

Palaeography

DIGITAL HUMANITIES FOR MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHICAL SOURCES

3. Abbreviation system

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1. Abbreviation types

- Because of the limits of writing space, the copyists invented techniques of word abbreviation.
- The abbreviations differ from a historical period to another, from a territory to another, from an intellectual context to another, both for abbreviation signs and for words which are abbreviated.

↪ **m̃** = mater (jur., comm.), magister (univ. XIII), martyr (theol.), multipliciter (comm. XIII)

- To decipher the abbreviations, we must take into account the abbreviation procedure:
 - very frequent words are the most abbreviated, often with letter-like conventional signs
 - the other words are often abbreviated to shorten them, using conventional signs and shortening procedures

1.1. Conventional signs

The conventional signs replace a succession of sounds

↪ sometimes the same abbreviation can stand for several homophone successions of sounds

↪ some signs correspond to whole words, but they can be used also inside another word

The most common abbreviation signs:

~ (tilde) nasalization m/n

q	que/quae	p	per/par-	& / 7	et	ē/ẽ	est
q̃	que/quae	p̃	pre/prae-	ĩ	in/im-	ñ	non
q̄	quod	p̄	pro	ſ	sed/secundum	=	esse
q̇	qui	ṗ	pri	ð	de	ʀ	vel
q̈	quo	g̈	ergo	ġ	igitur	m̈	modo
q̉	-que/quem	b̉	-bus	2	-rum	'	-ir/-er
9	cum/con-	3	-et/-m	9	-us	u	-ur
h	hic	h̄	haec	ḣ	hoc		

1.2. Shortening of words

Longer or more frequent words are abbreviated by suppression of letters, which can be one of two types:

- suspension (only the first letters are written, the last are replaced by a mark)
- contraction (only the beginning and the end are written, letters from the middle are omitted)

The suppression can be marked by:

- tilde (warning! the tilde may also mean nasalization)
- āia** (anima) **rō** (ratio) **cā** (causa) **h̄nt** (habent)

- superscript at end

po^a (potentia) **a^a** (alia) **phr^{ci}** (physici) **cor^{is}** (corporis)

- above the word

ñ (natura) **p̄r^o** (posterius) **ex^ema** (extrema)

- omission (some letters may be omitted when the word is easy to guess)

lba (substantia) **qo** (quaestio) **Jo.** (Iohannes)

To restore the word, one must find an existing word in latin which corresponds to the written or abbreviated sounds and which is obtainer by minimum expansions from a known form. (↪ **rōle** (*rationabile*) (*rationale*))

2. Instruments for deciphering

There are abbreviation dictionaries which contain the transcription of abbreviation signs and of the common words.

- ❗ not all the possible words are contained in dictionaries
- ❗ the dictionaries cover several domains and languages, attention to the specific usage in the transcribed text

📖 ADRIANO CAPPELLI, *Dizionario di Abbreviature latine ed italiane*

NCC ^m – NCCITA	233	NCCITI – NE ^{ar}
ncc ^m (ncc, ncc ^m) neces- sarium XIV f.	ncc ^{ti} (ncciti) necessi- tati XIV m.	
ncc ^a (ncc ^{aa}) necessaria XIV	ncc ^m (ncc ^{am}) necessa- rium XV f.	
ncc ^a (ncc ^{aa}) necessaria	ncc ^s (ncc ^{as}) necessitas XIII	

🌐 **Breviter** Interactive Dataset of Medieval Abbreviations <https://breviter.mihaimaga.ro/>

💡 students are encouraged to form their own dictionaries of abbreviations

📝 Homework

Identify 10 abbreviations in the following manuscript and transcribe them unabbreviated:

Om̃is causa p̃m̃aria plus est influens sup̃ cā
cum quam sedā cā uniũsalis
C̃um g̃ remoũz cā sedā uniũsal̃ ututem are.
cā. t̃. p̃ma nō aut̃ ututē ab ea. q̃d̃ q̃ cā uniũ
lis. p̃ma d̃g̃ in sedm̃ cācum. cē sedē. an̄q̃ in p̃am. cā
uniũsalis sedā quo nō seq̃t̃ p̃am. Cum g̃ d̃g̃ cā sedā. i
cācum. q̃ p̃am seq̃t̃ nō excusat̃ ip̃i actō a cā p̃ q̃ ē sup̃
p̃am q̃m̃ ē cā er̃. z nōr̃ q̃d̃ explicam̃. illd̃ p̃tem z m̃

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Latin 3237, f. 53r (first quart of 13th c.)

PSEUDO-ARISTOTELES, *Liber de causis*

- | | |
|---------|----------|
| 1. | 6. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |