

Artificial Intelligence in archival and historical scholarship workflow: HTS and ChatGPT

Salvatore Spina

Università degli Studi di Catania
salvatore.spina@unict.it

Abstract

The article deals with the impact of artificial intelligence tools on the archival heritage digitisation workflow, specifically regarding the manuscripts' automatic transcription, correction, and normalisation. It highlights how digitality leads scholars to redefine the paradigms of archival and historical research methodology and has facilitated the accessibility of analogue sources through digitisation and integration into Big Data. The article focuses on two AI platforms, Transkribus and ChatGPT, which enable efficient analysis and transcription of digitised sources, moreover deals with a test on ChatGPT, which was employed to normalise the text of 366 letters preserved in the "Correspondence" section of the Biscari Archive (Catania). Although, the AI tool exhibited some limitations, which resulted in inaccuracies, the corrected texts met the expected results. The article concludes that digitisation and AI tools can significantly enhance archival and historical research by allowing the analysis of vast amounts of data and the application of computational linguistic tools.

Keywords: Digital History, Semantic, Syntactic, Historical Craft, Text Normalization.

L'articolo tratta dell'impatto degli strumenti di intelligenza artificiale sul flusso di lavoro della digitalizzazione del patrimonio archivistico, in particolare per quanto riguarda la trascrizione automatica, la correzione e la normalizzazione dei manoscritti. Evidenzia come la digitalità porti gli studiosi a ridefinire i paradigmi della metodologia di ricerca archivistica e storica e abbia facilitato l'accessibilità delle fonti analogiche attraverso la digitalizzazione e l'integrazione nei Big Data. L'articolo si concentra su due piattaforme di IA, Transkribus e ChatGPT, che consentono un'analisi e una trascrizione efficiente delle fonti digitalizzate, e tratta inoltre di un test su ChatGPT, che è stato impiegato per normalizzare il testo di 366 lettere conservate nella sezione "Corrispondenza" dell'Archivio Biscari (Catania). Sebbene lo strumento di IA abbia mostrato alcuni limiti, che hanno portato a delle imprecisioni, i testi corretti hanno raggiunto i risultati attesi. L'articolo conclude che la digitalizzazione e gli strumenti di IA possono migliorare significativamente la ricerca archivistica e storica, consentendo l'analisi di grandi quantità di dati e l'applicazione di strumenti linguistici computazionali.

Parole chiave: storia digitale, semantica, sintattica, artigianato storico, normalizzazione del testo

Introduction

Like every system of communication and cultural experience, Humanities are being drawn into the world of computing, and the digital turn has pushed scholars to redefine Languages, Arts, and History paradigms. Just as words have been assimilated into "second-order abstractions"

(*i.e.* numbers) ([4]; [5]), the concept of “source” has taken on those forms of communication that characterise the «onlife» ([10]; [11]) society.

The digital (and digitised) document will be, tomorrow in the future, the (meta)source ([9]) of historians, allowing them to write about our present. However, this perspective seems to leave out analogue or archival documents, which may be regarded as non-existent assets —since what is not displayed on the Internet does not exist! These documents seem to regain their cultural-historical role only when traditional historians study and analyse them. Several digitisation projects of archival documents, however, have allowed digital historians to also make use of these corpora, which, being increasingly abundant, have enabled —also— different scholars to consider them as the “Big Data of History” ([15]; [34]; [20]; [35]).

Analogue sources are transformed into images enriched with metadata and digital information that enables their identification on the web. Their volume is increasingly vast and challenging to manage without the aid of other ICT tools. Two artificial intelligences (*i.e.*, Transkribus and ChatGPT) now offer the opportunity to enhance archival and historical workflows. They both enable the automatic transcription of large quantities of manuscripts and facilitate a more profound analysis, allowing the extraction of extensive information from texts. Therefore, this helps reconstruct past events with an extraordinary richness of historical details.

Beyond a purely philological-linguistic approach, in the case of historical analysis, source texts require a certain degree of normalisation and correction in order to be useable in other computational contexts because, unlike literary compositions —both in prose and verse— or homogeneous documents such as companies’ cash registers, banking documentation, or even medical records from a hospital or medical practice, the archival sources used by historians —to reconstruct even single event or the activities of a person— are characterised by different writing styles and languages, as in the case of epistles from a monarch or prince drafted by various secretaries —hence, the different handwriting, even though the epistles come from the same sender. In other cases, the writing is uniform precisely because it is personally penned by the sender, as in the case of the letters of lower-rank nobles or wealthy bourgeois. This uniformity is also particularly evident when there is a strong personal relationship between the sender and the consignee, so the letter is not entrusted to external writers (for example, a secretary). An example of this can be found in the 28 letters that are part of the section under examination, sent by Prior Michele Maria Paternò to Princess Anna Maria Morso Bonanno¹.

