

2008 Annual Conference of CIDOC
Athens, September 15 – 18, 2008
Casey Dué

DIGITAL CRITICISM OF ANCIENT ORAL “TEXTS”: A MULTITEXTUAL APPROACH¹

Casey Dué
Modern and Classical Languages
University of Houston
4800 Calhoun Rd
Houston, TX
USA
E-Mail: Casey.Due@mail.uh.edu
URL: http://chs.harvard.edu/chs/homer_multitext

Abstract

In this paper, I would like to give a brief overview of the significance for Homeric studies of the manuscripts of the *Iliad* that were digitized in May 2007 by an international team sponsored by Harvard’s Center for Hellenic Studies, together with a discussion of how this project fits into a larger project at the CHS, the Homer Multitext (http://chs.harvard.edu/chs/homer_multitext). This project encapsulates many of the goals of the Center for Hellenic Studies, an institution that is now at the forefront of digital initiatives in Hellenic Studies and a leader in the creation of a set of common standards for digital collections. The Homer Multitext seeks to present the textual transmission of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in a historical framework. Using technology that takes advantage of the best available practices and open source standards, the Homer Multitext offers free access to a library of texts and images, a machine-interface to that library and its indices, and tools to allow readers to discover and engage with the Homeric tradition.

A digital medium provides an opportunity to construct a truly different type of critical edition of the Homeric epics, one that better reflects the circumstances of its composition and transmission. The framework and tools that will connect these texts and make them

¹ The following paper is about a collaborative project, of which I am one of four primary editors. We have worked together to produce a number of presentations and publications connected to the project over the past year, including the forthcoming book: *Recapturing a Homeric Legacy: Images and Insights from the Venetus A Manuscript of the Iliad* (Harvard University Press, 2008). For this reason, this paper should be considered to be co-authored by Christopher W. Blackwell, Mary Ebbott, and Neel Smith.

dynamically useful are the challenge that lies before us, as it does for other digital scholarly editions.

INTRODUCTION

In May of 2007 an international team of Classicists, conservators, photographers, and imaging experts came together in the Marciana library in Venice's St. Mark's square and digitized three medieval manuscripts of the Homeric *Iliad*. These manuscripts represent the oldest complete texts of the *Iliad* in existence, but they but they are valuable for even more than their texts of the poems. Each of these manuscripts contains a vast amount of marginal scholia, commentary in the margins that derive ultimately from the great Homeric scholars of Hellenistic Egypt and Rome. These scholia preserve an historical record of many previous editions of the poems, as well as a treasure trove of ancient scholarly interpretation. It is largely because of these scholia that we are aware that the Homeric texts were fluid (or multiform) in antiquity, and did not become relatively standardized until after 150 BCE.

In this paper, I would like to give a brief overview of the significance for Homeric studies of the multiformity preserved in the manuscripts that were digitized in May 2007, together with a discussion of how this project fits into a larger project at the CHS, the Homer Multitext (http://chs.harvard.edu/chs/homer_multitext).

DIGITAL CRITICISM: A MULTITEXTUAL APPROACH

The practice of textual criticism, as applied to classical Greek texts, has the goal of recovering the original composition of the author. To create a critical edition, a modern editor assembles a text by collating the various written witnesses to an ancient Greek text, understanding their relationship with each other, knowing the kinds and likelihoods of mistakes that can occur when texts are copied by hand, and, in the case of poetry, applying the rules and exceptions of the meter as well as grammar. The final published

work will then represent what she or he thinks are the author's own words (or as close to this as possible). An editor may follow one manuscript almost exclusively, or pick and choose between different manuscripts to compile what seems truest to the original. The editor also places in the *apparatus criticus* what s/he judges to be significant variants recorded in the witnesses. The reader must rely on the editor for the completeness of the apparatus in reporting variants. For a text that was composed and originally published in writing, this goal of recovering the original text is valuable and productive, even if it may never be fully achieved because of the state of the evidence.

