

**Renaissance and Reformation**  
**Renaissance et Réforme**



**Stokes, Peter A., project dir. DigiPal: Digital Resource and Database of Palaeography, Manuscript Studies and Diplomatic**

Isabella Magni

Volume 43, Number 2, Spring 2020

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

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1072201ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i2.34827>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Magni, I. (2020). Review of [Stokes, Peter A., project dir. DigiPal: Digital Resource and Database of Palaeography, Manuscript Studies and Diplomatic]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 43(2), 338–342. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i2.34827>

© All Rights Reserved Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2020

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

**é**rudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

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?<sup>1</sup> 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.

WHITNEY SPERRAZZA

Rochester Institute of Technology

**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](http://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.<sup>2</sup> Funded by the European Research Council (ERC, [erc.europa.eu](http://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”<sup>3</sup> (now renamed Archetype). The

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](http://digipal.eu/about/project-team)).

3. DigiPal, “The Project,” [digipal.eu/about/the-project/](http://digipal.eu/about/the-project/).

website allows users to visualize, compare, and annotate samples of hands of transcription and letter forms while contextualizing them in their material and theoretical contexts.

Even though the major work on the project ended in 2014, the homepage and overall site are still being updated and maintained; they display a user-friendly, clean, and simple design. The homepage includes a main navigation bar (in the website's distinctive red colour) and a carousel box alternating seven images linking to seven different representative documents. The main navigation bar allows users to access the homepage (home icon), the database of images ("Browse Images," a searchable gallery of all images; and "Search," an advanced search function to navigate the entire database), previously saved documents ("My Collection"), most recent news, publications, and updates ("News & Blog"), documentation and general information about the project ("About"), and assistance in navigating the site ("Help"). At the bottom of the homepage, users are presented with previews of the news, blog, and glossary pages, which are constantly updated as new content is added.

Documents and manuscripts that comprise the DigiPal database are mostly examples of minuscule scripts produced in England during the eleventh century: Caroline minuscule, English vernacular minuscule, Insular cursive minuscule, and square minuscule. The website currently contains 1,675 records of manuscripts and charters, 986 manuscript pages, 63,880 images of letters (graphs), and 1,477 records of scribal hands. High-resolution images come from several British and international institutions, including the British Library, Trinity College and Corpus Christi College at Cambridge, Canterbury Cathedral Library and Archives, Gloucester Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, The Wellcome Library in London, Winchester College at Oxford, and the J. P. Getty Museum. Each digital photograph is combined with detailed descriptions and characterizations of the script, as well as contextual information about the selected texts and the material object that contains them. One of the features that makes DigiPal stand out compared to other similar projects is the possibility for users to closely analyze individual characters, and to explore and manipulate the information and annotated images. Highly structured and rich linked data also allow users to visually compare letter forms, graphs, hands of transcriptions, and symbols within the same document and throughout the entire corpus.

Through the "Search" page, users can process advanced queries sorting documents and manuscripts (faceted search by filters: catalogue number,

repository, and date), hands of transcription (faceted search by filters: scribe, repository, place, and date), scribes (faceted search by filters: scribe, place, date, character type, character, component, and feature), and graphs (faceted search by filters: script, character type, character, allograph, component, and feature). These advanced search features are undoubtedly one of the most useful and innovative aspects of the site. Each document page contains the distinctive DigiPal image viewer Framework, purposely built for the project. For each document within the image viewer, by clicking on the tabs right below the manuscript name users can visualize the manuscript image, annotations, hands of transcriptions, other images (from the same document), additional information about the document, and image copyright information. The viewer also allows users to visualize the high-resolution image (with additional options of zooming and full screen view), turn on and off annotations of single characters, filter annotations to visualize only selected ones, create their own collections of saved images, select an allograph present on the manuscript page, and visualize all its other instances by clicking on the eye icon on the right of the frame.

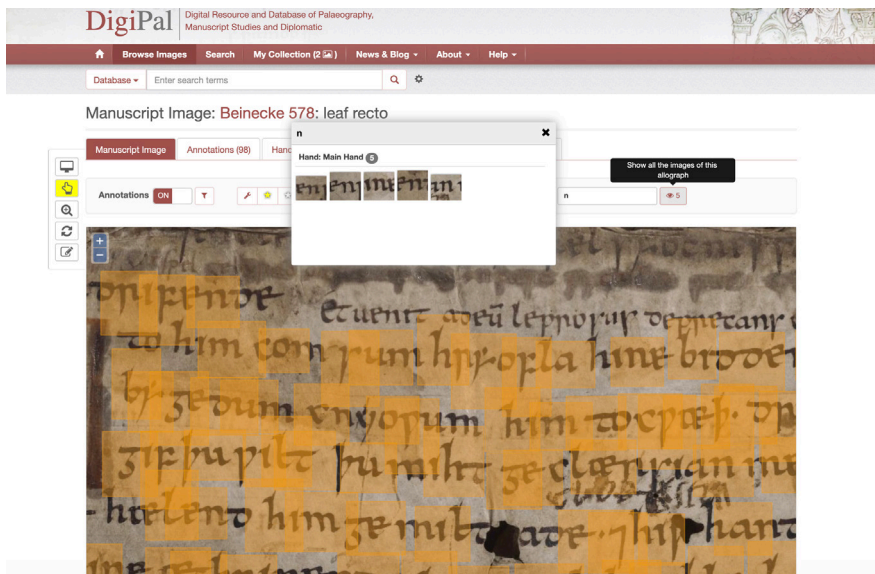


Figure 1. Example of an annotated image from MS Beinecke Library MS 578.

