

Digital Humanities and Libraries and Archives in Religious Studies: An Introduction

Clifford B. Anderson, Editor. *Digital Humanities and Libraries and Archives in Religious Studies: An Introduction*. Introductions to Digital Humanities - Religion. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022. \$30.99 Paperback. ISBN 978-3110534320. Open Access eBook <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110536539>.

All too often, “collaboration” functions as a buzzword that gestures towards a particular set of values rather than describing the real give and take of shared work. Librarians are as guilty as any professionals of throwing the term around carelessly. This volume, however, bears the marks of a deeply collaborative endeavor, from its production, to its themes, to its content. The collective labor of digital scholars, librarians, and the support of institutions with a shared vision has produced a truly accessible volume that explores the current state of Digital Humanities (DH) and the place that libraries are playing in supporting and advancing DH initiatives in theology and religious studies. The combined financial backing of Atla and Vanderbilt University’s Divinity Library make it the only volume in the *Introductions to Digital Humanities – Religion* series (at least to this point) that is available in an open access format. The shared knowledge, skills, and experience represented in these chapters back up editor Clifford B. Anderson’s insistence that, “the partnership is the project” (1).

The *Introductions to Digital Humanities – Religion* series is further evidence that the field of DH is not a fad, but a necessary product of humanities scholarship working to shape digital culture as well as to respond to it. The series is an indication that theology and religious studies are beginning to find their place in the broader DH discussion. This volume in particular, by bringing together the work of digital humanists working in religious studies with theological librarians, demonstrates just how deeply DH is being engaged across the spectrum of religious scholarship. As Steven E. Jones has pointed out, the Jesuit scholar Roberto Busa’s collaboration with IBM to produce the *Index Thomisticus* serves as the “founding myth of humanities computing.”¹

With its roots in theological research, it is only fitting that theological librarians and archivists are beginning to be recognized for their contributions to the evolving landscape of DH.

Anderson’s Introduction acknowledges a crucial dynamic of any DH project: “Reading the contributions to this volume invariably raises feelings of inadequacy and imposter syndrome” (7). This is a welcome disclaimer, and it recognizes the truth that imposter syndrome is baked into the task of interdisciplinary scholarship. Readers will inevitably encounter DH projects far outside the scope of their technical abilities and language beyond their frame of reference (I certainly did), but Anderson and his contributors take pains to include librarians from small seminary libraries as well as large university libraries in the discussion. In addition to his roles as editor and contributor, Anderson crops up as a collaborator in more than one of the projects described – further evidencing the collaborative ethos that brought this volume into existence.

The chapters are organized under four headings. The first, “Methodological Approaches,” includes three different methods of data visualization. Michał Choiński and Jan Rybicki use stylometric analysis to examine the rhetoric of Puritan sermons and to map the genres of the writings of Jonathan Edwards. Matthew Handelman uses network mapping of the archived correspondence of Franz Rosenzweig to unearth connections between Rosenzweig and other Jewish intellectuals. Jeri

E. Wieringa applies topic modeling to depict shifting eschatological views represented in Seventh-day Adventist periodicals from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s. Each of these projects investigates questions of immediate interest to traditional scholars of religion, but they do so by employing computational analysis and data visualization in ways that both reveal new information and pose new questions.

Reservations about DH do of course remain, and the best critics warn against the possibility of reductive interpretations from computational methods that reduce literary texts to data. In their own ways, each of the authors in this section speaks to this concern by attempting to maintain the creative tension between qualitative and quantitative analysis. Religious scholars without programming experience may be lost when reading Choiński and Rybicki's explanation of the algebraic formulas and software programs they used to produce a network analysis of the most frequent words used throughout Jonathan Edwards' corpus. However, the model produced by this work – Edwards' writings laid out on a map and clustered according to genre – poses creative questions to anyone with an interest in the theologian's work. Specifically, these findings could send scholars back to Edwards' work to ask questions about "the stylistic migration of some of his sermons towards some of his treatises." They insist that "stylometry must always remember to return to the very texts from which it seems to depart when reaching for mathematical and statistical methods" (29).

Handelman is concerned to embrace quantitative, computational, and digital methods in the humanities without becoming positivistic. He uses metadata and archival finding aids to visualize connections between Rosenzweig and his correspondents, uncovering surprising connections between Rosenzweig and members of the Frankfurt School. Handelman recognizes the "negative dimension" (39) of the kind of visualization he creates, but it also signals new avenues of research that those with access to Rosenzweig's scattered correspondence can pursue. Wieringa is similarly realistic about the limits of DH, noting that while computational methods can allow scholars to gather information on a scale unavailable to traditional close reading, the broad patterns identified by these methods do not provide easy answers to questions of meaning and interpretation. Another objection to DH involves methods that critics see as involving a lack of quantitative rigor. Wieringa effectively addresses these concerns by focusing on the "slow cultivation" of digital projects, "where the complex, labor intensive, and careful work of data creation, algorithm development, and infrastructure building that will support the next generation of computational scholarship can thrive" (57). These first chapters display a concern for the iterative relationship between machine reading and close reading, as well as a recognition of the role that religious libraries and archives play in providing the metadata infrastructure and properly digitized holding for these projects.

