



A Scribe of the 14th century between Tradition and Innovation. Some considerations on the Codex B.R. 226 (Florence, BNCF)

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Abstract

*Among other important and rare books, The National Central Library of Florence in Italy preserves a manuscript dated to the first half of the 14th century and compiled in Bohemia. It contains three Middle High German courtly romances: Gottfried von Straßburg's *Tristan*, its continuation by Heinrich von Freiberg, and Hartmann von Aue's *Iwein*. This paper focuses on the history of the codex and some interesting stylistic features of *Iwein*'s copy, which denotes a strong tendency to simplify the text. It is suggested that the Florentine *Iwein* is not a 'rewriting', rather, it could be seen as a 'reshaping' of the inherent sense of the chivalric poem, given its probable audience would likely not understand the old code of the Arthurian world.*

Keywords: Courtly Romance, Middle High German Literature, Hartmann von Aue, Gottfried von Straßburg, *Iwein*, *Tristan*, Bohemia

The codex known by the shelf mark B.R. 226ⁱ is a parchment manuscript preserved in the National Central Library of Florence, dated approximately to the beginning or the first half of the 14th century, which contains three Middle High German literary courtly romances by Gottfried von Straßburg, Heinrich von Freiberg, and Hartmann von Aue respectively.

This paper will focus on the description and history of the manuscript and some peculiarities of the witness of Hartmann's work because it has interesting characteristics, compared to the manuscript tradition of *Iwein*, and to Gottfried's work preserved in the same codex and transcribed by the same copyist, as specified later. The witness of Heinrich's romance does not fall within the field of investigation of this paper, since other scribes have handed it down.

This codex is a parchment manuscript in 4° (cm. 22 x 15.5 approx.), and it comprises 192 sheets plus two paper flyleaves at the beginning and two at the end. As mentioned, it contains three German courtly romances, i.e.: *Tristan* by Gottfried von Straßburg (fol. 1v-102v), its continuation by Heinrich von Freiberg (fol. 103r-139v), and *Iwein* by Hartmann von Aue (fol. 142r-192v). The three texts have been transcribed in verse, and each begins with a new quireⁱⁱ; on the verso of the last sheet of each quire, the number of pagination used as a reference for their placement is still visible. There are two more recent numberings: the first, indicating the number of the pages, is in the upper right edge of the rectum of each sheet; the second has been written down in the lower left edge of the sheet rectum and refers to the number of sheets.

The texts are written in a two-column format using Textura script (*rotunda*): the layout has been drawn in black ink on rectum and verso of the sheets. To the left of each main column is a narrow bounding one used for the initial of each verse of Heinrich's *Tristan*, while in the case of Gottfried's and Hartmann's works this occurs in every each verse, alternating indented and normal line in each couplet: this *mise en page* is of great interest, as it helps to identify manuscripts drafted in East Bavaria, Bohemia, and the area of Central East Germany between the end of the 13th and the first half of the 14th centuryⁱⁱⁱ, and therefore gives a first important indication to ascertain the area in which the witnesses of the two courtly romances would have been copied.

The number of lines within the columns is variable, from 38 to 40 of Gottfried's *Tristan*'s first sheets to 61 of the fol. 102v; fol. 1v is acephalous; in fact, 102 verses are missing at the beginning, even if the lines of the *rectum* and of the whole col. a of the versus had been regularly drawn. As regards the continuation by Heinrich, the lines have a more constant number, namely 46, 47 per sheet, while Hartmann's *Iwein* has predominantly 40 lines per sheet; sometimes, they can contain 38, 39, or 42 verses^{iv}.

