

= Israel the Grammarian =

Israel the Grammarian (c . 895 ? c . 965) was one of the leading European scholars of the mid @-@ tenth century . In the 930s , he was at the court of King Æthelstan of England (r . 924 ? 39) . After Æthelstan 's death , Israel successfully sought the patronage of Archbishop Rotbert of Trier and became tutor to Bruno , later the Archbishop of Cologne . In the late 940s Israel is recorded as a bishop , and at the end of his life he was a monk at the Benedictine monastery of Saint @-@ Maximin in Trier .

Israel was an accomplished poet , a disciple of the ninth @-@ century Irish philosopher John Scottus Eriugena and one of the few Western scholars of his time to understand Greek . He wrote theological and grammatical tracts , and commentaries on the works of other philosophers and theologians .

= = Background = =

The reign of Charlemagne saw a revival in learning in Europe from the late eighth century , known as the Carolingian Renaissance . The Carolingian Empire collapsed in the late ninth century , while the tenth is seen as a period of decline , described as the " Age of Iron " by a Frankish Council in 909 . This negative picture of the period is increasingly challenged by historians ; in Michael Wood 's view " the first half of the tenth century saw many remarkable and formative developments that would shape European culture and history . " The Bible remained the primary fount of knowledge , but study of classical writers , who had previously been demonised as pagans , became increasingly acceptable .

When Alfred the Great became King of Wessex in 871 , learning in southern England was at a low level , and there were no Latin scholars . He embarked on a programme of revival , bringing in scholars from Continental Europe , Wales and Mercia , and himself translated works he considered important from Latin to the vernacular . His grandson , Æthelstan , carried on the work , inviting foreign scholars such as Israel to England , and appointing a number of continental clerics as bishops . In the 930s the level of learning was still not high enough to supply enough literate English priests to fill the bishoprics . The generation educated in Æthelstan 's reign , such as the future Bishop of Winchester , Æthelwold , who was educated at court , and Dunstan , who became Archbishop of Canterbury , went on to raise English learning to a high level .

= = Early life = =

Very little is known about Israel 's early life . Michael Lapidge dates his birth to around 900 , while Wood places it slightly earlier , around 890 . He was a disciple of Ambrose and spent time at Rome , but it is unknown who Ambrose was or whether he was Israel 's tutor in Rome . In Wood 's view Israel was a monk at Saint @-@ Maximin in Trier in the 930s .

Tenth @-@ century sources provide conflicting evidence on Israel 's origin . Ruotger in his life of Bruno referred to Israel as Irish , whereas Flodoard in his Chronicle described him as " Britto " , which may refer to Brittany , Cornwall or Wales , all three of which were Celtic speaking refuges for Britons who had fled the Anglo @-@ Saxon invasion of England . According to Lapidge : " The consensus of modern scholarship is in favour of an Irish origin , but the matter has not been properly investigated . " He argues that the bishop of Bangor in County Down , Dub Innse , described Israel as a " Roman scholar " , and that he therefore does not appear to have recognised him as a fellow Irishman . Lapidge states that Flodoard was contemporary with Israel and may have known him , whereas Ruotger wrote after Israel 's death and probably did not have first hand knowledge . Giving children Old Testament Hebrew names such as Israel was common in Celtic areas in the tenth century . Lapidge concludes that Brittany is more likely than Wales or Cornwall , as manuscripts associated with him have Breton glosses , and Æthelstan 's court was a haven for Breton scholars fleeing Viking occupation of their homeland .

In 2007 , Wood revived the Irish theory , questioning whether Flodoard 's " Israel Britto " means "

Breton " , and stating that Ruotger knew Israel . Æthelstan 's biographer , Sarah Foot , mentions Wood 's view , but she rejects it , stating that Israel was not Irish and may have been a Breton . Thomas Charles @-@ Edwards , a historian of medieval Wales , thinks he may have been Welsh .

= = Æthelstan 's court = =

Israel 's presence in England is known from a gospel book written in Ireland in about 1140 , which contains a copy of a tenth @-@ century drawing and explanation of a board game called Alea Evangelii (Gospel Game) , based on canon tables (concordances for parallel texts of the four gospels) . According to a translation by Lapidge of a note on the manuscript :

Here begins the Gospel Dice which Dub Innse , bishop of Bangor , brought from the English king , that is from the household of Æthelstan , King of England , drawn by a certain Franco [or Frank] and by a Roman scholar , that is Israel .

