

SVAVL ok GYNN-ÞRÓ.  
FIÖRM ok FIMBVL-ÞVL.  
RÍN ok RENNANDI.  
GÍPVL ok GAVPVL.  
GAVMVL ok GEIRVIMVL.  
Þær hverfa ym k) hodd goda.

SVÖLA et GUNN-THROA.  
FIÖRMA et FIMBUL-THULA.  
RINA (Rhenus) et RENNANDE.  
GIPULA et GÖPULA.  
GÖMULA et GEIRVIMULA.  
Illae voluntur per circulum (regio-

# Digital Scholarly Editing Theories and Practices

ÞYN ok V  
ÞAVLL ok  
GRÁP ok

m) VINA heitir  
En aynnor VEGSUINN.  
Þridia ÞIÓDNUMA,  
NÝT ok n) NAVT,

VINA dicitur  
At altera VEGSUINNA.  
Tertia THIODNUMA.  
NYTA et NÖTA.

G 3

NAVNN

g) drvpir, id. mox, Hvergemli O. U.  
l) Bavll, videtur esse in R. consentiente  
n) Nöt. U.

h) Ækin. U. i) Sæl. O. k) haudd. O.  
Edda Snorr. Cod. Reg. m) Vin á. R. O.

16) Verine, an ficti, sint hi Amnes incertum est; mihi quidem sit verisimile misceri utroque. Nomina autem eorum pleraque sunt appellativa,

quorum adeo sensus literalis suis locis dabitur in Glossario; hic Latinam modo terminationem singulis dedi, sic ut commodissimum visum est.

*hæc inter se cōveniunt: þkaplur, per euphonia (n̄ oib. fonte palpabilem) þkaplur; et (ad var. r) þkaplur originatibne ducta ab at þkapa, de Arribuere, significatione nova, certe n̄ probata. Adde et þkaplur pro þkaplur mihi potius latmali (sequitlogvian) l. bōgn-mali (pravi loquium) videri, quam euphonia aliqd sapere. nec qsq̄quam unquam dixit þkripmōgr, þkōpūgr, þkōpūgr, pro þkripmōgr etc. Adde et nr̄um þtur (vlt. cod. sequi) vas amplu, diarium l. trium; tornoz capax (quod et forte þtur et inde þkpmatu) alias þtur m. g. qd ad þgr (mais vobis) videt, nullo unquam \**

EDITED BY

MATTHEW JAMES DRISCOLL  
AND ELENA PIERAZZO

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# Digital Scholarly Editing

Theories and Practices

*Edited by*

*Matthew James Driscoll and Elena Pierazzo*



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# 12. The Battle We Forgot to Fight: Should We Make a Case for Digital Editions?

Roberto Rosselli Del Turco

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## Introduction

When Peter Robinson wrote ‘Current Issues in Making Digital Editions of Medieval Texts—Or, Do Electronic Scholarly Editions Have a Future?’,<sup>1</sup> he was looking back at what we may call the ‘pioneer era’ of digital editing and publishing: a time span of roughly ten years, from the early 90s to 2004.<sup>2</sup> It was during this time that important editorial projects such as the *Piers Plowman Electronic Archive*,<sup>3</sup> the *Electronic Beowulf*,<sup>4</sup> the *Canterbury Tales Project*,<sup>5</sup> the

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- 1 Peter Robinson, ‘Current Issues in Making Digital Editions of Medieval Texts—Or, Do Electronic Scholarly Editions Have a Future?’, *Digital Medievalist*, 1.1 (2005), <http://www.digitalmedievalist.org/journal/1.1/robinson>
  - 2 Robinson’s article was received by the *Digital Medievalist* editors on January 6, 2005.
  - 3 Hoyt N. Duggan, ‘1994 Prospectus: Archive Goals’, *The Piers Plowman Electronic Archive (1994–2003)*, <http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/seenet/piers/archivegoals.htm>
  - 4 *The Electronic Beowulf*, ed. by Kevin S. Kiernan (London: British Library, 1999/2013) [CD-ROM]. See also Kevin S. Kiernan, ‘Digital Preservation, Restoration, and Dissemination of Medieval Manuscripts’, in *Gateways, Gatekeepers, and Roles in the Information Omniverse: Proceedings of the Third Symposium*, ed. by Ann Okerson and Dru Mogge (Washington: Office of Scientific and Academic Publishing, Association of Research Libraries, 1994), pp. 37–43.
  - 5 *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue on CD-ROM*, ed. by Peter Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

*Parzival-Projekt*<sup>6</sup> and many more<sup>7</sup> published the results of their efforts. The preferred publishing medium during this phase was that of an optical support, CD or DVD, but there were already in existence not only interesting experimental editions on the Web,<sup>8</sup> but also more complex, hypermedia-based ones.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of the great attention and interest that these editions enjoyed at the time of their publication, their acceptance and actual use by scholars was lower than expected:

We thought then that we had a sound publication model for digital editions: major publishers would publish them, just as they have always done for print editions. But this has not happened. Further, we now know anecdotally that many scholars remain sceptical of electronic publication. Combined with the movement by leading academic publishers away from this field, this scepticism leads rather easily to the opinion that electronic publication is not real publication at all.<sup>10</sup>

This was all the more surprising since 'it is rather clear that well-made digital editions are better than print editions from the perspective of their users'.<sup>11</sup> The question remains 'if digital editions are so manifestly superior, then why indeed are we in the state of affairs described above? Why are so many scholars, and so many scholarly projects, still making print editions?'<sup>12</sup> According to Robinson, the answer lies in the

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6 Michael Stolz, *Die St. Galler Epenhandschrift: Parzival, Nibelungenlied und Klage, Karl, Willehalm. Faksimile des Codex 857 der Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen und zugehöriger Fragmente: CD-ROM mit einem Begleitheft*, Codices Electronici Sangallenses, 1 (Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen/Basler Parzival-Projekt, 2003).

