

Identifying medieval liturgical manuscripts

A rough guide

I. Identification of book type by layout and format

A. Liturgical books

1. Is the text in Latin?
 - A. Yes: go to 2
 - B. No: the MS will not be in the main Western liturgical tradition, however interesting it may otherwise be. Take another seminar.
2. Is there any musical notation?
 - Yes: go to 3
 - No: go to C
3. Is almost everything notated (except for rubrics, usually in a different ink and smaller writing) ?
 - Yes: go to 4.
 - No: go to B
4. Most likely the book or fragment is an antiphoner or a gradual. Are most of the chant pieces preceded by the rubrics *a.*(or *ant.*) or *R.* (or *Rx*, or *Resp.*)?
 - Yes: the book is probably an **antiphoner**. See the description and determine whether it is secular or monastic.
 - No: Most likely the book or fragment is a gradual. Go to 5
5. Graduals contain series of chants for mass. The normal sequence of pieces in a complete mass have labels in this order: *I.* (or *Intr.* , occasionally *Officium*), *Gr.* (or *R.* or *Resp.*) with *V.*, *Alleluia* with *V.* [or instead of *All.*, *Tr.* or *Tractus*], *Offertorium* (or *Of.* or *O.*), *Communio* (or *Co.* or *C.*). Is this series, or part of it, present in the manuscript?
 - Yes: The book is probably a **gradual**. See the description.
 - No: The book may be one of several other rarer types, described briefly here:
 - Kyriale**: a book containing the Ordinary chants of the mass. These may either be arranged in sets (*Kyrie*, *Gloria in excelsis*, *Credo*, *Sanctus*, *Agnus Dei*), or they may group all the Kyries, etc. together. (note: a gradual may contain a Kyriale as an appendix).
 - Processional**: contents vary; format is usually small; generally arranged in liturgical order, with two or three pieces for each feast, often a Responsory and two antiphons. For special processional days (Rogation Days [*in rogationibus*], Major Litanies [*letaniae maiores*], there may be longer series of pieces, mostly antiphons with a penitential tone; there are often special pieces for the feast of the Purification and for the special days of Holy Week (*in cena domini*, *in parasceven*, *sabbato sancto*).
 - Cantatorium**: format is usually vertical; contains solo pieces for the mass: graduals, tracts, Alleluia; and sometimes only those portions sung by a soloist: the verses of graduals and tracts, the verses of the Alleluia.
 - Sequentiarium (Prosarium)**: a book of sequences. These are long poetical texts, with syllabic notation (usually only one note per syllable) and paired versicles (same music for each pair of lines).
 - Troparium**: a book of chants to be sung as introductions or interpolations to the standard chants of the mass. The word *tropus* or *tropos* is usually found in the rubrics.
 - Tonarius**: a specialized book for musicians and theorists, listing incipits of chants according to their mode and psalm-tone.

B. Books with partial musical notation

1. Does the book seem to have about half its texts notated (rather than having only rare or sporadic notation?)
 - Yes: the book is probably a missal or a breviary. Go to 2.
 - No: the book may be one of several types: go to E.
2. Do the chant pieces appear as groups of antiphons (labeled *a.* or *ant.*) or as responsories (labeled *R. Rx*, *Resp.* each with a verse) alternating mostly with prose texts of 10-20 lines (labeled *Lectio*, or *Lec.* Or *L.*, often numbered—*Lec. iii*, etc.)?
 - Yes: The book is a notated **breviary**. See the description and determine whether it is secular or monastic.
 - No: go to 3
3. Do the chant pieces, labeled in the sequence of mass [*I.* (or *Intr.*, occasionally *Officium*), *Gr.* (or *R.* or *Resp.*) with *V.*, *Alleluia* with *V.* [or instead of *All.*, *Tr.* or *Tractus*], *Offertorium* (or *Of.* or *O.*), *Communio* (or *Co.* or *C.*)] alternate with prayers (which may be labeled *coll.*, *secr.*, *super obl.*, *post comm.*) and with texts for Epistle (rubric may say something like *lectio epistoli beati Pauli ad Romanos*) and Gospel (rubric says *lectio sancti evangelii secundum Marcum*; text begins *In illo tempore*) ?
 - Yes: the book is a notated **missal**. See the description.
 - No: the book is one of several other possible types, including these:
 - Hymnal (liber hymnarius)** : a book containing the hymns sung at the office during the year. Hymns are metrical and strophic; often the first strophe is given in musical notation, the remaining strophes written continuously, as though they were prose, after the first strophe and without notation.
 - Psalterium**: the book of Psalms, often accompanied by other texts (canticles, litanies, etc), is usually without music. Occasionally, however, each psalm or portion of a psalm is preceded by one or more notated antiphon.
 - Pontificale**: a book used by bishops in performing episcopal ceremonies. Contents vary, but pontificals generally include ordinations, consecration of churches, various blessings, sometimes coronations. Occasional music, especially in the office and mass for the dedication of a church, is typical.

