

Three Scribes in Search of a Centre

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This paper explores scribal attitudes to normative models for scripts in the Early Middle Ages by investigating and juxtaposing the work of a scribe writing without an evident set of conventions about his alphabet with that of two scribes who altered their scripts to conform to conventions about the appropriate letter forms to be used in copying a schoolbook and a high grade liturgical manuscript. The evidence presented will suggest that when a scribe decided to change his script this could involve a complex process of exploring the morphology of written forms. The three examples are chosen to raise the issue of what a centre may have represented for a scribe: in some cases he will have chosen to try to copy the script of an exemplar, or to observe a series of conventions about the forming of letters and ligatures which he regarded as normative, but in other and methodologically more interesting cases the scribe creates a script. By addressing all three cases I hope to raise issues about the process of development of a script, and the presumed normative role of ‘centres’.

In the first instance, the Bobbio Missal (Paris, BNF, Ms. lat. 13246), the main scribe was thought by E. A. Lowe to be untrained, elderly, and working for himself¹. But recent discussion of the content of the Missal suggests that he may have been copying this book for a bishop. In that case our assumptions about scribal conventions require revision, and the case of a scribe apparently copying without any sense of a scribal model can serve as a rare instance of an extreme case of book production, and so clarify the processes involved in the development of Caroline minuscule.

In the second instance a group of books annotated and augmented by Martin of Laon shows an Irish scribe adopting the conventions of Caroline minuscule (and even using Tironian notes) so as to conform to the scribal norms in use in Francia. Other Irish scribes working in Francia kept their Irish script: Martin’s change of script shows his awareness of a ‘centre’ and of the needs of a school community.

In the third case Godeman, the scribe of the *Benedictional of St Aethelwold* (London, BL, Additional 49598) created an English version of Caroline minuscule and a Capitalis script in order to copy a luxury manuscript, clearly striving to match the highest level of book production on the continent. While we lack evidence of how he developed this script, he stands at the start of the use of Caroline minuscule in Anglo-Saxon England and raises the question of how far the master calligrapher creates a script and a centre.

This paper seeks to investigate the ways in which early medieval scribes showed that they were aware of scripts different from those in which they had been trained, and the ways in which they adapted their own practices to meet other sets of conventions about the shaping of letters. This should help us to scribal attitudes to normative models for scripts in the Early Middle Ages. I want to investigate the work of three scribes, whom I have chosen to represent three very different grades of script, and then to juxtapose the work of a scribe writing without an evident set of conventions about his alphabet with that of two scribes who altered their scripts to conform to conventions about the appropriate letter forms to be used in copying a schoolbook and a luxury manuscript. My first

¹ The Bobbio Missal was reproduced in a full black and white photographic facsimile in: *Henry Bradshaw Society* 53 (1917); *The Bobbio Missal. A Gallican Mass-Book* (MS Paris Lat. 13246). Text ed. by E. A. LOWE. *Henry Bradshaw Society* 58 (1920); Notes and Studies by A. WILMART, E. A. LOWE and H. A. WILSON. *Henry Bradshaw Society* 61 (1924).

case is the most problematic, and because of the lack of relevant comparative materials it must remain uncertain.

I

The Bobbio Missal Paris, BNF, Ms. lat. 13426 is a Gallican sacramentary with a collection of pontifical ordines. It is copied in a script which seems to defy all of our assumptions about calligraphy, indeed Armando Petrucci regarded it as an instance of the *scrittura di base*, the elementary set of letters which enabled a scribe to sign his name². But more elaborate investigation of the liturgical content of this manuscript has suggested that the book was not the work of an elderly priest in an obscure village, as Lowe had suggested, but was almost certainly made for a bishop. It includes blessings for a nun and an abbess, forms for the first and second marriage, and blessings to be said over an offering, the chalice and pattern, over an oblate, and a penitential with two accompanying prayers. No simple priest would ever have had the right to bless an abbess. The narrow oblong format would be appropriate for a man on the move. The book was copied at a date when calligraphic norms were rare, when scribes seldom mastered the penmanship required for an even and elegant uncial, and when there was a tendency to combine letterforms to create a more rapid script, but a hesitation about the status of cursive scripts as book hands to copy the main text of a volume. Can we suggest what sort of script the main scribe of the Bobbio missal was trying to write, and how far that script shows an awareness of a centre? The decoration and the range of texts show he was aware of something.

