"Many hands make light work. Many hands together make merry work": *Transcribe Bentham* and crowdsourcing manuscript transcription

Abstract

The award-winning crowdsourced transcription initiative, **Transcribe Bentham**, was launched in September 2010. Since that time, amateur volunteers from around the world have transcribed – and encoded in Text-Encoding Initiative-compliant XML – over 13,000 manuscripts written and composed by the philosopher and reformer, Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832). These transcripts are used for two main purposes: uploading to a freely-accessible digital repository, and in acting as a starting point for the future volumes of the *Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham*, and major scholarly editorial enterprise.

This paper will discuss the reasons behind the establishment of *Transcribe Bentham*, its most recent results, user behaviour, and project management. As crowdsourcing is becoming an option increasingly considered as a tool to generate research by scholars and institutions alike, the paper will also examine the quality of data produced in *Transcribe Bentham*, and the economics of crowdsourcing, and discuss the potential savings which it affords.

Finally, the paper will also introduce and discuss the potential impact of *TSX*, a crowdsourcing platform under development for *tranScriptorium*, which allows users to take advantage of Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR) technology when transcribing manuscripts. In TSX, users will be able to transcribe for themselves without any assistance, request an HTR-generated transcript which they can correct, or request suggestions for a particular word or words from the HTR engine. In this way, it is hoped that *TSX* will fully support the participation and learning of users of various levels of expertise.

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