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**Language, law and loanwords in early medieval Gaul:  
language contact and studies in Gallo-Romance phonology**  
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## 7 Adding Insult to Injury

### Introduction

In Early Merovingian Gaul, the free-born Franks constituted the highest stratum of society. They owned their own farms, travelled the roads freely and were better protected in legal disputes than the Gallo-Romans, the land-bound peasants, the freedmen and the slaves (cf. Von Olberg 1991: 60; see also Drew 1991: 46). But the life of a Frank was not without care and when the king raised the levy, the farmer turned fighter and rode off to war. Also in times of peace, the free-born Frank had a personal duty to violence. When the honor of the family was threatened, the relatives were duty-bound to exact reparation and avenge the affront (cf. Miller 1990).<sup>184</sup> And in a society where one's social position needed constant asserting and protecting, it did not take much for a conflict to arise (cf. Brown 2011). In Merovingian Gaul, a word said in anger was often all it took.

### Insults

An entire chapter of the Salic Law, titled 'on abusive terms' (*de convitiis*), provides legal maxims for cases that involved the exchange of ill words.<sup>185</sup> In that regard, the legal customs of the Franks can be compared to those of other early medieval societies: law articles dealing with insults and slander have also come down to us from Visigothic Spain (code of Leovigild), Lombardic Italy (edict of Rothar), Anglo-Saxon England (law of Æthelberht) and Early Wales (laws of Hywel Dda). Generally speaking, insults in early medieval law codes can be divided into the following gendered categories and subdivisions:

- Insults deprecating the honor of a man
  - Lack of bravery
  - Lack of honesty
  - Being effeminate
- Insults deprecating the honor of a woman
  - Lack of sexual propriety
  - Lack of social decency
  - Being a witch

What may be clear from the sketch above, is that all insults target a perceived transgression of the gender dichotomy and thereby accuse the receiver of the insult of disturbing the social

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<sup>184</sup> Miller (1990: 30) characterized this social system of retributive violence between families as an 'economy of honor'.

<sup>185</sup> Depending on the manuscript, the law article 'on abusive terms' can be found in different chapters of the Salic law. In manuscripts of the Merovingian A and C redaction, the law article constitutes chapter XXX and in the post-Merovingian D redaction it is chapter XLIX.

order of society (cf. Clover 1993). The provisions of the Salic Law are no exception to this: in the pre-Carolingian redactions of the Salic Law (A, C, D), the following injunctions are found that concern cases of insults deprecating the honor of a man or a woman.

- Insults at a man
  - Being effeminate                    **A/C** = clause 1                    **D** = clause 1
  - lack of bravery                    **A/C** = clause 2, 4, 5, 6   **D** = clause 3, 5, 6
  - lack of honesty                    **A/C** = clause 7                    **D** = clause 2
- Insults at a woman<sup>186</sup>
  - lack of sexual propriety        **A/C** = clause 2                    **D** = clause 4

It stands to reason that from these law articles fascinating historical information about Frankish society and concepts of masculinity and gender roles can be distilled (e.g. Nelson & Rio 2013).

Among linguists, the Salic Law is mostly famous for the vernacular glosses (the Malberg glosses) that are almost exclusively found in the pre-Carolingian redactions. Also the law article on insults includes some of these glosses. This brings us to an interesting peculiarity; in the Merovingian A and C redactions hardly any vernacular glosses to the law article are provided, whereas this situation is completely different in the mid eighth-century D redaction. In the D redaction, issued in the time of Pippin the Short (cf. Ubl 2017: 223), several clauses of the law article are marked by the gloss <iscrabo>/<estrabo> . In this investigation, the philological context of the gloss will be explored and a new etymology will be provided.

### Latin text

The Malberg gloss <iscrabo>/<estrabo> is featured in manuscripts of the D redaction and in the Herold manuscript, a sixteenth century print edition based on the Merovingian C and B redaction and other lost manuscripts (cf. Ubl 2017: 227). The gloss is featured in the clauses that cover the following cases:

- calling someone libelous or a liar
- calling a free-born woman a prostitute
- accusing someone to have fled from the enemy

Since all clauses that contain the gloss concern an abusive term that was probably more than a mere derogatory comment and rather constituted an unjust accusation, the gloss might be interpreted as meaning ‘slander’ or just plainly ‘insult’ (cf. Van Helten 1900: 414). In order to

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<sup>186</sup> Accusations of witchcraft are covered in a separate law article (LXVII) of the Salic Law.

illustrate how the gloss is featured in the text, we may take clause 2 from manuscript D7 as an example.

**Salic Law** (Eckhardt 1969: 88, D7)

§ 2 Si quis alterum falsatorem clamauerit et non potuerit adprobare, mal. **iscrabo**, sol. XV cul. iud.

“if someone will have called another a liar and he cannot prove it, in judicial speech **iscrabo**, may he pay 15 gold pieces if he is judged guilty”

When we want to establish what linguistic form might hide behind the spelling, we should take note of the following spelling variants in the manuscripts. The forms are given according to Eckhardt’s edition (cf. Eckhardt 1962: X; 1969: 88).

