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BURCKHARDTSOURCE.ORG
THE UNPUBLISHED CORRESPONDENCE
TO JACOB BURCKHARDT

ABSTRACT: Burckhardsource.org is the semantic Digital Library designed and developed by EUROCORR ERC Advanced Grant Project, which hosts the on-going critical edition work on the correspondence of over 300 European intellectuals with the Swiss cultural historian Jacob Burckhardt over a period of more than half a century. Aim of this article is to outline an introduction to EUROCORR[1] by describing content and tools of Burckhardtsource.org platform.

KEYWORDS: Burckhardt; Critical Edition; Linked Open Data; Digital Library; Semantic Web

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[1] The ERC-project, Advanced Grant EUROCORR, Grant Agreement n. 249483, is coordinated by Maurizio Ghelardi (Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa). Ghelardi is member of the Board of *Jacob Burckhardt Werke* (*Kritische Gesamtausgabe*) since 1991 and associate editor of the critical edition of *Jacob Burckhardt's Work* (Nachlass, herausgegeben zusammen mit S. Müller im Rahmen der neuen Gesamtausgabe von Werken und Nachlass, herausgegeben von der Jacob Burckhardt-Stiftung, Schwabe und C. H. Beck, Band 13, 16, 17). See also the Team page on http://www.burckhardtsource.org. For a detailed description of the project, the corpus of letters and its characteristics, the methodology and the scientific goals see S. Müller, F. Di Donato, "Burckhardtsource.org. A semantic digital edition of the correspondence to Jacob Burckhardt", *EVA-Berlin Conference Proceedings*, 2013.

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1. *Introduction*

In the last decade the use of computer technologies has gradually emerged also in the Humanities. The adoption of Research Infrastructures such as Digital Libraries has radically transformed both the way in which the research activity is performed and its products: "The availability of scholarly content in digital form makes possible new research questions, methods, and uses".[2] In other words, what Besser wrote in 2004 has become a reality:[3]

> Though the promise of digital technology in almost any field has been to let one do the same things one did before, but better and faster, the more fundamental result has often been the capability of doing entirely new things. It is very possible that digital libraries will enable future humanities scholars to engage in new activities that we haven't yet envisioned.

More specifically, in the edition of correspondences, besides mere digitization of paper editions,[4] several projects have been conceived to make an advanced use of new technologies for publishing extensive online correspondences *corpora*[5] in new ways and with high visual impact.[6]

By completing Burckhardt correspondence in a digital critical edition,[7] EUROCORR project aims at preserving and making available a corpus of about 1,000 letters in German, Italian, English and French of about 300 different authors. Once published, these resources will contribute to

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[2] C. Borgman, *Preface* in L. Hughes (ed.), *Evaluating and Measuring the Value, Use and Impact of Digital Collections*, London, Facet Publishing, 2012.

[3] H. Besser, *The Past, Present and Future of Digital Libraries,* in S. Schreibman, R. Siemens, J. Unsworth (eds.), *A Companion to Digital Humanities*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2004.

[4] For instance, a selection of digitized correspondences on the Internet Archive (http://archive.org) includes the following Correspondence collections: Samuel Johnson; Lake Poets; Samuel Taylor Coleridge; Richard Wagner; Jean-Jacques Rousseau; Mary Wollstonecraft; John Locke, John Keats; Zwingli.

[5] See, among others, *The Darwin Correspondence Project* (http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/), *The Diplomatic Correspondence of Thomas Bodley* (http://www.livesandletters.ac.uk/bodley/bodley.html), and *Cultures of Knowledge* (http://www.culturesofknowledge.org/).

[6] See for example Stanford's project *Mapping the Republic of Letters* (http://republicofletters.stanford.edu/).

[7] With critical edition we refer to an accurate version of the text with an apparatus both analysing the source material and recording all editorial interventions.

reconstruct one of the most important written exchange of the 19th century on relevant questions such as: the advance of industrial culture; the development of the modern concept of democracy; the establishment of art history as an autonomous discipline. Since its beginning in 2011, EUROCORR has been conceived as a trans-disciplinary work designed and developed through a continuous interaction between Humanists and Computer Scientists.

