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On the Way to the Future of Manuscript Studies
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**Looking Through the Preacher's Kaleïdoscope:
Digital Humanities and the Study of Intertextuality in
Preaching Material (13th-15th c.)**

The preaching revival that began towards the end of the 12th c. left us an impressive body of manuscript sources: sermons by the thousand of course, but also a wide range of preaching aids, like collections of *exempla* or *distinctiones*, florilegia, biblical tools, etc. The preachers could delve into this *materia praedicabilis* or 'preaching material' to borrow entire sermons, compose new ones, or simply rearrange existing material into a new shape, creating new texts like one creates a new image by rotating a kaleidoscope - to borrow an image coined by David D'Avray. At the same time, the architecture of a text was becoming somehow more important than its contents. Powerfully structured and made from building blocks sometimes borrowed from other monuments: 13th c. sermons bear a certain resemblance to Gothic cathedrals, their contemporaries.

In this paper, I will discuss the different takes on authorship revealed by the practice of medieval preachers. For instance, how was reuse considered in a performative form of communication like preaching? What is the place of invention in Bonaventure's famous division between scribe, *compilator*, commentator and author? But also, for us modern scholars using digital methods, what does it mean to edit and publish texts that were part of a complex system where the 'building blocks' were circulating widely and constantly reshuffled?

Note: the discussion of medieval authorship and reuse in this paper owes much to yet unpublished parts of my PhD dissertation, *Remploi textuel, invention et art de la mémoire : les Sermones ad status du franciscain Guibert de Tournai († 1284)*, defended in Lyon in 2013.

The preaching revival that began towards the end of the 12th c. left us an impressive body of manuscript sources: sermons by the thousand of course — at least 60 000 latin sermons have survived just for the period 1150-1350¹ — but also a wide range of preaching aids. Practically all the “ingredients” of those sermons could also be found in thematic collections. The *exempla*² for instance were short, illustrative stories (sometimes deriving from popular folklore and folktales) presented as true and used in sermons to help the preacher drive an argument. *Exempla* were gathered and organised in collections by experienced preachers like Etienne de Bourbon, Humbert of Romans or Jacques de Vitry. The *distinctio*,³ a rhetorical tool derived from exegesis, became extremely important in the 13th century and later. *Distinctiones* were used to give a powerful structure to sermons, and like the *exempla* they could be gathered in collections. To this you could add also different sorts of biblical commentaries, and *florilegia* (like the famous *Manipulus florum*⁴) where preachers could easily find relevant quotations for their sermons, and of course the legends of saints. You could even add to this list moralised bestiaries - anything, in short, that could fuel preaching.

All those texts were referencing each other, quoting each other, reusing and repurposing each other to create new preaching material. It could be described as a web of texts, but a web is static. That is why I prefer the image of the kaleidoscope, coined by David D'Avray.⁵ Every time you move a kaleidoscope, the same little pieces inside rearrange themselves into a new picture. It is more about a system than a static image, a snapshot. This raises the question: how can we work on texts produced within this system, and particularly how can we take advantage of digital methods?

First, let us reflect briefly on how exactly literary creation and text reuse were perceived in the Middle Ages. There is ample literature on this topic, but here I will concentrate upon a definition given by Bonaventure, the famous Franciscan friar. Bonaventure's definition of auctorial roles is

¹ Estimation in Nicole Bériou, « Les sermons latins après 1200 », in *The Sermon*, éd. Beverly M. Kienzle, Brepols, 2000 (*Typologie des sources du Moyen Âge occidental*, 81-83), p. 363-448 (p. 363).

² The literature on *exempla* is very abundant. The volume in the *Typologie des sources* collection is still a good starting point: Claude Brémont, Jacques Le Goff et Jean-Claude Schmitt, *L'exemplum*, Brepols 1982 (*Typologie des sources du Moyen Age occidental*, 40).

³ On *distinctiones*, see for instance Richard et Mary Rouse, «Biblical distinctiones in the 13th century », in *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 41 (1974), p. 27-37, or the articles by L. J. Bataillon in *La prédication au XIII^e siècle en France et en Italie...*, and his article «The Tradition of Nicholas of Biard's Distinctiones», in *Viator*, 25 (1994), p. 245-288.

