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Abstract

DIGITAL METHODS OF LITERARY CRITICISM: AN EXAMPLE OF USE IN MARCO POLO'S *TRAVELS*

Following Lexicometry and Text Statistical Analysis, Textometry has developed powerful techniques for the analysis of large body of texts. This article presents an example of use, adapted to one of the major texts written in the Middle Ages : Marco Polo's *Travels*. The variety of sources, coupled with the number of versions which recall the travels of the Venitian in Kublay Khan Mongol empire, has provided an excellent material of research. Following the works of Consuelo Wager Dutschke (1995) on the reception of Marco Polo's *Travels*, and Damon Mayaffre on logometry, this article stands at the crossroads of multiple branches of humanities such as History, Medieval literature and Ethnography. The focus is the religious and cultural diversity pervading a text which, according to the language it was copied, bore the names – among others – of *The Book of Marvels*, *The Description of the World* or *Il Milione*.

In order to provide a global approach, eleven early versions of *The Travels* were selected. Written in Old French, Venetian, Toscan, Italian and Latin, they contrast in their content according to the audience they were addressed to. In a multi-language context, the use of textometry has proved particularly well founded. Thanks to text analysis tools such as PALM, Tropes, Iramuteq or TXM softwares, neglected ethnographic aspects of Marco Polo's narrative were put in evidence. For a long time the attention was drawn on the description of unknown territories, but not much was said about the customs of their inhabitants. Considering a list of items covering the scopes of religion and social rites, and by comparing the different versions with digital tools it was possible to outline a cartography of the narrative structures and to underline the importance of these topics in Marco Polo's account.

Interestingly, although some episodes of *The Travels* are common to all the versions, their content differs in many ways. Were the changes due to Marco Polo himself or to the copists whose intervention in the narrative could be tracked through the use of textometric approach? This article proposes an answer and new developments.

Key words : Digital Humanities, Marco Polo, Ethnography, Medieval literature.