

THE SCRIBE OF THE OATHS OF STRASSBURG: WHAT WAS HIS NATIONALITY?

IT is the purpose of this paper to suggest an answer, based on reasons chiefly paleographical, to the query serving as its title. The writer has had at his disposal the plates in G. Paris: *Les plus anciens Monuments de la Langue Française*, 1875, planche I; M. Ennecerus: *Die ältesten deutschen Sprachdenkmäler*, Frankfurt am Main, 1897, Tafeln 34-36; and Steffens: *Lateinische Paläographie, Supplement zur zweiten Auflage*, Freiburg in der Schweiz, 1908, Tafel 31. The latter two collections have been of especial service in this inquiry, for the Ennecerus plates, for example, furnish six whole columns of the complete manuscript; *i. e.*, not only the text of the *Oaths* in the Romance and German versions, but also, what is extremely important for our investigation, the Latin context in which the Romance and German texts are embedded. Few investigations of the *Oaths of Strassburg*, considered in their linguistic and paleographical aspects, have paid attention to the context of these monuments. Still more valuable as a reproduction than the plates of Ennecerus are the splendid photographs of Steffens, and their value is increased by the editor's learned and careful transcription and paleographical annotations.¹

Steffens and other critics, such as Léopold Delisle,² have given brief bibliographical accounts of the unique manuscript which we are considering. For the purpose of this article, it is perhaps sufficient to recall that MS. 9768 *du fonds français*, in the National Library at Paris, was written about 970, and came from the North French monastery of Saint Médard de Soissons, being a copy

¹That Steffens' work is not free from errors is, however, to be seen in his note on page 1: <saluari> "aus *saluarai*; es scheint wenigstens dass das dritte *a* durch einen untergesetzten Punkt getilgt ist." The "dot" of which he speaks is not a *punctum delens*, but one of the numerous blotches or possible water stains visible in the photograph of both Steffens' pages.

²This venerable scholar has published some little-known information about the manuscript of Nithardus in his delightful *Souvenirs de Jeunesse*: see the concluding article: *The Library*, London, 1908, pages 245-49.

(direct?) of an original which was more than a century and a quarter older.

Does this most valuable manuscript offer any evidence as to the nationality of the scribe who copied Nithardus' important text?

To answer this question at all adequately, we must observe

1°. That these manuscript pages contain texts in Latin, French and German.

2°. That the language used by a North French scribe would, if he was a native, probably be French in some one of its dialects, or some variety of German; if a foreigner, his language was in all likelihood Anglo-Saxon or Celtic.

3°. That any competent scribe must have had a knowledge of Latin.

4°. That this codex dates from a period when the Frankish or French or Caroline minuscule, sometimes known as the ordinary book-hand of the Middle Ages, had triumphed over other forms of script in France, Germany and England, not to mention its inroads on Beneventan and Visigothic territory. In this period, too, an effort is made to separate the words from one another, though this evolution is hardly complete for another half century. Let us now, by means of Ennecerus' plates, test the copyist's knowledge of Latin. He usually separates his words, and that, too, correctly. His mistakes in transcription are not numerous, the worst being the miswriting of *quo* for *qua*: 36 A 10; *que* for *qua*: 36 A 32; the omission or *non* after *nec*: 36 B 29; writing *contigi* for *contingere*. His other errors he has in the main corrected of his own volition, with the result that we have a good Latin text, one not differing materially in our printed copies from that of the codex. One thing which everywhere troubles the scribe is the combination *dh*. He divides it between lines: see 36 A 23-4. His use of the *ç* is not oftener incorrect than that of the average scribe of the time. He employs the sign ^{*} (*spiritus asper*) for *h*, as was frequently the custom during this period. On the whole, he was not only a good copyist, but was a competent Latinist.

Now, as to his French. The text, as so many Romance scholars have found, contains a large number of problematical forms, such as: *podir*, *sendra*, *eo*, *eu*, *iu* and *io* from *ego*, *pro* for *por*, *ad iudha*, *a iuha* and *cad huna* (divided thus), etc. Making all due allow-

ance for the difficulties of the original scribe who first wrote down the French *Oaths*—and his task was not an easy one—we cannot believe that the scribe of our manuscript properly copied his original. Nor should we explain many of his apparent blunders so much by his defective paleographical knowledge, as by his comparative ignorance of the French language. In other words we do not believe that the scribe who copied the *Oaths* as we have them in the manuscript of Nithardus was a Frenchman.

If we now pass to the German portion of the text, here is what he actually writes for the first oath (36 B 16–24):

Ingodes minna indinthes x̄panes folches
indunser bedhero gelt nissi. fonthese
moda ge frammordesso framso mirgot
geuuizci indimadh furgibit so haldihtes
an minanbruodher soso manmit rehtu
sinan bruher scal inthi utha zermigso
maduo. in dimit luheren in no^t hein uit
hing nege gango. zhe minan uuillon imo
ces cadhen uuerhen.

