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WALAHFRID STRABO – A STUDENT AT FULDA

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Walahfrid Strabo, the mid-ninth century abbot of Reichenau, has received the attention of some very fine historians who have emphasized his poetry and relations with Carolingian royalty. In one of the best accounts, Eleanor Shipley Duckett gave a refreshing biographical reading of poems and correspondence of Walahfrid. However Miss Duckett and all others[1] have failed to recognize that he had given attention to science as well as to humane letters. His active intellect was more wide-ranging than later medievalists supposed, for the evidence strongly indicates that he concerned himself with arithmetic and astronomy as well as with grammar and poetry.

Born about 808/9, Walahfrid had been the child of a poor family in Allemania (Swabia) when he was brought to the island of Reichenau. He became one of those pueri oblati, who renounced property rights and devoted themselves to the riches of eternal life, even as children, on the analogy that no offering was too small! He liked monastic life and proved to be an apt pupil, despite the "twisted eye" which led others to call him Strabo.

We are only beginning to understand the practical and psychological significance that writing had for the young and old in Carolingian schools.[2] No doubt Walahfrid began writing with an iron griffel on a wax tablet, and at least by the year 825 he was eager enough to have acquired his own vellum copy-book. The earliest entries were made at Reichenau when Walahfrid was about sixteen years of age and already a close friend of Gottschalk when they both were students of Wetti (d. November 824). In 827 Walahfrid went north to the now famous monastery and school at Fulda in order to study with Hraban, and there he added to his notebook. But within two years both Gottschalk and Walahfrid were in trouble: Gottschalk wanted to be free of his vows and appealed over the abbot's head to a council of bishops, and Walahfrid felt Hraban's antagonism for his loyalty to a rebel. In the spring of 829 Walahfrid joined the royal family of Louis the Pious at Aachen as tutor for Judith's son, Charles, known later as emperor Charles the Bald. He continued to make entries in the notebook during his time at court and also later as abbot of Reichenau. The final notations were made within weeks of his death in the summer of 849.

Walahfrid's personal notebook is now manuscript no. 878 in the Stiftsbibliothek at Sankt Gallen, Switzerland. It contains none of the poems which have attracted scholary attention, nor the biblical commentaries which brought him abuse.[3] Rather there are tracts and excerpts from other authors which he transcribed for study and later use, or because he simply liked them: for example, a paragraph on how to grow pears.[4] Two decades ago Bernhard Bischoff demonstrated that this was Walahfrid's personal manuscript and that perhaps half of its contents was transcribed by Walahfrid himself during specific and datable periods of his life. Three previous attempts to identify Walahfrid's script had not been successful; there are many mediaeval autographs, and it is a temptation to add to the number prematurely. In June 1967 however I was able to spend a week at Sankt Gallen, and not only was I impressed with the validity but also expect to publish further evidence to substantiate Bischoff's analysis.[5]

The earliest entry in this manuscript as it now stands (ms p. 178-240) is Hraban's Computus which Walahfrid was trying to learn about 825 at Reichenau — perhaps transcribing a copy which had been brought there from Fulda by Gottschalk in 824. As a student he drilled on Latin word forms (ms p. 174-176) and copied out grammatical instructions from versions of Priscian and Donatus (ms p. 5-69) which allow us to see the student struggling with language before he became an accomplished poet. Both sides of the seven liberal arts are represented from the beginning therefore; later he came back to these materials and added to them, perhaps using them at Aachen with the young Charles, or in the school at Reichenau; and neither the trivium nor the quadrivium was neglected during the subsequent periods of Walahfrid's life. But when all the grammar and metrics which we expect to find in his notebook have been mentioned, most of its contents have still not been touched. In fact, it is natural history and science which seem to dominate his attention and in particular the computus, that is, material on calendar usage.

A surprising correlation of two manuscripts will allow us a view of Walahfrid, as he was just beginning to grasp the elements of computistical science. One of the tasks carried out by Walahfrid at Fulda in 827-829 was a complete re-reading and correction on every page of his copy of Hraban's *Computus*. I have identified the manuscript which he used to correct his own: it is now Canonici Miscellaneous 353 in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, and the primary writing is mature Fulda script while the remainder is by scribes who were being trained

by a Fulda master. Both Walahfrid's manuscript and this Fulda manuscript contain not only Hraban's *Computus* but also additional notes by which we may see how the computus was taught and learned at Fulda.[6] I shall discuss them together as sources of Walahfrid's experience in the classroom.

Hraban's handbook[7] began with the concept of number, how to use numerals and how to apply fourteen divisions of time. By question and answer the student learned to observe the stars and their patterns, the movements of sun and moon and their imperfect correlations. By the middle of the book he was deeply into the technical details of how to make and use a continuous calendar based upon a nineteen year cycle, as well as the rationale for such a calendar in Latin Christian history.

