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## THE WORLD DIGITAL LIBRARY

**ABSTRACT:** The World Digital Library is a partnership project, led by the Library of Congress and supported by UNESCO, in which libraries, archives, and museums contribute high resolution digital versions of their most important cultural and historical documents. The main purpose of the project is of preserving copies and information contained in documents at risk of destruction. Here is reported on the 2014 Annual Partner Meeting held in Rome focused on the educational aspects of the World Digital Library.

**KEYWORDS:** Digital Libraries; Repositories; Multilingual access; Preservation; Education

The 2014 World Digital Library (WDL) Partner Meeting took place in Rome on October 29-30, 2014 at the Institute for the History of the Italian Risorgimento. The event has been organized by the Central Institute for the Union Catalogue of Italian Libraries (ICCU) together with the Library of Congress.

The WDL is a partnership project initiated and led by the Library of Congress with the support of UNESCO, in which libraries, archives, and museums contribute high resolution digital versions of their most important treasures to be displayed on a single interactive website. The guiding philosophy is that people have a better understanding of each other not only by being exposed to other cultures, but by sharing with others the achievements of their own cultures and countries. So far 81 countries represented by 183 partners have joined the project: the goal of the WDL is to involve at least one library or other cultural institution from each country.

Italy has contributed rare and unique documents held in the National Libraries of Florence, Rome and Naples, in the Casanatense Library (Rome), Estense Library (Ferrara), Riccardiana Library (Florence), University Library of Naples and that of Padua. Thanks to an agreement with the Library of the National Academy of the Lincei and Corsiniana, the Italian National Research Council (CNR) is represented by (ILIESI), Institute for the European Intellectual Lexicon and History of Ideas. ILIESI has contributed to the WDL, supporting the Library of the Lincei, *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, the first of Giordano Bruno's six Italian philosophical dialogues, first published in London in 1584. ILIESI is leading an international project aiming at providing access to the digital editions of the major philosophical texts with the purpose of facilitating research on the intercultural history of philosophy. In addition to the original text and to its transcriptions, ILIESI provides later editions and translations, comparing the texts in order to show how philosophical concepts migrate from the original version to the later editions and translations up to now. The collaboration with the WDL is deeply linked to the traditional attention that ILIESI has paid to textual source of philosophical and scientific subject matter which, during the years, led to the creation of a large collection of open access digital resources. This collection corresponds to an actual crossroads between history of philosophy, of science, and of ideas, with a special attention to textual and lexical data.

The WDL includes very interesting *corpora* of philosophical texts from different countries and representative of different cultures: so far it contains more than 10,000 unique manuscripts, rare books, maps and atlases, prints and photographs, and historic films and sound recordings, comprising some 500,000 images. Aztec and Mayan codices from Mesoamerica; ancient papyri from Egypt; illuminated manuscripts from Western Europe, Byzantium, and Persia; Arabic and Islamic scientific manuscripts; early photographic surveys of the Russian and Chinese Empires; founding documents (constitutions, treaties) of many countries; these and many other documents form the WDL collection. Highlights include the fourth century BC *Curse of Artemisia*, one of the earliest surviving Greek documents on papyrus; the *Damascus Pentateuch* in Hebrew; the *Gutenberg Bible*; the magnificently illuminated manuscript

*Bible of Borso d'Este*; Matteo Ricci's 1602 map of the world in Chinese. Also included are the *Florentine Codex*; the autograph scores of Bach's *Missa in B Minor* and Mozart's *The Magic Flute*; a sound recording of the *Marseillaise* made in 1898; and early films by Thomas Edison and the Lumière Brothers.

The WDL is designed to encourage users, including students, teachers and lifelong learners, to explore commonalities and interconnections among cultures. This is done by providing, for each item, consistent high-quality metadata which includes place, time period, date of creation, item type, topic, contributing institution, and language. These information provide windows into the content and allow users, for example, to compare documents from or about different places at one time period or to trace developments in one place over the time. Every item in the WDL is accompanied by a description of the item itself and its importance. The descriptions, written by scholars and curators, are in straightforward, jargon-free language, designed to present complex material to interested average users and advanced middle and high school students, as well as to scholars. Its rich body of content and the accompanying curatorial descriptions represent the *Open Educational Resources* which are freely available for use and reuse by teachers and students, in lessons plans, presentations, and in students papers.

The WDL provides free, universal, multilingual access to the world's most important cultural and historical documents. As a matter of fact, all metadata, descriptions of items, and navigational information on the WDL are provided in seven languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Russian. These languages represent seven of the top ten languages in the world by internet usage and seven of the top eleven languages by number of users. The WDL features manuscripts, books, and maps in more than 100 languages from Chagatai (Turkish spoken in Central Asia) to Quechua (spoken in Peru) included Sanskrit and Ladino. The multilingual WDL interface is especially valuable for teachers and for students whose native language is not English. The wide variety of historical and cultural content of the WDL is ideal for schools and teachers committed to teaching cultural diversity and broadening educational content to cover all parts of the world.

