The Archaeology of Reading in Early Modern Europe (AOR) is a Digital Humanities initiative that examines how people read books centuries ago through the notes they left behind in the margins of their books. Complete, free digital images of heavily annotated Renaissance books appear alongside viewable and searchable transcriptions and translations of their manuscript marginalia. The AOR interface allows you to “look over the shoulder” of a Renaissance reader as he or she first engaged with information during the Printing Revolution more than 400 years ago. www.bookwheel.org
What is the “Archaeology of Reading” (AOR)?

Scholem’s claim that print is fundamentally different from manuscript always left behind questions of multiple readers. In manuscript form, the text is not fixed, but rather serves as a guide to new discoveries. In printed books, the text is fixed and the reader is expected to follow the text exactly. However, the “Archaeology of Reading” (AOR) project is changing this perspective. AOR allows the traditionally subjective study of reading practices to be seen and analyzed by technology. This technology enables the process of reading and engaging with a printed book to be observed and analyzed in ways never before possible.

AOR provides high-resolution images from a select corpus of heavily annotated books spanning hundreds of years and thousands of pages. These books are digitally accessible and can be explored through an online viewer called Mirador. The viewer allows users to interact with the marginalia, marking passages of interest and making notes. The technical infrastructure of AOR includes a data archive, an image server, a IIIF presentation service, and a IIIF-compliant Mirador server, which are designed to support the research goals of the project.

Who are the archaeologists?

The AOR team includes historians, librarians, digital humanists, and technologists who work together to preserve and make accessible the marginalia of printed books. The team comprises the core group of scholars and technical experts who have been working on the project for several years. In addition, the team has worked with related digital humanities initiatives, including the Bibliography Data Center (BDC), the Scholarly Communications division of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the Digital Humanities Initiative (DHI) at the University of Virginia.

Who are the sponsors and partners?

The AOR project is funded by a variety of organizations, including the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Digital Humanities Initiative at the University of Virginia, and the Scholarly Communications division of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Additional funding is provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Library of Congress. The project also receives support from related digital humanities initiatives, including the Bibliography Data Center (BDC) and the Scholarly Communications division of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

What do the marginalia tell us?

Marginalia are a recording of the reader’s engagement with the text, reflecting their thoughts, questions, and reflections. They provide a rich source of information about reading practices and the historical context in which the books were written. The marginalia can tell us about the reader’s background, their interests, and their reactions to the text. They can also provide insights into the social and cultural context of the time in which the book was written.

What is the Gabriel Harvey corpus?

The Gabriel Harvey corpus is a collection of annotated manuscripts that were used by Gabriel Harvey, a prominent scholar and author of the Renaissance. These manuscripts provide a rich source of information about Harvey’s thought and the intellectual climate of his time. The corpus comprises over 200 manuscripts, including notes and annotations on a wide range of topics, such as science, medicine, and philosophy.

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How does the AOR technology work?

AOR makes digitally accessible the wealth of data contained in these annotated books through an open-access viewer that displays high-quality digital images of these marginalia side-by-side with translations of all the notes and marginalia that they contain in a separate panel. All annotations are captured in XML transcript records and presented as linked images through a viewer technology. Users can access and download marginalia, and explore their full potential through the Mirador viewer that has been specially adapted to the research requirements presented by the AOR project. The viewer technology and content teams have worked closely together at every stage of the project to design and implement a user-friendly tool for transcribing marginalia that is both simple and capable. Further developments of the technical infrastructure and user experience will engage with complex features of marginalia, including their dynamic and visual nature, and forms of visual attention. Development efforts also include a data research feature to allow users to capture complex sequences of linked thoughts through the AOR viewer.

What will I find on the AOR website?

The AOR website is a comprehensive resource that provides a wealth of information about the project, including information about the AOR corpus, a list of sponsors, and a description of the project’s technical infrastructure. The website includes a project bibliography, a list of related digital humanities projects, and a description of the funding sources. The website also provides access to the AOR viewer and the Mirador viewer, which allow users to explore the marginalia and annotations of the AOR corpus.

Who were the annotators?

The marginalia in AOR’s annotated books were created by a diverse group of readers, including scholars, students, and ordinary people. The annotations are a record of their thoughts, questions, and reflections on the text. They provide a rich source of information about reading practices and the historical context in which the books were written.

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