Clasice.ro – A DIGITAL LIBRARY

50 years ago, the first issue of "Studii clasice" Journal, one of the most prestigious periodical in Romanian philology was published, and started with the following phrase: "Classical Philology enjoys a quite long tradition in our country". During the following decades, it proved to be the most reliable resource for its field, being a reference for all classical philologists in Romania, and also becoming an international reference, due to the high level accuracy of the analysis and scientific approach.

Despite the very good reputation it always enjoyed, the journal has gradually become more and more hard to be found in book shops and even in public libraries, due to the less and less number of copies printed each year. Unfortunately, and more and more during the last 20 years, the same happened with many other publications, no matter if papers, journals or books on classics. While noticing this inconvenient situation we were wondering if it was peculiar to our country or a common problem everywhere in the world, we were wondering how they handled such a problem, had it ever occurred, in other countries. So we realized that costs of printing embarrassed almost everybody everywhere, both publishing houses, scientific organizations, editors and so on. Maybe after a long and successful era of printed books it was time for a change, not in a way of replacing them by something else, but rather by finding a supporting solution for spreading the information more cost effective. It is hard to claim supremacy for books and science in the age of television and PCs while not being able to print enough copies and spread the information to everybody eager for knowledge, especially young intellectuals. The way out has proved to be at hand: the fast growing and user friendly technology, which had to be transformed from the enemy into a friend. Gradually the Internet became the tools for practical communication and cooperation between scientists and the place to be for most of the journals and many books. You can now either buy a paper, a journal or a books, or, in so many situations you can access them over the Internet, sometimes against a fee which in most cases is reasonable and anyway a fast and direct way to the desired information.

But. Is there any more bizarre association than that between a "classicist" and technology? Maybe not, according to the common opinion. Simply because people think at the classicists as at the most strange, isolated, reclusive human beings, studying alone in old and inaccessible libraries, using old books and sources, fighting dialects and grammars, like in the famous engraving of Albrecht Dürer representing St. Jerome in His Study.

St. Jerome in His Study, engraving by Albrech Dürer, 1514.

Time has passed by and we have hardly noticed the very progress in the field of classical studies, which today claim for their well deserved place in the new technological world. Despite the general and actually unfounded opinion, classical studies usually succeed in keeping pace with the general development of science, by approaching the modern methods of storing and organizing the staff and information they manipulate. Old and dusty editions of ancient writers, so valuable according to many, quite often simply because they are old, are more and more substituted by modern prints and, surprisingly, by digitized alternatives making life of the researchers easier by providing research tools and direct access to online dictionaries. Nowadays, one can look into the famous Liddell-Scott-Johnes Greek-English Dictionary by simply typing in any web browser a common web address such as http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/resolveform, where it is now possible to search the entire dictionary for any string of characters, whether in the Latin or Greek alphabet. Books are books, and they will be. We deeply enjoy entering into a library room and we like laying on a sofa reading from a printed edition we love and definitely this is the kind of an emotion only a printed book can stir up. But, when it comes to being efficient in coping with modern way of researching and scientifically "networking", then modern tools like web, digitized editions and real time communication, over the web for instance, become more efficient.

There are today plenty of web sites dealing with classical languages like Latin and Greek. The most "visited" and used are, according to a top 21 the followings:
- Diotima - http://www.stoa.org/diotima/
- Internet Classics Archive - http://classics.mit.edu/
- Perseus Project, The - http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/
- About.com - http://search.about.com/fullsearch.htm?terms=latin&IAM= URL_latin

