

# *The Carolingians and the written word*

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# I ❁ The spoken and the written word

## I INTRODUCTION

Literacy and the use of the written word in the early middle ages have hitherto been thought to have been confined to a clerical elite, while society at large conducted its affairs orally. Many, indeed, have seen the beginning of 'good things' at the millennium, with a 'rebirth' of literacy in the eleventh and twelfth centuries,<sup>1</sup> as if brand new awakenings and skills appeared in the wake of Halley's Comet to an awed Europe. But if such great changes were taking place in the eleventh century, from what were they a change?

Rather than a sudden enlightenment, are we not observing in the history of western Europe after about 1000 an increase, extension and diversification of literate skills, the next stage in a continuous pattern from late antiquity to the early Germanic kingdoms? We also need to establish the possible functions of literacy, both private and public, in relation to a particular society's needs; as those needs change so do the particular contexts in which literate modes are required. Above all, the early Germanic kingdoms were not only Rome's heirs, they were Christian. In societies whose religion was one of the Book, and whose government and legal practice were founded, to a greater or lesser extent, on the written word, it cannot be maintained that they were purely oral societies.<sup>2</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> The most stimulating discussions of mediaeval literacy after c. 1000 are the now classic studies by Michael Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record 1066-1307* (London, 1979); H. Grundmann, 'Litteratus-illiteratus. Der Wandel einer Bildungsnorm vom Altertum zum Mittelalter', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 40 (1958) 1-66, and his earlier 'Die Frauen und die Literar im Mittelalter', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 26 (1936) 129-61; and J. W. Thompson, *The Literacy of the Laity in the Middle Ages* (New York and London, 1939 and 1960). New perspectives have been offered by Franz H. Bauml, 'Varieties and consequences of medieval literacy and illiteracy', *Speculum* 55 (1980) 237-65, and Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy. Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, 1983). It is Stock who goes so far as to speak of a 'rebirth of literacy' c. 1000. His forthcoming *Studies in Literacy, Rationality and Society in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge) will also concentrate on the eleventh century onwards.

<sup>2</sup> I accept Walter Ong's definition of a primary oral culture, that is, a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print, and maintain that neither Carolingian

## 2 *The Carolingians and the written word*

written word had a function in early mediaeval society and it is for us to determine precisely what that function was.<sup>3</sup>

There was undoubtedly some continuity and much change in the functions of writing and possession of literate skills from the late Roman to the Carolingian periods; there is certainly sufficient evidence to dispose of any Pirenne-like thesis of the decline in literacy outside a clerical elite by the eighth century and a rebirth of literacy in the eleventh century. The Franks in particular increased their resort to literate modes for legal and administrative business from the mid-eighth century. The written word became a fundamental element of Carolingian culture, and Frankish society in the Carolingian period was transformed into one largely dependent on the written word for its religion, law, government and learning. The purpose of this book is to demonstrate how it was so transformed, and how this manifests itself in our sources.

Past studies of early mediaeval Frankish culture, such as those of Pirenne or Riché, invaluable in documenting strands of Roman survival, have measured early mediaeval developments by the yardstick of classical culture.<sup>4</sup> Preoccupation with cultural 'decline' or the degree of survival of classical culture, however, is tangential to a study of Carolingian culture. It is not simply a matter of whether or not Roman literary culture and education survived, but what kind of culture existed and the degree to which the written word was an element of that culture. If it was an element, why was it, and from what source was its use continued and promoted? The most remarkable legacy of Roman civilization to Frankish Gaul was not in fact its content but its form. In the pursuit of lingering traces of the content our awareness of the form is in danger of being blunted. It was the written word which was the most vital vehicle of continuity, a continuity about which there is now a growing consensus.<sup>5</sup>

culture nor that of the early middle ages generally can be understood as an oral culture, even if both preserved, in Ong's terms, 'much of the mind-set of primary orality': Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word* (London, 1982), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> The studies contained in R. McKitterick, ed., *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe* (Cambridge, forthcoming), will concentrate on this issue in a selection of early mediaeval societies, from Ireland to Byzantium and the Jewish communities of the Mediterranean region before the eleventh century.

