# Review: The digital edition of the «Esordio» of the Storia d'Italia by Francesco Guicciardini

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### 1. Digital Humanities and the text *in itinere*

Nowadays several projects of digital critical editions are being developed. In this regard, a volume recently appeared on *Griseldaonline* – an 'Alma Mater' University of Bologna online magazine – entitled *Italianistica Digitale*, has collected essays dedicated to digital studies applied to humanistic methods and knowledge ([5]). On this occasion, many projects were presented, in addition to some that have already been active and that have acted as models for this constantly innovating discipline. Among other works are *Leopardi Ecdosys*, focused on Leopardi's *Idylls*; *Philoeditor*, experimented on the two printed editions of *Promessi Sposi* and Collodi's *Pinocchio*; or again, outside the national borders, the Spanish project, carried out in collaboration with the University of Bologna, on the Lope de La Vega's *La Dama Boba*, or the English prototype of *Proust's notebooks* (Cahier 46), developed by Julie André and Elena Pierazzo, which can be regarded «as a first step to a future digital edition of Proust's manuscripts» ([1]: 53). All these initiatives were already presented at a conference organised in 2015 by 'Sapienza' University of Rome, whose proceedings have been collected in a volume edited by Claudia Bonsi and Paola Italia ([3]). Returning to the Italian *parterre*, as for the projects, the bibliography on the subjects has grown increasingly in the past few years, aiming at discussing and reflecting on new design models as well as problems relating to the implementation and standardisation of such initiatives. Among these bibliographical contributions we can recall the studies of Tiziana Mancinelli and Elena Pierazzo ([11]); Francesco Stella ([17]); Paola Italia e Francesca Tomasi ([8];[9]).

The usefulness of these digital supports, even when transposed to the humanities, has long been clear. Through *open source* systems and the aims of *interoperability, fluidity, dynamism and iconicity,* the new digital platforms allow us to interactively visualise the history of a text,

deepening the process of its genesis ([6]). Therefore, these systems, in spite of the variety of the encoding methods used depending on the nature of the text itself, make it possible to overcome the limits of a linear and static visualisation, usually compressed in the limited space of a paper page. On the contrary, the digital version returns the value of the text not as a finished product, but as a dynamic text that can be visualised at each stage of its evolution, within its own history. Such hypertextual editions thus offer the chance to visually and iconically represent the different movements of the text over time, also thanks to the use of «policromia» and «spazialità» ([10]: 15), and to compare them with each other. In this way, it is possible to define not only the *quantity* but also, and above all, the *quality* of the author's variants and to understand the reasons for their revision and evolution, in a perfect and hoped-for synthesis between philology and criticism.

Despite the fact that many digital editions have followed one another in a short time, there is a lack of common paradigms and unambiguous guidelines. This gap has often precluded – and still precludes – a dialogue between the various projects, which appear as a sort of isolated monads that the reader may come across by pure chance. What has just been said is particularly true for most of the digital Italian attempts, characterised by «frammentazione», «dispersione» and digital «isolamento» ([8]:79). On the other hand, a standardisation capable of bringing together different philological-digital initiatives within a shared system does not exclude the need to preserve the specificity of each text, without distorting or simplifying its textual nature, even, and above all, in cases of rather complex genetic history, as the work by Beatrice Nava on Alessandro Manzoni's *Conte di Carmagnola* has demonstrated ([15]).

## 2. Relationships between complex genetic histories and Digital Humanities: the case of Francesco Guicciardini

When speaking of complex ecdotic history, we cannot fail to mention the extraordinary case of Francesco Guicciardini. The Florentine author, even though he never claimed to be a humanist, reserved a maniacal care for his texts, bending them to an indefatigable exercise of writing and re-writing. In fact, most of his known works have been written in several stages, aimed at perfecting the formal stylistic structure in order to achieve a prose that is as clear and lucid as it is coherently and logically ordered. We only need to recall the different drafts of *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, of *Oratio Accusatoria* or *Ricordi*. Even more exceptional and singular in its complexity, which is also the cause of its profound charm, is the case of *Storia d'Italia*, the masterpiece whose prolonged elaboration accompanied Guicciardini until his death in 1540. It has been preserved in various manuscripts, partly in the family archives and partly in the Biblioteca Laurenziana, both in Florence. By now, there is only one critical edition of the work, edited by Alessandro Gherardi and Enrico Rostagno in the first half of the 20th

century ([7]). Over the years, further discoveries have followed one another, making it necessary, however, to update this critical work that remains, even today, a milestone in Guicciardini's critical and philological studies.