The twelfth @-@ century copyist appears to have changed Dub Innse 's first person note to the third person . In a later passage , he interprets " Roman scholar , that is Israel " as meaning a Roman Jew (Iudeus Romanus) . This has been taken by some historians , including David Wasserstein , as showing that there was a Jewish scholar at Æthelstan 's court , but Lapidge argues that this interpretation was a misunderstanding by the copyist , and his view has been generally accepted by historians . Israel is thought to be Israel the Grammarian , described as a Roman scholar because of his time in the city , and the Gospel Game manuscript shows that he spent a period at Æthelstan 's court . A number of manuscripts associated with Israel , including two of the four known copies of his poem De arte metrica , were written in England . In Foot 's view :

Israel provides a tantalising link between the spheres of masculine camaraderie of a conventional royal court and the more rarefied , scholarly atmosphere that Æthelstan may have liked both his contemporaries and posterity to think he was keen to promote .

Israel was a practitioner of the " hermeneutic style " of Latin , characterised by long , convoluted sentences and a predilection for rare words and neologisms . He probably influenced the scribe known to historians as " Æthelstan A " , an early exponent of the style in charters he drafted between 928 and 935 . Hermeneutic Latin was to become the dominant style of the English Benedictine reform movement of the later tenth century , and Israel may have been an early mentor of one of its leaders , Æthelwold , at Æthelstan 's court in the 930s . The Latin texts which Israel brought to Æthelstan 's court were influenced by Irish writers , and the historian Jane Stevenson sees them as contributing a Hiberno @-@ Latin element to the hermeneutic style in England .

= = Later career = =

Israel 's poem De arte metrica was dedicated to Rotbert , Archbishop of Trier . It was almost certainly composed in England , and the dedication was probably a successful plea for Rotbert 's patronage when Æthelstan died in 939 . From about 940 Israel was the tutor of Bruno , the future Archbishop of Cologne and brother of the Holy Roman Emperor , Otto the Great . Froumund of Tegernsee described Israel as Rotbert 's " shining light " . In 947 Israel attended a synod at Verdun presided over by Rotbert , where he was referred to as a bishop , but without identification of his see . He was famous as a schoolmaster and probably played an important role in Emperor Otto 's establishment of a court school at Aachen .

Tenth @-@ century sources describe Israel as a bishop ; around 950 a man with this name is identified as Bishop of Aix @-@ en @-@ Provence , but it is not certain that he was the same person . Between 948 and 950 he may have held a bishopric in Aachen , where he debated Christian ideas about the Trinity with a Jewish intellectual called Salomon , probably the Byzantine ambassador of that name . He retired to become a monk at the Benedictine monastery of Saint @-@ Maximin in Trier , and died on 26 April in an unknown year . Lapidge sets his death in about 970 , whereas Wood dates it before 967 ? 68 .

= = Scholarship = =

Charters produced from 928 by King Æthelstan 's scribe , " Æthelstan A " , include unusual words almost certainly copied from the Hiberno @-@ Irish poems *Adelphus adelphe* and *Rubisca* . The poems display a sophisticated knowledge of Greek and are described by Lapidge as " immensely difficult " . It is likely that they were brought by Israel from the Continent , while *Adelphus adelphe* was probably , and *Rubisca* possibly , his work .

Mechthild Gretsch describes Israel as " one of the most learned men in Europe " , and Lapidge says that he was " an accomplished grammarian and poet , and one of the few scholars of his time to have first @-@ hand knowledge of Greek " . Greek scholarship was so rare in western Europe during this period that in the 870s Anastasius the Librarian was unable to find anyone competent to edit his translation of a text from Greek , and had to do it himself . Israel wrote on theology and collected works of medicine . In the 940s he became interested in the Irish philosopher John Scottus Eriugena , and commented on his works in a manuscript which survives in Saint Petersburg . In a manuscript glossing Porphyry 's *Isagoge* , he recommended John 's *Periphyseon* . His redaction of a commentary on Donatus 's *Ars Minor* was a major teaching text in the Middle Ages , and still in print in the twentieth century .