These words are printed thus in W. Braune's *Altdeutsches Lesebuch*, 4te Auflage, Halle, 1897, p. 49:

In godes minna ind in thes christiānes folches ind unsêr bêdhero gehaltnissi, fon thesemo dage frammordes, sô fram sô mir got geuuizci indi mahd furgibit, so haldih thesan mīnan bruodher, sôso man mit rehtu sīnan bruodher scal, in thiu thaz er mig sô sama duo, indi mit Ludheren in nohheiniu thing ne gegango, the mīnan uuillon imo ce scadhen uuerdhên.

The second oath in its German form runs thus (35 A 1–16):

Oba karl theneid then er sinen obruodher
ludhu uuige gesuor geleistit, indilud
hu uuig minherro thener imo gesuor forbrih
chit. obihinanes iruuen denne mag noh
ih noh theronoh hein the nihes iruundenmag
uuidhar karle imoce follus tine uuirdhit.

In Braune's text this is printed, p. 50:

Oba Karl then eid, then er sīnemo bruodher Ludhuuige gesuor, geleistit, indi Ludhuuig min hērro then er imo gesuor forbrihchit,

ob ih inan es iruuenden ne mag: noh ih noh thero nohhein, then
ih es iruuenden mag, uuidhar Karle imo ce follusti ne uuirhdit.

When we consider the fact already mentioned that our scribe divides correctly his Latin words, and when we note the way he divides his German words, we are forced to the conviction that his acquaintance with the latter language was distinctly imperfect. No one who understood German could have given us such confusion as we have here. What scribe of good training, for example, who knew well the German language, could have written at the end of a line: *fonthese*, and, at the beginning of the next line: *moda ge*, when the correct forms were: *fon thesemo dage?* This point appears in its true light when one has the manuscript before him, and notes that the scribe had abundant space at the end of the line to include the final syllable *ge*. Again, note in passing how the scribe has split the digraphs *th* and *dh*. This can only be taken to indicate ignorance of the language. To employ a simple illustration, only the ignorant and uneducated would divide the English *th* between the end and beginning of lines. It is unnecessary to dwell longer on this fact.

If our scribe is only a fair scholar in French and has no great knowledge of German, is there any trace of Celtic in his manuscript? None that we have been able to observe. There are, however, symptoms of the Insular (Anglo-Saxon or Irish) scribal habits, and this seems to us a point of great importance. For example, the reader has already noticed in the French text the singular division of *ad iudha*. These words might serve as samples of the tendency on the part of Anglo-Saxon scribes to divide a compound word into its component parts or what were supposed to be its component parts. One may consult in this connection W. W. Skeat: *Twelve Old English MSS.*, Oxford, 1892, p. 8, and W. Keller: *Angelsächsische Paläographie*, Palæstra, XLIII, i, Berlin, 1906, p. 2.

Are there illustrations of this habit in our Latin text? We find here some forms which might possibly be merely accidental: *pip pino* 34 A 21; and *Pip pinus*, 34 B 12. But we also find such forms as: *bene uola*, 34 A 16; *p humane*, 34 A 17 and 36 B 7; *tra iecit*, 34 A 24; *sub iugare*, 34 A 29 *ludhu uic*, 34 B 6: cf. 15-16 and 27; *int ea*, 34 B 14, and 36 A 31; *ad iuuare*, 35 A 6: *ad iutorio*,

29; *con uenimus*, 35 A 23; *cō ui uia*, 36 B 5; *cō ui uii*, 8, and *cō munia*, 9. Other examples might be cited, but these are the most striking. The case of *gellu*, 36 A 15, may be mentioned as illustrating another Insular habit, namely, the doubling of consonants after a short vowel.

But our evidence has not yet all been cited, for there is a letter which shows a wonderful conservation and power of resistance—*N*. The Merovingian majuscule hand of the eighth century often has *F* for *N*, but it is only the Insular *F* which can provide us with the precedent for the forms of *N* occurring in 35 A 3 and 17, and 36 A 17, no one of which is an initial of a sentence. This is a point of the utmost importance in determining the nationality of our scribe.

Still another habit usual among both Irish and English scribes, is that of grouping together words united in pronunciation under a single utterance of accent, *e. g.*, in the first French Oath, *sisaluarraieo*. For this trait in Old Irish, see J. Vendryes: *Grammaire du vieil-irlandais*, Paris, 1908, § 582–98, where examples and the literature of the subject will be found, and Thurneysen: *Handbuch des altirischen*, I Teil, Heidelberg, 1909, § 32. For Old English, see Keller, *l. c.*, p. 51.

The writer believes that the facts and considerations here adduced justify the conclusion that the scribe who copied the *Oaths of Strassburg* was, or had been, under Insular (and probably Anglo-Saxon) influence, if not actually an English monk. He may have used the Insular hand in his earlier days, and then, learning later the ordinary minuscule so much clearer to read and easier to write, he may have adopted it, but may have found it unadvisable or impossible to divest himself entirely of his acquired habits.

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