

AFTER THE FALL –EARLY MEDIEVAL WRITINGS FOR THE LATIN CLASS

60 minute workshop

Introduction

Map of Europe 500 A.D.



The Dark Ages of Europe, in which Rome as an idea continued to wield power after Rome in the substance was largely gone, had a profound influence on world history. Important Latin writers such as Boethius, Isidore, the Venerable Bede, and Alcuin still thought of themselves as Romans or preservers of the Roman tradition. People couldn't believe that Rome was no longer the Owner and Protector of the World, and opportunists kept strengthening their power by putting on its empty mantle. Visigoth kings in France and Spain claimed to be subjects of the Roman Emperor, and carefully kept the Roman civil systems going as long as they could. When the Emperor became a total nonentity, Odoacer and after him Clovis, as barbarian a pair of kings as any who ever lived, hurried to claim the titles Patricius and Consul and pose as successors to the Roman Emperors. Even Charlemagne did this, and gained prestige from it to augment his power. In addition to seeking power, however, these people, as well as the scholars living in their realms, saw themselves as Guardians of the Roman Culture, which must not be allowed to perish from the world. Thanks to their efforts, it didn't. Historically this period is unbelievably fractured. In order to establish some order, I will use maps of Europe and a chronological organization, as I did in my book *The Lighter Side of the Dark Ages*.

AFTER THE FALL – THE LEARNER IN A DIFFICULT WORLD

1) Italy—Boethius – Riding the Whirlwind

Like stalwart Romans going back to Aeneas, Boethius feels that a man must learn – especially in dire circumstances

2) Spain – Isidore—Saving Knowledge

The thoughts of the ancient world—all of them—must be preserved

3) Britain –Bede—Getting All the Facts

Recount – accurately—Britain’s place in the Roman world

4) Britain/Carolingian World– Alcuin—See Everything Nature can teach us much

5) Carolingian World – Einhard—King, Man, Scholar Charlemagne the Learning Monarch

The five literature excerpts we shall consider deal with the desperate efforts to preserve Roman culture.

We will advance chronologically through Latin literature in Italy, Spain, Britain, Britian-Germany, and Germany-- three excerpts are in prose, two in poetry.

For this workshop I shall follow the general method I use to introduce such passages to a Latin class.

- 1) A brief discussion of the excerpt and where it fits into history.
- 2) An oral reading of the passage (in this case, a segment of the passage)
- 3) An overview of the vocabulary which may be unfamiliar to the students (This may need to be adjusted to different classes)
- 4) A reading of the comprehension questions in English (These give hints about the meaning of the passage)
- 5) A second oral reading with alternate Latin words that may be more familiar to the students.
- 6) A discussion of the meaning of the passage.

After we have worked with short sections of the first two, we will divide into groups to brainstorm about classroom uses for the other three, and then discuss our ideas.

ANICIUS MANLIUS SEVERINUS BOETHIUS ca. 480-524 A. D.

<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/boethius/boethius.html>



Born very soon after the last Roman Emperor, Romulus Augustulus, was deposed by Odoacer, and living most of his life under the Ostrogoth king Theodoric, Boethius stands at the meeting point of classical Rome and the Dark Ages. Although he was a committed Christian, this Roman aristocrat of the great family of the Anici was perhaps the last of the classical humanists who pursued truth and learning for their own sake. After receiving the best education Rome could give, he studied a number of years in Athens.

To preserve the classical culture he saw dying around him, he set out to translate the great works of Greece into lucid Latin, summarizing Euclid, Archimedes and Ptolemy. His translations of Aristotle and Porphyry were leading texts of logic for seven centuries. His theological writings profoundly influenced Christianity. He is generally regarded as the last Roman philosopher and the first medieval scholastic.

Under Theodoric, the 2nd Rex Italiae, this brilliant and eloquent man, who was often compared to Demosthenes and Cicero, became prime minister. Accused by jealous Goths of conspiring against the king, he was tried and sentenced to death. Imprisoned in Pavia, he wrote *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, one of the most famous of all medieval books. Alternating between prose and poetry, he shows a Stoic resignation to the inexplicable variations of Fortune and heroically struggles to reconcile good men's undeserved suffering with ultimate goodness. Curtius says this book has refreshed minds through the centuries, and is the only work of late Roman antiquity to be translated into German in the twentieth century. Its translators into English include Alfred the Great, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Queen Elizabeth I. He was executed in 524, but he had preserved much of classical literature for the future.