Additional notes which appear at the end of the computus in these two manuscripts[8] are answers to problems which a master had posed for his students when they began their study of the calendar itself. The first problem was this: On which *feria* (weekday) did the *Kalends* (first day) of each month occur? Bede had explained the system, and so did Hraban who also applied it to the example of August when he was writing. Taking the year 820 as his example, a student has worked out in the Fulda manuscript the feria for the Kalends of each month from March 820 to February 821; thus the problem was solved and a system learned which could be applied to any year.[9]

The second problem was this: In the Roman system, one must know how many Nones, Ides, and Kalends there are in each month. Bede and Hraban had provided explanations of how the Romans came to their system and what the terms meant, but not how to use them. But in both Walahfrid's manuscript and the Fulda manuscript we see that Fulda students were drilled in the number of Nones and of Ides and of Kalends, and in the application of the terms by groups of months, according to a corresponding number of Nones and Ides.

Students were also taught to divide months into weeks. How do you correlate 12 months and 52 weeks in the Roman system? On which days of the month will a weekday recur? Begin with the Kalends of January: whatever feria occurs on the Kalends of January will recur on the sixth Ides and on the 18th Kalends, the 11th Kalends, and the fourth Kalends (of February). In order to continue reckoning the sequence of weeks, the student must recall what he had drilled on in the preceding problem: the number of Nones, Ides, and Kalends for

each month. Answers to these problems would have been simple, almost instinctive for a Roman. But Fulda students learned to think in Roman terms only with effort,[10] and they needed the aid of memory verses which are so abundant in medieval manuscripts.[11]

If such drills are elementary, they are also necessary in order to go further. Perhaps Walahfrid took the teaching more seriously than most student, for he applied it in an uncommon way. At Fulda he copied into his notebook a complete calendar, (ms. p. 324-327), but in a form rarely found. Rather than using one page for each month, he grouped the months exactly as here described, according to whether they had the same number of Nones, Ides, and Kalends: January, August, and December together on one page; March, May, July and October on a second page; April, June, September, and November on a third; and a column for February — a space of less than two folios. While calendars of this type had been used in the Roman Empire, none is known for five centuries before Walahfrid created his at Fulda.[12] The teaching was that of Hraban; application by a quick-witted student may be seen in this short practical calendar.

Not all of Walahfrid's time at Fulda was spent in either grammatical or computistical studies. On one page of his notebook (ms p. 277) he took a compass and drew a circular maze, that is, a game, which no doubt distracted attention from his assignments. Also all of us who have studied in Germany for more than a year will have empathy with Walahfrid when I mention his attention to medicine while at Fulda. He must have sought medical aid where he could find it and copied out a letter falsely ascribed to the Greek physician Hypocrates (ms p. 328-331). It provided a medical regimen for an entire year, and it also told him what to do for headaches, constipation, vertigo and ulcers. To this he added further medical prescriptions with German translations.[13] He must have been trying to overcome the real and very disturbing communications gap between a local physician and a transient foreign student by translating key words and phrases into his own language. Many of us know the situation well.

In both the manuscript of Walahfrid and the Fulda manuscript which Walahfrid used, there is evidence that attention to the calendar led to further learning. In the Fulda manuscript (f. 53^{v}-55) the student proceeded to copy an elaborate description of the heavens according to groups of stars which once could have been visualized as storybook figures of beasts and heros and thus be easily remembered. Hraban

had given little space to the Zodiac, so this longer text of Hellenistic origin was added. It begins, *Duo sunt extremi vertices mundi, quos appellant polos . . .* , and clearly assumes the globular shape of the whole cosmos and of the earth. So did Bede's *De natura rerum* which was Walahfrid's next addition to his notebook while at Fulda (ms p. 242-262). The same teaching had been stated or assumed in several parts of Hraban's *Computus,* but no doubt good students raised questions. At Boniface's monastic foundation at Fulda, the ninth century abbots and masters taught both Christian doctrine whose orthodoxy never failed and a cosmology which was never publicly challenged: the world was a globe, the universe a sphere, and all was in God's own hand.[14]

His notebook shows that Walahfrid continued to collect materials on these subjects later at Aachen and at Reichenau. He added Bede's *De temporibus* and took up the question basic to any calendar — when does it begin? To Bede's and Hraban's account of the *annus mundi,* the year of creation, he added three more accounts and noted the conflicts and the confusion which would result if anyone tried to use them. He copied a variety of computistical paragraphs by which one might find the *indiction,* the *bissextus,* the *saltus lunae,* the *lunar epacts,* and other technical information for reckoning dates. And he grouped these paragraphs together according to whether they used the *annus mundi* or the *annus Domini.* Apparently Walahfrid recognized that there is an uncertainty about the year of Incarnation, as well as about the year of creation — a problem which he could not resolve; nor can we. In his notes we can see a scholar moving from elementary questions, through technical data, into the most difficult problems of computistical science — and the arithmetic, astronomy, and history which it required.[15]

I have emphasized some aspects of schooling which were important to Walahfrid at Reichenau, at Fulda, and throughout his life, but which have rarely claimed the interest of modern historians and biographers. I hope that attention to a few computistical notes has led us into the heart of Carolingian education, into the mind of a student studying.

