

On Editing the Avesta

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“... nor should any text be sacred, unless it has first been perfectly emended.”
BARTOLOMEO PERAZZINI 1775, p. 56

To the present day Avestan Studies largely rely on two monumental works, both published more than a hundred years ago: KARL FRIEDRICH GELDNER's edition of the Avesta of 1889–1896 and CHRISTIAN BARTHOLOMAE's *Altiranisches Wörterbuch* of 1904. Attempts have been made to replace the latter, but so far none has come to fruition. Thus, for instance, BERNFRIED SCHLERATH's Avestan dictionary project came to a standstill, although two volumes of *Vorarbeiten*, listing secondary literature and textual parallels, were published (SCHLERATH 1968). In addition, a related enterprise, SONJA GIPPERT-FRITZ's transliteration both of GELDNER's Avesta and of Avestan texts not included in his edition, has been electronically available since 1996 on the website of JOST GIPPERT's TITUS project at the University of Frankfurt am Main. Moreover, within this project, MICHIEL DE VAAN and others have supplemented the text of the Yasna with variant readings of manuscripts some of which GELDNER did not use, most notably the Iranian Pahlavi Yasna Mf4. The website thus not only provides the romanised text but also a database of variant readings which may serve as a tool for investigating “the consistency of readings and the interdependency of manuscript classes”.¹

1. Westergaard and Geldner's Avesta editions

Editors of the Avesta usually start from GELDNER's work, supplemented by GIPPERT's electronic version.² The authority which GELDNER's edition later acquired, however, greatly exceeded his own estimation of its scope. For in spite

- 1 GIPPERT 2002, pp. 177–180. On the texts omitted in GELDNER's edition, cf. also SCHMITT 1993, VIII f.
- 2 Some editors, including myself, indicate GELDNER's editorial decisions by including a bold G alongside the manuscript readings in the textcritical apparatus. Such practice is intended as a mere convenience for the reader and does not of course mean to imply that GELDNER is treated as a manuscript. Not infrequently, however, the form edited by GELDNER is the product of conjecture on his (or WESTERGAARD's) part.

of the fact that GELDNER had more manuscripts at his disposal than anyone else before him, his intention was not to constitute an entirely new text based solely on manuscript readings, but, as he states at the beginning of his *Prolegomena*, to provide a “revised edition”, an “improved reprint” of the *editio princeps*, WESTERGAARD’s *Zendavesta*, published in 1852–1854 but then out of print. GELDNER saw the main difference between his and WESTERGAARD’s work in the fact that “the critical apparatus has unfortunately greatly increased in extent and compass”.³

WESTERGAARD chiefly based his edition on the manuscripts which RASMUS RASK had brought to Copenhagen in 1820 and deposited in the University library there (K). He also collated manuscripts from various private collections, including his own (M) and those of EUGÈNE BURNOUF (B) and his friend JOHN WILSON of Bombay (W). The latter also provided him with a transcript of the first eight Fragards of the Iranian Vīdēvdād Sāde ms. Mf2. Furthermore, WESTERGAARD was able to examine collections “more or less completely” in London (L, Lb), Oxford (Ob, Or) and Paris (P). He aimed at the “utmost brevity” in listing variant readings while at the same time hoping not to have omitted any important ones.⁴

GELDNER had access to 133 manuscripts (excluding Mf4)—about five times as many as WESTERGAARD—and their description offered in his *Prolegomena* is of immense value, as in some cases this is the only record of their existence. Most importantly, 49 of them were sent to him from India and four (those of Manekji Limji Hataria) from Iran. However, apart from the fact that in GELDNER’s edition mss. from Iran are underrepresented,⁵ the choice of those particularly from India and Iran was largely beyond his control. He offers his thanks to Dastur JAMASPJI MINOCHEHERJI JAMASPASA from Bombay both for making available his own collections and for persuading other dasturs to do the same.⁶ But at the time the textcritical value and genealogy of the mss. that were sent to him were unknown to all parties involved.