7 I will also cite Bernard James Muir's *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2004) and a digital Facsimile of Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Junius 11 (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2004) as particularly significant for my area of research, that of medieval literary texts belonging to the Anglo-Saxon tradition.

8 *The Wanderer: Edition and Translation*, ed. by Tim Romano (1999), <http://www.aimsdata.com/tim/anhaga/edition.htm>

9 *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Hypermedia Research Archive*, ed. by Jerome McGann (Charlottesville: Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities, 2000–), <http://www.rossettiarchive.org>

10 Robinson, 'Current Issues', § 11.

11 *Ibid.*, § 12.

12 *Ibid.*, § 13.

availability, or lack thereof, of suitable software tools that would allow editors to produce scholarly editions in digital form:

Over the past two decades I have made two of the leading tools for making scholarly electronic editions. The first is the collation software *Collate*, which I first wrote as a set of VAX routines in the 1980s, and re-wrote into a Macintosh program in the 1990s. The second is the XML publication software *Anastasia*, which I initiated in the mid-1990s. Several of the electronic editions named above depend heavily on these two tools. One can assert that it is indeed possible to use them to make digital editions which offer all we could hope for. But as their creator I think I am uniquely qualified to note that they are not easy to use: if everyone who wanted to make digital editions was required to use these two tools, very few digital editions would ever be made.<sup>13</sup>

The rest of the article is devoted to a discussion of existing software tools and frameworks, and how to improve the workflow of scholars who wish to publish digital editions. Its conclusion is fairly optimistic:

Throughout this article, I have expressed what I think should be our aim: that some time quite soon scholars wishing to make scholarly editions will naturally choose the electronic form. It follows then that all major series of scholarly editions, including those now published by the major academic presses, also will become digital. There will be exceptions: there always will be a place for a printed reader's edition or similar. But we should expect that for most of the purposes for which we now use editions, the editions we use will be electronic. We should do this not just to keep up with the rest of the world, but because indeed electronic editions make possible kinds of reading and research never before available and offer valuable insights into and approaches to the texts they cover.<sup>14</sup>

Roughly ten years after this article was written, we may now wonder about what has changed: has the balance between printed and digital editions tilted in favour of the latter? Surely there are many more digital editions available, but can we claim that they have 'succeeded'? Indeed, how do we measure success with regard to acceptance of scholarly editions in digital form?

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13 *Ibid.*, § 11.

14 *Ibid.*, § 30.



## Ten years later

Two recent surveys conducted by Ithaka S+R, part of the non-profit Ithaka group, on American<sup>15</sup> and British<sup>16</sup> academics' use of digital tools for research and teaching show that the acceptance and use of such tools is growing, albeit very slowly and that there is still considerable resistance. According to the surveys the use of Internet search engines and other web-based research tools is widespread, Open Access is increasingly considered as a dissemination method, although the majority of scholars still rely on printed monographs and A-level peer-reviewed journals to publish the results of their research. Moreover, the surveys shows that only a fraction of scholars actively use social media such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs for scholarly purposes. An interesting trend is that, in spite of the preference for traditional printed books both for research and dissemination of its results, there is a fast-growing acceptance of electronic-only versions of journal articles, to the extent that in 2012 about 40% of the respondents strongly agreed with the question 'Assuming that electronic collections of journals are proven to work well, I would be happy to see hard copy collections discarded and replaced entirely by electronic collections',<sup>17</sup> a percentage that has more than doubled since 2003. E-books are also increasingly valued as an alternative to printed books and textbooks for research and teaching purposes: 'After many years in which e-books were seen as the 'next big thing', they are firmly established in the mainstream marketplace and they are increasingly common among scholarly materials as well'.<sup>18</sup> Note, however, that

Even while digital versions of scholarly monographs remain a relatively new feature on the mainstream scholarly communications landscape, some libraries have already begun to consider how library collections of print books will evolve, following the example of library journal collections. Very few respondents have historically agreed strongly with the statement: 'Within the next five years, the use of e-books will be so

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15 US Faculty Survey 2012, <http://www.sr.ithaka.org/research-publications/faculty-survey-2012-us>

16 Ithaka S+R | Jisc | RLUK: UK Survey of Academics 2012, <http://www.sr.ithaka.org/research-publications/ithaka-sr-jisc-rluk-uk-survey-academics-2012>

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 28–29.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

prevalent among faculty and students that it will not be necessary to maintain library collections of hard copy books'. This overall pattern did not change in this cycle of the survey.<sup>19</sup>

It is unfortunate that a study on such a large scale is not available for a specific type of monograph production, i.e. that of scholarly digital editions (SDEs), but we have a good approximation, even if limited to the field of medieval studies and (again) to English-speaking countries, thanks to Dot Porter's surveys conducted in 2002 and 2011.<sup>20</sup> This kind of survey is fundamental in order to assess the degree of acceptance and popularity of SDEs, but we can also rely on the following parameters:

- general discussion: either in public mailing lists, conferences or other forums of discussion; the risk is that information gathered by these means verges on the anecdotal while remaining incomplete;
- the number of digital editions published: on the assumption that, if more and more editions are published in digital form, there is a demand for and an appreciation of them;
- hard metrics: very few sites (or publishers) make publicly available data regarding number of hits per day/month/year (or actual number of CD/DVDs sold), but if it were available, such data would be a reliable indicator of actual use.