- D-redaction
  - <iscrabo> (clause 2, manuscript D7)
  - <solis trabo> (clause 4, manuscript D7)
  - <ischrabo> (clause 2, manuscript D8)
  - <hischrabo> (clause 2, manuscript D9)
  - <solestrabo> (clause 4, manuscript D9)
- Herold manuscript
  - <extrabo> (clause 2, manuscript H)
  - <austrapo> (clause 5, manuscript H)

The above listed spelling variation can be significantly reduced if we take a couple of peculiarities of Merovingian scribal practices into account. We should take note of a scribal error reflected in D7 and D8 and another scribal error reflected in D7 and D9

- The spelling <scr> and <schr> can be explained from <str> and <sthr> as a misspelling provoked by the similarity between the Merovingian graphemes <t> and <c> (Van Helten 1900: 238)
- The spelling with initial <sol> can be explained from a misplaced abbreviation <sol> for *solidi* ‘gold coins’ (cf. ONW s.v. *strāpa*)<sup>187</sup>

Other spelling variants may have been motivated by the interference of the Merovingian reading tradition of Latin. It is important to realize that the Merovingian scribes were

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<sup>187</sup> There is a small chance that <sol> represents a Germanic word \**sōl* ‘dirty’ (cf. OE *asōlian* ‘to become dirty’, Low German *sōl* ‘dirty’), a lengthened grade formation next to Gm. \**salwa-* (cf. ON *splr* ‘dirty yellow, OHG *salō* ‘dirty’, see Boutkan-Siebinga 2005: 360-61). The form <solestrabo> might then be a compound denoting a particularly vile insult. However, it seems more likely that we are dealing with a misplacement of the abbreviation <sol> for *solidi*.

conditioned by this reading tradition when they interacted with Latin texts (see section 2.17). The following spelling features may be interpreted as such.

- The spelling of an initial <h> in <hischrabo> was probably a scribal hypercorrection motivated by the Gallo-Roman reading tradition of Latin, where the initial Latin <h> was dropped in pronunciation (see section 3.33).
- The presence and alternation of an initial <i> or <e> before <str> was probably motivated by the Gallo-Roman reading tradition of pronouncing an epenthetic vowel /i/ or /e/ before /sC/ clusters (see section 3.20).
- The spelling <xtr> can be explained from <str> as a Merovingian spelling variant motivated by the Gallo-Romance merger of etymological /kstr/ and /str/ (see section 3.35).
- The alternation between <b>/<p> was probably motivated by the Gallo-Roman reading tradition of pronouncing intervocalic <p> as /b/ or lenited /β/ (see section 3.34).

This allows us to distill an underlying form for the Malberg gloss, namely /<sup>i</sup>strabo/, or, alternatively, /<sup>i</sup>straβo/, if we take the lenited Gallo-Romance pronunciation of written <b> into account.<sup>188</sup> This word might reflect a Frankish word of Germanic origin, a Frankish word of Romance origin or even a Frankish word of Gaulish origin (cf. Quak 2017; see section 1.18).

## Etymology

A fanciful early attempt at an etymology came from Knut Jungbohn Clement in a posthumously published study (1879) on the Salic Law. He argued that the Malberg gloss <estrabo> originally belonged to the clause on calling a woman a prostitute. He proposed to connect the gloss to the Frisian word *strabbe* which he translated as an ‘unruly, stubborn, headstrong person’; the word <estrabo> would then have referred to the woman as a ‘mulier rixosa’ (Jungbohn Clement 1879: 167). However, it seems likely that Jungbohn Clement misheard the word because the Frisian dictionary cites it with an /o/ vowel as *strobbe* (WFT s.v. *strobbe*<sup>189</sup>) and connects the Frisian word to Dutch *strobbe* ‘stubborn child’ and Dutch *strubbelen* ‘to be stubborn’. It is therefore clear that this etymology cannot be correct.<sup>190</sup>

A vastly better etymological connection was offered by Van Helten in 1900 (cf. Van Helten 1900: 414). He argued that we should connect <estrabo> with a group of similar-looking

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<sup>188</sup> Although previous scholarship has not provided formal accounts of how spoken Romance interfered with the Latin spelling, most scholars still recognized that the underlying form should be <estrabo> or <strabo> (cf. Van Helten; Eckhardt 1969: 75).

<sup>189</sup> Consulted at URL: <http://gtb.inl.nl/iWDB/search?actie=article&wdb=WFT&id=99193&article=strobbe>

<sup>190</sup> Jungbohn Clement’s alternative suggestion that <solestrabo> might contain the German word *traben* ‘to trot’ is not any better since it ignores the operation of the Old High German sound shift.

Germanic words whose meanings aptly approximate the content of the clauses in which the gloss is featured (cf. Benecke e.a. 1854-1866: 671; Lexer 1872: 1221; Kluge-Seebold 2002: 888).

