

ADVANCES IN DIGITAL SCHOLARLY EDITING



ADVANCES IN DIGITAL SCHOLARLY EDITING

PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE DIXIT CONFERENCES
IN THE HAGUE, COLOGNE, AND ANTWERP

edited by

PETER BOOT
ANNA CAPPELOTTO
WOUT DILLEN
FRANZ FISCHER
AODHÁN KELLY
ANDREAS MERTGENS
ANNA-MARIA SICHANI
ELENA SPADINI
DIRK VAN HULLE

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Published by Sidestone Press, Leiden
www.sidestone.com

Imprint: Sidestone Press

Lay-out & cover design: Sidestone Press
Cover illustration: Tessa Gengnagel

ISBN 978-90-8890-483-7 (softcover)
ISBN 978-90-8890-484-4 (hardcover)
ISBN 978-90-8890-485-1 (PDF e-book)

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'... but what should I put in a digital apparatus?' A not-so-obvious choice

New types of digital scholarly editions

Raffaella Afferni,¹ Alice Borgna,² Maurizio Lana,³

Paolo Monella⁴ & Timothy Tambassi⁵

Paper presented at 'Academia, Cultural Heritage, Society' DiXiT Convention, Cologne, March 14-18, 2016.

We propose to develop and expand the concept of 'digital edition of a text'. The specific value of a digital edition is not only in the digital form of representation of textual information: dynamic rather than static, resulting in better visual or practical usability, but it mainly lies in the ability to work with computational methods on the text and on the information it conveys. Therefore the digital edition of a text should aim to provide adequate data and functionality to further forms of processing.

Hence the idea that the 'digital scholarly edition' until now often identified with the 'digital critical edition' (i.e. an edition *variorum*, reporting variant reading), also can take other forms focused on other types of 'scholarly research': from the geographical knowledge contained in the text, to the historical knowledge (time and events) often inextricably linked with the prosopography, and much more.

If the *digital critical edition* is a type of *digital scholarly edition* containing an apparatus that analyses and describes the state of the text in the witnesses, then we can conceive e.g.

1 raffaella.afferni@uniupo.it.

2 alice.borgna@uniupo.it.

3 maurizio.lana@uniupo.it.

4 paolo.monella@gmx.net.

5 timothy.tambassi@uniupo.it.

- the *digital scholarly geographical edition* of a work – whose apparatus contains an analytical description of the geographical knowledge contained in the placenames;
- the *digital critical geographical edition* whose geographical apparatus is layered over a base critical edition:

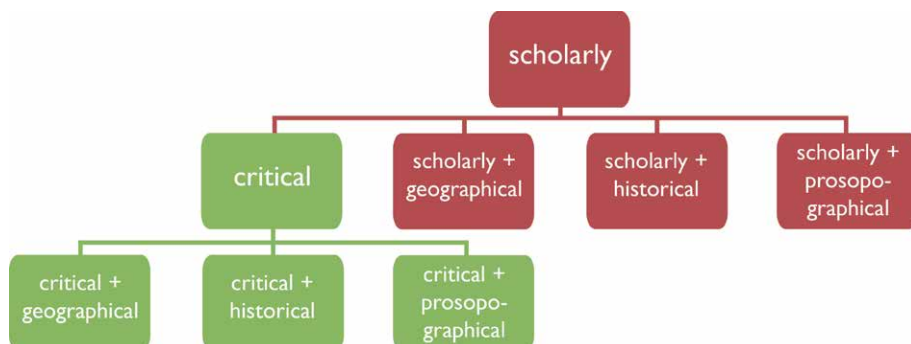


Figure 1: Types of digital scholarly editions.

By ‘base critical edition’ we do not necessarily mean a previously published edition with a critical text already established. The best model would be an integrated edition where the critical discussion on (and selection of) textual variants and the interpretive extraction of geographical knowledge are integrated and both ‘born digital’.

The knowledge contained in the text must be expressed in a highly formal manner – the same way that the critical apparatus is a highly formal device – by means of an ontology. The ontology both from a philosophical or a computer science point of view is a structure aimed to analyse and describe the categorical hierarchy of a specific domain, analysing its basic constituents (entities like objects, events, processes, etc.), the properties characterizing them and the relationships which correlate them. The resulting (structural) representation of knowledge allows to resolve conceptual or terminological inconsistencies, providing a dictionary of terms formulated in a canonical syntax and with commonly accepted definitions. It also provides a lexical or taxonomic framework for the representation of knowledge, shared by different communities of information systems that can range across several domains.

From this point of view, the starting point can be the adoption of GO!, a geographical ontology aimed at providing a complete and informative description of the geographical knowledge emerging from Latin literature.⁶ The most general aims of GO! are essentially three: accessibility (both for the scientific community and for general public), informativeness and completeness. Moreover, about the most specific goals, GO! has been developed to describe the geographical locations, with a particular attention to the description of the Ancient World, especially to give the opportunity of having a link between the places mentioned

6 <https://goo.gl/3VRPGt>.

in the texts, especially ancient, and their identification and correspondence with contemporary ones. For classical scholars this correspondence of ancient and contemporary modelling is of undisputed interest, both for the study of the habits of the most ancient peoples, and for the most various themes of literary interest. Through ontologies you can build maps of the ancient world and compare them to contemporary ones, annotate historical, geographical, cultural details connected to the place, indicate in which ancient text the place is mentioned and which author discloses the details. These are just some ideas for research that can be developed, but the scenario that opens through these connections will be much larger.

From a scholarly point of view we also can add that digital critical editions of classical works whose textual tradition is made of many witnesses are still very rare. The ancient literatures scholars usually ask to the digital no more than authoritative collections of texts (TLG, PHI, and online digital libraries). So the opportunity to enrich the digital text with variants (especially from a new collation of manuscripts) has known little practical application. Even less common in Classics, not to say absent, is the model of an edition 'based on full-text transcription of original texts into electronic form' (Robinson 2006). The peculiar nature of textual variance in classical texts, where the discarded lesson is a mistake to recognize and remove, contributes to this closure face to the opportunities of the digital. Consequently a digital critical edition aimed to include a bigger number of variants – that is 'errors' – than in printed format is unsustainable in terms of cost/benefit evaluation. Thus a new space for reflection opens, no longer confined to the form (that is to the textual tradition) but open to the content of the text formally analysed in the apparatus, which might be thought of as a space open to contain other, new, kinds of knowledge.

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As the papers in this volume testify, digital scholarly editing is a vibrant practice. Scholarly editing has a long-standing tradition in the humanities. It is of crucial importance within disciplines such as literary studies, philology, history, philosophy, library and information science, and bibliography. In fact, digital scholarly editing represents one of the longest traditions in the field of Digital Humanities — and the theories, concepts, and practices that were designed for editing in a digital environment have in turn deeply influenced the development of Digital Humanities as a discipline. By bringing together the extended abstracts from three conferences organised within the DiXiT project (2013-2017), this volume shows how digital scholarly editing is still developing and constantly redefining itself.

DiXiT (Digital Scholarly Editing Initial Training) is one of the most innovative training networks for a new generation of scholars in the field of digital scholarly editing, established by ten leading European institutions from academia, in close collaboration with the private sector and cultural heritage institutions, and funded under the EU's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions. The partners together represent a wide variety of technologies and approaches to European digital scholarly editing.

The extended abstracts of the convention contributions assembled in this volume showcase the multiplicity of subjects dealt with in and around the topics of digital editing: from issues of sustainability to changes in publication cultures, from the integrity of research and intellectual rights to mixed methods applied to digital editing — to name only a few.



Sidestone Press

ISBN: 978-90-8890-483-7



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