Conference Shaping the sciences of the ancient world
Text criticism, Critical editions and Translations of ancient and medieval scholarly texts (18th-20th centuries) - June 17—21, 2013

What is at stake in editing and translating ancient texts?
A Historical perspective

June 21st, 2013

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Poinsinet's Edition of the Naturalis Historia (1771-1782) and the Revival of Pliny in the Sciences of the Enlightenment

Abstract - This paper analyses the revival of Pliny’s *Naturalis historia* within the scientific culture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, focusing on a French effort to produce an edition with annotations by scientists and scholars. Between the Renaissance and the early eighteenth century, the *Naturalis historia* had declined in scientific importance. Increasingly, it was relegated to the humanities, as we demonstrate with a review of editions. For a variety of reasons, however, scientific interest in the *Naturalis historia* grew in the second half of the eighteenth century. Epitomizing this interest was a plan for a scientifically annotated, Latin-French edition of the *Naturalis historia*. Initially coordinated by the French governmental minister Malesherbes in the 1750s, the edition was imperfectly realized by Poinsinet a few decades later. It was intended to rival two of the period’s other distinguished multi-volume books of knowledge, Diderot and D’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* and Buffon’s *Histoire naturelle*, to which we compare it. Besides narrating the scientific revival of the *Historia naturalis* during this period, we examine its causes and the factors contributing to its end in the first half of the nineteenth century.