

Editing digital knowledge

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Editing digital knowledge: Alfonso el Sabio's *Estoria de Espanna* in the 21st
century
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The opening section of Alfonso X el Sabio's *Estoria de Espanna*, the chronicle of Spain of which he was the intellectual author, contains a particularly striking geographical definition. For the chronicle opens with a delimitation not of Spain, but rather of Europe, and it is one which covers the territorial space from the mighty river Don in the east to the Mediterranean south, of perhaps more direct interest to Alfonso, and to my own homeland of Ireland in the western Atlantic fringes of the continent. The whimsical co-incidence of the three geographical points appearing in the writings of an Irish academic in a Russian publication to celebrate the 800th anniversary of Alfonso's birth aside, the passage, seen here in the form of the sole extant manuscript of the *Estoria de Espanna* produced in Alfonso's *taller* and its digital equivalent in the *Estoria de Espanna Digital*, contains a number of pointers to how textual editing might evolve in the digital world.

De como fue Europa poblada de los fijos
de Japhet

¹ Evropa comienza en **un rio que a nonbre thanays**. e de la una parte la cerca el mar mediterraneo. e dela otra el mar oceano.² Este rio thanais nace en los montes ripheos; y es moion entre asia y europa.³ Enel grand mar oceano de la parte de cierço. ay muchas yslas. assi cuemo ingla terra a que llama ron antiqua mientras bretanna la mayor.⁴ **E es ybernia ala que llaman yslanda**

Estoria de Espanna Digital E₁: 4, 1-4 (3r) Patrimonio Nacional. Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial, Y-I-2, fol. 3r¹

As is immediately apparent there is an error, since Hibernia is translated not as Irlanda, but rather Yslanda, and this characteristic element of medieval textuality can provide us with an appropriate starting point to discuss a range of phenomena which emerge from Alfonso's history where textual editing, and specifically digital textual editing, is concerned. Although one might imagine that a harassed Alfonsine scribe would be quite entitled to confuse the similar names of rocky islands in the cold northern seas, the nature of the error points to general questions of how we relate to and understand our textual heritage, and also how we can best leverage the technological changes we have recently undergone to

¹ Aengus Ward ed., *Estoria de Espanna Digital* v.1.1 (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 2020), E₁: 4, 1-4 (3r) <estoria.bham.ac.uk/edition> [17/12/2021] henceforth *EED*; Patrimonio Nacional. Real

understand better our textual heritage. I do this from the standpoint that there are elements of medieval writing which can illuminate our own practices - thus, one question is not so much what we can learn about Alfonsine texts through digital analysis, but rather what Alfonso, on his 800th birthday, can tell us about ourselves. Neither the image nor the text produced here is Alfonso's *Estoria* - the *Estoria* itself, so to speak. So we might like to ask ourselves, what they are, or indeed what it means in the twenty-first century to speak of Alfonso's *Estoria de Espanna* in the first place. In order to address this question, there are a number of unacknowledged underpinning categories which may well have changed in the transition from a printed to a digital disposition. In order to analyse an possible hint of an epistemic change in our interactions with textual heritage in the digital world, the implications of these must be interrogated and adequately theorised.

An Alfonsine digital architecture: categories of epistemic change

The categories with which I deal here are not intended to be exhaustive, nor do I intend to deal with their more widespread implications here. They are merely those which have emerged from my own digital editing practice in recent years as significant categories for our future interactions with textual heritage. They are further born of a deep appreciation of the philological analysis encoded in printed editions and are a critique not of philology but of digital developments which have taken place at breakneck speed in practice, but not in theory. The world of print has a set of underlying principles which became settled, and indeed naturalised, over centuries, but the same does not yet apply for the algorithmic disposition which is taking shape at high speed around us.

- Interfaces
- The form of the book
- Skeumorphism (visual and linguistic)
- The illusion of screen depth
- Linked data
- Data composition and structure
- Trust and authority

Interfaces: One element which should be taken into account in any discussion of the future of textual editing is that of the interface. The way in which we have interacted with our textual heritage has been unchanged for hundreds of years, in the form of a book, but we can no longer take for granted that this will continue to be the case in the future. The nature of that interaction should not, I think, be left *solely* to programmers and graphic designers, for this, and indeed this is also true of each of the other categories, is not merely a question of form but also of substance. The means by which we have gained access to our medieval textual heritage has been unchanged for hundreds of years, to the point that we would

have hardly considered the existence of an "interface" in previous years. The digital world, however, presents us with a range of different possibilities for that access, and the extent to which the altered mode of access also changes the fundamental nature of the exercise is not one which has troubled many outside the specific domain of digital humanities. These comments, of course, are hardly ² new, but I would hope to extend their importance to the question of the next 800 years of Alfonsine textuality which will take place in a format quite different to those of the past. The extent to which this change alters fundamentally the nature of the understanding of the past is worthy of theoretical reflection.

The form of the book: Closely related to the question of future access is a reverse one: the extent to which the way in which we are currently organizing our digital lives as a function of a cultural form which is designed for a very different mental frame. Thus we have internalised many ways of doing research and thinking about the past as they were so embedded in a bookish culture which all-pervasive to the point of seeming natural. On the one hand, this has meant that much of the early digital production has taken the form of what Joris van Zundert calls "bookalikes", that is, effectively a physical book in digital form. On ³ the other hand, and related to the foregoing, we are not, yet, taking advantage of an epistemic shift in the conceptual architecture presented to us by the digital world. This dimension, fundamentally that of the mental frame which conditions both construction of digital editions and the ways in which they are read, is central to the notion of an Alfonsine digital architecture and the very notion of what constitutes the object of study in the digital age.

Skeuomorphism (visual and linguistic) and the illusion of screen depth: a related question is that of the form and words we have available to us to think about and comprehend our textual heritage. Page, archive, página, archivo (and I suspect страница) have already been adapted to mean other, quite radically different, things to those of their traditional meanings. But then, the traditional meanings will gradually be squeezed out. I point this out, again, not to bemoan, but rather to take note - although there is an implied diminution of bookish culture in these questions, which may perhaps interest all of us bibliophiles. At what point in the future will the terms page and archive mean primarily something digital? And when they do, will their original meanings be lost and their related bookish mindset with them? And is there, then, a way to embed within the new dispensation all that is fundamental to the material, bookish culture which they have expressed for so long?

Data composition, and structure, data linking: The final areas of general interest, which I consider to serve as background to what follows, concern what lies beneath. How is the data in digital editions put together and structured? In the past, scholars never had to consider the relationship between the paper and the pen, when they took notes, nor the order in which they filed their papers, why would they? Whom could it affect? But now, the way in which the raw materials of our work are structured is out of the hands of those who are producing the editions, and therefore the access to the past. Does this matter? Does it change anything of the substance of the editions we produce and the nature of the

²The question of the status of the digital interface is addressed in Roman Bleier, Martina

Bürgermeister, Helmut W. Klug, Frederike Neuber, Gerlinde Schneider (ed.), *Digital Scholarly Editions as Interfaces* (Norderstedt: Herstellung und Verlag Books on Demand, 2018). See especially in this volume Tara L. Andrews and Joris J. van Zundert, "What Are You Trying To Say? The Interface as an Integral Element of Argument", 3-24.

