

# What is a Critical Edition?\*

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## Collating texts in ancient China

An old Chinese figurine represents a scriptural activity being performed in a way that may come as a surprise to some readers.<sup>1</sup> The object in question is made of celadon, a kind of Chinese pottery produced with a gray-green glaze, and it is very small, only 17.2 cm (less than 7 inches) in height. It is a funerary figurine unearthed from a tomb at Jinpenling, Changsha, Hunan province, in 1958; the date is inscribed on a brick, and the tomb dates to the second year of the Yongning reign, Western Jin Dynasty (ca. 302 CE). It is now preserved in the Hunan Provincial Museum in the city of Changsha.

The object represents two clerks collating and checking the accuracy of manuscripts. Many of us are likely to think of the collation of texts

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\* Parts of this article overlap or coincide, with certain modifications in expression but also some improvements in substance, with various earlier publications of mine: 'Preface', in *Editing Texts – Texte edieren. Aporemata 2*, ed. by Glenn W. Most (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1998); 'Introduction', in Sebastiano Timpanaro, *The Genesis of Lachmann's Method*, edited and translated by Glenn W. Most (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Lorraine J. Daston and Glenn W. Most, 'History of Science and History of Philologies', *Isis*, 106:2 (2015), 378–390; 'Introduction', in *Canonical Texts and Scholarly Practices: A Global Comparative Approach*, ed. by Anthony Grafton and Glenn W. Most (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). I have chosen to retain in this published article some traces of the oral character of the original lecture, and not to burden it with a full apparatus of references to the vast scholarship on all the issues discussed here.

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as a solitary activity, undertaken in silence and performed by the eye. We imagine a modern scholar sitting in a library with a printed text and a manuscript in front of him, or a pre-modern scholar with two manuscripts on his desk; in either case he is looking alternately at the one and then at the other, blocking out all distractions so that he can focus on one of the texts in front of him and can compare it, letter for letter, word for word, with the other one.

Here, by contrast, it is not one person who is involved but two, and they are engaged in an intense joint activity that is at least as much interpersonal as it is intertextual. They kneel or squat facing each other across a small wooden table on which a pen, an ink stone, and books made of bamboo have been placed; the table separates them but at the same time links them as a physical object and as the embodiment of the ancient tradition in which they have their place. The figure on the left holds a book in his right hand and is ready to write something onto it with a pen held in his left hand. The one on the right is holding a pile of books. The figure on the right stares fixedly at the face of the other one, perhaps most precisely at his right ear. He is saying something of great importance to the other man, and he wants to be quite certain that his oral communication reaches its goal unimpeded. The man on the left seems to be staring out into empty space beyond the man on the right, so that no sensory impressions will distract him from that urgent communication. Each one leans toward the other as an expression of the intensity of their collaboration. The two blocks out of which they are sculpted are correlated with one another and connected by an intimate complementarity in a kind of elegant inter-scriptural tango. And as in any good tango, the partners are asymmetrical: the man on the right has been placed a little bit lower and is leaning slightly more toward his colleague in a gesture of respect, indeed of deference. For their interdependent collaboration is articulated unmistakably as a strict hierarchy. Both men are wearing distinctively ornate headgear; but the hat on the left man's head has an additional ornament on its back that affirms his higher status. The one on the right has to do only one job: he has to pronounce out loud as precisely and clearly as possible what he reads on his text. But the one on the left has a number of jobs to do: he must listen to his colleague, understand what he says, compare what he hears to what he sees on the page in front of him, and then if necessary write something onto that page. The one on the right is using his brain, his eyes, and his mouth; the one on the left is using those three organs as well, but also his ear and his hand.

These two men are engaged in correcting manuscripts, and they are doing so in a collaborative, oral and aural, way. The man on the left is checking, word for word, what he hears from the man on the right against what he can see in the manuscript he is holding. Pen poised to make a correction at any moment, he is waiting to hear one reading and to see a different one before he strikes to emend where he finds a discrepancy. We might have expected the sculptor to show these two men actually looking at their manuscripts, to which their labors are in fact directed; but instead he has chosen to show the one man looking at the other and the second man looking into space. A moment's reflection is enough to explain his choice. For what else could he have done? He could have shown both scribes looking down at their respective manuscripts; but if he had, he would have shown something that a viewer could not have interpreted otherwise than as two independent scholars, each one reading his own manuscript next to but not in collaboration with the other. Or he could have shown one looking down at a manuscript and the other looking at his colleague; but this would have conveyed a one-way act of dictation, which represented one person speaking and the other simply copying down what he heard.