Thus, EUROCORR has two main goals: to produce a trustworthy critical Edition, whose texts are philologically exact and easy to consult, and to set-up a semantic digital library (Burckhardsource.org) where texts and data are interrelated both within the corpus and with Linked Open Data entities on the World Wide Web. Obviously, as the project will end in May 2015, until that date all data published on the platform are in a permanent beta version.
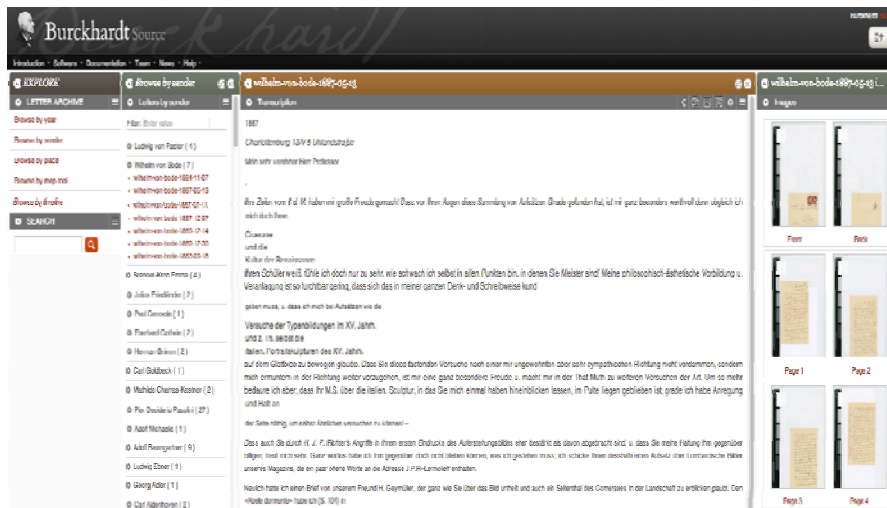

Fig. 1. Burckhardtsource platform: a view showing the explore and browsing options, a letter transcription and facsimile images.

At the present time the Digital Library includes around 800 letters, which can be browsed by year, sender and place. From a logical perspective, on Burckhardtsource.org it is possible to access three layers of content: the first

one is made of manuscripts facsimiles, diplomatic transcriptions, edited texts and metadata. The second layer is composed of semantic annotations and graphical visualizations. A third one, complementary to the first two, is constituted by the Documentation section, in which the textual apparatus as well as the encoding compendium and the technical documentation will be made publicly accessible at the end of the project.[8]

2. First Layer: Images, Transcriptions and Metadata

At its first layer, the critical edition will include four representations of each letter.

Images: manuscript facsimiles

The platform provides the reproductions of the manuscripts thus showing its effective materiality. The quality of the facsimiles and the zoom function allow an easy reading of the original, allowing scholars to study directly online the original sources of the correspondence. Moreover, agreements with European cultural institution in order to ensure the long-term preservation of images are on-going.
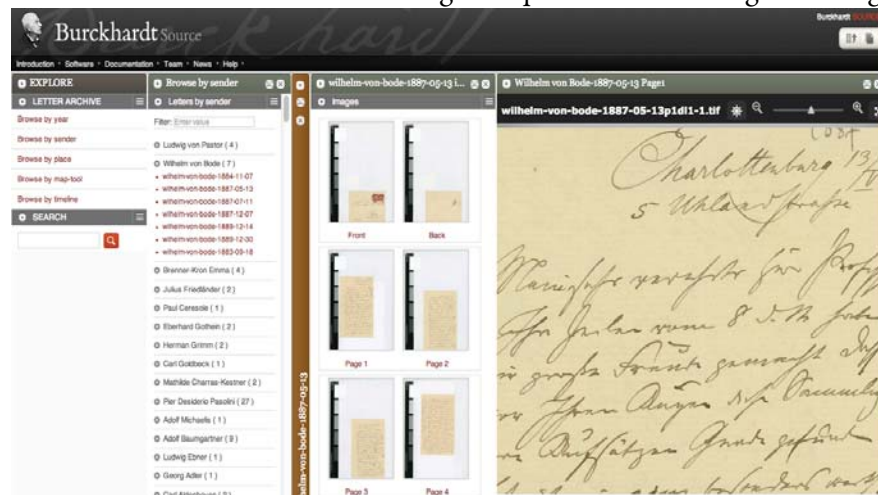

Fig. 2. On the right box, a manuscript view.

