

Digital Humanities, Medieval History, and Lexicography:  
*Dictionary of Medieval Names from European Sources*

Dr. Sara L. Uckelman

Dept. of Philosophy / Institute for Medieval and Early Modern Studies  
Durham University  
@SaraLUckelman, @theDMNES

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## A two-part talk

- Part 1: I tell you all about my cool DH project.
- Part 2: I tell you all about the problems with my cool DH project, and by extension all DH projects.

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Well, three parts.

- Part 3: You help me brainstorm ways we can deal with these problems.

## DICTIONARY OF MEDIEVAL NAMES FROM EUROPEAN SOURCES

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A Dictionary of given names found in European sources between 500 and 1600, with etymological information, information about usage and distribution, and other relevant information.

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### Currently:

- 68791 citations of 2458 names (finalized); 79426 citations of 7446 names (total)
- From 519 to 1599.
- Covering: England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Spain, Portugal, Algeria, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Ukraine, Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Croatia, Romania, Malta, Italy, France, the Low Countries, Belgium, Switzerland. . .

# Where?

<http://dmnes.org/>



@theDMNES



<http://www.facebook.com/thedmnes>



<http://dmnes.wordpress.com>

# Why?

- To fill a lacuna.
- A resource for:
  - ▶ Linguists and philologists.
  - ▶ Historians.
  - ▶ Genealogists.
  - ▶ Re-enactors.
  - ▶ Parents.
- Big data!

## To fill a lacuna (1)

Recent significant interest in lexicography of medieval languages:

- Middle English Dictionary
- the TLFi project (Old French)
- Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources
- Dictionary of Medieval Latin from Celtic Sources
- Anglo-Norman Dictionary
- Dictionary of the Scots Language
- Dictionnaire Étymologique de l'Ancien Français



## To fill a lacuna (2)

### Why document a language?

Unlike some other cultural legacies, languages leave no trace in the archaeological record. There's often no trace in the written record, either.

Only a small portion of the world's estimated 7,000 languages are well-documented in places like dictionaries and grammar books. Those that are least well-documented are the most endangered.

Daniel W Hieber, "Renaissance on the bayou: the revival of a lost language", <https://theconversation.com/renaissance-on-the-bayou-the-revival-of-a-lost-language-43958>

## To fill a lacuna (3)

- Names are part of the language
- Importance for vernaculars
- Problem of invented names

# Big Data

- Cross-linguistic/cross-cultural patterns and trends.
  - ▶ Patterns of diminutive and hypocoristic usage
  - ▶ The eclipse of native names by “Christian” names in the 12th C
  - ▶ Distinctly “Protestant” names.
- Scholarship beyond the English language.
  - ▶ “Made-up”/invented names: Shakespeare, J.M. Barrie, Neil Gaiman
- Name/gender tools; OCR; etc.
- Automated name-identification tools.

# How?

Primary motivating consideration: Document *everything*.

- Every change to every file is recorded, along with who made the change.
- Track responsibility (“blame”) for errors.
- Assign authorship credit:

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# How?

## Why this way?

- Stable citations; reconstruction of thought processes
- Particularly important for historically-oriented projects.
- Focus on perfection/completion erases contributions.
- We should provide the info that we ourselves are interested in.

# What makes this project interesting for DH?

- Inter/cross-disciplinary collaboration: How can computing/computer scientists help?
- Potential for new tools and applications: Date parser/sorter; GIS and visualizations; statistics
- Big data

# The DH problem

In an ideal DH world:

- Experts in some field of the humanities pool their resources with
- Experts on the technical and computational side of things.

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But...

*'Humanities' people don't know what to ask for;  
'Digital' people don't know what to give*



## A common situation

HUMS has a project and needs to find a COMP. How?

- Dedicated DH clusters/centers are rare.
- Problem of articulating needs/wants; no common language. (Role of IT architects).
- What is research to HUMS is application to COMP.
- £££.
- Program/tool constraints
- What is 'big' for the humanities scholar is quite small for the computer scientist.

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- £££. (Or, since we're in Luxembourg, €€€.)
- Program/tool constraints
- What is 'big' for the humanities scholar is quite small for the computer scientist.

## Some big questions/challenges

- How to change the perception of the contributions of COMP to DH projects so that collaborative work counts.
- How to work with funding agencies and bodies to change their perceptions of the use of grant money for consultants, especially in the start-up phase.
- How to deal with long incubation periods in an era of fast research.