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Review

Macé L. 2021. ECuMe: Édition Censure et Manuscrit. <https://eman-archives.org/Ecume/>

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Édition Censure et Manuscrit (ECuMe), designed by Laurence Macé and launched in December 2021, is a prototypical digital library of censorship archives which aims to identify, classify and describe texts that were suppressed during the Ancien Régime.¹ With a core focus on textual genetics, ECuMe aims to reconstruct censorship processes, producing digital collections that unite all versions of a single work, or a series of works by a given author, as well as the plethora of documents surrounding each text.

Through this approach, and following the arguments of Gérard Genette (1987) and Steven Shapin (2014), the project aims to demonstrate that textual production is never solely the province of the author, but is formed by a host of actors, including censors – transforming the written page into a collaborative space shaped irrevocably by dialogue and debate. Within each collection, the autograph or fair copies of manuscripts submitted to the censor take precedence, as they often preserve the annotations, corrections and redactions that bear witness to this collaborative process, as well as the signature of the censor and standard

¹ The project was supported by Région Normandie as part of the CorNum project, and was developed in partnership with the Université de Rouen, the Comédie-Française, and the THALIM laboratory based at CNRS-ENS-Université Sorbonne Nouvelle. Its development has also been aided by the input of several project assistants, including: Élixa Barthelemy (Assistant Engineer), Maria Laura Cucciniello (Digital Editing Assistant), Sophia Mehrbrey (Transcription), Nicolas Morel (Transcription) and Guillaume Queruel (Support Engineer). The digital platform is part of EMAN (Édition de manuscrits et d'archives numériques), built using Omeka Classic, and is hosted via Huma-Num.



legal formulations at the end of the text. As a result, the focus is shifted away from print, encouraging users to think about the cross-professional interactions so vital to the creation and editing of a text, rather than merely its final published form. With this focus in mind, ECuMe is guided by three key aims: to identify, classify and describe censored texts; to study the practices of censors and understand the nature of their interventions; and to produce an experimental digital genetic edition.

The platform brings to light a series of previously unknown, or significantly under-used, manuscript sources, presenting these in standardised formats that aid findability and usability, ensuring that ECuMe successfully meets its first and third aims. Drawing on 16 archival collections to produce almost 1000 fully encoded transcription files, ECuMe utilises both well-known collections, such as those of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Paris) and the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (Munich), and lesser-known provincial ones, such as the Médiathèque Ceccano (Avignon) and the Médiathèque Louis Aragon (Le Mans), widening access to these sources, many of which are unknown, under-used or otherwise unavailable in digital formats. The consolidation of such dispersed and incomplete collections into a single resource represents a substantial achievement in itself, allowing users interested in the genetic dossier to access relevant documents in one place instead of navigating multiple repositories individually. Perhaps the project's greatest feat to date, however, is making available an important collection of seventy-eight documents from the Comédie-Française which are marked and corrected by the censor, but which have hitherto been largely overlooked in discussions of the genetic dossier of the Ancien Régime.

ECuMe's source base is four-fold, comprising library archives, print editions (both clandestine and authorised), correspondences and articles that appeared in contemporary periodicals, though, as noted above, the autograph or fair copy manuscript is given primacy within any given collection. Transcriptions have been produced based on these manuscripts and encoded using EMAN's Transcript tool which uses TEI-XML mark-up (Walter 2020–2024). The resulting code is made available for users to download when viewing a transcription page. The project offers semi-diplomatic transcriptions, preserving the physical layout and archaic spellings of a manuscript whilst correcting and modernising capital letters and punctuation for enhanced readability. By adopting this approach, ECuMe offers transcriptions that are sensitive to features such as marginalia, corrections and redactions, whilst also being accessible for a general audience. The platform flags any interventions made by the editors, using the tags <abbr> and <expan> to indicate instances where transcribers have intervened by, for example, expanding an abbreviation. However, it also highlights the numerous contributions of historical actors to a given document, using, for example, the tag <handshift> to signify changes in hand within a manuscript. This tag is especially useful in helping ECuMe meet its goal of repositioning manuscripts as sites of transaction and collaboration.

These carefully created and encoded transcriptions are of significant value, however work to upload transcripts is ongoing, meaning that the full corpus is not yet available on the platform. Whilst some



collections, such as ‘Recueil de lettres de Voltaire, de Mme Du Châtelet et de Jean-Jacques Rousseau’ have a complete set of transcriptions available, others included in the ‘Accès aux transcriptions’ tab, such as ‘Amazones (Les), tragédie en cinq actes et en vers’, remain to be uploaded. Images of the manuscripts are, however, available for those works currently without transcriptions.

