Report on Visiting Professorship, Dipartimento di SAGAS

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The Visiting Professorship ran in practice from Monday, 1 April 2019, to Friday 10 May 2019, in the Department of SAGAS. As previously arranged, much of the time in practice was devoted to preparing and delivering classes and workshops, but important opportunities also arose for research, and it is certain that collaborations on this will continue to develop in future.

Teaching

The following lectures and classes were given, for a total of 36 hours of classroom teaching:

Four full-day workshops:
1. **'Introduzione a Archetype'**, on the theory and practice of the Archetype framework for digital palaeography and digital editions of texts
2. **'Immagini digitali'**, on the theory and practice of digital images with emphasis on images of manuscript pages: what images are, how they can be manipulated and enhanced, and a practical introduction to the automatic transcription of the text (OCR) using machine learning.
3. **'Testi e descrizioni con TEI'**, on the theory and practice of XML text markup using the international standard of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI).
4. **'Modellazione'**, on the theory and practice of modelling, including Conceptual Reference Models and ontologies, with specific application to digital codicology.

Five two-hour classes were given as part of the regular courses by Profs. Zamponi, De Robertis and Ceccherini:
1. **'La scrittura anglosassone del secolo XI'** (twice), a palaeographical lecture on the development of script in the eleventh century in England, with particular emphasis on methodological questions around digital analyses on the one hand, and on comparison with material from elsewhere, particularly Italy, on the other.
2. **'La paleografia e la diplomatica digitale: i documenti inglese e scozzesi, e il progetto di «Models of Authority»'**, a lecture on the palaeographical (primarily) and also diplomatic developments in charters in England, particularly up to the end of the eleventh century, with comparative reference also to Scottish documents of the twelfth century and discussion of digital approaches to their study.
3. **'Introduzione a Archetype'**, a condensed version of the workshop described above.
4. **'Introduzion alle immagini digitali'**, a condensed version of the workshop described above.

Finally, a two-hour lecture was delivered to the PEsEC students: '**Varietà di scritture, varietà di metodo: combinazione di approcci automatici, digitale e manuali allo studio del multigrafismo storico**', which presented methodological questions around the application of digital methods to the humanities, taking as a case-study the problem of polygraphism, namely a given individual or culture simultaneously using different scripts or alphabets.

I also participated informally in a class held by Prof. Zamponi at the Archivio del Duomo di Pistoia.

As noted above, the workshops included both theoretical and practical components, and participants worked through exercises on their own computers, on the one hand to gain real 'hands-on' familiarity with the techniques, but also to emphasise the theoretical and practical challenges and limits as well as possibilities that the methods present. The other classes were more theoretical purely because of limits in time but the discussions also comprised both theoretical and practical aspects. Teaching materials from all classes were also distributed electronically to all participants (including slides, but also files for practical exercises, etc.) meaning that participants could return to and practice the content at home and also, if they wish, benefit from materials from other sessions which they had not attended themselves.

The classes and workshops were well attended. The workshops in particular had seventeen participants in total, of which nearly half attended all sessions and almost all attended at least two sessions. Participants were primarily at doctoral level or above, and came from Rome and Bologna as well as Florence; they comprised students, post-doctoral researchers, university academics and librarians (from the Nazionale, Riccardiana and Laurenziana). As well as teaching and training, they also provided useful opportunities for contacts and networking, and indeed it is likely that discussions will continue with several of the participants regarding possibilities for future research. Students of the regular courses also gave positive feedback, including one in the PEsEC programme choosing to write an essay on the topic of the lecture.

Research

Although the focus of the visit was on teaching, it was nevertheless productive also for research. I was able to visit several important libraries in Florence and Venice (Nazionale, Laurenziana, Villa I Tatti and Marciana), and I also participated in a day-long workshop at Ca' Foscari on 'Digital scholarly editions, Facsimiles, and Medieval manuscripts'. Fruitful discussions were also held with professors in SAGAS, particularly Profs. Zamponi, De Robertis and Ceccherini, including testing some of the practical and theoretical methods on their particular areas of research, which helped them to see new approaches but also helped me see different applications, research questions and ideas. As well as sharing ideas and publications, these discussions have already led to two concrete outcomes, namely shared work on modelling writing through the Archetype framework (particularly for cursive script which has not yet been properly taken into account), and plans for a future workshop in Florence on codicology. It is hoped also that connections with the librarians particularly through the workshop will lead to future collaboration around the application of machine vision and artificial intelligence to the analysis of digitised manuscripts, work that is already underway in my team in Paris.

Overall, then, the Visiting Professorship proved stimulating, rewarding and a pleasure for me, and I hope also for others who were involved. I send my sincere thanks to SAGAS and to the academics and administrative staff who supported me, and I look forward very much to continued collaboration in future.