

Classical Philology Goes Digital. Working on Textual Phenomena of Ancient Texts
Universität Potsdam, February 16-17, 2017

Digitale Datenbank zum Gleichnis in der antiken epischen Dichtung (GaeD) Digital Database of Ancient Epic Similes

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Readers of ancient epic will be struck by the prevalence of similes and comparisons¹ in the narratives. Such devices are employed to make the epics more vivid in the mind's eye of the audience, since they illustrate facts and situations with images. Therefore, a systematic study of similes offers deeper insight into the narratives and the shared cultural conceptions among the poets and their audience.

The primary aim of GaeD is to create a resource to collect, display, and analyze the imagery conveyed by similes, that means to produce a comprehensive and innovative research resource – a collection of all similes (and comparisons) in ancient epic poetry from the earliest Greek epics to late antiquity,² and in the process, to develop generic tools, methods, and techniques for accessing and processing the collection. The dataset is intended for use in both a synchronic and a diachronic perspective. From a synchronic perspective, users can discover models for ancient similes, forms that were popular in a given period or group of texts. In a diachronic perspective, crosslinking will offer the possibility to compare imagery of different periods, spaces, genres, authors or works and thereby create a foundation to study the relation between society, literature and the imagery projected in similes. This analysis will show how ancient authors use similes in a constant dialogue with their predecessors through imitation, emulation, and reinterpretation within evolving historical, institutional, political, and cultural frameworks. In particular, the dataset will highlight the changes and constants in the historical and cultural continuum which led from pagan antiquity to Christianity. The semantically linked dataset will make this process of continuity and transition clear by leveraging a formal ontology with well-documented criteria. In this way, we will be able to compare texts from widely different places and times on the basis of consistent criteria.

The project is still at the very beginning. The presentation at the workshop “Classical Philology Goes Digital“ made purposes, benefits and challenges of GaeD a subject of discussion.

¹ In the following “simile” is used for simile and comparison.

² Narrative and didactic, pagan and Christian including fragmentary works.