

= Stichometry =

Stichometry refers to the practice of counting lines in texts : Ancient Greeks and Romans measured the length of their books in lines , just as modern books are measured in pages . This practice was rediscovered by German and French scholars in the 19th century . Stichos is the Greek word for a ' line ' of prose or poetry and the suffix ' -metry ' is derived from the Greek word for measurement .

The length of each line in the Iliad and Odyssey , which may have been among the first long , Greek texts written down , became the standard unit for ancient stichometry . This standard line (Normalzeile , in German) was thus as long as an epic hexameter and contained about 15 syllables or 35 Greek letters .

Stichometry existed for several reasons . Scribes were paid by the line and their fee per line was sometimes fixed by legal decree . Authors occasionally cited passages in the works of other authors by giving their approximate line number . Book buyers used total line counts to check that copied texts were complete . Library catalogs listed the total number of lines in each work along with the title and author .

Scholars believe that stichometry became established in Athens sometime during the 5th century BCE when copying prose works became common . Stichometry is mentioned briefly in Plato 's Laws (c . 347 BCE) , several times in Isocrates (early to mid @-@ 4th century) , and in Theopompus (late 4th to early 3rd century) , but these casual references suggest the practice was already routine . The same standard line was used for stichometry among the Greeks and Romans for about a thousand years until stichometry apparently fell out of use among the Byzantine Greeks in the Middle Ages as page numbers became more common .

The standard work on stichometry is Kurt Ohly 's 1928 Stichometrische Untersuchungen which collects together the results of some fifty years of scholarly debate and research . Today , stichometry plays a small but useful role in research in fields as diverse as the history of the ancient book , papyrology , and Christian hermeneutics .

= = Definitions = =

There are two kinds of stichometry . Total stichometry is the practice of reporting the total number of lines in a work . Partial stichometry is the practice of including a series of numerals in the margins of a text , usually to mark every hundredth line .

Stichometry was sometimes confused with colometry , the practice of some Christian authors in late antiquity of writing texts broken into rhetorical phrases to aid delivery . Some modern Jewish and Christian scholars use ? stichometry ? as a synonym for ? stichography , ? which is the occasional practice in ancient scriptures of laying out texts so that each biblical or poetic verse begins on a new line .

= = Evidence for Stichometry = =

The libraries of Europe contain many medieval copies of ancient Greek and Latin texts . Many of these contain short notes or ' subscriptions ' on the final page that , in hundreds of cases , give the total number of lines in the work . In texts of classical authors such as Herodotus and Demosthenes , these totals are expressed in the older , acrophonic numerals that were used in Athens during the classical period but abandoned sometime during the Hellenistic period . Thus these stichometric totals are thought to descend , along with the content of the texts , from very early editions .

Many ancient authors mention stichometry . Galen complains about the verbosity of a rival and says he can offer a description in fewer lines . In the 1st century BCE , a philosopher criticized Zeno of Citium and cited particular passages by giving their line number to the nearest hundredth line . Diogenes Laertius probably draws on the Pinakes , the published catalogue of the Library of Alexandria , when he reports the total number of lines in the oeuvres of various authors . He says , for example , that Speusippus wrote 43 @,@ 475 , Aristotle wrote 445 @,@ 270 , and Theophrastus wrote 232 @,@ 808 lines . The Cheltenham Canon lists line totals for books in the

Christian Bible and concludes with an anonymous note apparently written by a book dealer in the 4th century CE when the practice of stichometry was perhaps becoming less familiar :

Since the list of line totals [of the books in the Bible available] in the city of Rome is not reliable , and elsewhere because of greed is not complete , I have gone through each individual book , counting 16 syllables to the line (as used in Virgil) , and recorded the number for each book in all of them .

Beginning in the 19th century , archaeologists discovered a large number of more or less fragmentary Greek scrolls in Egypt . Ohly describes and analyzes some fifty papryi which provide direct , ancient evidence for total and partial stichometry .

= = The Modern Rediscovery of Stichometry = =

Friedrich Ritschl , a leading German classicist in the mid @-@ 19th century , stimulated interest in the mysterious numerals found at the end of medieval manuscripts by discussing them in several of his essays .

In an 1878 article that Ohly called ? epoch @-@ making , ? Charles Graux proved that the numerals at the end of the medieval manuscripts were proportional to the length of each work and in fact gave the total number of a fixed unit equal to a Homeric line . This discovery established the concept of the standard line .