Gottfried's *Tristan* and Hartmann's *Iwein* were transcribed by the same hand, while Heinrich's *Tristan* was handed down by two or three different scribes^v; at the beginning of the latter work, there is a decorated initial 8-line

tall, while *Iwein* begins with a 6-line tall letter, which is decorated as well. In all three texts, each paragraph is marked with blue Lombards alternated to red ones three-four lines tall, and they are sometimes equipped with ornaments in black ink. Lombards generally have a form that recalls that of Library Gothic script, while sometimes they are like Capital letters. The ink used to write the whole codex is black, while some corrections and words have been inserted between the lines using red ink. Some sheets of Gottfried's *Tristan* show initials of the indented verses embellished with a red ornament.

The copyist who compiled Gottfried's and Hartmann's works transcribed the texts in a neat Gothic Textura; compared to the previous texts, Heinrich's work has been copied with less accuracy. Some letters with ornaments and shapes suggest the transcripts were made in a chancery^{vi}.

In the upper margin of fol. 1r a number has been written down: 1343, with the second 3 obtained by correction of a 4. It may be a date, yet it is of uncertain origins, and scholars have not discovered whether it refers to the date of assembly of the whole codex or to other facts that we cannot anymore prove^{vii}. Furthermore, in the middle of the right margin of the same sheet, there is a MHG sentence: *des waz da michel erebeit*. It has probably been written by one of Heinrich's *Tristan* copyists^{viii}. On the back of fol. 192, Col. b, there is a Latin epigram dated to the 15th century: *marchus et rusticus et asinus hec tria consociantur*: it would seem to refer to a peculiarity that characterizes King Mark in Irish histories, in which he is described with equine ears^{ix}. According to Becker, in the 15th century the codex was still available to a native German speaker. Still, it is impossible to decide upon the area in which they lived^x.

At the beginning, besides the flyleaves, there is another paper sheet, on which a brief description of the contents of the codex is given, with indications about the editions of Gottfried's *Tristan* published from 1785 to 1869. On the verso of the same sheet, bibliographic information about the manuscript should have been provided, but the page has not been compiled.

The current cover is made of wooden axes with leather coated rib and metal latches: it was assembled according to the style of the 15th century^{xi} thanks to the interest of Baron Bartolomeo Podestà^{xii}, second librarian and director from 1882 to 1904 of the Manuscript Section of the Royal National Library^{xiii}. Inside the front part of the binding, there is a parchment sheet compiled by a 15th century scribe with the following writing: *das pûch ist der mendlin*; just below, there is another writing in Latin: *omnes apostoli sint duodecim ... duo sunt apostoli ungariae*. There is no information as to the reason the sheet was attached to the codex; however, according to Becker, the form in which the word *ungariae* is attested, instead of *hungariae*, indicates the German origin of the annotation^{xiv}.

Becker also notes that the codex format suggests that it could be a Leseausgabe, sort of anthology of classical poetic works typical in the 14th century^{xv}. It could have probably been transcribed at different times: eventually, the first copies being made were those of Gottfried's *Tristan* and Hartmann's *Iwein*, in the early years of the 14th century during the last period of the *Præmyslids* or the beginning of Johann of Luxembourg's reign (1296-1346). At first, the two texts would be kept separately to be read aloud^{xvi}: the traces of wear on the first and last pages of each work would suggest such usage^{xvii}.

It was only at a later stage that the probable possessor of the two texts would have let a copy of Heinrich's *Tristan* transcribed to complete Gottfried's novel, he or she eventually let the three texts bound into a codex. The state of wear of fol. 1 and 192, which are darker than the inner ones between Gottfried's romance and Heinrich's one and between the latter and *Iwein*, would confirm the hypothesis that the three works have been kept together for a long time, as the epigram verse on the last sheet of the manuscript would testify^{xviii}.

The information obtained from the codex may not be useful to understand the way it reached Florence. There is no doubt it was already to be found in the Tuscan city before the establishment of the first nucleus of the current Central National Library, the first collections of which are represented by the books that had belonged to Antonio Magliabechi, librarian of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany at the end of the 17th century. At his death in 1714, he left thousands of ancient manuscripts and printed books to the inhabitants of Florence: he had obtained those books from other bibliophiles and merchants throughout Europe; unfortunately, however, there is no specific information regarding the acquisition of the codex subject of this paper.

