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Tours of the Libraries of Reichenau and St. Gall

The Use of German in Reichenau and St Gall manuscripts

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Many of the monks at St. Gall and Reichenau grew up speaking a dialect of German and continued to use their native tongue as adults in daily business and conversation. Most of these monks also learned Latin, the language of the Church and of learning, although proficiency levels no doubt varied with some monks achieving fluency in Latin, but others having only a very rudimentary knowledge of it. Latin was the language of literacy, and nearly all writing took place in it, including that of business and administration. German was rarely written down and when it was recorded it was often as an aid to understand a Latin text or passage. German literature, folklore and law existed but largely in the oral sphere and were passed down by word of mouth. Judging from the few texts that fortuitously made it to parchment, however, the oral tradition must have been quite rich and diverse.

Old High German

The various dialects that were spoken in the East Frankish kingdom during the Carolingian period are collectively referred to as 'Old High German' (OHG). Linguists use the adjective 'old' to refer to the earliest period from which written vernacular texts survive, ca. 750-1050; 'high' refers to those varieties of German that were spoken in the central and mountainous southern regions and that had undergone a phonological change in their consonants called the 'Second' or 'German Consonant Shift.' These consonantal changes also account for some of the major differences between German and English, for example *apple* vs. *Apfel*, *make* vs. *machen* and *to* vs. *zu*. German dialects in the north (Old Saxon, Old Low Franconian and Frisian) did not undergo this shift and are collectively referred to as 'Low German.' The varieties of OHG that were spoken at Reichenau and St. Gall differed from each other in small degrees; they belonged to a larger dialect group called 'Alemannic' which is today represented by Swiss German, southwestern German and western Austrian dialects, and the language of Liechtenstein.

Speaking German

Most St. Gall and Reichenau monks grew up speaking German and continued to speak it as adults, with one another, servants and locals. Some of the more educated monks, the *scholastici*, no doubt also spoke Latin, especially if they wanted to exclude others from their conversation. Other vernacular languages including varieties of Romance such as Old French and Rhaetian were also spoken, perhaps even on a daily basis, and many monks were bi- and even trilingual. Foreign visitors and speakers of Irish, Anglo-Saxon, and other languages were often also present, although we assume that they soon acquired at least a rudimentary knowledge of the local dialect if they stayed for any longer period of time. If the visitors were educated, they may also have conversed with local monks in Latin. Communication with speakers of Romance languages was facilitated by the fact that these were still very close to Latin and could probably be at least somewhat understood with a knowledge of it.

Writing German

There was no standardized written or spoken 'German' language at this time, and variation was the rule, from region to region, within a region, and even within a single monastic house or scriptorium, which often housed monks from several regions. When writing German, there were no dictionaries or other reference aids to which one could refer for the spelling of a word. There was yet no orthographic standard, and scribes often wrote phonetically by recording with Latin letters what they felt best reflected pronunciation. Some monasteries established a house style, but this could change from generation to generation. All scribes first learned to write Latin, and literacy in any other language was based upon this foundation. Sometimes a German sound had no corresponding Latin letter, and scribes had to be creative when writing it. The /pf/ sound in a word like *Apfel* was represented with various combinations of letters such as <pf>, <ph>, <ff>, etc. A few scholars during this period expressed their concern about the unruly nature of vernacular orthography. Notker Labeo (ca. 950-1022), who was a monk and school master at St. Gall, even applied accent marks and developed a spelling system to help his pupils correctly read aloud German translations of important school texts. The consonants known as voiceless 'stops' /p/, /t/, and /k/ were to be written and read aloud with their

voiced counterparts /b/, /d/, and /g/ when used at the beginning of a word and preceded by another voiced sound such as vowels, nasals or the liquid /l/. Notker's 'law' is found applied in several St. Gall manuscripts of his own works, but never caught on outside of the Abbey.