GELDNER recognized the importance of some manuscripts as he collated them. However, since this was a gradual process which came to a head only when his work was finished, the recording in his textcritical apparatus of the readings of some crucial witnesses, such as the Iranian Pahlavi Yasna Pt4, is noticeably inconsistent.⁷ In fact, the latter reached him only when the first sheets were already in press, and Mf4 after publication of his edition of the Yasna. He

3 GELDNER 1896, p. i.

4 WESTERGAARD 1852–1854, pp. 1f., 23.

5 In addition to those that were sent to him from Iran, GELDNER was also able to use those from WILSON’s collection. According to HOFFMANN and NARTEN 1989, p. 15 fn. 4, GELDNER had access to about fifteen manuscripts which were written in Iran, mainly Kerman and Yazd.

6 GELDNER 1896, p. liii.

7 Cf. GIPPERT 2002, p. 182.

did receive Mf4 in time for his *Prolegomena*, though in it he regretfully admitted that “the important keystone in Yasna criticism was wanting to me” (1896, p. xxiv).

Since MIGUEL ÁNGEL ANDRÉS-TOLEDO critically evaluates GELDNER’s edition in detail elsewhere in this volume (p. 433ff.), I shall confine myself here to a few observations. In his textcritical apparatus GELDNER does not present the various readings according to manuscript classes. A random example is Y2.1 note 4, where the text witnesses of the JAMASPASA collection for the reading *hadā.barəsmā* are simply listed as J2.5.6.7 in spite of the fact that the Pahlavi Yasna ms. J2 belongs with K5, which attests the same reading, while the Yasna Sade mss. J5, 6 and 7 belong to a different group. Consequently, his critical apparatus presents, in HOFFMANN and NARTEN’s words, a hopeless muddle (“ein heilloses Durcheinander”, 1989, p. 18).

Furthermore, ALBERTO CANTERA and MIGUEL ÁNGEL ANDRÉS-TOLEDO have drawn attention to the fact that many of GELDNER’s manuscript readings are based not on his own collations but on those of others, including WESTERGAARD, and unfortunately perpetuate earlier mistakes. With regard to the Vīdēvdād the Spanish scholars have established the inaccuracy of about 6 % of the manuscript readings cited in GELDNER’s critical apparatus. They have also shown that he even confuses the sigla of the manuscripts P2 and P10.⁸

A shortcoming of GELDNER’s edition of the Yasna in particular is that he only records ms. readings of its own liturgy, though, as JOST GIPPERT notes, for an understanding of the text of the Yasna it is also important to take into account the traditions of the Visperad, Vīdēvdād and Vištāsp Yašt Sāde liturgies. Textual differences indicate that the text of liturgical passages was variable, specific terms being substituted according to the occasion and type of ritual being observed.⁹

As far as text constitution is concerned, GELDNER was committed to WESTERGAARD’s edition, and thus largely based his edited text on it rather than on the manuscripts. In doing so, however, GELDNER also perpetuated some of his predecessor’s shortcomings.¹⁰ For instance, WESTERGAARD generally followed the reading of the oldest manuscripts he had at his disposal, trusting them because they were “nearest the original” in time.¹¹ With regard to the Yasna, this was the Indian Pahlavi Yasna K5. Although he was aware that more recent manuscripts

8 ÁNDRES-TOLEDO 2009, pp. 119–122. GIPPERT 2000, p. 144 also notes that GELDNER made mistakes when copying variant readings.

9 GIPPERT 2002, p. 174ff.

10 See HOFFMANN/NARTEN 1989, p. 19.

11 “Wherever there exist different classes of Mss. ... I have grounded my text in that class which has the oldest copies, and therefore as to time is nearest the original ... But I have only followed them as far as I considered their readings primitive or preferable ... and I have thought myself fully entitled to adopt from the other classes ... those readings that appeared more worthy, even where a modern copy only gives as it were by chance what is apparently the truer or more correct form” (1852–1854, p. 23).