This variety in calligraphy prevents an HTR model from producing a consistently accurate transcription without a training phase that may allow historians to transcribe numerous manuscripts quickly —which is the purpose of HTR technologies.

Handwritten Text Recognition platforms, such as tranScriptorium ([33]), Transkribus ([18]; [26]; [8]; [24]), and eScriptorium ([21])², have expanded the prospects for archivists and historians. Digitalisation has undoubtedly facilitated access for historians to numerous archival documents, creating the conditions for reconstructing historical events with greater detail beyond the possibility of working with transcribed texts. Furthermore, artificial intelligence tools have enabled archivists to develop digitisation projects beyond the simple photographic

¹ State Archive of Catania, Biscari, Corrispondenza, ff. 370-414.

² Several articles have analyzed the differences between HTR (Handwritten Text Recognition) software and systems, with a particular focus on the two mentioned here, Transkribus and eScriptorium ([16]; [23]). Additionally, a report of the study day held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France on May 9, 2022, provides an insight into the development of these two platforms ([13]).

representation of documents, as exemplified by the Stockholm City Archive³, the Mining Hub digital archive⁴, and the Regesta Pomeraniae Monastica⁵.

However, automatic transcription is not the only challenge related to digitisation. The ability to rapidly obtain the transcribed (digital) version of numerous documents from archival collections poses a “physiological” limit for researchers in quickly analysing their content. Whilst not intending to engage in a “quantity over quality” debate in this regard, it is safe to say that digitalisation severely tests the Droysenian capacity of historians to connect facts through the use of analogy, imagination, and subjective interpretation ([7]).

Quickly transcribing numerous documents in a digital format —albeit with a margin of error— generates an uncontrollable mass of data and information that cannot be easily organised and reviewed; moreover, it does not enable the identification of any patterns.

Historical research —since Herodotus— is based on a close reading methodology and the analysis of a limited number of documents. Numerous digitisation projects —like the collection of the Library of Congress with millions of newspaper pages and the Finnish Archives’ court records dating back to the 19th century— pushed historians to start using machine learning (deep neural networks, in particular) to organise and examine historical documents.

Consequently, the «Big data of History» is both a problem and an opportunity for researchers: it provides much more information, though there is no evidence of an effective way to sift through it. However, ICT seems to yield a solution to the problem. A representative case of the aforementioned observation is that of the seventeenth-century plague in Venice, which historians described relying on archival sources that collect data and information from documents that recorded only a few days of that terrible experience. Instead, with the “Venice Time Machine” project ([19]; [1]), digitisation has allowed scholars to trace up to three years of events and incidents, increasing knowledge about the epidemic ([22]).

On the other hand, even HTR tools have their limitations ([39]). The models are being constantly trained and enhanced. Their use has undoubtedly profoundly impacted the Humanities research field, particularly Archival Science ([28]). However, it is necessary to consider that the documentary material processed by these technologies may not be correctly transcribed in its entirety. Each model has an error range (Character Error Rate) that requires scholars to carry out a thorough revision (1) in case of online distribution of a digital edition of a complex (large or small) documentary, an epistolary corpus, or other materials, as well as (2) in case of a detailed historical or linguistic analysis that requires accurate and normalised texts, regardless of their potential publication and/or dissemination. From the perspective of mass digitisation, such corrections cannot be entrusted to an individual scholar, as their capacity would be limited to a few documents, thereby prolonging the research timeline.

However, nowadays, Computer Science and ICT development companies may have found a solution in the Artificial Intelligence tool named LLM (Large Language Model), which, due to its characteristics related to the construction and formulation of texts, could be configured as the best tool for correcting lengthy texts.

Notably, OpenAI was founded in 2015. Since then, significant funding has enabled the company to develop InstructGPT ([29]), followed by ChatGPT ([2]; [42]; [17]; [30]; [37]), an innovative

3 Link: <https://stockholm-city-archives.transkribus.eu> (last access, 20 Jul 2023).

4 Link: <https://transkribus.eu/r/mining-hub/#/> (last access, 20 Jul 2023).

5 Link: <https://transkribus.eu/r/regestapomeraniae/#/> (last access, 20 Jul 2023).

AI system capable of engaging in dialogue with humans, thus realising Alan Turing’s vision [40]). From its early stages of development, GPT has emerged as one of the leading Language Models (LLMs). However, it is essential to note that regardless of the testing it regularly undergoes, the AI ChatGPT lacks any semantic understanding. Indeed, any test involving “reasoning” is inherently flawed *a priori*.

