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Reconsidering an Enigmatic Bobbio Codex (Paris, BN, MS Lat. 13246)

The northern Italian monastery of Bobbio "is probably unsurpassed by any other library in the West" in the "number of ancient texts which it has uniquely preserved."[1] Founded in the early seventh century by the Irish monk Columbanus to support missionary activity among the Arian heretics of Lombardy, Bobbio maintained its importance as a manuscript center into the tenth and eleventh centuries, when an early inventory was written. In the Renaissance, especially after Observant reformers compiled a new inventory, Bobbio emerged as a trove. Choice items moved promptly into official government safekeeping as part of secular Milan's intellectual arsenal; they were announced to Europe in print by the curial humanist Raffaele Maffei.[2] During the early modern confessional *Historikerstreit*, volumes continued to exit in the interest of learning: Cardinal Borromeo, for example, gathered a selection of Bobbio's liturgical manuscripts at the Ambrosiana. In the nineteenth century, Bobbio codices excited renewed attention when ultraviolet light applied to the famous palimpsests revealed the sole surviving manuscript of Cicero's *De republica*. Now this new collection of ten essays proves with resounding success that Bobbio manuscripts still provoke exceptionally engaging, innovative, and sophisticated scholarship.

The codex at issue here was first discovered by Jean Mabillon, the founder of modern manuscript studies. Stopping at Bobbio briefly in 1686, the Benedictine monk examined a book remarkable for its humility, and perhaps on that account not recorded in the 1461 inventory.[3] Its 300 parchment folios were of unusually small and narrow format, barely 3.5 x 7 inches. Its scribe or scribes were content with informal calligraphy, unspaced words, and minimal punctuation, but kept a fairly regular line count per leaf. The observable hands were unselfconscious about orthography and grammar in ways that reproduced now the sound and sense of spoken late Latin, now the effect of a logographic pedagogy that sought to conserve learned traditions.[4]

The manuscript's liturgical content, clearly not designed for monastic use, also posed severe analytic challenges. Mabillon noted that *primo intuitu*, to judge from its Canon of the Mass, the text seemed a witness to the Roman Order. But he recognized several other traits, including prayer formulae, the order of certain observances, and the inclusion of the Burgundian royal saint Sigismund, that told against Rome. Eliminating the Mozarabic (Visigothic), Ambrosian, and African liturgies, Mabillon concluded that the main section of the codex was a Gallican sacramentary compiled in late seventh-

century Burgundy, possibly under the influence of insular traditions at Luxeuil. The following year he published an edition of the sacramentary and some of its complementary texts. By way of a preface, Mabillon set out a lucid defense of his hypothesis; this introduction is helpfully edited and translated in the volume under review (pp. 8-15).[5] Thus began three centuries of debate, as paleographers, liturgists, and historians contested the dating, origin, and significance of the exceptionally complex but, as Mabillon noted, evidently "complete" and "unmutilated" object (p. 13).

Consensus did not emerge. Even paleographer E. A. Lowe, addressing the Bobbio Missal in the last major scholarly campaign devoted to the codex, and agreeing on fundamental points with Mabillon, concluded that the "homely" manuscript remained an "enigma." Contributing to the same 1924 Bradshaw Society collection, the liturgist AndrÃ© Wilmart agreed that the codex was portable, suited to a priest's daily ministrations, and of use in missionary work.[6] But Wilmart, who had investigated the palimpsested final gathering closely, differed significantly from Lowe on the question of origins. He remarked with weary wisdom: "Le Missel se moque de la mÃ©thode, sinon de la logique. Parfaitement conservÃ©, assez bien agencÃ©, complet, pourvu mÃªme de supplÃ©ments divers, on l'ouvre et on l'examine patiemment, selon les procÃ©dÃ©s reÃ§us, avec l'espoir de rencontrer des indices prÃ©cis de la provenance. On pense dÃ©couvrir, grÃ¢ce Ã des observations de dÃ©tail, par quelles mains, d'aprÃ¨s quels modÃ¨les, pour quelle communautÃ© il a Ã©tÃ© rÃ©digÃ©. On arrive seulement Ã constater, et toujours plus clairement, qu'il est un tout complexe, un bloc qui ne se laisse apprÃ©hender d'un cÃ´tÃ© que pour Ã©chapper aux prises de l'autre."[7]

