THE REIMS SCHOOL,

ITS SOURCES AND ITS IMPACT
ON BOMANESQUE ART

Elizabeth Ratcliffe Western Medieval Art 424 McKenzie Fall, 1971

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# THE REIMS SCHOOL ITS SOURCES AND ITS IMPACT ON ROWNESCUE ART

The Reims School of illuminators filled the early Christian bottles left from the Antique tradition with a heady new wine and in so doing transformed Western art for all time. These artists at work in the Carolingian court-affiliated scriptoria of Hautvillers, active in the first third of the ninth century are a bridge from Early Christian to Romanesque art, giving to that art its chatty narrative scenes, landscape settings, real people involved in real persuits, unabashed disregard for restraining frames, linear aggitation, fondness for visual puns, and its dynamic vitality. Scholars for a long time have recognized that the sources of the Reims School were involved in a curious dichotomy. There was an obvious connection visible between the Reims bbo Gospel Evangelists' classically Roman toga-muffled figures and the Coronation and Aachen Gospel Books; yet the way in which the Ebbo artists transformed each of these scenes implied some other source which, because of the striking technical skill of the Reims artists, could not be ascribed simply to the temperament of a northern artist. The pulsating vitality enkindling the classically posed figures permeated every facet of the Ebbo Gospeland classical confinements of all sorts seemed to be thrown off in persuit of a new freedom. Not until recently has it been seriously surmised that this new freedom of expression stemmed from Hellenistic-Italian manuscripts transported to Charlemagne's central-European court.

Erle Loran writing about the new freedom seen in Hans Hofman's

20th century work, says:

The freeing of the individual artist so that he could explore unknown territories of expression is the opposite of any kind of preconceived conception, restrictions or damming up the creative spirit...To become free in the profoundest sense, seems to be man's highest appiration...Released from the bondage of fear and restraint(the creative person) has the daring to "let go".

And it is in this sense of letting go", that the artists of Charlemagne's lively and sovinor than to free themselves and their art from old ways.

Stemming from the Aachen scriptoria, known as the Palace School, and Troyes the Reims School, (producing the EbbotGospels, the Utrecht/Psalters, versions of Terance and Psychomachia) was at first located at Hautvillers. During the last half of the minth century its Reims style spread to Metz (producing the Drago Sacrementary), and Tours(producing the Marmoutier Sacramentary and the Moutier-Grandval Bible).

Both man and his arts in Charlemagne's ninth century were embarking on the long journey of becoming free. Society in Charlemagne's empire was settling down to increased stability. The barbarian invarians invarians had ceased two hundred years before. The Viking menace was only periperal. The strong secular power of Charlemagne's court as well as the increasing strength of the Roman papacy were beginning to assume proportions to be recomed with in the East, still rocked by the violent waves begun by the Iconoclastic Controversy of the Bazantine Emperor Leo III, the Isurian, in 726. Symptomatic of this new central European stability, Charlemagne was able to attract to his court at Aachen cosmopolitan learned scholars from all parts of the continent, a precedent established before him by his father Pepin the Short, in whose scholar-staffed "Palace School" the boy Charles had been educated.<sup>2</sup>

Playing active roles in the comraderie of the Emperor Charles' new "Palace School", were such brilliant men as Peter of Pisa, Paul

the Deacon (also a Lombard Italian), and Paulinus, later elevated to the Patriarchate of Aquileia by Charlemagne -- all of whom were scholars in Latin and Greek letters and led the discussions in the humanities for Charles' court; a Frankish nobleman Angilbert, nicknamed Homer for his many court poems, lover of one of Charlemagne's daughters, who ran important diplomatic errands across the Alps for his king and was eventually made Abbot of St. Riquier; Theodulf, nicknamed Pindar, a Goth who brought with him from his native Spain a wide background of classic art and theology and was eventually appointed bishop of Orleans by Charles; Hildebold, Bishop of Cologne, who was also arch-chaplain of the Court; Einhard, a young Frankish scribe talented in metalwork and writing of verse, living at the court for instruction, who later became biggrapher of Charles; and Alcuin, from Northumbria, the spiritual grandchild of the Venerable Bede, formerly in charge of the Cathedral School and Library at York, who in 782 at about the age of fifty was invited to join Charlemagne's court and take charge of the Palace School. It is through Alcuin who became Charles' most trusted friend and advisor that we learn much of what went on at the court for he wrote many letters and records.

