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The Script of Corbie: a Criterion

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In his description of the Leiden Servius, a manuscript that unites two distinct periods in the history of the Corbie scriptorium, Gerard Lieftinck has illustrated a characteristic long associated with its Caroline minuscule: the rule, observed with almost perfect consistency, that quires of normal length and construction have flesh-side outside.¹

About two hundred manuscripts and fragments have been attributed to the Corbie scriptorium by identifying hands recurrent in manuscripts of which most are known to have belonged to the Corbie library. The procedure, initially favoured by some concentrations of manuscripts from its library, is too laborious to be followed in searching for the manuscripts from its scriptorium which may be latent and widely dispersed in modern repositories, may offer no very clear marks of Corbie provenance and may be uncertainly or not at all recognizable by the sole criterion of generic style. Entailing and accompanied by secondary practices, and varied in quires of abnormal length, a characteristic method of arranging the parchment was followed by the scribes who wrote Caroline minuscule at Corbie, from the abbacy of Maur-dramnus until some time after the period of intense activity promoted by the librarian Hadoardus.² Only a wide survey of manuscripts written at other Carolingian centres will show whether the method, certainly not a universal one, was peculiar to Corbie-written manuscripts. At Corbie itself the method followed in Caroline manuscripts, though distinct from the method followed in examples of the *ab*, seems to have been inherited from the earlier practice of the scriptorium.

The script of Corbie: main sources

It is proposed to collect and systematize examples of the Caroline minuscule of Corbie. The procedure is to identify the hands of common scribes among manuscripts which have seemed more or less likely to have been written in the Corbie scriptorium; and of these the principal

¹ Acknowledgements are due to librarians and keepers for opportunities of seeing manuscripts and for answers to original and supplementary questions about them.

² Bernhard Bischoff, 'Hadoard und die Klassikerhandschriften aus Corbie' (cited below as 'Bischoff'), *Mittelalterliche Studien* I (Stuttgart, 1966), pp. 49ff., with

many new and confirmed attributions. To Professor Bischoff's generosity and unparalleled knowledge of ninth-century manuscripts I owe a further long list of 'probables', and among these the hands of numerous Corbie scribes have been repeatedly identified.

source must be the remains of the Corbie library. The main lines of its devolution are well known.¹ Perhaps three hundred manuscripts, of earlier date than 900 A.D., bearing Corbie inscriptions or identifiable in Corbie catalogues, are now at Amiens, Leningrad, and the Bibliothèque Nationale. In these large concentrations, and in some manuscripts of known Corbie provenance in other collections, the hands of many Corbie scribes are readily identified. Perhaps two thirds of all Corbie-owned manuscripts are confirmed as products of the Corbie scriptorium; some others are known to be of alien origin; the rest are left, for the time being, unattributed.

The script of Corbie: additional and possible sources

Modern and medieval circulation, bringing to the Corbie library some manuscripts written in other centres, dispersed some manuscripts written in the Corbie scriptorium to other medieval and modern *fonds* and collections. In many new attributions by Bernhard Bischoff the evidence of Corbie ownership, even where eventually established with probability or certainty, has not been the first clue to origin; evidence of Corbie origin, certain, probable, or possible, is forthcoming in the external features of some decorated manuscripts, in the internal features of some liturgica, in matter of original and permanent domestic interest, in manuscripts of which the textual tradition indicates that they were written at Corbie, in the earliest copies of works by house-authors and, outside the several *fonds* that represent or embody parts of the Corbie library, in manuscripts acquired by Claude Dupuy: any unattributed Puteanus is worth considering as a Corbie 'possible'.²

