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ÍNDICE

Sección Monográfica. Ediciones filológicas digitales: hitos y nuevas perspectivas / <i>Digital Scholarly Editions: Achievements and New Perspectives</i>	13
Introducción. Ediciones filológicas digitales: hitos y nuevas perspectivas/ <i>Introduction. Digital Scholarly Editions: Achievements and New Perspectives</i>	15-19
VICTOR MILLET (Universidade de Santiago de Compostela)	
Taming the Beast: Transcribing Hernando Colón's <i>Libro de los epítomes</i> / <i>Domando a la bestia: transcripción del Libro de los epítomes de Hernando Colón</i>	21-39
Matthew Driscoll (University of Copenhagen)	
Alessandro Gnasso (University of Copenhagen)	
https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/PH.2025.v39.i02.01	
Editing Premodern German Song Texts within the Musicologocial Edition Platform <i>E-Laute</i> . Challenges and Possibilities/ <i>Editar textos de canciones alemanas de los siglos XV y XVI en el contexto de la plataforma de edición digital musicológica e-laute: desafíos y oportunidades</i>	41-63
Stefan Rosmer (Universität Bayreuth)	
David M. Weigl (Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien)	
https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/PH.2025.v39.i02.02	
Edición digital académica de textos áureos no canónicos: la propuesta del proyecto BIDISO/ <i>The Scholarly Digital Editions of Non-Canonical Spanish Golden Age Texts: the Proposal of the BIDISO Project</i>	65-96
Nieves Pena Sueiro (Universidade da Coruña)	
Carlota Fernández Travieso (Universidade da Coruña)	
https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/PH.2025.v39.i02.03	
Designing a User Interface for the DSE 2.0: New Opportunities, New Challenges/ <i>Diseño de una interfaz de usuario para la DSE 2.0: Nuevas oportunidades, nuevos retos</i>	97-115
Roberto Rosselli Del Turco (Università di Torino)	
https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/PH.2025.v39.i02.04	

Designing Digital Editions for Humans: Insights on User Experience and Usability from the *Digital Dossier: Alexander von Humboldt and Cuba (1800–1830)* / *Diseño de ediciones digitales para humanos: perspectivas sobre la experiencia del usuario y la usabilidad a partir del Dossier digital: Alexander von Humboldt y Cuba (1800–1830)*..... 117-130
 Antonio Rojas Castro (Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen)
<https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/PH.2025.v39.i02.05>

Un modelo HTR para incunables castellanos/ *An HTR Model for Spanish Incunabula*..... 131-177
 José Manuel Fradejas Rueda (Universidad de Valladolid)
 Mario Cossío Olavide (Université de Bretagne Occidentale)
<https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/PH.2025.v39.i02.06>

The Future is already here: Navigating the New Frontiers of Digital Scholarly Editing in an Age of HTR and AI/ *El futuro ya está aquí: navegar por las nuevas fronteras de la edición filológica digital en la era de la HTR y la IA*..... 179-199
 James Cummings (University of Newcastle)
<https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/PH.2025.v39.i02.07>

Sección Varia

Trauma, mito y tragedia en la narrativa de Leslie Marmon Silko: de «Old Juana» a los zapatistas / *Trauma, Myth, and Tragedy in Leslie Marmon Silko's Narrative: from "Old Juana" to the Zapatistas*..... 203-218
 José Manuel Correoso Rodenas (Universidad Complutense de Madrid)
<https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/PH.2025.v39.i02.08>

El episodio del alguacil en el tratado séptimo del *Lazarillo de Tormes*: sátira contra el arzobispo de Toledo Juan Martínez Silíceo y los «retraídos» de la catedral primada / *The Episode of the Bailiff in in the Seventh Treatise of Lazarillo de Tormes: Satire against the Archbishop of Toledo Juan Martínez Silíceo and the "withdrawn" of the Primate Cathedral*..... 219-237
 Jesús Fernando Cáseda Teresa (IES Valle del Cidacos - Calahorra, La Rioja)
<https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/PH.2025.v39.i02.09>

El alma del mundo y el tejido cósmico: la poética del territorio del Inca Garcilaso de la Vega / *The Soul of the World and the Cosmic Fabric: the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's Poetics of Territory*..... 239-257
 Pedro Martín Favaron Peyón (Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú)
<https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/PH.2025.v39.i02.10>

Reseñas de libros

- Javier Salazar Rincón: *De alcaldes y alcaldadas. Trayectoria y significado de un personaje risible en la literatura del Siglo de Oro*. La Seu d'Urgell: Javier Salazar Rincón, 2024, 735 pp. ISBN: 978-84-09-58793-3 261-264
Luis Gómez Canseco (Universidad de Huelva)
- Prue Shaw (Ed.): *Dante Alighieri Commedia. A Digital Edition*. Segunda edición. Florencia: Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, Inkless Editions, Saskatoon, 2021. ISBN: 1-904628-21-4 265-267
Adriana Camprubí Vinyals (Universidad de Barcelona)
- Antonio Reyes Ruiz: *Génesis del Ensanche de Tetuán (Marruecos). El papel de la burguesía comercial catalana*. Sevilla: Editorial Universidad de Sevilla (Colección *Mediterráneo Textos y Estudios*, vol. 1), 2024, 158 pp. ISBN: 978-84-472-2758-7 269-272
Carmelo Pérez Beltrán (Universidad de Granada)
- Verónica Casais Vila (Ed.): Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Las manos blancas no ofenden* (https://www.calderondelabarca.org/editions/las_manos_blancas.pdf), pp. 1-102; Verónica Casais Vila (Ed.): Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *A secreto agravio, secreta venganza* (https://www.calderondelabarca.org/editions/secreto_agravio.pdf), pp. 1-62; Laura Carbajo Lago (Ed.): Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Duelos de amor y lealtad* (<https://www.calderondelabarca.org/editions/duelos.pdf>), pp. 1-94. Acceso en línea: https://www.calderondelabarca.org/ediciones_criticas 273-278
Candela Iglesias Balsa (Universidade de Santiago de Compostela)
- Evina Stein y Gustavo Fernández Riva (Eds.): Networks of Manuscripts, Networks of Texts, *Journal of Historical Network Research*, 9(1), 2023, 238 pp. ISSN-e: 2535-8863 279-281
Lorena Pérez Ben (Universidade de Santiago de Compostela)