- MHG *strāfe* ‘scorn, insult’
- MHG *strāfen* ‘to chide, to insult, to punish’
- MidDu. *strāfen, strāven, straffen* ‘to refute, to scorn, to insult’
- OFris. *straffia\**, *straffie*<sup>191</sup> ‘to insult’

Van Helten assumed that the Malberg gloss reflects an Early Medieval pre-stage of the Middle High German verb *strāfen*. Through corruption and misspellings, a Germanic form *\*strāfō* (in his opinion an inflected verbal form) was deformed into the <estrabo> gloss that we find in the Salic Law (Van Helten 1900: 414). The problem with this scenario is that the Middle Dutch and Old Frisian words are relatively young; the Old Frisian form *straffie* only occurs once and goes back to the fifteenth century (third Emsingo manuscript, ca. 1450). The Middle Dutch word is unfortunately not much older<sup>192</sup> (1420 – 1470, see MNW s.v. *straffen*).

This led De Vries (De Vries & De Tollenaere 1971: 707) who took the Middle High German attestations of *Strāfe* as starting point, to argue that the German-Frisian-Dutch word complex originated around the thirteenth century in Germany. The Frisian and Dutch words should then be considered late medieval borrowings of German legal terminology. This scenario has the benefit of explaining the recent date of the Dutch and Frisian attestations but brings us no closer to answering where German *Strāfe* came from.

The most recent etymology comes from Seebold (2012), who was inspired by the metaphorical secondary meaning ‘to slander’ of Latin *carpere* ‘to pick, to pluck, to gather’ (see Lewis & Short s.v. *carpo*). Seebold argued that the gloss <estrabo> could be connected to Latin *carpere* via Latin *excarpere*. In order to make this etymology work, he derives <estrabo> from a Romance pre-stage *\*estrapere* that via an intermediary *\*esterpere* would go back to Latin *excarpere*. According to Seebold, from this reconstructed *\*estrapere* both the Frankish word reflected in <estrabo> and the Middle High German word *Strāfe* could be derived. However, since almost all Romance sound changes that Seebold needs for this etymology are irregular and contradicted by the testimony of Old French (e.g. OFr. *escharz* ‘niggardly’ < Latin *\*excarptus*), this etymology can safely be discarded.<sup>193</sup>

The editors of the ONW (2013 s.v. *strāpa*<sup>194</sup>) went back to Van Helten’s discussion of the gloss. They accepted Van Helten’s etymological connection but chose to project the Middle

<sup>191</sup> Manuscript E3 5:61: “Js hit ac thet hit hua straffie sa scelt nawt stonde...” (text accessed via the TDB, courtesy of the Fryske Akademy).

<sup>192</sup> However, EWN s.v. *straf* (Philippa e.a. 2003-2009) gives as oldest attestation the line ‘Ic straffe haer woerde, ic en machs niet horen’ from ‘dit sijn Seneka leren’ for which they give the date 1400 – 1420 CE.

<sup>193</sup> Seebold requires the following irregular developments for his etymology, which are in contradiction to the historical phonology of Early Romance: 1) Latin /ksk/ > Romance /sts/, 2) /CerC/ > /CarC/ and 3) /CraC/ > /CraC/

<sup>194</sup> URL: <http://gtb.inl.nl/iWDB/search?actie=article&wdb=ONW&id=ID5662&article=iscrabo>

High German noun back into Proto-Germanic (cf. Brüch 1922). The Malberg gloss <estрабо> would then continue a Proto-Germanic form *\*strǣpō* (f.) which was also reflected in Middle High German *Strāfe*.<sup>195</sup> They connect this Proto-Germanic form *\*strǣpō* and its verb *\*strǣpōjan-* to the following Proto-Germanic words and their reflexes:

- PGm. *\*straupijan-* > OE *striepen* ‘to strip’, MidDu. *strōpen* ‘to strip, to streak, to brush’
- PGm. *\*strīpōjan-* > ModG *streifen* ‘to streak’

It is however clear that these words cannot be connected to the *\*strǣp-* root since an inherited Proto-Germanic root vowel /*ǣ*/ does not ablaut with an inherited Proto-Germanic /*au/* or /*i/*. Although the semantic link between the Malberg gloss and the Germanic *Strāfe*-words is still plausible, the formal mismatch between the proposed cognates shows that the inner-Germanic derivation cannot be maintained. If we want to connect the gloss of the Salic Law to the German-Dutch-Frisian word complex, we will need a better etymology for the German word.

## Gaulish

I would like to contend that a convincing etymological connection for Middle High German *Strāfe* and the Malberg gloss <estрабо> can be found in the Celtic language family. In Middle Welsh we find two words that provide a satisfying semantic match.

