

## Critical Editing

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In inviting me to give this opening paper of your conference the organizers have done me a perplexing honour. Of all those who are going to speak over the next couple of days, I am certainly the one who knows least about the Septuagint and the problems of editing it. I am truly not qualified to speak about the Septuagint at all. So I shall have to talk about other things, and try to create a perception that they have some possible relevance to the great task which those of you involved in the Göttinger Septuaginta-Edition have taken upon yourselves.

If I cannot say anything about the Septuagint, I can say something about editing, and that is what I have undertaken to do. So the conference can begin from contemplation of general principles and later proceed to the more particular issues that arise in their application. It occurs to me that lecture courses in Germany often begin with a substantial and profound discussion of *Methode*. The typical English approach is rather different. We tend not to talk about methodology but simply to tackle each problem as we come to it with whatever method seems appropriate to the case. But I am in Germany.

It is true (as some of you know) that I am the author of a small treatise on textual criticism and editorial technique, which I wrote at the invitation of a German publisher.<sup>1</sup> In it I did speak about method, and indeed I said there more or less everything I have to say on the subject. The book is now 35 years old, but the principles have not changed. If I were rewriting it today, I would state them in much the same way. But I have over these 35 years acquired greater experience of editing a variety of Greek texts, in which I encountered many different problems and different types of problem, and I would now be able to illustrate the fundamental principles with a wider range of examples. Among other texts I have edited the plays of Aeschylus, the Homeric *Iliad*, and fragments of ancient Greek music. The transmission of the Homeric text has some features that may be of interest to editors of the Septuagint, and the task of producing a usable critical edition of a text for which there is such a multitude of sources presents analogous challenges to those that editors of the Septuagint have to face. I may return to this later.

I have also studied, though not edited, various ancient texts in other languages than Greek or Latin, where the processes of transmission have been somewhat different. I think it may be refreshing to widen our perspective by saying something about them and about what is involved in producing critical editions of them.

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1 M. L. WEST, *Textual Criticism and Editorial Technique applicable to Greek and Latin texts*, Stuttgart 1973.

For me there is no kind of book more satisfying to use than a good critical edition of an ancient text. What do we mean by a good critical edition? I would define it as an edition that presents the text in a form established by the editor after applying intelligent and informed judgement, accompanied by a critical apparatus that provides the necessary supplementary information about the sources for the text, the significant variants, and the best available proposals for the solution of problems. What, then, is an uncritical edition? There are several ways in which an edition might be uncritical, but the essential factor is that the editor (or consortium of editors) takes over what is given by the manuscripts or in previous editions without adequate scrutiny and consideration. ‘Critical’ comes from the Greek *κριτικός*, which is a derivative of the verb *κρίνω*: it implies being discriminating, making judgements and decisions, and making judgements and decisions implies considering alternatives. Some of the options to be considered will be presented by the manuscript tradition itself, insofar as it is characterized by variant readings. Others will be presented by the work of previous scholars who have identified problems and proposed solutions. Others again may become apparent after a fresh, intensive study of the text, or after fresh reflection on the history of the transmission.

I should like to stress the need for the editor to maintain an awareness of all the stages of transmission that the text has gone through from the beginning, and not only during the period covered by the surviving sources. Of course our knowledge of the earlier stages may be more or less hypothetical, but it is important to form such conceptions of them as can be formed on the basis of incidental evidence or general historical conditions. For example, we know that when classical tragedies were revived in the later fifth or the fourth century, actors or producers were liable to interpolate lines, passages, or occasionally whole scenes. The editor of a tragedy must bear this fact in mind and be prepared to consider that a conspicuously redundant or over-rhetorical passage, or one that interrupts a coherent train of thought, may be such an interpolation.

One of the great strengths of Wilamowitz was his perpetual awareness of the nature of the whole tradition. His famous edition of Euripides’ *Herakles* (1889) was prefaced by an entire volume of introduction, the wonderful *Einleitung in die attische Tragödie* (he later modified the title to *Einleitung in die griechische Tragödie*), which contains a hundred pages on the history of the text of the tragedians, ‘Geschichte des Tragikertextes’, starting from the poets themselves and their preparation of their plays in book form, and going on through the centuries, concluding with ‘consequences for *recensio* and *emendatio* for the editor of Euripides’. Eleven years later, in 1900, he published as an *Abhandlung* of the Göttingen Academy a shorter but again a marvellous book with the surprising title *Die Textgeschichte der griechischen Lyriker*. Why is that a surprising title? Because apart from Pindar’s Epinician odes, the books of the lyric poets have not survived; we know their work only in fragments. Wilamowitz was the first to write a history of the transmission of texts that are lost. He did it with such sovereign learning, skill, and insight that the fact that these texts did not make it into the Middle Ages seems almost incidental.

