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On the importance of studying and preserving Latin poetic literature

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For the past few decades, digital technology has emerged as an important innovative tool in the study and preservation of the many-centuries-old heritage of Latin literature. This has brought many advantages to academics and has held a certain weight in the disciplinary statutes of Philology. Today I will begin by offering a summary of the current situation and by describing Musisque Deoque (from now on: MQDQ, a tool developed by us at Venice's Ca' Foscari University, < <http://mizar.unive.it/mqdq/public/> >). In the second part of my presentation, I will present some of the results obtained by us in using the word search machine.

SOME GENERALITIES. THE VERSATILITY OF PHILOLOGY

The birth of Philology coincides with the Alexandrine exegesis of Homer. With its use of quantitative analysis of texts, the new discipline was later improved by the collective effort of Greek and Roman lexicographers in the imperial age and, after the darkest medieval times, it was revived thanks to the biblical concordances of Hugh of Saint-Cher (ca. 1230). In modern times, sophisticated printed tools have been developed and are now ready to be digitalized. This can be dated around 1985, when the first personal computers were launched into the market.

It may seem a paradox, but disciplines studying ancient cultures and languages opened the way to avant-garde practices in the field of the digital treatment and analysis of texts. Some reasons for this trend, often neglected, are evident. A specific characteristic of classical (Greco-Latin) literatures allows the organization of texts within

historically concluded *corpora*, and as such are retrievable almost in their entirety – even though it is inaccurate to speak of ‘entirety’, when considering the precariousness of textual transmission, and the remarkable role played by choice and chance in it.

In addition, it is well known that the western literary system, from Homer on, is characterized by a strong tendency to conscious emulation, systematic imitation, and occasional or less conscious withdrawal. While the so-called ‘intertextuality’ has been largely examined and theoretically established, it can be more thoroughly understood with a stronger grade of scientific certainty provided that the investigation is conducted on electronic *thesauri* of considerable dimension.

Ancient authors and their legacy should be read beyond the well-tested formats represented by the critical editions of established academic series such as Bibliotheca Teubneriana, Oxford Classical Texts, Collection Budé, MGH, CSEL, etc. In fact, they should be experienced through the formats distributed via CD-ROM digital *corpora* (at this point residual) and, even more importantly, via the Web. The latter option does certainly not aim to contradict the former, neither does it promote innovation for its own sake; rather, it aims to foster autonomous research, focusing on stylistic and linguistic studies to be accomplished through media that are incomparably more rapid and reliable than any other repertoire available on printed paper so far (i.e. lexica, indexes, concordances).

The current techniques of word retrieval have outclassed any previous search tool concerning words or lexical patterns. They offer a unique extent of the field onto which textual queries can be operated (thousands of authors and texts, at once); they allow for an extreme refinement of the investigation when searching for delimited word segments, or for one or more composition elements, or even for verbal segments of nexuses, sequenced or at a short distance, or for specific and peculiar positions of single words within a verse or a prose period, and so on.

Many of these possibilities are already available thanks to the tools that already exist. The poets, however, are not just sensitive to morphemes and phrases, semantics and rhetorical imagination. They perceive rhythms, and phonic and metric recurrences and correspondences: all apparently neutral elements. But these very elements

deserve accurate analysis, which may offer surprising results, even more significant when understood within a larger scale as that allowed by MQDQ and its *marginalia*: Poeti d'Italia in lingua latina, Hellenica, Pedecerto. Please have a look at:

<<http://mizar.unive.it/poetiditalia/public/>>, <<http://mizar.unive.it/mqdq/public/hellenica/indici/autori>>,
<Pedecerto. <<http://www.lutessa.it/pedecerto/public/>>

While in Greco-Latin Antiquity, up to the edge of the Middle Ages, poetry was either listened to, read individually, or read aloud at home or in public spaces dedicated to such purposes (*auditoria*, *odea*, small theatres, etc.), nowadays we tend to overlook the consequences of this practice, which is attested by our sources. The main advantage of lexical research conducted on an electronic (digitized) text is the possibility (universally recognized nowadays) to extend the criteria of survey concerning written words, without the instruments' typical limits on printed paper of the pre-computer era. Subjectivity is therefore reduced, as well as critical preconception, in favour of a much better and safer intuition of intertextual relations.