- MW *ffrawt, ffrawdd* ‘passion, ardor, zest, insult, injury’
- MW *ffraw* ‘passionate, brisk, lively, swift, fervent’

Both words cover the semantic range of ‘ardor’ and ‘passion’ with MW *ffrawdd* also including the meaning ‘insult’ and ‘injury’. We may note that the meaning ‘insult, injury’ can easily be derived from a wider meaning ‘passion, ardor’ as is clear from Middle High German *Zorn* ‘ardor, anger, verbal dispute, insult’ that shows the same polysemy (Lexer s.v. *Zorn*).

The Middle Welsh words *ffrawdd* and *ffraw* are in all likelihood lexical doublets that can be reduced to a single Old Welsh form *\*ffrawf* ‘passion, ardor, insult’ (cf. Vendryes 1929: 255-256; *contra* Schrijver 1995: 441, 443). This Old Welsh word then split into the dissimilated but commonly used noun *ffrawdd*, whose semantics were mainly negative, and the isolated, but not-dissimilated adjective *ffraw*, whose semantics were mainly positive.<sup>196</sup> The Old Welsh form *\*ffrawf* would go back to Proto-British form *\*srāβos* ‘passion, passionate’ (cf. OIr. *sráb* ‘torrent’

<sup>195</sup> That the Dutch word was borrowed via a German form with a singulate /f/ is suggested by Maastricht Dutch *strāve* (cf. De Vries & De Tollenaere 1971: 707).

<sup>196</sup> Dictionary of the Welsh language, s.v. *ffrawdd*, consulted at URL: <http://welsh-dictionary.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html>.

< PCelt. \**srābos*), a form that closely approximates the Germanic word complex that we are seeking to explain.<sup>197</sup>

- OW *\*ffrawf* < PBritt. *\*srāβos*
  - PBritt. *\*sr-* > *\*ffr-* (cf. Schrijver 1995: 440)
  - PBritt. *\*-β-* > *\*-f* (cf. Schrijver 1995: 351)

This would give us a British Celtic form that we can compare to the Germanic *Strāfe*-complex and the Malberg gloss. I would argue that the connecting link between the Celtic words and the Germanic words may have been Gaulish, the continental Celtic language of Gaul that in Roman times bordered the West Germanic dialect continuum. The question when Gaulish ceased to be spoken has captivated the minds of many generations of scholars (see Blom 2009). Its survival in Belgium seems to be secure up to the third century CE if we take the Gaulish inscription on the Baudcet tablet as decisive in this regard (Plumiers-Torfs 1993; see also Schrijver 2014: 49). It is therefore possible that when the Franks settled in fourth century Wallonia and Lorraine, they still encountered Gaulish-speaking rural communities.

In this regard, we may note that the Walloon dialect of French is home to some peculiar Gaulish relics that are restricted to the northeastern periphery of the Gallo-Romance dialect continuum. These relics might indicate that Gaulish may there have survived longer than in the more central parts of Roman Gaul (see Legros 1942: 194).

- Wall. *duhon* ‘goblin’ < Gaul. *\*dusion* (FEW III: 195)
- Wall. *dieffe* ‘thick clay’ < Gaul. *\*derwo-* (FEW III: 50)
- OWall. *ancrawe* ‘female salmon’ < Gaul. *\*ankorawo-* (FEW XXIV: 514)

Still, it seems overly ambitious to assume that Gaulish was still spoken at the moment that the gloss was added, which was at the earliest in the sixth century and at the latest in the eighth century. But even if the Germanic-speaking Franks did not encounter speakers of Gaulish in the northeastern border region of Roman Gaul, it is still possible that Gaulish lexis entered their language through a Romance intermediary. This may have been the case with several Gaulish words that are continued in Old Dutch toponyms.

- Gaul. *\*wabero-* ‘forest stream’ > Rom. *\*waβro-* > ODu. *waver* ‘forest’ (FEW XIV: 92)
- Gaul. *\*nauda-* ‘marsh’ > Rom. *\*nauda-* > ODu. *node\** ‘marsh’<sup>198</sup> (FEW VII: 53)

Either way, it is plausible that Gaulish substratum words in either Germanic or Romance could have been known to the Frankish lawyers, who redacted the Salic Law in the Merovingian period.

<sup>197</sup> It is likely that the medieval Welsh words continues the same Proto-Celtic word *\*srābos* that we find in Old Irish *sráb* ‘torrent’.

<sup>198</sup> For the Germanic connection to a purported PGM. *\*hmōbu-*, see Van Durme (1996: 355).



We can then consider three possibilities when we want to establish which language the Malberg gloss <estrabo> reflects: 1) the Gaulish word \*srāβos entered Old Frankish directly when the Franks were in direct contact with Gaulish speakers. 2) Gaulish \*srāβos entered Gallo-Romance and the form we find reflected in the Salic Law is a Romance form. 3) the Gaulish word \*srāβos entered Gallo-Romance first and then got adopted into Old Frankish when the Franks were in contact with Gallo-Romance speakers.