To illustrate how this panoptic consciousness of the tradition may have consequences for the detail of a text, let me draw your attention to what is in my view one of the most elegant emendations ever made in a classical text. It was made here in Göttingen by Wilamowitz. Aristotle in the first book of his *Metaphysics* describes the atomist theory of Leukippos and Demokritos, and explains that atoms, according to them, may differ among themselves in three ways: in shape, contiguity, or orientation. This is illustrated using letters of the alphabet: *A* differs from *N* in shape; *AN* differs from *NA* in contiguity; and *Z* differs from *N* in orientation (that is, it has the same shape rotated through 90 degrees). Or so the manuscripts give it. Wilamowitz, in the same year as his *Herakles* appeared, published his fourth *Commentariolum grammaticum* in the Index scholarum for the winter semester of 1889/90. In it he deals with a multitude of problems in various authors. He disposes of the Aristotle passage in seven lines, two of which are taken up in quoting the text.<sup>2</sup> In the remaining five lines he points out that the statement that *Z* differs from *N* in orientation is true in the script that prevailed after the first century BCE, but that in Aristotle's time *Z* had a different shape, with a central upright; when rotated through 90 degrees it became not *N* but *H*. Aristotle had therefore written, 'Z differs from *H* in orientation'. In the course of transmission, when copyists began to write the *Z* in its later shape, someone noticed that the statement did not seem to be true as it stood, and he made what seemed the obvious correction of the *H* to a *N*. So the text was falsified; and the falsification was only discoverable by someone who asked himself how these letters were written in Aristotle's time, and who knew the answer from his study of inscriptions.

I said I would widen the perspective by speaking about some non-classical texts and their transmission. I will begin with one that has made some impact on Biblical studies: the Epic of Gilgamesh. It was from this source that scholars first learned of the Mesopotamian Flood myth, though we now know it from an older and more original poem, *Atraḫasis*. That was in 1872. Since then more and more manuscripts of the Gilgamesh epic have been found, and they continue to be found. The manuscripts are of course clay tablets written in cuneiform. Since 2003 we have the magnificent, monumental edition by Andrew George, which enables us to survey the material and assess the problems of editing it.<sup>3</sup>

In his preface (v) George writes, 'This book is fundamentally a work of textual reconstruction. It seeks to establish an accurate text of the Babylonian Gilgameš.' But what is 'the Babylonian Gilgameš', and what is an 'accurate' text? The epic evolved over a period of centuries, probably from oral origins. The first written version dates from the Old Babylonian period, about the 18th century BCE. Sometime in the later second millennium a revised and considerably expanded recension

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- 2 U. VON WILAMOWITZ-MOELLENDORFF, *Commentariolum grammaticum* IV, in: *AKADEMIEN DER WISSENSCHAFTEN ZU BERLIN UND GÖTTINGEN* (ed.), Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff. *Kleine Schriften*. Vol. IV: *Lese Früchte und Verwandtes*, Berlin 1962, 660–696 (= *Ind. Schol. Hib. Göttingae* 1889, 3–28), here 695 (= 27); *Arist. Metaph.* 985b18.
  - 3 A. GEORGE, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*. Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts, Oxford 2003.

was made, probably by the incantation-priest and master scribe *Šîn-lēqi-unninni*. This was, or became, what is known as the Standard Babylonian Version, and it is the version represented by the great majority of the known manuscripts. But it is not simply a matter of two different recensions. There are eleven tablets dating from the earlier second millennium and assigned to the Old Babylonian Gilgamesh. But while they agree, so far as can be seen, in the plan of the poem and the sequence of episodes, where a given episode survives in more than one manuscript they show considerable divergences. It appears that already at this period there were variant versions. George considers that some of them may represent different oral performances that the scribes had heard and remembered.

Then there are a number of manuscripts from later in the second millennium, from various widely separated areas, not only in southern and northern Mesopotamia but also from sites in Syria, Palestine, and the Hittite capital Hattusas in central Anatolia; there are also fragments of translations or paraphrases in two other languages, Hurrian and Hittite. This Middle Babylonian material occupies an intermediate position between the Old Babylonian and the later Standard versions. Some of the copies are closer to the one, some closer to the other; one contains a passage not known from either. 'To sum up,' George writes (27), 'the Middle Babylonian period, even more than the Old Babylonian period, is characterized by a proliferation of different versions of the epic, both in Babylonia and abroad.'

