SINGERS’ RATIOS IN RAUCA SONORA *

In an appendix to an article about the adonic verses Ad Fidolium now attributed to the Irish peregrinus Columbanus of Saint-Trond Michael Lapidge published an edition and translation of some adonic verses Rauca Sonora,¹ composed perhaps in the ninth or tenth century, perhaps by an Irishman roughly contemporary with Sedulius Scottus, who wrote

Rauca sonabat enim pastorea fistola nostra 
nos quia deseruit pastor honestus oves.

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS latin 8069, folios 1v-2r

| f. 1v | Rauca, sonora, |
|      | languida uoce |
|      | tibia nostra |
|      | est, pater; inquam. |
|      | ast gerit ora |
|      | fusca colore; |
|      | tristis habunde |
|      | flens modo, serta |
|      | forte diremp<ta> : |
|      | nam rosa mollis, |
|      | fragmina la<ne>, |

| f. 2r | lilia clara, |
|      | pinguiquaque |
|      | (quid memorem nunc ?) |
|      | nectara mixta — |

Harsh, noisy,  
dull in tone  
is my flute,  
father, I confess.  
And it produces speech  
dark in colour;  
exceedingly sad,  
weeping now, it is deprived  
by chance of its laurel:  
for the delicate rose,  
pieces of wool,  
bright lilies,  
and also rich  
(why need I mention it now?)  
blended nectars —

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

plurima sunt hic. all these are here in abundance.

sed mihi baccus
But it tells me that wine,
inquit, abest, heu !
unfortunately, is lacking —
conficiatur
(the wine) through which the poetry-
unde fonascus :
teacher is made ready:
" quo medicata,
I shall produce lively
uiuida passim
poems all over the place ! "
carmina fingam ! ”

larga potestas, O abundant potency (of wine),
perfice uelle
to hymn that desired (song)
ut queat illud
to the very best of its wishes.
pssallere uoto !

Readings in MS: 1 rauco 8 scieta 11 fracmina 12 clana 13 queque.

Let us make only trifling changes to this text, restoring the manuscript readings fracmina 11 and queque 13, altering the punctuation of lines 13-4 (to smooth the awkward interruption caused by the parenthetic question) and 17-21 (to extend the passage of direct discourse), and suggesting possible rhymes by italics in the first third of the poem. Let us make a few changes to the translation. Lapidge taxed earlier editors with not knowing ‘that uelle can be a neuter substantive in medieval Latin’. One might (but need not) construe uelle as an infinitive.

f. 1v
Rauca, sonora, a
Husky, buzzing,
languida voce b
feeble in tone
tibia nostra a
our pipe,
est, pater, inquam c
is, father, I say;
ast gerit ora a
moreover she produces utterances
fusca colore ; b
dark in colour,
tristis habunde b
very sad,
flens modo, serta a
weeping now, [her] garlands
forte dirempta, a
by chance pulled apart,
nam rosa mollis, 10 for a delicate rose,
broken bits of wool,
fracmina lane,
bright lilies
lilia clara

f. 2r
(pingua queque 13 14)
(why should I call to mind now
quid memorem nunc ?) 14 13 these several luxuriant things ?),
nectari mixta, 15 mixed nectars,
plurima sunt hic ;
very many things are here;
‘Sed mihi Baccus’
‘But to me Bacchus [i.e. wine]’
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The spelling *fracmina* may imply that the poet understood the orthographic system of a Celtic language, as in *Bricte - Brigite* and *Ricemarch - Rhygyfarch*.

The metre is nearly faultless, with only one false quantity, in *fonascus* $20 < \varphi\omega\nu\acute{a}\sigma\kappa\acute{o}\varsigma$.

The poet has filled his composition with words (like the first five) that bear musical senses so obvious as to need no comment. But some, in lines 8-12, are less immediately apparent than others. *Serta*, rendered here as ‘garlands’, are actually ‘what have been linked together’, that is ‘compositions’, which have been *dirempta* ‘pulled apart’. The garlands of presumably red roses and presumably white lilies, held together by woollen threads now broken, *fracmina lane*, are modified by adjectives that bear musical senses, *mollis* ‘soft’ or ‘flat’ as well as ‘delicate’ and *clara* ‘clear’ to the ear as well as ‘bright’ to the eye. The red and delicate nature of the roses and the white and clear nature of the lilies are appropriate also to *bacca* ‘wine’, the lack of which has made the pipe’s song dull.

The composition divides by the ratios of music theory, symmetry (1:1), *duplus* or duple ratio (2:1), *hemiolus* or sesquialter ratio (11/2:1 or 3:2), *epitritus* or sesquitertian ratio (11/3:1 or 4:3), and *epogdous* or sesquioctave ratio (11/8:1 or 9:8, or reckoned another way 1/9 and 8/9).

The poem divides by symmetry at the poet’s reference to himself, at the centre of the central fourteenth of twenty-seven lines, in the
thirty-first word from the end of sixty-two words, \textit{memorem}, which also contains the central letters of the composition.

The sixty-two words of the poem divide by duple ratio at 41 and 21, at the forty-first word, \textit{baccus}, the substance that empowers a singing-teacher. The remaining twenty-one words divide by the same ratio at 14 and 7, at \textit{quo} \textit{21}, referring to wine, and \textit{potestas} \textit{24}, referring to its power.

Every pentasyllabic line of the poem divides by sesquialter ratio with three short and two long syllables.

The twenty-seven lines of the poem divide by sesquitertian ratio at 15 and 12. The sixty-two words divide by the same ratio at 35 and 27. From \textit{est} \textit{4} to \textit{abest} \textit{18} inclusive there are fifteen lines. Between \textit{est} and \textit{abest} there are thirty-five words.

The twenty-seven lines of the poem divide by sesquioctave ratio at 14 and 13. The sixty-two words divide by the same ratio at 33 and 29, exactly at the poet’s parenthetic question \textit{pingua queque quid memorem nunc}? \textit{1} from the twenty-ninth word to the thirty-third inclusive in lines 13-14. In the fourteenth line after \textit{inquam} \textit{4} the thirty-third word is \textit{inquit} \textit{18}.

The sixty-two words of the poem divide by 1/9 and 8/9 at 7 and 55, at the references to the poet’s patron, \textit{pater} \textit{4}, and the power to perfect the will, \textit{larga potestas} \textit{24-5}.

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\textit{Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources}

\textit{Bodleian Library}

\textit{Oxford}