

CHARLEMAGNE

Charlemagne's reputation as an author rests largely on the memorable account given in Einhard's *Vita Karoli* of the king's efforts to learn to write. Einhard says that Charlemagne "attempted to learn how to write, and for this reason, used to place wax-tablets and notebooks under the pillows on his bed, so that, if he had any free time, he might accustom his hand to forming letters. But this effort came too late in life and he achieved little success" (*Vita Karoli* XXV, ed. Holder-Egger, *MGH* SRG p 30; trans. Dutton 1998 p 32; discussion by Dutton 2004). Scholars have, on the whole, found little reason to dispute Einhard on this point, but Charlemagne's apparent inability to write for himself is misleading. By learning to write, the king was in fact striving beyond convention, since an educated man of rank in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages would have had a *notarius* to note down his compositions and a *librarius* to draw up fair copies to send out and to retain. We can be sure that Charlemagne was, if not a scribe, a dominant authorial "voice" behind many capitularies, letters, and conciliar documents, some of which were known to contemporaries in England and others which were preserved for the scrutiny of later Anglo-Saxon scholars in manuscripts that were in England before 1100 (Freeman 1971; Nelson 2001).

Einhard prefigures his account of Charlemagne's nocturnal writing practice with a description of the king's fluency in Latin and in Greek — "which he could understand better than he could speak" — and his extensive education in the liberal arts under the tuition of Peter of Pisa and, especially, **ALCUIN** of York. Alcuin was the most important but certainly not the only contemporary contact between Anglo-Saxon England and Charlemagne (see, for example, the letters that were sent by **CATHULF** or via **LUL**, the Anglo-Saxon archbishop of Mainz in the 770s), and it was through him and his network that many Anglo-Saxons made contact with the Frankish king, either in person or by letter. Furthermore, the circulation of selections of letters made not just Alcuin's correspondence available to later Anglo-Saxon scholars but also some letters that had been written in Charlemagne's name.

Alcuin's major period of influence at Charlemagne's court was the decade 786–96. In 796 he was made abbot of St Martin's at Tours, and thereafter the nature of his interaction with the king changed; this was a prestigious appointment but one that rendered him physically remote from the court now settled at Aachen. His absence from court meant that he had to write letters to keep in touch with friends as well as with the ebb and flow of political discourse. It was at Tours that Alcuin made systematic efforts to collate, copy, and distribute selections from his correspondence for friends such as Paulinus of Aquileia and Arn of Salzburg, although he had probably begun the process of organizing his correspondence a few years before (Bullough 2004 pp 101–02). The cathedral at York seems also to have received a copy of some of the letters at about this time, and these were combined with original, recipient-copies already there to form part of the so-called "English" collection now extant in one Anglo-Saxon manuscript, namely, London, BL Cotton Tiberius A.xv, fols 1–173 (s. xiⁱⁿ, probably Canterbury, Christ Church) (HG 368; Bullough 2004 pp 85–87). Extracts from this "English" collection were copied for Archbishop **WULFSTAN II OF YORK** in the early eleventh century; his book is now London, BL Cotton Vespasian A.xiv, fols 114–79 (1003 × 1023, Worcester or York) (HG 383; Chase 1975; Mann 2004).

Importantly for our purposes, Alcuin's letter collections include correspondence composed in Charlemagne's name, as well as Alcuin's replies to letters from the king that are now lost. Three of Charlemagne's letters were addressed to Anglo-Saxon recipients in England. Ernst Dümmler edited all three within his collection of Alcuin's letters in *MGH* ECA 2, and the numbers assigned to them here follow Dümmler.

Epist. 85 [CHARL.Epist.85]: *CSLMA* 2.222–23 (ALC 45.85).
ed.: Dümmler, *MGH* ECA 2.128.

MSS – Refs none.

This first letter written in Charlemagne's name, datable to 794, was sent to Archbishop Æthelheard of Canterbury and Bishop Ceolwulf of Lindsey concerning the fate of a band of anti-Mercian exiles. It is also edited by Scheibe (1959 pp 182–83). English translations appear in Whitelock, *EHD*, no. 196, and in Loyn and Percival (1975 pp 111–12 [no. 26]).

