

REFERENCE
SECTION S

FOR ITALIAN RECORDS EXTRACTION

Reference Sections

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Section A

ITALIAN HANDWRITING

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Section A

ITALIAN HANDWRITING

Because Italian and English printing are based on the Roman alphabet the handwriting in both languages tend to be very much alike. Some letters (most noticeably D, G, P, R, and S) are formed quite differently in the two languages, however. Although there is a general notion of how a "correct" letter should look, you will be confronted in your extracting by a wide range of handwriting styles for each letter of the alphabet. The following examples show some of the more common variations of the same letters you will discover in the records you will be extracting.

A		H		Q	
a		h		q	
B		I		R	
b		i		r	
C		L		S	
c		l		s	
D		M		T	
d		m		t	
E		N		U	
e		n		u	
F		O		v	
f		o		v	
G		P		Z	
g		p		z	

Whenever you are faced with difficult handwriting styles, it is a good idea to copy new examples of letters beside the examples above.

You may wish to add blank pages to your notebook so that you can copy entire words for further reference. These will be helpful for later comparisons when you find similar words that you can't read. The following is an example of this technique.

Compare the A and a in *Angela* with the letters in the second name.

The image shows two words written in cursive. The first word is 'Angela' and the second word is 'Archangelo'. The letters in 'Archangelo' are written in a style that is difficult to decipher, but the 'A' and 'a' are clearly visible and match the ones in 'Angela'.

Perhaps you can make out the letters **ngle** in the second name, but can't make out the rest of the word. By comparing the two you will discover that the second name is **Archangelo**.

The letters **J, K, W, X, and Y** appear in the Italian alphabet, but are used mainly in foreign words adopted into the Italian vocabulary. Examples: *jazz, kilogramme, water-polo, xilofono, yacht*. The letter **j**, as used in older texts, had an "i" sound and was often used in place of a double **i**.

ELEMENTS OF HANDWRITING STYLE

Minims. The up and down strokes of letters are called "minims." The letters **e, i, m, n, u, v, and w** are composed mostly of minims. When a word has two or more of these letters in a row, the letters can be hard to identify, as is the case in this word:

The image shows the word 'Armenante' written in cursive. The letters 'e', 'i', 'm', 'n', 'u', 'v', and 'w' are composed of minims, making the word difficult to read.

You can decipher many words from the context or format of the record, but you may have to count the strokes in personal names and compare the letters with other words written by the same person. You might also have to compare the name with other names within the same or other records before you can determine the correct spelling.

Linking strokes. The small U-shaped strokes which connect minims in letters and connect the letters within the word are called "linking strokes." Many Italian scribes, however did not link their letters as we do today with the bottom U-shaped stroke at the foot of the letters. Instead they used an overhead stroke: . This stroke is frequently encountered in the older records. A scribe may have linked **Ls** at the top or crossed **Ds** or **Ts** and continued into the next letter from the crossbar as shown in the examples below.

The image shows four words written in cursive: 'Vilico', 'Vastaio', 'di', and 'Perano'. The words are written in a style that uses linking strokes, which are small U-shaped strokes that connect the letters within the word.

Capitalization. Standardized capitalization was not applied until the 1900s. Even today many differences remain. For example, the names of the month are not usually capitalized as they are in English. In the older records, capitalization could be used anywhere in a sentence or word, as in the name Migelangelo, below.

migelangelo

Don't depend on capitalization as a clue in establishing the first word in a sentence or a proper name.

Ending letters. Vowels at the end of words can be very helpful to the extractor. An *i*, for example, is used to indicate that a noun is plural. A noun ending with *a* is feminine; one ending with *o* is masculine. (You will find more information about determining the gender of individuals in the reference section, "Name Identification and Gender" beginning on page xx.)

Alternating vowel and consonant sounds. The musical quality of Italian is caused by a regular vowel-consonant interchange. You will sometimes be able to predict what a letter will be because vowel sounds and consonant sounds are normally alternated--as in the name *Domenico*. Even when there are double consonants as in *Rossa*, blends as in *Angelo*, and diphthongs as in *Maria*, you will still find it helpful to observe the regular way consonant and vowel sounds are alternated in Italian.