Let us put aside survey results and hard data for the moment and resort to the most unreliable form of evidence, i.e. the empirical and anecdotal evidence hinted at in the first bullet point above. First of all, I will quickly have to put aside my own country, Italy: use of digital resources, such as electronic facsimile and editions, is currently increasing, but it seems fairly safe to say that traditional formats are not on the verge of extinction, quite the contrary. If I look at the 'production side', i.e. scholars and researchers using IT methods and techniques to create scholarly digital editions, I can count those active in my field of study (myself included) on the fingers of a single hand; the same numerical proportion applies

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>20</sup> Dorothy Carr Porter, 'Medievalists' Use of Electronic Resources: The Results of a National Survey of Faculty Members in Medieval Studies' (Phd thesis, UNC-Chapel Hill, 2002), <http://ils.unc.edu/MSpapers/2807.pdf>; Dot Porter, 'Medievalists and the Scholarly Digital Edition', *Scholarly Editing: The Annual of the Association for Documentary Editing*, 34 (2013), 1–26, <http://www.scholarlyediting.org/2013/essays/essay.porter.html>

when extending the research area to the whole of the medieval studies field, of course discounting specific and worthy exceptions. Therefore I will have to look to the world of the Digital Humanities in general, and in particular their application in the domain of Anglo-Saxon studies where they are stronger than in other areas of Medieval studies and on the upside of a growth curve.<sup>21</sup> There is a particular example that lends itself very well to show the problems that SDEs encounter when it comes not only to actual use, but also to receiving adequate recognition for the services they offer. In a thread about citation standards on the ANSAXNET mailing list,<sup>22</sup> several subscribers wrote that they routinely make use of digital resources, but they are quite wary of citing them in their works, with at least one person declaring that while he or she uses the online editions to do research, he or she then quotes from the printed equivalent. This statement caused understandable distress among those who are aware of the work and resources needed to create online resources: that people may not acknowledge the labour required to produce them, nor the high quality of many of them, struck many participants in the discussion as unfair. However, those who expressed 'uneasiness' at citing these resources were able to provide the reasoning behind it through a set of good points that I will take into account in the following section.

An increasing number of SDEs are published every year.<sup>23</sup> These editions seem to improve constantly in both their overall quality and the richness of features that they offer. Thus apparently all is well and good in regard to the second parameter.

With regard to the last criterion, I have personally visited about forty web-based digital editions, but could only find a single site which showed statistics about page hits—in the form of an apparent total number of visitors since the moment the site was created. While this is disappointing, it is also understandable: this feature hardly looks

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21 See the reports quoted above; note, however, that there is a very strong push in favour of digital resources creation and fruition in many European countries.

22 A full-text database for the ANSAXNET mailing list has, until recently, been available at <http://www.mun.ca/Ansaxdat>, but this appears no longer to be active. The discussion thread I am referring to starts on 19 April 2013 with a message by C. E. Anderson with title 'Charter citation standards?'

23 See the chapter by Greta Franzini et al. in the present volume. Patrick Sahle's *A Catalog of Digital Scholarly Editions*, <http://www.digitale-edition.de>, is also a valuable resource.

essential when compared to all the other features required by a digital edition, and, in fact, it may be objected that the present writer is not himself open to criticism on this very point, since the *Digital Vercelli Book* web site is not able to count visitors (yet).<sup>24</sup> It is possible that these numbers are available for some web-based editions, but are simply not made accessible to the general public. In any case, it would be interesting to undertake more in-depth research on this topic, since we definitely need more evidence about the actual use of digital resources in general, and digital editions in particular.

The results of Dot Porter's surveys, which also allow us to assess the changes that occurred in a period of about ten years, confirm the situation described by the more general surveys mentioned above:

The results of my survey bear out the continued usefulness, or at least continued use, of print editions: medievalists are using print editions more than they are using digital editions, and the use of digital editions has not grown over the past nine years, as it has, for example, for digital journals.<sup>25</sup>

The progress towards wider use of electronic editions is actually measurable, but unfortunately quite limited:

Twenty-two percent of all respondents reported using only print editions (down from 48% in 2002), while 58% reported using mostly print (up from 44% in 2002). This is where the largest single shift occurred—not from a clear preference for print to a clear preference for electronic, but from a clear preference for print to a slightly less clear preference for print. Twelve percent of respondents (up from 7% in 2002) reported using electronic and print editions equally often, and 7% reported using mostly electronic editions.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of several excellent electronic editions having been published, therefore, not much seems to be different from the situation described by Robinson ten years ago:

It is depressing to find cases where scholars do not use the digital editions one has gone to such trouble to make, even when they know of

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24 <http://vbd.humnet.unipi.it/beta2>. Note that this is a beta version whose main purpose is that of soliciting feedback by its users.

25 Porter, 'Medievalists and the Scholarly Digital Edition', p. 8.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

and have access to them. To give just one example: my edition of the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* and several later *Canterbury Tales* Project publications include Dan Mosser's descriptions of the *Canterbury Tales* manuscripts. These descriptions are the result of several decades of work by Professor Mosser, in the course of which he has inspected every manuscript and every complete incunable copy (and very many fragments too); consulted with every leading scholar; read every article of note; and built up a formidable expertise in palaeography, codicology, and watermarks. By all odds, these are not just the most recent, but also the most careful and comprehensive accounts ever made of the *Tales'* earliest texts. Despite this, I have come across several examples of work, even by senior scholars with access to Professor Mosser's research, where these essential resources have not been cited.<sup>27</sup>

In conclusion, if we combine general data about the steady but slow increase in use of general digital tools among academics with more specific information about digital editions use gathered through public surveys, in public discussions with colleagues or by other means, we have to acknowledge that the acceptance and use of such resources for research purposes is still far below the expectations that we had many years ago.<sup>28</sup> The apparent good health of scholarly editions in digital form, as witnessed by the growing number of projects, sharply contrasts a general perception of those editions and resources being underused and often undeservedly undercited.