Epist. 87 [CHARL.Epist.87]: *CSLMA* 2.223–24 (ALC 45.87).
ed.: Dümmler, *MGH ECA* 2.131.

MSS – Refs none.

Epist. 87 is one of two letters from Charlemagne to King Offa of Mercia. It can be dated 793 × 796 and discusses the expulsion of an Irish priest from the diocese of Cologne who had been accused of eating meat during Lent. An English translation appears in Loyn and Percival (1975 pp 112–13 [no. 27]).

Epist. 100 [CHARL.Epist.100]: *CSLMA* 2.231–32 (ALC 45.100).
ed.: Dümmler, *MGH ECA* 2.144–46.

MSS London, BL Cotton Tiberius A.xv, fols 1–173: HG 368.
Lists – Refs none.

This second, much longer letter from Charlemagne to Offa was written in 796 in response to a letter from Offa. It covers diverse topics such as the lawful transit of merchants and pilgrims, political exiles, black stones, the commemoration of the late pope, and the Avar treasure hoard. It is also edited by Scheibe (1959 pp 83–85). English translations appear in Whitelock, *EHD*, no. 197, and in Loyn and Percival (1975 pp 113–14 [no. 28]).

It may well be that Alcuin had helped draft these three letters and thus that they were filed among his own correspondence (Scheibe 1959 pp 186–90). It is probably safe to assume that all three “original” recipient-copies were indeed sent to England in the mid 790s and that they were received there by their intended audiences; however, the letters are known now only from the “register” copies (i.e. those preserved by Alcuin) and, of these, only the long letter from Charlemagne to Offa (*Epist. 100*) was included in the “English” collection; it is the last item in Tiberius A.xv (fols 143r–144v), where it forms part of the “Canterbury” group of letters in that book (Bullough 2004 pp 82–85). It was from this manuscript (or a transcription of it) that the letter became known to William of Malmesbury, who used it as a source for his *Gesta regum Anglorum* in the early twelfth century (Thomson 2003 pp 154–59).

The other two letters from Charlemagne to English addressees noted above (*Epist. 85* and *87*) survive as part of the extended collection of Alcuin's letters drawn from the Tours archive in the early ninth century: both letters are in Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Reg.lat. 272, fols 70v and 92 (s. ix^{med}, Rheims), and *Epist. 85* from Charlemagne to Æthelheard and Ceolwulf is also in Troyes, Bibliothèque Municipale 1165 Part 1, fols 76v–77 (s. ix^{1/4}, Saint-Martin, Tours) (Bullough 2004 pp 57–66). A closely related version of this extended Tours collection survives in an Anglo-Saxon book, now incomplete, namely, London, Lambeth Palace Library 218, fols 131–208 (ca. 900 or s. x^{1/4}, southern or eastern England, prov. Bury St. Edmunds) (HG 511; Dumville 1994 p 135; Ganz, Roberts, and Palmer 2007 pp 33–36). This is a lavish and generously spaced book written in Anglo-Saxon square minuscule with decorated display capitals. Two further leaves, copied from the same exemplar, now Chicago, Newberry

Library fragm. 15 (s. x^{2/4}, England) are also in Anglo-Saxon square minuscule (HG 808.7; Ganz 1993). However, neither the Lambeth book in its current mutilated state nor the Newberry leaves contain either the letter of Charlemagne to Offa concerning the Irish priest (*Epist.* 87) or that to Æthelheard and Ceolwulf (*Epist.* 85) from the extended Tours collection.

Two additional letters from Charlemagne, both addressed to Byzantine emperors, are found in Alcuin letter-books that are known to have been in Anglo-Saxon England. Both letters post-date Alcuin's death, and so must have been added to the archetypes of the Alcuinian collections as an afterthought. Both were edited by Dümmler in *MGH ECA* 2, but not among Alcuin's letters proper; rather, the first (*Epist.* 32) is included in an appendix to Alcuin's letters, and the second (*Epist.* 37) figures within a collection of miscellaneous letters by various authors that date to Charlemagne's reign. Again, numbering follows Dümmler.

Epist. 32 [CHARL.Epist.32]: *CSLMA* 2.354–55 (ALC 45.[318.2]).

ed.: Dümmler, *MGH ECA* 2.546–48.

MSS London, BL Cotton Tiberius A.xv, fols 1–173: HG 368.

