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The French of Italy TimeMap

Fordham University, Center for Medieval Studies

Archiving Dossier Narrative

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Narrative Section 1. Project Rationale and Scope

Scholars interested in the history of French-language writing in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italy have previously approached the topic in one of two ways: either by examining one specific textual tradition, or by tracing French-language production within one Italian region, most often Venice. Neither "close" approach allowed for an understanding of how French was used at different times and places on the peninsula, or on the possible connections between various locales of production. Using a spatial humanities approach, the French of Italy TimeMap attempts to close those gaps and provide new ways of seeing this complex literary phenomenon. Project contributors, based at Fordham University's Center for Medieval Studies, have built a digital object using the Omeka/Neatline platform which incorporates textual, geographic, and temporal data about French-language writing in Italy. The French of Italy TimeMap aims to provide geotemporal visualization of this textual phenomenon, and to invite users to interact with the data about medieval literary production across Italy in a dynamic digital format.

Narrative Section 2. Project Trajectory

The project had five distinct phases: 1. conceptualization; 2. construction; 3. data collection and verification; 4. launch and maintenance; 5. archiving.

Conceptualization: Creating a clear vision for the French of Italy TimeMap was challenging. In 2012 at Fordham's Center for Medieval Studies, there was little community knowledge about how to use digital tools to address complex research questions. Although the Center had years of experience disseminating information online, particularly via the Internet History Sourcebook Project (https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/, inaugurated in 1996), it had not yet sponsored a project that used digital tools to analyze humanities data, as was the goal with the French of Italy TimeMap visualization.

The TimeMap aimed to explore information first assembled in the Center-sponsored website, The French of Italy (https://frenchofitaly.ace.fordham.edu/, inaugurated in 2008) featuring the corpus of French-language writings associated with Italy from 1250-1500. As these sources were collected, connections among the sources emerged, linking geographic regions and textual production in ways not present in previous literature. Instead highlighting the disjunction among texts or textual traditions running the length of the Italian peninsula, the TimeMap was conceived as a tool to see where and when common texts were produced and to encourage further inquiry on the culture of French-language writing in Italy over time and space.

Exhibit construction: We used the Omeka digital platform to store the information that would ultimately be displayed on the map, including a map we made to reflect the uncertainty we had about where texts were created and to accommodate imprecise dating (for example, if a text were identified as created in the fourteenth century in Northern Italy, it was difficult to map it using modern mapping tools). The dynamic part of the map was created using a plugin to Omeka called Neatline. We also included images of the manuscripts when available, and displayed information about the texts, including the manuscript in which the text was copied and the date it was copied.

Data collection and verification: Once we decided to map the occurrences of French-language texts in Italy, we chose the textual witness as the unit to map. If one Italian manuscript contained several different French-language texts, a point would appear on the map for each of these texts, not simply for the entire miscellany, so that the contents of one codex might appear several times on the map. This allowed users to see the relative popularity of a text on the peninsula, and to question the means of transmission from one place to another. To collect data concerning production locale and timing, we relied on information from the French of Italy website, but also on other related sites such as RIALFrI (http://www.rialfri.eu/rialfriWP/) and Medieval Francophone Literary Culture Outside of France (http://www.medievalfrancophone.ac.uk/). The

data collection and verification process resulted in a spreadsheet of French-language texts created in Italy or by Italian authors. This datasheet was used to create the points that appear on the map and can be freely downloaded from the site.

Launch and Maintenance: The map was launched in late 2014. From the start, getting the platform to work well with university computer systems required co-operation with both university information technology specialists and with the creators of the Omeka and Neatline platforms. Many of the difficulties we encountered were only resolved by appealing to the Omeka forum and to the wider user audience. During the TimeMap's active phase, the Omeka and Neatline platforms were updated several times, and Fordham's IT department would often update the Omeka versions it supported so that the project lost functionality with each successive upgrade. Major maintenance was performed in December 2015 and August 2016 following platform upgrades and the migration of the project from one university server to another. Yet another migration will occur in late 2018.

Narrative Section 3. Project-Specific Digital Objects

The digital objects created for the French of Italy TimeMap, with the accompanying tools used to create them, are listed below. Participants did not record the versions of each tool used to create individual project components.

1. The project website (Omeka, with the following plugins: Exhibit Builder, SimplePages, CSV Import, SocialBookmarking, Simple Contact Form) 2. The interactive map (Omeka, Neatline, Similie Timeline, Waypoints), 3. The data spreadsheet (Excel) 4. The project specific map (Photoshop).

Narrative Section 4. Project Outcomes

No project analytics are available for this project.

However, the following presentations and publications authored and co-authored by the project's senior scholar, Laura Morreale, featured elements of the French of Italy TimeMap. Co-authors and presenters are listed in the citation.

"Medieval Digital Humanities and The Rite of Spring: Thoughts on Performance and Preservation," in *The Digital Medieval: New Directions in Medieval History and the Digital Humanities*. Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures 53, College Station: Texas

A&M University Press, forthcoming.

"A Tour of Fordham Medieval Digital Mapping Projects" (with Tobias Hrynick and Stephen Powell), *Terra Digita: Digital Approaches to Medieval Mapping*, Ithaca, NY, November 4, 2017.

"Digital Approaches to the World of Medieval French," *University of Colorado Symposium on Digital Humanities*, Boulder, CO, September 16, 2016.

"Telling the Story of French after the Linguistic, Spatial, and Digital Turns," *University of Connecticut Medieval Studies Lecture Series*, Storrs, CT, December 3, 2015.

"Visual Exploration of Medieval Textual Histories: The Case of the French of Italy," (with Abigail Sargent and David J. Wrisley) *Keystone Digital Humanities Conference*, University of Pennsylvania Libraries, Philadelphia, PA, July 22, 2015.

Testi e manoscritti franco-italiani: verso una definizione del corpus," Conference sponsored by Medioevo Romanzo, "Il Franco-Italiano: Definizione tipologia fenomenologia," Venice, Italy, October 2014.

Narrative Section 5. Documentation Statement
The French of Italy TimeMap was an important project for the promotion of digital scholarship at Fordham's Center for Medieval Studies. When it was first conceived in 2012 and while it was active from 2014-2018, it introduced Omeka as a content management system to the Center's digital scholars, challenged students and faculty to consider the problems inherent in mapping medieval places on to modern geographies, and offered a new approach toward the French of Italy corpus, which had already been a topic of interest to Fordham medievalists. However, most of the project contributors have moved to other institutions, and the 2018 migration will certainly create functionality issues that will need time and attention that the Center can no longer support. The project will therefore become the first to undergo the archiving process, thereby leading the way for other Center projects that will eventually exceed their active life-cycles.

Narrative Section 6. Project Bibliography

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