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Towards an integrated digital edition of the *Leges Langobardorum*

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ABSTRACT

The *Leges Langobardorum* project, born within the ALIM project (PRIN-2012) and now founded in the framework of PRIN PNRR 2022, builds on the current state-of-the-art to provide an integrated edition of this law texts corpus, handling both separate diplomatic transcriptions and “virtual witnesses” automatically generated thanks to the TEI markup for critical editions. It also aims to provide a seamless navigation between critical text, diplomatic transcriptions and digital facsimiles. Furthermore, the visualisation software EVT will be equipped with accessibility settings, i.e. features that let people with disabilities customise a device for their own needs, which can represent a true life-changer for people with special needs.

KEYWORDS

Leges Langobardorum; Digital Philology; Textual Criticism; XML/TEI; EVT.

1. INTRODUCTION AND STATE-OF-THE-ART

The original idea of the *Leges Langobardorum* project, now founded in the framework of PRIN PNRR 2022, was born in 2015 as a collaboration between the Research Units (PRIN-2012) of the ALIM - “Archivio della Latinità Italiana del Medioevo” project¹. Initially limited to the text of the *Edictus Rothari*, which is also the testbed of the current experimental editions, it was later extended to cover the whole body of Lombard laws as preserved in several manuscripts and manuscript fragments. The Lombard culture, as well as its relationship with different forms of writing, particularly important in the moment they decided to write down their *Leges*, is a real building block of Italian culture within the wider European setting. The need for a new, digital edition of this corpus of laws, crucial for the studies of the Lombard language and for a better appreciation of their culture, arises from two different necessities: the inadequacy of the existing critical editions and the impossibility of publishing an edition including facsimiles of the manuscripts, their diplomatic rendering, as well as the critical edition except in digital form. The codices that preserve the *Leges Langobardorum* amount to a dozen (counting the Codex Heroldinus which has survived in a printed edition of 1557) and span a wide chronological arc between the second half of the seventh century and the eleventh century. To these must be added a series of fragments (14) that preserve parts of the law texts, thus increasing the total number of witnesses, currently estimated at 26. In order to reconstruct the documentary history of the *Leges*, it is also necessary to take into account the three Lombard-Latin glossaries of the 10th/11th-13th- c. (Cavense, in ms 9; Matritense, in ms 8; Vaticano, probably from Salerno), which include the interpretation of terms also taken from the juridical corpus [13].

The reference edition for the entire corpus of “Lombard Laws” is still the one prepared by Bluhme in 1868 for the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. In 1947 Beyerle published *Die Gesetze der Langobarden*, reprinted in 1962. More recently, Azzara [2] offers an important translation of the text of the Laws, to which he adds an edition of the original that builds on Beyerle, but departs from it in some points.

A new edition of the *Leges* is definitely needed for a number of reasons:

- (1) the editions currently available to scholars are all based on ms. 1 (Codex Sangallensis 730), the oldest one, which does not always transmit Lombard terms in accurate form;
- (2) a complete *recensio* of the extant witnesses has never been carried out;
- (3) it would be enlightening to take the fragments into account more than has been done so far, including the most recently discovered ones;
- (4) the editions produced to date (cited above) have been judged not to be satisfactory by experts in Lombard language and culture;

¹ <http://it.alim.unisi.it/>

(5) the new edition would be published in a digital form that is potentially more inclusive since it would reach a larger and more differentiated audience, and used in fields not necessarily strictly related to academia (e.g. tourism, museums and, more generally, the GLAM sector).

As for the drawbacks of the editions currently available, Molinari [16: 234] considers the text restored by Bluhme “readable, but a-historical in terms of both language and content.” Beyerle [3] builds upon Bluhme’s text, but does not take into account the fragments discovered by Dold in the 1930s [7: 1-52]. Azzara [7: 1-52] uses Beyerle as a base, but departs from it at specific points because of unspecified “textual criticisms that were deemed necessary.” The author seems well aware of the substantial fragility of his editorial method when he warns the reader that: “[t]he present edition represents only a start, a first step, toward a future critical edition” [2: lx].