<sup>4</sup> Henri Pirenne, 'De l'état de l'instruction des laïques à l'époque mérovingienne', *RB* 46 (1934) 165–77, and P. Riché, *Education et culture dans l'occident barbare VI<sup>e</sup>–VIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, 1962), Eng. trans. J. J. Contreni (Columbia, South Carolina, 1976); but compare the position adopted in Riché's more recent *Ecoles et enseignement dans le Haut Moyen Age* (Paris, 1979), especially pp. 285–313.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the illuminating comments and assessments in Edith M. Wightman, *Gallia Belgica* (London, 1985), pp. 239–56, and Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory. Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge and Paris, 1986), especially pp. 6–7. For some sense of the trends of opinion in the older literature see P. E. Hübinge, ed., *Kulturbruch oder Kulturkontinuität im Übergang von der Antike zum Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 1968).

What was transmitted from late Roman Gaul to the Frankish kingdom that succeeded it was the use of literate modes, the structure of the law and written instruments, the pattern of administration and its dependence, at least to some extent, on the written word and the Latin language. It is on the role of the written word in Carolingian society, therefore, that this study concentrates.

This book is also in some ways a reaction against the preoccupation with the later middle ages of most recent studies of mediaeval literacy. It is based on the conviction that the roots of later mediaeval developments are to be sought in the centuries immediately succeeding the period of Roman rule. It is only with reference to the transformations of these years that the changes documented in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and later, now attracting an increasing amount of attention and interest from a variety of perspectives, can be interpreted.

The questions of Frankish literacy and the function of writing in Frankish society can be reduced to the purely quantitative. What proportion of the population possessed literate skills or employed literate modes in their social organization? Was that proportion further differentiated by function? Was literacy only possessed by a particular group within society or was it more widespread? Is the number of people possessing literate skills, employing literate modes and participating in literacy statistically significant enough for Frankish society in the eighth and ninth centuries as a whole to be regarded as literate in the pragmatic sense, that is, literate for practical purposes rather than, or, as well as, learned ones?<sup>6</sup> Given that Frankish society cannot be described as a purely oral culture, may we call it a literate one?

Such quantitative questions, however, inevitably depend on qualitative ones. The study of the place of the written word in any society cannot confine itself to literacy and its uses alone. Some attempt must be made to study the relationship between orality and literacy, and the operations of literacy in Frankish society. It will be argued that in the prodigious output of the written word at every level of Carolingian society we are observing essential phases in the development of a literate culture, with new ideals and definitions of education and knowledge dependent on a written tradition. The consequences are to be seen in an impulse to the recording of the past in writing, in the exploitation of the written word in government and administration and in a marked impact on the character of aristocratic and lay culture in general. It is my hope that this study may

<sup>6</sup> On the notion of pragmatic literacy I follow Malcolm Parkes, 'The literacy of the laity', in D. Daiches and A. K. Thorlby, eds., *Literature and Western Civilization. The Mediaeval World* (London, 1973), pp. 555-77, especially p. 555.

prompt other investigations, particularly concerning the degree to which the foundations for the developments I describe were laid down in the Merovingian period.