- Bryn Mawr Classical Review - http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/
- Classics Page at Ad Fontes Academy - http://people.hsc.edu/drjclassics/avclassics/
- Dr J's Illustrated Guide to the Classical World - http://people.hsc.edu/drjclassics/
- Loebs online - http://www.powells.com/sub/ClassicsLoebClassics.html
- Biliotheca Augustana - http://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/augustana.html
- FAQ - Classical Studies - http://www.faqs.org/faqs/classics-faq/
- Online Dictionaries - http://www.alphadictionary.com/index.shtml
- The Bulfinch Mythology Site - http://www.bulfinch.org/
- Maecenas - http://wings.buffalo.edu/AandL/Maecenas/
- Oxford's comprehensive list of resources for Classics - http://www.classics.ox.ac.uk/resources/www/index.asp
- The Cambridge School Classics Project - http://www.cambridgescp.com/
- The Encyclopaedia Britannica Online - http://www.britannica.com/
- The Beazley Pottery Archive - http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/ pottery/default1.htm
- The Philodemus Project - http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/ classics/Philodemus/ philhome.htm
- Lacus Curtius - http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/home.html
- Pinax Online - https://perswww.kuleuven.be/~u0013314/pinaxonline.html
- Nuntii Latini - http://www.yleradio1.fi/nuntii/

Of course this tendency is growing in Romanian also, scholars trying to use the latest technology, including web based information, along with data base searching in their research. People invest more and more resources in developing web sites with either direct access to libraries or linked to different web sites of interest. unibuc.ro, the official web page of University of Bucharest, includes a growing library with useful texts and secondary literature with easy access for the students; the corresponding web page of Department of Classical Studies, http://www.unibuc.ro/ro/catd_lsclc_ro, has links to Internet resources on classics, as well as a small library of valuable texts.

Within this context, we, as a small group of young researchers interested in Classical Studies, but acting in different science field, as philology or engineering, have decided to create an on-line archive of texts and studies related with Classics; the archive is called clasice.ro and has the following aims:

- to provide easy access to digitized papers and studies related to Classical philology, stressing on Romanian contributors and Romanian school, structured as an electronic library in *pdf format;
- to encourage the linkage between philologists and other researchers as engineers or physicians sharing the interest in Classics;
- to discuss and comment on technological topics of Antiquity, based on diachronic approach;

- to analyze and explain the ancient technological progress in engineering, architecture, military technique etc;
- to establish a platform of communication and support for studies and modern analysis in relation with Antiquity, mostly for young students and PhD researchers interested in wide cooperation with their colleagues involved in either philology or other fields.
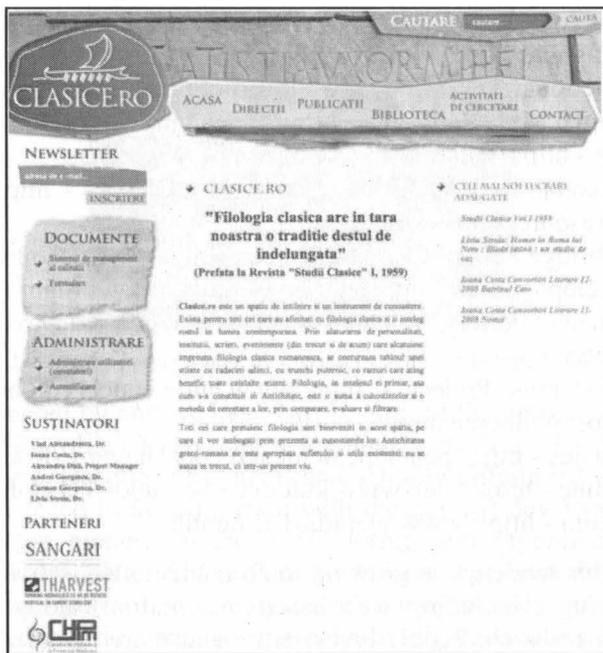
Picture 1.

The idea came first when we realized that such an archive was missing in Romania as an organized form, also noticing the actual interest for such studies; engineers for instance pay respect to Latin and Greek Antiquity without having a real access to its values and principles, while philologists are paying respect to the antique engineering, usually not being able to understand it from the technical point of view. The most reasonable solution is joint investigation and research, by putting together knowledge and expertise in each field. We have then realized that many major contributions of the past classical Romanian school are not accessible to the public, due to the difficult access to the papers, journals and books. The best example would be the very the well known and widely appreciated Romanian journal "Studii clasice". We are celebrating now 50 years since the first number was printed in 1959 and most of us this journal is more a legend than a reality, meaning that only few have ever used the full collection, which is only available in some public and private libraries. Therefore, in agreement with the Romanian Society of Classical Studies, we have decided to digitize the full series of the journal and to upload it on the clasice.ro web site in the common *pdf format, making it accessible

for everybody by direct download. The first number of 1959 is already posted there and a lot of work is done put the remaining numbers online.