We also strongly believe that a well-designed scholarly digital edition is the best method to publish a new, more up-to-date and philologically correct edition of the *Leges*. An edition that starts from the diplomatic-interpretive rendering of the manuscripts, also providing digital images, would be able to represent the historical dimension of each witness much more accurately than a printed edition. Furthermore, a digital edition can facilitate the study of Lombard terms, and their Latin glosses when present, not in isolation, but in their context of transmission. Moreover, the iconographic programme in the tradition of illuminated manuscript witnesses of the “Lombard Laws” bears a crucial historical value in itself. The ‘southern’ codices (Cavensis and Matritensis), for example, contain a number of images depicting the legislating kings and prince-legislators (see [8, 12, 22]). In fact, only a digital environment can efficiently highlight the peculiarities of the text-image relationship in these codices.

2. GENERAL PROJECT ROADMAP

The overall project is divided into the following phases:

(1) The first phase, which will be conducted in parallel with 2 and 3, will see a reassessment of the textual tradition of the *Leges* to ascertain which witnesses and fragments are needed in order to complete the *recensio* step, necessary for the preparation of the critical edition. The identified documents will be likewise digitized, so that they can be included in the *constitutio textus* phase.

(2) Phase 2 aims at providing a diplomatic-interpretive edition of the "Piedmontese" witnesses to the *Leges*, namely: ms 2 Codex Vercellensis (Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare CLXXXVIII, see Fig. 1) and ms 3 Codex Eporedianus (Ivrea, Biblioteca Capitolare, XXXIV).