- |                  |   |           |
|------------------|---|-----------|
| 1. Gaul. *srāβos | → OFrnk. *stravu ~ *strafu              | <estrabo> |
| 2. Gaul. *srāβos | → Gallo-Rom. *estraβo-                  | <estrabo> |
| 3. Gaul. *srāβos | → Gallo-Rom. *estraβo- → OFrnk. *stravu | <estrabo> |

We will return to this problem later in this chapter. For now we continue with the question what the inclusion of the gloss in the manuscripts of the Salic Law tells us about the moment when the word was still in use. When we recall that the gloss is featured in the D-redaction and the Herold manuscript, the following facts should be taken into consideration:

- The late sixth-century C redaction does not include the gloss.
- The early eighth-century D redaction does include the gloss.
  - The D redaction is assumed to copy material from seventh-century example texts.
- The Herold manuscript also includes the gloss.
  - The H manuscript is assumed to incorporate text from the Merovingian B and C redactions.

Although there are many uncertainties in the stemma, it seems plausible to me that the gloss was added in the late Merovingian period. A hypothetical scenario could be that the gloss was entered by a seventh-century Frankish scribe into a lost Late Merovingian prototype, which would have been written between the C tradition and the D tradition. Evidence for such a lost seventh-century tradition comes from the *Septinas Septem* collection and a recently rediscovered Paris BN 441 manuscript (cf. Ubl 2017). Subsequently the gloss may have found its way into the Herold manuscript and the D manuscripts.

## Gallo-Romance

I want to continue the present investigation by arguing that in the French dialects an additional connection can be found that reinforces the proposed etymology by confirming the former existence of a Gaulish form \*srāβo- in Roman Gaul. This evidence consists of a group of French and Provençal words that share the same semantic range of the Celtic and Germanic words and are also phonologically similar (FEW XVII: 253).

- Walloon (Liège) *strabot* ‘insult, term of abuse’
- Lorraine (Metz) *estrabot* ‘insult’

- Provençal *estrambord* ‘passionate action, vivid expression of a feeling’<sup>199</sup>
- OFrench *estrabot* ‘satirical poetry’

It seems plausible to me that these words at least partly continue the same Gaulish etymon \**srāβo-* ‘passion, ardor, insult’, albeit it in the slightly altered form \**estrambo-*. The Gallo-Roman pre-stage of the above listed words displays the traces of nasal epenthesis, a process that spuriously affected Romance vocabulary.<sup>200</sup> We may note that the Old French word and the Walloon/Lorraine dialect words appear without a nasal but this may be due to secondary de-nasalization that is common to the northeastern corner of the Gallo-Romance dialect continuum (Lathi 1953: 23-24,32; Remacle 1948: 68-69). It is unclear why the Gaulish etymon underwent nasal epenthesis during its transfer into Gallo-Romance but for similar cases in the Romance dialect continuum the following possible reasons have been outlined<sup>201</sup> (Schuchardt 1911; Malkiel 1990):

1. Assimilation at distance induced by a nasal elsewhere in the word
2. Lexical contamination by a semantically related word that contains a nasal
3. Lexical contamination by a phonologically similar word that contains a nasal

Wherever the assimilation option cannot apply, most etymologists reckon with the option of lexical contamination. For the case of \**estrambo-* none of these scenarios seems to provide a satisfactory explanation and we are left with the possibility that in this case the lexical model for the nasal epenthesis is lost to us.<sup>202</sup>

### Semantic contamination

However, the main problem with connecting the above listed words to Gaulish \**srāβos* does not so much lie in the presence of a spurious nasal, but consists of the extensive semantic contamination that must be assumed for the prehistory of these words. Credit is due to Corominas who discussed the etymological factors influencing the Gallo-Romance words when he untangled the etymologies of the Spanish *estrambote-estribote* word complex (Corominas 1954: 440-45, 449-51). His conclusions were accepted by Wartburg and taken up

<sup>199</sup> FEW (XII: 284) mentions that the suffix of this word is probably influenced by Provençal *transport* for ‘emotion’

<sup>200</sup> The explanation of these non-etymological nasals in the Romance lexicon remains a problem today and led Meyer-Lübke (1890: 485 § 587) to state that the nasal infixation belongs to the most difficult part of the metatheses and epenthetic processes of Romance historical phonology.

<sup>201</sup> A fourth possibility that Schuchardt mentions is phonetic reinterpretation of phonemes during lexical transfer when the source language has a stop and the recipient language only spirants. This may have been the case for Italian loanwords in Modern Greek (Schuchardt 1911: 87).

