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### The Experience of Scholarly Labor: Recording Affect in Transcription

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Current scholarship on crowd-sourced transcription and traditional paleography tends to focus on efficiency and community, on the one hand, and specialist training to create texts for scholarly readers on the other.[\[1\]](#) Largely absent from the conversation has been how the non-specialist transcriber experiences these digitized textual objects, intellectually as well as emotionally.[\[2\]](#) Seeking to add these dimensions to our understanding of paleographic transcription, this essay offers a qualitative report on a pilot project which documents a small group of non-specialists' experiences with transcription.[\[3\]](#) To do this requires stepping outside of the normal expectations both for literary studies as generally practiced and for academic articles in this field. I wanted to capture reflections that were thoughtful yet unscripted and casual, and to let these reactions guide and shape the project. I hoped to be able to access not just the conventional intellectual payoffs scholars pursue but a less definable recognition of the individual transcriber's vulnerability and growth in working with texts that until recently would have been the exclusive purview of trained academicians. In other words, this essay seeks to assess how the democratization of transcription is experienced by disparate collaborators generally working with unfamiliar texts, rather than by those overseeing crowdsourced efforts with an eye toward aggregating the results of contributors' labor.

Crowd-sourced transcription offers a nontraditional version of scholarly production in the humanities—broadly collaborative, more democratic, and with minimal gate-keeping (in most cases, participants can join without any official credentials or evaluation).<sup>[4]</sup> As such projects gather information scientists, professors, undergraduates, graduate students, alt-academic professionals, and community members to do this work in service of scholars' or cultural institutions' goals, it is also important that we see participant reactions to this work as substantial contributions to the study of manuscripts and their digitization. By exploring what we can glean from participant experiences with digital transcription, this essay argues for an expansion of the methodologies we use to report on these projects and a more capacious sense of what counts as evidence in reflecting on these experiences. Such responses present an opportunity to consider how we can bring bodies, voices, and minute-by-minute reflections on the experience of transcription into our thinking about early modern recipe manuscripts. In the case of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century digitized English manuscript recipe collections, information from transcribers can bring the process-oriented experience of transcription into contact with a similar disposition in many recipe books, revealing a continuity of interest in process and collaboration between these manuscripts and their early transmission and their re-mediation and transmission in today's digital archives.

This essay looks to three primary sources of evidence: the Twitter hashtag #transcribathon, with a particular focus on transcribathon responses to Early Modern Recipe Online Collective (EMROC) and Early Modern Manuscripts Online projects, the Early Modern Recipes Online Collective's blog, and a brief series of videos I took of students and faculty having novel encounters with Mary Baumfylde's recipe collection, dated 1626 (Folger MS V.a. 456). Twitter repositories of participant responses, in addition to the more sustained blog entries and videos, amplify the scholarly and para-scholarly experiences people within and outside the academy can have with recipe manuscripts. Despite the study they reflect and embody, such collections were themselves often everyday practical texts and collections for families, rather than academic texts, and scholars frequently attend to the types of communities we can reverse engineer by decoding different hands, marginalia, ownership declarations, manuscript provenance, and even supply networks for ingredients.<sup>[5]</sup> We should therefore attend to transcribers' real-time, sometimes off-hand responses because they offer reflections on the impact these texts have as they are transmitted through today's technologies. Transcribed books themselves offer a boon to historians of science and medicine, scholars of women and gender, and food historians, among others. The process of transcription by a wider public, recorded on public platforms, breaks such texts out of the traditional brick-and-mortar archive and puts them, once again, into social circulation, repositioning them within networks of collaboration and exchange predicted by their own initial creation.

### **Crowd-Sourced Transcription: A Brief Overview**

In recent years, a number of projects have emerged to enable non-specialists to encounter, engage with, and transcribe digitized handwritten documents. Transcribe Bentham, one of the more well-known of these efforts which launched in 2010, has worked with volunteers and scholars to transcribe more than 20,000 pages of writings by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832).<sup>[6]</sup> And the Bentham project has produced numerous publications that evaluate efforts

to build an online community for transcribers and offer a detailed look at the economic ramifications of crowdsourcing this labor.<sup>[7]</sup> While the Bentham project is built on the sustained labor of a large cadre of casual and “super” transcribers, numbering near a thousand, EMROC, in collaboration with the Folger Shakespeare Library, has organized yearly “transcribathons.” A transcribathon gives a group an opportunity to work intensively with a digitized manuscript during a set period of time—usually a day or two. EMROC’s yearly event aims to have volunteers transcribe a complete manuscript in about twelve hours. Volunteers around the world are invited to dip into the chosen manuscript, working with others in real time and sharing insights through social media platforms and follow-up blog posts. Meanwhile, teams of graduate and undergraduate students may work with the organization to transcribe sections of manuscripts as part of a course module.<sup>[8]</sup> Such public-facing and student-focused work represented by Transcribe Bentham and EMROC exists alongside the more long-standing scholarly work of trained paleographers who produce highly edited transcriptions for conventional print publication. “Richard Hakluyt the Younger’s Notes for the East India Company in 1601: A Transcription of Huntington Library Manuscript EL 2360” is an example of a traditional transcription project wherein scholars are engaged on a single text, working with it physically in its home archive to produce a transcription peer-reviewed and published by a prestigious academic journal or press, its access limited to those with institutional or personal database accounts whose libraries subscribe.<sup>[9]</sup>

