

Lecture on Winchester Manuscripts

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Twenty years ago, I and others put together a book called *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain*.² *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain* is concerned with provenance not origin, that is to say it tries to show where books belonged in the Middle Ages, and not where they originated. Provenance and origin may be the same thing, but often they are different things. There is often no reason to suppose that a book was written in the place where it belonged; indeed, there is often evidence to the contrary.

In the book *Medieval Libraries*, you will not find manuscripts which appear from their script to have been written in a certain place, if there is no evidence that they remained in place. Here, I am concerned with origin and not provenance. I want to try and consider what extant books or parts of books or charters originated in Winchester in pre-conquest times. I am not concerned with whether they remained in Winchester or with the precise place in which they originated, whether at the Old Minster or the New Minster, or with the scribes who wrote for the king whatever their habitation may have been. Some of the question marks disappear if one considers the manuscripts from this point of view; some of them indicate doubt not because the Winchester provenance and origin of a manuscript are doubtful, but because it is doubtful whether a book comes from the Old Minster or the New Minster or the Nunnaminster; and some are there because though there is at least a strong presumption that they originated in Winchester there is doubt as to whether they ever really belonged to a Winchester house. But many doubts remain. One could hardly expect otherwise in view of the unfortunate history of the Winchester houses – from the point of view of a palæographer or an art historian.

May I review briefly the kinds of evidence there are, going down the scale from absolute certainty to reasonable probability – I do not wish to go further than that – and insert under the various, in their kinds, the Winchester manuscripts in question.

Certainty:

1. A reliable inscription stating that a manuscript was written in a certain place. So far as I know no Anglo-Saxon manuscript has this sort of inscription and there are in fact few of them before the fifteenth century.
2. Internal evidence of a convincing kind.
3. Evidence from script combined with evidence of some other kind: for example,

¹ Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS 21050/69, Box 7.1, consulted by Elaine Treharne on March 6th 2024. Transcribed by Creagh Factor; edited by Elaine Treharne. It is possible that this lecture dates to the later 1950s, given that Ker mentions publications from 1941 as of 'nearly twenty years ago'.

² At the top of the page, Ker writes 'Winchester', which he does for most of the pages following.

internal evidence; the evidence of an *ex-libris* inscription or the evidence provided by a medieval catalogue; or even an earlier or previous catalogue. For example, if a manuscript can be identified in the medieval catalogue of Christ Church, Canterbury, and is written in the³ kind of script which is known to have been used at Christ Church, then that manuscript not only belonged to Christ Church, but also originated there.

Now the first of these sources of evidence is no use at all in the Anglo-Saxon period. The third source is one that can hardly be used.

<u>Certainty.</u>	Stowe 944	√	N.M. s. xi in.
W.9	Titus D. xxvi, xxvii	√	N.M. s. xi in.
	Corpus 473	√	O.M. s. xi
	Bodley 775	√	O.M. s. xi in.
W.11	Arundel 60	√	N.M. s. xi med.
	(Add. 34890. How like Titus is it? ⁴ 'Not very' N.M. s.xi in.)		
W.12	Vitellius E. xviii		N.M.(?), but later O.M. s. xi med.
W.10	TCC 945		N.M. s. xi in.
	Galba A. xiv		s. xi in.
	Royal 15 C. viii	√	O.M. s. xi in.

