



Carolingian Culture at Reichenau & St. Gall

The Carolingian Libraries of St. Gall and Reichenau

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An Introduction to Reading Carolingian Manuscripts

by **Richard M. Pollard**

Our manuscripts are just that: *manu* (by hand) *script* (written). They were written with a pen, made from a quill, dipped in ink made from branches of blackthorn and wine, on parchment made from sheepskin. The scribes were monks for most if not all of our books, working in a scriptorium, a special room or building at the monastery for the copying of texts. Scribes in a particular scriptorium were generally trained to write in a similar script. The particular script for Reichenau and St Gall is known, unsurprisingly, as 'Reichenau-St Gall School'.

Most of our manuscripts are written in Latin, though some have additions in Old High German or Old Irish.

Reading our Latin manuscripts is somewhat different from reading Latin in modern books. Here are some simple things to remember that should help you get started:

Letter Forms and Ligatures

A few letters are different in Carolingian script from modern typefaces. For example, there is usually no separate *v* letter in early medieval Latin, just *u*, which is used for both consonant *v* and vowel *u*. Also, scribes sometimes joined letters to one another to make a 'ligature' which can be difficult for a modern reader to recognise. Here are some of the common letterforms and ligatures:

Carolingian		Modern
ȝ (rare, usually g)	=	g
ʀ	=	r
ʃ	=	s
æ	=	æ
œ	=	oe
ct	=	ct
ft	=	st

Word Separation

Modern books always have more separation between words than between individual letters. This was not always the case. In late antiquity, books were written with all letters equally spaced, effectively meaning that there were no spaces to indicate where one word ended and another began. Words were separated by reading the text aloud. In the Carolingian period, words were mostly separated as they would be now, but short words, especially prepositions (e.g. *in*, *per*, *pro*, *ab*, etc.), were frequently joined to the following word.

Abbreviations

Even now, people use abbreviations like *w̄* for 'with' when writing by hand. In an age when every single book was entirely handwritten, there were many more abbreviations to make copying faster and books shorter. Materials like parchment were expensive, after all!

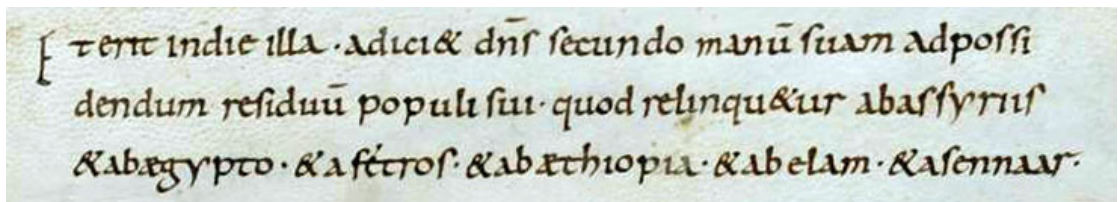
These abbreviations can be daunting for anyone who knows Latin, but hasn't read manuscripts before. But a short list of the most common ones should make things easier:

añ	=	ante	mīa	=	misericordia
ā	=	aut	nī	=	nihil
xps	=	Christus	n̄	=	non
c̄	=	cum	n̄r (n̄ri, n̄ra)	=	noster (nostri, nostra)
d̄s	=	deus	p	=	per
dīx	=	dixit	p̄	=	prae
dñs	=	dominus	p̄	=	pro
ej	=	eius	pp̄t	=	propter
o	=	ergo	q̄	=	quae
g	=	est	q	=	qui
÷	=	-em	-q̄	=	-que
-ē	=	esse	q̄d	=	quod
ēe	=	et	-r̄	=	-rum
7	=	et	s̄cs	=	sanctus
ḡla	=	gloria	s̄ps	=	spiritus
grā	=	gratia	ūr (ūri, ūra)	=	uester (uestri, uestra)
-ib; / -ib3	=	-ibus	-r̄ / -ū / etc.	=	-ter / -uer / etc.
i ÷	=	id est	-t ² / -m ² / etc.	=	-tur / -mur / etc.
ihs	=	Iesus			

Note, in the transcriptions below, expanded abbreviations are marked with parentheses, e.g. dñs is transcribed as d(omi)n(u)s.

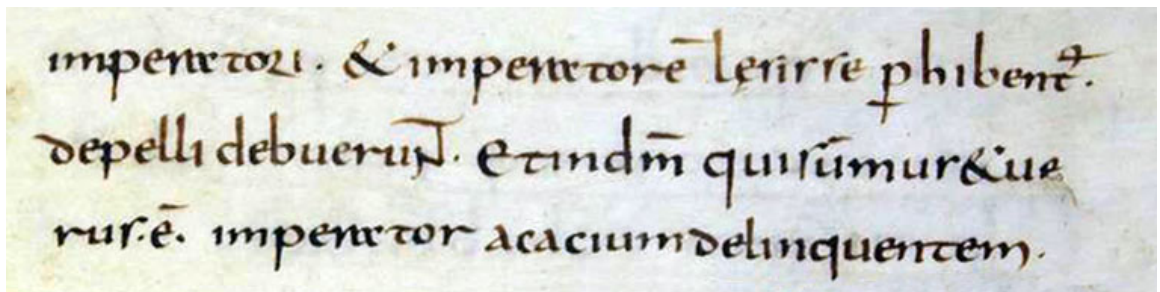
Scripts

The most popular script found in our manuscripts from St Gall and Reichenau is known as ‘Carolingian minuscule’ or ‘Caroline minuscule’. This style of script developed in the later eighth century in what is now northern France. It spread throughout the realm of the Carolingians afterward, reaching into modern-day Switzerland, Germany and Italy. Many thousands of manuscripts survive in this script, and its popularity led to its eventual adoption as a model for modern typefaces, such as the one you are reading right now. An example and transcription:



