
A Digital Edition of *Dei Viaggi di Messer Marco Polo, Gentilhuomo Venetiano* (Giovanni Battista Ramusio, *Navigazioni et Viaggi*, II, 1559):
The Project and Its Recent Updates

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1. In Spring 2011, Eugenio Burgio, Marina Buzzoni and Antonella Ghersetti¹ presented a project to Ca' Foscari University of Venice, whose main objective was the production of a scholarly digital edition (freely accessible at «Edizioni Ca' Foscari – Digital Publishing» Web Portal) of *Dei Viaggi di Messer Marco Polo*, the Italian version of *Il Milione* written by Giovanni Battista Ramusio (1485-1557) and published in the second volume of his odeporic collection *Navigazioni et viaggi* (Venezia, Giunti, 1559).² Because of its innovative content (a scholarly critical edition in the form of a digital object which is not intended for print) the Project was granted by Ca' Foscari University, and could therefore be developed: in July 2013, at Nancy, Eugenio Burgio and Samuela Simion (the latter responsible for implementing the part of the project which deals with texts still unedited and/or uncommented upon) will show a demo of the digital edition at the *xxvii^e Congrès international de linguistique et de philologie romanes*.³ So, it has seemed to us appropriate to present here the general outline of the Project, along with an assessment of its recent updates.

1.1. Within the history of transmission of Marco Polo's work, *Dei Viaggi di Messer Marco Polo* represents the watershed between the Middle

1. They are the Coordinators of a research group composed of Alvisè Andreose (University of Padua), Alvaro Barbieri (University of Padua), Giampiero Bellingieri (Ca' Foscari University of Venice), Marco Ceresa (Ca' Foscari University of Venice), Simone Cristoforetti (Ca' Foscari University of Venice), Serena Fornasiero (Ca' Foscari University of Venice), Giuseppe Mascherpa (University of Pavia), Fabio Romanini (University of Trieste), Samuela Simion (Ca' Foscari University of Venice), Federico Squarcini (Ca' Foscari University of Venice).

2. An up-to-date bibliography on Ramusio and his text can be found in *Ramusio «editor» del «Milione» 2011*.

3. The present paper was submitted to «QV» in June 2013.

Ages (where the text circulated in manuscript form, and was actively re-used, translated and re-written according to the expectations of its virtual audience) and the Modern Age (where the text circulated in print, and was considered as a «classic», foreshadowing the discoverers of «new worlds»); indeed, one may claim that Ramusio's contribution to the opening of the latter period was crucial. He acted as a humanist philologist-editor; he established a «critical» text through collation of exemplars; the result was a sort of *editio variorum*, made up of the combination of various «tesseras» of different origin. Ramusio's choices make his text a crucial component of Marco Polo's tradition: due to the sources he took into account, his edition keeps track of a textual stage which is more informative than the one attested in the only witness that is linguistically close to the original, i.e. the Franco-Italian text transmitted in the Parisian codex BnF, fr. 1116 (F) – a stage that can be only virtually reconstructed by comparing information gathered from sources that differ with respect to the language, the period, as well as the communicative intentions. The outcomes of the workshop held in Venice, in September 2010, and published in *Ramusio «editor» del «Milione»* (see footnote 2) have contributed in better defining the contours and nature of what was only partially known since BENEDETTO 1928, as well as in reordering the sources used by Ramusio and revising the way they have been used. On that occasion, the necessity for a new edition of Ramusio's text was affirmed, which would provide a crucial support to the studies on Marco Polo's tradition. The comment should on the one hand reconstruct the various conditions of Ramusio's compilatory work, and on the other hand provide a network of information to substantiate the interpretation of the text (particularly as for the so-called *realia* and the history of the Eastern world). Such an aim is hardly achievable in the form of a printed book: it requires a complex apparatus to account for every single step in processing the sources and for the mechanism through which their manipulation has taken place. Such an apparatus would prove impracticable as regards the editorial composition, very difficult to handle by the user, and even misleading in its outcomes: in fact, in order to be built up, one should literally tear apart texts (i.e. the sources used by Ramusio) that are endowed with a life of their own. Furthermore, the stiffness and inflexibility of a printed comment risks concealing the intrinsic dynamicity of the original (it is in fact almost impossible and also unproductive to edit Ramusio's text, its commentary and the complete sources as one single object).

