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## To cite this version:

Ariane Pinche, Thibault Clérice, Alix Chagué, Jean-Baptiste Camps, Malamatenia VlachouEfstathiou, et al.. CATMuS-Medieval: Consistent Approaches to Transcribing ManuScripts: A generalized set of guidelines and models for Latin scripts from Middle Ages (8th-16th century). DH2024, ADHO, Aug 2024, Washington DC, United States. hal-04346939

HAL Id: hal-04346939
https://inria.hal.science/hal-04346939
Submitted on 15 Dec 2023

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# CATMuS - Medieval: Consistent Approaches to Transcribing ManuScripts <br> A generalized set of guidelines and models for Latin scripts from Middle Ages $\left(8^{\text {th }}-16^{\text {th }}\right)$ <br> Ariane Pinche ${ }^{1}$, Thibault Clérice ${ }^{2}$, Alix Chagué ${ }^{2,3,4}$, Jean-Baptiste Camps ${ }^{5,}{ }^{6}$, Malamatenia Vlachou-Efstathiou ${ }^{4}$, Matthias Gille Levenson ${ }^{5,1}$, Olivier Brisville-Fertin ${ }^{1,6}$, Federico Boschetti ${ }^{7}$,, , Franz Fischer $^{8}$, Michael Gervers ${ }^{9}$, Agnès Boutreux ${ }^{9}$, Avery Manton ${ }^{9}$, Simon Gabay ${ }^{10}$, Patricia O'Connor ${ }^{5}$, Wouter Haverals ${ }^{11}$, Mike Kestemont ${ }^{12}$, and Caroline Vandyck ${ }^{12}$ <br> ${ }^{1}$ CIHAM-UMR 5648, CNRS <br> ${ }^{2}$ ALMAnaCH - Automatic Language Modelling and Analysis \& Computational Humanities, Inria, Paris, France <br> ${ }^{3}$ UdeM - Université de Montréal, Montréal, Canada <br> ${ }^{4}$ EPHE - École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris, France <br> ${ }^{5}$ CJM - Centre Jean Mabillon, Paris, France <br> ${ }^{6}$ ÉNC - École nationale des chartes, Paris, France ${ }^{7}$ ILC-CNR <br> ${ }^{8}$ VeDPH - Venice Centre for Digital and Public Humanities, Ca'Foscari, Venice, Italy <br> ${ }^{9}$ UToronto - Department of History, University of Toronto, Canada <br> ${ }^{10}$ UNIGE - Université de Genève, Switzerland ${ }^{11}$ Princeton University <br> ${ }^{12}$ Antwerp University, Belgium 

December 2023

## Introduction

In 2016, the OCRopy tool (Breuel 2014) -designed as an open-source, easily trainable OCR engine- piqued the interest of digital humanists in deploying its application to manuscripts Camps 2017. While the majority of the community explored its usefulness for incunabula and fraktur texts (Springmann et al. 2018), we delved into its potential beyond printed material. Between 2016 to 2019, the landscape of handwritten text recognition (HTR) underwent a profound transformation. The advent of general public GPUs for model training became feasible, and the availability of programming libraries like Tensorflow and PyTorch became standard. Notably, during this period, Kraken (Kiessling 2022) gained prominence, while Transkribus (Kahle et al. 2017) emerged as a comprehensive solution, enabling manual annotation, model training and post-correction.

Along with the growing popularity of applications such as Transkribus and eScriptorium (Stokes et al. 2021), the use of HTR has seen significant growth in the digital humanities. Each project varies widely and is often inclined to tailor its own transcription methods based on specific objectives: from automatically transcribing cartularies (Stutzmann et al. 2018) to extracting literary manuscript texts for further study (Camps, Clérice, and Pinche 2021; Haverals and Kestemont 2023). The need for a standardization of methods and datasets became evident in 2021 with the production of generic HTR models able to embrace diversified collections. The divergence in transcribing practices across projects prompted the creation of a set of unifying guidelines for transcribing Old French manuscripts from the $10^{\text {th }}$ to the $15^{\text {th }}$ century (Pinche 2022b). The collective dataset expanded through external additions, culminating in the development of the first generic model for Medieval manuscripts: the CREMMA medieval model (Clérice, Pinche, and Vlachou-Efstathiou 2022a). Subsequently, fuelled by multiple funding sources and collaborations, both the guidelines and models are extending their reach to encompass various languages, with a coming expansion for Old English and Middle Dutch.

