

Seppo Eskola & Lauri Leinonen

National Archives of Finland

Digital humanities in the Nordic Countries 2018

Abstract, long presentation format

Diplomatarium Fennicum and the digital research infrastructures for medieval studies

Digital infrastructures for medieval studies have advanced in strides in Finland over the last few years. Most literary sources concerning medieval Finland – the Diocese of Åbo – are now available online in one form or another: Diplomatarium Fennicum encompasses nearly 7 000 documentary sources, the Codices Fennici project recently digitized over 200 mostly well-preserved pre-17th century codices and placed them online, and Fragmenta Membranea contains digital images of 9 300 manuscript leaves belonging to over 1 500 fragmentary manuscripts. In terms of availability of sources, the preconditions for research have never been better. So, what's next?

This presentation discusses the current state of digital infrastructures for medieval studies and their future possibilities. For the past two and a half years the presenters have been working on the Diplomatarium Fennicum webservice, published in November 2017, and the topic is approached from this background. Digital infrastructures are being developed on many fronts in Finland: several memory institutions are actively engaged (the three above-mentioned webservices are developed and hosted by the National Archives, the Finnish Literature Society, and the National Library respectively) and many universities have active medieval studies programs with an interest in digital humanities. Furthermore, interest in Finnish digital infrastructures is not restricted to Finland as Finnish sources are closely linked to those of other Nordic countries and the Baltic Sea region in general.

The technical solutions used in different medieval studies projects are very varied – both between the Finnish services and internationally. Metadata models can be based on e.g. Dublin Core, xml or tailor-made solutions, and even services with very similar goals have rarely made the same technical choices in general. Good international points of comparison for Diplomatarium Fennicum are for instance Diplomatarium Suecanum (SDHK), Diplomatarium Danicum, and the webservice of the 'Making of Charlemagne's Europe' project, all of which have been examined when making Diplomatarium Fennicum. What perhaps makes the Finnish services unique, and could make them of special interest internationally, is the fact that surviving literary sources concerning medieval Finland are limited in scope to a degree that has made it possible to include them all in online projects with no need to make choices that would leave materials out. This, on the one hand, gives Finnish medievalists comprehensive tools to work with and, on the other, potentially allows for relatively quick progress in (further) developing the services.

In our presentation, we will compare the different Finnish projects, highlight opportunities for international co-operation, and discuss choices (e.g. selecting metadata models) that could best support collaboration between different services and projects.