

Abstract

Digital Humanities in the Nordic Countries 2018

Medieval Publishing from c. 1000 to 1500

Poster

Medieval Publishing from c. 1000 to 1500 (MedPub) is a five-year project funded by the European Research Council, based at Helsinki University, and running from 2017 to 2022. The project seeks to define the medieval act of publishing, focusing on Latin authors active during the period from c. 1000 to 1500. MedPub's research hypothesis is that publication strategies were not a constant but were liable to change, and that different social, literary, institutional, and technical milieux fostered different approaches to publishing. A part of the project is to establish a database, whose working title is Medieval Publication Database. The poster will present the main aspects of the projected database and the process of data-gathering.

For the purposes of this research, we define 'publishing' as a social act, involving at least two parties, an author and an audience, not necessarily always brought together. The former prepares a literary work and then makes it available to the latter. Medieval publishing was probably more often a more complex process. It could engage more parties than the two, such as commentators, dedicatees, and commissioners. The social status of these networks ranged from mediocre to grand. They could consist of otherwise unknown monks; or they could include popes and emperors.

We propose that the composition of such literary networks was broadly reactive to large-scale societal and cultural changes. If so, networks of publishing can serve as a vantage point for the observation of continuity and change in medieval societies. We believe such a proposition is significant for the reason that statistical investigations into large-scale social phenomena in the Middle Ages are very rare in the absence of relevant evidence. Therefore, we shall collect and analyse an abundance of data of publishing networks in order to trace how their composition in various contexts may reflect the wider world. It is that last-mentioned aspect that is the key concern of Medieval Publication Database.

It is a central fact for this undertaking that medieval works very often include information on dedication, commission, and commendation; and that, more often than not, this evidence is uncomplicated to collect because the statements in question tend to be short and uniform and they normally appear in the prefaces and dedicatory letters with which medieval authors often opened their works. What is more, such accounts

manifestly indicate a bond between two or more parties. As a rule these parties are the author and a dedicatee and/or a commissioner.

The evidence in question can be collected in the quantities needed for large-scale analysis. The evidence can also be processed electronically and approached statistically. For the function and form of medieval references to dedication and commission remained largely a constant. Eleventh-century dedications resemble those from, say, the fourteenth century. By virtue of such uniformity the data of dedications and commissions may well constitute a unique pool of evidence of social interaction in the Middle Ages. For the data of dedications and commissions can be employed as statistical evidence in *various* regional, chronological, social, and institutional contexts, something that is very rare in medieval studies.

The base framework of the database is a roster of medieval Latin authors and their works. The project's first step is to establish that roster by way of text mining; the materials to be mined come from previous printed and electronic catalogues of medieval Latin writers and/or medieval Latin works. Text-mined entries are standardized and converted into a relational database of individual works and authors, with relevant metadata. Each work will be given a unique identifier and will be specified with the information of its genre and its date of composition (as derived from the active years of its author). Additional information about e.g. editions, surviving copies, etc. may be included in case the catalogues to be mined provide us with such. The first catalogue we deal with is *A Handlist of Latin Writers of Great Britain and Ireland before 1540* by R. Sharpe. Its selection as a starting point was on account of two virtues: the catalogue attends to a coherent geographical whole and does so with remarkable consistency.

At the second step, the standardized entries of published works will be enriched with information related to publishing networks. In most cases the information in question concerns dedication and/or commission. To put shortly, we will mainly identify authors, dedicatees, and commissioners. The database records their name, social status and the geographical region and the time frame of their activity. As noted above, such data can relatively easily be gathered from works that have been edited in modern times. At subsequent steps, we will also study manuscripts for works that remain unpublished in print.

Yet there are complications that we must overcome at this initial stage of the project. These mainly pertain to the ontologies and hierarchies needed when defining the social status and geographical region of authors and other persons. In particular the latter, the

geographical aspect of publishing, appears problematic as to standardization. The poster will explicate this aspect in detail.

To conclude, our metadata to be harvested and enriched can be summarised as temporal, spatial, social, and literary. We believe that once standardized such data can be used as evidence in statistical inquiries in various fields, ranging from literary studies to social history. At the first stage, the Medieval Publication Database will cover medieval Latin authors connected to the British Isles. The final goal is to encompass medieval Latin Europe in its entirety. The database will be published online in accordance with the Open Science guidelines.

The poster will introduce the database, metadata scheme and how the data of dedications and commissions will be harvested.