

# A Text as a Set of Research Data. A Number of Aspects of Data Acquisition and Creation of Datasets in Neo-Latin Studies

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## Abstract

In this paper, the authors, who specialise in part in neo-Latin studies and the history of early modern education, share their experiences of collecting sources for Open Research Data sets under the Bridge of Data project. On the basis of inscription texts from St. Mary's Church in Gdańsk, they created 29 Open Research Data sets. In turn, the text of the lectures of the Gdańsk scholar Michael Christoph Hanow, *Praecepta de arte disputandi* (Recommendations on the art of discussion) written in 1754 and a series of 17th-century syllabuses from classes at the Gdańsk Academic Gymnasium became the core of two other Open Research Data collections. The article discusses: the authors' approach towards the text (this approach primarily takes into account the traditionally understood philological research paradigm), and then the method of obtaining data from church (church parish) or state institutions (Polish Academy of Sciences Gdańsk Library). In the authors' opinion, the issue to which they devote the most attention is also operations on the original text, i.e. transcribing the original record into a character that a modern recipient of Latin texts can expect – both an amateur of history or old literature, as well as a professional researcher of the history and writings of the early modern period.

**Keywords:** Neo-Latin studies, inscriptions, Academic Gymnasium in Gdańsk, research dataset, transcription, data acquisition, St. Mary's Church in Gdańsk; epigraphy

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Under the Bridge of Data project, we have prepared<sup>2</sup> twenty-nine datasets based on the texts of inscriptions from St. Mary's Church in Gdańsk (e.g. Kotłowski and Starek, 2019.; Starek and Kotłowski, 2019). Under the same project, we have prepared two datasets containing texts from sources printed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and from handwritten sources created a century later (Pokrzywnicki, 2019; Pokrzywnicki, 2020). The printed sources involved syllabuses for lessons in Gdańsk Academic Gymnasium, bound together with other prints in a volume with the following reference number: Ma3920 8o (Oelhaf et al., 1645–1653). The handwritten source text, on the other hand, is a transcript of lectures on the theoretical foundations of the discussion. These lectures series' title in Latin is: *Praecepta de arte disputandi*. In 1754, they were delivered at Gdańsk Academic Gymnasium by Michael Christoph Hanow (1695–1773) – a versatile scholar who held the position of a professor of philosophy at this school for many years (Hanow, 1754).

Since the title of our article quotes the text as the main element of the dataset, we deem it appropriate to provide a brief explanation of our approach to the texts and why we used this type of methodology. We will not, however, try to define the term “text”. Anyone interested in the subject should refer to the definitions provided in dictionaries (e.g. Cluysenaar, 2006). Further, we would like to describe how we acquire old Latin texts. We also feel it is necessary to touch on the issue of text transcription, that is, transferring the text from the source to a more accessible medium (for on-line research datasets, it is obviously an electronic file). This is because the transcription procedure directly affects the form of the record.

Let us start with stating the following: in our daily research and academic work, we do not focus on theoretical reflection. However, and it must be clearly emphasised, we are far from belittling the importance of newer formal or functional text analysis (for an account of some contemporary textological research, see, e.g. Bartmiński and Niebrzegowska, 2012, pp. 7–10). As a general rule, we act as practising text analysts. Sometimes, we also move towards descriptive textology. We do so while interpreting a text and place it within a specific literary, historical and social context. We are, however, most interested in the coherence of lexis and syntax: our analysis primarily boils down to organising and verifying the Latin text in these two aspects. The text we are analysing should, as we assume, become understandable for the users of Latin. However, it is necessary to provide a translation (in this case, a translation into Polish) for people who, for various reasons, are not going to use the Latin original. The quality of the translation also depends on the ordering of the lexis and the syntax of the text. Only with a properly reconstructed text are we able to effectively recognise the meanings conveyed in the Latin-language source text. It follows from the above considerations that we act in accordance with the editorial tradition of classical philology, using the tools or procedures that are needed in order to reconstruct a multidimensional text, in line with the origin of the word ‘text’, which

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<sup>2</sup> In the paper, the plural form is always used. However, we would like to clarify that the research datasets with inscription texts were prepared by Elżbieta Starek and Grzegorz Kotłowski. Two other datasets with the texts created by the teachers of Gdańsk Academic Gymnasium were prepared by Jacek Pokrzywnicki.

derives from ‘texere’ – “weave a fabric”, but which, in ancient times, was also used to describe the literary texture, or style (Quintilianus, 1996, pp. 514–515).