⁴ On this florilegium, see: Richard and Mary Rouse, *Preachers, florilegia and sermons: Studies on the Manipulus florum of Thomas of Ireland*, Toronto, 1979 (Studies and texts / Pontifical institute of medieval studies, 47); Jacqueline Hamesse, María José Muñoz, Chris L. Nighman (eds), *New Perspectives on Thomas of Ireland's Manipulus florum / Nouvelles perspectives sur le Manipulus florum de Thomas d'Irlande*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2020. See also the *Electronic Manipulus florum Project* by Chris Nighman, <<https://manipulus-project.wlu.ca>>

⁵ David d'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons diffused from Paris before 1300*, Oxford: OUP, 1985, p. 246-247.

interesting for our purpose here, which is discussing authorship in the context of preaching material, because it comes from a scholastic context, and from a famous preacher who himself used and produced preaching material. In a prologue to his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (written between 1250 and 1252), Bonaventure distinguished the various roles involved in the creation of a book. He wrote that four roles are involved in the process of literary creation and transmission: *scriptor*, *compilator*, *commentator* and *auctor*.

“The method of making a book is fourfold. For someone writes the materials of others, adding or changing nothing, and this person is said to be merely the scribe (*scriptor*). Someone else writes the material of others, adding, but nothing of his own, and this person is said to be the compiler (*compilator*). Someone else writes both the materials of other men and of his own, but the materials of others as the principal materials, and his own annexed for the purpose of clarifying them, and this person is said to be the *commentator*, not the author. Someone else writes both of his own materials and those of others, but his own as the principal materials, and the materials of others annexed for the purpose of confirming his own, and such must be called the author.”⁶

The *scriptor* or scribe certainly has the most passive role among those protagonists, almost a mechanical function, since he does not bring anything of his own. Despite this passivity, the function of scribe is not to be dismissed as a menial, technical job. And it is significant that Bonaventure mentions the scribe here: this is grounded in a long monastic tradition of regarding copyist work as a form of preaching. The most ancient testimony dates as far back as Cassiodorus, who in the 6th c. praised the work of scribes as the noblest of physical labour for monks, because they:

“preach to men with their hands, open tongues with their fingers, silently give salvation to mortals, and fight with pen and ink the unlawful snares of the Devil.”⁷

The *Constitutions* of the Carthusian order, written in the early 12th c., also insist on this silent preaching operated by monastic scribes and echoes Cassiodorus’s words:

⁶ Bonaventure, « Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum », in id., *Opera Omnia*, I, ed. PP. Collegii a S. Bonaventura, Grottaferrata, 1882, p. 14 (*Proemium, quaestio IV*). English translation taken from Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of authorship : Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988 (2nd ed.), p. 94.

⁷ “Felix intentio, laudanda sedulitas, manu hominibus praedicare, digitis linguas aperire, salutem mortalibus tacitam dare, et contra diaboli subreptiones illicitas calamo atramentoque pugnare.” Cassiodorus, *Institutiones*, I, 30, Oxford: Mynors, 1937, p. 76, quoted in Corinne Mencé-Caster, « Problématiques d’écritures », in *Un roi en quête d’auteurité*, Paris: e-Spania Books, 2011, note 62. See also Felix Heinzer, “Preaching with the Hands: Notes on Cassiodorus’ Praise of Handwriting and its Medieval Reception”, in *Exploring Written Artefacts: Objects, Methods, and Concepts*, ed. by Jörg B. Quenzer (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), pp. 947-964, <<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110753301-046>>.

“Because we desire that books should be made with great zeal, [...] in order that we may preach with our hands the word of God since we may not do so with the mouth. For each book that we copy makes us heralds of the truth [...]”⁸

The *compiler*, while he does not add any material of his own, makes active choices in selecting other peoples’ materials, and by doing so leaves a personal mark on the work.⁹ *Compiler* is a difficult term, because its definition has evolved a lot.¹⁰ In classical Latin, for Cicero for instance, a *compiler* was nothing more than a plunderer of words, a mere thief,¹¹ and as late as the 11th century the famous grammarian Papias was still abiding by the same definition.¹² Compilation work has been a major vector of literary creation throughout all the the Middle Ages, and by the turn of the 13th century it had become more and more recognised as such. As evidenced by Bernard Guénée,¹³ this was especially true of historical works, where chroniclers defended themselves of any accusation of having “invented” anything and actively claimed the dignity and status of “compilatores”. For instance, the anonymous “compiler” of the *Historia regum franforum* beseeches whoever will copy his work not to forget the sidenotes indicating the origin of the sources, so that

“it should be clear proof that [he] is not the author of this book, but its *compiler*”.¹⁴

Even the scholars who did not want to be considered as “*compilatores*” acknowledged that it was hard work. In a letter written about 1184, Peter of Blois protested that he was not a *compiler*,

⁸ “Libros quippe tanquam sempiternum animarum nostrarum cibum cautissime custodiri et studiosissime volumus fieri, ut quia ore non possumus, Dei uerbum manibus predicemus. Quot enim libros scribimus, tot nobis ueritatis precones facere uidemur, sperantes a Domino mercedem pro omnibus qui per eos uel ab errore correcti fuerint, uel in catholice ueritate profecerint, pro cunctis etiam qui uel de suis peccatis et uitii compuncti, uel ad desiderium fuerint patrie celestis accensi” *Constitutiones Cartusie*, PL 153, 695. I quote here ch. 16 of the *Constitutiones*, which describes the kind of work that carthusian monks would do in their cell.

