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THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE ‘METRICAL CALENDAR OF HAMPSON’

The so-called ‘Metrical Calendar of Hampson’ (hereon MCH) is the most substantial piece of Latin poetry surviving from Britain from a period spanning the mid-ninth to the early tenth century. It is a poem of 365 hexameters, each representing a day of the calendric year through the commemoration of saints’ feasts, obits and biblical, seasonal and astronomical events. It is preserved fully with variant readings in three manuscripts, the earliest of which was written out by a scribe in the south of England in the first half of the tenth century.¹ Several verses of MCH were also included in the otherwise prose ‘Junius Calendar’ that palaeographically appears to have been produced in southern England in *c.*920.² The incorporation into MCH of obits for the West Saxon king Alfred (d. 899) and his wife Ealhswith (d. 902) provide *termini post quos* for the production of the exemplar text from which all surviving full witnesses ultimately derive.

Though the subject of relatively little scrutiny, MCH has attracted attention for its inclusion of several Irish and Frankish saints who do not appear to have been venerated

¹ For an overview of these witnesses, see the modern edition of the poem by P. McGurk, ‘The Metrical Calendar of Hampson: a New Edition’, *Analecta Bollandiana*, civ (1986), 79–125, at 79–81 and 84–88.

² Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 27, fols. 2r–7v. For discussion of this calendar and its MCH verses, see David N. Dumville, *Liturgy and the Ecclesiastical History of Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 1992), 1–38; Mechthild Gretsch, ‘The Junius Psalter Gloss: its Historical and Cultural Context’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, xxix (2000), 85–121, at 107–20.

widely across Europe at the beginning of the tenth century. The inclusion of these saints is highly suggestive of the range of sources and learning acquired by its poet; moreover, alongside the orthography of the poem in its respective manuscripts, it suggests that the poet is likely to have been Irish. I have elsewhere provided an overview of this Irish and Frankish content, building on the work of several earlier scholars who have commented on these elements of the poem.³ However, as I indicated in this earlier discussion, there is also good reason to believe that the version of MCH from which the extant witnesses descend is the work of two stages of composition. In saying this, I am directly disagreeing with Patrick McGurk, the editor of MCH, who described such evidence as ‘insignificant’.⁴ As I shall demonstrate here, these discrepancies should not be dismissed so readily.

The section of MCH with which I am concerned is the verses that cover the first thirteen days of December (lines 335 to 347). These lines stand apart from the remainder of the poem in several regards. Most obviously, they differ in terms of their dating system. Most lines of MCH give the Roman calendric date for the corresponding day of the year; in the lines for these days of December, however, the dates are simply indicated as the first, second, third, etc. day of the month. Compare, for example, the verse for 6

³ Robert Gallagher, ‘An Irish Scholar and England: the “Metrical Calendar of Hampson”’, in England, Ireland, and the Insular World: Textual and Material Connections in the Early Middle Ages, ed. Mary Clayton, Alice Jorgensen and Juliet Mullins (Tempe, AZ, 2017), 151–69. Earlier discussion of these Frankish and Irish elements can be found, for example, in Edmund Bishop, Liturgica Historica: Papers on the Liturgy and Religious Life of the Western Church (Oxford, 1918), 250–56; Michael Lapidge, ‘A Tenth-Century Metrical Calendar from Ramsey’, Revue Bénédictine, xciv, (1984), 326–69, repr. in and cited from his Anglo-Latin Literature 900–1066 (London, 1993), 343–86, at 364–5; McGurk, ‘Metrical Calendar of Hampson’, 89.

⁴ P. McGurk, ‘The Metrical Calendar’, in An Eleventh-Century Anglo-Saxon Illustrated Miscellany (British Library Cotton Tiberius B. V Part 1), ed. P. McGurk, D. N. Dumville, M. R. Godden and Ann Knock (Copenhagen, 1983), 44–50, at p. 45.

May ('Pridie consecrat Iohannis numine Portam', line 126) with that for 8 December ('Octava Urbanum depromit nomine sanctum', line 342).

The unusual nature of the first thirteen December verses is also apparent in their syntax. These lines are consistent with the rest of MCH in being end-stopped, yet grammatically they are markedly more monotonous than other sections of the poem. Elsewhere in MCH there is a clear desire to vary the syntax through variation of word order, verbal tenses, moods and voices. However, all but two of the thirteen December lines open in the same way, beginning with the relevant ordinal dating numeral. Furthermore, in eleven of these thirteen lines, the grammatical subject of the verse is not the object of commemoration, but the day itself. The result is a series of highly repetitive verses, ten of which place the celebrated individual in the accusative, just as we see above with the verse for Saint Urbanus on 8 December. Beyond these December verses we find just one celebrated individual in the accusative – Saint Barnabas on 10 June (line 161) – who appears in the one and only verse that the poet is known to have borrowed verbatim from the earlier 'Metrical Calendar of York'.⁵

Metrical and caesura patterning also represents a clear disjuncture. Put simply, the verses for the first thirteen days of December are considerably more dactylic and metrically more monotonous than the remainder of MCH.⁶ Elsewhere in the poem no metrical pattern accounts for more than 24% of verses. In contrast, seven of the thirteen December lines share the same metrical pattern (DDSS), while a further three of these

⁵ That the author of MCH was familiar with a version of the earlier 'Metrical Calendar of York' was established beyond doubt by John Hennig in his 'Studies in the Literary Tradition of the "Martyrologium Poeticum"', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature*, lvi (1953–4), 197–226, at 218–19.

