



### **Born in the digital age!**

Kimmo Elo (ed.) 2016. *Digitaalinen humanismi ja historiatieteet*. *Historia mirabilis* 12. Turku: Turun Historiallinen Yhdistys. 258 pp. ISBN 978-952-7045-05-3. ISSN 1795-0759.

Digitalization is probably one of the most powerful megatrends of our time. The “digital turn” affects all sectors of our lives, including the processes of the academic world: research, publishing and sharing the results. Worth mentioning is also teaching – the pedagogical methods and topics relevant to university teachers are today closely connected to digital humanities. As researchers, we produce research texts with different programs, we save our texts in cloud services and we crowdsource research processes in different digital ways. We use open access publishing methods and make online profiles of ourselves in digital academic networks. Of course, our methods and research topics are also more connected to digitalization than ever before. The Historical Society of Turku has now produced a book

called *Digital humanities and historical sciences* to researchers and students who are interested in the questions and methods of digital humanities.

The book consists of two sections; the first section includes articles handling the possibilities and limitations of digital history research, and the second section introduces some digital research methods for historians. Altogether, the viewpoint is strongly one of historians’, but the book also has some valuable contributions to ethnologists and cultures researchers. Most of the writers are connected to the University of Turku, but there are also two articles by researchers from the universities of Lausanne and Luxembourg, who connect and contextualize the current discussion to European discourses of digital humanities. The editor of the book, docent Kimmo Elo, is a social scientist, and his research interests have mainly been connected to digital methods, for example digital explorative methods, data mining and visualization of knowledge. Those interests are also visible in the contents of the whole book.

The editor understands and forecasts digital humanities as a new paradigm within humanis-

tic sciences, which has roots in the humanities computing. Elo describes the battle field of the traditional historians and the new researcher generation that uses and interprets digital humanities, and highlights especially the growing pains of the rather new research field. This stage of the development can also be seen in the articles of this book. There is a complex variety of concepts and definitions of digital research concepts – even in the definition of digital humanities itself. The editor Kimmo Elo understands and discusses digital humanities especially in the context of new possibilities of using computational methods to solve humanistic research questions. Sometimes a strong ambition towards computational methods can also be seen as digi- and datafetisism, which Elo views as a sign of the early stage of a new paradigm. However, some articles of the book extend this quite limited definition to a wider one including research that has some or all the sources in a digital form as part of the research of digital humanities. For example, the article of professors Jaakko Suominen and Anna Sivula focuses on digitally generated sources. Suominen and Sivula emphasize that digitalized and digitally generated objects and sources have differences. Digitally generated objects have more variety and ability to transform, and they are also connected to each other more often than digitalized objects. On the other hand, digitalized objects are further in the process of becoming cultural heritage. Digital scholarship can be directed to digital sources but they can also be a target and operational environment of research. This is also a reason why the field of digital humanities appears very wide and open – and at the same time unorganized and unclear.

An interesting viewpoint to the definitions and concepts of digital humanities is offered by lecturer Frédéric Clavert from the University of Lausanne. The book contains two blog texts published by Clavert and a short introduction to his work and digital discussion with audience. Clavert observes different types of historical reading: close and distant reading, and human and machine reading. Clavert claims that in the context of archive materials, machine reading will be the most valuable type of distant reading re-

search in the future because it gives a possibility to reach and interpret a massive volume of research material from a distant perspective. He also examines the concept of datafication (*mise en données* in French) in distinction from digitalization (*numérisation* in French). Datafication is understood as a process in which digitalized material is transformed into data for a research process. This datafication process still needs careful criticism of the sources because inaccurate information in the process will lead to wrong and distorted conclusions.

In the second section of the book, there are a few examples of methodological experiments connected to digital humanities. While the previous section raised questions and made one think about the definitions of digital humanities and the digitalized world in general, this section gives concrete examples of the current work among historians. Because I have background in archaeology, I did not find any extremely new applications from these articles. Spatial analysis and augmented reality solutions are current and quite common methods and ways to share results in archaeological research. Nevertheless, especially the article by Kimmo Elo and researcher Olli Kleemola on a metadata research of military photos can be valuable for ethnologists who are interested in data mining. Elo and Kleemola underline the importance of the preparation and interpretation of research processes concerning big data and its possibilities to historians.

I was also delighted to read researcher Lauri Viinikkala's article on the representations of history in the context of mixed and augmented reality. Visual representations will be more important and effective ways to present research results and make history alive to different audiences. The technical solutions are developing fast, and in the future more and more believable and stimulating solutions will be launched. These solutions that will influence all our senses change the ways of interpreting history and communicating with the audience. All these changes are grounded in digitality and its applications. This also creates different demands to the education of future ethnologists. How to teach digital humanities to our students, and how to prepare them for future

working environments? The writers of this book are also concerned about this educational question – and there are no simple answers to give. This book is a good starting point to think about these questions, but we would also need more re-

search from the ethnological perspective to understand and anticipate the needs and demands of the digital sphere of our time.

*Maija Mäki*