The Son of Suda On-Line

Ryan Baumann

The Son of Suda On-Line (SoSOL) represents the first steps towards a collaborative, editorially-controlled, online editor for the Duke Databank of Documentary Papyri (DDbDP). Funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's Integrating Digital Papyrology Phase 2 (IDP2), SoSOL provides a strongly version-controlled front-end for editing and reviewing papyrological texts marked up in EpiDoc XML. This is accomplished in a tagless environment through the use of a dual-syntax grammar which provides a bidirectional unambiguous mapping between EpiDoc and a plaintext Leiden-style markup dubbed Leiden+. For version control, SoSOL uses the distributed version control system Git as its backend. This allows us to essentially have a "forked" repository for each user of the system while using very little space, yet still track change history in a robust way so as to enable intelligent automatic merging of submitted changes. While any user can edit anything, submitted changes must pass through an editorial control workflow. Here editors can vote and comment on the submission (as well as make editorial interventions) before it is included in the public, "canonical" version of the repository. The process is designed to maintain transparency and accurate attribution, with post-submission editorial interventions appropriately attributed to the editor who made them. The entire framework is implemented as a Ruby on Rails web application, tested and deployed with JRuby so that it can run in any Java Servlet Container such as Tomcat.

While development and documentation is still ongoing, in March of 2010 we began to introduce papyrologists to using SoSOL at EpiDoc workshops in order to gather feedback and make improvements. The results so far have been encouraging, with over one thousand changes made to the DDbDP through SoSOL in just four months. Previously, though the DDbDP was in electronic form, it was very difficult for third parties to submit new texts to it or make emendations and corrections to existing texts. With the integration, consolidation, and EpiDoc standardization achieved under phase one of the Integrating Digital Papyrology project laying the groundwork, SoSOL has been able to provide a convenient interface and scholarly workflow for editing the DDbDP's large corpus of ancient documentary papyri (approximately 55,000 texts). We also hope to extend the usefulness of this tool by making it a reusable open-source software component. Effectively SoSOL will be the core component which manages version control, users, and editorial workflow, while our project-specific components for editing EpiDoc texts and aggregating disparate sources into publications would become a separate piece of software which uses the SoSOL component, called the Papyrological Editor. The core of the tool, which allows anyone to edit while retaining scholarly integrity, transparently integrating a rich distributed version control backend, could help reduce the friction of contribution to a wide range of projects.