

P25. The Future of the Past: Archives and the Digital Revolution

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Archives are a material heritage essential to the life and understanding of societies. They contain the past to better face the future. But they are fragile. The panel proposed here focuses on one of the effects resulting from the attention given to this structural fragility, the accelerated digitization of documents. The digital revolution has indeed made it possible to answer the question of duration and conservation. But it also opened another dimension quite as essential: to diffuse more widely than with this traditional media that is the printed book, itself the fruit of a technological revolution, but of more restricted access in the time and the communication space.

The effect of the technological revolution in progress is marked by considerable progress, in less than ten years of automatic handwriting recognition (HTR: Handwritten Text Recognition) and digital paleography. In addition to providing answers to the problems of conservation and dissemination of archives (as well as other types of documents), we are now able to transcribe them. The creation of artificial intelligence models generated through machine learning transforms the way we look at archives, as at any old handwritten or printed document, and makes it possible to process them on a large scale in order to consult them from the inside and to process the data.

This panel will therefore be particularly interested in what this technological advance brings to the field of historical studies with regard to the period of early modernity (15th-18th centuries). It aims to determine, from the most recent pioneering projects, the future of research from the cultural, methodological, (trans)disciplinary, material, etc. points of view.

Keywords: Archival Heritage; Digital Humanities; Handwritten Text Recognition; Inquisitorial Studies.

Thematic lines: Debates in Heritage-Related Research; Heritage Training/Skills Profile; Destroyed Heritage and Vulnerable Heritage.

Short bio: Hervé Baudry is a researcher and member of CHAM. Since January 2022, he is responsible for the FCT exploratory project Transcribing the Court Records of the Portuguese Inquisition (1536-1821). The team of 11 paleographers collaborating on the project is creating an automatized transcription model on the digital paleography platform Transkribus.

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