More Anglo-Saxon Runic Graffiti in Roman Catacombs

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[*Editor's Note*: a foreshortened production schedule for this issue and difficulties with the traditional modes of transatlantic communication made it impossible to submit proofs of this essay to Professor Schwab before going to press; the editor accepts full responsibility for all errors, omissions, and inconsistencies, particularly in the notes. Following common practice, transcriptions of runic inscriptions are indicated by widely-spaced boldface letters; ligatures are indicated by arches between letters.]

[*Online note, 25 July 2004:* This essay contains names in runes which are encoded in the 'Gullhornet' font designed by Odd Einar Haugen of the University of Bergen, Norway. The font is available as a free download from http://helmer.aksis.uib.no/Runefonter/Gullhornet-e.html. If you cannot download this font, or if these characters do not display properly in your browser, please view the article in .pdf format via the link given above. The .pdf file also corrects some editorial errors in footnote numbering found in the print version of the essay.]

In these pages in 1987 Professor René Derolez presented some results of Professor Carlo Carletti's revision of *ICVR* n. s., on the names of English pilgrims scratched on the fresco of St. Luke "medicus" in the Cimitero di Commodilla at Via Ostiense, of which the runic **e a⌒ d b a l d** was the main attraction. [1] In 1991, at the Erice-Conference "Epigrafia medievale greca e latína," Carletti read a paper entitled "Viatores ad martyres. Testimonianze Scritte altomedievali nelle catacombe romane" including a survey on the presumable dating of the 'REMEMBER-ME'-graffiti found in fourteen Roman Catacombæ (± s. vii med. to ± s. viii/ix). [2] Out of 370 inscriptions Carletti recognized some twenty of "Germanic" origin; he distinguishes (p. 209) an Anglo-Saxon group of names from Langobard and "Franco-Langobard" ones. [3] The twelve Anglo-Saxon names, marked by their number in *ICVR*, are 'identified' (tentatively and not always exactly) by quoting the relevant pages in W. G. Searle's 1897 *Onomasticon Anglo-Saxonicum.* It is a pity that neither Anglo-Saxonists nor runologists were consulted. Most of these graffiti are found in Cimitero di Commodilla and had already been published in Carletti's 1986 work, though not without errors; [4] the 'Catacomba di Marcellino e Pietro' (Via Labicana) has yielded the names *Sassula* (still to be examined) and *Ceolbert* (*ICVR* VI, 15975; 15966 [cf. Commodilla No 33]); in the 'Catacomba di Ponziano' (Via Portuense) we find one *Healfred* (*ICVR* II, 4533e; for "graphic and anthroponomic" reasons [p. 203] Carletti suggests a period not later than the beginning of s. viii). The initial *h-*, in my view, may be indebted to the owner of the name or to a carver wishing to create a 'distinguished' (hypercorrect) spelling, if the name is a perverted form of *Alhfrith, Ealhfrith,* etc. [5]

The most interesting English name in Roman letters is found in the 'Catacomba di S. Pan-filo' (Via Salaria vetus): *Headrid* (*ICVR* X, 26317). Carletti cites Searle p. 286, evidently pointing to Heardred, bishop of Hexham [797-800], who appears once in Symeon of Durham's *Historia Dunelmensis ecclesiae* II:59, with the erroneous spelling of '*Headred*'. We would suggest rather a modified *heaðu-ric* or *heaðu-rēd* (< - *rǣd*), or *ead-rēd* written with this same 'hyper-correct' *h-*, and -*ē-* raised to -*ī-* as may have been the case with the EADRHID SAXSO V(IR) H(ONESTUS) carved on the 'Rulers pillar' in the vestibule of the old Michaelic Sanctuary at Monte Sant'Angelo (Gargano) around 700, most probably by a member of the retinue of the Langobard Queen Herme-linda ("*ex Saxonum Anglorum genere*"). [6] The English wife "Hermelinda" of the Langobard King Cunipert (680-700) residing in Pavia was in close relation to the Beneventan court—her sister in law, Wiglinda, being married to Grimoald II whose father, Romuald I († 687), and then her nephew Romuald II (706-731) appear as benefactors of the Monte Sant'Angelo sanctuary on the 'pillar of official inscriptions' in vicinity of *Eadrhid*, carved carefully in the same ductus; [7] her English name was *Eormenhild* (or *Eormenlith*?). [8] Hence, hers is another 'be-aitched' English name in an Italian/Langobard environment (see *Healfred* below). This same *Eadrhid* [9] might have visited the Roman catacombs on his way from Pavia to Benevent and to the Gargano. There, as is well known, [10] some English pilgrims had their names carved in runes on the outer wall of the old Michaelic Sanctuary.

