

Defragmenting Digitized Manuscripts Sources: A Unified Portal to Medieval Manuscripts

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Summary

The aim of this short paper or poster is to report and present preliminary results of the ongoing development of a newly conceived tool that allows direct access to hundreds of digitized medieval manuscripts repositories online. The name of the project is Digitized Medieval Manuscripts Maps (or DMMmaps).

The Issue at Hand

A search with the terms “Digitized Medieval Manuscripts” in search engines leads to well established libraries on the first results page: The British Library, The Houghton Library, et al.,ⁱ mixed with other results, such as articles and blogs on this matter. These search results make finding many other online repositories difficult because digital libraries have often not been optimized for easy access by search engines’ crawlers. Sanderson et al. have estimated that only around 1% of existing medieval documents have been digitized to date, and most of the effort has been spent in taking care of the visual presentation of the digitized projects. Many institutions have used autonomous approaches to the subject.ⁱⁱ These factors have led to a fragmentation of digitized resources over the internet.

- **The aim of our project is to develop an open source and easy to browse portal that leads to all the digitized libraries in the world.**

About the DMMmaps

The DMMmaps is an independent project that aims to collect the web-links to the digitized medieval manuscripts repositories and make them available on an interactive map. The project originated as an attempt to unify well-known digitized sources already available (f.e. E-Codices in Switzerland, and La Bibliothèque Virtuelle des Manuscrits Médiévaux in France) along with the lesser-known repositories, in order to allow an easier consultation of digitized manuscripts.

The collection of these links is done through crowd-sourcing, with the use of:

- A web-form on the project's website so that users can point out any missing collections
- Social Media interactions (Tweets, comments on the project's Facebook Page, etc.)
- Active research of repositories by the project's authors.

After a link is acquired, it is 'pinned' to a virtual map that can be navigated by the user. Clicking these pins shows the following information of the repository:

- Name and location of the institution that hosts the digitized manuscripts
- Number of digitized objects available on the institution's website
- Link to the website digital repository.

The project has been combined with a careful social media strategy and today the DMMmaps database connects directly to 312 libraries, containing at least 30'000 digitized objects.ⁱⁱⁱ The project has received more than 40 crowd-sourced links to digitized repositories and institutions such as the Reynolds Library in Manchester, directly requested to be added to the database.

Copyright License & Budget

Although the project is maintained privately, the results and the project are shared under a Creative Commons Attribution - Sharealike License allowing free use of the data acquired.^{iv}

The DMMmaps currently receives no funding and the project is made possible by using free software available on the internet. Specifically, the project uses the following software and services:

- Google Spreadsheets
- Google Fusion Tables
- Google Maps

Conclusion

The use of current computer technologies offer many new ways of approaching medieval manuscripts. The DMMmaps project is one way to show what is possible for manuscripts studies and historians when the traditional ways are presented in combination with these new technologies. The possibilities are endless.

The project will continue its development in the future in order to become a useful tool for scholars, but also enthusiasts, in search for digitized medieval manuscripts.

Links

- The DMMmaps App (or DMMapp) is accessible here: <http://digitizedmedievalmanuscripts.org/app/>
- The DMMmaps website: <http://digitizedmedievalmanuscripts.org>
- The Blog: <http://digitizedmedievalmanuscripts.org/blog/>

ⁱ The results taken in consideration here are those of a search done in Google's "Incognito Mode" in order not to have personalized results. For further information on personalized results:

<https://support.google.com/accounts/answer/54041?hl=en>

ⁱⁱ Sanderson, Robert et al. "Sharedcanvas: a collaborative model for medieval manuscript layout dissemination."

Proceedings of the 11th annual international ACM/IEEE joint conference on Digital libraries 13 Jun. 2011: 175-184.

ⁱⁱⁱ A precise count of the number of digitized objects is currently impossible to obtain. Some libraries count the number of digitized folia; others do not insert the exact numbering of digitized objects at all. 30'000 is the sum of the digitized books from libraries, which have added a precise counting of digitized manuscripts.

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