

Manuscript shelfmarks:

A **shelfmark** is a manuscript's call number, and it has a standard form:

City, Library, MS [Fonds] Number

The **fonds** (French for “source”) is a sub-collection within a larger library collection. In practice, that is usually the name of a collection that has been absorbed into a larger collection: the name of a collector (as in the British Library's Cotton, Harley, Sloane, etc. collections) or a previous constituent library (Vatican library, Palatine library, etc., making up the modern Vatican Library.) Not all libraries have fonds.

Examples:

London, British Library, MS Harley 1775

(Harley is the fonds.)

St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, MS 1394

(No fonds; St. Gall's is a single, intact medieval library.)

Famous manuscripts also typically have nicknames. Examples:

Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat.lat. 3225

The Vatican Virgil

London, British Library, MS Harley 1775

The Harley Gospels

Dublin, Library of the Trinity College, MS 58 (A.1.6)

The Book of Kells

San Marino, The Huntington Library, MS EL 26 C 9

The Ellesmere Chaucer

Variations in shelfmark form include using Latin (“Cod.” i.e. codex for MS) and placing the “MS” after the fonds, but if you have the general idea you can make sense of most modern shelfmark usage.

Big, famous libraries are often abbreviated: BL = British Library, BAV = Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, BNF (formerly BN) = Bibliothèque nationale de France, etc.