Scribal and textual networks – collaboration and exchange in manuscripts and scriptoria

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The foundation of Heiligenkreuz by margrave Leopold III. in 1133 marked the beginning of the expansion of the Cistercian order in what is today Lower and Upper Austria and lead to a large surge in book production. When monks from Morimond settled in the Sattelbach valley close to Vienna they almost immediately must have started to copy books for their library. By the middle of the 12th century they had gathered a collection over 60 manuscripts, many of which are still extant today. In the same period Heiligenkreuz founded the two daughter houses Zwettl and Baumgartenberg. They too soon started producing books in their own scriptoria. These three closely connected monasteries therefore provide an almost perfect sample for investigating the exchange of scribes and texts in the 12th century.

For Heiligenkreuz and Zwettl Alois Haidinger has already gathered a large amount of paleographical data on his platform scriptoria.at. The website provides detailed information on scribes working on one manuscript, on every manuscript each scribe contributed to and even on scribes collaborating in their work. From my own research additional in-depth paleographical analysis for the library of Baumgartenberg is now available. In the early phase of the scriptorium a lively exchange of scribes with its mother house Heiligenkreuz is apparent that makes it possible to directly integrate the results into the data already available at scriptoria.at.

However, so far scriptoria.at mainly presents paleographical data as long lists of scribal activity in various manuscripts. With every new manuscript and scriptorium added, the data becomes more and more complex and therefore increasingly difficult to interpret. Above all, the larger picture of scribal collaboration and exchange mainly gets lost in the mass of data.

Less work has been done on potential textual networks established between Heiligenkreuz, Zwettl and Baumgartenberg. Each manuscript copied in either scriptorium needs an exemplar and an exchange of scribes might also point towards an exchange of texts between the Cistercian houses. For manuscripts from Baumgartenberg this has been studied in more detail andit soon becomes evident that scribal exchanges do not necessarily overlap with textual exchanges. Further networks of monastic interaction have therefore to be added by investigating manuscript transmissions of often copied texts, thus again adding to the complexity of the collected data.

So far my research resulted in two rather complex sets of data which are possibly but not necessarily linked through various factors. The challenge is to find a tool capable to support the integration and interpretation of these ever expanding data sets. A promising candidate for such a tool seems to be network analysis.

This paper therefore intends to test the application of network analysis for the presentation and interpretation of the scribal network between Heiligenkreuz, Zwettl and Baumgartenberg. It will also discuss the challenges and limitations of adding data from textual networks to fully understand the interactions between Cistercian houses and other monasteries in their quest to expand their library.