⁹ Roland Barthes, commenting upon Bonaventure’s conception of the division of roles, wrote that “critical vision begins with the compiler himself: it is not necessary to add something of oneself to a text in order to “distort” it: it suffices to quote it, that is to say, to break it up: a new intelligibility is born immediately; this intelligibility can be accepted by people to a greater or lesser extent: it is none the less a construction.” Roland Barthes, *Criticism and Truth* (transl. by Katrine Pilcher Keuneman), New York City: Continuum, p. 39 (originally published as *Critique et Vérité*, Paris: Seuil, 1966).

¹⁰ On the negative or neutral views of *compilatio* from Antiquity to the 13th century, see Neil Hathaway, « *Compilatio* : from plagiarism to compiling », in *Viator*, 20 (1989), p. 19-44. respectively. For a more recent study of the conception of *compilatio* as a method for literary creation, especially among Mendicant friars, see Florent Coste, « Poétique et éthique de la compilation médiévale: la conversion de saint Augustin dans quelques compilations du XIII^e siècle », in *French Studies: A Quarterly Review*, Vol. 65, Number 3, July 2011, p. 306-314.

¹¹ Hathaway, « *Compilatio* : from plagiarism to compiling », p. 22-23.

¹² Bernard Guénée, « L’historien et la compilation au XIII^e siècle », in *Journal des Savants* (1985), p. 119-135 (p. 122, n. 14).

¹³ *Op. cit.*; *id.*, *Histoire et culture historique dans l’Occident médiéval*, Paris: Aubier, 1980.

¹⁴ “Si cui autem noster labor placuerit, sibi que librum hunc scribi fecerit, illum rogo in Domino ut testimonia illorum a quibus hec sumpta sunt, in margine, sicut in autentico est notatum, faciat denotari, ut certiori appareat argumento me huius libri non esse auctorem sed compilatorem” Anonymous, *Historia regum Francorum* (1214), quoted in Guénée, « L’historien et la compilation au XIII^e siècle », p. 119.

and as proof of that, he said that he was known, as many people could attest, to always dictate his writing faster than others could note them down. Funnily, he said that

“such speed excludes any suspicion of the vice of *compilatio*.”¹⁵

That is a striking argument: clearly, to him, writing your own text was a quicker work than compiling the texts of others!

The third role mentioned by Bonaventure is the role of *commentator*, defined by a relation of subordination: his material is only there to support another author’s material, making it better or more accessible. Like the *compilatio*, the commentary has been a very important genre in the Middle Ages, despite — or maybe thanks to — its ancillary nature, positioning itself at the service of another work. This has been especially true in the scholastic milieu, with the biblical commentaries and of course the commentaries on the *Sentences* by Peter Lombard, which played a key role in the intellectual training of preachers and theologians.¹⁶

Finally comes the author (*auctor*), who also uses other people’s materials in his text, but only to support, amplify and corroborate his own arguments.

From Bonaventure’s definition, we learn that there are different levels of importance of the authorial roles, which are defined by the level of originality of the writing. Giles Constable, in his study of medieval “forgery and plagiarism”, has shown that this emphasis on originality has been growing from the 12th century onwards.¹⁷ None of these authorial roles consists in writing and creating only of your own materials: every text is necessarily supporting or supported by previous texts, and is in some way a rewriting of previous texts.¹⁸ This is a somehow mixed message: on one side we have this insistence on originality, and on the other the idea that one must always in some way base their writing on others.

It is true that medieval authors defended their originality, and by the 13th century an accusation of plagiarism, of stealing other authors’ words, was indeed a serious matter. There is a quite fantastic anecdote told by Boncompagno da Signa, about a misadventure he says happened to

¹⁵ “Confidenter et sub testimonio plurium dico, me semper dictare litteras solitum citius quam posset aliquis exarare. Ipsa certe festinatio vitium et suspicionem compilationis excludit.” Peter of Blois, *Epistula XCII ad Reginaldum Episcopum* (ca. 1184). Quoted in Giles Constable, « Forgery and Plagiarism in the Middle Ages », in *Archiv für Diplomatik, Schriftgeschichte, Siegel-und Wappenkunde*, 29 (1983), p. 1-41 (p. 34).