Vestiges of spoken language can sometimes be deduced from transcribed translations of common pastoral texts, e.g., prayers, creeds, baptismal vows and confession formulas. Texts like this would be repeated by illiterate parishioners after having heard a cleric read them out loud; many of the clerics who put the texts to parchment had only a rudimentary training in writing. Moreover, even if they knew how to write, they were not used to writing German. The confession formulas and credo recorded in **Csg 232** are an excellent example. The texts were copied on the verso side of a flyleaf sometime in the late eleventh or early twelfth century by two inexperienced hands. Spellings in the texts are rudimentary and closely reflect local speech; a later hand has gone through and made corrections of some of the most obvious dittographic and orthographic errors (in column B: l. 18 *In de<n>* 'in the' with the <n> added above the word, *unse* changed to *unde* 'and' in l. 19, and *seundenno* changed to *sundenno* 'sins' in the last two lines). Word division is at times disregarded, e.g. in column A *aldez* for *alde ez* ('or it') in line 12, *wandez* for *wande ez* ('because it') in line 19 and *pittich* for *bitte ich* ('I pray') in line 21. The first person singular pronoun *ich* ('I') is written with an initial aspirated /h/ closely reflecting spoken Alemannic. In line 3 the first scribe spells *allen cotes* ('all of God's'), yet one line later he writes *din gotes* ('yours God'), demonstrating that although 'Notker's Law' was no longer being followed, the distinction between voiced and voiceless stops was still problematic. In line 1, the first scribe spells 'almighty' *almactigen*, whereas the second scribe spells it *alemactegon* (l. 21), *alemáctigen* (l. 2 of column B) and *alemachtiger* (l. 6/7). Similar pastoral texts from around the same period are preserved in **Csg 338 [e-codices]** and **1394 [e-codices]**.

Written German

Written German was an exception and rarely the primary goal of inscription when pen was put to parchment. Those who could write German had learned to write in order to compose, record, and copy Latin. When German was written, it was most often as a means to understand a text written in Latin, and when it is found in manuscripts, it is often between the lines, in the margins, or on unused fly leaves. In only a few, rare cases was a German text carefully copied in its own book for presentation. A list of books drawn up at Reichenau in 822 mentions *De carminibus theodiscae volumen I* ('a volume of German songs'). A list from ca. 20 years later lists *XII carmina theodiscae linguae formata* ('12 songs in German format') and a volume containing *Carmina diversa ad docendum theodiscam linguam* ('various songs for teaching the German language'). It is unclear what these volumes contained and whether any of the 'songs' they reference can be attributed to surviving vernacular works or whether they represent literature that has since perished. Some scholars have suggested that the books may have been used to teach vernacular poetry, e.g., alliterative and other types of verse. Several OHG original literary monuments may have been produced or were at least copied at Reichenau. 'Christ and the Samaritan Woman' (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, cod. 515) is a 31-line poem with end rhyme that recounts events from the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John; the 'Lay of St. George' (Heidelberg, Bibliotheca Palatina, Cpl 52) may also have been copied at Reichenau.

At St. Gall short snippets of original German poetry are found scribbled on fly leaves, e.g., **p. 1 of Csg 30 [e-codices]** where we find two verses about a marriage gone awry and **p. 1 of Csg 105 [e-codices]** with an enigmatic verse about gifting one's lover with a spear; on p. 204 of the same manuscript is a puzzling line, perhaps about a visiting Rhaetian. Sometimes Old High German is also found in short scribal verses, such as in the bottom margin of **Csg 166, p. 314** where we read *chumo kibeit* 'I awaited it with difficulty'. A longer form of the verse is found on **p. 209 of Csg 623** *chumo kisceib filo chumor kipeit* 'I finished writing it with difficult, even more arduously I awaited it (to end)'. Apparently copying manuscripts could be a difficult task!

Glosses, Glossaries and Translations

The bulk of written German that survives from this early period is in the form of 'glosses,' i.e., single words or phrases copied between the lines (interlinear) or in the margins (marginal), at times even within the text (contextual). Glosses serve to explain difficult words or passages or simply to translate a Latin word or 'lemma' in the primary text. Vernacular OHG glosses are found in some 80 St. Gall manuscripts. **Csg 844** is a tenth century copy of a popular medieval school text *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius. In addition to copious Latin lexical and other types of grammatical commentary, the ms. also contains 16 interlinear and 28 marginal glosses in OHG. So on **p. 16, l. 14** the Latin phrase *conquesta est* is glossed first with the Latin *causata* and then above that another hand wrote the OHG *chlagota* 'contested'. On **p. 19, l. 10** the lemma *obuersatus fueram* 'I had moved about in the presence of' is glossed *i. commoratus .i. inheimmon*, '[I had] lingered or in the home of'. In this example the OHG word follows the Latin word and provides a freer translation. Some glosses and commentary were copied from other manuscripts whereas others represent the vestiges of a singular reading and were entered spontaneously. Glosses could be used for teaching others or for reminding a teacher what needed to be covered; sometimes they reflect a personal commentary that brings the text into the present or helps to make connections and references between texts, weaving them into the complex medieval knowledge web.

One of the most prolific glossators at St. Gall at the turn of the millennium was Ekkehard IV (ca. 980-1060). Ekkehard came to St. Gall as a young boy and studied there under Notker Labeo. Sometime after Notker's death in 1022 Ekkehard became the head of the cathedral school at Mainz. He returned to St. Gall in 1031, where he remained until his death, busying himself as a teacher, scholar, scribe and editor; he glossed 62 St. Gall manuscripts, mostly in Latin, but also with a few OHG words. Some of Ekkehard's glosses may have served a pedagogical purpose but others were made for personal reasons, e.g., to jog his memory regarding the meaning of an uncommon word or to reference an item or concept in his everyday sphere. A focus of Ekkehard's glossing appears to have been the Church father Augustine and his reception, e.g., Csg 162-166, a five-volume set of Augustine's *Commentary on the Psalms*. Two of the volumes, **Csg 162** and **166** also contain a few OHG glosses. On **p. 58 of Csg 162** Ekkehard wrote two glosses. The first above l. 9 is in Latin above the lemma *ab integumentis* 'from the coverings'; Ekkehard glosses *.i. paleis . aut vinaces* 'that is chaff or pomace'. The term *vinacia* comes up again in l. 19, but here Ekkehard glosses it with the German *i. trestin* 'that is grape marc'. On the next page 59, l. 3 he glosses *acuirit* with its OHG equivalent *sûrêt* 'makes sour, unpleasant'. On **p. 69, l. 3 of Csg 166** Ekkehard glosses the technical term *tectorium* with *tunicha* 'whitewash,' a term that was perhaps unfamiliar in Latin and for which a Latin synonym would have been difficult to find.

Sometimes glosses were collected into books called "glossaries"; two such collections at St. Gall are the oldest books with written German. The first, the *Abrogans* (named after the first word of the text, 'humble') was written in southwestern Germany, perhaps Reichenau, at the end of the eighth century and is today preserved in **Csg 911 [e-codices]**. It contains the copy of a Latin thesaurus compiled sometime in the first half of the eighth century with some 3200 of the words translated into German and on **pp. 320-321 [e-codices]** the oldest vernacular version of 'Our Father' and the Creed. The second, the 'Vocabularius Sancti Galli' in **Csg 913 [e-codices]**, is a thematic Latin-German glossary that contains 450 words and was copied ca. 790, perhaps at the monastery of Fulda. It may have originally been used by an Anglo-Saxon missionary travelling through Germany. A slightly later version of the *Abrogans* is found in **Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek Aug. 111 on f. 76-90**. Scholars refer to this version as *Ra* (after the monastery where it was preserved, Reichenau, and the order in which the manuscript was edited by its first editor E.G. Graff, in this case the very first one, a). Scholars think that *Ra* was copied somewhere in the upper Rhine region at the beginning of the ninth century; the dialect is Alemannic with some Bavarian influence. On the bottom of **f. 90r**, a later ninth-century hand has scratched in with a stylus two German words, *apanst* 'mistrust' and *peranlith* 'fruitful'. 'Scratch glosses' like this are common in manuscripts and represent a spontaneous interaction with the text. In this case the scribe was recopying two glosses found earlier on the same page in column b, lines 20 and 28, where they translate the Latin *invidia* and *fru<c>tiosa*. The *Ra* glossary is followed on **fols. 97 and 98** by a set of glosses to Gregory's *Moralia in Job*. It is thought that *Ra* and Csg 911 are closely related; a third copy of the *Abrogans* is found in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale lat. 7640, thus testifying to the glossary's popularity, since very few OHG German documents are preserved in more than one copy. It is thought that the text stems from an Anglo-Saxon glossary tradition, although some scholars have also argued for a Lombardic origin.

