

CARMINA SPOLIATA

LATE-ANTIQUÉ INSCRIPTIONAL VERSE IN THE POETRY OF BEDE

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PERHAPS SENSING THE imminence of his own mortality, at the end of his *magnum opus*, the *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, the Venerable Bede took stock of his accomplishments with a list of the works he had completed over the course of an enormously productive lifetime. Among the many surviving exegetical and theological texts included in this list, Bede also numbered a *librum epigrammatum heroico metro siue elegiaco* (book of epigrams in hexameter or elegiac verse).¹ It had long been assumed that this *Liber Epigrammatum* was utterly lost. In 1975, however, Michael Lapidge argued convincingly that several items likely belonging to this work were included in a collection of inscriptions compiled by or for Milred, Bishop of Worcester (d. 774/5).² We know of Milred's epigraphic sylloge thanks to the antiquarian curiosity of John Leland (d. 1552), who partially transcribed its contents out of an *antiquissimum codex epigrammaton* he found at Malmesbury,³ and to the discovery of a fragment in the University of Illinois Library at Urbana of the very codex that Leland consulted (the so-called "Urbana Sylloge").⁴ In his transcript, Leland listed a number of poems attributed explicitly to Bede, including an epigram on Jerome's treatise on Isaiah, various *aenigmata*, dedicatory *tituli* for a church of St. Michael and a church of St. Mary, verses inscribed on the portico of the church of St. Mary at Hexham, and a *titulus* for an apse in a church erected by Bishop Cyneberht. Although Leland recorded only the headings to the majority of these poems,

1 Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 5.24.2.

2 Lapidge, "Some Remnants," 798–820.

3 Leland, *Joannis Lelandi Antiquarii de rebus britannicis collectanea*, 114; Leland, *Commentarii*, 134. For an edition of Leland's transcript, see Lapidge, "Some Remnants," 802–20.

4 For the contents of this fragment, see Wallach, "The Urbana Anglo-Saxon Sylloge," 138–47.

their titles alone demonstrate that Bede, like Aldhelm a generation earlier in the *Carmina Ecclesiastica*,⁵ was interested in the production of native verse modelled consciously on an earlier tradition of Roman epigraphic poetry.

Bede's interest in this genre of poetry raises the question to what degree he was himself familiar with individual examples of Roman and Roman-style inscriptions. His inclusion in the *Historia ecclesiastica* of the epitaphs of Wilfrid, Bishop of York, Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury, Cædwalla, King of the West Saxons, and Pope Gregory the Great, show that he was acquainted with several such examples.⁶ But how broad was his knowledge of this body of verse, and in what ways might it have exerted an influence upon his own compositions? Such a question has never been directly addressed. In seeking to answer it, this chapter argues that Bede both knew and utilized a range of Roman inscriptions more substantial than hitherto suspected. Moreover, and perhaps most significantly, it will show that he did so in a way that revises prior assumptions about how early medieval English authors encountered and appropriated Roman epigraphic verse for their own purposes. Far from resulting in the genre-constrained production of yet further epigrams or inscriptions, Bede's engagement with this material reveals how it flowed into his larger poetic world to generate broader possibilities and relationships.⁷

In contrast to some of the work conducted on Aldhelm,⁸ the extent of the influence of Roman epigraphic poetry on Bede's metrical works remains almost entirely unstudied. Scholars have so far identified only a very small number of cases where Bede demonstrates knowledge of such sources. In his important edition of the metrical life of St. Cuthbert, for instance, Wer-

5 For the suggestion that Aldhelm was inspired by the monumental *tituli* of Pope Damasus when composing the *Carmina ecclesiastica*, see Lapidge, "The Career of Aldhelm," 53–58.

6 Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 5.19.14, 5.8.2, 5.7.2, and 2.1.10.

7 In identifying discreet correspondences between various Roman inscriptions and Bede's Latin poetry, I have adopted a methodology that privileges overall at least three distinct lexical points of contact. Where only two points of convergence are witnessed, I supply additional evidence supportive of the suggested relationship. I have excluded outright from consideration examples of textual influence or borrowing where the elements concerned are shared by a plurality of texts across the broader Latin corpus and are thus too diffuse to be of merit to the present study. In short, I have tried to be careful in pairing texts whose relationship with one another is unique or at most shared with a very small number of other sources.