Of course, these projects fulfill complementary goals—Transcribe Bentham and EMROC creating open access to very large archives unlikely to be transcribed by any single or even pair of dedicated scholars, and the Hakluyt project offering a deeply contextualized bibliographic account of a single historical text. Certain projects have, as this essay hopes to do, connected the social contexts of a manuscript’s production with a more collective research process for its contemporary editing and transmission. For example, *A Social Edition of the Devonshire Manuscript* “blends traditional scholarly editing practices and standards with comparatively recent digital social media environments.” Such projects demonstrate the usefulness of transcription methodologies that bring together scholarly discussions about manuscripts and the more fluid and ephemeral physical/emotional experience of transcribing in real time. The Devonshire manuscript miscellany is “an inherently collaborative document” and therefore “calls for a social investigation of its production.”<sup>[10]</sup> The edition’s methodology—working “at the intersection of academic and wiki culture”—seeks to “expand knowledge communities using accessible social technologies.”<sup>[11]</sup>

These examples offer some hope that, despite predictions to the contrary, the skill of paleography will persist. In fact, digital transcription platforms like the Folger Shakespeare Library’s Dromio, or the more recent From the Page, have changed the field of paleography in early modern studies, helping to keep it from the obscurity of what seemed, even a decade ago, a dying skill. A 2009 article in the *Sixteenth Century Journal* worried that “Training in paleography, codicology, and diplomatics, once a given in the education of Renaissance scholars, has become a luxury item offered only at those large universities that can maintain a textual specialist on the faculty.”<sup>[12]</sup> This piece also notes approvingly early efforts (at that time) in the form of Rare Book School and the Mellon-funded institutes in vernacular

paleography held at various American libraries. The essay's author admires how these digital initiatives have democratized the practice of paleography to the extent that thousands of volunteers working on various projects, with keen eyes and access to encoding standards, can create creditable draft transcriptions for vetting by scholars, many of whom were trained at research libraries or in Rare Books School. Though these projects don't themselves focus on the experience of the transcriber, this move towards bringing larger communities into humanities research is in tune with continuing scholarly efforts to better understand and reconstruct early modern reading communities, as well as the environmental practices at the heart of early English recipes, and to question the race and class presumptions that structure archives. Bringing less heard voices into the archive and amplifying archival voices long silenced is part and parcel of recognizing the role of emotion in the experience of scholarly work now and in the textual production of the past.[\[13\]](#)

### **Process and Progress Reports: Twitter and Blogs**

Social media platforms can reify standard institutional hierarchies, as participants use the opportunity to promote publications and cultivate an academic persona. In the case of live-Tweeting during an event, however, Twitter, with its bite-sized reflections in real time, can also help posters transgress conventional professional and authorial norms of self-presentation by capturing their affective experience in writing. The platform also creates a surprisingly deep collection of such dispatches which can help us to reconnect with the experience of transcribers in much the same way a brief marginal note might help us connect with an early compiler of recipe books. Consider a hand that drops into the margin of Rebecca Winche's manuscript, noting of a recipe for "The Posion" that "this recipe was kept as a secret and valued much, the whole cours was yett sold by one that got a living by it."[\[14\]](#) The margins add an affective, pragmatic, and concise valence to the recipe's circulation—its secrecy and value, and that it was shared for economic expediency. Tweets about a research project can fill in similar emotive gaps. Looking back at a sample of Tweets regarding transcribathons in 2017 and 2018 by following the hashtag "transcribathon," a few types of reflections emerge: appreciation for new knowledge, the surprise of discovery, a sense of self-direction, and some anxiety about accuracy.[\[15\]](#) Transcribers reported excitement at information learned: "now I know how to make quince wine. You should join!"[\[16\]](#) A graduate student transcriber was excited by a new-to-her orthography for "everyone": "Loving this scribe's creativity: 'euerichone'..."[\[17\]](#) While this spelling might not surprise a seasoned paleographer, Twitter provides a space for new transcribers to share the excitement of their own discoveries and learning process; a lighthearted series of laughter emojis convey the text's emotional impact on its transcriber. Another Tweet reports on finding an unusual ingredient in *The Lady Grace Castleton's booke of receipts* (Folger MS V.a. 600), finding that "Dragons are always good to have in the early modern kitchen."[\[18\]](#)

