

Soggin, J. Alberto. Introduction to the Old Testament. The Westminster Press. Philadelphia. 1974. Trans., 1976.

Textual Criticism or 'lower criticism'

p.33 Textual criticism or 'lower criticism' is the name of the discipline which sets out to restore, as far as possible, the original form of a text. It therefore works essentially with grammar, syntax and philology, comparing the text with ancient manuscripts and versions. It is required whenever there is uncertainty whether the text that we have corresponds to that intended by the author, which is almost always the case before the invention of printing. . . (p.33)

In the Old Testament field, the tendency of scholars at the end of the last century and at the beginning of this was to mistrust the Massoretic text because of the late date of the manuscripts which have been preserved, and to prefer earlier translations, above all the LXX. In every critical commentary up to the 1930s, therefore, it is easy to find in doubtful or controversial cases a pronounced preference on the part of scholars for the readings of the LXX rather than the Hebrew text. This is, of course, a choice which can rebound against the person who makes it: if the Massoretic text showed a higher incidence of errors or omissions than can be found in the LXX translation, could this not be a sign, applying the criteria of the lectio brevior and the lectio diffilior, of an accurate transmission, as no one has dared to correct errors or evident omissions? . . . (pp.33-34)

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Literary criticism today tends to be much more prudent about the traditional Hebrew text than it was some decades ago. It is not that scholars fail to recognize errors of various kinds . . . nor that it is impossible that in certain cases a parallel text or translation may have preserved a more accurate textual tradition; it is the fundamental attitude to the Massoretic text that has changed. The starting-point for the scholar today will always be only the Hebrew text, which is accorded a remarkable authority on almost all sides. As we have seen, this does not exclude some blemishes of notable proportions. But it has been recognized that these rarely prejudice the sense of passages which are historically or theologically important. (p.34)

Historical criticism or 'higher criticism'

Once the scholar has arrived at a text which, within the limits of possibility, is as near as possible to the original, a second stage of work begins; we can compare it with that of the engineer who is building a bridge between the two banks of a river, with the reader on one bank and the text to be examined on the other. The wider and deeper the river bed to be crossed, that is, the greater the chronological and ideological distance which divides us from the times and the settings in which the author of the texts lived or in which the texts, if they are anonymous, came to be written, the more difficult will be the work. In this phase of research the scholar investigates the formal aspects of the text, its contents and hence its literary genre; he determines, where possible, the author or at least the period in which it was written, and seeks to discover