In the second section, "The Database as Locus of Digital Humanities," Tracy Miller chronicles the process of field research and the use of XQuery and XSLT to build a database of medieval Chinese temple architecture. To create this database of images, Miller had to rely on the expertise of colleagues to learn how to transfer much of her data collected on spreadsheets using software developed for humanities computing. Her account of the project highlights the materiality of digital culture, noting that emerging DH scholars will need to learn how to communicate the scholarly value of the work of developing digital tools. Miller's account pushes against the characterization of DH as overly commercialized, showing how DH can result in open access digital tools that make scholars less beholden to commercial platforms.

Perhaps more concretely than any other contribution, Christine Schwartz's chapter demonstrates how existing library practices can be transferred to digital projects. Princeton Theological Seminary's Theological Commons is a remarkable library of open access digital collections. Schwartz's account of the learning curve involved in her transition from cataloger to metadata li-

brarian bears Miller's insistence that worthwhile digital projects entail not only collaboration with technical specialists but hard work on the part of scholars and librarians to develop skills outside their traditional fields of expertise. Schwartz combined new programming proficiencies with her traditional knowledge of metadata like MARC records to build and continue to grow the Theological Commons. Both Miller and Schwartz's chapters are examples of digital projects involving the kind of collaboration required to support the multiple modes that DH scholarship involves.

The third section, "Digital Humanities Pedagogy," deals with library instruction and the task of teaching introductory programming to humanities students. Richard Manly Adams, Jr. calls for an approach to digital pedagogy in libraries that neither valorizes nor demonizes digital tools. The challenges that librarians face in instruction multiply as quickly as new information sources and tools develop. Adams argues that libraries have an essential role to play in equipping patrons to navigate a digital information environment. Instead of simply teaching students which digital tools can help them access, use, and create scholarship, librarians should provoke our patrons to ask questions about how a digital environment shapes our access, use, and creation of scholarship. Adams productively appeals to the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy, demonstrating how they can help patrons reflect critically on their use of digital tools. This chapter will be immediately helpful for instruction librarians. In our library, we frequently encounter students who use Zotero and other citation tools with little consideration of the information they are providing or the quality of the resulting citation. There is also the broader issue of encouraging patrons to think beyond a "print vs. e-book" paradigm and start to discern the utility of various types of information sources in different contexts.

Anderson and Gayathri Narasimham further explore a pedagogical approach that focuses on critical engagement with digital tools rather than instruction on a specific tool or technique. They discuss the challenges and rewards of offering a hands-on DH class that teaches basic programming skills to undergraduate humanities students at Vanderbilt University. They go on to look at how that course could be appropriately contextualized for a seminary or divinity school. They describe the measures they took to balance instruction in general programming skills versus discipline specific tools, arriving at a "human-centered" design approach that prioritizes the specific questions a researcher is asking over the acquisition of a specific set of skills or knowledge of a certain programming language. This approach is consistent with the other contributions in the volume in that it promotes an approach to digital scholarship that does not lose sight of properly humanistic methods.

Finally, "Collaboration and Beyond" consists of the final chapter, authored collectively by the Experimental Humanities Lab at the Iliff School of Theology. It points to the inherent interdisciplinarity of religious studies and encourages conceptualizing theological libraries as interfaces rather than mere repositories of information. While DH is an intentionally digital approach to scholarship, all scholarship to one extent or another is carried out in a digital environment and with digital tools and resources. While the chapter discusses strategies for collaboration across departments to accomplish DH projects, it also highlights the role that librarians have in making the implications of this digital environment more explicit to patrons through instruction and curation. This is a welcome emphasis, and just one more way that the volume makes DH relevant for libraries that do not have the resources, institutional support, or demand to host something like a DH lab.

From the smallest seminary library to the largest university-based divinity library, the delivery of digital content is a daily component of religious education. Even for librarians who would never think of themselves as digital humanists, selecting, providing, and offering instruction in the discovery of e-books, electronic databases, and other digital tools is as routine as shelving a cart of books. This inescapably digital environment necessitates serious reflection. This volume both

shows and tells. It shows the work that scholars of religion are producing in DH, and it tells the story of religious libraries supporting, facilitating, and contributing to DH. Not only should it help librarians and archivists see the relevance of DH for the task of theological education and scholarship (and vice versa), its practical recommendations surrounding programing languages and collaborating across departments and disciplines will no doubt generate new DH ventures in theological libraries. For a discipline whose founding myth is rooted in theological questions, it is particularly gratifying to see this series continuing to tell the story of the ongoing contribution of theology and religious studies to DH.

Andrew C. Stout
Covenant Theological Seminary

ENDNOTES

- 1 See Steven E. Jones, *Roberto Busa, S. J., and the Emergence of Humanities Computing: The Priest and the Punched Cards* (New York: Routledge, 2016).