

## Book Reviews and Notices

*Technology and the Historian: Transformations in the Digital Age*, by Adam Crymble. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2021. xii, 258 pp. Appendix, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. \$110.00 hardcover, \$28.00 paperback.

Reviewer Joel Zapata is Assistant Professor of History and the Cairns K. Smith Endowment Faculty Scholar at Oregon State University. His research focuses on ethnic Mexicans and the Southern Great Plains, engaging with a variety of fields and approaches including oral and digital history methods.

Adam Crymble traces the often-ignored transformation that technology has brought to the historian's work. To uncover this story, the author conducted thirteen oral histories and mined private papers, blogs, social media, syllabi, archival collections, discussion group logs, and the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine. From this dataset, Crymble focuses upon technologically enabled history in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Within this scope, the author considers five aspects of the historian's work that have been significantly influenced by technology: research, archives, classrooms, self-learning ecosystems, and scholarly communication. These are, of course, divergent subjects. Hence, the author argues that "there is not one history of technology and historians but many" (9). Perhaps naturally, then, historians have talked past one another for decades when defining digital history. Crymble, thus, further argues "that an understanding of the field's history is the best way to develop the vocabulary necessary to lead those conversations and to take the field into the future" (9).

The book opens by looking at two different ways that scholars used computers for research in the mid-twentieth century, which led to the way we practice history in the twenty-first century. Crymble examines quantitative history as well as the use of computers for linguistic and literary analysis that emerged during the 1940s and 1950s. While today's digital history does not directly descend from such work, Crymble asserts that this scholarship inspired the digital research of the twenty-first century and provided the academic infrastructure that historians built upon when the internet emerged and billions of primary sources began to be digitized during the 1990s. Importantly, each of the various forms of historical research that are reliant on computers have their own distinct intellectual genealogy. For example, the movement to

digitize billions of pieces of archival holdings and then taking those archives into the world in new experimental forms has its own unique history that further digresses in national and regional contexts. In the United Kingdom that movement was focused on driving research agendas forward while in the United States the movement often centered on bringing primary sources into the classroom.

In the classroom, digital history entered in waves and changed over time. By analyzing 130 syllabi, Crymble notes the introduction of quantitative approaches, the building of collections, big data analysis, and other forms of computer-based history education. In the United States and Canada, the emphasis was on aiding students in becoming digital storytellers while in the United Kingdom the emphasis was on developing students' digital research skills. However, universities on both sides of the Atlantic were slow to adapt to historians' growing technological demands and largely failed to provide technical training to scholars. Hence, scholars mostly picked up technical skills through tutorials, summer schools, workshops, and discussion groups influenced by library science, archival science, computer science, and other fields. But in learning new skills, historians almost always concentrated on innovations and the new, not considering one of the basics of the history profession, historiography. To help fill this scholarly void, Crymble tracks the history of blogging—one of the most visible innovations of digitally inclined historians that the broader history profession adopted—and the waning of blogging as social media outlets like Twitter emerged.

Crymble concludes that to understand their profession, historians must understand the role of technology within it. Historians must also revise their vocabulary because "the word 'digital' has come to mean too many things" (161). To understand each other, historians need a clear and nuanced vocabulary that describes the many aspects of what historians place under the umbrella of digital history. To that end, the author provides a glossary of terms and definitions that will be of use for the seasoned digitally inclined historian as well as the digital novice. Likewise, Crymble stresses that understanding regional differences—he uses the English-speaking world in the North Atlantic to demonstrate this point—"is key to a strong profession able to communicate effectively across boundaries" (161).