could preserve older readings, WESTERGAARD occasionally overlooked a better one in a more recent manuscript, and thus contravened the principle of *recentiores non deteriores* ‘the more recent manuscripts (are) not the worse ones’, a rule which at the time was already well established in textual criticism. It allows for the possibility of a later copyist copying from an ancient and good manuscript and thus producing a more important witness.¹² As a result, a more corrupted form may appear in WESTERGAARD’s edited text, and then be adopted by GELDNER in spite of the fact that a better form is found in other, but younger manuscripts.¹³

At the time GELDNER prepared his edition, the phonetic value of the Avestan script was much less understood than it is today. For instance, the rationale for the distribution of the three signs for *š*-sounds (*š*, *ṧ* and *š̈́*) was unknown. Here GELDNER again followed WESTERGAARD in editing *-aešqam*, for example, in the pronominal gen.pl. ending and the word for ‘rule’ as *xšaδra-*, despite the evidence of the manuscripts, which usually have the letter for the unmarked *š*-sound in these words. Thanks to the work of KARL HOFFMANN and JOHANNA NARTEN we now understand much better what might have been the motivation for and distribution of the 53 letters that were designed in order to put the sounds of the Avesta recitation into writing.

2. Ongoing Avesta editions

Since WESTERGAARD and GELDNER no single scholar has attempted to undertake a new edition of the entire Avesta. However, individual texts from it, in particular the Gathas and Yasna Haptañhāiti as well as individual Yašts, have been re-edited in romanized form, although not always textcritically, but usually with a translation and commentary.¹⁴ Moreover, as far as I am aware, there are the following ongoing projects on Avestan text editions.

The textcritical edition of the *Vīdēvdād* (Vd) is now in the hands of ALBERTO CANTERA and his team in Salamanca. It is planned to publish both the Avestan and Pahlavi versions in several volumes. CANTERA is working on fragards 1–9 while MIGUEL ÁNGEL ANDRÉS-TOLEDO, who edited chapters 10–12 for his doctoral dissertation (2009), is now carrying out a postdoctoral project on Vd 13–15, directed by ALBERTO CANTERA and MARIA MACUCH. However, publication of their works is only envisaged after transmission of the text has been clarified and the textcritically relevant manuscripts identified. Under the supervision of ANTONIO PANAINO, PAOLO DELAINI, a pharmacologist, is editing the

12 TIMPANARO 2005, p. 73.

13 Cf. the example in HOFFMANN/NARTEN 1989, p. 19 fn. 18.

14 For publications between 1975 and 2002 see the literature survey by CANTERA 2002 and, including more recent editions, BICHLMEIER 2011, pp. 25–26.

Avestan medical texts. His research includes a study of Vd7. At Harvard University SHAI SECUNDA edited Vd16 for his PhD dissertation under the direction of PRODS OKTOR SKJÆRVØ, and in Paris CÉLINE REDARD has prepared her doctoral dissertation on Vd19.

The Visperad was largely neglected until in recent years JEAN KELLENS started publishing his *Études avestiques et mazdéennes*, in which he studies the Yasna in conjunction with the Visperad. However, the focus of his work is not a textcritical edition but the ritual function of the Yasna and its relationship to the Visperad and the other Avestan texts.¹⁵

My own 2007 edition of the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti forms part of a larger enterprise to produce an edition of the entire Avestan and Pahlavi Yasna. The plan is to involve several researchers as a team and, as the manuscripts largely overlap, to collaborate with ALBERTO CANTERA's Vīdēvdād project. My student ARASH ZEINI is currently editing the Pahlavi version of the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti for his PhD at SOAS. In 2008 one of JEAN KELLENS's students, BAHMAN MORADIAN, submitted an edition of the Avesta and Pahlavi versions of Y 65.6–14 and 68.1–15 for his PhD at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris. These texts form part of the *āb zōhr*, 'offering to water'.