The work of the Corbie scriptorium, in manuscripts of intra-mural, alien, or unknown ownership, appears in a succession of well characterized styles. Bischoff has recorded the features of the Corbie script, minuscule and majuscule forms, practised in the third quarter and middle of the ninth century.³ About one hundred manuscripts of the period are associated in a single nexus by the hands of identified scribes. This productive episode seems to have been preceded by a period of inactivity (conjecturally the second quarter of the ninth century);⁴ no scribal links have yet been found to connect the mid-century to an earlier period of steady output (conjecturally the first quarter of the ninth century), which has left numerous manuscripts interconnected by the hands of common scribes. Manuscripts from this period are characterized by the 'late Maurdrampus-type', a style which developed and continued the Maurdrampus-type. This is characteristic of the Caroline minuscule invented at Corbie in the time of abbot Maurdrampus (772-80) and written at Corbie in the last quarter of the eighth century; the Maurdrampus-type has been amply illustrated in *Codices Latini Antiquiores* and other published facsimiles.⁵ What miscellaneous early Caroline may have been written at Corbie, in the last quarter of the eighth century, the facsimile of the Leiden Servius (original portion) has partly disclosed, and it may be that other heterogeneous specimens, even from the late eighth century, remain to be attributed.⁶ Some practitioners of the Maurdrampus-type developed an elegantly informal script of distinct aspect;⁷ this continued to be practised and developed at Corbie, side

¹ *Catalogue général des manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France* XIX, preface.

² Bischoff, pp. 55-7.

³ Bischoff, p. 54.

⁴ B.N. 13373, containing script of late Maurdrampus-type, is dated 817-35 by W. M. Lindsay, *Notae Latinae* (Cambridge, 1915), p. 476. The typical Corbie minuscule written in the third quarter of the ninth century was probably developed before 850; cf. Bischoff, pp. 57, 58, noting the apparent recession.

⁵ For the Maurdrampus-type, cf. E. A. Lowe, *Codices Latini Antiquiores* (C.L.A.) vi, p. xxiv.

⁶ Leiden, University Library B.P.L. 52. G. I. Lieftinck, *Umbrae Codicum Occidentalium I* (Amsterdam, 1960), introd., records the make-up of the original and added portions. Maurdrampus-type hands are associated with others of widely varying aspect in Leningrad F.v.VI. 3 (C.L.A. xi. 1611).

⁷ E.g., the fluent and elegant script of B.N. 12176, ff. 1-19, etc., by a scribe who reappears in B.N. 12171, ff. 101, 102, etc., and B.N. 12260, ff. 1-11, etc.

by side with the late Maurdrampus-type and with script, some of it excellent, for which there has been found no more precise term than 'ordinary Caroline minuscule'.¹ More examples from the first quarter of the ninth century may yet be attributed by identifying the hands of individual scribes. In the middle and third quarter of the ninth century, a period of renewed activity, there were Corbie scribes, by no means negligent or incompetent, who did not conform to the prevalent style.² Its features are occasional, subdued, and mostly not to be found in the work of one Corbie scribe whose excellent hand would not seem out of place in contemporary manuscripts from the Loire region; concerned in eleven Corbie-written manuscripts, he was clearly esteemed in the scriptorium, since in six of them he appears in the unmistakable role of the scribe who gives a lead.³

The procedure by identification of individual scribes, though it will fail to catch the holograph manuscript written by a scribe never elsewhere identified, remains the surest approach to the possible limits of attribution. But it is too laborious to be pursued among some thousands of unattributed Carolingian manuscripts, dispersed as they are among the remains of medieval *fonds* and among modern collections, without some preliminary screening. Manuscripts already attributed (about two hundred) amount to a corpus large enough for a provisional criterion to be discerned. This appears in the arrangement, quiring, pricking and ruling of the sheets in manuscripts written in Caroline minuscule from the last quarter of the eighth to perhaps the end of the ninth century.

The script of Corbie: a criterion

Flesh-side (fs) outside quires is a normal appearance in almost all the manuscripts, and an almost invariable appearance in quires of normal length. (The generalization leaves out of account a variety of accidents: losses, deliberate excisions, insertions; in many Corbie-written manuscripts the quire-signatures have been cut off and the appearances have been otherwise obscured and sometimes falsified by the vicious practices of nineteenth-century binders.) The direct impression of the ruling on fs, equally a normal appearance, will be shown to have been entailed on the previous arrangement of the sheets in quires of normal length. These prevalent appearances are combined with others that are severally common enough, though perhaps with some distinctive force in combination.