A helpful comparison can be made to the critical editions of Shakespeare's plays known as the "Variorum" editions, which are sponsored by and overseen by the Modern Language Association (http://www.mla.org/variorum_handbook). Although the textual tradition of Shakespeare is far less old than that of Archaic and Classical Greek texts, editors for each play in much the same way painstakingly compare and evaluate readings from different sources, make choices as to which is most likely to be correct, and justify their decisions. The Greek New Testament is another group of texts for which a rigorous system of evaluation of the various readings and their witnesses has developed (see, e.g., Aland 2005). Some digital projects, such as the Cervantes Project digital library, while capturing variation in the textual tradition in an Electronic Variorum Edition, do so for the stated goal of producing "a more correct edition closer to Cervantes' original manuscript" (Monroy et al. 2002). Similarly, Stringer argues that a variorum edition of John Donne's poetry has allowed the restoration of a particular line "to its original form" (1999, 91). For an edition of *Don Quixote de la Mancha* or poems of Donne, this goal is appropriate to the fundamental notion of an original manuscript of an individual author and a text composed in writing.

But since the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were not composed in writing, this editorial system cannot be applied in the same way. The Homeric epics come from a long oral tradition in which they were created, performed, and re-performed, all without the technology of writing (Lord 1960/2000, Parry 1971, Nagy 1996). This fundamental difference in the

composition and history of this poetry means that we must adjust our assumptions in our understanding of the variations in the written record. What does it mean when we see variations, which still perfectly fit the meter and language of the poetry, in the witnesses to the texts? Instead of “mistakes” to be corrected, as an editor would treat them in the case of a text composed just once in writing, these variations are testaments to the system of language that underlies the composition-in-performance of the oral tradition.

Yet it is difficult to indicate the parity of these multiforms in a standard critical edition on the printed page. As we have noted, one version must be chosen for the text on the upper portion of the page, and the other recorded variations must be placed in an apparatus below, often in smaller text, a placement that necessarily gives the impression that these variations are incorrect or at least less important. An approach to editing Homer that embraces the multiformity of both the performative and textual phases of the tradition—that is to say, a multitextual approach—can convey the complexity of the transmission of Homeric epic in a way that is simply impossible on the printed page. The variations that the textual critic of Homer encounters come from many different kinds of sources and many time periods. In his edition of the *Iliad* T. W. Allen included 188 manuscripts, dating from the 10th century CE on, and the relationship between manuscripts or manuscript families and their descent from earlier exemplars can be only partially reconstructed (Allen 1931). From the scholia that survive in our medieval manuscripts, we learn of readings attributed to the texts of various cities (some as far away as Marseilles), texts in the collection of individuals, texts called “common” or “standard,” and texts that are “more refined” (Nagy 2004, 20). In the literature that survives from Classical Athens, especially in the Attic orators and in Plato, we find quotations of Homer, some quite extensive, and these texts can vary considerably from the medieval texts of Homer on which we rely for our printed editions (Dué 2001a and Dué 2001b). Some of our earliest witnesses to the text of Homer are the fragmentary papyri that survived in the sands of Egypt from the third century BCE onwards. These texts too are often quite different than their medieval counterparts (Dué 2001a). A multitextual approach can be explicit about these many different channels of transmission, placing

each in its historical and cultural framework and allowing the reader to understand better their relationships to one another, rather than giving the false impression that they are all of the same kind and same time.

Yet even as we emphasize the historical significance of these multitudinous channels of transmission, we must be careful to acknowledge that there was never one *Iliad* or one *Odyssey* at any given time or place in the ancient world that we can seek to reconstruct. In earlier stages of the project, we have ourselves been tempted to create and include such a reconstruction. For example, we had considered attempting to reconstruct what would have been the “common” or koinē text at the time of Aristarchus, the great second century BCE scholar and editor who worked at the ancient library at Alexandria (Dué and Ebbott 2004). Having this particular text would be a dream come true, for Aristarchus’ critical work on the text of Homer is referred to throughout the scholia that survive in the margins of our medieval manuscripts. But here the situation is no less complex, no less multiform. As Gregory Nagy has demonstrated (see especially Nagy 2004), Aristarchus had available to him at the library of Ptolemaic Alexandria a great number of Homeric texts. Aristarchus’ practice was to collate the many texts known to him and to comment on the various readings that he found, often asserting which reading he felt to be the correct one. Unlike a modern editor, however, Aristarchus confined his opinions to his commentary, which was published in its own separate volume. The text that would have accompanied this commentary was what Aristarchus and subsequent scholars refer to as the “standard” or “common” edition. But was this indeed a single edition that is reconstructable? Aristarchus himself does not seem to have ever published his own text of Homer, with his own preferred readings. Even if he had, we would know from his commentaries about the many other texts that were available to him, and so once again we are forced to confront the multiformity of the Homeric tradition.

