

# Open Recensions, *Textus Recepti*, and the Problems of Edition

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## Summary

The paper surveys the concept and practice of correction (διόρθωσις, emendatio) in classical and mediaeval times as evidence for the belief in a “correct” text and the possibility of maintaining it. This leads to controlled transmission of texts, open recensions and the impossibility of reconstructing an archetype. The actual effects of this are illustrated through the Slavonic text of the Catholic Epistles. The paper ends with a discussion of the implications for editorial practice, and a plea for the sharing of experience across disciplines.

Scribes make mistakes. This is known to anyone who has copied a text, and is certainly well known within any literate culture. The concept of scribal error was definitely familiar to European antiquity, and so was the concomitant concept of correction, διόρθωσις: the idea that a text may be corrected, that it regularly *is* corrected, and that a scholar ought to be capable of correcting it.

This was especially true of culturally important texts (obviously if a text was not highly regarded, and variation within it therefore tolerable, not only was there little impulse to correct, there was freedom to modify *ad libitum*). For antiquity, the most important text was that of Homer, and the διόρθωσις of the Iliad was a normal feature of cultural life.<sup>1</sup> Historically it can be traced back as far as the third century BCE and Zenodotus. Traditionally, the correction of this text goes back even further, to the sixth century BCE and Pisistratus. This may or may not be historical, but the authority for the tradition is a remark by Cicero in the third book of his *De Oratore*, where he says, ‘Quis doctior eisdem temporibus illis aut cuius eloquentia litteris instructor fuisse traditur quam Pisistrati? Qui primus Homeri libros confusos antea sic disposuisse dicitur, ut nunc habemus.’ From this we may learn, firstly, that Pisistratus’s activity was commonly believed in in Cicero’s time (‘dicitur’). Secondly, if Pisistratus is thus held up as a model of learning, we may infer that editorial scholarship was regarded as normal activity for a learned man (Pisistratus’s pre-eminence consisting in his seminal work on such an important text). And finally, we discover that the established text of Homer was held to have been created in the sixth century out of previous confusion, which gives an interesting insight into how classical antiquity viewed the genesis and maintenance of its canonical texts.

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1 ‘The schoolmaster, however, ‘corrected’ his Homer [...] and the implied ideal is ὀρθότης.’ – West 2001, 25.

Διόρθωσις, or *emendatio*, is a broad concept, and could mean anything from the proof-reading of a new copy to full-scale editorial activity. Nevertheless, the very fact that it took place is proof that people had a concept of the ‘right’ text and that manuscripts were liable to correction to make them conform to it. It would not be going too far to say that a good scribe was not only permitted to correct his text, he had a duty to do so (at the absolute minimum, to eliminate his own mistakes).<sup>2</sup> The process had two aspects—the establishment of a text and the maintenance of a text, and the second is, of course, dependent on the first. There is ongoing debate among classicists regarding the extent to which the Alexandrian scholars were dependent on *divinatio*, and to what extent on collation of manuscripts. This latter undoubtedly did take place in antiquity. Perhaps the earliest datable evidence for the practice comes again from Cicero, not this time speaking *in propria persona*, but having himself become a classical author whose texts were liable to correction. The *scriptio* of Statilius Maximus, written in the second century CE, to his copy of Cicero’s *De lege agraria* reads ‘Statilius Maximus rursus emendavi ad Tironem et Laecanianum et Domitium et alios veteres iii. oratio eximia’.<sup>3</sup> This evidently means that Statilius had collated the text against six ‘old’ witnesses, of which three were believed to have a known provenance, in an evident effort to restore a text as close as possible to the original. How typical his approach was it is impossible to say, but it is hard to believe that it was wholly exceptional.

However it was obtained, though, the *result* of the labours of the editors of antiquity is clear: a massive reduction in variation, and a ‘bottleneck’ in transmission. A similar effect, for Greek texts, is held to have been produced by the μεταχαρακτηρισμός of the ninth century, in that once a minuscule text had been produced, the old uncial manuscripts were much less likely to be copied from. Perhaps the most radical example is that of the Qur’ān: according to tradition, the Caliph ‘Uthmān not only assembled a standard text from the fragments in circulation, but then ordered the destruction of all other copies to prevent the re-introduction of variants that had been eliminated.<sup>4</sup>

The result of such processes is a new *Ausgangstext*: variants in the extant manuscript tradition are, with few exceptions, later than this, and it is more or less impossible for textual scholars to look beyond it into the earlier history of the text. Moreover, once it is established, efforts are made to maintain it free from any new variation, which usually means a controlled transmission,

2 Similar remarks were made in their contributions to the conference by Malachi Beit-Arié regarding Hebrew scribes and Evren Sünnetçioğlu on the Ottoman legal tradition.