NOTES

1 E. S. Duckett, "Walahfrid Strabo of Reichenau", *Carolingian Portraits: a study in the ninth century* (Ann Arbor, Michigan 1962) 121-160. In addition to the great surveys of medieval literature by Adolf Ebert (vol. II, 1880), Max Manitius (1911), and J. De Ghellinck (1939), as well as the two large volumes of essays in *Der Kultur der Abtei Reichenau*, ed. Konrad Beyerle (Munich 1925), the following studies should be noted: Konrad Plath, "Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Visio Wettini des Walahfrid," *Neues Archiv* XVII (1892) 261-279; Ludwig Traube, "Zu Walahfrid Strabos De imagine Tetrici," *ibid.* XVIII (1893) 664-665; Emil Madeja, "Aus Walahfrid Strabos Lehrjahren," *Studien und Mitteilungen O.S.B.* XL (1920) 251-256; Friedrich von Bezold, "Kaiserin Judith und ihr Dichter Walahfrid Strabo," *Historische Zeitschrift* CXXX (1924) 377-439; and Otto Herding, "Zum Problem des karolingischen 'Humanismus' mit besonderer Rucksicht auf Walahfrid Strabo," *Studium Generale* I (1948) 389-397.

I wish to thank Professor Hugh Mackinnon of Waterloo University for his useful comments on my paper at the meeting of the Canadian Historical Association at Memorial University on 31 May 1971. Portions of this material were presented also at the annual Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, 21 March 1970.

2 See the suggestions of Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (Eng. tr. New York 1961) 128, 175 passim.

3 Beryl Smalley, *Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (2 ed. Oxford 1952) 56-60; Karl Langosch, "Walahfrid Strabo," in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters, Verfasserlexikon*, ed. Wolfgang Stammler and Karl Langosch, IV (Berlin 1953) 734-769, esp. coll. 739-745; see also V (1955) 1111-1112.

4 "De pomis" on ms p. 368-369 was excerpted from a Fulda copy of Palladius; later Walahfrid used it in a poem addressed to his sponsor and friend, Grimald, abbot of S. Gallen, as one of the twenty-seven short poems gathered into his "Hortulus," ed. MGH. Poetae latini V 434 seq.; see Bischoff (note 5) 47.

5 Bernhard Bischoff, "Eine Sammelhandschrift Walahfrid Strabos (Cod. Sangall. 878)," in *Aus der Welt des Buches Festgabe Georg Leyh* (Leipzig 1950) 30-48; reprinted with additions in Bischoff's *Mittelalterliche Studien: Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Schriftkunde und Literaturgeschichte* II (Stuttgart 1967) 34-51 and four reproductions. See also Gustav Scherrer, *Verzeichnis der Handschriften der Stiftsbibliothek von St. Gallen* (Halle 1875) 307-309, and Anton Bruckner, *Scriptoria medii aevi Helvetica* I (Geneva 1935) 93-94 and Tafel XXII.

If I may supplement the brilliant analysis by Bischoff, whose work so often leads others to new discoveries: the script on ms p. 344-347 (called Hand M) is actually two different hands; leaving rubrics aside, one hand copied ms p. 344 lines 4-17 and 19-32, while another copied p. 345-347. Furthermore the script of p. 344 and the preceding script of p. 322-323 and 340-344 line 2 (called Hand L) show distinct Fulda characteristics, as does a note in the lower margin of p. 341. With the exception of one later addition, all the material in ms p. 322-351 was found at Fulda when Walahfrid was there as a student, including especially the computistical argumenta discussed below.

I wish to express my thanks to Professor Bischoff for discussing this manuscript with me in August 1967, as well as to Professor Johannes Duft, Librarian of the Stiftsbibliothek at Sankt Gallen, for making it available to me.

6 The Bodleian ms Canon. Misc. 353 was copied in the Fulda scriptorium during the decade before mid A.D. 836, as I have shown through palaeographical analysis of the scripts: "Fulda Scribes at Work," *Bibliothek und Wissenschaft* IX (Wiesbaden 1972) in press; see also my general description of the manuscript and its contents: "A Ninth Century Manuscript from Fulda," *Bodleian Library Record* XII (Oxford 1972) in press.

