



Special Issue on **Digital Libraries, Epigraphy and Paleography: Bringing Records from the Distant Past to the Present**

Written expression is the most common form of recording and communicating the human experience of life on earth. This special issue will be concerned with written and inscribed works, from the earliest markings on stone and cave walls to the brilliantly crafted and elaborately illustrated manuscripts created by scribes in the centuries prior to the printed era. Epigraphy and Paleography research contributes new information to long-established fields in the humanities, social sciences, and the arts by studying writings, in many forms, that pre-date the print era. Many of these ancient works have been damaged, partially destroyed, or in extreme states of deterioration. While museums and libraries may maintain numerous small collections, a larger number are scattered about, located around the world, lacking provenance information, improperly referenced, and held in poorly maintained physical environments. And perhaps most importantly, unknown and inaccessible to scholars for whom these might be of great value.

Digital libraries research and development have had a transformative effect on these two areas, along with those disciplines that draw upon them. It is now feasible, both technologically and economically, to create extremely accurate digital facsimiles of a wide variety of cultural heritage materials and, in many cases, increase the scholarly value of the originals while leaving them undamaged, intact, and unaltered. New techniques for digitally reconstructing, remediating, and restoring manuscripts and scrolls have rendered many of these fully legible and coherent for the first time. Some accomplishments were dramatic, such as the digital unrolling and deciphering of scrolls turned to charcoal by flash combustion. Seminal funding for remediation research was provided by digital libraries research programs. The advantages of digital versions of inscribed materials are manifest. They can be stored, copied, disseminated, and shared, allowing students and scholars worldwide to study invaluable inscribed works for which direct access is not possible. Basic repository standards offer memory institutions the means to link collections with others of the kind, provided that acceptable cross-institutional arrangements can be made.

Digital libraries technologies can offer much more by adding additional identity, structure, representation, and relational properties at the data element level – words, graphemes, illustrations, maps, and other elements making up the larger whole. For the scholar then, enhanced linking capabilities across mixed-media collections can enhance the data gathering and analysis stages of the workflow. At the same time, new toolsets become available for use and, in some cases, automate what were normally tedious manual tasks. As a result, a scholar in one location can access, search and gather information from a large number of geographically distributed repositories while collaborating with peers in real-time. The benefits of these capabilities cannot be overstated. The impact is such that research that would have taken years to accomplish only a few decades ago can now be completed in a matter



of months. Moreover, open access journals and open data practices provide for rapid dissemination of findings. Collaboration and unencumbered access to digital libraries sustain the interdisciplinary dialogues that move scholarly work forward.

The complementarity of digital libraries and epigraphy, and Paleography is far-reaching and likely to provide new models for other studies. Epigraphy is taken here to focus on pre-codex inscriptions – establishing the origins and context of creation, and performing other tasks necessary to produce a readable, coherent work. Writings are typically engraved or embossed on durable media. Paleography focuses, in part, on hand-written manuscripts created prior to the print era. Like epigraphic scholars, paleographic scholars are concerned with the origins and circumstances that motivated the creation of the work, but a primary interest is content – interpreting the meaning and significance of the text. There is considerable overlap of these, and early written works also draw the interest of scholars in many other fields. Taken together, the advances in the past several decades have led to enhanced access to new primary source materials and epistemological frameworks for evidence-based research in the digital humanities.

Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Existing digital libraries of ancient written works with innovative access and retrieval, tools for content exploration and navigation, and semantic linking properties
- Research related to creating digital facsimiles of inscribed cultural artifacts and overall workflow descriptions
- Multi-disciplinary requirements for remediation of specific classes of written works
- On-going international collaborative projects to aggregate and link digital collections of manuscripts; institutional arrangements and management mechanisms
- Current state-of-the-art applications of digital libraries tools and services by epigraphy and paleography research communities
- Specific applications of computer vision, computer graphics, and other information visualization tools for rendering inscribed artifacts
- Interoperability requirements: metadata definitions, syntactic and semantic standards
- Unique approaches to stewardship to develop sustainable collections that promote reuse of data assets
- Scholarly impact of specific projects and future needs and opportunities

Important Dates:

Manuscripts submission due date: July 15, 2021

Reviewing submitted manuscripts starts immediately after submission, and manuscripts appear online as Online First articles soon after acceptance.

Anticipated publication date: December 1, 2021

Submission Guidelines:

- Authors are invited to submit original manuscripts that have not been published and are not currently under review by other journals or conferences. Authors will be asked for their help to review other manuscripts submitted to this special issue due to their expertise in the field of this special issue.



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- Manuscripts need to be prepared according to the Instructions for Authors provided on the IJDL online submission page at <https://www.editorialmanager.com/ijdl/default.aspx>. Submitted manuscripts will be peer-reviewed according to the IJDL reviewing procedure. Note that the page limit of manuscripts is 12 (double column format).
- During the submission procedure in Editorial Manager (<https://www.editorialmanager.com/ijdl/default.aspx>), at the submission step '**Additional Information**', authors should select the special issue title.
- Special issues are reviewed and published on a "fast track" basis. Prior to sending full manuscripts, it is highly recommended to query their appropriateness for the special issue from the guest editors whose contact information is provided below.

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