What we mean by intertextuality is not the comparison between isolated and inactive objects that researchers often do to show off their ability, something like what the Quellenforschung did one century ago, revealing a certain scholarly pedantry and producing a many lists of *loci similes*. This kind of intertextuality usually deals with *the* 'classical' author, from whom all other writers were derived. What we rather mean is a study that attributes the same importance to all the texts, using a philological as well as historical approach. Every text speaks of reciprocal intellectual relations between literary authors that happened throughout the centuries and across countries, contributing to a reconstruction of the cultural panorama of a certain period of time and area.

The highly-celebrated intertextuality, which in academic jargon has overwhelmed scientific publications of the last 40 years (albeit it is often misunderstood), actually represents the most spontaneous approach of a commoner to any type of art. The ability to recognize what is already known increases the number of people potentially interested in literary and, more generally, artistic products, aiding technical and scholarly efforts.

Our ambitious goal is to demonstrate, as far as possible, the evolution of European culture in chronological and geographical terms from

its classical (Greco-Latin) origins up to its modern outcomes, using dedicated digital tools. The interdisciplinary and comparative study we propose could lead to understanding, in a sophisticated level of detail, the continuity of the literary tradition marking the belonging to Europe of individual citizens as well as people living on our continent. Moreover, we aim to make available to everybody – common readers as well as web users, students and scholars – an advanced textual repository, excelling in terms of usability, reliability and scientific quality, wide-ranging since the beginning, but always open to implementation and development. The study of this common textual base will be made manageable and controllable to a previously unexplored level, through the creation of dedicated digital tools. It will thus be possible to comprehend how cultural, literary and artistic models of classical Antiquity have survived for ca. 3,000 years in different areas of Europe, especially via the shared medium of Latin expression, interacting with independent phenomena (external or internal) such as languages, social habits, religions, thus founding current ‘national’ differences. The data base will be allowed to globally, objectively, organically, and to systematically investigate aspects that previously had been the fruit of eureka moments, individual memories, or, at best, of incomplete and sometimes faulty paper tools.

Our work deliberately springs from the crisis that our civilization is currently undergoing. This implies an identity issue, to which massive migrations, as at the end of Antiquity, are contributing with new values and a new collective consciousness, while centrifugal moves tend to weaken the texture of the Europe of peoples, at the same time envisioning a shift of its cultural hub towards the Latin-Germanic and Latin-Slavic sides. Nonetheless, this is not the only change under way.

Another historic transition, which began more than 500 years ago thanks to Gutenberg’s innovation, is represented by the passage to an electronic format for texts, which implies not only formal but also epistemological changes. In the face of the severe challenges deriving from such transformations, it now seems necessary to show Europe the essential data founding its knowledge, which for centuries has been transferred via the medium of Latin. Europeans cannot truly be Europeans without acknowledging their common cultural roots.

In a wider perspective, our programs aim to reconsider the criteria governing literary studies, beyond the limits set by disciplinary sectors,

chronological periodization, geographical boundaries of the areas of textual production, traditional genre theories. An expert use of the digital tools demonstrates that all barriers or hindrances - bureaucratic (through interdisciplinarity, which overcomes any long-established disciplinary sector) and epistemological (through analyses, which exceed the usual linearity thanks to new multimedia resources) – have always given way to other ways of studying literature: the ‘depth’, or tridimensional aspect, of a text (thanks to the richness of textual apparatuses), its variance and dynamicity (against the centrality and firmness of a traditional critical edition), the enormous and unpredictable chaos of its relations, and its thematic trespassing recommend even a new order for the study of the literary system. Whatever may be the future of our studies, it really depends upon the awareness of all this.

It is well-known that Bernard of Chartres, or John of Salisbury (attribution varies), described scholars as “dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants”. No learned man would be able to see anything alone, except when being lifted up and borne aloft on the gigantic stature of our predecessors – our ancestors, indeed, *antiqui* (in Latin: those who lived *ante*). In that case, he or she may even see more and farther than them. The giant, for us, is Ernst Robert Curtius (1886-1956): perhaps the most important expert of Romance studies of the 20th century, a comparatist born in Alsatia who specialized in national literatures sprung after the dissolution of a thousand-year old cultural and linguistic unity. Seventy years after the publication of Curtius’ seminal book *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (Bern 1948), we can count on some advantages: much research on the concept of intertextuality (so advanced when compared to the traditional textual exegesis); the well-established practice of multidisciplinary approaches merging philological, historical, and technological expertise on a variety of aspects of Roman literary production, from different chronological and geographical points of view, but put together through the aid of dedicated digital tools. All this allows one to target results previously unthinkable.

