

Defenders *of the* Text

THE TRADITIONS OF SCHOLARSHIP IN AN
AGE OF SCIENCE, 1450–1800



ANTHONY GRAFTON

hiberi recte possint (1785), could cite a rich body of monographic work to support his perverse belief that no extant set of scholia antedated Eustathius: "rivalry led others to follow his example, and even to try to surpass Eustathius's diligence."⁹⁶ No wonder, too, that a far less conventional man like J. J. Reiske denounced the study of scholia as a fad as early as 1770:

Had the decision lain wholly with me, I would have added no scholia at all to my Demosthenes. Most of them are emptier than a nut with no meat, futile, footling, trivial, childish. The language is full of unbearable solecisms. But who can stand against a flood? I therefore decided to leave the commentaries commonly attributed to Ulpian to others to edit—if anyone wants to do so—and give here only what my Bavarian and Augsburg codices afforded me. It is not that they are better than the common ones—they are about the same—but that they will give my edition the attraction of novelty and make it more saleable . . .⁹⁷

By 1788, then, German scholars were well prepared to see the historical importance of the A and B scholia. Prepublication announcements had made them curious as well.⁹⁸ Hence several of them—including Wolf and Heyne—skimmed the cream from this material in elaborate reviews.⁹⁹ The anonymous reviewer in the *Bibliothek der alten Litteratur und Kunst*, for instance, took Villoison's edition as the starting-point for a long investigation of all the Homer scholia in print, which he traced back to two distinct original sources.¹⁰⁰ G. C. Harles assembled the views of Villoison and his critics in staggering detail in the first volume of his new edition of Fabricius's *Bibliotheca Graeca* (1790). He dealt with the scholia in all their forms, assembled the information they yielded about the lives and lost works of the Alexandrian scholars, and, imitating Fabricius's treatment of Eustathius, had indices to the new scholia drawn up.¹⁰¹

Wolf was as excited as anyone by the Venice scholia, but his treatment of them differed markedly from those summarized by Harles. As C. G. Schütz put it in 1796:

Anyone who compares Harles's edition of Fabricius and Villoison's *Prolegomena* will easily see that Mr. Wolf has done more than emulate in his own further investigations their *Sammlerfleiss*—

a quality really valuable in the light of the intention behind their works. By historical reasoning and ingenious rapprochements [of facts] he has established new results, and thus greatly surpassed them.¹⁰²

A more precise way of expressing the difference would be to say that Wolf wrote the history of scholarship rather than the history of scholia. He knew that the scholia needed analysis, that each Alexandrian needed reliable dates and bibliography. But he devoted most of his time and effort to reconstructing the technical method each ancient critic had used—and, through them, the story of Homer's fate. Villoison and others, as we saw, had known that the scholia should be made to tell this tale. But they did not make them tell it.¹⁰³ Paradoxically, Wolf learned more than others had from the scholia precisely because the scholia themselves did not interest him as much.

THERE WAS a model for the "reasoning" and "rapprochements" that set Wolf's work apart. Since the Reformation, the textual history of the Bible—especially that of the Old Testament—had received much passionate attention. It posed intractable problems. The Hebrew text of the extant manuscripts and the printed editions had undergone radical changes since the days of Moses and David. The square-charactered alphabet in which it was written was not the original one, as Jerome and others pointed out. The word divisions, the vowel points, the accents, the marginal apparatus of variant readings had apparently been introduced by the Masoretes, the Hebrew grammarians of the Near East, during the first millennium A.D. Some Protestants inferred from these facts that the Septuagint was more reliable than the Hebrew. After all, it had been translated with divine help from good manuscripts. The Greek and Hebrew texts disagreed because perfidious Jews had deliberately altered their manuscripts. Others denied patristic and Jewish evidence alike and claimed that the extant Masoretic text of the Pentateuch went back to Moses, vowel points, variants, and all. Catholics on the other hand tended to claim that the Latin vulgate surpassed both the Hebrew and the Septuagint.¹⁰⁴