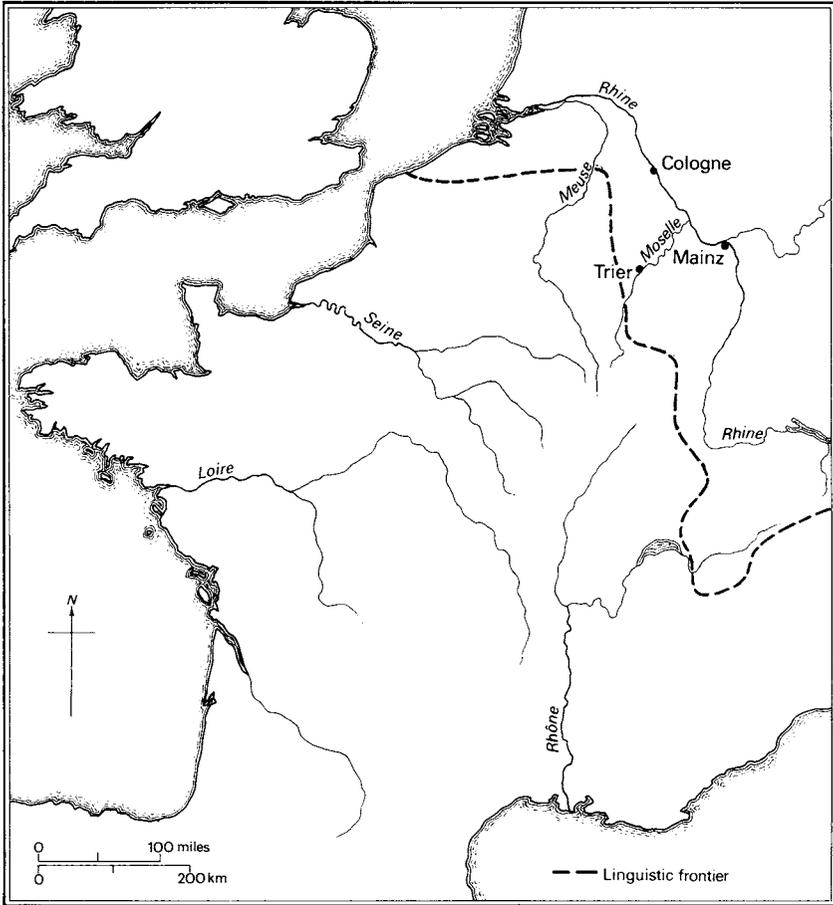
The role of the written word in Carolingian society has to be demonstrated rather than asserted. An arresting image in Carolingian manuscript illumination is of the Book from John the Divine's apocalyptic vision. As interpreted by patristic and Frankish exegetes, the Book represented the gift of the written law of God in the Old and New Testaments. The implication of this iconography and the explanation of the written words on which it is based is that possession and use of writing were, for the Franks, the keys to faith, knowledge and power. The iconography and symbolic meaning of the Book, moreover, are to be linked with the theology of the Word, the *Logos* of St John's Gospel, for it was a connection not lost on Carolingian commentators on this text.<sup>7</sup> A manuscript such as the Trier Apocalypse is the expression of a highly sophisticated understanding of the functions of word and image; but the Franks' pragmatic understanding of the use of the written word is the essential context in which such symbolic interpretations are to be understood. The largely pragmatic contexts and manifestations of the use of the written word on which I have chosen to concentrate in this book are thus only some among many on which it would be possible to dwell. My aim is to expose the essential foundations of the uses of the written word, the many manifestations of literacy in the eighth and ninth centuries and the degree to which they are either innovative or a result of steady evolution from the fifth century.

The first consideration has to be the degree to which Latin can be or was regarded either as a foreign language or even exclusively as the language of literacy in the eighth and ninth centuries. I therefore rehearse the arguments concerning the development of Romance, and the survival of Latin as a spoken language, in the remainder of this chapter. One spectacular demonstration of the vigour of Latin in the early barbarian kingdoms as a whole was the redaction of their customary laws in Latin. Law and the use of the written word thus form the subject of my second

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the Trier Apocalypse, Trier 31 *passim* and the commentary with facsimile, in R. Laufner and Peter K. Klein, eds., *Trierer Apokalypse* (Graz, 1975); compare the frontispieces to the Apocalypse or Book of Revelation in the bibles of Charles the Bald: BN lat. 1, fo. 415v, San Paolo fuori le Mura Bible, fo. 331v, and also the Moutier-Grandval bible, BL Add. 10546, fo. 449r. The context of this iconography and the general relationship between text and image in Carolingian painting will be discussed in R. McKitterick, 'Text and image in the Carolingian world', in McKitterick, ed., *Uses of Literacy*. For Carolingian exegesis on St John see, for example, Alcuin, 'Commentaria in sancti Johannis Evangelium', PL 100, col. 745.

chapter. I discuss there the status of law, the significance of the recommendations for recourse to the written word in legal transactions and the implications of legislation from the Carolingian period, which assumes a widespread ability to communicate by means of the written word in the process of administration and government. The third chapter narrows the focus of the discussion of the law by examining a large group of charters. These documents provide crucial information concerning the conduct and record of a society's methods of gift, endowment and exchange, and the status of the written word within a community at a lower level than is usually appreciated. They also reveal participation in literacy and actual use of literate modes by members of the lay population as well as by the clergy and monks in their midst.