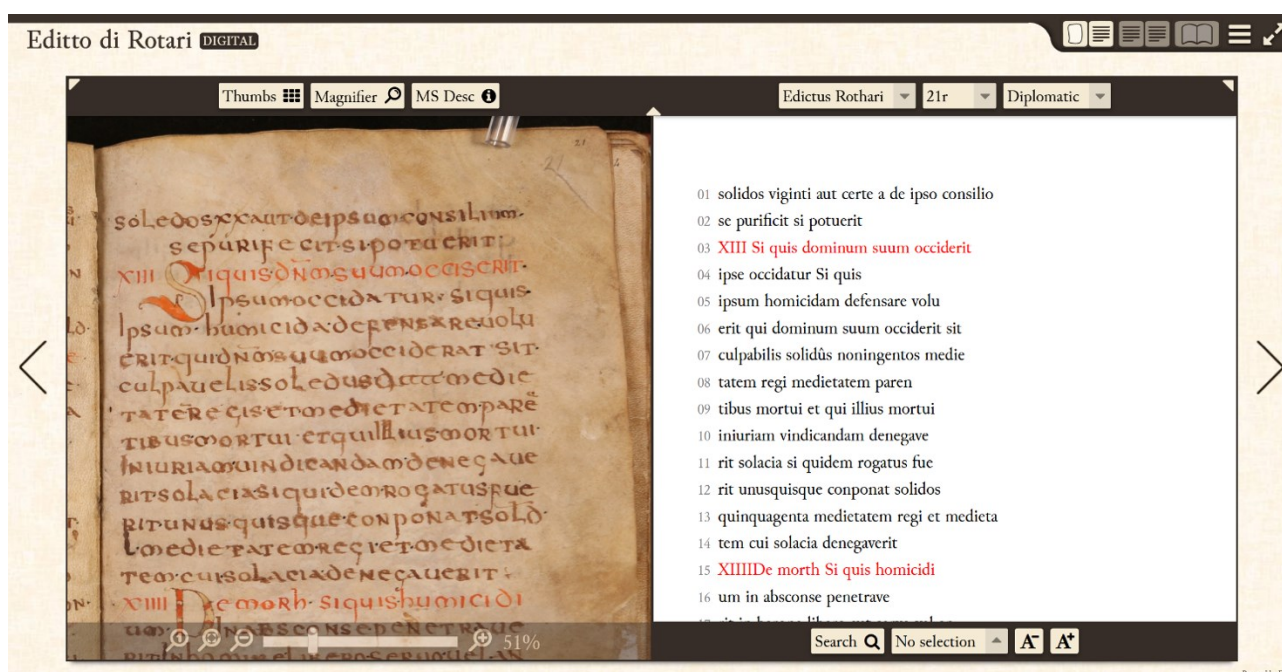


Figure 1. The first experimental edition of the Codex Vercellensis CLXXXVIII using EVT 1

(3) In the third phase, the same process will be repeated for witnesses identified in phase 1, including the fundamental ms 1 Codex Sangallensis (St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 730) and ms 5 Codex Vaticanus (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 5359) whose scanned images are available online.

- (4) The critically defined texts of all selected witnesses will then flow into the ALIM digital library, while full digital editions (facsimile + transcriptions) will be published using a dedicated software: EVT (Edition Visualization Technology).
- (5) The fifth, more laborious phase involves the preparation of the critical edition of the text of the *Edict* based on the comprehensive collation and review of the witnesses which have been selected for that purpose.
- (6) In the final phase, the EVT software will be developed to include an integrated edition feature: an innovative functionality which will allow it to handle digital facsimiles, diplomatic transcriptions and a critical edition enabling the user to seamlessly navigate from one to another, e.g., linking variant readings to the corresponding form in the context of the reference witness, and from there move to the digital facsimile to examine the material evidence of the same form. Phase 2 has already been developed and completed as part of the ALIM project, while phase 1 and 3 are underway. An important step will be a thorough check of the transcriptions both on the linguistic (mediaeval Latin) and the technical (XML encoding) level prior to their publication.

3. INNOVATIVE ASPECTS AND METHODOLOGIES

The most important innovative aspects of our project are:

- The idea of providing an **integrated edition**, handling both separate diplomatic transcriptions and “virtual witnesses” automatically generated thanks to the TEI markup for critical editions (see Fig. 2);
- The handling of named identities within a TEI-compliant glossary (see Fig. 3);
- The full digitization of the most important witnesses, including the fragments, which are of high philological value;
- A new EVT 3 feature, themes, will be used to implement support for people with disabilities such as colour-blindness.

