Galway project using technology to study ancient manuscripts

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Researchers and technologists have convened in Galway this week for an intensive "hackathon" aimed at leveraging cutting-edge technology to transform the study of ancient manuscripts. The event, held at PorterShed, a prominent collaborative workspace for startups, is focusing on the University of Galway's groundbreaking STEMMA project.

The hackathon is centered on **STEMMA (Systems of Transmitting Early Modern Manuscript Verse)**, a pioneering initiative that employs data-driven methodologies to analyze the circulation of early modern English poetry in manuscript form. This includes verse manuscripts produced and utilized between 1475, marking the introduction of printing in England, and 1700. The STEMMA team has developed an extensive database, enabling scholars to meticulously trace the evolution of stories, histories, and legends across different periods and geographical regions.

Participants in the hackathon are tasked with analyzing a comprehensive dataset comprising bibliographical metadata and selected lines from nearly 160,000 transcripts of early modern poetry. The objective is to identify novel patterns or anomalies within this data, which could open new avenues for scholarly research and understanding.

The event fosters a unique collaborative environment, bringing together experts from diverse digital humanities backgrounds with computer science students and technical specialists. This interdisciplinary approach is designed to unlock innovative methods for interacting with and extracting insights from the rich STEMMA data.

Tomorrow, participating teams will present their findings, showcasing the powerful synergy between technology and the humanities in advancing the study of historical documents.

Professor Erin A McCarthy, of the STEMMA Project, highlighted the initiative's significance: "Humanities researchers often conceive fascinating questions but may lack the precise technical expertise to answer them. By integrating technologists and computer science students, these researchers are empowered to pursue their inquiries without technical limitations, bounded only by their imagination."

This hackathon underscores the growing intersection of technology and historical research, promising to unlock unprecedented insights into our cultural heritage.