Fueled by *odium theologicum* as well as *philologicum*, the debate ran long and hot. Scaliger, Casaubon, the Buxtorfs, the Cappells, Morin, and the Vossiuses took sides. By 1678 the Oratorian Richard Simon had produced a *Critical History of the Old Testament*, which used the patristic evidence, the Talmud, and the Jewish scholarly apparatus and commentaries to reconstruct the state of the biblical text century by century from its origins to his own time. He hoped to show that no version was complete and reliable. Hence one had to rely on Mother Church, which was guided by infallible Tradition, to compensate for faulty Scripture.¹⁰⁵

This tradition of biblical research and controversy was still active in the eighteenth century; and Wolf had it very much in mind as he worked on Homer. In calling for more collations of manuscripts, he wrote that "Homer still awaits his Kennicott."¹⁰⁶ He referred to Benjamin Kennicott, whose critical edition of the Hebrew Bible, based on obsessively minute collations, had appeared at Oxford in 1776-1780. In reviewing Villosion, Wolf explicitly compared the Alexandrian scholars to the Masoretes.¹⁰⁷ In the *Prolegomena*, he likened the Venice scholia to the apparatus of the Masoretic Bible: "Let the Oriental masters, proud of their Masorah, cease to deplore the bad fortune that makes us rely on such late manuscripts for the text of Homer . . . We too now have a sort of Greek Masorah." And he made clear that his efforts to reconstruct the methods of Alexandrian scholars were exactly similar to what the orientalists had already done for ancient Jewish scholars (though they had been hindered by the comparative poverty of their sources):

The Oriental masters would, I think, be delighted if they knew for certain what Gamaliel or any other early Jewish doctor read in three passages of Moses and the Prophets. We know what Zenodotus read in Homer in some four hundred passages, what Aristophanes read in two hundred, what Aristarchus read in more than a thousand.¹⁰⁸

Wolf even compared those who tried to defend the authenticity of the standard text of Homer to the Buxtorfs, who had defended the *theopneustia* of the Masoretic Old Testament.¹⁰⁹

It is not surprising that Wolf knew this body of work. Many of his best friends were theologians who used a historical method.

One of the few Göttingen teachers he had liked, Michaelis, had been a pioneer in applying a critical technique to the Old Testament. Wolf's closest ally in the early days at Halle, Semler, was a radical theologian and textual critic of the New Testament. And he knew and greatly respected Semler's pupil Griesbach, whose edition of the New Testament was the model for Wolf's own final deluxe Homer.¹¹⁰

But there is more than general analogy and biographical anecdote to connect Wolf's work to that of the biblical scholars. The evidence suggests that the *Prolegomena* were directly modeled on one of the most controversial products of the German biblical scholarship of Wolf's time: J. G. Eichhorn's *Einleitung ins Alte Testament*, which began to appear in 1780. Like Wolf, Eichhorn studied at Göttingen under Heyne and Michaelis. He returned there as a professor in 1788.¹¹¹ His works on the Old and New Testaments fascinated literati of widely different stripe. Coleridge filled the margins of his copies with approving, detailed notes.¹¹² Wolf thought the volumes on the New Testament exemplary. He cited those on the Old Testament in passing in the *Prolegomena*, and recommended them to his friends and students.¹¹³ But the connection between his work and Eichhorn's is far closer than his explicit remarks suggest.

Like Wolf, Eichhorn treated his text as a historical and anthropological document, the much altered remnant of an early stage in the development of human culture.¹¹⁴ Like Wolf, he held that the original work had undergone radical changes, so that the serious biblical scholar must reconstruct "the history of the text."¹¹⁵ Like Wolf, too, he saw the true history of the text as its ancient history, before the standardized manuscripts now extant had been prepared. With the work of the Masoretes, he wrote, "properly ends the history of the written text; for the chief work was accomplished, and the Hebrew text continued now, some insignificant changes excepted, true in all its copies, to its once-for-all established pattern, as is clear from Kennicott's 'Collection of Variations.'"¹¹⁶ Unlike Kennicott, Eichhorn spent hardly any space on the printed editions of the Hebrew text.