In addition to the published editions of some Yašts, there are several ongoing projects on Yašt editions. NORBERT OETTINGER edited Yašt 5 (Ardvīsūr) in his habilitation thesis of 1983 and is planning to publish a revised version in due course. ANTONIO PANAINO has privately published an edition of Yašts 6 (Xwaršēd) and 7 (Māh), and is hoping to make a revised version available to the wider scholarly world. In addition, he has supervised several PhD projects on Yašt editions. They include that of Yašt 9 (Druvāsp) by SARA CIRCASSIA, who completed her PhD in the early 2000s. DIRK NOWAK, a former PhD student of GEORGE DUNKEL at Zürich, has been working on a new edition of Yašt 10 (Mihr), but unfortunately this work has so far remained uncompleted. LEON GOLDMAN edited Yašt 12 (Rašnu) under my supervision at SOAS and was awarded a PhD in 2012. He is currently preparing his work for publication. PRODS OKTOR SKJÆRVØ has prepared both an edition and translation of Yašt 13 (Fravardin) and a study of the Zoroastrian cosmogonic myth and the fravashis and is hoping to publish his work in the near future. Two further PhD students of ANTONIO PANAINO have been working on Yašts: CHIARA RIMUNICCI prepared a textcritical edition of Yašt 14 (Bahiram) for her doctorate, which she obtained in 2008, and is hoping to publish her findings, while ROBERTO CASCIOLI is currently editing Yašt 15 (Vāyu). ANDREA PIRAS is working on an edition of Yašt 16 (Dēn), paying special attention to the transmission and genealogical relationship of the mss. One of JEAN KELLENS's PhD students, HOSSEIN NAJARI obtained his PhD in Paris in 2008 with a study of Yašt 17, the hymn to Aši.

15 KELLENS 2006–2011. The four volumes which have appeared to date cover Y1–61 (excluding the OAv. texts) and Vr1–24.

Alongside the Visperad and some sections of the Younger Avestan Yasna and the Vīdēvdād, texts of the Khorde Avesta belong to the most neglected parts of the Avesta. One exception is the Sīrōze in its Avestan and Pahlavi versions, of which ENRICO RAFFAELLI submitted an edition and philological and historical-religious analysis in March 2004 for his doctoral degree jointly at the University of Naples “L’Orientale” and the École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses. He is planning to publish a revised version in English in the *Serie Orientale Roma* of the Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente (IsIAO). DASTUR F.M. KOTWAL and I have collaborated on an edition of the Gāhs and we are hoping to bring out our findings in the near future.

Of the non-liturgical literature, DASTUR F.M. KOTWAL and PHILIP KREYENBROEK published the fourth, and last, volume of their edition of the Hērbedestān and Nērangestān in 2009.

3. Some general principles for editing the Avesta

Since, as outlined above, the text GELDNER constituted closely follows that of WESTERGAARD, the *editio princeps*, or first printed edition of the Avesta, the former’s work shares some of the features which also characterize the *editiones principes* of Greek and Latin texts made by the humanists. Such editions were based on manuscripts that were chosen not because of their textcritical value but for textcritically irrelevant reasons such as accessibility or being well preserved. They constituted a vulgate text that was subsequently “propagated from one edition to another”.¹⁶ Later scholars, from the humanists to the end of the eighteenth century, particularly those who endeavoured to improve on the vulgate text, had recourse to two methods. One was the occasional use of manuscripts considered more authoritative for supporting a particular reading. An emendation justified in this way, the *emendatio ope codicum*, or ‘emendation with the help of manuscripts’, is characterized not by the systematic collation of better manuscripts but by the occasional recourse to them. The other method was conjecture, that is *emendatio ope ingenii*, ‘emendation with the help of native wit’.

However, these procedures were carried out without the methodology of an *ars critica*, or art of textual criticism, which at the time was yet to be developed. The vulgate text of the *editio princeps*, rather than that of the superior manuscripts, continued to be the basis for subsequent editions. About two hundred years ago, FRIEDRICH AUGUST WOLF, one of the protagonists of the *ars critica*, wrote in his *Prolegomena ad Homerum*:

A true, continuous, and systematic recension differs greatly from this frivolous and desultory method. In the latter we want only to cure indiscriminately the wounds that are conspicuous ... We pass over more [readings] which are good and