We spend our entire academic life and have our experiences in circles where disciplines have raised walls, as they were old state borders, between “Latin Literature” and “Ancient Christian” or “Late latin literature”, between “Classical” and “Medieval Latin”, “Humanistic and Renaissance Latin and Neolatin, etc.; teaching or researching matters like these were sometimes joint ventures, so that, e.g. in Italian univer-

sities “Filologia medievale e umanistica” differs from “Classical philology” or “Romance philology” or “Italian philology” and so on. But we must consider that ca. 15-20% of all literary texts written in Italy before the end of the 18th century (I do mean literary, not technical, scientific, medical, juridical etc. texts) were written in Latin and not in Italian. (I think that we could say the same for other countries in every part of Europe). Ernst Robert Curtius’s masterpiece continues to offer one of the best developed interpretative keys to understanding European culture and western civilization: where the Latin component (specifically Latin, almost always exclusively Latin) has played a leading role – in the Middle Ages and later.

The transition and the reuse of the elements of a text into another have always been considered one of the main objectives of Philology as a ‘science’. We aim to improve, adapt and, to a certain extent, create from scratch digital libraries provided with research tools capable of analysing multilingual texts in order to catch sight of their mutual echoes and relationships. In this way, one will be able to identify every (conscious or unconscious) presence of memory of a poet within the rewriting activity of another poet, so that what is usually just postulated, or also just proven in an occasional and extemporaneous way, can now find objective – or rather, if one can legitimately say, ‘scientific’ – confirmations.

INTERTEXTUALITY AND DIGITAL TOOLS

Since the late 1980s, when I began dealing with the subject, I have had the chance to explore my ideas on the richness (happy marriage) of the interrelationship between philology and technology. Please find a few bibliographical references at the end of the essay. For our purposes, I will limit myself to show only a few examples of metrical-verbal similarities between Ancient Latin poems that are discussed for the first time (that is neglected by earlier commentators and critics) thanks to the new “co-occurrences” functions of MQDQ.

We shall begin with some clear references to Ennius by dactylic poets from the Augustan and late Imperial ages, who offer immeasurable aid in the reconstruction of the original hexameters, preserved exclusively in prose contexts. Here is the first, incorporated into the text of Pliny (*Naturalis historia*, 18, 84):

pulte [...] non pane uixisse longo tempore Romanos manifestum quoniam et pulmentaria hodieque dicuntur et Ennius antiquissimus uates obsidionis famem exprimens offam eripuisse plorantibus liberis patres commemorat.

From the mid-nineteenth century the verse, taken from the *Annales* (454 Skutsch), was edited by Theodor Bergk in this manner:

erip<uere> patres pueris plorantibus offam.

Others have chosen different solutions, but they have erred, in light of the recovered text almost certainly written by Persius (4, 30-32):

Ingemit 'hoc bene sit!' tunicatum cum sale mordens
caepe et, farratam pueris plaudentibus ollam,
pannosam faecem morientis sorbet aceti.

Another example. The unknown author of the so-called *Bellum Hispaniense*, when describing (in 31, 7) an image of hand-to-hand combat, uses a beautiful poetic citation:

... cum clamor esset intermixtus gemitu gladiatorumque crepitus
auribus oblatu, imperitorum mentes timore praepediebat. Hic, ut
ait Ennius, pede pes premitur, armis teruntur arma, aduersariosque
uehementissime pugnantes nostri agere coeperunt.

The source (Enn. *Ann.* 584 Sk.) is able to be reconstructed with some certainty in the following manner:

<hic> premitur pede pes atque armis arma teruntur.

And that is thanks to what seems to me to be an imitation of it written by Ovid (in *Metamorphoses*, 12, 621):

bella mouet clipeus deque armis arma feruntur.

I had assumed previously that Ovid could have 'coined' the form of the clause on the basis of the almost identical sound of the Ennian prototype. Yet another hypothesis also appears: the epicism which expresses the perennial "taking up arms" is likely older than Ovid, and even Virgil himself (in whose works a verse is opened with *arma ferunt*

in *Aen.* 9, 133 and 12, 586, as well as in *Georg.* 1, 511). Behold how Propertius narrates the etiology of Feretrius in elegy 4, 10, 45-48:

Nunc spolia in templo tria condita: causa Feretri,
omine quod certo dux ferit ense ducem;
seu quia uicta suis umeris haec arma ferebant,
hinc Feretri dicta est ara superba Iouis.

