

The *Vocabularius Sancti Galli*
(St Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek MS 913):
diary, travel dictionary, or something else?

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St Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek MS 913, pp. 181-202, which consists of Latin lemmata with parallel Old High German glosses, is well known to scholars as one of the most important repositories of Old High German vocabulary. However, there has been much debate about how to characterize its genre and purpose, some viewing it as part of a scholar's commonplace-book, others proposing that it was meant as a translation aid for an English-speaking missionary working among the Germanic peoples. The present paper investigates the possibility that underlying this collection was a Latin-Old English dictionary originally composed as a vocabulary aid for an Irish scholar at Archbishop Theodore's Canterbury school.

Keywords : Archbishop Theodore's Canterbury School; foreign-language acquisition; *Hermeneumata pseudo-Dositheana*; Scriptural lemmata.

The arrival of Archbishop Theodore at Canterbury with his North-African assistant Hadrian in 669 set in motion a school of learning, designed to provide higher education for English students in a country which had been Christianized just a few decades earlier. As a near-Easterner educated in the great schools of the Antiochene tradition Theodore had much to offer. The fame of his school became such that it attracted students from the neighbouring island of Ireland; we find evidence of Irish students coming there, drawn no doubt by a novel menu of subjects, including the study of Greek. A contemporary letter written by the English scholar Aldhelm to a certain Hehfrith portrays a lively classroom scene with the archbishop surrounded by a group of contentious Irish students, an account which, for all its characteristic hyperbole, was based on firsthand experience from his own period of study at Canterbury.¹⁾ For these visiting Irishmen there would have been the additional linguistic challenge of learning at least a modicum of the English vernacular which was spoken by the majority of the school's students, some of whom recorded in English Theodore's *viva voce* comments. Unfortunately, no direct evidence has survived of how Irish students handled this linguistic challenge. But a possible window on an Irish student addressing the problem may be preserved in Sankt Gallen MS 913, a pocket-book manuscript copied on the Continent in the second half of the eighth century by a single scribe trained in the Anglo-Saxon scribal tradition. Among its contents is a Latin-Old High German glossary of some 400 words (known as the *Vocabularium Sancti Galli*; hereafter 'VSG'), one of the primary lexical sources for our knowledge of Old High German.²⁾

Given its importance it is not surprising that VSG has benefited from numerous scholarly investigations, especially by German philologists. Of these studies the most thorough was that of Georg Baesecke, who concluded that VSG was a type of diary, composed of gleanings from the compiler's readings and school notes.³⁾ More recently Thomas Klein characterized the compiler as a native English speaker working as a missionary in German-speaking areas on the

1) Letter to Hehfrith, translated in *Aldhelm: The Prose Works*, by Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren (Cambridge, 1979), p. 163.

2) E. Steinmeyer and E. Sievers (eds), *Die Althochdeutschen Glossen*, 5 vols. (Berlin, 1895), III, pp. 1-8. Glosses from VSG cited in the present work are identified by the page and line number of that edition. I follow Thomas Klein, 'Zu Herkunft, Sprache und Übersetzer des Vocabularius Sti. Galli', *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie*, 131 (2012), 3-32, at p. 5, who identifies VSG proper as ending at p. 7, line 10 or 15, of Steinmeyer and Sievers' edition.

3) Georg Baesecke, *Der Vocabularius Sti. Galli in der angelsächsischen Mission* (Halle, 1933), p. 16.

