

« APOSCRIPTA. A Database and Text Corpus of Papal Charters : Towards a Unified Evolutive and Collaborative Research Tool »

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« One may fantasize about the creation of a computerized database in which all the elements collected and described in any form whatsoever would be gathered », Bernard Barbiche, a pioneer in the research on original papal letters of the 13th and 14th centuries, wrote a few years ago. Such is the long-term objective, expanded to include all types of manuscript tradition and editions of the texts themselves, of [APOSCRIPTA Database – Unified Corpus of Papal Letters](#), freely accessible on TELMA, an online platform managed by the French CNRS. This paper will present the main characteristics and challenges of APOSCRIPTA, and will suggest how such a research tool can support new historiographical advances.

After 5 years of existence, APOSCRIPTA now gathers more than 25 000 papal (mostly letters, but also, of course, privileges) issued by the apostolic Chancery, nearly 20 000 of which are from the 13th, nearly 3 000 from the 12th, and nearly 2 000 from the 14th centuries. Of course, these current numbers are very low, considering the huge amount of documents that were produced by the Chancery in the Middle Ages. Still, APOSCRIPTA is designed to progressively bring together not only the immense legacy of existing calendars of editions, but also the products of new scholarship. One of the first achievements, which will be reached in the coming months, will be the replacement of the August Potthast's venerable calendar, the *Regesta pontificum Romanorum* in 1874-1875 (approximately 26700 letters dated from 1198 to 1304), with the addition, as often as possible, of the texts of the letters.

Indeed, such a research tool can not claim to be exhaustive nor perfectly accurate in every respect, nor can it claim to provide definitively established textual and meta-textual data for all documents. The data offered by APOSCRIPTA often needs to be completed, and sometimes corrected, by checking the manuscripts or editions cited (and, as far as possible, made accessible by hyperlinks). It is important to keep this aspect in mind when using the database. APOSCRIPTA is therefore not a fixed and unchanging working tool, but a constantly open and developing project, in a fundamentally collective and collaborative manner. It should thus be noted that the project is by no means intended to interfere with other ongoing projects concerning pontifical letters (such as the third edition of the *Regesta pontificum romanorum* and its online version, or the *Index actorum Romanorum pontificum* launched after Franco Bartoloni's appeal), whose approaches are much more precise and demanding in terms of erudition. On the other hand, APOSCRIPTA could be useful for the development of all projects of this kind, current or future.