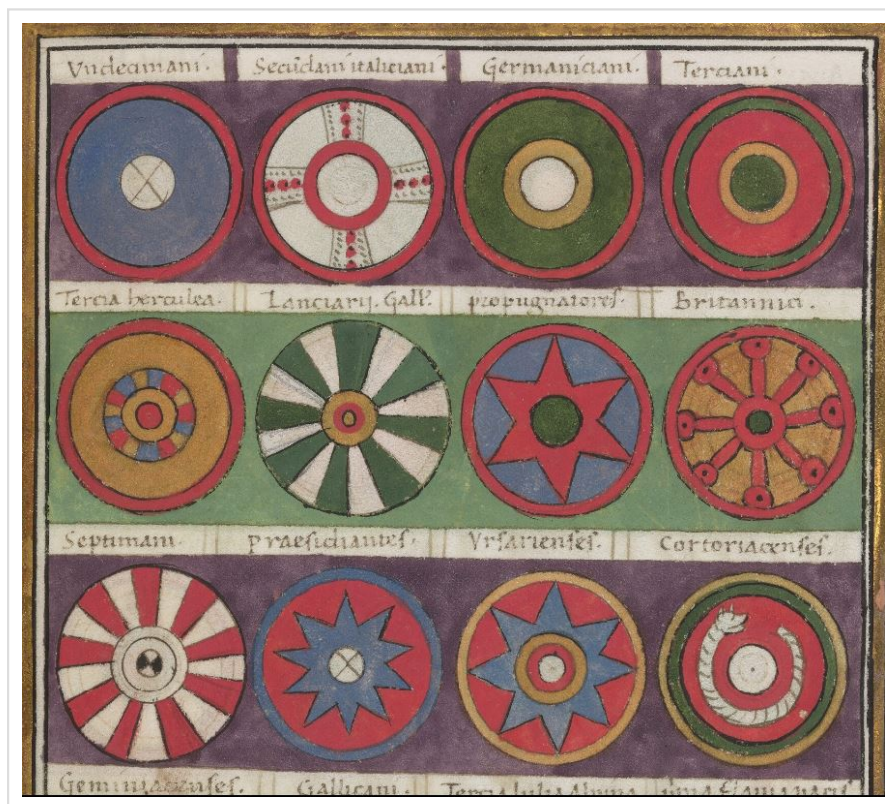


# Digital Preservation at Oxford and Cambridge

A collaborative research project to evaluate and provide sustainable recommendations for our digital preservation programmes

## Closing the digitization gap

Posted on **9 May, 2018** by **Emma Stanford**



*Bodleian Digital Library's Digitization Assistant, Tim, guest blogs about the treasures he finds while migrating and preparing complete, high-fidelity digitised items for Digital Bodleian. The Oxford DPOC Fellows feel lucky to sit across the office from the team that manages Digital Bodleian and so many of our amazing digitized collections.*

We might spend most of our time on an industrial estate here at [BDLSS](#), but we still get to do a bit of treasure-hunting now and then. Our kind has fewer forgotten ruins or charming wood-panelled reading rooms than we might like, admittedly – it's more a rickety MySQL databases and arcane php scripts affair. But the rewards can be great. Recent rummages have turned up a [Renaissance masterpiece](#), a [metaphysical manuscript](#), and the [legacy of a Polish queen](#).

Back in October, Emma [wrote](#) about our efforts to identify digital images held by the Bodleian which would make good candidates for [Digital Bodleian](#), but for one reason or another haven't yet made it onto the site. Since that post was published, we have been making [good progress](#) migrating images from our legacy websites, including the Oxford Digital Library and – coming soon to Digital Bodleian – our Luna collection of digitized slides. Many of the remaining undigitized images in our archive are unsuitable for the site, as they don't constitute full image sets: we're trying to keep Digital Bodleian a reserve for complete, high-fidelity digitized items, rather than a dumping-ground for fragmentary facsimiles. But among the millions of images are a few sets of fully-photographed books and manuscripts still waiting to be showcased to the public on our digital platform.

