

Collecting fragments today: what status will have a fragment in the era of digital philology?

The innovations brought to the study of Antiquity by the tools of Digital Humanities challenge the concepts and analysing methods applied to ancient texts. By focusing on fragments, we will deal with one of these concepts and address the question of its origin. Further we intend to trace back some of the changes it underwent over time and to sketch out tentatively how fragments may be understood in the era of digital philology.

Our analysis will start with the Library of Alexandria and the notorious claim of its founders to overcome the previously fragmentary access to literature by assembling an exhaustive collection of literary works. But by trying to eliminate fragmentarisation they gave it a prominent position. The enormous amount of literary works made the concept of fragments necessary, as it was no longer possible to encompass the whole collection without the help of selection and catalogisation tools.

We will explore the numerous forms of fragments those ancient scholars used or even invented and how they wrote them down. Further we will analyse the influence their understanding of fragments had on our modern conception and point out the differences. For instance our understanding of fragments seems to be larger, since our conception of Antiquity itself is based on the assumption that our access to it is fragmentary. Moreover the creation of fragments in the ancient libraries seems to depend on a selection based on deliberate elimination (e.g. canons or anthologies). This is in sharp contrast with one aspect of the modern concept of fragments. Nowadays the process of selection is often used to increase the number of texts, for instance by creating collection of fragments from lost works.

By sharpening the awareness of these processes we hope to address the issue of the handling with fragments in a digital environment.

Alexandra Trachsel
University of Hamburg