From the first millennium there are 184 fragments, from 73 different manuscripts, that represent the Standard Babylonian Version. But there are also a few from Assyria, and showing Assyrian dialect features, that do not fit very well into the canonical text. In George's view they are relics of one or more Babylonian editions that predated the Standard one. But even the manuscripts of the Standard version by no means present a uniform text. There are variations in the order of lines; expansions or contractions of the text; variant forms of lines; transpositions of words or phrases, or their replacement by others of similar meaning; differences of grammatical form; variant spellings reflecting differences of dialect or pronunciation.

How is the editor to proceed in such a situation? His primary duty is to put the evidence before the public, and George has done that in exemplary fashion. Obviously not all the variant forms of the text are of equal value and significance. On the other hand it is impossible to identify one version that is uniquely 'correct' or authentic; there is no single common archetype to be reconstructed. The Standard Babylonian Version of *Šîn-lēqi-unninni* is the nearest thing to it, and one may aim at an approximation to that. But the Old and Middle Babylonian fragments and the eccentric Assyrian ones cannot be accommodated in that frame; they have each to be edited separately. What we have of the Standard version is itself an assemblage of fragments, adding up to perhaps two thirds of the complete original. The manuscript attestation changes from line to line; sometimes there are several manuscripts preserving the line in question, sometimes just one. In his edition George prints beside each line the sigla of the manuscripts that have it (or part of

it), and he reports the variants in the critical apparatus below the text. The text that he presents (not in cuneiform but in transliteration) is, as he acknowledges (443), ‘necessarily eclectic, bringing together in a single reconstruction the readings of very different manuscripts. In much of the Standard Babylonian epic the choice of extant manuscripts for any given line of text is very limited. By consequence poor or atypical spellings often find their way into the eclectic transliteration in the absence of better readings, as do some corruptions. In fragmentary passages some words are necessarily hybrid, combining the evidence of different manuscripts. ... As is normally the case in Assyriology, the result is an idealized, hybrid text. The epic presented ... is essentially a modern construct built from ancient evidence, not the authentic text of the Standard Babylonian epic at one moment in its transmission.’

It is difficult to find fault with this procedure. The spellings regarded as poor or atypical might be avoided by substituting better and more regular ones, giving the text a more uniform orthography and no doubt bringing it closer to the text of *Sîn-lēqi-unninni*. But that would take up more space in the critical apparatus; and when it is acknowledged that the edition is more a composite display of the manuscript evidence than a serious attempt at a reconstruction of the original, such an exercise would have little point. George’s work is entitled *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic. Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*. Its claim to be a true critical edition cannot be denied.

I turn to a text which, if not as old as the *Gilgamesh Epic*, is not many centuries younger and considerably more extensive: the *Rigveda*. Here the situation is very different. Instead of an incomplete assemblage of overlapping fragments and a bewildering variety of different recensions made at different periods, we have in the *Rigveda* a complete corpus of over a thousand hymns to different deities, preserved from the late second or early first millennium BCE with a more or less complete absence of variants. How can this be, particularly as the transmission was for many centuries exclusively oral and has remained primarily oral? The answer is that the *Rigveda* is a sacred text, and at an early date it was resolved to preserve it *verbatim*. From that time on, rishi taught it to rishi, and great pains were taken to ensure that it was recited correct in every syllable. The written tradition has remained subordinate. It is not literally the case that there are no textual discrepancies among the manuscripts, but according to those who have studied them they consist only of trivial errors and omissions and orthographical variants. To all intents and purposes it is a uniform text that is transmitted. Moreover, beside the *Samhitā* text, that is, the poetic text itself, there has been transmitted the *Pada* text, in which each word is given separately in its independent form, with compounds analysed into their elements. This was the work of an ancient interpreter named Śākalya. He made occasional mistakes in analysing the *Samhitā* text—he misdivided the words in one or two places—but the text he used is identical to the *Samhitā* text that has been transmitted in parallel. We also have interpretations and commentaries by a series of Indian scholars going back to the fifth century BCE, and they all presuppose the

same text. This perfect agreement shows that the text has been preserved virtually unchanged from perhaps 600 BCE.

However, it is not altogether true that there are no variants, because many verses and stanzas of the Rigveda recur in other Vedas, the Atharvaveda, Yajurveda, and Samaveda, often in variant form. Hermann Oldenberg in the Prolegomena to his edition<sup>4</sup> made a careful study of these variants and came to the conclusion that they are nearly always inferior and secondary. But in a very small number of instances he allowed that they are superior to the standard text. This is not a conclusion that Vedic scholars necessarily accept. But in any case they are variants, which might in principle be reported and evaluated by an editor of the Rigveda.

