

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



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

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Transformative Translations in Early Modern Britain and France  
Traductions transformatives dans la première modernité française et britannique

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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.

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**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

supports d'enseignement, d'initiation aux diverses sciences et aux méthodes de l'histoire").<sup>1</sup> Thélème's hosting institution is known for its expertise in historical diplomatics, and the quality of scholarship and breadth of content in this web resource live up to that reputation. Students wishing to deepen their knowledge of historical documentation and method in the western European tradition would benefit from engaging with Thélème, even if the resource has aged since it was first launched. Although there are some drawbacks to the way Thélème's material is currently presented, the site remains an important resource for students interested in western European history and paleography.

To navigate the site's architecture from the landing page, users can choose one of three subdivisions: "introductory courses" ("cours d'introduction"), "collections of historical documents" ("dossiers de documents"), and "scholarly apparatus to support history research" ("des outils pour l'étude et la recherche"). Each subdivision is fully populated with well-organized content accompanied by references and recommendations for further reading.

Although the first subsection is entitled "introductory courses," the information contained within this rubric is far from elementary. Instead, users are quickly confronted with an exposition on the fundamentals of diplomatics and a discussion of the philosophical groundings of modern historical method. This is heady stuff; the approach asserts that an "analytical-descriptive program" ("un programme [...] analitico-descriptif") should be applied when assessing any piece of historical evidence. In an effective demonstration of that same approach, content on the Thélème site is often organized both chronologically and geographically according to century or country, allowing readers to quickly identify a specific area of research interest. Among the topics in the *cours* section are an introduction to modern editions of historical texts (how to create and appreciate them), a discussion of what constitutes a text, a short primer on the history and dating of incunables, and a subsection on sigillography. The material presented throughout the *cours* subsection is learned, well-researched, and well-organized, albeit restricted to the western European tradition.

1. Clavaud Florence, "Les éditions électroniques de l'École nationale des Chartres: objectifs, principes, outils et perspectives," in "Digital Edition of Sources in Europe: Achievements, Problems and Prospects: Conference Celebrating the 175th Anniversary of the Commission royale d'Histoire – Koninklijke Commissie voor Geschiedenis, Held on the Occasion of the Annual Meeting of Porta Historica," special issue, *Bulletin de la Commission royale d'histoire. Académie royale de Belgique* 176.1 (2010): 107–20, doi.org/10.3406/bcrh.2010.1079.

The second part of the site brings together 109 images of manuscripts dating from the fifth to the eighteenth centuries and is perhaps the most useful for those wanting to gain familiarity and facility with the primary sources used for western European historical research. The images of handwritten items featured on the site are placed in one of two categories, either “books” (“livres”) or “documents” (“documents”), and arranged chronologically in order of date created. Users can scroll through a faceted menu at the top of the “summary of document dossiers” page to choose which manuscript to consult. Clicking on one of the titles takes the user to an interface with a thumbnail image of the chosen document, accompanying metadata, and set of viewing options. Choosing the “interactive facsimile” view allows users to zoom in or out on the high-resolution image; the “text and translation” option provides a full transcription of what is written on the manuscript with a translation into modern French. Finally, the “paleographic commentary” tab highlights particular aspects of handwriting found in the manuscript witness that help to determine the date and locale of production. Translations and transcriptions are accompanied by a glossary of French manuscript abbreviations, listed alphabetically according to the abbreviation’s first letter. The transcription/translation pane and glossary are especially useful for students who need a point of reference for the historical documents they are using for their own studies. Indeed, the site offers an excellent way to sharpen one’s own paleographic skillset. What is covered in this section encapsulates much of the science of handwritten material since it first became a subject of critical study in the mid-to-late seventeenth century. Although the choice of documents included on the Thélème site is staunchly conventional and western in its orientation, the resource provides a firm understanding of the foundations of paleographic study in that same tradition and a grounding in how the science of handwriting intersects with scholarly editing and textual analysis.