Instead, the sculptor has shown us both men engaged primarily with one another and only secondarily with the texts that are their true *raison d'être*. What is more, he has focused all of our attention on the left scholar's right ear, into which his colleague pours his words and toward which he and we direct our concentrated gaze. At the beginning of their collaboration stand various written exemplars of the same text that differ in various points from one another; at the end stand once again the same written exemplars, now corrected and standardized with one another. But the collaboration itself is not visual but oral, not written but spoken. A scriptural tradition involving canonical texts—for what other kind would these clerks be paid to control?—is represented here as an act of oral transmission and constant reciprocal checking. Yet it is not only a rational scholastic procedure that we witness. Collation is figured here simultaneously as the transmission of certain values—attention, obedience, precision, collegiality—that are important not only for their embodiment in canonical texts but also for their instantiation in the acts by which those texts are copied and checked (as well as in all other activities). And at the same time it seems to suggest a ritual procedure, one following, with scrupulous seriousness, an ancient code of conduct in which success is a form of piety and in which failure would entail dire theological consequences. Are we reading too much into this tiny

sculpture to see the man on the right as expressing not only deference toward his superior but also a certain degree of anxiety—as though the only guarantee for the accuracy and transparency of this act of textual transmission and of all the values and institutions that depended upon its success were their unremitting attention to their ancient, tedious, and indispensable labor? After all, the man on the right is younger, and he is still a reader; perhaps, if he does his job very well and is otherwise ordered in his life, he might someday himself become a corrector—and if he does not, he certainly will not. So what is at stake for the man on the right in his scholarly collation is not only the world, the nation, and the future of mankind—but also his own career.

## Writing and Canons

In fact, the practice of collation was oral, and aural, for many centuries, and not only in Confucian China but also in the West. Evidently our prejudices about the nature of collation rest on very limited experience. They reflect practices that came into being in the modern scholarly library, with its rules imposing silence and separation upon its users, and they give a false idea of the way textual work has been carried out in the past, in the Greek and Roman traditions and in others as well. The similarity in the practice of manuscript collation in various cultures separated from one another in space and time is the result of an inherent tension between two widely attested facts: on the one hand, the privilege given by some traditions to certain canonical texts; and on the other, the vicissitudes of the transmission of texts by means of handwriting. Those cultural traditions that have assigned a preeminent importance to a small body of canonical texts—religious, philosophical, literary, legal, observational, and other kinds—have historically faced a perplexing set of problems. For the central role that these texts have played in their institutions has meant that they usually had to be reproduced over and over again—not only because any material bearer was liable to damage over time, but also because empires expanded, institutions proliferated, and users multiplied. And, inevitably, the more often they were reproduced by hand, the more they were altered.

A written record has this advantage over an oral utterance, that it lasts in time beyond the moment of expression, in a physical form independent of the speaker's and listeners' memories. Of course, even an oral utterance can be repeated and propagated (consider rumors); but most often it is subjected to constant modification during the process of its transmission

(the Vedas provide an exception of a remarkably stable oral tradition that proves the general validity of this rule). But writing too has its limitations, for it is restricted to a single spatial location and must be entrusted to an ultimately perishable medium to bear it. For one reason or another—either because the existing copy no longer suffices for the new, spatially dispersed uses to which it is now to be put (usually, new readers), or because it has become damaged over time (by overuse, inadequate materials, or simple old age)—it may become desirable to produce new copies of written texts. Before the age of photographs, photocopies, and scanners, which copy texts by purely mechanical processes simply on the basis of the contrast between lighter areas and darker ones, the only way to produce new copies was to transcribe them by hand from old copies, element for element, most often semantic unit for semantic unit. If greater accuracy of transmission was required, this could be done visually, by a scribe copying onto one new medium the text he saw before his eyes (but the disadvantage was the smaller number of copies that could thereby be produced at the same time from a single exemplar); if on the other hand a large number of copies was sought after, an acoustic procedure could be preferred, whereby the exemplar was read out before a group of scribes who listened to it and copied down, each onto his own medium, what they thought they had heard (at the cost of greater inaccuracy, due to homonyms, distraction, noise, the differences between spelling and pronunciation, and other forms of interference). It is only a guess, but probably a good one, that for most of the history of human culture the normal situation was one which began with a single exemplar to be copied (the source text) and ended up, as result and usually as purpose, with more than one copy of the text (the source text plus the target text, or multiple target texts): transmission normally entailed multiplication. And given that the procedure was performed neither by machines nor by gods but by humans, and that humans err, transmission always entailed variation, and multiplication of copies usually entailed proliferation of variants. And above all, these variants—which, depending on one's point of view and cultural goals, could be regarded either as innovations or as errors—became exponentially more numerous with every further act of copying. So the cultures involved—Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Arabic, Vedic, Chinese, Tibetan, Japanese, and some others—had to deal with a fundamental and potentially deeply unsettling paradox: the texts that were central to many of their most important activities were available to them only in copies that diverged from one another in at least some passages; and the older the originals

