

## **Andrews T., Macé C., (eds) *Analysis of Ancient and Medieval Texts and Manuscripts: Digital Approaches* (2014)**

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The scholarship on texts and manuscripts is extremely wide ranging, more so when considering digital approaches, as is the content of this stimulating volume and so this review gave me the opportunity to critically update my own perspectives on this important area of study. As the editors rightly point out, a work like this is only ever going to provide a snapshot. They raise important questions about how digital techniques have changed the way in which their work is conducted and put to rest some of the scepticism of the value of digital methods witnessed within the discipline. There is always a time lag in quality publications and this volume is no exception; projects presented here would have moved on with some reaching the end of their funding period and now deemed to be complete. Overall, this volume covers an impressive expanse of material pulling together many fields of interest beyond the ability of any individual to be an expert in them all. It is usefully divided into specific sections to make things more manageable: Stemmatology, Statistics and Stylistics, Intertextuality, Script Analysis, and Codicology.

In all areas, and especially stemmatology, there is a need for transparency (Heikkila) and particularly with computer assisted scholarship to remove the "black box" effect as we tease out the significant aspects for examination. Camps and Cafiero include helpful information for the non-specialist and extensive explanatory footnotes. The Stemma, they say, is always a "simplification" and acknowledge the effects of time and space on vernacular texts which are more than a medieval "localisation" effect but rather conscious changes to make the text more "modern" or "appealing" to their specific audience. Understanding the mechanisms implicit in the copying of texts helps us to understand variants. This is a well-argued position as is the following chapter (Cantera) with the movement from the oral to written tradition. This makes the archetype model redundant particularly in the case of the Avestan texts with the wide geographic dispersal of the rituals on which they are based. Something that is becoming an essential feature of research is that the source data itself should be openly available for future researchers to check and verify to support their own conclusions and arguments; it is good to see that in process here particularly as we see the important distinction being made between "unconscious mistakes" and "conscious corrections". Simulating copyist and expected errors in artificially created corpora is an interesting approach to test algorithms looking at the accuracy of transmission (Hoenen). Cluster analysis and other statistical procedures borrowed from very different academic disciplines are indeed effective tools when looking at stylistic variations (van Dalen-Oskam) and opening up the possibilities for measuring linguistic deviation and variation (Stella).

Beyond transparency, a major emphasis should be on openness and sharing. This is evident along with more technical methodologies in the chapters looking at intertextual research. The collections of wise sayings in SAWS are encoded in TEI XML and RDF to make them not only sharable but also to identify who it was that made various assertions about the texts and to facilitate conflicting opinions (Tupman). Importantly, it also allows the editors to express their degree of certainty about those assertions, making the whole editorial process explicit and transparent. I trust there was ample opportunity to discuss the encoding of Arabic texts with Romanov and, with the recent developments, it may be possible to move that encoding to sharable TEI XML.

The changes to methodology that the digital turn brings to the interdisciplinary field of palaeography is explored in the penultimate section. Despite technological advances, human intervention is always going to be needed for the selection of features to be examined (Castro). The Hesperia project, has many useful features and provides good faceted browsing to allow direct access to the texts but the authors should (if they have not already done so) take a look at EpiDoc and the range of epigraphic corpora making use of this dedicated subset of TEI.

The concluding section on codicology pulls together pertinent projects on the identification of inks using sophisticated imaging techniques (Rabin), the divergent interests of manuscript scholarship and the removal of error through avoiding repetition of data (Andrist). Processes can never be fully automated as intervention and interpretation is always an essential part of the workflow. We need to move away from a focus on speed and ease of search to being able to ask new and better questions of our source material, in whatever form. One central element to that, and presented here, is that the research should be a shared partnership between so-called traditional scholarship and that of the technologists. It needs to address and drive forward the research agendas of both disciplines; not a case of technology simply being a tool to ease the workload of the textual scholar but one in which both parties benefit. Getting computer scientists involved in the research process and not just as tool builders but by giving them interesting problems to address, as van Zundert suggests, will go some way to achieving this goal.

Nevertheless, as the Introduction clearly points out, the intellectual focus must be on method and technique rather than specific software packages as these become outdated and obsolete whereas the method does not. Make explicit the links that existed previously only in the mind of the scholar and build on this to facilitate the serendipitous discovery of the intertext that was not previously recognised. Making data open and linked to allow interaction is the way things are moving and the projects in this volume support that.

The high editorial standard of this publication series is maintained in this volume with very few typos apparent. The occasional US English spelling creeps in along with the increasingly common but incorrect use of "digitalisation". Overall, the strength of this volume is in its diversity both in terms of range but also the depth that is managed in a series of articles limited by wordcount; it represents a significant contribution to the field.