Eichhorn ransacked the Masorah for evidence about the methods of its creators as ruthlessly as Wolf later attacked the Venice scholia.

His conclusions, set out point by point in heavily documented chapters, resembled Wolf's far more closely than anything I have been able to find in strictly classical philology. If Wolf showed great resource in classifying the critical signs by which Alexandrian scholars expressed their opinions of the received text of Homer, Eichhorn had already done the same for the critical remarks that filled the margins of the Masoretic text (and which, like the Alexandrian signs, assumed that the received text should be respected). Here, for example, is his chapter on the Masoretic marginal direction *Qerē velo Cethib* (literally "read and not written"), which instructs the reader to insert a word into a given passage of the Bible when reading it aloud or analyzing it, but not when copying the text proper:

The Talmud already knows seven instances of the *Qerē velo Cethib*; the Masorah lists ten of them at the beginning of the fifth book of Moses. Our editions, finally, note a still greater number, but they deviate from one another in the passages where they omit the *Qerē velo Cethib*. The passages in the Masorah are: Judges 20.13; Ruth 3.5, 17; II Sam. 8.3; 16.23; 18.20; II Kings 19.31, 37; Jerem. 31.38; 50.29. In our editions cf. II Kings 20.13; Ezech. 9.11; Is. 53.4, 9; Ps. 46.2; Jos. 22.24 . . .

The *Qerē velo Cethib* are not variants, as they have been previously presented, but exegetical glosses . . . For all the words added in the *Qerē* could be omitted without harming the sense. An interpreter presumably added them for the sake of clarity in meaning. Further, in the passages that I checked by way of trial, there is no evidence that the ancient translators read them. Finally, they are simply exegetical glosses . . .¹¹⁷

Even the Dutch had not made such systematic use of evidence from scholia.

These parallels, though striking, do not prove that Wolf imitated Eichhorn. For Eichhorn was not the first to classify and analyze Masoretic critical methods. The Masoretes themselves sometimes listed the passages at which a given marginal direction occurred; the *Masora magna* to Deuteronomy 1.1, for instance, gives ten cases of *Qerē velo Cethib*.¹¹⁸ Jacob ben Chajim and Elias Levita discussed in the sixteenth century the origins and nature of the dif-

ferent forms of variant found in the Masorah.¹¹⁹ Louis Cappell reworked the evidence in his *Critica sacra* of 1650; in the case of the *Qerē velo Cethib* as elsewhere, he provided the bulk of Eichhorn's collections of cases in point.¹²⁰ The younger Buxtorf went over the same ground from the opposite point of view in his reply to Cappell, the *Anticritica*.¹²¹ Brian Walton summarized Buxtorfs and Cappells in his *Prolegomena* to the London Polyglot of 1657. Those who referred the *Qerē* "to the *traditio* of Moses on Sinai," he wrote, "deserve laughter rather than serious refutation." It was clearly the work of later scholars, and consisted partly of variant readings drawn from manuscripts, partly of rabbinical conjectures designed to replace "*voces obscoeniores*."¹²² The most active eighteenth-century textual critics of the Hebrew Bible, Kennicott and de Rossi, naturally also raised and gave answers to what had become a canonical set of problems about the extent to which the *Qerē* came from collation or conjecture.¹²³ And Simon had shown long before Eichhorn how to insert a systematic analysis of the Masorah into a diachronic account of the history of the biblical text. Wolf did not have the Hebrew to study the Masorah on his own; but the scholarship of the Republic of Letters could obviously have offered him a plethora of sources and partial models for the *Prolegomena* even if he had not read the *Einleitung*.