Conversely, v. 47 *seu quia uicta suis umeris haec arma ferebant* seems to have been taken from Ovid, when he describes with an image of Aeneas with complacent grandiloquence (5, 565):

hinc uidet Iliaden umeris ducis arma ferentem.

Perhaps, however, both elegiacs date back to a common archetype, now lost to us. The suspicion comes up, first of all, when examining the remote link between *umeris* – *arma* in the solemn diction of Statius (*Silu.* 5, 129) *monstrabunt acies Mauors Actaeaque uirgo, / flectere Castor equos, umeris quater arma Quirinus* eqs. In its turn, the anastrophe *ducis arma*, although not attested by our eyes except for a single instance in the *Pharsalia* of Lucanus (2, 526), offers the evidence (or at least appearance) of a formulaic link belonging to the vocabulary of epic poetry, such as that destined for a lasting fate in the repertory of medieval and humanistic poetry; and also appreciated in the slight phonic oscillation that will suggest to Venanzio Fortunato the coining of a joint *crucis arma*, used by him repeatedly and willingly adopted by later Christian poets. Among the very numerous “withdrawals” made by Ovid from the text of his direct predecessor, I choose some particularly explicit and unprejudiced examples; they are proof of the mimetic ability from which the elegy of Propertius is pulled, almost subject to metric-verbal reuse that can often be defined as “auricular”, therefore unconscious; where the relationship between form and content is lost, between signifier and signified.

Finally, I propose a short series consisting of the products of inter-textual reading made with the aid of *Musisque deoque*.

1) Ovid: mechanical deconstruction of the pentameters of Propertius

Prop. 1, 13, 36

et quodcumque uoles, una sit ista tibi

Ov. *Fast.* 1, 174

ad quascumque uoles + Ov. rem. 682 una sit illa tibi

2) Ovid: mechanical recomposition of pentameters of Propertius

Ov. *Am.* 3, 13, 10

ara per antiquas facta sine arte manus.

Prop. 4, 9, 68

ara per has - inquit - maxima facta manus + 4, 1, 6 nec fuit opprobrio
facta sine arte casa

3) *Liasons inavouables*: Propertius / Ovid

Prop. 4, 2, 50, 52

Et tu, Roma, meis tribuisti praemia Tuscis
(unde hodie Vicus nomina Tuscus habet), 50
tempore quo sociis uenit Lycomedius armis
atque Sabina feri contudit arma Tati.
Vidi ego labentis acies et tela caduca,
atque hostis turpi terga dedisse fugae.

Ov. *Fast.* 1, 260

Ille, manu mulcens propexam ad pectora barbam,
protinus Oebalij rettulit arma Tati, 260
utque leuis custos, armillis capta, Sabinos
ad summae tacitos duxerit arcis iter.

Here are also 9 citations found using the keywords **nomina** near **habet**, parallel of the prototype:

Prop. *Eleg.* 4, 2, 50

Vnde hodie Vicus nomina Tuscus habet,

Ovid. *Fast.* 3, 4

A te qui canitur nomina mensis habet.

Ovid. *Fast.* 3, 118

Vnde manipularis nomina miles habet.

Ovid. *Fast.* 3, 150

Incipit a numero nomina quisquis habet.

Ovid. *Fast.* 3, 246

Qui nunc Esquillas nomina collis habet,

Ovid. *Fast.* 4, 70

Et quod adhuc Circes nomina litus habet;

Ovid. *Fast.* 4, 474

Quique locus curuae nomina falcis habet,

Ovid. *Ibis* 550

Vt Phrygium cuius nomina flumen habet.

Avson. *Ecl.* 16, 28

Prima haec Romanus nomina circus habet.

For the continuation of Prop. 4, 20, 49 *et tu, Roma, meis*, v. possibly Claud. *Prob.* 133 *Non ego uel Libycos cessem tolerare labores / Sarmaticosue pati medio sub frigore Cauros, / si tu, Roma, uelis; pro te quascumque per oras / ibimus eqs.*

4) Blind intersections? Propertius / Ovid

Prop. 2, 13, 33

Deinde, ubi suppositus cinerem me fecerit ardor,
accipiat Manis paruula testa meos
et sit in exiguo laurus super addita busto,
quae tegat exstincti funeris umbra locum.

