With the wiki into the early Middle Ages

On the trail of the Saracens: Researchers at the University of Bonn have developed an open science platform to invite broad participation.

"Repertorium Saracenorum". With this impressive name, historians at the University of Bonn now present the result of a project that took years to complete: an online wiki, created from more than 70 Latin-Christian works and 622 individual reports from the 7th to 11th centuries - digitally collected, categorized and scientifically processed. In cooperation with the Cologne Center for eHumanities (CCeH) at the University of Cologne, a novel compilation of sources dedicated to the so-called Saracens has been created. These are medieval populations of Muslim faith. The platform, called “Saracen Wiki" for short, is intended to benefit researchers, students and the interested public. The resulting new research questions and findings have relevance for present times, for example in researching communication and globalization processes or the history of Christian-Muslim relations. The website is now online and open to the public.*

The expansion of the Arabs began in the 7th century and took them as far as mainland Europe. This led to increased contact between the resident Christian population of western Europe and Muslims, whom Christian authors refer to as Saracens. The encounters, for example on trade, legation or pilgrimage journeys, but also during military conflicts, are described in Latin-Christian works of the earlier Middle Ages and have been handed down to the present day.

Historians usually spend a long time searching for passages in individual works that are relevant to them. The Repertorium Saracenorum (Repertorium = written directory), in short "Saracen Wiki", now provides a new access. This is where reports on Saracens are compiled, electronically recorded, and published online in linked form. "This makes it possible to analyze the material directly and to pose new research questions based on this," says Prof. Dr. Matthias Becher of the Institute of History at the University of Bonn.

Based on Wikipedia

At first glance, the website looks like the online encyclopedia Wikipedia. "We see this as a great opportunity, as many users are already familiar with the interface structure," says Dr. Katharina Gähbler from the Institute of History at the University of Bonn, who played a leading role in developing the Saracen Wiki with the help of Lukas Müller. The core of the wiki are the individual works and associated source references. Other categories include listings of the authors of the works, the people and places mentioned in them, and the regions in which the works were created. Furthermore, certain topical "distinctive features" are noted, for example, combat operations. The sources are linked to external data such as the The Integrated Authority File (GND) of German National Library and the international database Getty Thesaurus of Geographic Names.

The special highlight: Interactive world maps allow users to see, for example, where contacts and conflicts were particularly intense, or how far away relevant locations actually are from each other.
Transdisciplinary research with a view to yesterday and today

The work associated with the Saracen Wiki is embedded into the Transdisciplinary Research Area (TRA) “Present Pasts” of the University of Bonn. This is one of six inter-faculty alliances established as part of the excellence promotion program. The goal: Bringing together researchers from different disciplines to work together on issues relevant to the future. The TRA “Present Pasts”, for example, brings together experts from the fields of history, theology, legal history, philology, and - as in the case of the Saracen Wiki - computer scientists.

In one of their main research areas, the researchers examine forms of communication as a basic prerequisite for globalization. Specifically, this means: If the wiki provides new insights into the way Saracens were discussed centuries ago and how this new group of people was dealt with, this will also help in the analysis of today’s processes of change and globalization.

Interface between history and digital humanities

The “Repertorium Saracenorum” is based on the open source software “Semantic MediaWiki” and was created in cooperation with the Cologne Center for eHumanities (CCeH) at the University of Cologne, one of the leading institutions for digital humanities in Germany. The software is a kit that will be discussed and extended.

Both researchers and interested persons can log in and co-edit contributions in order to continuously develop the wiki. "Unlike a printed publication, the 'Repertorium Saracenorum', due to its wiki structure, is an open, expandable format for collaborative work that should not be considered 'finished' and therefore invites collaboration," emphasizes Katharina Gahbler. "So the value of the wiki increases with each new entry and with each addition."

Funding:
The project was funded by the German Research Foundation.

*Link to Wiki "Repertorium Saracenorum": https://saraceni.uni-koeln.de

wissenschaftliche Ansprechpartner:
Prof. Dr. Matthias Becher
Institute of History at the University of Bonn
Phone: +49 228 73-5160
Email: matthias.becher@uni-bonn.de

Dr. Katharina Gahbler
Institute of History at the University of Bonn
Phone: +49 228 73-6770
Email: kgaehler@uni-bonn.de

URL zur Pressemeldung: https://saraceni.uni-koeln.de Wiki "Repertorium Saracenorum"
With the wiki into the early Middle Ages: Dr. Katharina Gahbler and Prof. Dr. Matthias Becher from the Institute of History at the University of Bonn in front of the large projected home page of the "Repertorium Saracenorum". 
Volker Lannert