

Online Resources of Interest to Text Critics Preliminary Observations

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Textual criticism is a glorious field of study whose landscape is dotted with monuments of past and present erudition. The question I address in this post is to the degree to which the field is currently navigable online, and prospects for voyages in the future. In the interests of brevity, I confine my attention to a few aspects of the question only.

A new dynamic is operative in the world of information exchange, whereby, more and more often, something new from the point of view of method or content first becomes available free of charge online and only later is repackaged for sale in a market. For this and other reasons, there are a number of online resources out there for anyone to use that lack as yet a better equivalent in the commercial sphere. This holds true for the field of text criticism as much as for any other field of study.

This is a healthy situation, unless one holds the view that Mammon must always be king. For my part, I have a demythologized view of Mammon, with a corollary: the purpose of an information market is not to make money per se, but to provide a venue that ensures support for and dissemination of original research and tools of the trade. To ring the changes on an eternal verity, the market was, or should be, made for man, not man for the market.

The line between online resources available free of charge and those which cost a pretty penny needs to become blurrier than it is now, so that access to the former becomes a portal to access to the latter, and ownership of a paid-for resource brings with it enhanced access to resources available to all. Someday any book worth paying for will include an online dimension. Reference works will be updated electronically on a continuous basis. Examples of both, of course, are already out there.

How this works for the moment and how it should work are often two different things. An example or two may serve to illustrate.

Let's say I am interested in researching the Peshitta as a text-critical resource for the study of the Hebrew Bible and/or the New Testament, a key component of the Aramaic linguistic and literary heritage, and a magnum

opus in its own right, knowledge of which is essential for an understanding of Syriac Christianity.

Ideally, in my view, I would be able to go to the site of the Leiden Peshitta Institute, access the text in the form of a tagged database free of charge, and in that context be offered other tools, both free and commercial, that will allow me to study the Peshitta in its various facets. In reality, when I go to the [site](#), I find no more than a list of the Institute's ongoing projects and links to lists of the fascicles of the Major Edition and the monographs of the Institute which have so far appeared. The cute picture of an unidentified researcher, of course, makes up for this. But still.

At the very least, one would have wished for a link to [CAL](#), where part of the Peshitta Institute's own database has graciously been made available to those who use CAL online. On the other hand, the OT Peshitta is not available in the for-pay version of CAL through [Logos Bible Software](#). This is unfortunate.

Links to www.peshitta.org, www.assyrianlanguage.com, and so on would also have been helpful. (The music of Linda George on the first site is a nice throw-in.) A link to the online [Syriac Studies Encyclopedia](#) (editor: George A. Kiraz) would have opened a door in another direction.

Furthermore, the purchasable items in the Institute's lists are cold, so one has to look elsewhere for a place to buy them. In this regard, a good place to start is [Eisenbrauns](#), and if one plugs "Syriac" or "Peshitta" into the online search engine, all kinds of excellent purchasable resources pop up, but not the Leiden Peshitta edition itself! The best way to examine and purchase volumes of the Leiden Peshitta online is to go to [Brill's](#) site, and from there to its links to books.google.com via ISBN number. It is then possible to take a look at a volume's cover, peruse its table of contents and so on, and choose a bookseller from which to purchase. Here's an example of what I mean: books.google.com/leiden-peshitta-isaiah. Beyond that, an almost complete listing of the Institute's published monographs purchasable new or used is available at amazon.com-search-keywords=Monographs+Leiden+Peshitta.

One more example. Let's say I'm interested in the Septuagint for reasons like those stated above with respect to the Peshitta. Here the situation is different, thanks to the marvelous [site](#) on the Septuagint and resources in the field offered by Joel Kalvesmaki. The site is literally priceless.

On the other hand, despite what Joel says, it's not necessary to buy the Göttingen critical editions of the Septuagint via their publisher. You can purchase them at [Eisenbrauns](#). After winning the lottery first.

Tyler Williams' brief [introduction](#) to the study of the Septuagint is also very helpful.

Beyond that, the number of online resources for the study of the Septuagint is steadily increasing. A few examples will have to suffice.

[A Database of Septuagint Greek](#)

Martin Roesel's Introduction to the Septuagint

Marguerite Harl's Introduction to the Septuagint

[July 2007 Colloquium on the Greek Bible in Byzantine Judaism](#)

[Hengel's The Septuagint as Christian Scripture](#) (review by K. de Troyer)

I keep hoping that I will wake up someday, go to [eisenbrauns.com](#), and discover that it has become a one-stop shop for all my needs as a biblical scholar. It's not that I'm expecting, necessarily, to find Gabriel Afram's [Swedish-Syriac Dictionary](#) among its listings, the very existence of which warms my cockles. But it is my hope that a commercially viable way will be found for Eisenbrauns' book catalogues to become a comprehensive portal to the purchasable print and electronic resources of the fields of study they cover. I can dream, can't I?

I also keep hoping that someone will introduce to the rest of us the most important resources available in other subfields of the textual criticism of the Bible with the same alacrity as Joel and Tyler have done for the Septuagint.

If you look long enough, you can find real gems, like [this](#). But who has time to do all that looking?