

LAT. MEDIOEV. C(H)ARAXĀRE E ANGLO-SASSONE WRĪTAN: UNA MICRO-STORIA SEMANTICA

ABSTRACT

This paper is an essay in micro-historical semantics and concerns the Late Latin verb charaxāre, a loanword from Gr. χαράξαι, χαράσσω. The scientific literature uses to separate two different semantic values of this Latin verb: 'to carve; to cut' and 'to write. In Herren's opinion, starting from Virgilius Maro Grammaticus' writings, charaxāre 'to write' was unique to Hisperic usage and derived from the knowledge of Greek glosses circulating among Irish monks from the VI-VII century AD onwards. Moreover, Herren considers this usage of charaxāre a sort of new Irish 'symptom', according to the wellknown linguistic, codicological and literary category created by Bernhard Bischoff. As a matter of fact, a close inspection of the texts shows beyond any doubt a very different story. The Lat. verb charaxāre originally meant 'to scratch, to cut, to carve', just as it did in the κοινή Greek, and referred to several objects, stone inscriptions and parchment manuscripts included. Despite Herren's point of view, we find these meanings also in Anglo-Saxon Latin documents and charters; the semantic development is perfectly clear at the light of the early history of the verb. Only in the British Isles the new, unmarked value 'to write' of lat. charaxāre started spreading from late VII century AD. It presumably affected the high variety of bilingual Anglo-Saxon/Latin speakers and it should be explained as a semantic borrowing or Lehnbedeutung from the Anglo-Saxon language. Actually, the new meaning 'to write' was born thanks to semantic interference between the Anglo-Saxon verb wrītan, both 'to cut, to carve (especially in Runic script)' and 'to write', and the Latin verb charaxāre 'to cut, to carve'.