

TERN2025 BOOK OF ABSTRACTS
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Jordan Avramov (Bulgaria)

Bulk, Handwriting, Sealed Packages, and Accompanying Objects: Aspects of Epistolary Materiality in the Correspondence of Henry Oldenburg

In this paper, I will discuss various aspects of epistolary materiality associated with early modern scientific letters, as reflected in the immensely rich correspondence of Henry Oldenburg, the first secretary of the Royal Society of London. First, I will point out examples where the sheer bulk of letters affected not only their transmission in terms of travel time, choice of postal routes, and postal costs but also led to more letters being written and dispatched. Secondly, I will turn to handwriting, demonstrating how its quality changed depending on various factors – the status of the addressee, the solemnity of the occasion, and the lack of time – providing visual cues to readers even before they read the letters. Thirdly, I will briefly discuss seals and, more importantly, sealed packages that conveyed information without actually disclosing it, serving as instruments for claiming priority in scientific controversies. Linked to this, I will revisit the question of objects accompanying the letters – minerals, plants, remedies, scientific instruments, etc. – showing how they interacted with the letters in the communication process. All of this will enhance our understanding of early modern scientific correspondence, which is often narrowly perceived as an archetypal Socratic dialogue only.

John Bessai (Canada)

Letters in the Code: Epistolary Memory and the Material Aesthetics of Digital Public Storytelling

This paper examines how epistolary aesthetics are reconfigured in Canadian digital public storytelling through National Film Board of Canada (NFBC) projects such as *A Journal of Insomnia* and *The Space We Hold*. Both works adapt the logic of letter-writing—its confessional mode, material intimacy, and archival logic—within networked, interactive environments. I argue that these projects do not erase the letter's materiality through digitization but reframe it. The fragmented interface, user-solicited testimony, and affective typography of these digital stories revive the epistolary form as an architecture of presence and vulnerability.

Drawing on new materialist theory and archival studies, this paper examines how digital letters in these works are co-authored across time, inviting users to assume the roles of both witness and responder. In doing so, the NFBC engages with the letter not only as a historical object but as a living medium of public address. These digital letterforms carry the residual weight of trauma, care, and political intimacy—what I term *the affective surplus of the archive*.

The analysis foregrounds how such “silent” digital epistles resist closure, activating shared responsibility through spatialized reading and distributed authorship. In reframing letters for interactive media, the NFBC recasts the material epistemology of the epistle, not as lost in transition, but as reanimated for democratic engagement in the digital age.

Rachel Bynoth (UK)

Lost Materialities and Meaning in Printed Letters and Letter Writing: George Canning's Letter-Journal, 1793-1795

George Canning wrote a series of letters he intended to be saved by his aunt and uncle and turned into a letter-journal. The resulting letter-journal has been published by Camden Press and whilst this offers accessibility to Canning's words, the missing information provided through the materialities and mechanics of the original letter-journal are lost through the digitisation focus on the contents. This obscures the meanings derived from the original letters' materialities such as their size, their binding and the inclusion of images alongside the text. These missing elements provide important illuminations on why this letter-journal exists, how it was bound and preserved, Canning's emotions at key moments through the journal and even at points the relationships between Canning and his relatives.

This paper aims to uncover the lost materialities of George Canning's letter-journal, to argue that without these material features, key nuances from the historical record are lost concerning his relationships, finances, emotions, and the overall importance of this journal in providing insight into Canning's professional and personal identity. It advocates for studies concerning letters to pay due attention to the materialities and mechanics of the letter and the letter writing, as these are as important as the contents themselves to historical narratives and analyses.

Julie Codell (USA)

Archiving the Archive: Organizing Epistolary Materiality, Time, Space, Networks

How archives sort and categorize letters shapes interpretations of letters' materiality, rhythms of meaning, and cultural value. Materiality and antecedent institutional design ideology are inseparable. 20th-century art dealer/agent Martin Birnbaum left 1800+ letters at Archives of American Art (AAA), Harvard, NY Public Library, among other places, by over 200 people. Alphabetically filed at AAA, the easiest, least useful organization, while looking “objective” emphasizes individuals but obscures relationships, social histories, networks, self-identifications, rhetorical excesses, dialogic interactions and the power dynamics of correspondence (Tamboukou, 2024). These obscured factors define the materiality of letters between Birnbaum and collector-clients recording otherwise-undisclosed negotiations among agent, private owners and clients whose secret prices can later be measured against public sales records.

