# RECITAL

# Combining crowdsourcing and expertise in Digital Humanities

#### FOSDEM - February 2021

#### Olivier Aubert www.olivieraubert.net - contact@olivieraubert.net

in collaboration with Françoise Rubellin (LAMO - Univ. Nantes) and Guillaume Raschia (LS2N - Univ. Nantes)



## Context: Comédie-Italienne history

### **RECITAL: Registres de la Comédie-Italienne**



# **CETHEFI** - Centre d'Études



### des Théâtres de la Foire et de la Comédie-Italienne

Literature and history lab aiming at studying fairground theaters and Italian Comedy in Paris around XVIIIth century

Multiple approaches

- edition and study of unedited plays (Ciresfi)
- musical studies and database (Theaville)
- VR reconstitution of no longer visible theatres (VESPACE)
- accounting registers study (**RECITAL**)



#### What are we expecting to learn from accounting registers?

- $\cdot$  performed plays titles
- sold tickets (by category)
- expenses (taxes, accessories, musicians)
- $\cdot$  theatre accounting

We want to learn generalities, but also find out exceptional things/events





### Data to re-think theatre history

#### **Economic history**

author's royalties, subscriptions, accounting rules...

#### **Social history**

audience composition, placement, involved actors...

#### Hardware history

sets making, costumes...





### Historical investigations...

Leone : Lion (a turkey actually)

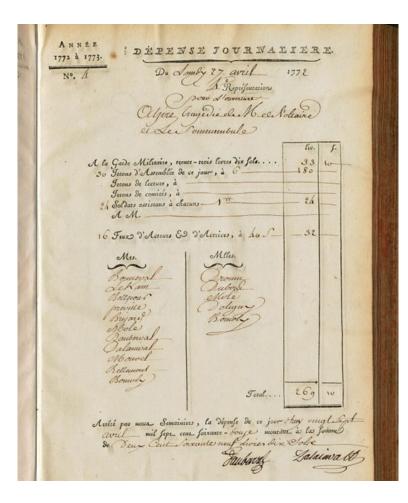
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#### A similar project is underway on Comédie Française registers

See https://www.cfregisters.org/



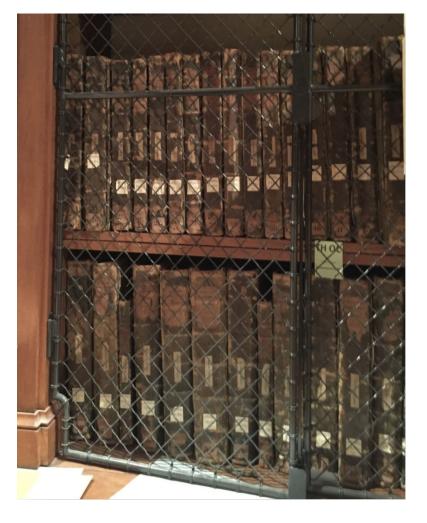


# The corpus



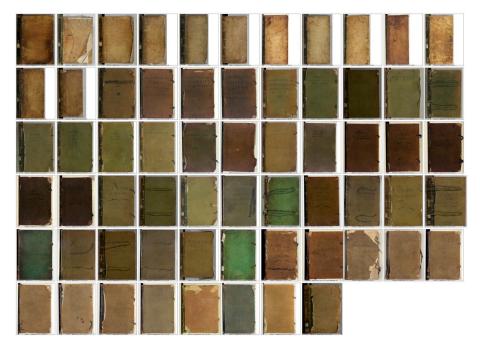
#### Accounting registers kept under the roof of the Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra





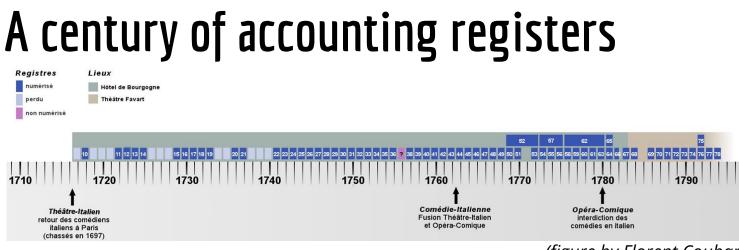


# Available corpus



Registers for Comédie-Italienne - now available on Gallica





(figure by Florent Coubard)

- 1 Register = 1 Theatre Season, from April to March
- digitized corpus: 1717-1794 (with 13 seasons missing)
- 64 registers of 300 to 600 pages
- about 26 000 pages