Continent, who probably composed his work as a handy reference dictionary. Klein plausibly argued that VSG was not composed by him *ab ovo*; rather, it seems to be a re-formatting of a pre-existing Latin-Old English glossary, with substitution of Old High German translations for the Old English.⁴⁾ The *ur*-glossary (hereafter referred to as *VSG) was likely one of several works which he copied from a Canterbury manuscript, judging by the presence in the St Gallen manuscript of known Canterbury texts, including two separate sets of glosses on Leviticus (one of which mentions Abbot Hadrian by name), a short alphabetical glossary with close affinities to the Epinal-Erfurt and Corpus glossaries associated with Theodore's teachings,⁵⁾ and perhaps also a tract (p. 118) which discusses disagreements between the Roman (*Latini*) and the Greek (*Greci*) churches in calculating the date of Easter. In his pronouncements on canonical and penitential matters, as recorded by his students, Theodore often juxtaposed the practices of the Eastern Church in which he had been trained with those of Western Church of which he was now a prominent archbishop.⁶⁾ Another section of the St Gallen manuscript (pp. 102–104) contains a short computistical tract which provides a precise chronological measurement of the increase in the duration of the lunar month over that of the solar month (in relation to the *saltus lunae*), using a formula of Irish origins.⁷⁾

The presence of this calculation in a manuscript of Canterbury materials led Immo Warntjes to suggest that not only it but also the neighbouring text of VSG (pp. 181–202) may have originally belonged to an Irishman studying there; and that the latter work in its original Latin-Old English form was intended by him as a linguistic aid for his time at Canterbury. Warntjes did not develop the ramifications of his suggestion,⁸⁾ simply characterizing *VSG as a *Reisewörterbuch*, a pocketbook containing lists of words dealing with travel necessities, such as

4) Klein, 'Zu Herkunft', 11–18, who showed that the language of the glosses is a mix of Franconian and Upper German, probably reflecting the copyist's uneven knowledge of Old High German. One might add that the grammar of the Latin lemmata is also shaky.

5) Klein, 'Zu Herkunft', 6–8.

6) Notably in the so-called, 'Penitential of Theodore'; ed. by Paul Willem Finsterwalder, *Die Canones Theodori Cantuariensis und ihrer Überlieferungsformen* (Weimar, 1929).

7) I. Warntjes, 'Die Werwendung der Volkssprache in frühmittelalterlichen Klosterschulen', in G. Mierke and C. Fasbender (eds), *Wissenspaläste: Räume des Wissens in der Vormoderne*, Chemnitzer Arbeiten zur Literaturwissenschaft (2013), pp. 153–83, at 163–166.

8) I am grateful to him for first bringing the text to my attention, though he is not responsible for the contents of the present paper.

food and accommodation, as well as the inevitable, formulaic questions which even today can be found in modern travel guides. Such books composed in the medieval period have survived, but, as will be argued below, VSG is not one of them. While it does follow the familiar protocol of Latin lemma followed by vernacular translation (e.g. the first entry, 'sarculus: *zui*' ('a hoe'), it does not meet the expectations of a conventional medieval glossary. It is not alphabetically arranged, nor does it represent the genre of the *glossae collectae* (sets of glosses extracted from specific Latin works) favoured by Theodore's students. Its system of organization, insofar as it has one, is best described as thematic, though it lacks headings for the individual themes. The following are VSG's main themes.⁹⁾

Horticulture (1.1-10)

Buildings and their accoutrements (1.11-40, 46-47; 2.1-13)

Husbandry (2.14-31)

Physical Features of the Landscape (2.32-37)

Sea and Riverine Ecology (2.38-64)

Social hierarchy (2.65-3.12)

Gender (3.13-21)

Adjectives referring to human attributes (3.22-47)

Parts of the body (3.50-4.19)

Celestial and meteorological phenomena (4.20-50)

Arboreal words (4.51-5.1)

Human deformities, physical and moral (5.2-27)

Human generational relationships (5.28-35 and 6.24-33)

The yearly cycle (5.36-46)

Wild quadrupeds (5.52-6.1)

Birds (6.2-7)

Human defects and proclivities (6.8-23)

Mercantile terms (6.34-42)

Domesticated animals (6.43-58)

Birds and flying insects (6.60-7.1)

9) References are to the edition of Steinmeyer & Sievers, by page and line number.