Unquestionably, GPT is anything but a biological entity. Despite its ability to engage in conversation—it almost seems like discussing with another sentient being—it is not an intelligent agent that relies on semantic understanding and logical inferences. ChatGPT is an AI system constructed upon models that enable it to generate syntactically accurate texts and statements ([12]). However, like other LLMs, ChatGPT is susceptible to hallucination issues ([32]; [27]) in its outputs.

Therefore, its strength lies in the feature to fix and reformulate the syntax of a text or its parts ([12]) correctly.

The workflow

Suppose it is true that the term “digitalisation” in archival and historical fields denotes the process of encoding documents/texts into a machine-readable format. In that case, it is even truer that most archival documentation digitisation projects do not go beyond the metadata phase. The historical documentation on the Web is, for the most part, a simple photographic reproduction accompanied by limited information and lacking a descriptive level that includes the complete transcription of the photographed text. Fortunately, HTR artificial intelligence tools have shown much more promising prospects to follow in the digitisation processes, enabling the creation of digital editions of documentation.

Nowadays, digital historians have at their disposal three different HTR platforms (*i.e.*, tranScriptorium, eScriptorium, Transkribus), which aim for the same goal while being structurally different⁶.

For instance, the Transkribus AI manages to combine, in the same tool, multiple functions and process management, ensuring more efficient results in terms of transcription accuracy, exporting results in different formats, and even enabling the possibility of dissemination and access to the digital edition.

Two artificial intelligence tools—Transkribus and ChatGPT—underwent a test to prove their effectiveness, performed on a corpus of letters, constituting the “Correspondence” section of the Paternò Castello, preserved at the Catania’s State Archive. The documentary collection of the family is very diverse ([3]). It consists of various documents, making it an essential tool for scholars interested in the History of Sicily and the relationships between the island authorities

⁶ The TranScriptorium and eScriptorium AI tools require computer skills for server configuration, installation, and application of transcription models, which some humanists seem to lack at times. On the other hand, the AI system Transkribus only requires the profile registration on the official website (<https://transkribus.eu/>), and a few simple steps to install the desktop version on a Personal Computer. Additionally, there is no need for specific configurations to use the models (or to access online repositories like GitHub), as the transcription process takes place entirely on the AI servers. Furthermore, unlike other platforms the Transkribus GUI, has a text editor where the user can, according to the segmented lines connected to the image, both produce a coherent transcription of each line of text and make necessary corrections to spelling errors; the user can also decipher any unrecognized symbols and abbreviations. In fact, they can transcribe their own documents and use a suite of tagging tools to create rich transcriptions that could also be part of a digital edition.

and European monarchies. In particular, the test used the epistolary section, a document that, although homogeneous in structure and layout, contains a large amount of data (names, places, dates) that need to be mined and numerous handwriting styles (262 senders). The section consists of 366 letters, and the acquisition process was performed using a Nikon D610 camera equipped with an AF-S Nikkor 24-120mm f/4G ED VR lens. The photos were collected in a database created using Claris FileMaker 19 software. After adding metadata, they were converted to PDF format in order to be uploaded to the chosen Transkribus server for automatic transcription, that is, the “Transkribus Italian Handwriting M1” public model, which exhibits a Character Error Rate (CER) of 12.50% for the “train set”⁷ and 6.70% for the “validation set”⁸ (Figura 1). Such percentages ensure an optimal transcription, requiring minimal corrections by the user, as described in Spina ([39]).



Figura 1

Subsequently, the transcriptions were downloaded in “.txt” format without undergoing any manual corrections or training aimed at reducing the error rate in order to proceed with an automatic correction of the entire correspondence, initiating a “chat”⁹ session to prompt LLM ChatGPT so that it could analyse each letter to assess whether this OpenAI tool can correct and normalise them, in a zero-shot learning ([41]; [38]) scenario—which is the typical condition of non-computer-savvy historians who wish to utilise technological tools for their research.

The prompt given to ChatGPT was to correct a text without linguistic instructions, historical references, or training on how to provide expansions of abbreviations ([36]).

The type of analysis required did not deviate from the capabilities of AI, and the corrections obtained met our expectations, allowing us to assert, without hesitation, that the LLM ChatGPT can be a helpful tool for correcting historical texts, especially those transcribed automatically. However, a problem arises regarding the length of the texts that require correction, which contradicts one of the fundamental principles of the digital era: the ability to correct, analyse, and process vast amounts of data, be it text or numbers.