## Extracting texts for research datasets

Preparing research datasets always starts with the acquisition of the text. It should also be taken into account that the texts we work on while preparing a dataset or while doing any research are not physically available to us: they were created several hundred years ago and for that reason, they are quite unique. Moreover, the origin of these texts is also, as is the case with the inscriptions, related to religious activities.

Working with inscriptions not only makes it necessary to visit the interior of the church, but also to establish contact with those officially responsible for the building. In the Polish reality, the person who can grant permission to work inside a church is usually the pastor of the parish administering the church. In our practice, although not with published datasets, we also had to negotiate for consent to work in the church interior with competent representatives of religious communities. This happened when the church with the inscriptions of interest to us was administered by a community of this type (e.g. the Church of St. Trinity in Gdańsk).

The contract, usually a verbal one, provides for the time and scope of works that we anticipate to carry out in the church’s interior. Since the in situ works mainly consist in making a preliminary version of the inscription reading and preparing appropriate photographic records of the inscription, it is important to schedule the works with the person administering the temple. The point is that the works that sometimes require a certain reorganisation of the church space (e.g. moving some movable elements of the interior) should not disrupt the religious activities within the church.

In the case of handwritten or printed texts dated before 1801 (the so-called old prints), the procedure is rather formalised. Trying to access the texts from these two groups, we follow the recommendations of the libraries. The rules governing access to unique collections are formulated in a generally similar way by various libraries – not only in the territory of the Republic of Poland; it is necessary to obtain a reader’s card or to present an ID document (which involves providing our own personal data), to fill in a special declaration indicating the purpose for which you are applying for access to the collections (usually research) or to supply recommendations from a person with extensive research experience (Michalska, 2019, pp. 108–110). The institution with the largest collection of early printed books and manuscripts about old Gdańsk is the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Gdańsk Library. The terms and conditions of using this library’s old collections provide for all of the above-mentioned methods of verifying the person attempting to access the collections (Polska Akademia Nauk Biblioteka Gdańska, 2019a).

Usually, however, the use of unique datasets is subject to further restrictions. The libraries with the collections of manuscripts and old prints recommend that readers should work with microfilms or scans of ordered prints or manuscripts if these institutions have such substitutes within their collections. However, working with the research datasets, we assumed that the data constituting the dataset would be totally generated in



an independent manner, i.e. without the use of substitutes offered by the Polish Academy of Sciences Gdańsk Library. We signaled our wish to create our own photographic documentation that would then be included in the planned datasets, in the official correspondence with the Special Collections Department of the Polish Academy of Sciences Gdańsk Library. The director of this unit agreed in a formal letter “for the use of [...] digital copies of the resources originating from the Gdańsk Library, or fragments thereof, as illustrative material” (Polska Akademia Nauk Biblioteka Gdańska, 2019b). This library, acting in accordance with internal regulations, also granted a non-exclusive license for an indefinite term, for the following fields of exploitation:

- recording and reproduction, production of copies of reproductions using a specific technique, including printing, reprographic and digital techniques;
- uploading objects and parts thereof into computer memory;
- disseminating the objects on the Bridge of Data project website, specifying the place of storage for such objects;
- use of the objects in informational texts, as part of advertising or press publications (Polska Akademia Nauk Biblioteka Gdańska, 2019b).

The Polish Academy of Sciences Gdańsk Library, in all of the above-mentioned circumstances, recommended informing that original sources, i.e. photographed manuscripts and printed texts, are stored in the library’s collection (Polska Akademia Nauk Biblioteka Gdańska, 2019b).

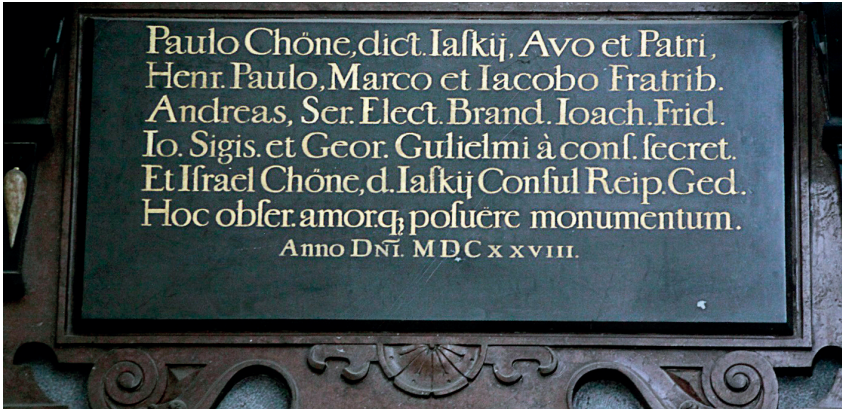
### **Certain operations on the texts located in research datasets – text retrieval and transcription**