VOCABULARY FOR BOETHIUS

1. caminus, i, m-- forge, furnace
2. catena, ae, f -- chain
3. copia, ae, f--abundance, figuratively, the goddess of plenty
4. minae, arum, f --threats
5. querella, ae,f--complaint



Scaevola in Porsena's Camp

TEACHERS' NOTES FOR BOETHIUS

Translation:

Book I, Section IV

**Whoever undisturbed in his tranquil years
has thrown haughty destiny under his feet
and upright, eyeing every Fortune,
has been able to keep an unconquered countenance,
that man not the madness and threats of the sea
troubling the waves with whirling heat,
nor fickle Vesuvius from a broken forge
as it hurls forth the fuming fires,
or the way of the burning thunderbolt accustomed**

to strike the tallest towers, will dismay.
Why are we miserable men so much in awe
of savage tyrants raging without power?
If you neither hope for nor fear anything,
you will disarm their powerless rage.
But whoever trembling hopes or fears,
because he will not be steadfast in his own right,
has thrown away his shield and, moved from his place,
forges the chain by which he will be dragged.

ISODORE OF SEVILLE (c.560 - 636)

Latin Library/Christian



As Rome ceased to be a great political power and became a cultural and legendary one, the Western Empire bound together by Roman roads and Roman governments slowly became a crazy quilt of small feudal states surrounded by infestations of robber barons. The libraries and universities suffered raids and destruction, and such books as survived slowly became concentrated more and more in the various Roman Catholic foundations. Isidore, a lifelong scholar who rose to be Bishop of Seville in Spain, was in the forefront of brilliant men trying desperately to preserve the knowledge of the classical world. An ardent student of the classics and a fine Latin author, he is one of the bridges between the ancient and the Renaissance worlds. Durant grumbles that a little personal observation would have made some of his scientific statements less outrageous, but Duff says that his value lies in his compilation of information which would otherwise be lost. Curtius says "He transmits the sum of late antique knowledge to posterity." His most important work is the *ETYMOLOGIAE SIVE ORIGINES*, in which he attempted to gather into an encyclopedia all universal knowledge, ancient as well as modern, forming a huge compilation of 448 chapters in 20 volumes. Incidentally, St. Isidore is a preferred choice for the patron saint of the Internet by many users, as he created in his encyclopedia the first known data-base. *ETYMOLOGIAE* was probably the most-read book of the Middle Ages. The following excerpt is taken from it.

VOCABULARY FOR ISODORE

- 1) abscondo, abscondere, abscondidi, absconditum-conceal
- 2) arena, arenae, f-sand
- 3) caelo (1)-engrave
- 4) cyprum, cypri, n-copper
- 5) flatus, flatus,m-blowing, breath
- 6) gleba, glebae, f-lump
- 7) inchoo (1)-begin
- 8) lignum, ligni, n-wood
- 9) lutum, luti, n-mud
- 10) nitrum, nitri, n-natural soda
- 11) phialis, phialis, f-vessel, cup
- 12) solum, soli,n-earth, ground
- 13) tero, terere, trivi, tritum-smooth, grind down
- 14) tollo, tollere, sustuli, sublatum-raise, destroy
- 15) vitrum, vitri, n-glass

GRAMMAR HINTS FOR ISODORE

He uses the standard classical forms, especially:

1. Cum Clauses
2. Gerundives
3. Tenses of Subjunctive

MAIN TEXT ON THE ORIGIN OF GLASS

Vitrum dictum est quod lux translucet. In alia enim materia quidquid in parte interiore continetur *absconditur*; in vitro vero liquidum vel species qualis est intus talis extra declaratur, et quodam modo clausus patet.

Vitri origo haec fuit. In illa parte Syriae, quae Phoenice vocatur, finitima Judaeae, circa radices montis Carmeli palus est, ex qua nascitur Belus flumen, quinque milia passuum in mare fluens juxta Ptolomaidem(Aegyptum), cuius *arenae* fluctibus torrentis purgantur.

Hic fama est: fracta nave mercatorum *nitri*, homines sparsim in litore cibum parabant.

Cum essent nulli lapides ad vasa sustinenda, *glebis* nitri usi sunt. His accensis et arena litoris permixtis, translucentes rivi novi liquidi fluxerunt.

Mox homo non fuit contentus mixtura nitri et arenae; alias mixturas conatus est. Nam ubi mixtura cum *lignis* levibus aridisque coquitur, adiecto *cypro*, continuisque fornacibus, massae fiunt. Postea mixtura calida in vasis funditur quae in officinis locata sunt; deinde alia figura *flatu* fingitur, alia torno *teritur*, alia argenti modo *caelatur*.