16 TIMPANARO 2005, p. 45.

passable as regards sense, but no better than the worst as regards authority. But a true recension ... examines in order the witnesses for every reading, not only for those that are suspect. ... Not uncommonly, then, when the witnesses require it, a true recension replaces attractive readings with less attractive ones. It takes off bandages and lays bare the sores. Finally, it cures not only manifest ills, as bad doctors do, but hidden ones too.¹⁷

To date our methodology in editing the Avesta is still widely governed by that of making only occasional collations and for the rest relying on GELDNER, that is to say having recourse to the manuscripts only where GELDNER's edition appears unsatisfactory. However, such procedures result in the text retaining a large number both of forms supported by inferior witnesses or made up by GELDNER for convenience (such as those with the 'wrong' *š*-sign), and also "of small corruptions and *lectiones faciliores* that, for better or worse, made some sense and hence did not arouse suspicion".¹⁸

All Avesta editions currently available, including my own, take GELDNER's text and manuscript readings as their starting point. While the importance of GELDNER's edition in the history of Avestan Studies is beyond question, the weaknesses mentioned above, and discussed in greater detail by ANDRÉS-TOLEDO in this volume (p. 433ff.), call for a new edition of the Avesta. For if we continue to base our edited text and manuscript readings on GELDNER, we will perpetuate decisions taken on insufficient grounds by him, and hence by WESTERGAARD: the latter had few though mostly good manuscripts, yet put excessive trust in the oldest ones, while the former had many manuscripts, but was not fully aware of their textcritical value until he had completed his task. For these reasons, textcritical editions should no longer be based on GELDNER's text and critical apparatus but on a fresh and systematic collation of the manuscripts.

Some editors have already begun to go beyond GELDNER. For instance, JOHANNA NARTEN collated mss. Mf4, K5 and J2 for her edition of the Yasna Haptaṅhāiti,¹⁹ and I have freshly collated the ones I could access in facsimile and in European and Indian libraries for my own editions of the Zamyād Yašt and Yasna Haptaṅhāiti. Moreover, while the readings of the remaining manuscripts are still based on GELDNER, both NARTEN and I list them grouped into manuscript classes. For the Yasna, for instance, the mss. of the Iranian Pahlavi Yasna, currently probably best represented by Pt4 and Mf4, are the most important text witnesses and therefore figure first, followed by the Indian Pahlavi Yasna (K5, J2), then the Iranian Vīdēvdād Sāde (Mf2, Jp1), Vištāsp Yašt Sāde (K4), and the mss. of the Indian Vīdēvdād Sāde and Yasna Sāde. Furthermore, some of WESTERGAARD's readings that bedevil GELDNER's text have been disposed of, such as the forms with the wrong *š*-sign.

17 Quoted by TAMPANARO 2005, p. 71f.

18 TAMPANARO 2005, p. 71, who notes this with regard to the status of the vulgate.

19 NARTEN 1986, p. 49.

The first principle of any new edition, therefore, is that it needs to be based on a fresh collation of the manuscripts. This is, of course, only possible when the latter are accessible. ALBERTO CANTERA has recognized the urgency of this need and started to meet it by means of his website, the Avestan Digital Archive (ADA), on which he makes available an increasing number of manuscripts in digital form. Moreover, in recent years he and his team have succeeded in recovering important manuscripts from both India and Iran, some of which were hitherto unknown. They include G 18, a Vištāsp Yašt (fols. 1–38) and Visperad Sāde (fols. 39–215) codex in the Meherji Rana Library, Navsari, dated 1647 CE and copied from the original of K 4,²⁰ and a Pahlavi Vīdēvdād manuscript in the Āstān-e Qods-e Razavī Library in Mašhad, the latter brought to light by FATEME JAHANPOUR. This and eleven other manuscripts in various Iranian libraries are described by KATĀYOUN MAZDĀPOUR in her contribution to this volume (p. 165ff.).