Prop. 2, 28, 36

Deficiunt magico torti sub carmine rhombi
et tacet exstincto laurus adusta foco
et iam Luna negat totiens descendere caelo
nigraque funestum concinit omen auis.

Ov. *Fast.* 1, 344

Ara dabat fumos herbis contenta Sabinis
et non exiguo laurus adusta sono.

Ov. *Fast.* 4, 742

Vre mares oleas taedamque herbasque Sabinas,
et crepet in mediis laurus adusta focis.

5) Archetypes of great poetry

Catull. 64, 364

Denique testis erit morti quoque reddita praeda,
cum teres excelso coaceruatum aggere bustum
excipiet niueos percussae uirginis artus.

Ciris 399

Illi etiam alternas sortiti uiuere luces,
cara louis suboles, magnum louis incrementum,
Tyndaridae niueos mirantur uirginis artus.

Ciris 482

donec tale decus formae uexarier undis
non tulit ac miseros mutauit uirginis artus
caeruleo pollens coniunx Neptunia regno.

Avien. *Arat.* 276

qua protenduntur uestigia summa Bootis
quaque per immensum circumflagrantibus astris
circulus obliquo late iacet astriger orbe,
contemplare sacros subiectae Virginis artus.

Prud. *Ham.* 635

aspernata dei fusam per uirginis artus
progeniem dulcesque uocans in fornice natos?

Drac. *Romul.* 7, 22

Vulgarem quia tela gerit, quibus auctor Achillis
arserit Aeacides nymphae radiatus amore;
spicula dixissem, quibus arsit Apollo disertus,
cum peteret Daphnen, Liber quibus arserat Indus,
candida Dictaeae cum cerneret ora puellae,
uel quibus ipse furor, Mars, est accensus amare,
Vesticolae niueos peteret cum uirginis artus,
ut daret aeternum Romana in saecula Quirinum
et post fata deos faceret super astra senatus.

20

6) Epic contamination

Ov. *Met.* 14

Ambieratque Venus superos colloque parentis
circumfusa sui: 'numquam mihi' dixerat 'ullo
tempore dure pater, nunc sis mitissimus, opto,
Aeneaeque meo, qui te de sanguine nostro
fecit auum, quamuis paruum des, optime, numen.

585

Ilias Lat.

'O Graiae gentis fortissime Achilles,
o regnis inimice meis, te Dardana solum
uicta tremit pubes, te sensit nostra senectus
crudellem nimium. Nunc sis mitissimus oro
et patris afflictis genibus miserere precantis.

1030

Sil. 4, 662

Tum madidos crines et glauca fronde reuinctum
attollit cum uoce caput: 'poenasne superbas
insuper et nomen Trebiae delere minaris,
o regnis inimice meis? quot corpora porto
dextra fusa tua! clipeis galeisque uirorum,
quos mactas, artatus iter cursumque reliqui.

660

7) Mechanical reuse or conscious borrowings? Intertextuality and textual criticism

Ov. *Fast.* 2, 311

Aurea pellebant tepidos umbracula soles,
quae tamen Herculeae sustinere manus.

Mart. 14, 28 (*umbrella*)

Accipe quae nimios uincant umbracula soles:
sit licet et uentus, te tua uela tegent.

Paul. Petric. Mart. 3, 373

O numquam cessare furor, rursusne resurgis
elusus totiens? ...

Non penetras purum taetra caligine sensum
nec claudunt uerum nebularum umbracula solem.

Claud. *Hon.* IV cos. 341

neu flantibus Austris
neu pluuiis cedas, neu defensura calorem
aurea summoueant rapidos umbracula soles.

Thus, the clause *umbracula soles* occurs several times after Ovid, but in the case of Claudian the correspondence extends to large parts of the first hemistiches and above all to the pause placed at the center of the verse, the adjective agreeing with *soles*. It is, however, interesting to note that way that some manuscripts of the *Fasti* (underlined in the commentary of M. Robinson to the second book, Oxford 2010, p. 234), in lieu of *tepidos* use the lection *rapidos*, later adopted by the Alexandrian poet.