Diacritical marks. In Italian the only diacritical mark used is the "grave accent" (`) which is placed over vowels to indicate stress in the pronunciation, as with the word *Carità* (charity). Diacritical marks from the very early records will clearly reflect a Latin influence. (To review Latin diacritical marks, please refer to the Latin Extraction Manual.)

Sample given names. Here are some of the more common given names and their transcriptions.

<i>Felice</i>	Felice	<i>Carolina</i>	Carolina
<i>Giodechino</i>	Giodechino	<i>Michele</i>	Michele
<i>Lucrezia</i>	Lucrezia	<i>Arcangelo</i>	Arcangelo
<i>Maria</i>	Maria	<i>Antonio</i>	Antonio
<i>Teresa</i>	Teresa	<i>Luigi</i>	Luigi
<i>Eugenio</i>	Eugenio	<i>Michelangelo</i>	Michealangelo
<i>Saverio</i>	Saverio	<i>Rachela</i>	Rachela
<i>Andrea</i>	Andrea	<i>Angela</i>	Angela
<i>Vitagliano</i>	Vitagliano	<i>Rosa</i>	Rosa
<i>Aniello</i>	Aniello	<i>Mariano</i>	Mariano
<i>Nunzia</i>	Nunzia	<i>Angiola</i>	Angiola
<i>Domenico</i>	Domenico	<i>Raffaele</i>	Raffaele
<i>Giuseppe</i>	Giuseppe	<i>Carmela</i>	Carmela
<i>Pietro</i>	Pietro	<i>Innocenzio</i>	Innocenzio
<i>Ferdinando</i>	Ferdinando	<i>Gesuele</i>	Gesuele
<i>Angelo</i>	Angelo	<i>Nicola</i>	Nicola

ABBREVIATIONS

In the 1800s, parish and civil registers were written with quill pens which were very difficult to use, even on the preprinted pages of civil registers. Also, because, paper was expensive, scribes charged for each sheet used in completing a document. Abbreviations, therefore, were quite common. Although it was not until the 1900s that abbreviations were standardized, you will soon learn to anticipate the words that are abbreviated as you become familiar with the forms.

Raised letters. One common form of abbreviation was to indicate that letters within a word or name were omitted by placing one or more raised letters at the end of a word, sometimes with a period beneath or slightly to the right of the raised letters.

Giuⁱ = Giuseppi Cu^o = Curato

You need to be aware, however, that you will occasionally come across raised letters when no abbreviation is intended.

Contractions. The most common method of abbreviating words was to omit letters from a word that was frequently used or easily recognized.

qta = questa

Period. The period is used in Italian as it is in English to designate a contraction.

Sig. = Signor N. = Numero

Flourish. A contraction may also be indicated by a flourish or an unusual short upward stroke at the end of the abbreviation or in the area of omitted letters.

 = Giovanni

Mark above letter. A short stroke was sometimes placed above an **m** or **n** to indicate that a second **m** or **n** had been omitted.



One of the oldest and most frequently used marks indicating contractions was a crescent with a dot above the word: .



Elisions. An Elision is the use of an apostrophe (') between two words when the first ends and the second begins with a vowel. The most frequent omissions are the letter *i* from *di* and the letter *a* from *la* before words beginning with a vowel. Examples:

di Amore becomes *d'Amore*
di Albergo becomes *d'Albergo*
dalla Oca becomes *dall'Oca*
le Alpi becomes *l'Alpi*
la Agricola becomes *l'Agricola*

Some scribes failed to include the apostrophe and wrote the contractions as a single word.

