Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme

Wolfe, Heather, principal investigator, and Paul Dingman, project manager. Early Modern Manuscripts Online. Other

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Early Modern Manuscripts Online. Other.
Folger Shakespeare Library, 2014. Accessed 18 January 2020.
emmo.folger.edu.

Over the past five years, the Folger Shakespeare Library's Early Modern
Manuscripts Online (EMMO; emmo.folger.edu) has become a rallying point
for early modern English manuscript work. Perhaps more than any other early
modern digital project to date, EMMO stands out not so much on its own
merit, but rather for its unprecedented ability to bring together early modern
scholars, students, and wider public audiences around a digital resource. The
project aims to provide access to images, transcriptions, and metadata for
sixteenth- and seventeenth-century manuscripts, most often housed in special
collection libraries and difficult to access for many people ("About"). Funded
from 2014 to 2017 through an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant,
the EMMO team did an extraordinary amount of work on a small number of
manuscripts—roughly one hundred letters from the Folger Library's collection.
The team concluded the initial grant cycle with a conference on "new
directions in teaching and research," and the EMMO website has been quiet
ever since as Folger staff work to secure additional funding. Consequently, the
EMMO website itself is limited in scope. But the project's mission flourishes
in the Folger's transcription platform, Dromio (transcribe.folger.edu), and in
EMMO's robust partner project, Shakespeare's World (zooniverse.org/projects/
zooniverse/shakespeares-world). International scholarly communities like the
Early Modern Recipes Online Collective (EMROC; emroc.hypotheses.org)
and the Early Modern Poetry Online Project (EMPOP; empop.hypotheses.org)
use Dromio to host their frequent transcribathons, which further EMMO's
efforts to make the Folger's manuscripts accessible to a wide public of scholars,
students, teachers, and readers.

Visitors to the EMMO project website first encounter a clean, top-to-
bottom scroll interface designed by Sites by Coop, a web development group.
The "Tool Features" section of the homepage provides a cluster of keywords—
searchable, easy-to-use, informative, and visual—that encapsulate the project's
main goals. Clicking on "Browse Transcriptions," the most prominent option
on the site's main menu, will bring the user to a list of fully transcribed letters,
catalogued by call number (default) and complete with a brief description,

correspondents' names, and the letter's date. The EMMO team offers three options for each letter: users can select a diplomatic, semi-diplomatic, or regularized transcription, with the conventions for each transcription mode thoroughly outlined in the project's "Resources" section. Selecting any of the three options launches EMMO's transcription view—an elegantly designed, flexible interface that displays the transcription alongside high-quality images of the original manuscript. Users can zoom in to magnify specific details, particularly helpful when trying to read John Donne's cramped lines to Sir Robert More, for instance (Folger MS L.b.535, emmo.folger.edu/view/Lb535/diplomatic). The interface also allows users to rotate the manuscript pages, view only transcription text or image, and toggle between full-screen images and the transcription view.

As a digital repository, EMMO offers exciting possibilities for both teaching and research. The site is an ideal starting point for teaching paleography basics, and the transcribed letters provide an easy way to incorporate manuscript primary sources into your syllabus. Teaching a class on early modern gender politics? You'll find in Isabel Kynnersley's letter to Walter Bagot (Folger MS L.a.593, emmo.folger.edu/view/La593/diplomatic) a deeply distressed female voice, relating that she is a "prisoner" in her chamber and under threat of daily harm from an unnamed "she," who would have "thrust [Kynnersley] down the stairs" during Bagot's last visit if he had not intervened. Taking advantage of the site's comprehensive search function, one needs only to search the word "chamber" to find another letter that could serve as useful evidence in such a course. A letter from Lettice Kynnersley to Richard Bagot (L.a.598, emmo. folger.edu/view/La598/diplomatic) communicates that she has been confined to her chamber, punished by her husband for not keeping the house well stocked with ale.