### Where the problem lies

Peter Robinson was surely right in citing the lack of user-friendly tools to create SDEs as a major reason for their (relative) scarcity at the time he was writing, but in my opinion this is just one of several factors that combine to produce the current state of affairs. First of all, however, it is necessary to distinguish the production aspect, i.e. why creating digital editions is perceived as being a complex, if not outright daunting task, and the enjoyment-and use-aspect, focusing on why digital editions are not used to the extent we would expect, and why, when used, they are often considered a useful resource, but one that does not enjoy the same degree of good standing as their printed counterparts.

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27 Robinson, 'Current Issues', § 11.

28 The situation seems to be slightly better as regards the use of digital resources for teaching purposes.

## Production

Robinson's remark about the lack of easy-to-use production tools is unfortunately still valid: there is no software tool nor suite of tools that allows a scholar to produce a full digital edition, be it image-based with a diplomatic text or a critical edition, in a way comparable to how printed editions are prepared.<sup>29</sup> Most of all, there is no 'standard way' to do it, so that right from the start the aspiring digital philologist will have to evaluate several alternatives, or rely on the opinion of technical support personnel or collaborators. Support from an IT centre is mandatory in the case of complex frameworks, such as those based on Drupal or Omeka, whose installation, configuration, data loading and maintenance is definitely beyond the reach of the average philologist, however enthusiastic he or she may otherwise be about the use of digital tools.

In fact, even in the best case scenario—that of a good, easy to use edition production software available for use—creating a SDE will always require more resources compared to a traditional one, unless you forgo such features as manuscript images, use of collation software, inclusion of a text search engine or of image-related tools. Not only that: the workflow of a traditional printed edition is dramatically simpler, since when you have finished working on the edition text you deliver it to a publisher, who will take care of printing and circulation. When embarking on a digital edition project, on the other hand, one has to start walking on an unfamiliar and possibly intimidating path, whose final destination may not be fully known in advance; this was especially the case for the 'pioneer era' projects described above, but even today, at least in my experience, there are often unexpected changes that the editor needs to be ready to perform so that the project can safely be concluded and an edition published. The progressive disappearance of the CD/DVD option, a surrogate of the book as a physical object that can be produced, distributed and sold, also means that traditional publishers are, at least for the moment, out of the equation:<sup>30</sup> as a

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29 Scholars can rely on several software tools to prepare their editions, from word processors to more specifically philologically oriented programs such as CTE (<http://cte.oeaw.ac.at>), but usually the final typesetting stage is entrusted to the publisher.

30 A possible alternative would be that of web-based editions curated by publishers and made available for a subscription fee. As far as I know, this publishing model is not particularly popular in the Humanities, at least not for digital editions.

consequence, it is not usually possible to replicate the same workflow as the one used for printed editions, eventually entrusting the publisher with the task of taking care of the final processing and visualisation of the edition data. Although web-based editions are the better choice for too many reasons to be listed here, it remains to be seen who will take the role of the publisher. Since web space is now incredibly convenient and inexpensive, self-publishing is definitely a possibility, in some ways also a very desirable one, but it is characterised by significant limitations related to sustainability, maintenance and 'quotability' (see below). In conclusion, a single scholar wanting to explore the brave new world of digital philology is suddenly at a disadvantage compared to the colleague who opts to stick with the traditional methods inworking towards a printed edition.

Of the participants in the aforementioned thread on the ANSAXNET mailing list, those who admitted to abstaining from citing digital resources reported two reasons for their uneasiness with these resources. The first is that since documents are displayed in a continuous HTML page, it is often difficult to refer to a specific text passage; secondly, and most importantly, web-based resources have an unpleasant tendency to be less reliable than print editions. Citing a web page only to lead to a '404—Page not found' error because the site, for whatever reason, is not available any more, is not an acceptable feature for a scholarly-level publication. While the first objection may be easily fixed by numbering and indexing text paragraphs, the second one highlights a crucial problem of digital publications, either based on optical media or on the Web framework: the sometimes rapid obsolescence of standalone software in the case of CD/DVD-based editions, and the sudden disappearance of web-based ones or, in some cases, the creeping of similar incompatibilities in the visualisation software when used with more modern operating systems and browsers. While manuscripts may have lasted hundreds of years, it is discomfiting to note how the life span of a digital facsimile/edition is sometimes less than 4–5 years. For web-based editions the problem is twofold:

- software compatibility: web browser extensions, such as Java applets, ActiveX controls and Flash applications, may look like a good idea at the time of implementation, but nothing guarantees that they will continue to function, especially in the case of closed, proprietary extensions;

- long-term sustainability: if you look towards persistence and actual usability of your edition for the next 10–20 years at least, it is essential to make sure that the web server on which the edition is published is sufficiently reliable, both on the technical side and on the financial one; complex software running on the server will require more financial resources to ensure its maintenance, and may be more prone to incur the compatibility problems described in the previous point.