were, and the more often they had been copied, the more discrepancies were likely to exist between them.

Comparison reveals that all or almost all cultures of which we have records have developed some of the same techniques and institutions for minimizing the probability of this problem or for dealing with its deleterious consequences when they have come about. Royal libraries and official copies of important texts are found invariably in such cultures; so too are scribal schools, with rigorous professional procedures for training and testing scribes. The restriction of literacy to a small caste of highly trained professionals (and sometimes to their masters) entrusted with access to the canonical texts was one way to limit textual variance in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and elsewhere; what happens when a more widespread and less highly professionalized portion of the populace achieved literacy is demonstrated by the astonishing errors of all sorts that festoon Greek and Latin papyri, graffiti, curse tablets, amulets, magical texts, and other forms of popular culture. So too, various philological techniques for dealing with textual variance once it occurs seem to be very widespread. Methods of copying manuscripts, orally and visually, one by one or in groups, practices of collating manuscripts, usually orally and in pairs (as we have seen), and modes of emendation of manuscripts (erasure, interlinear correction, marginal annotation) have tended to be surprisingly invariant throughout the world and over centuries, at least until recently.

Yet cultures can also differ from one another in their attitude and approach to the problems posed by manuscript variance. The Vedic tradition puts a unique premium upon the ability to memorize exactly extraordinarily extensive classical texts in Sanskrit, thereby in effect reducing the likelihood of textual variation arising and proliferating because of the copying of written exemplars. The Chinese, by contrast, are reported to display a high degree of sangfroid about the differences that obtain among copies of classical texts (which they are said to regard not as errors or as variants but as versions), and yet archaeological, anecdotal, and pictorial evidence suggests that collation of manuscripts did indeed take place, and if so textual variance may well have caused at least some Chinese scholars to feel misgivings. But in any case it is the ancient Greek tradition that seems to have felt the strongest anxiety about divergent copies of texts and to have developed methods earliest and most systematically for dealing with these. Over and over again during the course of antiquity, Greek political leaders established standard collections of important texts —perhaps already in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century

BCE the Athenian tyrant Pisistratus for the epics of Homer, certainly in the latter 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE the Athenian statesman Lycurgus for the texts of the three great Athenian tragedians, and certainly too starting in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE the Ptolemaic kings in Hellenistic Alexandria for all the preceding works of Greek literature thought worth preserving. Such Ptolemaic institutions as the library (the “Mouseion”, a temple of the Muses), the head librarian, the library catalogue, the edition, the commentary, and the monograph went on to become models first for later Greek culture, then for ancient Rome, and then, through the mediation of Rome and Latin, for post-Classical Europe. In the present article I focus first on the edition in general, and then on the critical edition.

### What is an edition?

What is an edition? The words for ‘edition’ in various languages — ἔκδοσις (*ek-dosis*), *e-ditio*, *Aus-gabe*, *ut-gåva*— can provide a helpful hint. For they have in common the suggestion of giving something out to people, of bringing it for them from an inside to an outside, from a place where few can see it, and perhaps not without some difficulty, to another place where many can see it, and with at least somewhat greater convenience.

To put the point drastically, we might say that an edition can be thought of as a mechanism intended to bring people texts from out of an archive in to a market. An archive is like a wine-cellar for words: since what is produced far exceeds the possibilities of immediate consumption, prudence can suggest that the excess (or at least that portion of the excess that is not immediately discarded) should be stored someplace out of the way, where it will not interfere with present needs but can wait patiently until it can be brought out someday to serve future ones. An archive always has rules that restrict access to what is stored in it, to make sure that the texts (the bottles) are not used by the wrong people, at the wrong time, in the wrong way; even public archives are not unconditionally public, to say nothing of private ones. And even if access to the archive can be gained, the texts (the wines) it preserves are not easy to enjoy without special knowledge: often the manuscripts (the vintages) are old and delicate, and for reasons of language, script, or circumstances they can be extremely difficult to read (the wine must be decanted with the greatest care, the taste may require skill and training to be enjoyed). A market, on the other hand, is characterized by the principle (not necessarily the fact) that anyone who has the necessary

money can have unrestricted access to it, can purchase the wares put on display and sale there, and can use them thereafter in whatever way he sees fit.