¹⁶ This anthology and its introduction are very useful in placing the commentary genre within the medieval literary tradition : A. J. Minnis, A. B. Scott, David Wallace (eds.), *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c.1100-c.1375: The Commentary Tradition*, New York: Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1992 (revised edition).

¹⁷ Constable, « Forgery and Plagiarism in the Middle Ages ».

¹⁸ See for instance Daniel Poirion, « Écriture et réécriture au Moyen Âge », in *Littérature*, 41 (1981), p. 109-118; Alain Boureau, « Peut-on parler d’auteurs scolastiques ? », in *Auctor et auctoritas. Invention et conformisme dans l’écriture médiévale*. Actes du colloque tenu à l’Université de Versailles-Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, 14-16 juin 1999, M. Zimmerman (ed.), Paris: 2001, p. 267-279.

him. He recounts that some of his jealous colleagues at the university of Bologna stole a copy of his book, the *Quinque tabule salutationum*, and went to great lengths to make it look much, much older. They stained the pages, moistened them so that they looked like old, wet rags, and then they put them in a high place and made a fire under them, exposing them to the smoke to blacken the pages, so much so that the manuscript looked like it had been written a hundred years before. His enemies then used this old-looking manuscript to publicly accuse Boncompagno of “cribbing”, of stealing these words without acknowledgement, like a naked crow steals other birds’ feathers.¹⁹

The notion of plagiarism was certainly present in the minds of medieval authors, and stealing other people’s words was frowned upon in the 13th century. Yet, every editor or even every reader of medieval scholastic text knows how massive and frequent was “silent quotation”, the practice of inserting a passage from another text without indicating that it actually is a quotation. It’s a practice that I like to call “reuse” rather than intertextuality, as an analogy with the blocks of stone reused in buildings that archaeologists study.

In many cases, the reuse must have been quite a natural process, keeping in mind that those authors relied heavily on their own human, imperfect memory. There is a brutally honest statement by Caesarius of Heisterbach to remind us that memory can be a bit dodgy sometimes. Writing in a postface to his work, around 1226, he candidly admitted:

“When I had to insert in my work sentences and authorities from the Ancient as well as the New Testament, and I did not know their words, and going back to the books was too tedious, I wrote them as I remembered them, sometimes changing the words in those quotations not on purpose, but out of ignorance.”²⁰

Leaving aside those little imperfections of memory, the attitude to reuse was mostly pragmatic. In a prologue to his *Policraticus*, a “mirror for princes” written in the middle of the 12th century, John of Salisbury was unapologetic about silent quotations. He writes:

“I have helped the case by bringing in pertinent material from various authors, provided I found it profitable and helpful, occasionally without giving credit. Partly because I know

¹⁹ “*Quinque salutationum tabulas* quas habere volentibus exhibueram, invidi hoc modo fumigio tenebrabant: humectaverunt cartas sicut madescit pannus de quo pilositas removetur, et eas altius collocantes fumum fecerunt sub eis fieri diuturnum et sic a centum annis retro composite videbantur. Postea fecerunt generalem conventum in quo *Tabulas* illas me non composuisse firmiter asserebant, testimonium sophisticè vetustatis coram omnibus ostendentes, et me furem et corniculam appellabant moventes capita et dicentes: « Triginta annos nondum habes et Habraham vidisti, sed depositis alienis plumis remanebis ut cornicula denudatus ».” Boncompagno da Signa, *Boncompagnus*, text quoted from the edition by Martina Basso, *Il libro del Boncompagnus di Boncompagno da Signa: edizione critica e glossario*, Università degli studi di Padova, tesi di Laurea, 2015-2016, p. 118.

²⁰ “Sententias et auctoritates tam Ueteris quam Noui Testamenti, cum a me expositionibus inserende essent, ipsaque uerba aliquando nescirem, et nimis esset tediosum libros reuoluere, posui illas ut sciui, non ex industria, sed ex ignorantia quandoque uerba ipsa uel sensum uerborum mutando.” Caesarius Heisterbachensis, *Moralitates Evangeliorum* (postface), ca. 1226. I thank Dr Victoria Smirnova, a great scholar of Caesarius’s work, for bringing this passage to my attention.

that your familiarity with writers has for the most part already made it known to you; partly to inspire the ignorant with the love of reading.”²¹

And just after:

“For the most part, the material that I utilise belongs to others, but I take whatever has been well said elsewhere and make it my own, so that I sometimes express ideas in my own words, for brevity, while at other times I express them in the words of others, for faith and authority.”²²

“For faith and authority”: this is certainly a key to the understanding of this practice of silent quotation, and the difference between stealing and re-using. The original author of a quotation is worth mentioning *only* if his name gives “faith and authority” to an argument or an idea. Otherwise, there is no need to give a reference, because the material itself is more important than its author. This is an extremely pragmatic approach to authorship, almost utilitarian: either the mention of the source strengthens the argument; or it is only useless and even cumbersome, disposable information. Most of the time, in the texts used by preachers, the material itself is deemed more important than the author.