Last, but definitely not least, there are also some issues of a strictly theoretical nature that have to be addressed in order to make SDEs appealing to scholars from a range of philological schools. A web-based publishing framework, a general term which I use to refer to all necessary software and server resources needed to publish a digital edition on the web, should be a complete and neutral tool, but at the present moment it seems to be neither: currently the most popular type of web-based digital edition,<sup>31</sup> the image-based digital facsimile accompanied by a diplomatic transcription, although clearly suitable for a ‘best text’ or ‘new philology’ edition, is less useful to editors aiming at establishing a critical text. Is the fact that the production method apparently lacks neutrality a reason why Neo-/Post-Lachmannian scholars do not use it more often? Or is their non-use simply related to the shortcomings of the current set of software tools?

### Consumption

Compared to the problems involved in production, problems in fruition of SDEs are, while still significant, much fewer in number and less troubling.

Any resource that requires a computer screen to be used is already at a disadvantage when compared to the traditional medium, the printed book. The simple fact that you need an LCD monitor to browse any kind of digital resource implies several drawbacks related to ergonomics, mobility, availability and quality of the Internet connection, among

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31 On this topic see Odd Einar Haugen, ‘The Spirit of Lachmann, the Spirit of Bédier: Old Norse Textual Editing in the Electronic Age’, in *Annual Meeting of The Viking Society, University College London*, 8 (2002), pp. 1–21, <http://www.ub.uib.no/elpub/2003/a/522001/haugen.pdf>, especially the section ‘The Drift towards Monotypic Editions’.



others. This is a well-known limitation, but also one which does not prevent successful use of digital editions as study and research tools, which should be their primary purpose.

Another obstacle to overcome is the high fragmentation of user interfaces and the resulting difficulty in the use of each SDE, considering that some effort to learn layout and function of all GUI elements, as well as general navigation of the edition, will be required in any case. While there is a slow trend towards a sort of 'canon' or standard set of tools expected to be available (such as image-related tools, a text search engine and so on), no standardised user interface exists, especially when it comes to the general layout of the web site. This problem would not be so bad if it were not for the fact that many web designers, and programmers of stand-alone SDEs on CD/DVD, often seem to make their creations more difficult to use than necessary.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, while we are well aware of the advantages of SDEs as research tools when compared to their printed counterparts,<sup>33</sup> a precise awareness of their benefits, together with the perception of what exactly a SDE is, may not be sufficiently clear to users, who are often scholars that may be interested in venturing out onto the digital path at some point in the future. The question that I have been trying to answer during the last few years, both at conferences and by other means of public discussion, is as follows: 'In terms of scientific efficiency, in which ways is a digital edition superior to a traditional printed edition?'<sup>34</sup> This is a very legitimate question showing how much the wondrous 'dynamic device', or at least its potential, is still largely unknown to a large part of the prospective users of such editions. At surface level, hypertext navigation or a diplomatic transcription accompanied by manuscript images may not appear more than a convenient set of functionalities granted by a brand-new medium (see above), but, again, this is just an adherence to an old, outdated perception of SDEs. As a consequence, since the 'manifest superiority' of SDEs is not 'rather clear', at least not for all users, the risk of underuse and underappreciation is high.

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32 On this topic see Roberto Rosselli Del Turco, 'After the Editing Is Done: Designing a Graphic User Interface for Digital Editions', *Digital Medievalist*, 7 (2011), <http://www.digitalmedievalist.org/journal/7/rosselliDelTurco>

33 See for instance Marina Buzzoni's chapter in the present volume.

34 Question asked by colleague and friend Marcello Meli at the 'Incontri di Filologia Digitale' conference (Verona, 15–16 January 2009).

## Perception

Another small piece of evidence concerning the problems afflicting SDEs is the way that we sometimes address less ‘digital-savvy’ colleagues: I find it telling when a speaker at a conference or workshop takes great pains to distinguish between a ‘digitised edition’ and a proper digital edition; indeed, the present writer had to make this very clarification on more than one occasion. That it is necessary to explain this to anyone who is not an undergraduate student, today, is symptomatic of a problem that goes beyond the mode of production or the appropriateness of citing from a digital edition.<sup>35</sup> To quote Dot Porter again:

The serious issue in the scholarly community is credit toward tenure and promotion for scholars who focus their efforts on creating digital editions and other projects. If we say ‘digital edition’ and our colleagues and administrators think ‘Google Books’ when what we really mean is ‘Electronic Beowulf’, that is a huge gulf.<sup>36</sup>

Actually the problem may be more severe and difficult to resolve because sometimes even those who produce such editions do not seem to understand fully the underlying concepts. In an article dating back to 2004, approximately contemporary with Robinson’s, Lina Karlsson and Linda Malm perform a survey of thirty-one web-based scholarly editions and conclude that ‘web editions seem to reproduce features of the printed media and do not fulfil the potential of the Web to any larger extent’.<sup>37</sup> Today, web editions have become much more sophisticated and can now conceivably fulfil the ‘potential of the Web’: the powerful, dynamic device to visualise SDEs theorised by Robinson is slowly becoming a reality, at least in a few select cases, but the true potential of this concept and its full implications must be very clear to those who start a digital edition, or what we will see will be more imitations of the traditional layout and features of printed editions. In other words, if an editor thinks that a digital edition is simply a traditional edition on a

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35 On this subject, see Patrick Sahle’s chapter in the present volume.