Why should anyone be willing to go to the trouble of editing a text? Some contingent reasons are evident, no doubt compelling in many cases, and not particularly interesting: editing texts is one way to advance one's career, to make money, to attach one's own small name to someone else's big one, to irritate one's colleagues, to have fun, to learn. In terms of the marketplace, the edition of an author always intervenes into a determinate literary situation and pursues particular intentions with regard to the other books available at any one time and also achieves particular effects that are often quite different from those intentions. But the fundamental purpose in making an edition, what is specific to this activity and characterizes it as such, is to make available texts to which people would not otherwise have access, to put more people into a position to do with these texts things which they could not have done otherwise —above all, to do things that the editor himself could not have possibly envisioned. The editor of a text is like a man who plants a fruit tree that he hopes will continue to bear fruit long after his own death: he is making available a resource, in which he has an interest himself, so that people whom he does not know and who have interests different from (and perhaps even violently opposed to) his own will be able to make use of it for their own ends.

If there exists only one copy of the document in question, it must be published if it is to be used at all by anyone who does not go into the archive himself; if there exist more than one copy of it, then the editor has the separate problem of deciding just which one or ones, in what combination, to publish. The latter situation in particular poses challenging problems, which have much exercised Classical philologists over the last twenty-five centuries. To have only a single source greatly simplified the editor's task: he (it was of course usually a he) could attempt to transcribe it as faithfully as he wished, intervening into the text as he saw fit, so as to correct obvious errors or to effect what he considered to be improvements of various sorts. But what was he to do when he had available two source texts? Given the proliferation of variants, these were bound to differ from one another in their readings, at least occasionally, if they were of any considerable length: on what basis was he to choose which reading to put into the target text? However rarely such a situation occurred —and presumably for many centuries it did not occur frequently except in the largest scriptoria, monasteries,

and libraries— it must have happened regularly enough for a certain set of rule-of-thumb criteria of choice to develop: whichever seemed to be the grammatically or semantically or logically better reading would be preferred from case to case, or both readings could be imported into the target text with or without an expression of greater authorization for one of them. The next step methodologically will have been to give a general preference to the one source text over the other available one whenever possible, either suppressing apparently equipollent readings in the latter or indicating them as inferior alternatives: this will have simplified the editor's task, freeing him from the obligation to apply thought to the choice among variants from case to case and, in effect, reducing once again the number of source texts. But at this point a new question arose: on what basis was the editor to choose which one of the available sources he was to prefer? Over the centuries, various contradictory criteria were developed, each with its own partial and specious justification: the oldest manuscript; the most legible manuscript; the one which appeared to have the most good readings; the one that had the fewest corrections; the one that had the most corrections; the one which derived from an authoritative provenance; the one that was closest to hand; and so forth. And of course even then the editor was still free as he saw fit to make whatever he thought were corrections and other improvements. And the complexities entailed by having two manuscripts were multiplied enormously with every new manuscript that was added to the pile.

As far as we can tell, this was already the situation that obtained in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE among the Alexandrian philologists who worked on Homer. Given that Homer was by far the most important and central text of ancient Greek culture and that many traces of learned commentary on him from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE until the 14<sup>th</sup> century AD have been transmitted, we are in a fairly good position to make informed guesses about what the ancient philologists did with his text —though in fact there has always been much disagreement among modern scholars not only about many details but also about some larger issues, and some of what I present here as being likely is in fact hotly contested.<sup>2</sup>

The centrality of Homer to classical Greek literature and education meant that the philologists who worked on him at the Library in Alexandria had available many manuscripts of his poems, gathered from cities and individuals throughout the Greek world. What did they do with them? From the fragmentary, ambiguous, and sometimes

contradictory ancient sources it is possible to reconstruct, in admittedly a rather schematic (and surely in certain regards greatly oversimplified) form, the following sequence of the names of three literary scholars and to connect them with a set of specific technical terms that designate the distinguishable products of their activities: (1) Antimachus of Colophon (fl. ca. 400 BCE), credited with the first ἔκδοσις (*ekdosis*) of Homer; (2) Zenodotus (fl. ca. 280 BCE), credited with an ἔκδοσις and the first διόρθωσις (*diorthôsis*) of Homer; and (3) Aristarchus (ca. 220–143 BCE), credited with at least one ἔκδοσις and διόρθωσις and with the first ὑπομνήματα (*hypomnêmata*) on Homer.<sup>3</sup>

Let us consider this sequence of scholars and scholarly text genres in a bit more detail.

