

**Digital humanities enhanced. Challenges and prospects of Ancient Studies.
A retrospect on the DH-conference in November 2015 in Leipzig.**

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It has been roughly two months since my visit to the specialist conference in Leipzig. During those three days egyptologists, papyrologists, archeologists, along with colleagues from other disciplines, explored the various ways one can apply digital tools onto the humanities.

I would like to anticipate how the event was both inspiring and educational. The various workshop reports and papers demonstrated that the growing interaction between the computer and fields of research and teaching, is key to the survival of our historical discipline.

The first two days of the conference covered the reports from the respective projects dealing with mostly philological work and also archaeological material using databases as means of research data utilisation.

The work of a philologist can be tough, as we all know. But at this event we learned about different projects using and producing distinct text encoding software and Unicode input methods that are taking the text related work onto a whole new level, whilst, at the same time, allowing its execution to become more transparent, exchangeable, and easier to connect with. It would seem that the challenges and prospects of the new technology are directly linked to the change of nature of our research.

There has been an increased interest in linguistic annotations of text corpora creating connected pieces of information that allow for linguistical analysis of ancient texts. In the case of treebanking it is this methodological approach that makes it so important and practicable because with basic training, syntax is understandable to users from any language background. Inter-annotator cooperation is therefore desirable and we were repeatedly invited to help with enlarging the corpus of various databases and benefit from the software instead. Treebanks of large annotated textual corpora can furthermore be turned into networks and then be used in the subsequent social network analysis.

The last day was reserved for the two workshops on 3D modeling in archaeology and annotated corpora. We shared our thoughts on the covered contents diving into an engaging and stimulating discussion. I attended the annotation workshop and here are the most significant ideas that I've written down in my notebook.

One of the main demands has been the development of standards for the work with database systems. We should achieve an agreement on a guideline for the storage and export of research data, the specification of input terms etc.

It has been registered that working with stable URI's for the benefit of easier data sharing should be intended. To make a real impact for the humanities, the philological disciplines need to work together as well as present themselves through online platforms to the public in a way that makes their crucial contribution to the society evident. Thus it appears that the content of the databases has to allow for long-term usability, cooperation and application by "non-DH" people. However, one should also support projects which do not immediately come out with a direct profit for the society and whose benefit is not always visible.

In order to succeed the funding problem for online platforms needs to be raised on a national level. So far we are confronted with the problem that one has to pay to maintain the database and no responsibilities exist on which institution is going to host the data in the future.

Another important thing to consider is how to get people to use the databases. Clearly it has to be part of our university education, meaning that colleagues have to be aware of it (i.e. DH) and the students need to be taught how to use it. This can be accomplished through the integration of DH modules in the curriculum and the granting of combined degrees. The offer of more practical classes would be of additional help. Some faculties of humanities are already starting to provide e-learning modules but in general we are still not making the most of the opportunities of online learning. In our Egyptological institute in Leipzig for example we are already running an online course to train students in digital methods using free digital learning sources in view of their future employability, as you might read at another point in this publication. At this point I just want to calm sceptics of e-learning by assuring them that, certainly, the digitalisation of academic teaching shall remain alternative to the traditional training instructions while it covers a wide spectrum of selectable activities fitted to support effective learning and teaching.

During the conference a few questions came up repeatedly:

- How does digitalisation change the nature of our research?
- Which standards should be used to make the digital data readable and archivable in the future?
- How to sell our work to society?
- How open is your data?
- Who will host the data in the future?

The work and discussion is still in progress and we hope that many other colleagues will take up the new challenge as well. Are there any guarantees that the new technological methods will make a huge impact and that everything will be easier? Of course not. But we will still go for it and experiment in the process, regardless of any statistical figures. After all we want to give as much as possible of our knowledge back to the society and to achieve this there has to be a clear flow of information. An online presentation of our work result thereby would be desirable to connect to the society through a digital medium.

And finally, both, my colleagues and I have gained something from this experience. I've learned about the different opportunities of the application of digital tools in the traditional

area of linguistic work. It appears to be an interesting journey that opens up new paths in a comparatively young field of digital humanities.

During these days we were introduced to different annotation environments. Treebanking and social network analysis using analytical methods to visualise dependency relationships, generated a lot of interest and enthusiasm among the participants. It was refreshing and motivating to be part of this conference and to take up the suggestion, it would be great to have more specialised workshops and summer schools as the sessions have shown how important such an exchange of experience and ideas is indeed.

Turns out, this grouping of interoperable database systems united with an open access working moral is one of the ways we can make our future research to become more interconnectable across the national and cultural context.