As Spiewok^{xix} points out, the cultural and political connection between Bohemia and Tuscany since the Middle Ages is a matter of fact; it can also be remembered that the last Grand Duke of Medici, Giovanni Battista Gastone (known as Gian Gastone), married Anna Maria Franzisca of Sachsen-Lahuenburg in 1697 and spent years in Bohemia^{xx}. Among the Grand Duke's personal retinue, there was, for example, the literary man Peter Domenico Bartoloni from Empoli, who was a personal acquaintance of Magliabechi and privately corresponded with him. That does not mean that Bartoloni was the man who acquired the manuscript for the account of the Florentine bibliophile, nor is it sure that the codex was still in Bohemia: nevertheless, it can be underlined that Tuscan intellectuals were present in the Bohemian lands since the Middle Ages. We could think, for example, to figures such as Cola di Rienzo, Francesco Petrarca, Giovanni Marignola, Enea Silvio Piccolomini (ie. Pope Pius II). We could also consider that several artists, writers, thinkers, politicians, merchants and so on had travelled from Bohemia to Florence and vice-versa^{xxi}. The codex could have been given away, sold, or purchased by any of them.

The one certainty lies in the fact that ms. B.R. 226 was part of Magliabechi's legacy, and that, with many other books, it became part of the library created by the will of Gian Gastone^{xxii}

Giovanni Targioni Tozzetti was commissioned in 1738 to prepare the catalogue of the Florentine library: the codex appears with the previous shelf mark, which identifies it as part of Magliabechi's bequest^{xxiii}. Later, the same library remained in existence during the Kingdom of Italy, and it continues nowadays as the Central National Library of Florence.

As to what concerns the popularity of the manuscript, in 1777 Leonard Meister mentioned it, regarding copies of the works of Gottfried and Hartmann that Johann Jakob Bodmer had them prepared in 1774 for the Library of Zurich^{xxiv}, which were then published in 1784-1785 by Christoph Heinrich Myller in the two volumes of his anthology of German poetry dating to the 12th, 13th and 14th centuries^{xxv}.

Regarding the Florentine witness of Gottfried's *Tristan*, known in the manuscript tradition as F, several scholars have evaluated it as one of the essential complete manuscripts of the romance, despite the lack of vv. 1-101, for which the page had been prepared. Myller's above-mentioned publication is considered the *editio princeps* of Gottfried's work. Yet, it is a mere incomplete and poorly accurate transcript, as the wrong interpretation of scribal abbreviations and the treatment of other graphic particularities show. From the linguistic viewpoint, there are undeniable elements of Alemannic dialect, but it is also possible to note some interesting East Middle German peculiarities^{xxvi}. Besides the dialectal characteristics, the differences with the other witnesses of the romance are not to evaluate this copy as too far away from the other manuscripts of Gottfried's *Tristan*.

One of the most compelling characteristics of B.R. 226 is that the two romances it preserves, which the same copyist compiled, retain the presumed original configuration of the works in different manners, in terms of both their metrical and morpho-syntactic structure. While the Florentine *Tristan* mostly corresponds to the critical text established by Marold^{xxvii} and Ranke^{xxviii}, this is not the case for *Iwein*, preserved in the same manuscript, which usually is identified as D^{xxix} in the manuscript tradition of the romance. Beyond the linguistic specificities determined by the transcription context, the typology of variants D presents would appear to suggest an attempted structural reconstruction of Hartmann's work.