Arrangement, quiring

The normal quire in a Corbie manuscript is of eight leaves, composed of four sheets folded together, a quaternion. As in the work of other centres, quires of abnormal length and construction may occur at the ends of manuscripts, and at the ends of tracts, main divisions of the text, scribal portions. Some anomalies are the result of correction: of official correction against the exemplar (everywhere, normally, by the original scribe or one of the original

¹ Cf. *C.L.A.* v. 631, with notices of B.N. 12173-80, 12182, 12183. B.N. 12154 (ff. 65-128, etc.) and Leningrad F.v.I. 13 (ff. 59-66, 107-14) contain the accomplished but untypical work of a scribe who collaborated with others writing the late Maurdrampus-type and miscellaneous hands of varying aspect and quality. In Leningrad Q.v.I. 46, with a like mixture of hands, one of them closely approaching the style of the mid-ninth century, the ruling of various quires might suggest that the manuscript was put together from work done at different periods; but it does not correspond to the different hands.

² E.g., in B.N. 14089, the holograph of a scribe who

reappears in other manuscripts as a collaborator. Most of the best scribes of the Hadoardus period conformed to the typical Corbie style, which is thus a valuable criterion, since the best written manuscripts are most likely to have survived. But numerous short passages of untypical and poor script indicate a class of inferior scribes, not entrusted with entire manuscripts or major portions.

³ In Leningrad F.v.Class. 1, f. 1r; B.N. 7886, f. 1r/i/1-ii/23; B.N. 12272, f. 1; B.N. 13020, f. 1r/1-9. The first scribe of the text (sometimes also beginning a succeeding quire for a successor) in Laon 330, B.N. 8051, B.N. 12125, B.N. 13956.

scribes) when the copy was finished; and of immediate correction. At any centre and at any period it might happen, from time to time in the progress of his transcription, that a scribe became more or less immediately aware of some disfigurement, major omission or other irreparable fault, and at once discarded the sheet or the leaf on which it had occurred. If he discarded the entire sheet and made up the quire by substituting another, and if his practice was to rule sheets one by one, then a series of disasters might be almost undetectably repaired,¹ in compliance, it might be, with a house-rule that quires should be of standard length and construction. Or if, having correctly written the first half of a sheet of which the second half had to be cancelled, he chose to retain the first half in its place as a singleton and to substitute a singleton for the cancelled leaf – quires so constructed are common in the work of many writing-centres – then it would seem that he was concerned at least to maintain a standard number of leaves to the quire. Many Corbie-written manuscripts are uniformly constructed from the first quire to the last, or to the last but one; but in each of a large number of manuscripts there occur two or three quires such as to suggest that the scribes were indifferent to construction or length. Many Corbie-written manuscripts contain two or three ternions; some of these are quires as originally (and apparently capriciously) prepared; others indicate that immediate correction discarded a sheet without substituting another.² A Corbie scribe who cancelled half a sheet normally proceeded to the next blank page of the next sheet; many Corbie-written manuscripts have one or two quires with odd numbers of leaves. Some occasional indifference to the construction and length of quires accounts for occasional departures from the Gregorian rule, by which hair-side (HS) faces HS and FS faces FS at every opening.³ This the Corbie practice observed in regularly constructed quires of normal length, in quires originally made up as ternions, and in quires originally made up as quaternions where the discarded sheet was the central sheet iv. A Corbie scribe who discarded sheet ii or sheet iii of a quaternion did not reshuffle or reverse the remaining sheets; in discarding sheet i he departed not only from the Gregorian rule, inasmuch as it applied to the facing of surfaces at the junction of quires, but also from the eminent Corbie practice of keeping FS outside quires. Lastly, a scribe who in the course of his transcription cancelled a leaf after the central opening was committed to the existing arrangement of the sheets by the text written before the central opening; in failing to insert a singleton to replace the cancelled leaf he necessarily departed from the Gregorian rule.

Pricking, ruling

The prickings appear often on only one sheet of the quire, infrequently on only two sheets, often on the whole quire. All pricking was done on the folded parchment; this is usually plain enough from the mirror-effect of the prickings on opposite sides of any pricked sheet, and it often appears from a diminuendo in the size of the prickings from one end of a quire to the other. The single sheet was folded for pricking with FS usually inside, less often outside (and was subsequently placed as the central or the outside sheet of the quire constructed on it). Two sheets folded for pricking were folded together, the facing of FS and HS being consistent or random in the practice of individual scribes (and were subsequently placed in the quire in accordance with the direction of the fold and the Gregorian rule). The whole quire folded

¹ Undetectably, if the prickings have been lost. Immediate or official correction might be indicated by a sheet independently pricked.