Yet it seems all but certain that Eichhorn was Wolf's source. For Eichhorn provided both formulations and solutions for technical problems that the scholia posed Wolf. I will give two examples. First, Wolf argued that the Venice scholia did not fully explain the methods Alexandrian scholars had used in collating manuscripts and assessing the worth of variants: "The most important facts—that is, what innovations Aristarchus made in the poems as a whole, how scrupulously he dealt with old MSS, how he used the recensions of Zenodotus, Aristophanes, and the rest—these cannot now be ascertained by certain or even probable arguments."¹²⁴ Wolf explained this gap in the information offered by the scholiasts historically, in terms of the cultural situation of the ancient grammarians. Exact details of a critic's reasoning about variants simply had not interested them: "The ancients apparently never worried about *our* problem."¹²⁵ Eichhorn had already solved

a parallel problem in a parallel way: namely, why the Masoretes did not bother to preserve the older, unpunctuated manuscripts of the Bible from which they copied their own more usable texts:

Truly the manuscripts of the ancient pattern were worthy of preservation for the sake of their critical value. But at that time criticism was regarded in a different point of view from that of our days. The Jews believed themselves to have furnished manuscripts better, and containing more information, than those of their ancestors, and to have imparted to the former all that was valuable in the latter; they were flattered also at beholding the manuscripts of their creation adopted and preferred. How probable then, under such circumstances, is the disuse and neglect of the older manuscripts.¹²⁶

Second, Wolf argued that in the Venice scholia the opinions of individual scholars were irretrievably mingled and confused, since the Alexandrians had not considered it worthwhile to keep them separate: "Once Aristarchus's *anagnōsis* became the vulgate . . . new emendations and observations were added to it; the names of the original authors of the readings were generally omitted, except perhaps where they disagreed."¹²⁷ Hence no single recension—even the best-attested, that of Aristarchus himself—could be reconstructed line by line or word for word. Eichhorn had made exactly the same point about the Masorah: "We must regret that in the Masorah the earlier and later recensions of the Jews are mixed together, that each Jew did not publish the results of his critical work separately or designate his own contribution more precisely—in short, that we can no longer distinguish the old Masoretic recension from the new one."¹²⁸ In each case, Eichhorn's argument combined existing methods in a novel way. Michaelis had given him the techniques for studying Masoretic scholarship, and the conviction that the Masoretes had introduced changes and errors in their text.¹²⁹ But Michaelis had freed himself from the established Lutheran view that the Masoretic text was perfect only at the cost of refusing any sympathy to the Masoretes "whose names we do not even know," and whose arguments were often "jüdische Grillen."¹³⁰ Eichhorn's other teacher, Heyne, had consistently taught that one must bring imaginative sympathy to every past person and phenomenon—that even early textual critics deserved

admiration for their learning and brilliance "if one considers the times in which [they] lived."¹³¹ Eichhorn applied Heyne's historicism to the material Michaelis had made available. Only in the *Einleitung* could Wolf have found a method so apt to fit his own prejudices and interests.

It will be clear by now that Wolf's treatment and Eichhorn's both led, like so many modern *Textgeschichten*, to results of great interest to historians but minimal utility to editors. In both cases, close study of the evidence showed that the work of the ancient scholars could not be reconstructed fully—and thus that a really critical text could not be produced. It would be hard for two treatments of different bodies of evidence to resemble one another more closely.

Three further bits of evidence confirm the view that Wolf imitated Eichhorn. In a brilliant essay in the *Repertorium für Biblische und Morgenländische Litteratur*, Eichhorn argued that the stories about Ptolemy Philadelphus and the LXXII translators of the Bible had been conflated from two divergent accounts, both intended to win credit for the Septuagint. He compared them explicitly with the story transmitted by a scholiast to Dionysius Thrax: that Peisistratus had reassembled the poems of Homer with the help of LXXII grammarians.¹³² Wolf, discussing the story about Peisistratus, made the same analogy in reverse. The LXXII Homeric grammarians were a Hellenistic invention, and should be eliminated from history just as "viri docti" had already eliminated the "Jewish invention of the LXX interpreters." Wolf's footnote made his reference clear: Eichhorn had treated this problem "acutissime omnium."¹³³ In this one case Wolf admitted how much his historical insight owed to Eichhorn's.