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[8] http://wiki.burckhardtsource.org

Diplomatic transcriptions

Once the text has been transcribed and collated, diplomatic transcriptions are encoded in XML-TEI P5. They offer a line per line visualization with the author corrections, afterthoughts and deletions, and are addressed to Scholars expert in the field. Transcriptions are combined with the textual apparatus, attesting both writer's corrections and any editorial decision, which is published in the documentation section of the Digital Library.

Edited texts

The edited text represents a letter as a continuous text illustrating the author's (virtual) fair copy (clear-text). This version corresponds to the default mode of visualization and is addressed to the general public of readers.

Metadata

To each letter is linked a metadata section shown in the same box of the diplomatic transcription. A full list of metadata and the data model used in the Digital Library is available in the Documentation section of the Platform.
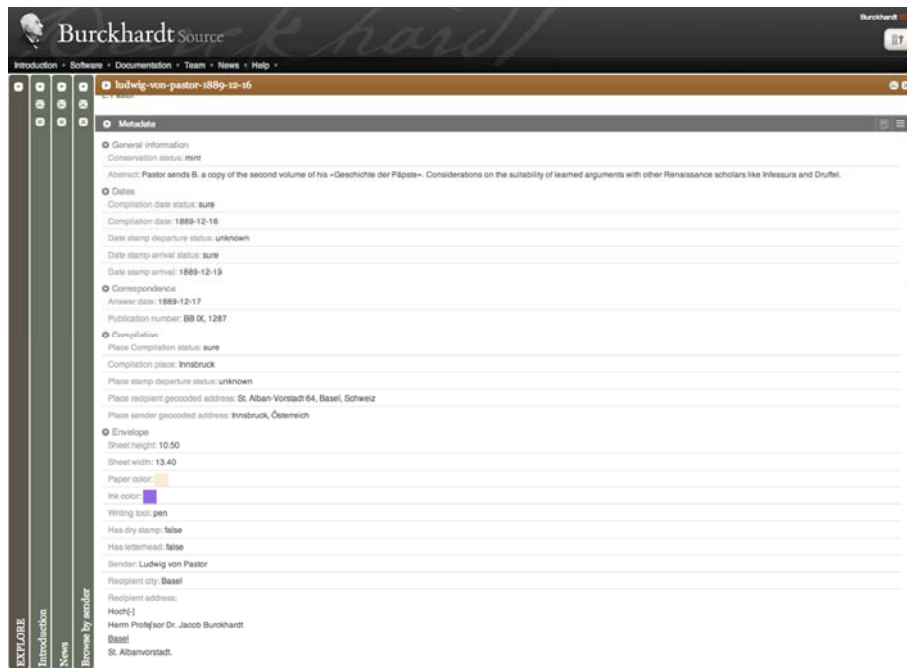
Fig. 2. The metadata section of a letter.

3. *Second Layer: Semantic Annotations and Visualizations*

Thanks to the adoption of Linked data technologies, the Digital Library and the edition go beyond the mere accumulation and simple classification or management of data. In other words, as Burckhardtsource.org aims at representing the opposite of a 'monolithic' and fixed edition, letters won't be closed nor self-referential, but potentially interrelated with all the other correspondence corpora on the Web of data and, more in general, with the Linked Data cloud.

Semantic annotations

Semantic annotations will be performed in the last year of the project on the following entity types, that Humanists have chosen based on specific research

needs: persons, places, bibliographical references and artworks. Being content related comments, these entities/types will be accessible on the Digital Library through edited texts.