The Consistent Approaches to Transcribing Manuscripts (CATMuS) guidelines, dataset, and model are the result of an international collaboration aimed at standardizing transcription practices for historic documents in Western Europe. CATMuS currently includes past and ongoing projects with collaborators from Europe and North America: France (CREMMA, HTRomance (Clérice, Chagué, et al. n.d.), Fabliaux (Pinche and Pierreville 2023), Liber (Aruta et al. 2023), Gallic(orpor)a, HTRogène ${ }^{11}$ ), Italy (HTRomance, HTRogene), Switzerland (Gallic(orpor)a, FoNDUE), Canada (DEEDS(Gervers, Boutreux, and Manton 2023)). While CATMuS aims at merging transcription practices for HTR across documents from the Middle Ages to

[^0]
## 1－23 fechura no deue paran mjero <br> 1－24 ala color \＄da q qere\＄a los <br> 1－25 fralcons $\bar{q}$ soy cntrados o <br> 1－26 f Fuara a manallos． <br> 1－27 oq＜ue＞torna cotra umneio prriua

Figure 1：Prediction using Transkribus Coloso Español model．The model uses two different ways to deal with abbreviations，line $24\left\langle q^{-}\right\rangle$and line $\left.27\langle<u e\rangle\right\rangle$ ．Capture kindly provided by J．M．Fradejas Rueda．
contemporary times，this paper specifically focus on the medieval and $15-16^{\text {th }}$ cen－ turies early print（incunabula and print with gothic typefaces）from the datasets developed around the CATMuS Guidelines to help design general model（s）for HTR．

## 1 Guidelines

Transcribing involve a nuanced balance between fidelity to the source and interpretive choices．For texts in Anglo－Norman，for example，the historians＇editions have nei－ ther accents nor apostrophes：we thus read Dangleterre and labbe，instead of modern d＇Angleterre and l＇abbé（Breuil 2019，Introduction，p．5）．On the contrary，French literary texts editions expect standardized punctuation，word segmentation，and ac－ cents．Moreover，while a human reader can handle the lack of homogeneity，it is a significant challenge for computers．The lack of standardization inflates character counts and introduces ambiguity．For example，the 〈p〉 with a stroke could be rep－ resented by the 〈 $\mathbf{p}\rangle$（Unicode A751）or by a 〈 $\mathbf{p}\rangle$（0554）from the Armenian alphabet． Such variations introduce noise during model training，leading to inconsistent predic－ tions．Such issues have been found regarding a generic diachronic model for Spanish called Coloso español on Transkribus（Fradejas 2023）（cf．Figure 11）．

In tandem with a seminar held at the École nationale des Chartesthe first guide－ lines for medieval French emerged，addressing documents spanning from the $10^{\text {th }}$ to $15^{\text {th }}$ centuries（Pinche 2022b）．These guidelines aim to assist medievalists in trans－ lating manuscripts into a computer－readable format and in unifying their practices by：

1．restricting the characters used for specific purposes according to the MUFI ${ }^{2}$ ；

[^1]2．applying a graphematic transcription ${ }^{3}$ ；
3．keeping abbreviations（and thus，reducing the part of the language specific traits the model has to learn）．

Decisions on abbreviations，diacritics，and phonetic representations aim to mini－ mize characters in the HTR model．In medieval sources，distinctions like $\langle\mathbf{u}\rangle /\langle\mathrm{v}\rangle$ and $\langle i\rangle /\langle j\rangle$ that are typically variations in form rather than distinct phonetic realizations are reduce to $\langle\mathrm{u}\rangle$ and $\langle\mathrm{i}\rangle$ ．

