

Abstract

Considering the change of rhythm that researchers in Humanities faced in the research process, the aim of the Swiss National Science Foundation project *HumaReC - Humanities Research and Continuous Publishing: a digital New Testament test-case* (2016-2018) is to investigate how a project in Humanities could deliberately embed this evolution, by providing continuous publications of the data and research results. The object of study is a trilingual manuscript of the New Testament in Greek, Latin and Arabic – an object at the crossroad of Arabic, Byzantine and Norman cultures. This paper will present the epistemological thoughts behind the project, the methods and techniques that were used for its achievement and the challenges that the team encountered as well as an insight into the final results, gathered in the research platform: <https://humarec.org>.

Project *HumaReC*: Challenges and Results

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Introduction

HumaReC - Humanities Research and Continuous Publishing: a digital New Testament test-case is a Vital-DH@Vital-IT project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation that started in October 2016, and will be running for two years. The project *HumaReC* was inspired by our concrete experience of the deregulation in the publication process and the change of rhythm that the research in Humanities is facing. Considering that the project will already be at an advanced stage at the time of the 5th DH Benelux Conference, the paper will present the results as well as the challenges the research team encountered.

Changes in the research process

With the shift brought by Internet and digitalization, the rhythm has changed drastically in Humanities research. While the amount of time needed between the end of a research project and its publication by an established publisher was perceived as a proof of authentic research, the digital turn in Humanities is creating new research paradigms and transforms the rhythm of research through digital writing material. Publishing formats often include paper drafts, but can also be social media posts, short syntheses in blogs, videos – all before the research is even completed and peer-reviewed. For its part, the peer-review process is becoming a continuous process rather than a unique event. As a parallel phenomenon, the question of open access as well as the concept of open data has been raised for Humanities both by scholars and by institutions.¹ These calls were followed by concrete measures for Swiss National Science Foundation projects.²

In this perspective, the aim of *HumaReC* was to elaborate a project in Humanities that would be “born digital” and be open as much as possible, and that would deliberately test the change of rhythm by providing continuous publications of the data and research results.

The object of study is a trilingual manuscript of the New Testament in Greek, Latin and Arabic – an object at the crossroad of Arabic, Byzantine and Norman cultures. Although this it is the only New Testament manuscript presenting the three languages together known so far, the codex was never studied before. It illustrates once more how DH enable the rediscovery of marginal topics.

Collaborations at the core of the project

An interesting aspect of the project is its team configuration, which is composed of humanists – more specifically theologians – and IT researchers. This configuration, which integrates computing research as part of the project, is new and unusual among the division “humanities and social sciences” of the

¹ See e.g. ‘The Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0’; <http://oa2020.org>. All links were last accessed 24.01.2018.

² <http://www.snf.ch/en/theSNSF/research-policies/open-access/>.

Swiss National Science Foundation. This paper will be the occasion to share our experiments of diversity in a digital project.³

In addition, the project has established from the beginning international collaborations in order to benefit from specific expertise, which is necessary for such an interdisciplinary work. We have a board of experts for the following fields: Digital Humanities; Publication and management; New Testament; Greek, Latin, Arabic. We are also collaborating with developers of tools such as the visualization tool EVT (<http://evt.labcd.unipi.it/>) and the Handwritten Text Recognition tool *Transkribus* (<http://transkribus.eu>). Finally, we are also in close dialogue with the academic publisher Brill, being convinced that the editors have to participate in the discussion about Open Access edition evolution.

What HumaReC does offer?

HumaReC offers a digital research platform, which respects the concept of continuous publishing:

- ♦ HumaReC provides a manuscript viewer (<http://humarec-viewer.vital-it.ch>) in full open access with quality images and many features for the study of the manuscript. Transcription is encoded following the XML TEI standards and is available under CC BY 4.0 license. Following continuous publishing principles, new folios are directly made available when they have been transcribed and encoded.
- ♦ The research blog (<https://humarec.org/index.php/continuous-publications-blog>) is part of the continuous publishing process. In the blog, we offer regular updates about the development of the project and the research results. Four announcements and ten articles are online for now.
- ♦ The forum (<https://humarec.org/index.php/forum>) was set up in order to facilitate communication with people interested in the project; it is mostly used by users of the manuscript viewer for proposing corrections in the transcription.

The research platform received an ISSN from the Swiss National Library:⁴ all published material associated with the project can be referred to with this number.

The web book will summarize the research done during the project. Similarly to a conventional book, this text will be long, structured, and published by a publisher, but the digital medium will also offer additional, enhanced features. The web book will be written continuously, allowing the readers to follow the progression of the research and permitting the inclusion of their feedback. Furthermore, the web book will be related to other data on the platform, such as to the manuscript viewer, enabling users to move easily among resources.⁵ The publisher Brill is very interested in this new format; a first announcement of the publication was included in their 2017 catalogue.⁶ As we are planning a partnership with Brill, we chose to present the web book in a simple and flexible structure, which could become independent from our research platform at any time.

The paper will present the epistemological thoughts behind the project, the methods and techniques that were used for its achievement and the challenges that the team encountered as well as an insight into the final results.

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³ Thompson Klein, *Interdisciplining Digital Humanities: Boundary Work in an Emerging Field*; Siemens et al., "It Challenges Members to Think of Their Work through Another Kind of Specialist's Eyes".

⁴ ISSN 2504-5075; in the catalogue *Helveticat*: <http://www.helveticat.ch/lib/item?id=chamo:1893712>.

⁵ The principles of the web book are explained in a blog article: 'Web Book', <https://humarec.org/index.php/continuous-publications-blog?start=10>.

⁶ http://www.brill.com/sites/default/files/biblical_studies_catalog_-_2017_1.pdf, p. 32.

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