

The renewal of the study of liturgical sources: The unique case of the *ordo missae* in the Roman Rite

La Renovación del estudio de las fuentes litúrgicas: el caso singular del *ordo missae* en el rito romano

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RESUMEN: El estudio analiza la evolución del *ordo missae* en el rito romano, destacando la influencia de la teoría de Luykx (1955), que lo divide en tres etapas: “Apología”, “Franca” y “Renana”. Se cuestionan sus hipótesis mediante la revisión de fuentes conocidas y nuevas, revelando errores en dataciones y diversidad textual que desafía clasificaciones rígidas. La investigación propone un enfoque más flexible y contextual para comprender la transmisión litúrgica medieval. Concluye que la variedad de prácticas exige una revisión metodológica integral y comparativa.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Ordo Missae* – Rito romano – Teoría de Luykx – Fuentes litúrgicas

ABSTRACT: The study analyzes the evolution of the *ordo missae* in the Roman Rite, highlighting the influence of Luykx’s theory (1955), which divides it into three stages: “Apology,” “Frankish,” and “Rhenish.” His hypotheses are questioned through the review of known and new sources, revealing errors in dating and textual diversity that challenge rigid classifications. The research proposes a more flexible and contextual approach to understanding medieval liturgical transmission. It concludes that the variety of practices requires a comprehensive methodological and comparative revision.

KEYWORDS: *Ordo Missae* – Roman Rite – Luykx theory – Liturgical sources

In the preface to a famous work by A. Baumstark on the historical development of the liturgy, R. Taft [2011, pp. XX-XXI] stated:

Knowledge is not the accumulation of data, not even of new data, but the perception of relationships in the data, the creation of hypothetical frameworks to explain new data or to explain in new ways the old. For sources alone do not tell us how they got the way they are, nor do later ones tell us why they are not the same as earlier ones. An examination of the sources gives rise not to answers but to questions ... The problems of liturgical history are not invented by the historian.

It often happens that the same sources, when reread in a different way, with new knowledge and new interconnections, give rise to a renewed understanding of the source itself and its contents. A clear demonstration of this can be found in studies on the genesis and development of the mass ordo.

1. SUMMARY OF LUYKX'S THEORY ON THE *ORDO MISSAE*

In 1955, the Premonstratensian B. Luykx wrote an article that continues to influence the study of this liturgical genre to this day, to the point of becoming the reference work on the subject. In his text, titled *De oorsprong van het gewone der Mis*,¹ Luykx offers a periodization of the development of the *ordo missae*, structured into three fundamental stages:

- The “Apology” type
- The “Frankish” type
- The “Rhenish” type

Summarizing his reflection, we can say that the origin of this new liturgical genre can be traced to the conflict between the characteristic sobriety of the Roman Rite and the increasingly widespread religious piety of the Carolingian priests. In fact:

1. There is a German translation of this article, B. Luykx [1960], «Der Ursprung der gleichbleibenden Teile der heiligen Messe», *Liturgie und Mönchtum*, 26, pp. 72-119; a Spanish one, B. Luykx [2022], «El origen del Ordinario de la Misa (*Ordinarium Missae*)», in *Estudios sobre «Ordo Missae» medieval* (Cuadernos Phase 268), Barcelona, pp. 7-64; and an Italian one is about to be published by C. Folsom in the *Ecclesia Orans. Studi e Ricerche* series.

According to the author, the Frankish mentality of the Carolingian era was not fully aligned with the liturgy celebrated in Rome, leading priests from the northern Alps to emphasize their own piety and personal devotion; this led to the formulation of brief prayers to be interspersed during the liturgy [Tacconelli, 2025, p. 90].

The spread of these apologies, initially located in specific parts of the Eucharist and then increasingly widespread throughout the rest of the celebration, led to the creation of a true liturgical genre, defined, precisely, as *ordo missae*.

