Towards a correspondence module in the TEI

The TEI at present has several modules (and corresponding Guideline chapters) for specific types of texts, e.g. "Performance Texts", "Dictionaries", "Verse". A separate "Correspondence" module is currently lacking, although various elements from the TEI P5 Guidelines (e.g. <postscript>, <opener>, <closer>) genuinely belong to this domain and the encoding of letters has a long tradition in the TEI[1].

At least two letter projects (DALF[2] and WeGA[3]) have tried to tackle this issue in the past and have developed and made available according TEI customizations. In the following, the TEI Correspondence SIG was set up in 2008 to bring together scholars working on correspondence material, to create a forum for discussion and to merge efforts in designing and developing Guidelines for the encoding of correspondence within the TEI. Recently (in 2013), a task force (consisting of the authors of this proposal) was created to implement the first item on the SIG's agenda, namely the encoding of correspondence specific metadata within the TEI header.[4]

The reasons for starting with the modifications of the header—and not with the elements that are part of the body—have been twofold: On the one hand, the addition of elements such as <sender> or <addressee> seemed to be the least controversial in the community, and on the other hand, backwards compatibility can be preserved by merely adding elements to the TEI standard instead of reorganizing already existing ones. For bringing together correspondence specific metadata in the TEI header, the special purpose element <correspDesc> (correspondence description) is introduced as a container for several child elements and made member of model.biblLike, thus allowing the description of correspondence within <sourceDesc>[5] like other bibliographic objects. But, in our notion, correspondence is not only about the physical object, instead it is an *act of communication* (in which a sender composes a message, manifest in a piece of correspondence, for a recipient that he/she receives mediated and time-delayed).[6] Hence, correspondence has a hybrid nature between *event* and *object*.

While the main goal of the <correspDesc> element is to provide an elaborate structure for detailed data capture (encoding of sender(s), addressee(s) and their respective places and

[1] Cf. e.g. the "Markup Guidelines for Documentary Editions" from 4 July 1999, ed. by David R. Chesnutt, Susan M. Hockey and C. M. Sperberg-McQueen.

[2] Digital Archive of Letters by Flemish Authors and Composers from the 19th & 20th century, http://www.kantl.be/ctb/project/dalf/.

[3] Carl-Maria-von-Weber-Gesamtausgabe, http://weber-gesamtausgabe.de/.

[4] Other items are (a) the restructuring of TEI elements for transcribing correspondence specific aspects in the body, and (b) developing a best practice model for encoding correspondence material.

[5] Most aspects of "materiality", regularly discussed in theoretical considerations on correspondence, are already covered in <msDesc> and therefore left untouched in phase one of this communication orientated approach.

[6] There seems to be a tendency though—especially in library based data models—of treating acts of correspondence, e. g. the sending of a letter, as *events* by bringing together data material of different sorts and from different sources (for instance the *Europeana Data Model*, partially based on *CIDOC-CRM*).

dates of sending/receiving, the type of the piece of correspondence and its transmission, etc.), the task force also pursues the goal to derive a more basic structure of <correspDesc> for easy data interchange, answering to the growing demand of correspondence projects for linked data facilities and collaborations between projects. Special attention is paid to including standard formats and authority files which poses problems when there are different authority files for one information[7] or, in regard to data interchange, when there are none. Along with developing this *Correspondence Interchange Format* we also strive for an accordant web service to demonstrate the envisioned benefits.

While the formal specification[8] of these additions is already quite stable, the prose description needs to be finalized before a formal feature request will be created which is to be expected before the next TEI council face to face meeting in June 2014. The goal of the paper will be to present the finished work of the task force concerning the TEI header in full detail as well as to identify and discuss remaining difficulties and next work steps to reaching a comprehensive TEI correspondence module.

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[7] E.g. for the identification of persons, there is, amongst others, the Integrated Authority File (GND, http://www.dnb.de/EN/gnd) or the Virtual International Authority File (VIAF, http://viaf.org/).
[8] The corresponding ODD file as well as examples can be found at the SIG's GitHub space at https://github.com/TEI-Correspondence-SIG/correspDesc. Cf. also the task force's wikipage http://wiki.tei-c.org/index.php/SIG:Correspondence/task-force-correspDesc.