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Johann Jakob Wettstein: New Sources, New Problems, and New Possibilities for Digital Research

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Abstract:

Johann Jakob Wettstein (1683-1754) worked almost all his life toward the publication of his landmark 1751-52 edition of the Greek New Testament. In recent years, a large number of previously unknown sources on and by Wettstein has come to light, scattered over libraries in Europe, that provide new insights into his life and his New Testament project. This paper explores the diversity of these sources, their genres, their connections, their state of conservation and accessibility and the like. Starting from the idea that the collection offers an excellent opportunity for mapping a single scholar's

projects and international networks over time and space, it envisages a project that brings together this wealth of material. It asks what challenges and possibilities for international digital research the collection entails and formulates the desiderata concerning the necessary digital infrastructure and collaboration across traditional scholarly boundaries.

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Introduction

Johann Jakob Wettstein was a famous eighteenth-century New Testament scholar and church historian. Originally from Basel, he worked as a professor at the Remonstrant

Seminary in Amsterdam, and published there, a few years before his death, his landmark edition of the Greek New Testament (Wettstein 1751–1752).

My initial interest in Wettstein mostly came from this edition. His text-critical ideas and the changes to the text that he suggested were an important step toward the modern text established about a hundred years later. He introduced the numbering system for New Testament manuscripts that is still in use today,¹ and he collected citations from classical authors that illustrate the New Testament.

Wettstein was also a controversial figure: he had to leave Basel for religious reasons, textual criticism of the New Testament being an eyebrow-raising activity. His way of using classical authors also touched upon sensitive matters: he allowed secular texts to elucidate sacred ones as if Athens rules over Jerusalem. His hermeneutical rules (rules of interpretation) were clearly grounded in—or, perhaps better, were grounding—the historical-critical method. Wettstein also had a way of making enemies, past and present.

In short, Wettstein was a pivotal figure in eighteenth-century New Testament scholarship, and a clear example of the struggle for academic freedom in matters religious. Study of his works and life can serve as a lens through which we can better understand his time. This contribution explores ways to facilitate such studies, with full use of digital scholarship and taking into account the astonishing wealth of material gradually becoming available.

The *status quaestionis* of Wettstein scholarship is as follows. There are two important biographies, but they are already somewhat (out)dated (Lente, 1902; Hulbert-Powell, 1938). There are some encyclopaedia entries that mostly draw upon these biographies (e.g. Mussies, 1988). There are some descriptions of Wettstein's struggles with the Basel authorities (see also Stenger, 1975), and there is of course everything that can be read in Wettstein's own publications, notably the "Prolegomena" to his New Testament edition. Parts of the latter drift into polemical autobiographical territory, making it all the more fascinating, though not easy to follow. Nearly everything Wettstein published is in Latin, a language necessary to anyone desiring to delve into

the history of whatever scholarly or scientific discipline. The current work of Bastian Lemitz at KU Leuven should also be mentioned; Lemitz is finishing a dissertation in which he analyses an important part of Wettstein's scholarship, namely the use of classical authors in the interpretation of the New Testament. At VU Amsterdam, Silvia Castelli is doing similar work for Wettstein the textual critic, concentrating on Wettstein's attitude towards conjectural emendation. Finally, Wettstein still inspires modern projects such as the *Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti*.²

New Sources

Intrigued by Wettstein's life and work, I started looking for sources: not only secondary sources, but also those left to posterity by Wettstein himself. What was found in just a few years is daunting, and far more than expected.

First, in Amsterdam, many papers left by Wettstein are preserved in the University Library of the University of Amsterdam, mostly on permanent loan from the Remonstrant Seminary. Space allows me only to mention some of the highlights, but it should be noted in passing that I repeatedly relived the experience of many archive researchers before me: catalogues do not tell you everything.

There is an interleaved copy of von Maastricht's first Greek New Testament edition of 1711 (published in Amsterdam by Wettstein's relatives; UvA UB shelf mark III H 8-10), full of annotations on readings and manuscripts. The catalogue describes it as "written in an unknown hand", but it was easy to identify as Wettstein's. Interestingly, the volumes match with a description given by Wettstein's first biographer Rathlef:

He [i.e. Johann Jakob Wettstein] had procured for himself an interleaved copy of the 1711 Wettstein edition of the Greek New Testament, and therein he had begun to enter readings he found that diverged from the printed text.