Otherwise, what is there for an editor to do? Clearly he must reproduce the inherited text accurately, whether in the Devanāgarī script or in Roman transliteration. But that is not really a critical endeavour. How can a critical editor of the Rigveda distinguish himself from an uncritical one?

The standard edition used by Western scholars is the one by B. A. Nooten and G. B. Holland published in 1994 in the Harvard Oriental Series: *Rig Veda. A Metrically Restored Text with an Introduction and Notes*. As the subtitle indicates, the text has been subjected to critical activity: it has been ‘metrically restored’. In the preface by Michael Witzel we read that this edition ‘presents the text, for the first time, in the form in which we have desired to see it for more than one hundred and twenty years; namely, as a metrical text, and in a phonetic shape that is very close to the form in which it was composed more than 3000 years ago.’

Metrical restoration was indeed the main form of attention that the text needed. To the holy men who handed these hymns down from mouth to mouth, what mattered most was their precise wording; and so it came about that an archaic form of Sanskrit was faithfully preserved through the millennia with its entire grammatical system and its entire accentual system intact. The fact that the language was preserved so exactly is a further guarantee of the accuracy of the transmission and the antiquity of the poems. However, in oral transmission over the generations it is impossible to avoid gradual changes of pronunciation under the influence of changes slowly taking place in the spoken language. In Sanskrit this involved such almost imperceptible changes as *iya* > *ya*, *uwa* > *wa*, in each case with a reduction from two syllables to one; or the contraction of adjacent vowels, as in *Indrāgnī* for *Indra Agnī*, again with the loss of a syllable. Since the counting of syllables is an essential feature of the Vedic metres, these small changes of pronunciation corrupted the metre, and in some cases fused two verses into one by eliminating the hiatus between them. But the reciters were concerned with the words, and if the words came with a metrical irregularity, that was how they must be chanted. An editor who wishes to present the Rigveda as it is accepted by Hindus and as it has been heard for most of its existence may print it with the vowel contractions and the defective metre. One who wishes to restore the words and metres to their

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4 H. OLDENBERG, *Die Hymnen des Ṛigveda*. Band 1: *Metrische und textgeschichtliche Prolegomena*, Berlin 1888, 271–369.

original forms must make the many hundreds of small adjustments to the text that the Harvard editors have made. They are easy and mostly uncontroversial, and they can be indicated by typographical means in the text itself without the need for a critical apparatus. The Harvard edition does not have an apparatus, only a metrical commentary following the text, in which a certain number of metrical emendations are mentioned and discussed.

Although the text of the Rigveda has been so very well preserved, it is not quite perfect, even when the metrical corrections have been made. I have mentioned that a small handful of better readings are perhaps to be found (at least in the opinion of some scholars well qualified to judge) when verses are taken over into the other Vedas. There may also be occasional cases where necessary or worthwhile emendations have been made by modern scholars. A Vedic verse as recited is a continuous stream of sound, which in a printed text has to be divided into separate words. As I have mentioned, the ancient analysis given by the *Pada* text occasionally needs to be corrected by redividing the words or resolving vowel contractions differently. A few errors of accentuation too have apparently occurred, to the detriment of the sense.

The Sanskrit text has no punctuation, except that dividers are used to separate verses. Those modern editors who have produced texts in transliteration have refrained from adding punctuation and from distinguishing proper names by capitalized initials. I see no merit in this convention. In editing Greek or Latin texts it is accepted that the editor will provide these aids to the reader's comprehension, capitalizing names and punctuating in whatever way best clarifies the sense, regardless of what the manuscripts do. Why not do the same with an Indian text? It may be argued that punctuation and capitalization prejudice the interpretation. But an editor may be expected to have formed his opinions on the articulation and interpretation of the text, and it is unhelpful to the user of the edition to withhold from him all indication of what those opinions are.

The Harvard edition of the Rigveda is undoubtedly the best and most convenient for the Western student. But it does not in my view fulfil all the requirements of a truly critical edition. It contains no account of the history of the text and the sources for it, and no critical apparatus. Its unpunctuated text does not reveal what thought, if any, has been given to its meaning; it appears as a text mechanically copied and mechanically made metrical. Even on its own terms it does not have the perfect accuracy that might have been expected. In one hymn (9.67) three stanzas are accidentally omitted, and elsewhere there are occasional omissions of diacritics or errors of accentuation.