³ Personal communication. See also Joris van Zundert, "Barely Beyond the Book", in Matthew James Driscoll and Elena Pierazzo, ed. *Digital Scholarly Editing: Theories and Practices* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2016), 83-106.

interaction with textual heritage? Perhaps not, but those of us involved in research and analysis of a specifically humanistic order should certainly ask the question. A related question is that of linked data, which is at the core of the type of edition proposed below. How are the elements of an edition linked to each other, by whom and why? In our editorial practice to date we have naturally taken for granted an object domain which, like Bourdieu's language, is in fact the outcome of a cultural and social process. It is likely that this print domain will ⁴ not last for much longer, at least in its traditional format. The links created in print editions were either of an explicit material kind in the form of an unshifting printed record of internal connections, or implicitly external, in the minds of the readers who are prompted to make extra-discursive connections by the fixed printed text. But in a digitally fluid world, the nature of the linkage is quite dramatically different. The implications for how we access medieval works, or indeed conceive of them in the first place, have yet to be placed on a firm theoretical footing.

Trust and authority: With what (explicit) authority is this done? These are all questions which we would not ask of printed editions, generally, although perhaps we should. The reason for this is that, as mentioned before, the form of the book became naturalised as the vehicle of the expression of our cultural heritage and the authority to create knowledge therefore implicitly resided in those who had access to publishing. A similar naturalisation is in process now, and it is one which needs analysis. In a world of shifting sands, who can be trusted to grant us access to knowledge and understanding about our textual heritage, and why? These are all, of course, *general* questions of digital theory and practice, but perhaps Alfonso can help us here too.

It is almost a commonplace to say that the world of medieval textuality, with its fluid writing and interactions with oral society, can help us to conceptualise better the digital world. There are, of course, many ways in which this is not true, but to the extent that manuscript culture is embedded in a form of cultural interaction which escapes the printed book effect, it is nonetheless true that there

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are pointers to a different conceptual frame in pre-modern world and these may help to frame post-modern cultural interactions. In what follows, I would like to suggest that the Alfonsine project is an appropriate pointer to digital textuality and the *Estoria de Espanna* in particular is an excellent case in point, for many of the questions raised above can be related specifically to medieval/ Alfonsine textuality. I will concentrate on the status of the object of study (here the *Estoria de Espanna*, but it might also be the Alfonsine Project more widely) And therefore, I focus, implicitly, on reading practices, mental schemes and conceptual architecture. I would like to suggest that editing of the future will be **editing knowledge**, not text, and that this is in line, in certain ways, with Alfonsine textuality. Here I base myself

on Tara Andrews's recent categorisation of digital editions as the compilation of meaningful assertions about the object of study.⁶

⁴Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1991). See especially "The Production and Reproduction of Legitimate Language", 43-65.

⁵Leonardo Funes, "Reflexiones en torno a una poética del relato cronístico", *Bucema*, Hors série No. 2 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.4000/cem.10813> [17/12/2021]

⁶Personal communication

Digital editing in theory

As noted by various practitioners of the art, the practice of digital editing is no longer new - there have been editions of medieval text in particular for some decades. However, the practice has yet to coalesce into anything resembling a

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stable set of theoretical principles, or even into anything like the opposing poles of editorial approaches which evolved over the centuries of print editing. I do not intend to propose such a theory here, rather to suggest how the Alfonsine project might help in its evolution. For the purposes of this exercise I will base myself on three central terms in recent thinking of a specifically Anglophone order, as these may help in clarifying both the nature of the digital editing exercise and the ways in which the underlying conceptual architecture may evolve.

The three terms I outline here, form, at least in part, an additional part of the structure for what I will go on to say. I should emphasise, though, that I mean their usage in a very narrow sense. I do so in the light of current debates on textual scholarly editing in English, and there are considerable echoes of the work of Robinson, Shillingsburg, Eggert and Gabler in particular, but I mean no wider ⁸ application beyond the specific examples provided by the Alfonsine works.

- Document: a physical object on which are inscribed marks both meaningful and trivial
- Text: the meaningful marks from which a human deduces their own meaning and which are an indication of a previous human's attempt to put meaning there
- Work: a regulative container of the negative dialectic of text and document

These working definitions seek to provide a schema within which to discuss the objects of digital editions. For the purposes of what follows then, the document is the physical object, whereas the text is the realisation of the meaningful marks in the act of reading. The two, following Eggert, are in a negative dialectic, and the notion of the work as the contingent container of the totality of those relations, is therefore the ultimate object of editing. But it is important to note that the notion of work here is contingent - entirely contextual, and may contain different elements depending on the range of contexts that contribute to the work, and these can refer both to the composition of the work in its genesis and history, but also to the contexts of editing. "Text" as an act of interpretation is of course not neutral and solely discursively internal, it implies a series of external references and

competences in the mind of the reader, and these necessarily are individual -

⁷See for example the survey in Patrick Sahle, "What is a Digital Scholarly Edition?", in Driscoll and Andrews, *Digital Scholarly Editing: Theories and Practices*, 19-40.

⁸Among the most noteworthy are: Hans Walter Gabler, "Theorizing the Digital Scholarly Edition", *Literature Compass*, 7/2 (2010), 43-56; Peter Robinson, "Towards a Theory of Digital Editions." *Variants*, 10 (2010), 105-131; Peter Robinson, "The Digital Revolution in Scholarly Editing", in B. Crostini, G. Eversen and B.M. Jensen, ed., *Ars Edendi Lecture Series, vol. IV*, Stockholm: Stockholm University Press (2016), pp. 181-207; Peter Shillingsburg, *From Gutenberg to Google: Electronic Representations of Literary Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Paul Eggert, *The Work and the Reader in Literary Studies Scholarly Editing and Book History* (Cambridge: CUP, 2019)

this understanding of "text" differs radically from the polyvalent meanings attached to the term over the years. In other circumstances, perhaps, attempting to represent these three dimensions of reading would be illusory, but part of the hypothesis I put forward here is that the digital edition can perhaps mimic some of them. And, again following Eggert:

The scholarly edition enacts, cannot help but enact, a theory or proposition about how the work exists and has existed in the world (rather than as an ideal entity) and therefore about how it may be more profitably encountered in the edition by a new readership. [...] It is a re-presentation, but not a representation (of the work) (p.6-7) ⁹

I take the view that the object of digital editing is "work" editing, that digital editing seeks not to recover an ideal text, but rather to re-present the work in its multiple facets of composition and consumption. These may be authorial, or reception facing, and so an individual edition may choose to create a hierarchy of the elements of the work-in-the-world, but the fluid nature of digital textuality will mean that there is no essential "work itself", rather a contingent container of the emerging dialectic mentioned above. And given the capabilities of digital practice, which in the volume and kinds of data it can provide, there exists the possibility to create in the same digital edition both an archive and an edition. Both, of course, have elements of editorial intervention, and neither is neutral, but the possibility of making explicit the editorial stance on the scale between archive and interpretation will mean that a richer form of editorial practice and consequent reading is possible.¹⁰

On the base of the foregoing commentary on the challenges presented by a native digital world, and on the tripartite theoretical division of elements, what follows is an attempt to sketch how a digital edition of the work that is the *Estoria de Espanna* might be realised as the product of a uniquely digital conceptual architecture. The hypotheses that inform the outline of such a project are:

- The future of our digital textual heritage lies in the editing of "works".
- The editing of a work -which is essentially provisional and contingent- is the editing of **knowledge** about something.
- The editing of a work is the compilation of **assertions of different validity**, based on different forms of authority, all of which must be made explicit.