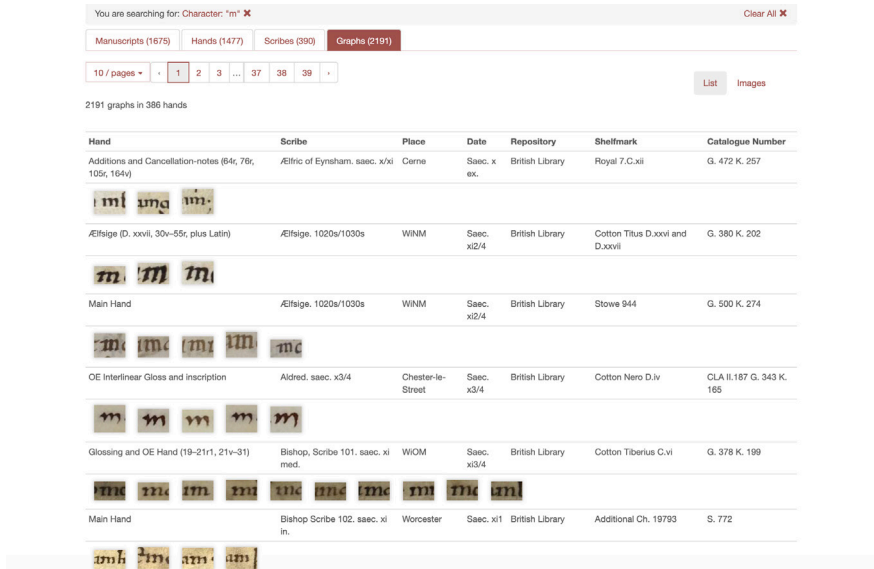


Figure 2. Results of advanced search of the graph “m.” Users can visualize and compare all annotated versions of letter “m” across the entire corpus.

DigiPal is a platform designed to serve a community of medieval scholars and paleographers at various levels. Even with its extensive documentation on how to use the site, its rich secondary source materials, and its comprehensive paleographical glossary, the website could be further enhanced by including more introductory resources free of technical paleographical jargon to serve non-specialists and beginners. Given its importance in the field of paleography and diplomatics, the site would also benefit from pedagogical materials to guide teachers and professors interested in using the site to teach medieval primary sources and paleography. Another important DigiPal audience is the digital humanities community. Especially in light of the latest developments of Framework (Archetype), the team has created a community of users who download and re-use the framework to create new digital projects. With DigiPal as a model (both in terms of method and web design), new websites have now been developed using the Archetype software: see, for example, Models of Authority ([modelsofauthority.ac.uk](http://modelsofauthority.ac.uk)) and Exon: the Domesday Survey of SW England ([exondomesday.ac.uk](http://exondomesday.ac.uk)). The extensive outreach the DigiPal team was

able to perform throughout the years is exemplary. The continuous commitment in disseminating the project by means of conference presentations, scholarly articles analyzing various aspects of the project, and a constant social media presence (see, for example, the Twitter handle @DigiPalProject) facilitated the creation of a broad and active community of users. News and updates are also announced on the website itself through “News & Blog,” both still in use, in which project members share updates, conference presentations, and materials to help navigate the site and re-use the Framework.

The DigiPal (and now also Archetype) GitHub repository provides access to the project’s data. Extensive project documentation in various forms is accessible both on GitHub and on the site; the “About” section of the site offers information about the project and the team who built it. DigiPal includes a wide range of content, all differently copyrighted. The project data are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0, [creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)), except those sections of data coming from other sources used on the project with permission, but not released under CC-BY license (e.g., data for the Gneuss, *Handlist Of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, copyright © 2001 Helmut Gneuss; the *Electronic Sawyer*, [esawyer.org.uk](http://esawyer.org.uk); and the Scragg, *Conspectus of Scribal Hands*, copyright © Donald Scragg 2012). Images of documents are copyrighted according to the image rights rules of the institutions that host the sources and provided the images. Users interested in downloading and reusing these images therefore need to contact the institutions to be granted permission. Finally, the software source code is available in open access and free to download and reuse (GPL 3.0 license) from the dedicated GitHub repository ([github.com/kcl-ddh/digipal](https://github.com/kcl-ddh/digipal)).

Even though DigiPal was one of the early digital paleographical projects, and its development ended six years ago, the website still remains pioneering for its uniqueness in the now crowded panorama of digital projects related to the fields of paleography and diplomatics. DigiPal is a valuable and innovative resource in its double approach of being both an annotated repository of medieval English manuscripts to be used and consulted, and a tool to be freely downloaded and re-used to create new projects.