The script was analysed by Lowe³ and recently by McKitterick. The letterforms used by the main scribe comprise uncial F, G, N, and R, p with the bow resting on the line, t with the crossbar curving down to the left to meet the shaft, round backed c and c with a shoulder, minuscule s with a pronounced shoulder, very tall minuscule l, (though uncial l is also used) uncial and half-uncial a, minuscule b and B (though the uncial form seems rarer), distinctive and clumsy angular z, N with a pronounced left turn back on final stroke. The common ligatures are ae, ns, us, ur and nt. In addition c enters into ligature with following vowels and with l. The word *est* is occasionally written with an s t ligature (f. 87v). On folio 179v is a particularly minuscule page with consistent use of a half uncial a and in ad a half uncial d, though the curved uncial d is also used on this folio. It is worth exploring whether particular texts show a preponderance of uncial or half uncial letter forms: uncial s is not used for the lessons for the feast of St John the Baptist ff. 159–60.

The main scribe corrected his text using an informal cursive script with ri ligatures and open a often attached to the preceding letter, the vertical stroke of d descends below the base of the letter. Examples of his corrections are found on fol. 16r cursive correction, 35r *ageli*, 43r *licci apocalipsis sci iohannes apostoli ego iohannes fui in spiritu et vidi que oportet fieri cito*, 82v *dieb illis loquentea turbe ad dnm ihm dixerunt*, 92v with ri ligature, 229v ri ligature ro clumsy minuscule of 56v–57r with half uncial a, 211 v looks more like minuscule, 235 plenty of half uncial a but also uncial uneven size of letters. By looking at the minuscule script of the additions and the compressed script at line ends Lowe inferred that the main scribe ‘regarded the script of the body of the Missal as a majuscule script’⁴.

Lowe’s verdict on the scribe was that: ‘It is a mixed type, a transition script with a strong admixture of personal idiosyncracies’⁵. Rosamond McKitterick has characterized the main hand as ‘unsteady’ though she is reluctant to attribute this to the advanced age of the scribe, whom she regards as ‘confident’, and she attempts to remove ‘subjective or aesthetic reasons’ from any evaluation of

² A. PETRUCCI, *Alfabetismo ed educazione grafica degli scribi altomedievale*, in P. GANZ, *The Role of the Book in Medieval Culture*. Turnhout 1986, 109–132, at p. 116.

³ E. A. LOWE, *The Bobbio Missal*. Notes and Studies. *Henry Bradshaw Society* 61 (1924) 67–71, with discussion of abbreviations at pp 76–85.

⁴ E. A. LOWE, *The Bobbio Missal* (cf. n. 3) 67.

⁵ E. A. LOWE, *The Bobbio Missal* (cf. n. 3) 67.

the script⁶. Unlike Lowe she is reluctant to see the manuscript as the work of a single scribe. Her suggestion that the script is similar to the main hand of the Ashburnham Pentateuch does not convince, and her historical arguments for localizing the Bobbio Missal in Provence are weak. The main scribe was happy to write successive words using alternate letter forms for l or s and a mixture of uncial with minuscule letters such as a, s and b, without any sense that this was inappropriate. But the presence of the letter forms for a, c, o, r and s in the added portions show that another scribe was trained to imitate the penmanship of the main scribe. We need more exploration of the work of unsophisticated scribes like the scribes of the Bobbio Missal: at a time when many varieties of minuscule script were in use and where, except at Luxeuil, centres of accomplished calligraphy were rare, these scribes may display a functional attitude to the process of copying books which defies our sense of developed scripts⁷.

