

A Digital Scholarly Edition for Historians

The Case of Matthew of Edessa

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The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa is well-known to most scholars of the medieval Near East and the First Crusade, both for the wealth of information that it includes and for the apparent ignorance and naïveté of its author, an Armenian priest living in the Crusader county of Edessa and writing between 1110 and 1132. Although the text is widely used by historians, it has never yet received a critical edition, and has not been published in any edition at all since 1898 (Urhayec'i, 1898). Surviving in some 35 manuscripts, all of which were copied at least 450 years after the death of the author, the Chronicle is now the subject of a fully digital text edition currently in preparation.

The challenge that the Chronicle presents is that it is not only a text that deserves a full philological treatment, but that it must be further annotated and presented as a historical work - as a platform for the study of a time and a place that many historians wish to know about but that is familiar to very few. This means that the work on the edited text encompasses not only the state-of-the-art methods familiar to digital philologists - full transcription of manuscripts, palaeographical markup using the vocabulary of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI Consortium, 2015), automatic manuscript collation with CollateX (Dekker, Hulle, Middell, Neyt, and Zundert, 2014), stemmatic analysis through the tools provided by Stemmaweb (Andrews and Macé, 2013), and publication of the complete set of transcriptions along with an editorial reconstruction of the text - but that the commentary on the text must also take advantage of the digital form and the online resources that exist for a historical study of the period. Place names are not simply tagged; their probable locations are resolved, and they are displayed geographically insofar as possible. Personal names and ethnographic labels are not merely indexed; they are linked, wherever possible, to prosopographical databases or even relevant pages on Wikipedia. The annalistic nature of the Chronicle then allows a scholar to trace the movement of individuals and groups through time and space, making the textual edition itself a platform for the study of medieval history.

The presentation portion of this submission will cover the working methods of the project as they have been developed over the last four years, its technological underpinnings and software architecture, and the lessons that have been learned along the way. The submission also includes a demonstration of the edition-in-progress, so that interested scholars - particular others working on historical texts of a similar nature - may evaluate our work for their own needs.

References

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Matthew of Edessa (Matt'ēos Urhayec'i). (1898). *Žamanakagrut'iwn*. Vataršapat.

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