Impurities (7.2-4)

Antonyms and Synonyms (7.5-15)

As evident from this list, the themes are not limited to any particular domain of knowledge; they range among architecture, meteorology, gardening, geographical features, social hierarchy, Christian virtues (and vices), anatomy, fauna, etc. The explanation for this multiplicity can be found in their main source, a Greek-Latin schoolbook of several parts known as the *Hermeneumata pseudo-Dositheana*, composed in the early third century. This composite work, which has survived in a number of recensions,¹⁰⁾ typically contains lists of Greek words with Latin translations, arranged thematically, followed by bilingual dialogues or conversations in different daily settings, designed to advance the learner from discrete lexemes of nouns and adjectives to basic sentences. Its themes are quasi-encyclopaediac in their range of topics, including pagan festivals, clothing, colors, birds, and trees, as well as military, judicial and financial terms. Although the debate about the original purpose of the *Hermeneumata* continues, a plausible explanation is that it was originally designed to teach Latin to Greek speakers,¹¹⁾ but subsequently was used in the West for the opposite purpose, to teach Latin speakers Greek. Theodore was evidently familiar with the *Hermeneumata* and used it to teach Greek to his students at Canterbury.¹²⁾ Surviving glossaries from Canterbury, recorded by Theodore's students, bear evidence of Greek lemmata from the *Hermeneumata* being glossed with Old English translations. In this trilingual environment the *Hermeneumata* with its Greek lemmata and Latin explanations could be transformed through an inverse process to make the original Latin *interpretamenta* of Greek lemmata into Latin lemmata supplied with Old English *interpretamenta*. However, it does not appear that *VSG had any direct association with the Canterbury glossing tradition of the *Hermeneumata*.¹³⁾

The *Hermeneumata* influenced the compiler of *VSG in two ways. First, its thematic

10) G. Goetz (ed.), *Hermeneumata Pseudodositheana* (Leipzig, 1892).

11) See M. Gayraud, *L'apprentissage du grec et du latin dans l'Empire romain d'après un manuscrit de la Bibliothèque Universitaire de Montpellier*, Académie des Sciences et Lettres de Montpellier 35, Séance publique du 1er février (Montpellier, 2010).

12) See Bernhard Bischoff and Michael Lapidge (eds), *Biblical commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 10 (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1994), pp. 173-75; and Klein, 'Zu Herkunft', pp. 8-10.

13) As shown by Klein, 'Zu Herkunft', 6-10.

approach to lexicography provided the model for his own work. Thus, *VSG is also structured by groups of lemmata, each one sharing a common semantic field or topic, such as human attributes (physical and moral), architecture, animals, domesticated and feral, architecture and furniture, human anatomy, social hierarchy, meteorology, geography, and horticulture. The absence in VSG of other themes found in the *Hermeneumata*, for example, the names of gods and goddesses, pagan festivals, the zodiacal signs, medicine, the theatre, military matters, clothes, precious metals, can be plausibly explained as deliberate omissions of matter judged inappropriate for a Christian audience or simply irrelevant. Secondly, the *Hermeneumata* supplied for *VSG many of the individual lemmata within these themes, though, as will be argued below, the borrowing process was not mechanical.

At some point during its transmission and reception in the West, the *Hermeneumata* was Christianized. A version reflecting this transformation is preserved in Vatican City, MS Vat. lat. 6925 (9th century) (hereafter referred to as *Hermeneumata Vaticana* or *HV*),¹⁴⁾ where references to pagan deities and practices have been replaced by lemmata relating to specifically Christian concepts such as archangels, the Trinity, and Christian virtues such as chastity and continence. Arguing that VSG shares striking resemblances to *HV* in content and sequence of lemmata, Baesecke proposed the latter as the primary source of the former.¹⁵⁾