36 Porter, ‘Medievalists and the Scholarly Digital Edition’, p. 14.

37 Lina Karlsson and Linda Malm, ‘Revolution or Remediation? A Study of Electronic Scholarly Editions on the Web’, *Human IT*, 7.1 (2004), p. 1, <http://etjanst.hb.se/bhs/ith/1-7/lklm.pdf>

digital medium, he or she is actually missing the real point of it and will produce no more than a digital replica of a printed edition.<sup>38</sup>

## How to fix things

While I will discuss each point in roughly the same order as they were presented above, let me state beforehand that availability of easy-to-use tools, amount of resources, time required, and streamlining of the workflow are all different facets of the same problem: how to make production of a scholarly digital edition as simple as possible for a scholar or researcher who is used to working mostly alone and on a limited budget.

### Production and visualisation tools

The 'perfect' software tool for any purpose is one requiring little to no training on the part of the user, ideally being ready to be used out of the box, no hefty manual study required. Judging from the current state of affairs as regards both production and visualisation tools, we are still quite far from that goal, but progress in that direction is undisputedly being made. A recent development is that of authoring tools for the encoding of edition texts.<sup>39</sup> While this can surely lower the bar for SDE production, I would be wary of relying on this kind of software exclusively, especially after web developers enjoyed a less than satisfying experience with similar tools (code produced by HTML authoring tools was often bloated and unreliable). What is recommended, if not required, from the scholar? Surely a good knowledge of the markup language is needed to create the edition, but anything beyond XSLT stylesheets application to XML documents, for instance XSLT programming or installation/configuration of server software, would require too much

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38 For a different point of view see Daniel Paul O'Donnell, 'Resisting the Tyranny of the Screen, or, Must a Digital Edition be Electronic?', *Heroic Age*, 8 (2008), <http://www.heroicage.org/issues/11/em.php>

39 See, for instance, the TextLab transcription tool developed by John Bryant at Hofstra University (available on the project's website: <http://mel.hofstra.edu/textlab.html>) and the DTA-oXygen-Framework (DTAoX: <http://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/doku/software#dtaox>), which uses the oXygen XML editor to build an authoring tool for text annotation.

time and resources from the ‘traditional’ scholar (i.e. one working alone on his or her edition, not in a research group, and often on a limited budget), especially if he or she is approaching the digital scholarly editing path for the first time. Assuming that the scholar is equipped with this fundamental knowledge, whatever the markup language used, the tools available for creating an SDE fall in one of two general categories:

- production tools: any good XML editor is an effective production tool, but new authoring environments are currently developed to assist the scholar in this phase;<sup>40</sup> provided that the encoded text is always available to inspection and human readable, this is probably the best solution since these environments usually offer image-related functionality (such as text-image linking tools) which should otherwise be looked for elsewhere;
- visualisation tools: one could maintain that, if you correctly encode your text, the edition is already there and only needs to be ‘extracted’ from the XML document base, but of course this phase is at least as delicate and complex as the previous one (especially considering the usability issues hinted above). This is also an area where tool development is particularly intense.

A survey of the existing visualisation tools undertaken by the *Digital Vercelli Book* project team in 2012, and the conclusion that none of the evaluated software was suitable for our purposes, led to the birth of EVT (Edition Visualisation Technology) software:<sup>41</sup> a framework to build a web-based diplomatic edition applying a chain of XSLT transformations to the TEI XML document holding the encoded text. Creating the edition

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40 Another example is Ediarum — an easy tool for editing manuscripts with TEI XML: <http://www.bbaw.de/en/telota/software/ediarum>; see also eCodicology — Algorithms for the Automatic Tagging of Medieval Manuscripts, <http://ipelsdf1.lsd.fkit.edu/index.php/nav-pro-projects/nav-pro-act-ecodicology>

41 Roberto Rosselli Del Turco and Raffaele Masotti, *Edition Visualization Technology: Digital Edition Visualization Software*, 2013–, <http://sourceforge.net/projects/evt-project>. For more information about this tool see Roberto Rosselli Del Turco, Giancarlo Buomprisco, Chiara Di Pietro, Julia Kenny, Raffaele Masotti and Jacopo Pugliese, ‘Edition Visualization Technology: A Simple Tool to Visualize TEI-based Digital Editions’, *Journal of the Text Encoding Initiative*, 8 (2014–2015), <http://jtei.revues.org/1077>; see also Roberto Rosselli Del Turco, ‘EVT Development: An Update (and Quite a Bit of History)’, in *Edition Visualization Technology* blog, 2014, <http://visualizationtechnology.wordpress.com/2014/01/26/evt-development-an-update-and-quite-a-bit-of-history>

is as simple as applying a stylesheet to the marked-up text. This is the software used to create the Digital Vercelli Book edition mentioned above, while for production we resorted to several different XML editors for text encoding and the Image Markup Tool<sup>42</sup> for annotating the manuscript areas corresponding to text lines and other points of interest.

### Long-term sustainability

One way to look at the preservation problem is to consider it as a consequence of the continuous, uninterrupted evolution of software, even ‘slow motion’ development of critical components of the modern web infrastructure such as the standards promoted by the W3C.<sup>43</sup> This is why the only viable solution to ensure that an edition is usable for the foreseeable future is to completely decouple the edition data from the visualisation mechanism: if the editor makes use of standard-based data formats (such as TIFF, JPEG for digitised images, (X)HTML or XML for texts etc.), he or she can be reasonably confident that the core of the edition will still be readable and usable for a very long time. The visualisation framework, on the other hand, may require periodic maintenance, up to the point when a total replacement will be a better option as a result of the availability of new technology, but that is probably unavoidable in the long term.

