

Textual Communities. An Environment for Online Collaborative Editing

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The Textual Communities environment, now in version 2 after a major rewrite, differs from other systems for online collaborative editing, in several major respects. Firstly, it offers complete support for both page-by-page editing of the document and for encoding of the structural elements of text contained within the text (as: chapter, paragraph, sentence). Page-by-page editing is essential to any collaborative system for editing, as it is usual to assign editing tasks by the page. However, encoding of the structural elements within the text is critical to any edition which aspires to be scholarly: without this, addressing textual elements across multiple documents (necessary for collation) or within a document (necessary for citation) is impossible. Accordingly, Textual Communities is built upon a view of texts as instances of multiple overlapping sets of trees, with an underlying architecture which sees textual units as leaves shared by multiple trees. Thus, it is particularly well-suited to encoding of texts in multiple documents, requiring collation of these texts. To this end, Textual Communities includes the Collation Editor developed by the Institute for Textual Scholarship and Electronic Editing at the University of Birmingham, itself built on CollateX.

Secondly, Textual Communities is designed for use by scholars who know a great deal about the texts they are editing, but are not expert (and do not want to be expert) in formal encoding systems such as XML (in its TEI incarnation, or any other) or in computer architecture. However, TEI documents are fully supported as an input format, with encoding of individual pages typically performed in XML/TEI encoding, and as an output format, if desired. Further, Textual Communities provides a sharp division between the publication interface and the development interface. Within Textual Communities, editors and their collaborators may import documents and images, build and manipulate the edition page by page and section by section, and preview their work with and without encoding as they go. When it comes to publication, Textual Communities offers a powerful API which permits direct access to the multiple tree representations held by the project database, so permitting publication both page by page (show me this page of this manuscript both in image and transcription) and text section by section (show me all the versions of this paragraph in all the documents).

This poster and demonstration will show Textual Communities in action: user registration and login via email/password and social media, community creation, collaborator management, image import and transcription, collation and editorial output, the underlying data models and the data storage (as JSON objects stored in a no-SQL database), and the API which gives access to all editorial

materials. Several major projects currently using Textual Communities, incorporating some 50,000 pages of document images and transcriptions and hundreds of active users, will also be shown.