For this trained early modernist, such dispatches seem a welcome opportunity to bring humor and the unexpected into scholarly communication, modes not generally embraced by standard peer-review publications, or in scholarly communications more generally. A new transcriber signs off her session with the following: "I made a couple of errors along the way (sorry!) but learned a lot, and hopefully managed to help more than I hindered! Thanks for having

me!" [19] Recognitions of imperfection and admissions of potential inaccuracy are not hallmarks of academic image-building. But for a project like this, which is low-stakes for the transcriber, and on a platform like Twitter, which is largely experienced as ephemeral, participants can experiment with a less curated scholarly persona. [20] Even emojis can add an emotional dimension, and a bit of silliness, to the stereotypically staid world of humanities research. While administrative blogging or production-driven reporting can capture large-scale project developments, small moments of amusement, discovery, and surprise are fundamental to the experience of transcription of manuscripts. Manuscript transcription projects also tout the broader research goals collaborators will contribute to, but the responses that precipitate out in social media are much more focused on serendipity, play, and discovery than on larger research agendas. While a professor Tweeting to motivate participation promises the chance to "Spend the day with women's voices," the voices of transcribers more consistently record, on this platform, the quirky, unexpected, and undiscovered. [21] Such sustained enthusiasm might not be evident were the task not a never-before-transcribed historical document and were the documents themselves not already inherently, and often visually (through multiple hands, marginalia) collaborative and multi-vocal. Such projects may have a particular advantage in intrinsically motivating participants. This brief dip into social media begins to suggest the spontaneous excitement of transcription. Those outside of, or in the early stages of, scholarly study or academic careers can find a venue to discuss early manuscripts through blogs, a longer form, but still more casual medium of scholarly communication, which, though generally edited, are not bound by the same peer-review structures.

Manuscript recipe books strongly warrant a collaborative, responsive transcription practice because they too are often process-oriented and amplify domestic voices largely absent from print as well as more elite manuscript structures of transmission in the early modern period. These texts are often a mix of recipes gleaned from unknown others, extracted from acquaintances, copied from reputed experts, and modified by the compiler. While the recipes in many collections are anonymous, Margaret Baker tends to note contributors in her manuscript. One opening, for example, includes a recipe introduced this way: "The coppie how to make a sufferant water by doctor Stevens phission and a greate; cunning man of long experiences..." [22] Two other recipes in the opening are attributed, one to a "Mrs. Reeve" and the other to "My Cousen." While Doctor Stevens is clearly regarded as a particular authority, his recipe is still embedded among myriad other contributors, his status both acknowledged and downplayed. A recipe for cowslip wine in Jane Dawson's cookbook is accompanied by a marginal note in a different hand that suggests "ade sirup of sittron or Lemon if you pleas." [23] This voice commenting (Tweeting??) from the margin enables the cook's innovation and disrupts the idea that the recipe is fixed or authoritative.

The EMROC blog is largely made up of entries from undergraduate students and early-stage graduate students offering research on manuscripts or reports on transcription experiences, professors discussing their teaching, and occasional check-ins from steering committee members. Taken together, the blog's entries offer a years-long account of the individual and large-scale scholarly benefits of this form of collaboration. The blog offers a space for recording and reflecting on communal transcription efforts from a number of positionalities

within the academy, and inviting and including comments from the broader community. The blog is a contemporary spin on the type of boundary crossing recipe knowledge has long facilitated, from medical professional to trained layperson, teacher to student, early modern transcriber to practitioner, and modern transcriber to researchers and students.

While EMROC's transcribathons are multi-national and involve a broad base of participants often working singly, classroom transcribers work in teams with the direction of a professor to transcribe, for a few hours or in larger course modules. Between 2012 and 2015, for example, Elaine Leong reports that "nearly 80 students have transcribed over 900 pages across 5 campuses." ("Back to school" October 9, 2015). In a post from 2015 called "Recaptured, Reflected, and Envisioned," Vincent Sosko, then a PhD student at the University of Texas, Arlington, observed how each transcriber in his campus group developed different methods for decoding difficult passages. He notes that he "clearly saw the very personal ways that we see the handwriting and thus the differing styles of transcribing emerged." Should flourishes be preserved? What of noting orthographic or paleographic conventions unique to a given author?[24] Sosko captures how the very quirks of manuscript handwriting yield similar variances in transcriber attention and protocol. These developing methods resulted in a final reflection, that transcribers receive "more reward in the journey than in the destination." [25] Kailan Sindelar is also interested in the collaborative process, noting "we collaborated on every word." [26]