One of the important components of the research datasets prepared by us are files with transcribed texts. The transcription process implies several changes to the original record. It should now be emphasised that the assumptions made for the transcription of the inscriptions differ from the assumptions used when transcribing manuscripts and old prints. The transcription of inscriptions was fully formalised and settled. This is due to the fact that all of the transcripts we have included in the datasets were published beforehand (see: Kotłowski and Starek, 2014). On the other hand, the transcriptions of Michael Christoph Hanow’s *De arte disputandi* lectures (Hanow, 1754) and the syllabuses of classes at the Gdańsk Academic Gymnasium (Oelhaf et al., 1645–1653) were prepared as part of the datasets and we do not treat them as definitive. Such a suggestion was proposed in the description of the dataset containing the text by Michael Christoph Hanow (see introductory remarks in: Pokrzywnicki, 2019).

What does the transcription we use in all of the inscriptions from St. Mary’s Church in Gdańsk look like? It must be said right away that we did not fully apply the principles developed by the historians analysing the inscriptions (for the principles, see: Szymański and Trelińska, 2003). We assumed that the inscriptions we publish are to be readable not only by specialists who usually transcribe inscriptions without deciphering any abbreviations (see e.g.: Grześkowiak-Krwawicz and Szyszkiewicz, 1988). We tried to reproduce



the Latin text as accurately as possible. That is why we have deciphered all of the abbreviations. We have maintained uppercase and lowercase letters; we also tried to keep the same word order in individual lines. This was the case, for example, in the epitaph of the Choene-Jaski family (Kotłowski and Starek, 2020. DOI: 10.34808/03by-1j90). The photograph, which was also included in the research dataset (see Fig. 5.1), clearly shows that all lines start equally from the left side.



**Fig. 5.1.** Inscription from the epitaph of the Choene-Jaski family |  
(photographer: Lucyna Lewandowska)

Despite the abbreviations used, the inscription does not form a compact column. In our transcription, the deciphered abbreviations completely disturbed the original column composition. That is why we decided to propose a centered composition.

Paulo Chöne, dict(o) Iaskii, Avo et Patri,  
Henr(ico), Paulo, Marco et Iacobo Fratrib(us)  
Andreas, Ser(enissimorum) Elect(orum) Brand(enburgensium) Ioach(imi) Frid(eric),  
Io(annis) Sigis(mundi) et Geor(gii) Gulielmi a cons(iliis) secret(iis)  
Et Israel Chöne, d(ictus) Iaskii, Consul Reip(ublicae) Ged(anensis)  
Hoc obser(vantiae) amor(is)q(ue) posuere monumentum  
Anno D(OMI)NI MDCXXXVIII.

[Paul Chöne a.k.a. Jaski, grandfather and father, brothers Henry, Paul, Mark and Jakob, Andrew, secret counselor of the brightest electors of Brandenburg, Joachim III Frederick, John III Sigismund and George Wilhelm I, and Izrael Chöne called Jaski, councilor of the city of Gdańsk, erected this monument of honor and love in 1628]

Note the abbreviations with a full stop. We were always deciphering them. For example, in the first line, the third word “dict(o)” (original: dict.), in the second line, the first “Henr(ico)” (originally: Henr.), and in the sixth – “Fratrib(us)” (originally: Fratrib.), etc. What may not always be the case, we also solved the popular abbreviation for the enclitic ‘que’ (this is the case in the sixth line, where in the original, along with an additional abbreviation for the word ‘amor(is)’, we read: amorq;). The same applies to another com-



mon abbreviation in the word “D(omi)NI” (in the original: “DNI” with the sign ‘-’ above the letters ‘NI’). However, we left the full stops if they appeared between words.

The transcription of the inscription on the sepulchral plate of Thomas Tympfius (see also Fig. 5.2–5.3 and Starek and Kotłowski, 2020l) indicates, in turn, how we tried to maintain the original size of the letters:

TYMPFIUS hic terra vitalis ubi aura recedet  
 Ossa gelata dari vult reditura sciens.  
 Euro flante plagis e quat(t)uor, ossa reviset  
 Et feret ad coelos aura calorq(ue) redux.  
 Ante DiEM CVrans, en! fVnera na(m) bene VIVIIt  
 Na(m) parat, et Late et possIt obIre bene.