Er [i.e. Wettstein] hatte die wetsteinische Ausgabe des griechischen Testaments von 1711 mit Papier durchschliessen lassen, und angefangen auf demselben anzumerken, wenn er eine vom Druck abweichende Leseart angetroffen.
(Rathlef, 1749, p. 213)

By means of these volumes, Wettstein's ways of gathering material, from early on, can now be studied in remarkable detail.

One of the most important—and remarkable—manuscripts of the Greek New Testament is the so-called Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis. Wettstein himself introduced the siglum “D” for this manuscript. This siglum is still in use, though increasingly the number 05 (with a zero to indicate that it concerns a manuscript written in majuscules) is employed. Wettstein obviously recognized its importance, because while in Cambridge he did not simply prepare a collation (a list of differences with a standard text), but he copied the entire manuscript, emulating its layout and also noting the corrections made by the scribes. This transcription has been preserved, though partly damaged by fire, as two unrelated entries in the catalogues (UvA UB shelf marks III F 18 and III C 20 g [partly]). Both entries are currently marked as incomplete, but they actually complement each other and could be reunited, preferably in digital form.

Such scholarly transcriptions are very rare. This one provides detailed information on how Wettstein dealt with this particular manuscript. The transcription may even provide more precise information on the readings of the manuscript for the few pages that have been lost since Wettstein's days.

There is an interesting list of books bequeathed to the Remonstrant Library after Wettstein's death (UvA UB shelf mark III C 1 d). In some cases, it gives better insight than Wettstein's printed works into which editions he used. Perhaps some copies can still be traced, even with annotations by Wettstein himself.

The numbering system for New Testament manuscripts already referred to can be witnessed in the making, by means of diverse lists and sheets preserved among Wettstein's papers (e.g. some leaves of UvA UB shelf mark III C 20 g). There is also a

large amount of notes related to New Testament textual criticism (e.g. UvA UB shelf marks V H 11 and 12), as well as many collations of manuscripts, both by Wettstein himself and by others who sent them to him.³ And as said, these are just the highlights.

Second, Paris. It is no longer necessary to go there, though there are still some other entries in the catalogues that look promising: an important treasure in the Bibliothèque nationale de France has been digitised and put online, namely Wettstein's letters over a period of 25 years to his cousin (BNF, shelf mark Fr 14629).⁴ It is really by a quirk of history that they have been preserved and found their way to Paris. So far these letters have hardly been explored, and certainly not by scholars interested in Wettstein.⁵ This remark is actually valid for every item discussed here. Yet they allow a detailed view into the making of Wettstein's editions, his dealings with Basel sensitivities, his pride and humour, his failed attempts to get married, and also his love of good books, tobacco, wine, and cheese (Swiss cheese, actually). Indeed, they have the well-known advantage of letters over printed matter: directness and the inside perspective. To give just one example, consider Wettstein's outspoken utterance on Pauline theology, or rather on whatever the theologians of his day derived from Paul's letters: "Their entire system is built on some obscure terms that Paul let slip out, and on some dubious variant readings" (*"tout le systeme est batie [sic] sur quelques termes obscurs echapés a S. Paul, et sur quelques Leçons douteuses"* (BNF Fr 14629, f. 78^r, a letter dated 30 December 1749)).

Daring words of this kind would not be found in print in those days. The letters are in French, even though Wettstein and his cousin both had German (Swiss German actually) as their native language. They also have the well-known disadvantage compared to publications: many matters are presupposed and left unsaid. Therefore, annotating them is a daunting task, perhaps best carried out in collaboration by specialists from various disciplines.

The Paris collection can be complemented with some letters found in the Amsterdam library, sent by cousin Caspar to Wettstein (UvA UB shelf marks J 97; A 168 a-e; A 170). Regrettably the rest of the correspondence is one-sided, as most letters

by Caspar have not been preserved. Wettstein must also have written far more letters to scholars, friends, and relatives, but only a few of these have been preserved as far as is now known.