Another useful tool is JOST GIPPERT's TITUS website, already mentioned above, which offers digital access to the Indian Pahlavi Yasna J2, reproduced from the facsimile edition which L.H. MILLS published in 1893. Printed facsimile editions include the Copenhagen Avesta and Pahlavi Codices in twelve volumes,²¹ Avestan and Pahlavi manuscripts in fifty-seven volumes, incorporating not only new manuscripts but also the Copenhagen codices in a reprint,²² the most important Yašt codex F 1,²³ and the Khorda Avesta and Yašt codex E 1.²⁴ Of the latter, electronic facsimiles are available on the website of the Institut für Iranistik of the Freie Universität Berlin. Such publications, both in electronic and book form, are designed to enable new editions to be based on the manuscripts, rather than on GELDNER.

As noted above (p. 420), due to the fact that the textcritical value of the mss. and their genealogical relationships were unknown when GELDNER prepared his edition, he lists manuscript readings indiscriminately. Subsequent editors of individual texts have grouped the readings according to manuscript classes while aiming at recording all available readings. WEST 2008, pp. 121–124 rightly criticizes such practice and suggests that “we need a different kind of apparatus”. He proposes that “orthographical trivia” should be eliminated from the textcritical apparatus, that the “variants reported should be limited to those which are relevant to the reconstruction of the archetype” and that where possible collective sigla for the individual manuscript classes should be used, such

20 See CANTERA in this volume (p. 295).

21 CHRISTENSEN 1931–1944. The Copenhagen mss. are described by ASMUSSEN 1992.

22 JAMASPĀSA/NAWABI 1976–1979. The edition also includes reprints of ANKLESARIA's first portion of the Dādestān ī Dēnīg and collections of articles by MAHYAR NAWABI and by RICHARD FRYE.

23 JAMASPĀSA 1991.

24 KOTWAL/HINTZE 2008.

as H for the Iranian Pahlavi Yasna (Pt4, Mf4, Mf1). Furthermore, he proposes that scholars' "plausible emendations" should be recorded in the textcritical apparatus.

In editions of Greek, Latin and Hebrew texts it is a long-standing practice that the apparatus should only list variants of mss. which are textcritically relevant. The decision as to which mss. are and which are not, i. e. the *eliminatio codicum descriptorum* 'elimination of derivative manuscripts', constitutes a crucial step in *recensio*. Such elimination is justified in cases when a more recent manuscript is found to be merely a copy of an older extant one. Several mss. deriving from the same ancestor have the same value as only one manuscript.²⁵ Thus, in the introduction to his edition of Tacitus' *Annals*, the theologian and philologist JOHANN AUGUST ERNESTI wrote in 1772:

When manuscripts are involved, one should make sure that we have not as many in number as possible, but as many of those that possess as it were the legal right to give an opinion ... For if you have a hundred manuscripts of the same book, but it is certain that they are derived from a single apograph, then all together they only have the right and force of a single book.²⁶

In principle, it is desirable to bring Avestan text editions into line with editorial practices well established in classical and biblical philology. However, in order to apply *eliminatio codicum* we need to develop a much better historical understanding of the Avestan manuscript tradition. GELDNER's *Prolegomena* and HOFFMANN's 1984 synopsis provide important starting points, but the new manuscripts that have since come to light, especially those from Iran, which are underrepresented in GELDNER's edition, have changed the picture considerably. Moreover, the genealogical interrelationship of the mss. within the classes of the Vīdēvdād Sāde and the Yasna Sāde is still largely obscure. Much work remains to be done on the history of individual manuscripts, their scribal traditions and the schools to which they belong. Palaeographic studies of scribal errors and hands should yield valuable insights into the history of textual transmission. They are to be carried out on *all* manuscripts, including those that eventually turn out to be textcritically irrelevant. Such studies would be separate from text editions.

ALBERTO CANTERA and his team have taken the first steps towards a new genealogical classification of the Avestan mss., and some of their results are already available both on the ADA website and presented in this conference volume. Their work involves the transliteration of each manuscript into Roman letters, whereupon each word is tagged so as to facilitate the comparison of corresponding words in different manuscripts. As CANTERA shows in his

25 JOHANN ALBRECHT BENDEL first asserted this principle in the field of New Testament Studies, and from there it spread among Classical philologists in the last three decades of the eighteenth century, cf. TAMPANARO 2005, p. 73.