1.2. Projecting a digital edition, in the form of a hypertext, can offer a proper solution to the aforementioned *impasse*. Through the simulta-

neous opening of different windows in an online environment, a digital edition permits to visualize (1) the text (Ramusio's *Dei Viaggi*); (2) the comment apparatus (identified sources; analysis of their manipulation; informative glosses); (3) the complete version of the text from which the source extract is taken, also in parallel with the Ramusian text. There is no doubt that, on the screen, the variability can be presented in much more lucid fashion and perspicuous visualization than in conventional editions. Electronic editions enjoy a number of fairly obvious practical advantages over print: they can be made accessible to a vastly wider audience, and the enormous power of electronic searching makes it possible for users to locate an incomparably greater range of information accurately and almost instantaneously. By means of «content tagging» – a fairly sophisticated form of indexing – the editor can ascribe values to words or phrases whose meaning may not be immediately obvious. Another inestimable advantage of the electronic medium is that work can be released while still in progress, and can still continue to progress after it has been released. There is no need, as with print, to produce an entire new edition every time the work is revised or updated. Nor is it necessary for a project's work to be completed before its publication. Last but not least, in employing the electronic medium, users are embedded in a century-old process of transmission which makes them active recipients.⁴

1.3. To sum up, the strong innovative potential of this project is twofold: (1) on the one hand, the project aims at providing an «intellectual» tool *which is now lacking*, thus helping in tackling a core issue in the philological studies of *Il Milione* (i.e. a complete edition of the text, which would enable to sketch its informative profile by drawing from different sources, and yet without «inventing» a historically unattested text); (2) *the creation of a «digital object», which is unique in its genre since it has no analogues*. For this reason, this object can find its proper place within the web portal of Edizioni Ca' Foscari – Digital Publishing (Ca' Foscari University Press), and, in turn, *it can contribute to enhance the innovative profile of this Press as deputed site of digital production*.

2. The project is structured in two levels, an intellectual one and a material one.

4. See FIORMONTE 2003; ROBINSON 2005; STELLA, CIULA 2007.

2.1. *Intellectual level.* (1) The papers edited in *Ramusio «editor» del «Milione»* 2011 have permitted to single out Ramusio's sources. As for the plan of the work, he decided to reproduce the tripartite composition structure «invented» by the Dominican Francesco Pipino (1320 ca.), who used it in the Latin version which became the most popular one in the Western tradition, i.e. his *De condicionibus et consuetudinibus orientalium regionum*. He then amply drew from the translation of the Latin redaction known as Z. He also drew from the late-15th-century Venetian redaction VB and, possibly, from two further redactions, i.e. the Venetian V and the Latin epitome L. The overview sketched through the essays contained in *Ramusio «editor» del «Milione»* 2011 is based on the systematic collation of Ramusio's text against the aforementioned sources. The collation was produced by three distinct working groups (Giuseppe Mascherpa; Alvise Andreose and Alvaro Barbieri; Eugenio Burgio and Serena Fornasiero) in the course of the year 2010. The outcomes of this research represents the «raw material» that has been refined in the years 2012-2013, and will be included into the *apparatus* of our digital Edition.⁵

(2) The possibility to access the texts in their complete form is one of the advantages of digital editions. Yet, that requires the availability of reliable editions, either critical or interpretative. At the beginning, what we had at our disposal was only a partial corpus of the *Milione's* versions already edited in critical edition: the Franco-Veneto F, the Veneto VA, the Venetian VB and V, and the Latin Z (see below, *Bibliography*). In the first step of the work, during the years 2012-2013, we have completed the scrutiny of the texts that are still unedited: Samuela Simion has provided an interpretative edition of Pipino's version (based on ms. Firenze, Bibl. Riccardiana 983), and a critical text of *Dei viaggi* (based on the *editio princeps* of the second volume of *Navigazioni*)⁶ which aims to be more respectful of its formal shape than the text edited by M. Milanesi;⁷ Eugenio Burgio has provided the critical text of the Latin epitome L.⁸

(3) An informative comment will complete the edition: it will consist of a series of «records», which will eventually find due place in a dedi-

5. The demo that will be presented at Nancy will contain the whole third Book of *Dei Viaggi*.

6. *De I Viaggi di Marco Polo, gentil'huomo venetiano*, in *Secondo volume Delle Navigazioni et viaggi Nel quale si contengono L'istoria delle cose de' Tartari, & diversi fatti de' loro imperatori, descritta da M. Marco Polo gentiluomo venetiano [...]*, Venetia nella stamperia de' Giunti, L'anno MDLIX, ff. 2-60r.