Re-organizing files could map the modern art market's material economic aesthetic evolution through Birnbaum's conflicted temporalities—European modernism vs American regionalism—as I will argue from selected letters. Temporal organization by decades—people in 1920s, 1930s, etc.—would expose power dynamics and networks, artists and dealers collaborating or competing. Spatial organization by countries would map Birnbaum's international networks. His visas and travel applications re-catalogued would trace his transatlantic travelogue, essential for agents' and dealers' careers. Archives' websites merit rethinking to interrelate and intertwine histories of art and artworld players. Archivists' descriptions of collections' origins, filing decisions and their reasons—archiving the archive to explore institutional systemic inclusions and exclusions (Buchanan 2024)—would acknowledge archives as perspectival, encouraging scholars to examine archives' organizing principles, its metadata, as the medium of epistolary contents' wider material and socio-economic histories.

Guy Cohen (Israel)

Do the write thing: exploring different forms of telepresence through comparison of handwriting versus keyboard writing

This study examines how the material act of sending a handwritten message shapes a distinct form of telepresence, compared to digital typing of the same message. Drawing on Heideggerian concepts for its theoretical material and using a micro-phenomenological methodology for a comparative experiment, it explores how different writing practices mediate presence, intimacy, and emotional engagement.

Through in-depth interviews and embodied writing tasks, participants revisited emotionally significant messages written by hand and via keyboard. The findings suggest that handwriting—marked by its slowness, tactility, and physicality—fosters heightened sensory awareness and reflective engagement. In contrast, keyboard writing, especially on smartphones, aligns with patterns of speed, strategic communication, and emotional detachment.

These contrasting experiences reflect broader cultural regimes of presence: digital media emphasize immediacy and constant availability, while handwriting creates temporal and spatial distance that paradoxically deepens a sense of connection. Rather than viewing pen and paper as obsolete, this study positions them as active agents in sustaining deliberate and embodied forms of communication.

By foregrounding the phenomenology of writing, the paper contributes to epistolary studies and material culture research. It argues that handwriting cultivates a form of intentional telepresence that resists the disposability and ephemerality of digital exchanges. Far from a nostalgic practice, letter writing emerges as a contemporary mode of meaningful, situated connection.

Luciana Dos Santos (Brazil)

De Profundis by Oscar Wilde: A Hybrid Text Shaped by Editors and Paratexts

De Profundis, written by Oscar Wilde during his imprisonment at Reading Gaol, was first published posthumously in 1905 from excerpts of the manuscript known as *Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis*, a letter addressed to Lord Alfred Douglas.

Three key editions of the text define its editorial history: The long essay *De Profundis* (1905), edited by Robbie Ross; *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* (2000), a collection of Wilde's letters edited by Rupert Hart-Davis; and *De Profundis/'Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis* (2005), commented and edited by Ian Small.

In Ross's edition, the text is framed as a philosophical essay. Hart-Davis, in turn, treats *De Profundis* as a letter among Wilde's correspondence. Ian Small sought to establish a "definitive" text and discuss the textual history of *De Profundis*. The identification of paratexts played a role in identifying genres attributed to the text in these editions and follows the theoretical framework proposed by Gérard Genette. Additionally, the discussion of the epistolary genre draws on the work of Liz Stanley.

Throughout this analysis, the attention is directed to these editors, whose interventions with paratexts, corrections and omissions shaped Wilde's text for publication in different formats, sometimes distancing *De Profundis* from *Epistola* and influencing the reception and conception by readers of Wilde's work.

Small acknowledges that the text resists definitive classification, which is particularly fitting: *De Profundis* emerges not as a single text with multiple facets, but as multiple texts, each shaped by a dynamic textual history that encompasses documents and literary works alike.

Tilly Guthrie (UK)

Tactile Materiality in letters of the British blind Community, c. 1840-1905

This paper will explore the ways in which tactile materiality affected the experience of correspondence in the British blind community. The introduction of the Penny Post in 1840 coincided with a drive to promote blind literacy, as various embossed writing systems were trialled before Braille was standardised at the end of the century. This plurality of scripts complicated the participation of blind writers in correspondence networks.