Lists – Refs none.

This letter from Charlemagne to the Emperor Nicephorus I (composed early 811) is in three early manuscripts including the eleventh-century English book, Cotton Tiberius A.xv, at fols 81v–82v. It is also in two closely related volumes, namely, Saint-Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek 271 (820s, Saint-Gallen), p 63, and London, BL Royal 8.E.XV (s. ix^{3/4}, Saint-Vaast, Arras), at fols 22r–23v, but there is no indication that the latter book was known in England before the Conquest (Bullough 2004 p 63).

Epist. 37 [CHARL.Epist.37].

ed.: Dümmler, *MGH ECA* 2.556.

MSS London, BL Harley 208: HG 417.

Lists – Refs none.

A second imperial letter, this time from Charlemagne to the Emperor Michael I (composed 813), is embedded in a set of letters written by **DUNGAL** that follows some by Alcuin in two manuscripts made at Saint-Denis ca. 820 (Bullough 2004 pp 75–76). One of these Saint-Denis books, now London, BL Harley 208 (s. ix¹, Saint-Denis, prov. England s. x/xi) contains Old English marginalia on fols 87v and 88r indicating that it was in the hands of an English reader by the end of the tenth or early eleventh century (NRK 229; HG 417; Bullough 2004 pp 75–80).

Apart from these five letters, we have additional evidence from a variety of other sources for the presence of Frankish envoys acting on Charlemagne's behalf in England in 786, 790, 792, and 796; on each of these occasions it is highly likely that letters or other documents in the king's name were presented. In 786 a Frankish abbot named Wigbod (perhaps of Saint-Maximian, Trier) was sent by Charlemagne to act as an assistant (*adiutor*) for two papal legates, Bishop George of Ostia and Amiens and Bishop Theophylact of Todi, who held a series of councils north and south of the Humber. Wigbod was a respected scholar at Charlemagne's court, and is described as being of "proven loyalty" (*probatae fidei*). The extant documentation relates mostly to the Northumbrian council held in the autumn of 786, but it also illuminates the progress of the legates through Kent, Mercia, and other "parts of Britain." The first part of a report from Bishop George to Pope Hadrian I (772–95) is dated by Charlemagne's regnal years and includes a Carolingian-style capitulary listing the decisions of the Northumbrian meeting. It

survives in one manuscript, now Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August Bibliothek, Cod. Helmst. 454 (s. x/xi, ?Hildesheim) (*Epist.* 3, ed. Dümmler, *MGH ECA* 2.20–29; *CSLMA* 2.176 [ALC 45.3]; Story 2003 pp 55–92); the text is found on fols 113v–117v and 126r–127v, though a quire of eight folios has been lost since the volume was paginated and transcribed. The capitulary was “read out both in Latin and in the vernacular [*theodisce*]” at the Southumbrian council that followed the one in Northumbria. It survived in England (perhaps with a vernacular gloss?) and was available to Archbishop **ODA OF CANTERBURY** (941–58), who used it in his *Constitutiones*; it was perhaps also a source for King **ALFRED THE GREAT**’s law code (Schoebe 1962; Whitelock, Brett, and Brooke 1981 1.67–74; Wormald 1991 and 1999 pp 106–08; Cubitt 1995 pp 153–90).

Another Frankish abbot, Gervold of Saint-Wandrille, “many times discharged diplomatic missions to King Offa by order of the most invincible King Charles” (Lohier and Laporte 1936; trans. Whitelock, *EHD*, no. 20). Gervold was Charlemagne’s *procurator* or toll-collector at Quentovic and other Frankish ports along the Channel, and it was he who diffused a row between Charlemagne and Offa that had escalated after the breakdown of marriage negotiations between their children. Alcuin and the Frankish author of the *Acts of the Abbots of Fontanelle* report that trade sanctions had been enforced on both sides of the Channel, and that “on both sides the passage of ships has been forbidden to merchants and is ceasing” (*Epist.* 7, ed. Dümmler, *MGH ECA* 4.31–33; *CSLMA* 2.178 [ALC 45.7]). The ninth-century author of the *Acts* says that his monastery’s archives still contained letters from Offa, and it is likely that orders from Charlemagne had also reached Gervold in written form.

