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    THE CAROLINGIAN MINUSCULE is a beautiful and legible book script which first appeared in French manuscripts at the end of the eighth century. Its emergence is one of the most important developments in the history of writing. It is a mature script of enduring quality (Fig. 1). In the centuries following its first appearance it was to be copied and adapted by scribes all over Europe, notably in England, Germany, and Italy. Humanist scribes, early in the 15th century, revived it as a most appropriate hand for the copying of classical texts. The first Italian printers then adapted it, and it has remained the basis of Western typography to this day.  
    But where did the Carolingian minuscule come from? There seems to be as many answers to this question as there are authors on the subject, but perhaps none quite so fanciful as that offered by Charles Anderson in Lettering (1969).

Charlemagne...realized that if he wished to establish a Roman-style unity within his kingdom, a universal writing hand was necessary. In his capacity as supervisor of the empire's education system, (Alcuin) was in a position of eminence in regard to the choice of a standard writing hand. Working with a team of writing scholars, he instituted a long study of the many styles of writing, selecting and retaining the best letters from these minuscule hands. From these examples, Alcuin developed the Caroline minuscule, drawing principally upon the Anglo-Saxon minuscule but with decided influences of the Italian Lombardic and French hands, probably the eighth-century French uncial.

    Anderson crowns this (almost total) nonsense by showing a spread from the English tenth-century Ramsey Psalter (which he describes as Latin Gospels, and dates c. 860!) as an example of "perfected Caroline minuscule."(FN1)  
    Part of my intention in this article is to show that such statements are not only misleading but also irresponsible. The student is not served well by the nonchalant repetition of unsubstantiated ideas. To get a more reliable picture of the part played by Charlemagne and Alcuin in the development of the Carolingian minuscule we must take account of the whole context of the Carolingian period.

**THE CAROLINGIAN DYNASTY**  
    Charlemagne is said to have been born on 2 April 742. He became king in 768 and, on the death of his brother Carloman in 771, was sole ruler over the Franks. From 800 until his own death in 814 he ruled as Holy Roman Emperor. His father was Peppin III, whose consecration by the Pope in 751 marked the end of the turbulent and barbaric Merovingian era and the beginning of a dynasty which, although short-lived, was to have a profound effect on European history. Much of what Charlemagne achieved was simply the bringing to fruition of movements and reforms begun in Peppin's reign. They both admired the glories of ancient Rome and were inspired by a love for the Church.  
    The crowning of Charlemagne as Emperor and Augustus in 800 was peculiarly fitting. He was actually described as a new Augustus and, perhaps even more significantly, as a new Constantine. During his reign, with the strong support of the Roman Church, he subdued much of Western Europe, colonizing and civilizing as he went.  
    In a series of decrees issued in his lifetime, Charlemagne set the objectives of his reforms and at the same time provided the means of achieving them. His primary concern was to raise the standard of Christian life in his kingdom. He instigated reforms of both civil and ecclesiastical law and, recruiting learned men from all over Europe, revived learning and the arts. Fundamental to such cultural reform was the making of books. A royal chancery already existed even under the Merovingian kings, but Charlemagne encouraged the production of manuscripts, and his library contained the largest collection of books of his day. He sent for books from Monte Cassino and Rome to fill gaps in his library or to improve the accuracy of texts he already owned. It is salutary to note that 90 percent of all classical Latin literature is only known to us via Carolingian manuscript copies.  
    One of the requirements in Charlemagne's Admonitio Generalis of 789 was the reformation of liturgical and scriptural texts. Such texts for distribution in his kingdom were to be "correct," "uniform," and "well edited." Gospels, psalters, and missals were to be copied by scribes "of mature age" and executed "with all possible care." It should be emphasized that the requirements of his decree were for a clear and legible hand (one worthy of the Divine origin of the texts), but not necessarily for a standard or uniform script. Authorized exemplars of texts were produced, intended for distribution throughout the empire.The quest for uniform accuracy was an attempt to achieve universal orthodoxy.(FN2)

