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The *Roman de Fauvel* as synthetic digital object

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The Digital Fauvel is an interactive facsimile-edition of the satirical “Roman de Fauvel” (ca. 1314) as preserved in the manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale fr. 146. In this source, the story of Fauvel (an allegorical horse that stands for the worst aspects of humanity) is augmented by hundreds of images and musical items in a variety of genres. To “read” Fauvel in a way that approximates the rich experience its original audiences could have derived from the object requires a working knowledge of Middle French, Latin, medieval music notation, and 14th-century iconographic conventions. As a result, modern scholars have dissociated the object into more recognizable volumes—editions that group like with like and necessarily leave context behind. We have used new media to re-synthesize the source, making it more navigable, intelligible, and meaningful to the untrained reader and expert researcher alike.

In its current form, The Digital Fauvel software runs on a large multitouch tabletop (the Samsung SUR-40) which allows people to interact with high-resolution pages of the original object using natural touch gestures familiar from tablets and e-readers. Users of this virtual manuscript can simultaneously view superimposed translations of the text, search manuscript text and metadata, view modern editions of musical items, and listen to audio. Such a presentation allows the intricate layout of the original to remain salient, even while translations and transcriptions are being displayed.

The project employs Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) conventions to store content and layout in separate files. We are currently refining the Digital Fauvel software to function as a “container” into which new translations, and even new manuscripts, could be dropped with little or no programming. Thus our project infrastructure—the TEI encoding conventions as well as the software for search, navigation, and display—will function as a foundation on which scholars and programmers can build new and different types of interactions.

Our approach stands aside from main trends in Digital Humanities, where the building of databases that allow powerful searches on large amounts of data is ascendant. Both the editors of medieval manuscripts and the modern makers of databases dissociate objects into their components. By contrast, The Digital Fauvel seeks to foreground the integrity of the original. As such it is synthetic rather than analytical, and may point to new directions in digital approaches to medieval objects.

The project homepage, with screenshots, can be accessed at
<http://www.doc.gold.ac.uk/~mas01rf/DigitalFauvel/>