- Some of these assertions, most notably the textual and documentary ones, are likely to have a higher point in the hierarchy of elements for this edition, but any hierarchy might be reversed, or altered in other ways, for different editions, and different entry points for the user allowed for.

⁹Eggert, *The work*, 6-7.

¹⁰Eggert, *The work*, "an editorially achieved version, a diachronic retrieval from various sources [...] is not 'the work itself'" 143; "Cutting the reader off from the original sources and instead providing a distilled record of them in the form of a textual apparatus was unavoidable in the past, but it no longer is [...] The digital edition of the work [...] can then be built on top of the archive as another layer" 151.

- The material object may, but does not have to be, the axial point around which all of the work is organized.
- Most of the above has always been true, but the possibilities for inclusion of different kinds of knowledge have now increased, and so these underpinning elements, and authority structures, must be made explicit.

For the purposes of my *Estoria de Espanna* example, I will deal with just three classes of knowledge about our work which could be embedded in a digital edition - but many others can be added in multilayer worlds. For the sake of simplicity I have confined myself to elements which would traditionally have been thought of as "textual"; this is not to suggest that extra-discursive knowledge cannot be included in a digital edition nor that it should not be considered central.

If we suppose a truly digital Alfonso -one which was epistemically different to previous editions, including the *Estoria Digital*, and for the moment limiting ourselves to the *Estoria de Espanna*, what would that look like? Here I will speak only of these three elements of knowledge about the work, each of which is linked in some way to the notion and performance of the *Estoria*.

- Sources
- Similar texts/Works
- Variant manuscripts/variance

One way to conceptualise these terms is to think of them as representing the past, present and future of the work at its moment of conception, perhaps reflecting Jauss's comments about the analysis of literary genres as a function of horizons of expectation and fields of experience. They therefore represent the most ¹¹ straightforward of dimensions since they can be conceived of in linear, chronological ways as part of a chain of meaning, but one in which the diverse elements do not necessarily have a fixed existence. Additional kinds of knowledge need not follow this linear pattern, and indeed the digital mode may be especially useful in this multi-dimensional regard. But for the purposes of my example, I will focus solely on this linear relationship.

1. Sources

The preliminary questions to be raised with regard to the incorporation of source materials into a digital edition might be: What is the conceptual link between a text and its sources? How should we think of these links (i) as readers (ii) as editors? If we regard our textual heritage as part of a chain of meaning, perhaps in the mode of the chain of memory so brilliantly analysed by Mary Carruthers,¹² which elements of that chain should be included in the edition?. Of course this is

¹¹ Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), 22-28 and Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia UP, 2004), esp. Chapter 14, "'Space of Experience' and 'Horizon of Expectation': Two Historical Categories", 255-75.

¹² Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990).

directly connected to the question of the status of the edition in the first instance - how does/should the editor decide what to edit, and on what basis? What place has our knowledge of the manner of composition of the work in the edition? This all relates directly to Eggert's notion of the archival impulse, mentioned above, and also to the question of what is not possible that was not beforehand. We can now include a larger range of textual elements in the archival dimension of our editions, but the ability to do something is not a theoretical justification for it.

The quotation provided at the outset of this article provides us with an excellent example of how these questions might be worked out in practice.

De como fue Europa poblada de los hijos de Japhet ¹ Evropa comienza en **un rio que a nonbre thanays**. e de la una parte la cerca el mar mediterraneo. e dela otra el mar oceano.² Este rio thanais nace en los montes ripheos; y es moion entre asia y europa.³ Enel grand mar oceano de la parte de cierço. ay muchas yslas. assi cuemo ingla terra a que llama ron antiqua mientre bretanna la mayor.⁴ **E es ybernia ala que llaman yslanda**

For we know already the fundamental source of Alfonso's presentation of the geography of Europe - it is Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada's *De Rebus Hispaniae*, a work produced in Latin not long before the *Estoria de Espanna*, and by an Archbishop of Toledo who was personally known to Alfonso himself. The equivalent passage in the source text, here reproduced from the best edition, reads as follows:

De Europa et generationibus Iaphet

Europa autem incipiens a Thanay fluuio ex una parte Tirreno, ex alia Septentrionali et Gaditano Oceano terminatur. Thanaym uero hunc dico qui ex Ripheis montibus oriens adeo preceps ruit ut, cum uicina flumina Meothis et Bosforus gelu sepiissime solidentur, solus ex confractuosus montibus euaporans numquam algore Scitio indurescit. Hic Asie Europeque terminus famosus habetur. Fretum autem Gaditanum in finibus Gallecie a Gadibus Herculis nomen habet; Oceanum Septentrionale quod uersus Septentrionem plurimas insulas in se tenet, scilicet, Schanciam, Frisiam, Schociam, Angliam et Hyberniam et alias menores.¹³

In a printed disposition, of course, it would be possible to take note of this, perhaps in the form of a footnote. But given the flexibility of digital space, in a digital edition

it is possible to imagine access to the entire passage, or work as a whole, upon which, in this case, the *Estoria* is based. One might imagine, indeed, that the provision of a representation of the *De Rebus Hispanie* in particular would be a valuable aid to the use of the edition, since this is single most important source for the *Estoria*. However, in conceptual terms, this is no more than a quantitative advance on previous practice, for it does not presuppose any substantive statement about the relationship between the two works. In fact, the example is a particularly fruitful one, for we also know the sources that Rodrigo

¹³Roderici Ximenii De Rada, *Historia de Rebus Hispanie Sive Historia Gothica*, Cura et Studio Juan Fernández Valverde, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis LXXII (Turnhout: Brepols, 1987) I.ii, pp. 10-11.

himself employed in composing his own chronicle - the previous works by Orosio and Jordanes:

- "**Europa** incipit ut dixi sub plaga septentrionis, a flumine Tanai, qua Riphæi montes Sarmatico auersi oceano Tanaim fluuium fundunt,"¹⁴
- "Thanain vero hunc dico, qui ex Ripheis montibus deiectus adeo preceps ruit, ut, cum vicina flumina sive Meotis et Bosforus gelu solidentur, solus annuum confragosis montibus vaporatus, numquam Scythico duriscit algore. Hic Asiae Europaeque terminus famosus habetur."¹⁵

The implied chain of connections could, of course, be represented in print, at least in short form. But the possibilities of a digital archive allow for a much more granular representation of the textual and conceptual links between all of the elements at play here. Whether or not the Alfonsine composers of the *Estoria* were even aware of the back history of *De Rebus Hispanie* is not truly relevant. The extent to which the Orosio and Jordanes passages might form a part of the edition of knowledge about Alfonso's *Estoria de Espanna* is an entirely different question, and not one which need detain us. In this case knowledge about the sources is provided in various layers, and at different removes from the *Estoria* passage. How (or indeed whether) to represent this in a digital edition which is an edition of knowledge and meaningful assertions, following Tara Andrews, is central to a form of editing of a conceptually distinct order. To what extent, then, is the *De Rebus Hispanie* (and indeed the others, at however many removes) a part of the *work* that is the *Estoria de Espanna*? The contention here is that however suspicious we might be of extra-documentary (but not extra-textual, in the formulation above) evidence in the establishment, this level of knowledge about the *Estoria* is indeed a significant part of that work, albeit one that might occupy a different order of hierarchical space as the backend chain of meaning in the resulting edition. And the same is therefore true, at a further hierarchical distance, for the Jordanes and Orosio.