**ALCUIN**  
    In Parma, on his way to Rome for the baptism of his son Pippin in 781, Charlemagne is said to have met the Anglo-Saxon scholar, Alcuin. Since 766 Alcuin had been the director of the Cathedral School in York, and was one of the most highly-regarded scholars of his day. Probably it was during that meeting, that Charlemagne invited Alcuin to be the director of the Court School and consequently he moved to France to assist in the implementation of Charlemagne's cultural reforms. He began by building up Charlemagne's library with books gathered from many centers of culture in Europe.  
    In 796, Alcuin, by then in his sixties (and seeking retirement) was appointed by Charlemagne to be Abbot of St Martin's monastery in Tours where he remained for just eight years, until his death in 804.While there his main interest was the revision and correction of existing texts of scripture and the liturgy (and not, as some have said, the supervision of the scriptorium). His version of the ancient Vulgate text became the basis of the large, one-volume Bibles which were later produced at Tours. It seems likely that an early Christian Bible was available to help his revision, and it is even possible that Alcuin himself brought it to Tours.(FN3)

**THE SCRIPTORIUM AT TOURS**  
    The scriptorium at Tours was long established before the arrival of Alcuin,(FN4) and flourished long after his death. However, in order to cope with the increased demand for books, Alcuin certainly enlarged it. One of his poems refers to "turba scriptorum," the crowd of scribes!  
    The most important period of manuscript production at Tours occurred in the first fifty years of the ninth century. During that time, incredible as it may seem, about one hundred Bibles were produced there, in addition to all the other liturgical and classical manuscripts that were written.(FN5) Books made in Tours can be traced to all the important centers of the Carolingian empire. Bischoff points to the influence of Tours as being in no small way responsible for the decisive changeover in most scriptoria, c. 810-820, to slimmer, rightward-slanting scripts.(FN6) Tours was the teacher not only of its own time, but also of the following centuries.  
    The three earliest Tours Bibles to survive date from before the year 810. These are now at Monza; Paris (BN Lat. 8847); and St Gallen (Cod. 75). Later examples include one produced c. 830 now in the Munich Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (Fig. 2 -- see also Historical Scripts, E1); the Moutier Grandval, which was produced c. 835 during the abbacy of Adalhard, 834-843 (Fig. 3); and the First Bible of Charles the Bald (Fig. 4), sometimes termed the Vivian Bible because it was produced in 846, during the abbacy of Vivian.  
    Despite references to the contrary, neither the Moutier Grandval nor any of these other Bibles can be called "Alcuin's Bible." The only specific connection with him is that, like all the biblical manuscripts emanating from Tours in the ninth century, these employed Alcuin's revised Vulgate as their text.  
    Manuscript production at this scriptorium came to an abrupt end in 853 when Tours was plundered by the Normans and its manuscripts scattered. The monastery and its scriptorium never recovered.

**THE CHARACTER OF CAROLINGIAN MINUSCULE**  
    Before attempting to trace the origins of this minuscule it would be helpful to ask, what distinguishes it from other, existing scripts? What are the peculiar characteristics of Carolingian minuscule?  
    Clearly, in contrast to the many barely-legible cursive scripts and the over-elaborate local bookhands of the early eighth century, Carolingian minuscule is a disciplined and formal hand. It is uniform, even to the extent of maintaining consistent heights for ascenders, descenders, and "body," size. It employs a natural, slanted pen angle as opposed to the flattened angle of half-uncial and most later uncial scripts. Its general appearance is of a soft, rounded, slightly-sloped letterform with a very even texture. There are no sharply angled strokes nor heavily accented serifs or stem endings. As for individual letters, the rounded "half-uncial," form of a was soon replaced by the "uncial," form. The looped g, such as that used in certain local hands like Luxeuil minuscule, replaces the half-uncial "Figure 5" form. Arched strokes (as in m and n) are often written without pen lifts, leaving the uprights without foot serifs. Variant letterforms are extremely rare in Carolingian minuscule, although the branching r is sometimes replaced by the "Figure 2," form, and round s does occur, though long s is usual. Ascenders are clubbed, but in a more sensitive and consistent manner than in half-uncial usage. Very few ligatures are employed; in fact, some Carolingian manuscripts have none at all. A sophisticated system of punctuation is used to aid legibility.