The eighth-century annals embedded in the *Historia Regum* (commonly attributed to its twelfth-century editor, Symeon of Durham) include fifteen detailed entries on Frankish affairs which signify close contemporary contacts with Francia and were probably imported into that text very early in its development. The annal for the year 792 provides additional evidence of direct contacts between the Carolingian and Northumbrian courts, mediated again by Alcuin (who had returned to Northumbria in 790 before the row with Offa had been resolved). In that year, it says, “Charlemagne, king of the Franks, sent to Britain a synodal book, directed to him from Constantinople . . . against this, Albinus [Alcuin] wrote a letter, wonderfully supported by the authority of the Holy Scriptures, and presented it with the same book and in the name of our bishops and nobles to the king of the Franks” (Arnold 1885 2.53–54; trans. Whitelock, *EHD*, no. 3). The book was a Latin translation of the proceedings of the 787 Council of Nicaea that had restored the veneration of icons in Byzantium after a period of iconoclasm. Alcuin’s response, approved by the Northumbrian secular and ecclesiastical elite, is not that known to scholars as the *Libri Carolini* or the *Opus Caroli Regis*, which was the work of Bishop **THEODULF OF ORLÉANS** (Freeman 2003). Alcuin’s response is lost, but the Northumbrian annal records evidence that letters and books, as well as people, traveled between Charlemagne and an Anglo-Saxon court.

796 saw more Frankish envoys carrying letters and gifts from Charlemagne to the kings of Mercia and Northumbria, and to the metropolitan sees of Canterbury, York, and Lichfield. The long letter from Charlemagne to Offa mentioned above (*Epist.* 100) formed part of the documentation for this mission. That letter and another one from Alcuin (*Epist.* 101, ed. Dümmler, *MGH ECA* 2.146–48; *CSLMA* 2.232 [ALC 45.101]; datable 796 after 18 April) reveal that Charlemagne had sent gifts and alms, accompanied by more letters that are now lost, to all the metropolitan sees and bishoprics of England, and to the kings of Mercia and Northumbria. The extant correspondence from 796 reveals the complexity of diplomatic exchange between the Carolingian and Anglo-Saxon courts and the extent to which Charlemagne attempted to mediate connections between England and the papacy. The mission had been prompted in part by Charlemagne’s efforts to co-ordinate the commemoration of the late Pope Hadrian I in kingdoms beyond his own, and he refers in these letters to the envoys that he was sending to Rome to intercede in the case of the Kentish exile Odbert/Eadberht, who had fled England in fear of his life.

The commemoration of Pope Hadrian is also the subject of the *Historia Regum* annal for 795, which includes a good description of the black marble epitaph that the king commissioned to be made in Francia to stand over the pope’s tomb in Rome. The *Epitaphium Hadriani I papae* (*CSLMA* 2.361–62 [ALC 46.[8]]) was composed by Alcuin but was written in Charlemagne’s voice: Line 17 reads *post patrem lacrimans Karolus haec carmina scribsi* (‘Weeping after the father, I Charles have written these songs’).

The poem circulated in manuscript form in ninth-century Francia (alongside Alcuin's epitaph for Archbishop Ælberht of York (*CSLMA* 2.356 [ALC 46.[1].2])) and was often included in later medieval pilgrim itineraries of Rome and the basilica of St Peter's, where it was undoubtedly seen by Anglo-Saxon pilgrims to the shrine of the Apostle (Story forthcoming).

One final source for information about Charlemagne's influence on Anglo-Saxon literary and artistic culture needs mention in this context: coins. In recent decades numismatists have systematically recorded single finds of "stray" coins (i.e. those lost from everyday use rather than hoards deliberately buried in times of social stress). The distribution of these coins suggests that Carolingian coin circulated quite widely in pre-Viking Anglo-Saxon England and was not always collected and re-minted at the point of entry as scholars had previously thought (Story 2003 pp 243–55; Coupland 2005). Charlemagne's coins are among these, and their clear Latin legends and images — including portraits on the imperial issues — were important sources of inspiration for contemporary and later coin-design in Anglo-Saxon England.

