

# Setting the Frame for Digital and Public [Re]constructions as the Very Soul of a Scholarly Enterprise

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## 1 Coming of Age (in Theory) and Paving New Ways (in Practice)

The present issue closes *magazén's* third annual volume, which presented a total of twelve original papers from international scholars who devoted their attention to the schemes and models of research that are defining our scholarly domain and revolving around the practice of [re]construction.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, we hope to prove that Digital and Public Humanities' vocation is grounded both in creativity and scientific rigour, thus highlighting an attitude that *de facto* blends humanities with speculation, intuition, and invention (Jenkins 2004). As becomes evident in this issue, the particular concept of '[re]constructions' we focused on was spontaneously met by numerous scholars that responded to our call for papers, offering insights into a varied array of cross-disciplinary domains - ranging from historical, societal, cultural, philological, artistic to archaeological studies - which turn this principle into a true cornerstone of recent research pro-

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<sup>1</sup> This introduction paper was mutually agreed on by the authors who acted as curators of *magazén's* volume 2022, divided in two issues, with the help of the journal's editorial board.

jects in the field of digital and public humanities (Dupré et al. 2020). The theoretical reflections and case studies summed up in this issue go even further, connecting digital tools for reconstruction purposes with a steady openness of their scientific outcome, such as to make the public delivery of results an intrinsic step of these modes of research (Beacham, Denard 2003). Hence, every analytical endeavour is tightly knit together with a lure for public display that allows scholars as well as the wider audience to appreciate the [re] configuration of lost realities, the [re]creation of long gone dimensions, the [re]building of likely scenarios, and the [re]covering of disappeared traces.

Most conveniently, this year's last issue comes also at the end of the Excellence Initiative (Progetto d'Eccellenza) that fed and carried the Venice Centre for Digital and Public Humanities over a few years, funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research. Henceforth, it truly represents the legacy of that seminal period which brought together enthusiastic minds and sensibilities from around the world to Ca' Foscari University of Venice, in order to kick-start a durable research outpost in the Digital and Public Humanities, as well as a wide network of collaborating scholars. The activities developed and the relations activated in these truly frantic years speak numbers and stand for themselves: the centre is running a unique international master programme in Digital and Public Humanities, by now in its third year. A biennial summer school was held for the first time in presence in Venice in collaboration with numerous local GLAM institutions such as La Biennale di Venezia, the Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Palazzo Grimani and M9, a museum narrating the Italian 20th century with immersive environments and multimedia technologies, but also with independent activists and organisations such as S.a.L.E. DOCKS. The call for applications attracted more than 160 candidates from all over the world of which only a number of 25 participants could be invited. As one outcome of the summer school, an uncurated virtual exhibition of the Tetrarchs and Arsenal Lions *Hidden in Plain Sight* was launched in November 2022, running until January 15, 2023.<sup>2</sup> Another core activity of the centre has been to raise competences and capacities of doctoral students and advanced researchers regarding essential methodologies for digital scholarship and public engagement as well as emerging technologies related to linked open data, semantic web, computer vision, handwritten text recognition to name just a few. At the heart of numerous collaborative projects there is a team of research software engineers ded-

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<sup>2</sup> *Hidden in Plain Sight. An (Un)curated Exhibition on the Tetrarchs and Arsenal Lions of Venice.* Virtual Exhibition curated by Elisa Corrà and Francesca Dolcetti: <https://www.unive.it/data/33113/2/68377>.

icated to developing and enhancing tools and applications (e.g. Cadmus, Euporia) in order to facilitate datafication, content creation and analysis for very specific domains in various humanities disciplines. After three years of productivity, the Venice Centre for Digital and Public Humanities is an internationally renowned competence hub connected to and integrated into scholarly networks and infrastructures, visible not least by the fact that since October 2021 the VeDPH and the Institute for Computational Linguistics “Antonio Zampolli” of the National Research Council of Italy (CNR-ILC) collaborate as an officially recognised CLARIN Knowledge Centre for Digital and Public Textual Scholarship.<sup>3</sup>

