

A Selection of Papers from the Digital Classicist Seminar Berlin (2012-2015)

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Introduction

The Digital Classicist seminar series was established in 2006 in London as a platform for discussion aimed at bringing together people working at the intersection between Classics and computing science. This seminar format has found a fertile ground also in Berlin – a city warming with activities related to the Digital Humanities (DH) and Digital Archaeology – where a comparable series was launched in 2012. Since then, more than forty papers were presented, a selection of which is published in this special issue.

In the context of this volume the term 'Digital Classics' is a placeholder for a much broader range of disciplines. 'Digital Classics' should not be misunderstood as a simple transfer of an existing subject into the digital realm, because this does not do justice to the possibilities provided by digital methods. Rather it should be understood as wide and open as possible.

Thus the scope of this special issue is the ancient world at large, covering not only the usual research areas of Classics and 'Altertumswissenschaften', but including also for example Babylonia, the Near East and China. The selected papers highlight inter- and cross-disciplinary approaches, which show how the digital component can lead to overcome disciplinary boundaries and to establish closer connections among philology, archaeology, ancient history and information science. Moreover, the contributions focussing on texts are not limited to classical Greek and Latin literature, but deal as well with the Indian, Ancient Egyptian and Arabic literary tradition.

The Digital Classicist Seminar Berlin (henceforth DCSB) is informed by the ideals of decentralisation, international collaboration and openness that characterise the Digital Classicist community as a whole.¹ As such, the seminar series is organised by a group of researchers belonging to various key institutions in Berlin – the excellence cluster TOPOI, the German Archaeological Institute (DAI) and the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities (BBAW) – and is made possible by the generous financial support of these institutions, as well as of DARIAH-DE. As part of our commitment to openness, the videos and slides of the seminar, and also the publications originating from it, are made available under a Creative Commons licence.² The open publication of the (seminar) outputs aims at

1 The description on the Digital Classicist website reads: "The Digital Classicist is a decentralised and international community of scholars and students interested in the application of innovative digital methods and technologies to research on the ancient world. The Digital Classicist is not hard-funded, nor owned by any institution", <<http://www.digitalclassicist.org/index.html>> (15/03/2017).

2 Abstract, slides and videos of each seminar are accessible from the DCSB website, <<http://de.digitalclassicist.org/berlin>> (15/03/2017).

making them as accessible as possible and potentially allows for reuse of these materials in other contexts (e.g. as learning and teaching resources).³

Since 2014 the DCSB is also part of the academic programme of the Freie Universität under the name “Digitale Methoden in den Altertumswissenschaften” and in this way contributes to establish in Berlin a DH curriculum with a specific focus on the ancient world. In addition to gaining familiarity with a broad array of methods for the study of the past, students can put into practice and improve their communication skills. This is achieved through the choice of English as official language for the seminars and a final presentation. This presentation consists of preparing a poster – a medium of essential importance for scholarly communication – on one of the topics that were touched upon during the seminar. It turned out that not only preparing a poster is a very useful soft skill for students to acquire (and rarely taught at undergraduate level) but it also helps students to engage more actively and more in-depth with the subject.

As for the organisation of materials, the wide variety of topics covered and methods employed by papers in this issue – which well reflects the nature of contributions that are presented at our seminar – made it impossible to arrange its content thematically. Therefore, we decided to present the papers going from the general to the particular, and to arrange them into three somewhat coherent blocks.

The first block features two methodological reflections on digital media, and on the effects they have on our scholarly practices. In the first contribution Haciguzeller focusses on cartography and collaborative mapping. After putting collaborative mapping into the context, she presents four possible scenarios for its use in archaeology, namely psychogeography, local community involvement, online collaborative mapping for archaeology and spatial narratives. In the second contribution, Trachsel considers how the philological work entailed by editing fragmentary texts (i.e. works that are known to us only through quotations contained in other texts) changes when moved to a digital environment. In particular, Trachsel reflects on how the new possibilities for the presentation of textual content that are offered by the digital medium, as opposed to printed editions, may lead us to a new understanding of what a fragment is and how it can (or should) be presented to the reader.

The second block gathers contributions about research projects that lead to the development of digital tools or services, which can be seen as individual components of an emerging digital infrastructure for the study of our past.

The papers by Bodard et al. and Varga form a prosopographical dyptich. The former presents the SNAP:DRGN project, where the acronym stands for the extended project’s name *Standards for Networking Ancient Prosopographies: Data and Relations in Greco-Roman Names*. SNAP:DRGN aimed at building a virtual authority list for ancient people through Linked Data collection of common information from existing resources. On the basis of three case studies the authors discuss the various challenges that are encountered when prosopographical data is merged into a single reference system. Some of these issues are due to the peculiarities and the fragmentary status of ancient sources, while others are related to technical aspects.

The latter paper, while remaining in the realm of prosopography, focusses on one specific geographical region, the Roman provinces of Dacia and Moesia. In this paper Varga discusses two aspects of the *Romans 1 by 1* project. First, she describes the structure of the

³ The first publication originated from this seminar series is Bodard & Romanello (2016).

prosopographical database being built in the project and then explains how its structure allows for asking complex questions about the Roman population.

In the last paper of this block Henny et al. take into consideration the whole lifecycle of a digital resource – the digital edition of the *Book of the Dead* – and reflect on the experiences made and the lessons learned with regards to the various stages of a digital resource's lifecycle. The authors address important issues, which are not often enough discussed in Digital Humanities scholarship, such as the costs of maintaining and continuously curating a platform like the Book of the Dead that is intended to be a living digital resource.

Finally, the third block consists of papers presenting the results of explorative research, conducted by using various methods ranging from imaging techniques to visualisation to network analysis.

Piquette describes the setup and results of capturing unrolled Herculaneum Papyrus fragments with Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI) and Near-infrared RTI (NIR RTI). Previous to this the fragments have been documented with NIR photography, which produced clear, but static images. The main advantage of RTI is that the resulting images can be relit digitally from any desired position, thus making it possible to discern holes and distinguish different papyrus layers, and to increase the contrast between ink and writing surface.

In his paper Roeder explores the use of various visualisation methods in order to further our understanding of the linguistics transformations occurring when ancient Greek is translated into Classical Arabic. He presents and discusses various visualisation examples drawn from the *Glossarium Graeco-Arabicum*, a parallel corpus of about 100,000 words.

Elwert et al. present the results of applying social network analysis methods on ancient Egyptian and Indian texts. They demonstrate how these methods can provide insights into the relations existing between different protagonists, their possible grouping into communities and the identification of the most important relations. Among the examples discussed by the authors there is also a plot network representing the main content and the sidelines of “the contendings of Horus and Seth”, which proved to be a useful resource for distant reading.

Finally, Da Vela examines the use of social network analysis to understand how local communities in Hellenistic Northern Etruria were transformed during the process of Romanisation, especially with regards to their perceived cultural identity. Her proposed approach tries to relate identity markers detected from archaeological and epigraphic sources with the diachronic evolutions in the structure of the social network between the local communities.

Bibliography

Bodard & Romanello (2016): Gabriel Bodard & Matteo Romanello (Eds.), Digital Classics Outside the Echo-Chamber, London, [DOI: 10.5334/bat](https://doi.org/10.5334/bat).

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