The circulation of this preaching material, the *materia praedicabilis*, was at the heart of the process of preaching and sermon-writing. The attitude to authorship and reuse in medieval sermons is particularly interesting, since preaching is a performance art: all this written material was produced to be ultimately preached in front of an audience, which might have informed the way reuse was considered.

We can find some examples of preachers looking down on sermon reuse — especially in academic environments. Gerald of Wales (c. 1146 – c. 1223) accused Cadogan de Bangor (an abbot and future bishop) of reciting by heart sermons of other preachers, and the canonist Albinus († 1197) was proud to claim his sermons were “made out of his own inventions and not theft.”²³ In Paris, in the early 1270s, an anonymous preacher pointed out that “some are outraged when they hear a sermon or a question that they have already heard from another, and say ‘I have

²¹ “Que uero ad rem pertinentia a diuersis auctoribus se animo ingerebant, dum conferrent aut iuuarent, curauit inserere, tacitis interdum nominibus auctorum; tum quia tibi utpote exercitato in litteris pleraque plenissime nota esse noueram, tum ut ad lectionem assiduam magis accenderetur ignarus.” John of Salisbury, *Policraticus* I, prologue (1159).

²² “Hec quoque ipsa, quibus plerumque utor, aliena sunt, nisi quicquid ubique bene dictum est facio meum, et illud nunc meis ad compendium, nunc ad fidem et auctoritatem alienis exprimo uerbis.” *Ibidem*. Quoted in Constable, « Forgery and Plagiarism... », p. 29.

²³ “...et quas ob hoc precipue more trutannico circuibat, fabricatos ab aliis sermones, sed bene firmatos ab ipso memoriterque retentos, uerbum ad uerbum reminescente, nimirum in filio facundi lingua parentis, predicando iugiter et exhortando, magis quidem ad ostentationem quam ad auditorum aedificationem, recitare consueuit.” Gerald of Wales, *Speculum Ecclesie*, III.7. References in Constable, « Forgery and Plagiarism... », p. 34, note 160.

heard someone else argue this question or make this sermon!’ ”²⁴ In the same city, ten or twenty years later, Servais du Mont-Saint-Éloi deemed in a *Quodlibet* that it would be beneath the status of masters to preach sermons found in notebooks, warning those who might do that that someone from the audience could protest and tell them “I am going to show you in my notebook the whole sermon you have just delivered!”²⁵

But for the most part, especially outside of the university, there are many indications that reuse was perfectly admitted in preaching. One of those is the practice of the *reportatio*, where students would note down sermons made by more experienced preachers, so they could reuse them — or some of their elements — in their own preaching.²⁶ There is also the huge success of model-sermons collections, where this time experienced preachers themselves were active in gathering material they offered to their younger or less-inspired colleagues. Peter of Cornwall, at the end of the 12th century, explained in his *Pantheologus* that he made this collection of *distinctiones* so that the preachers would be able

“to form an already-made sermon out of previously invented sermons, placed before [their] eyes and explained.”²⁷

Maurice de Sully had a similar aim when, in the 1160s, he wrote his famous collection of model sermons in Latin, later translated into French, for the priests of his diocese who were not competent enough to preach by themselves:

“And if one of you is lacking in this science that is necessary to teach lay people, he should read what follows and he will find it. I have indeed written for you very short

²⁴ “Aliqui indignantur quando audiunt sermonem quem alias audierunt uel questionem et dicunt ‘Alias audiui istam questionem determinari uel fieri sermonem istum!’ ” Anonymous preacher, *Sermo a subpriori*. Quoted in Nicole Bériou, *La prédication de Ranulphe de la Houblonnière*, Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1987, p. 79.

²⁵ “... timerem enim mihi ne posset impropere mihi, sicut magnis magistris factus est : ‘Monstrabo uobis in quaterno meo totum sermonem quem fecistis!’ Et hoc esset contra decentiam status magistrorum quod predicent de sermonibus qui sunt in quaternis ex quo satis habent de tempore”, Servais du Mont-Saint-Eloi, *Quodlibet* q. 43 (ca. 1282-1291), quoted in Jean Leclercq, « Le magistère du prédicateur au XIII^e siècle », in *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 15 (1946), p. 105-147 (esp. 119-120) and Nicole Bériou, *La prédication de Ranulphe de la Houblonnière*, p. 79.

