

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Zecher, Carla, project dir. French Renaissance Paleography. Other

Elizabeth K. Hebbard

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Transformative Translations in Early Modern Britain and France  
Traductions transformatives dans la première modernité française et  
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substitute for expert-led, hands-on training in paleography, vHMML School and its fellow digital paleography resources will play a major role in providing the technical training required to keep the many fields of premodern studies thriving in the future.

CHRISTOPHER D. FLETCHER

Newberry Library

**Zecher, Carla, project dir.**

**French Renaissance Paleography. Other.**

Chicago: Newberry Library, 2016. Accessed 1 January 2020.

[paleography.library.utoronto.ca](http://paleography.library.utoronto.ca).

French Renaissance Paleography unites recently digitized medieval and Renaissance manuscripts with tried and tested tools for manuscript study. A collaborative effort among four partner institutions—the Newberry Library, the University of Toronto Libraries, the Center for Digital Humanities at Saint Louis University, and ITER: Gateway to the Middle Ages and Renaissance—the development of the site was supported by a Mellon grant. The site features an archive of research and study materials comprising high-quality images and descriptions of 107 manuscripts in Old and Middle French dating from 1300 to 1700, but this count does not include additional items, like maps and calligraphy manuals also presented among the site resources, that bring the total of digitized objects to 125. The manuscripts are evenly divided across three difficulty levels for paleographers and cover a broad range of document genres and subjects. Most were copied in France, which the project team divides into three large regions, each of which is represented equally in the materials. The vast majority of the documents come from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with about a quarter of them having been copied before 1500. Most of the digitized materials are held in the Newberry Library, but collections from ten different North American institutions are represented. The site identifies a broad intended audience of students, researchers, librarians, calligraphers, and designers. In fact, given the date range of documents made available via this project, the audience could be even larger than the title suggests. Indeed, the manuscripts and their contents are of genuine interest to all who study

the history, culture, and material culture of medieval, Renaissance, and early modern France. Because the project creates a repository of study materials for French paleography, codices are not digitized in full but are represented by a small number of consecutive leaves.

From the homepage, users can discover the digital facsimiles by collection, topic, or time or place of copy. Alternatively, users can navigate to “Manuscripts” to browse the collection alphabetically by title, or “Search” to see a full list of filters that can be used to include or exclude items from the query. Clicking on an individual item will take the user to the digital facsimile, housed in an International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF) viewer, which allows users to manipulate an image of a single item (zoom, rotation, and colour adjustment, including toggle to greyscale) or to manipulate and compare multiple images side-by-side. Additional tabs on the viewer offer a set of thumbnail images of the selected document (“Pages”) and allow users, if they have registered an account with the site, to transcribe images using T-Pen, a web-based transcription tool developed by the Walter J. Ong S.J. Center for Digital Humanities at St. Louis University. Each facsimile is followed by a standardized description and a set of links directing the user to the holding library’s catalogue entry, to a partial transcription of the document, and to a background essay about the document.

The manuscript search feature uses the open-source framework Islandora built on Drupal. Metadata follow a MODS schema (provided by the project team), and certain fields use controlled vocabulary that conforms to additional standards (FAST for the Subjects field; LC Name Authority File for Author/Contributor, Publisher, and Provenance fields; and Iso639-2 Languages for the Language field), though there appear to have been a few small errors in entry (e.g., one item’s language is listed as “Middle French” instead of “Middle French 1400–1600”). The site is licensed under a Creative Commons – Attribution – Non-Commercial – No Derivatives 4.0 International License.

French Renaissance Paleography contains a wealth of additional resources under the “References” menu, which predominantly consist of teaching materials compiled over decades of research by Bernard Barbiche and Marc Smith of the École des Chartes. These resources include a list of common French abbreviations expanded from Maurice Prou’s *Manuel de la paléographie latine et française* (though the latter is available online via Gallica, this text-searchable version is much easier to use); language resources for Middle

and modern French; a glossary of basic paleography and manuscript terms; charts of the structure of French institutions of the Ancien régime; suggested reference works to guide the researcher in topics that may arise through the study of documents in French; and links to other digital paleography resources, including a number of sites belonging to departmental archives in France that offer paleography lessons or transcription exercises based on documents from their own collections.

Overall, the site infrastructure works well, the manuscript materials themselves are fascinating and certainly worthy of further study, and the project provides several unique and excellent resources for the study of premodern manuscripts in French. But in terms of usability, the site could work toward a few improvements. If a user begins by browsing the collection, for example, they must either return to the homepage to access the “Get Started” guide or find it as the last item under “Resources.” The division of content between the two menus, “Resources” and “Reference,” seems arbitrary—and in fact, the site guide describes them as one entity. Although the site guide explains how to use the search function, the viewer, and the transcription tool, it does not offer any introductory material about paleography. The pages “French scripts and hands” and “About French documents,” whose titles suggest a basic orientation in the digitized material and its paleographical analysis, only provide links to external articles and other websites. Thus, while the intended audience of the project is vast and general, not all intended users will be capable of self-directed learning using only the site’s resources. Beginners, especially, will need more direction in paleographic methods and principles and in the identification or classification of scripts. In its current version, the site is best suited to paleography courses where teachers and researchers can fill in these gaps for their students in person, or to the intermediate or advanced paleographer who can skip directly to the study of the materials.

It is unclear whether there are planned updates for this project, but I will suggest a few areas that could be given more attention. At the moment, there is no project documentation available on the site that might indicate updates in progress or already completed. Though each item has a complete description, many of the partial transcriptions and background essays are missing. Project documentation could clarify whether more of these support materials will be added in the future by the project team or contributors. Additionally, a collaborative work feature and a discussion forum about teaching with site

materials both depend on integration with Google Groups, but the group seems no longer to exist. Finally, where the site guide makes reference to a button where users can share their feedback, that button has disappeared from the homepage.

A sister site released in summer 2019, Italian Paleography ([italian-paleography.library.utoronto.ca](http://italian-paleography.library.utoronto.ca)), is clearly built on the model of French Renaissance Paleography, but with important and welcome improvements. Italian Paleography brings together the same breadth and quality of resources, but these are more intuitively organized and the site is more welcoming to beginning paleographers, who can orient themselves, via links on the homepage, with videos (“How to navigate the site” and “How to use T-Pen”) and with practical instruction (“How to analyze a script” and “Tips and Tricks”) before attempting transcription. Where French Renaissance Paleography foregrounds its archive of documents, Italian Paleography emphasizes the learning of paleography through its documents. As it stands, French Renaissance Paleography is a valuable archive of diverse French document genres and scripts. A slight reorganization and a homepage with more direction would ensure that teachers, students, and researchers at all levels of experience would best be able to benefit from the rich content it presents.

ELIZABETH K. HEBBARD

Indiana University, Bloomington

**Thélème: Techniques pour l’Historien en Ligne; Études, Manuels, Exercices, Bibliographies. Other.**

**Paris: L’École Nationale des Chartes, n.d.**

Accessed 31 January 2020.

[theleme.enc.sorbonne.fr](http://theleme.enc.sorbonne.fr).

Thélème: Techniques pour l’Historien en Ligne; Études, Manuels, Exercices, Bibliographies states its purpose clearly on the landing page. Created in the mid-to-late 2000s by one of France’s most esteemed educational institutions, the École Nationale des Chartes, the aim of Thélème is to support “teaching and orientation to various topics and methods of historical research” (“des