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Leon, Sharon, and Sheila Brennan, principal investigators; Jim Safley, lead developer; Kem Nguyen, web designer. Scripto. Software

Anthony E. Guidone

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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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Scripto. Software.

Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, Fairfax, VA: George Mason University, 2009. Accessed 21 January 2020.

Scripto.org.

Scripto is a free and open-source website plug-in that facilitates crowdsourced transcriptions, translations, and descriptions of digital media collections. Archives and libraries have increasingly turned to volunteer transcribers to expand access to their primary source collections. Two such examples are the Library of Virginia's transcription project, Making History: Transcribe (virginiamemory.com/transcribe), and the University of Iowa Libraries' DIY History (diyhistory.lib.uiowa.edu). Both of these projects have been incredibly successful. Making History: Transcribe has 621 active users who have transcribed over 85,023 pages of documents, and DIY History surpasses this mark with over 99,474 pages transcribed. Transcriptions not only make possible several forms of digital research, such as text mining, but also expand access to handwritten documents. Scripto is an effective tool for harnessing volunteer efforts to explore the past.

The Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media (RRCHNM) at George Mason University first developed Scripto in 2009. The RRCHNM received a Digital Humanities Start-up Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Office of Digital Humanities and a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission to build and develop Scripto for the Papers of the War Department, 1784–1800 (wardepartmentpapers.org), a community transcription project. The RRCHNM also received a Digital Humanities Advancement Grant from the NEH in 2017 to develop Scripto specifically for Omeka S.

Scripto's user interface is functional without becoming cluttered. Users register for an account and are then able to select items from the hosting institution's digital archive. Each item is presented with a textbox in which users type transcriptions or translations, and a short note describing their contribution.

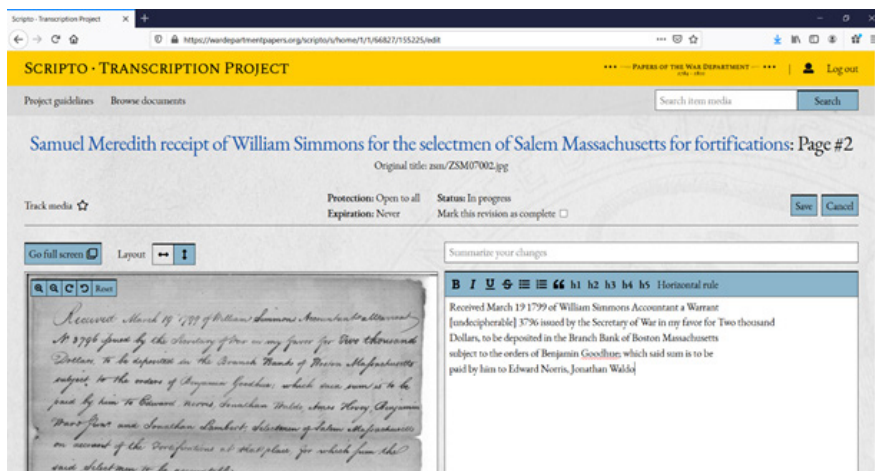


Figure 1. The user view when transcribing a document in the Papers of the War Department, 1784–1800 transcription project.

Scripto has several functions that increase the ease of transcribing. Users can manipulate images by zooming in and out, rotating images, and customizing the screen layout by choosing a vertical or horizontal orientation. The vertical layout presents the digital media window on the left half of the page with a textbox on the right, and the horizontal layout presents the digital media window on the top half of the page with a textbox on the bottom. Administrators can then view and edit submissions before they are made public. Published transcriptions are then keyword searchable on the project website. Scripto utilizes MediaWiki to manage user registration.

Users who register and create a profile can do more on the project website than simply transcribe documents. They can access discussion boards, ask editors questions, create a list of “watched” documents, and view an inventory of all their transcription contributions. Items maintain a saved revision history so users can improve upon each others’ transcriptions until project editors mark it complete. Administrators can bolster a sense of community by including tickers that show the total number of pages transcribed and the users with the most contributions. Researchers benefit from the ability to create lists of relevant documents to track their transcription progress.