This micro-level teamwork is to some extent reflected in EMROC's vetting process, in partnership with the Folger Shakespeare Library, wherein each page of a manuscript has been triple-keyed and is then vetted by a trained paleographer. While vetting reimposes a necessary hierarchy onto the process in order to obtain a useful, accurate, consistent output, it is still a hierarchy determined by expertise but rooted in collective learning. Unlike more high-stakes academic work, inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the initial transcription are welcomed as points of discussion and each transcriber's anxiety over their performance is a means of affiliation rather than competition—we're all looking at this text for the first time and are, in many ways, in a similar affective space. In a sense, then, collaboration in transcription drills right down to the individual letter. Transcribers for EMROC also insert TEI tags through buttons provided by Dromio, and this tagging must also be proofed. Joul Smith, another graduate student at University of Texas-Arlington, notes of the process of correcting tags that the task is not just to fix xml, but is work, in his case, in "transferring knowledge of the Winche manuscript..." [27] The Winche manuscript itself was compiled by Rebekah Winche, a woman of medicine whose father was a doctor, again suggesting how these early texts model collaborative knowledge sharing among non-experts and, in this case, from trained physician to aspiring domestic practitioner. One of the signature fascinations of the Winche manuscript, as noted by Elaine Leong, is that it might help us to understand the transfer of medical knowledge from father to daughter. [28] From the mid-seventeenth century to today, the transfer of knowledge in such texts, whether from doctor-practitioner to daughter-compiler, or from Folger archive to graduate-student encoder, relies on a collaboration across lay and professional lines.

### **Capturing Novel Encounters With Digitized Manuscripts**

If Twitter offers real-time, short-form dispatches on the transcription experience, while the blog shares longer reflections that offer a platform to developing scholars, neither quite captures that unique first encounter with a recipe manuscript. What would these initial encounters suggest about transcription, and how might a focus on transcribers with different academic backgrounds elicit different questions about the material, acknowledging a different set of boundaries for transcription to cross? For the following pilot study, I recorded two videos of students and scholars encountering a digitized manuscript recipe collection for the first time. In each case, questions arose, sometimes related to the material at-hand and sometimes wildly diverging, but in each case capturing the salience of first encounters for understanding our archival objects, transcription methods, and potential goals for digital projects.

I teach at a large, public, STEM-focused institution that does not have a significant collection of early modern texts, let alone manuscripts. In order to give students experiences with paleography, I have created class modules in partnership with EMROC and the Folger to contribute to their transcription projects. These experiences, also reflected in the Tweets and blog posts discussed above, have taught me, in turn, how students experience digitized manuscripts in surprisingly emotional and immediate ways, challenging our common assumption that this type of material experience can only be had with the “real” archival object rather than its digital artefact.[\[29\]](#) To pursue this phenomenon further, I wanted to capture people’s moment of encounter with digitized manuscripts and record the conversations and questions it provoked. My initial idea was to have individuals from different realms and disciplines in the academy (professors, graduate students, undergraduates) record themselves working with a digitized manuscript (Folger MS V.a. 456). At this stage, the project was very experimental, mainly seeking to ascertain if the video format would yield any substantial qualitative insights about the non-specialist experience with transcription. My goals also included trying to understand the embodied positionalities of these users, from gender, to professional status, to institutional or disciplinary affiliation. The study design and participant responses were shaped not only by the physical presentation and content of the manuscript but by volunteers’ position within a complex disciplinary and institutional network. The first participant, a tenured male scholar of nineteenth-century literature and digital humanities, worked on his own with the material with no preparation. In the second case, I invited two students who had transcribed portions of a different manuscript in my graduate-level seventeenth-century literature, and who thus had some paleographic experience, to work together in discussing the Baumfylde manuscript. Both women, the first student was completing an MFA in historical and experimental fiction while the second was an advanced undergraduate majoring in English and minoring in horticulture. In noting the moments of stress and frustration for my colleague in the first video, I shifted to this more collaborative design to recognize the positionalities of student volunteers.

Both videos in this pilot study operated through similar parameters. Participants pondered and spoke about the manuscript and transcription process in an uninterrupted thirty-minute session. Sessions were held in a recording room at our campus’s humanities library. The room was chosen for its neutrality (it was not a classroom) and acoustic design. Participants were not specifically instructed to bring laptops or notebooks, though all brought laptops and/or

notebooks, demonstrating the multiple text technologies often in play with transcription, particularly of digitized manuscripts. I was not present in the room, although I did welcome them to the session. For the student pair I chose a series of terms for them to refer to in order to provoke conversation: *materiality, body, fragment, code, prior knowledge/insider knowledge, language, science, art, affect, feeling*. The chosen terms were based on my previous experience working with students to transcribe digitized manuscripts, on the medical and culinary content of V.a. 456, and on the digital platform students would use to access the manuscript. The terms were intentionally broad and abstract so as not to overly direct students in their responses.