II

The life of Martin of Laon is known from entries in a set of annals from Laon⁸. He calls himself an Irishman and an exile, so he was presumably born in Ireland. He records a birthdate of 819, and his death is recorded in 875. A group of Carolingian manuscripts from Laon preserve Martin's notes and indexes, and occasional textual entries or corrections⁹. They comprise Berlin Phillipps 1830 and 1832 (Dionysius Exiguus and Bede de Natura Rerum (Reims or Laon); Laon 37 Haimo in Isaiam (Soissons), 38 Jerome on the minor prophets (NE France); Laon 50 Lathcen (N France irish contacts), Laon 67 Paschasius Radbertus in Mattheum from Corbie; Laon 80, Commentarius in evangelium Johannis St Amand; Laon 86 Augustine in Ep Johannem ad Parthos (?Lyon); Laon 92 Bede on Mark contents list and ff. 162–164 (Reims); Laon 265 contents list Fulgentius de Trinitate et al (St Amand); Laon 273 Wicbod marginalia (NE France); Laon 298 Origen on Numbers (St Amand); Laon 299 Origen on King's (St Amand); Laon 319 Taio, Sententiae (France); Laon 336 de institutione canonicorum of 816 (NE France); Laon 420 Marcellus, de medicamentis (NE France); Laon 424 Oribasius N. Italy; Laon 444 Greek Latin Glossary ff. 1–4 and 276–318 ; Laon 464 Aldhelm, de metris. Laon 468 glosses on Vergil and Sedulius was copied by Martin in collaboration with another scribe¹⁰ and BN Lat 2024 Ambrosius Autpertus, Ferrandus, Martin of Braga on virtues and vices. (NE France) was annotated by Martin¹¹. The manuscript which contains the largest section copied by Martin is Laon 444, a remarkable collection of Greek Latin glossaries and grammatical and lexicographical notes, together with poems composed by John the Scot and Martin¹². It includes the inscription Graecus Scripsit Martinus litteras istas (f. 296 v) in a clumsily and artificial cursive script. Martin copied a letter on the front flyleaf and the last part of the codex, ff 276–319 is a collection of quaternions and bifolia. Denis Muzerelle has shown that Martin supervised the transcription of the glossary.

Martin described himself as a teacher in a heading to texts in Laon 444 'the beautiful poem of Martin the Teacher Versus Pulcher Didadskalou Martinou and in his autobiographical entry in the

⁶ R. MCKITTERICK, The Scripts of the Bobbio Missal, in Y. HEN, R. MEENS (Ed.), The Bobbio Missal. Liturgy and Religious Culture in Merovingian Gaul. (*Cambridge studies in palaeography and codicology* 11). Cambridge 2004, 19–52.

⁷ The work of Winithar at St Gall is a similar phenomenon, now accessible via Codices Electronici Sangallenses (<http://www.cesg.unifr.ch/en/index.htm>), St. Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Codd. 2, 11, 70, 109, 238, and 907.

⁸ MGH Scriptores in Folio XV 1293–1295.

⁹ These were first discussed by J. CONTRENI, The Cathedral School of Laon from 850 to 930. Its Manuscripts and Masters. Munich 1978, 53–60, 95–134.

¹⁰ Full facsimile: J. CONTRENI, Codex Laudunensis 468: A Ninth-Century Guide to Virgil, Sedulius, and the Liberal Arts. Turnhout, 1984.

¹¹ For the origin of the manuscripts cf. B. BISCHOFF, Katalog der festländischen Handschriften des neunten Jahrhunderts (mit Ausnahme der wisigotischen) II. Laon–Paderborn. Wiesbaden 2004, 19–37 which corrects the discussion by J. CONTRENI, The Cathedral School (cf. n. 9) 41–65.

¹² The best account of the contents of Laon 444 is found in A. C. DIONISOTTI, Greek Grammars and Dictionaries in Carolingian Europe, in: The Sacred Nectar of the Greeks: The Study of Greek in the West in the Early Middle Ages. Ed. M. W. HERREN, S. A. BROWN. London 1988, 1–56.

Laon Annals¹³. Several of the manuscripts which he owned and annotated contain teaching texts. At Laon in the time of Martin we know the names of the dean, 2 provosts, 14 canons who were priests and 5 deacons, and these may have been among his students.

Martin's annotations and additions to his manuscripts are copied in a distinctive Caroline script which has been described by John Contreni as clear, steady and vigorous with insular traits, some Irish abbreviations *et enim et ex* ligatures¹⁴. It is a hybrid script: a scribe originally trained to write an insular script with distinctive *g* and *t* has adapted that script so as to write Caroline minuscule. Bischoff suggested that the change from Insular to Caroline script was for the benefit of his students¹⁵. His letterforms include a distinctive *x* curves sometimes *s* and *r* descend below the line *e* somewhat squat *g* with rather high sitting upper compartment. Note insular looking *m* on f. 289 of 444. Ascenders generally show wedges, *e* enters into ligature with a following *t* or *x*¹⁶.

