

The Last Hand: On the Craft of Editing Weber's 'Börsenschriften'¹

Thomas M. Kemple interviews Cornelia Meyer-Stoll

Interviewer's Note

The theory and practice of editing texts for publication are an integral part of how writers are received and texts interpreted by readers. In spite of the indispensable character of this work, it is more often taken for granted than taken up as an explicit theme for research and reflection. In the case of Max Weber's 'Börsenschriften' – his neglected though massive writings on the stock and commodity exchanges from 1894 to 1898 intended for educated workers, social scientists and members of the Bundesrat (upper house of parliament) – the editorial problems involved are distinctive and complex. Not only does late-nineteenth-century political and economic terminology pose a formidable challenge for any reader, but editors must also explain the many textual formats, historical contexts and hermeneutic frameworks through which these ideas have been transmitted and received. Since the craft of editing is itself ruled by particular methods of research and presentation (cf. Marx 1976: 102), it both participates in and mediates between the creative communicative efforts of the writer on the one hand, and the critical interpretive activities of the reader on the other.

Since its formation in 1976 the editorial board of the *Max Weber – Gesamtausgabe* (MWG) has managed the enormous work of researching and presenting all of Weber's writings and speeches by following a number of editorial guidelines. Among the most important of these is

1. After considerable discussion, we decided to follow Keith Tribe in translating the term 'Börse' with the somewhat antiquated and technical term 'bourse' (see Borchardt 2002: 139-40, translator's note). This reflects the recent practice by the *Financial Times* in using 'bourse' as a generic term for institutions dealing in stocks, shares and commodities, and also roughly corresponds to what Weber means by the term 'Börse'. Nevertheless, in various places we also use expressions such as 'stock and commodity exchanges', 'exchange' and 'market'. We wish to thank Steven Vaitkus, Stephen Guy-Bray, Guenther Roth, and especially Knut Borchardt and David Chalcraft for their advice in preparing and translating the text of this interview. Any errors that remain are our own.

the priority of 'the last hand' (*die letzte Hand*), that is, the ordering and presentation of texts according to the most reliable evidence available that each text constitutes the last version that Weber himself worked on or approved. To be sure, this principle is not universally accepted among editorial scholars, who differ widely in their views over which 'copy text' (manuscript, typescript, corrected proof, the first or last edition, and so on) may be understood to correspond most closely to the 'final authorial intention' (Tanselle 1979). Nevertheless, an interesting outcome of these debates has been a renewed focus on the interpretive implications of historical-critical editing and its social-institutional contexts: 'The scholar's text is a positive construction in its own right, a new stage of collaboration with the (now dead) author and his or her earlier collaborators' (McGann 1991: 65).

The first division of the MWG (Abteilung I) contains Weber's writings and speeches as well as reports on his speeches and contributions to various discussions for which there is no text. The second division includes his correspondence. The contents of each volume in the first division are organized thematically and ordered chronologically according to the date of composition or publication. To enable the reader and researcher to trace how Weber draws from sources and develops his ideas, editorial footnotes, indexes, a glossary, biographical notes and appendices provide scholarly context for sources and historical information on particular references. Perhaps most importantly, an 'editorial report' to each piece and a substantial introduction to the volume as a whole further contextualize the texts and explain their historical background or contemporary relevance. Weber's own writings on the stock and commodity exchanges, as well as stenographic notes from speeches and newspaper reports on related lectures, stretch over two 'Halbbände' (half-volumes).

Along with the work of typists, typesetters and the publisher J.C.B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck in Tübingen, the coordination of a highly skilled editorial team is also needed to ensure fidelity to 'the last hand' for each piece, as well as consistency and clarity within and between volumes. For the 'Börsenschriften', the bulk of this work was undertaken by Knut Borchardt as the chief volume editor in collaboration with Cornelia Meyer-Stoll at the Kommission für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte in the Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Munich. Karl-Ludwig Ay and Edith Hanke, the Generalredaktion (editors-in-chief) for the MWG, checked and corrected the manuscript. From the MWG editorial board, Wolfgang J. Mommsen read and criticized the manuscript, and after some revisions, he and M. Rainer Lepsius (also from the editorial board) gave final permission for publishing.

In approaching Dr Meyer-Stoll for an interview about her work in preparing MWG I/5.1-2 for publication, I had three general methodological objectives: (1) to expose in some detail the scholarly work that is involved in this often ignored collaborative craft (*Handwerk*) and vocation (*Beruf*) of editing, (2) to explore some of the implications that editorial principles and practices may have for reading and interpreting social scientific texts, and (3) to consider the importance of editorial work on Weber's texts for understanding his place in the history of thought. The idea for our interview emerged over several informal lunches and a dinner party during the time I studied at the Kommission in Munich in summer 1999 and fall 2001. It began formally as a series of more structured though open-ended conversations, which were then supplemented by an extensive e-mail correspondence conducted in English and German over the course of a year. An early draft of Dr Meyer-Stoll's responses was translated by me into English, which then became the basis for subsequent revisions and additions. The sub-headings for each section are my invention. Since we have jointly edited and approved the text of the interview that follows, it should itself be understood as issuing from 'the last hand' of each of us.

A distinctive feature of our interview can be seen in the respective intellectual disciplines that each of us takes as our starting point in addressing the craft of scholarly editing. Where Dr Meyer-Stoll is primarily concerned with editorial practice and economic history, my main interest is in editorial theory and sociological interpretation. Partly as a result of these contrasting approaches, several issues could only be raised without being brought to a mutually agreeable conclusion, as in the second half of the interview when we discuss whether or to what extent editing may be considered an act of interpretation. To be sure, in matters such as these, an expert like Dr Meyer-Stoll, rather than an amateur like myself, must be given the last word, as Weber himself liked to point out: 'Almost all sciences are indebted to dilettantes for one thing or another, and often for quite valuable points of view. However, science would come to an end if dilettantism became its operating principle' (Weber 2002: 162; translation modified).

1. *The Devil in the Details: Editorial Principles and Editorial Practices*

Thomas M. Kemple: When I first came to do research at the Kommission für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte in Munich I wanted to explore Weber's methods of reading and writing by examining materials that are largely inaccessible in English and hard to find even in German. However, I did not expect so much of my attention and time to be