4. Newminster calendars:

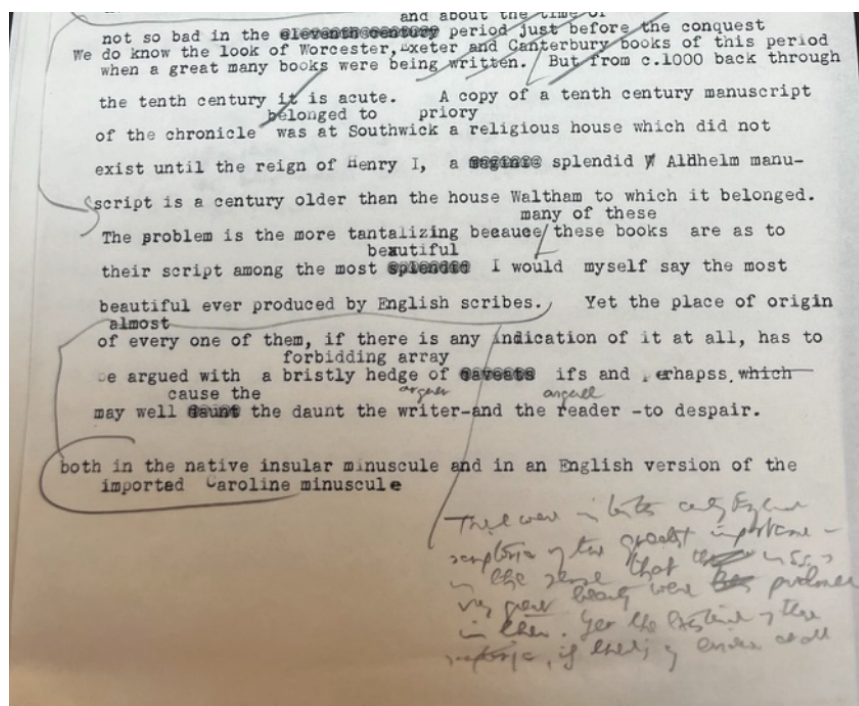
Nov. 15	Sancti Machloni confessoris. Other calendars containing this entry have the form Machuti.
Oct 8	Sancti Iwigii confessoris. Occurs as Iwi only otherwise in Nero A. ii and in Corpus 9. Buried at Wilton.
July 7	Sancti Haeddi episcopi. Also in Douce 296.
July 18	Translatio sancte Eadburge virginis.
Jan.19	Sancti Branuualatoris confessoris. Not in Arundel 60. Buried at Milton.
June 10	Dedicatio ecclesie sancti marie Arundel 60 and Vit. Dedicatio monasterii saluatoris mundi. Titus (Titus has Dedicatio basilica sancte marie at June 5. R.15.32 has nothing. The dedication of Newminster was to our Saviour in the Liber Vitae (ed. p.); to St Peter in Winchester College 3; St Saviour in Winchester College 2. ⁵

³ Here at the top of the new page, 2, Ker writes: 'See the three Winchester college charters in favour of New Minster'.

⁴ Ker writes: 'Not very' as a response, in the left margin of this line.

⁵ Ker notes at the top of the new page 3, 'Raymond Russell. Refer [...] to other [.....]'

One of the striking features about the older Anglo-Saxon manuscripts written in English is the extent to which they moved about both in the Anglo-Saxon period and after it. The book *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain* includes quite a lot of important pre-conquest manuscripts listed under the places they are known to have belonged in the Middle Ages, but at which they were most certainly not written. [In these centuries only] you will find an important example of the Life of St Cuthbert and the book known as the Durham Ritual under Durham, but it is an import from the south. You will find nearly a dozen beautiful tenth-century books, including the famous Exeter book of Old English poetry, but these were among bishop Leofric's gifts to Exeter Cathedral about the time of the Conquest. A copy of a tenth-century manuscript of the *Chronicle* belonged to Southwick Priory – a religious house which did not exist until the reign of Henry I; a splendid Aldhelm manuscript is a century older than the house, Waltham, to which it belonged. Of book after book, we say to ourselves 'now where was this written?' and there is no answer. The problem is the more tantalizing because many of these books are, as to their script, among the most beautiful; I would myself say the most beautiful ever produced by English scribes both in the native insular minuscule and in an English version of the imported Caroline minuscule. There were in tenth-century England scriptoria of the greatest importance – in the sense that manuscripts of very great beauty were produced in them. Yet the existence of these scriptoria, if existing[?] of evidence at all, [and] yet the place of origin of almost every one of them, if there is any indication of it at all, has to be argued with a forbidding array of 'ifs' and 'perhaps's', which may well daunt the writer-arguer – and the reader-arguee – to despair.