In some cases a Latin text is glossed word for word with German equivalents. The *Rule of St. Benedict* in **Csg 916 [e-codices]**, originally perhaps from Reichenau, provides such an interlinear vernacular version up until chapter 67. German prepositions, when they appear, govern the case of their Latin equivalents, not as would be dictated by German grammar, thus reminding us that the goal was to understand and practice Latin. Another manuscript now on deposit in England, Oxford MS Junius 25, contains a German interlinear version of 26 early Christian hymns composed by St. Ambrose. The German text may have been produced at Reichenau at the beginning of the ninth century and could be one of the song collections referred to in the Reichenau catalogue. In a few instances, the Latin words of the hymns are glossed only with what would be the equivalent morphological ending in German, thus helping students to practice their Latin grammar. Another extremely important OHG text preserved in **Csg 56 [e-codices]** is a bilingual version of a Gospel Harmony attributed to the Syrian Tatian. The Latin text appears in the left column, the German translation of over 2000 words in the right column. Scholars believe that the translation, which very closely follows the Latin almost like a gloss, was carried out at Fulda under the guidance of Hrabanus Maurus, sometime in the second quarter of the ninth century.

At the turn of the millennium, a unique translation method was developed at St. Gall by the teacher Notker Labeo. Instead of providing vernacular equivalents between the lines, in the margins, or a facing column, Notker deconstructed the Latin text passage by passage and attached to it a free rendering into OHG that translated not word for word, but the meaning of the entire passage. He also rearranged the Latin word order into a simplified, more logical order and provided additional commentary both in Latin and German. Notker considered the form of his vernacular translation/commentary project to be quite revolutionary and was afraid that it might shock his readers. He argues, however, that students can more easily understand texts in their mother tongue than in Latin. Notker translated several common school texts into this format, among them Latin versions of logical writings by Aristotle (**Csg 818 [e-codices]**), Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy* (**825 [e-codices]**), and a school text on the seven liberal arts by Martianus Capella (**Csg 872 [e-codices]**); he also translated the Psalter (**Csg 21 [e-codices]**) and composed an original musical treatise in

German (Csg 242 [e-codices]). One of Notker's possible exemplars may have been Csg 844 discussed above.

Conclusion

The German vernacular of Reichenau and St. Gall was a spoken language used by the monks for daily communication. German was rarely written and, if it was, it was usually as a means to understand a written Latin text. Even then, many of the concepts that needed translation were foreign to the native vocabulary, since they represented the new Christian culture and philosophy. Scribes struggled to find native equivalents for concepts and terms, often resorting to neologisms and creative compounding. It's not unusual to run across several variants for words such as 'humility,' 'grace' or even 'sacrifice,' the latter of which had very different connotations in the pre-Christian world. Vernacular literature, folklore and even legal lore were widely practiced, but the material was rarely preserved in writing and instead passed down orally from generation to generation. It wasn't until the 'Middle High German' period, ca. 1150-1350, that we see a larger number of vernacular texts, both religious and secular, literary and pragmatic, recorded on parchment. Nonetheless, the monks of Reichenau and St. Gall were pioneers in applying their native tongue to help teach and to express the new concepts of Christianity and the culture of literacy that came with it.

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