²⁶ On note-taking in general, see for instance Ann Blair, “Textbooks and Methods of Note-Taking in Early Modern Europe”, in *Scholarly Knowledge: Textbooks in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Emidio Campi, Simone De Angelis, Anja-Silvia Goening, and Anthony Grafton, Geneva: Droz, 2008, p. 39-73. On *reportationes* in preaching more specifically, see Nicole Bériou, “La reportation des sermons parisiens à la fin du XIII^e siècle”, in *Medievo e Rinascimento* (1989), new edition in *En quête d’une parole vive: Traces écrites de la prédication (X^e-XIII^e siècle)*, Aubervilliers-Paris-Orléans: IRHT, 2022, p. 21-52 (available online: <<http://books.openedition.org/irht/894>>), as well as Idem, *L’avènement des maîtres de la Parole. La prédication à Paris au XIII^e siècle*, Paris, Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 1998 (2 vol.). See also Roberto Rusconi, « Reportatio », in *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, III (1989), p. 7-36, and B.M. Kienzle, “Medieval Sermons and Their Performance: Theory and Record”, in *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages*, ed. C. Muessig, Leiden, 2002, pp. 89-124.

²⁷ “... ut non iam oporteat sermones facientem circa dicendorum inuentionem laborare, sed potius ex iam inuentis et ante oculos positis et expositis non tam sermonem facere quam iam factum formare” Peter of Cornwall, *Pantheologus*, prologue (1170-1180). Quoted in Constable, « Forgery and Plagiarism... », p. 29-30.

sermons for Sundays and saints feasts all around the year. If you want to read them, you will find many things useful to this function (of preaching).”²⁸

Nevertheless, slavish recitation was probably not the way preachers were expected to reuse the material at their disposal — especially the more experienced Mendicant friars, who were a far cry from ignorant parish priests but still produced and used a lot of preaching material. If preachers gathered material for others, it was not to give ignorant priests something to read out loud to their parishioners. It was to provide other preachers with a material from which they could draw inspiration and intellectual tools to form their own sermons, by reusing, rehashing, repurposing the initial material. Nicole Bériou has evidenced a nice example among the works by Ranulphe de la Houblonnière who preached in Paris in the early 1270s: one of his sermons has been built by borrowing elements from two different collections of model sermons, by Gérard de Mailly and Nicolas de Biard respectively.²⁹ Preaching material itself could be a true patchwork of other works, William de Pagula’s *Speculum prelatorum* being a prime example.³⁰

Although all this preaching material was in a sense extremely fluid, it was used to create powerfully structured sermons. With the rise of a new style of preaching, at the beginning of the 13th century, preaching switched from more narrative homilies to very structured sermons, in a style of preaching called in the 13th c. “modern sermon” (*sermo modernus*). These “modern sermons” are divided into often symmetrical parts, themselves subdivided again, and their structure is often rhymed, adding a sort of rhythm to the text and facilitating its memorisation. With those stylistic evolutions, the quality of the structure of a sermon began to be considered as one of the main criteria to evaluate its beauty, and perhaps the most important one.³¹ To borrow the image coined by David d’Avray, the process of creating sermons from this material was in fact like using a kaleidoscope:

“the preaching of the friars operated rather like a kaleidoscope : the patterns of dogmatic and moral ideas were continually being shaken up, from sermon to sermon, to make new combinations, equally symmetrical.”³²

²⁸ “Si quis autem uestrum illa scientia indiget que ad populum laicum erudiendum pertinet, legat ea que secuntur et inueniet. Scripsimus enim uobis breuissimos sermones in diebus dominicis et in festiuitatibus sanctorum per anni circulum dicendos, quos si legere uolueritis multa que ad hoc officium necessaria sunt inuenietis.” Quoted from ms. Paris, Bnf, Latin 14925, fol. 63rb-va in Nicole Bériou, *L’Avènement des Maîtres de la Parole*, Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1998, vol. 1, note 29 p. 20-21.

²⁹ Nicole Bériou, *La prédication de Ranulphe de la Houblonnière*, p. 80-82 esp.

³⁰ Marjorie Burghart, “Remploi textuel et fluidité de la *materia predicabilis*. Le cas du *Speculum prelatorum* de William de Pagula († 1332)”, in *Revue Mabillon*, 31 (T. 92), 2020, p. 109-147.