2. Parallel texts/works - overlapping hierarchies and intersecting bodies of knowledge

If source works represent the backstory of the chain of meaning of any medieval text, what then of those documents and texts which are contemporary products of the same or related environments, but which would not generally have been thought of as part of the work concerned? To what extent could, or indeed should, such material be incorporated into the digital edition in its realisation as knowledge about and meaningful assertions on the work? The question arises in respect of medieval writing especially since its mode of composition also

¹⁴ Pauli Orosii, *Historiae Adversum Paganos*, 1.2.4;
<http://www.attalus.org/latin/orosius1.html> [17/12/21]

¹⁵ Iordanes, *De origine actibusque Getarum*, 1.45.
<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/iordanes1.html> [17/12/21]

predates modern notions of authority and individualism - and perhaps for this ¹⁶ reason it may provide something of a pointer to how such questions will evolve in the digital world whose fluidity is both similar and different.

Here again, the *Estoria* provides with a significant example.

**Dond fue tomado este nombre
emperador e que quiere dezir:.**

¹ En latin dizen parare por appareiar.
Et esta palabra parare segund cuenta
hugitio; componese con Jn. e dizen
Jmperare. ² Et es Jmperare en
el nuestro language tanto cuemo
mandar sobre otros e sennorear. ³ E
deste Jmperare por tal mandar uiene
este nonbre Jmperator que es por
Emperador. por que ell Emperador es
sennor que manda e sennorea sobre
otros e sobre Reys.

EED 116.1-3 E₁, fol. 57va¹⁷

The passage comes in the interpolation between the end of the Roman civil wars and the beginning of the empire of Julius Caesar. It is a section that has been much discussed, not least because it appears to be in the vicinity of a textual frontier and it may represent a section of the chronicle which was composed first. It might be imagined that the nature of the passage in question, which deals ¹⁸ with the fundamentals of empire and emperors, would have been of particular interest to Alfonso in the 1270s, precisely the moment at which his two significant histories were being composed. A recent critical edition of this passage reads as follows:

D'ESTE NOMBRE EMPERADOR DÓNDE FUE TOMADO E QUÉ QUIERE DEZIR E A QUIÉN DEVE
SER LLAMADO

Dizen en el latín *parare* por aparejar, e esta palabra *parare* segunt Ugucio e otros compónese con in, e dizen *imperare*, e *imparare* en el latín quiere dezir en el lenguaje de Castilla como mandar todos e señorear, e d'este *imperare* por tal manera viene este nombre *imperator* que es por emperador; e emperador por mandador, porque el emperador es señor que manda e aseñorea sobre otros e sobre reyes, e non ninguno sobre él si non Dios.¹⁹

¹⁶ See for example the classic work on medieval authorship: Alastair J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (Pennsylvania: UP, 2010).¹⁷<https://rbdigital.realbiblioteca.es/s/rbme/item/13129#?c=&m=&s=&cv=126&xywh=138%2C282%2C682%2C384>

¹⁸ Diego Catalan, *De la silva textual al taller historiográfico alfonsí. Códices, crónicas, versiones y cuadernos de trabajo* (Madrid: UAM/Fundación Menéndez Pidal, 1997), pp.41-47.

¹⁹ Alfonso X el Sabio, *General Estoria*, Quinta y sexta partes, Tomo II, edición de Pedro Sánchez-Prieto y Belén Almeida (Madrid: Biblioteca Castro, 2009) p.471.

With the exception of apparently minor questions of orthographic detail, and the rather more significant addition of the final sentence, it would generally be accepted that this is the same text. However, as can be seen from the footnote, this passage is in fact from an edition of the *General Estoria*, and there are other similar passages of the *Estoria de Espanna* which also appear almost verbatim in the universal history. In the terms in which I have sketched these questions, the ²⁰ two passages are different *texts*, that is, the different contexts of reading of each *document*, imply that a different meaning is arrived at. We therefore assume that in those contexts, the meeting of document and text in the negative dialectic outlined by Eggert implies that each forms part of a different *work*, ones to which we conventionally refer as the *EE* and *GE* respectively. And yet, the passages are, at sentence level at least, fundamentally the same, and once could therefore regard the *GE* text as a variant of the *EE*. If, for example, one were to attempt to edit the entire work that is the extant Alfonsine project -something which is no longer unimaginable- the status of these passages would then be quite different. Lengthy sections dealing with Julius Caesar, for example, appear verbatim in both chronicles, and a digital edition of the whole project would clearly outline this in a way which, in print at least, was previously left to the mental extrapolation processes of the reader.

<p>dizen que este ninno salio de luego con cabellos. e con una uedija apartada mientre mas luenga que todos los otros cabellos. 6 Et en latin dizen Cesares por uedija. o por cabelladura. o por cerda de cabellos. Onde fue tomado desta palaura Cesaries este nombre Cesar. e llamado a aquel ninno por aquella cerda con que nascio. E segund esto cesar tanto quiere dezir cuemo el de la uedija o el de la cerda. o el de la crin.ca por tod esto es dicho cesaries.</p>	<p>La segunda razón, porque este niño salló de luego con cabellos e con una vedija apartadamente más luenga que todas las otras, e en el latín dizen <i>cesaries</i> por vedija o cabelladura o cerda de cabellos, onde fue tomado d'esta palabra cesaries este nombre César e llamado a aquel niño por por aquella cerda con que nació, es segunt esto César quiere dezir tanto como <i>el de la cerda, el de la vedija</i> o aun <i>el de la crin</i>, ca por todo esto es dicho <i>cesaries</i>.</p>
<p>E1, fol. 57r GE, p.433</p>	

Here again we have documents containing meaningful marks that seem to be very much the same. Extra-discursive knowledge, in this case both the importance of empire to Alfonso and the fact that his own first-born son was known as Fernando de la Cerda, adds to our understanding of the passage in a multi-dimensional way. Given that such cross-work linkage is now possible, it is incumbent on editors to consider how (or if) this should be done, and what status the resulting textual hierarchies would possess. Perhaps, in this sense, a framework of relative textual

²⁰ It seems clear that the direction of copy was from the *EE* to the *GE*, although the composition of the two ran in parallel.

distance from an assumed core of the edition would help to create the necessary editorial (and readerly) conceptual architecture for the edition.