How can we make web publishing as simple and painless as possible for the ‘traditional’ scholar, who usually works independently and cannot count on the support of technical staff to handle electronic publishing? As noted above, hosting services are cheap and there are plenty to choose from, but this is not a solution except for beta-testing and short-term experimental editions. Entrusting a significant SDE to such a fickle support would only make it all the more frustrating when a good resource is lost, temporarily or forever, because the person responsible for its accessibility has forgotten to renew the yearly domain license, or has just abandoned the project. We need a reliable third party, such

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42 The Image Markup Tool project, [http://tapor.uvic.ca/~mholmes/image\\_markup/index.php](http://tapor.uvic.ca/~mholmes/image_markup/index.php)

43 The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), <http://www.w3.org>

as universities and other research institutions,<sup>44</sup> offering support and preparing an adequate infrastructure for long-term publishing of select digital editions. This is, in fact, also an opportunity to ensure visibility and support for those SDEs that exceed certain quality criteria and are therefore eligible to be hosted on institutional web sites. Last but not least, a stable, institution-guaranteed ‘home’ for SDEs would also solve the quotability problem, since this would undoubtedly ensure that a specific digital resource would stay online for the foreseeable future.

### Usability

Two concepts as different as hypertext theory and the e-book were have been theorised years (many years, in the case of hypertext theory) before a suitable medium would allow them to succeed. The situation is less clear-cut when it comes to SDEs: on a purely technical ground we have all that is needed already, and in fact many excellent editions are already available to be used for research purposes which are superior to traditional printed ones, even though possibly not ‘manifestly superior’; but, as remarked above, some rough edges still exist and have to be addressed. Progress on the usability front will be slow but hopefully steady if visualisation tool designers take into account usability and accessibility standards, conforming to best practice guidelines. A particularly delicate point will be the implementation of the most advanced features that are being discussed and deployed in experimental form right now (shared annotation, social editions, linked open data etc.).

It is also important to consider the inherent limitations of the physical media conveying the digital editions: for the great majority of users it is not a problem to use a SDE as a research tool,<sup>45</sup> even for extended periods of time; anyone intending to use such a resource as a reading edition on a computer, on the other hand, will have to face both the

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<sup>44</sup> Also cultural heritage bodies such as Europeana, <http://europeana.eu>

<sup>45</sup> Although it is surely essential to follow usability and accessibility best practices to avoid making use of such digital resources difficult for certain classes of users (for example users suffering from colour blindness).

physical constraint of the typical PC workstation and the well-known Visual Fatigue phenomenon induced by LCD monitors.<sup>46</sup>

The e-book story may teach something useful here. In fact e-books only started being popular when e-reader devices with suitable characteristics (e-ink display) and reasonable prices were introduced to the market. In a similar way, we already have cheap mobile devices, namely tablets, with all the features needed to visualise an SDE (processing power, medium size but often high resolution screens); the e-codices iOS app<sup>47</sup> shows how even on smaller, smartphone screens you can have a usable and useful opportunity to search and browse digital facsimiles of medieval manuscripts. Moreover, new and more sophisticated displays combined with the inherent mobility of such devices would allow us to overcome the limitations of PC monitors hinted at above. The considerable difference and peculiarities of a Touch User Interface will require special attention and a determined search for effective solutions to implement in such an app, but the challenge is well worth the effort.

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46 Note that, while the subject is still very much open to research and debate, at the present moment the e-ink displays of e-book readers such as the Kindle or the Nook seem to have an edge over smartphones and tablets based on LCD screens. In part this was caused by the relatively low resolution of the first tablets: a comparison of the original iPad with the contemporary Kindle model by means of a high resolution microscope done in 2010 (see Keith Peters, 'Kindle and iPad Displays: Up Close and Personal', *BIT-101* (2010), <http://www.bit-101.com/blog/?p=2722>) showed how the e-ink display is much more similar to printed paper with regard to resolution and appearance, which explained why it was felt to be a lot less tiring on the eyes by its users. Subsequent iPad models, as well as the great majority of tablets now sold by other brands, greatly improved screen resolution, so that according to some researchers (for example Eva Siegenthaler, Yves Bochud, Per Bergamin and Pascal Wurtz, 'Reading on LCD vs. e-Ink Displays: Effects on Fatigue and Visual Strain', *Ophthalmic and Physiological Optics*, 32 (2012), 367–74) the gulf has been bridged and e-ink displays are no longer to be considered better than tablets for reading purposes. A recent article, however, brought up the backlit nature of LCD as a significant factor increasing Visual Fatigue; see Simone Benedetto, Véronique Drai-Zerbib, Marco Pedrotti, Geoffrey Tissier and Thierry Baccino, 'E-Readers and Visual Fatigue', *PLoS ONE*, 8.12 (2013), <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3873942>, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0083676>. Tablet displays are constantly improved and new technologies are introduced at an impressive rhythm, however, so the problem of 'visual fatigue' will hopefully be eliminated or greatly reduced in the near future.

47 E-codices — Virtual Manuscript Library of Switzerland iPhone and iPad app developed by text & bytes LLC and e-codices, <http://e-codices.textandbytes.com>

### Theoretical issues

The discussion about topics that relate to the digital philology field is very lively,<sup>48</sup> but I think that we still need to formulate a convincing definition of SDE, including a description of what makes it different from a 'digitised edition' and a description of types and sub-types, that can be offered to our colleagues who want to know more about philology and 'computer stuff'.<sup>49</sup> Dot Porter concludes her essay with the following recommendation:

My findings strongly suggest that there is a disconnect between scholarly interest in electronic resources in general and in reported use of digital scholarly editions, and that this disconnect may be related not only to a relative lack of digital editions but also to a lack of understanding by non-digital-editing medievalists about what exactly a digital scholarly edition is. Before we can encourage the scholarly community to take up tools and develop digital editions instead of print, we need to ensure that there are clear definitions regarding 'digital' vs. 'digitised' editions so that scholars are aware of what they are getting into.<sup>50</sup>

We should also explain in detail the advantages and (current) drawbacks of the SDE concept, highlighting its potential without hiding the pitfalls and the differences from the traditional way of preparing a scholarly edition. This 'general survey' of digital philology studies should also take into account how the SDE concept relates to different ecdotic theories, again pinpointing benefits but also shortcomings in some cases.