**THE ORIGINS OF CAROLINGIAN MINUSCULE**  
    My rather cagey statement in A Book of Formal Scripts about the origins of Carolingian minuscule, "The hand of Charlemagne's Court Scriptorium in the last decade of the eighth century provided the immediate model for the Caroline minuscule at St Martin's," reflects the uncertainty of modern palaeographical opinion, and my adviser's (Professor Julian Brown) own caution.  
    There is little consensus. Some authorities detect Roman (ie.half-uncial) roots, others French pre-Carolingian, some even see Insular influence (perhaps seeking a link with Alcuin), others cursive or semi-cursive scripts. Various combinations of these influences are also suggested. The opinions are many and bewildering.(FN7)  
    The problem is made more complicated because the actual emergence of Carolingian minuscule appears to have been rather haphazard. There is no solid evidence to suggest that it emanated from just one center, nor can any systematic development of the script be discerned (apart from the natural maturing observable in the work of energetic scriptoria like that at Tours).(FN8)

**EARLY EVIDENCE**  
    The abbey at Corbie in Picardy was founded c. 660 by monks from the very influential center of Luxeuil in eastern France. The distinctive Luxeuil minuscule was used by its monks wherever they founded other monasteries. This popular (though rather over-elaborate) script underwent some local variation.  
    Two manuscripts from the Corbie scriptorium are of particular interest in the search for a source of Carolingian minuscule.  
    The first is a copy of the Moralia of Gregory the Great, written sometime after 750, during the time when Leutchar was abbot (Fig. 5), which now resides in Berlin (Staatsbibliothek Ms. Theol. Lat. Fol. 354).The main text is written in half-uncial which on folios 48-49 (now thought to be later additions(FN9)) incorporates some minuscule characteristics and uses a slightly slanted pen angle. At one point the scribe, pressed for space, condenses the script and produces a few lines of what look to us like an early form of Carolingian minuscule.  
    The second is a multivolume Old Testament, now divided (Fig. 6). Five volumes remain in the Bibliothèque Municipale of Amiens and two folios of a sixth volume are in Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale Lat. 13174, fols.136, 138). This was written at Corbie between 772 and 781, during the abbacy of Maurdramnus, who was Leutchar's successor. Here we have a surprisingly mature minuscule hand -- majestic and assured.It was written with a natural pen angle and contains all the basic elements of Carolingian minuscule. In some ways it is more formal than mature Carolingian minuscule. The whole script has a rather static, upright stance and the arches are made with separate rather than branching strokes. However, the visual relationship between this hand and Carolingian minuscule is patently obvious.  
    A further manuscript (this time not from Corbie) is an Evangelistary (a set of Gospel readings for the Mass) actually commissioned by Charlemagne himself to commemorate the baptism of his son, Pippin. It is now in Paris (Bibliothèque Nationale Nouv. Acq. Lat. 1203).  
    The text of this luxurious, illuminated manuscript is written in gold and silver uncials on purple-stained vellum. One of the six full-page illuminations depicts the Fountain of Life, a symbol thought to allude to the baptistry of the Lateran in Rome where Charlemagne's son was probably baptized, copied from an early Christian manuscript (possibly a gift from the Pope brought back by Charlemagne from Rome).  
    Of the most significance in our present quest, however, is a Dedicatory Poem included in the manuscript, not only because it reveals the royal patronage, the occasion (and thus the date, 781-783), and the scribe and illuminator (Godescalc), but also because of its script, which is an unmistakable (if early) Carolingian minuscule (Fig. 7).

**ALCUIN'S INVENTION?**  
    Evidence from these three manuscripts indicates that neither Alcuin nor Charlemagne could have been involved in the "invention" of Carolingian minuscule. Long before Alcuin arrived in Tours in 796, Carolingian minuscule was already well-established at all the main centers of writing in France. It was in existence prior to Charlemagne's Edict of 789. In his Admonitio Generalis, Charlemagne called for the use of a clear and legible script (one worthy enough to "carry" the written Word of God). This requirement was part of a program intended to improve the accuracy and authenticity of both scripture and liturgy.Carolingian minuscule was readily available at that time, and fit those requirements perfectly.