Ongoing efforts include addressing new transcription requirements arising from di－ verse language domains，illustrated by challenges introduced by Latin in the CREMMA project and Spanish in the HTRomance project．The addition of Latin as added new difficulties as the representation of specific abbreviations for morphological suffix representations such as 〈 $1 \boldsymbol{\downarrow}\rangle$ for 〈rum〉 or 〈；〉 for 〈bus〉．The future addition of Middle English introduces the imperative need for new signs，like $\langle ð\rangle$（eth）representing the voiced and voiceless dental fricative（ $[\theta]$ and $[\partial]$ ）．

The establishment of transcription rules remains an ongoing and evolving effort， crucial for ensuring data quality and homogeneity．To ensure a better accessibility to the guidelines，the project aims at building a new set of guidelines，more inter－ active and more multilingual than the current PDF，with a delivery planned for the beginning of 2024.

## 2 Data

The CATMuS Medieval 1．0．0 dataset is built upon 17 different repositories across 10 different projects for which the guidelines have been applied，and for which Choco－ Mufin character normalization and quality control have been applied Clérice and Pinche 2021．The corpus（c． 115.000 lines and 3.4 M characters）is heavily influenced by its two first languages：Old French and Latin，and the existence of three personal projectst which produces the three overrepresentation of French－Narratives（ $29.2 \%$ of the dataset），Treatises－Latin（24．2\％）and Treatises－Castillan（23\％，cf．Figure 2a）． Speeches，Epistolary and Drama are three under－represented genres but it is not ex－ pected that their abbreviation rate or vocabulary differs much from the Narrative and Poetry genres．

Languages from the modern area of Italy and Spain（Castilian，Catalan，Navar－ rese and Venitian）are mostly underrepresented as only two projects are providing

[^2]

Figure 2: Relative importance (in characters percentage) of categorical features in all CATMuS Medieval 1.0.0 training languages. Bars are accumulation of percentage per categorical feature.
ground-truth. The final corpus contains 180 different documents-hands, of which 20 are prints and 34 are microfilms. Its most represented centuries are the $15^{\text {th }}$ century ( 74 document-hands), the $14^{\text {th }}(45)$, and the $13^{\text {th }}$ (34). The least represented centuries $\left(8^{\text {th }}, 10^{\text {th }}, 11^{\text {th }}\right.$ with a total of 6 manuscripts) can only be represented by Latin manuscripts and Old English manuscripts, which reduces the opportunities to accumulate data.

## 3 Evaluation

For CATMuS Medieval 1.0.0 (Pinche, Clérice, et al. 2023), we provide a test based on out-of-domain manuscripts (see Table 1). Data were transcribed using the previous CREMMA Generic 1.0.1 model and post-corrected in the eScriptorium interface by the same annotators than the training data. Cambridge, CCC, ms. 041 represents one exception, as its language is completely out of domain (Old English and Middle Dutch is not in our training set), and its annotator has joined the initiative after the training of the model. Two competitor models are provided as baselines: the CREMMA Cortado mode (Pinche 2022a), a monolingual model trained on Old French (no character count available), and the CREMMA Generic model (Clérice, Pinche, and Vlachou-Efstathiou 2022b), trained on Latin and Old French (1.357 M characters).

Test results (cf. Figure 3) shows a large upgrade from the previous monolingual
model (CREMMA Cortado) and a relative upgrade compared to the bilingual model CREMMA Generic. The later outperforms our larger models on most of the Old French test set $(<2 \%)$ except for Paris, BnF, fr. 1553. Looking at this specific manuscript, we hypothesize that its digitization (lower quality, a little blurry, greyscale microfilm) provided noise for our original model which our new model, trained with more noisy digitization, was able to overcome. On all other languages (except Old English and Middle Dutch), the model severely outperforms the original model. For English specifically, we can see that moving from a monolingual to a multilingual model provides an important performance gain, while the language barrier remains stable for multilingual model, despite having more languages $(+2)$ and more data (around 2 million more characters).