The second half of the book broadens the enquiry to embrace various manifestations of the written word in Carolingian society and how these can be interpreted to reveal attitudes towards writing and books. It demonstrates how in both social and intellectual contexts the written word and the particular forms it took were the embodiment of a written Romano-Christian tradition, defined and refined by the Carolingians in their turn, and passed on to their successors. I consider the social status of the book and the written word in economic terms and how members of a warrior society were able to adapt their code of values to rank the possession and production of books with their greatest treasures, an adaptation with crucial and far-reaching consequences for western European society. I take up the compilation of inventories of this book-formed wealth, and show how in the intellectual sphere, methods were employed to systematize the enumeration of items of the golden hoard of words, with the effect of providing a canon of texts to form the basis of both contemporary knowledge and future libraries. This canon is in itself, in a real sense, one of the consequences of literacy; it shaped intellectual development and spiritual understanding of the Christian faith in a particular and distinctive way, and influenced the forms and expressions of both clerical and lay piety. These chapters have implications indeed for the extent of both clerical and lay literacy and show the Carolingian period as one in which fundamental transformations and adjustments concerning the function and future of the written word took place. But at a more practical level the hints in the evidence concerning the laity need fuller investigation. The last chapter therefore examines the questions of the education of the laity and the degree to which the 'lay aristocracy', and especially the women, can be regarded as literate. It is based on a wide variety of different types of evidence, some of it not usually considered in



Map 1 The linguistic frontier between 'Romance' and 'Germanic' in the eighth century

Source: based on Werner König, *dtv-Atlas zur deutschen Sprache* (Munich, 1978), p. 70

this context, but which, as I argue, has much to tell us about the use and functions of the written word in Carolingian society, and thus in a vital and formative period in the history of western Europe.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> I have assumed a general familiarity with the main discussions of literacy. For those who are new to the subject the following, in addition to the studies cited in nn. 1, 2 and 6, may serve as useful introductions to the wide variety of interpretations and perspectives: Harvey J. Graff, *Literacy in History. An Interdisciplinary Research Bibliography* (New York and London, 1981); Brian V. Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge, 1984), especially pp. 95–125; Jack Goody, *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1968); *idem*, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge, 1977); *idem*, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge, 1986); Eric A. Havelock, *Origins of Western Literacy* (Toronto, 1976); Carlo Cipolla *Literacy and Development in the West* (Harmondsworth, 1969); R. Pattison, *On Literacy. The Politics of the Word from Homer to the Age of Rock* (Oxford, 1982).

## II THE QUESTION OF LANGUAGE

In 844, Lupus of Ferrières wrote to Abbot Marcward of Prüm, asking him whether he could send him three young men – his nephew, son of Guago, and two others – for instruction in the German language. Marcward was clearly willing to receive them, for three years later, Lupus thanked him for giving the boys an understanding of the German language, the need for which Lupus regarded as important at that time.<sup>9</sup>

The passage highlights the linguistic complexity of the Frankish kingdoms in the ninth century. Broadly speaking, the regions from the Rhineland eastwards were Germanic-speaking areas, and those west of the Rhineland were Latin-based or Romance-speaking areas. But there was a great diversity of dialects in both east and west; many areas, for example, the northern Moselle region, were essentially mixed language regions and many 'pockets of Romance' have been posited in Germanic areas.<sup>10</sup> Although a map (such as that provided, Map 1) can give a rough idea of the language areas, it is totally inadequate as far as informing us what language or languages a person in any one region could speak or understand, let alone which languages he or she could read. Given the great diversity of dialects, the possession by the church and lay individuals of lands in both eastern and western portions of the Carolingian realm, the intermarriage between men and women within the Frankish kingdoms, the intellectual and spiritual links between monasteries on either side of the Rhine (evinced by such exchanges as Lupus sending boys to Prüm, Lupus himself having studied at Fulda, and the German Hraban Maur going to Tours) and the enormous stress on the essential unity of the Frankish kingdoms, it is hardly likely that monolingualism was the norm except among particularly isolated social groups or in remote areas with no contact with people in another community speaking a different language or dialect. The whole process of Germanic settlement in the late Roman Empire must have created great linguistic diversity in all areas once part of the Roman Empire. A process of assimilation and adaptation in social spheres undoubtedly had an impact on language patterns as well. We may, therefore, throughout the early mediaeval period in the areas

<sup>9</sup> Lupus of Ferrières, ed. Léon Levillain, *Loup de Ferrières. Correspondance* (Paris, 1964), Epp. 35 and 70, and see also Epp. 58 and 65, Eng. trans. Graydon W. Regenos, *The Letters of Lupus of Ferrières* (The Hague, 1966), from Levillain's edition.