Since a fully tagged and displayed transcription of V.a. 456 is not yet available, a brief overview of the contents and physical elements of the text will help convey what participants encountered when they began to transcribe and discuss. The manuscript was made available for a Shakespeare Association of America seminar, "Transcribing and Interpreting Digital Recipe Manuscripts," led by Hillary Nunn and Amy Tigner. Loaded into the Dromio interface, the manuscript's page images were readied for transcription by the Folger Shakespeare Library, in conjunction with EMROC. The manuscript has an ownership declaration, "Mary Baumfylde. Her book. June Anno 1626," though as the record in the Folger's Hamnet database clarifies later additions were made across 1702-1758 likely by Catherine Thatcher of St. Mary at Hill, Billingsgate [London], a possible relative of Mary. Catherine's name appears on leaves 10 and 61v. The manuscript is 76 leaves, relatively short compared to many receipt collections of this period. The hands throughout are italic, making the book an accessible choice for new transcribers. The book does not have an index, as many such compilations do, and the content, as is typical, is wonderfully various, moving from cures for rheumatism and canker sores to recipes for "snow" (a form of custard) and white hippocras (a mulled wine). The manuscript has a somewhat spontaneous and unplanned feel, with plenty of empty pages or half-pages within, and a few inserted verses (penned by Catherine Thatcher). Folio 24v includes marks cancelling one recipe "for Scaldinge or Burninge to Keepe itt from blisterringe" and adding in another just below. Nonetheless, there are occasional efforts to amass recipes focused on similar ailments, as is the case with folio 9r which includes a recipe in Mary's hand "To stop bleedinge inwardly" and a recipe in a later hand for a method "to stop bleedinge in a wound." In short, the text fits rather comfortably within scholarly expectations for miscellanies of this sort.

My study participants also encountered the manuscript through the Folger's Dromio transcription portal. The portal includes high-resolution scans, sometimes of single pages, sometimes of two-page openings, of the manuscript to be transcribed. Zoom and rotation features are available, and the page is overlaid by a small transcription window which can be minimized or maximized as needed. The window includes buttons that allow transcribers to automatically tag the features EMROC and the Folger have determined relevant based on TEI standards and the particular needs of the archive. Once a transcription has been drafted, the work is stored in a file on the back end and various transcriptions can be collated and vetted by more expert paleographers.

The first faculty participant from my institution worked initially with the text at the time of the recording. For the second video, which included the two student participants described above, I had them do some preparation. These students were advised to spend about 30-40 minutes in total exploring the digitized manuscript, taking note of some of its physical features, and material scope. They were then to choose a page to transcribe. And they were to end by brainstorming some research questions such a text might raise within their particular discipline or subfield. While these students had a bit more scaffolding going in to their recorded conversation, they did not have the handwriting guides or instructor support I usually offer when conducting an in-class transcription module. Of course, this pilot study is limited and exploratory, yet its results do suggest provocative directions for considering not just the way students and scholars influence what ends up in digital archives, but how these archives shape our own ideas about authority, experience, digital information, interdisciplinarity, and the scope of humanities research.

Despite the first participant's extensive experience in book history, he nonetheless notes many moments of uncertainty, repeating the phrase "no idea" as he comes upon difficult words or phrases. And he even goes so far as to note, like the Twitter poster above, being "anxious as an outsider to this work to enter errors that are less helpful than simply not having someone like me do this at all... but we will keep going." He further conveys the physical labor this work requires, that it is slow, that it involves mental and physical strain and focus, calling attention to how this process makes his forehead wrinkle. While a book itself sometimes carries the tangible traces of our experience with it as readers and interpreters (fingerprints, smudges, stains, even, as we are increasingly discovering, readers' DNA), traces of our physical and emotional experience in the digital realm are more mediated (through language and emojis, for example, or Dromio keys). The strained or hurried handwriting, obscured letters, squinting eyes, the wrinkled brow that both created the original manuscript and create its transcribed surrogate can't easily be evidenced on the searchable page (though certainly some physical features like smudges or cancellations can be tagged). In fact, the labor of transcription is mostly evident in the variations and errors manuscript vettors see in the draft tagged transcription file, which includes each transcriber's efforts and mistakes. Editing out these errors, while crucial from a research perspective, also flattens the very experiential and tangible evidence manuscripts and our work with them can convey. On early modern paper, and with early modern ink, erasures are done with a knife or, more commonly, through strikethroughs. The strikethrough is necessarily a form of performative erasure—in many cases, the cancelled word is still legible, and thus a trace of the writer's process persists. And Dromio's digital transcription provides a tag for strikethroughs. Yet this process of reinterpretation and correction is not available for the transcriber's transcription and is not preserved in the final copy.

In many ways, the first participant's novel experience reveals what is dichotomous about these texts themselves. He notes how the process of transcription is both "mechanical and conceptual." He explains "There's all sorts of stories that this manuscript could be involved in that, um, are... are not here... and that the transcription itself does not bring up, but when you step back and try to read it and think about what's going on here, these things emerge..." When the recipe he is working on, "To Stop Bleeding Inwardly," asks the sufferer to drink

every morning and evening (our transcriber mistakes “every” for “sunny,” offering a much more unexpected dosing requirement!), he wonders how the mundanity of instruction pairs with the seemingly desperate nature of the ailment. The recipe, in short, tells us a lot about the matter it is made from (as our transcriber lists, “leaves, vinegar, cloth, fire”), but often rather little about the body it will be administered to or how the body came to be in crisis, or how the writer came to find the recipe. Likewise, the transcriber’s experience with this text— anxieties, frustrations, mistakes—will ultimately be hidden from view. In this sense, each text, the manuscript and the transcription, holds secrets and potentials, is a record of the fragmentary nature of human experience and of human expertise.