Transcription: *Et erit in die illa . adiciet d(omi)n(u)s secundo manu(m) suam ad possidendum residuum(m) populi sui . quod relinquetur ab assyriis et ab aegypto . et a fetros . et ab aethiopia . et ab elam . et asennaar .*

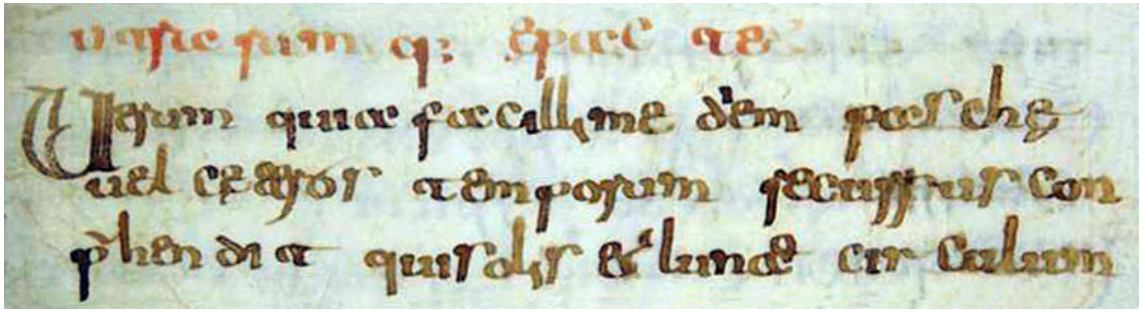
There are other scripts to be found in our books, however. Most prominent is ‘Alemannic minuscule’, which is named for the region (Alemannia) in which St Gall and Reichenau stand. It is very similar to Caroline minuscule:



Transcription: *imperatoru . et imperatorem leſisse perhibent(ur) . depelli debuerunt . Et in deum qui su(m)mus et uerur(e)st) imperator acacium delinquentem .*

The main differences between Alemannic and Caroline minuscules are: a wider, rounder appearance; tall ascenders (the high strokes on the h, d, l, etc.) and long descenders (e.g. p, q); double-c (cc) a; frequent ligatures of n+t.

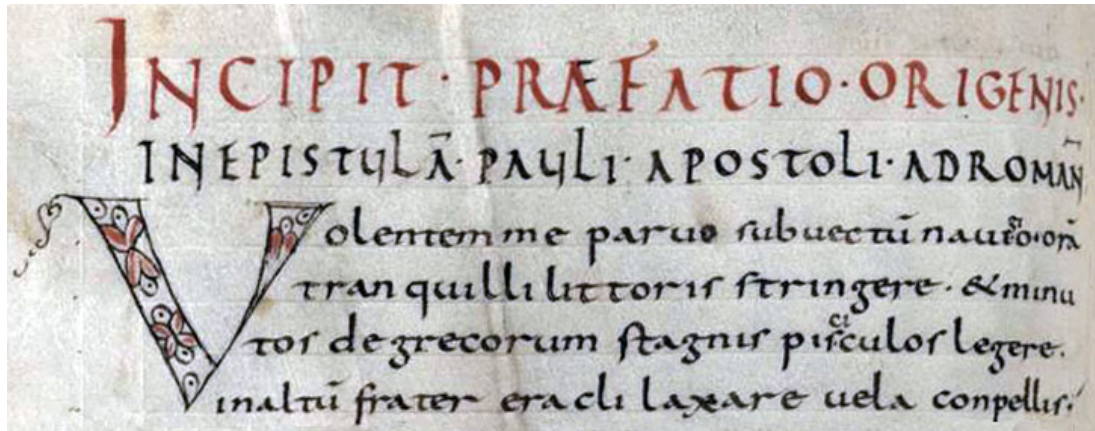
Sometimes we run into contemporary scripts from entirely different places, like the below, from central Italy. They are easily distinguished from scripts used at Reichenau / St Gall:



Transcription: *utrarumq(ue) epacte
Uerum quia facillime d\i/em pasche
uel ceteros temporum recursus con-
p(re)hendit qui soli et lunae circulum*

Rubrics

Much in the way that modern books have headings marked off in bold or larger typefaces, manuscripts used different scripts to organise the text for the reader. Here we have an example from Reichenau:



Transcription: *Incipit Praefatio origenis
in epistula(m) pauli apostoli ad roman(os)
Volentem me paruo suuectu(m) nauis\o ora(m)
tranquilli littoris stringere . et minu-
tos de grecorum stagnis pis\ci/culos legere.
in altu(m) frater eracli laxare uela compellis*

The top two lines of script in this example are in a style known as ‘capitalis’ or ‘rustic capitals’, and which derives directly from ancient Roman writing. The main text then begins (after an enlarged letter known as an ‘initial’) using standard Caroline minuscule.

Punctuation

The punctuation of our manuscripts is somewhat different from modern practice. Here are the equivalences:

Carolingian		Modern
,	≈	, (comma)
;	≈	, (comma)
·7	≈	. (period)
·7·	≈	. (period)
·	≈	? (question)