8 On Aldhelm's knowledge of Roman inscriptions, see Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 203–12; Story, "Aldhelm," 8–20; and Lapidge, "The Career of Aldhelm," 53–64.

ner Jaager observes that Bede incorporates at various points elements from two of Pope Damasus' *epigrammata*.⁹ Yet Bede's debt to Roman epigraphic verse extends beyond the monumental poetry of Damasus, and it is possible to detect both in the *Vita Metrica S. Cudberti* (hereafter *VMC*) and elsewhere correspondences to at least seven further inscriptions.¹⁰

While narrating Cuthbert's posthumous healing of Felgild, an anchorite of Lindisfarne, for example, Bede draws from the mosaic *titulus* of Felix IV (d. 530) for that pope's dedication of the basilica of Cosmas and Damian:¹¹

Titulus of the Basilica of Cosmas and Damian
Martyribus medicis populo *spes certa salutis*.

VMC 46.952
Partiri docuit fide
spes certa salutis.¹²

In this dedication, still extant *in situ* today, Felix plays subtly and effectively upon the multiple identities of his titular saints. On the one hand, the brothers Cosmas and Damian were indeed physicians (*medicis*), serving during their mortal life to heal disease and restore the sick to health. Now, through their holy merits as saints and martyrs, they bear to the people (in Felix's church) the sure hope of health (*spes certa salutis*), which in its realest form is Christ's salvation, an eternal healing that far surpasses the remedy of any earthly doctor.

Bede, clearly alive to the conceit at work in his source, likewise casts his subject in the role of physical and spiritual healer, albeit from the inverse perspective. Previously, he had described how Cuthbert laboured during his earthly ministry to apply the eternal salve of Christ's redemption, throwing open for the people the way to the celestial kingdom through admonitions and the healing waters of salvation, that is, baptism: "iussis limphisque salutis / Pandit iter populis coeli per regna vocandis" (Cuthbert, by means of admonitions and the waters of baptism, reveals the way for the people to be called to the kingdom of heaven).¹³ Now, in death (as Cosmas and Damian did in life), Bede associates him with the certain hope of health (*spes certa*

⁹ Jaager, *Bedas Metrische Vita*, 68, note to line 140; 112, note to line 708.

¹⁰ All references to the *Vita Metrica S. Cudberti* (hereafter *VMC*) are from the text as edited by Lapidge in Bede, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 184–314.

¹¹ de Rossi, *Inscriptiones Christianae*, 2:6.41.3

¹² This phrase is found in Ausonius, *Versus paschales* 22, but Bede is almost certainly drawing upon the Roman epigram here, as both verses operate explicitly in the context of martyrs and saints healing people of their physical ailments through proximity to their holy bodies and relics.

¹³ *VMC* 10.309–10.

salutis), showing the way to corporeal healing to those in his community.¹⁴ Cuthbert's figuration as a physio-spiritual physician is compounded further here by the description of his instructions to Felgild as *salutiferi documenta vigoris* (lessons of healing strength),¹⁵ which in its immediate context might be read as a doctor's instructions to his patient, as well as by the characterization of his relics as medicine (*medicamina*), which drive illness from the body.¹⁶ Both Felix's and Bede's verses thus operate in the context of the martyrs' and saints' healing of the faithful through proximity to their numinous bodies and relics, of saints who are physicians not only of the soul but of the body as well.

Bede may also be playing with this same source and its theme of spiritual health in his *Versus de Die Iudicii*:

Haec est sola salus animae et spes certa "olente:
uulnera cum lacrimis medico reserare superno,
qui solet allisos sanare et soluere uinctos.

This is the only salvation of the soul and the certain hope for someone in mourning: tearfully to open up the wounds before the heavenly Physician Who is accustomed to cure those in danger and to release those in bonds.¹⁷

There, instead of *spes certa salutis*, Bede writes *sola salus animae et spes certa "olente*, referring to the laying bare of one's sins before Christ, the *medico superno* (Heavenly Physician) who heals the broken and sets free the bound. Of course, it is not always possible to detect a clear intention in Bede's engagement with his epigraphic sources. But this example is particularly illustrative of how his remembered reading is capable of lending itself to conscious and dynamic adaption of material thematically and contextually suited to his purpose.

Into his metrical life of Cuthbert Bede appears to have incorporated two further inscriptions, both of which survive in the so-called Cambridge Sylloge,¹⁸ a collection with strong English connections that may have circu-

14 It is the personified *spes certa salutis*, whether to be identified here with Cuthbert himself or Christ as grace operating to glorify Cuthbert's merits, that inspires the anchorite Felgild to remove a wall covering belonging to the saint and teaches him how to prepare it for medicinal application.

15 *VMC* 46.945.

16 *VMC* 44.906. The relics in question here are strips of the same calfskin veil from which Feldgild received healing of a facial tumour in *VMC* 46.944–59.

17 Bede, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 160, ll. 22–24.

18 For an edition of this collection, see Silvagni, "La silloge," 84–112.

lated as part of the eighth-century sylloge attributed to Milred of Worcester,¹⁹ and which derive ultimately from Old St. Peter's in Rome. The first of these, the epitaph of Benedict II (d. 685),²⁰ he adapted to describe Cuthbert in terms very similar to the late Roman pontiff:

Epitaph of Benedict II

Fulguris in specimen mentis splendore coruscas.

