

Vernacular languages in the long ninth century

The long ninth century was a period of great importance for the history of vernacular languages in Europe in both Eastern and Western Christendom. Some of those languages appeared for the first time in written form and others changed considerably in that period. The examples are numerous and include:

- Slavonic, with Methodius' mission to Great Moravia, the creation of two alphabets, and Clement of Ohrid's career in Bulgaria;
- Romance (or Old French), with Nithard's rendering of the "Oaths of Strasburg";
- Old English, with the translations ascribed to King Alfred, and also religious poems such as those of Cynewulf;
- Old Saxon, with the biblical paraphrase known as the *Heliand*;
- Classical Old Georgian, the earliest fully-fledged literary language to appear in Georgia;
- Old and Middle Irish, the transformation happening towards the end of that period, along with the appearance of inscriptions in *ogam* on materials other than stone;
- Old Norse, as runic inscriptions survive in many more numbers from the the early Viking Age on.

The coincidence is even more striking when we realise that this phenomenon appears not to have been confined to Christendom; in the ninth century, many classical Greek works began to be translated into Arabic at Baghdad's "House of Wisdom".

In 2018, we will hold two conferences to focus on this, in Canterbury and Boulogne, and we invite proposals for papers. We would be interested in ones that address any aspect of the topic, especially these questions:

1. To what extent were these phenomena connected? The prose preface to "Alfred's" translation of Gregory the Great's *Cura pastoralis*, explains that Scriptures were first written in Hebrew, then translated into Greek and Latin, and that "similarly all the other Christian peoples turned some part of them into their own language". Did the author know about previous Armenian or Slavonic versions of Biblical texts? We know that vernacular languages sometimes appear together, for example, one of the earliest literary texts in Old French, the *Sequence of Saint Eulalia*, is in the same manuscript, on the same page (Valenciennes, Bibliothèque municipale, 150, f. 141v) and in the same hand, as the Old High German heroic poem *Ludwigslied*. How many other examples are there of such interconnections?
2. Why was all this happening in the long ninth century? Why was it then that there was so much confidence about writing in the vernacular? We would be especially interested in papers on the specific historical contexts in which these changes happened.
3. To what extent was this primarily a religious phenomenon restricted to literary forms and high status media? We would also be interested in examples that are more ephemeral, oral or domestic such as inscriptions on personal objects or sermons for oral delivery.

The two conferences will be held at the:

- University of Kent, Canterbury, UK, on Saturday, 30th June 2018
- Université du Littoral Côte d'Opale, Boulogne-sur-Mer, France, on Friday, 12th October 2018

Proposals may be sent to Alban Gautier (alban.gautier@univ-littoral.fr) and Helen Gittos (H.B.Gittos@kent.ac.uk) before 31 May 2017, with a title and a short summary in English. At the conferences, papers may be delivered in English, French, German or Italian, but we will ask all speakers to provide a longer English abstract.