The CBGM Applied to Variants from Acts
Methodological Background

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1. Basic terms and procedures

The reconstruction of the initial text by means of the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method (CBGM) is carried out on the basis of assessments of the genealogy of variants at each variant passage. The resulting relationships between variants of the same passage are graphically represented by so-called local stemmata. The construction of these is done in phases proceeding from secure cases which hardly need any discussion to those whose analysis requires genealogical data.

In phase 1 of our work on the local stemmata of Acts we focused on the passages where genealogical decisions can be made on the basis of external and internal criteria without knowledge about the genealogical coherence of witnesses. The genealogical coherence of witnesses emerges from an analysis of the local stemmata according to a central principle of the CBGM:

> **A hypothesis about genealogical relationships between the states of a text as preserved in the manuscripts has to rest upon the genealogical relationships between the variants they exhibit. Therefore a systematic assessment of the genealogy of these variants (displayed as local stemmata)[1] is a necessary requirement for examining the genealogy of texual witnesses.**

Another kind of coherence which we call *pre-genealogical coherence* is taken into account from the beginning when examining the variants. Pre-genealogical coherence results from a purely quantitative summation of agreements between the manuscript texts. Often it is possible on the basis of pre-genealogical coherence alone to see whether a variant has coherent support pointing to a common source or whether a lack of coherence suggests that the variant arose several times independently.

In phase 2 of the construction of local stemmata the genealogical structure which emerged from phase 1 was used for a revision of more complex cases. At many places where we had to

[1] The basis for this comprehensive analysis is a critical apparatus comprising all variants of every Greek textual witness selected for the edition.

set a question mark in phase 1 we now reached a decision. At the same time, however, new question marks had to be set where no problem had been seen before.

Transcriptional probability is the preeminent internal criterion for the assessment of relationships between variants.

Every scholar who has evaluated comprehensive collations will confirm Hort's verdict: "There is always an abundance of variations in which no practised scholar can possibly doubt which is the original reading, and which must therefore be derivative."[2] Three factors are primarily responsible for the emergence of this kind of variant:

- lack of attentiveness bringing about an inclination to false readings and/or renderings,
- an attempt to correct seemingly obvious errors,
- editorial tampering with the text aimed at a clearer, better rendition of the presumed authorial intention.[3]

In the case of editorial variation one certainly needs to take readers and editors into account who sporadically or, more rarely, systematically left corrections or annotations in a manuscript which then were incorporated into a copy of it.

Hort emphasises that transcriptional probability alone is not sufficiently able to clarify the relationship between variants. He refers to *intrinsic probability* as a complement which derives from our knowledge about the language and style of the author.[4] However, these criteria often point in different directions or are not applicable to a considered relationship between variants because they differ only by elusive nuances. In this regard the methodological strength of a combination of transcriptional probability and coherence analyses becomes obvious.

2. Guidelines for the assessment of variants and their Greek manuscript attestations

The guidelines for assessment of variants set out below largely rest on the following four assumptions about manual transmission of texts:

- "A scribe wants to copy the Vorlage with fidelity.
- If a scribe introduces diverging variants, they come from another source (are not 'invented').
- The scribe uses few rather than many sources.
- The sources feature closely related texts rather than less related ones."[5]

These assumptions partly reflect basic features of the evidence and partly derive from the rule of parsimony. We consider each more probable than its contrary, which does not mean that the contrary never occurred in the long history of the New Testament text. The fact, however, that close relatives of nearly all witnesses have survived, confirms assumption number one.

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[2] B. F. Westcott, F. J. A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*. Vol. 2. *Introduction* (Cambridge/ London: Macmillan, 1882), 23.

[3] Cf. *Ibid*., 24.

[4] *Ibid*., 26f.

[5] Gerd Mink, *The Coherence-Based Genealogical Method—CBGM: Introductory Presentation* (2009, online at <http://egora.uni-muenster.de/intf/service/downloads_en.shtml>, 96–107.

It follows that textual identity in closely related witnesses is non-coincidental and points to common origin. Scribes primarily are copyists. That is why very many variants derive from errors. Intentionally introduced variants are likely due to contamination because scribes were not free to tamper with the text *ad libitum*. The sources were at hand where the copy was produced. Therefore it is likely (according to the second assumption) that the source of a variant was similar in many respects to the copy into which the variant was incorporated.[6] Assumption number three follows from the rule of parsimony. It is not likely that a scribe collated numerous manuscripts before or when he produced a copy. The fourth assumption, finally, is a corollary of the first one.

The following nine guidelines derive partly from these assumptions, partly from the practice of constructing local stemmata. (The examples are available here. TP = transcriptional priority; GC = genealogical coherence.)

1. Singular readings and unique readings of small groups which differ from the mainstream of transmission are secondary. Exceptions to this rule require strong support from internal criteria. (Ex. 1, 4, 7) However, as was the case with the Catholic Letters, such variants are systematically subjected to text critical analysis if they are supported by witnesses closely related to A.
2. An attestation lacking coherence is a sign of multiple emergence i.e. posteriority of a variant. (Ex. 1, 2, 3, 5) Multiple emergence weakens the force of internal criteria which might be used to account for the priority of the variant.
3. Good coherence of an attestation is primarily a sign of unfractured transmission. Good coherence is a valid argument for the priority of a variant only if supported by internal criteria. (Ex. 6, 8, 11)
4. A strong argument for assessing a variant as initial text is provided by an attestation which combines coherence and a broad range of witnesses closely related to A. (Ex. 9, 10, 14, 15) In such cases strong coherence only materializes if A is part of the attestation.
5. The priority of a majority reading is indicated if it is linguistically more difficult or contextually less suitable and thus atypical of the majority text. This may be valid even if the competing variant has a broad range of witnesses closely related to A. (Ex. 10)
6. The source of a variant is likely to be a similar variant. If the attestation of a variant indicates that two or more other variants need to be considered as possible sources then TP suggests that the one which requires the least change to be transformed into the variant in question is preferable.
7. The source of a variant is questionable:
   a) if GC and TP point to different potential source variants or cannot be aligned with each other for other reasons; (Ex. 8, 13)
   b) if we cannot decide which of two or more variants is the prior one because neither GC nor TP provides a convincing argument. (Ex. 18)
8. Consciously introduced editorial variants are exceptional. If possible, variation should be explained with reference to the process of copying itself and to known causes of error. (Ex. 16, 17)
9. If the witnesses of a variant have to be assigned to different source variants, then the attestation should split accordingly.

[6] Exceptions are allowed if another explanation would avoid violation of the rule of parsimony. This primarily relates to block mixture which could hardly be perceived at all if the source texts were very similar.