VMC 22.557

Mente manu fulget Cuthbertus et ore coruscus.

Like Benedict, Cuthbert appears resplendent (*coruscus*), shining forth in the virtue of his mind (*mente*). Where Bede has altered his source, moreover, it is to multiply the spheres of action in which Cuthbert's virtue so brilliantly gleams, adding deed and word (*manu et ore*) to the saint's panoply of distinction. Strengthening the case for Bede's knowledge of this inscription, a further lexical correspondence with Benedict's epitaph can be observed in the description of the fame of Cuthbert's character (*Virtutum titulis*) that concludes this same section of Bede's poem:

Epitaph of Benedict II

Virtutum titulis o decus atque dolor.

VMC 22.562

Virtutum titulis auget miracula mentis.

Here the *Virtutum titulis* with which Cuthbert enlarges the work of his miracles strongly echoes that which Benedict is said to leave as a lasting memorial for his people.²¹ It may be that Bede was inspired by Benedict's example to think of Cuthbert's virtue in similar terms, as a durable monument strengthening the testimony of his miracles and setting a pattern for his own flock.

¹⁹ See below, pp. 186–89.

²⁰ Silvagni, "La silloge," 104, no. 31.3. This line of Benedict II's epitaph was also known to the author(s) of the *Miracula Nynie Episcopi*. See *Miracula Nynie Episcopi* 4.86 and compare the following correspondences: "Fulguris in specimen mentis splendore coruscas"; MNE 4.86: "Quo pater omni evo mentis splendore coruscans."

²¹ Silvagni, "La silloge," 104, no. 31.1–2: "Magne tuis benedicte pater monimenta relinquis / Virtutum titulis o decus atque dolor."

Bede appears to have employed the second inscription, an epigram of Symmachus in elegiac distichs pertaining to the Vatican baptistery,²² as follows:

Epigram of Symmachus

Iam cui siderei commisit *limina regni*.

VMC 30.644

Aurea ne rutili penetres cum *limina regni*.

While Bede's verse demonstrates only limited correspondences to Symmachus' poem, sharing here only the two words and their terminal positioning in common, his knowledge of the Roman inscription is rendered more probable by the fact that the phrase *limina regni* appears only once elsewhere prior to Bede, in the *Thyestes* of Seneca, a work that does not appear to have been known in early medieval England.²³ Moreover, both verses are concerned with the same object, that of entry through the threshold of the heavenly kingdom.

It is just possible that Bede also knew the epitaph of John II (d. 535), an inscription likewise preserved in the Cambridge Sylloge and originating from Old St. Peter's:²⁴

Epitaph of John II

Qui gratus *populis* et celso dignus *honore*

Sumpsisti meritis *pontificale decus*.

VMC 37.812

Pontificale decus plebisque instaurat *honorem*.

Here he appears to have collapsed the original elegiac distich of his source into one compact hexameter and substituted the word (*populis*) for one of comparable meaning (*plebis*). The appearance of the signal phrase *pontificale decus* in these lines of John's epitaph is not sufficient alone to show that Bede knew and used this source, as it is a term that may be found in a number of other earlier works. Taken together with the additional occurrence of *populis* and *honore*, however, it is clear that he would have found in this couplet most of the elements which populate his own verse, a circumstance which makes his knowledge of the inscription at least plausible.

²² Silvagni, "La silloge," 92, no. 13.7.

²³ Evidence for knowledge of Seneca's tragedies in this period is extremely slight and limited to Aldhelm's quotation of two lines from the *Agamemnon* in his *De pedum regulis* (see Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, 93–95).

²⁴ Silvagni, "La silloge," 101, no. 28.5–6.

Far less ambiguous is Bede's incorporation, in the opening line of his metrical paraphrase of Psalm 83,²⁵ of a rare inscription preserved in the Urbana Sylloge and belonging to an unidentified basilica of St. Paul:²⁶