<sup>202</sup> We may note that a similar case of an epenthetic nasal before a labial stop needs to be assumed for the prehistory of Old French *brimber* ‘to beg, to stroll, to roam’ next to Old French *briber* ‘id.’ (etymology unknown, cf. FEW I: 527) and Old French *pompon* next to Old French *poupon* ‘pumpkin’ (Latin *pepōnem*, cf. FEW VIII: 210-11).

in his etymological dictionary of French (FEW XVII: 253-54). Corominas' word history can be summarized as follows and concerns three relevant etymological factors:

1. Germanic *\*streupa-* 'stirrup' was continued as loanword into Pre-French as *\*estrieve* (cf. OFr. *estrief* 'id.')

  - The Pre-French word *\*estrieve* spread to the Iberian peninsula where it was adopted as Old Spanish *estribo* in the meaning 'stirrup'.
  - Old Spanish *estribo* acquired a variant *estribote* through semantic association with other horsemanship terminology that had the suffix *-ote*

2. Arabic *al-markaz* had a concrete meaning 'stirrup, support' and a metaphorical meaning 'supporting verse/rhyme'.

  - In Spain, the semantic range of Arabic *al-markaz* was transferred to Old Spanish *estribote* which now also referred to both 'stirrup, poetic genre, verse'

3. Greek *στραβός* 'crooked, bent' was continued in Romance as *\*estrambo-* 'crooked, bent' with an intrusive nasal of unknown origin.<sup>203</sup>

  - When in the High Middle Ages poetic terminology spread across the Mediterranean, the Old Spanish word *estribote* likewise spread north to France in the form of Old Provençal *estribot*.
  - In France, the word *estribot* was associated with the word *\*estrambo* 'crooked, bent' leading to a connotation 'satirical poetry' as in Old Provençal *rime estrampa* 'faulty rhyme'.
  - A contaminated form *estrambot* meaning 'satirical poetry' arose that is found in Old Provençal, Old Spanish and Old Italian.

Because of the semantic link to Old Provençal *estribot*, *estrambot* 'satirical poetry' and Old Provençal *rime estrampa* 'faulty rhyme', most scholars have linked Walloon and Lorraine French *estrabot* 'insult' to the Spanish word complex, that is, the contamination between the etyma *\*streup-* 'stirrup, supporting verse' and *\*strambo-* 'crooked'. If we want to separate a hypothesized *\*estrambo*<sub>-1</sub> of Gaulish origin from the *\*estrambo*<sub>-2</sub> of Greek origin, we need external evidence that compels us to do so.

To my mind, this external evidence may be provided by the Middle Breton word *stram* 'hateful, horrible, malediction' (att. 1519 CE, Hemon 1976: 2973). This word is commonly explained as a loanword from Old French *\*estrambot* (Wartburg 1966: 284), but we may note that the Middle Breton word does not continue any meaning associated with poetry. In my opinion, Middle Breton *stram* 'hateful, malediction' is therefore more easily derived from an

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<sup>203</sup> Malkiel's suggestion that the introduction of the nasal in Latin *strambus* might have occurred in order to stress comicality does not convince me (see Malkiel 1990: 237).

Old French word *\*estram* < *\*strambo*-<sup>204</sup> meaning ‘insult, term of abuse’ rather than a form *\*estrambot* meaning ‘literary genre, satirical verse’.

At a later moment, the southern etymon, *\*estrambo*-<sub>2</sub>, whose meaning was tied to poetry may slowly have displaced the meaning of the northern etymon, *\*estrambo*-<sub>1</sub>, which led to the semantic contamination that we find in Old French and the French dialect words. Only in Walloon and Lorraine French did the original meaning ‘insult’ persist, which is understandable when we consider that this meaning may have been supported by the existence of an Old Frankish *\*stravu* ~ *\*strafu* ‘insult’ on the other side of the language border.

We may even hypothesize that the nasal infix of the northern Gallo-Romance form is relatively recent and only occurred when in the High Middle Ages an original northern Gallo-Romance word *\*estraβo*- was associated with the southern Gallo-Romance form *\*estrambo*-. This would mean that the Middle Breton word was also borrowed after the southern Gallo-Romance word had already deformed the northern word which is not likely if we want to argue that the Old French donor word reflects an archaic stage in the word history.

## Malberg gloss

We can now return to the question of the linguistic identity of the gloss; does the Malberg gloss represent a Gaulish loanword in Germanic, simply a Gallo-Romance word or a Gallo-Romance loanword in Germanic that happens to be of Gaulish origin?

In my opinion, the easiest solution would be to separate a Gaulish form *\*estraβo*- from a Gallo-Romance form *\*estrambo*-. We can then assume that the form *\*estraβo*-, that we find in the Salic Law, reflects the Gaulish loanword in Old Frankish, and that Gallo-Romance only had forms with nasal epenthesis. The Walloon and Lorraine dialect forms would then almost directly continue the early Gallo-Romance stage *\*estrambo*-<sub>1</sub>. In the south of France, there was also a form *\*estrambo*-<sub>2</sub> of Greek origin which initially did not interact with the northern form since in the north, other words were used to denote ‘crooked, bent’ (e.g. OFr. *courbé* ‘id.’ ← Lat. *curvare* ‘to bend’). These etymologies may be summarized as follows:

- Gaul. *\*sraβo*- ‘insult, passion’ → Old Frankish *\*strāvu* ~ *\*strāfu* ‘insult’
- Gaul. *\*sraβo*- ‘insult, passion’ → Northern Gallo-Rom. *\*estrambo*-<sub>1</sub> ‘insult, passion’
- Greek στραβός ‘crooked, bent’ → Southern Gallo-Rom. *\*estrambo*-<sub>2</sub> ‘crooked, bent’

In the High Middle Ages, however, the semantics of the two homonyms got mixed, when minstrels brought a ‘wanderwort’ from the Iberian peninsula to the south of France. From there it quickly spread across the Gallo-Romance dialect continuum.