<sup>10</sup> A useful study of a linguistic 'frontier region' between Romance and German is that of A. Joris, 'On the edge of two worlds in the heart of the new Empire: the Romance regions of northern Gaul during the Merovingian period', *Studies in Mediaeval and Renaissance History* 3.3 (1966) 1–52. I addressed some of the problems of the vernacular and discussed the older literature in *Frankish Church*, though I concentrated on the German vernaculars. Work since then on Late Latin and Romance has necessitated modification of some of the views I there expressed, and I would now lay more stress on the continuity of the Latin language.

dominated by the Franks, be dealing with a largely bilingual or even polylingual population as far as the spoken word is concerned. A modern parallel could be made with the situation in present-day Switzerland.

The type of spoken word is relatively easy to determine in the Germanic-speaking areas, for the dialects within Old High German have been largely agreed by modern scholars and we are fortunate in the possession of written witnesses to the language from the end of the eighth century onwards.<sup>11</sup> As far as either Romance or Latin is concerned, however, there is no agreement, not even on the proper broad linguistic categories.<sup>12</sup> The problem is exacerbated, from the historian's point of view, by a lack of written records of the spoken Romance forms in any quantity until the end of the tenth century, though glosses and some short texts survive from the first half of the ninth century onwards.<sup>13</sup> The debate concerning the nature of the spoken word in Frankish Gaul has sometimes formulated the problem under the heading 'When did Latin cease to be spoken in Gaul?', and has more recently been reformulated as 'When did Latin cease to be understood in Gaul?'.<sup>14</sup> The key questions at issue therefore are as follows: did the Franks adopt Latin as their native speech, and to what extent did they introduce their own language habits into it? To what degree was the Latin encountered by the Franks in the fourth century already modified and changing? Did Latin gradually evolve into 'Romance' and when did it do so? It is the last of these which is the most relevant for determining the language of the Carolingians.

Let us consider the situation in the so-called Romance regions. It used to be the general view that it was during the period between 600 and 800 that 'Latin', until then the language of the Franks in Gaul (as far as we can gather from the written Latin texts which survive) became Romance, that Latin remained the written language, while the spoken language,

<sup>11</sup> The most useful guide to Old High German is J. Knight Bostock, *A Handbook on Old High German Literature*, 2nd edn revised by K. C. King and D. R. McLintock (Oxford, 1976).

<sup>12</sup> For an excellent survey of recent work on Late Latin and proto-Romance, with full bibliography, see Marc van Yytfanghe, 'Histoire du Latin, protohistoire des langues romanes et histoire de la communication. A propos d'un recueil d'études, et avec quelques observations préliminaires sur le débat intellectuel entre pensée structurale et pensée historique', *Francia* 11 (1983) 579–613. His reflections constitute a response to Reinhold Kontzi's two collections of essays by various scholars on the history of the Romance languages: *Zur Entstehung der romanischen Sprachen* (Darmstadt, 1978) and *Substrate und Superstrate in den romanischen Sprachen* (Darmstadt, 1982). See also Mario Pei, *The story of Latin and the Romance Languages* (New York, San Francisco and London, 1976), especially pp. 67–77.

<sup>13</sup> Henry F. Muller, 'When did Latin cease to be a spoken language in France?', *The Romanic Review* 12 (1921) 318–24, and Ferdinand Lot, 'A quelle époque a-t-on cessé de parler Latin?' *Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi VI Bulletin du Cange* (1931) 97–159.

<sup>14</sup> For example, by Michael Richter, 'A quelle époque a-t-on cessé de parler Latin en Gaule? A propos d'une question mal posée', *Annales E.S.C.* 38 (1983) 439–48.