Months of the year. The last four months of the year are frequently abbreviated using the numbers 7 (*sette*), 8 (*otto*), 9 (*nove*), and 10 (*dieci*). This was a carry over from the Julian calendar. Because the sound of the numbers corresponded with the names of the months, scribes often abbreviated the months by using the numbers:

7bre = *Settembre*
8bre = *Ottobre*
9bre = *Novembre*
10bre = *Decembre*

The character †. A symbol representing the Cross (†) was often used as an abbreviation for Christ.

† foro = Christoforo † tina = Christina

Double letters. Double letters were sometimes employed for godparents or grandparents.

PP = *padrinos* godparents
AP = *avi paterni* paternal grandparents
AM = *avi materni* maternal grandparents

BREVIGRAPHS

In the earlier records you may encounter unusual letters and symbols in the text. Many of the officiating agents and scribes had originally been trained in Latin and used a form of symbols called **brevigraphs** in their writing. This was a unique shorthand system which allowed scribes to speed up the writing process. For example, a horizontal bar through an otherwise uncrossed letter meant that it was an abbreviation: \bar{D} .

There were other symbols that, when combined with the first letter of a word, became its abbreviation. The following are Latin words which frequently appear in Italian records.

\bar{P} \bar{P} \bar{P}	<i>par, per</i> <i>por, pra</i>	\bar{q} \bar{q}	<i>quem</i>
\bar{p} \bar{p}	<i>prae</i>	\bar{n}	<i>non</i>
\bar{p} \bar{p}	<i>pro</i>	\bar{n}	<i>neque</i>
\bar{q}	<i>quod</i>	\bar{v}	<i>videlicet</i>
\bar{q} :	<i>quae</i>	\bar{v} \bar{v}	<i>vir, vri</i>
\bar{q}	<i>qua</i>	\bar{e} \bar{e}	<i>em, en</i>
\bar{q} \bar{q}	<i>quia</i>	\bar{c} \bar{c}	<i>cur</i>
\bar{b} \bar{b}	<i>bar, ber, bre, bir</i>		

These three symbols frequently replaced words in the records:

$\bar{=}$	<i>et</i>	\bar{e}	<i>est</i>	$\bar{7}$	<i>esse</i>
\bar{G} \bar{G}	<i>con, cum, cun</i>				

Symbols were sometimes used to represent the days of the week:

SYMBOL	HEAVENLY BODY REPRESENTED	DAY OF WEEK	ENGLISH TRANSLANTION
☉	<i>Solis</i>	<i>La Domenica</i>	Sunday
☾	<i>Lunae</i>	<i>Il Lunedì</i>	Monday
♂	<i>Martis</i>	<i>Il Martedì</i>	Tuesday
♀	<i>Mercurii</i>	<i>Il Mercoledì</i>	Wednesday
♃	<i>Jovi</i>	<i>Il Giovedì</i>	Thursday
♀	<i>Veneris</i>	<i>Il Venerdì</i>	Friday
♄	<i>Saturni</i>	<i>Il Sabato</i>	Saturday

Symbols were also used to describe the conditions and events of an individual's life:

♄	Birth	+ †	♄	Death
⊙	Married	⊙ ⊙		Divorced
♂	Man	♀		Woman
⋈	Christened			

The brevigraphs shown above are the symbols you will encounter most frequently in Italian records. Additional symbols which were occasionally used are presented in the *Latin Extraction Manual*.

PRONUNCIATION ISSUES

Variations in spelling. Because some letters have similar sounds they were frequently interchanged:

GLI <--> LL	<i>figlio</i> <--> <i>fillio</i>
TH <--> T	<i>Catherina</i> <--> <i>Caterina</i>
PH <--> F	<i>Phelipe</i> <--> <i>Felipe</i>
Z <--> S	<i>Roza</i> <--> <i>Rosa</i>
J <--> G	<i>Jesù</i> <--> <i>Gesù</i>

If you cannot recognize a word, try sounding it out or exchanging similar-sounding letters to identify the word.

Double consonants. Sometimes one of the double letters in a word was omitted. Since words with double consonants have a slightly different meaning from words with single consonants, the meaning can only be established through contextual clues when one of these letters are omitted.