Dicitur autem quendam artificem, Tiberio Caesare regnante, invenisse vitri temperamentum ut flexibile et ductile fieri posset. Cum ille admissum esset ad Caesarem, huic *phialem* dedit, quam Caesar iratus in *solo* proiecit. Artifex autem *sustulit* de solo *phialem* correxerat.

Hoc facto, Caesar artifici dixit: "Num quid alius scit hanc condituram vitrorum?" Postquam ille iurans negavit alterum hoc scire, iussit illum Caesar

decollari, ne cum hoc cognitum fieret, aurum pro *luto* haberetur et pretius omnium metallorum deminueretur; et recte, quia si vasa vitrea non frangerentur, meliora essent quam aurum et argentum.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Isodore sets out in a very organized way to define his subjects and give their history. Since glass was much rarer in his day than it had been in the Roman Empire, some of his readers may not have seen any. How does he describe it in contrast to pottery?
2. What requirements for the making of glass are furnished by the geography described in the second paragraph?
3. What accident created a combination of heated soda and sand to produce glass?
4. What four different ways of finishing glass are mentioned in paragraph 4?
5. What was unusual about the glass vessel the craftsman brought to Tiberius?
6. What decision did Tiberius make? On what economic reasoning was this based? Do people still try to block technology that might threaten them?

GRAMMAR/WORD USE QUESTIONS

1. Isodore uses many deponent verbs and also many passive verbs relating to craft processes. Careful distinction between the two must be made. Translate GLEBIS NITRI USI SUNT (remembering that UTOR takes a ablative direct object); translate QUIDQUID CONTINETUR ABSCONDITUR.
2. Remember that CUM , when it introduces a subjunctive clause, may be translated WHEN, SINCE, or ALTHOUGH. Translate CUM ESSENT NULLI LAPIDES (paragraph 3) and CUM ILLE ADMISSUS ESSET (paragraph 5).



Roman Glass and Pottery



TEACHERS NOTES FOR ISODORE

Isodore's fragmented world seemed to demand minute definitions which were no more needed in the time of Pliny and Quintilian than they are in our own. Seeing the world's achievements slipping away, he tried to compile an encyclopedia of all knowledge. Since he accepted whatever was written in ancient manuscripts and in addition many things which were oral tradition, some of his statements are wildly inaccurate. However, his attempt to preserve learning is admirable, and his quotes sometimes come from works otherwise lost to us. As one not far removed from them in time or space, he gives a valuable view on the ancients, the state of society in his time, and the origin, both historical and legendary, of things we take for granted. Especially interesting is the economic attitude toward innovation found in the history of glass he gives--every age seems to have people struggling to save their jobs even at the expense of progress for all.

TRANSLATION: ON THE ORIGIN OF GLASS

That is called glass which light shines through. For in other material anything contained in the interior part is hidden; in true glass the liquid or the appearance of whatever is within is declared as such on the outside, and in a certain way that which is enclosed is exposed.

The origin of glass was this. In that part of Syria which is called Phoenicia, near to Judea, around the base of Mount Carmel there is a swamp, from which the Belus River springs, flowing five miles to the sea near Egypt, whose sand is cleansed by the raging torrent.

Here is the story: a ship belonging to a merchant of natural soda having been wrecked, men here and there were preparing food on the shore. Since there were no rocks for holding up cooking vessels, they used lumps of soda. These having been burned and mixed with the sand of the shore, translucent rivers of a new liquid flowed forth.

Soon man was not content with the mixture of soda and sand; he tried other mixtures. For when the mixture is heated with light dry wood, copper having been added, lumps are formed in conjoined kilns. Afterward the hot mixture is poured in vessels which are located in workshops; then one figure is formed by blowing, another is smoothed by a wheel, another is engraved in the manner of silver.

It is reported moreover a certain craftsman, in the reign of Tiberius Caesar, to have discovered a tempering of glass that was able to be made flexible and conformable. When that man had been admitted to Caesar, he gave to the Emperor a drinking-vessel which the angry Caesar threw on the ground. The craftsman, however, lifted the cup which had folded itself as if (it were) a bronze vase; then he produced a small hammer and straightened it.

This having been done, Caesar said to the craftsman: "Does any other know this working of glasses?" After that man swearing denied another man to know this, Caesar ordered that man to be beheaded, lest when this thing became known, gold might be held as mud and the price of all metals would be diminished; and rightly, because if glass vases might not be broken, they would be better than gold or silver.

