

AHRC ICT Methods Network Workshop

LARGE SCALE MANUSCRIPT DIGITIZATION

Centre for Computing in the Humanities, King's College, London, Monday 5th June 2006.

*Convened by the Institute for Textual Scholarship and Electronic Editing,
Birmingham University, and the AHRC ICT Methods Network*

INTRODUCTION

Advances in digital photographic technology, mass data store and networking capacity have in the last years reached the point where it is now possible to contemplate large-scale digital photography of manuscript materials. Some projects have reported costs as low as 1 euro a page, inclusive of image store and basic metadata information. Such cost levels, comparable to traditional microfilm photography, would make possible digitization of whole manuscript collections (indeed, several initiatives have achieved this) and, beyond this, digitization on a national and trans-national scale, for example within the EU I-2010 program. However, such claims need to be rigorously examined, as any large-scale digitization programme would need to ensure that it could deliver the quality required while protecting the originals from any degradation through the digitization process.

This seminar draws together experts from digitization projects in Europe who have worked on large-scale manuscript digitization initiatives with UK technical experts, representatives of UK manuscript holding institutions, and interested academic experts, to discuss the possibilities and implications of large-scale manuscript digitization, examining different methods of how to best achieve a high volume of digitization in a timescale that makes it conservation safe, financially viable, and academically useful.

Questions to be addressed include: Can digitization be done at sufficiently high standard, and at sufficiently low cost, to be both feasible and worthwhile in larger volumes than has hitherto been done? Who should decide priorities for digitization? How are the images to be stored and made available? How far is it possible to envisage a national, or indeed, trans-European, initiative with uniform policies on image use, access, and delivery? How might the image delivery systems be maintained and updated? What impact will this have on existing policies for capture and use of digital images in different libraries? How would content owners adjust payments for the rights to use images, and would this materially affect their revenue streams? How is such digitization to be financed in both the short and the long term?

PROGRAMME

10.00	<i>Coffee</i>
10.30	<i>Welcome and Introduction – aims of the day</i>
11.00	The need for speed? Balancing throughput, workflow and conservation Simon Tanner, KDCS, King's College London
11.30	How Big is Big Enough? Digitization for scholarly research Julia Craig McFeely, DIAMM Project, Royal Holloway and Oxford University
12.00	On cultural heritage and the digital world Manfred Thaller, University of Cologne
12.30	From Estimate to Experience: Workflows and some numbers about manuscript digitisation Torsten Schassan, Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, Fotomarburg and the project CESG
13.00	<i>Lunch</i>
14.00	In the afternoon session, we will be asking scholars, librarians and archivists to discuss digitization from their own perspectives, and will be seeking to ascertain what scholars need from digital images of manuscripts, and what the key concerns are for content holders in the supply of digital images. A detailed report of the day will be produced.
16.00	End