Urbana Sylloge

Serva, Paule, *tui veneranda sacraria temple.*

Metrical Version of Psalm 83.1

Quam dilecta *tui fulgent sacraria templi.*

The first two words of Bede's line belong, of course, to the opening of Psalm 83 in the Vulgate, but most of what remains he has taken from the Roman inscription. De Rossi conjectured that this inscription had been set beneath an image of the Apostle Paul,²⁷ but the heading in the Urbana Sylloge identifies it as belonging to an altar. Interestingly, it is witnessed only once elsewhere outside of the Urbana fragment, in the now lost Saint-Bertin manuscript from which André Duchesne edited a great many poems of Alcuin in 1617.²⁸ Patrick Sims-Williams has suggested that the Saint-Bertin manuscript (consisting both of Alcuin's genuine poems and others that were known to him) was put together shortly after his death in the early ninth century.²⁹ If it indeed contains material that Alcuin knew and drew upon in composing his own poetry,³⁰ it is tempting to imagine that the inscription under consideration came to him through a copy of Milred's sylloge, of which the Urbana fragment is a tenth-century copy.³¹ On the other hand, Bede's knowledge and use of the same inscription confirms that some of the materials included in Milred's collection were available in Northumbria no later than 735.³²

25 Bede, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 344–45.

26 Wallach, "The Urbana Anglo-Saxon Sylloge," 142, no. 10.3.

27 de Rossi, *Inscriptiones Christianae*, 2, 285n.3–4.

28 Sims-Williams, "William of Malmesbury," 23.

29 Sims-Williams, "Milred of Worcester's Collection of Latin Epigrams," 35.

30 Schaller, "Bemerkungen," 15.

31 Alcuin's use in *Carmen* 99 of Bishop Cuthbert's epitaph for the common tomb of the nobles of Hereford, a text transmitted uniquely in Milred's sylloge, in fact makes this scenario quite plausible. See Lapidge, "Some Remnants," 813, no. 21.5, and compare the following correspondences in Alcuin, *Carmina* 99.13.17: "*Hos ego Cudbertus sacri successor honoris*"; (*Carm.* 99.13.7) "*Hoc Ato non suffert, Aperi successor honoris.*"

32 This reality makes it at least possible that the inscription came to Alcuin's notice

Finally, Bede appears to have known a small handful of inscriptions otherwise unattested in the early medieval syllogae. In the space of fewer than two hundred lines near the end of his metrical life of Cuthbert, he appears to quote from two such poems, the epitaph of the martyr Abbot Vincentius of León (d. 630),³³ and the epitaph of St. Florentinus (d. 553),³⁴ first abbot of the monastery founded by St. Aurelian at Arles:

Epitaph of Vincentius, Florentinus
Raptus aetereas subito sic venit ad auras.

VMC 31.679
 Quo sacer aetherias raptum cernebat ad auras.

In the prefatory epigram to his *Expositio Apocalypseos*,³⁵ Bede may have also drawn from the now lost epitaph of Aurelius, Bishop of Ridditio in Armenia (d. 475),³⁶ who spent the rest of his days in Milan after returning Bishop Dionysius' remains to that city:

Epitaph of Aurelius
 Aurelius penetrans regna beata poli.

Exp. Apoc., praefatio 10
 Cum duce percipiet regna beata polo.

The burden of proof is arguably much heavier in these cases where evidence for transmission in medieval syllogae is lacking. The case for Bede's knowledge of these verses can be strengthened, however, by noting the thematic context which many of them share with the relevant lines in his own poetry. It is significant, for example, that Bede employs the line of Vincentius' epitaph, originally describing the martyr's rapture at death to the spiritual realm, to likewise depict the rapture of a soul into heaven. Similarly, in both Florentinus' epitaph and line 815 of Bede's metrical life of Cuthbert, the phrase *de sede beati* functions in the context of deposited or exhumed funereal remains. This is certainly not the only time, moreover, that an Anglo-Latin poet demonstrates knowledge of such obscure inscriptions. As Orchard has shown, Aldhelm clearly knew at least two inscriptions that

and thence into the Saint-Bertin manuscript through channels other than those emanating from Milred's circle in the middle of the eighth century.

33 Diehl, *Inscriptiones Latinae*, 1:1645.8.

34 Diehl, *Inscriptiones Latinae*, 1:1644.25.

35 Bede, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, 326–29.

36 Diehl, *Inscriptiones Latinae*, 1:1043.2

have left no trace in the extant medieval syllogae, one from the church of St. Felix near Nola and the other from a church in Spoleto,³⁷ though it cannot be known whether his documented trip to Rome took him to these sites where he might have seen them firsthand,³⁸ or whether he accessed them through a now lost collection. Certainly, no one can suppose that the surviving syllogae represent the totality of what would have been available to either Aldhelm or Bede.

