Normalisation of Place Dates in Regesta Imperii Online

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Regesta Imperii Online is one of the biggest archival records repositories. It records medieval sources (especially charters) of the Roman-German kings/emperors and other princes of the Holy Roman Empire. It contains more than 170,000 regesta (scientific abstracts), written in German.

The Academy of Sciences and Literature of Mainz is the central host of this research project.

http://www.regesta-imperii.de/unternehmen.html
An essential aspect of a regestum is the **place date**, i.e., the name of the place where the charter was issued or the event took place (de.: Ortsangabe, Ausstellungsort).

The regesta have overall 11,700 different place dates, of which 7,500 have only one occurrence. Our working goal is currently the normalisation of place dates with at least 5 occurrences and their variations.
Normalising requires to find a unique and definitive denomination, by means of shared normalisation rules. Place names are to translated in our case to modern German toponyms:

*Frankenfurt uff dem Moyne ---> Frankfurt am Main*
*Cracovie ---> Krakau*
*vor Kreuzburg (im lager) ---> Creuzburg (an der Werra)*
Normalising necessary requires permanent identifiers. We adopted wikidata and geonames (the latter being linked inside the former URL):

Köln. [https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q365](https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q365);
http://www.geonames.org/2886242/koeln.html
As long as identification is concerned, some place dates are not unequivocally identifiable:

*e.g.*: *Montem sancti Johannis*; Neustadt

Sometimes they are voluntary generic:

*e.g.*: *trans Rhenum*; *in Francia*.

For some other entries, the commentary of the regestum proposes an identification:

*Joham* ---*> *Giaia del Colle*  
[https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q51827](https://www.wikidata.org/wiki/Q51827)  
[http://www.regesta-imperii.de/id/1222-11-22_1_0_5_1_1_2109_1410](http://www.regesta-imperii.de/id/1222-11-22_1_0_5_1_1_2109_1410)
In other cases, some practical thinking can help too. In case we are not sure of the location of the place date, an unequivocal place date that immediately precedes, or follows, our charter will be helpful, e.g.:

In [http://www.regesta-imperii.de/id/1418-08-10_1_0_11_1_0_3863_3409](http://www.regesta-imperii.de/id/1418-08-10_1_0_11_1_0_3863_3409) the place date is Weil. Is it „Weil am Rhein“ (near Basel) or „Weil der Stadt“ (near Stuttgart)?
Coming to toponyms normalisation, a specially complicated issues is represented by cities and villages in previous German-speaking regions of central Europe, e.g. Silesia, Bohemia, Hungary. While earlier volumes did not realise the problem, it is now faced and discussed by the Regesta Imperii office in Brno.

The place dates normalisation has many goals. First of all, it aims to ensure a better researchability: today, the research query “Köln” as place date does not give the results “Coloniae” or “Colonia civitate”.

Normalised (and permanently identified) data are the precondition for all digital humanities data manipulation, e.g. geo-information systems, data visualisation and information modelling.

On the long run a model in the field of geo-visualisation may be the interactive map of Deutsche Biographie.

https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/
In order to conclude, some open problems!
The project Regesta Imperii started around 1830, and the first volume was issued in 1877, while some volumes are still to be published; such a long-running, multicentric, international, cooperative editorial project presents many problems, e.g.:
- changing scientific approaches and editorial standards;
- interoperability between paper-born and digital-born editions;
- countless addenda and corrigenda…

No definitive answers!
Thanks for your attention!

http://www.regesta-imperii.de/
http://www.adwmainz.de/

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