[Believing in the resurrection, Tympfius wants to lay his bones here when the soul leaves the earth. He will see the bones again when the wind blows from all four corners of the world, and the breath and warmth returned will lift them to heaven. Because caring for the funeral during his lifetime, he lives well, he prepares himself so that he can die well.]

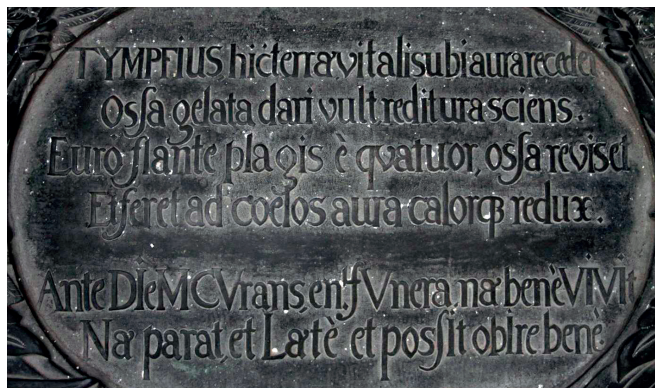


Fig. 5.2. Inscription on the sepulchral plate of Thomas Tympfius  
 (photographer: Lucyna Lewandowska)

This poetic inscription is provided with a chronogram (fifth and sixth lines). In order to reflect the presence of a chronogram in the transcription indicating the date of the inscription, it was necessary to leave capital letters. We also found it necessary to keep the letter ‘V’ for the Roman numeral ‘five’. This letter in other words, for example in the “quattuor” in the fourth line, has been transcribed as ‘u’.

Finally, let us add that we deciphered conventional abbreviations using widely available dictionaries of abbreviations in ancient Latin inscriptions (e.g. Cappelli, 1995; Węcowski, 2010; Winiarczyk, 1995; Kloos, 1973, pp. 111–125).

In the transcription of the manuscript (*Praecepta de arte disputandi* by Michael Christoph Hanow) and of the old prints (syllabuses from the Academic Gymnasium in Gdańsk), we applied a number of principles that partially (e.g. in terms of spelling) comply with the instructions of the international Latinist society *Academia Latinitati*

Fovendae (see: Sallmann, 1992), for the purposes of research datasets. At the same time, they fail to follow the rules of the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (II, Manuzio and I, 1566; Lipsius et al., 1660; Manuzio, Manuzio and Keller, 1738). Why such difference? Well, both of the above-mentioned datasets do not contain texts that are fully prepared for publication. Rather, they should be treated as a preliminary analysis of a text extracted from old sources. In these transcripts, we simply introduced a series of solutions, developed within our own research practice. Below are some examples of such solutions.



Fig. 5.3. Inscription dedicated to Thomas Tympius – right in the centre of the sepulchral plate of the Zimmerman family (photographer: Lucyna Lewandowska)

## Capital letters

First of all, we avoided capital letters at the beginning of words. The decision to eliminate the excess of capital letters appeared to be the right one, because in early modern Latin texts, there are no clearly defined rules on this matter. Therefore, whoever decides to transcribe a Latin text is forced to make their own decisions: when to start a word with a capital letter, and when to start with a lower case. It is irrelevant whether we are dealing with a manuscript or a printed text (the former is usually more flexible in terms of spelling).

In any case, we tried to use the commonly accepted recommendations for the use of a capital letter at the beginning of a word. Therefore, we left or used a capital letter:

- in a word that starts a new sentence
- in proper nouns
- in words derived from proper nouns (adjectives and adverbs)
- in titles (including modified and abbreviated) of literary works
- in common words that indicate a specific thing or person, e.g. Salvator – Savior, i.e. JCH; Christmas holidays – Natalitia Christi



## Abbreviations

Wherever possible, we deciphered conventional abbreviations. Such a procedure allows for comparing the understanding of a shortened word proposed in the transcription and the original notation of this abbreviation,

for example:

“[Daniel Lagus] [...] continuabit [...] analysin Testam[enti] Novi [...]”

[Daniel Lagus] [...] will [...] continue to comment on [Greek excerpts] from the New Testament] (See: 106, fol [buntur verso] and IMG\_3569 in Pokrzywnicki, 2020: DOI: 10.34808/823g-1y16), and:

“P[relo] P[ublico] Dominica I Adventus Christi”

[From the official printing house [Gdańsk City Council] on the first Sunday of Advent] (see: 108, fol [A1 verso] / quam, IMG\_3577 Pokrzywnicki, 2020. DOI: 10.34808/823g-1y16), or:

“S.S. – sacrosancta theologia, Trinitas” [the most holy theology, the Trinity (see: 108, fol [A1 verso] / quam, IMG\_3577 Pokrzywnicki, 2020. DOI: 10.34808/823g-1y16).