Certainly, the difficulty of reconstructing Guicciardini's work on the text of the *Storia* and restoring it in the space of a paper critical edition was clear then and is much clearer today: it is in fact a matter of dealing with a rather large number of witnesses, continuously and densely compelled by the hand of the author or by his secretaries, in a crossroad where *authorial philology* and *philology of the copy* merge. Not to mention the background – the «avantesto» – that precedes and accompanies the drafting of the work, including correspondence, notes and memos – the so-called *Memorie Storiche* – and other texts that, left unfinished, ended up flowing into the basin of the *Storia*.

Given the philological complexity of Guicciardini's case, how can a new critical edition be built? And, above all, how to construct a critical edition that makes clear to its public the intricate editing process that included, after revision, a large amount of preparatory material? Paola Moreno in her book *Come lavorava Guicciardini* offers two different examples of the critical edition of the *Storia d'Italia's Esordio.* In summary, Moreno presents two different possibilities of edition: the first refers to just one of the manuscripts that have transmitted the text and to a textual segment of a few lines; the second one includes the entire text of the *Esordio* and it accounts for each passage that has characterised the different drafts, from the first manuscript to the last – the manuscript Laurenziano, which is the basis of the modern printed editions ([13]). This "analogical" attempt is counterbalanced by a new digital prototype, designed by an international team headed by Moreno herself, who proposes to offer the critical edition, this time in a digital version, of *the Storia d'Italia's Esordio* ([12]). This prototype – available in French and in Italian – presents an edition of the different drafts of the *Esordio*. The text, although not so extensive, was the result of a tormented work of composition, which lasted five years and is today testified by eight manuscripts, within which it is possible to identify multiple internal re-writings ([2];[12]).

### 3. The digital edition of the «Esordio» of the *Storia d'Italia*: building a prototype

Thanks to a user-friendly system the site is easy to consult, with a 'speaking' interface allowing the user to find his way around. Divided into macro-sections, the main index – placed on a horizontal bar – offers several headings to select: if we exclude the first one, *Progetto* (*Project*),

the other headings correspond to a specific display of the text: *Manoscritti* (*Manuscripts*), *Segmenti Testuali* (*Textual Segments*), *Edizioni* (*Editions*). In more detail, the first section, *Progetto*, is an efficient guide for the user: it contains various kinds of information, divided into paragraphs by clicking on the selectors on the left of the page. In addition to a description of the project and of the technologies used, this first page, just like a "Note to the text", contains a list of manuscripts that have been handed down the *Esordio* from the beginning. Furthermore, this section offers notes on method or on lexicon, useful for a better orientation within the composing dynamics of the *Esordio*.

By moving the cursor to the *Manoscritti* section, it is possible to choose one of the various drafts of the text using a drop-down selector, which can be displayed in two different ways:

1. *Riproduzione fotografica* (*Photographic reproduction*), a *facsimile* of the manuscript, interesting for understanding how the author has materially organised his work page.

2. *Trascrizione diplomatica-interpretativa* (*Diplomatic-interpretative transcription*), where the page, as in a photograph, is reproduced in an iconic manner, showing the topography of the corrections, which can be made by superscription, by formatting or by insertion in line spacing and in the margin. It has also chosen to mark in red with an arrow of the same colour those annotations added in the margin by the author, marked and ordered inside the text in alphabetical order (A, B, C, *etc.*); whereas the parts left open or deleted are coloured in grey.

These transcriptions can then be displayed according to two other textual reconstructions: one version called *Primo getto* (*First draft*), where it is possible to read − in relation to the chosen textual phase − the text in its first draft, prior to revision; a second version called instead *Testo revisionato* (*Revised text*), which displays the final state of the text. In this way, the multiple layers of the text can be more easily visualised.

Furthermore, by using a selector, located on the top right-hand corner, the reader can choose different combinations of side-by-side visualisation: it is possible to compare in a synoptic way the image − the *facsimile* of the manuscript − of a specific drafting phase with the corresponding text in one of the proposed types of visualisation (Diplomatic-interpretative transcription; First draft; Revised text); or to choose a purely textual comparison, where different types of visualisation of a text attributable to the same drafting phase are compared. Also in this case, the exploration is intuitive: indeed, after choosing the different possibilities for displaying and comparing the text(s), the user may also choose which page to display (*recto* or *verso*) thanks to other selectors.