Now, almost eighty years later, this new collection, based on a 2001 Utrecht conference, brings renewed energy to "the riddle of the Bobbio Missal" (p. 7). Despite small and large disagreements, the contributors are eager to reclaim the manuscript as positive evidence of a period that has suffered from scholarly neglect, not to say disdain. In some cases, this reclamation amounts to a near-ideological rejection of Lowe's assumption that the uniquely varied content, the unclassical Latin, and the inelegant script of the Missal indicate precisely the liturgical eclecticism, the clerical incompetence, and the educational decline that called forth the Carolingian reforms of the late eighth and ninth centuries.

The collection falls into three parts. In the first, attentive to paleography and codicology, Rosalind McKitterick comprehensively re-opens the questions of origin and scribal capacity, while Marco Mostert applies the insights of Paul Saenger and Malcolm Parkes on layout, punctuation, and word-spacing in order to characterize readerly use, and David Ganz demonstrates the importance of the final five palimpsested leaves for the history of paleography. The next two contributions, linguistic studies by Els Rose, and Charles Wright and Roger Wright, address the late Latin of instructively different parts of the codex. Rose analyzes five liturgical prayers from the main body of the sacramentary, while Wright and Wright examine two brief catechetical addenda found in the first gathering. The final five contributors, Yitzhak Hen, Rob Meens, Louise Batstone, Mary Garrison, and Ian Wood, range through early medieval "religious culture" to identify social, political, and theological significances in the sacramentary and its penitential.

Technically dense and aimed in the main at specialists, the essays cannot be even cursorily evaluated in the space of a short review. It is fair to ask, however, where this indispensable new volume gets us. Its contributions fall into two categories. First, it provides new tools in the form of editions, translations, figures, tables, and lists. I note just a few examples: McKitterick forwards paleographical analysis with a chart of comparative letter forms in the four hands identified by Lowe (p. 24). Ganz's renewal of Wilmart's work on the palimpsested leaves includes a comprehensive list of papyri, parchment codices, and marginalia that contain cursive half-uncial (pp. 55-57). He aims to direct scholarly attention to the unexpected use of an "annotating" hand–combined, in this "almost unique" (p. 58) instance, with two column format–for the transmission of major patristic works. Editing several prayers from the eighth-century Burgundian *Missale Gothicum* alongside their consistently abbreviated, reworked, and garbled versions from the Bobbio Missal (pp. 73-76), Rose demonstrates that the former cannot derive from the latter. In the longest and most demanding of the articles, Wright and Wright provide a first critical edition of the pseudo-Augustinian sermon *De dies malus*; they rely on five manuscripts "all of which employ more conventional grammar and orthography" than the sixth, Bobbio version (p. 82). Wright and Wright also edit, annotate, and translate the Bobbio version of a more widely-distributed "Bible quiz for monks," *De joca monachorum.* To promote study of royal liturgy and its contexts, Garrison translates the inserted leaves of the *Missa pro principe* (pp. 201-203); to demonstrate the singular character of the Bobbio ver-

sion, her appendix identifies Old Testament references in crucial *comparanda* (pp. 204-205). Altogether these tools guarantee the collection's longevity and ensure its significance well beyond the focus on a single manuscript.

The second category to which this volume of essays makes important contributions is, of course, the reevaluation of Mabillon's and Lowe's understanding of the codex itself. The chief questions concern origins, dating, number and competence of scribes, and use.