His minuscule forms the letters with a crude clarity, but without a clear ductus which links them. He also uses Tironian notes, most notably to annotate the medical texts. Martin was clearly aware of the practice at centres of Carolingian learning and teaching. So in Martin we have a scribe who does not appear to have copied complete manuscripts, and whose work consists of scholarly annotations and additions, but who, unlike many of the Irish scribes who worked in the Carolingian realms, chose to adopt the international script practised there. In Martin we are confronted with a scribe ready to adopt the norms, not so much of a centre as of a landscape. Martin's career as a Carolingian teacher required him to use a Carolingian script.

III

The third example is also an instance of a scribe developing a Caroline minuscule, but here we are dealing with a skilled calligrapher, and with one of the earliest instances of English Caroline minuscule. The *Benedictional of St Aethelwold* is a volume now containing 119 leaves 19 lines to the page¹⁷. It probably dates from 971–984¹⁸. It contains twenty-eight full page miniatures, and probably another fifteen are missing. No other *Benedictional* is as lavishly illustrated.

According to the poem at its start, copied in gold ink in a distinctive capitalis script, the *Benedictional* was the work of Godeman writing at the express command of Aethelwold, Bishop of Winchester. In the words of the dedicatory poem copied on folios 4v–5 'A bishop, the great Aethelwold, whom the Lord had made patron of Winchester, ordered a certain monk subject to him to write the present book. He commanded also to be made in this book many arches well adorned and filled with various figures decorated with manifold beautiful colours and with gold. This book the Boanerges aforesaid caused to be indited for himself in order that he might be able to sanctify the people of the Saviour by means of it.' Godeman was a monk at the Old Minster in Winchester whom Aethelwold made abbot of Thorney.

It is not clear what examples of Caroline minuscule served as models for Godeman's script: the broad and monumental script is of a larger size than in most manuscripts, and this size of script seems to have been used on the continent in the tenth and eleventh, rather than the ninth century¹⁹.

¹³ *Post futurum exulans magister Laudunensis.*

¹⁴ J. CONTRENI, *The Cathedral School* (cf. n. 9) 98.

¹⁵ B. BISCHOFF, *Irische Schreiber im Karolingerreich*, in: *Mittelalterliche Studien III*. Stuttgart 1981, 39–54, at p. 51.

¹⁶ D. MUZERELLE, *Martin d'Irlande et ses acolytes : genèse codicologique du "Pseudo-Cyrille" de Laon (ms. 444)*, in: H. SPILLING (Ed.), *La collaboration dans la production de l'écrit médiéval. Actes du XIII^e Colloque international de paléographie latine* (Weingarten, 22–25 septembre 2000). Paris 2003, 325–346.

¹⁷ The *Benedictional* has been reproduced in a full colour facsimile: *The Benedictional of St Aethelwold. A Masterpiece of Anglo-Saxon Art. A Facsimile introduced by A. PRESCOTT*. 2002.

¹⁸ 'References in the text of the *Benedictional* to miracles at the shrine of St Swithun suggest that the manuscript was executed sometime after Aethelwold moved Swithun's remains to a new shrine in 971. This indicates that the manuscript was executed between 971 and Aethelwold's death in 984 (probably at the beginning of this period, in view of Godeman's appointment to Thorney.' A. PRESCOTT, *The Benedictional* (cf. n. 17) 6. The references are found on folio 98 v.

¹⁹ For script of comparable size cf. the late tenth century Berlin, SBBPK, Ms. theol. Lat. qu. 231, fragments of a *Sacramentary* from Fulda, illustrated in H. HOFFMANN, *Buchkunst und Königtum im ottonischen und frühsalischen Reich*

Dry point annotations discovered by Schipper reveal that the arrangement and layout of the texts was being planned and altered as the volume was being copied²⁰. Many of the blessings for saints' days are of English composition²¹, some perhaps were composed by Aethelwold. So the scribe was not copying an existing exemplar, but creating a new collection of episcopal blessings.

