John S. Kloppenborg and Judith H. Newman, eds.

*Editing the Bible: Assessing the Task Past and Present*

Resources for Biblical Study 69


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Initial versions of most of the essays in this book were presented at a 2007 Conference on Editorial Problems organized by John Kloppenborg and held at the University of Toronto. Although the same conference has been held annually since 1965 (see http://projects.chass.utoronto.ca/cep/history.html), this was the first time that the difficulties and challenges of making critical editions of the Bible was discussed. Unusually, the conference brought together text-critical scholars of the Hebrew Bible and Septuagint and the New Testament. As a result, *Editing the Bible* contains five essays each on Old Testament and New Testament textual criticism that together constitute a stimulating update on developments in both fields.

The book begins with a very provocative essay by John Van Seters, “The Genealogy of the Biblical Editor,” which is based on his book *The Edited Bible* (2006). His targets are (1) redaction criticism and the hypothetical roles it has assigned editors/redactors in the redactional history of the Pentateuch, and (2) textual criticism and the standard or “canonical” status it has supposedly accorded the archetype of the Masoretic Text (MT). Both are weighed in the balance against Van Seters’s narrow definition of an “edition” as an authorized, standardized, “canonical” Textus Receptus and the Qumran evidence that suggests that such a thing never existed. The argument is right from one standpoint: there
probably never was a standard or “canonical” text in antiquity simply because such a thing only became possible with the invention of printing and subsequent mass production. But whether textual scholars have anachronistically retrojected the Renaissance editor and his standard edition on to antiquity, as Van Seters charges, is another matter entirely. There was undoubtedly lesser “editing” of various kinds, in terms of both the initial and ongoing “making” of books and the making of later “critical” editions of books, and there were also “canonical” collections of various kinds (Law, Prophets). For these reasons, his blanket characterization, while its contains elements of truth, cannot be sustained. The question raised by the Qumran evidence should have been posed in another way. In light of the diversity of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) and the lack of evidence for any attempt to produce a standard text, should proto-MT be privileged over other “texts”? That is a text-critical question that needs to be answered in relation to individual variation units, but one that also has a bearing on the text-historical task and what Qumran has to say about the history of textual transmission. Van Seters ends by asking those questions but can only generalize about the “historical reality of great textual diversity.”

In the second essay, “The Evolutionary Composition of the Hebrew Bible,” Eugene Ulrich argues that a paradigm shift is needed in textual criticism. The DSS “are not ‘sectarian’ but display the Scriptures of general Judaism.” Therefore, the text was “pluriform,” and “many of the books circulated in variant literary editions simultaneously, each of which apparently enjoyed equal status” (24). While Ulrich agrees with Van Seters that editor-edition terminology needs to be more carefully employed, he endorses the findings of redaction-critical scholarship and proffers text-critical support for a dynamic and organic composition process (“even evolutionary” [29], in the case of the prophetic books). One example of minor editing is variant chronologies in the MT, Samaritan Pentateuch (SP), and LXX texts of Gen 5 and 11 that attempt independently to solve contradictions between the ages of individuals and the date of the flood. Two examples of major editing are: (1) 4QpaleoExod and 4QNum, which contain an expanded text similar to SP minus the Mount Gerizim references, suggesting that SP may have been one of the common forms of the text in the first century BCE; and (2) similar textual consanguity between 4QJer and the shorter LXX text of Jeremiah, which validates the reliability of the latter against the “secondary, expanded version” in MT (36). Thus, MT is not the Urtext or even “a text.” For Ulrich, it is a varied collection of texts, different in each book, and must be subjected to the same criteria by which the LXX, SP, Qumran scrolls, and other texts are evaluated. Since SP and the LXX are reliable witnesses and Qumran has provided Hebrew and Greek manuscripts more than one thousand years older than the medieval codices, diplomatic editions of the Hebrew Bible need to be replaced by an eclectic edition such as
The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Edition (HBCE; formerly known as Oxford Hebrew Bible [OHB] and referred to as such in this volume).

The next essay, Eibert Tigchelaar’s “Editing the Hebrew Bible: An Overview of Some Problems,” discusses the practical and theoretical limitations of three current projects, the two diplomatic editions, the Hebrew University Bible (Codex Aleppo) and Biblia Hebraica Quinta (Codex Leningradensis), and HBCE/OHB, which uses Leningradensis as a “copy text” by following it in regard to so-called “accidentals”: orthography, vowels, accents, and paragraphing. HBCE/OHB appears to have adopted the copy-text concept uncritically and overlooked the fact that Masoretic vocalization and accents are an essential part of the text-critical task. In utilizing the consonantal text of the DSS, how valid is it to adopt the vocalization, vowels, and accents of a later medieval manuscript? The result is inconsistent methodology in the samples that have so far been released. Tigchelaar also asks why definitions of “plural texts” and “multiple editions” are lacking in the parallel presentation of variant literary editions of passages in HBCE/OHB (e.g., 1 Sam 17–18 or Dan 4–6 in the Old Greek and MT). This kind of presentation, however, is what is needed. A multiple-column critical edition that gives equal room to MT, LXX, SP, and some Qumran texts would alert the reader to the claims of competing variants and editions. The best way to achieve this may be to move to hypertextual critical editions.