According to the author, the first type, the “Apology” one, would reflect an initial phase in which brief prayers, especially in contexts such as the offertory and communion, are inserted to express the personal piety of the priest. Later, in the “Frankish” type, a more organized and rubrical structure would have emerged, clearly observable in the 10th century *Sacramentary of Amiens*, which includes additional moments such as the preparation for the Mass and thanksgiving. Finally, the “Rhenish” type would represent the peak of this development, becoming a mature and integrated model for the Eucharistic celebration. Luykx identifies the origin of this liturgical genre in the Abbey of St. Gall, from where it would have spread throughout the Germanic area, also thanks to the transcription of manuscripts in centers such as Reichenau and Mainz.

Immediately, Luykx’s article had a significant impact, to the point that it was “elevated to the altars” right from the start by Jungmann in his canonical work *Missarum Sollemnia* [pp. 122-125], and from that moment on, his writing has remained the reference study on the *ordo missae*. Many authors began to publish and edit new sources following Luykx’s classification; however, several scholars, starting as early as 1984 [Rasmussen, p. 161], began to question some points of Luykx’s thesis, renewing the call to publish new sources and conduct further studies.

The current situation presents us with a system commonly perceived as inadequate, yet one we still cannot free ourselves from, or at least have not yet adjusted; there are, in fact, general timid partial proposals for verification [Baroffio, 1988, pp. 45-79], but there is still a lack of a comprehensive study that can offer new categories more respectful of the great variety of texts currently available.

The renewal of the study of the *ordo missae*, moreover, goes hand in hand with a general verification of the history of the Roman Rite after the milestone work of Jungmann [Parenti, 2022, pp. 282-283], but while significant steps forward have been made regarding the entrance rites [Angelucci, 2021] and the communion-conclusion rites [Celiński, 2020], the ordinary of the Mass is still awaiting a systematic revision, especially from a comparative perspective, an inseparable method for the contemporary study of *scientia liturgica*.

For the moment, as case studies to inspire methodological reflection, we would like to present some examples of verification of Luykx's hypothesis, divided according to two criteria:

- a) In-depth study of already known sources;
- b) Study of new sources.

2. VERIFICATION OF ALREADY KNOWN SOURCES

Luykx's hypothesis on the development of the "Rhenish" *ordo missae* has among its assumptions the fact that in the *Ordo Romanus X* it is stated that: «54. Tunc alius presbiter proprium repetat locum, alius autem librum episcopo porrigat atque revolvat et diaconi III^{or} in dextro III in sinistro altaris cornu consistant» [Andrieu, 1960, p. 355].

Now, according to the Premonstratensian scholar, this *librum* would be nothing more than the first testimony of a volume containing the aforementioned "Rhenish" *Ordo Missae*. However, this attribution appears forced when we take into account the fact that the text of *Ordo Romanus X* provides no indication that could link the *librum* to what Luykx hypothesizes. Alternative explanations can, in fact, be offered regarding the nature of this *librum*: it could have been one of the many prayer books circulated at the time, containing prayers and orations to be recited privately (such as, for example, the *Libellus Turonensis* [Wilmart, 1940] from the 9th century or the famous *Sacramentary of Amiens* [Taubitz, 2025] from the 10th century) or a book of an entirely different nature. Whatever explanation one chooses to provide, asserting that an example of an "organic" and liturgically used "Rhenish" *Ordo Missae* can already be found in the 10th century is a rather forced hypothesis, one that tries to read into the source information that the source itself does not provide. Therefore, in this case, until new information is discovered or a more plausible explanation is proposed that integrates all available data as much as possible, the best choice is to suspend judgment.