At the beginning of the test, we used GPT-3, which could only analyse and correct texts of up to 1000 characters. In our case, this meant processing one letter at a time. This limitation, on the one hand, prevents historians from obtaining a correction for the entire body of texts in a single phase. On the other hand, it does not allow a revision process that takes into account linguistic

7 Set of examples used to fit the parameters of the model, i.e., the data on which the knowledge in the net is based.

8 Set of examples that provides an unbiased evaluation of a model, used to tune the model’s parameters during training.

9 Despite its name, ChatGPT has not been primarily used as a chatbot.

and syntactic correlations or any relevant data within the corpus that could contribute to a more thorough correction. Additionally, if scholars intend to correct multiple texts, they will have to provide as many prompts as the number of letters required.

The latest update of this AI (in May 2023), as stated by OpenAI, no longer has this limitation (Figura 2, Figura 3, and Figura 4). The company claims that «GPT-4 can handle over 25,000 words of text, enabling use cases such as creating long-form content, engaging in extended conversations, and conducting document research and analysis». This statement should allow historians to correct the entire corpus of letters, which consists of approximately 900,000 characters.

However, once again, the desired outcome cannot be achieved: the character limit in GPT-3 is still active in its subsequent versions (such as GPT-4), and although there has been a significant improvement in computational instructions and text analysis capabilities, the epistolography, which comprises 10,662 words, cannot be corrected.



Figura 2

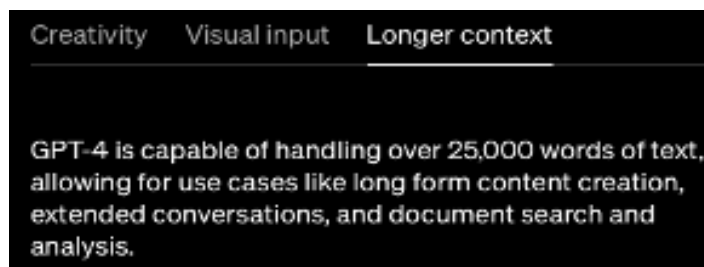


Figura 3

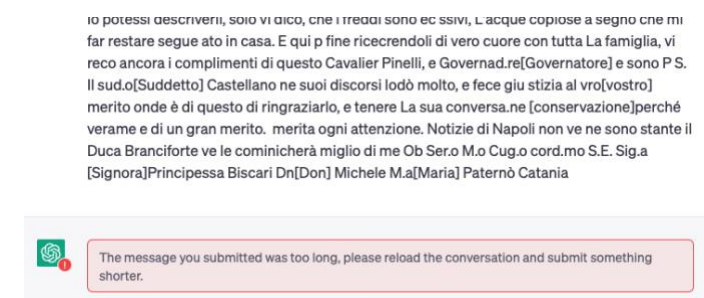



Figura 4

Although ChatGPT is a powerful language generation model, it has a limitation: it lacks access to external information and internet browsing. Consequently, it cannot provide accurate or

updated information on a wide range of topics, and it may struggle to generate responses to complex or unconventional questions ([6]).

This constraint prevents scholars from analysing texts that contain information that could enrich the understanding of historical events, as in the case of the letters sent by Michele Maria Paternò to Anna Morso, wife of Ignazio, the fifth prince of Biscari. These letters cover a period (1781-1786) marked by various events related to the History of Sicily, Naples, and the Bourbon court (intrigues, attempts at reforms, management of seismic emergencies such as the reconstruction of the Catania Cathedral, and aspects of religious life). However, they cannot offer valuable insights into the History of Sicily in the modern era (Figura 5 and Figura 6).



elencami persone, date ed eventi di questo testo: Messina, 9 aprile 1782

Venerdi, Signora Principessa,

Mi rincresce sino nell'anima sentire dal vostro dolcissimo foglio del 5 andante l'attrasso sperimentato con le mie lettere con il passato corriere. E siccome non ho lasciato di scrivervi, credo con ragione che la mia lettera si sia smarrita o ritardata nel corso delle poste e quindi dovrete riceverla senza meno con la presente.

Mi compiaccio, intanto, che stiate bene in compagnia del Principe vostro, della Signora Principessa vostra sorella e di tutta la vostra famiglia. E di me vi assicuro che sto bene e sono tutto disposto ai vostri graditi comandi. Vi prego dunque di portare i miei rispetti a tutti e, con particolarità, alla degna vostra sorella e al Principe, che abbraccio con tutta cordialità. Niente mi dite di notizie a riserva che doveva partire ben presto il Commendatore. Credo che il medesimo abbia già fatto mosca e resto ben contento che il nostro San Giuliano resterà libero da tante inquietudini, mentre il processo niente prova contro di lui.