7. In RAMUSIO 1982, pp. 7-297.

8. On the text of L see BURGIO, MASCHERPA 2007.

cated part of the digital *apparatus* and will be prepared by the Oriental scholars who take part in the project under the coordination of Antonella Ghersetti (see footnote 1). The aforementioned records will contain essential information about the more significant *realia* mentioned by Polo, i.e. toponyms, ethnonyms, social institutions, etc. The objective is to refresh the status of knowledge which is available through the only two repertoires presently at our disposal, PELLIOT 1959-1973 and CARDONA 1975. These, in turn, will undergo a process of thorough revision.

2.2. *Elaboration and implementation of the digital part of the project.* A further step will be that of adapting the web architecture tool used in the «Electronic Heliand Project», based at the University of Venice and coordinated by M. Buzzoni, to the «Electronic Ramusio». The template used in the former consists of a series of click-and-drag resizable windows, which can be activated or deactivated by the user, so that he/she can freely choose the material to view and in which order, according to his/her own interests. Technically, the modal windows were developed using a Java/Ajax Open Source Framework which can build up a multi-layered structure. Quite obviously, the windows are not isolated items; they are connected by hyperlinks. By clicking on a word in the main window (the one at the top-left of the screen) the user can activate other windows such as, for example, the one containing the image of a manuscript, or the one providing its transcription. Thus, what is being built up in the «Electronic Heliand Project» is a hyper-textual environment and a hyper-textual way of using the electronic edition, based not on a static but on an interactive model. The main principles followed are text mobility, on the one hand, and flexibility of text representations, on the other (BUZZONI 2011). In the «Electronic Ramusio», the modal windows will permit to visualize a chapter of Ramusio's text in parallel with its major sources. Furthermore, each section of the text will be accompanied by a philological commentary made accessible through pop-up windows which present the relevant interface to the user. Finally, it will be possible to display (and superimpose) the entire text of the other *Milione* redactions (see above, section 2.1., point 1) and access the records containing the information on the *realia* (see above, section 2.1., point 3).

3. The scientific value of the project is self-evident: while aiming at obtaining significant achievements within the field of the textual criticism of *Il Milione* – one of the key texts for the formation of the Venetian and Italian cultural identity, as it is almost universally recognized –, the project also offers a work-tool, namely the web-architecture created to implement the edition that is perfectly in line with those produced in the

most up-to-date international projects. Therefore, the predictable spin-offs are: (1) the realization of a digital object (i.e., the edition itself) that is unique within the Italian academic field, and (2) the production of digital tools especially oriented to editing texts characterized by complex textual traditions (e.g. multiple redactions, contaminated recensions). Both the critical and comment apparatus of such texts would hardly fit into a traditional print edition. The digital tools developed by our research group will be characterized as a typical product of Edizioni Ca' Foscari - Digital Publishing (Ca' Foscari University Press). (3) The development and implementation of this project can pave the way for a series of collateral theoretical and applicative enterprises; for instance, the creation of teaching laboratories on electronic publishing destined to graduate students in Humanities. Taking part into the laboratory activities, they would acquire a competence in information technologies that, added to the already gained knowledge in the Humanities, would allow them to productively interface with experts in the field of digital press.

4. *In lieu of a conclusion.* An electronic edition is potentially used by a wider variety of recipients. In employing the electronic medium, users are embedded within the process of transmission playing an active role in it. Here the relevance of electronic editions of texts in terms of «cultural historiography» becomes evident. These editions perfectly agree with recent developments in editorial scholarship, which is devoting itself increasingly to mediality, to the history of transmission, to textual manipulations and rewrites. Our project is meant to show once again that the electronic medium represents an added value in terms of the quantity of data represented, their relationability, multimodality and multimodality, as well as the interaction with the scientific community (interoperability).⁹

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9. On these notions see STELLA 2007.

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ABSTRACT *The paper presents the general outline of the Project «A Digital Edition of “Dei Viaggi di Messer Marco Polo, Gentiluomo Venetiano” (Giovanni Battista Ramusio, “Navigazioni et viaggi”, II, 1559)», along with an assessment of its recent updates.*