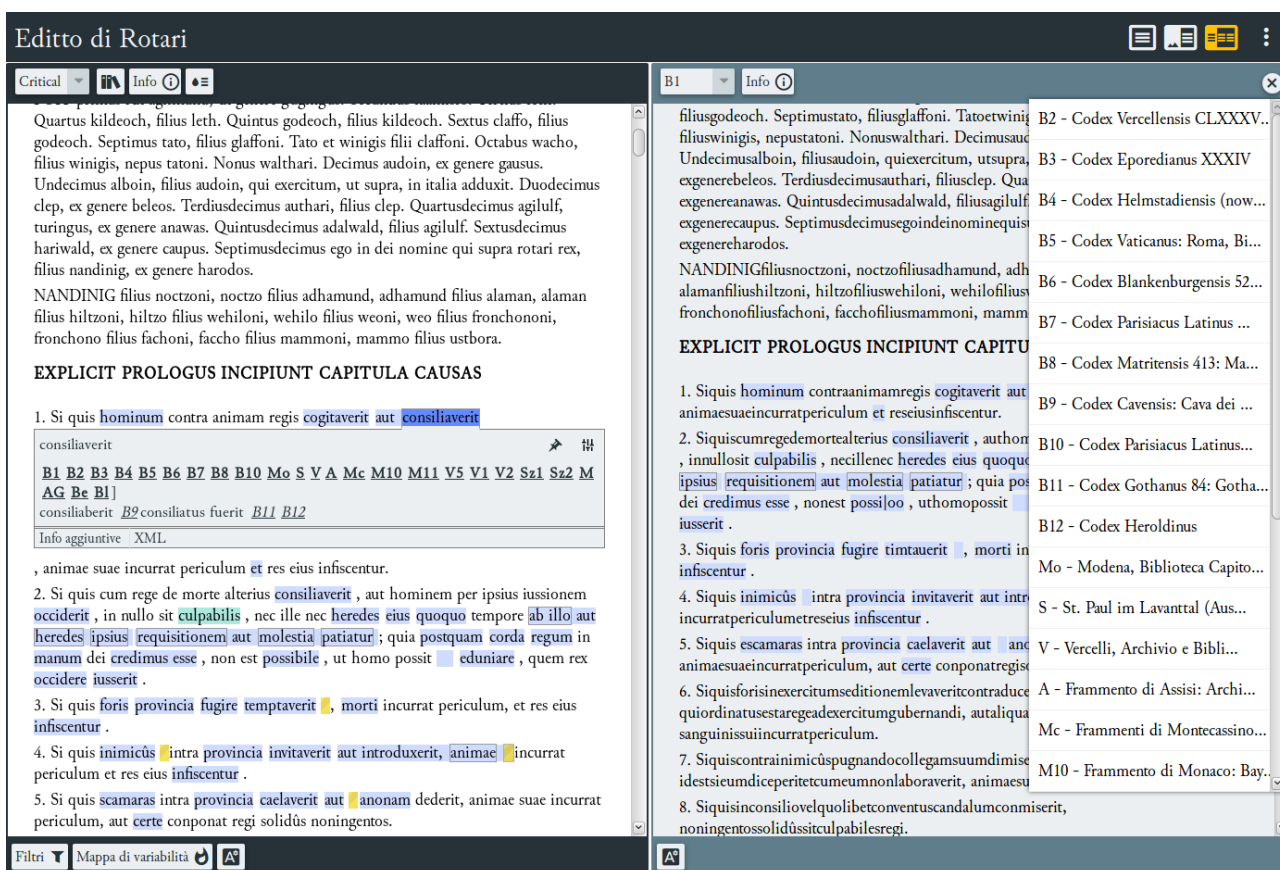


Figure 2. The critical edition of the Edictus Rothari in EVT 2 with a list of automatically generated witnesses on the left

For codices included in the project, but which are not already available because of previous acquisitions or thanks to publication by digital libraries (with a preference for servers relying on the IIF framework), a digitization is planned to be carried out either at the DH Center 'Digital Scholarship for the Humanities' of the Turin Unit (DISH²) or on site thanks to portable scanners again provided by DISH. For texts lacking a transcription, a new one will be carried out by means of the

² <https://www.dish.unito.it/>

TEI³ schemas and *Guidelines* (TEI Consortium 2023⁴) based on the XML markup language, an established standard in the production of digital editions, in order to prepare a digital facsimile accompanied by the corresponding transcription.