The participant ends by reiterating his sense of being “amateur” and having created a transcription “with lots of errors,” returning to the experience of insecurity or risk that this type of project elicits from new users, even those well-established in the academy. As an expert in the field of digital texts, he notes that such texts would benefit from a “discovery layer to search and find within these documents” pending an accurate transcription and “fuzzy enough search.” On the question of the tagging and metadata collected in transcription (a feature of Dromio he noted was obscure to users throughout the process) he claims “markup is often a more robust enterprise than extracting and organizing that information.” In other words, and in a spin on the process-oriented nature of this work noted by Vincent Sosko above, this user suggests that we are still figuring out what to do with metadata once it is attached to individual words. Implicit here is that applying metadata is a companion to close reading—it encourages us, at the level of the letter or mark, to look for patterns, divergences, details. While the output of markup on the large scale is still being assessed, for an individual text it works, like paleographic transcription, as a mode of close-reading in service of legibility on a given platform. As such, conducting markup or paleographic transcription are forms of translation across media.

Given the process-oriented nature, and currently uncertain global payout for both transcription and markup of these texts (we need a significant corpus to be transcribed and archived online in order for larger scale research on text or metadata to be feasible), such work might in the moment allow us to imagine perhaps ultimately impractical, but provocative, uses for this type of labor. Collaborative projects like crowd-sourced transcription might encourage us to imagine tagging for experience, embedding in the digitized object itself the experiences of uncertainty, discovery, frustration, or connection creators underwent in the process of transcription, creating digital traces of bodily affect, sentiment encoding rather than sentiment analysis. The EMROC steering committee signed off its 2015 transcribathon noting “12 hours have passed, our fingers are sore, and our computers are fast running out of batteries.” This focus on physical fatigue echoes both the recorded faculty transcriber's wrinkled brow and, in a bit of transhistorical connection, the marginal notes left by medieval scribes, who offer dispatches from their labor: “I am very cold,” “This page has not been written very slowly,” “Oh my hand.”<sup>[30]</sup> While such an approach might not be practically feasible and would create its own circular result (how would we tag to capture the labor of tagging!?), it’s nonetheless a worthy thought experiment for how it can help us to see the completed transcription not as perfected, transparent, and autonomous but as itself the product of experiment, risk, error, physical pain, and time.

If the first recording conveys some of the larger questions specific to this type of project and text, the second video tends to see V.a. 456 and its transcription as a jumping off point for multi- and inter-disciplinary questions. The student transcribers reacted differently than the faculty transcriber, having benefited from the context of our course on seventeenth-century literature. The students also worked with the manuscript on their own prior to their meeting, and had the aforementioned keywords to scaffold their conversation. This distance from the act of transcription, as well as the words provided by me, set up a dynamic that kept the conversation rather far from the page.

Rather than focusing on their own physical experience of transcribing, the students ended up using transcription as a touchstone for broader intellectual concerns. Like the first participant, both students evinced a lack of confidence in their own accuracy or understanding of the project. For the MFA student, the encounter with V.a. 456 immediately became framed within a concern with language: “a lot of people now treat language as a sacrosanct structure but a mere four hundred years ago it was much more open to interpretation which feels very postmodern... it’s interesting to see that fluidity in documents from a long time ago...” Emily, the MFA student, is also very interested in canonicity, in considering both “the power of the transcriber in terms of shaping how a text is viewed” and the “subjectivity” of moving a text from one form (manuscript) to another (searchable digital text). She is ultimately interested in how these texts help us consider “whose stories are included in works of literature” which is “a really important political question.”

The undergraduate participant, Sarah, given her horticultural background, finds an interest in the type of epistemological questions these texts raise and how they might not just contribute practically to scientific knowledge, but might even inspire a level of methodological scrutiny. Of her work in the sciences, she notes “there are always things that we’re wrong about and we can’t see what they are but seeing where other people were wrong makes us ask better questions.” She expresses that these texts play a role in “making the humanities important outside of its own field... that importance is obscure to people who are not of the humanities frame of mind.” She continues “this project opens a lot of really good doors... by connecting to specific topics in other fields it opens the door for conversations about ‘how do we know what we know?’ and ‘why does it matter that we know what we know?’ and all of those more philosophical questions about the humanities.”

