

NOTES

THE CAROLINGIAN COPY OF THE CALENDAR OF 354

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In an important article on the Calendar of 354, Dr. Carl Nordenfalk has shown with his usual acumen in matters of style the close relationship of figures in the Renaissance copies of this work to Roman art of the mid-fourth century, especially to the putti on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus.¹ His analysis compels us to question the common view that the original Calendar belonged to the art of the Eastern Empire, if not to the Orient, as Strzygowski had maintained. However, Dr. Nordenfalk goes further and argues that the late copies by which we know the Calendar are better evidences of the original than has been supposed, for they were not made from a Carolingian copy of the lost original, but from the manuscript of 354 itself. The antiquarian Peiresc, who had the model of the Barberini copy in his hands in 1620, estimated its age as seven or eight hundred years; but Nordenfalk doubts that Peiresc was capable of judging correctly the antiquity of manuscripts, since Mabillon had not yet published his *De re diplomatica*, the first systematic work on paleography (1681).

It is the first time, to my knowledge, that the statement of Peiresc has been questioned. The opinion of Nordenfalk corresponds to the tendency among historians and paleographers to regard the judgments of script prior to Mabillon as necessarily worthless. It is easy to point to gross errors in the dating of manuscripts by editors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—errors which are frequent enough in the eighteenth and nineteenth as well—but I believe it is a mistake to suppose that before paleographic knowledge had been systematized in a textbook, scholars like Peiresc (who had been trained in natural science and was accustomed to methodical observation and inference) could not form correct judgments about the antiquity of manuscripts.

For several reasons I am inclined to trust Peiresc in his estimate of the age of the model of the Barberini copy. In the first place, this copy includes minuscule writing that is apparently of Carolingian type (see Figure);² and the base of a column in the image for the month of June has an unclassical, but characteristically medieval, profile, with a high scotia.³ In the second place, if Peiresc had been

ignorant of the difference between classical and Carolingian scripts, he would more likely have regarded a Carolingian copy as antique than an antique work as Carolingian. The humanists in fact believed that there was a Roman minuscule book hand.⁴ But the truth is that Peiresc, like other scholars before the time of Mabillon, was able to recognize late classical manuscripts. It was he who had the miniatures of the Cotton Genesis copied for reproduction; and in a letter on this manuscript he speaks of its "majuscules de la plus ancienne figure, qui se trouve dans les plus vieux manuscrits."⁵ And although the opinion of his day referred it as far back as the time of Origen, he attributed the Genesis more correctly to a later time in antiquity. Against Peiresc's judgment, Dr. Nordenfalk adduces the observations of lesser scholars of the Renaissance on the model of the Barberini copy: they refer to its "vetustissimis" and to its "antiquis plane characteribus." The presence of ancient capital forms in the Calendar surely did not escape the notice of Peiresc, who was one of the pioneers of classical epigraphy and had recognized the antiquity of the script of the Cotton Genesis. In the time of Peiresc, scholars already knew that classical forms had been reproduced in the Middle Ages. Towards 1620 the librarian of Robert Cotton, who dated the Canterbury Psalter (now British Museum Vespasian A 1) about 700 A.D., described its majuscules as "antiquo caractere."⁶ The seventeen-year-old Grotius, editing in 1600 the text of the Leyden Aratus, a Carolingian manuscript of which the illustrations reproduce in part images of the Calendar of 354, said of its script: "Litera Romana, quam Capitelem vocant, multorum saeculorum praefert auctoritatem," but he observed also the corruption of the text—"miraberis quidem antiquitatem, sed ridebis turpissimos errores."⁷ That some discernment of the differences between ancient and early medieval capital writing was possible before paleographic knowledge had been systematized in a treatise, we may judge from the fact that a layman like Montaigne could speak of medieval tendencies in the script of the late Roman Empire. In the account of his journey into Italy in 1581 he observes that a manuscript of Virgil in the Vatican has "those long thin characters which we see in the inscriptions of the time of the emperors; for instance, those of the period of Constantine which have begun to lose the square proportions of the antique Latin writings in the Gothic form." In this judgment, Montaigne was perhaps following critics like Erasmus for whom the

1. *Der Kalender vom Jahre 354 und die lateinische Buchmalerei des IV. Jahrhunderts* (Göteborgs Kungl. Vetenskaps . . . Saml. Handlingar, Föl. v, Ser. A., Bd. 5, no. 2), Göteborg, 1936.

2. Professor Elias Avery Lowe of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, is of the same opinion and writes me that "the minuscule is a humanistic version of the Caroline he (*sc.* the scribe) had before him."

3. Joseph Strzygowski, "Die Kalenderbilder des Chronographen vom Jahre 354," *Jahrbuch des deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*, Ergänzungsheft I, Berlin, 1888, pl. xxiv; Nordenfalk, *op. cit.*, fig. 25.

4. Carl Wehmer, *Die Namen der gotischen Buchschriften*, Berlin dissertation, 1932, pp. 4, 5. Even Mabillon described the Caroline minuscule as "Romana minuta . . . quae a minutae Romanae forma paulum recedit" (*ibid.*, p. 10).

5. H. Omont, *Miniatures des plus anciens manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque nationale*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1929, pp. 1 ff.