3. Variant manuscripts/variance

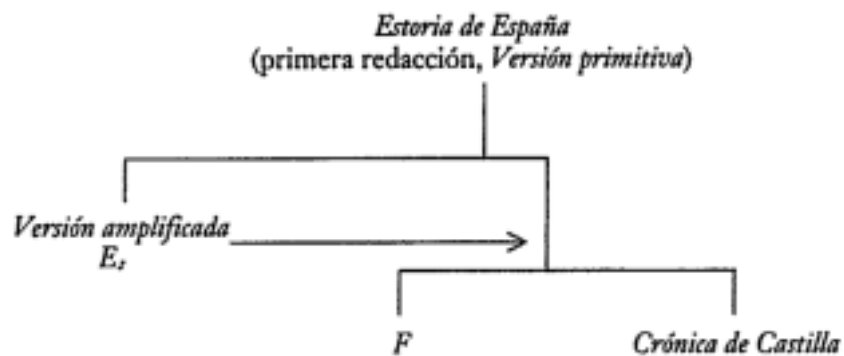
The third relationship to take into account in my limited example is that of the reception and reading of the work; something which is assumed to be reflected in the variant manuscripts of the work which were produced in the subsequent centuries. The *Estoria de Espanna* again provides an excellent use case, for thanks to the (non-digital) philological work carried out on the chronicle, we know that there are multiple versions and moments of composition and perhaps 40 direct variant manuscripts in a range of guises. If we were to take the traditional approach, it would be reasonable to read these in a linear fashion and hierarchically. The ²¹ cultural frame of print meant that a hierarchy of reading was necessary, not because this was necessarily explicitly desired, but rather because of physical limitations. Alternative manuscripts therefore came to be considered precisely as variant, and if there was a space for their consideration beyond what they could contribute to the establishment of an ideal text, then this was left in the manner of a prompt to the skilled reader. These limitations may no longer apply, so what could be the conceptual and practical space for additional manuscript readings in the digital sphere? Should these hierarchies be reconceived, and if so, how? If we take an overarching view, we might treat all of these manuscripts as part of the same work, in traditional fashion, but other dynamics of textual interplay can now be addressed in editing, and which could not be done beforehand. If we aim to take these into account, what is the implication for the act of editing? What *Estoria de Espanna* results from this? And what are the "rules of the game" in principle? Textual editing has a very sound set of scientific principles which evolved over a lengthy period of testing. Can they also apply to digital editing? And, if not, what principles are needed? Similarly, the reading experience might be accounted for in digital editions, and by this I mean both the reader of the edition and the contemporary reader of the manuscript in its historicised existence. Should *this* be taken into account? I mention all of this, not necessarily because I think the answer is "yes" but rather because the questions *can* and ought to be asked. There would be no place for them in print, but in a different conceptual frame - in line with Eggert's point about the possible - there may well be. But we have not yet worked out what the implications of that conceptual frame might be. Examples of the implications of these questions abound in the textual, or workly, tradition of the *Estoria de Espanna*.

²¹ Rather in the like of Jauss's comments about genre, we understand the tradition of the chronicle *work* historically, as a function of its unfolding over time. But the nature of that unfolding and that resultant understanding is not the traditional one, necessarily. That is, the work that is the *EE* in the 21st century is not the same as its 13th century equivalent.

		
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The three images, chosen from the 27 possible exemplars of the *Estoria* which contain this section, all represent the same chapter opening that I employed above. A quick scan of these reveals that the marks on the page appear to vary little from the equivalent in E₁. And for the purposes of generating a printed edition, there would be little they could add, at this point, to the object of the exercise. But a similarly cursory glance at the images also reveals that each has its own history, that the *mise en page* and *mise en texte* of each have their own specificities, and that in the notion of edition as the edifice constructed on the archive, each of these in its own way can contribute to a wider notion of the work that is the *Estoria de Espanna*. In this sense, the digital editor is compelled to ask what text is being generated in concert with the document here? Can these manuscripts then be treated as anything other than variant? And if so, what might that be?

These examples of how to treat variance are relatively uncomplicated, because they come from a section of the *Estoria* for which we have an authorised Alfonsine exemplar, produced in the royal *scriptorium*. But most medieval manuscripts are not like this, as the tools of philology have demonstrated to us. Especially noteworthy in this regard is the sixth textual section identified by Diego Catalán and Inés Fernández-Ordóñez, after the reign of Vermudo III, and for which there is no direct Alfonsine evidence:



²²Diagram from Inés Fernández Ordóñez, “La transmisión textual de la “*Estoria de Espanna*” y de las

principales “Crónicas” de ella derivadas”, in *Alfonso X el Sabio y las crónicas de España*, al cuidado de Inés Fernández-Ordóñez (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 2000) p.230.

Here the surviving exemplars all provide indirect evidence of an Alfonsine *Estoria*. Indeed, current research suggests it is unlikely that there ever was a completed Alfonsine version of this section. If in the examples above, the question was whether the evidence could be treated as anything but variant, here the question is different, for what can it mean to speak of variance if *everything* is variant? Of course, this is not a drawback to editing, it *is* editing.



The question is therefore how do we conceive of these representations of the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, as *Estoria de Espanna*? We can think of them as contributing to our knowledge of many things, as evidence for many things, but what is their relationship to each other and to the work that is the *Estoria de Espanna* which was never completed at this point? And how might digital editions leverage these relationships in future? This is the key question for our editorial future, and one which may have a usefully Alfonsine answer. It is one which is related to the wider question of knowledge and understanding and which speaks to a possible epistemic shift in the nature of editing and our interactions with textual heritage.

Visualising works, establishing links

There are different ways in which these three sets of relationships (not to mention the other myriad possibilities of "knowledge about") might be incorporated into a digitally-native edition of the work that is the *Estoria*. In what follows, I propose a number of ways of conceiving of such an edition. In a printed text, ironically, these can only be represented two dimensionally, so the reader will have to imagine that screen depth allows for the illusion of alterative dimensions. This mental activity of creating conceptual multi-dimensionality from a two dimensional document is, of course, precisely what the medieval or modern reader did. But the mental activity can also be represented, in some way at least, visually through the impression of screen depth.

One way to conceive of the kinds of relationships between different documents I have outlined here is as follows:



That is, we present the meaningful marks on a page, through the mode of editorially interpreted transcriptions it is true, and seek to relate these to each other, and perhaps to images of the document, in some way. Presented in this manner, there is no hierarchy of interpretation. The diagram allows for the existence of some kind of Platonic ideal form of the work in the tiny section where the documents and their consequent texts meet but there is little by way of editorial interpretation of the nature of the relationship between the elements of the edition. Any number of additional documents could be added, but the theoretical stance is not explicit, not interpretation truly allowed for. In one sense, this is a representation of the most basic advantage of the digital disposition - its ability to store and present data. It thus broadly represents Eggert's archival impulse, but its digital Bédieriste approach, implying a suspicion of interpretation beyond presentation of the evidence, it does not represent any kind of qualitative leap in the nature of editing, nor an epistemic change in interactions with textual heritage and it abdicates responsibility for editorial expertise.

An alternative might be to include a focal point as an element of hierarchy, in the understanding that in a digital mode any of the nodes provides a point of entry. Thus, although one of the documents can be privileged - and of course that can be an edited Lachmannian of Platonic ideal text if required- the mode of data organization and display allows for the reader to take an alternative view. The representation of privileged text and variant satellites would then look this this:

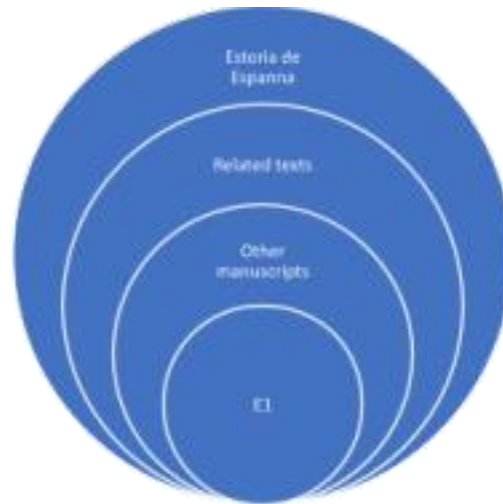


This mode of organization could also include variants from, for example, the *General Estoria*:



Here we have the representation of the work that is the *Estoria de Espanna* which includes a document which we agree is not the *EE*, and which therefore takes some account of the range of knowledge I alluded to above as constitutive of the edition. However, what is most at issue here is that the ethical basis for the organization of the edition is not clear, and furthermore, it does not allow for the establishment of connections between elements of evidence which are unmediated by their relationship to the privileged document.