Unlike Aldhelm, though, Bede never left his community at Wearmouth-Jarrow to travel abroad. This means that he could not have experienced any of the inscriptions so far discussed as a firsthand witness. How, then, did he come to know them? Perhaps the simplest explanation is that he encountered these texts in one or more of the collections of Roman inscriptions that were circulating both on the Continent and in England at the time. Such collections represent the coalescence of smaller clusters of pilgrim-sourced inscriptions taken from a broad variety of Rome's holy sites, including the major intra- and extra-mural basilicas, numerous catacombs, and prominent areas of St. Peter's in the Vatican. While some were compiled as late as the ninth or tenth century, most of these compilations first took shape in the course of the seventh century. One of the earliest and most important of these is known as the *Sylloge Laureshamensis IV*, one of four distinct groupings of Roman and Italian inscriptions (collectively known as the *Corpus Laureshamensis*) preserved in Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. lat. 833, fols. 55v–82r.³⁹ Copied at Lorsch in the first half of the ninth century, its robust gathering of some one-hundred and four inscriptions belongs to a lost *libellus* originally compiled no later than the seventh century.⁴⁰ Another early collection, enlarged at Tours ca. 670–676 and thus known as the *Sylloge Turonensis*,⁴¹ contains a group of forty-two items, the first thirty-seven

37 Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 210. To these two identifications a third may be added: the sixth-century epitaph of one Petrus, *vir clarissimus*, from Salerno. See Diehl, *Inscriptiones Latinae*, 1:170.3, and compare the following correspondences in Aldhelm, *Carmen de virginitate* 1962: “clausisti subito *crudeli funere vitam*”; (*CdV* 1962) “Nam dicto citius *crudeli funere vitam*.”

38 Lapidge, “The Career of Aldhelm,” 52.

39 de Rossi, *Inscriptiones Christianae*, 2:8. For a detailed argument on the dating of each of the four epigraphic collections in the *Corpus Laureshamensis*, see Franklin, “The Epigraphic Syllogae,” 975–90.

40 de Rossi, *Inscriptiones Christianae*, 2, 97; Trout, *Damasus of Rome*, 64.

41 de Rossi, *Inscriptiones Christianae*, 2:6. This collection now survives in two late-medieval witnesses, Klosterneuburg, Stiftsbibliothek, 723 (saec. xii), fols. 264^v–269^r, and Göttweig, Stiftsbibliothek, 64 (saec. xiii), fols. 163^v–169^v.

of which represent a topographically arranged booklet of inscriptions from Roman churches similarly put together before the middle of the seventh century.⁴²

Writing in 1921, Angelo Silvagni controversially argued that these two syllogae are not in fact independent compilations, but rather contain each in part the contents of a single unified seventh-century collection. Moreover, he ascribed the assembly of this prototypical collection to a learned early medieval English pilgrim.⁴³ While Silvagni's thesis has been seriously questioned,⁴⁴ it is nevertheless true that the early medieval English were aware of and maintained a definite interest in epigraphic collections from a very early period. Nor, indeed, is the list of pilgrims or travellers capable of producing such syllogae lacking in names. Aldhelm's presence in Rome, combined with his demonstrable interest in epigraphic verse, has rendered him to some a very attractive candidate for the transmission of several important inscriptions.⁴⁵ Another likely vector might be the London priest Nothelm, who later served as Archbishop of Canterbury from 735–739. Bede tells us that it was Nothelm who obtained for him in Rome copies of the letters of Gregory the Great and of other popes.⁴⁶ There is no reason why it could not also have been this same source that provided Bede with copies of Gregory's epitaph and that of Cædwalla for inclusion in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in addition to other inscriptions from Rome's holy sites. However, the reality is that there were many early medieval English travellers, men and women alike, who could just as easily have brought these collections of inscriptions back from Italy.⁴⁷

Regardless of who brought them back, there is material evidence that coherent collections of inscriptions were circulating in England by at least the eighth century. As demonstrated by the epigram which prefaces it, one of the earliest such collections was compiled by or for Milred, Bishop

42 Sharpe, "King Ceadwalla's Roman Epitaph," 1:173.

43 Silvagni, *Inscriptiones Christianae*, 1, xxv–xxvii; Silvagni, "Nuovo ordinamento delle sillogi epigrafiche di Roma."

44 Sharpe, "King Ceadwalla's Roman Epitaph," 1:175.

45 See Lapidge, "The Career of Aldhelm," 60–61; Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 211–12.

46 Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, Praef. 2.

47 See Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 5.7. Writing in the context of the death of King Cædwalla of Wessex (d. 689), Bede records that at this time a great many English men and women from all ranks and walks of life alike eagerly desired to make the pilgrimage to Rome.

of Worcester from 745–775.⁴⁸ As noted above, Milred’s collection survives largely thanks to the antiquarian John Leland, who made a transcript of it during his larger quest for British antiquities in the libraries of England.⁴⁹ Writing in his *Collectanea*, Leland describes the book as an “antiquissimum codex epigrammaton,”⁵⁰ and elsewhere notes that he discovered it at Malmesbury.⁵¹ Leland’s transcription is unfortunately not complete, giving in some cases only the titles or headings of certain poems, but it is sufficiently full to give us a picture of some of Milred’s poetic interests. In addition to the epigrams attributed to Bede, its contents include several dedicatory epigrams and a series of epitaphs for early medieval English clerics. Except for a few outliers, such as an epigram commemorating the gift of a veil by the Visigothic King Chintila to St. Peter’s,⁵² or a poem on an oratory to St. Patrick attributed to Cellanus of Péronne,⁵³ Leland’s excerpts give the impression of a collection focused largely along local, English lines of interest.⁵⁴