Third, Basel. In January 2014, during a visit to the University Library, I found some letters by Wettstein (e.g. shelf mark Ms. Ki.Ar. 154 N° 8, the draft of a letter to Berriman), and a wealth of material from the so-called *Wettsteinhandel*, the ecclesiastical proceedings that forced Wettstein to leave Basel.⁶ Most important among these is the extended—but still short—version of Wettstein’s earliest effort at an edition of the Greek New Testament, precisely what led to the affair around 1730 (shelf mark Frey-Gryn. VI 13, ff. 5^r-10^v and 164^{r-v}). The material more or less doubles the part of the history already known, since Wettstein’s opponents had produced a large book with information and official documents from the case (Anonymous, 1730).

The catalogue, however, did not prepare me for some even larger finds. Almost the entire printer’s copy of Wettstein’s famous edition is kept in Basel (shelf marks A XIII 18–20). How it came there from Amsterdam, where the edition was prepared and produced, and why it was not thrown away at some moment in history is an intricate story. A few thousand pages have been preserved, as they came from Wettstein’s own hand and went to the typesetters. Short notes urging Wettstein to produce more copy and to proofread faster are found as well (in Dutch). This collection, with smudges and printer’s marks over Wettstein’s tiny handwriting, probably makes the 1751-52 edition, Wettstein’s *magnum opus*, into one of the best documented works of the eighteenth century. There is even more than just the printer’s copy, namely draft versions and separate notes from which Wettstein, working night and day, put together his new edition. The edition also has more than two hundred printed pages of “Prolegomena”, about 50% of which Wettstein had already published 20 years earlier in preparation of his then-aborted edition (Wettstein, 1730). The Universitätsbibliothek preserves an important copy of these 1730 *Prolegomena*, marked up by Wettstein himself in order to serve as printer’s copy for the new “Prolegomena” (shelf mark A IX 85). All in all, the

development of Wettstein's work can be studied in great detail, and may provide new insights in eighteenth-century scholarly book production.

And then, fourth, there is Cambridge. What is preserved there dates from an earlier period in Wettstein's own life, when he had just defended his dissertation (Wettstein, 1713) and started working as a preacher and travelling scholar with a special interest in textual criticism. At that time the famous classical scholar Richard Bentley was raising money for a new and revolutionary edition of the Greek New Testament (Bentley, 1720). This edition itself never materialised, and the subscribers were reimbursed after Bentley's death. However, much work was done in its preparation, for instance Bentley taking notes and employing young scholars to assist him. One of these was Wettstein, who collated manuscripts for Bentley, notably in Paris. Some letters between the two have been preserved (Wordsworth, 1842, nos 191; 192; 194–198; 202; 205; 207–208), and the results of Wettstein's collations can still be found in Cambridge (Cambridge University, Trinity College Library, shelf mark Adv. e. 2.4–5). Wettstein's transcription of Codex Bezae, mentioned above, also dates from this period.

In the Municipal Library in Rotterdam, famous for its Erasmus collection, my colleague Mirjam van Veen and I made another discovery in 2014: Wettstein's handwritten version of his course on Church History (Archive of the Rotterdam Remonstrant Church, no. 457). It starts at the very beginning of Christianity, and gives in some respects clearer insight in Wettstein's opinions on New Testament matters than his published writings.⁷ Some more letters are preserved in Germany and some material is probably preserved in the Champollion museum in Vif (Isère). Perhaps there is even more, just as the printer's copy now in Basel was laying in some drawer in the Wettstein family for some generations before being bequeathed to the University Library in the nineteenth century. But what is there is already immensely rich and intriguing. It poses new problems and offers new possibilities for current-day research, notably for Digital Humanities.

The Problems

How to deal with all this material? It seems too much, too varied and too dispersed. And despite it being so much, there are also significant lacunae, such as the one-sidedness of the correspondence. The state of conservation is some reason for concern as well: some parts of Wettstein's transcription of Codex Bezae were lost through fire, and other documents are becoming darker and darker over time.

The most important question however is: how to connect the material? How to work with it in its entirety, or even better: how to allow the scholarly world to work with it? What is required in order to do that? And what is the importance of this wide range of sources?

