TEXTvre: a Virtual Research Environment for Textual Scholarship

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According to UNESCO reports, Britain tops the European lists of research publications per year in philology, literature and other text-based studies such as philosophy. Worldwide, Britain overtook the U.S. in 2006 in terms of book publications per year. In the list of countries for number of book publications in the latest available year, Britain is no. 1. These figures emphasize the urgent need of the British textual studies communities to explore new ways of dealing with this deluge of research data.

With the quoted figures collaboration becomes fundamental to digital scholarship in textual studies. No researcher alone will be able to cope with the plethora of new daily published material. Furthermore, text analysis in the humanities can be a tedious and time-consuming task. But advanced computer enabled methods make the process easier for digital or digitised works. Researchers can search large texts rapidly, conduct complex searches and have the results presented in context. The ease brought to the analysis process allows the researcher to engage with texts more thoroughly and can then lead to the development of insightful, well-crafted interpretations.

Much in line with the idea of new data-driven research, various projects have emerged internationally in recent years that allow a new scale of textual studies research. To name but a few, software developed by the US MONK (Metadata Offer New Knowledge) project helps humanities scholars discover and analyze patterns in the texts,1 while its sister project SEASR (Software Environment for the Advancement of Scholarly Research) is designed to enable digital humanities developers to design, build, and share software applications that support research and collaboration in textual studies.2 Aus-e-Lit is an Australian project that aims at Australian literary scholars and will allow these to seamlessly search across relevant databases and archives to retrieve reliable information on a particular author, topic or publication.3 These are just three projects that are more closely linked to e-Research initiatives. For over fifty years, there is a worldwide academic movement to work on Digital Humanities, with many achievements, especially in the field of textual studies. It is impossi-
ble in the space of this paper to list all the projects, for a history of Digital Humanities and some of the involved textual scholarships see (Schreibman, Siemens et al. 2004).

In this presentation, we shall concentrate on a project linked to both Digital Humanities and e-Research, which exemplify in a very particular way two major new developments in textual studies research that are directly linked with the shift in methodologies based on data-driven research: the UK TEXTvre project exemplifies the value of new collaborative research in textual studies and the effective use of e-Infrastructure to support everyday research in the Digital Humanities.