

qqman: an R package for visualizing GWAS results using Q-Q and manhattan plots

Stephen D. Turner^{1, 2}

¹ Department of Public Health Sciences, University of Virginia School of Medicine, Charlottesville Virginia 22908 ² Bioinformatics Core, University of Virginia School of Medicine, Charlottesville Virginia 22908

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Software

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Summary

Genome-wide association studies (GWAS) have been successful in identifying thousands of trait and disease-associated single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs). The primary result of a GWAS analysis is a list of SNPs, their associated chromosomal position, and a P-value representing the statistical significance of the association. A commonly used method used to visualize GWAS results is the “manhattan plot” – a plot of the $-\log_{10}(P)$ of the association statistic on the y -axis versus the chromosomal position of the SNP on the x -axis. Another commonly used results diagnostic plot is the quantile-quantile (“Q-Q”) plot. Q-Q plots display the observed association P -value for all SNPs on the y -axis versus the expected uniform distribution of P -values under the null hypothesis of no association on the x -axis.

One of the most commonly used software packages for manipulating and analyzing GWAS data is PLINK (Purcell et al. (2007)). **qqman** is an R package that allows for quick and flexible generation of publication-ready Q-Q and manhattan plots directly from PLINK results files. The **qqman** package is a user-friendly tool to visualize results from GWAS experiments using Q-Q and manhattan plots. The **manhattan()** function in the **qqman** package takes a data frame with columns containing the chromosome number, chromosomal position, P-value, and optionally the SNP name. By default, **manhattan()** looks for column names corresponding to those output by the **plink --assoc** command, namely, “CHR,” “BP,” “P,” and “SNP,” although different column names can be specified by the user. Thresholds for suggestive and genome-wide significance are drawn, and users also have the ability to highlight/annotate SNPs of interest. Finally, the **qq()** function can be used to generate a Q-Q plot to visualize the distribution of association P -values. An example of the plots produced by **qqman** is shown in Figure 1.

These graphics can be created in other software, such as the standalone desktop software Haploview (Barrett et al. (2004)), or for focused regions using the web-based application LocusZoom (Pruim et al. (2010)). Conversely, **qqman** is distributed as an R package with no other dependencies that can be easily integrated into existing R-based scripted workflows to further enable automated reproducible research. Furthermore, users can take advantage of R’s very granular control of graphical output, enabling a high degree of customizability in creating high-resolution, publication-ready figures. The **qqman** package ships with example data and a detailed vignette illustrating its usage and further features not described here. The package is available on GitHub under the GNU General Public License at <https://github.com/stephenturner/qqman> and on the Comprehensive R Archive Network (CRAN) at <https://cran.r-project.org/package=qqman>.

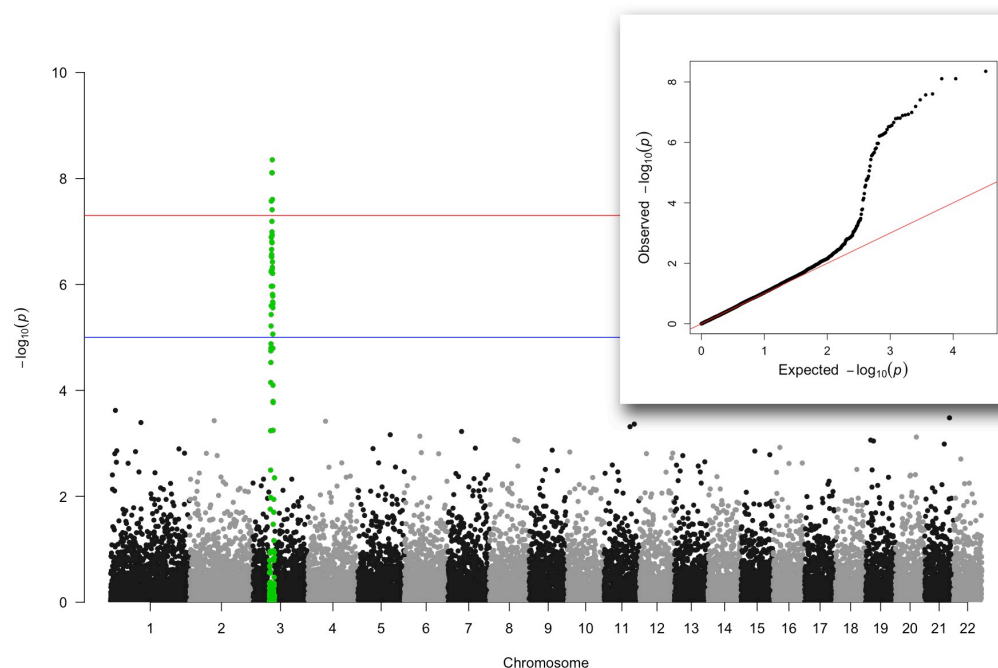


Figure 1: Manhattan plot highlighting SNPs of interest on chromosome 3, with Q-Q plot showing substantial deviation from the diagonal (inset).

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