(1) Antimachus was a learned epic poet who was writing a century or more before the foundation of the Library in Alexandria. A number of ancient scholia refer to an ἔκδοσις under his name, hence one associated with him in some way, either prepared by him or belonging to him or both;<sup>4</sup> but what precisely this ἔκδοσις was is entirely obscure. If we do decide to assign an ἔκδοσις to Antimachus (as the evidence suggests we should), we should nonetheless be very cautious about understanding the term as referring in this case to a scholarly edition based upon standardized philological techniques and conceived with the intention of publishing it; it is likeliest that the references made by ancient scholars to Antimachus' ἔκδοσις are in fact the result of their projecting anachronistically back onto him a terminology that was suitable to their own, later times, but not to his. All that we can be sure of is that there was extant in Alexandria a copy of a version of Homer's poetry that was considered to have been Antimachus'; but we do not know just what the source and nature of that version was. Given that Antimachus was a celebrated poet, and was renowned for his historical knowledge, it is perhaps likeliest that this manuscript was simply the personal copy of Homer's poetry that he himself had owned, and that was regarded as prestigious because of the owner's celebrity and poetic taste. But whether he had purchased it, or had it made for himself, or had made it himself, and if so by what procedures and according to what criteria, we cannot know.

(2) In the case of Zenodotus, we are on somewhat firmer ground.<sup>5</sup> There are scores of references to his edition of Homer in the scholia to that poet, and the Byzantine encyclopedia *Suda* reports that he was the first man to have been a corrector (διορθωτής) of the poems of Homer. With regard to his edition (ἔκδοσις), we are surely dealing with the

product of a set of standardized scholarly practices designed to make available and intelligible a copy of a certain version of Homer's poetry; after all Zenodotus was the first head of the Library at Alexandria, and there is good reason to think that it was considered to be part of his duties not only to collect books, organize them, and ensure their preservation, but also to make available an authoritative edition of the most important of them, those of Homer. As for his correction of it (διόρθωσις), the term used usually designates the process of marking up a finished manuscript, going through it after it has been written and checking it for mistakes of any kind, which are then signaled and corrected by various more or less standardized markings made either on the words involved, between the lines, or in the margins; a proof-reader was called in Greek a διορθωτής (*diorthôtês*), and we can imagine the activity of διόρθωσις as being something along the lines of what proof-readers or copy-editors do (or used to do) in modern printing houses. Thus we may suppose that the absence of any reference to a διόρθωσις by Antimachus means that the edition associated with his name did not bear corrections or marginalia of particular interest, whereas the ἔκδοσις prepared by Zenodotus did. But if this is the case, then the relation between Zenodotus' ἔκδοσις and his διόρθωσις becomes problematic. For how did he prepare his ἔκδοσις? Did he do so himself, by preparing a new copy on the basis of existing ones? That is hardly likely: for if he had made his own copy, why would he have had to correct it? To be sure, one might imagine that he had had a copy prepared by a scribe who copied some existing text, and then went through it himself and corrected its mistakes; but if this was what he had done, we would expect his corrections to be minor rectifications of simple scribal errors and not the very different variants that are reported under his name. So the likeliest explanation is that, out of the very many manuscripts of Homer that Zenodotus acquired for his Library, he selected that already existing one that he thought was the best, or at least the least bad, and then went through it line by line correcting it, in the sense of marking passages he thought were problematic, adding textual variants, marking lines that he thought ought to be deleted, and so forth. On what basis did he perform these activities? Did he work on the basis of comparison with other manuscripts (i.e. did he find the variants in other manuscripts?), and if so was this comparison systematic or inconsistent, or did he work on the basis of his own intuitions, conjectures, and literary taste (i.e. did he propose his own conjectural emendations)? We do not know the answers to these questions for sure, and the reason

is that the ancient Greeks did not know the answers to them either. For evidently Zenodotus simply marked his changes but did not explicitly explain them anywhere in writing (though presumably he did explain them orally in his teaching for his pupils) —it cannot be accidental that there is no evidence that Zenodotus prepared any commentaries or treatises (ὑπομνήματα/ *hypomnēmata*) to which later Greek scholars could have had recourse in order to understand his editorial choices. It seems to me most likely that what Zenodotus did in his edition was some mixture of unsystematic consultation of some other manuscripts on the one hand and divinatory emendation on the other; but even if this should happen to be true, the exact proportion of each ingredient is quite unknown, and some modern scholars have argued vigorously that in fact what he did was all the one or all the other.