An alternative way to consider the relationships in the work/system that is the *Estoria de Espanna* is a nest which is contained by the contingent notion of the work:



This is perhaps a better representation of what a digital edition might do, beyond the capabilities of printed editions. However, unlike the digital world, and implicitly the mental frame offered by any reading, it is a closed system, and it offers no especial expression of the relationship between the parts. The hierarchy is provided by the presence of the sole Alfonsine manuscript, but it does not allow for the situation in which there is no comfortably authoritative manuscript or version. Attempts to represent the possibility of dynamic links between textual elements are not easily achieved, not least because in most reading practices such links are made conceptually, in the mind, as part of the act of constituting the text, in the sense I outlined above.

Another reason why the establishment of such links is problematic specifically in digital contexts is that most digital editions, the *Estoria Digital* included, are based around the use of xml and the Text Encoding Initiative. The following is the example with which I started, in this format.

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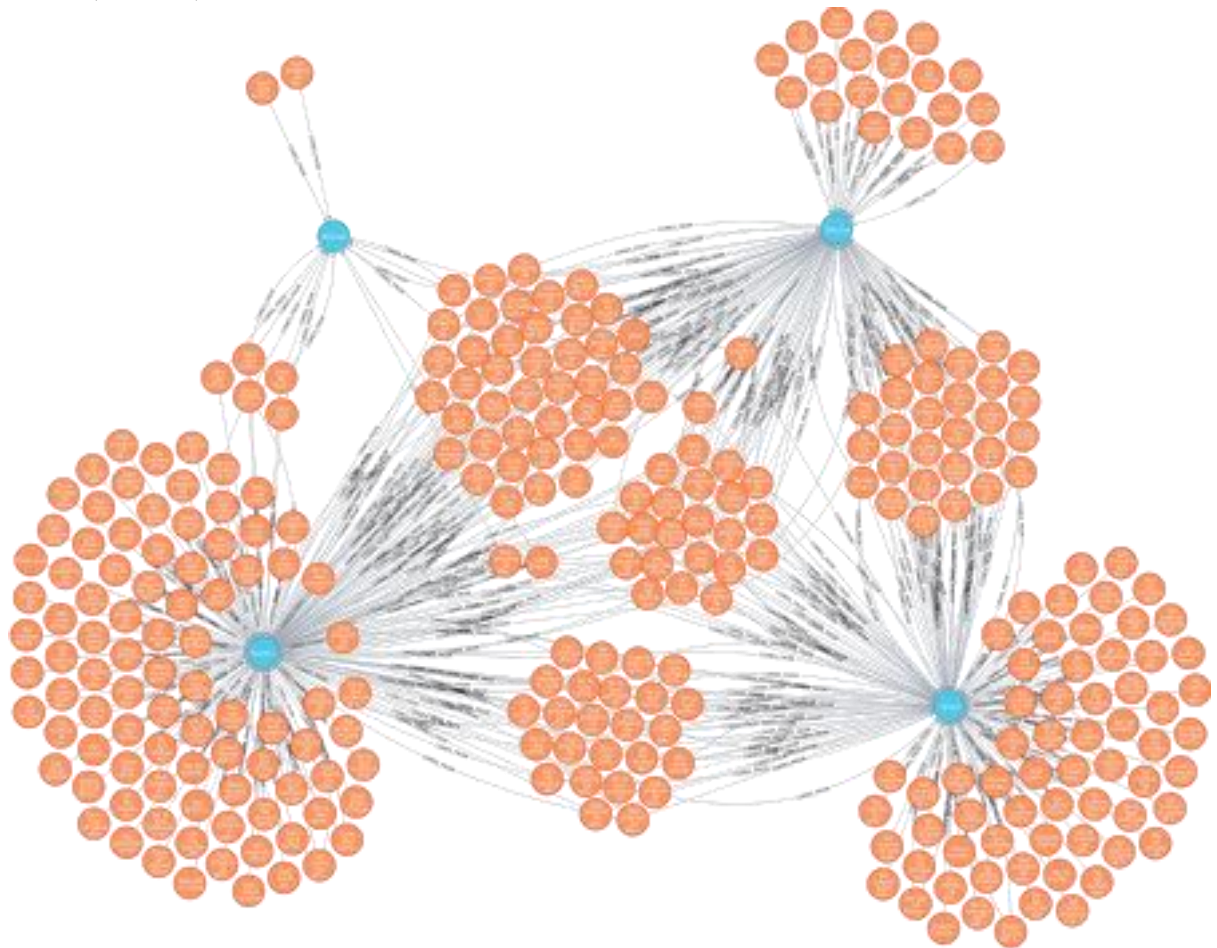
<lib break="no">ene q<am>/am><ex>ue</ex> sus digamos primero q<am>/am><ex>n</ex> es euna
<lib break="no">pa, e quantas otras tierras se encierran en ella.</ab></div><div nu="4" corresp="#PCGcap3">
  <lib><head n="Rubric" rend="hl">De como fue Europa poblada de los fijos d<am>/am><ex>e</ex> Japhet</head><note>PCG cap. 3, </note>
<lib><ab n="180"><hi rend="init4">E</hi>vropa comienza en un rio q<am>/am><ex>ue</ex> a no<am>/am><ex>n</ex> bre
<lib>thanays, e de la una parte la cerca el
<lib>mar mediterraneo, e dela otra el mar
<lib>oceano.</ab><ab n="200"> Este rio thanais nace en los
<lib>montes ripheos; y es moian entre asia y europa.</ab><ab n="300">
<lib>Enel grand mar oceano de la parte de cierço, ay
<lib>muchas ysias, assi cuemo ingla terra a q<am>/am><ex>ue</ex> llama
<lib break="no">ron antiqua mientre bretanna la mayor.</ab><ab n="400"> E es
<lib>ybernia ala q<am>/am><ex>ue</ex> llaman yslanda.</ab><ab n="500"> E son y escocia e
<lib>escancia a q<am>/am><ex>ue</ex> llaman nuruaga.</ab><ab n="600"> e es y thisia.</ab><ab n="700"> E ot<am>/am><ex>ra</ex>
<lib>ysla q<am>/am><ex>ue</ex> llaman cile.</ab><ab n="800"> Todas estas son de parte de ci
<lib break="no">/erço, las unas contra occident, e las otras co<am>/am><ex>n</ex> tra

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xml-TEI is an extremely flexible and powerful tool for marking up text. But there is a problem with this format at the level of relationality of different documents, in that it structures all of the transcription as linear data; something which is logical because the TEI encodes TEXT not knowledge, or works in the sense in which I have been using the term. This is very powerful at the level of the individual document, but because xml-TEI regards everything as internally coherent on the page, the effort to incorporate extra-discursive information is problematic, and the necessity to avoid overlapping hierarchies gives rise to complicated solutions both at transcription and text processing levels.