From the Rigveda I turn to another, much smaller ancient collection of sacred poetry, in which the problems are to some extent similar but in some respects more complex: I refer to the foundation texts of the Zoroastrian religion, the seventeen poems that make up the *Gāthās* (or 'Songs') of Zarathushtra. These are the oldest texts in the Avesta and indeed the oldest in any Iranian language, though probably not quite as old as the Rigveda. Like the Rigveda, they were transmitted orally for many centuries before being written down, and here again they were transmitted

with extraordinary fidelity. The text did undergo changes of pronunciation over the centuries, resulting in some superficial disruption of the metres. But the archaic vocabulary and grammar, only half understood by those who recited and heard the poems, were preserved intact. Evidently it was the case in Iran, as in India, that from an early date the priests committed their sacred poetry to memory and recited it or chanted it on the appropriate ritual occasions. They could not write it down because the country they lived in was illiterate. Until the Parthian period there existed, with one exception, no means of writing down any Iranian language; the exception was the customized cuneiform syllabary which the Achaemenid kings from the time of Darius I used for their royal inscriptions, but this had no wider currency.

It was the Sasanian kings who set in motion the project of drawing up a canon of sacred texts and recording them in writing. This began under Ardashir in the third century CE. But the task of reducing the mass of available material to order and producing an authoritative text extended over many generations. The oral tradition still retained the highest prestige. It was only in the reign of Khosrow I in the sixth century that a definitive edition of the Avesta was established.

In order to record it in writing a special alphabet had been devised, and this is what is used in our manuscripts. It was based on the Pahlavi alphabet, but the number of characters was more than doubled, to a total of fifty-three, in order to reflect meticulously every distinct phonetic nuance that was audible in the oral recitations by the priests. However, the priests' pronunciation had gradually changed over the centuries, to the point where it would have sounded very strange to Zarathushtra. This Sasanian pronunciation is what our written text reflects.

The manuscripts, the oldest of which were written in the fourteenth century, offer a virtually uniform text; the divergences among them are practically confined to trivial matters of orthography or casual error. However, the agreement of the manuscripts is no guarantee of a reliable text, because they all derive from an archetype copy made around 1000 CE, that is, five or six hundred years later than the Sasanian prototype. In the course of that time mistakes had crept in.

Since 1896 all study of the Avesta has been based on the great edition by Karl Geldner.<sup>5</sup> It gives the text in Avestan script and a substantial critical apparatus giving variants from some fifty manuscripts. The introduction provides a clear account of what can be reconstructed of the history of the manuscript tradition.

More recent editors such as Humbach, Insler, and Kellens-Pirart<sup>6</sup> have printed texts in transliteration. None of them, however, provides anything like a proper critical apparatus. Humbach and Kellens-Pirart give no variants with their texts, though they discuss some in their commentaries. Most of the notes below Insler's text consist of the emended readings that he advocates in preference to what he

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5 K. F. GELDNER (ed.), *Avestā. The Sacred Books of the Parsis*, Stuttgart 1896.

6 H. HUMBACH, *Die Gathas des Zarathustra*, Heidelberg 1959; H. HUMBACH, *The Gāthās of Zarathushtra and the other Old Avestan texts*, Heidelberg 1991; S. INSLER, *The Gāthās of Zarathustra* (*Acta Iranica* 8), Teheran/Liege 1975; J. KELLENS / E. PIRART, *Les textes vieil-avestiques*, Wiesbaden 1988–1991.



has printed in the text; the emendations are mainly his own, but he never indicates their authors. His other notes merely identify manuscripts from which he has taken a non-standard variant. We still have to go back to Geldner for fuller information.

I should like to see a new critical edition, with a transliterated text reflecting the current state of linguistic knowledge and an apparatus constituted on more critical principles.<sup>7</sup> Many of the manuscripts reported by Geldner are of no importance and might as well be discarded, and most of the readings cited are banal errors and orthographical variants: it is good that they have been collected and recorded, but they are of no significance for the constitution of the text and should not be allowed to clutter up the apparatus. It should concentrate on such variants as represent real alternatives, for example where the manuscripts offer a choice between an active and a middle verb ending. It should include at least a selection of scholars' conjectures for the improvement of the text. The edition should also supply information on the indirect tradition, by which I mean quotations and imitations of Gāthic passages in the Younger Avesta and Pahlavi writings. These reflect an earlier state of the text than the archetype of the extant manuscripts and might in principle supply a better text, or at any rate an old variant that ought to be considered.

