

# A Mock-up for the Development of a Digital Edition for Ancient Greek Fragmentary Poetry: Results of Its Evaluation

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## ABSTRACT

Ancient Greek poetry is an essential part of the western cultural heritage; thus, it is important that people have access to its texts and whatever relates to their understanding in a reliable and easy way. Whenever user evaluation is concerned, mock-ups are used by designers to acquire feedback from users. A mock-up is defined as a model of the final product, and may be used for demonstration, evaluation and other purposes. The authors prototyped a mock-up for focusing on the requirements of a scholarly digital edition of Archilochus. This was put under evaluation to assess its usability: it was submitted to extensive use and testing by a sample of prospective users, to better focus on the requirements from a product's perspective. Experimentation involved a group of university students, attending a Greek Philology course at Parma University. More than half of the respondents considered the mock-up a useful study support. The evaluation also pointed out that the mock-up had to be revised, so as to guarantee better cognitive simplicity of the user interface.

## KEYWORDS

Aesthetics Of Technology, Ancient Greek, Digital Humanities, Human Computer Interaction, Prototyping, Testing And Feedback, User Evaluation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ancient Greek poetry is an essential part of our cultural heritage and it is crucial that the highest number of people may know about those texts and whatever relates to their background in a reliable and easy way. Nowadays there is much interest in the use of digital resources for several purposes, e.g. divulgation, teaching, philological research etc. (Babeu, 2011). This paper is about an experiment on the effectiveness of a digital edition of an ancient Greek author, Archilochus, for didactic purposes.

Until the early 2000s, digital editions have replicated the print edition model, both in terms of product (i.e. the materials included and how they are accessed) and process (i.e. how they are used and how they may be used). Only after 2003 this model began to be developed by exploring the full potential of the world wide web. Notwithstanding over fifteen years of intense activity in the production of critical digital editions, since the mid-1990s, the discipline of Digital Humanities has not elaborated a commonly agreed definition of what a digital edition is<sup>1</sup>. The debate among scholars has tried to distinguish between digital editions and digitized editions. According to (Sahle, 2008)

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digital scholarly editions are not just scholarly editions in digital media. “A digital edition cannot be printed without a loss of information and/or functionality...if the paradigm of an edition is limited to the two-dimensional space of the page and to typographic means of information representation, then it is not a digital edition.” Pierazzo (2014) points out that the readers of the past are replaced by a most common users category, whose practice more than reading is browsing: the user no longer reads a text in a linear way, but searches for information without a precise plan, so, the knowledge required to a digital publisher is multifaceted and diversified and can hardly be mastered by a single person (‘creating a digital edition ... takes a village’). It is to accommodate the needs of a casual user as well that this edition is structured around the windows paradigm, where diverse windows present different facets of the target text such as its translation, its grammatical features, its metrics, its syntactic structure etc., which the user may open according to his/her current interest or curiosity.

In summary, production of a digital edition is a large endeavour and requires collaboration by a team of persons. Its development must follow an iterative practice, where from user needs analysis, users’ profiles are defined, prototypes of the digital product are produced and are evaluated in a somewhat formalized way, so that the product is modified to undergo a further evaluation stage. The design of specialized digital editions should also adhere to the principles of web design, which make iterative project design and evaluation a fundamental principle: “a graphic object must be beautiful to see and inspire confidence also through its aesthetic qualities” (Ruecker, Radzikowska, & Sinclair, 2011). These remarks are consistent with a set of studies concerning the way humanists approach and make use of material available on the web, by (Toms & O’Brien, 2008) (Audenaert & Furuta, 2010) (Warwick, Galina, Terras, Huntington, & Pappa, 2008), all of them stressing on a set of recommendations that emphasize interface usability, whose key tenets are iterative design and evaluation.

First of all, to evaluate which way users may find a Digital edition attractive and engaging, a survey was performed on the use of digital resources in Ancient Greek scholarship through a questionnaire, so as to ascertain what the current practice is and what the perceived needs are with a group of practitioners in the field. The outcomes of the survey focused on the end user needs concerning features and tools for authoring, editing, indexing and presenting a digital edition, which way to link them together with the existing resources and improve them.<sup>2</sup> Among other, the survey listed the following features as very important to integrate in a digital edition:

- Primary sources<sup>3</sup>
- Variants and conjectures about variants
- Comments from critical editions
- Translation
- Logic analysis
- Metric analysis

## 2. DEVELOPMENT OF A MOCK-UP

Based on the results obtained by the survey, a mock-up was prototyped (based on Nicolosi 2013)<sup>4</sup> in view of better focusing on the requirements for a complete scholarly digital edition of Archilochus.

In several areas of manufacturing and design, a mock-up is defined as a scale or full-size model of the final product, and may be used for teaching, demonstration, design evaluation, promotion and other purposes. Whenever user evaluation is concerned, mock-ups are used by designers mainly to acquire feedback from users. Thus, the design practice through mock-ups is common practice in web products design, as a way to allow early user evaluation of the final product.

Analytically, they pertain to a spectrum of design practices that includes:

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