

## MISCOUPLINGS IN COUPLETS \*

Oxford, Queen's College MS 320 contains a copy of *Isidori Hispalensis Originum siue Etymologiarum Libri XX*, written in the English square minuscule script associated with the period about 940 to 965.<sup>1</sup> Before the list of chapter headings there is a poem about miscouplings in elegiac couplets on folios 1v-2r.<sup>2</sup> Capital letters and punctuation marks in boldface represent features of the manuscript. Italics suggest rhymes at caesuras and ends of lines within couplets. Solid underlinings suggest alliteration within lines. Dotted underlinings suggest alliteration between adjacent lines.

### IN NOMINE TRINITATIS.

**S**ericeum tegmen gemmatica tecta laconum  
    Pellibus hircinis aequiparanda loquor  
Nobilis horribili iungatur purpura burrae  
    Nectatur plumbo fulgida gemma graui  
Sit captiua sui nunc margarita nitoris                   5  
    Et clause obscuro fulgeat in calibe.  
Leuconico pariter claudatur in aere smaragdus .  
    Conpar silicibus nunc hiacintus adest

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\* I owe thanks for helpful criticism to Dr Leofranc Holford-Strevens.

1. Copied probably from an exemplar in Insular script, not Cambridge, Trinity College MS B 15.33, which was written in Winchester about A.D. 920. Professor David Ganz in a private communication.

2. D. SCHALLER & E. KÖNSGEN, *Initia carminum Latinorum saeculo undecimo antiquorum* (Göttingen 1977) no. 14935, record this manuscript as the unique source for this poem.

Rupibus atque molis similis dicatur iaspis Eligat infernum iam modo luna caos .	10
Nunc etiam urticis mandemus lileā iungi Perspicuamque rosam dira cicuta premat .	
Nunc simul optemus despectis piscibus ergo Delicias magni nullificare freti	
Auratam crassantus amet saxatilis anguem Limacem pariter nunc sibi tracta petat .	15
Altaque iungatur uili cum uulpe leaena Perspicuam iincem simius accipiat	
Iungatur nunc cerua asino nunc tigris onagro Iungatur fesso concita damma boui	20
Nectarium uiti et nunc laus erat et raro satum Mellaque cum fellis sint modo mixta malis .	
Gemmantem sociem aquam luteumque baratrum Stercoribus mixtis fons eat inriguus .	
Praepes funereum cumuulture ludat hirundo . Cum bubone graui nunc filomela sonet .	25
Tristis perspicua sit cum perdice cauanus Iunctaque cum coruo pulchra columba cubet	
Haec monstra incestis mutent sibi tempora fatis Rusticus et seruus petat euceriam .	30

1 gemmatiqua. 2 æquiparanda. 7 Lenconico. 8 sic[ ]licibus.  
12 Praespiciuam. dina *underpointed and corrected in left margin to*  
dira. præmat. 13 dispectis. 17 Altque. leena. 18 Prespicuam.  
25 Prepes. funerē. 27 præspicua.

Analogy with *pariter* 7 and *compar* 8 supports emendation to *aequi-*  
*paranda* 2. Alliteration with *similis* 9 supports emendation to etymo-  
logically correct *silicibus* 8. Alliteration with *delicias* 14 supports  
emendation to etymologically correct *despectis* 13. Analogy with the  
Classical diphthong *ae* in *aequiparanda* 2 and *burrae* 3 supports res-  
toration in *leaena* 17 and *praepes* 25. Grammar and metre alike  
require the form *funereum* 25. The manuscript misspellings *praespi-*  
*ciam* 12, *prespicuam* 18, and *prespicua* 27 may have issued from  
misreading of the abbreviation *p as p̄*. In this text *h* is present in Latin





- 7 smaragdus CL < σμάραγδος here representing the Greek nominative singular form.
- 8 hyacinthus CL hyacinthus < ὕακινθος.
- 9 iaspis CL iaspis < ἰάσις.
- 10 caos CL chaos < χάος.
- 15 crassantus CL crassus + anthus < ἄνθος, not otherwise recorded in *DMLBS*.
- 23 baratrum CL barathrum < βάραθρον.
- 25 funereum is not recorded as a neuter substantive in *DMLBS*.
- 27 cauanus *DMLBS* s.v. *cavannus* records one quotation from Aldhelm and two from glossaries.
- 30 euceriam < εὐχέρεια is not recorded in *DMLBS*.

The poet may have been reading the beginning of *Horatii de Arte Poetica Liber*. In the first of the poet's inconcinnities the first words of the second verse remind one of coincident diction at the end of the seventh-century pseudo-Isidorean Hiberno-Latin text *De Ordine Creaturarum* §13 :<sup>3</sup>

in aurato tabernaculo, ubi aurum argentumque et gemmarum pretiosarum, bissi et purpurae et hiacinthi et cocci dona conferuntur, etiam eorum qui pelles caprarum deferunt diligentia non dispicitur.

There the *pelles caprarum* are the goat skins on which the author presents his work to his patron. Here the *laconum pelles hircinae* may allude to the poet and his clothes, if not his work. He may refer to himself at the beginning and the end of the poem, at the end of the first couplet in *loquor* 2 and at the beginning of the last line, *rusticus seruus* 30, and in three verbs in the first person, *mandemus* 11, *optemus* 13, *sociem* 23. Observing a widespread convention the poet refers to himself at places determined by sesquioctave ratio (9:8) and one-ninth and eight-ninths of the text. The 170 words of the poem divide by sesquioctave ratio at 90 and 80, at the centre of the lines, there being eighty words in lines 1-15 and ninety words in lines 16-30. The ninety words of lines 16-30 divide by the ratio 9:8 at 48 and 42. After *sociem* 23 the forty-second word is the last of *rusticus et*

3. *Liber de ordine creaturarum*, ed. M.C. Diaz y Diaz (Santiago de Compostela 1972), p. 204. D.R. Howlett, 'Insular Latin Writers' Rhythms', *Peritia* XI (1997), pp. 53-116 at 64-6.

*seruus* 30. The eighty words of lines 1-15 divide by  $\frac{1}{9}$  at 9, at the ninth word, *loquor* 2. There are nine words between *mandemus* 11 and *optemus* 13. The 170 words of the entire poem divide by  $\frac{1}{9}$  and  $\frac{8}{9}$  at 19 and 151, at *cauanus* 27, which might suggest, but for the early date of the manuscript, that the composition was written by a poet surnamed Howlett.

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Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources  
Bodleian Library  
Oxford