The DigiPal Project for Script and Decoration

Peter A. Stokes, Stewart Brookes, Giancarlo Buomprisco, Debora Matos, Geoffroy Noël, and Matilda Watson
Department of Digital Humanities, King’s College London

What is the DigiPal Project?

The core project aims to bring new methods in Digital Humanities to the study of medieval handwriting in its diplomatic and manuscript context by combining images and their constituent letter-forms. Designed to enable the presentation of palaeographical evidence as clearly and convincingly as possible, it is also being extended for use by Art Historians for the study of decoration. Funded by the European Research Council, it finishes on 30 September 2014.

The DigiPal Framework

The project includes a generic, open-source framework for the description, exploration and communication of visual evidence through highly structured annotations. Although designed for handwriting, it is highly generalised and so is being used successfully for different alphabets (Latin, Hebrew and Greek), different materials (parchment and stone) and also decoration. It comprises:

- A new generalised model for describing handwriting and decoration
- An annotation tool for structured descriptions
- An interface for exploration, experimentation and knowledge creation
- User-created collections and deep stable URLs for citation and sharing
- A RESTful API for harvesting content, advanced querying or custom UIs

The framework is under development until 30 September 2014, but beta releases are available for download from GitHub or functioning at www.digipal.eu.

The DigiPal Architecture

DigiPal is based on Django/Mezzanine, with a responsive user interface built on Bootstrap, jQuery and OpenLayers. It requires a relational database and image server; currently these are PostgreSQL and IIPImage though in principle others could be used. It is available as a Django project app, as a Django app within a larger Django project, or a fully-functional application running in a Virtual Machine. It also provides a RESTful API for direct querying of the data model. Further documentation is available from the GitHub repository.

Beyond DigiPal

The framework is being used in a number of current and planned projects:

DigiPal: English Vernacular minuscule from the eleventh century
ScandiPal: Eleventh-century Latin fragments from Scandinavia
SephardiPal: Fifteenth-century manuscripts in Hebrew from the Iberian Peninsula
InsPal: Inscriptions in Greek and Latin (and both) from the province of Thracia
Poules pour les Inscriptions Monétaires: Coins from the Bibl. nationale de France
Models of Authority: Twelfth-century curvilinear charters from Scotland
The Conqueror’s Commissioners: Palaeography and codicology of Exon Domesday
The workshop of Matthew Paris at St Albans, 1230–1259

These all extend the framework in different ways, and two (Models of Authority and Conqueror’s Commissioners) are collaborative projects with substantial research grants in their own right, extending development until at least January 2017.

Annotation

Structured Markup of Images

Description

Labels for Interpretation and Recall

Exploration

Creating Knowledge through Interaction

Communication

Evidence in Support of an Argument

The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Union Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) under grant agreement n° 263751

Visit us at http://digipal.eu/ or on GitHub at kcl-ddh/digipal