6. W. de Birch Gray, *The Utrecht Psalter*, 1876, pp. 83, 84.

7. Hugo Grotii Batavi, *Syntagma Arateorum*, 1600, "Notae ad Germanici Phaenomena," p. 2.



Rome, Vatican Library, Cod. Barb. lat. 2154, Calendar of 354:
 Natales Caesarum (after Strzygowski)

majuscules on Roman coins were an "absolutissimum exemplum" and all else "Gothic."⁸ But already in the middle of the sixteenth century, Pierre Hamon, the secretary of Charles IX, composed a book of specimens of ancient and medieval writing which was known to Mabillon and favorably cited by him in his *De re diplomatica*.⁹

Nordenfalk has argued that the faithful copying of so unique a work as a calendar of the year 354 would be purposeless in the Carolingian period.¹⁰ In saying this, he underestimates the interest of the scholars of the ninth century in Roman and early Christian antiquities. The celebrated Carolingian manuscript in the library of Einsiedeln, with the itinerary of Rome, contains not only topographical indications, but also a collection of pagan and Christian inscriptions of Rome.¹¹ If the Carolingian manuscript were destroyed and we had only Mabillon's transcription and other seventeenth-century copies, we might be led to suppose by arguments such as Nordenfalk's that they were made from the original Roman inscriptions. There is another example of a late Roman secular manuscript reproduced in the Carolingian period and preserved for us through late Gothic and Renaissance copies of the medieval reproduction—the *Notitia Dignitatum Im-*

8. Wehmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 3, 4.

9. H. Omont, *Le recueil d'anciennes écritures de Pierre Hamon 1566-1567* (Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes, LXXI), 1901, pp. 57-73.

10. *Loc. cit.*, pp. 7, 8. He believes that only a post-medieval copyist, with the peculiar historical consciousness of the modern period, would have reproduced the dedication page with the name of the scribe, Filocalus, and the patron, Valentinus. "Es ist eine billige Forderung, dass man in einer neuzeitlichen Nachzeichnung von der archäologischen Gewissenhaftigkeit der barberinischen irgendwelche noch so geringe Spuren karolingischer Kunstwillens entdecken müsste, wenn das Vorbild wirklich eine karolingische Handschrift gewesen wäre. Diese fehlen aber vollständig." The Barberini copyist was, incidentally, very attentive to the non-naturalistic conventions of perspective drawing in his model, and reproduced not only the broader aspects of the pre-Renaissance spatial forms of the miniatures before him, but also such details as the emphatically divergent lines of the parallels on the receding planes of the dice and the edicule-box on the table in the December page (*loc. cit.*, p. 13, fig. 3, and Strzygowski, *op. cit.*, pl. xxxii). It would be worth studying this page for light on the relations of classical and Carolingian styles as well as the Renaissance archaeological interpretation of these two.

11. Stiftsbibliothek MS 326. For the contents see P. Gabriel Meier, *Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum qui in bibliotheca monasterii Einsidlenensis O.S.B. servantur*, 1, 1899, pp. 297-300. Bruckner (*Scriptoria medii aevi Helvetica*, Geneva, 1935, 1, pl. xx) reproduces a page with rustic capitals and Caroline minuscule remarkably like the script pages of the Barberini Calendar.—Nordenfalk (*op. cit.*, p. 22, n. 1) has called attention to the fact that the text of the Calendar was copied in the ninth century, in the same Swiss region, in St. Gall Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. 878.

perii Romani. The evidences of a minuscule in the various copies of the lost codex of the cathedral of Speyer indicate that the antique original of the time of Theodosius was known only by way of a copy or descendant of the ninth century.¹²

If it is true, as Nordenfalk asserts, that the ornament of the copy of the calendar is thoroughly classical and shows no trace of an intermediate Carolingian hand (and this has still to be proved by investigation), it must be remembered that this ornament has a close resemblance to the architectural ornament of Carolingian manuscripts of the Palace school (e.g., the Schatzkammer Gospels in Vienna, the Gospels in the cathedral of Aachen),¹³ which is also copied from late antique Italian works. The Leyden Aratus, a manuscript of the same school (or, at least, closely related to it), includes images of the months faithfully reproduced from the Calendar of 354,¹⁴ and its paintings of the constellations, based on some model of the fourth or fifth century, are so classical in appearance that if they were known only through Renaissance copies, like the Calendar, it would be extremely difficult to detect the Carolingian intermediary through either script or miniatures. Nordenfalk reproduces figures of the Leyden Aratus beside the Barberini drawings to illustrate the stylistic kinship of the Carolingian work with the classic forms of the Calendar.

These facts strengthen the probability that the latter was indeed copied as a whole around 800. Together with the summary re-classicizing of the Carolingian model by the copyist of 1620 they would account for the rarity of obvious Carolingian traits in the Barberini version. Whether Peiresc's judgment was based on the script alone, or on the miniatures, or on some documentary evidence now lost, we cannot say. In any case, it is confirmed by Carolingian elements in the script of the copy. This conclusion does not weaken the force of Nordenfalk's comparisons of the Barberini copy with works of the fourth century; Carolingian artists were eminently capable of reproducing the forms of that period. But it enables us also to account for the medieval traces in the Barberini manuscript.

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12. Otto Seeck, *Notitia Dignitatum*, Berlin, 1876, "Praefatio."

13. *Der Trierer Ada-Handschrift* (ed. Janitschek et al.), 1889, pl. 18, 22.

14. Nordenfalk, *op. cit.*, pp. 28, 29; and more recently, James Carson Webster, *The Labors of the Months in Antique and Mediaeval Art*, Evanston and Chicago, 1938.