

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

Practices of editing: Numbers & Diagrams

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Reduction of Absurdity? Publishing the Diagrams of Indirect Proof

Abstract - In the modern editions of the diagrams of indirect proofs (or proofs by contradiction), there is sometimes a tendency to minimize the impossibility or absurdity of the depicted geometrical configuration, giving rise to a prima facie plausible diagram - though, it later turns out, an impossible one. This contrasts with the ancient diagrams which are often more starkly absurd. We will survey the evidence and consider the nature of the diagrams of indirect proofs, ancient and modern, leading on to speculations concerning the motivations, and consequences, of the modern transformation.