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Evaluation of ORB

One of the most difficult tasks in researching on the internet is finding reliable sources. The Online Reference Book for Medieval Sources found at www.the-orb.net gives all the appearances of a fully operational, diverse collection of materials related to the Middle Ages. Although the website boasts an extensive encyclopedia and library, many of the links on the site do not go anywhere, despite the links being to universities (including Virginia Tech). The ORB could be an authoritative source but lacks maintenance and accessibility of a professional webpage.

As the overused adage goes, “appearances can be deceiving.” The ORB is a website constructed to supply medieval sources. Most of the links provided by the webpage are to outside sources, mainly universities. Unfortunately, those of the encyclopedia and library are found wanting, with few actually working. The problem source is tracked to the page’s use of “gopher,” an information seeking tool. The version of Internet Explorer used could be the problem source, but it is unlikely. Moderators maintain links on a professional webpage, but the last update to the page is listed as November 2002. The lack of maintenance is eased by the extensive documentation on the authenticity of the page.

The ORB has the potential to be an informative website, with e-texts and journal articles on the medieval world. However, for all of the articles and teacher’s references offered, the webpage provides little without working links. Accessibility is the key to a webpage. The layout may be dazzling, but what good is that if the links are dead? The ORB may appear to have a complete guide of medieval sources, but in reality the collection is much smaller than it appears.

An online reference of medieval sources edited and as well referenced as the ORB would be ideal. The reviewed webpage simply lacks the sources required for success. Updates are infrequent and external links are rarely accessible. If the online reference book was maintained then perhaps eventually medieval enthusiasts would have a ready source of translated texts and articles.