Stylometrics and the Question of Interpolation in Paul

Some Analytical Possibilities in 1 Corinthians

There are two complications with the Corinthian correspondence. One is the possibility of post-authorial interpolations, probably made by Paul’s editors. The other is the possibility that three or more Corinthian letters were edited down to the present two. Note that some 2 Cor conflation proposals also involve 1 Cor passages.

1 Cor 1-6 responds to news brought to Paul by friends; 1 Cor 7-16 responds to questions in a letter. The latter are answered in orderly fashion; each topic introduced by the itemization formula περὶ δὲ (“as for”). We expect those sections to be topically consistent. They are not, and inconsistent passages are suspect as editorial additions.

1 Cor 1-6. The following, proposed by Widmann 1979, has been accepted by *Walker 1992):


1 Cor 7-16. Passages which seem to be off-topic for that περὶ δὲ section include the following (*some have been dealt with in Walker Interpolations; *others in subsequent papers by Walker).

- 9:1-27. Defense of Paul’s working for his food. Off-topic in a section on idol food; cf 2 Cor 11:7f
- *10:1-22. Food in the wilderness. But is it really off-topic in this section on idol food?
- 11:2, 17-34. Wrong behavior at Eucharist. Only vaguely on-topic in a section on idol food

If 11:3-16 was interpolated into this passage, then 11:3-16 is from the second of two editorial stages.

- *14:33b-36. Subordination of women; cf 11:3-16 above
  - °15:29-34. Baptism on behalf of the dead. See 15:1-58 below

Note the introductory 15:1. “Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the Gospel.” “Reminder” formulas are typical of post-Pauline passages; cf 2 Thess 2:5.

Parts of 1 Cor (c56) which agree with Matthew (c68, Gundry) are probably post-Matthean harmonizations.

That some Pauline editing is post-70 is shown by the reference to the destruction of the Temple in 1 Thess 2:13-16.

One demonstrable interpolation impugns all others in the same category, such as the Haustafeln or the “subordination of women” passages, which occur, but uninterpolated, in the deutero-Paulines.