Joanna Story

Works Cited

- Arnold, Thomas, ed. 1882–85. *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*. 2 vols. RS 75. London.
- Bullough, Donald A. 2004. *Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation. Being Part of the Ford Lectures Delivered in Oxford in Hilary Term 1980*. Education and Society in the Middle Ages and Renaissance 16. Leiden and Boston.
- Chase, Colin, ed. 1975. *Two Alcuin Letter-Books from the British Museum MS Cotton Vespasian A VIX*. Toronto Medieval Latin Texts 5. Toronto.
- Coupland, Simon. 2005. "Charlemagne's Coinage: Ideology and Economy." In *Charlemagne: Empire and Society*, ed. Joanna Story, 211–29. Manchester.
- Cubitt, Catherine. 1995. *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c. 650–c. 850*. Studies in the Early History of Britain. London and New York.
- Dümmler, Ernst, ed. 1895. *Epistolae Carolini Aevi* 2. MGH Epistolae 4. Berlin.
- Dumville, D. N. 1994. "English Square Minuscule Script: The Mid-Century Phases." *Anglo-Saxon England* 23: 133–64.
- Dutton, Paul Edward, ed. and trans. 1998. *Charlemagne's Courtier: The Complete Einhard*. Readings in Medieval Civilizations and Cultures 2. Peterborough, Ont.
- Dutton, Paul Edward. 2004. "Karolus Magnus Scriptor." In his *Charlemagne's Mustache and Other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age*, 69–92. The New Middle Ages. New York.
- Freeman, Ann. 1971. "Further Studies in the Libri Carolini III: The Marginal Notes in Vaticanus Latinus 7207." *Speculum* 46: 597–612. Reprinted as Chapter 5 in Freeman 2003.
- Freeman, Ann. 2003. *Theodulf of Orléans: Charlemagne's Spokesman against the Second Council of Nicaea*. Variorum Collected Studies Series: CS772. Aldershot.

- Ganz, David. 1993. "An Anglo-Saxon Fragment of Alcuin's Letters in the Newberry Library, Chicago." *Anglo-Saxon England* 22: 166–77.
- Ganz, David, Jane Roberts, and Richard Palmer, eds. 2007. *Lambeth Palace Library and Its Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: Exhibition Mounted for the Biennial Conference of the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists, 3rd August 2007*. London.
- Holder-Egger, O. ed. 1911. *Einhardi Vita Karoli Magni*. MGH SRG. Hanover and Leipzig.
- Lohier, F., and J. Laporte, eds. 1936. *Gesta sanctorum patrum Fontanellensis coenobii (Gesta abbatum Fontanellensium)*. Rouen.
- Loyn, H. R., and John Percival. 1975. *The Reign of Charlemagne: Documents on Carolingian Government and Administration*. Documents of Medieval History 2. London.
- Mann, Gareth. 2004. "The Development of Wulfstan's Alcuin Manuscript." In *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: The Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*, ed. Matthew Townend, 235–78. Studies in the Early Middle Ages 10. Turnhout.
- Nelson, Janet L. 2001. "Charlemagne's Voice." In *Belief and Culture: Studies Presented to Henry Mayr-Harting*, ed. Richard Gameson and Henrietta Leyser, 76–88. Oxford.
- Scheibe, Friedrich-Carl. 1959. "Alcuin und die Briefe Karls des Großen." *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 15: 181–93.
- Schoebe, G. 1962. "The Chapters of Archbishop Oda (942/6) and the Canons of the Latin Council of 786." *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 35: 75–83.
- Story, Joanna. 2003. *Carolingian Connections: Anglo-Saxon England and the Continent, c. 750–c. 870*. Studies in Early Medieval Britain. Aldershot.
- Story, Joanna. Forthcoming. *Charlemagne and Rome: Alcuin and the Epitaph of Pope Hadrian I*. Oxford.
- Thomson, R. M. 2003. *William of Malmesbury*. 2nd ed. Woodbridge.
- Whitelock, Dorothy, M. Brett, and C. N. L. Brooke, eds. 1981. *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church. I. A.D. 871–1204*. 2 vols. Oxford.
- Wormald, Patrick. 1991. "In Search of King Offa's 'Law Code.'" In *People and Places in Northern Europe, 500–1600: Essays in Honour of Peter Sawyer*, ed. Ian N. Wood and Niels Lund, 25–45. Woodbridge.
- Wormald, Patrick. 1999. *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century. Volume I. Legislation and Its Limits*. Oxford.