

What is the Early Manuscripts Electronic Library (EMEL)?

EMEL is a non-profit research organization based in California which uses digital technologies to preserve, and provide access to, historical source materials, especially ancient and medieval manuscripts. EMEL promotes the development of new technologies to digitize fragile manuscripts, implements these technologies in projects around the world, and collaborates with libraries and universities to make the resulting digital images accessible for study.

EMEL implements projects through a consortium of advisors, scholars and scientists in the U.S. and Europe, and enjoys cooperative relationships with the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, and the National Centre of Manuscripts in Tbilisi, Georgia.



What are examples of EMEL projects?

'Next-Generation' Digitization System.

EMEL organized an international working group to develop specifications for a 'next-generation' system to digitize fragile manuscripts. The resulting system—now in production by Stokes Imaging of Austin—features a rotating book cradle to support fragile bindings (patent licensed from Buchanan Designs, Ltd.) and a computer-controlled camera to optimize efficiency and precision for large-scale digitization projects. The system is now in use at Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, and will soon be installed at St. Catherine's Monastery of the Sinai and the National Centre of Manuscripts in Tbilisi, Georgia.

St. Catherine's Monastery Palimpsests Survey, Sept. 2009. With the kind permission of His Eminence Archbishop Damianos of Sinai, EMEL worked with the scientific team from the Archimedes Palimpsest project to apply spectral imaging to sample pages of 16 palimpsests at St. Catherine's Monastery of the Sinai, home of the world's oldest library. Palimpsests are recycled manuscripts. Medieval scribes would erase an old manuscript and write new text over the old. The erased layers of palimpsests preserve unstudied texts from antiquity, and spectral imaging has proven effective to recover the erased texts. The project advanced the science of palimpsests by testing the effectiveness of different modalities of spectral imaging with diverse palimpsests. This project was made possible by a grant from Arcadia, a U.K. foundation.

Georgian Palimpsests. The National Centre of Manuscripts in Tbilisi, Georgia, holds some 4,750 pages of palimpsests, and has invited EMEL to help make the erased texts legible again. They include texts in Greek, Georgian, and Armenian from as early as the 5th century.

How did EMEL become involved with the journals of David Livingstone?

After EMEL's successful survey project with palimpsests at St. Catherine's Monastery, Adrian Wisnicki, director of the new project with Livingstone's journals, asked EMEL to assist in securing funds and coordinating the application of spectral imaging to the journals.

EMEL is enthusiastic to support the application of spectral imaging to 19th century manuscripts and thereby expand the use of spectral imaging to recover precious historical sources.