An emphasis on actual, complete witnesses to the transmission has thus driven many of our considerations in building the Homer Multitext, a project sponsored by Harvard’s Center for Hellenic Studies that seeks to present the textual transmission of the *Iliad* and

Odyssey in a historical framework (http://chs.harvard.edu/chs/homer_multitext). We share with many digital editions the value of including images of the sources, especially for wider access to fragile manuscripts (Dahlström 2000, Monroy et al. 2002, Kiernan 2005, Robinson 2005, Ulman 2006, Porter 2007; for examples of textual edition projects using images, see the Internet Shakespeare Editions <http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/index.html> and Digital Donne project <http://digitaldonne.tamu.edu>). The Multitext has now published digital images of three manuscripts of the *Iliad* housed in the Marciana Library in Venice, Italy: the tenth-century Marcianus Graecus Z. 454 (= 822), also known as the Venetus A, the eleventh-century Marcianus Graecus Z. 453 (= 821), also known as the Venetus B, and the twelfth/thirteenth-century Marcianus Graecus Z. 458 (= 841), also known as U4. Each manuscript contains its own set of scholarly commentary in the margins. The initial publication of these images is focused on making them available as quickly as possible, but as we work to integrate them with other components of the Multitext, an important question we will be facing is how to make them truly accessible, not just available, to a range of users broader than just those who happen to be experts in Greek palaeography (cf. Kiernan 2005).

The Multitext will thus collect historical witnesses to the text of Homer (individual Medieval manuscripts, Homeric papyri, works from antiquity that quote Homer, as well as a wide range of readings attributed to such historical figures as Aristarchus), and put them in a framework that allows these historical *Iliads* and *Odysseys* to be compared in various ways. By doing this, we the editors hope to provide users with a more accurate understanding of the transmission of orally created “texts” over the course of more than 2,500 years. It is necessary to put the word “texts” in quotation marks here, since it must be understood that in their earliest phases the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were not and never could be a single “text.” Indeed, this difficulty alone (what do we call the *Iliad* if not a text?) highlights better than anything our need for a digitally presented Multitext, and by way of it, a more complete understanding of Homeric poetry.

Publication of the Venetus A, the Venetus B, and the U4 manuscripts of the *Iliad* is central to these goals. These manuscripts are among our oldest complete manuscript of the *Iliad*. They serve as a bridge between the ancient and medieval transmission, and they preserve in their margins a vast amount of references to the many other *Iliads* and *Odysseys* known to have existed in antiquity. As a deluxe edition unparalleled in beauty, design, construction, or execution by any other manuscript produced subsequently, the Venetus A in particular is a cultural artifact worthy of study in its own right. The Venetus A was on the cutting edge of book technology when it was created, and made the Homeric texts available to its audience in a way that was at that time sophisticated and novel. It allowed its readers to appreciate the poem together with a thousand years of interpretation, and it did so in a format that was far easier to use and more durable than earlier editions of the *Iliad* on papyrus. Even the manuscript's elegant and compact minuscule script can be seen as a technological advance over the capitals in which the earliest parchment manuscripts must have been written. By publishing the Venetus A as collection of high resolution digital images, together with images of other Medieval manuscripts and electronic editions of ancient papyri, the Homer Multitext will be making a similar technological breakthrough in the presentation of the *Iliad*, and with it readers will receive a much clearer picture of where our *Iliad* comes from.

It is once again instructive to return to the comparison made to the transmission of the works of Shakespeare at the beginning of this paper. An understanding of both the performance medium in which the Homeric poems were created and the complexities of their textual transmission allows us to better appreciate how the two sets of texts share features but also differ in important ways. The transmission of Shakespeare's plays is indeed quite complex. Authoritative editions of the plays were not overseen by Shakespeare himself, and the earliest editions seem to have in some instances at least been made on the basis of faulty transcripts of actual performances, requiring substantial reconstruction of the text (Greg 1955). The First Folio edition of 1623, which is the most authoritative of the early editions, was put together seven years after Shakespeare's death by two actors in the King's Men, the company for which Shakespeare wrote. The texts of

the thirty-six plays included in the edition are of various provenance. Some derive from the heavily annotated copies prepared for prompters; others are based on Shakespeare's own working drafts. It is clear that some plays were revised for subsequent performances during the course of Shakespeare's lifetime, with the result that there are multiple versions of the same work that are equally Shakespearean. Editors of such important Classical authors as (Greek) Aristophanes and (Roman) Ovid face similar difficulties.

