WEB-BASED RESOURCES IN THE FIELD OF OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES

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Digitization had a great impact on Biblical studies, especially since the introduction of professional, commercial software, like Logos Bible Software (1991), Bibleworks (1992), and Accordance (1994). More than twenty years later it can be concluded that for most scholars the benefits were primarily the digitization of the familiar resources and the familiar tools. This helped to save physical space (complete libraries on a hardisk), to speed up the searching in primary sources (more flexible concordances) and secondary literature, and to produce more easily texts with quotations in the languages of the Bible and its early translations. Only more recently one may note a broader interest in the efforts, which was until then done by a few pioneers, to seriously investigate the possibilities of new methods. Instead of only digitizing the old tools scholars are experimenting with new digital tools.1) These are based on the digitized resources and they for their part also have impact on the way the familiar resources are digitized.

Two recently published volumes offer a good survey of what is going on in this field. The first is based on a congress in Amsterdam in 2008 titled ‘Text Comparison and Digital Creativity. An International Colloquium on the Co-production of Presence and Meaning’.2) This meeting evolved out of the projects of ‘The Virtual Knowledge Studio for the Humanities and Social Sciences’3) and ‘Turgama’, a research project at the Institute for Religious Studies of Leiden University on computer-assisted analysis of the Peshitta and the Targum.4) The congress volume contains a number of methodological considerations and some case studies in the field of linguistics and concerning the digitization of manuscripts. The second volume is the product of a research group of the European Association of Biblical Studies called ‘Digital Humanities in Biblical Studies, Early Jewish and Christian Studies’5) and contains a number of examples of the new ways in which modern scholars work with digitized editions of ancient texts. 6)

In the introductory article to this volume Claire Clivaz expresses the hope ‘that we can use digital resources as tools with which to develop a better, clearer, and deeper understanding of human products’. She presents the volume as ‘a showroom of what is at stake in digital streams in biblical studies, early Jewish and early Christian studies. The changes are not only irreversible, but probably greater than many scholars acknowledge, even if they do not consider either themselves or the peers to be digital humanists, or doing anything fundamentally different from their predecessors’.7)

A good example of the efforts to realize a change from digitized to digital tools is the project Shebanq (System for HEbrew text: ANnotations for Queries and markup). The aim of this project is to make it possible to save queries on a linguistic database of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament into the public domain, so that researchers can cite results in publications. 8) Compared to the work with the common concordances of Biblical texts this can be seen as an interesting attempt to attain a deepening of insight into the text of the Old Testament.

This is not the place to pursue these methodological aspects, but it is certainly something that has impact on the following survey of web-based resources. What can and will be offered here is no more than a selection of the flood of material that can be found on the internet. The emphasis will be on quality and on innovation. It is difficult to present this survey on the basis of a simple and clear classification of the different parts of the field of Old Testament studies. One can see this as a positive aspect of the internet: it crosses old borders and helps the scholars to make new associations. No matter which categories we choose, there will always be overlaps. Many websites can be mentioned in more than one category. We will start with what everyone who is searching the internet needs: the right portals. In fact, almost every website is some kind of portal, because most of them refer in their turn to other websites. The next category will be the websites specifically aimed at presenting the biblical text.

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2) Wido van Peursen, Ernst D. Thoutenhoofd, Adriaan van der Weel (eds), Text Comparison and Digital Creativity: The Production of Presence and Meaning in Digital Text Scholarship, Brill: Leiden 2010.
3) http://virtualknowledgestudio.nl/.
4) http://www.hum.leiden.edu/religion/research/research-programmes/antiquity/turgama.html.
7) Clivaz, Digital Humanities, 7.
starting with one of the most exciting aspects of the internet: the possibility of presenting the manuscripts. To this will be added the websites devoted to the archaeology of ancient Israel. Other websites with relevant resources will be listed under the very general heading of the interpretation of biblical texts, with a separate category of open source journals. A final group to be mentioned is that of the discussion groups and weblogs. When it comes to quality and innovation especially this last category is very important.

