

The Centre of Excellence “Ancient Greek Written Sources” of the Academy of Finland, on the instigation of the advisory board, of which Prof. Bowman is a member, organized a symposium entitled “Digital Imaging of Ancient Textual Heritage: Technological Challenges and Solutions”. It took place in Helsinki on the 28th and 29th October 2010. As the chosen brand name for the symposium, εἰκονοποιία, also indicates, the themes of the meeting revolved around “image-making”. “Image-making” of textual heritage encompassed both image capture and image processing for the use of documentary scholars and historians.

Attending the conference and presenting their work, were a group of experts all working closely with papyrologists, palaeographers, and epigraphers, and all specialized in the digitization of and image processing for textual heritage. The intent of digitization is usually to reveal hidden text, like in the case of the Archimedes palimpsest, but also for non-palimpsest texts that are difficult to read, such as the Vindolanda tablets, to enhance the legibility of these texts, and to create digital avatars of the documents that can be further digitally manipulated, processed, and eventually interpreted by documentary scholars and historians.

This very enjoyable symposium achieved the remarkable thing of assembling technology experts who are usually dispersed and rather isolated from one another. It thereby created a community of “image-making” experts (εἰδωλοποιοί? image-makers, literally shape-makers), where design strategies, technological challenges and solutions to the questions of how to usefully image ancient textual heritage could be shared.

Each speaker presented: the technologies they used, ranging from X-ray systems and multi-spectral imaging to 3D imaging and Reflectance Transformation Imaging; why they used them, e.g. the choice of an imaging modality based on the composition of inks; and how end-users take an active part in the design and implementation of these imaging projects (Proceedings available here: <http://www.eikonopoiia.org/programme.html>).

The scale of the event and the fact that it stretched over two days made it possible to interact with each and every participant. It also permitted rich discussions and exchanges during the break-out sessions, where, amongst others, the following subjects were broached: funding (inevitably!); where to publish and how to disseminate our research; how to visualize

Εἰκονοποιᾶ... or the emergence of a community of (digital) shape-makers

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meaningfully the results of our research; how to make our results reproducible; what kind of imaging workflows we have adopted...

Besides a Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum volume, which the organisers are currently editing, and which will regroup the papers presented at the symposium, we all thought that one or even two books could constitute a further output of this event. There was a consensus on the fact that imaging technologies have reached a certain maturity and that the imaging techniques that have been tried and tested should be gathered, documented and detailed along with the type of textual artefacts they are most suited to.

All participants were also eager to keep this community alive, and it was agreed that a second instalment of εἰκονοποιᾶ would take place some time in 2011, probably in Washington. Looking forward to it!

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