Through a series of case studies of both embossed and manuscript letters, I will examine how blind writers navigated correspondence in the nineteenth century. In doing so, I centre touch as a tool of analysis, presenting the opportunity to shift away from ocular centrism in the study of epistolary materiality. In this context, the material form of a letter is imbued with significance quite literally, as small changes to the surface of a page can significantly impact meaning. There is also scope to explore a new materialist approach here, as sharp embossing can damage the fingertip and thus physically mark the reader.

I will focus particularly on three letters, written with pin-pricks to create an embossed Roman script. Combining the tactility of Braille and the visual familiarity of print, these texts attempted to bridge the sensory language barrier between eye and finger readers (a blind sender to a sighted recipient, for example). In negotiating a compromise between visual and tactile materiality, I will demonstrate that such letters sacrificed the integrity of both media, and ultimately failed to accommodate either correspondent.

Elisabeth Harris (USA)

Writing Under Difficulty: Smuggling Letters in 19th Century American Asylums

In her 1904 memoir *Sane or Insane?*, former asylum patient Margaret Starr recounts how she sustained friendships and resisted asylum authority through subtle transformations of feminized labor. In an institution where letters were censored and often never mailed, Starr patched her sleeves with lace so the design would hide messages she tucked inside. Cut off from friendships with fellow patients, Starr traded petticoats with another patient and the women sewed messages into the hems of each others' petticoats, before trading back. Starr was by no means alone in these practices. Women's narratives recounting their time as asylum patients in the second half of the 19th century index a host of secret epistolary practices. In addition to Starr, Lydia Denny, Elizabeth Packard, Adaline Lunt, and Clarissa Caldwell Lathrop describe letters hidden in balls of yarn, embroidered garments, and bouquets of flowers. In this paper, I trace some of the creative epistolary practices that women developed in 19th century American asylums. In their hands, textile products became sites of concealment, and objects of women's labor became tools of women's resistance. These practices, I argue, insist on an alternative theory of health to that which asylum superintendents largely subscribed to. Medical consensus at the time was largely that individual patients could become healthy when removed from environmental and relational stressors with family and friends. By contrast, women's desperate resourcefulness to smuggle letters out to family and amongst each other embodies a quest for health premised on relational connection.

Ayako Hoshino (Japan)

On Isamu Noguchi's Letters from 1920s Paris: An example of How Digitization worked

This presentation introduces the process by which two letters of the sculptor Isamu Noguchi went from being owned by a private researcher, to now being digitized and made available to the public. It covers the significance of these letters, the decision-making involved, and takeaways from this experience.

Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988) is a world-renowned sculptor, whose studies in Paris from 1927 to 1928 were an important turning point in his life as an artist. These two letters were particularly meaningful as they were written at the beginning of his stay. According to The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum in New York, they had never been previously referenced.

These letters were owned by a private researcher and discovered by family members upon his death. This presentation will detail the decisions necessary for these letters to be preserved and made publicly available, including: 1) recognizing their potential value; 2) seeking expert advice; 3) giving up ownership; and 4) reaching agreement with the preserving institution. The presenter was consulted as a scholar with expertise in this area and played a key role in this process.

The presenter will share lessons learned from this experience, they will and argue that the historical significance of the contents was more valuable than the materiality of ownership, and that this was an important guiding principle in dealing with this issue.

Siyun He (China)

Handwriting as Self-Representation: A Case Study of Zeng Guofan's 曾國藩 (1811—1872) Family Letters

Handwriting, as a crucial aspect of the materiality of letters, has received growing attention in epistolary studies. Janet Gurkin Altman observes that in letter writing, elements such as tears, handwriting, punctuation, and even spelling can all contribute to meaning. Yet the ways in which handwriting generates meaning remain underexplored.

Zeng Guofan, a renowned statesman, military commander, and pioneer of Chinese modernisation, was also a prolific letter writer who left behind 1,485 family letters. Within this corpus, over forty references explicitly concern handwriting. A systematic examination of these references shows that handwriting—by virtue of its distinctive material form—conveys information that cannot be fully captured in textual forms. Zeng and his family members communicated not only through the textual content of their letters but also by interpreting the handwriting. For Zeng, handwriting provided a means to understand the physical and emotional state of his relatives while representing his own circumstances. Writing in his own hand further signified intimacy, respect, and encouragement. At times, variations in handwriting styles reflected different relationships between Zeng and his correspondents, shaping the negotiation of interpersonal dynamics.