Ports

A very well-organized website to start with is that of Torrey Seland (School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger, Norway) ‘Resource Pages for Biblical studies’ (http://torreys.org/bible/) with a page on texts and translations, containing links to biblical texts and various other texts related to the Bible, and especially to the New Testament. It is subdivided into pages on Bible texts and translations, Greek and Hebrew texts, apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, Qumran and Josephus and rabbinica, gnostica and church fathers, classical texts, and linguistic resources.

The ‘Old Testament Gateway’ (http://www.otgateway.com/) is a comprehensive and up-to-date gateway by Roy Nicholson (Tabor College, Victoria, Australia), who also gives clear annotations to the character of the sources. It is built up according to the books of the Old Testament. Next to that there are entries on archaeology, the ancient Near East, Dead Sea scrolls, Bibles, noncanonical works, and commentaries.

The website of Ehud Ben Zvi (University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada) has a very instructive page titled ‘Assisting you to learn’ (http://www.ualberta.ca/~ebenzvi/teaching.html) with the subdivision: ‘Ancient Mesopotamia (learning about the Ancient Mesopotamia and the Levant)’, Hebrew Bible/Ancient Israel (‘learning about the Hebrew Bible, the history of Ancient Israel, Biblical Hebrew, and related topics’), From Cyrus to Jesus (‘learning about “The Second Temple Period” in Judah within its larger historical and geographical context’), Judaism (‘some resources pertaining to the study of Judaism’), and Resources (‘for writing papers and additional resources’).

‘Biblical Studies Online’ (http://biblicalstudiesonline.wordpress.com/), maintained by James Crossley (University of Sheffield) and Deane Galbraith (University of Otago) is meant ‘to provide both biblical scholars and the interested wider public with ease of access to quality biblical scholarship, as it comes available online’. The home page offers a very long list of almost 300 (!) categories, with the subdivision: ‘academia’, ‘biblical languages’ (which includes most languages of the ancient Near East), ‘biblical literature’, ‘biblical reception history’, ‘biblical studies topics’, ‘historical and literary contexts’, ‘media’, ‘methods and approaches in biblical studies’, ‘primary sources’, and ‘seminars, conferences, talks’. This very rich website deserves a better layout.

Okeanos (http://faculty.washington.edu/snoegel/okeanos.html), a website maintained by Scott B. Noegel, gives a good overview of the available websites for the study of the Bible and the ancient Near East.

Tyndale House (Cambridge) offers a good portal and also a special toolbar for many online resources for biblical studies: http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/index.php?page=online-resources.

Biblical languages

A long list of useful links to web-based resources related to studying Biblical Hebrew is given by Ben Zvi: http://www.ualberta.ca/~ebenzvi/Assist/Hebrew_Bible/hebrewbibstudy.html.

A number of Hebrew lexicons can be consulted online. A very useful portal for this is the website ‘2Letterlookup’ (http://www.2letterlookup.com/), which gives access to among others the old lexicon of Gesenius, and lists relevant other websites. Also the work of Brown, Drivers and Briggs is available, for instance on http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/kjv/.

The United Bible Societies present ‘The Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew’ (http://www.sdbh.org/home-en.html), which is building a new dictionary of biblical Hebrew that is based on semantic domains. The editor is Reinier de Blois.

The Academy of the Hebrew Language presents in the ‘Historical Dictionary Project’ (http://hebrew-academy.huji.ac.il/English/HistoricalDictionaryProject/) ‘the history and development of the Hebrew lexicon, from the earliest occurrences of words down through their most recent documentation’. The enormous database is available, but only via a Hebrew interface (http://hebrew-treasures.huji.ac.il/).

‘The Semantics of Ancient Hebrew Database’ project (http://www.sahd.div.ed.ac.uk/) ‘aims to provide a structured and critical survey of scholarly literature on the vocabulary of classical Hebrew’. The project started already in 1994 and seems to progress only slowly. What has been produced is of high scholarly quality.