26 Quoted in TAMPANARO 2005, p. 73 fn. 43.

contribution to this collection (p. 316ff.), the level of agreement between different manuscripts, in other words their pregenealogical coherence, can thus be measured and quantified. A high index of agreement can be due to different factors, of which genealogical relationship is only one, another being secondary convergence in the course of the tradition. Genealogical coherence, by contrast, is established by means of textual disagreement. For each word which has variant readings local substemmata are built on the basis of a reconstruction of the rise of the local variants. The total of such substemmata eventually indicates the ‘textual flow’ and becomes the basis for the global stemma for the entire text.²⁷

A full collation of manuscripts is the basis of and first step towards *recensio*, that is to say an assessment of the manuscripts, their genealogical classification and textcritical evaluation. *Recensio* may be a most laborious and complicated process. As the Italian classicist SEBASTIANO TAMPANARO (1923–2000) put it,

... more and more philologists first treat the manuscript tradition of a text in a monograph, making ample use of the assistance of codicology and cultural history, and then go on to do a critical edition of it with the same success (2005, p. 138 fn. 55).

As long as details of the genealogical relationship between the extant Avestan manuscripts are still largely unclear, for the time being text editors should register all variant readings of the accessible manuscripts, even at the expense of cluttering up the apparatus,²⁸ until we have reached some certainty about which manuscripts are textcritically relevant and which are not. Consequently, some scholars use a text editing programme, such as Classical Text Editor, which allows the posterior addition or suppression of the readings of a manuscript as the case may be. For, to quote TAMPANARO again,

... the practical exigency remains that certain critical editions [should] not be postponed forever for the sake of studying the history of the tradition in all its smallest details ... (2005, p. 138).

The notion that manuscripts are copied by a single hand without the interference of other manuscripts is often an ideal rather than a real proposition. Perhaps the greatest obstacle to establishing the genealogical relationship of mss. is contamination,

the process also known as ‘horizontal’ transmission whereby readings from one manuscript are copied into another, either as corrections or variants; the descendants of the contaminated manuscript will then include readings from more than one tradition, and its precise affiliations cannot then be determined.²⁹

27 Cf. on this also MINK 2000.

28 This is one of WEST’s 2008, p. 121f. criticisms of GELDNER’s edition.

29 ZETZEL 1993, p. 115 n. 5.

In addition to contamination, the Avestan tradition has one characteristic that markedly distinguishes it from that of the Greek and Latin writings: its orality and the prehistoric origins of its texts. A long period of oral composition and transmission preceded the written tradition. The latter started, presumably in the Late Sasanian period, with the invention of the Avestan script and the first commitment to writing of the Avesta. From then on a literary tradition existed alongside the oral one, the latter never stopping but continuing to the present day. A priest copying an Avestan manuscript would have had the text in his heart as well as before his eyes. Internal recitation while copying is thus very likely to have exerted an influence on the text as it was being written down, and might be one of the reasons for the numerous phonetic variations found in the manuscripts.

Clarity about the genealogical relationship and classification of the manuscripts, achieved in *recensio*, is the methodological prerequisite establishing the foundation both for text constitution, by which the editor decides between variant readings, and for conjectural criticism, by which textual corruptions are emended. A reading that is attested across different manuscript classes has more authority than one that is found in only one of them. What is decisive is when a reading is attested not by the majority of manuscripts but by the majority of families. JOHANN ALBRECHT BENDEL, one of the earliest scholars of textual criticism and already mentioned above, in the context of *eliminatio codicum*, noted this fundamental principle of the *ars critica* in his edition of the New Testament of 1734, when he stated that it is “the consensus of mss. belonging to different families that guarantees the antiquity of a reading”. Subsequently it was recognized that only within each family does the majority of the mss. have a value for reconstructing their ancestor’s reading. This is the procedure which PAUL MAAS called *eliminatio lectionum singularium* ‘elimination of unique readings’.³⁰

When choosing between variant readings preference is to be given to what is called *lectio difficilior*. JEAN LE CLERC coined the term in his *Ars critica* published in 1697,³¹ a foundational work for Old Testament textual criticism, in which he defined it as follows:

If one of them (sc. the readings) is more obscure and the others clearer, then the more obscure one is likely to be true, the others glosses.