Since 1985 we have known the name of one Englishman who had scratched his name in runic letters in a Roman Catacomb. Only in 1991 Professor Carletti told his audience at Mount Erice about two more graffiti "in alfabeto runico" found under the same circumstances—which, however, he did not reveal, since they were "ancora in fase di studio" (p. 208). Ten years later Dr. A. E. Felle (Bari) at the end of an article dedicated mainly to the "Monte Sant'Angelo-Inscriptions" [11] tells us more: these two runic graffiti are located at Rome in the 'Cimitero di Marcellino e Pietro sulla via Labicana'. One he discovered himself, correcting the old reading *Firmina* (in *ICVR* n.s. VI, 15972 r. 5) to the runic **aQelFeRQ** *æ þ e l f e r þ*; the other was found by Carletti, who corrected *ICVR* n.s. VI, 15966 B to the runes composing the name *Fagihild* (in his interpretation). In a hitherto unpublished paper "Nuove iscrizioni runiche dalla catacomba romana dei SS. Pietro e Marcellino," which Dr. Felle kindly sent me in 2002, I was able to see the picture and his transliteration of the runes composing this name. They are of particular interest, since the lady-pilgrim used the very rare sign g^3 [ġ] [12] and also crossed her [i]:

    F A J H n l D

    F Ā Ġ H I L D

This name is quite rare, as is the use of the rune J. [13] It is employed in the center of each of the four metallic stripes framing the bottom of the Gandersheim Casket; it forms the beginning of the name *ġ i l s u i þ* on the '*Thornhill C*' slab (Yorkshire, s. ix) and of the name *ġ i s l h e a r d* on the 'Dover' slab (c. 900); it appears on the Frisian 'Westeremden A', a weaving toil (c. 800?); the sign also stands at the beginning of *ġis-* in two similar names, *a d u ġ i s l u m e þ ġ i s u hi l d u.* Here we will neither discuss *Westeremden* B [14] nor the use of the rune J as a 'shorthand' sign (i. e. the abbreviation of the prefix *gi-, ga-, ca-* in manuscripts written in Germany

in certain scriptoria of English influence). [15]

We are of the opinion, however, that the late runic sign J g^3/ġ is used in Anglo-Saxon names not only for phonetic or ornamental sake but also because of its resemblance to the Christian *signum* 'Chi-Rho'. And this also may be why the pilgrim-lady *Faġhild* also crossed her *i*. The 'meaning' of the first element of her name, *fāg*- (ie. *peik*/*poik*) 'varicoloured, variegated; shining, brilliant; "illuster"' [16] shall be discussed presently elsewhere in comparison with pre-OHG FeHa *f ē h a* (Weingarten, s. vi). [17]

It is not easy to say why some English pilgrims wrote their names in runes: in any case, archaeologists would do well not to speak of a "sacral heathen" script being accepted by the "catholic" church in converted Britain, but instead seek better information about "Runes and Literacy" in political and clerical circles of Anglo-Saxon England. [18]

NOTES

[1] R. Derolez, "Anglo-Saxon Runes in Rome," *OEN* 21.1 (1987): 36-7. Carlo Carletti's essay is "I graffitti sull' affresco di s. Luca nel Cimitero di Commodilla: Addenda et corrigenda", *Rendiconti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia* 57 (1986), 129-143. *ICVR = Inscriptiones Christianae urbis Romae*, n.s., ed. A. Silvagni and A. Ferrua (7 vols.; Rome, 1922-80).

[2] Subsequently published as "Viatores ad martyres: testimonianze scritte altomedievali nelle catacombe romane," in *Epigrafia medievale greca e latina. Ideologia e funzione, Atti del seminario di Erice (12-18 settembre 1991)*, ed. G. Cavallo and C. Mango (Spoleto, 1995), 197-225.

[3] Identifying the latter partly on the basis of J. Jarnut's *Prosopographische und sozialgeschichtliche Studien zum Langobardenreich in Italien [568-774]* (Bonn, 1972).