A similar project — also in progress — is the one on Aramaic texts: the ‘Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project’ (http://call1.cn.huc.edu/). It offers a database of lexically parsed words of the Aramaic texts in all dialects from the earliest (9th Century BCE) through the 13th Century CE, currently. The ultimate goal is the creation of a complete lexicon of the language, but it is already very useful for scholars working in this field.

‘Davar — Biblical Hebrew Vocabularies’ (http://flexible-learning.auckland.ac.nz/davar/index.html) is a project developed at The University of Auckland as a tool in the teaching of Hebrew. It has built a vocabulary that can be customized with different textbooks or lesson objectives.


Bible software

This is not the place to evaluate the well known software of BibleWorks, Accordance, Logos (with the Stuttgart Electronic Study Bible), e-Sword and many other tools that are available to study the biblical texts. There are many websites with surveys and reviews, like the ‘Top 10 Bible Software Programs’ (http://christianity.about.com/od/biblestudyresources/tp/bssoftwarereview.htm). Very useful are the following discussion groups and group pages on the internet.

With regard to the Greek translations of the Old Testament we can refer here in the first place to the “E-Sword Bible Program” (http://www.e-sword.org/), an open source tool created by CrossWire Bible Society, the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Bible Society. It only offers the biblical text in (many) translations, together with lots of (partially rather outdated) secondary literature.

Another tool, with a better interface, for browsing the Biblical texts (in English translation), with much extra information is the ‘Blueletterbible’ (http://www.blueletterbible.org/).

The best tool in this category is probably the very extensive and fast working ‘Bible Hub’ (http://biblehub.com/), which also offers Greek and Hebrew study tools, with among other things a good interlinear English — Hebrew/Greek text.

**Text editions**

Some information on the edition of the Biblia Hebraica Quinta is given on http://www.scholarly-bibles.com/products/Original-Texts/New-Testament/Hebrew/Biblia-Hebraica-Quinta-BHQ.html. It contains samples of the parts that have been published thus far.

Information about The Hebrew University Bible Project working on a comprehensive survey of the history of the textual development of the Hebrew Bible and the production of a major critical edition on the basis of the Aleppo codex can be found on http://www.hum.huji.ac.il/english/units.php?cat=5015&incat=4982 with samples of the edition of the text of Ezekiel.

The work in The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Edition project on a new critical edition of the Hebrew (unlike the diplomatic editions of the Biblia Hebraica Quinta and the Hebrew University Bible) is presented, with a number of samples, on http://ohb.berkeley.edu/.

**The biblical text in unicode**

The biblical text in Hebrew and its ancient translated versions are in many ways available on the internet in unicode, enabling the user to consult the text and use it in word processors. On the site of the German Bible Society http://www.academic-bible.com/en/home/scholarly-editions/ one finds the following editions: the text of the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, the text of the Septuagint (ed. Rahlf/Hanhart), and the Latin Bible following the text of the Vulgate (ed. Weber/ Gryson).

The website of the Mamre Institute (http://www.mechonmachne.org/) presents the Hebrew Bible in different editions, including a parallel Hebrew and English version, and also the Targum Onqelos on the Books of Moses.

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Accordance: https://www.facebook.com/accordancebible

E-Sword: http://www.biblehub.com/


Stuttgart Electronic Study Bible: http://www.sesb-austausch.de/


Next to this there are also many useful tools available on the internet for exploring the Bible. A good example is ‘The Bible Tool’ (http://www.crosswire.org/study/index.jsp), an open source tool created by CrossWire Bible Society, the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Bible Society. It only offers the biblical text in (many) translations, together with lots of (partially rather outdated) secondary literature.

Another tool, with a better interface, for browsing the Biblical texts (in English translation), with much extra information is the ‘Blueletterbible’ (http://www.blueletterbible.org/).

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There is also a digital text version of the codex Leningradensis transcribed by the J. Alan Groves Center (http://www.tanach.us/Tanach.xml).