Among these items, Milred’s sylloge also contained two rare poems by Cuthbert, Bishop of Hereford (736–740), one celebrating the completion of a cross-cloth begun by his predecessor Walhstod,⁵⁵ and the other an epitaph for the common tomb of bishops and nobles of Hereford.⁵⁶ These poems, together with another epigram bearing the title *Epitaphium Bedae*,⁵⁷ are of special interest insofar as they appear elsewhere only in William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta pontificum Anglorum* and *De gestis regum Anglorum*.⁵⁸ In quoting the Cuthbert poems in his *Gesta pontificum*, William remarks tellingly that he “saw the verses recently” (*uersus isti, nuper michi uisi*). The phrasing of this note suggests that he must have originally encountered them while visiting another library, perhaps at Worcester or Canterbury.⁵⁹ It is possible

48 Lapidge, “Some Remnants,” 799.

49 Leland, *Joannis Lelandi Antiquarii de rebus britannicis collectanea*, 114–18.

50 Leland, *Joannis Lelandi Antiquarii de rebus britannicis collectanea*, 114.

51 Leland, *Commentarii*, 134.

52 Lapidge, “Some Remnants,” 808, no. 15.

53 Lapidge, “Some Remnants,” 804, no. 9.

54 Sims-Williams, “Milred of Worcester’s Collection of Latin Epigrams,” 26.

55 Lapidge, “Some Remnants,” 812, no. 20.

56 Lapidge, “Some Remnants,” 813, no. 21.

57 Lapidge, “Some Remnants,” 819–20, no. 29.

58 William quotes the two Cuthbert poems in full in the *Gesta pontificum Anglorum* 4.163. The *Epitaphium Bedae* may be found in his *De gestis regum Anglorum*, 1.62.

59 Sims-Williams, “Milred of Worcester’s Collection of Latin Epigrams,” 24. Writing

that William then brought the source of these verses back to Malmesbury at some other date, where they subsequently remained for Leland to find several centuries later. Significantly, when Leland again quotes these poems later on in his *Collectanea*, this time based on William's reading in the *Gesta pontificum*,⁶⁰ he once more explains how he found the same verses in an extremely old volume of sacred poetry at Malmesbury:

hos uersus, sed corruptos, alias legi in uetustissimo codice sacrorum carminum Melduni, sed sine auctoris nomine.

I saw these verses, corrupt as they were, elsewhere in an extremely old book of sacred poetry at Malmesbury.⁶¹

On the basis of these connections and the Malmesbury provenance of Leland's exemplar, Lapidge and Sims-Williams have both strongly argued that William had at his disposal a copy of Milred's sylloge.⁶²

Until 1975, it was presumed that Leland's transcript in the *Collectanea* was the only surviving witness to this collection of Milred's.⁶³ In that year, however, Luitpold Wallach published an edition of sixteen epigrams from a then uncatalogued manuscript fragment in the library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (now Urbana, University of Illinois Library, MS 128).⁶⁴ The fragment, a bifolium measuring 375 × 320 millimetres and written over twenty-four ruled lines in English Square minuscule, has been dated on palaeographical grounds to the tenth century.⁶⁵ Of the sixteen poems witnessed in this fragment, two of them, the epigram for an oratory to St. Patrick attributed to Cellanus, and an epigram of Bede for Cyneberht, were also among the verses that Leland copied at Malmesbury *ex antiquissimo codice epigrammaton*.⁶⁶ The epigram by Cellanus survives elsewhere only in a ninth-century manuscript from Monte Cassino (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, MS lat. plut. LXVI. 40), while the epigram by Bede

earlier, Lapidge, "Some Remnants," 820, also assumes a Worcester origin for the codex and suggests it was there that William saw it.

60 Sims-Williams, "Milred of Worcester's Collection of Latin Epigrams," 23.

61 Leland, *Joannis Lelandi Antiquarii de rebus britannicis collectanea*, 265.

62 Lapidge, "Some Remnants," 813–14, 820; Sims-Williams, "Milred of Worcester's Collection of Latin Epigrams," 21–24; Sims-Williams, "William of Malmesbury," 11–14.