As already noted, the two romances were handed down by the same scribe. It would be interesting to ascertain whether the copyist transcribed the two works during the same period or the copying could instead be ascribed to slightly distinct stages of his activity. As such, it is impossible to establish whether they were initially transcribed at the wish of a single purchaser and for the enjoyment of the same audience, as likely as this may appear. The two romances were probably transcribed to satisfy one wealthy person's desire to possess a copy of the two famous masterpieces, even though the cultural background of Bohemian society in the first half of the 14th century differed from that of Hartmann and Gottfried's world. However, the reason for binding the two works in a single manuscript could also have been based on practical necessities: surely loose booklets were easier to handle when the texts were to be read aloud for an audience, yet, as soon as they were no longer recited, joining them in a single manuscript may have responded to practical needs, to the owner's wishes, or the antiquarian tastes of a bibliophile.

The fact the relationship of the *Tristan* and *Iwein* texts of the Florentine manuscript with their originals is so different can depend on various reasons and can be addressed from the philological, cultural, sociological, history, and theory of literature viewpoint. Purely philological considerations cannot be overlooked when considering the conservatism or innovations of the two texts, because they may result from handwritten transmission: that is, in examining the different textual quality of the two Florentine witnesses, obviously the possible discrepancy in quality between the respective antigraphs cannot be ignored.

The question concerns whether the copyist knew this and why he did not find it inappropriate to transcribe one copy of *Iwein* so strikingly far from Hartmann's work, especially if the peculiarity, in terms of both form and content, of the chivalric romance was still evident to him, given the same high quality of the other work he handed down, perpetuating its fortune: Gottfried's *Tristan*.

It is possible he was not aware of or could not obtain more faithful transcripts of the work. The answer to this question may also lie in the different fortunes and diffusion of the two romances that, as is well-known, followed two routes: Hartmann's *Iwein* was better known and more widely spread along the South-North ridge of the eastern area, while Gottfried's *Tristan* was restricted to the south-western area with a north-eastern, eastern-central German, east-Franconian *Inselüberlieferung*, and it is probably related to the continuation of the romance by Heinrich von Freiberg, who was active in that region^{xxx}.

The same question could also be asked from the audience's viewpoint: how is it possible an audience that continued to be fascinated by Gottfried's intertwining of metrical elegance and ideal depth could find pleasure in the spare and vulgarized version of the Florentine *Iwein*?

Many peculiarities of the Florentine *Iwein* are not exclusive; in fact, it shares them with other witnesses, with which it constitutes the group DJbc^{xxxi}. Apart from fragment b, of Franconian-Rhine origin, the remaining witnesses were handed down in the Bavarian area, yet f betrays a Bohemian influence, which is doubtless where D originated. Two of these, c f, are examples of the so-called abridgements (*Kurzfassungen*) of the romance^{xxxii}.

The innovations transmitted exclusively by D can be said to continue and build upon a trend, characteristic of the group to which it belongs, towards simplifying formal structures and a trivialization of content. The Florentine *Iwein* does share some of the identifying characteristics of this form regarding the clear presence of examples of trivialization, morpho-syntactic simplification, and the elimination of redundant expressions. Technically speaking, it is not an abridgement: it contains a small number of unattested verses—about 50—compared to the critical edition; yet, in terms of the number of words, it is notably shorter than Hartmann's hypothetical original.

Throughout the text, it is possible to find regular occurrences, as for instance the omission of anaphoric pronouns or of the adverb *vil* 'much': such practice is shared with ms. J (Wien, Österreichisches Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 2779). Another usual procedure is to skip the conjunction *und* 'and' at the beginning of a verse: this determines an asyndetic and paratactic reformulation of the sentence. Some examples will be provided below, comparing the reference critical edition text [i.e.: Benecke, Lachmann, Wolff (2001)] with that of the ms. D [i.e.: Digilio (2015)]:

v. 170

- critical ed. (p. 15):

vil lûte rief er unde sprach

«He called out very loudly and said»

- ms. D (p. 90):

lvte rvfte er vnde sprach

vv. 77-77

- critical ed. (p. 4):

Der künec und die künegin / die heten sich ouch under in / ze handen gevangen

«The King and the Queen / had, for their part, / taken one another by the hand»

