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Manuscript based editions – Benefits and disadvantages

In connection with the rise of the new textual technologies editors are increasingly expected to provide annotated texts, which are available on-line and can be integrated into larger searchable corpora. However, some characteristic features of older texts transmitted in manuscripts can be presumed to pose serious problems to both the annotation as such and to the usual presentation of the syntactic composition in the form of parse trees. For instance, breaks in sentence structure, such as ellipses and anacolutha, which may have been caused by copyists as well as by the author of a given work himself, occur considerably more frequently in the witnesses of historic texts than in modern printed ones. In order to establish a reliable base for further computational processing the peculiarities of the creation and transmission of premodern texts must not be neglected. In fact, it remains the editor's task to detect errors caused by the copying of manuscripts, to suggest possible corrections, but also to identify and explain inconsistencies in the reconstructed original. Thus, a digital presentation of historic texts requires philological analysis and, from time to time, editorial intervention rather than making them obsolete.