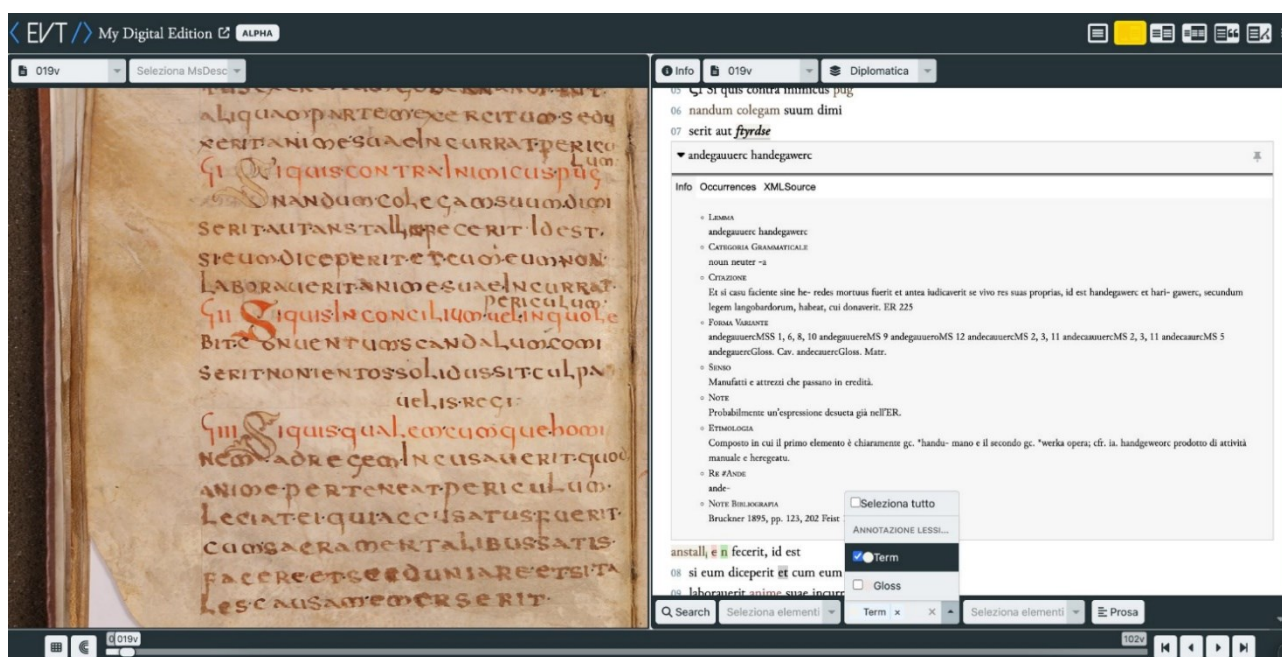


Figure 3. Experimental glossary support added to the EVT 3 alpha version (December 2022)

The newly digitised materials, and the XML/TEI documents containing the texts of the respective editions, will also be accompanied by metadata so that the components of the global edition can be documented in view of their subsequent dissemination.

The diplomatic editions will be published by means of the EVT software [20], whose graphical interface and display system allow for a more immediate interaction with the images of the codices, the texts of the digital edition, and the supporting and commentary materials that will gradually be included within the various editions. The solid performance of such mature software with TEI-based editions has already been extensively proved by its use in projects such as the Digital Vercelli Book⁵ [21], the Codice Pelavicino Digitale⁶ [23], the Petrus de Ebulo critical edition⁷ and the DI edition of Marco Polo's *Devisement dou Monde*⁸.

The use of an open source and flexible system such as EVT, moreover, will enable the development of a set of specific features necessary to achieve the goals of the project: in particular, adding support for critical editions accompanied by the images of a specific witness and the development of an integrated edition system within EVT. The latter is especially important because, at the time of writing, diplomatic editions alongside digital facsimiles and critical editions reflect two distinct methodological approaches that are functional to their respective goals, but in fact prevent a “dialogue” even within the same textual tradition. They are in fact the result on the one hand of the new philology [18] and digital documentary editions [19] approach, which is predominant in the Anglo-Saxon world, and on the other hand of the traditional stemmatic method, which can boast an abundant tradition in continental Europe and, in particular, in Italy. As a result, each scholar follows the method he or she considers most appropriate, but the final products, however good their quality, are “islands” that do not communicate with each other. An integrated edition, on the other hand, constitutes an important methodological innovation precisely because it would allow both the diplomatic editions of the most relevant witnesses and the critical edition that is produced on the basis of their collation to be brought under a single navigation and research environment, one that would allow an encounter and a successful blending of the different philological approaches [18].