ESTUDIOS LITERARIOS

DESIGNING A USER INTERFACE FOR THE DSE 2.0:
NEW OPPORTUNITIES, NEW CHALLENGES

DISEÑO DE UNA INTERFAZ DE USUARIO PARA LA DSE 2.0:
NUEVAS OPORTUNIDADES, NUEVOS RETOS

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ABSTRACT

The creation of a Digital Scholarly Edition (DSE) is a demanding process in which the scholar is engaged on several fronts: preparing the text and related paratexts, taking care of the critical and commentary apparatus, curating the images (if available), configuring the browsing software, and more. However, the end user is unaware of all the work behind the scenes and is often not familiar with what a TEI document is, or the image format used: what he or she sees is, in fact, the edition. Despite the fact that the visual impact of a DSE, and its navigation and use, are central to the user experience, there seems to be little interest in designing a better user interface (UI) for DSEs. In this paper I offer some thoughts on the current state of research and the challenges that will arise in the near future, using the evolution of the Edition Visualisation Technology (EVT) software as an example of a progressive adaptation to new UI requirements due to recent developments in DSE capabilities.

Keywords: scholarly editing, digital philology, digital publishing, HCI studies, dynamic user interfaces.

RESUMEN

La creación de una Edición Digital Científica (EDE) es un proceso exigente en el que el erudito se compromete en varios frentes: preparar el texto y los paratextos relacionados, ocuparse del aparato crítico y de comentarios, conservar las imágenes (si están disponibles),

configurar el software de navegación, y mucho más. Sin embargo, el usuario final no es consciente de todo el trabajo que hay entre bastidores y a menudo no está familiarizado con lo que es un documento TEI ni con el formato de imagen utilizado: lo que ve es, de hecho, la edición. A pesar de que el impacto visual de una DSE, y su navegación y uso, son fundamentales para la experiencia del usuario, parece haber poco interés en diseñar una mejor interfaz de usuario (UI) para las DSE. En este artículo ofrezco algunas reflexiones sobre el estado actual de la investigación y los retos que se plantearán en un futuro próximo, utilizando la evolución del software Edition Visualisation Technology (EVT) como ejemplo de una adaptación progresiva a los nuevos requisitos de la IU debidos a los recientes avances en las capacidades de las DSE.

Palabras clave: edición académica, filología digital, edición digital, estudios de HCI, interfaces de usuario dinámicas.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, numerous contributions have advanced significant ideas in the fields of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and User Interface (UI) design for Digital Scholarly Editions (DSE). These studies were carried out by researchers in digital philology and other interested parties, such as developers of browsing tools for DSEs. I am thinking in particular of the *Digital Scholarly Editions as Interfaces* conference,¹ held at the University of Graz in September 2016, which provided an interesting forum for discussion and debate.² However, several other articles have been published that focus on specific aspects of UI design for DSEs, and the topic of HCI is also frequently addressed at Digital Humanities conferences.³

Unfortunately, despite these interesting contributions, this still seems to be an underdeveloped field of research. Perhaps not so much on the theoretical level, which is quite vibrant, but on the uptake and implementation of at least some of the concepts and good practice guidelines that have been discussed and/or proposed. In fact, DSEs are still not as effective as they should be when it comes to the UI/UX (User Interface/User Experience) aspect.

¹ See <https://www.uni-graz.at/en/events/digital-scholarly-editions-as-interfaces/>. Unfortunately the original web site for the conference doesn't seem to be available anymore, but you will find a short report by Bleier *et al.* (2018) which includes the full conference programme and links to recorded videos of all papers, here: <https://dixit.hypotheses.org/1250>.

² The final result is a hefty miscellaneous volume (Bleier *et al.*, 2018) which includes such interesting contributions as "What Are You Trying to Say? The Interface as an Integral Element of Argument" (Andrews & van Zundert, 2018) and "The Editor in the Interface: Guiding the User through Texts and Images" (Dillen, 2018). My own contributions in this research area can be traced to an early article (Rosselli Del Turco, 2012) based on a review of what were the current practices and on basic ideas of how to improve DSEs, and a later one which is derived from my participation, together with Chiara Di Pietro, to the *Digital Scholarly Editions as Interfaces* conference (Di Pietro & Rosselli Del Turco, 2018).

³ See f. i. Fechner (2020), Huskey (2022) and Stäcker (2020), among others.

1.1. Desiderata

The main goal of a DSE should be to provide the user with a device that allows data navigation and retrieval at the highest research level: it should be able to provide general knowledge about a text, but also to enable verification of editorial decisions, support of alternative research hypotheses, enrichment of available information through links to online resources, and creation of new knowledge through data interrogation and subsequent analysis. Any DSE browsing software must therefore be a powerful and flexible research tool in order to perform a crucial hermeneutic function for the end user. To achieve the main goal described above, such a tool must be able to address several UI issues:

- data navigation: the landing page should offer the UI scenario that is most likely to be useful; if not, it should be easy to move to another part of the edition and also to trace one's steps back to the starting point;
- data visualization: depending on the type of edition, display the edition data with the most frequently used tools in the foreground (e.g. text analysis tools, highlighting of named entities, selection of edition levels, etc.), while still making others easily accessible (e.g. text search, links to glossaries or online dictionaries, etc.);
- data processing: the software can provide various types of text or image analysis tools, once the processing is complete the results are displayed; for example, in the case of named entities we have list creation, linking from text to content in lists, browsing occurrences, etc.;
- text search: it can be very simple, or provide very sophisticated search options as well, especially if it relies on an underlying database.