THE VENERABLE BEDE (c. 672-c.735 A. D.)
Latin Library/Christian writers



Rome, in a futile attempt to shore up her struggling home base, had recalled her forces from Britain in 410 A.D. In spite of the chaos which followed, the Christian establishments which had come with Roman civilization were flourishing again by the

time of Bede (c. 672-c.735 A. D.) He spent his scholarly life in the monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow in Northumbria. As the history of the Christian Church written by Eusebius and continued by Rufinius made no mention of the Church in Britain, Bede wrote his most famous work, HISTORIA ECCLESIASTICA BRITANNORUM, with an eye to filling this gap. Like Isidore, he longed to preserve and pass on classical knowledge. Unlike Isidore, he made a careful distinction between fact, hearsay, and probability. Certainly his painstaking attempts at accuracy and his view of history as an interacting of forces foreshadow the best of the modern historians.

VOCABULARY FOR BEDE

- 1) anguilla, anguillae, f-eel (diminutive of anguis)
- 2) attritus, attritus, m-rubbing
- 3) bal(a)ena, ae, f- whale
- 4) coccineus, a, um-scarlet, crimson
- 5) conchylium, i, n-shell-fish
- 6) crepusculum, i, n-evening
- 7) germino-1-sprout
- 8) iacintinus, a, um-violet-blue
- 9) iumentum, iumentum, n pack animal
- 10) prasinus, a, um-green
- 11) prolixus, a, um-extended
- 12) rubicundus, a, um- red, reddish, pink
- 13) rubor, oris, m-redness
- 14) solummodo-only
- 15) succinum, i, n-amber
- 16) transmeo, transmeare, transmeavi, transmeatum-to go over, cross

GRAMMAR HINTS

Bede foreshadows Medieval Latin in the lack of the intricate periodic structure and in the almost modern word order. However, special attention must be paid to case endings of nouns and adjectives and unusual vocabulary. Note that Isidore uses CYPRUM, from the name of the island Cyprus, for "copper," while Bede uses AES.

MAIN TEXT

Britannia Oceani insula, cui quondam Albion nomen fuit, inter septentrionem et occidentem locata est, Germaniae, Galliae, Hispaniae, maximis Europae partibus multo intervallo adversa. Quae per milia passuum octingenta in Boream longa, latitudinis habet milia ducenta, exceptis dumtaxat *prolixioribus* diversorum promonteriorum tractibus, quibus efficitur ut circuitus eius quadrages octies septuaginta quinque milia compleat. Habet a meridie Galliam Belgicam, cuius proximum litus *transmeantibus* aperit civitas quae dicitur Rutubi protus, a gente Anglorum nunc corrupte Reptacaestir vocata. A tergo autem unde oceano infinito patet, Orcadas insulas habet.

Opima frugibus atque arboribus insula, et alendis apta pecoribus ac *iumentis*; vineas etiam quibusdam in locis *germinans*; sed et avium ferax terra marique generis diversi. Fluviis quoque multum piscosis ac fontibus praeclara copiosis, et quidem praecipue salmone abundat et *anguilla*. Capiuntur autem saepissime et

vituli marini et delphines, necnon et *balenae*; exceptis variorum generibus *conchyliorum*, in quibus sunt et musculae, quibus inclusam saepe margaritam omnis quidem coloris optimam inveniunt, id est, et *rubicundi*, et *purpurei*, et *iacintini*, et *prasini*, sed maxime candidi. Sunt et cochleae sati superque abundantes, quibus tinctura *coccinei* coloris conficitur, cuius *rubor* pulcherrimus nullo umquam solis ardore, nulla valet pluviarum iniuria pallescere; sed quo vetustior, eo solet esse venustior.

Habet fontes salinarum, habet et fontes calidos, et ex eis fluvios balnearum calidarum omni aetati et sexui per distincta loca iuxta suum cuique modum accomodos. Aqua enim, ut sanctus Basilius dicit, fervidam qualitatem recipit, cum per certa quaedam metalla transcurrit, et fit non solum calida sed et ardens. Quae etiam venis metallorum aeris, ferri, et plumbi et argenti fecunda, gignit et lapidem gagatem plurimum optimumque; est autem nigrogemmeus et ardens igni admotus, incensus serpentes fugat, *attritu* calefactus applicita detinet aequae ut *sucinum*.