The third section, “Bibliographies,” fills out the site’s presentation of how documents have been received, treated, and understood since the discipline’s earliest years. The bibliographic topics listed are wide-ranging and exhaustive. They include readings on archival access, medieval archive practice, codicology, medieval and modern diplomatics, book history, specialized vocabularies of the Middle Ages, onomastics, liturgy and spiritual life, paleography, and romance philology. Each topic has its own set of subtopics, and each includes both the fundamental reading for the subject as well as a list of more recent publications.

For any serious scholar of history, paleography, or diplomatics, the readings found in the Thélème “bibliographies” section represent the fields’ essential scholarly building blocks.

Although it presents a very traditional view of the fields it covers, there is no doubt that the content of Thélème is of the highest scholarly quality. As a digital resource, however, Thélème was first envisioned, completed, and launched in the late 2000s, and the site remains a product of that same moment. This is apparent in two ways: first, in the rather dated understanding of what the digital medium might accomplish, and second, in the technological affordances brought to bear in the project as it currently stands.

A cursory examination of the site’s organization and content reveals that those who planned and executed the Thélème project were primarily concerned with transferring the content and configuration of non-digital modes of scholarship directly into the digital medium. The site’s structure, which mimics a standard outline formula and relies heavily on parent-child hierarchical relationships, underscores the unidirectionality of such an approach. Although the sidebar menu allows the user to choose which topic or subsection to explore (much as does a table of contents in a printed book), the lack of horizontal access, to which we as digital consumers have become accustomed, dictates how the material should be consumed and limits the ability to create pathways of knowledge not anticipated by the site’s creators. This is less a criticism of Thélème than it is an acknowledgement of how our increasingly frequent interactions with the web of knowledge known as the internet have conditioned our expectations of scholarly communication. Certainly, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, having immediate access to all the materials found on the Thélème site would have been ground-breaking. In the third decade of the same century, the presentation of that same material seems decidedly dated.

In the same way, Thélème has not kept up with the many technological advances and modifications made in digital humanities over the past decade. In the late 2000s, for example, having access to digital images of manuscripts that the user could manipulate and examine up close was cutting-edge technology. Medievalists of the time, and particularly those living outside of Europe, would rarely have had access to the precious sources at their fingertips. Now, however, as more repositories have adopted and integrated the advanced technologies that readily serve up IIIF-compliant digital images, downloadable metadata, and linked data at the click of a mouse, images on the Thélème site appear

clunky, outmoded, and limited. The same can be said of the glossary. The typed approximations of handwritten abbreviations seem out of place and hard to negotiate in the age of the ubiquitous screenshot. An image of an abbreviation from a handwritten source, for example, could replicate what is found in actual manuscripts far more accurately than any type-face font, and would facilitate the user's ability to identify abbreviations in the manuscript environment.

Whether *Thélème* is still actively maintained and updated at this time is unclear; the last notice of revision is dated October 2017, and many of the bibliographies include entries from the early 2010s. Several of the embedded links are no longer active, and some of the images, transcriptions, and translations on the document interface do not load properly when clicked.<sup>2</sup> None of these glitches is a surprise to those who work with digital media. However, given the high quality of content and its value as a teaching tool, my hope as a reviewer is that the site's creator might consider archiving the current version of *Thélème* as a first edition of the project. Such a precaution would guard against the site's further degradation or loss, as has been the fate of so many good projects created in the fragile digital world in which we work. A second edition of *Thélème*, which would draw upon the work of the project's first iteration and incorporate technological and organizational updates, would be an extremely valuable resource for students of history and paleography alike.

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**Hernández, Ramona, project dir.**

**Spanish Paleography Digital Teaching and Learning Tool.**

New York: City College of New York Dominican Studies Institute (CUNY DSI), 2013. Accessed 30 January 2020.

[spanishpaleographytool.org](http://spanishpaleographytool.org).

Like many other disciplines studying the past through textual heritage, paleography has been impacted by the digital turn at different levels. In some

2. See, for example, the following broken link on the "Théâtre" section of the bibliography: CESAR (Calendrier électronique des spectacles sous l'Ancien Régime et la Révolution).