The “stylistic/aesthetic” factor should not be underestimated, i.e., the choice of fonts and other graphical features which, without affecting the overall effectiveness of the navigation software, can make it more pleasant to use.

2. THE PROBLEMS IN DESIGNING AN EFFECTIVE UI

Peter Robinson perfectly captured the essence of a DSE and revealed its enormous potential back in 2005:

of the many kinds of print objects produced over the last centuries, it is difficult to think of any genre that is so well adapted to the computer as the scholarly edition. The layers of footnotes, the multiplicity of textual views, the opportunities for dramatic visualization interweaving the many with each other and offering different modes of viewing the one within the many—all this proclaims “I am a hypertext: invent a dynamic device to show me”. The computer is exactly this dynamic device. (Robinson, 2005: §12)

The dynamic devices wished for by P. Robinson have indeed appeared, but we soon discovered that they are quite difficult to build. In fact, the basic problem of any DSE UI could be summarised as follows: representing a complex, multi-layered data set –one might think of it as a 3D object– in a 2D space, trying to handle heterogeneous data types such as images, text and paratext, etc., while at the same time providing seamless navigation between them. In a way, this is the same problem that traditional editions face, because a computer –or tablet– screen is actually just as flat as a printed page.

This means that the current approach is based on the use of layers of GUI (Graphical User Interface) objects: instead of a true 3D interface, the browsing software provides multiple 2D objects, which can partially or completely overlap and are often activated on demand, for data visualisation purposes, including the results of data processing. This is a powerful solution because the multiple layers create a “2D and a half” interface that is flexible and expandable, but it also carries many risks: it adds complexity to the overall UI, it may make navigation more difficult, and some functionality may be difficult to discover and use.

The “layered interface” approach, although quite popular, may not be the only viable one, unfortunately it seems that there is little applied research in this area, and that experimentation is left to *haute couture* editions. For many projects the UI design phase consists of combining a few basic “UI primitives” to achieve an acceptable result in a sort of empirical way,⁴ which works as a general method, but leaves the current tools unprepared for the next wave of changes and requirements linked to new functionality.

2.1. Haute couture vs. prêt-à-porter

One of the problems to be solved is the fact that there is still too much variability and inconsistency in the appearance, layout, and other UI-dependent functionality in DSEs. Much depends on the browser tools employed to publish such editions, in fact the current unsatisfactory situation could be attributed to two main reasons:

- with regard to the excessive variability, the comparatively good fortune of *haute couture* editions, to use the terminology introduced by Elena Pierazzo (Pierazzo, 2019), i.e. editions that envisage the creation of an *ad hoc* publishing tool as a means to achieve their intended goals;

⁴ Actually, old-style approaches are sometimes visible in some published DSEs: e.g. a great number of text fields and/or available options, typical when dealing with complex data searches, small size characters in the front-end, complex navigation of the edition data, etc.

- the relative inadequacy of the former and of *prêt-à-porter* editions, again using Pierazzo's label, i.e. editions based on general-purpose DSE browsing tools, which haven't yet reached the desired level of efficiency.

Currently, *prêt-à-porter* editions tend to be the preferred choice due to the growth and capability of general-purpose tools, though *haute couture* editions remain popular.⁵ With regard to the former, we have a variability that depends on the specific software tool, each of which has strengths and weaknesses. The current scenario is much more diverse than it was 10 to 15 years ago, with significant differences in capabilities offered by the current tools.

I want to make it clear that *haute couture* editions have their reasons to exist: it is of crucial importance that new DSE browsing tools continue to be created and used, so that new UI approaches can be deployed and tested. Standardization brings implicit benefits to DSEs, though: using the same interface not only reduces or completely eliminates learning time for people browsing editions published with the same tool, but induces a feeling of familiarity so that the use of navigation software is more productive and pleasant. To think that we can achieve the level of standardization that characterizes the UI of general-purpose software, such as word processors, is clearly a utopian proposition: applications for DSEs are not only far more specialized, but they also have different features –sometimes very different– depending on the edition type. The intersection between the array of technical solutions provided by the ICT area, and that of the methods of textual criticism results in a wealth of forms and variety of content presentation that cannot be harnessed in any standard, “one size fits all” layout.⁶

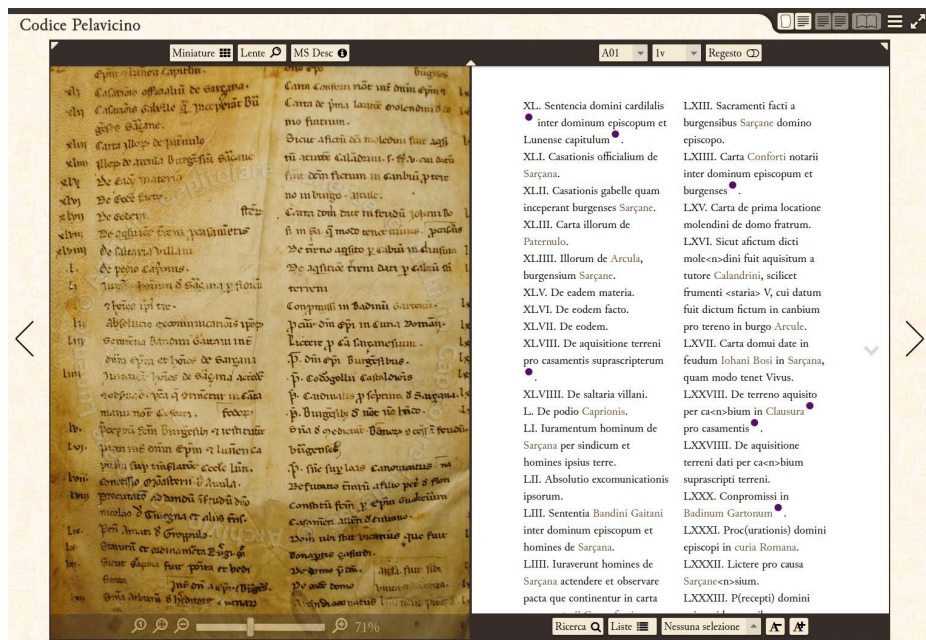
This is not to say that conventions do not already exist, and that new ones could be introduced, at least at a relatively high level of abstraction. The classic layout of diplomatic editions accompanied by digital facsimiles, for example, uses a set of graphic elements arranged in what we might call a “standard” way (Figure 1):