Certainly, his privileging of *HV* over other versions of the *Hermeneumata*, notably the 'Leiden *Hermeneumata*' (hereafter *HL*),¹⁶⁾ is plausible. For example, he identified two entries in VSG that are only found in *HV*, *ouicula* and *armentum* (6, 47 and 59);¹⁷⁾ more convincingly, he argued that even though many of VSG's entries within a particular section are common to the different recensions of the *Hermeneumata*, the sequence in which they are arranged often follows the one particular to *HV*.¹⁸⁾ However Baesecke's argument is problematic insofar as *HV* lacks complete sections present in the other recensions. For example, VSG has a section on the

14) Goetz, *Hermeneumata*, pp. 424-38. More recently edited by Georgias Brugnoli and Marcus Buonocore (eds), *Hermeneumata Vaticana: Cod. Vat. lat. 6925*, Studi e Testi 410 (Vatican City, 2002).

15) Baesecke, *Der Vocabularius*, a conclusion seconded by Klein, *Zu Herkunft*, p. 10, who hypothesized that VSG used an earlier version of *VH* than the one which has survived.

16) Goetz, *Hermeneumata*, pp. 1-71.

17) Baesecke, *Der Vocabularius*, p. 35.

18) Some of his sequences of parallels are not unique to *HV*; for example, that proposed (at p. 39) between VSG 5.36-44 and *HV* 427.2-36 also closely resembles *HL* 9.53-61.

parts of the body containing 44 entries (3.50–4.19), some 29 of which are also found in the corresponding dedicated section of *HL*, where *HV* lacks a section on this topic. Likewise, VSG has a section on buildings and architecture (1.11–40, 46–47; 2.1–13) which contains 18 lemmata with parallels in *HL*'s dedicated section, *De habitatione*,¹⁹⁾ whereas *HV* has no such section. To explain these anomalies Baesecke hypothesized an earlier, fuller version of *HV*.

Beyond its textual relationship to the *Hermeneumata* tradition lies the more immediate issue of the various adaptations which the compiler of VSG made to his source(s) and what they may tell us about his purpose. Even as he depended on the first part of the *Hermeneumata* for most of his lexical content, he introduced elements not found there: for example, his short section on the terminology of a business transaction (6, 34–42) with lemmata in the 1st person singular (*uolo/nolo*) juxtaposed with complementary infinitives (*emere/uendere/dissociare*); and another section (7, 11–15) which has the imperative verb *indiga* [= *indica*] followed by four infinitives as lemmata. Since neither section has a parallel in any of the surviving recensions of the *Hermeneumata*, Baesecke was puzzled about their origins.²⁰⁾ One possible explanation is that the compiler took them from the more advanced part of the *Hermeneumata* which provides conversations on daily life; for example, the Montpellier version of that work has a scene where a master accompanied by his student haggles with a merchant over the price of a scarf.²¹⁾

Another deviation from the main source is found in the compiler's treatment of terms denoting Christian virtues and vices. Certainly, many, if not all, of the virtues were drawn from *HV*, but whereas it presents them as abstractions, the compiler of VSG humanizes them. For example, contrast *VH*'s *prudencia*, *puclitia*, *mansuetudo*, *modestia* with VSG's *prudens*, *puclicus*, *mansuetus*, *modestus* (3.24, 41, 39, 40), where the adjectival forms imply human agency.²²⁾ Likewise, the list of vices found in VSG (5.2–20) but absent from *HV*, are predominantly cast as adjectives rather than abstractions; for example, *uiziosus*, *cupidus*, *superbus* (5.5, 7, 10), interspersed with agentive forms such as *detractor*, *latro*, and *raptor* (5.19, 13, 12). His approach to the material of his source was to anthropomorphize it.

In his lexical selections he displays a particular kind of economy. For example, in dealing with

19) Goetz, *Hermeneumata*, 19.25–20.14.

20) He referred to them as '*Gesprächsreste*', vestiges of conversations.

21) Gayraud, *L'apprentissage*, p. 38 (§ 13).

