



Carolingian Culture at Reichenau & St. Gall

The Carolingian Libraries of St. Gall and Reichenau

[Site Home](#)

[About the Project](#) >

[Search the Library](#) >

[Resources](#) >

[Tours](#)

[The Plan](#)

[Deutsch](#)

Tours of the Libraries of Reichenau and St. Gall

The Libraries, Librarians and Library Catalogues of Reichenau and St. Gall

David Ganz

Our sources in reconstructing the contents of Carolingian libraries are fourfold: the over 7500 extant manuscript books and fragments from the period [see Bischoff, *Katalog*]; the select number of surviving Carolingian library catalogues and lists of donations to libraries; and the evidence of works quoted by Carolingian authors. The study of these materials has been transformed by the Internet: the manuscripts of Cologne, Lyons, Lorsch and St. Amand may be viewed on separate websites, Carolingian manuscripts and fragments may also be viewed on the websites of the British Library, the Beinecke Library, the libraries in Bamberg, Florence and Wolfenbuettel and the Digital Scriptorium. Furthermore, the website of the Monumenta Germaniae Historica allows students access to many of the narrative sources which mention Carolingian libraries, such as the letter from Leidrad of Lyon to Charlemagne, and the various letters and poems of Alcuin, Hrabanus Maurus, and Lupus of Ferrières which mention books. There are, of course, fragments still to be identified, and the identification of sources is always problematic. but (as this essay will show) the evidence of the surviving Carolingian catalogues for St. Gall and Reichenau is particularly instructive.

The largest Carolingian libraries owned some 500 volumes, and their holdings combined manuscripts copied at the monastery (or sometimes at the cathedral) where the library was located, together with manuscripts acquired by donation, inheritance or purchase. A manuscript was a substantial investment of labour, and in the case of luxury books also of gold or silver for ink or for bindings, in addition to the cost of the parchment. Consequently manuscripts entered into the economy of religious houses, and could be exchanged for favours (most notably in the case of the Tours Bibles and Gospel Books given to Charles the Bald and Lothar), for prayers, or for money. But despite the costs there is clear evidence that individuals could copy manuscripts for their own use, and that laymen as well as clerics copied and owned such books. If they subsequently passed into the possession of religious foundations their chances of survival improved, though the French wars of Religion, the French Revolution, the secularization of religious foundations under Napoleon and the first and second World Wars all took their toll. In addition, visiting scholars might steal books (Pierre Daniel), destroy books (Theodor Mommsen) or even accidentally set fire to libraries (Richard Bentley).

Good Carolingian libraries had a librarian, and Reginbert at Reichenau, Hadoard at Corbie and Notker Balbulus at St. Gall were among the most learned of these [see Preisendanz ; Rankin]. The St. Gall charters, in particular, include attestations by witnesses who identify themselves as librarians, Liuthart between 867 and 872, Notker in 890, and Waldramm between 903 and 909.¹ Librarians, as today, cultivated donors, maintained catalogues, and acquired books, often by copying them themselves. They might write an expression of ownership in their books. They often listed all of the works contained in a volume on the front flyleaf. They might ensure, as at Bobbio and Laon, that the names of donors were recorded in the books which they gave. And they decided how the books were to be grouped in the library. The fullest account of the duties of the librarian is found in the monastic customs of Fleury. From these we learn that the librarian (*armarius*) was also the head of the monastery school. He was to be regarded by the brothers as equal to an apostle equipped with the knowledge of all truth and he also wrote charters for the abbey. He was responsible for the care of the books and of all of the tools of the scriptorium. These are listed: parchment, threads for sewing the codices and deerskins to bind the books. Lastly, he was responsible for correcting the books, fixing the office lessons and defending the faith, refuting heretics, and all that concerned purity of doctrine.²

How then were the books to be read? We get a sense of those books used for celebrating the Mass and Office from the *Monasteriales Indicia*, the sign language used in monasteries. At Christ Church Canterbury monks used signs to ask for a gradual, a sacramentary, an epistolary, a troper, a Bible, a martyrology, a psalter, a hymnal, and in the Chapter a small martyrology and the Benedictine Rule.³ In terms of personal reading and study, we know that during the Night Office in winter the Rule of St. Benedict required readings from the Bible and the Fathers: 'let the inspired books of both the Old and the New Testaments be read at the night offices, as also the expositions of them which have been made by the most eminent orthodox and Catholic Fathers' [c. 9]. Books were also read at mealtimes [c. 38]. The Rule of St. Benedict prescribed readings in winter to the end of the second hour from Matins and from lunch until Vespers, and in summer from 5 to Prime. After Prime the