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<sup>204</sup> We may note that we do not need the suffix for the Breton form.

- Gallo-Rom. \**estrambo*<sub>-1</sub> ‘insult, passion’ ↔ Rom. \**estrambo*<sub>-2</sub> ‘crooked, bent’

From that moment onwards, the contaminated Old Provençal word *estrambot* will have displaced the original northern Old French form \**estram*. Only in the northeastern periphery did the meaning of \**estrambo*<sub>-1</sub> persist.

### Earlier etymological suggestions

Here it should be mentioned that the connections, which I have proposed above, are not entirely new and several aspects of them have already been touched upon by earlier scholars:

- Emile Littré (1863: 142-46) connected the Malberg gloss to the French dialect words meaning ‘insult’.
- Brüch (1922: 199-215) connected the French dialect words (meaning ‘insult’) to Middle High German *Strāfe* ‘insult’.

Littré however did not relate the Malberg gloss to the *estrambote-estribote* complex within the Romance languages, and he also did not account for the French historical development that connected <estrambo> to Walloon *estrambot*. Brüch (1922: 199-215) likewise ignored the *estrambote-estribote* complex and described, although hesitantly, a scenario in which a Germanic form \**strāpō*, the assumed pre-stage of Middle High German word *Strāfe*, would have crossed the border into Gallo-Romance as \**estrambo*. From there, the Pre-French word would have spread to the far edges of the Romance dialect continuum. This scenario was rejected by Corominas (1954: 443), because of the isolation of the Middle High German word, and the short time window for the diffusion over the Romance languages.

My scenario considers the Middle High German word *Strāfe* to be a loanword from Gaulish \**srāβos*, thereby accounting for its isolation in a plausible way. The northeastern French dialect words would likewise continue the Gaulish etymon, albeit in a form with nasal epenthesis. I remind the reader that a hypothesized Gaulish form \**srāβos* would constitute a perfect formal and semantic match to the Proto-British form \**srāβos*, that we must reconstruct for Welsh.

### Austrasia and Germany

On a final note, we may try to contextualize the historical context, which links the gloss to the German and Dutch dialect words. As stated above, I assume that the Malberg gloss was entered by a Frankish lawyer into a seventh-century Merovingian prototype. In my opinion, it is very likely that the person who added the gloss would have come from Austrasia, the northeastern part of the Frankish realm. The reason for this is that the addition of new vernacular glosses would better fit the bilingual northeast than the predominantly Romance-

speaking southwest. We should also note that the gloss was taken over in the D manuscripts, a redaction that can directly be tied to Pippin the Short and the Austrasian take-over in Late Merovingian politics (cf. Ubl 2017).

The gloss may therefore be linked to seventh-century Austrasia, a bilingual and bicultural region, which included the Meuse valley, the upper Moselle valley and the Rhineland (cf. Pfister 1992). It is therefore plausible that the Austrasian glossator knew both the Old Frankish word \**stravu* and the Pre-French word \**estrambo*-.<sup>205</sup> I have argued above that we may regard the simultaneous occurrence of the word in Old Frankish and Old French as a reflection of the same Gaulish substratum, that was home to Austrasia before its speakers switched to Romance and Germanic.<sup>206</sup>

After Pippin the Short issued his redaction of the Salic Law, we lose track of the word, and for the next five centuries it disappears from the written record. It surfaces again in Middle High German *Strāfe*, where it is mainly found in the meaning ‘reproach, insult’ (Lexer s.v. *strafe*). We may illustrate this by its occurrence in *Alpharts Tod*, a thirteenth-century poem, which is preserved in a late fifteenth-century manuscript.

“*Ich het ys bylch vermeten, das ich dorch solich straffe wer gein Bern gerieden.*” (Alpharts Tod, line 38-39, Lienert & Meyer 2007: 14)

“I would have gladly avoided it, that because of such reproach, I have ridden to Verona.”