This journal, too, comes as one of the legacies of the excellence project developed over the last few years and will henceforth continue to build upon the network created among international scholars, particularly to offer an open platform for theoretical debates, methodological reflections, and case studies. Though it will not be the only enterprise that continues to flourish from the Venice Centre for Digital and Public Humanities. Very much so, the experience of *magazén* convinced us that there was the necessity to offer another platform to disclose even wider projects, thus paving the way for a special book series, again with Edizioni Ca’ Foscari in open access. Indeed, the new book series starts in parallel to this last journal issue and we are proud to announce that the first volume is already online.<sup>4</sup> Titled *Disclosing Collections: Studies, Catalogues and Data in the Arts and the Humanities*, the series intends to complement the journal, focusing on practical examples and specific research projects in connection with institutions in the GLAM sector. Inspired by the process of scientific analysis and contextual public disclosure of collected materials in the wider Humanities, this academic book series aims at establishing a paradigmatic practice in producing catalogues, inventories, indexes, collection displays, data sets, and item lists. The series is grounded on the idea of both mapping and disclosing unprecedented territories, which are then left with infrastructures that allow them to be available for the research community and the wider public. In this sense, the series intends to go beyond traditional concepts such as the ‘catalogue raisonné’ or full inventory lists, rather trying to present publications in print and digital form that cut across a given collection of items and thus highlight categorisations, interconnections, and relevance attribution. Of particular importance is the methodology applied to the production of the finalised publication, which takes into account recent interdisciplinary stances, modes of research, and forms of presentation prompted by

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<sup>3</sup> DiPText-KC: <https://diptext-kc.clarin-it.it/>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://doi.org/10.30687/2974-5276>.

scholars in the Digital and Public Humanities, particularly the development and importance gained by relational databases. The scope of the series embraces the entire array of the Humanities: from textual scholarship to history, from art history to cultural heritage, from archaeology to archival studies. A distinctive feature of the series is its institutional interconnectedness, since publications are each the unique product of intense and planned collaboration with specific museums, libraries, collections, archives, estates, excavations, field works, and research institutions. Our thanks go to the many scholars of international renown who accepted to be part of *Disclosing Collections'* Advisory Board and will help us to shape this new and exciting enterprise. The series is open to proposals and we will be glad to receive feedback or note of projects. With this book series our *magazén*, as the public house was called at the time of the Venetian Republic (Tassini [1863] 1970, 364-5), is being enriched in the years to come with a new front row table for scholars to take their seat and play their cards.

## 2 Models and Modes of Reconstruction and New Construction

The papers chosen for the second issue of the present volume address the theme of [re]constructions from different angles, taken from diverse perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds on specific materials and objects of individual case studies.

The first contribution by James Cook and Sophia Mirashrafi analyses the reconstruction of visuals and acoustics of the now-ruined Linlithgow Palace chapel, a truly cutting-edge project – *Space, Place, Sound, and Memory: Immersive Experiences of the Past* – in which the research team was able to virtually recreate not only the sacred environment but also the atmosphere in which the liturgical music was played, reinterpreting a historically informed musical performance within the palace. The authors discuss the conceptual issues of reconstruction and recomposition based on fragmentary evidence and the use of rebuilding likely scenarios for both research and cultural heritage institutions. The second article by Goki Miyakita examines the case study of the Keio University Museum in Japan, which offers a digital-analogue fusion of the dispersed physical museum collection. Miyakita discusses in detail the research process that led to the creation of the digital museum, embedding the analysis into the wider context of digitisation of collections and exhibitions following the COVID pandemic, and the need for accessibility to enhance the potential of existing (and future) museum realities. The third contribution of the present issue reflects on 3D reconstructions in the GLAM sector from a theoretical point of view. Angelica Federici anal-

yses the methodological implications of virtually reconstructing archaeological artefacts from the Middle Ages critically evaluating the impact on digital conservation practices in the cultural heritage sector regarding both scientific and pedagogical aspects. The fourth article by Monique Bellan departs from the question whether the digital can create more visibility for modern art from the Arab region, revising the modern art boundaries and ultimately leading (ideally) to a de-canonisation of art which includes artists and artworks traditionally excluded from the art canon. Her take on [re]constructing art knowledge through digital means is a challenging one, which certainly opens up new threads for discussion and lays out a methodology for the construction of relational databases in a collaborative environment. The fifth paper by Valeria Finocchi and Marco Mazzocco analyses in detail the impact of the COVID pandemic on the practices of museums storytelling in the context of social media, taking as an exemplary case study Palazzo Grimani in Venice. The curators of the museum discuss the difficult situation experienced during the pandemic, and the strategies that were used in order to substitute a real on-site visit, thus leading to a [re]construction of meaning around cultural heritage based on the involvement of the public via social media and shared practices. In the last contribution, Konrad Szuba discusses the [re]construction of the sacred urban space in Warsaw after the second northern war (1655-60), explaining the modification in urban space based on the Urban ontology. In doing so he reconstructs the changes taking place within the space of Warsaw between the late Middle Ages and the beginning of the twentieth century.

We cannot but finish with a heartfelt thanks to all scholars and experts that participated in this issue: our Advisory Board members, the selected contributors, the many peer reviewers, all members of the Editorial Board, and the magnificent team of our publishing house.

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