What the plays of Shakespeare share with the Homeric tradition is that they were created in the context of performance. Individual instances of performance could result in new texts, depending on the occasion of performance, the intervention of actors and/or others involved in the production, or the desire of Shakespeare himself. A transcript created on the basis of a given performance would no doubt vary from transcripts created on other occasions. Such variations can teach us a great deal about the performance traditions of Shakespeare's plays, the creative process, and Shakespeare's working methods. Scholars of recent decades have rightly seen the value in the variation that we find in the textual transmission, and several web-based projects have been developed that make the quartos and folios available to an interested public. Of particular note is The Internet Shakespeare Editions (<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/index.html>), which plans to publish high-resolution photographs of these early editions together with a variety of supplementary information, electronic texts, and fully edited (modern) editions.

But the Shakespeare analogy can only be taken so far. Homeric poetry was not only created *for* performance, it was created *in* performance. In the earliest stages of the Greek epic tradition no song would have ever been sung the same way twice. The content and form of the songs were traditional and the tradition was a highly conservative one, but the compositional process was nonetheless dynamic. As editors of the Homer Multitext, we are not seeking to recover the most authoritative performance, because such a performance does not exist. Rather than screen out variation in the search for the author's own words, we seek out variation for what it can tell us about Homeric composition-in-performance and the evolution of the texts we now recognize as our *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

DIGITAL CURATION: A CALL FOR COLLABORATION, STANDARDS, AND OPEN ACCESS

A digital medium provides an opportunity to construct a truly different type of critical edition of the Homeric epics, one that better reflects the circumstances of its composition and transmission. We know that the circumstances of the composition of the Homeric epics demand a new kind of scholarly edition, a new kind of representation. We believe that a digital criticism of the witnesses to the poetry provides a means to construct one. Now the mission is to envision and create the Multitext so that it is true to these standards. The framework and tools that will connect these texts and images and make them dynamically useful are the challenge that lies before us, as it does for other digital scholarly editions.

Given the complexity of the Homeric transmission and these challenges, one might well ask how such an ambitious project can be achieved. The technological infrastructure of the project has been described on the project website (http://chs.harvard.edu/chs/homer_multitext) and a series of technological papers have been commissioned to document how we will proceed (see <http://chs75.harvard.edu>). As we continue to build our collection of texts, there are still questions to be answered about how to construct the architecture to achieve the visual representation we envision and that will achieve the results we have described here. But no matter what the details end up being, we have committed to three foundational principles: collaboration, open access, and interoperability. I would like to conclude this essay by emphasizing them, for these principles are essential to this project but also vital to the future of the humanities as a whole.

First and foremost is the collaborative nature of the project. Dozens of scholars of every rank and from many different kinds of institutions currently play vital roles, contributing their own areas of expertise. Although the model for Homeric research is most often that

of the individual genius working alone, we suggest that the collaboration that is at the heart of the Multitext allows for a higher quality of research and analysis that can be accomplished in a more timely manner. As other digital edition projects amply demonstrate, these large, long-term undertakings simply cannot be accomplished without this fruitful, energizing collaboration. We have been fortunate to collaborate with many technologically informed classical scholars, and we expect that this project will demonstrate how our sustained collaboration can lead to more thoughtful, thorough, and creative scholarship on the Homeric epics.

Second, the Homer Multitext project is an open access project: that is, it is on-line, free of charge to all, and free of most copyright or licensing restrictions. A prime example of our ideals of open access is the digital photographs of the three manuscripts. These images will be a significant element of the Multitext, but even before we have fully integrated them into the project, we want to make them available to any and all through the CHS website so that others may use them in their own research. As other digital scholarly editions have noted (e.g., the Cervantes Project, see Monroy et al. 2002), providing users access to these rare and normally inaccessible manuscripts or other texts is an important goal for the project in and of itself.

Third, we are committed to using international standards based technology. We want our project to talk to other digital initiatives in the Classics and in the humanities at large. We want scholars and readers to be able *easily* to find and use the texts and images that are part of this project, including re-using them for their own purposes. Toward this goal, we use TEI-conformant XML and Creative Commons Licensing in our publishing, and scholars affiliated with the CHS have developed the Canonical Text Services protocol, described on the Multitext website (http://chs.harvard.edu/chs/technological_infrastructure). All three of these principles are themselves connected to a larger ideal of sharing these texts and our work with as large an audience as possible, and not allowing barriers or restrictions to prevent others from using them in their own research or in other creative endeavors.