### Numerals

We left ordinal numbers in the Roman system when they meant:

- a number / part of a literary work,

for example:

“[...] impraesentiarum pollicetur certo se (si Deus robor corporis et artuum concesserit) librum III et IV Institutionum semestris spatio methodo solita absoluturum”.

[Now [Peter Oelhaf] promises that in this semester he is certainly going to finish explaining, as he has done so far, the third and fourth Institutiones, if God gives strength to his body and its [sc. body] members] (see: 106, fol. A2 [verso] / maiora, IMG\_3567 in Pokrzywnicki, 2020. DOI: 10.34808/823g-1y16), or:

“Absolvi tamen [1] de Deo Trinuno, [2] de peccato originis, cum quo propter materiam cognatam articulum XVIII de libero arbitrio et XIX de causa peccati coniunxi [...]”.

[“But I finished 1) On Triune God, 2) On the origin of sin, and with him – because of the thematic relationship – article 18, On free will, and added [article] nineteen On the cause of sin [...]” (see: 109, fol. A2 [recto] / sterio, IMG\_3585.JPG109, fol. A2 [recto] / sterio, IMG\_3585.JPG in Pokrzywnicki, 2020. DOI: 10.34808/823g-1y16).

- numerals accompanying the names of sovereigns,

for example:

“Historias a Friderici I usque ad nostra tempora chronologice et politice pertexturus” [“[Peter Oelhaf] is going to start with a history lecture (from Frederick I to our times)”] (see: 106, fol. A2 [verso] / maiora, IMG\_3567 in Pokrzywnicki, 2020. DOI: 10.34808/823g-1y16).





## Spelling

We have changed the original spelling, using the currently used Latin dictionaries. They are popular reference dictionaries available on-line (see: Gaffiot, 1934; Georges, 1879–1880; Lewis, 1987) and in hard copy version (see: Glare, 2004; Korpanty, Bobrowski and Brodka, 2001–2003).

## For example

- elimination of diphthongs: “ceptarum” instead of “caeptarum” (see: IMG\_3567, page A2 [verso] / maiora in Pokrzywnicki, 2020. DOI: 10.34808/823g-1y16)
- elimination of the letter j: “iuris” instead of “juris” (see: IMG\_3567, page A2 [verso] / maiora] in Pokrzywnicki, 2020. DOI: 10.34808/823g-1y16)
- elimination of letters not falling within the classic set of 24 Latin letters, e.g. “Oelchafius” instead of “Ölchafius” (see: 107, fol. nimi-, IMG\_3573 in Pokrzywnicki, 2020. DOI: 10.34808/823g-1y16)

## Punctuation

We resigned from the rhetorical punctuation, which takes into account such elements of an extended complex sentence, called period in rhetoric, such as colon (membrum in Latin) and komma (incisum in Latin). Instead, we introduced punctuation marks in a manner similar to the rules applicable in Polish. However, we also assumed that the potential user of the dataset would be able to change the punctuation in the most appropriate way in his or her opinion. In any case, the Societas Latinitati Provehendae instruction, cited earlier, recommends not to overuse punctuation marks (see: Sallmann, 1992, 447, 455).

## Conclusions

All of the examples presented above show how extensive are the activities of the creator of Open Research Data sets. It is possible to freely shape the content of the dataset, which must first be acquired, following the rules imposed by the persons or by the institutions storing the original source material. It is obvious: when deciding what should be found in such a set, individual research preferences are important. The creator of datasets with a background in classical philology (or neo-Latin studies) will be primarily interested in reading and presenting a text that will seem understandable to all potential recipients. Rather, it is the text files that will form the backbone of such an open dataset. These files can appear within the set individually. However, the combined formula seems to be better, where next to the text file with the transcription of the source text there is a photograph of that source. In the case of little-known languages – Latin is certainly one of these today – you should also consider introducing text files with translations. This applies especially to those texts that, according to the creator or authors of the open dataset, could be useful for people who do not know the source language. This group of texts



includes inscriptions. After all, they are clearly present in the public space and, if only for this reason, they may interest people who do not have appropriate linguistic skills. More specialised texts – and we consider syllabuses or lecture notes as such – do not (rather) require translation. People interested in obtaining this type of textual data will probably have an appropriate linguistic background. These advanced users of datasets will probably also be willing to modify the acquired data according to their own research methodologies. Such an operation seems even desirable: the research dataset should not only serve its creator.

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