[4] Derolez ("Anglo-Saxon Runes in Rome," 36) notes, e.g., *UUernoð* for Carletti's *Uverno d[iaconus]*.

[5] Cf. Searle 202-03, and O. von Feilitzen, *The Pre-Conquest personal Names of Domesday Book* (Nomina Germanica 3. Uppsala 1937), 144, *s.v. Al-frið*.

[6] See R. Derolez & U. Schwab, "The Runic Inscriptions of Monte S. Angelo (Gargano)," *Mededelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van Begië: Academiae Analecta. Klasse der Letteren* 45 (1983): 95-130, esp. 103-107, 125-130.

[7] See Derolez & Schwab, "The Runic Inscriptions," 100-108.

[8] Cf. Maria Boehler, *Die altenglischen Frauennamen* (Germanische Studien 98. Berlin 1931), 735.

[9] With the 'superfluous' -*h*- displaced not only in the original but constantly again by modern editors, e.g. A. E. Felle, "Testimonianze epigrafiche del pellegrinaggio garganico in età altomedievale: La memoria e la scrittura," *Mitteilungen zur christlichen Archäologie* 7 (2001): 60-77, especially p. 75 where one reads -RIHD, and also -*hrid*, whereas the photograph shows -RHID.

[10] See now R. I. Page, *An Introduction to English Runes* (Woodbridge 1999), ch. 14, "Runic and Roman," p. 224: "Runes may have been a common script for giving one's name in an informal setting." See also R. Derolez and U. Schwab, "More Runes at Monte Sant'Angelo," *Nytt om Runer* 9 (1994): 18-19, and recently K. Düwel, "Die Runenarbeit am Seminar für deutsche Philologie (Arbeitsstelle: Germanische Altertumskunde), Göttingen,"*Nytt om Runer* 10 (1995/96): 9, on more runic traces recently discovered at Monte Sant'Angelo.

[11] Felle, "Testimonianze epigrafiche," p. 735.

[12] Called 'Sternrune' after my book *Die Sternrune im Wessobrunner Gebet: Beobachtungen zur Lokalisierung des clm 22053, zur Hs. BM Arundel 393 und zu Rune Poem V. 86-89* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1973).

[13] See my *Sternrune*, p. 74-78 and *passim*.

[14] See also *Sternrune*, p. 76.

[15] The 'name' *jor* of this late rune is discussed in my *Sternrune*.

[16] Cf. the names *Fulgentia*, *Lucentia*, *Luminosa*, in I. Kajanto, *The Latin Cognomina*. Societas Scientiarum Fennica, Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum XXXVI. 2 (Helsinki 1965), 287, and cf. Boehler, *Die altenglischen Frauennamen*, p. 182, on the initial 'themes' of female names, denoting shining 'beauty', such as *beorht* 'brilliant'; *flæd* 'beauty'; *scīr* 'pure; brilliant'; *torht* 'shining, brilliant'. Some themes refer also to colours: *brūn*-, *dunn*-; *hwīt*-; *read*-. Words relating to ornament or trinkets also belong to this realm: e. g. *beag*-; *gold*-; *hring*-; *mēn*-. Boehler does not mention *fāg*- but only the related *fēger*- (West Saxon *fæger*) in the loction '*to Fegerhilde forda*' (s. ix/x) referring to a place near Duntun, Wilts.

[17] Cf. Wolfgang Krause and Herbert Jankuhn, *Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark*, Abhanglung der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse, 65 (Göttingen, 1966), N. 306; H. Roth and C. Theune, *Das frühmittelalterliche Gräberfeld bei Weingarten (Kreis Ravensburg). Katalog der Grabinventare* (Stuttgart 1995), p. 79 and pl. 96.1. U. Schwab, "Runen der Merowingerzeit als Quelle für das Weiterleben der spätantiken christlichen und nichtchristlichen Schriftmagie?" In K. Düwel and Sean Nowak, eds., *Runeninschriften als Quellen interdisziplinärer Forschung* (Berlin and New York, 1998), p. 418.

[18] See, e.g., D. M. Metcalf, "Runes and Literacy: Pondering the Evidence of Anglo-Saxon Coins of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries," in *Runeninschriften als Quellen interdisziplinärer Forschung*, ed. Düwel and Nowak, 434-438.