It may sound as if I am calling for this Avestan text to be edited in just the same way as a Greek or Latin work is edited. But there is a fundamental problem with it. From the manuscripts we can extract an approximation to the Sasanian text. Geldner held that that should be the limit of the editor's ambition. But we should really like to be able to get back to the original poems of Zarathushtra. The Sasanian text, as I have said, seems to preserve their substance and their vocabulary and grammar with extraordinary fidelity. But their phonology has been deformed by more than a thousand years of oral transmission. Many words appear with more syllables than they should have to fit the metre, and others with fewer. We can usually see how to correct the metre by restoring older forms, just as the Harvard editors have done in the Rigveda. But it is not possible to restore the authentic original form of the *Gāthās* from the Sasanian text. We do not have an accurate enough knowledge of the state of the language in Zarathushtra's time. What is feasible and useful is to make an illustrative reconstruction in a hypothetical form of early Avestan that fits the metres. This was done by Monna in her edition of 1978.<sup>8</sup> But clearly one could not present such a hypothetical text in place of the Sasanian text and say 'this is my edition of the *Gāthās*'. One would have to do as Monna did, and print the two side by side. This at once clarifies the underlying metrical form of the text, and, where anomalies of versification remain, that may indicate where further textual intervention is called for.

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7 See M. L. WEST, On Editing the *Gāthās*, in: *Iran* 46 (2008), 121–134. *Added in proof*: I have now provided an edition as an appendix to M. L. WEST, *Old Avestan Syntax and Stylistics* (AAWG N.F 13), Berlin et al. 2011.

8 M. C. MONNA, *The Gathas of Zarathustra. A Reconstruction of the Text*, Amsterdam 1978.

The linguistic dress in which the main text should be printed, then, is that of the Sasanian text. The editor is entitled to remove those late spellings which can be seen to postdate the Sasanian archetype, where older and younger spellings exist side by side in the manuscript tradition. But he should aim at more than a reconstruction of the Sasanian archetype, because that archetype, or what can be reconstructed of it, contains manifest corruptions. He should be prepared to print an emended text where he judges that an emendation is certain or highly probable, and, as in a classical text, he should print an obelus in cases where he considers the text to be corrupt but no convincing solution is available. He should punctuate the text so as to indicate how he construes it, how the clauses and sentences should be divided, which sentences are questions, which nouns are best treated as names, and so on. Most users of the edition will prefer to have his guidance in these matters rather than being left to make their own decisions from scratch. They are after all free to dissent from his punctuation, just as they are free to dissent from his choice of readings. It is up to them to exercise their prerogative of independent thought.

I have said that a new critical edition should include at least a selection of scholars' conjectures. Among modern editors of the *Gāthās*, Stanley Insler has been the most active in the field of conjectural criticism. He certainly resorts to emendation too readily. But he deserves much credit for being prepared to recognize problems and for trying to solve them. In the introduction to his edition he sets out a typology of copying errors based on observation of the variations found in the extant manuscripts, and he uses this as the basis of his textual criticism. Among the commonest types of error he finds assimilation of endings between neighbouring words, misdivision of words, changes due to the influence of a similar passage elsewhere, and replacement of rare forms by more familiar ones. The last two of these types may well have occurred already in the oral tradition, but all of them are characteristic also of the written transmission of Greek and Latin texts. So Insler is following a method long familiar to classicists, but he is the first to apply it systematically and explicitly to the textual criticism of the *Gāthās*.

I became fascinated by the *Gāthās* several years ago, and I have studied them closely. I do not have a deep enough grounding in Iranian philology to make an edition of them myself—I would if I could—but I have laboured over a translation, and in my earnest struggles to make sense of these difficult documents I have been moved to emend the text in a number of places. I wrote up a series of my conjectures and submitted them to a suitable journal. The editor referred them to an expert in the field, who criticized my approach on four grounds, none of which convinces me that conjectural criticism of these texts is illegitimate in principle. I paraphrase them as follows:

(1) Classical philology deals with written traditions, whereas the Avestan tradition was for over a thousand years purely oral, and classical philology provides no model for determining how a text might change in those conditions.

(2) Religious texts like the Rigveda or the *Gāthās* remained in the possession of the priesthood and were protected from alteration by their links with cult. No doubt this provided some safeguard. But the situation with the Avesta is not com-

parable to the more or less perfect transmission of the Rigveda. The Zoroastrian community suffered severe disruption following the Islamic conquest of Iran, and the greater part of the Avesta was lost altogether. What survived, clearly did not survive in pristine condition. The faulty nature of the transmission is most glaringly evident in the *Gāthās* from two omissions that leave a defective stanza structure. In one poem (*Yasna* 46) a line is missing from one of the five-line stanzas. In another (*Yasna* 53) two stanzas have become conflated, with the loss of three and a half lines. In other places the metre within the line indicates that a word has been interpolated with the aim of clarifying the meaning.