⁵ To assess quite effectively the number of DSEs using custom tools or sites for publication, it is possible to consult the catalog created and maintained by Greta Franzini from 2012 onwards (Franzini *et al.*, 2018). An annotated list curated by Patrick Sahle is also available: <http://www.digitale-edition.de/index.html>

⁶ Not that general-purpose software can boast of an immaculate record: without mentioning special cases such as drawing programs, pixel-based or vector-based, which have interfaces that are sometimes perceived as more user-hostile than user-friendly, word processors themselves have undergone an evolution of the UI with the introduction of new solutions for managing existing features (e. g. the famous ribbons introduced by Microsoft Word, sidebars added to Libre Office Writer) and a whole host of new features (connection to bibliography management tools, shared document review, AI-driven assistants etc.) which in turn required an increase in the complexity of the UI. The increasing complexity of software programs, and consequently of their UI, is a common theme in the current evolution of DSEs, see the next section.

Figure 1

General layout of the *Codice Pelavicino Digitale* (EVT₁)



Note. Source: own elaboration.

- general layout: an image frame and a text frame, possibly with tools for linking the two;⁷
- edition navigation tools: page or section selectors, TOC frame, navigation through image thumbnails;
- image-related tools: zoom, magnifier, hotspots, comparison of details or different versions of the same image, etc.;
- text-related tools: search engine, display of named entities, linking of specific words or terms to a glossary, etc.

The picture is much less clear for other types of editions, especially those that provide text only (e.g., critical editions) or others that require a different mix of content and/or a particular interaction between text components, or that provide access to internal and external resources (e.g., knowledge base editions, use of ontologies, etc.).

⁷ See the TEI *Guidelines* chapter on digital facsimiles: 12.1 *Digital facsimiles* (<https://tei-c.org/release/doc/tei-p5-doc/en/html/PH.html#PHFAX>).

By their very nature, *haute couture* editions, in addition to having designs that may deviate significantly from these admittedly limited “standards” for the layout and navigation of a DSE’s content, generally do not benefit from the traditional cycle:

prototype → feedback → bug fixing/refining → new stable version → repeat

Often, they are themselves very mature prototypes that are not developed further after the project that funded their creation has ended. This does not mean that general-purpose programs are automatically better: to be so, they would need continuity of development and a variety of use cases, which cannot always be guaranteed.

In conclusion, the first goal of any UI-related initiative for DSE publishing would be to improve the design of current and future browsing tools so that *prêt-à-porter* will be good enough for most use cases. A secondary goal should be to define best practice guidelines for experimental UIs, such as those created for *haute couture* editions but also for innovative general-purpose tools, so that a common ground can be established between these two types of digital editions.

2.2. The underlying framework

Designing software based on Web technologies to publish a DSE online is certainly challenging, as these technologies are constantly changing and innovating. Although the basic encoding and programming languages (HTML5, CSS, JavaScript) are common standards that evolve rather slowly, the whole backend part of the Web consists of very sophisticated software, such as relational databases, that runs server-side. In addition, many different frameworks for building the front-end rely on such software. The end user often perceives this constant evolution only through the appearance of websites, but the changes are not limited to the aesthetic layer,⁸ in fact many of them are substantial and have a deep impact on the effectiveness and accessibility of DSEs.⁹

The speed with which these technologies evolve and are gradually replaced by other, newer and more innovative ones is certainly a concern. More generally, however, we need to ask whether their indiscriminate adoption is the most appropriate choice for the digital humanities:

⁸ For example, the skeuomorphic design introduced by Apple has been quite popular for a long time, but was later abandoned in favor of different approaches, see Google’s Material design.

⁹ A significant change at the framework level took place when the proprietary Adobe Flash platform was replaced by equivalent HTML technologies.

In the several decades since humanists have taken up computational tools, they have borrowed many techniques from other fields, including visualization methods to create charts, graphs, diagrams, maps, and other graphic displays of information. But are these visualizations actually adequate for the interpretive approach that distinguishes much of the work in the humanities?¹⁰ (Drucker, 2020: 8)

The use of such tools, and more generally of advanced Web development technologies, must therefore be carefully evaluated, taking into consideration the long-term effects on the durability and accessibility of DSEs, as well as on the design of their UI.

2.3. New functionality, new UI requirements

The next generation of digital editions will benefit from several new methods and tools that are currently being tested and refined. Consider, for example, the so-called semantic edition, the use of ontologies to create a true knowledge base rather than an actual edition, or the use of Linked Open Data resources to enrich the content of the edition. All of these new features will require some adaptation and integration into an often already overcrowded UI.

A special case is that of the computational edition, or assertive edition (Vogeler, 2019), understood as a DSE where the navigation software allows the user to process and query textual data, such as ontology-based texts –but TEI¹¹ documents with rich markup can also be an excellent starting point– to perform complex searches by cross-referencing the available data. This is an important advance, and a significant step towards the DSE as a knowledge base, but while the data format and query methods are clearly defined, the UI to enable the user to take advantage of this wealth of information has yet to be developed. The first question to be addressed is the relationship with the text search engine: should the new UI be kept separate, or is it better to merge the two types of search to provide the user with a single point of access to the edition data?