- ms. D (p. 74):

Der chvnch vnd die chvnegin / hetten sich ovch vnder in / ze handen gevangen

vv. 475-478

- critical ed. (p. 11):

weder wider mich sîn muot / wære übel ode guot, / desn weste ich niht sie wârheit, und was iedoch ze wer bereit

«Whether his intentions towards me / were evil or good / I did not know for certain, but I was ready to defend myself»

- ms. D (p. 84):

Weder wider mich fîn mût / ware vbel oder gût / Des enwefte ich deheîne ficherheit / ich was zewere bereit

It would not be right to define the Florentine *Iwein* as a case of 'rewriting', since the witness is strictly bound to Hartmann's work and does not seek to establish an alternative version. However, it does bring about a 'reshaping' of the work, in a process that can be viewed

“as part of that dialogue between text and reader and audience which, for Arthurian romance, ensures the continuing value of the language of chivalry as a currency for literary esteem”^{xxxiii}

The Arthurian ethical context is put severely through its paces, if we may say so, by the formal revision of D. In chivalric literature, revisions to expression have significant repercussions for the message of the work itself. For, albeit without twisting the content, which is preserved in D, unlike the *Kurzfassungen*, it distinguishes the ethical sense and that of the behaviour embodied by the characters. While, on the one hand, D may also respond to the need for a “new and textually improved version which mediates a literary past for its readers”^{xxxiv}. One must, nonetheless, question the meaning of such literature for an audience that evidently could not always grasp its profound essence, for example:

vv. 190-192:

- critical ed. (p. 6):

ez ist umb iuch alsô gewant /daz iu daz niemen merken sol, / sprecht ir anders danne wol

«The way things are with you, / no-one is supposed to notice / if you speak in a manner that is other than correct»

- ms. D (p. 76):

her kay es ift vm iuch so gewa(n)t / Das iv niemen niht merchen fol / sprecht vbel oder wol

«Sir Kay, the way things are with you, / no-one is supposed to notice / if you speak in a manner that is bad or correct»

Other witnesses present similar reformulations, but D is the only one in which the conclusion seems that no one listens to what Kay has to say, independently of what he affirms. This trivialization is based on the desire to cause swift, coarse offense, and also implies an underestimation, if not an ignorance of the Arthurian dialectic code, which would not permit it.

It may be possible in the end to notice several examples of the simplification of periods, such they assume a pace more in keeping with prose. See, for example:

vv. 2795-2798:

- critical ed. (p. 52):

wan daz er sichs erholte / sît also in rîter solte, / sô wære vervarn sîn êre

«Were it not that he made amends / afterwards, as a knight ought, / then his honour would have been lost»

- ms. D (p. 141):

Wan daz er sich fin erholte / also in ritter scholte / Anders ware verlorn fin ere

«Except that he made amends / as a knight ought. / Otherwise his honour would have been lost»

Unlike the syntactic structure of the probable original text, the phrase preceded by "except that" is connected to the previous verses, the parenthetical clause is expunged, thereby the phrase at v. 2798 is syntactically detached from what precedes it.

Many such examples can be found in the Florentine *Iwein*. Such samples confer upon the text an image of simplification and a reduction of the story recounted to a mere succession of events, as often occurs in the prose versions of Arthurian romances. The facts seem reduced to their outer shell as they have lost the charge of meaning Hartmann had given them, albeit with little conviction, and without fully succeeding. The richness and variety of the adventures narrated, the only partially successful harmonisation of the content, and the imperfect clarity of the messages seem to have facilitated a noteworthy 'reshaping' of Hartmann's text. As already noted, this proceeding is, however, not to be found in the Florentine *Tristan*.