Per questa volta, una sola è la notizia che posso comunicarvi, cioè che il Papa era arrivato 18 miglia lungi da Vienna quando ebbe una espressa di Gabinetto, per cui da parte dell'Imperatore si pregava di ivi fermarsi sino a tanto si quietava una insorta tumultazione nata fra cattolici e protestanti, mentre, morto in Vienna l'ambasciatore di Moscovia, si pensò, da protestanti, di seppellire in San Stefano il di lui cadavere. Si opposero i cattolici, e venuti alle mani, i primi con i secondi, vi succedette una strage di 4000 persone circa. Mi protesto che questa notizia può essere dubbiosa ed equivoca, ma ve la presento quale l'ho ricevuta. Frattanto, vi riverisco con tutta stima e sono sempre stimato signora. Pregarla la vostra grande se la processione sia riuscita e se vi siete digerita la notizia di Palermo, le saprete meglio di me, onde tralascio di darvele.

Sto aspettando mia figlia in questa villa. Ci ho fatto accomodare due camere, ho dato l'ordine ad alcuni miei corrispondenti di prendere la lettiga e una sella per portare tutta la roba e darle denaro per le strade. Il tempo comincia a far bene, con lo incomincio a respirare e uscire di casa, mentre ricevo con cordialità, come pratico conviene, la vostra e tutti della vostra. Abbia il Principe vostro e mia rispettosa S.E. la Signora Principessa dello Biscari vostra servo molto umile cugino,

Obbligatissimo
Michele Maria Paternò Catania

Figura 5

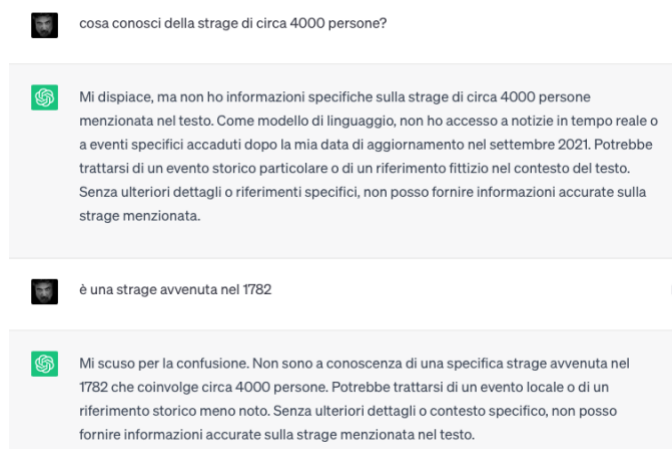


Figura 6

As a consequence, ChatGPT cannot perform text-to-web comparisons. Furthermore, like most LLMs, OpenAI's GPT has not been explicitly trained for information extraction tasks (*e.g.*, Named Entity Recognition and Classification — NERC, and relation extraction) ([31]), especially concerning historical documents (Figura 7).

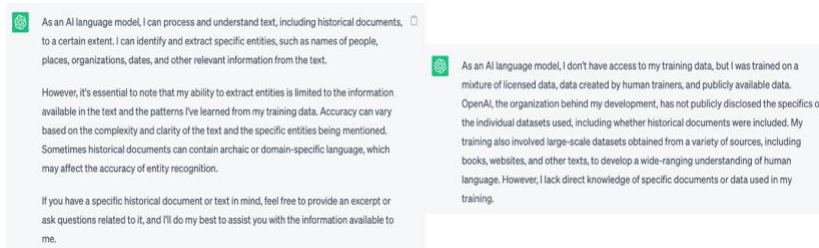


Figura 7

The correction, therefore, is necessarily performed on the individual epistles.

ChatGPT first aims for a probability distribution over word or token sequences, enabling it to predict the next word in a sequence. In practice, however, there is an apparent disconnect between the training of language models (LLMs) and their intended use for valuable cognitive work. Although LLMs can generate text, they cannot perform accurate corrections. The text generated by the AI may align with the original text, somewhat satisfying researchers' expectations (Figura 8). The statistical architecture of the machine allows it to generate a text where the distribution of tokens conveys the linguistic sense of the text to be corrected. However, without specific instructions from the user aimed at a potential "ground truth", in many cases, even if the AI generates a text with minor corrections, the "next-token-prediction" may yield incorrect names or expand abbreviations inaccurately. Conversely, it can generate the name of a month composed of numbers and letters (8bre, 9mbre, Xmbre). Moreover, owing to its inherent functionality, the AI might introduce names that are absent in the original text or

paragraphs and may not faithfully adhere to the original content (as shown in Figure 8 and Figure 9).