Note, however, that even a “standard” critical edition may have peculiarities that require special care in displaying the critical apparatus. This is the case when dealing with families of witnesses and, more generally, with multiple apparatus layers. Tools such as the *reledmac* package for the LaTeX typesetting software do an excellent job of creating such apparatus layers for printing. In a DSE, however, the dynamic aspect is crucial, so managing the apparatus in relation to the critical text,

¹⁰ This is a general problem for the Digital Humanities, see for instance the overlapping hierarchies problem in XML: the tree data structure that defines how XML handles the text (Ordered Hierarchy of Content Objects–OHCO approach: the text as a hierarchical object) is widely used in Computer Science, but proved to be not fully suitable for advanced semantic annotation in the Digital Humanities.

¹¹ Text Encoding Initiative. Home page: <https://tei-c.org/>. *Guidelines*: see TEI Consortium (2024).

witness navigation and other aspects requires careful UI design. In a synoptic edition, the simultaneous display of multiple texts introduces additional UI requirements in terms of page layout, synchronisation between different documents, and selection and navigation of relevant texts. In the field of genetic criticism and authorship philology, an additional difficulty is the introduction of the time factor into the apparatus: again, printed editions may be an imperfect model; the task of a DSE is to render the apparatus dynamically, not statically (Gabler and Rehbein, 2013; Armaselu 2022).

Multimedia is a label that has been misused in the past, but the potential of a multimedia and hypermedia approach is often underestimated, and thus underdeveloped, in today's DSEs. An interesting example of the potential in this area is *CantApp: The General Prologue* (2020; also see Bordalejo *et al.*, 2021), an app for touch devices (mobile phones, tablets) that combines images of the Hengwrt manuscript, a line-aligned transcription of the text, and audio files to present the *General Prologue* of the *Canterbury Tales* to the user. Proving that it is possible to create a viable UI for both TUI (Touch User Interface) environments and a Web resource, *CantAPP* is also available as a traditional website.

In the GLAM world, specific needs arise due to a very different context, mode of presentation of cultural heritage, and audience than in traditional DSEs. There is therefore a need for an approach that is not merely “simplified”, in the sense of “less complicated because not strictly academic”, but also more flexible, direct, and engaging for the end user. The challenge is also to define an UI framework that, while not directly aimed at the general public, can be easily configured for that purpose.

2.4. The functionality overload

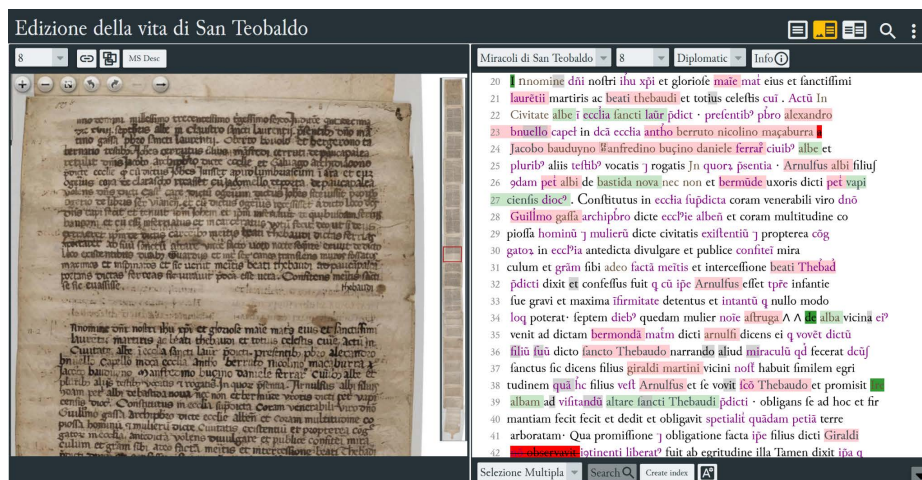
Another issue recently observed is feature overload, which affects the UI in two ways: the number of GUI widgets users must learn to use, and the excessive highlighting of text features –what we might call the “fruit salad effect” (Figure 2).

Unfortunately, solving both problems at the same time is very difficult, because if there are too many features highlighted in the text then selectors could be introduced to choose what to show, but this would lead to an increase in the number of widgets the user has to learn how to use, and thus increase the complexity of the UI. Careful use of feature selectors seems to be the best possible solution, in this case.

Complexity problems due, for example, to the amount of configuration options and the large number of possible UI layouts sometimes plague the editor before a DSE reaches the end user: this aspect is underestimated and can also have repercussions on the final result. Constraints of flexibility and comprehensiveness of available features in the preparation of a DSE may spill over to the UI of the published edition, if only because they steal valuable time for the preparation of the edition.

Figure 2

Textual phenomena (damaged text, deleted and added text, abbreviations) and named entities highlighting in the Vita di San Teobaldo edition published with EVT 2



Note. Cioffi et al. (2018)

2.5. UI and new technologies: TUI and VUI

The introduction of tablets and other devices based on a TUI raises new issues: should DSE projects take them into account or ignore them completely? Unfortunately, many DSEs are not optimised for TUI devices. While tablet use has declined since their initial market enthusiasm, tablets remain widespread and could significantly enhance the accessibility and adoption of DSEs. Consider, for example, the GLAM environment and the benefits that could be gained from creating TUI-compatible editions of Cultural Heritage objects preserved in this context. Fortunately, development frameworks such as Angular, React and others are making web applications at least partially touch-enabled.