3 Reynolds and Wilson 1991, 31.

4 See, for example, Gillot 2006, especially p. 49.

in which correction is part of the process of creating a new manuscript, and typically involves multiple antigraphs. Of course, not every single manuscript will be copied as part of a controlled transmission, because controlled transmission requires certain conditions, which are, primarily, the availability of manuscripts and a certain professionalism on the part of the scribes, conditions which were fulfilled by the scholarly communities of antiquity and by the scriptoria of the Middle Ages. It does, however, shape the overall transmission of culturally important texts. For example, it privileges majority variants, as scribes will naturally prefer readings in which their manuscripts concur, and this is why, for example, the Byzantine text-type of the Greek New Testament becomes 'more Byzantine' with the passage of time. Furthermore, controlled transmission necessarily results in an open recension; and this, in turn, means that not only can we not get past the *Ausgangstext*, we cannot even reconstitute that.

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Now let us see how these considerations apply to the Slavonic New Testament, and more specifically to the Acts and Epistles. Simplifying somewhat, these were translated three times: twice in the ninth century (the First and Second Redactions), and once in the fourteenth (the Fourth Redaction).<sup>5</sup> It should be noted, of course, that retranslation is in itself a form of *emendatio*, the aim of which is to produce a Slavonic text that conveys more exactly the sense of the original (whether this means a more accurate rendition of the Greek or a closer adherence to an accepted Slavonic linguistic norm).

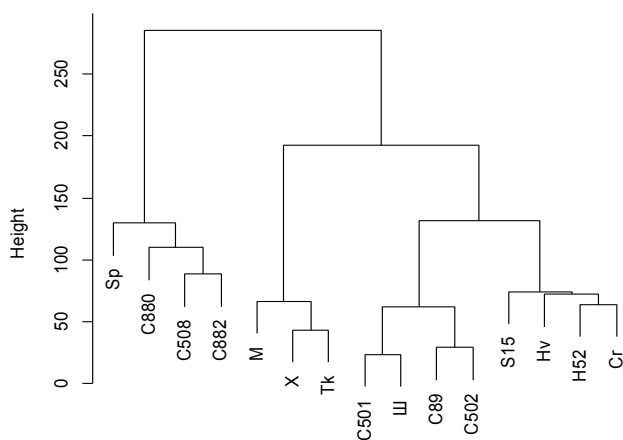
Although the conditions for controlled transmission certainly existed in tenth-century Bulgaria, this ceased to be the case after the conquests of Basil II (completed at the beginning of the eleventh century), and they were not re-established until about the beginning of the thirteenth century, with the rise of the Second Bulgarian Empire, of the Nemanjid dynasty in Serbia, and of a well-organised ecclesiastical administration, with major monasteries, in the East Slavonic lands. In principle, therefore, we could expect the Fourth Redaction to have had a controlled transmission for all of its existence, and the other two to have acquired it after a period of uncontrolled copying.

The evidence of the manuscripts does indeed agree with just such a history. This is well illustrated by a dendrogram of the menaion text (fig. 1)<sup>6</sup> of the Catholic Epistles according to the First Redaction. (It must be remem-

5 There is a Third Redaction, but since it consists of two almost identical manuscripts, it is of no relevance to textual criticism.

6 Since the Catholic Epistles are appointed to be read during the six weeks preceding Lent, their text is not included in the short lectionaries, with the exception of the four passages appointed for particular feast days, which are to be found in the menology which forms the second part the lectionaries.

Fig. 1. Menaion Text of the Catholic Epistles, First Redaction: dendrogram.



James v 10-20, II Peter i 10-19, I John i 1-7, iv 12-19

bered that this is a dendrogram, not a stemma: in other words, it illustrates the degree of similarity between manuscripts, but not its origin, and the nodes do not represent hyparchetypes.<sup>7</sup>)

This shows well the position of what may be termed the Early Bulgarian Short Lectionaries, i.e. the four manuscripts that represent the left-hand branch of the dendrogram. These are not a text-critical group: though they are markedly different from the other manuscripts, they are not particularly similar to each other. They are, however, a codicological group: they are all early (the latest, **Sp**, is dated 1313, the others are considerably earlier), they are all small-format manuscripts, all with archaic features and all incorporate a significant amount of liturgical material. This all indicates that they come from a relatively impoverished, provincial milieu, in other words, precisely the sort of milieu where controlled transmission is not practical. This is reflected in the high number of singular variants that their texts contain. The two manuscripts with commentary, **X** and **Tk**, also represent a discrete branch, reflecting the revision of the text which appears to have taken place when the commentary was added.<sup>8</sup>

7 For the principles of constructing dendrograms, and also the sigla of the manuscripts, see Cleminson 2014.

8 **M**, the Maticin Apostol, which is associated with them here, has a notoriously anomalous text, and in fact evidently represents a deliberate construction of an eclectic text on the basis of the First, Second and Commentated First redactions. In these particular passages it is closest to the last; elsewhere the others predominate.