REFERENCES

Aland, K., (2005), *Synopsis quattuor evangeliorum: locis parallelis evangeliorum apocryphorum et patrum adhibitis*. Stuttgart, 2005.

Allen, T. W., (1924), *Homer: The Origins and Transmission*. Oxford.

Allen, T.W., (1931), *Homeri Ilias*. Oxford.

Dahlström, M., (2000), “Drowning by Versions.” *Human IT* 4. Available on-line at <http://hb.se/bhs/ith/4-00/md.htm>. Accessed April 20, 2008.

Dué, C., (2001a), “Achilles’ Golden Amphora in Aeschines’ *Against Timarchus* and the Afterlife of Oral Tradition.” *Classical Philology* 96, pp. 33-47.

Dué, C., (2001b), “*Sunt Aliquid Manes*: Homer, Plato, and Alexandrian Allusion in Propertius 4.7.” *Classical Journal* 96, pp. 401-413.

Dué, C. and Ebbott, M., (2004), “‘As Many Homers As You Please’: an On-line Multitext of Homer.” *Classics@* 2. Available from C. Blackwell, R. Scaife, http://chs.harvard.edu/chs/issue_2_-_du_and_ebbott. Accessed April 20, 2008.

Greg, W. W., (1955), *The Shakespeare First Folio: Its Bibliographical and Textual History*. London.

Kiernan, K., (2005), “Digital Fascimilies in Editing: Some Guidelines for Editors of Image-based Scholarly Editions.” In Burnard, O’Keeffe, and Unsworth, eds., *Electronic Textual Editing*, New York.. Preprint available at: <http://www.tei-c.org/Activities/ETE/Preview/kiernan.xml>. Accessed April 20, 2008.

Lord, A. B., (1960/2000), *The Singer of Tales*. Cambridge, MA. 2nd rev. edition.

Monroy, C., Kochumman, R., Furuta, R., Urbina, E., Melgoza, E., and Goenka, A., (2002), “Visualization of Variants in Textual Collations to naylze the Evolution of Literary Works in The Cervantes Project.” *Proceedings of the 6th European Conference on Research and Advanced Technology for Digital Libraries*, pp. 638-653. <http://www.cSDL.tamu.edu/cervantes/pubs/ecdl2002.pdf>. Accessed April 20, 2008.

Nagy, G., (1996), *Homeric Questions*. Austin, TX.

Nagy, G., (2004), *Homer’s Text and Language*. Champaign, IL, 2004.

Parry, A., ed., (1971), *The Making of Homeric Verse*. Oxford.

2008 Annual Conference of CIDOC
Athens, September 15 – 18, 2008
Casey Dué

Porter, D., (2007), “Examples of Images in Text Editing.” *Proceedings of the 19th Joint International Conference of the Association for Computers and the Humanities, and the Association for Literary and Linguistic Computing, at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign* 2007. Available from <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dh2007/abstracts/xhtml.xq?id=250>. Accessed April 20, 2008.

Reynolds, L. D. and Nigel G. Wilson, (1991), *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*. Oxford.

Robinson, P., (2004), “Where We Are with Electronic Scholarly Editions, and Where We Want to Be.” *Jahrbuch für Computerphilologie Online* 1.1. Available from <http://computerphilologie.uni-muenchen.de/jg03/robinson.html>. In print in *Jahrbuch für Computerphilologie* 2004, pp. 123-143.

Robinson, P., (2005), “Current Issues in Making Digital Editions of Medieval texts—or, Do Electronic Scholarly Editions have a Future?” *Digital Medievalist* 1.1 (2005). Available from <http://www.digitalmedievalist.org/article.cfm?RecID=6>.

Stringer, G., (1999), “An Introduction to the Donne Variorum and the John Donne Society.” *Anglistik* 10.1, pp. 85–95. Available on-line at <http://donnevariorum.tamu.edu/anglist/anglist.pdf>. Accessed April 20, 2008.

Ulman, H. L., (2006), “Will the Real Edition Please Stand Out?: Negotiating Multi-Linear Narratives encoded in Electronic Textual Editions.” *Proceedings of the <Code> Conference*, 2006. Available from <http://www.units.muohio.edu/codeconference/papers/papers/Ulman-Code03.pdf>. Accessed April 20, 2008.