monks were to leave the church and meditate on holy reading for the profit of their souls and from the fourth hour until Sext [c. 48]; of course, because the Benedictine 'hour' is a division of the day or of the night depending on the length of the day/night, these readings varied in length. During Lent, they read until the third hour and the Rule of St. Benedict required each monk to read a complete book [c. 48]. Hildemar of Corbie, in his ninth-century commentary on the Rule composed for Northern Italian monasteries, gives the fullest account of the expectations for reading [see Hildemar, ed. Mittermueller]. The librarian with the help of the brothers was to assemble all the books on a carpet in the chapterhouse. He had a list of which brother had borrowed which book up until then. The monk was to return the book and the prior, or someone whom he designated, was to question the monk to find out if he had read it carefully. Hildemar explains that if a monk has chosen to read a book beyond his capacities he is to return it and be given one which the abbot thinks more suitable, but that if he has been idle he must reread it until he can answer the questions satisfactorily [p. 487].

To get a sense of which books were available to these monks, our best sources are the lengthy ninth-century catalogues of Reichenau (821-2), Lorsch (c. 830), St. Riquier (831), St. Gall, Murbach (both mid ninth-century), and Fulda.⁴ These lists of some 300 to 500 titles are arranged by authors and subject headings, and reveal a sense of a systematic collection which matches the bibliographies of Cassiodorus's *Institutiones* or Notker Balbulus's *Notatio de illustribus viris*. The St. Gall catalogue lists books under various headings: books of the Old and New Testaments, works by Gregory, Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, Prosper, Bede, Isidore, Origen, Cassiodorus, Eusebius and then books by various authors, monastic rules, lives of the saints, lives of apostles and martyrs, law books, glossaries, works on metre, books of grammar, and books of medicine. The catalogues from Reichenau, Lorsch, Murbach or St. Wandrille have a similar order.

The St. Gall Library Catalogues

Two manuscripts containing catalogues from St. Gall have survived.⁵ **The first, CSG 728** (second half of the ninth century), starts with a separate list of books in Insular script *Libri Scottice scripti* ('books written in English or Irish style') **and then lists** books under the title 'A list of the books of the monastery of St. Gall, confessor of Christ' (*Breviarium Librorum de Coenobio Sancti Galli Confessoris Christi*). The list has been corrected by the St. Gall teacher Notker Balbulus, (c. 840-912) who added comments about the state of the books [Rankin, 'Ego Itaque']. Some books are described as *vetus* ('old') or *inutilis* ('useless') The book titled the 'Collectio de verbis beati Augustini Hieronimi, Gregorii seu ceterorum patrum' is *inutile*; a copy of the letters of Jerome to Eustochium in *quaternionibus veterrimis et falsatis* ('on very old and damaged [?, or even 'falsified?'] quires'); a copy of Isidore's *Liber Differentiarum* is *totum mendacium et inutile* ('wholly false and useless'); a book of Isidore's Sentences is described as *defectus et disiectus* ('incomplete and unbound'), while a copy of Bede's Synonima in Canticum Abbae is *pusillulum iuxta translationem antiquam* ('very small, and follows the old translation', i.e. the pre-Jerome Latin version of the Bible). One volume of Isidore is marked *Hoc legi non potest* ('This cannot be read'), while a copy of Primasius is *corruptus* ('corrupted' or 'damaged'). Notker also made positive comments about the books in his charge, however: we find a volume containing the lives of St. Gall and Otmar described as *Nobiliter scripta* ('nobly written'), a copy of the life of St. Silvester (CSG 567 or **568?**) that is *Recens et bene conscripta* ('new and well-written'), while a copy of the life of St. Martin is *optime scripta* ('superbly written'). Some books are marked with an R for *Require* ('look for it') and one copy of Isidore's *de Deo* is marked *hoc auditum et non visum* ('[I have] heard of this one but not seen it'). The comments make clear that the St. Gall catalogue in CSG 728 was not a static document. It was something actively used by the librarian, who also seemed to care about keeping the library collection in good order.