LE CLERC is probably too restrictive in assuming that a *lectio faciliior* always derives from a marginal gloss that has replaced the original reading for, as TIMPANARO points out, it could also arise by the psychological process of unconscious banalization.³²

30 TIMPANARO 2005, pp. 64–66.

31 Cf. STEIGER 2008, p. 750f. on JEAN LE CLERC’s description of the origins of textual corruptions.

32 TIMPANARO 2005, p. 68f., fn. 29.

While there are many reasons for textual discrepancy, changes to the text are basically of two types: they are either deliberate or unconscious. The former include orthoepic redactions such as the introduction of preverb repetition in the Old Avestan texts during the purely oral phase of the tradition³³ and the intentional changes made to the transmitted text after the visit of the priest Jāmāsp Velayati from Kerman to Surat in the 1720s.³⁴ Moreover, the vulgate pronunciation of different priestly schools entered the written tradition, and, as CANTERA argues in this volume (p. 297ff.), travelling priests carried local variants to other places. Unconscious corruptions are due, for instance, to the confusion of graphic signs or the accidental omission or duplication of text.

4. Conclusion

Thanks to the fact that a substantial number of facsimiles of important Avestan manuscripts is available in electronic or book form, it is now possible to base new editions of Avestan texts on a fresh collation of the manuscripts, rather than on GELDNER's text and variant readings. If a manuscript or facsimile is not accessible, then the reading may be taken from GELDNER's edition, but this does need to be clearly indicated. In the textcritical apparatus the manuscripts should be grouped into classes, with the most important witnesses being listed first.

A full collation of manuscripts, employing computer technology such as that described by CANTERA in this volume (p. 319ff.), would then serve as the basis of *recensio*, that is the attempt to establish their genealogical relationship and the drawing up of a *stemma codicum*. As far as the Yašts are concerned, this would need to be done for each Yašt separately, as each of them has its own peculiar textual history. The collation of manuscripts could also contribute towards establishing a typology of textual corruptions. *Recensio* should eventually enable the editor to decide which manuscripts are textcritically important and which ones should be neglected because they are copies of existing manuscripts. However, a copy of a still extant manuscript containing corrections from a different line of transmission cannot be eliminated because its genealogical affiliation is contaminated by horizontal transmission. The problem of contamination and of the accidental rise of variants besets the study of virtually any manuscript tradition.

The tasks of textual criticism are to evaluate the manuscripts, to reconstruct their genealogy and to establish the earliest possible form of the text on the basis of all available evidence. As TIMPANARO notes, the graphic aspect of textual transmission is rarely the sole cause of errors, but very frequently acts as one cause among others, and palaeographic probability is a strong argument in

33 GIPPERT 2002, p. 166.

34 See CANTERA/ANDRÉS-TOLEDO 2008.

favour of a particular conjecture.³⁵ While it is true that a conjecture must find “its starting point in the oldest stage of the tradition that we can reach,” not in the more recent manuscripts,³⁶ RICHARD BENTLEY, a champion of conjectural criticism, famously stated: “For us, reason and the facts are worth more than a hundred manuscripts”.³⁷ The goal of a critical edition, however, is not to constitute the best text according to the editor’s taste and mentality but the one which is historically most probable. The best we could possibly achieve in Avestan textual criticism is the form of the Avesta as it was written down for the first time in the script in which it has survived to the present day. When practising *ars critica*, we constantly need to remind ourselves that conjectural criticism must aim at correcting the transmitted reading, but not the poet himself.³⁸

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35 TIMPANARO 2005, p. 128f.

36 TIMPANARO 2005, p. 48.

37 BENTLEY 1711, quoted by TIMPANARO 2005, p. 55.

38 Cf. TIMPANARO 2005, p. 56.

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