

Brave new move: Reflection on delivering a presentation at Atla Annual 2023¹

Hannie Riley

Chair of ABTAPL, Board member of BETH, librarian at Wycliffe Hall,

I was very fortunate to attend Atla's Annual 2023 this June as this was the second time to participate in this wonderful conference for a consecutive year. In 2022, I was formally invited by Atla to honour their former executive director, Brenda Bailey-Hainer's retirement, as the BETH (Association of European Theological Libraries) representative since I am a board member of BETH. For this year's event I was representing BETH once again sponsored by them to join the celebration of John Kutsko's appointment as the new Atla executive director. However, the significant difference for me between the two years was not just the changing hands in Atla's leadership, but it was my involvement in the conference. This time I wasn't simply attending sessions as a guest, but I was brave enough to embrace the role of a presenter.

The reason for my courage was last years' experience led me to think how I could contribute to our counterparts in the States to return their support to ABTAPL and BETH. Each year Atla sends their subscription royalty return fund to BETH who then subsequently distribute to each national association including ABTAPL. Traditionally this fund has been for us to send delegations to Atla and BETH to continuously build connections with them. However, for last two years, Atla financially supported our representatives so our members, Marni Thurm and Gudrun Warren were able to attend freely. For that reason, I felt we were even more indebted to their generosity.

Also, one observation I made, which was written in the bulletin volume 29, number 2, was about Perlego. I stated that "I felt that I ought to warn them what was coming over from across the Atlantic shortly." To be true to my own word, I applied their call for proposal² for a presentation to introduce Perlego and share our experiences.

Atla offered a helpful online session to guide potential presenters to learn tips and tricks for strong applications in winter 2022. The submission deadline was the 7th January and my proposal title was 'Perlego: A Friend or Foe?'. The acceptance of my proposal was notified in late February.

The good thing about the process was not only that you don't have to be member of Atla to submit a proposal, (even though their membership can be completely free with a financial relief called 'pay what you want' discount rates³), but also that there is no need to be there in person to present to this event as it is hybrid. This allowed Marni Thurm from Union School of Theology, who takes out Perlego licences for her library, to co-present with me the 45-minute session online from Wales.

I felt that Atla really wanted overseas librarians to participate their conference. They removed the conference registration fee for them. Atla made it easy with introducing a painless process when registering by simply ticking a declaration box. Also, there are a few grants available such as a travel grant (in-person only), registration grant (online only) and a global librarians grant.⁴ The one I applied for was a travel grant of \$1,000 USD. Fortunately, I was awarded the full amount, so

¹ Atla is a membership organisation of librarians and information professionals in the United States.

<https://www.atla.com/>

² <https://www.atla.com/blog/proposals-atla-annual-2023/>

³ <https://www.atla.com/about/individual-membership/>

⁴ <https://www.atla.com/blog/grant-programs-available-for-atla-annual-2023/>

together with BETH's support I was able to make my trip to the Annual without worrying about money.

As before, the organisation of the conference was excellent and there were about 200 attendees at the conference. It was great to mingle with librarians from the States and some from other parts of the world such as New Zealand, Philippines, Italy and Australia. The buzz from the conference excited me but was not enough to calm my nerves about the presentation.

The conference started off on Wednesday 14th June for 4 days and my presentation was on the third day, Friday 16th June at 8.45am. As it is a big conference, apart from two Plenary sessions there were four sessions spontaneously happening at the same time. Thankfully the attendance ratio during my session was quite evenly spread out over all four presentations. As most of sessions are recorded the recordings of other sessions can be viewed later.

Even before the conference, there was some discussion about Perlego on the online community amongst theological libraries in the States unlike last year. Last year no one knew about Perlego when I spoke to the American counterparts but this year some librarians were already questioned about Perlego from their institutions, so I felt that my presentation was timely and well received with anticipation.

I delivered the first part of the session introducing Perlego and pointing out the good and bad aspects of Perlego. In the second part, Marni gave a Perlego demonstration and answered all the questions from the room and online. Her professionalism and confidence came across through the video screen. She was able to address issues raised during the delivery successfully. I was so thankful that I teamed up with her.

After the presentation, at last I felt relieved and started enjoying the rest of the conference. Having said that, regardless how nerve racking it was, I value my experience of delivering the talk at a bigger conference. For our first away match I think Marni and I pulled it off quite well.

Now back to the UK, I thought my task was completely over-which was a mistake. The last stage which I had to pass through was to write up my presentation for their annual proceedings. I was given about a month and this has been a challenge as I had to catch up after a week and half absence from work and to do jury service. Despite of this I have managed to submit my article via Books@atlaopenpress. This was also a new experience for me to work on the Open Journal System platform. This was eye opening to learn what I have to do as an author and now I can empathise with our academic authors at work much more. I always wondered why and how some are less enthusiastic about open access publication. The amount of commitment you have to put in is much more than just sending your article to a publisher.

Overall, was this experience worth it? Yes, with no hesitation. I confess that I was overstretched and tired with jetlag there and after returning. For an introvert, to mix with new people at a big conference in a new city in a different country was tough, especially when you are representing officially. However, the whole trip has been valuable for me to learn other practices and urge myself to step out of my comfort zone.

I am writing this piece to encourage our members as to what Atla offer. If I can do it anyone can! Thanks to Atla for giving many opportunities to enable overseas librarians to attend their conference. I would like our members to take advantage of these offers.