For the rest, the manuscripts fall into two groups, which are consistent across the whole of the Catholic Epistles. (There are also other manuscripts, not shown in the dendrogram, which are associated with one or other of them.) Neither group appears to be united by any particular common local or chronological factor, but given the consistency of their text, we may infer that they are the product of controlled transmission. As one might expect, no stemma can be constructed, confirming that this is an open recension; we may thus, in fact, be dealing not with one, but two *textus recepti* for the First Redaction.

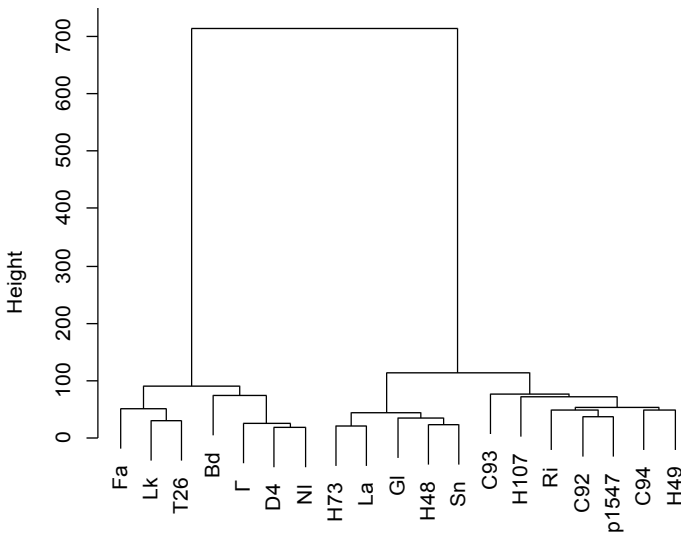
Admittedly, much of the above is inference, but this is inevitable: by its very nature, a process designed to ensure textual homogeneity does not leave direct traces. In particular, the use of multiple antigraphs is impossible to see when they all have very similar texts. That multiple antigraphs were used in the tradition of the Slavonic Apostolos is demonstrated by the rare occasions when they belonged to different text types. There are two examples: the Karpinski and Karakallou Apostoloi.<sup>9</sup> These are both old (though by no means as rustic as the Early Bulgarian Short Lectionaries), and have texts which alternate between the First and Second Redactions (in some parts the text is predominantly of the First Redaction, but with Second-Redaction variants, while in others the situation is reversed). They probably represent the very beginnings of attempts at controlled transmission, using only two or three manuscripts. Once a tradition of controlled transmission is established, such obvious contaminations no longer occur: obviously, a scribe who had a clear idea of the established text, or several First-Redaction manuscripts at his disposal, would normally recognise a Second-Redaction manuscript as divergent and not use it. Nevertheless, the fact that such examples exist corroborates the use of multiple antigraphs within the controlled tradition.

Turning to the Fourth Redaction, where we postulate a controlled transmission from the beginning, again the evidence from the manuscripts is entirely in accord with the hypothesis. This may again be illustrated by means of a dendrogram (fig. 2), this time for the Epistle of James (though other portions of the text show just the same pattern).

The dendrogram reveals two distinct groups of manuscripts. Within each group the manuscripts are all very similar to each other; moreover, the manuscripts in one group (on the left-hand side of the dendrogram) are all East Slavonic, and those in the other are all South Slavonic. The South Slavonic group almost invariably presents the better text (in the sense of being closer to the Greek), suggesting that the East Slavonic group is derived from it. Some insight into this process may be gained by focusing on the oldest of the East Sla-

9 Moscow, Historical Museum, MS Chludov 28 and Athos, Mone Karakallou, MS 294.

Fig. 2. Epistle of James, Fourth Redaction: dendrogram.



vonian manuscripts, **T26**, written in the fourteenth century. This still has some features in common with the South Slavonic manuscripts, and thus represents an early stage in the development of the East Slavonic text-type. It also has marginal corrections, and the effect of these is to eliminate ‘South Slavonic’ readings, and thus bring the text more into line with the East Slavonic norm as it had developed in the years after **T26** was written. It is equally noteworthy that some of these corrections also eliminate East Slavonic minority readings, which of course has the same effect. This manuscript thus provides a rare glimpse into the establishment of a *textus receptus*.

