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Paper Title: Networks of Shared Manuscript Transmission for Medieval European Vernacular Languages. Evaluating the Data and the Method.

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Abstract:

Codices that compile different textual units in the same physical object were common in the European Middle Ages. Many reasons guided scribes when collecting a variety of works and their analysis can offer scholars insight into scribal practices and the circulation of medieval works. In order to study this shared transmission of medieval texts, methods from (social) network analysis offer the possibility of researching the phenomenon from a general perspective and discover fundamental trends. This paper deals with the methodological and practical foundations for such an approach.

Modern digital databases of medieval manuscripts provide a big amount of relevant data for this type of research. In this article, I consider three online databases, each dealing with textual witnesses in vernacular languages: *Handschriftencensus* (German)[1] *Jonas* (French and Occitan)[2] and *Philobiblon* (Iberian languages)[3]. Each of these has different criteria on data collection and data modelling. For this reason, their analysis and comparison offers insight not only on medieval manuscripts and texts, but also on the consequences of different approaches when cataloguing and describing medieval manuscripts.

The first part of the article deals with some of the possible research questions for which a network of shared manuscript transmission can be useful: identify criteria that contributed to the selection of texts in the process of compilation (availability, similarity in form, genre, place and time of composition, etc.); quantify the level of randomness involved in that process; detect differences in specific linguistic, geographical and temporal contexts.

The second part considers the reliability of such an analysis, given that the available data is the product of centuries of both intentional and unintentional alterations and destructions of the relevant original objects, as well as the result of specific criteria guiding the work of each database. In this part, the strengths and weaknesses of each used database are evaluated and some suggestions on how to create high quality data are formulated.

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[1] http://www.handschriftencensus.de/
[2] http://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/
[3] https://bancroft.berkeley.edu/philobiblon/