The WDL contributes to US and international efforts to highlight the danger for manuscripts and other documents threatened by war, natural disaster, or environmental factors. Although clearly not a substitute for preservation of the actual artifact, digitization can at least preserve copies and the information contained in documents at risk of destruction. The high resolution digital versions of the items are contributed by Institutions only for a preservation scope: as a matter of fact the open access website copies are in a lower resolution so as to prevent the use for commercial purposes. Furthermore the WDL has provided equipment, training, and software to the digitization centers at the national libraries of Egypt, Iraq, and Uganda. As a result these centers are now self-sustaining, and are digitizing rare and at-risk documents for the WDL and for their own use. In order to bridge gaps and build trust among countries the WDL also assists partners and potential partners with training workshop and by providing online tools and information about standards and best practices. By assisting partners in these ways, the WDL builds good-will and helps to bridge the global digital divide, particularly as it relates to the creation of high-quality local content.

The WDL is supported by corporations, foundations, and private individuals. The main current sponsors are Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Qatar National Library of the Qatar Foundation, and the James Madison Council of the Library of Congress. Previous contributors have included Google, Inc., Microsoft, and the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology of Saudi Arabia. Development of the WDL began in early 2006: the WDL Charter adopted in 2010 designates the Library of Congress as the project manager, and provides an annual partner meeting and an executive council elected by the partners. The executive council is chaired by Ismail Serageldin, Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Egypt, and includes members from Brazil, China, Germany, Qatar, the United States, and UNESCO.

On the first day of the meeting held in Rome last October 2014, John Van Oudenaren, WDL Director, illustrated the project update with a special regard to the new User Interface (UI) <[beta.wdl.org](http://beta.wdl.org)>, through which every item can be viewed using state-of-the-art zoom features. Other features include text-to-voice conversions that allow users to listen to the descriptions and metadata in any of the seven interface languages, full-text search of books, interactive maps and timelines, and a split-screen features

aimed at illuminating and encouraging users to explore content. He stressed the importance to establish solid interactions and relationships with research institutions for a further development of WDL in the educational field. He reported that WDL would begin experimentation in a number of areas, including use of controlled crowdsourcing to research and write descriptions, and the expanded use of social media, including some tools along the lines of the Europeana Project presentation.

As a final point Van Oudenaren presented usage statistics and user feedback: 5 million visitors a year in 2013 and almost 4 million in 2014, mainly from Spain, United States and Brazil but also from China, United Kingdom, Argentina, Germany and Columbia. Percentage of pages viewed by language of user interface: Spanish (41.9 percent in 2013; 33.7 in 2014); English (24.4 percent in 2013; 30.3 in 2014), Portuguese (13.7 percent in 2013; 11.1 in 2014); Arabic (5.6 percent in 2013; 6.9 in 2014); French (5.0 percent in 2013; 5.4 in 2014); Russian (4.9 percent in 2013; 5.4 in 2014); Chinese (4.3 percent in 2013; 5.5 in 2014). Although the number of visits is falling, page views, total time on site, and other measures of engagement are rising. The decrease is mainly in the number of users in Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries, and it is concentrated in single-page users, while there is a substantial growth in some countries, e.g., India, 42.9 percent; Egypt, 23.6 percent; Saudi Arabia, 21.5 percent. The data show also an improved balance among languages. Besides mobile traffic is up 78 percent, even before the launch of the new User Interface (UI). The last slide by Van Oudenaren dealt with social media and presented two interesting examples: the Tweets on December 25, 2013 about Johann Sebastian Bach, *Christmas Oratorio*, Berlin State Library (over 35,500 visits and over 168,500 page views), and Polish Facebook posting on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2013 about an 1772 atlas of Poland, National Library of Belarus (almost 21,000 visits and over 308,000 page views).

The second day has been devoted to presentations by WDL partners: Rossella Caffo presented *The ICCU and Italian libraries in the WDL and in other National and International Projects*, Patrizia Martini's relation dealt with *Italian Content in WDL. A Cultural Path through History*; Saif Al-Jabri, from Sultan Qaboos University, presented *Digital Initiatives in Oman and Cooperation with the WDL*; Mark Paul, from Qatar National Library, pointed out *Collaboration to Spotlight Thematic Presentation on*

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*the World Digital Library*; and finally Ewa Barczyk, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, showed *Modelling an Efficient Digitization Workflow: The Roman Kwasniewski Photographic Collection*.

The Executive Council (EC) requests concluded the two days convention: EC recommended the partners to begin working on thematic presentations of every item in order to increase the educational aptitude of the WDL. In order to pursue WDL long-term objective of universal participation, the UNESCO Director General will send a joint letter, with James Billington, Librarian of Congress and Project Manager of the WDL and Ismail Serageldin, Director of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Alexandria, Egypt, and chair of the WDL Executive Council, to national libraries and national archives that have not yet joined the project, reminding them of the invitation extended to them in 2009. Furthermore the partners are asked to identify potential partners (national libraries and archives, but also other repositories), especially in countries currently not represented in the WDL.

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