The charter issued by the monks of New Minster which still remains at Winchester in the College Library was presumably drawn up at the abbey. The additions in insular minuscule to the Psalter, itself continental in origin, which King Athelstan gave the Old Minster must be almost certainly the work of Old Minster monks. Neither however helps much towards establishing a Winchester type of Anglo-Saxon minuscule. More help is to be had from the *Parker Chronicle* and from the charters.⁶

It is in some ways a great help to the palaeographer that there is no difference between the writing of books and charters in Anglo-Saxon times. One can to some extent localize, and, to a rather greater extent, one can date our tenth-century books with the aid of the charters. All but a few of the charters have been reproduced in facsimile in the two well-known publications – four volumes and three volumes respectively – the *Facsimiles of Ancient Charters in the British Museum*, and from what are known from their place of publication as the *Ordnance Survey Facsimiles*. The eighth- and ninth-century charters do not help our book-studies much because there are so few Anglo-Saxon books of this period. Then for the reigns of Alfred and of Edward the Elder we have a curious lack of charters. [The] *Parker Chronicle* and Ealhswið's boundaries in the *Book of Nunnaminster*⁷ and the few single sheet documents from this period do not inspire confidence. We have in fact nothing to compare with the two scripts of the famous books which appear to have been produced in the lifetime of King Alfred and under his immediate supervision, [Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS] Hatton 20 and [London, British Library, Cotton MS] Tiberius B. xi of the *Pastoral Care* and nothing to compare with the even more famous book whose beginnings are nearly if not quite coeval with Alfred – the earliest part of the *Corpus Manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.⁸ But from the reign of Athelstan from about 930 until the end of the century, the charters can be made to cast light on the books. The moment that they begin to do this is the moment of the reform of the Winchester script, which can be measured most conveniently by looking at the difference between the first and second hands of the *Chronicle*, between the hand, that is, which writes up to 892, and the hand or hands from this date onwards

The new script has a good many majuscule elements, especially at first: the reformers were inspired by the great gospel books in Anglo-Saxon majuscule of the eighth century. The best of it is very good indeed. A measure of Anglo-Saxon skill in

⁶ Ker writes in pen underneath: 'and this represents[?] the distressing absence of information about the Winchester libraries in the later Middle Ages. The Winchester origin of some...'

⁷ The *Book of Nunnaminster* is London, British Library, MS Harley 2965, dating from the eighth century and with ninth-century additions, as mentioned here by Ker.

⁸ This is Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 173 (see the website 'Parker on the Web').

calligraphy is that having evolved this very good type of insular script they abolished it again in some places after a run of little more than a quarter of a century and produced a no less good Caroline type in its place in the entirely different Caroline minuscule script. I feel that I have been rather lazy about getting photographs for this lecture by relying solely on what the Bodleian can produce, but at least I am able to show one really good specimen in each of the two scripts; each has some connection – I wish I could say a really firm connection – with Winchester.

The new script appears at the same time as a new wording of the charters. A new wording of charters is coeval with the new script. Speaking of a charter of 925 known only from a later transcript Stenton says: 'the turgid Latin in which it is composed anticipates the artificial language employed to the grievous detriment of good sense in the elaborate diplomas which are the characteristic records of the reign'; that is, the reign of Athelstan 925-940. The amount of verbosity in these charters can be conveniently measured by the number of words which precede the first two completely essential words 'I Athelstan'. Three preceding words may be held as quasi-essential: *In nomine domini*, 'In the name of god', but most Anglo-Saxon drafters liked to reflect in this place on the dangers and the transitory nature of this human life.⁹ The charter of 925 which Armitage Robinson gallantly translated in the *Times of St. Dunstan* takes 48 words to get to I Athelstan, and this is not a record by any way, by the way.¹⁰ The important point for us in all this verbiage is that it is skilled work, a high mystery of which few people can have been capable. The form of the charters, in fact, supports what we should suspect from a study of their script. They were drawn up and written by clerks in the royal service. This has long been recognized, and especially since the thoroughgoing article by Richard Drögereit, 'Gab es eine angelsächsische Königskanzlei', in 1935.¹¹ But the assumption that clerks wrote these charters carries with it the assumption that clerks also wrote books, for it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that at least 13 dependable charters issued from the same scriptorium as three manuscripts.¹² It is tiresome that any absolutely firm evidence as to where these three manuscripts were written is not forthcoming.¹³ The book known as *Bald's Leechbook*

⁹ Perhaps referring to examples, Ker notes in left margin 'Edgar 972, Aug. I 6 231, Pershore[?] BL 5677 (BL Cotton Charter viii 16; 82 [.....]; Aethelred 993 (Aug. 136) Abingdon'.