(3) It was Aristarchus who seems to have taken the further step of not only preparing an edition (or editions) and correcting it (or them), but also adding to these products of his scholarship various written commentaries or treatises, ὑπομνήματα/*hypomnēmata*, in which he explained in some detail the grounds on which he had made his textual choices.<sup>6</sup> Here too he seems to have selected one manuscript and marked it up, rather than having a new one made on the basis of compilation and comparison of existing manuscripts; but whether this in fact was the case, and if so on what basis he made his choice, is quite uncertain. Some of the evidence seems to suggest, and indeed it is possible, that he performed this procedure twice, choosing at two different times two different manuscripts (or the same one twice?), marking them up, and preparing two sets of commentaries on them; but this too is uncertain, and controversial.

If this schematic reconstruction is correct, then it means that it took at least a century, from the time of Zenodotus in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE to that of Aristarchus in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century, for the scholarly genres of edition, commentary, and monograph that seem so familiar and natural to us today to become differentiated and to develop into something like the forms we know. It was in any case the Alexandrian philologists who bequeathed to later generations of scholars the model of the traditional, pre-critical editions that dominated European culture until the end of the eighteenth century. During this whole period, anyone who wanted to edit an author would take some one manuscript and use that as a guide. Whenever something struck him as odd or mistaken, in any way at all, he could change it if he wished to do so, either by comparing it with one or more other manuscripts that he had access to

(*ope codicum*) or on the basis of his own erudition, intelligence, native wit, or literary taste (*ope ingenii*). Where the manuscript's readings did not bother him, he left them as they were —as they say in America, “If it ain't broke, don't fix it”.

This pre-critical editorial method may sound innocuous, but in fact it never was. Its fundamental defect was not only that it inevitably produced many false positives —that is, passages where some editor thought the transmitted text was mistaken and emended it when in fact it was perfectly acceptable. Far more insidious than this was the fact that this method inevitably produced very many more false negatives — passages that bothered no one but in which in fact the text was unsound. For there is no rational reason to suppose that manuscripts produce nonsense wherever they happen to be mistaken and are correct wherever they happen to agree in a plausible reading. Nonetheless, this remained the only way of editing texts throughout antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Early Modern period.

### **What is a critical edition?**

It was only starting at the end of the eighteenth century, when German scholars were eager to found a new, national science of *Altertumswissenschaft*, one that could lay claim to a much higher degree of scientificity (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*) than earlier or foreign scholars had managed to achieve, that this traditional way of editing texts came to seem unsatisfactory. And it is not accidental that the first and most influential formulation of the new conception of how to edit texts was promulgated in Friedrich August Wolf's *Prolegomena ad Homerum* of 1795, the foundational text of modern Classical philology and *Altertumswissenschaft*. Wolf's treatise, which was intended as a preface to his own edition of Homer, provides in its opening pages a lucid analysis of the differences between pre-critical and critical editions that has gone on to shape all modern theories of text editing.<sup>7</sup> Wolf distinguishes here between two kinds of ways of editing texts: the one is fun and easy, but the other is hard work; the one is useful, but the other is more useful; the one operates by *ope ingenii* and *ope codicum* and is what scholars used to do, but the other laboriously collects all the transmitted readings, compares them with one another, and applies emendation in a consistent manner; the one corrects texts only where the scholar perceives a problem and is ultimately frivolous and desultory, but the other aims at a true, continuous, and systematic examination and evaluation of the evidence;

