

From Networks of Texts to Networks of Genres? On the Classification of Texts in Compilations with a View towards Manuscript Transmission

Ina Serif

At the end of the 14th century, Jakob Twinger von Königshofen, a cleric from Strasbourg, composed a chronicle in the vernacular that spread widely – up to today nearly 130 manuscripts are known that contain the text, wholly or in parts, and that were produced not only in Strasbourg, but as far as Cologne, Augsburg, or Tyrol. About thirty qualify as true copies, while in the big majority of the witnesses, the text is altered in various ways: abbreviated, augmented, updated, corrected, put in a different order, and more often than not combined with other texts, either with distinct text boundaries or resulting in new compositions made of several texts.

In several manuscripts, a combination of historiographical texts – chronicles, annals, lists, etc. – can be observed, leading to the assumption that Twinger's work was preferably copied for historiographical compilations and that its structure facilitated some historiographical activity of the recipients.. But this view puts a big weight on the genre of Twinger's work, making it a filter through which all the other texts in a codex are seen. As I have been working on the chronicle transmission, the attribute in common of the known manuscripts is of course the appearance of at least some lines of the Twinger chronicle; but the attempt to look at a single codex as objectively as possible, without giving preference to a particular text, can not only reveal connections between different manuscripts, but also the fluidity and flexibility of medieval texts. The classification of a *work* as part of a certain genre does not necessarily hold true for its entire transmission, for the manifestation of a distinct *text* – what is, on the one hand, a nuisance, but on the other a chance to better understand medieval text transmission, manuscript production and the transfer of knowledge.

The co-occurrence of certain texts in several manuscripts hints towards intentional copying processes that are reflecting particular interests not only of one individual scribe or commissioner; multiple occurrences of particular compilations can reveal networks that go unseen if the content of a codex is not regarded as a whole. While a text-based analysis often faces difficulties that result from insufficient manuscript descriptions, a broader view that would compare less particular texts, but more areas of interest or fields of knowledge, has to deal with problems regarding the classification of the single texts: Apart from an inevitable subjectivity, questions about the criteria and levels of classification have to be addressed, while the danger of over- or under-representation is always lurking. Discussing these issues and the applicability and usefulness of the comparison of codices from a kind-of-genre-perspective could be fruitful to develop a better understanding for the transmission of manuscripts, of texts and of knowledge.