² E.g., in B.N. 12213 quire XIV (ff. 103–8) has no prickings and no immediate ruling; these were on a central sheet discarded for error at the time of writing. In Amiens 12 quire E (ff. 34–9) has FS outside and at the central

opening; the Gregorian rule is not observed at ff. 35v/36r, 37v/38r; an original sheet iii was discarded. Quire Z (ff. 173–8) has FS outside; the sheets comply with the Gregorian rule; the central opening is HS, and has the immediate impression; the quire is as originally made up.

³ E. K. Rand, *A Survey of the Manuscripts of Tours* (Mediaeval Academy of America, 1929), p. 12.

for pricking had *fs* outside and the sheets already in their final order and facing; the prickings, made consistently or indifferently by individual scribes on the first recto or last verso, often failed to penetrate all leaves, or much beyond the centre of the quire; pricking the folded quire was in effect a remarkably awkward (but very common)¹ method of getting a complete set of prickings on to the central sheet, other sheets remaining imperfectly pricked and incapable of receiving direct impressions when the parchment was temporarily unfolded for ruling. Necessarily, where prickings failed to penetrate beyond the central sheet, and necessarily also where only one sheet was pricked, but often enough where two sheets were pricked or where all sheets were effectively pricked, the direct impression of the ruling was made on only one sheet: on the inside of the central sheet or on the outside of the outside sheet; *fs* in either case. Ruled all together, the sheets of a quire were already in their final order and facing, so that in all internal openings except the central opening furrows opposed ridges. Ruled in pairs, as thicker membranes sometimes were, the sheets were likewise already in their final order and facing; so also where three sheets of a quaternion were ruled together and one separately.

Single bounding-lines are found more often than not in Corbie-written manuscripts of the mid-ninth century; where double bounding-lines were ruled the inner were often merely ignored at line-ends; the number of horizontal lines ruled to the page (and the number of lines actually written) is not always constant in any one volume. At the zenith of their activity, secure in a long tradition of sound writing-materials, well tried methods and excellent script, the scribes of Corbie seem to display a conscious indifference to the rules and refinements of contemporary centres.

A later limit?

The mere lacuna that seems to terminate this episode, in the history of the scriptorium, may answer a real and prolonged interruption of its activity, perhaps caused by the Scandinavian raids of 881 in the Somme region.² Perhaps to be considered as a late detached representative of the series of *classica* started in the mid-century,³ Leningrad F.v.Lat. Class. 8 (Auct. ad Herennium) may be dated not much earlier than c. 900 by doubtful evidence: the relation of the script to the general development of Caroline minuscule. The sole characteristic of the mid-ninth century Corbie style – it is common enough in the work of other centres – is occasional *-N-* with the first stroke a descender. *Len.* is written in good dark brown or brown ink on very good parchment, rather inconsistently prepared, with 28, 29, and 27 long lines, single or double bounding-lines and a varying written space which approaches the square (205 × 165 mm) in two quires (ff. 49–64). The ruling, occasionally on *hs*, one or two sheets at a time, is mainly on *fs*, two or four sheets at a time. All quires have *fs* outside.

Exceptions

In about ten manuscripts, certainly or very probably written at Corbie, though not all certainly written throughout by Corbie scribes, the normally constructed quaternions, or some of them, have *hs* outside. For the discussion of each on its merits the exceptions, thus qualified, demand more space than would be proportionate in a preliminary survey; let a few stand for the rest. The only full description of a Corbie manuscript yet published, Lieftinck's of the Leiden Servius, notes and accounts for an anomalous quire. *HS* is outside all quires in B.N. 12294 (Paschasius Radbertus),⁴ apparently of s. IX.⁵ In the main scribal portions the script, though

¹ Especially in manuscripts with the Maurdrampus- and late Maurdrampus-type.

² Albert d'Haenens, 'Corbie et les Vikings', *Corbie: Abbaye Royale* (Lille, 1963), pp. 183, 187.

³ The scribe of ff. 18v, 19r, etc., occurs in the lower margins of B.N. 12248, ff. 210v, 230v.

⁴ Notice of this and some other Corbie 'probables' is owed to the Abbé Merlette.