(3) The wording of the Avesta is supported by the testimony of the Pahlavi translation transmitted with it, which draws on a long-standing school tradition. But it is admitted that this Pahlavi exegesis shows extensive ignorance of Avestan grammar and inflexions and is often mistaken as regards the content. It may take us back to an earlier period than the extant manuscripts, but it is obviously inadequate to guarantee the integrity of the underlying text.

(4) The Avestan corpus is too small to permit a full understanding of the linguistic and stylistic norms that govern it, and we cannot take the risk of unnecessarily reducing the usable evidence by casting doubt on transmitted forms and promoting conjectures on which it would be unsafe to base any conclusions. This is a fundamentally unsound argument. If, on critical inspection, a passage arouses suspicion that it is corrupt, that may indeed make it unreliable as evidence for the language, but we do not preserve its reliability by suppressing our suspicions. It is certain that the text has not reached us in a completely pure and uncorrupted state, and whatever use we want to make of it, whether to analyse the language or to understand Zarathushtra's thought, it is clearly desirable, so far as possible, to purge it of such errors as may have infected it in the course of transmission.

The expert concluded that while my 'wagemutiges Engagement' deserved acknowledgment, on grounds of method the acceptance of my paper for publication could not be recommended.<sup>9</sup> In classical circles my *Wagemut* as a textual critic is well known and often deprecated. But I believe it is more fruitful to err in this direction, as a result of observing difficulties in a text and looking for solutions, than to make a policy of accepting whatever the manuscripts offer and resisting any proposal for emendation. The fact that conjectures of mine in over fifty Greek authors have been accepted by other editors does not prove that those conjectures were all correct, but it does indicate that in making them I was doing something useful and not just playing a game.

My friend and former colleague Barrie Hall has recently published (with two collaborators) a new edition of Statius' *Thebaid*<sup>10</sup> in which there appear a huge number of Hall's own conjectures, sometimes as many as six on a single page. In

9 The conjectures have appeared in the article cited in n. 7 above.

10 J. B. HALL (ed.), P. Papinius Statius, Vol. 1: *Thebaid* and *Achilleid*. In collaboration with A. L. Ritchie and M. J. Edwards, Newcastle 2007.

the preface, in answer to critics who complain of editors putting conjectures in the text, he writes:

We do not print conjectures unless we believe them to be necessary, that is to say, unless we think that the text, however intelligible it may seem to some to be, is not what Statius left behind; and not to print conjectures when we deem them necessary seems to us to be an act of moral cowardice and dereliction of critical duty. In any case, for practical purposes, conjectures confined to the apparatus are left disregarded by most people; and not to remind people of their duty to think hard about what the editor deems necessary is another act of dereliction. ... But even rejected conjectures may have their utility, if only that of drawing attention to an anomalous or obscure usage; and all scholars are entitled to know what conjectures have previously been made.

Future editors of the *Thebaid* will perhaps reject the majority of Hall's conjectures. But because he has given critical thought to the text, pointed to what he sees as difficulties, and proposed solutions, his edition will remain one that they will have to consult systematically with particular attention.

The Homeric *Iliad* is not a text that offers much scope for emendation, except as regards the identification of small-scale interpolations by rhapsodes. The medieval manuscript tradition is abundant and of high quality; in addition there are fragments of over 1500 papyri, thousands of ancient quotations, and rich scholia that preserve much information about the readings known to or favoured by the ancient scholars at Alexandria, Pergamum, or Rome. Consequently we can follow the history of the text back into the Hellenistic period and feel some confidence that we know what was usually read at that time in any given passage. The number of places where we stop and say 'this does not make sense; it cannot be right; the text must be corrupt' is vanishingly small. Most editors have not found any; the obelus or crux which in editions of other authors is printed from time to time as a marker of an unhealed corruption was never seen in editions of Homer until my Teubner *Iliad*,<sup>11</sup> and even there it appears in no more than 21 places.

The problems of editing Homer are mainly of other kinds. First there is the problem of defining what historical entity the editor is aiming to recover. Is it the *Iliad* as its original poet left it, or the *Iliad* as it was known to Greeks of the classical period? Of course I wanted to establish the form of the original poem. But it was necessary to compromise. I could not, for example, omit Book 10 (the Doloneia), which most scholars agree to be a later addition; it was clearly known as part of the *Iliad* from an early period. The same applies to other, shorter interpolated passages that appear in all sources. They have to remain in the text, though bracketed, so that they can be seen in the contexts in which they were interpolated and in which they have been read ever since.