The homepage of clasice.ro has a modern easy to use web architecture and a comfortable design as is shown in Picture 1. Besides the detectable logo, the main feature of the web site are visible, as the search field, the main chapters of the site, the last adds-on and the fix bar on the left side showing the individual supporters of the projects as well as the partners, either institutions or research projects. At two clicks distance one can directly access the recently added texts by download, also getting in the opening window the necessary information as "Section" where the text belongs to, the researchers involved, short description and name of the item.

Any one interested in participating to this project can ask for permission to the administrators, 3 e-mail addresses being available under "Contact"; by receiving this request, the administrators will add the details of the new researcher, as name, surname, position, e-mail address and short form CV (shown in Picture 2); each new researcher will then be allocated a password; using the e-mail address and the provided password, the researcher will then be able to log in, to change and update his own information and to upload his individual scientific contributions to the web site; this uploaded files will become available to any visitor, but only the author himself can modify or delete them.

Picture 2.

When uploading a new document, the researcher will be able to fill into additional fields and providing the necessary details as name, section, short description, key words, details which will automatically become part of any search performed by any visitor. This will facilitate the search into the web site, allowing complex associations. The researcher can also link the uploaded files to any existing project listed on the right side of the page, as shown in Picture 3. This allows combined navigation and understanding the structure of the complex projects to come.

Now it maybe time to define the concept of "a project" in the spirit of clasice.ro. By project we understand the ongoing research activity developed by a group of researchers from any field of science, no matter if philologists or something else, but connected somehow with Antiquity. Let's take an example: Hero of Alexandria (fl. 1st century A.D.), the engineer. He is of interest both for classicists, as a Greek writer, as well as for engineers as testifier of antique engineering solutions for more or less complex technological issues.


Picture 3.

We have already built a team of researchers who study his contributions, based on the quite many texts we have. This team is composed of both philologists and engineers, each of them interpreting Hero's legacy based on individual competences and specific background. As an ongoing project, "Hero's legacy" is both listed under "Research Activity" and registered as an "Project", as shown in Picture 4; the information exchange based on Hero's Project will remain posted under "Research Activity" as long as Project is going on. In this way anyone will be able to follow the last progresses on the matter, being able in the same time to see who is adding the new information on this topics and, if necessary, get in direct touch with the team by e-mail. As soon as papers or books will be published, as we all wish, their content will be also posted on the web site, with links to the contributors and of course to the Project description, which will make that after a while, a complex informational database on Hero will become available, including not only texts and comments, but also media files. The intention is to create an interactive and open reference compendium on Hero to be then upgraded to a kind of Ancient Engineering Compendium.

We hope that similar initiatives will soon come out, as for instance, and just to give random examples, studies on ancient topography, where multidisciplinary cooperation might also be required, or ancient diet.
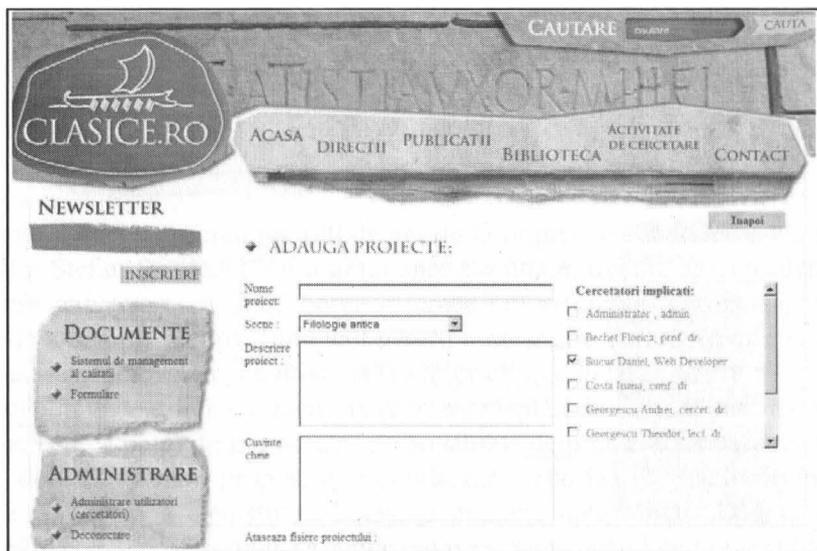
Picture 4.