In the future, we may also consider Voice User Interfaces (VUI): we are becoming more and more confident in speaking to a computing device, albeit disguised as a household appliance, mobile phone or television, in order to get things done and obtain information. Although a Star Trek-like scenario is not just around the corner, it is not far-fetched to imagine a future where it will be possible to talk to the DSE software and have it jump to the philological notes we are interested in, display the desired image(s), perform textual searches. Fortunately, this scenario will require very little design to find an effective interface: the listening function could always be on, although privacy concerns may make it preferable to add a simple button to activate it when needed. The VUI approach would also be highly beneficial in mitigating the visual impairments of some of the potential audience for DSEs (see next section).

2.6. Accessibility and inclusivity

Compared to the situation a few years ago, a new issue has emerged: that of accessibility and inclusivity of DSEs. This is the logical next step in the drive towards greater democratisation in the sharing of cultural heritage works, which has seen online publication as a powerful means of disseminating such resources –and DSE’s in particular– to the general public. Unfortunately, it seems that the UI problems of DSEs include a very low level of compliance with standards and guidelines that were defined several years ago.¹² UI choices that can make normal navigation of a DSE cumbersome –cluttered GUI widgets, fonts that are too small, over-reliance on colour to highlight textual phenomena, clumsy navigation– make it difficult, if not impossible, for people with visual impairments to use it.

If we want DSEs to be truly accessible and inclusive, it is the responsibility of editors not to cut off the part of the public with disabilities that prevent such works from being fully appreciated. To this end, we can draw on both research into specific disabilities and standardised web guidelines, which can also be used as a model for designing appropriate UIs for DSEs.

3. DESIGNING AN EFFECTIVE UI FOR EVT

When I first started looking into UI for DSEs, my main goal was to get a sense of what a possible UI for the digital edition project I was working on, the *Digital Vercelli Book* (Rosselli Del Turco, 2024), could be. There were already digital editions, some in my research area (Old English language and literature), which had attracted attention both for their philological quality and for showcasing the full potential of DSEs. Thus, I had a reference model, both in terms of the functionalities then considered fundamental and for the layout of the UI elements used in such editions. However, the tools available at that time were unsatisfactory for several reasons:

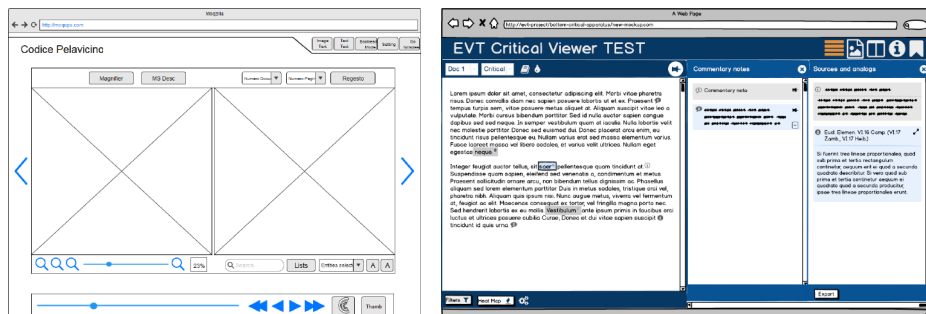
- proprietary software;
- software aimed at a specific operating system;
- overly complex in terms of installation, use and subsequent maintenance;
- cumbersome user interface;
- incomplete set of functionalities.

In short, no tool offered a reasonable mix of key features: availability as open source software, functionality needed for a diplomatic edition linked to a digital facsimile, flexibility and expandability for future needs, and user friendliness of the

¹² The WCAG guidelines date back to 2008.

Figure 3

Mockups of the initial UI layout for EVT 1 and 2



Note. Source: own elaboration.

interface. This last point was particularly relevant in the light of the analysis carried out in Rosselli Del Turco (2012).

The decision to launch a project to create a new software for browsing digital editions, to be used by the DVB project but also to be made available to the academic community, was therefore a natural one. The development of EVT (*EVT - Edition Visualization Technology*, 2014-), a general-purpose software for *prêt-à-porter* DSEs, was therefore not only a necessary step towards the goals of the DVB, but also a testing ground to see what could be done to make a DSE browsing interface easy to use, as well as effective and philologically capable.

3.1. The UI design workflow in EVT

EVT has a development story spanning for more than 10 years and across several development frameworks.¹³ As a result, the UI has evolved constantly, with major differences driven by two factors: the introduction of major new features, and the migration from one development framework to another. Sometimes these two coincide, for example the move from XSLT 2 to AngularJS was driven by the need for a more powerful framework to accommodate a crucial new feature, critical edition support.

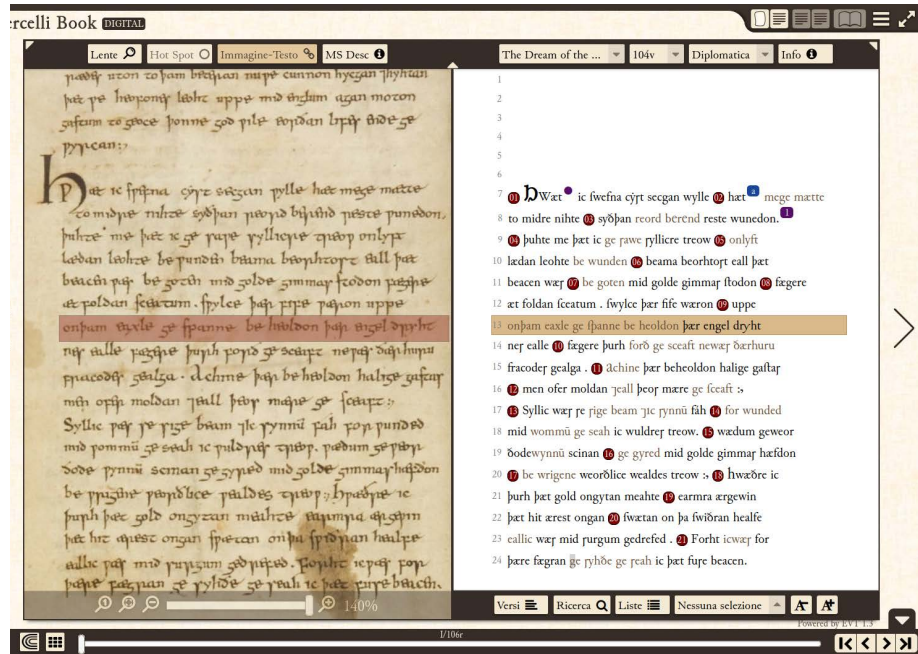
Over the years, the workflow for discussing UI changes has remained largely consistent:¹⁴ an initial proposal, often with mockups (essential for complex changes; Figure 3), evolves into a prototype that is refined until a final version is agreed upon.

