2013

Databases: Libraries, Museums, Churches, Major Digitizing Projects

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As the idea of digital humanities spreads, more and more institutions, museums, libraries, and historical/cultural societies have created and made available incredibly useful databases. Using these you can locate magnificent manuscripts or obscure churches. Sometimes the photographs are so good that it rivals studying the real thing.

Libraries, for example, are leading the way:
http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/medieval/mss/don/b/006.htm Bodleian Library, Oxford

http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/medren/search.html?fq=collection_facet%3A%22Medieval%20%26%20Renaissance%20Manuscripts%22 University of Pennsylvania Library

http://digidol.llgc.org.uk/METS/lhw00003/physical?div=0&subdiv=0&locale=en&mode=thumbnail National Welsh Library

Museums in certain countries have begun to make available large numbers of medieval images. Hungary, for instance, has a number of resources as described by Zsombor Jékely in his excellent Medieval Hungary blog.

The Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest launched two separate databases this year: one is a general collection database, which provides basic inventory data on thousands of artworks. Integrated into the newly revamped museum website, the database is available in English as well - although the translation seems to have been made with a translation software, and contains a lot of peculiarities and inaccuracies. You can browse the objects based on the collections and

also by period, so it is fairly easy to get to the medieval and Renaissance objects. The Museum also launched another, more scholarly database: an online catalogue of Italian and French prints before 1620. The catalogue, containing 4.604 objects, is the first complete publication of a section from the rich collection of 100.000 prints preserved in the Museum of Fine Arts. The catalogue was edited by Eszter Seres and Zoltán Kárpáti, and provides detailed catalogue records of each print, as well as new, zoomable images.

The Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest also launched its collection database, which contains over 2000 objects, but is growing. There are plenty of medieval objects in this rich and varied collection of decorative arts, some of which have already appeared in the database. At this point, the database is only available in Hungarian, but an English language version is currently in preparation. Medium-size images can be downloaded for personal use after registration.

A large number of objects in the collection of the Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest have been available on the museum's bilingual website for some time - including of course medieval artworks. These are accessible from the 'advanced search' page of the museum website - where you cannot really search, only browse according to various criteria (such as period or collection, or artist). Either way, you get relatively small images and only basic information - the basis of the information is a system separate from the collection management system used in the Gallery.

Christian Museum, Esztergom is the largest ecclesiastical collection in Hungary, conserving European and Hungarian works of art of several centuries. Besides late medieval works of art – including the Calvary Altarpiece by Thomas of Coloswar, the Lord's Coffin from Garamszentbenedek, and the Passion scenes by Master MS , a significant collection of Italian Trecento paintings, as well as a rich collection of the decorative arts. The collection page of the website of the museum gives a generous selection of these objects - with rather small images, but good detailed information. Most important objects are also accessible in the form of a virtual tour. Not having a medieval collection, the collection database of the Museum of Ethnography, Budapest still includes a number of medieval objects, such as European furniture, ceramics and textiles. The website of the museum is available in English, but the collection database is only in Hungarian. The Ethnological Archives also contain a lot of material about medieval buildings and wall-paintings, which is largely available online.

> Rewritten from http://jekely.blogspot.com.es/2013/01/collection-databases-of-hungarian-art.html?goback=.gde_4008284_member_201266637

Heritage and scholarly groups are also publishing databases of **medieval churches**, wall paintings, sculpture, etc. Here is a brief selection:

http://www.visitchurches.org.uk/wallpaintings/ Churches Conservation Trust

http://en.structurae.info/structures/data/photos.cfm?id=s0013247 Structurae –Gallery of Structures

http://monasticmatrix.usc.edu/figurae/index.php

http://www.englishheritageimages.com/r1/low.php?xp=gm&xg=8789

What is pushing much of this sharing online are **major historic digitizing projects**, often comprising years of future work.

Vatican puts 3.5 million historical treasures online

The Vatican has put a catalog of the Italian Catholic Church's artistic heritage online. It features 3.5 million objects, from paintings to crucifixes, belonging to thousands of Italy's churches. The project is a collaboration between the Church and the State, with initial funding of around €51.6m, *The Art Newspaper* reported. The Church hopes the database could help in the recovery of works if they are stolen. Thousands of pieces are still to be cataloged in some dioceses, including Florence and Naples.

It will be regularly updated and is to be expanded to feature the Church's architectural heritage as well as literary archives. Users are invited to search by artist, object, by subject matter, diocese and date range. "It'll be years before this task is complete," art historian at Università Federico II in Naples, Tomaso Montanari, told *The Art Newspaper*. "It's an enormous job and it's still rough around the edges, but anything that promotes the knowledge and preservation of the Church's artistic heritage can only be good for the country," he said, adding that "cataloged items will now be harder to sell on the black market."

Rewritten from http://rt.com/art-and-culture/church-catalogue-online-vatican-800/

Oxford University, Vatican libraries to digitize works

The Bodleian Libraries of the University of Oxford and the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV) intended to digitize 1.5 million pages of ancient texts and make them freely available online. The libraries said the digitized collections will focus on Greek manuscripts, 15th-century printed books and Hebrew manuscripts and early printed books, chosen because of the strength of the collections in both libraries and their importance for scholarship in their respective fields. With approximately two-thirds of the material coming from the BAV and the remainder from the Bodleian, the digitization effort will also benefit scholars by uniting virtually materials that have been dispersed between the collections for centuries.

"Transforming these ancient texts and images into digital form helps transcend the limitations of time and space which have in the past restricted access to knowledge," Bodley's librarian Sarah Thomas said. "Scholars will be able to interrogate these documents in fresh approaches as a result of their online availability." The initiative has been made possible by a 2 million pound ($3.17 million) award from the Polonsky Foundation.

"The service to humanity which the Vatican Library has accomplished over almost six centuries, by preserving its cultural treasures and making them available to readers, finds here a new avenue which confirms and amplifies its universal vocation through the use of new tools, thanks to the generosity of the Polonsky Foundation and to the sharing of expertise with the Bodleian Libraries," Holy See Librarian Cardinal Raffaele Farina said.

Re-written from http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/11/net-us-vatican-oxford-digital-idUSBRE83A1HF20120411