Knowledge graphs, standoff properties and distributed linkage

A possible way towards an epistemic advance in digital editing is provided by the use of graph technologies. Here the compilation of data is not linear but ²³ rather more easily relational. The principal advantage of such an approach is that the text/document is not the endpoint of the edition, but rather one (perhaps the most important one means of considering knowledge about the work. A recent example of how this might be useful is presented by the following graph designed by Elena Caetano Álvarez and Andreas Kuczera, which represents the chapters of the Roman history in the *Estoria de Espanna* (in orange), linked to the sources of the work (in blue):

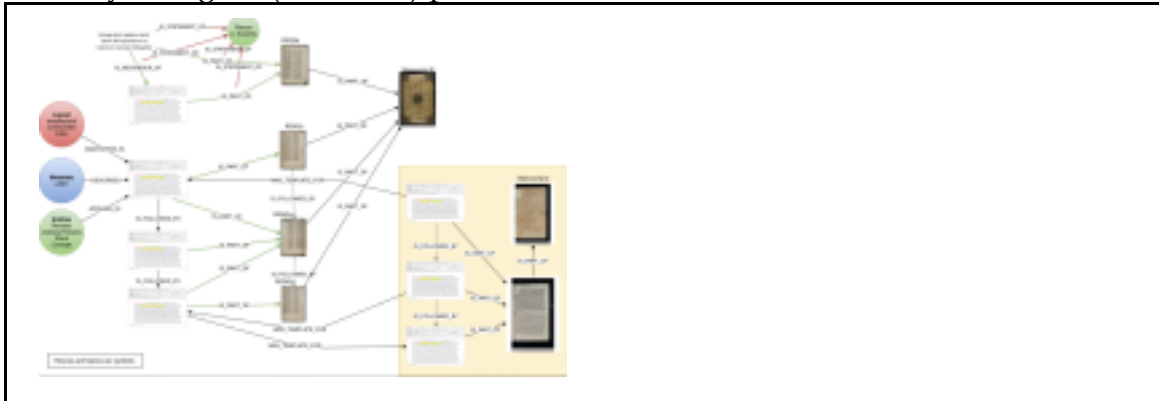


In this disposition, particular knowledge represented -source works- is instantly visible, but this is also merely a tool of access to the text/documents of the *Estoria*. One might easily imagine that the text of any of the witnesses of the chronicle, or indeed the images of the manuscripts, or indeed an edited version, could also appear here, and allow the reader to read any of the witnesses

²³ For further reading on knowledge graphs, see Alessandro Negro, *Graph-Powered Machine Learning* (Shelter Island NY: Manning, 2021). For a concrete example see The Hildegraph Project <https://www.adwmainz.de/projekte/das-buch-der-briefe-der-hildegard-von-bingen-genese-struktur-komposition/digitale-editions-umgebung.html>; and for an explanation of the value of standoff markup in practice see The Charles Harpur Critical Archive, <https://charles-harpur.org/Home/Site/>. [both 17/12/21]

(however broadly understood) of the *Estoria de Espanna* in traditionally linear fashion, but also as a function of any of the classes of knowledge (here sources) which are included in the edition. The recent Hildegraph edition and the edition of

the glosses to the *Etymologiae* provide an idea of how such technologies might be used in future to model textual knowledge and create a revised notion of the object of study in digital (medieval) practice.



<https://www.adwmainz.de/projekte/das-buch-der-briefe-der-hildegard-von-bingen-genese-struktur-komposition/digitale-editions-umgebung.html>

<https://db.innovatingknowledge.nl/edition/#right-network>

The possibilities for the use of standoff properties in respect of Alfonsine works are enormous. The limits of print do not allow for truly multi-dimensional representations, but at its most basic level, the digital *Estoria de Espanna* could contain the following:

In this example, each node represents the full text/document of a manuscript or printed edition, linked dynamically to all of the other nodes. The editor could choose to foreground any of these, but the reader could also reverse this by choosing a different access point. Since the archive of documents is the base on which this rests, any possible linkage of elements within, and potentially without, the system is permitted. This is therefore contingent work editing, and ²⁴ editing of knowledge, for the work that is the *Estoria* is here delimited by the elements of the (open) textual system which is presented, and which can be made up of any type of relevant knowledge, however proximate to or distant from the moment of composition of the work. Print editions already do this, but leave the conceptual organization up to the trained reader who must create the knowledge system prompted by the work on the basis of editorial and textual prompts. Just as in print, in the digital frame, each of these gives rise to complex set of relationships on their own merits, so that the presentation is contingent – the hierarchically privileged centre is available for recasting in different editions/objects of study. The mental frames of reading are catered for both through prompts for extra-textual knowledge and in linear reading. And the same material can be reconfigured in the context of a different work.

Thus, one could posit the same elements linked in a *GE* edition, but this time the hierarchy works in a different direction. Thus the editing of knowledge about something (in this case the *General Estoria* - defined for the purposes of the edition, but only the edition) also includes an element of the *Estoria de Espanna* as linked knowledge. Indeed the *General Estoria* might be even more paradigmatic a case of medieval textuality and born-digital textual editing. For in its totality there is also a set of linked works - Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the Bible, Lucan's *Farsalia*, Paulo Orosio to name just four of the best known- which both comprise

²⁴So, for example, the prologue to the *Estoria* might include a network of knowledge about the sources etc. but also about the very notion of medieval prologue. The inclusion of information which is extra-documentary but not necessarily extra-textual, (in Eggert's terms) would not have been possible in print both because physically impossible and because readers might in the past have been suspicious of such addition. But these knowledge networks will soon be possible, and the epistemic status of the edition changed as a result.

it and stand on their own, both textually and in the mind of the reader. The palimpsestic nature of the *GE* as a translation of the Vulgate which includes Jerome's own commentary, is an especially revealing example.

It should be noted, however, that, in line with what was mentioned above, the interface (and indeed programming generally) will be an increasingly important element in the construction of editions. Competence in, or at least familiarity with, such questions will also have to be built into the evolution of the editing discipline, for there is a difference between what lies beneath and what it possible on the surface. One might regard these things as esoteric, and not of relevance ²⁵ to

humanities scholars. But the new world is not just about form, but also content, and that how future scholars interact with Alfonso, and indeed how Alfonso and his project is understood, depends on the ability of humanities' scholars to shape these things. And there is a model for us to do so in the encyclopaedic Alfonsine world of different kinds of knowledge interacting in a range of ways and cultural forms - in this sense the *work* could be the Alfonsine project as a whole.

Where, then might all of this lead in the light of the hypotheses I outlined at the beginning, and in particular the suggestion that the subject matter of digital critical editing is that of a contingent "work", understood as the assembly of meaningful assertions of different authoritative value? I would emphasise that any editorial project must inevitably take a place on what Eggert describes as a sliding scale between the archival impulse and the editorial impulse. Although editors can choose where to situate themselves along this continuum, it remains the case that the archival impulse, the gathering of the raw materials of editing, usually understood as the assembly of transcriptions, must come first. It is also ²⁶ the case that the archival impulse also implies the exercise of editorial judgment, as it always did - but the choice of elements may now be larger. However, in a world in which the composition of data is increasingly automated, the nature of that editorial judgment will also change. Tools such as Transkribus can already convert printed text into recurring patterns of 1s and 0s (as it is doing in the case of the *Siete Partidas*), and it and its comparators will soon be able to do so confidently with manuscript text, so the theoretical battle over the status of the data used in digital critical editing is also yet to be resolved. In one sense, the ²⁷ battle is one of classifying and explaining; this, of course, has always been the role of philology, and it will undoubtedly continue to be the case. But perhaps in a different way. Why, one might ask, is any of this *epistemically* different? Is it not really the case that what is happening is that we have become able to do what we have always done, just faster and perhaps more efficiently. The response to this would be a

²⁵ The incorporation of code as a fundamental element of the edition is addressed by Jeffrey C. Witt, "Digital Scholarly Editions and API Consuming Applications", in *Digital Scholarly Editions as Interfaces*, 219-48.