¹³ See Rosselli Del Turco (2019) for more information about the birth and evolution of EVT.

¹⁴ See *SDE design: The agony and the ecstasy I* on the EVT development blog (<https://visualization-technology.wordpress.com/2015/04/20/sde-design-the-agony-and-the-ecstasy-i/>) for some additional notes on this subject.

Figure 4

The Dream of the Rood poem published with EVT¹



Note. From the EVT home page.

3.2. The UI of the current EVT versions

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the main goal of EVT¹ was to publish a diplomatic edition together with a digital facsimile, allowing for image-text linking, text search with special characters and at least two edition levels (diplomatic and semi-diplomatic/interpretative). Over time, and thanks to the collaboration with other projects,¹⁵ the number of features has grown to include support for named entities, linking of words to an integrated glossary, support for VisColl¹⁶ stylesheets to display the physical collation of a manuscript, and other features.

The arrangement of the UI objects is that of the “standard” layout described in section 2.1, with a focus on keeping widgets related to the most common features in view at all times, and keeping navigation to more specific ones simple (Figure 4).

¹⁵ In particular with the *Codice Pelavicino* project (Salvatori *et al.*, 2020).

¹⁶ <https://viscoll.org/>.

Figure 5

Experimental edition of part of the *Codice Pelavicino* using EVT 2

The screenshot displays the 'Codice Pelavicino Digital [short extract]' interface. On the left, a manuscript page is shown with a large illuminated initial 'D' in red and blue, followed by text in a Gothic script. The right sidebar contains a search bar and a list of entities. The 'NAMID ENTITIES' section is expanded, showing a list of entities including 'Albertus', 'Episcopus Lunensis', and 'Gottfried II'. The 'ALIAS ENTITIES' section is also expanded, showing a list of aliases including 'Role Name', 'Measure', and 'Selezione Tutto'. The 'Selezione Multipla' section is at the bottom, with a search bar and a 'Create index' button.

Note. Source: own elaboration.

The next version, EVT 2, moved from XSLT 2 stylesheets to the AngularJS¹⁷ framework and the MVC design pattern¹⁸ to overcome the limitations of the former. The current implementation in EVT 2 effectively addresses the requirements of critical editions, with UI-related choices partly inspired by an analysis and comparison with the printed edition tradition (Di Pietro & Rosselli Del Turco, 2018), although certain aspects—in particular the representation of witness families and multiple apparatus layers—are being enhanced in EVT 3. Support for critical editions was the initial goal, but after the release of the first beta the development team worked to reach feature parity with EVT 1 with respect to diplomatic editions (Figure 5).

Unfortunately, in 2018 Google decided to discontinue development and support for AngularJS, forcing the team to migrate the codebase to the new framework that replaced it, simply called Angular.¹⁹ It's been a very long process, which is still ongoing, but has also allowed us to rethink some architectural choices and improve the flexibility of the software. This is particularly important since the introduction of

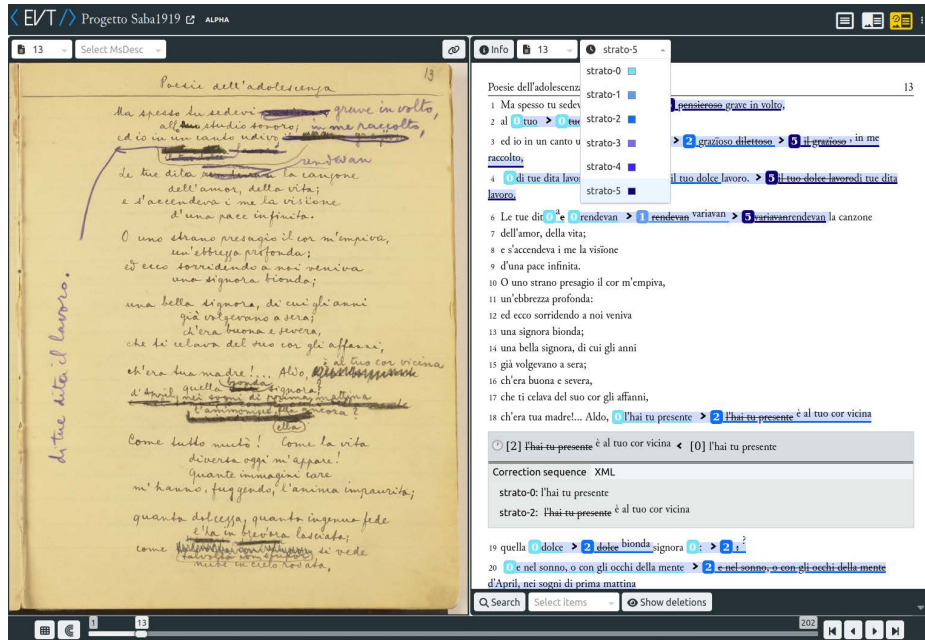
¹⁷ <https://angularjs.org/>.