¹⁰ Ker types in left margin a seeming response to his own statement: 'or is it'.

¹¹ This is 'Gab es eine angelsächsische Königskanzlei?', *Archiv für Urkundenforschung* 13 (1935), pp. 335-436.

¹² In the left margin, Ker writes 'section of the Parker chronicle from 955'. Ker did not complete the date, but presumably it's 955, as a struck-through phrase in the typescript reads 'of which the most important is the tenth-century part of the Parker Chronicle up to 955'.

¹³ Ker strikes through the following words here: 'One of them, the Junius Psalter, contains in its calendar – which is otherwise not distinctive – the obits of King Alfred and Queen Ealhswið; another is a

contains a set of prescriptions which Elias, patriarch of Jerusalem, ordered to be told to King Alfred; the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* itself (these limited to the *Parker Chronicle* itself, or rather some parts of it, from 925-946), though not at this time in any way; another [copy? manuscript?] is of Bede's *History of the Anglo-Saxons* [...]

A local *Chronicle* has a special interest in recording the succession of the bishops of Winchester; particularly important is the entry at 951, one of two entries added contemporaneously and in a similar script after the main series of annals ended at 946. It records the death of Bishop Aelfheah of Winchester and gives the exact day of his death, St. Gregory's mass day. It is I think safe to presume that these books and charters were written in the place where the tenth-century kings had their capital and in the seat of the bishopric of the bishops of Winchester. But where in Winchester? A book which I and others put forth nearly twenty years ago, *Medieval Libraries of Great Britain*, is not very helpful about these books.¹⁴ Two, the Bede and the *Leechbook*, are listed under Winchester Cathedral without a query (~~two with a query~~ and one, the Junius Psalter, is by mere error omitted altogether. It would have been better, I think, if all five had been included with a query.)

The *Chronicle* and the others [in all] possibility, or one might say probability – that these books belonged to St. Swithun's after the introduction of the monks in 963 cannot be dismissed. But this is not to say that they were written there. In Dr. Cyril Wright's introduction to the facsimile edition of the *Leechbook*, I am credited with having said in *Medieval Libraries* that these manuscripts were written at St. Swithun's. This I did not say. *Medieval Libraries*, being about provenance not origins, does not say anything about where these manuscripts were written. At a later date – I told the public a little more by saying that they were written in Winchester. Today I am trying to face it even a little more.¹⁵ The answer must be looked for if anywhere in the *Parker Chronicle*.

The Parker Manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is full of puzzles but its essential structure up to 946 is not difficult to grasp. It falls simply into three blocks, the oldest block up to 892 is, in its script, pre-reform; of it, I would say in passing that, so far as I know, the only writing at all closely like it is the writing of the list of boundaries of Queen Ealhswith's estate at Winchester, entered in a blank space of the prayer book known as the book of Nunnaminster. The second block up to 924 is in the script of the Junius Psalter and the Tollemache Orosius. There is nothing closely similar to it in the charters, I think.¹⁶

copy of one of the Anglo-Saxon texts which were produced by or for King Alfred, the translation of Orosius's *History*; a third'.

¹⁴ Ker writes 'five books' but then strikes through 'five'. *MLGB*, the initial volume, was published in 1941.

¹⁵ It isn't clear quite what Ker is saying here.

¹⁶ At page 4, the number 7 appears to the left of text that is now struck through. I wonder if the essay was meant, then, to finish with this emended text. Ker wrote: 'If there is one place about which a little more is

known in this connection [written above 'period'] than another it is Winchester. And this in spite of the distressing absence of information about the Winchester libraries in the later Middle Ages. We do not need to argue, or not much, about the Winchester and Old Minster origin of the British Museum manuscript copy of Wolstan's Life of St. Swithun, nor about the Old Minster origin of the Corpus Manuscript of the Troper known as the Winchester Troper, and the manuscript of Lanfred's Life of St Swithun now at Rouen – the rustic capitals of these two last are interestingly similar. These three are in Caroline minuscule of a generally similar type and are not unlike another manuscript the Winchester origin of which seems certain: King Edgar's foundation charter of New Minster, datable in 966. For Winchester manuscripts in insular minuscule the evidence is less good, but at least there is some evidence.'