Via www.biblia.net the United Bible Societies offer a wealth of Bible translations on a website with a very useful interface enabling the user to compare different translations by putting them next to each other on the screen.

The New English Translation of the Septuagint, as published by Oxford University Press in 2009, including corrections and emendations, is available via http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/.

The Aramaic Bible Society made available the English translation of the Peshitta by George Lamsa via http://aramaicpeshitta.com/AramaicNTtools/dr_george_lamsa_bible.htm.

http://www.scripture4all.org/ offers a good interlinear Hebrew-English text.

Biblical archaeology

The Israel Antiquities Authority (http://www.antiquities.org.il/) is a good portal for resources about the archaeology of ancient Israel. The Hebrew version is better than the English one.

The website of the American Schools of Oriental Research http://www.asor.org/ contains a lot of interesting material about current issues but also about excavations in the past. The archive houses material documenting a century of archaeological work with a number of photograph collections.

Very interesting photographs can also be found on http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/matsp/. Eric and Edith Madsen made these photographs in Palestine in the first half of the twentieth century.

The University of Kiel offers a database http://www.uni-kiel.de/kibidano/ with digital resources for teaching and research related to the Middle East. It contains late 19th century photographs reproduced from books but also photos taken by modern scholars.

The website of the Biblical Archaeology Society (http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/) has a very useful list of current excavations, with links to the related resources (http://digs.bib-arch.org/). A similar list can be found on the website ‘The Bible and Interpretation’ (http://www.bibleinterp.com/ac.shtml).

The website ‘Theology on the web’ also has a page on biblical archaeology (http://www.theologyontheweb.org.uk/biblicalarchaeology.html) with ‘material relating to the archaeological background of the lands of the Bible’.

The Bible + Orient Museum in Fribourg (http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/) offers the very useful tool ‘Bible + Orient Datenbank Online’ (http://www.bible-orient-museum.ch/body/) for consulting the digitalized catalogs of the collections. The database includes a growing number of objects from other iconographically relevant collections as well, for instance from the works on iconography of Othmar Keel and others. It will also include the entries from the ‘Iconography of Deities and Demons Project’ (http://www.religionswissenschaft.uzh.ch/idd/).

Very useful and good information about biblical realia is given on the website of the Dutch society of Old Testament Study in the database about ‘Utensils in the Hebrew Bible’ (http://www.otw-site.eu/KLY/kly-intro.php), edited by Johannes de Moor.

The interpretation of the Hebrew Bible

The website ‘The Bible and interpretation’ (http://www.bibleinterp.com/), maintained by Mark Elliott and Patricia Landy, is designed to delivering the latest news, features, editorials, commentary, archaeological interpretation and excavations relevant to the study of the Bible for the public and biblical scholars. It is up-to-date, with many original contributions and useful links.

We already mentioned the website of the German Bible Society (http://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/). This is also the portal to the excellent ‘wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet’ (http://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/wibelix/), edited by Michaela Bauks and Klaus Koenen.

Also the website ‘BibleStudyTools’ (http://www.biblestudytools.com/) can be mentioned here as a portal to biblical lexicons, be it that these lexicons are relatively old and therefore in some respects outdated.


The ‘Internet History Sourcebooks Project’ (Fordham University, the Jesuit University of New York) has a very useful page on Israel (http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/ancient/asbook06.asp) with a big collection of public domain historical texts on the usual issues of biblical studies and many links to other relevant websites.

‘Bible History online’ (http://www.bible-history.com/) is a conservative lexicon about the Bible and its historical context.

The Review of Biblical Literature (http://www.bookreviews.org/) presents extensive scholarly reviews of books in biblical studies.

The website ‘Best Commentaries’ (http://www.bestcommentaries.com/) offers reviews and ratings of commentaries of the books of the Bible, thus helping to find a way in this flood of literature.

The well-organized website of Chris Heard (http://www.itanakh.org/) offers a wealth of secondary literature on the books of the Old Testament.