C. Books with little or no musical notation

1. Does the book's regular format involve an alternation of texts in two writing sizes?

Yes: the book is probably a missal or a breviary. Go to 2.

No: the book is of another type. Go to D

2. In such books, the chant pieces are written in smaller writing than the texts to be read. The succession of chant pieces (skipping over the passages in large writing) should match those of the office or the mass. Are most of the chant texts preceded by the rubrics *a.*(or *ant.*) and *R.* (or *Rx*, or *Resp.*)?

Yes: the book is probably a **breviary**. See the description and determine whether it is secular or monastic.

No: Most likely the book is a missal. Go to 3.

3. Do the chant texts (in smaller writing), labeled in the sequence of mass [*I.* (or *Intr.*, occasionally *Officium*), *Gr.* (or *R.* or *Resp.*) with *V.*, *Alleluia* with *V.* [or instead of *All.*, *Tr.* or *Tractus*], *Offertorium* (or *Of.* or *O.*), *Communio* (or *Co.* or *C.*)] alternate with prayers (which may be labeled *coll.*, *secr.*, *super obl.*, *post comm.*) and with texts for Epistle (rubric may say something like *lectio epistoli beati Pauli ad Romanos*) and Gospel (rubric says *lectio sancti evangelii secundum Marcum*; text begins *In illo tempore*) ?

Yes: the book is probably a **missal**. See the description.

No: the book may be one of several other types. Go to D

D. Other liturgical books

1. Does the book appear to contain mostly biblical texts, Saint's lives, or sermons?

Yes: go to 2

No: go to 4

2. Are the texts psalms?

Yes: the book is a **psalter** (see the description above).

No: go to 3

3. Do the texts to be read also include prayers?

Yes: the book is probably a **sacramentary**; see the description below.

No: go to 4

4. The book may or may not be designed for use in the liturgy. Does it appear to be divided into short passages, each with a rubric?

Yes: the book is probably some sort of **lectionary**: the following are most typical:

Evangeliarium (Evangelistarium) a book containing the Gospels for mass; feasts are labeled, text says *lectio sancti evangelii secundum Marcum*; text begins *In illo tempore*; these books are often luxurious

Epistolarium a book containing the Epistles for mass; feasts are labeled, texts for Epistle may begin something like *lectio epistoli beati Pauli ad Romanos*.

Homiliarium a book containing sermons, arranged for reading in the night office at the third nocturn. Sermons are generally preceded by a brief passage from the Gospel, and when they are used liturgically are generally divided into several numbered lections. Such books are often in large format, sometimes in double columns.

Passionarium (Vitae sanctorum) a book containing the lives of saints, arranged for reading in the night office at the third nocturn. Lives intended for liturgical use are generally divided into several numbered lections. Such books are often in large format, sometimes in double columns.

No: the book is likely to be a literary, rather than a liturgical, book. Depending on its text, it may be a **bible**, a collection of **sermons**, a collection of **saints' lives**, or some other work or collection. It is probably not intended for liturgical use.

E. Books with rare or sporadic notation

1. Is musical notation very rare, occurring only on a few pages in the middle of the book, or very occasionally elsewhere?

Yes: the book is probably of a type mentioned above in section C; first go back to C and see whether the description correspond to the book or fragment. If not, then go to 2 below.

No: go to 2

2. Is the musical notation an addition to the book or fragment (in the margin, etc.)?

Yes: the music may be interesting, but may not be related to the document.

No: go to 3

3. Consider one of the two following possibilities:

a. The book or fragment is from a standard book whose notation appears sporadic, perhaps because the fragment is incomplete: consider the following possibilities:

Hymnal: see B3 above

Psalter: see B3 above

Pontifical: see B 3 above

b. The book or fragment contains one of several special musical items which are often notated even when the rest of the book is not. These items include the following (this list is surely not exhaustive):
Vere dignum et iustum or *Vere quia dignum*: A series of proper prefaces to the Sanctus: the books is probably a **missal**. See the description.

Gloria in excelsis deo, several versions: the books is probably a **missal**. See the description.