It is interesting to note that the legal meaning of the word first appears in texts from southeastern Germany and Austria. There we find it in the form *straff*, e.g. Dresden (1285 CE), Nürnberg (1348 CE), Sankt Pölten (1386 CE, see DRW s.v. *straf*<sup>207</sup>). The Middle High German verb *straffen* is attested a little later (Trient, Switzerland 1307 CE), but also mainly in these southeastern regions.<sup>208</sup>

In order to explain this eastern locus, we can assume, that, in the High Middle Ages, the word spread from Austrasia to the east. This may have happened gradually, but we could also consider migration from the Rhineland to the dioceses of Bamberg, Salzburg and Passau as a contributing factor. In the southeast of Germany, the word might have acquired its connotation of ‘punitive legal action’, which replaced the older meaning ‘reproach, insult,

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<sup>205</sup> Ironically, the presence of a nasal line abbreviating the /m/ that would allow us to distinguish the two forms is easily lost in Merovingian manuscript traditions.

<sup>206</sup> The survival of a Gaulish substratum word in the two languages of seventh-century Austrasia may not be a coincidence, since it is possible that in this peripheral area of Roman Gaul, Gaulish may have survived longer than in the center.

<sup>207</sup> Deutsches Rechtswörterbuch, consulted at: URL: <http://drw-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/drw-cgi/zeige?index=woerterbtext&term=straf>.

<sup>208</sup> An exception is *straffen* in a diploma from 1317 from the city of Speyer, see Deutsches Rechtswörterbuch s.v. *straffen*, consulted at: URL: <http://drw-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/drw-cgi/zeige?index=woerterbtext&term=straffen>

verbal rebuke'. This semantic specialization could then, later, have spread to other parts of the Holy Roman Empire, including the Low Countries.

This southeastern origin of the legal meaning would also explain why in Middle Dutch the word first appears with a double <ff>, a form that corresponds to southeastern Middle High German *straff* and *straffen* (MNW s.v. *straf*). The Middle Dutch variant *strāven* could then be considered as a native Dutch form; a Dutch continuation of the Old Frankish word *\*stravu*.<sup>209</sup>

If this scenario is correct, we would be dealing with the semantic contamination of two etymological doublets: a southeastern Dutch verb *strāven* that had retained the original meaning 'to insult', and a southeastern German loanword *straffen*, *straeften* with the legal meaning 'to enact punishment':

- MidDu. *strāven* ← ODu. *\*stravōn* 'to insult, to scorn'
- MidDu. *straffen, straeften* ← Southeastern MHG *straffen* 'to punish'

This scenario would be further strengthened by an in-depth study of the Middle Dutch attestations, but this is beyond the scope of this present investigation. My suggestion therefore remains hypothetical.

We may conclude that, despite these complications, De Vries' (De Vries & De Tollenaere 1970: 707) assessment that Middle Dutch *straffen* and Old Frisian *straffia*\* were German loanwords, remains unaffected. We can add to De Vries' suggestion, by arguing that the borrowing of the German legal term might be tied to the diffusion of Roman Canon law. In this regard we may note that Roman canon law reached the Low Countries mainly via the universities of the Holy Roman Empire (De Ridder-Symoens 1992: 287-88). Eventually, the legal meaning 'to exact punishment' replaced the older Merovingian meaning, both in Dutch and in German.

## Conclusion

To conclude, in this chapter I have argued that the Malberg gloss <estrabo> belongs to a Late Merovingian redaction of the Salic Law and reflects an Old Frankish word *\*stravu* 'insult'. This Old Frankish *\*stravu* would constitute a borrowing from a Gaulish word *\*srāβos* 'passion, insult' that was in use in the northeastern border region of Late Antique Gaul. The Gaulish word is cognate to Middle Welsh *ffraw* 'passionate, lively' and *frawd* 'ardor, passion, insult', words that reflect a Proto-Celtic form *\*srābos* 'torrent'.

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<sup>209</sup> Middle Dutch *strāven* could then be considered as a Rhineland dialect form, coming from Cologne and Trier. In my opinion, this is not a satisfying solution because in the German Rhineland the word is only attested in its legal meaning in the sixteenth century (DRW s.v. *straf*).

From the same substratum in northeastern France, the Gaulish word *\*srāβos* entered Gallo-Romance where it was continued as *\*estrambo-* ‘insult, passion’, a form that had undergone nasal epenthesis. The northern French word *\*estrambo-* which in Old French would have yielded *\*estram* was in the High Middle Ages displaced by a southern France word *estrambot* ‘satirical poetry’, the curious outcome of a contamination between a Spanish loanword and a Greek loanword. The original meaning of the northern French word was retained in the northeastern border dialects of Walloon and Lorraine in the form *estrabot* ‘insult, injury’ and in Middle Breton in the Old French loanword *stram* ‘hateful, malediction’.

In southwestern Germany, the Old Frankish form *\*stravu* was continued as a legal term and surfaces in the thirteenth century as Middle High German *Strāfe* ‘insult’. From the German universities, the word spread in the Late Middle Ages as a legal term to the Low Countries where it was adopted into Late Middle Dutch as *strāfe*, *straffen* and in Old Frisian as *straffia*\*. We may therefore conclude that when insult was added to injury and found its way into the Salic Law, we received a valuable clue on how to etymologize one of the most crucial legal concepts of German and Dutch.