Et quia prope sub ipso septentrionali vertice mundi iacet, lucidas aestate noctes habet;

ita ut medio saepe tempore noctis in quaestionem veniat intuentibus, utrum *crepusculum* adhuc permaneat vespertinum an iam advenerit matutinum, utpote nocturno sole non longe sub terris ad orientem boreales per plagas redeunte; unde etiam plurimae longitudinis habet dies aestate, sicut et noctes contra in bruma, sole nimirum tunc Lybicas in partes secedente, ita est horarum decem et octo; plurimae item brevitatis noctes aestate et dies habet in bruma, hoc est, sex *solummodo* aequinoctialium horarum; cum in Armenia, Macedonia, Italia, ceterisque eiusdem lineae regionibus longissima dies sive nox quindecim, brevissima novem compleat horas.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Bede is eager to introduce Britain to his readers, so he begins with its geography and location. (Consulting a map of Britain might be helpful here.) What does he say is its approximate size? How does he attempt to explain to readers familiar with Belgium?
2. Name three products of the land.
3. Name three types of larger sea creatures that the Britains catch.
4. For what products are the shellfish evidently valued?
5. Medicinal springs were much prized in the ancient world for bathing. What two kinds does Britain have? What other valuable things does Bede say can be found in Britain?
6. In Bede we see in its early stages the shift from measuring hours in twelve equal parts according to the amount of daylight to measuring them in equal units. Bede calls this latter type of measurement "equinox hours", which are the kind we use now. What does this term mean? How does he explain the varying length of the daylight time?

GRAMMAR/WORD USE QUESTIONS

1. The dative of reference is often used in Latin where we would expect a genitive. Translate *INSULA CUI ALBION NOMEN FUIT*.
2. As Latin had no punctuation, sentences as we know them did not end. Verbs often signalled the end of a thought, but a piece of writing was actually one long sentence. For this reason sentences often begin with "which" or "who" used as the subject of a new

statement. For smoother English these words are sometimes translated "this" or "these."
Translate QUAE LAPIDEM GAGATEM GIGNIT. (The word GAGATEM refers to the city of Gages in Asia Minor where jet was reportedly first found.



Spring in Roman Bath, Bath, England
TEACHER'S NOTES FOR BEDE

While Bede holds few grammatical terrors, his vocabulary and his geography can bring on mild insanity.

TRANSLATION:

The island of Britain, for which once the name was Albion, is located between the north and the west, opposite to Germany, France and Spain, the greatest part of Europe, by a great interval. It (extends) into the North through 800 long miles, and has 200 miles of width, only the wider regions of diverse headlands having been excepted, by which it comes about that its circumference fulfils 48 times 75 miles (i.e. 3600 miles--an odd

measurement Bede evidently got from Solinus). It has on the south Belgian Gaul; to those traveling upon this land's nearest shore is evident the city which is called the port of Rutubus, now by the race of the Angles corruptly called Reptacaestir. At the back, from which the unending ocean extends, it has the Orkney Islands.

The island is rich in crops and trees, and suitable for nourishing cattle and beasts of burden; growing vines also in certain places but also productive of birds and different kinds of land and sea life. Also outstanding in rivers very full of fish and in plentiful springs, it also abounds especially in salmon and eels. Very often sea-cows and dolphins are captured, and also whales; in addition to (besides) various kinds of shell-fish among which are mussels in which often indeed they find enclosed a very fine pearl of one of many colors: that is, pink, purple, blue, and green, but especially white. There are also cockles abundant enough and over from which is made a dye of crimson color, whose beautiful red color by no heat of the sun, no injury of the rain is able to pale; but by however much it is older, by that much it is accustomed to be more beautiful.

It has springs of salt water; it has also hot springs and from these rivers of hot bathing water suitable to every age and sex in different places according to the requirements of each. For the water, as Saint Basil says, receives its heated quality when it runs across certain metals and becomes not only hot but burning. Which (island), rich in veins of metal, of copper, iron, lead and silver, produces very many and very fine Gages stones(jet); this is a (lustrous) black stone moreover that when moved sparkles with fire; burned, it puts serpents to flight;having been warmed by rubbing it holds things applied to it equally as amber. (evidently by electric attraction)

And because it lies near under the very northern top(pole) of the world, it has light nights in summer; so that often in the middle of the night it may come into question to those watching whether the evening darkness may remain or already the morning may be coming as the nightly sun is not far under the lands returning to the northeast through these regions; from which also it has days of very great length in summer just as the nights are on the other hand, in winter; then the sun too much withdrawing into the Lybican parts (South); that is, 18 hours (as measured at the equinox); likewise it has very many nights of brevity in summer and days in winter; this is only six of the equinox hours; although in Armenia, Macedonia, Italy and the other regions along the same line(latitude) the very longest day has 15 hours, the shortest, 9.

ALCUIN OF YORK (ca. 735-804)

Latin Library/ Christian Latin





In the fifth and sixth centuries the Germanic tribes had conquered Italy; the Visigoths, Spain; the Franks, Gaul and the Angles and Saxons, England. The great Roman Empire in these lands continued to exist only in the minds of men. Durant says that after the Teutonic victory at Deorham in 577 most Britons accepted the conquest and intermarried with the conquerors. Economy, law, education, and all other aspects of life largely reverted to the primitive. Converting the conquerors to Christianity, which was still Roman-based, led to gradual improvement. Monastic schools established at Wearmouth and York helped make England the leader of European learning north of the Alps.