In a less wide-ranging contribution titled “Evidence from the Qumran scrolls for the Scribal Transmission of Leviticus,” Sarianna Metso discusses the substantial Qumran evidence for that book (only Lev 12 is not represented in the seventeen manuscripts: fourteen Hebrew including four Paleo-Hebrew, two Greek, and one Aramaic targum). While there appears to have been only one Hebrew edition of Leviticus, the Old Greek occasionally agrees with a single Qumran Hebrew manuscript, and sometimes SP as well, against MT. But in the absence of longer parallel passages, six isolated agreements are hardly adequate proof for a second Hebrew text, as Metso asserts. Kristin De Troyer (“Greek Papyri and the Texts of the Hebrew Bible”) also argues for pre-MT readings in the Schøyen Greek papyri of Leviticus and Joshua, but in each case provides only one minor example of agreement between OG, a single Qumran manuscript, Symmachus or Theodotion, and SP (in the case of the Leviticus papyrus) against MT. One gets the feeling that the scribal tendency to make improvements, part of the limited fluidity that characterizes the period, has been forgotten in the press for multiple editions. De Troyer does, however, find “many” examples of (pre-Hexaplaric) correction of OG toward MT in both Schøyen manuscripts. This is evidence for textual fluidity in the Hebrew text in the period when the Greek translation of these books was produced. That is, the corrections are evidence that the Hebrew text underwent minor changes over time. Whether that
justifies the use of terms such as “textual plurality” and “multiple literary editions” with respect to Leviticus and Joshua is debatable.

On the New Testament side, Michael W. Holmes examines the question of “What text is being edited?” in a survey of selected critical editions. The goal of the discipline has moved from the recovery of the “original text” in earlier editions to the recovery of the “initial text” in the *Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior* (ECM). The change in emphasis responds to recent recognition of the inherent ambiguity of the term “original text.” The *Ausgangstext* or “initial text” is “the form of the text that stands at the beginning of a textual tradition” (102, citing ECM 1–2 Peter, 23* n. 4). It is neither the authorial text, the text that left the hand of the author, nor the archetype, the manuscript (whether extant or not) from which the manuscript tradition is descended. Although it may or may not succeed, the initial text aims to get closer to the authorial text than the archetype. Importantly, the ECM text is not the initial text either (to date only the Catholic Letters have been published). It is the “hypothetical reconstruction” of the initial text (103, citing ECM 12 Peter, 23* n. 4). Thus, the assumption that the “original” reading of the source text survives somewhere in the extant witnesses must now be tested at every variation unit. It is precisely this step—the third step in classical textual criticism: *recensio, selectio, examinatio, divinatio* or *emendatio*—that “has often been neglected or ignored” because of the same assumption (109). Occasionally, when none of the available variants can explain the rise of the others, conjectural emendation may also be needed. Holmes concludes with consideration of whether a pre-200 CE text can be recovered (since the earliest manuscripts are dated to the second half of the second century). While he offers cogent criticism of views that dismiss that possibility (Helmut Koester, William Petersen), he refrains from criticizing the view that this should not be the task of the editor (David Parker). It is enough to ask editors to clearly state what text is being edited.

Two essays follow on the Coherence-based Genealogical Method (CBGM) being used by the Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung in Münster to produce the ECM. Klaus Wachtel (“The Coherence-Based Genealogical Method: A New Way to Reconstruct the Text of the New Testament”) explains the characteristic features of the method. Notably, because of sheer numbers the CBGM analyzes only the relationships between texts (or “states of a text” in manuscripts), leaving aside matters of codicology and palaeography. There is a high level of “coherence” across the tradition. The texts of most of the manuscripts selected for the ECM “agree with each other in more than 85 percent of cases” across the 3046 variation units identified in the Catholic Letters (130). Genealogical assessment of the states of a text in various manuscripts begins at the variant level. It can be inferred from the genealogical relationship of variants within a variation unit. Individual textual decisions are then assessed “in the light of evidence from the 3046 variant passages in the entire corpus” (134). By doing this “variant by variant and
manuscript by manuscript ... a detailed picture of transmission emerges” that, according to Wachtel, compensates for contamination. The result is “an external criterion for assessing textual variation that is far more discerning than the old text-type model” (136). This same process has now resulted in the publication of a second edition of the ECM Catholic Letters. The CBGM is available to scholars for use and testing in the form of the “Genealogical Queries” program (see http://intf.uni-muenster.de/cbgm/index_en.html).