Finally, all the written or media material is automatically collected and put together under "Library", as is shown in Picture 5, which lists all the titles and authors. By clicking on any item in the list, additional information on each title is provided, as shown in Picture 6.
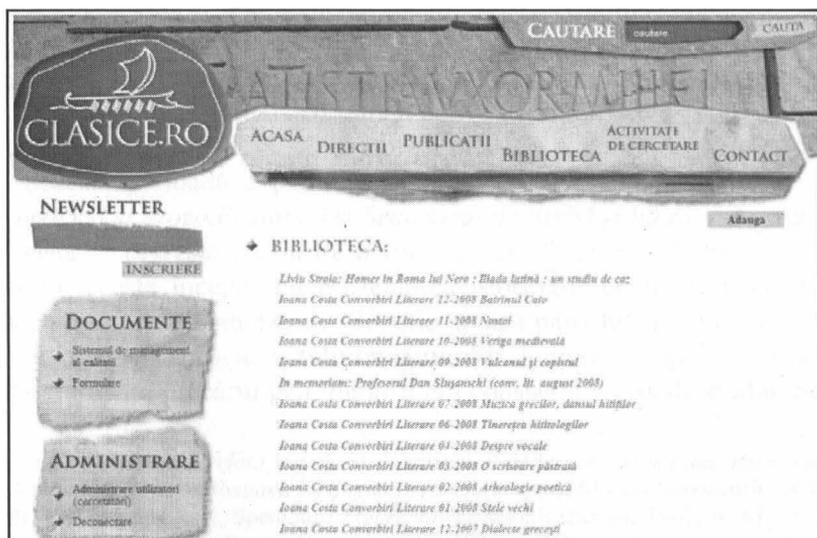
Picture 5.
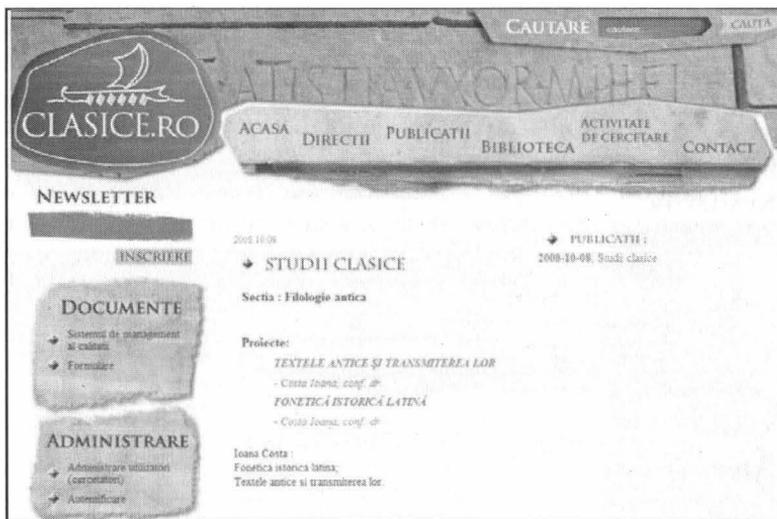
Picture 6.

This article is supposed to be part of the next issue of "Studii clasice" journal, the anniversary one. And it is a celebration of its 50 years continuous existence. It is not intended to undermine the long established tradition of paper written research, which used to be, still is and will be the ultimate experience of any scientist. It is only a proposal for further development and progress in classical studies. We have started this argumentation with an example taken from Dürer; now, take the look at Rembrandt's "Anatomy Lesson": it was medicine at that time; and then, think about modern physicians and how they do it today: same principles, same basic rules and same goals, but obviously different approach.

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