*A recent Digital Bodleian addition: the Notitia Dignitatum, a hugely important Renaissance copy of a late-Roman administrative text ([MS. Canon. Misc. 378](#)).*

Identifying these full-colour, complete image sets isn't as easy as we'd like, thanks to some slightly creaky legacy databases, and the sheer volume of material versus limited staff time. An approach mentioned by Emma has, however, yielded some successes. Taking suggestions from our curators – and, more recently, [our Twitter followers](#) – we've been able to draw up a digitization wishlist, which also serves as a list of targets for when we go ferreting around in the archive. Most haven't been fully photographed, but we've turned up a [clutch of exciting items](#) from these efforts.

Finding the images is only half the hunt, though. To present the digital facsimiles usefully, we need to give them some descriptive metadata. Digital Bodleian isn't intended to be a catalogue, but we like to provide some information about an item where we have it, and make our digitized collections discoverable, as well as giving context for non-experts. But as with finding images, locating useful metadata isn't always simple.

Most of the items on Digital Bodleian sit within the Bodleian's [Special Collections](#). Each object is unique, requiring the careful attention of an expert to be properly catalogued. For this reason, modern cataloguing efforts focus on subsets of the collections. For those not covered by these, often the only published descriptions (if any) are in 19th century surveys – which can be excellent, but can be terse, or no longer up-to-date. Other descriptions and scholarly analyses are spread around a variety of published and unpublished material, some of it available in a digital form, most of it not. This all presents a challenge when it comes to finding information to go along with items on Digital Bodleian: much as we'd like to be, Emma and I aren't yet experts on the entirety of all the periods, areas and traditions represented in the Bodleian's holdings.

*Another item pulled from the Bodleian's image archive: a finely decorated 16th-century Book of Hours ([MS. Douce 112](#)).*

Happily, our colleagues responsible for curating these collections are engaged in constant, dogged efforts to make descriptions more accessible. Especially useful to those of us unable to pop into the Weston to rifle through printed finding aids are a set of TEI-based

electronic catalogues\*, developed in conjunction with BDLSS. These aim to provide systematically-structured digital catalogue entries for a variety of Western and Oriental Special Collections. They're fantastic resources, but they represent ongoing cataloguing campaigns, rather than finished products. Nor do they cover all the Special Collections.

Our most valuable resource therefore remains the ever-patient curators themselves. They kindly help us track down information about the items we're putting on Digital Bodleian from a sometimes-daunting array of potential sources, put us in touch with other experts where required, and are always ready to answer our questions when we need something clarified. This has been enormously helpful in providing descriptions for our new additions to the site.

With this assistance, and the help of our colleagues in the Imaging Studio, who provide similar expertise in tracking down the images, and try hard to squeeze in time to photograph items from the aforementioned wishlist, we've managed to get 25 new treasures onto Digital Bodleian since Emma's post, on top of all the ongoing new photography and migration projects. This totals around 9,300 images altogether, and we have more items on the way (due soon are a couple of Mesoamerican codices and an Old Sundanese text printed on palm leaves from Java). Slowly, we're closing the gap.

*A selection of recent items we've dug up from our archives:*

[MS. Ashmole 304](#)

[MS. Ashmole 399](#)

[MS. Auct. D. inf. 2. 11](#)

[MS. Canon. Bibl. Lat. 61](#)

[MS. Canon. Misc. 213](#)

[MS. Canon. Misc. 378](#)

[MS. Douce 112](#)

[MS. Douce 134](#)

[MS. Douce 40](#)

[MS. Holkham misc. 49](#)

[MS. Lat. liturg. e. 17](#)

[MS. Lat. liturg. f. 2](#)

[MS. Laud Misc. 108](#)

[MS. Tanner 307](#)

\*Currently live are catalogues of [medieval manuscripts](#), [Hebrew manuscripts](#), [Genizah fragments](#), and union catalogues of [Islamicate manuscripts](#) and [Shan Buddhist manuscripts](#) in the United Kingdom. Catalogues of [Georgian](#) and [Armenian](#) manuscripts, to an older TEI standard, are still online and are currently undergoing conversion work. Similar, non-TEI-based resources for [Incunables](#) and some of our [Chinese Special collections](#) are also available.

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