Romance, moved steadily away from it. We are apprised of communication problems in the canons of the reform councils of 813, with their reference to the need to *transferre* sermons into *rusticam Romanam linguam aut theotiscam*. Whether *transferre* actually means 'translate' in this context has been disputed.<sup>15</sup> Further, the Strasbourg oaths of 842 provide the texts of the oaths sworn by the eastern and western Frankish followers of the sons of Louis the Pious in 'Romance' and 'German'.<sup>16</sup> An important consideration in estimating the nature and use of the vernacular, of course, is that we only become aware of it in the literary evidence, and this is inevitably some time after the main developments in the formation of the mediaeval Romance idiom have presumably taken place. It is generally agreed, moreover, that the emergence of written Romance was very gradual.

The socio-linguistic perspectives of such scholars as Richter, Banniard and Itkonen, however, have considerably altered our understanding of late and mediaeval Latin and the early history of the Romance languages. They have, for example, retarded considerably the emergence of Romance languages perceived as different from Latin by hearers and speakers, and they have indicated that a prolonging of the organic connection between written and spoken languages far into the ninth century is now far more likely. The search for proto-Romance is moving to the Carolingian and even post-Carolingian eras.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> MGH *Conc.* II. 1, p. 288, and see the discussion of the meaning of *transferre* by Roger Wright, 'Late Latin and early Romance: Alcuin's *De Orthographia* and the Council of Tours (813 A.D.)', *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar* 3 (1981) 343-61, at 355-8.

<sup>16</sup> Nithard, *Histoire des Fils de Louis le Pieux*, ed. P. Lauer (Paris, 1926), p. 104, and Eng. trans. Bernard Scholz, *Carolingian Chronicles* (Ann Arbor, 1970), p. 162.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Richter: 'A socio-linguistic approach to the Latin middle ages', *Studies in Church History* 11 (1975) 69-82; 'Kommunikationsprobleme im lateinischen Mittelalter', *Historische Zeitschrift* 222 (1976) 43-80; 'Urbanitas-rusticitas: linguistic aspects of a mediaeval dichotomy', *Studies in Church History* 16 (1979) 149-57; *Sprache und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter. Untersuchungen zur mündlichen Kommunikation in England von der Mitte des elften bis zum Beginn des 14. Jahrhunderts*, Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 18 (Stuttgart, 1979). Michel Banniard: 'Le Lecteur en Espagne wisigothique d'après Isidore de Seville: de ses fonctions à l'état de la langue', *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 21 (1975) 112-44; *Le Haut Moyen Age occidental. Que sais-je?*, 1807 (Paris, 1980), pp. 104-12, and see his references on pp. 126-7; 'Géographie linguistique et linguistique diachronique. Essai d'analyse analogique en occitano-roman et en latin tardif', *Via Domitia* 24 (1980-2) 9-43; 'Vox egestis: quelques problèmes d'élocution de Cassiodore à Alcuin', in *Trames. Etudes antiques* (Limoges, 1985), pp. 195-208; 'Iuxta uniuscuiusque qualitatem. L'écriture médiatrice chez Gregoire le Grand' in *Gregoire le Grand, Colloques Internationaux du C.N.R.S.* (Paris, 1986), pp. 477-88; 'Théorie et pratique de la langue et du style chez Alcuin: rusticité feinte et rusticité masquée', *Francia* 13 (1985) 579-601; *Communication écrite et communication orale du IV<sup>e</sup> au IX<sup>e</sup> siècle en occident latin* (forthcoming). E. Itkonen, *The Significance of Merovingian Latin to Linguistic Theory. Four Linguistic Studies in Classical Languages* (Helsinki, 1978); 'Un conflit entre facteurs phonétiques et facteurs fonctionnels dans un texte en Latin mérovingien', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 70 (1969) 471-84.