**AND SO...**  
    In view of the diversity of scholarly opinion about the origins of the Carolingian minuscule(FN10) it may be presumptuous (and unwise) to try to formulate a conclusion. Nevertheless, it does seem that the evidence strongly favors half-uncial as the main ingredient. Half-uncial had been popular as a bookhand for many centuries. It was fully developed by the fourth century, and early half-uncial forms date from the third or even second century.(FN11) It would certainly have been a familiar script to eighth-century scribes.  
    The scribes of the Moutier Grandval, for example, writing as late as 835, used a "half-uncial," form of minuscule right alongside the "classic" Carolingian minuscule (Fig. 8). This demonstrates that easy familiarity and infers strong links between the two scripts.  
    The early manuscripts from Corbie indicate one way in which half-uncials could be adapted to a more minuscule form: a move from flattened to slanted pen angle; a more clearly defined body height and ascender/descender length. Individual letterforms were modified in the interest of legibility -- a return to uncial a, the use of looped g, and a more cursive character given to m and n. The whole was written with more discipline and thus achieved greater economy and clarity.  
    My considered opinion is that Carolingian minuscule was a modification of the ancient and serviceable half-uncial script, incorporating certain features gathered from other current scripts, and that the Abbey of Corbie led the field in this vitally important calligraphic development.  
ADDED MATERIAL  
    Stan Knight first gained an enthusiasm for the historical aspects of calligraphy forty years ago, while a student at Leeds College of Art with Thomas Swindlehurst (who, in his turn, had been a student of Edward Johnston's at the Royal College of Art). A revised and expanded version of his highly acclaimed paleographical survey, Historical Scripts is reviewed in this issue.

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    I am indebted to Rutherford Aris of the University of Minneapolis-St Paul, Michelle Brown of the British Library, Ewan Clayton of the Society of Scribes and Illuminators, and David Ganz of King's College, London for commenting on the draft of my text. Their generous advice has immeasurably improved its accuracy; any remaining shortcomings, however, are my own responsibility.  
Fig. 1 The "classic" Carolingian minuscule Moutie Grandval Bible London, The British Library Add. Ms. 10546, fol. 411v  
Fig. 2 Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek CLM 12841, fol. 309r  
Fig. 3 London, The British Library, Add. Ms. 10546, fol. 100r  
Fig. 4 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Lat. 1, fol. 237r  
Fig. 5 Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Ms. Theol. Lat. Fol. 354, fol. 49v  
Fig. 6 Amiens, Bibliothèque Municipale Ms. 11, fol. 29r  
Fig. 7 Section from Dedicatory Poem Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale Nouv. Acq. Lat 1203, fol. 126v  
Fig. 8 The "classic" Carolingian minuscule alongside the "half-uncial" form of minuscule Moutier Grandval Bible London, The British Library Add. Ms. 10546, fol. 268r

**FOOTNOTES**  
1 David Goldman in A is for Ox adds his own twist to the fable, "the famed Alcuin of York...was commissioned to start a school for calligraphers by Charlemagne." A further flight of fancy is contributed by Donald Anderson in The Art of Written Forms (and regurgitated by Marc Drogin), "Alcuin and his staff, interested in establishing a legible bookhand, decided that ascenders and descenders were to take up the same space as the main body of letters. Thus the script was written between four equally measured lines" -- Have these people ever looked at Carolingian minuscule?  
2 David Ganz has pointed out (The Preconditions for Caroline Minuscule, p.41) that the primary concern of the Carolingian reforms was the reading, copying, meditation, and commentary on Scripture -- the communication of the written Word of God. It was this which provided the intense motivation for accuracy and legibility, for texts without errors, and for a clear and unambiguous layout and script.  
3 See Nordenfalk, Carolingian Illumination, p.148.  
4 At a Sotheby's sale in London, June 1989, there was a late seventh century Rental Book from St Martin's in Tours written in "cursive Merovingian minuscule."  
5 This information from Bernhard Bischoff in correspondence with the present author. Compare E K Rand, A Survey of the Manuscripts at Tours.  
6 See Bernhard Bischoff, Latin Palaeography, p.114. Bischoff was the acknowledged authority on Carolingian minuscule.  
7 Boyle in Medieval Latin Palaeography, discussing the origins of Carolingian minuscule, cites eight further authorities, Ganz another seven.  
8 Ganz, p.28.  
9 E A Lowe (CLA VIII, p.x) and Bischoff (Latin Palaeography, p.108) both retracted their earlier opinions which suggested that this section of the manuscript revealed the "birth" of the Maurdramnus/Carolingian minuscule. However, regardless of the date to be assigned to these folios, the script still demonstrates strong connections between half-uncial and Carolingian minuscule.  
10 Boyle gives a succinct summary of opinions in Medieval Latin Palaeography, p.144-145.  
11 Compare the Livy Epitome, British Library Papyrus 1532 (shown in Knight, Historical Scripts, Fig. 1).

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