My discovery that Walahfrid used this Fulda manuscript to correct his own copy depends upon a correlation of corrections in his copy of Hraban's computus with marginal notae in ms Canon. Misc. 353. Positively, the correlation is thoroughgoing; negatively, there is no other rationale for the presence of these notae, so far as I have been able to conceive. Part of the evidence was presented

to a meeting of the History Colloquium of the universities of Manitoba and Winnipeg, 11 December 1970, and is now being prepared for publication.

7 Hraban's Liber de computo, ed. *Patrologia Latina* CVII 669-728; a critical edition of the text is being prepared from sixteen manuscripts, of which two discussed here are the earliest known.

8 These computistical notes appear in substantially the same form in both ms St. Gallen 878 p. 327 and ms Canon. Misc. 353 f. 53v. The usefulness of such material is attested by the presence of similar notes in innumerable other manuscripts.

9 *Bedae Liber de temporum ratione* XXI 5-7 (ed. Jones); *Hrabani Liber de computo* LXXIII (ed. PL CVII 709B) and LXXIIII (ibid. 710C). See the discussion by Charles W. Jones, *Bedae Opera de temporibus* (Cambridge, Mass., 1943) 157-158.

10 Modern scholars, like those of the ninth century, resort to their own schoolbooks and reference works in order to keep such matters straight. A good summary may be found for example in Allen and Greenough's *New Latin Grammar* (Boston 1931) 428-429).

11 Walahfrid's four computistical poems are found together with Hraban's computus in ms Paris BN lat. 4860 (s.IX^2) f. 156-157 whose contents derive from Reichenau and whose writing is from the area of Constance, and in CLM 14523 (S. Emmeram s.X^1) f. 1-1v; they were edited by E. Dümmler, *MGH. Poetae latini* II, no. lxxxix, who expressed uncertainty about their authenticity, but cf Bischoff 46.

12 This calendar was published by E. Munding, *Die Kalendarien von St. Gallen* I (Beuron 1948; *Texte und Arbeiten* XXXVI) 6, 19-20, 36, without understanding that it was a Fulda calendar or that it had been copied by Walahfrid. Munding worked from a transcription which had been made for Bischoff during World War II.

13 The medical regimen here attributed to Hippocrates, *Ep. ad Aaniochum et Antonium,* is very common in medieval Latin manuscripts. Walahfrid was probably at Fulda when he copied it and could have discovered it in *Bedae Liber de temporum ratione* XXX 13-39; Hraban had used parts of this chapter in his *Liber de computo* LIII *De solstitiis et aequinoctiis* but had omitted the ps-Hippocratean material; see Jones 365-366. Also at Fulda Walahfrid transcribed the medical prescription on his ms p. 331-334; on the interlinear German words see E. Steinmeyer, *Die althochdeutschen Glossen* IV (Berlin 1898) 455. Further medical notes were added after Walahfrid had left Fulda (ms p. 368-377 and 392-393).

14 This work begins to appear in manuscripts during the early ninth century and was attributed to either Aratus or Hyginus or not at all; ed. PL XC 368-369.

The historical evidence is overwhelming that educated men of the Middle Ages conceived of the earth as a sphere, though some purveyors of "enlightment" wish it were not so — e.g. such fabulists as Cosmas Indicopleustes, J. L. E. Dreyer, and John Herman Randall. See the discussion by C. W. Jones "The Flat Earth," *Thought* IX (1934) 296-307.

The only significant exception may be the sixth century bishop, Isidore of Seville, whose language usage suggests that he imagined the world not as a perfect sphere but rather as somewhat flattened at the poles and bulging at the equator — which it is!

15 At Fulda were recorded *Bedae Liber de natura rerum* (ms p. 242-262) and further computistical argumenta (ms p. 344-347). At a later period he added *Bedae Liber de temporibus* (ms p. 262-276 with table of contents on p. 243), various argumenta (ms p. 176-177, 284-302), and excerpts of chronicles (ms p. 240-241, 277-283, 302-305).

In addition to the interest they have as evidence for Walahfrid's studies, some of these computistical materials have never been found in other manuscripts and should be published.

On ms St. Gallen 878 see also the essays of Alfred Cordoliani, "Les manuscrits de comput ecclésiastique de l'abbaye Saint-Gall du VIIIe au XIIe siècle,"

Revue d'Histoire de 'lEglise Suisse XLIX (1955) 179-181, and "L'evolution du comput ecclésiatique à Saint-Gall du VIIIe au XIe siècle," ibid. 288-323, esp. p. 293. Their usefulness is seriously restricted by M. Cordoliani's acceptance of dates and provenance for this and other manuscripts which were incorrect and by his attempt to cite folios rather than pages (pagination is standard in Swiss collections); see Johannes Duft, "Berichtigungen zu A. Cordoliani," ibid. L (1956) 388-393, esp. p. 391.