ECuMe’s second aim, namely to understand the censorial process and its interactions with editorial ones, is partially met through the formation of collections. These unite all known sources surrounding a censored document to make the various processes visible. Each item within a collection has its own unique landing page with a clean and intuitive design. Here, users can view information about the work, such as the location of its primary manuscript, bibliographical data and codicological descriptions. In addition, users are able to view a digitised version of the manuscript, and, most pertinently for the meeting of ECuMe’s second aim, have the option to explore the relationships between this work and other iterations of the same work, such as its printed counterpart(s).

Relationships play a crucial role in the construction of the ECuMe site and there are various entry points into the data which are all based around cross-resource connections. Indexes have been prepared based on the following fields, allowing users to easily navigate to a specific item, or set of related items, within the project’s database:

- author
- censor
- date
- repository
- printer/bookseller
- title

The corpus can also be browsed by title and by keywords relating to genre, form and subject. This relational navigability makes the database accessible to a broad audience with wide-ranging research needs, whilst simultaneously encouraging the user to think beyond their initial research questions.

In addition to having multiple entryways into the data, ECuMe also offers two different data visualisations: the ‘Graphe général des relations entre toutes les notices (items) du corpus’ and the ‘Graphe entre les collections et/ou les relations’. The ‘Graphe général’ displays all items of the corpus currently available in ECuMe as a sociogram, with the user being able to click on specific nodes within the visualisation to analyse a set of relationships more closely. Each node represents an individual iteration of the same text (print edition, manuscript draft or letter, for instance) and is linked to other versions of the text using arrows. As such, when viewing a subset within the sociogram, the user has the option to navigate to either a sub-sociogram of a collection or an individual work page according to preference. The ‘Graphe entre les collections’, meanwhile, provides a means of navigating between collections and/or



relationships, offering several parameters by which the data can be filtered. The resulting visualisation is, as before, a sociogram, with users having the ability to view subsets of the data in more depth and navigate from the graph to other pages within the site.

These varied ways of exploring related documents within the ECuMe platform are certainly helpful in revealing the ways in which censors shaped the literary outputs of the period, providing a vital corpus from which scholars can go on to study and analyse processes of interaction and change during the Ancien Régime within a censorial context. In order to enhance its offerings in this regard, it would be useful for ECuMe to allow users to view multiple transcriptions at once, enabling them to, for instance, directly compare and contrast the autograph manuscript with the eventual print edition. Other projects, such as the Taylor Editions project (<https://editions.mml.ox.ac.uk>) designed by Alexander and Emma Huber (2018), implement such a process to great effect, and may provide a useful model for the future development of ECuMe. The platform was initially intended to integrate manuscript transcriptions with the corresponding pages of both authorised and clandestine print editions through which works eventually overcame censorship hurdles to reach publication. Such an enhancement would have substantially improved users' ability to trace the evolution of a text across its various iterations, thereby allowing ECuMe to fulfil its second objective more comprehensively. Owing to alignment challenges, however, the implementation of this feature was temporarily suspended in 2022 (Macé 2021–2023). Should ECuMe's interoperability developments resume, it would markedly strengthen the platform's functionality: the ability to view both iterations on the same screen, as is the case with Taylor Editions, would be particularly welcome.

Reuniting different iterations of a work with its surrounding documents (such as drafts, censorship papers and correspondences discussing the work) to produce a prototypical digital genetic edition enables ECuMe to shed light on the collaborative process underpinning publications, revealing the multifarious ways in which censorship shaped the editorial process, and by extension the literary outputs, of the Ancien Régime. Scholars have typically viewed the literary outputs of the Ancien Régime as a vast, calm sea, its printed depths ready to be explored. However, aptly echoing its title, ECuMe shows that the surface of the water has been shaped, altered and distorted by a myriad of clustering bubbles, each an important actor in its own right. In this regard, the project successfully meets its central aims: it widens access to previously unknown or overlooked sources held in dispersed global collections, while also providing a novel methodological framework through which to reposition the manuscript as an important site of transaction that fundamentally shaped printed works of this period. Future updates and enhancements will further add to the value of this resource, and allow ECuMe to more fully meet its aims. However, its value in its present form to scholars interested in textual genetics and eighteenth-century literature is undeniable.



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