One of the most interesting contributions to the debate about the idea of written Latin and spoken Romance has been that of Roger Wright whose thesis is still being digested by the philologists. Wright challenges the view of written Latin and spoken Romance as two separate languages coexisting before 800. He argues that late Latin was early Romance, that there was no difference between spoken and written Latin until the Carolingians created it, not just with their emphasis on correct Latin, but by introducing new, and reviving old, rules for the pronunciation of written Latin. This made Latin virtually unintelligible to those used only to speaking it. Those already used to writing it would simply have had to learn the new Latin pronunciation instead of the old Romance one. In Romance communities before 800, everyone would have learnt automatically to speak the local vernacular when young, while when, and if, he learnt to read later, he would have learnt to spell the old-fashioned correct way, that is, Latin. When the Strasbourg oaths were recorded in 842, because Latin pronunciation had been changing, a spelling reform to represent the spoken Latin/Romance phonetically was thought necessary for the first time.<sup>18</sup>

After all, the concept of a general lack of correspondence between spelling and pronunciation, that is, a non-phonetic orthography, should not astonish English native speakers, as it is something to which we have long been accustomed. Absurdities such as the eight different pronunciations of 'ough' – though, thorough, bough, through, rough, lough, cough and hiccough – and the sound changes wrought by the addition of a final 't' do not disturb us at all. Nor, generally, do the varieties in accent and pronunciation among the different English-speaking groups, all of them represented by the same group of letters. Other modern analogies are the distinctions between Dutch and Flemish, or the regional pronunciations of Chinese, which rely on the same written characters. Writing, when all is said and done, is but a sign language, and there is perhaps an inevitable discrepancy between graphic representation and the sound of words, even in the apparently most phonetically transliterated of languages. Letters are a mnemonic device; they form a written code, similar in function, as far as the reader is concerned, to musical notation, for they give a guide to sounds. But the degree to which they record and preserve oral delivery is dependent also on the understanding accorded the letters and the sounds they represent. They do not necessarily, therefore, represent a sound precisely. The knowledge and exploitation of writing

<sup>18</sup> Roger Wright, *Late Latin and Early Romance in Spain and Carolingian France* (Liverpool, 1982). My brief summary does less than justice to but a portion of Wright's important book.

may have suggested deliberate variations of spelling in an attempt to represent sound, much as modern novelists try and render sound by a particular sequence of letters when reporting rustic or colloquial speech. If a particular convention of written language as far as spelling and even syntax is followed, and insisted upon, then its relation to speech may not be close. If the written convention had become somewhat etiolated, but steps were taken to restore old rules and impose uniform spelling and grammar in the written language (because, presumably, the more colloquial forms were felt to be too local to be generally acceptable, as seems to have been the case with the Carolingians and their deliberate promotion of purer Latinity), the pronunciation of the spoken language would not necessarily have been affected; its written forms simply accorded with stricter universal conventions.

Wright argues that the Carolingians not only sought to reimpose stricter conventions on the written language as far as spelling was concerned, but that a pronunciation reform was instigated as well. This he attributes to the influence of Alcuin of York who came from Anglo-Saxon England, a country where the vernacular was a totally different language from the Latin of the church and where Latin when pronounced was phonetic and based on traditional Latin spelling. This view raises a number of questions. Did the English in Anglo-Saxon England have a system of writing symbols that provided a faithful guide to the pronunciation of the vernacular?<sup>19</sup> Were the English taught to pronounce Latin phonetically by the seventh-century Italian and Irish missionaries who presumably introduced them to the language for the first time, not to mention the Franks with whom they were in contact? That is, was Latin in England pronounced as if the letters or combinations of letters in the words represented invariable sounds, with a strict correspondence always between sound and letter? Why should the late sixth- and early seventh-century Italian and Greek clerics, the Irish missionaries or the Frankish bishops and chaplains have been speaking Latin phonetically? Might they not also have been speaking forms of Late Latin? The notion of Alcuin speaking phonetically exact Latin because he had learnt it, as it were, from a book is a nice tidy one, but one fears that it may have been more complicated than that. Although an eighth-century Italian could understand the speech of an eighth-century Spaniard, Boniface the Englishman had problems in the early eighth century making himself understood when speaking Latin in Rome; all only became crystal clear when he wrote his views down in formal written Latin for the Pope

<sup>19</sup> On some aspects of Latin and Old English literacy in Anglo-Saxon England, see Susan Kelly, 'Anglo-Saxon lay society and the written word' in McKitterick, ed., *Uses of Literacy*.