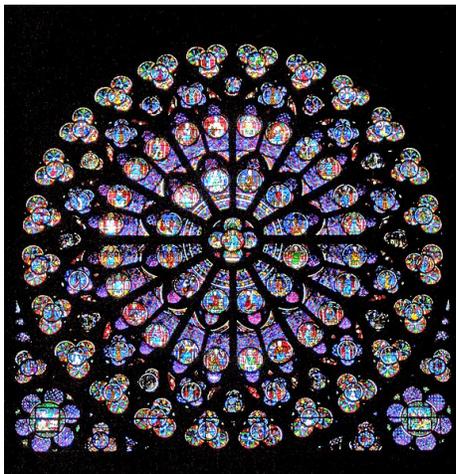
³¹ See for instance Nicole Bériou, “Le sermon thématique, une construction fonctionnelle et esthétique”, in *L’œuvre littéraire du Moyen Âge aux yeux de l’historien et du philologue*, ed. Ludmilla Evdokimova and Victoria Smirnova, Paris: Garnier, 2014, p. 341-358, new edition in *En quête d’une parole vive: Traces écrites de la prédication (x^e-xiii^e siècle)*, Aubervilliers-Paris-Orléans: IRHT, 2022, p. p. 179-192. Available online: <<http://books.openedition.org/irht/922>>).

³² See note 5 above.

This powerful image echoes the parallel already noted by Siegfried Wenzel between *sermo modernus* and gothic architecture³³. Kaleidoscopic images bear an uncanny resemblance to gothic rose windows: same geometrical symmetry, same satisfying harmony...



<https://pixabay.com/illustrations/kaleidoscope-shape-abstract-design-1945279/>



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Notre-Dame-de-Paris_-_rosace_sud.jpg

This leaves modern textual scholars with the question: how do you edit a kaleidoscope? Or more prosaically, how can Digital Humanities help us to disentangle the web of medieval preaching material? Three directions seem particularly promising for our type of material: a change of paradigm in editions from text-as-document to text-as-network, a focus on databases complementing editions, and analysis of large text corpora.

³³ Siegfried Wenzel, chapter “The Sermon as an Art Form”, in Idem, *Preachers, Poets, and the Early English Lyrics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986, p. 61-100.

Jeffrey Witt has long advocated that the “scholastic corpus can be understood as a huge network of thought.”³⁴ The Scholastic Commentaries and Texts Archive (SCTA) offers a good example of how digital scholarly editions could expand their capabilities. This initiative created and directed by Jeffrey Witt is a platform enabling and implementing this change of paradigm, it offers an infrastructure to help scholars move from traditional printed to more data-oriented editions, giving real opportunities to identify the circulation of texts and ideas.³⁵ This model strictly separates the data from its presentation, which allows to bridge the gap between two worlds: from the same data, with the right model, it allows different approaches to a text, from generating a graph representing the connections between several texts (reuse, citations, etc.) to creating a PDF of a traditional-looking critical edition. Editions themselves can be regarded as data sources, that could be accessed through Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) independently from their interface.³⁶ Initiatives like the Distributed Text Services (DTS) are aimed at “machine-actionable linked data,”³⁷ allowing us indeed to approach scholastic texts as networks.

This approach is perfectly fitting with the idea that digital scholarly editions are meant to extend the possibilities offered by print critical edition: according to the definition of Patrick Sahle, “a digital edition cannot be given in print without significant loss of content and functionality,” and a digital scholarly edition can be seen as a “modelled information resource.” As Sahle points out, “data, even from distributed sources may fuel various editions, differing in scope and distributed over place and time.”³⁸ The data complementing digital scholarly editions can come from other editions, but also from more traditional databases and knowledge bases. Those can even support research when editions are lacking: pragmatically, databases allow us to cover and index much more material than we possibly could if we were editing it. Such databases are particularly useful

³⁴ Michael Stenskjær Christensen, Jeffrey C. Witt, and Ueli Zahnd, “Re-conceiving the Christian scholastic corpus with the scholastic commentaries and texts archive”, in *Digital Humanities and Christianity: An Introduction*, ed. by Tim Hutchings and Claire Clivaz, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2021, p. 47-76 (here p. 47), <<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110574043-003>>. See also Jeffrey C. Witt, “Transparency and Discovery: Using a Text-Image Network to Study Manuscripts and Text Transmission”, in this issue **FULL REFERENCE OF THE FINAL ARTICLE**.

³⁵ <<https://scta.info>>

³⁶ Jeffrey C. Witt, “Digital Scholarly Editions and API Consuming Applications”, in *Digital Scholarly Editions as Interfaces*, edited by Roman Bleier, Martina Bürgermeister, Helmut W. Klug, Frederike Neuber, and Gerlinde Schneider, Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2018, p. 219–47 (*Schriften des Instituts für Dokumentologie und Editorik*, 12), <<https://kups.ub.uni-koeln.de/9118/>>.