Second, at least one contemporary observer saw the resemblance between Wolf and Eichhorn. In 1827 H. K. A. Eichstädt remarked that Eichhorn had set out "to achieve with equal success for biblical criticism what Wolf did for Homeric criticism."¹³⁴ Both, he reflected, had destroyed far more than they had built, but that was only to be expected in critics. Eichstädt's chronology was backward—but such an error is not surprising in a man so cavalier with details.¹³⁵

Third, Wolf himself hinted in a variety of ways that biblical

scholarship was the model that anyone interested in the history of ancient scholarship must imitate. In Chapter 4 of the *Prolegomena* he wrote that the true nature of ancient criticism would become clear "through comparison of both of these farragoes, Greek and Hebrew."¹³⁶ Of the two chapters of Part II of the *Prolegomena* that he completed, one compared at length the textual histories of the Old Testament and Homer, and the origins of the Masorah and the Venice scholia:

Our Hebrew text derived from a *paradosis*; so, clearly, did our vulgate Homer. In each *paradosis* a choice was made among readings, which we may nonetheless rework. In each text, the *paradosis* itself has undergone some mutilation and corruption . . . The Masorah is full of trifles and feeble, superstitious inventions; this mass of scholia does not lack similar things. True, ~~Greeks~~ Greeks rave in one way, Jews in another . . .¹³⁷

And he explicitly advised his students, if they hoped to understand Greek textual criticism, to approach it through that of the Jews:

One who wants to penetrate more deeply must concern himself with the history of the Masoretic MSS. True, these came into being much later than Greek criticism. But there is much similarity with the earliest Greek criticism. It is at least clear that they were not so bold as the Greek scholars. But one must not think that we have the Old Testament in its original form.¹³⁸

Y I do not think that it is stretching a point to take this passage as autobiographical. Wolf himself had learned from the Masorah, as analyzed by Eichhorn, to read the Venice scholia.

Moreover, Wolf stated in the preface to his Homer of 1804 that he used critical techniques "established by Griesbach, that outstanding practitioner of *Critica sacra*."¹³⁹ Griesbach had argued that the extant manuscripts of the New Testament fell into three great recensions and laid down rules for choosing among the readings they offered.¹⁴⁰ Wolf held that these rules should guide the Homeric scholar as well. He too had to choose not merely among manuscripts but among distinct recensions—the ancient ones that Wolf had reconstructed. This passage shows that Wolf could set out deliberately to borrow tools from another discipline. And it suggests that his grand plan was to forge a Homeric criticism that

drew on both Old and New Testament scholarship. The former would show how to reconstruct ancient recensions, the latter how to use them.

Wolf, then, did not create a new model of philological criticism. Rather he annexed for classical studies the most sophisticated methods of contemporary biblical scholarship—just as Lachmann was soon to annex with greater success the methods of New Testament textual criticism.¹⁴¹ True, the biblical scholarship that Wolf used had received powerful help from eighteenth-century classical scholarship; but Heyne, not Wolf, deserves the credit for that.

WHAT REMAINS of the *Prolegomena* after all this is subtracted? A great deal. Wolf combined detailed work on textual criticism with a general contribution to broad and fashionable literary problems. He thus made philology more intellectually respectable and interesting than it had been since the late Renaissance. As Humboldt put it in another context, he showed that the study of grammatical details could be *geistvoll*.¹⁴² This was the best possible response to the *philosophes'* scoffing about pedantry.

Wolf also achieved a masterpiece of presentation. He could state the commonplaces of eighteenth-century scholarship in a style that gleamed with polish. No one could put the insights of Bengel and Griesbach more pithily:

Newness in MSS is no more a vice than youth in men. For just as age does not always make men wise, so insofar as each MS closely follows an old and good authority, it is a good witness.¹⁴³

No one could admit with a prettier pretence of humility that poets understand the growth of an epic more profoundly than scholars:

I have done what I could . . . But this is a subject worthy of the study of many, and of men who will follow a different path; above all, of those who can measure the poetic abilities of the human mind by the standard of their own intellect, and possess powers of judgment trained by classical literature: the Klopstocks, Wielands, Vosses.¹⁴⁴