Alcuin, born to a noble Northumbrian family, was sent to the Cathedral school at York. A brilliant scholar, he helped build up the Minster library and was put in charge of building the great new church. In 778 he went to Rome, where the Pope conferred an archbishops' *pallium* on him. While returning to England he met Charlemagne, King of the Franks, at Parma, and Charlemagne persuaded him to come to Aachen and take charge of his palace school.

In France, as in England, the victorious barbarians had intermarried with what remained of the Gallo-Roman senatorial class, but this had become a nobility of force, relishing war and scorning letters. Durant states that by 600 literacy had become a luxury of the clergy and science was almost extinct. Raby says that in Alcuin Charlemagne had found the man he needed—a master of learning who could educate his clergy and his court. Though he felt great reluctance at leaving his homeland, Alcuin went to Aachen, and taught eager scholars, the chief of whom was Emperor Charlemagne himself.

Charlemagne later appointed him abbot of the Monastery of St. Martin at Tours. Raby credits Alcuin's work with raising the level of education in Western Europe. Remembering that he was also trying to raise the level of the surface Christianity of the new western leaders, perhaps we can forgive him for enclosing a sermon in most of his work.

Alcuin wrote many letters and some prose; his *Vita S. Willibrordi* was written in poetry and then recast in prose, but most of his work was in poetry. *De Sanctis Euboricensis Ecclesiae* is probably his most imposing work, but his charm lies in his occasional poetry, which is written mainly in elegiacs reminiscent of Ovid and Virgil.

VOCABULARY FOR ALCUIN

- 1) almus, alma, almus-nourishing, supporting, refreshing
- 2) ci(e)o, cire, civi, citum-to move, to incite
- 3) dextra, ae, f-the hand, the right hand
- 4) furvus, furva, furvum – dark, gloomy
- 5) iuventus, iuventutis, f-youth, young persons
- 6) luscinia, ae,f-the nightingale
- 7) melos, meli, n(Greek word borrowed by Horace)-a tune
- 8) merces, mercedis, f-reward, pay
- 9) moestus, moesta, moestum-- sorrowful
- 10) noverca, ae,f-the newcomer, the step-mother
- 11) oda(e), odae, f-song, ode
- 12) plango, plangere, planxi, planctum-to lament, grieve, bewail
- 13) segnities, ei, f – inactivity, rest
- 14) sperno, spernere, spreui, spretum- to reject, despise, scorn

The Lost Nightingale

NB. Alcuin is using the elegiac couplet.

The nightingale, herald of the dawn, was revered in medieval thought. This plain little bird with a beautiful voice was believed to work hard all night warming her eggs or her chicks under her breast, and to sweeten the long labor with her song.

**Quae te *dextra* mihi rapuit, *luscinia*, *ruscis*,
illa meae fuerat invida laetitiae.
Tu mea dulcisonis implesti pectora musis,
atque animum *moestum* carmine mellifluo.
Quapropter veniant volucrum simul undique coetus, **5**
 carmine te mecum plangere Pierio. **I****

Spreta colore tamen fueras non spreta canendo;
lata sub angusto gutture vox sonuit,
dulce *melos* iterans vario modulamine Musae,
atque creatorem semper in ore canens. **10**

Noctibus in *furvis* nusquam cessavit ab odis
vox veneranda sacris, o decus atque decor.
Quid mirum cherubim, seraphim si voce tonantem **II**
perpetua laudent, dum tua sic potuit?

Felix o nimium, Dominum noctemque diemque 15
qui studio tali semper in ore canit.
Non cibus atque potus fuerat tibi dulcior odis,
alterius volucrum nec sociale iugum.
Hoc natura dedit, naturae et conditor almus,
quem tu laudasti vocibus assiduis, 20
ut nos instrueres vino somnoque sepultos III
somnigeram mentis rumpere *segnitiem*.
Quod tu fecisti, rationis et inscia sensus,
indice natura nobiliore satis,
sensibus hoc omnes magna et ratione vigentes 25
gessissent aliquid tempus in ore suo.
Maxima laudanti *merces* in saecula manebit
aeternum regem perpes in arce poli.