And it was this lively and creative court family in whose service the Pálace scriptòria worked busily, copying manuscripts of both a secular and religious nature-serving both the pleasures of the mind and the edification of the soul and spreading the Christian faith beyond the confines of the court. For "Alcuin saw in Charlemagne Augustine's

ideal Christian emperor, the felix imperator, who used his power for spreading the worship of God... In order to conform to this ideal of a Christian emperor, Charlemagne had to propagate the worship of the true God. \*\*4

The manuscripts created in his royal scriptoria became paragons of the art and gradually replaced the insular Celtic style as models for manuscripts created in the monastic workshops all over Europe.

After Charlemagne's death in 814 the importance of the palacelocated Aashen scriptoria (in whose workshops before 800 were created
the "Coronation Gospels of the Holy Roman Empire", found buried with
his body when his tomb was opened in 1000 by Otto III, and the "Aachen
Gospel Book" of the early ninth century) was transferred to the Reims
workshops. Through Charlemagne's conscious renovatio of Classical Roman
forms in all things from church architecture and liturgy to secular
intellectual ferment, the palace-connected manuscripts which originated
court's
prior to the 800 A.D. settling in Aachen, had already begun to transform the established eighth century eclectice Hiberno-Saxon and Mozarabic
styles, so that the earliest Carolingian gospel books in the late eighth
century style of the Ada School, had acquired a more refined though still
somewhat hybrid, simplicity.

Anchen scriptoria, there appears an entirely newform in which the miniature pages of the Evangelists show a clear kinchip to monumental classical philosophers, sitting in open landscapes usually without the earlier motif of an architectural setting, though still equipped with the open book, Roman-style stool, and bead-and-reel lecture. The models for these so-called "Palace School" (to distinguish them from the Ada School group) Evangelists are now thought to have come directly from Rome, probably through imported books in the court library.

The Coronation Gospel Evangelists, painted appropriately on purple velum, a custom of Byzantine Greek artists, sit solidly in open landscapes, hunched in body-revealing classically enveloping togas; they have no symbols (a motif introduced early in the West but not till the 13th century adopted by the Greco-Byzantine East.), and although they have been given names by various scholars, at least two have been called St. Matthew since there is no indication of which is who.6 their very

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Byzantine mosaic halos; they have bullet heads and jutting chins; only other who sit one wears a long white beard and it is only he and one /in architectural thrones against a landscape, sprouting with frisky little trees like the others; the footstool from the bearded patriarch's throne projects somewhat awkwardly but without apology over the classical acanthas frame; except for the halos of all and the staring eyes and awkward footstool of the bearded one, there is no visual clue that these four figures do not represent Classical philosopers, though one scholar believes they in fact stem from neither ancient philosophers nor canonical Latin types but from early miniatures of saints and apostles.

Even the Ganon Tables of the Coronation George Rare plain Roman architectural models lacking the usual Geatic-derived embellishments.

The text is Latink yet on the margin of one page at the beginning of the gospel of Luke appears, still in Latin letters, the Greek name

Demetrius Presbyter. The work presbyter in Greek means elder or monaltic priest and it is thought that this Greek Demetrius might have been either a Greek or Syrian scholar imported to Aachen to edit the liturgical texts, or an elder in the monastery which made the model used at

Aachen by the Coronation Gospel scribe, who faithfully copied even the marginal notation though "he knew not why" it was there.8

Aachen Gospel Book whose single page of the four Evangelists seems to derive from the same Classical monumental type. Here the toga-muffled four Evangelists sit in open landscapes sprouting with little trees; they scribble on the same Roman bead-and-reel lecterns; two here are bearded, two clean shaven; all have bullet-shaped heads. They differ from the earlier gospel book by having symbols and no dark rims around their proportionately smaller halos; St. Matthew and St. John have no stools

ST. JOHN HAS FOLDING STOOL

it can be discerned in the case of St. Matthew and St. Mark that originally the artist had timidly sketched in crenelated stone walls which he later painted over for some reason; the frame is here a combination of spirals and acanthus leaves studded with painted oval and rectiminear Gospel Book represents jems. All in all the Aachen, a composite of the Classical Coronation model used with Western Christian forms inherited from later Carolingian times.

The third work from the Aachen School is the so-called Xanten Gospel Book. Manten is located about 20 miles north of Aachen and its Gospel book contains two full-page miniatures, one simply inserted among the keaves of the book. Both pages closely relate to the figures of the Aachen Coronation Book and later Gospel Book. The inserted page contains a bullet-headed, classically-draped figure seated on a stool at his bead-and-reel lecture in an open air, non-framed setting. The second page shows the four toga-draped and bullet-headed Evangelists, huddled without stools to sit upon but with feet on footstools, below their four symbols ranged in a row above them and separating them from the blessing Christ in Majesty at the top of the page. These Evangelists, are closer to the Aachen Gospel than the Coronation Book in that they have symbols and lack seats and are grouped on some factored of four pages.

