

‘Bruxelles, Bibliotheque Royale, MS 8558-8563, fols. 80-131 and the introduction of Caroline minuscule in Britain’

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Project Objectives

My doctoral research at King’s College London focuses on the process through which Insular trained scribes adopted Caroline minuscule in Britain in the tenth century. Although previous scholarship has attached the entrance of Caroline minuscule into the Insular script system in Britain to the Benedictine Reform, my initial findings indicate that Caroline minuscule entered Britain on more than one occasion, including in Western Britain (i.e., Wales and Cornwall). The present study at hand represented a new chapter in my doctoral research on a manuscript that has received little scholarly attention, especially for its script. After consulting the only published note on the script (a footnote in David Dumville’s 1993 book, *English Caroline Script*), I decided that this book merited more attention than it had previously been afforded, and originally planned to dedicate at least half of a chapter to the manuscript. What I was not expecting to find, however, was the trove of Insular-Caroline hybrid scripts contained within the manuscript, which now warrant a full chapter solely dedicated to this manuscript.

Research Results

With the grant, I was able to spend five full days in the Bibliothèque royale de Belgique working with just this manuscript. Through a codicological analysis, I was able to determine that the relevant portion of the manuscript is arranged in an Insular manner (HFHF), yet on Continental parchment of poor quality, which is an anomaly for the time in which it was ostensibly written, and narrowed my search for the origin of the manuscript to an Insular centre that would have imported Continental parchment as opposed to making their own in the Insular manner. The codicological analysis further revealed a number of missing pages, which eased in identifying the many scribal changes throughout the manuscript.

I spent the largest portion of my time analysing the script of the manuscript. I was able to identify at least three individuals writing in a strange form of Square minuscule (with archaic and modern features), as well as five scribes writing in an Insular-Caroline hybrid script. But what was fascinating is that none of these five hybrid scripts matched any of the ‘mainstream’ Insular-Caroline hybrids that either Bishop or Dumville identified. The scribes learned Caroline minuscule in a very different manner from those forty other examples that I have examined as part of my PhD research. What is exciting about this is that the number of ways in which Insular trained scribes learned Caroline minuscule points further to the fact that Caroline minuscule could have penetrated the Insular script system on more than one occasion, and, at the very least, that this particular script adoption was not necessarily the monolithic event that previous scholarship has labelled it.

I would like to extend my gratitude to Medium Aevum for this grant, as well as to the staff at the Bibliothèque royale de Belgique for their kind hospitality during my stay. Furthermore, I look forward to acknowledging Medium Aevum in subsequent publications.