

Terras, M. (2008). Review of *Digital Heritage: Applying Digital Imaging to Cultural Heritage*. Lindsay MacDonald (ed.). Amsterdam etc.: Butterworth-Heinemann / Elsevier, 2006. LLC, 23: 244 - 246

Digital Heritage: Applying Digital Imaging to Cultural Heritage.

Lindsay MacDonald (ed.). *Amsterdam etc.: Butterworth-Heinemann / Elsevier, 2006, 583 pp. ISBN: 378-0-75-066183-6. £69.99 / € 102.50 / \$ 110 (hardback)*.

The digital imaging of cultural and heritage objects has become commonplace as memory institutions create digital surrogates and representation of their holdings, generally to increase public access by providing the resulting images online, but also to provide accurate and detailed records, and to facilitate detailed analysis of objects, documents, buildings, and artefacts. Commercially available digital imaging technologies have developed rapidly in the last ten years, becoming more popular nowadays than their analogue counterparts, and increasing expectations from the general public about the range and quality of digital image material which should be made available by heritage institutions. However, there are many issues raised in creating and disseminating digital image representations of cultural and heritage institutional holdings, and there are still many tools, techniques, and methodologies which need research, explanation and discussion for those wishing to understand and apply imaging technologies within the heritage industry.

The library, archive, museum and information sectors have produced many good texts regarding why digitisation is becoming increasingly popular, and how best to undertake a digitisation project, generally from a managerial perspective (Kenney and Rieger, 2000; Lee, 2002; Deegan and Tanner, 2002; Besser, 2003; Hughes 2004). These texts are essential reading for those considering establishing a digitisation project within an institutional setting. Technology, however, continues to develop, presenting novel techniques for imaging as the range of objects being digitised and

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experience of those undertaking digitisation in the sector increases, and there is a need for access to case studies from those carrying out digital imaging in order to give insight into the practice of leading institutions, major projects, and those working with new and developing approaches. *Digital Heritage: Applying Digital Imaging to Cultural Heritage* is a collection of edited chapters written by those working on important, well established, projects in digital imaging of all aspects of culture and heritage, including 'research and general libraries, museums, commercial photographic collections, fine art auction houses, and the built heritage' (p. xv).

Instead of being a text book guide regarding how to undertake a digitisation project, the book is presented as a sequence of chapters which detail individual projects and approaches, describing both previous and current leading-edge research in digital imaging. All chapters stress issues of use, usefulness, and usability, giving a historical and holistic view of the evolving nature of user requirements over the past decade or so. Lavishly illustrated in full colour, this text is therefore a useful addition to the range of textual material available regarding digitisation for memory institutions, having the opportunity to explain, demonstrate and advise in a way complementary to previous text heavy and guideline focussed publications on digitisation.

The book is divided into three major sections. The first, 'User Requirements', presents case studies from established institutions with a focus on why the projects were undertaken, and how they encouraged uptake and use of the resulting images through understanding the demands of the different types of users who wish to access digitised material. Chapters by authors representing the British Library, The Victoria and Albert Museum, and English Heritage, detailing their own experiences with particular projects, are juxtaposed with overview articles from experts in digitising

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rare books and manuscripts, allowing digital access to photographic collections, and how digitisation has been used in the commercial art world. The reader is thus presented with a combination of advice regarding how best to achieve their aims, and a record and discussion of how established projects have addressed problems of user needs and usability.

A section on 'Technologies' provides seven chapters which span 'well-selected axes of digital heritage: digital cameras, infra-red reflectography, image processing, colour management, image compression, and – a neglected Cinderella in the field – image quality' (p. xvi), providing an accessible and useful introduction to the technologies which underpin digitisation projects. Well illustrated and explained, these chapters will help those about to undertake a digitisation project understand the nature of the digital image and the inherent issues surrounding digital image veracity and truthful representation, aiding them in making institutional decisions regarding best practice in capturing images of their collections. The nature of reporting cutting edge technology means that some of these accounts will rapidly date: but as a record of current technology and research, the book succeeds in presenting an overview of the main areas which need to be understood, covering important areas of colour management and image quality, which are often overlooked by other text books in the field.

The final section, 'Applications', considers the digitisation of particular types of object, such as architectural sites, stained glass windows, easel paintings, and sculpture, and looks at how advanced technologies can aid in the capture and delivery of particular types of digital images. The book finishes with an overview chapter on 'Research Policy and Directions', providing a stimulating overview of future possibilities for the application of imaging in this arena.

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The range of topics covered within the text presents applications of imaging technologies beyond the usual scope of the library, archive and museum sectors, for example the use of digital imaging in commercial art galleries, or sites of architectural interest, is often overlooked. As such, *Digital Heritage* shows how central digital imaging has become to both public and private sectors, and how increasingly reliant we have become on imaging technologies. By encouraging information professionals to develop an understanding of the underlying principles behind digital imaging, and grasping the pertinent issues to the application of these technologies to the cultural and heritage sectors, this text encourages us to see beyond traditional institutional boundaries, and consider how digital imaging of documents, images and artefacts relates to the use of images in wider culture.

This informative, varied, and well illustrated text should be viewed as an essential companion to the managerial texts on the instigation of digitisation projects, demonstrating the strengths of digitisation for the cultural and heritage sectors, whilst illustrating and explaining at first hand how the application of imaging technologies to complex, historical artefacts can increase our understanding of, and access to, the objects themselves.

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Melissa Terras, School of Library, Archive and Information Studies, University College London, UK.