Exultet iam angelica turba celorum: the blessing of the candle on Holy Saturday: the books is probably a **missal**. See the description.

Incipit lamentatio ieremie prophete or

Aleph, Beth, Gimel, other Hebrew letters transliterated: the lamentations of Jeremiah, sung as lections in Holy Week. The book is either a **breviary** or a **lectionary** (or very occasionally a **bible**)

Iudicii signum: the Sybilline prophecies of Christ: the book is probably a **breviary** or a **lectionary**.

II. Brief descriptions of principal types of music book

Gradual (graduale, liber gradalis, antiphonale missarum)

The book consists of the music for the proper items of the mass, arranged within the mass in the order in which they are sung (Introit, Gradual, Alleluia (or Tract), Offertory, Communion). The masses are arranged in liturgical order throughout the year, each mass preceded by a rubric indicating the feast. In some cases the proper of the time (*temporale*) and the proper of the saints (*sanctorale*) are in separate volumes. Elsewhere the sanctorale may be divided into two sections, inserted after Christmas and after the Sundays after Pentecost, or alternated with the temporale in smaller sections. (Not that St. Stephen, Dec. 26, St. John, Dec. 27, and the Holy Innocents, Dec. 27, by tradition appear in the temporale, not the sanctorale).

A gradual may be preceded by a calendar; it may include a separate sections of ordinary chants (the Kyriale); its masses may include sequences or, more rarely, tropes.

Antiphoner (antiphonale, antiphonale officii)

The book contains the music for the singing of the daily office, arranged more or less in order through the day. A complete major feast will normally include, in order:

5 (or 4) antiphons for first vespers, including an antiphon for the canticle *Magnificat* (major feasts only)

invitatory antiphon, antiphons, and responsories for matins (or vigils)

antiphons for lauds (including an antiphon for the canticle *Benedictus*)

antiphons for the little hours (prime, terce, sext, none) sometimes an antiphon used elsewhere is used for these offices, and the antiphons are cued only)

antiphons for vespers.

Feasts are arranged in liturgical order throughout the year, each feast preceded by an identifying rubric. In some cases the proper of the time (*temporale*) and the proper of the saints (*sanctorale*) are in separate volumes. Elsewhere the sanctorale may be divided into two sections, inserted after Christmas and

after the Sundays after Pentecost, or alternated with the *temporale* in smaller sections. (Note that St. Stephen (Dec. 26), St. John (Dec. 27), and the Holy Innocents (Dec. 27), by tradition appear in the *temporale*, not the *sanctorale*). The largest decorated letters usually appear, not at the first musical item of the feast, but at the first responsory.

There are two principal medieval organizations of the office: the secular, or Roman *cursus*, and the monastic *cursus*. The simplest way to identify which is present is to look at matins (or vigils). After the invitatory and antiphon and the singing of *Venite exultemus*, there are three *nocturns*, or *vigilia*.

The arrangement of antiphons and responsories for nocturns of major feasts varies between secular and monastic:

	secular	monastic
vig. i.	3 ants. 3 resp.	4 ants. 4 resp.
vig. ii.	3 ants. 3 resp.	4 ants. 4 resp.
vig. iii.	3 ants. 3 resp.	1 ant. (labeled " <i>a. ad cantica</i> ") 4 resp.

So if you see the rubrics "*R. iv*", or "*a. ad can.*" you are in the presence of a monastic book.

Another way to distinguish between secular and monastic books is the number of antiphons at vespers: 5 in secular use, 4 in monastic.

Offices may include other material: hymns or their incipits; versicles; incipits of short lections.

Antiphoners sometimes include a calendar, and a separate section giving the various tones of the *Venite exultemus* for matins.

Missale

The missal combines into one volume lectionary, sacramentary, and gradual. It presents the proper chants, prayers, and readings of each mass in order. For an individual mass the normal sequence is: *Introit*, collect (prayer), epistle (reading), *Gradual*, *Alleluia* (or Tract), gospel (reading), *Offertory*, secreta (prayer), *Communion*, postcommunion (prayer). Chant pieces, italicized above, may or may not have musical notation. There are many non-notated missals. (Be sure to note, as many do not, whether a missal bears musical notation or not).

The masses are arranged in liturgical order throughout the year, each mass preceded by a rubric indicating the feast. In some cases the proper of the time (*temporale*) and the proper of the saints (*sanctorale*) are in separate volumes. Elsewhere the *sanctorale* may be divided into two sections, inserted after Christmas and after the Sundays after Pentecost, or alternated with the *temporale* in smaller sections. (Note that St. Stephen (Dec. 26), St. John (Dec. 27), and the Holy Innocents (Dec. 27), by tradition appear in the *temporale*, not the *sanctorale*).