⁶ For a more detailed survey of the metrical patterning, prosody and style of MCH, see Robert Gallagher, 'Latin Literary Culture in the Age of Alfred the Great and Edward the Elder' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Cambridge Univ. 2015), 187–203.

thirteen lines (23%) are formed by a pattern (DSDS) that is found in no more than 6% of MCH's other verses. Further still, within these thirteen lines there are no instances of SDSS, which is the second most popular pattern within the rest of MCH. This metrical monotony is brought into even sharper focus when we consider caesuras: every single one of these December lines includes a penthemimeral caesura and a diaeresis at the end of the fourth foot. There is a comparable dependence on the penthemimeral caesura for the composition of other verses in MCH (97% of which contain this caesura), yet elsewhere in the poem only 56% of lines contain a diaeresis at the end of the fourth foot. The impression is that the thirteen December verses were composed with less concern for metrical texture than other sections of the poem.

A final aspect to note is the use of elision and hiatus. It was the 'mode of elision' that McGurk cited as one of his key pieces of evidence for the single authorship of MCH, particularly noting the identical form of elision found with the use of quoque in the verses for 26 October ('Aelfred rex obiit septenis; et quoque Amandus', line 299) and 4 December ('Quarta dies retenet Prudentem cum quoque Eraclo', line 338).⁷ The repetition of this formulation, however, could simply be evidence of an earlier author influencing the compositional technique of a second author. Moreover, in terms of frequency, there are clear differences between the thirteen December verses and the remainder of the poem in their employment of elision. Elsewhere in MCH elision is employed infrequently, occurring only seventeen times. The poet of the thirteen December verses depended on elision considerably more often: across the thirteen verses there are four instances of elision, two of which are in the verse dedicated to Ealhswith (line 339). As to hiatus, there are no instances in the remainder of MCH, if we accept that the poet understood h as a

⁷ McGurk, 'The Metrical Calendar of Hampson', 84.

consonant (and thus not as a letter that can elide).⁸ In the thirteen December verses we find a single example of hiatus, with the introduction of Eulalia on 10 December ('Decima Eulalia congaudet uirgine casta', line 344). As a poetic practice that strongly divided Latin poets in the early medieval period, the inclusion of even a single example of hiatus is notable.⁹

How best should we understand these differences? Two qualifiers need to be stated. First, the majority of verses in MCH are sufficiently consistent in their content and expression to be the work of a single author – an individual who evidently sought to achieve a degree of phrasal, metrical and syntactic variation in a poem that is highly repetitive in its form and focus. Second, the first thirteen verses for December do not depart substantially from the remainder of the poem in terms of their content.¹⁰ That being said, to my mind the heightened phrasal, syntactic and metrical monotony, the placement of saints in the accusative and the loss of the Roman dating system collectively make the first thirteen verses for December such a distinct body of verse that they must surely have been composed under different conditions – perhaps by a different poet – from those of the remainder of MCH.

⁸ A single verse (line 291) includes one example that would be considered hiatus if we were to take h as a vowel: 'Hospitium recipit Phoebum hic Scorpius atque'.

⁹ For an overview of early medieval insular attitudes to elision and hiatus, see Seppo Heikkinen, 'Elision and Hiatus in Early Anglo-Latin Grammar and Verse', in Outposts of Historical Corpus Linguistics: from the Helsinki Corpus to a Proliferation of Resources, ed. Jukka Tyrkkö, Matti Kilpiö, Terttu Nevalainen and Matti Rissanen (Helsinki 2012), <http://www.helsinki.fi/varieng/series/volumes/10/heikkinen>.

¹⁰ It should be noted that these December verses do not contain any of the aforementioned highly distinctive Frankish or Irish elements. Note, however, that line 347 (for 13 December) contains the verb *rutulare*, the spelling of which may indicate Irish influence. This verb occurs elsewhere in MCH. For details, see Gallagher, 'An Irish Scholar and England', 155.

What might these conditions have been? Here one is naturally drawn to the verse for 5 December, which commemorates the death of Ealhswith ('Quinta tenet ueram dominam Anglorum Ealhswythe caram', line 339). The author of this hexameter seems to have been particularly fond of her; indeed, she is given a far more elaborate dedication than her husband Alfred, who has to share his verse on 26 October with Saint Amandus ('Aelfred rex obiit septenis; et quoque Amandus', line 299). The author of this line also seems to have been acutely aware of the contemporary West Saxon practice of not bestowing the wives of kings with the title regina, instead identifying Ealhswith as a domina.¹¹ At the same time, the inclusion of Angli suggests that the poet recognised the importance of Ealhswith as an emblem of a group identity beyond the confines of Wessex. Considering that Ealhswith died three years after Alfred, one may suspect that these December verses were rewritten in order to include her within the poem.

This does not, however, explain why thirteen verses were rewritten and not simply the line for 5 December. Instead, I think it is more likely that we are dealing with the results of a damaged exemplar, from which all surviving full copies of MCH ultimately derive. This exemplar, I would suggest, was damaged somehow to the point that the first thirteen verses for December were no longer legible and thus required redrafting, perhaps rather hastily, given their monotonous character. It is worth noting here that none of the verses embedded in the Junius Calendar come from these thirteen December days, so we cannot discount the possibility that the redrafting occurred after the production of this manuscript. Since the earliest full witness to MCH (London, British Library, Cotton Galba A.XVIII) was copied out in the first half of the tenth century, we are nevertheless dealing with activity that could have taken place within living memory of the death of

¹¹ For discussion of this historical phenomenon, see Pauline Stafford, 'The King's Wife in Wessex 800–1066', *Past and Present*, xci (1981), 3–27, at 3–4; *idem*, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford, 1997), 56–8.

Ealhswith. If I am correct, MCH is a Latin poem that was subject to at least two stages of composition, probably by two different individuals, in the earlier decades of the tenth century. As such, it speaks to the continued value of this text for contemporaries beyond its initial production.

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