⁵ Jean Vezin kindly let me read in typescript his article

careful, is inferior to that of main portions in contemporary Corbie-written manuscripts, and the main scribes have not been identified. But there is good evidence that 12294 was written at Corbie. It seems to belong to the category 'early copy of a work by a house-author'. Both the script of some additional matter and the binding show that it was at Corbie at the end of the ninth century.¹ In B.N. 12296, with a binding of the same period, at least one quaternion has HS outside and ruling, after final arrangement, on HS; in three quires the arrangement is hardly discernible in daylight; in the excellent parchment of the earlier quires the difference between HS and FS is so slight that the scribe may have regarded it as negligible. In B.N. 11995, with a binding of the same period, eight quaternions (out of twenty-two) have HS outside. Two follow a ternion with HS outside, and were perhaps committed to the arrangement by unusually scrupulous observance of the Gregorian rule. But six were originally ruled for some other manuscript, and were perhaps contributed by the apparently alien scribes who assisted in the writing. B.N. 12526 has the work of an identified Corbie scribe of s. IX med. or IX;² all quires have HS outside, and it seems an unqualified exception to the normal practice.

A distinctive practice?

The practice of Corbie has not been certainly recognized elsewhere in a desultory and only moderately wide reconnaissance of ninth-century manuscripts, mostly from identified or unidentified centres in northern France. It was not the practice of St.-Martin Tours, where advances and refinements in book production, by the middle of the ninth century, contrasted with the traditional methods of Corbie.³ That these were not the rule in some other centres appears from ninth-century manuscripts attributed, if only a few to each, to Auxerre, Laon, Reims, St.-Amand, St.-Denis; some early ninth-century manuscripts, now at Orléans, some of them probably from Fleury, have FS outside quires, but the sheets are mostly ruled on HS. Only a comprehensive account of ninth-century manuscripts will show what other centres persisted, like Corbie, in methods of book production which, though not prevalent, were less unusual in the eighth century. The descriptions in *Codices Latini Antiquiores*, even if the field is limited to manuscripts written in northern Frankland and to a period coeval with the Maurdrampus-type at Corbie, record methods identical with those of Corbie in manuscripts from other identified and unidentified centres, and in numbers large enough to reduce the exclusive value of the criterion.

Revival, survival, alien influence?

In the late eighth and early ninth century some ancient texts were available at Corbie, and were copied there in script of the Maurdrampus- and late Maurdrampus-type.⁴ In the middle and third quarter of the ninth century, as Bischoff has shown, interest in ancient literature was renewed; with some early Christian texts, numerous classica were copied in the Corbie minuscule of the period, often characteristic.⁵ With FS outside quires and ruling on FS they reflect two features of Latin codices produced under the late Roman empire; and conspicuous in a large minority of manuscripts written at Corbie in the mid-ninth century is another ancient characteristic: the nearly square proportions of the written space.⁵ This does not appear in the earlier Caroline of Corbie, but in manuscripts of the late Maurdrampus- and Maurdrampus-type – in at least some quires of a large majority – another ancient practice is reflected: the prickings for horizontal ruling appear sometimes on inner bounding-lines, sometimes between

on Corbie bindings, *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* CXXVII, pp. 81–113.

¹ See previous note.

² Rand, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–18.

³ Bischoff, p. 60.

⁴ Bischoff, p. 58–60.

⁵ E. A. Lowe, 'Some Facts about our oldest Latin Manuscripts', *Classical Quarterly* XIX (1925), pp. 197–208; 'More Facts about our oldest Latin Manuscripts', *ibid.* XXII (1928), pp. 43–62.

columns and most often within the written space. Late antiquity might be thought to be reflected in the Caroline minuscule as first developed at Corbie, an adaptation of the last oecumenical script of the Roman empire.¹ Coeval with the earliest Caroline minuscule of Corbie, the Corbie *eN* script has been considered to show some affinities with ancient $\frac{1}{4}$ -Uncial;² the few examples of the *eN* likewise have *rs* outside quires and ruling on *rs*. The Caroline and the *eN* might be held to be epiphenomena of ancient culture restored, and to mark a reaction against the national cultures of the successor states, represented in France by the Merovingian script.