22) *VH*, p. 424, lines 9, 12, 19, and 51; VSG, nos. 157–159, and 142, respectively.

animals, both domesticated and feral, he chose those which would have been familiar to an Insular audience, such as cow, calf, bull, deer (5.53, 54, 56, 61); lamb, ram (6.48, 49); pig, horse (6.55, 57); bear, wolf, fox, hare, weasel, mole, and bat (5.62-68). He makes no mention of the exotic animals like lion, tiger, camel, elephant, tortoise, scorpion, unicorn etc, which embellish the *Hermenuemata*. Likewise, in the category of birds, he identifies only the eagle, hawk, raven (6.5-7), kite and sparrow (6.60, 62), where *HL* and *HV* list some 40-60 other, more exotic types of birds. This selective approach, which suggests a practical need to focus on very basic, frequently encountered lexemes, is consonant with someone learning a new language.

Another adaptive technique involves incremental word building whereby the customary list of nouns and adjectives of a particular subject incorporates semantically related verbs, the two elements in potential combination resulting in basic sentences. For example, the section on marine and riverine ecology, in addition to nouns such as *flumen*, *fons*, and *piscis*, has occasional Latin verbs, invariably cast in the normative 3rd person singular present form, namely *surgit*, *fluet*, and *natat*, thereby allowing for the ready production of collocations such as *piscis natat*, *flumen fluet*, *fons surgit* etc.; likewise, in the respective sections on husbandry and social hierarchy, semantically suitable combinations such as *semen germinat/nascit* (2.21+2.19/20), *uillicus habitat* (3.4+3.6), *sol/luna fulgit* (4.22/23+4.49) are potentially present. Other examples are *erba uirescit* (4.57+55), *bouis/uitulus mugit* (5.53/55+5.52), *plaga fetet* (5.25+27), *equus hinmit* (6.57+58). The compiler may well have borrowed this device from *HV*, but he depended on the latter work in only three cases. Significantly, out of a total of some 400 lemmata, the 18 occurrences in *VSG* constitute a significantly greater proportion than *HV*'s 16 examples (out of some 1200 *interpretamenta*). To these can be added other potential syntactical collocations such as noun+past participle (*meretrix contaminata/repudiata*, 3.17+21 and 19), *nolo/uolo*+infinitive.²³⁾ This kind of building-block approach is consonant with language acquisition. Also suggestive of the same process is the occasional groupings of synonyms (e.g. *decipere* and *seducere*, 7.12 and 13) and antonyms (*prope* and *longe*, 7.7 and 8; *eleuare* and *decipere*, 7.14 and 15). For a native speaker of Old English such devices, on the Latin side, might have some merit, but their corresponding Old English renderings would surely have been redundant.

If, as this evidence suggests, the original compiler was attempting to increase his lexical

23) See above, p. 00.

knowledge of Old English, the presence of basic words in VSG is understandable. However, his 'dictionary' also contains a considerable body of specialized words which would hardly qualify as basic vocabulary. Thus, *cimentus* [sic], 'plaster', *cicer*, 'a chick pea', *cornicula*, 'a jackjaw', *fespertilia* [sic], 'a bat', *gurgustium*, 'a hovel', *locusta* ('a locust'), *stercur* [sic], 'a dung-heap'; *pastor*, 'a shepherd', *centurius* [sic], 'a centurion', *tribunus*, 'a high-ranking Roman official'. The final two examples have a distinct Gospel resonance, while the others are attested in either the Old or the New Testament. That they were chosen on purpose as lemmata is suggested by instances where when paired they match Scriptural collocations such as *montes et colles* (2.32 and 33=Ps 71: 3 or Is 40: 12), *uirga et baculus* (1.34 and 35=Ps 22: 4), *favillae et cineri* (1.44 and 45=Job 30: 19), *glacies et gelu* (4.38 and 39=Iob 38: 29), *cynomia et scinifes* (6.66 and 67=Ps 104: 31). In other cases, two adjacent lemmata evidently derive from the same Scriptural verse, as in *farisei* followed by *publicani* (3.11 and 12=Lc 18: 10), *brune* [sic] and *carbones* (1.42 and 43=Prov. 26: 2, 'sicut carbones ad prunam'). In one striking instance, in the section on husbandry, four physically proximate lemmata, *pallea* [sic], 'chaff', *triticus*, 'wheat(en)', *uentilabrus* [sic], 'an instrument for winnowing grain', and *area* 'threshing floor' (2.22, 24, 27 and 29) match the occurrence of the same four words in a single verse of Matt 3: 12.²⁴⁾ Nor can this combination be explained by reference to *HV* or *HL*, both of whose corresponding sections have only the entry on *tricitium*.²⁵⁾ This evident recourse to Scripture raises the possibility that other lemmata in VSG of less specialized character may have been selected on purpose from *Hermeneumata* because of their occurrence in Scripture.