- I. Pierian means “pertaining to the Muses.” Some sources say Pierus was father of the Muses; others say the adjective refers to Mt. Pierus and its spring.
- II. Cherubim and seraphim were two groups of ancient Hebrew heavenly beings.
- III. This is an echo of the *Aeneid*, Book II, line 265.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. In these poems Alcuin uses the elegiac couplet. Scan the first four lines of “The Lost Nightingale.”
2. For what is the nightingale praised?
3. In what way is she common and ordinary?
4. Break into basic parts *dulcisonis*, line 3 and *somnigeram*, line 22. Define them.
5. Discuss the blending of pagan and Christian images: *Pierio*, *Musae*, *Dominum*.
6. In lines 19-21, what does the nightingale do for man?
7. Could you call Alcuin a pantheist? Why or why not?



This section is separated from the previous ones by the collapse of civilization and the slow and tortuous gathering of its remnants. Some student reports on the history and culture of the early Middle Ages would be valuable.

Translation:

The Lost Nightingale

What hand snatched you from me, nightingale,
that one who envied my joy.
You filled my heart with your sweet-sounding song,
and my sad spirit with your honey-sweet music.
Therefore a crowd of birds comes now on all sides
to lament you with me in Pierian song.
Though scorned for your color you were not scorned for your singing;
a wide song poured forth from that narrow throat,
a sweet tune going forth in the varied harmonies of the Muse,
and always singing the creator in your throat.
In the dark nights never from the sacred odes
did your worshipping voice cease, o charm and virtue.
What wonder that the cherubim, if the seraphim praise
with an unending voice, when yours is so able?
Oh too fortunate one who night and day
always praises the Lord eagerly with such a voice.
No food and drink had been sweeter to you than song
Nor social union with another birds.
Nature gave this, and the nourishing founder of nature,
whom you have praised with never-ceasing voice
so that you might instruct those buried in sleep and wine
to break the inertia of a dreaming mind.
This you have done, ignorant of sense and reason,
by nature, enough nobler as a witness,
than all those flourishing in senses and great reason
had carried on some time in their voices.
The greatest eternal reward will remain in praising
the eternal king through the ages in the citadel of heaven

Einhard the Frank (ca. 775-840)

[The Latin Library/ Medieval](#)



Einhard (also Eginhard or Einhart), a courtier in the court of Charlemagne and his son Louis the Pious, was a dedicated servant of both. Einhard wrote numerous works, the most famous of which is his *Vita Karoli Magni*, "The Life of Charlemagne" written at the request of Louis the Pious between 817 and 836. Einhard's literary model was Suetonius, but unlike Suetonius he praised his subject extensively, saying he was debtor to Charlemagne in life and death. Also unlike Suetonius, he takes care either to exculpate Charlemagne in doubtful matters or to gloss over entirely anything that the Carolingian family might find embarrassing. In spite of this he seems to give a fairly accurate description of events. Certainly Charlemagne's efforts to promote education in an era not noted for it are admirable. Dahmus quotes Einhard as saying that while eating Charlemagne often heard a reader, being especially fond of history and of St. Augustine. However, Curtius quotes Einhard as scorning those who do not consider the present worthy of study, as a blend of past and present is most educational. Einhard was an intimate friend of Charlemagne, but held no office under him. After the death of Charlemagne in 814, his son Louis the Pious made Einhard his secretary.

VOCABULARY FOR EINHARD

1. cervical, -calis, n -- pillow
2. codicelli, orum, m – sheets for writing
3. diaconis, i, m- minister of the church
4. dialectica, ae, f -- logic
5. rethorica (rhetorica) , ae, f – public speaking
6. dicaculus , a, um – witty, sarcastic
7. facundus, a, um -- eloquent
8. peregrinus, a, um -- foreign
9. praeposterus, a, um – badly timed
10. sagax, sagacis –sharp, perceptive
11. computo (computo)- 1 – to count, compute
12. edisco, ediscere, edidici – to learn by heart, learn thoroughly
13. impertio (impertio), impertire – to assign to, give to
14. rimor, rimari, rimatus sum – search diligently, pry into

EINHARDI VITA KAROLI MAGNI

[25] Erat eloquentia copiosus et exuberans poteratque quicquid vellet apertissime exprimere. Nec patrio tantum sermone contentus, etiam *peregrinis* linguis *ediscendis*