A missal may be preceded by a calendar; it may include a separate sections of ordinary chants (the Kyriale).

Breviarium

A breviary combines the chants, prayers, and lections of the office, in liturgical order. This it contains the same musical pieces as the antiphoner, but with the addition of textual passages for prayers and lections. The lections of the night office are many and long, and breviaries are thus very bulky, often divided into two or more volumes.

Distinction between secular and monastic use can be made on the same basis as that described above (see **antiphoner**).

Chant pieces, italicized above in the description of the antiphoner, may or may not have musical notation. There are many non-notated breviaries. (Be sure to note, as many do not, whether a breviary bears musical notation or not).

Feasts are arranged in liturgical order throughout the year, each feast preceded by an identifying rubric. In some cases the proper of the time (*temporale*) and the proper of the saints (*sanctorale*) are in separate volumes. Elsewhere the sanctorale may be divided into two sections, inserted after Christmas and after the Sundays after Pentecost, or alternated with the temporale in smaller sections. (Note that St. Stephen (Dec. 26), St. John (Dec. 27), and the Holy Innocents (Dec. 27), by tradition appear in the temporale, not the sanctorale).

A special subset of the non-notated breviary is the **liber horarum**, or book of hours. This consists of a limited number of complete offices, normally for each day of the week and normally of secular cursus. The offices themselves are complete with antiphons, prayers, and lections. Such books are often very highly decorated.

Other liturgical books occasionally encountered:

(Note: these collections are often parts of larger volumes)

Rituale: a priest's manual for ceremonies: baptism, marriage, burial, etc.

Collectar: prayers said at office and/or mass

Martyrology: brief commemorations of saints to be commemorated on a certain day, in calendar order. Normally read at chapter or in refectory.

Ordinale, liber ordinarius: description of the liturgy and ceremonies of a particular church

III. Identification by specific musical contents

To check the accuracy of identifications using the method above, or to identify a manuscript or fragment by specific musical contents, it may be sufficient to identify one or more musical pieces and see whether they are standard elements in the known repertory of liturgical song.

Identify the beginning of a chant text, and look it up in one of the following standard sources. Where the genre of the chant is labeled (introduction, antiphon, responsory, etc.) it will be easier to go to the right source.

Liber usualis, or some other modern chant source. These have indices by genre, and are most useful for chants of the mass (introduction, gradual, Alleluia, offertory, communion). If you find your text in the printed book, compare the music to see that it corresponds. If so, you will probably find that the pieces on either side also correspond to a great degree. You probably are dealing with a gradual or a (noted) missal. Further refinements can be begun by comparing facsimiles of graduals and notated missals. If your chant piece, which you believe to be a mass chant, is not readily found in a modern chant book, check some medieval facsimiles (*Graduale sarisburiense*, relevant volumes of *Paléographie musicale*—vols. 10, 11, 13, 15, etc.).

Hesbert, *Antiphonale missarum sextuplex*. Volumes 3-4 are an edition of the chant texts of six early and important antiphoners. If your chant is an antiphon or a responsory, and if its text matches one in CAO of the same genre, you probably are dealing with an antiphoner or a breviary. You might then seek your piece in accessible facsimiles of chant books (*Paléographie musicale* volumes 9, 12, 22; *Antiphonale sarisburiense*) to see whether the music corresponds. Note that the ordering of chant pieces in the office is much less regular than in the mass.

If you don't know the genre of your chant piece, and if you think its text is or may be biblical, consult Marbach, *Carmina scripturarum*, which can tell you what biblical texts are used in the liturgy for which genres. Then proceed as above.

Texts found in none of these sources may have special problems and opportunities.

IV. Very basic dating information for chant sources

Most manuscripts and fragments will be from the later middle ages, and will need to be dated on the basis of script, decoration, content, as well as the style of the musical notation. Very basic guidelines for notation are the following:

Musical notation with no staff-lines or guidelines, and no clefs: 9th-11th century (note that some German sources continue this style of notation very late).

Musical notation with one or two colored lines, notation other than square: 11th-early 13th century

Musical notation on four lines, colored or not: 13th century and later. Most such MSS will have notation that looks like squares with a few lozenges (France, Spain, Italy, England); but in the east: Germany, Hungary, etc. there are various "Gothic" notations.