20 Years of Digital Medievalist – A Reflection on the Development of a Community

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On the 27th of January in 2002, the first mail was sent through the Digital Medievalist mailing list (dm-l). Initially, this was understood as a group of supportive scholars, a "Community of Practice", that wanted to test digital methods for their research projects. Since then, it has developed into a full-fledged scholarly community with over 1500 registered members, and it has also become an integral part of the field nowadays called Digital Humanities (O'Donnell 2005). Digital Medievalist was thus among the first online communities to follow the path many learned societies within the DH umbrella took.

Interviews of founding members of DM, conducted as part of our research, provide essential insights into the motivations to establish DM, its mailing list and journal, and the changes over time. These oral history accounts show that DM originally had a very practical purpose and started as a platform to exchange information about best practices for digital research in medieval studies. DM was a model for other communities, such as the Digital Classicist, and over time its role in community- and identity-building became more critical. For some of its members, being part of DM signified being a member of a subgroup of medievalists and digital humanists. Additionally, the DM open-access journal was innovative at a time when hardly any scholarship was available online, and it allowed Digital Medievalists to share their projects and research freely with their peers.

For the first decade of the project's existence, the main online presence of DM was a Wiki open to any digital medievalist who wished to contribute (DM 2003/2013a). The Wiki provided pages on definitions, standards, software and tools (including a core of resources referred to as the 'Primer on Digital Humanities for Medievalists', comprising, among others, brief introductions to various technologies, such as XML and CSS) (DM 2013b), best practice papers (e.g., 'How do I encode a punctum delens'), conference announcements, and descriptions of projects relevant to digital medievalists. As time passed, the resources of the Wiki became less relevant, and with the launch of the new website in 2016, it was decided to only keep the conference calls and project descriptions of the old structure. An internal Wiki was kept as a management tool, and the public face of DM has become more focused on communication and community announcements.

Twenty years after its inception, the community still exists, building partly on the mentioned mailing list but also constituted through an Executive Board, the open-access journal, regular events, and social media accounts. In late 2019, the Postgraduate Committee was founded, consisting of early career researchers interested in digital medieval studies. The goal was to participate in outreach and scholarly research to engage other postgraduate and early-career digital medievalists. The Committee has been very active in organizing joint panels, promoting peer-to-peer exchange, and producing the award-winning podcast *Coding Codices,* which features interviews with scholars, archivists, and others, ranging from topics such as the digitization of specific manuscripts to discussions on biocodicology or multispectral imaging, thereby highlighting contributions of skilled labor and expertise within the community.

DM also still to this day regularly participates in dedicated sessions at the largest medievalist conferences. Since 2004, there have been 23 sessions in Kalamazoo and 12 sessions in Leeds officially sponsored by Digital Medievalist, totaling 35 sessions. The covered topics began very broadly ("Text, Databases, and Dictionaries" in Leeds 2006) and became more focused on encoding (with digital editions in mind, "Diplomatics and Editorial Practices…", Leeds 2014). In recent years, papers focused on "best practices" have dominated.

In conclusion, Digital Medievalist may be regarded as an alternative to the local DH lab, leading to frictionless trading of ideas based on common research goals (see for the local trading zones concept, Kemman 2021). It became a community of practitioners that reflect closely on their use of digital media, both on methodological and epistemological levels.

The poster addresses not only how this scholarly community developed that is closely tied to the Digital Humanities in general, but furthermore analyzes narratives describing the development of the community. With a combination of oral and textual sources alongside quantified outputs of DM, we will showcase how community-building can evolve and inform plans for the future of collaboration within the Digital Humanities as well as the Digital Medievalist community specifically.

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