



Decretum mnemonic poem

This transcript is a mnemonic poem in hexameters, as found in Berlin, *SBPK 462*, fol. 184r, created to facilitate the memorization of the number of *causae* and *quaestiones* contained in the second section of the *Decretum Gratiani*. The number and order of the poem's words reflect those of the *causae* of the *Decretum* (36) and the letters composing each word are said to correspond to the number of *quaestiones* included in each *causa* – i.e. the first word has seven letters as the first *causa* has seven *quaestiones*.

The scribe – apparently a fifteenth-century hand – noted the number of letters above each word, with some exceptions. While the number of words (36) corresponds to the number of *causae* contained in the second section of the *Decretum*, there are some mismatches in the number of letters (*quaestiones*), as specified in the footnotes.

In 1911, German author Victor Scholderer, based on the analysis of the anonymous fifteenth-century work *Modus legendi abbreviaturas in utroque iure*, discovered an acrostic at the beginning of the section *De decreto versificato*, which contains the name of the author:

Wernherus monstrat ut sic distinctio fiat

Sancti Germani Spiraee canonicus

Cuius erat patria Schussenrieth in Swevia

Discere causarum quarumlibet ordine membra...

Scholderer did not realize that the fourth verse was the beginning of our mnemonic poem. [\[1\]](#)

This poem, with slight variations, is also contained in two manuscripts of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana: [Vat. Lat. 3259](#) fol. 224v (13th c.) and [Ros. 307](#) (14th c.). In the latter, the poem is part of a *Decretum versificatum*, an in-verse abbreviation of the *Decretum Gratiani* which was intended to help to commit to memory the structure and content of all three sections of the book. The poem is transcribed on top of fol. III va, followed by an acrostic where every letter of the poem is the initial of a hexameter (fos. IIIva-IVrb).

[\[1\]](#) *The Library*, Volume s3-II, Issue 6, April 1911, Pages 181–182, <https://doi.org/10.1093/library/s3-II.6.181>

Introduction and transcription Copyright © Attilio Stella 2019.

Cite as: *Mnemonic Poem for memorising the structure of the second section of the Decretum Gratiani, as found in Berlin, SBPK 462*, transcr. Attilio Stella, in *Civil Law, Common Law, Customary Law Project Publications*, St Andrews, 2019 [<https://clime.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/online-texts/decretum-mnemonic-poem>]

Berlin, SBPK 462, fol. 184r

Infr(ascript)i sunt versus in quibus breviter continentur cause et quaestiones in causis decretorum, unde nota / quod in decretis sunt tot cause quot dictiones sunt in ipsis versibus, et tot sunt / quaestiones in ipsis causis quot sunt lit(ter)e in ipsis dictionibus, videlicet:

7	8	11	6	6					
Discere	causarum	quarumlibet	ordine	membra					
5	2	5	3	3	3	5	7		
Optas	et	docto	sic	non	sis	obses	existes	si	exstas
8	7	3	2	3	4	5	5		
Instanti	dabitur	sic ¹	tu	ius	quod	petis	illud		
7		7	3	3	2	5			
Efficies ²	et	sic ³	affatus	set ⁴	sis	ut	ipsum		
5	8	5	3	10	2				
Versu ⁵	doctrina	tutum	set ⁶	constituas	te.				

¹ Causa XVIII has four and not three *quaestiones*.

² Causa XXIII has eight and not seven *quaestiones*, but the correct Latin form 'efficies' would match.

³ Causae XXIV and XXV have respectively three and two *quaestiones* – maybe the scribe reversed these two words in the hexameter?

⁴ Causa XXVII has two *quaestiones* and not three.

⁵ Causa XXXI has three *quaestiones* and not five.

⁶ Causa XXXIV has two *quaestiones* and not three.

Recent Posts

[A Memoir of Susan Reynolds](#)

[Postdoctoral Appointments](#)

[The Papacy and the Norman Conquest of England](#)

Cookie preferences

@CICICI Europe

Tweet from @CLCLCL_Europe

Civil Law, Common Law, Customary Law in Europe



@CLCLCL_Europe · Sep 23

One of interest for our followers as a demonstration of the continuing importance of 12th century grants 📌

Though we feel Doncaster's appeal falls as a claim by being a grant of Stephen - Henry II would insist on the return to the situation in his grandfather's time...

Gordon McKelvie @GordoMck · Sep 22

One of the most innovative modern references to a medieval treaty. English side Doncaster City have applied for a place in the Scottish Cup #medievaltwitter dailyrecord.co.uk/sport/football...

💬 ❤️ 2

[View more on Twitter](#)

[Learn more about privacy on Twitter](#)

Funded by a European Research Council 'Advanced Grant' of €2,161,501. (Grant agreement number: 740611 CLCLCL).



European Research Council
Established by the European Commission



**University of
St Andrews**

Cookie preferences