The Possibilities

That last question is the easiest to answer: to my knowing there is no eighteenth-century book the making of which can be so meticulously followed as Wettstein's great New Testament edition, thanks to the combination of the letters, the notes, the collations, the 1730 affair, and especially the printer's copy and drafts. This fact creates a unique situation with unique possibilities, in which an entire spectrum of research questions can be explored (see further below). Most importantly, with so many sources waiting to be explored, Wettstein's edition can henceforth be properly studied and understood only if these are made available to the scholarly community.

Obviously Digital Humanities (DH) are essential here. Thanks to DH, the material being too dispersed no longer has to be a problem: it can be united in a virtual reality. Neither is the material being too varied a problem any longer. Diversity is merely a challenge.

The astonishing quantity of the material is still a problem, of course, but mainly if the research would depend on a single scholar who alone has access to the material and studies it in isolation. Partnering-up is the key here, in various respects. Institutions and scholars, librarians and students could and should work together. Various

disciplines, from History to Art History and from Biblical Studies to Palaeography, will have something to learn and to contribute.

So the project envisaged here is to bring together in a Virtual Research Environment (VRE) all the eighteenth-century Wettstein sources, both published and unpublished, in print and in manuscript. The challenge is to get the project going and to create an environment in which everyone can contribute. The Swiss SALSAH (System for Annotation and Linkage of Sources in Arts and Humanities) infrastructure is very promising in this respect.⁸ Only such a VRE can do justice to the diversity of these widely dispersed sources, allowing for annotations and connections of various kinds. Some of the decisive advantages of SALSAH are the following: (1) its strict separation between the layers of the material, e.g. images, transcriptions, and annotations; (2) sophisticated versioning, so that the progress of the work can be traced and documented; (3) wide and open availability to the scholarly community; (4) durability of the material that has been gathered, and of the research that has been conducted.

The work itself still has to be done, and as the most important tasks the following can be named. The sources should be classified and included according to different criteria, and to differing degrees: catalogue number/shelf mark/location/size | description of nature, state and contents | availability of digital images | availability of transcriptions | annotations/links. It is also important, in view of the sheer quantity, to prioritize. Priority should be given to the material that is closely connected to Wettstein's great New Testament edition, and that can be easily related to it by tagging and annotating. In practice the project should start with the following core: (1) the New Testament edition itself; (2) the printer's copy, both the manuscript and the annotated 1730 *Prolegomena*; (3) collations of single manuscripts made by or received by Wettstein; (4) the letters, as these allow to trace the progress of the edition, the negotiations surrounding it, and its reception.

The following data structures should be employed in the annotation layers, in order to make any such research trajectory possible: dates; places; names, both contemporary and classical/patristic; New Testament manuscripts; New Testament

verses. Perhaps some others will present themselves once the material is systematically explored.

What kind of research questions can be pursued? An elegant way of being both realistic and ambitious is conveyed by the word “trajectories”. Trajectories can be developed and offered as examples of “research paths”. Some examples out of many can be named. Collation practice can be studied in detail, now that all elements can be put together on the screen: the manuscript itself; the collation base (mostly a well-known edition); the collation; the result in notes, printer’s copy and printer edition. Elements of daily life emerge, not only in the letters but also in the printer’s copy. Wettstein’s classification and numbering of New Testament manuscripts, which has had enormous impact on New Testament textual criticism, can be traced from its inception to its implementation and even reception by contemporaries. Particular New Testament texts function as storm centres of attention and references to them are found scattered throughout the sources. Luke 22:43-44 could be mentioned,⁹ but even more so 1 Tim 3:16. Both text are important because christological sensitivities are intertwined with textual variation.¹⁰ Wettstein’s conflicts in Basel can be seen from even more angles than before. Establishing such research trajectories can be seen as facilitating research by simultaneously doing it.

I myself am a New Testament scholar specialised in New Testament textual criticism, and it stands to reason that the Wettstein project presented here can be expected to yield an important contribution to that field of study.¹¹ However, the great diversity of the material and the many angles from which it can be studied suggest other research questions as well, e.g. the history of (New Testament) scholarship and eighteenth-century Church history.