¹⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Model%E2%80%93view%E2%80%93controller/>.

¹⁹ <https://angular.dev/>.

Figure 6

The original manuscript of the *Canzoniere* 1919 by U. Saba published using EVT 3'



Note. Source: own elaboration.

new features such as support for synoptic editions and authorial philology requires careful consideration of visual presentation strategies. A particularly challenging aspect is the temporal dimension inherent in genetic criticism, which requires innovative approaches to apparatus visualisation. As a first approach EVT handles the correction phases in a dynamic way, allowing the user to choose which step of the creative process to display (Figure 6).²⁰

Throughout this journey, we have tried to retain the same level of ease of use and effectiveness in visual presentation that has characterised EVT since its earliest versions.

3.3. Future developments

The current development version, EVT 3, is going to see several UI updates, as new functionality is introduced. Two features, in particular, will have an impact on the current layout:

²⁰ See Buzzoni *et al.* (2024) and Buzzoni (2024) for more information.

- support for genetic criticism / authorial philology will require two new views in part overlapping with existing ones: it will be interesting to see whether they are both merged with the existing ones, only one of them (the critical text view) but not the other (the documental-diplomatic view shown in Figure 6), or whether they are kept separate;
- support for synoptic editions will add a completely new view, one which is similar to older ones (e.g. the collation view), but it will actually present different texts in a synchronised manner.

Another significant change will address accessibility and inclusivity. The older EVT 1 version has been used as a benchmark for accessibility (Cappellotto & Cioffi, 2024) and its performance was not entirely satisfactory. Since the *Leges Langobardorum* project²¹ plans to improve accessibility in a significant way, EVT 3 will undergo a specific development cycle to achieve this goal and serve as a browsing tool for the project. We have already identified the methods to reach this goal. First, we will test the next beta version extensively to find weak spots and areas for improvement. We will then follow the *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines* (WCAG, 2008) to improve all relevant aspects, e.g. making sure that tab navigation works, adding alt text for images, possibly a text reader, etc. Finally, we will take advantage of a feature introduced in EVT 3 mainly for aesthetic reasons, themes (Figure 7):²² we will extend the themes capabilities to cover most, if not all, UI aspects of visual presentation that might have an impact on accessibility.

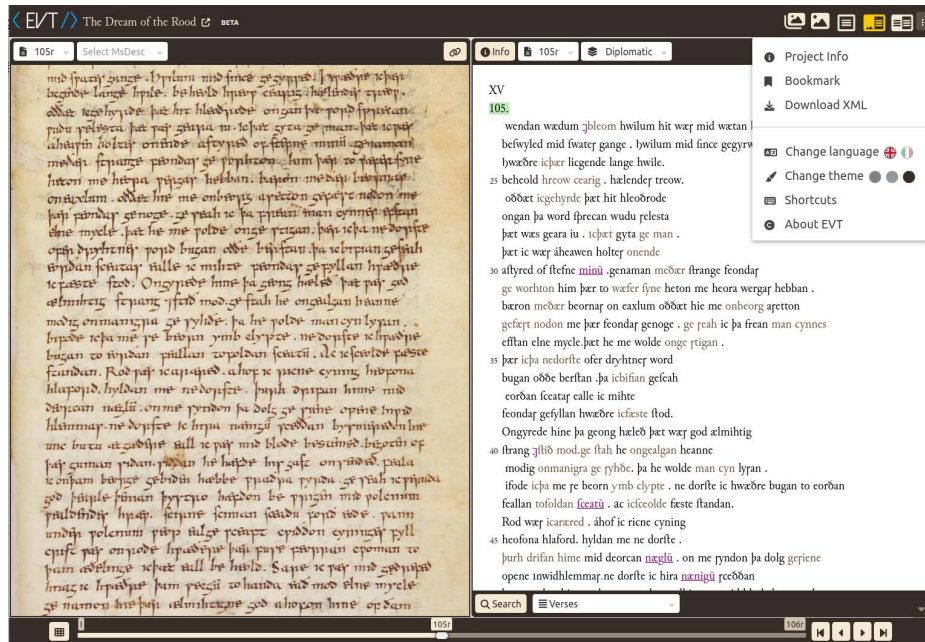
This will allow us to create new special themes, e.g. for visually impaired users, to adapt data visualisation for colour blindness and similar disabilities. Researchers using EVT will be able to create their own themes so that further enhancements can be added over time.

²¹ An Italian PRIN (Progetti di Rilevante Interesse Nazionale) project funded by the 2022 PNRR (Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza). Full title: *A digital scholarly edition of the “Leges Langobardorum”: social memory, historical legacy and valorisation of cultural heritage*. See Buzzoni & Rosselli Del Turco (2024) for more information.

²² In their current form, themes are used to distinguish different types of editions using specific colour palettes, e.g. a black / dark brown / brown palette for digital facsimiles and diplomatic editions.

Figure 7

The “classic” theme used to publish *The Dream of the Rood* poem with EVT 3 and the theme selector in the main menu²³



Note. Source: own elaboration.

4. CONCLUSION

The evolution of UI design for DSEs represents a crucial intersection between digital philology, human-computer interaction, and scholarly editing practices. As the development of EVT moves forward, several key challenges require attention: the need to balance functionality with usability, the necessity to find effective and innovative solutions for UI issues related to new functionality, and the growing importance of accessibility and inclusivity in digital editions. The experience gained through the development of EVT demonstrates that successful UI design must negotiate between competing demands –comprehensive functionality, intuitive user experience, and philological accuracy. Future advances in this area will need to address emerging paradigms, such as genetic criticism and computational editions, while upholding the core principles of effective scholarly communication. To address these challenges, collaboration between digital humanists, developers and designers is essential.

²³ Notice the difference of the UI colour palette compared to Figure 6.

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