

Special Feature: The Coherence-Based Genealogical Method Editorial Introduction

The following introduction and four articles are based on papers delivered in the panel session “The Genealogical Method” of the New Testament Textual Criticism section of at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, San Diego, 22 November 2014.

The Editio Critica Maior (ECM) of the New Testament, a collaborative project of teams in Münster (INTF), Birmingham (ITSEE/IGNTP) and Wuppertal (Institut für Septuaginta- und biblische Textforschung), uses the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method (CBGM) to explore the structure of the Greek manuscript tradition and to reconstruct the *Ausgangstext* of the New Testament writings. Two members of the Münster team (Klaus Wachtel and Annette Hüffmeier) gave papers about the theoretical background and methodological principles of the CBGM, Tommy Wasserman presented results of an application of the method to a passage for which we do not yet have an ECM apparatus (Mark 1:1), and Dirk Jongkind presented a critical appraisal of the nature and limitations of the CBGM. Bruce Morrill and Stephen Carlson responded to these papers.

TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism invited the contributors to publish revised versions of their panel presentations. The majority of contributors largely agreed that the *TC* journal is an appropriate platform for publication, the more so, because it offers better means to present the online tools of the CBGM than a printed journal. Dirk Jongkind, however, declined the offer to publish in this venue. The board of the journal and the other panelist respectfully accept this decision. However, Wachtel’s paper and Carlson’s response refer to Jongkind’s appraisal. Therefore it was decided to represent Jongkind’s paper by his abstract and a short summary based on his paper circulated in advance of the session. The summary has been collaboratively authored by the contributors of the present publication and approved by the editors of the journal. Morrill decided not to publish his response without Jongkind’s full paper.

On the Nature and Limitations of the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method

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Abstract. Over the past years some big claims have been made regarding the benefits

of the newly developed CBGM. However, now that the honeymoon is over, it is time to start talking about the limitations of the method. As a discipline we should start asking questions like, What does the CBGM actually tell us? Within the method, is “genealogical coherence” more than just an abstraction with little to say about actual history or is “genealogical coherence,” in terms of textual history, a “real” concept? Is the method perhaps unnecessary complicated? Could the same be achieved with simpler, more accessible and more flexible methods? In this paper it will be argued that so far, the CBGM has only been used to provide materials for a visual analysis of the distribution of the evidence. Besides, the contribution of the CBGM as an analytical tool has not been distinguished sufficiently from the particular way of doing textual criticism by the editorial team in Münster. On the other hand, the CBGM is raising an important issue within our discipline, namely by questioning the value of “earlier is more important.” But is the method correct in suggesting that the actual age of a document may be of much less importance than often assumed?

Summary of the paper read

§1

The CBGM gives the impression that its aim is modelling history. However, as the method restricts itself to describing structures within the development of texts, it remains unclear what exactly it wants to achieve.

The key questions are:

- (1) whether the CBGM can be used to achieve an adequate hypothesis of the overall development of the text; and
- (2) whether the CBGM can be used to edit the initial text.

In sum, the answer is “no” to the first question, “yes” to the second.

§2

The CBGM is inherently limited in explaining how the witnesses are historically related to each other. The CBGM relies on measurements of data, yet the fuzziness of the data and the measurements limit the detail of the possible conclusions due to the following measurement errors:

- (1) Measurement errors derived from comparison of witnesses
 - due to a subjective element in setting the boundaries of variation units;
 - due to an ambiguity as to which is the text of a manuscript where there are corrections; and
 - due to an ambiguity as to the number of variants to be counted, if they may be seen as multiple instances of the same kind of variation.
- (2) Measurement errors derived from an assessment of the genealogical relationship between variants
 - due to the subjective element in such assessments;
 - due to the fact that variants do not just move from the predominantly prior to the posterior witness but also from the posterior to the prior

Moreover, the CBGM does not use a proxy (a property by which another property can be measured as in carbon-dating of manuscripts) that is suited to produce an adequate hypothesis. The CBGM regards a textform as earlier than another one if it contains more variants that the editors assess as prior. Two scenarios are given for which the CBGM is not able to reconstruct precisely the relationships between texts: first, an example of a witness that is more corrupted

than the witness it influences, and second, an example where the influence of another witness improves the level of prior readings.

§3

The CBGM is a useful tool for establishing the *Ausgangstext* because

- (1) it offers the tools to find groupings of witnesses;
- (2) it shows the coherence of witnesses in spite of imprecision and measurement errors in detail; and
- (3) it identifies the witnesses relevant for editing the *Ausgangstext*.

§4

The virtue of the CBGM is its usefulness for organising the external evidence and suggesting relationships between witnesses. However, it does not lead to an adequate hypothesis of the development of the text.