## Anatomy of a register



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10%

**Blank pages Daily accounts** Monthly accounts Final state + various 10% 77% 3%

TH-OC-42 register (1760-1761) - 373 pages



# Original corpus characteristics

- Handwritten pages
- · 2+ languages: French and Italian (various dialects)
- · 7+ « bookkeepers »: from Alborghetti to Linguet
- · Currency of the Ancien Régime : Livre-Sou-Denier
- $\cdot \,$  All along the century
  - formal changes of balance sheets
  - updating of accounting rules



# Digitizing approaches

Two complementary approaches

#### Automated (AI-based)

VS

Manual (expert+crowdsourcing)



### Al automation

Usage of AI for segmentation and transcription

- PhD work by Adeline Granet during the project (2015-2018)
- Difficult corpus characteristics + lack of ground truth (bootstrap)

Off-the-shelf open solutions now exist for HCR

- Transkribus: mostly open-source, but recent paying model for using models in SAAS mode.

eScriptorium (web interface for Kraken): open-source

# Crowdsourcing approach

- more tedious, workforce-demanding
- fit for irregular contents
- more apt at identifying exceptional/interesting items
- a requirement for building the ground-truth
- issues of data quality evaluation and data validation



# Crowdsourcing platform - ScribeAPI

ScribeAPI software

issued from the Zooniverse project

**MIT-licensed** 

Ruby-on-Rails platform



# Crowdsourcing tasks in short



#### 3 activities

- Mark (segment and categorize)
- Transcribe
- Verify



# Crowdsourcing interface

8 different page types Déterminez le type de la page cicontre :

COUVERTURE

INTRODUCTION

ETAT

COMPTE QUOTIDIEN

COMPTE MENSUEL

COMPTE ANNUEL

PAGE VIERGE

OK

Inclassable ?



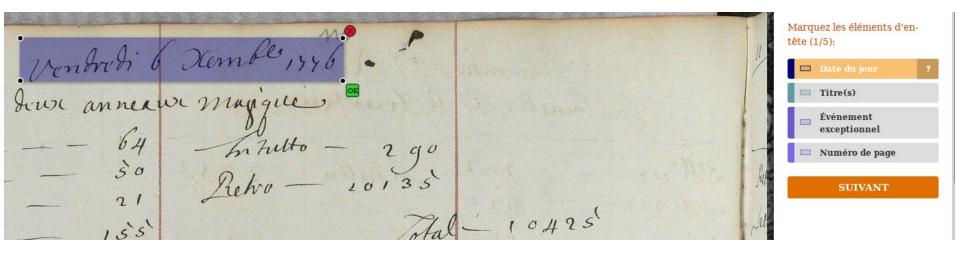
### Crowdsourcing interface - marking

133 data categories - displayed according to the page type

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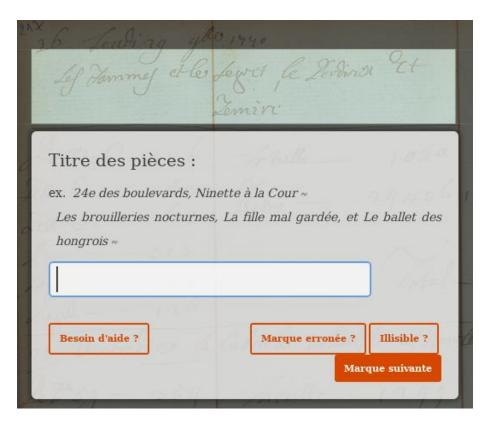


#### Crowdsourcing interface - marking





### Crowdsourcing interface - transcription



*Les femmes et le secret, la perdrix et Zémire* 



### Crowdsourcing interface - verification





# ScribeAPI

Pros

- Open source
- Collaborative annotation of images
- Able to express chained task sequences (mark-transcribe-verify)
- Well thought interface (accessible to non-technical users)

Cons

- Complex architecture/model
- End-of-life reached in 2016



### **Open-Source and Technical debt**

Official ScribeAPI - End-of-Life in 2016

Dependencies on old versions of Ruby, js/coffeescript, Mongo, unbuildable as-is now

Current server/dependencies dockerized

But not all hope is lost

effort by Utrecht University to update critical dependencies (unmerged pull request)



# After crowdsourcing - ongoing work

- Data quality evaluation
  - first phase crowdsourced (peer-reviewed verification)
  - second phase automated
  - third phase manual
- Data cleaning and validation
  - custom tools, using external information (list of play titles, actors...)
  - dedicated user-interface (dashboard) for experts
  - integration of Al-based tools
- Data publication
  - FAIR principles
  - collaboration/links with other projects/data



### If you want to contribute, welcome at...

#### https://recital.univ-nantes.fr/