the one corrects only obvious errors, but the other seeks to determine the author's own text by checking every reading, and not only suspicious ones, and is willing (like a doctor) to substitute less attractive but more genuine readings for attractive but specious ones, examines sources, classifies manuscripts, and (like a judge) assigns them their relative values, and is loath to suggest conjectural emendations without manuscript support. While Wolf does not actually use the term 'critical edition', there can be no doubt that what he meant is what this phrase designates. The difference he establishes between pre-critical and critical editorial practice is sharp and evident: pre-critical editions are top-down, they start with a received authority and gradually change it bit by bit; whereas critical editions are bottom-up, they start with all the surviving witnesses and work their way up until they have reached the witnesses' proximate, and eventually ultimate, sources. This is not only a difference of methodology, it is also one of social standing and ethos: for the pre-critical edition is described in terms of aristocratic ideals, of graceful wit and irresponsible dexterity, while the critical one has all of the bourgeois virtues of hard work and the tedious collection and scrutiny of evidence —it is worth recalling that the years of the preparation and publication of Wolf's *Prolegomena* coincided with the French Revolution. Finally, the goals of the two kinds of edition are widely disparate: the pre-critical edition aims to produce an impeccable text, i.e. one that conforms to the tastes and knowledge of the age of its editor; but the critical edition aims to provide an authentic text, i.e. one that conforms to the tastes and knowledge of the age of its author.

As for the term 'critical edition', I do not in fact know who the first person was who used it. My suspicion is that the term '*editio critica*' was in use for some time before Wolf described the practice in his *Prolegomena* without applying this terminology. But during the years at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, it must have become quite popular, in part because it answered the needs of this post-revolutionary period, in part because it was thereby enabled to acquire some of the prestige of Kant's Critical philosophy. The formula is itself a hybrid typical of its age of transition: for 'critical' suggests the stern and unsparing rational critique of transmitted authority, the characteristic mode of thought of the Enlightenment; but here that 'critical' aspect is directed as a means towards the goal of an 'edition', in a typically Romantic hope of returning somehow to a lost origin, to the classical author's very own text. In any case, this ideal of a critical edition is critical in at least two senses: first in that it considers the textual tradition critically rather than simply trusting it; and second

in that it provides its competent readers with all the materials they need in order to put its own authority into question critically and to improve it by using the means it provides them.

As it happened, Wolf himself never went on to prepare the kind of critical edition of Homer that he had called for in his *Prolegomena*. But over the subsequent decades, his German followers worked out the implications of the theory he had expressed so clearly. The first attempt to provide a thoroughly mechanical and systematic procedure for rationalizing and standardizing the choice among manuscripts, and hence among readings, was developed during the nineteenth century and since the beginning of the twentieth century has been known as ‘Lachmann’s method’ because of its association with Karl Lachmann, a German Classicist who produced celebrated editions of texts in Latin, Greek, and medieval and modern German. ‘Lachmann’s method’ is genealogical and largely mechanical in nature, and aims at providing a standardized, rational procedure for editing texts on the basis of multiple manuscripts, thereby minimizing the editor’s need to rely upon his personal judgment in order to choose among variant readings. Its goal is to determine the filiation of manuscripts, i.e. to ascertain which ones have been copied from which other ones: given that every act of transcription is likely to introduce new errors (for this is how this model understands variants), a manuscript B, if it has been copied mechanically from a manuscript A, will have all the errors that A had (if it does not have all of them, then it has probably corrected some of them during the transcription and hence is likely not to have been copied mechanically after all), and it is also likely to have at least one new error of its own; if this can be shown to be the case, then B can be discarded for the purposes of the constitution of the text it shares with A, since B, compared with A, brings no new information that is not erroneous. Thus, if the manuscripts and groups of manuscripts of a given text can be shown to be related to one another as depicted in the accompanying diagram (Figure 1).

‘Lachmann’s method’ aims to establish a genealogical stemma of transmission by excluding direct copies and determining family relations, and thereby to permit, as far as possible, a purely mechanical choice among variants. The procedure is mechanical, both in the sense that it must presuppose the unthinking transcription of manuscripts if it is to be applied to them and in the sense that the determination of relations of filiation is achieved on the basis of simple rules and calculations of probability. Ideally, choices of manuscripts and of readings based

1. if a reading in group  $\beta$  is identical to the corresponding reading in manuscript C, then this gives us with certainty the reading in group  $\alpha$ .
2. if a reading in manuscript A is identical to the corresponding reading in group  $\alpha$ , then this gives us with certainty the reading in the archetype  $\omega$ .
3. if a reading in group  $\beta$  is different from the corresponding reading in manuscript C but is identical to the reading in manuscript A, then the reading in group  $\beta$  and manuscript A gives us with high probability the corresponding reading in the archetype  $\omega$ .
4. if a reading in group  $\beta$  is different from the corresponding reading in manuscript C but the reading in manuscript C is identical to the reading in manuscript A, then the reading in manuscript C and manuscript A gives us with high probability the corresponding reading in the archetype  $\omega$ .
5. It is only if the corresponding readings in manuscript A, group  $\beta$ , and manuscript C are different from one another that we cannot know with any certainty or even probability what the corresponding reading in the archetype  $\omega$  was.