Evangelist miniatures were painted, according to its dedicatory verses, under the direction of Peter, Abbot of the monastery at Hautvillers near (formerly Library at the Access)

Reims, to the order from Ebbo, Arch bishop of Reims, whom the verses praise for his many good works, yet since they do not include paens for his conversion of the Danes in 823, 10 the book must have been ordered prior to that date. In them we see an entirely radicalized version of the three Aachen Gospel Books. Though their four toga-draped Evangelists hunch over Roman-style lectures in open landscapes crowned with the now-

familiar little trees of Aachen, the landscapes are now streaked with implusive racing lines, the togas seem to be alive with wrinkles, the trees have had wobbly little buildings join them as landscape baubles, and the tripoded feet of St. Matthew and St. John's lecterns seem about to collapse. In fact everything, even the acanthus frames now wavering of doing their job of solidifying uncertainly instead, seems to be nervously alive, shaky and altogether the product of some sort of psychodelic dream world. The pages of the Canon Tables, supposed to be seriously devoted to intellectual persuits, find their columns boasting spirals and architectural openings filled with prouting green plants, and their pediments surmounted with eager little archers shooting game and busy tittle carpenters whacking away at the corners of their cornices. How and from where did this amazing transformation come about? For the answer we now look to another product of the Reims School, the Utrecht Psalter, produced also around 820.

Thes Psalter illustrates an increasing trend towards the manufacture of prayer books rather than Gospel Books during the later MiddleAges. In the early development of Western Christianity the Old Testament Book of Psalms had become one of the most popular books for liturgical and devotional use. Studying and writing commentaries on the Psalms, cohsiddered to be the prayers used by Christ, had been one of the learned Church Fathers' favorite occupations and St. Jerome in 383-384 A.D. produced a Latin version based on various Greek and Latin texts. Around 390 he revised his first version into what was called officially the Psalter Gallicum, which ultimately was to become the version incorporated into the authorized Latin Vulgate Bible. The following year, St. Jerome at the request of a scholarly friend who wan ted a more "authentic version" based on original Hebrew texts, wrote a third version of the Psalms called the Hebraicum. This version, though not accepted for liturgical use as being not traditionally Latin enough, became nevertheless, very popular for devotional reading and illustration.

the eighth century wide-scale adoption of Benedicting ritual and liturgical forms in all western European monansteries, there was also an increased demand for Psalter books and their production in scriptoris skyrocketed. The Utrecht Psalter, which became one of the most important models for later psalters, follows the St. Gerome Gallican Psalter text, keeping also its traditional Latin rustic capital lettering rather ninth century than the Alcuin-introduced/Carolingian mindscule. Il This fact, along with the stylistic quality of the illustrations, would indicate that the model for the Utrecht Psalter had come from a book produced in Rome.

During the seventh and eighth centuries in Rome there had been a tremendous revival of interest in Byzantine-Greek learning. Partly this was due to many more Greek and Syrian merchants and scholars being active in western Europe, especially in the Holy See. Also, during these centuries, when almost all the Popes were of Eastern origin as compared with the previous three canturies when only ten had been Eastern popes. there had been a conscious Hellinization of Italy by the learned Greek and Syrian pontifs. Syyian Pope Gregory III, 781-741, knew both Latin and Greek well and, expecially fond of the Psalms, could recite them by heart and interpreted them as well. 12 Alcuin, while he labored at Charlemagne's court, edited a supplemented version of the Gregorian Sacrementary and Charlemagne, perhaps following Gregory's noble example, issued an official edict in which he stated that no one could be consecrated a bishop unless he knew the Psalms by heart. In the monastic schools, as well as the Palace School, it was customary to teach both Latin and reading using the Psalms as texts. 14 During the reign of Pepin the Short it was an Eastern pope Paul I, who around 757 sent an important collection of Greek books to the king as a gift and it is thought that among these Greek books were the models for the Charlemagne

court-affiaiated Reims School secular books of Terance drama and the Psychomachia of Prudentius, as well as for the religious Utrecht Psalter and Ebbo Bospel Book. 15