In this way, although geographical distance precluded the physical presence of participants in Zeng's epistolary exchanges, handwriting functioned as a vital mode of self-representation.

Sam Kaislaniemi (Finland)

How significant is space in 17th-century English letters?

Ever since Jonathan Gibson's seminal essay in the journal *Seventeenth Century* (issue 12(1), 1997), we've had a term for the early modern practice of using space – particularly at the end of a letter – to indicate social distance, deference, humility and politeness. The prime example of *significant space* are letters to the sovereign and higher nobility, which typically

required leaving more than ample space between the body of the text and the signature to signify the writer's most obedient & humble servitude, &c. What is less well understood is how letter-writers who were not from or writing to the highest echelons of society used and understood significant space, or indeed whether they did so at all beyond the most superficial level.

In this paper, I look at hundreds of 17th-century English letters written by writers from all literate social ranks, to study their use of significant space. I am primarily interested in if and how much space is left before the signature, and how this correlates with social factors such as the relative social standing of the writer and recipient of the letter. My material spans the 17th century, so I will also be able to look at change over time. If space allows, I will also discuss the use of space at the beginning of letters.

Steven King and Peter Jones (UK)

Writing Under Stress: Materiality in the Lives and Letters of the English Poor

Over the past 25 years, pauper letters have become a cornerstone of 18th and 19th century social history. They are an astonishingly rich source, shedding light on cultures of dependency and welfare negotiations, as well as contributing to new demotic histories of emotion, literacy, sickness, mental health, and labour. Despite their growing influence, pauper letters (almost entirely written in the hands of the poor themselves rather than scribes) have so far tended to be viewed solely as conduits of textual content: their lives as constructed artefacts have been, at best, downplayed and, at worst, ignored. This paper offers a re-evaluation, arguing that by disregarding the material lives of pauper letters we run the risk of missing many tacit, and some explicit, messages contained within and beyond the text itself. These messages may be documentary or semiotic: they might be signified by blots or emendations, or indicated by shifts in pen pressure, character size, line structure or neatness. They might be obvious (different hands writing in the same letter) or subtle (the use of different inks or changes in nib size), but taken together we argue that if we wish to move beyond the obvious textual messages they contain to uncover the hidden stories behind them – the epistolary tensions and personal stresses that led to their construction – we need to formulate new ways of seeing that take account of pauper letters as both textual and material artefacts.

Gary Wayne Loew (USA)

The Hidden Secrets of Envelopes in Epistolary Research

Letters offer us windows into the daily private transactions of society. In our enthusiasm for studying these original source documents, we often neglect to carefully examine the coverings that contain those letters.

The author's forthcoming book, *Fundamentals of Postal History*, introduces a taxonomy for deconstructing and understanding postal artifacts, including envelopes and wrappers. Our

paper addresses the seven components of this taxonomy that are relevant to epistolary research.

We will touch upon postal delivery organizations, the significance of mail origins and destinations, postal markings, and the routes taken by letters. These intangibles can expose a wealth of information to supplement our grasp of a letter's contents. Indeed, the letter and the envelope are best considered as an integrated epistolic entity.

We will demonstrate the application of this taxonomy using an 1852 French language folded letter from Bordeaux to West Africa. This methodology reveals how postmarks and other indicia on the cover illuminate the letter writer's challenges with the communications delays of the mid-19th century.

The takeaway: you will learn how to recognize and extract important information from the envelopes that are themselves original source documents.

Linda McGuire (France)

Words blotted out with my tears: multiple meanings behind materiality in Cicero's The Letters to his Friends 14.3

Greetings Primigenia of Nocerina. Would that I were the gemstone if only for one single hour when you moisten it with your lips to seal a letter. [Graffito Pompeii, CIL iv.10241]

For many in the ancient world, letters were familiar objects. Their materiality was evoked in a range of media like plays, poetry and graffiti. Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE) often refers to the physical letter he is writing or reading. When reading letters from his wife Terentia, the exiled senator claims to erase her words with his tears (*Fam.* 14.3.1). This gushing emotion provoked later writers, including Plutarch and Dio Cassius, to take Cicero to task for behaving like a tearful and distressed lover.

