

Report: Brill & PIMIC Publishing School for Historians, I

Leiden, 20-21 October, 2014

Over two days, Brill academic publishers hosted PIMIC at a 'Publishing school for historians.' The workshop aimed to introduce the students to the world of academic publishing, providing them with practical knowledge and endowing them with the skills and understanding necessary to promote positive relationships between scholars and publishers. It is hoped that, by familiarising the students at this early stage, they will be better informed when they come to interact with publishers and will have a clear understanding of the processes and issues involved, from the publishing perspective as well as from the author's perspective.

The workshop sessions focused on four different publishing products: books and book series, reference works (including online), journals, and primary sources (including digitisation). The workshop participants were first introduced to the product by a Brill editor, with the process of setting up such a product, and the issues and considerations from the publishing perspective outlined. The participants then broke into two groups to work on a series of case studies. These aimed to encourage the participants to 'think like a publisher', using a sample proposal as the basis; the students were asked to discuss and critique the proposal, taking into account issues such as logistical requirements, financial considerations, academic content, likely audience and market, and opportunities for further development. These sessions were felt to be useful; the students came away well-informed and with a more rounded view of the academic publishing process, and the sessions also gave rise to some interesting discussion of bigger issues in publishing today, such as possible future online developments, the Open Access movement, and the changing role of publishers in academia.

We also enjoyed two excursions as part of the workshop. As a complement to the session on primary sources and digitisation, we were hosted by Leiden University library, where we learnt about the history of the Vossiani Latini collection of manuscripts (currently being digitised by Brill), were able to view some of the highlight manuscripts, and heard about procedures of digitisation within the library. A highlight of the workshop was the excursion to Printforce: a print-on-demand factory which prints around 10,000 unique books per day. After a talk on the history of printing and some information about the company, we were given a fascinating guided tour of the factory at work, with all the automated machines explained and the processes demonstrated for our benefit: from the printing of the innerworks, the binding and the production of the hardcovers, all the way through to shipping and postage. The efficiency of the operation was very impressive.

The workshop was rounded off by a plenary session, with talks given by two publishers from outside Brill. Simon Forde (formerly Brepols, now Amsterdam University Press) took commercial publishing as his topic, and drew attention to the sorts of issues that first-time authors should consider when submitting manuscripts for publication; several of the

students commented that they had never considered how important issues such as brand recognition, pricing structure, and editorial relationships were with regard to academic publishers. Anniek Meinders (Leiden University Press) then gave an interesting insight into the challenges and opportunities of setting up a publishing list in a recently-established university press.

Overall, the workshop offered something different to the previous more academic PIMIC gatherings; although perhaps not as immediately, obviously relevant to the early stage researchers as a more traditional academic conference, the workshop provided them with a solid grounding in academic publishing, an area which initially can be confusing, which should stand them in extremely good stead for the future.