completely rewritten. Contemporary readers will find Fischer's prose far more lucid, readable, and transparent than that which was found in previous editions. Fischer is also to be commended for his marked way of seeking to make the history and/or the discovery of certain texts and manuscripts come alive in surprisingly vivid, even "page-turning" language (see Plate 3, *The Siloam Inscription from Jerusalem*).

Other prominent changes include the fact that each chapter now ends with bibliographical notes on the texts and tools discussed, as well as manuals and other works useful for further study. In keeping with the nature of the text, that is, a basic introduction that is not intended to compete with the standard reference volumes, only select works are mentioned (see xi). Nevertheless, the recommendations that have been made ought to be well received by the reader and should serve their intended purposes sufficiently well.

That being said, however, there remains, in the eyes of this reviewer, certain infelicities and a number of regrettable oversights. Here are some examples. (1) There is a rather high volume of German references throughout the recommended reading that would perhaps only bewilder the uninitiated. While most assuredly it is of great importance for readers (particularly those situated in North America?) to be aware of these German sources, it seems that the bibliography is weighted too heavily on them at times. For instance, at the end of chapter 1, "Language, Script, and Writing Materials," eight of the ten resources listed are German works. (2) The list of recommendations in chapter 3, "The Qumran Scrolls," fails to mention Flint and Vanderkam's *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (2002), or any of the series of volumes in *Studies in the Dead Scrolls and Related Literature* (e.g. Ulrich [1999], Fitzmyer [2000], or Flint [2001]). (3) The recommended reading list in chapter 5, "The Septuagint," fails to mention Muraoka's lexicon (2009) under "Septuagint Aids" (albeit Fischer does list it in his Hebrew/Aramaic index), Dine's *The Septuagint* (2004) under "Introductions," or Tov's *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (1999) at all. (4) Within chapter 9, "The Method of Textual

Criticism,” Fischer fails to recommend, list, or cite Brotzman’s *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction* (1994) or Wegner’s *Textual Criticism of the Bible* (2006). (5) All references to Tov’s magisterial *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* are keyed to the second edition.

Moreover, other references and resources cited or discussed are also either already dated or shall soon become so. For instance, Fischer mentions the twenty-seventh edition of *Novum Testamentum Graece* (1993) on page 47, even though the twenty-eighth revised edition has been made available since 2012 (not to mention the fifth edition of the UBS Greek New Testament that has also been recently released). One may also note that, on page 51, Fischer discusses the Oxford Hebrew Bible Project as a future eclectic edition, which is indeed correct; however, the first volume on the book of Proverbs by Fox was published in the early part of 2015 with the new series title, *The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Edition*. In addition, Tov’s *Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* has recently appeared in its third edition (2015), and a second edition of Jobes and Silva’s *Invitation to the Septuagint* has also been released (2015). Combine this with the soon-to-be-released second edition of Brotzman (July 2016) will undoubtedly date Fischer’s work somewhat prematurely in certain ways. Given the author’s boast that one of the reasons Würthwein’s text has “served so usefully for so long” is that he “stayed in touch with current research,” (xi) these solecisms are particularly unfortunate. Nevertheless, it is evident that Fischer has clearly endeavored to make the Würthwein reader conversant with details concerning the BHQ (this third edition includes two one-page charts of the accents [prose and poetical] in BHQ and a sample page of Canticles from BHQ, showing the Masorah magna between the text and apparatus) and matters pertaining to Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls, including a whole chapter devoted to the subject. Such additions were ably handled and, of course, are most welcome.

Numerous additional elements also enhance the user-friendliness of this volume, one of which is a modest glossary. Deserving of special mention, however, is a series of tables that

have been either developed by Fischer or adapted for this particular volume. For example, in chapter 5, “The Septuagint,” Fischer has compiled a chart outlining the Hebrew Bible order of books, the King James Version, and the Septuagint, thereby providing the reader much comparative information at a glance. In the same chapter, not only does Fischer provide a helpful profile of the individual translations of the books within the LXX and the approximate date for each, he also tabulates each of the codices containing the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, delineating their name, age, character, and symbol. Additionally, in chapter 2, “The Masoretic Text,” Fischer provides the name, date, content, character, and symbol of each of the medieval biblical manuscripts. Another poignant example may be found in chapter 7, “The Goal and Task of Textual Criticism,” wherein Fischer illustrates the relationship between the original and the final text. These tables/diagrams are well designed and will surely serve to enhance the reader’s comprehension and understanding of the material at hand. A list of tables is also provided for ease of use. The author, subject, and scriptural indexes are also helpful and most appreciated. In addition, it is perhaps worth mentioning that some evangelicals will most likely disagree with a number of the assumptions in the book regarding canonicity, dating, and the literary development of biblical texts. Nevertheless, there is much to be gleaned within this volume, and one should be reticent about dismissing the text itself based upon such criteria. This thorough revision of Würthwein by Fischer shall surely “prepare beginners for further research in textual criticism” (xi) and thoroughly equip the student to use more scholarly, advanced textual criticism manuals, such as Tov’s *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, with increased skill and fluidity. Its primary readers will be studious undergraduate/graduate students and the serious pastor/minister. The “Würthwein tradition” indeed “lives on!” (x). And for this, I am sincerely glad.

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