Godeman was also the scribe of the bifolium London, College of Arms, Arundel MS 22 f. 84–85²² and, according to Prescott, of the first part (f. 1–84) of Paris, BNF, Lat. 987²³. His script was characterized by T. A. M. Bishop as 'Medium-large slightly sloping, broad, round, clear, characteristic of an early type of English Caroline'²⁴.

The script is fairly light in weight, copied with a slanting pen which is twisted to form m, n and u. Distinctive letter forms are the large bowl and weak tail of the g, and the almost uncial form of h. E is formed with a very small bow, there are marked shoulder on s and f, ascenders and descenders are rather short, distinctive ra ligature, overlap of e and shoulder of s f. 68v, f a ligature or ligature 14r, 27v sclor. Wormald wrote that the script 'occasionally looks a little uncertain as if the scribe might be more at home with the Insular type of writing'²⁵.

Uncial N is found frequently as a variant letter form IN f. 7r *non inueniat* 7v f. 12v, 13r *Nativitas* 14r *Natum Nobis*, 14v 16v *Nativitate* 21v *Non* 23v *Nelegem* 26r *In Nec* 27v *In* 31v *Nisa* 33v *Nominis* 38r *iN* 38v *Non* 49v *iN IN civitate* 118r *Non solum*

Clumsy script by the main scribe is found in the text of the blessing for Epiphany on f. 26v.

Godeman was trying to write a local version of the Caroline minuscule script which had become the standard script for continental books except in Spain and Beneventan Italy. His ra ligature, in which a low r is followed by a cc form of a, is distinctively English. But he betrays his training, for he copies the name of the Anglo-Saxon saint Aethelthryth of Ely using Anglo-Saxon letter forms, the barred curved d, the rounded d and the long r whose first stroke goes well below the line of writing and whose tongue curves down to meet the baseline (f. 91v). These forms of d and r are found in Anglo-Saxon square minuscule script and in the tenth century that script, written in a large module, was used for liturgical books, though only a single fragment of such a book has survived²⁶. There was no need for Godeman to have written English Caroline minuscule: his choice to do so is an affirmation of the international values of Aethelwold and his ecclesiastical reforms. Caroline minuscule had become the normative script for the copying of liturgical manuscripts in England. Whether Godeman's distinctive ra ligature was a deliberate attempt to impose a personal hallmark on this script is impossible to establish, but worth consideration.

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(*MGH Schriften* 30). Stuttgart 1986, plate 36 and Karlsruhe Aug. XXXVII from the Reichenau, *IBIDEM*, plate 151, or the early eleventh century Regensburg manuscripts Munich, BSB, Clm 4456, *IBIDEM*, plate 123, Clm 13601, *IBIDEM*, plate 124 and Clm 15713, *IBIDEM*, plate 126.

²⁰ W. SCHIPPER, Dry-Point Compilation Notes in the Benedictional of St. Aethelwold. *British Library Journal* 20 (1994) 19–32.

²¹ A. PRESCOTT, The Benedictional (cf. n. 17) 17–23.

²² The fragment was first discussed by F. WORMALD, A Fragment of a Tenth-Century English Gospel Lectionary. Reprinted in: F. WORMALD, *Collected Papers I. Studies in Medieval Art from the Sixth to the Twelfth Centuries*. Oxford 1984, 101–104. The identification was accepted by T. A. M. BISHOP, *English Caroline Minuscule*. Oxford 1971, 10.

²³ B. EBERSPERGER, Die angelsächsischen Handschriften in den Pariser Bibliotheken (*Anglistische Forschungen* 261). Heidelberg 1998, 46–48; J. VEZIN, Manuscrits du dixième et onzième siècles copiés en Angleterre et conservés à la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, in: *Humanisme actif. Mélanges d'art et de littérature offerts à Julien Cain II*. Paris 1968, 283–296.

²⁴ T. A. M. BISHOP, *English Caroline Minuscule*. Oxford 1971, 10.

²⁵ F. WORMALD, The Benedictional of Saint Ethelwold. Reprinted in: F. WORMALD, *Collected Papers I* (cf. n. 22) 89.

²⁶ Cambridge, Trinity College, B 1. 30A + New Haven, Yale University, Beinecke Library, Ms. 320, illustrated actual size in: S. D. KEYNES, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts and other items of related interest in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge*. Binghamton 1992, Plate III.