In the Middle Ages, Gottfried's romance was not the only version of the story of the two unhappy lovers, nor was it perhaps even the most appreciated: in the German area, we can think of Eilhart von Oberg's work, which was closer to Béroul's poem. This does not seem true, though, for the Bohemian *Inselüberlieferung*, which represents a sort of enclave of the diffusion of Gottfried's masterpiece in a macro-area comprising Bavaria, central Germany, and the Low-German and eastern regions, where the preference for Wolfram was undoubtedly more marked^{xxxv}. In that "Bohemian island", where the age-old story of *Tristan* and Isolde continued to fascinate a rich audience parallel to the Přemyslid and Luxembourg dynasties, where Heinrich von Freiberg completed the work Gottfried had left unfinished, and where the Florentine witness was born, *Tristan* continued to speak its ancient, timeless language, preserved with all the force with which outlying areas frequently guard over works that have reached them from afar.

End Notes

ⁱThe contraction B.R. indicates that the codex is part of the "Fondo Banco Rari" (Rare Books Collection), in which manuscripts, incunables, collections of prints, tables, drawings, printed books are currently preserved. The previous shelfmark, 'Magliabechianus German. VII [9], 33', referred to the Magliabechi Collection. There are three modern editions based on the works handed down in this manuscript, which are mentioned in chronological order of publication: Spiewok, Buschinger 1993; Gherardini 2010; Digilio 2015.

ⁱⁱGottfried's *Tristan* consists of eleven quaternions (I-IX, XI, XIII), the last of which lacks two sheets that were cut before the transcription of the text, immediately after fol. 100 (however, the numbering of the sheets does not consider this gap, which did not cause any loss in the text), a quinterium (XI) and a ternium (XII); Heinrich's work is composed of four quinterions, of which the last was not compiled entirely, in fact two sheets are empty; the witness of *Iwein* has been handed down in six quaternions and three sheets.

ⁱⁱⁱSchneider 1987, I, 91-92; cf. Palmer 1991, p. 220; Wetzel 1992, pp. 342-392; Digilio 2015, 9.

^{iv}Cf. Handschriftencensus <<https://handschriftencensus.de/2686>>.

^vBernt 1934, 140.

^{vi}Becker 1977, 42.

^{vii}Ibid.

^{viii}Ivi, 41.

^{ix}For what concerns the story of the king's equine ears, see for ex.: Milin 1991.

^xBecker, 42, n. 8.

^{xi}Ivi, p. 40.

^{xii}Fasola 1892, p. 4.

^{xiii}Buttò 1999, *Dizionario biobibliografico dei bibliotecari italiani del XX secolo*, <<https://www.aib.it/aib/editoria/dbbi20/podesta.htm>>.

^{xiv}Becker 1977, 42, n. 7.

- ^{xv}Ivi, 41.
^{xvi}Ivi, 42.
^{xvii}Ivi, 163.
^{xviii}Ivi, 42.
^{xix}Spiewok 1993, 149.
^{xx}See for ex.: <<http://www.themedicifamily.com/Gian-Gastone-de-Medici.html>>.
^{xxi}Novak 1925, 207; cf. Pánek 1999, 333-345.
^{xxii}Buschinger, Spiewok 1993, 145-154.
^{xxiii}Mannelli Goggioli 2000, 65-77.
^{xxiv}Meister 1777, Vol. 1, 97-98.
^{xxv}Myller 1784-1785, Vol. 1, 1-141; Vol. 2, 1-59.
^{xxvi}Steinhoff 1974, VII, 21; Becker 1977, 40; Wetzel 1990, 43, Gherardini 2007, 35-36; cf. Marold, Schröder 2004, 284.
^{xxvii}Marold, Schröder 2004.
^{xxviii}Ranke, Studer 1962.
^{xxix}Handschriftencensus, <<https://handschriftencensus.de/2686>>; Digilio 2011, 72.
^{xxx}Klein 1988, 148-156.
^{xxxi}Ibid.
^{xxxii}Ibid.
^{xxxiii}Taylor 2017, 177.
^{xxxiv}Ivi, 176.
^{xxxv}Klein 1988, 126.

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