As for the source of Pope Paul I's gift of Greek books, it is increasingly speculated today that they came from a seventh and eighth century scriptoria of Greco-Italian artists who came with the Influx of Eastern popes to Rome in the seventh century, andwhose numbers were enlarged and nourished by Alexandrian artists emigrating after the Arab conquest of Egypt in the mid-seventh century, and again in the eighth century by Byzantine artists fleeing Constantinople's Iconoclastic madress of 726. The hypothetical notion of thriving Greco-Italian community of artists located in seventh and eighth century Rome, was given powerful concrete validity in 1944 when by chance some World War II soldiers, scraping at the plaster in the small church of Castelseprio near Milan, uncovered signs of a much earlier fresco which subsequently proved to have been painted in the Greek-Byzantine style of the second Golden Age.

Scratched into one layer of the plaster of this provincial, tiny church is a somewhat ambiguous inscription whose writing uses Roman characters and Greek spelling, duplicated by a similarly bi-lingual 7th century graffiti in the far-off/church of Santa Maria Antigua in Rome, C.R. Morey writing, about the sources of medieval style in 1924--twenty years before Castelseprio was discovered--says of the S. Maria Antigua frescos that "they represent a flash of Alexandrian style" appearing in the second half of the seventh century in Rome as a result of the invasion of Egyptian artists at that time. These two, bi-lingual graffiti are paralleled in a ninth century manuscript of the Greco-Latin Psalter in the Hamilton collection in which the expanded text tells that the psalter was written in the Milan monastery of St. Ambrose, by a monk named Magnus

a Latin name, at the order of the elder prior Symeon, a Greek name, whose wish it was to create this Greek and Roman Psalter. 18 These paleographic similarities as well as the striking similarity between the pictorial styles of Castelseprio and S. Maria Antigua, similarities which also appear in many features of the 1st century Roman frescontal House of Livia and Nero's Golden House, as well as carlier in Pompeli and Herculaneum, tend to associate their illusionistic somewhat sketchy and active style with Hell aistic Greek architectural illusionism.

In the lively narrative scenes of the Utrecht Psalter the same sketchy illusionism is found. Various characteristics of it occur also in the generation earlier Aachen Gospel Book and the Xanten illustrations. Still later in the century it appears in the manuscripts from Tours and Metz. In the Alcuin-edited Libri Carolini, the official Carolingian protest against the 787 Ecumenical Council of Nicaea's decree regarding the worship of images, 19 "it is maintained that the art of the painter had nothing to do with the Scriptures, whose often purely verbal precepts and injunctions were not, in fact, adaptable to pictorial representation".20 Yet surely the enthusiasm the Carolingian scriptoria showed for illustrating their texts, whether secular or religious, bears out their uninhibited joy in combining the literary with the visual arts.

The Utrecht Psalter jostles one visual pun after another from its multiple-sourced old Testament text of psalms, and when there is a choice of texts, the more graphic is chosen. The Psalmist says, "He encompassed me about like bees", and a swarm of bees appears; or "He hath strengthened the bars of the gate", and two angels swoop down to fasten two rods to the city gates; or "Praise Him with psaltery and organ", and six intense musicians pump madly away at a bellows organ; "He gives cream to the cow and to sheep milk" produces a rustic farmer churning butter and a companion

milking an unwilling sheep; when hell is to be described a fierce manthe leads decorating eating head bursts onto the page, a head reminiscent of architectural Herculaneum wall frescos. Everywhere, is eager action set in rolling sketchy landscapes sprouting temples, towers, cities and the waving little gnarled trees familiar in the Aachen and Ebbo Gospels, and before that in continuous narrative scenes from Stabiae, Pompeii, Herculaneum and Rome where, also, no frames separate actions and no action is too complicated to portray.

Besides its stylistic resemblance to Hellenistic wall paintings, as well as those of seventh century Rome and Castelseprio, the Utrecht Psalter shows close connection to innumerable Jewish fourth to sixth century manuscripts in the Alexandrian tradition. The best-known one, NO PROOF THAT IT WAS JEWISH the Joshua Roly, is variously dated from the sixth to the tenth centuries, and is probably based on a fourth to sixth century original. Its colored drawings continuously narrate from a Greek text of the Old Testament, deeds of Joshua which are explained below each scene in short columns of minuscule script along with some rustic capitals for titles. Very little "orientalizing" appears. Hellenistic features abound everywhere -in the costumes of Joshua, in personifications, in perspective, in variety of attitudes of figures. Except for its later minuscule script, its skillful figure style would indicate it belonged to a third or fourth century production. 22 In general, however, it is thought that the Joshua Roll was produced in the early seventh century taking its stylistic features from a fourth century western Hellenistic model.

