

## 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 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013

Jeff Loveland (University of Cincinnati)  
&  
Stéphane Schmitt (CNRS-SPHERE & SAW)

*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.