Overall, the new multilingual model provides a lower standard deviation across accuracies and a better average accuracy (Table 2), providing as such a better "generic" model according to this test set. The improvement from the Cortado model remains a huge leap, while the improvement from CREMMA Generic (and the detailed loss for some manuscripts) provides a picture of what can be enhanced in the near future.

| Model | Scripta | Lang. | Cent. | Char. | CATMuS 1.0 |  | CREMMA Cortado |  |  | CREMMA Generic 1.0.1 |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  |  |  |  |  | Errors | Accuracy | Errors | Accuracy | Diff. | Errors | Accuracy | Diff. |
| Paris, BnF, fr. 12558 | Textualis | French | 14 | 17258 | 1021 | 94.08\% | 1669 | 90.33\% | 3.75\% | 913 | 94.71\% | -0.63\% |
| Paris, BnF, fr. 1443 | Textualis | French | 13 | 13233 | 1820 | 86.25\% | 2308 | 82.56\% | 3.69\% | 1710 | 87.08\% | -0.83\% |
| Paris, BnF, fr. 1450 | Textualis | French | 13 | 17930 | 2280 | 87.28\% | 3419 | 80.93\% | 6.35\% | 2416 | 86.53\% | 0.76\% |
| Paris, BnF, fr. 1553 | Textualis | French | 13 | 13510 | 348 | 97.42\% | 1978 | 85.36\% | 12.07\% | 1500 | 88.90\% | 8.53\% |
| Paris, BnF, fr. 17229 | Textualis | French | 13 | 15027 | 1002 | 93.33\% | 1434 | 90.46\% | 2.87\% | 835 | 94.44\% | -1.11\% |
| Paris, BnF, fr. 6447 | Textualis | French | 13 | 16309 | 624 | 96.17\% | 1563 | 90.42\% | 5.76\% | 581 | 96.44\% | -0.26\% |
| Paris, BnF, fr. 840 | Cursiva | French | 14 | 7564 | 672 | 91.12\% | 1491 | 80.29\% | 10.83\% | 528 | 93.02\% | -1.90\% |
| Paris, BnF, lat. 14354 | Textualis | Latin | 14 | 24498 | 4744 | 80.64\% | 7619 | 68.90\% | 11.74\% | 4442 | 81.87\% | -1.23\% |
| Dublin, TCD, ms. 524 | Praegothica | Latin | 13 | 9500 | 726 | 92.36\% | 2159 | 77.27\% | 15.08\% | 1013 | 89.34\% | 3.02\% |
| Toronto, Fisher Library, ms. 01053 | Goth. Doc. | Latin | 14 | 10216 | 2368 | 76.82\% | 3955 | 61.29\% | 15.53\% | 2718 | 73.39\% | 3.43\% |
| Cambridge, CCC, ms. 111 | Praegothica | Latin | 11 | 4943 | 414 | 91.62\% | 1264 | 74.43\% | 17.20\% | 590 | 88.06\% | 3.56\% |
| London, BL, Egerton 3031 | Goth. Doc. | Latin | 12 | 14799 | 1387 | 90.63\% | 4488 | 69.67\% | 20.95\% | 2001 | 86.48\% | 4.15\% |
| Mâcon, Archiv. Dep., G 443 | Praegothica | Latin | 13 | 8455 | 494 | 94.16\% | 1158 | 86.30\% | 7.85\% | 589 | 93.03\% | 1.12\% |
| Madrid, BNE, ms. 3995 | Semi-hybrida | Castil. | 15 | 2842 | 113 | 96.02\% | 967 | 65.97\% | 30.05\% | 375 | 86.81\% | 9.22\% |
| Madrid, BNE, ms. 6406 | Hybrida | Castil. | 14 | 1702 | 207 | 87.88\% | 584 | 65.81\% | 22.07\% | 385 | 77.46\% | 10.42\% |
| Madrid, BNE, ms. 12732 | Hybrida | Castil. | 15 | 6178 | 151 | 97.56\% | 865 | 86.00\% | 11.56\% | 519 | 91.60\% | 5.96\% |
| Brussels, KBR, 2485 | Textualis | Dutch | 14 | 10394 | 1047 | 89.93\% | 1475 | 85.81\% | 4.12\% | 1143 | 89.00\% | 0.92\% |
| Brussels, KBR, 1805-1808 | Textualis | Dutch | 14 | 32421 | 6677 | 79.41\% | 8774 | 72.94\% | 6.47\% | 6530 | 79.86\% | -0.45\% |
| Vienna, ÖNB, 13.708 | Textualis | Dutch | 15 | 28421 | 5643 | 80.14\% | 7591 | 73.29\% | 6.85\% | 6087 | 78.58\% | 1.56\% |
| Cambridge, CCC, ms. 041 | Caroline | English | 11 | $17071$ | 5279 | $69.08 \%$ | 7051 | $58.70 \%$ | 10.38\% | 5212 | 69.47\% | -0.39\% |
| - Without new chars* |  |  |  | $16399$ | 4607 | 71.91\% | 6379 | 61.10\% | 10.81\% | 4540 | 72.32\% | -0.41\% |