For those interested in the logotechnical analysis of the Old Testament the webpage of Casper Labuschagne (http://www.labuschagne.nl/) will be of great help. Here he publishes his ongoing research on the numerical features of the Psalms, the Torah and the books Joshua-Kings.

A good introduction to the more common literary critical approach is offered by Tzemah Yoreh on his webpage http://www.biblecriticism.com/.

A good webpage about analyzing Hebrew poetry is offered by John F. Hobbins: http://ancienthebrewpoetry.typepad.com/ancient_hebrew_poetry/. It is presented in the form of a weblog (and therefore also listed below), but it contains next to the discussion of some of the contemporary issues in the field of biblical studies a number of good resources on the subject of ancient Hebrew poetry.

Ralph W. Klein presents a useful overview of available sources of secondary literature on his website ‘The Old Testament and the ancient Near East: http://prophetess.lsec.edu/~rklein/.

An index of Biblical quotations and allusions in early christian literature is found on http://www.biblindex.mom.fr/

A good online Bible atlas is http://swartzentrover.com/cotor/Bible/Bible/Bible%20Atlas/Bible%20Atlas.htm.
Very interesting is also the website ‘Holy Land Maps’ (http://www.jnul.huji.ac.il/dl/maps/pal/html/), a big collection of beautiful ancient maps of Israel from the 15th until the beginning of the 20th century, collected by Eran Laor and now made available by the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem.

The Pontifical Biblical Institute (http://www.biblico.it/sussidi.html) supports the research of biblical literature with good bibliographies.

**Online journals**

When it comes to surveys of recent literature the Denver Journal is very helpful. It offers online (http://www.denversoninary.edu/resources/denver-journal/) every year an extensive annotated bibliography.

Now we have entered the field of online journals it is good to refer to the constantly renewed list of open access journals in ancient studies on http://ancientworldonline.blogspot.nl/.

The website ‘Biblical Studies on the Web’ (http://www.bsw.org/) functions as a gateway to the electronic version of the journals Biblica and Filologia Neotestamentica.

The online journal HIPPIL Novum (http://www.hiphil.org/) is part of the SBL program unit on Global Education and Research Technology. It continues HIPPIL which was published between 2003 and 2010.


**Discussion groups and weblogs**

Strictly speaking this final category cannot be ranked among web-based resources. Nevertheless, they cannot be excluded from this survey, because they represent one of the most important advantages of the new possibilities offered by the internet for the study of the Old Testament. The ongoing discussion in these groups and via these weblogs helps to find the individual researcher to find his way in the ever growing streams of information. It shows tendencies and stimulates the critical view on relevance and quality.

There are lists of discussion groups on facebook: http://biblioblogtop50.wordpress.com/complete-list-of-facebook-biblical-studies-pages/ or on yahoo: https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/bibliolist/info. Interesting (usually these are also big) groups are https://www.facebook.com/ASOR.org, https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/biblical-studies/info, and https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/ANE-2/info

A very helpful tool in finding one’s way among the many weblogs is the regular lists of the best or most interesting ones, like http://peterkirby.com/category/top-biblioblogs, or the ‘Biblical Studies Carnival’ (http://biblioblogtop50.wordpress.com/biblical-studies-carnival-list/), ‘a monthly carnival showcasing the best of blog posts in the area of academic biblical studies’.

Here I give an admittedly subjective short list, in random order, of useful, high level and regularly updated weblogs on the study of the Old Testament.

‘Biblische Ausbildung’ (http://www.biblische.blogspot.nl/) by Stephen L. Cook (Virginia Theological Seminary).

‘Higgaion: Musings on the Bible and Christianity, mostly’ (http://drchris.me/higgaion/) by Christopher Heard (Pepperdine University).

‘KV8R Excavator’ (http://robertcargill.com/) by Robert Raymond Cargill (University of Iowa).


Sheffield Biblical Studies: An unofficial blog dedicated to ideas from, and news about, the Department of Biblical Studies, University of Sheffield’ (http://sheffieldbiblical-studies.wordpress.com/) by James Crossley (University of Sheffield).


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