Scripto provides tools to help users overcome the knowledge gap that understandably exists between volunteers and the professionally trained editors and administrators managing a project. Scripto allows users to leave comments and questions on items that editors or other users can respond to. Editors of most community transcription projects running Scripto include helpful guides for users. These can include general guidelines, such as maintaining original spelling, and more specific tips varying from “common abbreviations” to “paleography resources.” For example, The Papers of the War Department, 1784–1800 project includes several extensive user guides, video tutorials, and links to helpful resources.

Scripto should be used with websites built on Omeka Classic or Omeka S web platforms. Like both platforms, Scripto’s metadata vocabulary is rooted in Dublin Core but can be customized for an individual project. There are some variances between how Scripto functions for Omeka Classic and Omeka S; Scripto on Omeka Classic allows for one project website, whereas Scripto for Omeka S allows for multiple project websites drawing on one shared master collection of digital media. For example, an institution running Omeka S could simultaneously create two separate websites that draw from the same server of media items without necessitating an entirely new Omeka and Scripto build. Omeka S has recently added a new theme, entitled “Papers,” which was created specifically for Scripto and aligns the appearance of an Omeka S page with Scripto functions. Those interested can examine Papers of the War Department, 1784–1800 which was built using the Papers theme. Omeka Classic and Omeka S provide outstanding support for Scripto including detailed user guides and monitored forums. Older Scripto plug-ins for WordPress and Drupal exist on GitHub but are not actively supported or updated. Scripto.org only provides downloads for Omeka Classic and Omeka S; Scripto is not available for websites built on Omeka.net.

Scripto’s functionality greatly expands access to primary source documents, but it does come with some limitations. Individuals and institutions already running websites built using Omeka will find its Omeka specificity a great help. However, for those not using Omeka, it will require learning the Omeka platform. Omeka is not overly complicated but its abilities are maximized with a basic knowledge of HTML. Scripto itself is free and open source, but as an Omeka plug-in it requires the user to purchase server space to host their webpage. This is an assumed cost when beginning any digital venture,

but it could prevent community transcription projects from using Scripto to demonstrate proof-of-concept before securing funding.

Scripto is an excellent tool for the wave of digital history projects focused on harnessing the Internet's democratizing power to expand access and participation in historical research. Scripto's intended audience is archives, libraries, museums, and other institutions conducting crowdsourced editorial projects, but it could also be utilized by individual scholars. Two specific applications for Scripto come to mind concerning pedagogy and trends in academic scholarship.

Instructors for courses such as documentary editing, paleography, or methods for digital archiving might find an Omeka page with Scripto useful. It could provide a shared platform for students and instructors to work from and give students experience managing a digital documentary editing project as well as contributing to one.

Scripto, as well as the digital humanities more broadly, is particularly suited to addressing developments in the early modern period. These centuries were marked by the beginning of colonization, imperial expansion, forced and unforced Atlantic crossings, and a higher degree of global interaction. Transnational partnerships are the only way to digitally unite incomplete sets of records which have been spread throughout the world due to both author migration and later institutional purchasing.

One example of a successful transnational project is the Georgian Papers Programme (GPP), a partnership between Royal Collection Trust and King's College London in the United Kingdom and the Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture and William & Mary in the United States. The GPP offers scholarships and research fellowships but also hosts a transcription project with the goal of transcribing nearly twenty thousand pages of material (transcribegeorgianpapers.wm.edu). While the GPP does not digitally unite scattered documents, as all records are held at Windsor Castle, the program is an excellent template for future transnational partnerships. Scripto provides a robust and accessible tool for digital humanists to meld disparate communities around a shared historical past.

ANTHONY E. GUIDONE

George Mason University