63 Sims-Williams, "Milred of Worcester's Collection of Latin Epigrams," 24.

64 Wallach, "The Urbana Anglo-Saxon Sylloge," 134–51.

65 Wallach, "The Urbana Anglo-Saxon Sylloge," 134; Sims-Williams, "Milred of Worcester's Collection of Latin Epigrams," 26.

66 Lapidge, "Some Remnants," 804–5, nos. 9 and 10.

is otherwise totally unknown outside of the Urbana fragment and Leland's transcript.⁶⁷ The appearance of these exceedingly rare poems in both the Urbana fragment and Leland's copy of Milred's sylloge, though supportive *prima facie* of some relationship between the two sources, would perhaps be insufficient by itself to establish a connection were it not for the fact that Leland's own annotating hand also appears in the left-hand margin on fol. 2v of the Urbana bifolium.⁶⁸ Taken together, these points of contact constitute strong evidence that the Urbana fragment is indeed a remnant of the very same ancient book of epigrams that Leland saw at Malmesbury.⁶⁹

The revelation that the Urbana fragment belongs to a tenth-century copy of Milred's sylloge has significant implications for understanding both the collection as a whole and the range of epigraphic verse circulating in England at the time of its creation, as its contents, in contrast to the apparently local focus of the poems excerpted by Leland, have almost entirely to do with the churches and bishops of Rome. By approaching Leland's transcript and the Urbana fragment as pieces of a larger whole, the misleading polarization of the individual witnesses vanishes, showing rather a collection whose organizing principle is balanced by both local and Italian interests.⁷⁰ The resulting picture gives us a collection not very dissimilar from other composite syllogae compiled at around this time.⁷¹

A second English collection of inscriptions, the so-called Cambridge Sylloge, containing the epitaphs and *tituli* of forty-one popes up to John VII, was added in the twelfth century to the edition of the *Liber Pontificalis* in Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Kk. 4. 6, fols. 224–80. Levison was the first to suggest that these interpolated inscriptions belong to an early eighth-century sylloge put together by an English pilgrim to Rome.⁷² Later scholars, notably Silvagni and Thompson, have broadly endorsed Levison's

67 Sims-Williams, "Milred of Worcester's Collection of Latin Epigrams," 24–25.

68 Sheerin, "John Leland," 173–74. Sims-Williams, "Milred of Worcester's Collection of Latin Epigrams," 24n20, also notes the presence of what may be Leland's marginalia on fols. 1v–2r.

69 Sheerin, "John Leland," 173–74; Sims-Williams, "William of Malmesbury," 11.

70 Sims-Williams, "Milred of Worcester's Collection of Latin Epigrams," 26–27.

71 See for example Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, lat. 8071, fols. 60r–61v (= de Rossi, *Inscriptiones Christianae*, 2.5; 2:21), which contains both epigrams and epitaphs from Carolingian circles as well as inscriptions from the city of Rome. On the character of this sylloge and its potential relationship to Milred's collection, see Sims-Williams, "Milred of Worcester's Collection of Latin Epigrams," 32–35.

72 Levison, *Aus englischen Bibliotheken*, 364–65.

dating and provenance.⁷³ The collection cannot, at any rate, be older than the epitaph of John VII, which being the most recent in the series gives a *terminus post quem* of 707. As Thompson has cogently argued, it is possible that the compiler of the Cambridge *Liber Pontificalis* is in fact William of Malmesbury himself.⁷⁴ The fact that William had already likely used a copy of Milred's sylloge as a source in his *Gesta pontificum Anglorum* and *De gestis regum Anglorum*, moreover, led him to conclude that the poems interpolated into this edition likewise derive from a copy of Milred's collection, represented by the Urbana fragment.⁷⁵

Whatever their origins, collections such as Milred's and the Cambridge Sylloge have frequently been described as "model books,"⁷⁶ a term which denotes "models or manuals of epitaph composition," that "were to the medieval world what the stone-cutters' manuals had been in Roman times."⁷⁷ This term, while not inaccurate, nevertheless requires some qualification. On the one hand, although they do exist,⁷⁸ examples of unambiguous model books are exceedingly rare, and it is by no means clear that theirs was the use to which early medieval collections of inscriptions were most commonly put.⁷⁹ On the other hand, and perhaps most importantly, the term only captures one out of the many ways in which authors like Bede encoun-

73 Sims-Williams, "William of Malmesbury," 10; Silvagni, "La silloge," 82; Thompson, *William of Malmesbury*, 126; Duchesne, "Le Recueil épigraphique," 279.

74 Thompson, *William of Malmesbury*, 119–38.

75 Thompson, "William of Malmesbury's Edition of 'The Liber Pontificalis,'" 101–4. Such a conclusion is attractive, though it is hampered by the absence of overlap between any of the poems in the Urbana fragment and Leland's transcript and those in the Cambridge Sylloge. Sims-Williams, "William of Malmesbury," 16–33, has more recently sought to bolster Thompson's hypothesis by demonstrating the Cambridge Sylloge's affinities with various "congeners of Milred's" collection.