No one could explain more powerfully just what it meant to think historically, to recognize the pastness of the past:

Here we must completely forget the archives and libraries that nowadays preserve our studies, and transport ourselves into a different age and a different world. There a great many devices that we think necessary for good living were unknown to wise men and fools alike.¹⁴⁵

If the ideas were well known, Wolf's axioms and images were his own. To that extent at least—as a literary masterpiece composed from already existing sources—the *Prolegomena* deserved the enthusiastic reception they received from such connoisseurs of style as Flaxman, Goethe, and Leopardi.

backwards The ultimate fate of the *Prolegomena* had little to do with the work's real origin and merits. In a sense, it is emblematic of Wolf's own larger fate as a writer. The *Prolegomena* became the model of philological criticism. Even those who lived through the origins of the *Historische Schule*, men like Niebuhr and Varnhagen von Ense, came to see the *Prolegomena* as the work "in which the higher criticism attained completion"; as the work that inspired a revolution in biblical as well as classical scholarship.¹⁴⁶ Newcomers to German philology, like the American George Bancroft, were told to master "Wolf & yet Wolf & yet Wolf."¹⁴⁷ The *Prolegomena* were reprinted several times in the nineteenth century so that students could have direct access to them.

Like some other classics of German scholarship—F. Schlegel's book *Ueber die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* is a case in point—Wolf's work was seldom criticized in detail.¹⁴⁸ Even those who denied the novelty of his general thesis applauded the rigor and originality of his technical work.¹⁴⁹ This need not surprise us. The admission that Wolf could have had predecessors in his technical discoveries could have suggested that the *Historische Schule* itself did not spring full-grown from the *Sturm und Drang*.

What is more surprising, at first, is that even those who continued Wolf's work did not mention or follow up his comparisons between Alexandrians and Masoretes. Karl Lehrs, a converted Jew, set out in the 1830s to show that Wolf had greatly underestimated the consistency and seriousness of Alexandrian textual criticism. Lehrs did not use the Masorah and made clear in passing that he had no knowledge of things or languages oriental.¹⁵⁰ Parthey, the historian of the Alexandrian Museum, followed Wolf rather than Lehrs in

his discussion of textual criticism. He too failed to refer to or use Jewish material. Parthey's critic Ritschl showed no greater comparative interest.¹⁵¹ Even Gräfenhan, whose comprehensive *Geschichte der klassischen Philologie im Alterthum* summed up all that was known of the subject by the mid-1840s, used strictly Greek sources to reconstruct Greek methods.¹⁵² Only in very recent times have historians of Judaism started to raise again Wolf's questions—apparently in ignorance of Wolf's work.¹⁵³ The "two farragoes" have not yet been compared in detail.

The reasons why Wolf's program was not carried out are not far to seek. Jews and Judaism seemed far less attractive in Restoration Germany than they had in the late Enlightenment. To use Jewish material to clear up Homeric problems would perhaps have seemed an oxymoron in 1840. More generally, the ready cross-cultural comparisons that had been Wolf's normal practice seemed suspect in the age of pure historicism. Classical scholars were professional specialists, who neither expected nor were expected to deal with Semitic philology. Wolf was not condemned for his excursions into Judaica; rather, they were not noticed. The founder of German *Philologie* simply could not have done something so uncharacteristic of the true Philologe. Generations of scholars apparently read and digested the *Prolegomena* without even noticing—far less building on—the remarks about the Masorah.

Nineteenth-century readers failed to see that Wolf, for all his self-conscious modernity, remained a good citizen of the old-fashioned, Latin-speaking Republic of Letters—that rich continent of the mind, whose baroque contours have not yet received their map. Wieland, a fellow citizen of the Republic, sketched Wolf's true historical location far more vividly than Wolf's professional successors could: "I have always wanted to see the vast learning of Salmasius, which I know from his *Exercitationes Plinianae*, united in one mind with the elegance of my idol Hemsterhuys. I have now found them truly united in Wolf."¹⁵⁴