On a technical level, project resources will be openly shared on the most appropriate repositories:

(1) GitHub⁹ for texts annotated using the XML/TEI markup language and for the EVT software development code: this

³ <https://tei-c.org/>

⁴ <http://www.tei-c.org/Guidelines/P5/>

⁵ <https://www.collane.unito.it/oa/items/show/11>

⁶ <http://pelavicino.labcd.unipi.it/>

⁷ <http://web.unibas.it/bup/evt2/pde/>

⁸ <http://dh.uni-wuppertal.de/test-evt-di-edition/>

⁹ <https://github.com/>

hosting will allow for a good RCS (Revision Control System) processing for all files on the basis of a widely tested and secure infrastructure;

(2) Zenodo¹⁰ for all project documentation, for images for which rights will be granted, and for academic deliverables (conference papers, articles, workshop materials): the Zenodo platform, in addition to being exceptionally stable (it is guaranteed to preserve the data for a period of 25 years from the time when it should eventually be decided to decommission it, so to allow an orderly migration to other platforms), assigns a DOI to each resource. This makes it possible not only to securely reference the resource in question (since it is a PID: Persistent Identifier), but also to ensure a public distribution of the edition data.

The project also presents important innovative features with regard to another methodological aspect, which is particularly relevant in view of the most recent developments of Web-based digital editions, namely the distributed edition. In this latest evolution of the Digital Scholarly Edition, at least part of the core components of the edition, textual data or images, reside on external servers, outside the one on which the main edition is published, and are the product of independent projects. The progress of the current IT infrastructure of the Web, in fact, makes it possible to start the realisation of an open ecosystem, within which resources of different types are made available to all interested parties for publication in digital editions or for processing for analysis and/or visualisation purposes.

Finally, all textual data will be made available to the academic community, again by means of the Zenodo platform, according to the FAIR principles: Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable¹¹. As discussed in the preceding paragraphs, all data for which rights are available will be:

- Findable: easily found on the web through the use of metadata, particularly PIDs;
- Accessible: directly downloadable or accessible on open repositories, in unnegotiated access mode;
- Interoperable: particularly with regard to textual data, all documents will be encoded making use of the XML/TEI standard, so as to ensure compatibility with other projects interested in their use;
- Reusable: distribution licences, combined with the technical aspect of interoperability, will make such data fully reusable in any kind of digital project or initiative.

4. PROJECT GOALS: INNOVATION AND INCLUSIVITY

The main goals of the project are as follows:

- (1) produce and publish a series of diplomatic editions, accompanied by digital facsimiles, of the most important witnesses of the *Leges Langobardorum* textual tradition;
- (2) further develop the EVT software so that it is fit for the project purposes, with particular regard to the integrated edition functionality and the accessibility settings (see below);
- (3) produce and publish a critical edition of the *Leges Langobardorum*” on the basis of all available witnesses and witness fragments, with particular regard to the texts published independently as diplomatic editions;
- (4) use the integrated edition feature of EVT to bring together the critical edition and the diplomatic editions, with the goal of a seamless navigation from the former to the latter;
- (5) organise the dissemination of all the edition materials (those the project has rights upon) in such a way that it will be possible both to reuse them according to the FAIR principles and maximise the global impact of the project (see below);
- (6) since the new edition would be the result of a research work carried out in the digital paradigm and published in a digital form, the ultimate goal is that of “disclosing” the Lombard world - strictly linked to past and present Italy within the wider European environment - to audiences beyond academia (e.g. tourism, museums and, more generally, the GLAM sector) with the aim of awakening the users to their own social memory, historical legacy and cultural heritage;
- (7) Special attention will be paid to the topic of inclusion: the proponents are aware of the fact that the digital means can in itself be more inclusive (for instance, it allows remote fruition, thus facilitating, among others, people with walking impairments), but also alienating due to digital divide or the lack of specific software features that allow access to specific categories of users, e.g. visually or hearing impaired people. EVT will be equipped with accessibility settings, i.e. features that let people with disabilities customise a device for their own needs. This kind of customization can be a life-changer for people with special needs: low vision, hearing difficulties, motor control issues, auditory-processing issues, expressive language disorder, nonverbal-communication issues, as well as attentional needs.

¹⁰ <https://zenodo.org/>

¹¹ <https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/>

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