Except that these are not strictly speaking private letters. An unidentified editor circulated them in an epistolary collection entitled *The Letters to his Friends* sometime after Cicero's death. Why did Cicero feel it necessary to stress the material effects of his tears? What did they mean to imperial readers including the collection editor? In addition to the role of tears and erasures within Cicero's speeches, this paper will examine the imperial poet Ovid (43 BCE-17/18 CE) who employed similar expressions in *The Heroides*, fictional letters from literary and mythological women to the men who left them behind. Whether affective bonds existed between Cicero and his wife cannot be known. References to blotted ink on letters, it can be argued, reveal more about imperial perceptions of spousal relations than Cicero's feelings.

Hannah Park (USA)

Simulacra of Presence: Sakhalin Korean Letters and the Materiality of Longing Across Cold War Divides

This paper examines letters written by Sakhalin Koreans—former forced laborers stranded in the Soviet Far East after 1945—to the Association of Zainichi Koreans Repatriated from Karafuto (AZKRRK) in Japan. Focusing on the Yi Hüip'al collection housed in the National Archives of Korea, I argue that these letters functioned not only as emotional lifelines for families divided by Cold War geopolitics, but also as political artifacts—simulacra of presence that sustained kinship ties, petitioned for repatriation, and eventually catalyzed reunion. Unlike typical correspondence, these letters crossed multiple state borders through unofficial channels, relying on the mediation of AZKRRK to bypass diplomatic impasses between the USSR, Japan, and South Korea.

I trace how the materiality of the letters—handwriting, dates, postal markings, even their careful preservation by Yi—convey the affective and activist labor embedded in their production and circulation. From the 1960s through the 1980s, Sakhalin Koreans used letters to enact reunion when it was politically impossible. This epistolary archive, largely overlooked in existing scholarship on Cold War humanitarianism or Korean separated families, reveals the emotional and political stakes of letter writing for a community long exiled on the margins of empire and nation. Through this case, the paper contributes to broader conversations on how letter materiality can illuminate atypical and underexplored modes of affective endurance, familial belonging, and transnational activism under conditions of prolonged separation.

Rosario Santiago (USA)

The rings of trees, the dregs of teacups: Materiality in This is How You Lose the Time War

In my paper, I will explore the relationship materiality has to the epistolary practice in the 2019 novel *This is How You Lose the Time War* by Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone. At opposite ends of a temporal war, characters Red and Blue form an unlikely correspondence that slowly evolves into an intimate connection. As time-travelers, they have the capacity to braid, thread, weave, and intertwine their letters to the physical world they inhabit. With the malleability of their surroundings, the context in which materiality exists in the novel works to convey a certain agency and ownership of themselves, their emotions, and the world around them. The material practices of *Time War*, though fictional, shows us how the physical manifestations, or the letters they exchange, are crucial to their survival as queer characters. Love letters between queer persons are often hidden or destroyed, so the heightening of the importance of these letters to it making up the world while still inconspicuous stands in as a metaphorical argument towards the survival of queer epistolary forms. What we already know about epistolary materiality is then enhanced, as *Time War* serves to be a critical work in how we can look at epistolarity through queer methodologies. Our perceptions of time, space, and agency are often defined through what could be considered oppressive structures towards queer people. I would like to show how *Time War*'s treatment of letters can change our conception of epistolary materiality to one that is complicated through queer means.

Zoe Screti (UK)

Cutting and Stitching: The Tearing and Repairing of Manuscript Letters, 1650-1850

Instructions to burn or destroy manuscripts have, for centuries, abounded in private correspondences. Such destruction denotes a process of self-curation, allowing an individual to preserve their public image and curate their legacy, as well as speaking to the negotiations of trust that underpinned epistolary relationships. Very rarely, however, are instructions expressly given for a recipient to tear a manuscript, yet such actions are not uncommon. This paper will question why letters were torn and repaired between 1650 and 1850. From the self-protective measures of Zoe Heger stitching up Charlotte Brontë's torn letters, through the tender stitches of Miss Mather who carefully repaired an accidental tear to a heartfelt family letter, to the letters of her mother and father sewn for perpetuity into a bound album by Maria Cowper, this paper explores a range of examples in which cutting and stitching hold a prominent place. In doing so, it not only explores the emotional reasoning behind destruction and preservation, questioning the motives informing processes of self-curation, legacy building, and sentimentality, but also casts light on the often-neglected contributions of women in archival preservation. Stitches, belonging as they did to the typically female pursuit of sewing, belie processes of silent labour that have shaped archival collections. Whether sewn tenderly or vindictively, these acts of archival reparation play an important part in our understanding of how relationships and reputations were maintained, curated, and destroyed in the early modern period, and of the shape of existing archives today.