### Success and acceptance

It cannot be considered a predetermined outcome, but I am confident that the act of attending to all the issues discussed above, together with digital editing work ending in excellent SDEs being published, will result in the greater acceptance and popularity of digital scholarly editing.

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48 See for instance the special issue 'Computing the Edition', *Literary & Linguistic Computing*, 24.1 (2009), and the special issue 'Scholarly Editing in the Twenty-First Century', *Literature Compass*, 7.2 (2010). On the specific subject of defining SDEs see Peter Robinson, 'Towards a Theory of Digital Editions', *Variants: The Journal of the European Society for Textual Scholarship*, 10 (2013), 105–31.

49 Patrick Sahle's chapter in the present volume, mentioned above, goes a long way toward formulating that definition.

50 Porter, 'Medievalists and the Scholarly Digital Edition', p. 14.



A critical point will be that of evaluation: there are already initiatives, such as NINES<sup>51</sup> and MESA,<sup>52</sup> that aim at aggregating scholarly digital resources and that can also work as peer-reviewing bodies to improve the perception of SDEs by the academic community.<sup>53</sup> Adding a rigorous selection at an institutional level to grant hosting and maintenance of web-based digital editions would reinforce the process of perception change and increased acceptance for digital scholarly editing.

## Conclusion

We are at a crucial moment in the evolution of digital scholarly editing: if we want it to succeed, to be accepted by our own colleagues, we should continue to discuss and improve its fundamental methodologies not only among us ‘pioneers’, but also with the numerous scholars who may be interested in adopting such methods, and have thus far refrained from doing so because of the many hurdles they assume they have to overcome. It is not by accident that so many papers given at the Experts’ Seminar on Digital Editions, and now so many chapters in the present book, revolve around the core themes that I have briefly hinted at as fundamental to ensure success and acceptance for SDEs: what a digital edition really is (Patrick Sahle), advantages of SDEs and problems in apparatus visualisation (Marina Buzzoni), a catalogue and taxonomy of SDEs (Greta Franzini), readers’ role in scholarly editions (Krista Stinne Greve Rasmussen) and more. The fact that the researchers contributing to the present volume worked independently and touched deeply interconnected topics to reach similar conclusions means that there exists a general consensus about the direction to take, which is an encouraging sign and an invitation to persevere in expanding the field of Digital Philology.

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51 NINES (Networked Infrastructure for Nineteenth-Century Electronic Scholarship), <http://www.nines.org>

52 MESA (The Medieval Electronic Scholarly Alliance), <http://www.mesa-medieval.org>

53 This is one of the primary goals of NINES: ‘Digital humanities projects have long lacked a framework for peer review and thus have often had difficulty establishing their credibility as true scholarship. NINES exists in part to address this situation by instituting a robust system of review by some of the most respected scholars in the field of nineteenth-century studies, British and American’ (<http://www.nines.org/about/scholarship/peer-review>).

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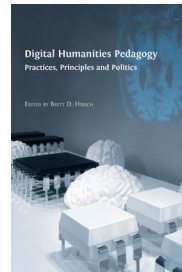
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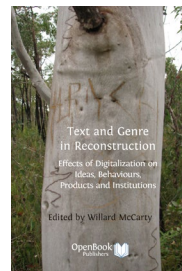
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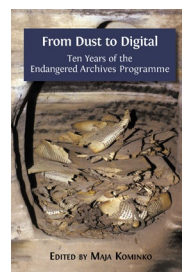
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Edited by Matthew James Driscoll and Elena Pierazzo

This volume presents the state of the art in digital scholarly editing. Drawing together the work of established and emerging researchers, it gives pause at a crucial moment in the history of technology in order to offer a sustained reflection on the practices involved in producing, editing and reading digital scholarly editions—and the theories that underpin them.

The unrelenting progress of computer technology has changed the nature of textual scholarship at the most fundamental level: the way editors and scholars work, the tools they use to do such work and the research questions they attempt to answer have all been affected. Each of the essays in *Digital Scholarly Editing* approaches these changes with a different methodological consideration in mind. Together, they make a compelling case for re-evaluating the foundation of the discipline—one that tests its assertions against manuscripts and printed works from across literary history, and the globe.

The sheer breadth of *Digital Scholarly Editing* along with its successful integration of theory and practice help redefine a rapidly-changing field, as its firm grounding and future-looking ambit ensure the work will be an indispensable starting point for further scholarship. This collection is essential reading for editors, scholars, students and readers who are invested in the future of textual scholarship and the digital humanities.

*The quality of these essays is uniform and high; they represent the state of the art in this area. The essays range over all the important technical and intellectual debates in digital scholarly editing and provide an excellent introduction to the field as well as a report on where we are. There are some fine discussions of the thorny theoretical topics as well as contributions that discuss particular projects without falling into the tedious show-and-tell format: we always hear why something matters.*

— Gabriel Egan, Director of the Centre for Textual Studies at De Montfort University

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