A second manuscript, **CSG 267 [e-codices]**, is headed *Adnotatio Librorum Que sunt in Monasterio Sancti Galli* ('Register of books that are in the monastery of St. Gall'). Lehmann, who edited the text in his *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge*, dated this manuscript to 883-896. It seems to be a copy of CSG 728's catalogue, before the latter was annotated. Here the original booklist from CSG 728 is followed on **pp. 25-28** by a list of 34 books commissioned by abbot Grimalt (841-872), titled *Hos libros patravit grimoldus abba in monasterio sancti galli in diebus hludovicus regis germaniae cum adiutorio hartmoti praepositi sui per annos XXX et unum* ('Grimalt, abbot of the monastery of St. Gall in the days of king Louis the German, provided these books with the help of Harmut, his prior, over the course of 31 years'). **This is followed by a list** of books written during the abbacy of Hartmut (872-883): *Hos vero libros idem hartmotus post grimoldo abba constitutus, sub hludovico supradicto rege et filio eius karolo imperatore in diebus regiminis sui fecit conscribi* ['and this same Harmut, made abbot after Grimalt, in the time of the aforementioned king Louis and his son Charles the emperor, ordered the production of these books during his abbacy']. These lists are also included in the *Casus Sancti Galli* of Ratpert, and two surviving volumes contain verses which attest to Hartmut's intervention, namely **CSG 7 (p. 460)**:

*Hos Salamon libros IHCOV clareque sophie
Ac praetermissum quod dicitur verba dierum
Hartmotus gallo tradebam munere firmo
Auferat huic siquis perhimatur vulnere pestis*

‘These books of Salomon, Joshua (?), and the famed Wisdom,
Not to mention what is called the ‘Words of Days’ (i.e. Chronicles),
I, Harmut, gave as gift to St. Gall the constant
If anyone should take it away from him, he shall perish by an onset of illness’

The note in **CSG 19 (p. 134)** reads as follows:

*Hoc ego psalterium quod iure vocatur hebreum
Hartmotus gallo donavi pectore laeto
Auferet hoc siquis damnetur mille flagellis
Iudicioque Dei succumbat corpore pesti*

‘I, Harmut, gifted this psalter that is rightly called ‘Hebrew’ (i.e. translated from Hebrew) to St. Gall with a happy heart
If anyone should take this book away, he shall be condemned to a thousand lashes,
And by the judgement of God he shall succumb in his body to illness.’

The final list is of those books given to the abbey by Grimalt titled *Istos autem libros dominus Grimoldus de suo dedit ad sanctum Gallum* (‘And those books lord Grimold granted from his own resources to St. Gall’) [see Bischoff, ‘Bücher’]. Two manuscripts contain verses recording their donation to the library, while some of some of Grimalt’s books are recorded as having been given to the emperor Charles and to Archbishop Noting and then returned. Of the books listed amongst Grimold’s collection, Bischoff has made the following connexions with extant manuscripts (one of which can be found on the our site): **CSG 187** (Prosper, *De activa et contemplativa*, etc.); **CSG 276** (Alcuin, *de Fide*); **CSG 277 [e-codices]** (Halitgar, *de VII principalibus vitiis* copied in South West Germany); **CSG 286 [e-codices]** (Hrabanus Maurus, *de ordinibus ecclesiasticis*, copied at Regensburg); **CSG 397 [e-codices]** (*Computistica and Liturgica* including personal entries by Grimalt); **CSG 457 [e-codices]** (Hrabanus Maurus, *Martyrologium* - copied at Mainz 840-853, possibly a gift); **CSG 556 [e-codices]** (*Passio Emmerammi* originally a part of St. Gall 570) with a verse dedication; **CSG 559 [e-codices]** (*Passio Sebastiani* etc.) listed as *passions sanctorum in una scheda* (on p. 31 of CSG 267); **CSG 570 [e-codices]** (*De sex aetatibus mundi*); **Zurich C 80 [e-codices]** (Alcuin, *Dialectica et Rhetorica*); Rome, Vat Reg Lat 339 + **St. Gall, Vadiana 317 [e-codices]** (Valerian of Cimiez; Einhard, *Vita Karoli, Admonitiones Sancti Basilii*). It is clear from this list that Grimalt, like his forebears, had a diverse range of interests, comprising grammar, theology, hagiography, history and beyond.