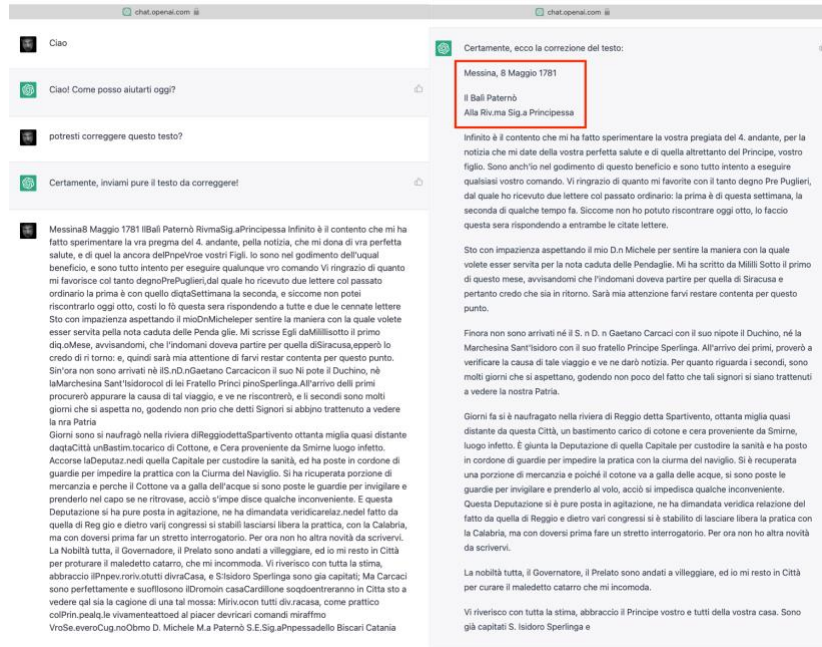


Figura 8

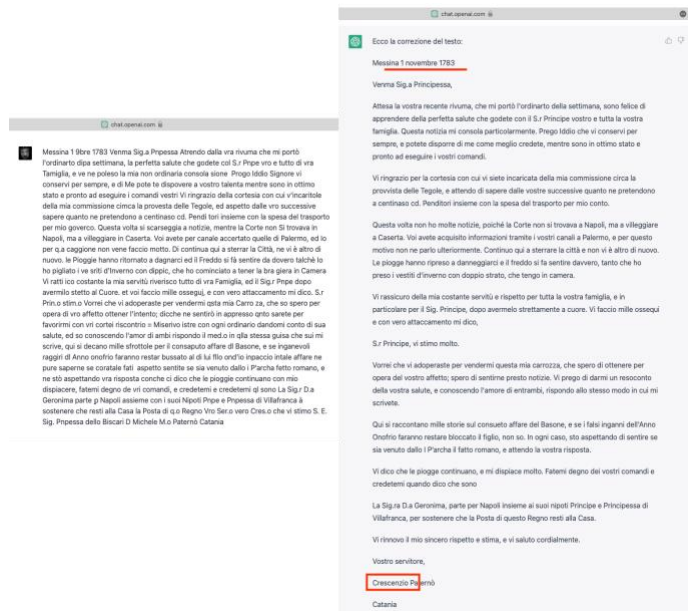


Figura 9

We proceeded by providing instructions to improve the result, prompting to expand the abbreviations found in the text and correcting those that have been expanded incorrectly (Reinforcement Learning with Human Feedback — RLHF). Subsequently, the user's instructions have successfully enabled the correct expansion of abbreviations in other epistles, resulting in a normalised text version of the latter and a list of all abbreviations present in the corpus (Figura 10).