²⁶ There is a drawback here in a hard distinction between document and text, one which is catered for in Eggert's symbiotic relationship. For the editorial/archival establishment of the document is not the document itself, but rather a part of the edition that comes about as a result of reading (and writing). In this sense the categories of text and document are analytical tools and not the foundations of a belief system.

²⁷ *Siete Partidas* Digital: <https://7partidas.hypotheses.org>; Transkribus: <https://readcoop.eu/transkribus/?sc=Transkribus> [both 17/12/21]

resounding no, for a variety of reasons, and principally because I contend that the digital form of editing (in this case, but all cultural interactions more widely) is not merely a question of form, but also of fundamental principles, as I hinted in the general questions at the outset. To conclude, I will concentrate on a number of elements specifically targeted at how we might interact with and understand Alfonso and his project in the future.

One might legitimately object that what I outline here is not truly an answer to the question "what should be included in future digital editions of Alfonso's *Estoria*". In one sense, however, Alfonso himself gives us an answer to this question, in the

famous prologue to the *Estoria de Espanna*.

nos don alffonso por la graçia de dios. Rey de Castiella. de Toledo de. Leon. de Gallizia. de Seuilla. de ordaua. de Murcia. de Iahen. e dell Algarue. ¶ Mandamos ayuntar quantos libros pudimos auer de Istorias en que alguna cosa contasse de los fechos despanna. ²⁰ e tomamos de la cronica dell arçobispo don Rodrigo que fizo por mandado del Rey don Fernando nuestro padre. [†] e de la de Maestre luchas obispo de Tuy. e de paulo orosio e del lucano. e de sant Esidro el primero. e de sant Alffonso. e de sant esidro el mancebo. e de Idacio obispo de Gallizia. e de Sulpicio obispo de gasconna. e de los otros escriptos de los concilios de Toledo. e de don Jordan chancellor del sancto palacio. ¶ e de claudio Tholomeo que departio del cerco de la tierra mejor que otro sabio fasta la su sazón. e de dion que escriuio uerdadera la estoria de los Godos. e de Ponpeyo trogo. e dotras estorias de Roma. las que pudimos auer que contassen algunas cosas del fecho despanna. ²¹ ¶ e compusimos este libro de todos los fechos que fallar se pudieron della; desde el tiempo de Noe fasta este nuestro. e esto fizimos por que fuesse sabudo el comienço de los espannoles. E₁, 2v. EED 1.19-21.

This act of definition of the book specifically refers to a whole host of object domains about authority, textual composition and reading and which are, implicitly, a part of the wider understanding of the "libro" - they are, then, the "knowledge" that might be the focus of a digital *Estoria de Espanna*. The work that is the *Estoria* is thus not just the physical object, but also the chain of physical and conceptual phenomena which participate in proximity to, or at a distance from, its composition and reception. The limits of my current imagination, in what I have mention here, confine knowledge about the *Estoria de Espanna* to the material manuscripts of it and its sources, related texts and reception history. But one can conceive of an editorial future in which knowledge about (for example) syntax, or prosopography, or geolocation, or the range of editions and translations constantly being produced could also form a more distant part of the digital Alfonsine work, or network. And it might also be pointed out, as suggested above, that the same data that is central to an edition of the work *Estoria de Espanna*, could also appear, in perhaps more peripheral fashion, in an edition of a different work. This fluid notion of the edition is why Eggert's formulation of the contingent dialectic between document and text is so useful in outlining a theoretical framework - for if in the future any data is available to be selected in compiling the edition, then the very concept of work must be

sufficiently flexible to account for this. And it must be one which takes account of different classes of information and different kinds of assertions, however proximate or distant from the moment of composition.

To misquote Adorno, then, the manuscript (or indeed the edition) does not exhaust the work conceived - for that work is necessarily open-ended - a contingent and ephemeral digital re-presentation. But then, if we consider the ²⁸ Alfonsine project as a whole, in all its unfinished encyclopaedic glory, it is perhaps the case that in seeking a model for the composition of knowledge with its attendant prompts about relationships to other bodies of knowledge, in the manner suggested by

Mary Carruthers in her *Book of Memory*, we might find that a pointer to an epistemically different conceptual architecture lies precisely in Alfonso's own project. As the prologue to the *Estoria* shows, it has *always* been ²⁹ the case that works are fluid, made up of multiple influences and external prompts. Previously our ability to represent these was constrained by the printed page. What has changed now is not truly the essential nature of the work (if there is such thing as an essence), but rather our ability to re-present it, to reveal more closely something of the network of elements within and beyond the document and text which go into making a work. And in Carruthers's characterisation of medieval memory as both a store and a prompt in a dynamic relationship with textual representations we may also find a pointer. The chain of memory of which she speaks might well serve us as a starting point for a revised conception of what digital critical editions are. We are all, of course, more than familiar with the Alfonsine textual moments which point to authorities. Thus, when the *Estoria de Espanna* tells us "segund cuenta eusebio", or "cuenta don Lucas de Thuy" or "el arzobispo don Rodrigo" or "ouidio", we understand that there is both a call to something exterior, in the sense of another work, but also an interior element of reading practice. These calls are both constitutive of the *Estoria* and an appeal to a readership which almost certainly is familiar with these works, and perhaps has memorised them (certainly in the case of many works alluded to in the *General Estoria* in which the Bible plays so central a part). Our editorial practice to date necessarily only takes account of the internal part of this discursive element, but not as if we were medieval readers, similarly familiar with the work referred to. Now, however, the possibility of virtual links, perhaps mimicking those mental and physical links arises. That is, we no longer have to represent the manuscript text and document *solely* as something internally coherent, but we can *also* do so as part of a chain of understanding, a linkage of elements of varying distance from the marks on the manuscript, and which might potentially be the object of textual and memory prompts on the part of the reader. In the limited sense in which I have employed these terms, what has changed is not the document, which remains the same, nor even the text, in the sense of the possible meaningful readings of it - reading can still be linear, or transversal, or logical, or distracted, just as it always was, but rather the ways in which these things come together - the dissolving negative dialectic, in Eggert's terms, contained in the ever-provisional, ever-contingent work. The novelty of the digital edition therefore lies in the conceptual frameworks in which it operates - the possibility to understand the elements of a work both as part of a

²⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Continuum, 1973) p.5.

²⁹ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, esp. Chapter 7 "Memory and the Book".

self-contained internally coherent whole, and as part of a chain of wider meaning exterior to it. This is perhaps where the epistemic advance lies, the edition of a wider sense of (contingent) work, rather than (only) text. And the establishment of such editions therefore becomes both a propaedeutic and substantive question - that is, such editions will not just provide new knowledge, but also a new way of conceiving of that knowledge in the first instance. This may sound like a condemnation of print editions and the physical book, but nothing is further from the truth. In fact, it is a call for digital editors to stop attempting what print editions

do much better and to focus their attention on different mental reading practices. We have centuries of practice of producing physical books, which for their purposes are scarcely perfectible. The physical object, and the pleasure of reading associated with them, have a unique value. The ambition of the Alfonsine project tells us that the way in which reading can work in a different order of things has not yet been achieved in twenty first century modes.