The Reichenau Catalogues

The earliest library catalogue from the Reichenau was apparently a roll (*rotulus*), known to the abbey historian Gallus Öhem in 1500. It was used by the Reichenau prior Johann Egon (1626-43) in his *de Viris illustribus monasterii Augiae maioris* [ed. Preisendanz], and edited from a now lost transcript by T. Neugart in 1803.⁶ It was last seen in 1787 [Preisendanz, p. 9]. It dated to 821-2, according to the title *Brevis librorum qui sunt in coenobio Sindleezes-Auva, facta anno VIII Hludovici imperatoris* and was followed by lists of books copied for abbot Erlebold (822-838), Ruadhelm (838-842), and those copied or obtained by Reginbert during the abbacies of Waldo (786-806), Heito (806-23), Erlebold and Ruadhelm. In Geneva BG Lat 21, f. 195v-196v, there is a copy of this list made at Murbach entitled DE INSULA and starting with the works of Augustine, omitting the biblical texts.⁷ The rotulus also included a list headed *De libris C* which lists books brought or sold by priests, chiefly missals, psalters, and antiphoners. Reginbert was active from 817 (if not earlier) to 846; he is mentioned in the letter of Tatto and Grimalt in 817, while his death is recorded in the *Annales alemannici* for 846. His distinctive hand has been identified in the corrections to the following books in the abbey library: Karlsruhe, **Aug perg 98** (Augustine *de consensu Evangelistarum*), **Aug perg 109** (Prædestinatus), **Aug perg 113** (Jerome, *in Oseam*, a manuscript copied at St. Denis); **Aug perg 144** (Bede, *in librum Tobiae, in Ezram et Neemiam*); **Aug perg 197** (Jerome, *Epistulae*); **Aug perg 233** (*Passio Sancti Dionysii*).

Reginbert also copied portions of Karlsruhe **Aug perg 18**; **Aug perg 26** (Pseudo-Jerome’s *Breviarium in Psalmos*); **Aug perg 32** (*Passionale sanctorum*); Aug perg 36 (Augustine, *Ennarationes in psalmos*); **Aug perg 94** (Jerome, *Adversus Iovinianum*), **Aug perg. 236** (Ambrose, *de bono mortis*).

Finally, Reginbert wrote inscriptions in **Aug Perg 136** and **202 (part 2)**, and also a verse colophon **Aug perg 109**, Stuttgart Theol. et philos. fol 95, and Aug perg 136 (a collection of saints’ lives). The inscription in Aug. perg. 109, f. 1r (Prædestinatus) reads:

In nomine Dei patris et filii et spiritus sancti A et Ω . Hunc codicem ego Reginbertus scriptor servorum Dei servus cum permissu et voluntate seniorum ad servitium Dei et sanctae Mariae ceterorumque sanctorum quibus in Auua servitur meo studio ac labore confeci. Eumque usibus fratrum inibidem famulantium aptari et conservari depono. Perque Deum optestor ut nulli a quoquam extra monasterium donetur aut praestetur nisi qui ibi fidem et pignus dederit donec eum sanum et salvum suo loco restituat.

'In the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Alpha & Omega. I, Reginbert, scribe of the servants of God, with the permission and willingness of the elders at the service of God and saint Mary, and [with the willingness] of the other saints who are served at Reichenau, have made this book through my own eagerness and labour. And I ask that it be furnished and preserved for the use of the brothers serving in this same place. And through God I beseech that it be given to no one outside the monastery by anyone, nor lent, except to someone who shall have there given faith and security until he should return it safe and sound to its place.'

Metrum Heroicum Exametrum
Magno in honore dei domini genetricis et almae
Sanctorum quoque multorum, quibus Auua fovetur,
Condidit hoc corpus permissu adiuta priorum
Cura Reginberti scriptoris, in usibus optans
Hoc fratrum durare diu salvumque manere.
Et ne forte labor pereat confectus ab illo
Adiurat cunctos Domini per amabile nomen
Hoc ut nullus opus cuiquam concesserit extra
Ni prius ille fidem dederit vel denique pignus
Donec ad has sedes quae accepit salva remittat.
Dulcis amice gravem scribendi attende laborem
Tolle, aperi, recita, ne laedas, claude repone.

'In the great honor of the nourishing mother of our Lord God, and Also of the many saints, by whom Reichenau is cherished, The care of Reginbert the scribe, with the helping permission of the priors, founded this work wishing it to remain a long time safe and sound for the use of the brothers. And lest perchance the work accomplished by him should perish He abjures all through the well-loved name of the Lord that no one should grant the work to anyone outside Unless first the borrower has given faith and even security, Until he safely returns what he received to these haunts, Sweet friend, heed the grave labour of writing, Take it up, open it, recite, don't harm, close it and return it.'

As his inscription and verses suggest, Reginbert was - as any good librarian and scribe - personally invested in the fate of the books in Reichenau's library. With this project, Reginbert's weary and worried soul can now rest easy: the books of Reichenau can now be 'lent' to thousands around the world, who can take them up, read them, without any chance of harm or loss.

Footnotes

¹ For Liuthart, see **H. Wartmann, *Urkundenbuch der Abtei Sanct Gallen. Theil II: Jahr 840-920 (Zurich: 1866)***, no. 523, p. 137 (867), no. 529, p. 143 (867), no. 530, p. 144 (867), no. 538, p. 152 (868), no. 557, p. 171 (872). For Notker, see Wartmann, no. 679, p. 243 (890). For Waldramm, see Wartmann, no. 743, p. 348 (903), no. 749, p. 351-2 (907), no. 761, pp. 362-3 (909).