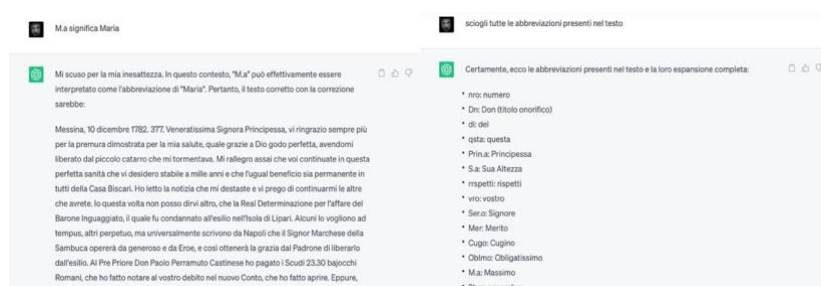


Figura 10

AI enhances numerous fields within the Humanities. While historians can now have the opportunity to work with much larger volumes of data compared to the Past, archivists can utilise these computational technologies to improve their workflow. Nowadays, Archival Science is also a “Networked Science” since our archival heritage is constantly being digitised and disseminated on the web through websites and digital databases. However, the digitisation process requires a certain level of dynamism based on the principle of constructing a machine-readable version of the documents. Nevertheless, before reaching the completeness of archival information and achieving meticulous and analytical digitisation, archivists have the task of creating cards that at least provide helpful data for online research, even if it is not possible to include the complete transcription of the photographed document.

In epistolography, creating these cards involves identifying specific information, such as the individuals involved (sender, recipient, and other persons), places (origin, destination, and other locations), dates, and, when possible, events. These pieces of information make the digital archive more dynamic. Therefore, archivists' work is meticulous and requires a deep understanding of the written document. For this reason, although recent studies have highlighted inaccuracies in the recognition of entities in historical documents ([14]), in our specific case, ChatGPT was able to identify entities and events with absolute precision, providing details that have led us to create detailed records of the documents. On that account, with the assistance of ChatGPT, we have successfully identified relevant information to compile records on the “Biscari Epistolography” website (Figura 11), demonstrating that GPT-3 is a technology that can genuinely serve archivists and historians.

The screenshot displays a digital archive interface with the following sections:

- Persone:**
 - Signora Principessa (destinataria della lettera)
 - Principe (probabilmente il marito della Signora Principessa)
 - Signora Principessa dello Biscari (forse una parente o un'altra persona di rilievo)
- Luoghi:**
 - Messina: Luogo menzionato nel testo come possibile residenza del mittente della lettera.
 - Vienna: Luogo in cui si è verificata la tumultazione tra cattolici e protestanti e la successiva strage.
- Eventi:**
 - 9 aprile 1782: Data menzionata nel testo.
 - Processione: La lettera fa riferimento a una processione di cui si chiede alla Signora Principessa se sia riuscita.
 - Tumultazione fra cattolici e protestanti a Vienna: Si parla di una tumultazione che è scoppiata a Vienna tra cattolici e protestanti a causa di una disputa riguardante il funerale di un ambasciatore di Moscovia.
 - Strage a Vienna: La disputa tra cattolici e protestanti a Vienna è sfociata in una strage di circa 4000 persone.
- Altri dettagli:**
 - Il mittente della lettera si riferisce alla figlia che sta aspettando in una villa e ha preparato camere per il suo arrivo.
 - Il mittente menziona il processo del San Giuliano, sostenendo che il processo non ha fornito prove contro di lui.
 - Si fa riferimento al Papa che si trova a Vienna e viene invitato a rimanere lì a causa di una tumultazione tra cattolici e protestanti.
 - Il mittente invia i suoi rispetti alla Signora Principessa, alla sua sorella e al Principe, con cui sembra avere un rapporto cordiale.
- Metadati:**
 - SOGGETTO PRODUTTORE: Famiglia Paternò Castello, principi di Biscari
 - SOGGETTO CONSERVATORE: [Archivio di Stato di Catania](#)
 - PERSONE: Varie
 - DATAZIONE: 1680–1844
 - SUPPORTO: 599 fogli raccolti
- Visualizza:** 5 elementi
- Cerca:** michele
- Table Headers:** Foglio, Mittente, Descrizione, Destinatario, Descrizione, Data, Emissione, Destinazione, Flipbook, XML
- Table Data:**

Foglio	Mittente	Descrizione	Destinatario	Descrizione	Data	Emissione	Destinazione	Flipbook	XML
22	Michele Ardito	Non descritto	Ignazio Paternò Castello	5° Principe di Biscari	22 giugno 1782	Napoli	Non indicato	Consulta	Scarica
265	Gregorio Parisi	Governatore	Non indicato	Non descritto	09 mese 1768	San Michele	Catania	Consulta	Scarica
370	Michele Maria Paternò	Priore di Messina	Anna Maria Morso Bonanno	Principessa di Biscari	08 maggio 1781	Messina	Non indicato	Consulta	Scarica
371	Michele Maria Paternò	Priore di Messina	Anna Maria Morso Bonanno	Principessa di Biscari	15 maggio 1781	Catania	Catania	Consulta	Scarica
372	Michele Maria Paternò	Priore di Messina	Anna Maria Morso Bonanno	Principessa di Biscari	09 aprile 1782	Messina	Catania	Consulta	Scarica
- Altri soggetti:**
 - Altri luoghi: Vienna, Moscovia.
 - Altre date
 - Eventi narrati: Tumultazione fra cattolici e protestanti a Vienna, Funerale di un ambasciatore di Moscovia, Strage a Vienna di 4000 persone, Processo a San Giuliano.
- Navigation:** Vista da 1 a 5 di 41 elementi (filtrati da 367 elementi totali). Buttons: Inizio, Precedente, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, ..., 9, Successivo, Fine.