³⁷ Bridget Almas, Hugh Cayless, Thibault Clérice, Vincent Jolivet, Pietro Maria Liuzzo, Jonathan Robie, Matteo Romanello and Ian Scott, “Distributed Text Services (DTS): A Community-Built API to Publish and Consume Text Collections as Linked Data”, in *Journal of the Text Encoding Initiative*, Rolling Issue, Online since 13 January 2023, URL: <<http://journals.openedition.org/jtei/4352>>; DOI: <<https://doi.org/10.4000/jtei.4352>>.

³⁸ Patrick Sahle, “What is a Scholarly Digital Edition?”, in *Digital Scholarly Editing: Theories and Practices*, ed. by Matthew J. Driscoll and Elena Pierazzo, Cambridge: Open Book Publisher, 2016, pp. 19–39 (quotes p. 27, 32 and 36). Available online: <<https://books.openedition.org/obp/3381>>.

for the various preaching aids, like collections of *exempla* or *distinctiones*,³⁹ allowing to quickly record the relationships between items used in different collections or sermons.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, we can hope that distant reading applied to large corpora of preaching material could help us further our understanding. Thanks to the growing concern for Open Access and Open Science, more and more medieval texts are freely available, in open and searchable formats. A good example is the *Corpus Corporum*, created by Phillip Roelli in Zürich, a free and open corpus now offering over 163 million Latin words: it covers the whole *Patrologia Latina* but also contains recent, natively digital editions contributed by scholars themselves, as well as digital versions of recent editions published in print, thanks to agreements with the publishers.⁴⁰ The progress of Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR) gives hopes for a new growth spurt in searchable texts corpora. The automatic detection of text reuse has already been applied to scholastic texts, among others, with both successes and limitations.⁴¹ One can hope that the progress of Natural Language Processing tools (like lemmatisers, PoS-taggers, morphological analysers, etc.) and various linguistic resources for Latin will boost the efficiency of historical text reuse detection.⁴²

This is a true novelty of our times: thanks to Open Science, corpora and our understanding of medieval texts can progress step-by-step, and through the intervention of many scholars collaborating across different places and even periods. Some scholars can contribute HTR models, others will apply them to manuscripts and correct the output to turn it into a proper transcription, others will engage with the tradition of the work and collate other manuscripts to produce a critical edition, and others again will add more interpretative layers to the text, modelling its relationships to other texts, etc. This possibility of independent collaboration is completely new to our field, and needs to be better taken into account in the evaluation process of scholarly outputs, which still focus too much on individual outputs and a harmful fascination for narrowly-understood “innovation”, forgetting that some endeavours take a team of “dwarves

³⁹ For *exempla*, see the *Thesaurus Exemplorum Medii Aevi* (ThEMA) database, <<https://thema.huma-num.fr>>. For *distinctiones*, see the DISTINGUO database, <<https://distinguo.huma-num.fr>>.

⁴⁰ *Corpus Corporum*, dir. by Philipp Roelli, <<https://mlat.uzh.ch>>.

⁴¹ Greta Franzini, Marco Passarotti, Maria Moritz and Marco Büchler, “Using and evaluating TRACER for an *Index fontium computatus* of the *Summa contra Gentiles* of Thomas Aquinas”, in *Proceedings of the Fifth Italian Conference on Computational Linguistics CLiC-it 2018*, dir. by Elena Cabrio, Alessandro Mazzei and Fabio Tamburini, Collana dell'Associazione Italiana di Linguistica Computazionale (Torino: Accademia University Press, 2018), DOI: 10.4000/books.aaccademia.3369, available online <<http://books.openedition.org/aaccademia/3369>>.

⁴² See for instance the ERC project *LiLa: Linking Latin - Building a Knowledge Base of Linguistic Resources for Latin*, <<https://lila-erc.eu>>. For more information on LiLa’s output, see Marco Passarotti, “La Knowledge Base LiLa. Interoperabilità tra risorse testuali e lessicali per il latino”, in *CHIMERA. Romance Corpora and Linguistic Studies*, 10, 2023, pp. 45-72. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.8076839.

perched on the shoulders of giants”.⁴³ Editing the preacher’s kaleidoscope is certainly one of them.

⁴³ John of Salisbury reports that this famous phrase was dear to Bernard de Chartres in the 12th century: “Dicebat Bernardus Carnotensis nos esse quasi nanos gigantium humeris insidentes, ut possimus plura eis et remotiora videre, non utique proprii visus acumine aut eminentia corporis, sed quia in altum subvehimur et extollimur magnitudine gigantea.” Ioannis Saresberiensis Episcopi Carnotensis *Metalogicon* III, 4, ed. by Cl. Webb (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), p. 136, l. 23-27.