A second example of the renewal of already known sources concerns the dating of several manuscripts that Luykx uses as early sources of the "Rhenish" *Ordo Missae* in the context of the Abbey of St. Gall: the codices Sang. 338, 339, 340, and 354. According to paleographic research at the time of writing the article, the four manuscripts should be dated as follows:

Manuscripts	Date
Cod. Sang. 338	10 th century (older than the others)
Cod. Sang. 339	10 th century
Cod. Sang. 340	10 th century
Cod. Sang. 354	11 th century

Instead, today's renewed research studies describe the manuscripts as follows:

Manuscripts	Dates
Cod. Sang. 338	1050-1060
Cod. Sang. 339	10 th -11 th century
Cod. Sang. 340	3 rd quarter of the 11 th century
Cod. Sang. 354	11 th century

As can be seen, with the exception of Sang. 354 (which still requires further investigation, although it is quite likely to actually belong to the 11th century), the other codices have rather different datings. The most emblematic case is Sang. 338, which, instead of being the oldest, turns out to be later than Sang. 339. Meanwhile, Sang. 340 had been thought to be chronologically aligned with the other manuscripts, but in reality, it is more closely dated to the 12th century, contemporary with or possibly later than Sang. 354.

The fact that Sang. 338 was singled out as the oldest source led subsequent historiography to adopt this datum and primarily base its study of the "Rhenish" *Ordo Missae* on this source. However, current knowledge seems to suggest rather that a different order of study should be followed, starting with Sang. 339 as the foundational source for the composition of the *Ordo Missae* at St. Gall.

In this case, the historiographical renewal is not due to a new interpretation of the sources, but to a more accurate clarification of the known information.

3. STUDY OF NEW SOURCES

There are also some new sources that require proper attention and with which Luykx's hypothesis must be subjected to verification.

A modest example can be found in Cod. Fab. VII, the only manuscript containing an *Ordo Missae* that can be attributed to the "Rhenish" genre, passed down from the liturgy of the Abbey of Pfäfers. This text includes a prayer that, to this day, has not been found in any other text:

ORATIO PROPRIA SACERDOTIS. Domine sancte pater omnipotens aeternae deus qui beatum Ioseph ad hoc eligere dignatus es ut corpus unigeniti filii tui de cruce tolleret et sepeliret ne despicias me famulum tuum sacra mysteria tua indigne tractantem sed per mysterium sanctae passionis eius electorum tuorum me consortem effice ministrorum. Per eundem.

The uniqueness of this attestation leads us to consider this prayer as an original composition specific to the Abbey of Pfäfers. The question then naturally arises: should this exception be considered simply a variant within the “Rhenish” category? Certainly, a single text is not decisive enough to completely overturn a categorization, but what about when there are multiple exceptions to the point that it seems impossible to point to a source as the exemplar of the “Rhenish” *ordo missae*? This is, in fact, the situation with the sources currently available: the differences seem to outweigh the similarities, making it necessary to reconsider this category in itself.

Another example of renewal through new sources appears to be Cod. Sang. 223 (12th century), which contains an *ordo missae* that, due to its characteristics, could also be ascribed to the “Rhenish” genre; however, we are dealing with an ordinary transcribed not within a sacramentary and therefore not in a book for the altar (as in the case of the other four aforementioned manuscripts), but in a miscellany of ritual and religious texts. In this case, the difference lies not so much in the content (which does have its own peculiarities) but rather in its placement. How should we approach this information? What does this new data tell us about the use and diffusion of the “Rhenish” *ordo missae* compared to what was previously hypothesized by Luykx?

4. CLOSING REMARKS

From a historiographical perspective, this research represents an emblematic example of renewal in the study of liturgical sources. In the past, there seems to have been a tendency to classify the manuscript sources concerning the *ordo missae* rigidly, following predetermined schemes and automatically associating certain elements with specific types or geographical areas. However, contemporary findings encourage a more in-depth and nuanced analysis: each source is studied within its specific context, and local variations and individual practices are taken into account, thus reflecting a greater complexity in the transmission of texts and in the liturgy. This case study, therefore, illustrates how the interpretation of sources requires methodological flexibility and interpretative caution, allowing for the avoidance of hasty conclusions and respecting the variety of liturgical practices in the 10th-12th centuries.

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