On origins, most contributors agree with Mabillon and Lowe that the evidence is consonant with compilation, or at least originary texts, in the RhÃ´ne Valley. Mabillon's proposal of Burgundy, adopted by Lowe, suits several of the contributors, but Mabillon's more specific suggestion of BesanÃ§on is not renewed. Strikingly, McKitterick and Hen abandon Burgundy, to hone in with confidence on Provence, particularly Vienne; McKitterick's forceful and multifaceted argument for Vienne will have to be taken into account by future scholars. Wright and Wright, along with Garrison and Wood, remain uncommitted, even on the conservative possibility of Burgundy: "a plausible context is not a necessary context, nor the sole possible one" (p. 194). Ganz's silence suggests that he shares their caution. No one is so bold as to return to the hypothesis of compilation at Bobbio, much less in Visigothic Septimania. But Wright and Wright's attention to insular precedents for the catechetical texts (p. 110), Garrison's discovery of a unique parallel in Clemens Peregrinus for an erroneous scriptural reading in the *Missa pro principe* (p. 199), and Meens' demonstration of a variety of sixth-century Hibernian aspects of the penitential, indicate that insular influence remains of paramount importance for a comprehensive view of Lat. 13246.

As for dating, the position of Mabillon and Ludwig Traube–that the Missal is a late-seventh-century transcription of mostly earlier material–remains a consensus. Still, contributors are willing, with McKitterick, to suppose a volume compiled over a period of use, even use by a single cleric, from the late seventh into the early years of the eighth century. Of the palimpsested cursive half-uncial in the final gathering, Ganz notes that "no specimen ... can be securely dated" (p. 55).

On the number and competence of the scribes, Lowe's identification of four hands produced by one or two scribes prevails. But the work may not be as poorly executed as Lowe thought. McKitterick sees evidence of considerable familiarity with the making of books: the abbreviations suggest Merovingian documentary practice; the thirty-six gatherings are 60 percent eights, in McKitterick's estimate not so irregular as in Lowe's; and the distribution of the texts across the gatherings indicates considerable care. Mostert demonstrates that three hands suggest native Latin speakers, while the fourth suggests the production of "private" texts for reading and oral interpretation. On the basis of their own linguistic analysis of the two catechetical texts in the first gathering, Wright and Wright concur (pp. 137, 138).

Medieval liturgical codices, especially those compiled before the Franciscan reforms, can be disconcerting mixtures of conservatism and innovation. Old texts circulate in new copies long after their originating circumstances have evaporated, but often accompanied by novelties and modifications that reflect immediate exigencies. Thus "longevity and subsequent reception are no less a part of the meaning of the artifact" than origin (p. 194), and scholars must be alert to a range of ensuing uses. Every article of this new collection contributes richly to our understanding of such functional contexts.

A handful of examples must suffice, several of which are methodological gems that deserve to be closely studied by graduate students. Surveying the liturgical evidence of the Missal, Hen reiterates some of his hallmark arguments for the distinctive variability and creativity of Merovingian practice, "where no uniformity was at stake." In effect he turns that "eclecticism," which had struck Edmund Bishop and AndrÃ© Wilmart as evidence of composition at Bobbio, to serve instead the "distinctive local 'Gallican' character" of the Missal (p. 152).[8] Batstone, taking up the theological implications of several relatively "uncorrupted" prayers, complements Rose's analysis, "highlight[ing] the principal doctrinal assertions" of the Missal's liturgy: the anti-Arian and anti-Pelagian positions associated with early medieval missions; a relatively precocious emphasis on saints' cults; and a conservative attention to resurrection theology rather than to the Pauline theology of the cross.

What emerges overall is the codex's strong catechetical emphasis, to which the penitential leaves and the *Missa pro principe* form an intriguing contrast. Meens works through the implications of the penitential's strictures, demonstrating point by point an overwhelming attention to "the moral conduct of the clergy" (p. 165), and linking that to the sixth-century reforms directed by Guntrum of Burgundy, whose concerns were still meaningful c. 700 when the Missal was compiled, and clearly formed "a prelude to the Carolingian reforms" (p. 161).

Two articles analyze the *Missa pro principe* to good ef-

fect. As part of her study of the Missal's paleography and origin, McKitterick argues that the addition of the *Missa pro principe* to the codex demonstrates the extension of Frankish control southward and bears witness to regular official travel between Gaul and Lombardy. Focusing solely on this Mass, whose prayers have "no parallel in any other early medieval liturgical manuscript" (p. 190), Garrison cautiously explores the political context of composition and subsequent use. She finds an "exceedingly warlike polity" in which the ruler had an "extreme need for divine assistance" (pp. 193, 195), and sought victory by invoking Old Testament exempla. Invoking a familiar paradox, Wood's review of Burgundian influences concludes that, for this "barbarian *regnum*, peace was a central point of propaganda" (p. 218).