76 See Lapidge, "Some Remnants," 800, who cites Wallach, "Alcuin's Epitaph," 144. See also Lapidge and Rosier, *Aldhelm*, 35–36; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 348; Keynes, "King Athelstan's Books," 162–63.

77 Lapidge, "Some Remnants," 800.

78 Le Blant, *L'Épigraphie chrétienne*, 70–71, demonstrated many years ago that a model book had been in use at Briord in the seventh century for the production of epitaphs. Bischoff, "Epitaphienformeln für Äbtissinen," 150–53, similarly identified another model book in use in the late seventh and eighth centuries at Jouarre. Most recently, Handley, "Epitaphs, Models and Texts," 47–56, has argued that a subset of epigrams in a ninth-century sylloge from Lyon belonged originally to a "Burgundian" model book, centred around inscriptions from the church of SS. Peter and Paul in Vienne.

79 Handley, *Death, Society and Culture*, 6.

tered and engaged with Roman epigraphic poetry. It implies that the utility of collections of such verse was limited to the production of generically identical compositions.

There are, to be sure, identifiable instances of early medieval English authors adapting parts of earlier epigraphic verse for use in their own attempts in the genre. Aldhelm, for example, certainly appears to have been inspired by a wide variety of Roman inscriptions,⁸⁰ not least the famous monumental epigrams that Damasus erected to commemorate the saints in Rome, lines and phrases from some of which he incorporated into his own *Carmina Ecclesiastica*.⁸¹ Other near contemporaries of Bede, such as Cuthbert of Hereford and the anonymous author of the epitaph of Berhtwald of Canterbury, also adorned their own epigrams with selections from earlier Roman inscriptions.⁸² It is therefore legitimate to see collections such as Milred's or the Cambridge Sylloge as serving at least in part an exemplary function, providing a reservoir of antique epigraphic poetry worthy of emulation and adaptation for the commemoration of venerable subjects in the present.

However, as has just been observed, Bede's engagement with Roman epigraphic poetry did more than simply beget further examples of this genre of verse. The rich inheritance of Late-Antique and early medieval Roman inscriptions transmitted in collections like Milred's and the Cambridge Sylloge not only likely provided him with models for his own forays into a venerable Roman poetic tradition, they also became part of the very literary stock with which he learned to write and think. Indeed, the available evidence suggests that early medieval English authors like Bede could engage with Roman epigraphic verse both as generic models for their own epigrams and inscriptions, as well as a genuine variety of Christian Latin poetry to be learned and internalized together with the rest of the literary patrimony of Rome.⁸³ Such verse, particularly in the case of epitaphs, excelled at merg-

80 Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 203–12.

81 Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, 204–5, 236–37.

82 See de Rossi, *Inscriptiones Christianae*, 2:23.2.3 and Silvagni, “La Silloge,” 107, no. 35.15, and compare the following correspondences in Lapidge, “Some Remnants,” 813, no. 21.15–16 (Cuthbert's epitaph of the bishops and nobles of Hereford) and 810, no. 17.19 (epitaph of Berhtwald of Canterbury): “*Hoc tibi pro meritis successor honorius amplius*”; “*Ianitor aeternae recludens lumina vitae*”; (Epitaph of the bishops and nobles of Hereford) “*Hos ego Cudbertus sacri successor honoris*”; (Epitaph of Berhtwald of Canterbury) “*aeternaeque frui per secula lumine vitae*.”

83 Aldhelm's diverse integration of epigraphic verse into many of his poems beyond the *Carmina Ecclesiastica* demonstrates that Bede is not unique in his appropriation of this material for use outside its original generic boundaries.

ing the genres of panegyric, elegy, and consolation to both elevate the one commemorated and praise their merits, as well as reflect on the sorrow of death through the lens of Christian hope. The exploration of these themes in many Roman inscriptions produced a vibrant store of formulae and phrases, themselves seasoned with echoes of the pagan epic poets, which could then be creatively adapted and repurposed for a given need. Such expressions, of course, most easily find their home in the poetic contexts that organically resemble their original, where both praise and commemoration occupy chief functions. It is scarcely surprising, then, that references to several Roman epitaphs should be found in Bede's metrical life of Cuthbert, in which the praise of the saint, the commemoration of his heroic merits, and the hope of his spiritual victory are all placed front and centre. Bede so dynamically integrated Roman epigraphic verse into his larger poetic world precisely because it equipped him to talk about such concerns in a naturally eloquent and compelling way.

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