

**Project WARLUX - Soldiers and their communities in WWII:  
The impact and legacy of war experiences in Luxembourg**

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***Student project - WAR LETTERS***

**TRANSKRIBUS USER CONFERENCE  
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## 1. Project Frame:

Project WARLUX - Study on Luxembourgish soldiers in WWII

- their experiences based on war letters

Documents: War letters (front and from home): crowdsourced material

- crowdsourcing campaign 2021/22 in Luxembourg (5000 letters, 20 diaries)

Challenge: Divers material

- different handwritings, different types of documents

Language: German (90 %), Luxembourgish and French

Students: 7 - Master in Contemporary History

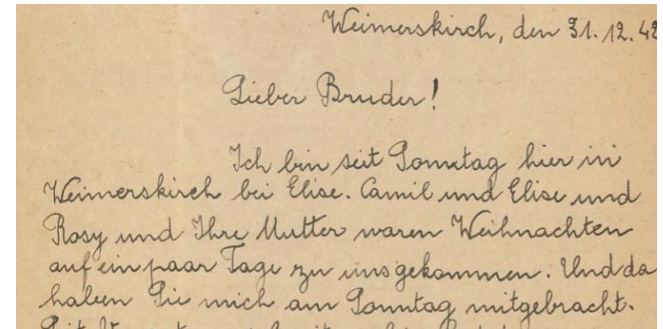
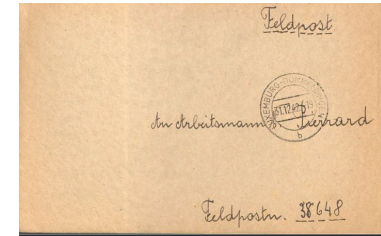
Time frame: 1, 5 hours x 13 (February - May 2022)

## 2. Procedure

Digitalisation of Documents: (300 dpi, pdf)

Storage: University Server

Selection of documents: Case study about war experience between home and front (letters cover “both” sides), Collection Pierrard two brothers at the front and rich correspondance with home



## 3. Workflow

Introducing Topic and type of documents

- working with ego-documents and war letters

Training: Hands-on Training Session with Transkribus Lite

Developing of joint workflow: Crowd working on joint collection in Transkribus Lite

- “protocol” of workflow
- group of 2 - uploading document, layout analysis, text recognition and edit/correct transcriptions - one edit, one reviewer for each document
- metadata, short summary, key words

Cote/Reference	Collection	Sender	Receiver	Date	Place
001-01	Collection Pierrard				
001-01-a	Collection Pierrard				
001-02	Collection Pierrard	Adolf Pierrard (Family letter)	Nikolas Pierrard	07.09.1943	Antoniusstra 3 Diekirch
001-03	Collection Pierrard	Adolf Pierrard	Nikolas Pierrard	28.07.1943	Rambruch (Luxembourg)
001-04	Collection Pierrard	Adolf Pierrard	Nikolas Pierrard	21.12.43	Rambruch (Luxembourg)

Workflow/Protocol

## 4. In and Output

Working with (digitized) ego-documents: Research on and Reading war letters, analysing letters, implement transcriptions in the research process

- part of Digital History Focus and working with digital tools - developing (digital) source criticism
- weekly research journals and studying war letters and using digital tools

Improving self-organisation in a small research project

- developing a research workflow
- implementing the pitfalls, and results into the process
- improving research skills based on digitised material and platforms

## 5. Challenges

- Turning pages - was not possible
- Multi-language sections: Luxembourgish text regions (LU model does not exist (yet))
- Checking and adapting workflow
- Review student's work and their transcriptions regularly
- Input for studying “more” than doing the transcriptions

## 6. Lessons learned:

Preparation is key: tables, docs

Defining clear goal: “What is it all about?”

- students have to understand that Transkribus is a tool - what happened afterwards with the text?

Transkribus Lite: for first trials and small project suitable - but: Transkribus

Expert might be a better choice for larger student projects

- more possibilities (turning pages) and model training

“Entrusting” students with complex tools and workflows

## 7. Results

### Last (graded) presentation: Poster presentations on Analysis of War Letters

1. what is a war letter?
2. how can a war letter be used to study the war experiences of Luxembourg conscripts and their families?

## Digital Transcriptions

1. what difficulties do you typically encounter when transcribing a source, whether in an analogue or digital environment?
2. how can you bring your research questions into the process of digitisation and transcription? Or how does this process help you answer your question?

⇒ <https://ninajanz.org/final-research-poster/>

**War letters describing events in Luxembourg during WW2!**

- Context**  
The German occupation started in May 1940. During the time of war, about 15.000 Luxembourgers were recruited to the Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS. Families and groups of friends were torn apart and the only way of communication left was via the German army postal office. Generally letters were very important!
- War letters**  
A war letter is a letter written in the context of a war. In this case WW2. They were used to give signs of life, and give information about the war situation on the front or back at home. Not included in this category are letters that were written during war times, but don't necessarily include information about it.
- Letters as a source**  
A letter falls into the same category as a diary, a manuscript, etc. This being an egodocument. Egodocuments give an insight into a personal experience. In this case, the letters written in Luxembourg and sent to the front are of interest, to see what information was given about what was going on in Luxembourg.
- Research question**  
How did the Luxembourgish people write about certain events at home to their friends or family at the front?
- Digitization**  
One of the main aspects of this research is the digitization of the Luxembourgish WW2 letters and postcards via Transkribus. This tool allows us to transcribe handwritten documents and thus have them in a digital form. This also permits us to attribute keywords to it and write a summary of the letter.
- Process and example**  
As the research relies on "all" the letters that were written in Luxembourg and describe the events during the war there, digitization is a crucial factor. After one can filter out the important letters for this research and compare them to each other and other sources that describe them such as newspapers. An example for such an event would be "Hier ist so ziemlich alles beim Alten. Nur hat man am vergangenen Sonntag eine Säuberungsaktion durchgeführt und viele eingepöppelt."

**A comparative study between German & Luxembourgish War letters**

- Context:**
  - Luxembourg invaded in 1940 by Nazi Forces
  - From 1942 on: Luxembourgish male population conscripted into the German Army
  - Fought alongside German Soldiers
  - wrote letters to their families back home
  - POV: What's different? Same experience? Hidden Patterns? Language?
- Research Process**
  - Search for German & Luxembourgish War Letters
  - Where? G. Feldpost Archiv Berlin ; Wittenbergische Landesbibliothek, etc.
  - I. Archivus nationales, Private Collections
  - Focus on letters from a same period (Ex. Year 1943)
  - Keyword search → Find Patterns
- Methodology: What use for Transkribus & Co?**
  - Digitized Letters → accessibility & preservation
  - Digitization very important → large corpus of data / letters
  - Keyword Search → facilitates research & saves time
  - Transkribus: Transcription of Letters / Transcriptions digitized → access for other researchers
  - BUT: still a lot of mistakes / not fully reliable
- What is a War Letter?**
  - Very broad definition
  - War Letter = Dialogue between the Front and Home ("Heimat")
  - Correspondence
  - Contact to family, news, experiences, emotions ; vice versa
  - different from official sources, not sanitized, but CENSORSHIP
  - Source for Historical Research
- What are the differences between German & Luxembourgish War Letters in WW2? Are certain events perceived differently by German and Luxembourgish Soldiers?**



# Stay connected with us!



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Blog: “Digital War History” and WARLUX

<https://digiwarhist.hypotheses.org>

<https://www.c2dh.uni.lu/projects/warlux>