Of this the best represented type, among bookhands, is the Corbie *ab*; most and perhaps all examples of the *ab* were written at Corbie itself, in the late eighth and perhaps the early ninth century.³ The *ab* had some slight influence on the Maurdrampus-type. Some of the Insular (and specifically Anglo-Saxon) abbreviations prominent in the *ab* reappear in the Maurdrampus and succeeding Caroline script of Corbie; most of these no doubt illustrate the general influx of Insular abbreviations into the earliest Caroline of many Continental centres, but one or two forms common to the *ab* and the Maurdrampus-type seem peculiar to Corbie; one or two bizarre majuscule forms from the *ab* reappear in the Maurdrampus-type.⁴ It is otherwise with the make-up of manuscripts in the two scripts. If the practice of the Maurdrampus-type scribes and their successors distinguishes their work from that of other north French scribes of the late eighth and the ninth century, it is nowhere so sharply distinctive as in the book-production of Corbie itself. In a single example of the *ab* a few quires (eight out of thirty-two) have *rs* outside,⁵ and this may be merely an instance of the inconsistent though mostly random arrangement that appears in one or two other examples. In a minority all sheets have *hs* outside;⁶ typical of contemporary Insular manuscripts, the arrangement may be linked with the Anglo-Saxon abbreviations of the *ab*, seeming to show the provincial culture influenced by that of a remoter province.⁷ In the majority of *ab* manuscripts, as in the majority of all north French manuscripts written in the late eighth century, the sheets are arranged in accordance with the Gregorian rule and with *hs* outside. The distinction between the practice of *ab* and of Maurdrampus-type and other Caroline scribes holds good in manuscripts where exponents of the two scripts seem to have collaborated, though possibly in protracted and desultory fashion: in at least three parts of the Liber Glossarum. In B.N. 11529 an *ab* scribe prepared and mainly wrote quire N, and the last page, f. 102v, is consequently *hs*; left incomplete by the *ab* scribe, this was finished by a Maurdrampus-type scribe who, whether or not he noticed the facing, arranged his sheets for the succeeding quire with *rs* outside. In B.N. 11530 the quires which were wholly written or at least begun (and presumably arranged)

The contrasting methods of Tours and Corbie are illustrated by two manuscripts of which the exemplars survive, and which depart from the tendency of scribes to reproduce the aspect of exemplars. (1) Vat. Reg. lat. 762 (Livius), s. VIII/IX, an early specimen of fine book production at Tours, was copied from the Puteanus B.N. 5730, Uncial of s.V. The ancient exemplar was written in columns; the copy is in long lines, and the proportions of the written space approach the canon recorded in E. K. Rand & L. W. Jones, *The Earliest Book of Tours* (Mediaeval Academy of America, 1934), pp. 87, 88. (2) Florence, Marcianus 257 (Cicero), a specimen of the classical revival of s. IX med. at Corbie, was put together (by a rather complex procedure) from Leyden, University Library, Voss. lat. F. 84 and F. 86, both of s. IX¹. The predecessors have long lines; the copy, in two columns and with a written space nearly square, reverts to the aspect of the finest prose codices from late antiquity.

¹ *C.L.A.* viii, introd., p. x; *C.L.A.* vi, introd., p. xii and plate opposite.

² *C.L.A.* vi, introd., pp. xxiv, xxv.

³ *C.L.A.* vi, introd., p. xxv. For the most recent list of manuscripts in the *ab* see Françoise Gasparri, 'Le scriptorium de Corbie à la fin du VIII^e siècle', *Scriptorium*, 1967, pp. 86-93, with facsimiles illustrating the characteristic display script, majuscules, minuscules, ligatures and their ductus, and abbreviations.

⁴ Noticed in the work of one of the Maurdrampus-type scribes of Cambrai 693: a majuscule *O*, a very tall *rg*-ligature and a *bus*-symbol characteristic of the *ab*, besides its frequent Anglo-Saxon *tur*-symbol.

⁵ Leningrad, F.v.I. 11; the arrangement is inconsistent in three quires, and in some quires of F.v.XIV. 1.

⁶ Cf. *C.L.A.* ii. 124, iv. 446, v. 554, viii. 1178, 1183.