From this evidence one might conclude that *VSG was compiled by an English-speaking student at Canterbury as a handy reference tool for supplying Old English translations of unfamiliar Latin words which inevitably arose from the study of Scripture and other related subjects. Moreover, the Antiochene exegesis favoured by Theodore in his scriptural commentaries, which involved a close literal/historical approach to individual words of Scripture, especially those of a technical nature, would lend a plausible context.²⁶⁾ And yet the hypothesis runs into several problems. First, one would expect the lexicon of VSG, if indeed it were the

24) In the attached image, reproduced by kind permission of St Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, see the final entry in the first (lefthand) column, and the second, fifth, and seventh line of the third column.

25) *HV*, *De floribus* (429.14–430.13), at 429.58; and *HL*, *De agricultura* (26.38–27.25) at 26.52.

26) As shown by Bischoff & Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries*, pp. 243–249.

work of an English student at Canterbury, to contain similar *Hermeneumata* material to that found in the Canterbury-derived glossaries compiled by his fellow students, who recorded Theodore's comments as preserved in the Epinal-Erfurt, Corpus and Leiden glossaries. That is not the case, however; the parallels which VSG shares with these glossaries amounts to a paltry 3.2%.²⁷⁾ Secondly, as argued above, the presence of propaedeutic techniques such as the facilitating of subject-verb collocations and the introduction of antonyms and synonyms (for which the *Hermeneumata* offers no parallels) is also suggestive of foreign-language acquisition.

But the most telling objection to the hypothesis that *VSG was compiled by an English-speaking student is its considerable stratum of Latin words so obvious in meaning and so commonplace in usage as to seem out of place in a work otherwise dedicated to specialized terms. Among such words are those denoting 'year, winter, head, mouth, bull, deer, wolf, city, house, leader, king, people, river, lake, sea, human being, man, mountains, sun, moon, earth, fire, blood'. Although these words are also found in the *Hermeneumata*, one can hardly imagine an English-speaking student selecting them for inclusion in VSG, a work defined by its lexical economy. For example, in place of a long section in *Hermeneumata* dedicated to various species of fish (*De piscibus*), VSG simply supplies a single Old High German entry for the generic term *piscēs* (2.58), which was presumably glossed by OE *fisc*.²⁸⁾ Explanations of such basic Latin words in English would surely have been judged unnecessary for a native English speaker, but for someone who did not speak English, all relevant vernacular words, regardless of their level of semantic difficulty, would merit inclusion. In sum, the hypothesis that the original exemplar of the St Gall glossary was compiled by an Irish student at Canterbury for handy reference seems more plausible than positing its use by an English-speaking compiler. His selective borrowings from the Latin part of the *Hermeneumata*, combined with his knowledge of Latin,²⁹⁾ provided him with a personal dictionary, a useful collection of Old English words such as would likely come up in biblical discussions at Theodore's Canterbury school.

27) See Klein, 'Zur Herkunft', 8–10.

28) In *VSG.

29) On the use of Latin in the early Irish schools, see Jacopo Bisagni, 'Prolegomena to the Study of Code-Switching in the Old Irish Glosses', *Peritia*, 24–25 (2014), 1–58.