Next, there is the heading *Segmenti di testo* (*Textual segments*), where a parallel reading of the several drafts of the same textual fragment is proposed. It is possible to visualise the section of the text in the two stages of writing − either the first draft or the revised text. The reading can

be further filtered through selectors on the left of the page, thanks to which it is possible to select manuscripts, segments or drafting stages.

In the last entry, *Edizioni* (*Editions*) each individual draft can be read in the first or revised text version. It is possible, also in this case, to compare different versions of the text, using the selectors in the left-hand margin.

This kind of prototype allows the user to easily follow the genetic history of the text. Going into more technical details, which are explained in the initial section (*Progetto*), the text has been marked-up with the *XML-TEI* language, using three different markers, i.e. three displays for a single encoding operation. For the section *Manoscritti*, the *EVT 1.1* display system was used, which is very popular among practitioners due to its highly intuitive interface. The challenge of Guicciardini's case, however, forced the designers of the project to add further elements and attributes that would allow the evolution of the text to be fully represented. In fact, the original *EVT* scripts did not provide the transformation with many of the elements and element attributes needed for *corpus* coding, such as substitutions, various types of deletions (of rend="overstrike" or rend="underline") or additions in various positions (in the line spacing, left margin, top or bottom). To this purpose, other scripts were created, both in *EVT*'s xslt and in the *CSS*. The software was then modified to obtain three different output formats, adding an additional version for the semi-diplomatic text and then adapting the two existing formats for the other two text versions. In this way, there are three sets of scripts linked with a hundred *CSS* styles created *ad hoc* and defined by a cascading style sheet. Finally, *Python* and *XLST* were used for the creation of *Segmenti Testuali* section.

A prototype of digital edition organised in this way restores, like a paper edition, the consubstantiality between authorial philology, representing how a text evolves over time, and hermeneutics, identifying the *fulcrums* of the author's thought that has undertaken an authentic hand-to-hand struggle with his papers. The hope is that, by continuing this successful digital experimentation, Guicciardini's masterpiece may be enriched, alongside these initial pages of the *Esordio*. In fact, we are dealing with papers and manuscripts that have interacted closely with a variety of written production during the course of their drafting: the long gestation of the text, which went hand in hand with the continuous fine-tuning of his work method, aimed at finding every documentary source. Furthermore, with stylistic *labor limae*, we have seen epistolary excerpts and passages of other works flowing into the basin of the *Storia* ([14]), as happened with the *Commentari della luogotenenza* ([16]). It would then be interesting, even just for portions of text, to catalogue the types of variants – substantial or formal – that occur between one version of the text and another, by using typographic markers. In this way it would be possible to visually retrace the evolutionary phases of the text and underline the quality and peculiarity of Guicciardini's intervention. Therefore,

understanding the process that led to the final text means to understand more deeply the purpose of this massive rewriting campaign. A work of this sort would clarify not only the method used by the author in the drafting of his masterpiece but would also allow a general understanding of Guicciardini's complex 'writing system'.

At this point, it is easy to understand the incidence of the digital *medium*, which, much more than a printed edition, allows to visualise the evolutionary process of Guicciardini's work in an immediate and intuitive way, thus offering a privileged key to access to his writing laboratory. Initiatives, such as this one dedicated to Guicciardini, which has been able to provide an essay on the systematic and analytical edition of a text with a complex and troubled history, force us to reflect on the «funzione transformativa» ([11]:9) induced by the digital, both on the method of edition and on the way it is used by its public.

Finally, such philological case experimented in digital form offers incentives and challenges how to *think* or *rethink* the traditional way to represent complex textual traditions. This applies consequently to critical edition in its canonical version, i.e. on paper, but also in its hypertext and interactive version. Freeing itself from the limitations of a linear representation, from a reliable critical text the digital editions allow us to restore the fluid entity of a text *in itinere*, in its dynamic approach to its «valore» ([4]:241) and to represent the correction process. In this way, it is possible to reconstruct at each stage the mobility and the dynamism of the text itself, which are the two main purposes of philology and, especially, of authorial philology.

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