⁷ W. M. Lindsay, 'The Old Script of Corbie', *Revue des Bibliothèques*, 1912, pp. 424-8.

by *ab* scribes have *hs* outside. The Maurdrampus-type scribe who completed quire S (ff. 205–12) continued on quire T, having departed from the Gregorian rule at the quire-ends and arranged quire T with *fs* outside; the succeeding quires, written by Maurdrampus-type and Caroline scribes, have *fs* outside. In Cambrai 693 the quires prepared by *ab* and by Maurdrampus-type and Caroline scribes show the contrasting practices consistently observed.¹ It is remarkable that the discipline of the scriptorium should have allowed them to coexist. If the technicalities of book production are worth recording as evidence in attribution, they are so in attributing manuscripts to Corbie; the consistent practice of the earliest Caroline scribes, continued by their successors far into a period when it was elsewhere uncommon or unknown, seems an arbitrary and even somewhat perverse one (there are physical disadvantages in arranging quires with *fs* outside and ruling on *fs* several sheets at a time).² It might be supposed that the contents, the script, and the codicology of the manuscripts in the post-Merovingian style represent a deliberate break with tradition (which might be supposed to be represented by the surviving ‘national’ script) and a quasi-humanistic return, by some section of the scriptorium, to ancient models and methods.

That this may be no more than a fancy is shown by the earlier practice at Corbie. From the period before the beginning of the Carolingian renaissance, from the middle and first half of the eighth century, comparatively few manuscripts remain, and these not all certainly attributed. Their make-up, not consistent, appears in manuscripts written in an experimental ‘pre-Caroline’ minuscule, in the Leutchar-type Half-Uncial, in canonical Half-Uncial (from which the Maurdrampus-type is understood to have been adapted), and in Uncial. With some exceptions and irregular practices, these seem to show that *fs* outside quires and ruling on *fs* were already more prevalent in Corbie-written manuscripts than in the work of other French centres of the period.³ In the light of this tradition, the speciously traditional *ab*, ‘the old script of Corbie’, appears as a freakish deviation entered upon by a group of privileged scribes.⁴ The practice of Corbie, founded from Luxeuil in the middle of the seventh century, was not inherited from the parent house.⁵ Some ancient manuscripts may have been in the Corbie library by the beginning of the Carolingian renaissance, but the scriptorium’s models may have been manuscripts more recent, though not far removed from the culture of the late empire.⁶ Masai has recognized in the *eN* an affinity with Italian minuscule of the seventh century, a decidedly exotic influence;⁷ and Corbie possessed some Uncial and Half-Uncial manuscripts of the sixth and seventh centuries and of Italian origin, mostly ruled on *fs* and having *fs* outside quires.

¹ The Karlsruhe fragment of the Glossary, *C.L.A.* viii. 1130, has the *ab* and the direct impression of the ruling on *fs*. Is it from a quire written in collaboration with a Maurdrampus-type scribe?

² E. K. Rand, ‘How many leaves at a time?’, *Palaeographia Latina V* (1927), p. 54.

³ *C.L.A.* xi. 1624 (*fs* outside all sheets), viii. 1067a, xi. 1601 (some inconsistent arrangement), 1602 (*fs* outside all sheets in some quires), i. 106, ii and xi. 182.

⁴ The *ab* is the closest of pre-Caroline bookhands to the script of Merovingian and early Carolingian royal diplomata. Cf. F. Lot & Ph. Lauer, *Diplomata Karolinorum* (Paris, 1936), plates iv, viii, ix, xi, xii, xviii, xix, xxii, xxiv, xxviii, xxx, for frequent though inconsistent barred

b and a form of *a* resembling *ic*, though not calligraphically stylized. Lowe, *C.L.A.* vi, introd., p. xxix, has emphasized the close relation of Corbie to the royal court. Was the *ab* practised by a group of retired (or active) royal scribes?

⁵ Nearly all examples of the Luxeuil script have *hs* outside quires; for a late example possessed by Corbie, with *fs* outside, cf. *C.L.A.* xi. 1617.

⁶ Cf. Patrice Cousin, ‘Les origines et le premier développement de Corbie’, *Corbie: Abbaye Royale*, p. 30 (ancient manuscripts), p. 29 (manuscripts of Italian origin).

⁷ H. Vanderhoven & François Masai, *La Règle du Maître* (Les Publications de Scriptorium III, Brussels, 1953), p. 41.