**Figure 1.**

upon this method will be rational, in that they will depend not upon the taste of the individual scholar, but upon objective evidence that can be mathematized and evaluated; and hence they will be capable of becoming standardized, for any scholar, young or old, inexperienced or expert, should in principle come up with exactly the same results if s/he is given the same information. We may interpret ‘Lachmann’s method’ as a defensive reaction to the proliferation of possible source texts, intended to reduce them to a more manageable number, and can identify it as one important element in the professionalization of Classics during the nineteenth century, since it established rules that all who wished to be recognized as full members of the discipline could be expected to follow so as to produce uniform and hence generally acceptable results.

Within the millennial Western tradition, there seems to be little decisive change in methods and techniques of textual editing until the nineteenth century—even printing, which has attracted so much attention, did not

transform the activity of textual editors as profoundly as some scholars have suggested. It is only in the nineteenth century that the situation in Europe was altered decisively by a series of innovations, such as ease of travel and communications, the pacification and reclamation of parts of Italy and the Eastern Mediterranean, the expansion of the scholarly community, the reorganization of the university and of scientific research, the establishment of the Big Science model for the organization of large-scale industrialized research into antiquity, and the invention of processes for copying texts mechanically without human intervention. ‘Lachmann’s method’ was one particularly notable sign of this transformation; another, closely connected one, was the development of the historical-critical edition, which since the latter part of the nineteenth century has become one of the identifying markers for Western textual philology. Both procedures, and others, can be interpreted as ways in which, within Classical philology, fundamental features of nineteenth-century science become expressed: mechanization, standardization, quantification, historicization, industrialization. Over the course of the past several generations, we have certainly acquired some distance to nineteenth-century science: but we are no less certainly its heirs, and we have not yet learned to understand fully the transformations it produced, let alone to emancipate ourselves from them.

To be sure, ‘Lachmann’s method’ was only one, very extreme and mechanistic version of critical editions. And Lachmann is no longer revered as uncritically as he was during his lifetime and in the following generation. But the concept of a critical edition in this very specific sense—reconstructing a text not on the basis of a single manuscript corrected sporadically, but on that of the systematic collection, examination, classification, and evaluation of all the extant witnesses, including manuscripts, citations, scholia, and other evidence—this concept has remained a pillar of Classical philology (and not only of Classical philology) ever since. It is only from the point of view of this theory of the critical edition that, by contrast, the two Chinese clerks with whom we began can indeed come to seem non-critical or pre-critical. We will be in a better position to understand what they were really up to when we do not simply measure them with the standard of the modern European critical edition but come instead to recognize that Lachmann too, with all his extraordinary legacy, is best understood not as the inevitable culmination of the development of editorial techniques, but as a particularly interesting modern European instantiation of a long-drawn-out and still ongoing process of grappling with texts.

## Notes

1. <http://www.hnmuseum.com/hnmuseum/eng/collection/collectionContent1.jsp?infoId=011198a6ecba40288483118d94210484#>

See also cover picture *Canonical Texts and Scholarly Practices: A Global Comparative Approach*, ed. by Anthony Grafton and Glenn W. Most (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

2. The basic study remains Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship from the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968); for an up-to-date survey of all the issues, with rich bibliography, see *Brill's Companion to Ancient Greek Scholarship*, ed. by Franco Montanari, Stefanos Matthaios, and Antonios Rengakos, 2 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2015), especially Fausto Montana, 'Hellenistic Scholarship', pp. 60–183; Markus Dubischar, 'Typology of Philological Writings', pp. 545–599; and Franco Montanari, 'Ekdosis. A Product of the Ancient Scholarship', pp. 637–672.

3. On the difficulties of understanding precisely what is meant by the terms ἔκδοσις and διόρθωσις, see Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship*, pp. 71–72, 94, 110, 122, 215–16, 277. I omit from this list of Alexandrian scholars Aristophanes of Byzantium (ca. 257–180 BCE), who was extremely important for the history of ancient Greek philology in other regards but not for innovations with regard to the typology of editions and other scholarly writings on Homer (see on him Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship*, pp. 172–209, especially 172–181).

4. Cf. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship*, pp. 93–94.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 105–119, especially 105–117.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 210–233, especially 214–218.

7. See Friedrich August Wolf, *Prolegomena to Homer* (1795), trans. and ed. Anthony T. Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and James E.G. Zetzel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 43–45.

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