Holger Strutwolf ("Scribal Practices and the Transmission of Biblical Texts: New Insights from the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method") disagrees with research (Ernest Colwell, James Royse, Juan Hernández Jr.) that has challenged the traditional lectio brevior est potior (“the shorter reading is preferable”) rule of textual criticism. He takes issue, first, with the use of singular readings to establish scribal habits on the basis that as more and more manuscripts become available support can appear for readings once considered singular. Subsingular support (the variant is found in only a few manuscripts), however, need not rule out the possibility that two or more scribes could have made the same change independently. Second, he notes that the vast majority of short omissions in the ECM are singular or subsingular readings, suggesting that omission is the most frequent source of variation. Unfortunately, he does not say what other kinds of singulars/subsingulars there are but goes on to point out that the majority of singular readings in late Byzantine manuscripts result from omission. However, these singulars are not representative of the Byzantine tradition as a whole, which has far more additions than omissions. Therefore, he concludes, textual history in general reveals more about scribal habits and should take precedence over the scribal habits on display in the early continuous papyri. The problem is that the general scribal tendencies on display in the early papyri are not like those on display in later manuscripts, so the later rules do not seem to apply to the early period. While Strutwolf provides some instructive examples of how the CBGM (external criteria) might assist textual decisions (using internal criteria), he appears to be applying genealogical lessons learned very largely from relatively late manuscripts.

In the penultimate essay David Trobisch ("The New Testament in the Light of Book Publishing in Antiquity") summarizes the main points made in his The First Edition of the New Testament (2000). His thesis is that a complete edited New Testament was published toward the end of the second century in four codex volumes. The editorial features evident in the extant manuscripts, which include the consistent use of the codex and nomina sacra, the formulation of titles, the uniform arrangement and number of writings, subscriptions/comments in individual documents that might indicate that the autographs were used, and use from the beginning of the title “New Testament,” suggest production by a “single editorial entity” (162). Unfortunately, the bald presentation of these points in a brief essay does little to recommend the thesis, and it is not possible to
review the more detailed arguments of the book here, although a few comments can be made. First, the evidence is not quite as uniform as Trobisch thinks. Second, Van Seters’s objections to the production of ancient canonical editions need to be considered. Even if such an edition had been made, it might reasonably be expected that it would have left more traces. Third, the arguments for canon formation toward the end of the second century have been significantly undermined in recent years. Notwithstanding these concerns, elements of Trobisch’s thesis are deserving of further investigation.

In the final essay, “Unseen Variants: Conjectural Emendation and the New Testament,” Ryan Wettlaufer criticizes the reluctance of New Testament textual scholars to use conjectural emendation. In response to the most common rationale, that the correct reading must be preserved somewhere in the enormous number of manuscripts, he argues that the early period was characterized by unprofessional copying (by educated church members) that produced plenty of mistakes/corruptions. This ignores recent research that shows that most second- and second/third-century gospel manuscripts were copied in quality-controlled settings. Wettlaufer also asks whether the new views on “original text” and the rise of so-called “narrative textual criticism” do away with any need for conjectural emendation. If narrative textual criticism is about how and why the church altered the text, and the term “original text” is nebulous, what text would scholars be emending? He decides that there must have been a point of textual origin and that narrative textual criticism depends more than ever on the “quest for the original text” (184). Although he does acknowledge that “it may be difficult to identify which text form deserves the mantle ‘original,’ or even to identify which layer has been recovered,” the mention in the same breath of the unnatural bed-fellows original text (without the quotation marks) and narrative textual criticism is disconcerting, to say the least. It seems that you cannot (or can you?) have it both ways: if the quest for the original text “is shown to be a chimera, then the rationale for conjectural emendation quickly becomes clouded in confusion” (184).

In conclusion, some comparison of developments in the two fields may be useful. Both disciplines have a homogeneous mass of later evidence. But Old Testament textual scholars are moving away from MT and looking for earlier text forms in the DSS and OG (though the reaction may have led to some overreaching). In contrast, New Testament textual scholars appear to be privileging the later evidence. While only manuscripts “that differ from the Majority Text in more than 10 percent” of the test passages are used (130), it is still the genealogical relationships between relatively late manuscripts that dominate the analysis. It is perhaps not so easy to prove that the CBGM has shown previous study of the early papyri to have been in error. A much more thorough investigation of the apparent discordance between the two seems to be in order.