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Linguistic repertoires and intra-writer variation: Hemming of Worcester

Hemming of Worcester has been identified as the scribe of a number of late-eleventh-century manuscripts, writing in both Old English and Latin (Ker 1947; Da Rold 2010). His output includes prose texts such as histories, prayers, homilies and charters, and he is unusual as an Anglo-Saxon scribe identifiable by name, who we can also locate at a specific ecclesiastical institution at a specific time. Hemming's scribal activity is contemporary with the incumbency of Wulfstan II, Bishop of Worcester (1062-95), one of only two bishops to retain their roles after the Conquest, and whose responsibility for a renewed emphasis on book-making in Worcester has been well-documented (Thomson 2001: xxii).

This paper focuses on dialectal and orthographical features in Hemming's Old English textual production. Previous studies have demonstrated the value of examining texts which survive in multiple witnesses, using the text as a control to investigate the extent of scribal influence and variation in a given performance (Laing 1992; Orton 2000). Wallis assessed Hemming's copy of the Old English *Bede* in Cambridge, University Library Kk 3.18 as compared with other versions of the same text, and concluded that in that performance Hemming worked as a Mixer scribe, albeit one whose writing admitted a number of Mercian exemplar features (2013: 159).

The present study, in contrast, examines Hemming's behaviour in the *Bede* alongside a number of his other scribal performances, to gain an insight into the extent to which intra-writer variation is present in his copying. Recent research has described intra-writer variation in historical texts from (among others) Middle English (Hernández-Campoy and García-Vidal 2018) and nineteenth-century lower-class German writers (Schiegg 2018), and this paper investigates the extent to which it can be detected in Hemming's output. Initial results show the presence in the *Bede* and in local charters of specific Mercian spellings, indicating that these features were at least part of Hemming's passive repertoire, and possibly part of his own preferred usage. Comparison with his other scribal output will explore whether these features form part of a consciously-deployed Mercian/ West Midland variety in the wake of the Norman Conquest and the decline in influence of Standard Late-West-Saxon.

References

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