Figura 11

Observations

Historical scholarship is primarily based on text-based analysis —where the original wording of historical sources often provides new insights and inferences of specific meanings— while Archival Science is called to reassess the principle of disseminating the documentary heritage. Thus, both historians and archivists, albeit from different points of view, need to work on texts that have been transcribed correctly due to the advantages offered by computing normalised text corpora in modern languages. Firstly, this enables the dissemination of results without the need for manual normalisation; secondly, it allows for the application of computational linguistic analysis tools that can uncover additional data, a feature that appears to be crucial for accurate storytelling. Tools like Keyphrase Digger ([25]) are more effective in processing modern-language normalised texts than those written in 18th-century style (as seen in Figura 12).

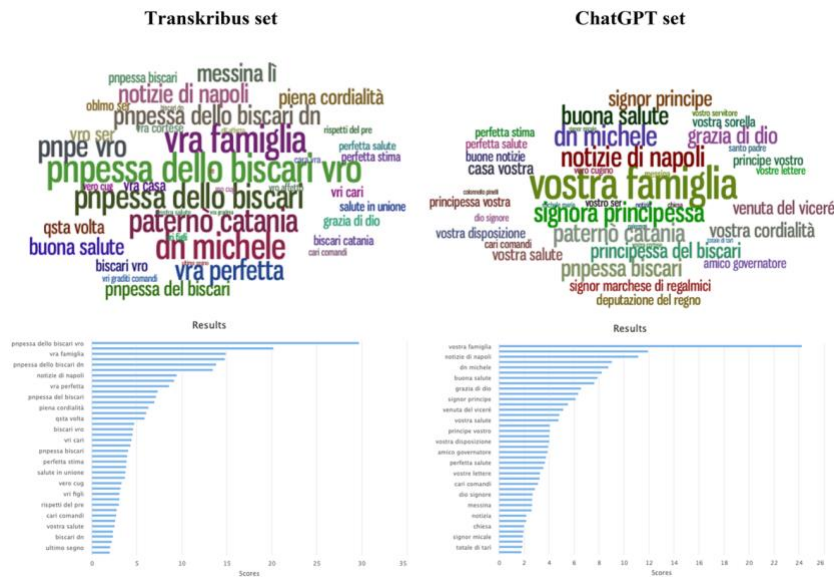


Figura 12

The unique features of 18th-century texts, such as abbreviations, syntactic errors, and incorrect word forms, would require specific modelling to train artificial Intelligence. It should be noted that querying neural networks and the semantic web with an 18th-century text might lead to its exclusion.

Artificial Intelligence is a rapidly advancing field within Computer Science, focused on creating intelligent machines capable of human-like thinking and action. While AI has found applications in various domains, History remains a discipline rooted in archival sources. Accurate digitisation and automatic transcription projects are essential for providing the necessary information to develop models that can effectively assist historians in their research.

However, specific observations seem necessary. The *digital turn* and digitisation projects have inundated historians with vast historical data extracted from digitised sources, posing challenges in managing and analysing such Big Data from the Past. ChatGPT—despite lacking sentient intelligence—utilises semantic processing and syntactic rules to generate a dialogue that may give the impression of understanding. Although it lacks a biological brain structure, the training on syntactic structures and instructions makes GPT-3 a valuable tool for normalising historical source corpora. Corrections made by the AI, even if unrelated to the text itself, such as reformulating propositions or merging names and abbreviations, do not distort the source but rather unearth new data for historians to explore.

Historical research relies on archival sources, which transmit more than just the linguistic structure of the text; they possess semantic structures. Nevertheless, this does not imply that historical methodology should forego the advantages offered by ITC innovations that ensure accuracy at specific stages of the workflow of historians. Transkribus, for instance, is an AI-powered tool used to transcribe digitised archival documents with impressive speed, generating machine-readable files that enable historians to analyse, process, and create digital editions. Though ChatGPT cannot invent new historical events, it has been trained to write about History, albeit not at the same level as scholars. It can be a valuable tool for archivists and historians,

serving their objective and compelling narrative by normalising information from digitised, encoded, and automatically transcribed sources.

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