² *Consuetudines Floriacenses Antiquiores*, ed. A. Davril and L. Donnat, in *Corpus Consuetudinum Monasticarum*, 7/3 (Siegburg: 1984), pp. 16-17.

³ D. Banham, *Monasteriales Indicia, the Anglo-Saxon Monastic Sign Language* (Frithgarth: 1996) pp. 26-28 and p. 30.

⁴ A. Häse, *Mittelalterliche Bücherverzeichnisse aus Kloster Lorsch: Einleitung, Edition und Kommentar*, Beiträge zum Buch und Bibliothekswesen 42 (Wiesbaden: 2002); *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge Deutschlands und der Schweiz*, ed. P. Lehmann, (Munich: 1918), pp. 55-146 (St. Gall); pp. 222-274 (Reichenau); Hariulf, *Chronique de l'abbaye de St-Riquier*, ed. F. Lot (Paris: 1891), pp. 86-93 (St. Riquier); W. Milde, *Die Bibliothekskatalog des Klosters Murbach aus dem neunten Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg: 1968); G. Schrimpf, *Mittelalterliche Bücherverzeichnisse des Klosters Fulda* (Frankfurt: 1992) edits the five ninth century lists pp. 14-56.

⁵ J. Duft, 'Die Handschriften-Katalogisierung in der Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen vom 9. Bis zum 19 Jahrhundert', in B. M. von Scarpatetti, *Die Handschriften der Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen, Beschreibendes Verzeichnis Codices 1726-1984 (14-19 Jahrhundert)* (St. Gallen: 1983), pp. 9-104; R. Schaab, *Monch in St. Gallen Zur inneren Geschichte eines frühmittelalterlichen Klosters* (Sigmaringen: 2003)

⁶ N. Trudpert, *Episcopatus Constantiensis Alemannicus* (St. Blasien: 1803), Adpendix II, p. 536-544; cf. his description of the list, p. 152.

⁷ Photographs in *Reichenauer Handschriften 2: Die Papierhandschriften - Fragmenta - Nachträge* (Leipzig: 1914), Tafeln 1-3; text edited by A. Holder, *Reichenauer Handschriften, 3: Register - Grundstock der Bibliothek - Die alten Kataloge* (Leipzig: 1918), pp. 82-86. Holder's editions of these texts are often more helpful than Lehmann's.

Bibliography

- Bischoff, B., 'Bücher am Hofe Ludwigs des Deutschen und die Privatbibliothek des Kanzlers Grimalt', in *Mittelalterliche Studien*, III (Stuttgart: 1981), pp. 187-215.
 - Bischoff, B., *Katalog der festländischen Handschriften des neunten Jahrhunderts (mit Ausnahme der wisigotischen). Teil I: Aachen-Lambach* (Wiesbaden: 1998). Teil II: Laon-Paderborn (Wiesbaden: 2004).
 - Heinzer, F., *Klosterreform und mittelalterliche Buchkultur im deutschen Südwesten*, (Leiden: 2008), pp. 17-31 [on Reginbert].
 - **Mittermueller, R., ed., *Vita et Regula SS. P. Benedicti una cum Expositione Regulae ab Hildemaro Tradita, (Regensburg and New York: 1880).***
 - Preisendanz, K., 'Reginbert von der Reichenau. Aus Bibliothek und Skriptorium des Inselklosters', *Neue Heidelberger Jahrbucher* (1953): 1-49.
 - Rankin, S. K., 'Ego Itaque Notker Scripsi', *Revue Bénédictine* 101 (1991): 268-298.
 - Reichenau catalogue, c. 821-2, and additions: Lehmann, P., *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge Deutschlands und der Schweiz. 1: Bistümer Konstanz und Chur* (Munich: 1919), nos. 49-53, pp. 240-262.
 - *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, ed. and trans. B.L. Venarde (Cambridge MA: 2011).
 - St. Gall catalogues, later ninth century: Lehmann, P., *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge Deutschlands und der Schweiz. 1: Bistümer Konstanz und Chur* (Munich: 1919), nos. 16-20, pp. 71-89.
 - Steiner, H., 'Buchproduktion und Bibliothekszuwachs im Kloster St. Gallen unter den Äbten Grimald und Hartmut', in *Ludwig der Deutsche und seine Zeit*, ed. W. Hartmann (Darmstadt: 2004), pp. 161-183.
-
-