Table 1: Out-of-domain tests for various manuscripts in languages represented in the CATMuS initiative. As CATMuS 1.0.0 has no Old English manuscript nor Middle Dutch. It is expected that Cambridge, CCC, ms. 041 might have a drop in performances because of its specific characters: we provide a second scoring method ignoring thorn, eth and other Middle English specific characters. For Middle Dutch, confusion of $\mathrm{u} / \mathrm{n}$ was a high factor in performance drop.

| Model |  | CATMuS | C. Cortado | C. Generic |
| :--- | :--- | ---: | ---: | ---: |
| Accuracy | Micro | $86.40 \%$ | $77.30 \%$ | $85.28 \%$ |
|  | Macro | $88.59 \%$ | $77.34 \%$ | $86.30 \%$ |
|  | STD Mac | $7.73 \%$ | $10.36 \%$ | $7.81 \%$ |
| Differences | Average |  | $11.26 \%$ | $2.20 \%$ |
|  | STD |  | $7.17 \%$ | $3.70 \%$ |

Table 2: Scores across manuscripts depending on the model. Differences are computed against CATMuS. Micro average takes into account each manuscript character and error count, while Macro-average and STD take into account each manuscript accuracy.


Figure 3: Test micro-accuracy per language and scripta. Bars represents the total number of characters per categorical feature.

## Future

Consistent transcription standards, collaboration and data sharing across languages have provided HTR for medieval manuscripts with a boost in terms of accuracy. Such boost results in the provision of general models for HTR that play a crucial role in setting common benchmarks and improving the quality of predictions (Camps, Baumard, et al. 2023). Thanks to the guidance provided by the guidelines and the support of our sponsors, we have seen a significant increase in the number of available, interoperable datasets for training HTR models in recent years. This increase has enabled us to develop new generic models adapted to medieval manuscripts.

Although this article focuses mainly on Romance languages, we plan to extend the project to Old English and Middle Dutch, demonstrating our willingness to further
broaden the linguistic eras treated. In addition, the project includes a section dedicated to the modern period, enabling the project not only to cover numerous linguistic eras, but also to extend chronologically from the Middle Ages to the contemporary era.

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## Appendix

| Scripta | Century | Language | Type | Genre | Color | Chars |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | Print | (K) |
| Caroline | 10 | Latin | prose | Poetry | False | False | 9.5 |
|  |  |  |  | Speeches | True | False | 0.9 |
|  |  |  |  | Treatises | True | False | 1.6 |
|  |  |  | verse | Poetry | True | False | 0.8 |
|  | 11 | Latin | prose | Narratives | True | False | 3.7 |
|  | 12 | Latin | prose | Narratives | True | False | 2.3 |
|  |  |  |  | Treatises | True | False | 1.1 |
|  | 8 | Latin | prose | Treatises | True | False | 1.6 |
|  | 9 | Latin | prose | Narratives | True | False | 2.4 |
|  |  |  |  | Treatises | True | False | 642.1 |
| Cursiva | 14 | Castilian | prose | Treatises | True | False | 4.2 |
|  |  | Catalan | prose | Treatises | False | False | 11.8 |
|  |  | French | prose | Narratives | True | False | 12.1 |
|  |  | Italian | prose | Narratives | True | False | 8.6 |
|  |  |  | verse | Narratives | True | False | 11.8 |
|  |  | Latin | prose | Treatises | True | False | 35.6 |
|  | 15 | Castilian | prose | Treatises | True | False | 10.1 |
|  |  | Catalan | prose | Treatises | False | False | 12.0 |
|  |  | French | prose | Narratives | False | False | 71.0 |
|  |  |  |  |  | True | False | 5.4 |
|  |  |  |  | Treatises | True | False | 76.0 |
|  |  |  | verse | Narratives | True | False | 85.6 |
|  |  |  |  | Poetry | True | False | 7.2 |