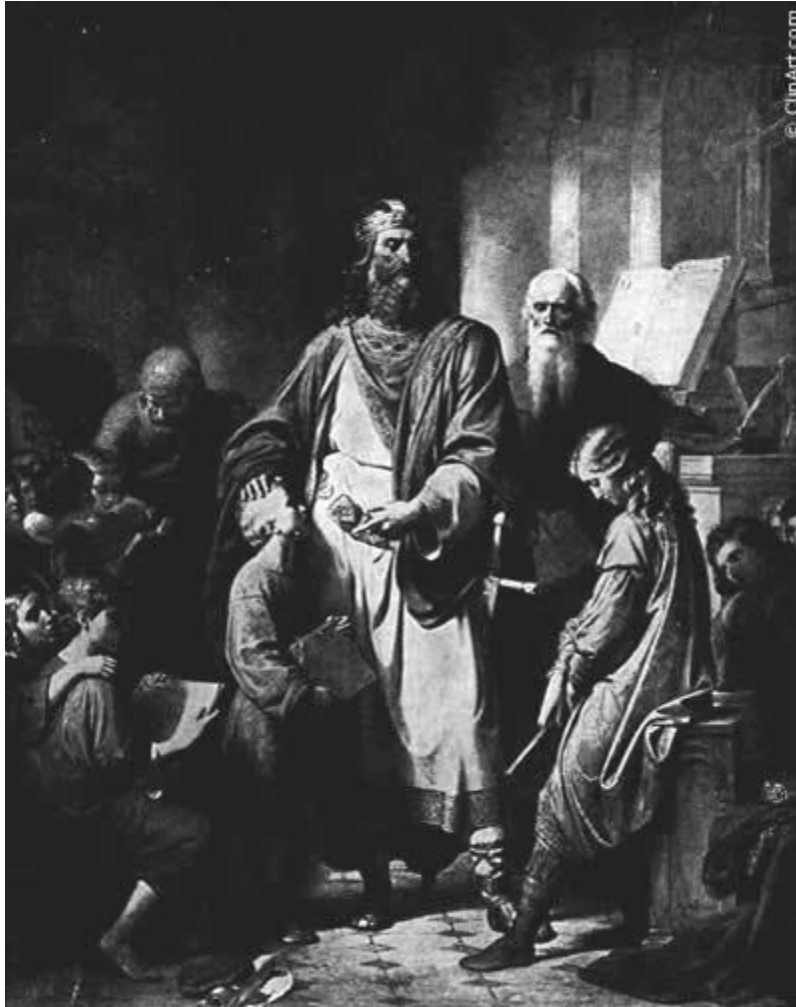
operam impendit. In quibus Latinam ita didicit, ut aequae illa ac patria lingua orare sit solitus, Graecam vero melius intellegere quam pronuntiare poterat. Adeo quidem **facundus** erat, ut etiam **dicaculus** appareret.

Artes liberales studiosissime coluit, earumque doctores plurimum veneratus magnis adficebat honoribus. In discenda grammatica Petrum Pisanum **diaconem** senem audivit, in ceteris disciplinis Albinum cognomento Alcoinum, item **diaconem**, de Britannia Saxonici generis hominem, virum undecumque doctissimum, praeceptorem habuit, apud quem et **rethoricae** et **dialecticae**, praecipue tamen astronomiae **ediscendae** plurimum et temporis et laboris **impertivit**. Discebat artem **computandi** et intentione **sagaci** siderum cursum curiosissime **rimabatur**.

Temptabat et scribere tabulasque et **codicellos** ad hoc in lecto sub **cervicalibus** circumferre solebat, ut, cum vacuum tempus esset, manum litteris effigiendis adsuesceret, sed parum successit labor **praeposterus** ac sero inchoatus.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What kind of speaker was Charlemagne?
2. Did he learn easily?
3. Did he like to learn?
4. Who were his principal teachers?
5. What did he attempt to do with only limited success? What does Einhard give as a reason for this?



Charlemagne with Scholars

TEACHER'S NOTES

(Charles) had abundant and enthusiastic eloquence, and could express whatever wished to say very clearly. He was not content with command of his native language only; he also gave attention to the study of foreign ones. Among these he learned Latin so well that he could speak it as well as his native tongue; but he could understand Greek better than he could speak it. He was so eloquent, indeed, that he even appeared witty.

He very eagerly cultivated the liberal arts, having held their teachers in great esteem, supplied them with great honors. He took lessons in grammar from the elderly churchman Peter of Pisa. In other studies another churchman, Albin of Britain, surnamed Alcuin, a man of Saxon descent, who was the greatest scholar of the day, was his teacher; with him (Charles) gave much time and labor (to) studying both rhetoric and logic, and especially astronomy. He learned the art of computing (counting), and used to investigate the motions of the heavenly bodies most curiously, with an intelligent scrutiny.

He also tried to write, and used to keep tablets and writing materials near him in bed under his pillow, that when there was leisure time he might accustom his hand to form the letters; however, but the badly- timed labor begun (so) late accomplished very little .

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