

Parchment fragments, Co-operation and Complementarity – a case study

Maria Sorjonen

National Library of Finland, Helsinki, Finland



Copyright © 2013 by **Maria Sorjonen**. This work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

Abstract:

"Fragmenta membranea", The Medieval Parchment Fragment collection, is the oldest written material in Finland hence unique with high cultural heritage value to the country. The collection consists of 9300 fragment leaves, which are the remains of the books written and used in Finland, contemporary Eastern Sweden. The fragment pages are from approximately 1500 different medieval manuscripts and originate mostly from codeces that were unbound and reused as covers for bailiffs' account books during the Reformation in the early 1500. The fragments enlighten the spreading of Latin culture and its written artifacts over Europe. The National Library of Finland launched a research data base with 18638 pages of its collection of mediaeval parchment fragments in March 2012.

The project started first as part of the Save the Book -project, which gives ordinary people an opportunity to contribute to preserve and digitise the collections of the National Library. The project expanded as the Library managed to interest two big donators the foundations Koneen Säätiö and Helsingin Sanomain Säätiö. The project was a huge collaboration and teamwork of the historian scholars from The University of Helsinki, experts in conservation, digitisation, IT, metadata etc. Even though the project had a reasonably low budget and involved very different kind of specialists like engineers, historians, conservators etc. the originally designed timetable was maintained. This tells of the enthusiasm of the participants and the well planned workflow.

Without the digitisation project, digital preserving nor the conservation of the fragments would have never happened. Although the conservation was not a complete restoration it will help the parchments to last longer and the digital images shelter the originals from use. Conservation was carried out with minimal intervention to prepare the leaves for getting the best possible digital image with the over head scanners. This meant for instance straightening the fragments by the means of humidification and tensioning. The Preservation and Digitisation Centre of the National Library created a special laboratory and tailor made workflow for the project. The

operators were specially trained for handling the fragile originals. This workflow, the Digital Chain, is easily developed to future projects.

The metadata used the Dublin Core – standard that maximised the semantic commensurability of the description. When the project started Dublin Core had not been used before in the description of manuscript fragments at The Library. The scholars created descriptive metadata for the fragments. In the digitisation process the guidelines of The National Digital Library were used which caused changes also to the docWORKS- application. This ensures the future digital long term preservation with METS definitions.

As concrete results of the project in addition to the database, have already been a website, an exhibition in the National Library, several articles and presentations.

Keywords:

preservation, digital preservation, digitisation, physical restoration, conservation, workflow, integration, case studies, access, complementary
