Integration, Interface, and Usability

Integration: Four Components, One Resource

TIMEA makes use of four distinct but related components:
- TIMEA home — is the portal site and provides access to the other components.
- DSpace — holds images and texts
- Connectors — is a tool for research modules and guides
- ArcIMS and a GIS server — deliver both GIS maps and historical maps

By using these systems, we are not only leveraging their functionality but also giving our users some advantages in accessing and understanding the materials.

Connecting Content:
To link place names in texts to places on maps, we use XHTML texts, DOM processing, a set of relational tables, and regular expressions. This process will apply to image metadata as well to link images to places on a map.

Interface: Seamless Design, Easy Access

A Straightforward Portal:
The TIMEA portal site is designed to accommodate different needs and styles of access.

The top navigation header serves as a general search by keyword, a filtered search, and as a way to discover general information about the different components.

Users can also discover general information about the texts, images, maps, and research modules via the more text-oriented page elements.

Resource Discovery:
Users won’t always access TIMEA through the portal. Where resources are discovered through other search engines, the TIMEA navigation header within each component directs users to more TIMEA resources.

Usability: Understanding Users and Needs

Defining User Groups:
A TIMEA user is anyone who accesses, enjoys, and uses the materials. For evaluation and other practical purposes, we think of them as:
- scholars,
- educators,
- museum and archive professionals, and
- students.

Designing Features to Meet Users’ Needs:
TIMEA users helped shape our key goals of:
- Search functionality
  Not only is our goal to make the archive easy to search, but also to make search results understandable.
- Connection between resources
  Connecting texts and maps (described left) is just one step to connecting content in TIMEA.
- Resource discovery within the archive
  Users need to easily navigate to the main site, perform a search from within any component, and find TIMEA resources when another search engine has taken them to one specific item.

More Ways to Meet Users’ Needs:
Beyond these goals, there are many ways we can make TIMEA materials more useful and the archive easier to navigate.

Metawhat? Making “geek speak” understandable:
Small changes to the item record make the metadata easier to understand. For example: “Full item record” = “Tell me more about this item”

Lost with a map:
Icons, especially GIS icons, can be confusing. Mouseover helps and a research module explaining the resource help users find their way around.

“To be more specific, I am looking for . . .”:
Advanced searching is an important part of accessing the archive. Our advanced search page allows users to search by: Title, Creator, Subject, Date, and Place.

Browsing along:
Browsing is both a fun and productive way to use an archive. By adding controlled terms to the metadata, we give users the option of browsing by eight broad categories. The browse page will also let users know what LC subject headings are found within each browse area.

But what is this? Making search results usable:
Getting good search results is one thing, making sense of them is another. We include icons with each result to indicate the type of material: text, image, map, research module. Search results also include: Title, Description, and Creator (e.g. author).

Just looking at pictures:
Many of the texts have great illustrations that users want to browse. We have included all of these as separate “images from texts” (and related them back to their source) to facilitate independent discovery.

A research module can tell you more:
We have taken points that might be confusing as opportunities to answer questions in a research module. These are part of the Connexions resource (www.cnx.org) where they are freely available to students and educators all over the world.