Then there are the problems of choosing between variant readings which in many cases are known to be ancient. It is an awkward fact that the further back we can see in the Homeric tradition, the less uniform the text appears; the earliest papyri and quotations, before about 150 BCE, show the greatest divergences from the

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11 M. L. WEST (ed.), *Homeri Ilias*, 2 Vol. (BSGRT), Stuttgart/Leipzig/München 1998–2000.

vulgate text, often with extra verses or different phrasing. Other variants, usually of a less extravagant nature, are reported from the editions of Alexandrian scholars. How are we to choose among them? Some editors, such as van Thiel,<sup>12</sup> follow the medieval tradition closely, seeing it as the faithful successor of an ancient vulgate which is to be trusted above all else. Variants from papyri or quotations they reject as aberrations, and readings attested for ancient scholars they reject as conjectures. This is illogical. Many of the ancient variants are erratic and worthless, but this cannot be true of all of them. We cannot assume that our medieval vulgate, because it is familiar, is safe and sound and all ancient variants dangerous and unsound. There is no guarantee that all the best variants current in ancient texts were channelled into the line of tradition that reached Byzantium. Sometimes the medieval vulgate disagrees with the consensus of the 'best' copies known to Didymus in the time of Augustus. We must therefore consider all variants on their merits, judging them in the light of our knowledge of Homeric usage and of the vicissitudes of the transmission, especially the tendency to modernize, and applying the standard canons of textual criticism. The medieval tradition derives from a late ancient source (or sources), and it was a good source; but it was only one among others.

A further question is how far it is legitimate to regularize the linguistic dress in which the poems appear, and to restore older forms than those given by the manuscripts. In certain cases more archaic forms appear in some passages and their more modern equivalents in others. It is certainly possible that the poet was inconsistent. But as we know that the tradition was subject to creeping modernization, I take the view that we are more likely to hit the truth by generalizing the ancient forms attested in some passages than by ascribing the inconsistency of the tradition to the poet. Early verse inscriptions can also be drawn upon as evidence of the state of the epic language at the relevant period.

Apart from the problems of constituting the text, how is the editor to draw up a critical apparatus that will provide adequate information about the sources for the text without occupying almost the whole page and drowning the user in a deluge of data? It is clear that he must be selective in reporting variants, omitting those that seem to be meaningless errors or simple mis-spellings, even if they come in an ancient papyrus or a good codex. He must use an economical system for identifying the sources cited. In modern editions of the Septuagint and the New Testament, where the number of manuscripts used is very large, the convenient system has established itself of labelling them not with sigla of the traditional kind based on letters of the alphabet but simply with numerals, and I adopted this solution for the papyri of the *Iliad*, which are now so numerous. Previous editors had used numerals preceded by a symbol for 'papyrus' such as *II* or *ϐ*. Much space is saved by omitting this, especially now that anything up to ten papyri may have to be cited for a given reading. I also had to deal with a very large quantity of testimonia. Here too I worked out a system that took up as little space as possible while giving

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12 H. VAN THIEL (ed.), *Homeri Ilias*, Hildesheim/Zürich/New York 1996.

accurate information on the extent of each quotation and the readings represented in it.

As I noted at the beginning of the lecture, the problems facing the editor of Homer have something in common with those facing the editors of the Septuagint. There is the problem of defining exactly what is the historical entity that you are trying to recover. There is the problem of variant forms of the text appearing in papyri and quotations; the problem of assessing the nature of interventions made by ancient scholars and editors; the problem of how best to present the evidence distilled from hundreds or thousands of manuscripts and other sources.

It is not for me to suggest any particular lessons to be drawn from this comparison. I hope that you may have found something suggestive in what I have said about Homer or in the other more heterogeneous material that I have touched on. There are just two particular points I would like to emphasize in relation to critical editing. The first is the importance of always keeping the whole history of the transmission in mind, in so far as it is known or can be plausibly hypothesized: a problem that manifests itself in a late phase of the tradition may sometimes find its solution in an earlier phase. The second point is the importance of being active and not passive; of not easily acquiescing in what our predecessors have accepted, and applying our minds only to issues that they have identified as problematic, but of scrutinizing every word of the text and being alert to new possibilities, including possibilities of different punctuation. To put this another way, we should remember that we are editing an ancient text, we are not editing the work of the last editor. We must always go back to the primary sources and form our own unprejudiced views of what issues they raise, of course taking notice of previous scholarship, but not letting it set the agenda.

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