In terms of reporting on process, the graduate student had a moment of digital nostalgia, wishing for a version of the Microsoft “paperclip guy” to pop up to assist her in navigating Dromio’s tags. To me, this somewhat humorous desire for animated direction is getting at something profound about the transcription process. Transcribers working alone, as opposed to working in class or through an organized transcribathon, don't benefit from the community and shared inquiry so central to the success of many transcription projects, particularly those that bring people together, physically or virtually, in real time. One unexpected outcome of pairing these students to discuss the text rather than recording them alone (as in the first video) was the way they pushed each other’s thinking, asking for clarification, redirecting, validating. Allowing transcribers to share their experiences and insights, not just with those in charge of a given project, but with one another, was an

effective way to build the transcriber's confidence, not necessarily with the accuracy of their transcriptions but with their sense of the importance and relevance of their work.

## Conclusions

There is a certain factuality to bibliographic description of transcribed texts which derives from the expertise and practice of the scholars undertaking these projects; impact studies and more data-driven approaches to capturing the experiences of transcription communities can flatten individual and collective experiences. Variations and ambiguities are certainly attended to in scholarly commentary or the textual introduction. But these settled reports, couched in the conventions of the field, don't necessarily convey what our undergraduate participant senses, through her work, as "the volatility of humanities research," the interpretive puzzle, the sense of decoding, that underlies bibliographic descriptions or transcribed and encoded texts. These conversational and anecdotal videos are interesting companion pieces to completed scholarship as they record process and demonstrate the emotional and intellectual yield of even amateur encounters with original documents. This project's goal was to understand how different constituencies engage the process of transcription through social media and in a low-stakes, minimally scaffolded recorded scenario. The recordings in particular demonstrate many of the challenges to capturing the serendipity and immediacy of the transcription process given the necessarily somewhat artificial nature of our sessions; Twitter and blog posts seem more conducive to eliciting unmediated and timely reactions. The Tweets, blog posts, and videos present an argument, from the perspective of users/students rather than developers/teachers, into the surprisingly physical, emotional, multi-disciplinary, and even un-disciplinary, conversations and insights the "micro-labor" of transcribing even a small section of a manuscript can inspire. While highly specialized training in paleography and manuscript studies has been and will likely remain a small scholarly domain, digitized manuscripts also offer the chance for these materials to enfranchise and energize scholars from a variety of disciplines and career stages, and to offer a conduit for emotion and social scholarship, promoted not just by digital platforms, but by the social texts themselves. Focusing on real-time, or personal reflections on digital transcription from broad constituencies presents a different argument for the relevancy of digitized archives and the continued importance of the type of bibliographic and information studies work that makes access to these materials possible.

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## Notes

[1] Tim Causer and Valerie Wallace, "Building a Volunteer Community: Results and Findings from *Transcribe Bentham*," *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (2012): n.p.; "'Making Such a Bargain': *Transcribe Bentham* and the quality and cost-effectiveness of crowdsourced transcription," *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 33, no. 3 (September 2018): 467-487, <https://doi.org/10.1093/llc/fqx064>

[2] Professors routinely collect such information in student reflections or impact studies, but it rarely makes it into peer-reviewed publications. Transcribe Bentham maintains an active blog to keep participants abreast of project developments, but does not feature reflections or content from volunteer transcribers.

[3] Many of the individuals quoted here are professional academics or students, but few have extensive experience with transcription.

[4] Such projects also raise questions about acknowledgement of contributors and the ethics of crowd-sourced labor. In the case of paleography-based projects, the payoff for students is learning paleography and understanding humanities research projects, plus in most cases the ability to list this work on a CV. In many cases, this last element presents technical challenges as projects with a large number of contributors work to create durable ways for students/participants to direct future employers to their contributions. EMROC abides by the Student Collaborator's Bill of Rights (see Rebecca Laroche, Elaine Leong, Jennifer Munroe, Hillary M. Nunn, Lisa Smith, and Amy L. Tigner, "Becoming Visible: Recipes in the Making," *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 12, no.1 (Fall 2018): 142). For a recent in-depth look at this issue, see Spencer D.C. Keralis, "Disrupting Labor in the Digital Humanities; or the Classroom is not Your Crowd," in *Disrupting the Digital Humanities*, eds. Dorothy Kim and Jessie Stommel (Earth, Milky Way: Punctum Books, 2018), 273-294.

[5] Elaine Leong discusses at length how recipe books were intergenerational and often involved women and men collaborating in their compilation. As such, recipe books were "the main medium for the recording and transmission of information and knowledge in pre-modern households." "Collecting Knowledge for the Family: Recipes, Gender, and Practical Knowledge in the Early Modern English Household," *Centaurus: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the History of Science and its Cultural Aspects* 55, no.2 (May 2013): 81-103. Other models of transmission do exist, as in the more ephemeral letters, which could share remedies across a global network, as Tara Albert discusses in her blog post on missionary cures in Southeast Asia. "Two 'Infallible' Missionary Cures in Seventeenth-Century Southeast Asia," *The Recipes Project*, <https://recipes.hypotheses.org/category/early-modern/page/2>, June 10, 2019.

