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**Why are there no digital scholarly editions of “classical” texts?**

An issue in current digital philology risks to go unnoticed: there are no digital scholarly editions of “classical” texts with a multi-testimonial tradition. This worrying assertion is true only if we understand both “digital” and “classical” in the most restricted sense, by defining a “digital” scholarly edition as one based on encoding of all primary sources, and by confining our scrutiny to Greek and Latin literary texts of “Classical antiquity”.

The present paper aims at addressing this ticklish – yet largely unaddressed – issue by exploring the reasons of the blatant shortage of “digital classical” editions.<sup>1</sup> It is argued that we do not have such editions because the interest of classical philologists in the textual variance of classical texts is purely instrumental – as opposed to other, more “document-oriented”, scholars, like papyrologists, epigraphists or editors of contemporary authors’ variants.

This is due to the specific nature of the textual transmission of classical texts, that is to the “canonisation” and the progressive linguistic and textual normalisation of the classical literary *corpus* throughout the centuries. The textual variance that one might consider meaningful (*e. g.* that introduced by the author, or by different ancient versions of the work) has faded out, and the variance actually existing in our textual sources (*e. g.* medieval manuscripts) is considered of little meaning and interest. The latter is taken into account only instrumentally as both a hindrance and a tool towards the restoration of the “original” text. Arguably, this explains why classical text editors are not so interested in the potential of “document-oriented” digital scholarly editions to take on the endeavour of encoding textual witnesses completely.

As a consequence, on the one hand we have vast digital collections of classical texts not accounting for variants, on the other hand we have an increasing number of digital editions of textual primary sources (including *papyri*, manuscripts, print *incunabula*), but we do not have editions that link them (digital scholarly editions). The reasons do not lie mainly in technology or research infrastructure, but rather in the methodological issues sketched above, inherent in classical textual philology.

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1 I published a first draft of this paper on my own website at the address <<http://www.unipa.it/paolo.monella/lincei/why.html>> in the fashion of an informal provocation. The animated debate on the “Digital Classicist” discussion list (<<http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/digitalclassicist>>) originated by my blog post can be followed in <<https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A2=digitalclassicist:58231d8f.1204>>.

Once more, the application of digital methodologies to the Humanities faces us with core questions of our traditional disciplines, questions that need to be addressed while we build a digital infrastructure for philology, in Classics as well as in other areas of literary studies involving the study of multi-testimonial textual traditions.

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