From a technical point of view, the annotation task is performed through Pundit, an open source research tool awarded at LODLAM2013 cohallenge.[9] All entities chosen from the texts build the vocabularies of the research group, stored in a component called Korbo.[10] When possible, entities are extracted from already existing Linked Data providers (such as Dbpedia); when missing, editors enrich the existing providers with new entries.

Visualizations

All metadata and semantic annotations can be then visualized on a graphical way, thus allowing an advanced way of browsing the platform content. Two experimental visualizations have been developed in order to meet scholars' needs. The first one shows departure and arrival place on a map, while the second one displays the letters on a timeline.

New ad hoc visualizations will be developed in the last six months of the project, once the quality and quantity of metadata and edited texts will be considerably reliable.

4. Conclusions

By attempting to provide a theoretical and pragmatic context for recent developments in Digital Humanities, in September 2011 the European Science Foundation published a Science Policy Briefing on *Research Infrastructure in the Digital Humanities*.

As Ciula *et al*. explain,

> Data and access are the keywords around which the report defines research infrastructures in the digital humanities. Infrastructures traditionally associated with research in the Humanities – such as libraries, archives and museums – as well as newly

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[9] See http://www.thepund.it
[10] http://www.korbo.org

established settings – such as virtual competence centres – find their place on the map. The map is argued to be dynamic and its parts interdependent: libraries are recognised as major players in the digital world, for instance, while web services are seen as building on local knowledge and expertise.[11]
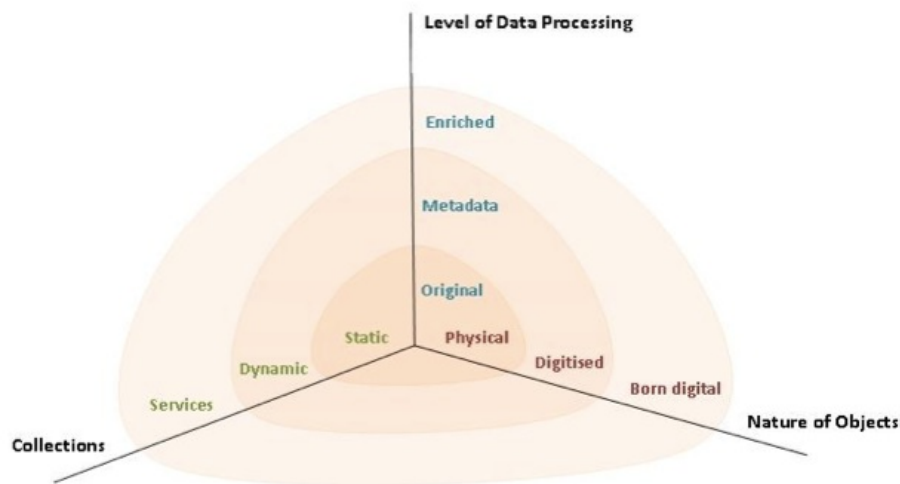

Fig. 3. A set of concurrent criteria for defining the RI in Humanities. The same representation applies for the local/institutional level, the national/community level, and the pan-European/global level.[12]

Compared to the scheme on the map above, Burckhardtsource.org main characteristics show how the Digital Library, which includes digitized and born-digital objects, has a very high level of data processing, including original data as well as metadata and semantically enriched content.[13] Moreover, the

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[11] A. Ciula, J. Nyhan, C. Moulin, "Science Policy Briefing on Research Infrastructures in the Digital Humanities: Landscapes, Ecosystem and Cultures", *Lexicon Philosophicum*, 1, 2013, p. 289.

[12] ESF, "Research Infrastructures in the Digital Humanities", *Science Policy Briefing*, 42, 2011, p. 9.

[13] As stated in Müller, Di Donato, "Burckhardtsource.org", it is clear then that "to fully exploit Linked Open Data potentialities it would be necessary a wider adoption of such standards by Libraries, Archives and Museums. This is a delay that European public

collection will include services conceived for different target audiences. This is certainly not an end in itself, but a new starting point to attempt providing "greater access to culturally broader and more varied set of empirical data".[14]

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institutions should fill as soon as possible, in order to promote the enhancement of our cultural heritage".

[14] ESF, "Research Infrastructures*"*, p. 9.