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What are the implications of the above for editing the text? Where the Fourth Redaction is concerned, one would probably want to edit a South Slavonic text, while indicating all the distinctively East Slavonic readings in the apparatus. This still leaves open the question of what to print as a base text. Given that it is an open recension, there is no possibility of a Lachmannian reconstruction of the archetype; nor is there any one obvious ‘good’ manuscript to encourage a Bédierist approach. However, one can generally distinguish ‘good’ readings<sup>10</sup> from ‘bad’, where one reading has the support of the Greek

10 As Alessandro Bausi pointed out in the discussion after the paper, the concept of a ‘good’ reading is a highly controversial one. It is, however, implicit in the very fact of *emendatio*. What constitutes a good reading is therefore dependent on the nature of the ideal text, however that is conceived by the *emendator* or editor. As an example, Stephen Emmel cited Coptic translated material preserved in such

and the other does not. Moreover, the good readings usually have the support of the majority of the manuscripts. There are, however, a few occasions when they do not, and in such cases the majority reading should certainly be indicated in the apparatus. Readings supported neither by the Greek, nor by a significant number of manuscripts, can probably safely be disregarded.

It is highly probable that a base text so constructed will in fact approximate quite closely to the original translation, even though this is in principle unknowable. Certainly such a base text, taken in conjunction with the apparatus, will provide a very good idea of the textus receptus recognised by the scribes (or textus recepti—though in fact the South Slavonic and East Slavonic texts are not widely divergent).

However, the Fourth Redaction provides an easy case. The First Redaction presents many more difficulties for the editor. Not only is the archetype lost beyond all hope of recovery (both in theory and in practice), there is no prospect of reconstructing a hyparchetype for either of the two groups of manuscripts that can be identified, either. The problem of the base text is thus even more acute, though it is at least clear that the Early Bulgarian Short Lectonaries need not be taken into account.

The selection of an individual manuscript could only be done on a quite arbitrary basis, and this would, indeed, be very much within the tradition of Slavonic editing. The results of this have not always been fortunate, in that a manuscript, once published, begins in practice to function as a sort of textus receptus in the scholarly tradition, to be perceived as ‘the text’. A case in point is Kałużniacki’s edition of **X**,<sup>11</sup> which seems to have been taken by the United Bible Societies as ‘the Slavonic text’ even though, as a commentated (and therefore revised) manuscript, it is not a particularly good witness to the earliest state of the Slavonic version, and even though the edition fills in the lacunae in **X** with material from other manuscripts.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the early emergence of **M**, with its highly eclectic text, in the study of the Slavonic Apostolos,<sup>13</sup> despite the masterly quality of the publication, has done more to confuse our understanding of the history of the text than to elucidate it. More recently, the Strumica Apostolos has been published with an apparatus which may help to explain the readings of this highly corrupt manuscript, but

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fragmentary sources that any edited text is necessarily a mosaic: *a priori*, readings agreeing with the original are considered good, and other readings from a source in which such readings prevail are also, *ceteris paribus*, to be regarded as ‘good’ readings.

11 Kałużniacki 1896

12 See Bakker 1995. It must be stressed that Kałużniacki, as editor, is not to blame for this, as he makes it perfectly clear what he has done.

13 Jagić 1919–1920.

contributes nothing to our understanding of the text as a whole or its transmission.<sup>14</sup>

The alternative would be for the editor to construct a ‘neutral’ text, one that does not depend on a single manuscript, but is as close as possible to all. This would, obviously, be an entirely artificial construct—but no more so than the scholarly editions of the Greek New Testament to which we are accustomed. An editor undertaking such a task would have to make this very clear, and also that his text is in no way intended as a reconstruction of the archetype. It would nevertheless be a safer point of reference than an actual manuscript: in comparing a new manuscript with such a neutral text, the differences would in all probability be distinctive features of that manuscript, whereas a comparison between two manuscripts will reveal differences, but will not reveal which of them are peculiar to either manuscript. Perhaps, besides, such a text would be close to the scribes’ ideal: not a text that actually existed, but one that theoretically ought to have existed, the form towards which controlled transmission was aspiring. This in itself might be a justification for it: an editor is within his rights to realise a *textus receptus*, if a *textus receptus* was the guiding light of textual transmission during the manuscript period.

To the best of the present writer’s knowledge, such an approach has never been taken in editing a Slavonic text, and, as a radical departure from tradition, it is not likely that it would be universally welcomed. It would be interesting to know whether other traditions have, in the face of similar problems, attempted such a solution, and if so, whether the attempt was judged successful. An initiative such as *COMSt* provides an excellent opportunity for sharing experience across subject areas which often have little mutual awareness, and many Slavists would be glad to know that the considerations set out above have already been taken into account in the editorial practice of other traditions. Such editions could then be taken as models for new publications in our own discipline, saving the labour and potential pitfalls of re-inventing the practice.<sup>15</sup>

## References

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14 Bláhová and Hauptová 1990. The edition is entirely linguistic in its focus and does not aim to address issues of textual criticism.

15 The paper as delivered at the conference *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies: Looking Back—Looking Ahead*, Hamburg, 26 September 2016 ended with an appeal for people to share examples of such an editorial approach from their own disciplines; but nobody did.



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