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Editorial

I bought a digital reader to use on long-distance flights and I am not impressed with it. It cannot be held as comfortably as a book, it reflects glare, and much more time is needed to flick back and forth through a digitized than a real book. Above all, textual digitization is far from perfect. Here at Arlanda airport, reading *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars* (C. Suetonius Antiquillus, digitized 2006), I am startled to learn that Octavian, after his naval victory over Antony, went 'from Actium to the isle of Samoa to winter' (p.68) and that he had been 'much hurt in one leg and both arms by the fall of a fridge' (p.70). The paper version of Suetonius, on which I had relied previously for this antique gossip, sends Octavian to Samos and drops a bridge on him.

Except for the disadvantage of their bulk, then, paper books remain much superior to their digitized copies in my opinion. But is this true of academic journals? My instinct is to say 'yes' because it is much easier to flick through the contents of a stack of journals, browsing papers here and there, than to perform the same activity by computer. Of course, you need access to a decent research library, and therein lies an increasing problem for much of the archaeological world. It is discussed with commendable clarity in the proceedings of a conference that celebrated 100 years of publishing *Fornvännen*, the Swedish archaeological journal.

Scholarly Journals between the Past and the Future, edited by Martin Rundqvist (KVHAA Konferenser 65, Stockholm, 2007) addresses the very pertinent question of whether printed journals have a future against online publication of journals, which began commercially about fifteen years ago. Research libraries are the main subscribers and have become gate-keepers for on-line journal databases but commercial publishers have brought in massive increases in license rates, restricting the journal coverage that most libraries can afford (Jan Hagerlid, National Library of Sweden, p.11), especially libraries in small academic institutions of relatively poor countries, as in much of the Pacific.

An alternative attracting increasing attention is Open-Access Publication (OAP), defined as digitized, on-line, free of charge and free of most copyright and licensing restrictions. The costs of publication are paid by the journal authors. An example is the biomedical journal, *Public Library of Science* (PLOS). Widespread adoption of OAP would have the considerable advantage of free, Web-based, access to the widest range of literature for everybody from

specialist scholars to the general public, thereby allowing journal articles to make the impact their authors want to achieve. Scholars in poor countries would need only web access, rather than online access to a library. OAP would also make research results easily available to those who paid the costs, especially the taxpayer. The success and rating of journals would be determined by citation indices.

However, re-location of the costs of publication from reader to writer will result in pressure on refereeing as authors, or research funders, become more forthright about unfavourable reviews or rejection of papers they are paying big money to publish, and this could affect the quality of publication (Martin Carver, *Antiquity* Editor, pp.38–41). A larger threat is the enlarged ability conferred upon state authorities to direct the course of research interests if publication is paid for from research grants. Those who miss out on grants would be doubly penalised; no research money and no money to pay the costs of OAP.

The contributors to *Scholarly Journals etc.*, all of them in the journals business one way or another in northern Europe, were nevertheless of the opinion that OAP was at least inevitable and probably to be preferred to alternatives; commercial print and on-line publishing which is increasingly expensive and thus has very uneven take-up rates, and state publishing of high-demand journals, mostly in the sciences inevitably, by public funding through Research Councils (Martin Carver p.41–45).

What does this portend for the future of *JPA*? As a very new journal this is, of course, a discussion that we have yet to have, but it is probably one which needs to begin sooner than we might think. Small journals are most at risk in the on-line world since they are not generally part of the journal packages that libraries purchase, and they depend quite largely upon personal subscriptions. Publication and distribution financing is often very tight and somewhat uncertain. Thus, we might well consider testing the waters of OAP by allowing a proportion of our publishing to fit that format. Contributions would be subject to the same refereeing methods and standards but their publication would be paid for by authors at commercial rates on the understanding that the papers would become immediately available, without restriction, on the Web.

I would like to think that adding OAP to the *JPA* array of publishing options would help to keep the printed version going, if not forever then at least until I am felled by a fridge, perhaps in Samoa. If you would like to express your thoughts about the future for *JPA*, do write to the Editor.

Atholl Anderson