Such content is a boon to researchers, but another noteworthy feature of the EMMO project is the team's attentiveness to absence. That is, the EMMO team digitized every recto and verso page of every letter, an approach that invites us to consider not just the semantic content of these letters, but also their materiality as archival objects: What can we learn from pages devoid of ink marks? As the EMMO homepage outlines, the site includes one hundred transcribed letters and over three hundred images, many of which are images of blank leaves. This thoroughness will be extremely useful for scholars of material

culture, interested, perhaps, in the process of folding early modern letters or the oil residue of wax seals.

Ultimately, though, paleography is really the star here, and the EMMO project consistently foregrounds the complexity and subjectivity of paleography work. "Paleography is not an exact science," the team notes on the site's "About" page. "Transcription is a subjective act and even the most faithful representation of a manuscript cannot fully represent its layers of complexity" ("About"). One important result of this approach to transcription is paleography's democratization, which circles back to my opening points about EMMO's influence on early modern English paleography training and transcription efforts. The EMROC community, for instance, has transcribed over one hundred recipe manuscripts, over forty of which are vetted and fully available alongside manuscript images in the Folger's digital image collection, LUNA (luna.folger.edu). Heather Wolfe, curator of manuscripts at the Folger and principal investigator for the EMMO project, explains that the team "now thinks of EMMO as an umbrella term for all of [their] crowdsourcing, transcription, and sharing efforts."[1] The kernels of these broader efforts are evident within EMMO's pages. The "Resources" section includes a "Common Abbreviations" reference document with snapshots of handwriting showing abbreviations ("w^{ch}" for "which") that transcribers for any of EMMO's partner projects might encounter as they work through a manuscript. By compiling such resources, the EMMO team makes paleography transparent and approachable for anyone who wants to join the effort.

In addition to democratizing paleography, another important result of the EMMO team's approach is that it advances paleography and transcription as critical acts. Such an approach is crucial for demonstrating the value of transcription projects to funding agencies and defending the labour behind this work to tenure and promotion committees. EMMO's robust transcription view interface testifies to the scrupulous attention to detail required in transcription work, and the "About" page articulates the substantial scholarly, pedagogical, and public humanities stakes of such work. Moreover, by modelling paleography as a critical act, projects like EMMO productively contribute to and extend critical conversations on scholarly editing as a critical practice increasingly attuned, as Jeffrey Masten urges, to how we might inscribe our complex intersectional analyses within our editorial work. If paleography and digital transcription

1. Heather Wolfe, email message to author, 30 January 2020.

are the first steps toward making manuscripts more accessible, enabling access to texts that will become the basis for new scholarship, how might our transcription methods register more fully, for instance, the complex range of meanings activated by an indistinguishable vowel?[1] At its best, transcription, like scholarly editing, becomes a thoughtful, critical practice when we make transparent the decisions and biases that inform our processes. EMMO urges us to do just that as we come together within digital communities to produce new work as the result of collective action.

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Stokes, Peter A., project dir.
DigiPal: Digital Resource and Database of Palaeography, Manuscript Studies and Diplomatic.
London: Department of Digital Humanities at King's College, 2014. Accessed 1 March 2020.
digipal.eu.

DigiPal is a digital paleographical resource for the study of medieval handwriting, developed by a team of researchers and web developers at the Department of Digital Humanities at King's College in London, UK.[2] Funded by the European Research Council (ERC, erc.europa.eu) and part of the European Union Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), the project began in October 2010 and ended its main development phase in 2014. DigiPal consists of three main parts: a database of English vernacular primary sources, an extensive bibliography of publications and resources, and an open access Digital Framework "for the delivery of palaeographical content online"[3] (now renamed Archetype). The

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1. See Jeffrey Masten, "Glossing and T*pping: Editing Sexuality, Race, and Gender in *Othello*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race*, ed. Valerie Traub (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2016), 569–85.

2. A complete list of project members, including project director Peter A. Stokes, lead analyst developer Geoffroy Noël, and research assistant Stewart J. Brookes, and a list of the project's international advisory committee are available on the Project Team page (digipal.eu/about/project-team).

3. DigiPal, "The Project," digipal.eu/about/the-project/.