Pamela Siska (USA)

"This transverse writing": Cross-writing in the Letters of Percy and Mary Shelley

In early nineteenth-century England, the cost of postage was borne by the recipient, not the sender, a circumstance that led many letter-writers to employ cross-writing. We see cross-writing in some of Percy Bysshe Shelley's letters, but with the added twist that it was done not by him but by Mary Shelley. As Timothy Webb has noted, the practice was mutual, with Mary sometimes adding to Shelley's letters and him sometimes adding to hers. No doubt husband and wife shared a page to save their correspondent a few pence, but, more significantly, this letter-sharing turns the epistolary dyad of one writer and one reader into a triad. In this paper, I explore how the Shelleys' practice of letter-sharing (cross-writing, marginal inclusions, post-scripts) shaped the picture of Shelley that emerges in these jointly written letters. For example, in a letter to Leigh Hunt, Shelley makes an uncharacteristically cynical comment about human nature. In her post-script, Mary explains that he is feeling unwell, thus invalidating his cynicism and preserving the idealism appropriate to a reformer. The complexities and nuances of self-presentation afforded by this collaborative cross-writing offer an interesting illustration of how the circumstances of a letter's production and transmission can shape its contents.

Kate Tilson (UK)

The materiality of missionary letters about childbirth: motherhood, medicine and cross-cultural interaction

This paper will analyze the materiality of missionary letters on childbirth to explore themes of motherhood, medicine, and cross-cultural interaction. The discussion will focus on the beginnings of the London Missionary Society (LMS) mission to Tahiti in the early nineteenth century. Drawing on letters from British missionaries, I will define their materiality in two ways. Firstly, I will study the material spaces in which they were written, zooming in on the interiors of sailing ships and missionary houses. *Where* missionaries chose to write and their descriptions of these places, I will argue, imbued their letters with both spiritual and personal meaning. The cabin of a sailing ship, for example, could reference Biblical scripture and convey missionary feelings of isolation. In the second half of the paper, I will turn to the materiality of the letters themselves: the blotches, the lines through script, the rushed and small handwriting of the postscripts. I will speak on what these inky markings might reveal about the emotional and physical experiences of birth in the context of the religious encounter. I will also speak on what they might disclose about the types of knowledge the LMS hoped to circulate among (or keep from) evangelical supporters of the mission. Overall, the paper will show the deeply personal vulnerabilities of the missionary project, as revealed in letter writing. These were vulnerabilities that were often patched over or re-stylized for the printed periodicals and books of the LMS.

Lik Hang Tsui (Hong Kong)

From Brushstrokes to Bytes: Digitizing and Cataloging the Epistolary Manuscripts from Song China

During the Song period (960-1279) in imperial China, the practice of letter writing among literati was celebrated as an art form for its calligraphic grace. Beyond its aesthetic appeal, it was also a vital element of historical significance, embodying the sophisticated exchange of ideas and cultural values among the learned elites. These letters served multiple purposes: as a means of communication for polite negotiations among the literati, a showcase of calligraphic and literary talents, and as valuable gifts that could be bought and sold. Treasured as art objects, these epistolary manuscripts were often reproduced through rubbings and model books, ensuring their dissemination and preservation. However, the materiality of these letters—ink and brushwork, paper and its mounting, seals, and other physical attributes—was central to their meaning, embodying the social and cultural contexts of their creation, use, and circulation. Digitization also raises critical questions about how these forms—and their meanings—are preserved and understood in new contexts.

In my study, I adopt a multidimensional research approach, utilizing digital tools to profile, map, and analyze the extant letter manuscripts from the Song period. By building an annotated digital catalogue of epistolary manuscripts, I reevaluate the various roles of letters in social contexts from the historical perspective of epistolary culture, exploring the significance of literati communications in Song China. My research also discusses how these letters, once esteemed as calligraphic models and social artifacts, are recontextualized in digital form, raising questions about the preservation, interpretation, and transmission of their material and historical meanings. I conclude by reflecting on the opportunities and challenges of using digital tools to engage with the material traces of literati communication in Song China.