|  | Latin |  | prose | Documents of practice | True | False | 57.0 |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | 16 | Latin | prose | Documents of practice | True | False | 8.6 |
| Goth. Doc. | 12 | Latin | prose | Documents of practice | True | False | 12.8 |
|  | 13 | Latin | prose | Documents of practice | False | False | 12.0 |
| Humanistica | 14 | Italian | prose | Narratives | True | False | 15.6 |
|  |  | Venitian | prose | Documents of practice | True | False | 1.6 |
|  | 15 | Italian | verse | Narratives | True | False | 17.3 |
|  |  | Latin | prose | Treatises | True | False | 7.0 |
|  |  |  | verse | Poetry | False | False | 7.0 |
|  |  |  |  |  | True | False | 3.6 |
|  | 16 | Castilian | prose | Treatises | False | False | 7.6 |
|  |  | Italian | prose | Narratives | True | False | 4.7 |
|  |  |  | verse | Poetry | True | False | 4.1 |
|  |  | Latin | prose | Narratives | True | False | 7.8 |
| Hybrida | 14 | Castilian | prose | Narratives | True | False | 16.8 |
|  |  |  |  | Treatises | False | False | 8.2 |
|  | 15 | Castilian | prose | Documents of practice | True | False | 1.3 |
|  |  |  |  | Espistolary | True | False | 8.5 |
|  |  |  |  | Narratives | True | False | 12.8 |
|  |  |  |  | Treatises | True | False | 151.4 |
|  |  |  | verse | Poetry | True | False | 1.1 |
|  |  | French | prose | Narratives | False | False | 11.5 |
|  |  | Italian | verse | Drama | True | False | 5.1 |
|  |  | Latin | prose | Narratives | True | False | 40.7 |
|  |  |  |  | Treatises | False | False | 10.5 |
|  |  |  | verse | Poetry | True | False | 0.8 |
|  | 16 | Catalan | verse | Poetry | True | False | 5.8 |
| Personal | 16 | Latin | prose | Treatises | True | False | 7.2 |
| Praegothica | 12 | Latin | prose | Documents of practice | True | False | 10.8 |
|  |  |  |  | Treatises | True | False | 27.7 |
| Print | 15 | Castilian | prose | Treatises | True | True | 174.8 |
|  |  | French | mixte | Treatises | True | True | 24.8 |
|  |  |  | prose | Narratives | False | True | 53.2 |
|  |  |  |  |  | True | True | 59.3 |
|  |  |  |  | Treatises | True | True | 19.3 |
|  |  |  | verse | Narratives | True | True | 49.2 |
|  |  |  |  | Poetry | True | True | 20.5 |
|  |  | Latin | prose | Narratives | True | True | 56.2 |
|  | 16 | French | prose | Narratives | True | True | 68.7 |
|  |  |  |  | Treatises | True | True | 39.1 |




[^0]:    ${ }^{1}$ This dataset is not yet public but collaborators were actively involved in the previous dataset.

[^1]:    ${ }^{2}$ https：／／mufi．info／q．php？p＝mufi．

[^2]:    ${ }^{3}$ Transcription preserving letter sequences and reducing each form＇s meaning to an alphabetical system（Stutzmann 2011）
    ${ }^{4}$ Namely the PhDs and MA thesis of Pinche（2021），Gille Levenson（2023b），and Vlachou－ Efstathiou（2023）．

