CHAPTER 2

From Polyglot to Hypertext

Ronald Hendel

A book is not an isolated thing: it is a relationship, an axis of innumerable relationships.

Jorge Luis Borges¹

The Hebrew Bible is a text that is not one. First, it is a library of books, as the Greek τὰ βιβλία (“the books”) announces. Second, for each book there is a plurality of manuscripts and translations, which are related in a dizzyingly complex genealogical web. Part of the task of the biblical textual critic is to explore this network of manuscripts and versions in order to make sense of it, to historicize the relationships and to uncover what we can of each book’s historia texti. This is an attempt to manage diversity, to tame the sheer abundance of biblical texts. Yet while we seek to master the plethora of manuscripts, we also savor their very unmanageability. The textual critic’s heart yearns for even more abundance and leaps at the discovery of new manuscripts. It doesn’t matter whether they were molding in caves or a synagogue genizah or miscataloged in an air-conditioned library. We crave new texts, even as they drive us to distraction. The superabundance of texts is our joy and our burden.

And so we make editions of the Hebrew Bible. This is a way of taming diversity, in which we attempt to make the relationships among the texts intelligible and, to the extent possible, restore the earliest readings of each book (including, ideally, the earliest inferable state of each edition of a book). The idea of a critical edition of the Hebrew Bible has taken many forms over the centuries, and it continues to evolve. In the following, I explore the aims

and intellectual context of the first modern critical edition, the Complutensian Polyglot, whose quincentennial we celebrate, and The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Edition (HBCE), whose first volume has just appeared.\(^2\) Given the passage of a half-millennium, it is illuminating to observe the points of convergence and divergence in the ways the two projects represent and manage diversity, both with respect to the plurality of the biblical text and the plural aims of a critical edition.

As we imagine the possibilities of the HBCE digital edition, we are in some respects recapitulating the Polyglot's strategic mobilization of a new technology – in its case, the printing press – in a novel representation of the biblical text. Digital technology raises the prospect of a new kind of Polyglot, since it multiplies the possibilities of representing parallel and plural texts.\(^3\) But while we are reviving the idea of a polyglot, our understanding of textual plurality contrasts markedly with the conceptual orientation of the Complutensian Polyglot. Our textual concepts have been thoroughly historicized, such that we now see an array of scribal and exegetical developments where the Polyglot's editors saw different manifestations of the *sensus plenior* and/or a clash between truth and heresy. The axis of relationships that constitutes the concept of textual plurality has shifted radically, even as we return to the material representation of plural forms of the biblical text. In the following I will trace some of changes and continuities between the mental landscapes of the Complutensian Polyglot and the HBCE hypertext, which will illuminate the shifts in the of textual scholarship over the last five hundred years, over the *longue durée* of modern textual scholarship.

**The Complutensian Polyglot (1514–1517): A Cultural Polyphony**

The diverse – and in part contradictory – aims of the Complutensian Polyglot are presented in two prologues, one addressed to the Pope and the second to the Reader.\(^4\) The prologues were probably jointly written, but are signed by the

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\(^4\) On the Polyglot and its texts, see L. Alonso Schökel, et al., *Anejo a la edición facsimile de la Biblia Políglota Complutense* (Valencia: Fundación Biblica Española / Universidad Complutense