

Identifying (Latin) Texts and Sources

Contributed by Farkas Kiss

The traditional tool of identifying a Latin text is by the *incipit* and/or *explicit*. The *incipit* is usually the first few words of the text and means literally, ‘it begins’. The *explicit*, meaning ‘it ends’, is the last few words of a text. This also allows a reader to see, from the outset, if there are any variants in the text that they are reading.

Incipits were already used in the Middle Ages as a tool of identification (enumerating extant works in inventories, but not, as used by modern scholars, as a tool to identify texts you don’t know)

Though less important for our purposes, late medieval catalogues often recorded books by their ‘second folio incipit’, recording the first few words on the second page. Because these are usually unique to the manuscript to which they belong, these records of second folio incipits have been invaluable for tracing the libraries to which surviving manuscripts once belonged.

Finding tools for Latin texts

When you come upon a Latin text that you don’t recognize, the first thing to do is to try google. The beauty of google is that you need not necessarily use an incipit, so if you only have a text fragment, you might still find what you are looking for if the text has been digitized and keyed in. You may find it useful to google a sentence with variations in inverted commas (“”), which will limit the number of finds

If this does not work then try *In Principio* (<http://www.brepols.net/Pages/BrowseBySeries.aspx?TreeSeries=INPR>) this requires an incipit or an explicit.

Don’t just enter one, but try several possible incipits from different works.

Slightly less useful, you can try (<http://www.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de/#|2>)

This is a database of 90,000 items but they are only those found within German libraries.

If all else fails, then, provided you have some context, there are of course more traditional resources that you can refer to.

Classical (ancient) texts

These are usually identified by the author

A useful aid

- Birger Munk Olsen, *L'étude des auteurs classiques latins aux XIe et XIIe siècles* (Paris: 1982-1989), 4 vols (esp. vol. 2, Catalogue 'des manuscrits classiques latins copiés du IXe au XIIe siècle').

Patristic texts

- Eligius Dekkers & Emil Gaar (eds.) *Clavis patrum Latinorum* (3rd ed. Turnhout, 1995). This is especially good for little known treatises and letters that became standalone works. [CPL]

And if your interest is in Greek works, then...

- Maurice Geerard, *Clavis patrum Graecorum* (Turnhout: 1974-2003), 6 vols. [CPG]

Further tools for finding Christian authors include

- **PL**: Jacques-Paul Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Latina* (Paris: 1844-1864), 221 vols.
- **PG**: Jacques-Paul Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris: 1857-1866), 161 vols.

Most of this is digitized at (<http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/>)

- **CSEL**: *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (1866-2017), 103 vols. [see <http://csel.sbg.ac.at/en/>]
- **CC**: *Corpus Christianorum*,

(This publishing series was intended to supplement and improve Migne's work above. Migne's work is readily available and generally good enough. However there are texts missing and some of his exemplars are no longer thought to represent the best version of the texts. Some of this has been digitised and is available via Brepolis. It is however rather expensive and not many libraries have subscriptions)

1. **CCSL**: *Series Latina* (1953-2017), 211 vols.

2. **CCCM**: *Continuatio Mediaevalis* (1966-2017), 343 vols.

Finding Tools for Medieval Latin Texts

Unfortunately for those of us working on medieval sources, there are no general handbooks. The simple fact of the matter is that there are too many texts. A general hand-list would be an unfeasibly laborious undertaking.

Yet, there are specialized lists of incipits for those working in specialized fields.

For example

- Frank Coulson & Bruno Roy *Incipitarium Ovidianum* (Toronto, 2000).
This deals with books from 400-1600 that deal with the works of the Roman poet Ovid. This includes commentaries summaries, biographies and so on and so forth.
- Morton Bloomfield, *Incipits of Latin Works on the Virtues and Vices, 1100 - 1500 A.D* (2nd edn. Cambridge: 1979)
Just as it sounds
- Harry Caplan, *Mediaeval Artes Praedicandi: A handlist* (Ithaca, 1934) (+ A supplementary handlist, 1936)
This concerns the medieval preaching handbooks
- G.L. Bursill-Hall, *A census of medieval Latin grammatical manuscripts* (Stuttgart: 1981)
Grammar books.
- Ulysse Chevalier, *Répertoire des sources historique du Moyen Age* (Montbeliard: 1894-1899)
Digitized at (<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k406137f>).
- Friedrich Stegmüller, *Repertorium Biblicum Medii Aevi*, 11 vols., 1950-1980.
<http://repub.uni-trier.de/cgi-bin/rebihome.tcl>
- Johann Baptist Schneyer, *Repertorium der lateinischen Sermones des Mittelalters für die Zeit von 1150-1350* (Münster, 1969-90), 11 vols.
Latin sermons 1150-1350
- L. Hödl-W. Koch, *Repertorium der lateinischen Sermones des Spätmittelalters 1350 bis 1500* (Münster, 1999) [CD-ROM].

Latin sermons 1350–1500

- Thomas Kaepelli- Emilio Panella: *Scriptores ordinis praedicatorum medii aevi*, 1970–1993

Digitized at (<http://www.e-theca.net/emiliopanella/minor/sopma3.htm>)

- Dieter Schaller & Ewald Könsgen, *Initia carminum Latinorum saeculo undecimo antiquiorum* (Gottingen, 2005)

Digitized at (http://digi20.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb00050039_00001.html)

- Hans Walther, *Initia carminum ac versuum medii aevi posterioris latinorum* (Gottingen, 2005)

And there are of course many more, so you are not entirely without friends.