Hen and Meens close with a disconcerting caricature of Renaissance scholarship. Their defensiveness is confusing: early medieval studies are currently enjoying a renaissance, while Renaissance studies are rapidly being "disappeared" into Early Modernity. It may, then, be optimistic to suggest that closer attention to humanism in the religious orders, as urged by P.O. Kristeller almost fifty years ago, could yet aid research on the provenance, use, and significance of such manuscripts as this one. And the offer may be superfluous: as these articles show, we are "closer now than ever" to a comprehensive grasp of the Bobbio Missal (p. 7).

Notes

[1]. E. A. Lowe, "The Ambrosiana of Milan and the Experiences of a Paleographer," repr. in *E.A. Lowe, Paleographical Papers 1907-1965*, ed. Ludwig Bieler (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), vol. 2: p. 584.

[2]. For Maffei's list of 1506, see Mirella Ferrari, "Le scoperte a Bobbio nel 1493: vicende di codici e fortuna di testi," *Italia medioevale et umanistica* 13 (1970): pp. 139-180, p. 140-141.

[3]. E. A. Lowe observed that the Bobbio Missal does not appear in the 1461 inventory. But see the puzzled or dismissive entry: "Quoddam quodlibet in littera longobarda. Satis parvi" given in Amedeus Peyron, *M. Tulli Ciceronis orationum ... fragmenta inedita ... praefatus ... de Bibliotheca Bobiensi cuius inventarium anno MCCCCLXI confectum edidit ...* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1824), p. 36, and even less informative entries traceable to the eighth or ninth centuries, such as "Libellum paruullum i" in Michele Tosi, "Documenti riguardanti l'abbaziato di Gerberto a Bobbio [Riedizione]," *Archivum bobiense* 6-7 (1984-85): pp. 91-174, at p. 136. Too slight to prove presence, such entries do forbid absolute claims of absence.

[4]. On logographic pedagogy, see the remarks of Nicholas Everett, *Literacy in Lombard Italy, c 568-774* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 143-144, with references to the work of Roger Wright. Everett's nuanced approach to varied sites of literacy in the Bobbio environment forms an important complement to this new collection.

[5]. As I have a special interest in Eugenia, named thrice in litanies in the Bobbio Missal, I note that the translation of Mabillon's introduction cannot be right in section IX (p. 15). Inter alia, "confer" is improperly rendered, with the result that the paragraphing introduced in the English translation is misleading: the reader is sent to seek Eugenia in the *Missa pro principe*. Mabillon's Latin is perfectly clear.

[6]. *Bobbio Missal. Notes and Studies* (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1924), pp. 7, 38-39.

[7]. Ibid., with Lowe's comments at p. 106 and p. 63, Wilmart's at p. 56. In 1907, Wilmart had tended to agree with Mabillon on the late seventh-century Burgundian origin of the codex; by 1924, he had migrated to the position of Irish liturgist Edmund Bishop, who claimed that the very eclecticism of the manuscript–in Wilmart's eyes its defining feature–indicated that it had been copied in the equally eclectic atmosphere of Bobbio. This new volume acknowledges Wilmart's *volteface* in a footnote (p. 5, n. 40).

[8]. See Hen's *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul, A.D. 481-751* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), and an erudite flood of articles on Merovingian liturgy. Hen here (p. 147 and n. 53) corrects an earlier statement (Culture, p. 47) that all the masses in the Bobbio Missal have the three scriptural readings. It would be still clearer to say that of fifty-five masses in the Bobbio Missal, fifteen have the requisite three readings that would confirm Gallican practice. Almost all the others have two, including the mass for the Burgundian healing saint Sigismund–an indication, perhaps, that his thaumaturgic rather than his "ethnic" identity is in play.

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