Instead of the Joshua Roll's minuscule script running in shortlined columns under each scene, the Utrecht Psalter scribe uses rustic
capitals, three columns to a page, under his scenes; since the text does
not always describe the scene above it, apparently the scribe preceded
the illustrator at work, a common practice of the time. The scribe copying

from one text, simply left the space he thought would be needed by the artist who followed him and might be working from a different text. In the Utrecht Psalter some of these spaces were left empty, some overcrowded, and often scenes would be illustrated on the following page from the text for the scribe had misjudged the interpretation or whimsy of the artist following him. There are many errors in the text-either supplied by the Carolingian scribe or contained in his copied prototype: erratic mistakes in the Roman numerals of Psalms, numbering ommitted altogether, verses omitted, misspellings. In any case and taking all things into account, the hand of the scribe seems less sure than that of the artist and he seems to be somewhat unsure of both the text and the rustic capital lettering in which he wrote, for at the Carolingian court by that time minuscule was well established. 24

The practice of parallel written columns on one page had long been common and since early in the seventh century when Isadore of Seville had produced a two-column commentary of the Hebrew Septuagiat and St. Jerome's Hebraicum juxtaposed line-for-line, several textural versions in several columns had become stock-in-trade of the monastic scriptoria. During Charlemange's ninth century the most popular of these multi-version commentaries was a tri-columnar psalter containing St. Gerome's Hebraicum, Gallican and Roman translations, and it was probably one of these that served as textural model for the Utrecht Psalter--helping to account for the many discrepancies in text and its often-strange alignment with the visual illustrations. 26

Combining histmical, pictorial and paleographic evidence to date, increasurally today the Utrecht Psalter is thought to have been the work of a ninth century Carolingian, court-affiliated Reims scriptorial located at Hautvillers. Here the scribe and artist worked from a seventh century Greco-Italian manuscript produced in Rome, which in turn copied from a fourth or fifth century Hellenized western book using rustic capital lettering.

The close stylistic and bi-lingual paleographic relationships between the Utrecht Psalter and its prototypes, and the fresco walls at Castelseprio and S. Maria Antigua would link manuscript and wall painting of the seventh century to manuscripts painting of the ninth, and likely to wall painting of the same time which is today lost to us. Books, far more portable than buildings, would naturally carry the style into manuscripts of later date, while the fresco style, relatively local, simply died out until a much later time. 28

Dimitri Tselos has illustrated this connection between Reims School manuscripts and their contemporary kin in a graphic diagram, <sup>29</sup> and has early ninth century made a good case for the/Reims-produced Physiologus, the Ebbo Gospels and the later Troyes Gospels, as well as for the Aachen Coronation and Gospel books, and the Kanten Gospels—all stemming from generically the same seventh century Greco-Italian source in Rome. <sup>30</sup> From sililarities of style it can be seen that manuscripts produced in the last half of the ninth century such as the Tours-produced Moutier-Grandval Bible, Marmoutier Sacramentary, and San Callisto Bible, and the Metz-produced Drago Sacramentary and Metz Gospels, also share this family lineage.

Wherever this so-called Reims-School-characteristic occurs we see the familiar Ebbo Gospel-Utrecht Psalter nervous, forward-thrusting, tapering little figures with cropped heads, sharp chins, bushy eyebrows, exaggerated calves, and large gesturing hands; dressed in fluttering wrinkled garments they race busily about their every-day tasks in open landscapes sprouting with trees and carefully detailed buildings. When they feel the need, they heed neither frame nor other spacial barrier in their energetic task of narrating for their literate or illiterate viewer the story of their lives and how it realites to that of those whom they instruct and delight. They link the Antique past with the Carolingian present and the Romanesque future.

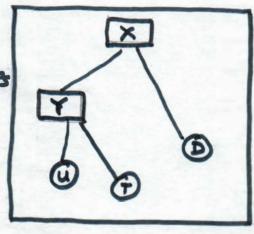
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Source RELATIONSHIP OF SOME RELAIS SCHOOL BALTERS



X = IV-V C. LATIN

ARCHETYPE

Y: VII C. MODEL,

FULLY ILLUSTRATED

U: UTRECHT BALTER

ILLUSTRATIONS TO

ALL PSALMS.

IXC.

T: TROYES PSALTER

ONLY PSALMS F;

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ONLY PSALMS F;

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CSTCI ILLUSTRATED

IX C.

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