What can or should also be done is to establish connections with other corpora. To name just a few possibilities here: the printed works of Wettstein can already be found online and are of course to be linked to the handwritten material in many ways, some straightforward such as printer’s copy or descriptions of manuscripts, some more surprising such as recurrent themes and names. In the letters and elsewhere many

persons are mentioned that are known from other sources, such as *Early Modern Letters Online*.¹² The New Testament manuscripts collated by Wettstein or for him by others have nowadays often been made available online, and even transcribed, notably in the Münster New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room. Wettstein's work on classical authors in relation to the New Testament continues today. Swiss researchers have put online excellent results of genealogical researches, and some of Wettstein's works have been taken up by later scholars for annotated reprints.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Wettstein's life and work, notably his great New Testament edition, form an ideal candidate for a DH project with both state-of-the art and pilot aspects. Research on Wettstein's scholarly production and on his time period will be greatly furthered by a DH approach. Indeed, in a VRE such as SALSAH the sources can be explored internally and externally in ways previously impossible and unthinkable. At the same time, DH in general and SALSAH in particular can benefit from the challenges posed by the nature, spread, and diversity of the Wettstein material. Finally, the project presented here presupposes international cooperation, a necessity luckily coinciding with a current trend in funding requirements.

Notes

- ¹ The numbering system is nowadays known as the "Gregory-Aland" system, after Caspar René Gregory (e.g. Gregory, 1908) and Kurt Aland (Aland, 1994). The list is currently maintained in a digital environment, the *New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room* (<http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de> [accessed 11 September 2015]).

- ² See http://www.theologie.uni-halle.de/faecher/corpus-hellenisticum/226905_226953/nw (accessed 11 September 2015).
- ³ For instance, UvA UB shelf mark III C 20 f, a collation of Revelation sent by Cardinal Quirini from Rome. It concerns the manuscript now known as 046 in the Gregory-Aland numbering and with the Vatican shelf mark Vat. gr. 2066.
- ⁴ <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9061820s> (accessed 11 September 2015).
- ⁵ For some initial explorations of the material see my “‘Mon cher cousin.’ Johann Jakob Wettstein’s Letters to His Cousin Caspar”, to be published in the volume of proceedings of the “Wettsteintagungen” in Halle, November 2011 and Leuven, November 2013 (edited by Manfred Lang and Joseph Verheyden; title to be confirmed).
- ⁶ An important part was already published in 1730, as part of the struggle against Wettstein (Anonymous, 1730). Yet in handwritten form much more can be found, mostly in Basel.
- ⁷ The papers are important for other aspects as well, but I happily leave the exploration and publication of these to Professor van Veen.
- ⁸ <http://www.salsah.org> (accessed 11 September 2015). For further technical discussion of SALSAH the reader is referred to the (German) project description on this website.
- ⁹ Luke 22:43-44 portrays a Jesus in agony, comforted by an angel, and sweating drops of blood. To some theologians in Wettstein’s time, and indeed today, these verses betray a disappointingly human saviour. Interestingly the manuscript transmission is sharply divided. For an extensive treatment see Clivaz, 2010.
- ¹⁰ The issue in 1 Tim 3:16 is whether one should read θεὸς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί (“*God* was manifested in the flesh”), ὃς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί (“*who* was manifested in the flesh”), or ὁ ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί (“[the mystery] *which* was manifested in the flesh”). The common

reading in Wettstein's days was θεός, and the verse was seen as scriptural proof of Christ's divinity, as it presents Christ as God incarnated. It was by no means harmless to point out the other readings as found in the manuscripts, let alone to actually advocate the substitution of "God" by a mere pronoun.

- ¹¹ It should be noted that studying Wettstein's work can be important for current-day critics, notably because of the fact that sometimes information on manuscripts was available to him that has since been lost. In particular portions of Codex Bezae (D 05) and Codex Boreelianus (F 09) have gone missing, and Wettstein had access to Codex Alexandrinus (A 02) and Codex Ephraemi rescriptus (C 04) when they were still less degraded than today.

- ¹² <http://emlo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk> (accessed 11 September 2011).

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