[6] See <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bentham-project/transcribe-bentham>.

[7] See Causer and Wallace (2012); and Karalis (2018).

[8] For a more detailed look at EMROC's teaching and collaborative research methods, see "Becoming Visible: Recipes in the Making," 133-143.

[9] Heidi Brayman Hackel and Peter C. Mancall, "Richard Hakluyt the Younger's Notes for the East India Company in 1601: A Transcription of Huntington Library Manuscript EL 2360," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 67, no. 3 (September 2004): 423-436.

[10] Ray Siemens, Constance Crompton, Daniel Powell, and Alyssa Arbuckle, with Maggie Shirley and the Devonshire Manuscript Editorial Group, "Building a Social Edition of the Devonshire Manuscript," *Digital Scholarly Editing: Theories and Practices*, eds. Matthew James Driscoll and Elena Pierazzo (Open Book Publishers 2016), 137-160. 137

[11] Ibid. 158, 160.

[12] Josephine A. Koster, "Most Excellent and Curious Hands: The Future of Paleography and Related Arts in Early Modern Studies," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 40, no.1 (Spring 2009): 255-8. 256

[13] Whitney Trettien's article, "Media, Materiality, and Time in the History of Reading: The Case of the Little Gidding Harmonies," discusses, among other things, the "remarkable cut-and-paste concordances made by the women of the household" in the parish of Little Gidding. *PMLA* 135, no.5 (October 2018): 1135-1151. 1135. Michelle DiMeo and Rebecca Laroche consider how to reconcile the need for sometimes brutally sourced animal ingredients in women's recipe books with conventional ecofeminism ("On Elizabeth Isham's 'Oil of Swallows': Animal Slaughter and Early Modern Women's Medical Recipes," *Ecofeminist Approaches to Early Modernity*, eds. Jennifer Munroe and Rebecca Laroche (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2011), 87-104. Most recently Kim F. Hall's plenary at the Shakespeare Association of America, "I Can't Love You the Way You Want Me Too: Archival Blackness," warrants the need to bring forward the individual positionalities and experiences scholars and students bring to their encounters with the ideological curation of early modern English textual materials. See Plenary Panel: Looking Forward: New Directions in Early Modern Race Studies, *Shakespeare Association of America Annual Meeting* 2019, <http://www.shakespeareassociation.org/resources/audios/>, June 10, 2019.

[14] *Receipt book of Rebeckah Winche*, 1666 Folger MS V.b. 366, p. 67.

[15] The goal of this exploration was not to be exhaustive, but rather exploratory, to see Twitter as a site to be read closely rather than "mined" for data-driven conclusions.

[16] Danielle Mitchell, Twitter Post, November 9, 2016. 12:34 PM <https://twitter.com/WhosoList2Hunt/status/79645096607775873>.

[17] Karole Paschiano, Twitter Post, October 25, 2018. 11:33 AM. <https://twitter.com/KarolPasciano/status/1055527755792625664>

[18] Derek Dunne, Twitter Post, November 9, 2016, 6:54 AM. <https://twitter.com/DerekVindice/status/796365320315400192>

[19] Early Modern Recipes, Twitter Post, September 18, 2018, 1:00 PM <https://twitter.com/EMRecipes/status/1042141224197664769>

[20] Devoney Looser's CV of Failure remains one of the best reactions to this trend of image-building for academic advancement.

[21] Dr. Samantha Snively, Twitter Post, November 9, 2016, 9:10 AM <https://twitter.com/snsnively/status/796399463090618368>

[22] [Receipt Book of Margaret Baker](#), ca. 1675. Folger MS V.a. 619. *Luna Image Archive*. June 11, 2019. 122

[23] [Cookbook of Jane Dawson](#). Folger MS V.b.14. *Luna Image Archive*. June 11, 2019. 60

[24] Some of these conventions have been encoded in subsequent versions of Dromio, but in 2015 much about the transcription portal was still being hashed out by developers and users.

[25] "Transcribathon: Recaptured, Reflected, and Envisioned." June 11, 2015. *Early Modern Recipes Online Collective* [blog]. <https://emroc.hypotheses.org/798>

[26] "Transcribing Teamwork." *Early Modern Recipes Online Collective* [blog], December 15, 2015. <https://emroc.hypotheses.org/857>

[27] "Vetting Rewards." *Early Modern Recipes Online Collective* [blog], November 2, 2015. <https://emroc.hypotheses.org/795>

[28] "The Winche Project." *Early Modern Recipes Online Collective* ["Projects"]. <https://emroc.hypotheses.org/ongoing-projects/the-winche-project>

[29] My essay, "Institutional Access and the Phenomenality of Digital Transcription," in a forthcoming volume of *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, on access and infrastructures, expands on the haptic experience of digital transcription.

[30] "Marginalized: Notes in manuscripts and colophons made by medieval scribes and copyists," *Lapham's Quarterly* 2 (Spring 2012): 155.