

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Magni, Isabella, Lia Markey, and Maddalena Signorini, eds. Italian Paleography. Other

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definitions, and quick references to guide users. The manual is transparent over how and why the bibliography has been created. This is beneficial for cataloguers and helps the user decide how useful the website is for their own research needs. Overall, while the database is clearly aimed at a fairly specialist audience, the information is presented in a strong, user-friendly manner. Even for people who are not familiar with concepts of state versus issue or gothic typeface versus roman, the website does an excellent job at revealing and sharing collections that few may have had the chance to explore.

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Wellcome Collection

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i3.35314>

**Magni, Isabella, Lia Markey, and Maddalena Signorini, eds.  
Italian Paleography. Other.**

Toronto: University of Toronto / St. Louis: Walter J. Ong SJ Center for Digital Humanities / Chicago: Newberry Library, 2019. Accessed 27 December 2019.  
[italian-paleography.library.utoronto.ca](http://italian-paleography.library.utoronto.ca).

Italian Paleography provides visitors with digitized versions of 102 handwritten Italian documents and the apparatus for contextualizing them, practising transcription, and applying or developing paleography skills at varying levels. The editors explain that the texts were chosen for their authenticity and readability for a contemporary user of the site. Resources for many of the documents include three-hundred-word background essays on the historical context and identity of authors (where available), a description of the manuscript, a paleographic description of the hand in Italian, and a bibliography. This resource represents ambitious collaboration across specializations. In addition to its three editors, Italian Paleography was developed and is maintained by nine members of two technical teams from the University of Toronto and the Walter J. Ong SJ Center for Digital Humanities, five consultants (three of whom are also contributors), thirty contributors from American and European universities and American libraries and museums, and eleven individuals representing four units at the Newberry Library. The technical teams represent all stages of development, from special collections to user experiences. The content creators include

graduate students, lecturers, junior scholars, and established professors in the fields of Italian Renaissance and early modern studies. Contributors are listed with links to the essays that they have provided and are credited on the page with the relevant bibliographic essay. The project was supported by an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grant and is modelled after the Newberry's French Renaissance Paleography Project.

Based on site design and content, there are multiple intended audiences. This reviewer has been practising paleography for research for over a decade and found useful materials and guidance for more challenging scripts while also seeing the potential for using this tool in advanced undergraduate and graduate-level courses. The site provides multiple ways to enter and navigate the content: a menu bar at the top of the page that relies on user-driven knowledge of useful paleography resources; a "Get Started" menu for novices; and central, expandable text on the landing page for a user who may already know key terms but who can benefit from more context. In these latter two cases, the architecture leads users through the steps to begin their exploration of the site. Instructional videos provide an overview of the site, resources, and transcription tool. The language is clear and accessible, but novices might benefit from more hyperlinking of key vocabulary (paleographic terminology and script names) across the presentational materials, examples of handwriting, and anchors in the handbook. The landing page for visitors new to paleography offers particularly helpful examples of scripts with transcriptions. One useful feature, while the project continues to add resources, would be to indicate which manuscripts have transcriptions, allowing beginners to quickly start with documents that have the most materials for support.

The support elements allow for guided immersion into Renaissance Italian handwriting. Further resources include a glossary of fifty-two paleography terms with links to external resources; links to Italian and English language dictionaries; a bibliography organized by script and then the categories of paleography generally, calligraphy, and codicology; an appendix with high-quality images of fifteen calligraphy manuals; and an appendix with eighteen high-resolution digitized maps that offer further examples of handwriting from the period. At the time of this review, the resources for abbreviations and symbols, history of the project, and teaching materials were still under development. When users create an account, they can save their transcriptions as well as customize their profile and information for contact by administrators

or other users. Icons that link to contact forms for Newberry support staff are on every page and the team is very responsive.

New avenues of research are likely to develop from the application of the users' skills to new documents, but the real value of Italian Paleography is the gap it fills in access to training. Few free alternatives exist for Italian Renaissance paleography. InScribe is a free online course offered by the Institute of Historical Research at the School of Advanced Study at the University of London, but the emphasis appears to be on study and knowledge of handwriting, with unclear levels of practice with transcription. The National Archives produced an online tutorial ca. 2006 for English texts in a flash-based site: "Paleography: Reading Old Handwriting 1500–1800." Interested students of Italian paleography can attend training through the Rare Book School, the Medici Archive Project, or Mellon-funded institutes, but some of these opportunities have associated course fees, and all require travel. The Newberry Center for Renaissance Studies provides a list of static, online resources for Latin, English, French, Italian, and Spanish resources. None of these alternatives offers the level of interactivity and customization of Italian Paleography.

Site users practise their paleographic skills using T-PEN (Transcription for Paleographical and Editorial Notation), an open source, web-based tool developed by the Center for Digital Theology at St. Louis University with funding from the Mellon Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. The T-PEN tool works best with Chrome, something that is announced to visitors who arrive at the site using a different browser. T-PEN allows users to navigate the digitized manuscript and control its tools by icons, menus, and keystrokes. Users are one click away from the support resources on paleography, the bibliographic information about the document, and dictionaries of abbreviations and symbols. Visualization tools allow for a split-screen experience to display these materials adjacent to the page being transcribed. Other tools allow for previewing a transcription, full page views with magnification, and a comparison of pages in the manuscript. Specific tools for adjusting the image allow for changes to colour, contrast, brightness, presentation of superimposed scoring lines, a zoom lock to make the line being transcribed as large as the aspect ratio permits, magnification, adding characters with grave and acute accents, as well as a list of common expansions of abbreviations. While some of the manuscript lines are not aligned with the computer-added transcription scoring lines, the flexibility of the tool to move

the page and transcription box allows users to look past this inconsistency to focus on the handwriting.

Project documentation includes transcription and metadata standards in the “Resources” section of the site, while the history of the project page is still in development. Specialist users will appreciate seeing rationales for metadata and technological choices in that section of the documentation. Italian Paleography uses the Metadata Object Description Standard (MODS), with a template available, and Library of Congress standards for controlled vocabulary to describe the genre, topic, and subject of the documents. Materials are made available under a Creative Commons Attribution, Non-commercial, No derivatives (CC-BY-NC-ND) 4.0 license.

Overall, Italian Paleography will be useful for students looking to decipher their first manuscripts and for scholars who have studied some paleography but find themselves facing new hands in their research. The project team has created an immediately usable resource that is deserving of continued support. As contributors add more resources for the documents, the value will continue to grow, eventually creating a repository deserving of study in its own right.

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**Brandhorst, Hans, and Etienne Posthumus, eds.**

**Arkyves. Other.**

Leiden: Brill, 1999. Accessed 20 June 2020.

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

Arkyves is an online database of nearly nine hundred thousand early modern images and texts. Published by Brill, the ambitious research tool is, in essence, a collection of collections, acting as a single point of access for the digitized collections of partnering institutions around the globe. Now in its third decade, an earlier version of Arkyves (then titled *Mnemosyne*) launched in 1999. Yassu Frossati, Peter van Huisstede, and Hans Brandhorst, who continues to act as editor, provided the first content. The software was then, as it is now, created by Etienne Posthumus. Today Arkyves aggregates content from museums, libraries,