

**CAMBRIDGE SONGS** [ANON.Cam.Songs]: DMA 3.57–58.  
ed.: Ziolkowski 1998.

MSS Cambridge, University Library, Gg.5.35: HG 12.

Lists none.

A-S Vers – Quots/Cits see below.

Refs none.

The Cambridge Songs are the most important early medieval anthology of Latin lyric poetry, especially of secular lyric poetry. They are preserved toward the end of a substantial manuscript that includes copies of many Christian Latin mainstays of the curriculum, such as the Bible poems of **JUVENCUS**, **SEDULIUS**, and **ARATOR**; **PROSPER**'s **EPIGRAMS**; **PRUDENTIUS**'s **PSYCHOMACHIA**; **LACTANTIUS**'s **DE PHOENICE**; and **BOETHIUS**'s **DE CONSOLATIONE PHILOSOPHIAE**. The manuscript also contains other late antique and early medieval favorites such as **HRABANUS MAURUS**'s **DE LAUDIBUS S. CRUCIS**; **ALDHELM**'s **CARMEN DE VIRGINITATE**; the riddles of **EUSEBIUS**, **TATWINE**, **BONIFACE**, **SYMPHOSIUS**, and **ALDHELM**; and the **DISTICHA CATONIS**.

Where the Cambridge Songs begin in the manuscript is clear, but where they end is not obvious. In the earlier standard editions by Strecker (1926) and Bulst (1950) the Cambridge Songs comprise 49 poems on fols. 432ra–441vb; and yet a persuasive case can be made for adding not only the 17 excerpts from the *metra* in Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae* that are on a recently recovered leaf, originally between the present fols. 441 and 442 (Gibson, Lapidge, and Page 1983), but also seven further poems on fols. 442ra–443rb (Dronke, Lapidge, and Stotz 1982). If so, the Cambridge Songs should total 83 poems.

There has been considerable debate over whether this miscellany, whatever its length, originated as a minstrel's songbook, a song-lover's anthology, or one unit in a classbook (Rigg and Wieland 1975). The manuscript appears to have been written by Anglo-Saxon scribes from a German exemplar: the script is a continental minuscule of the eleventh century, but some letters show Anglo-Saxon features. Possibly the manuscript was produced at St Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury, where we know that it was located from the twelfth through the sixteenth century. After being removed during the Dissolution, it came to Cambridge at the end of the seventeenth century.

Although the manuscript was produced in England and owned by an English monastery, the contents of the Cambridge Songs have few connections with England. On the contrary, many of the pieces are ultimately German in origin (Strecker 1926 p IX). For instance, all German emperors from 950 to 1050 are praised or at least mentioned (nos. 9, 11, 16, 17, 19, 33): seven poems are concerned with German emperors, from the Ottonians through Henry III. The Cambridge Songs also mention archbishops of Mainz, Trier, and Cologne (nos. 24, 25, 7); nunneries in Cologne (no. 26) and in Homburg in Thüringen (no. 20); and the patron of Xanten (no. 8). Finally, the collection contains two macaronic poems in Old High German and Latin (nos. 19, 28). This information suggests that at least one large part of the collection took shape near the Middle or Lower Rhine.

But even though the Cambridge Songs constitute a cultural document essential for the understanding of early medieval German culture and poetry (Strecker 1926 p V), they are nevertheless impressively international. The collection features poems from Merovingian France, from later France, and from Italy, in addition to excerpts from classical poets (**VERGIL**, **HORACE**, **STATIUS**).

The poems are truly lyrical: musical notation may be scanty on fol. 432 and following in CUL Gg.5.35, but neumes for many of the poems (among them the excerpts from classical poets) are extant in other medieval manuscripts, and many of the poems make mention of music theory and performance (Richter 1987; Spanke 1942). Indeed, the recovery of the Boethian *metra* answers Strecker's speculation (1926 p XXI) about why so many poems in the Cambridge Songs are incomplete (e.g., nos. 1, 2, 21, 22, 30, 33, 36, 37, and 47). Whereas Strecker reached a literary solution and decided that the collection was intended to present an abundance of themes, we can now conclude that the incompleteness reflects the original musical purpose of the collection: in some cases only enough text was included to remind the reader of the melody.

Despite the significance of the Cambridge Songs in medieval Latin literary history, the collection had no demonstrable impact on Anglo-Saxon literary culture. The lack of Anglo-Saxon versions, quotations or citations, and references is partly the result of chronology: although many items in the collection were available in other manuscripts, the core of the collection seems not to have reached England long before the Conquest. Furthermore, the secular nature of the poems that make the Cambridge Songs unique would have made them ill-suited to the purposes of many writers. Finally, the century in which the Cambridge Songs and related collections took recognizable shape is “the period least investigated by modern research” (Lapidge 1986a p 32).

For bibliography on the Cambridge Songs, see Strecker (1926), *ICL* (by the incipit of each individual poem), and the relevant entry in *Medioevo Latino. Bollettino bibliografico della cultura europea dal secolo VI al XIII*.

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