THE ALLEGED USE OF *CURSUS* BY BISHOP ARBEO OF FREISING

Did Arbeo (d. 783) write rhythmical prose ? The answer affects the way scholars evaluate his contorted Latin. For instance, does Arbeo's overuse of the pluperfect subjunctive, naturally often at the ends of clauses, result from a desire for rhythmical effect or from some other cause ? Since Arbeo's writings together with the Bavarian laws and some inscriptions and documents provide the only clues to the Latin used in Bavaria prior to the Carolingian literary reforms, his language is of special interest. [1] This note is written to resolve the problem of his alleged *cursus*. [2]

Bruno Krusch first claimed to find rhythmical cadences in Arbeo's *lives* of saints. [3] Georg Baesecke presented supporting documentation by analyzing the first thirty full stops of the *vita Haimhrammi* and of the *vita Corbiniani*. [4] Subsequent scholars who have presumed that Arbeo used *cursus* include Heinrich von Löwe [5] and Bernhard Bischoff. [6]

1. Arbeo's language is analyzed in Bengt Löfstedt, " Zu Arbeos Latein, " *ALMA*, 41 (1979), pp. 51-73.

2. My thanks to Profs. Bengt Löfstedt (University of California at Los Angeles) and Tore Janson (Stockholms Universitet) for encouragement and suggestions.

3. Bruno Krusch, *MGH* SS Rer Mer VI (1913) 528, rpt. in *Arbeonis Vitae Sanctorum Haimhrammi et Corbiniani* (« Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in Usum Scholarum »), Hannover, Hahn, 1920, p. 147.

4. Georg Baesecke, *Der deutsche Abrogans und die Herkunft des deutschen Schrifttums*, Halle (Saale), Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1930, p. 118n.

5. Heinz Löwe, " Arbeo von Freising : Eine Studie zu Religiosität und Bildung im 8. Jahrhundert, " *Rheinische Vierteljahrsblätter*, 15/16 (1950/1951) [not seen], rpt. in *Von Cassiodor zu Dante : Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Geschichtschreibung und politischen Ideenwelt des Mittelalters*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1973, p. 83.

6. Bernhard Bischoff, *Leben und Leiden des hl. Emmeram* (Munich, Ernst Heimeran Verlag, 1953), p. 94.

Yet Arbeo's *cursus* was never systematically examined. The traditional method for identifying rhythmical prose is to isolate all concluding metrical cadences and to consider them intentional if they constitute a high percentage of the total. The distortion produced by Baesecke's concentration on only the first 30 full stops can be seen in the disproportion between the 6 instances of *planus* found there in the *vita Haimhrammi* and the 15 found in the remaining 187 acceptable full stops. [7] Since the first 30 sentence endings cover chapters i-vii of the *vita Haimhrammi* and the prologue and chapters i-v of the *vita Corbiniani,* their more frequent rhythmical cadences do not appear to be due to any ornate prologue style, but rather to chance or to Baesecke's deliberate choice of a particularly fruitful sample. Overall, the standard *cursus* patterns — *velox, tardus,* and *planus* — constitute only 8 %, 9 %, and 10 % of the full stops in the *vita Haimhrammi* ; and 6 %, 14 %, and 14 % in the *vita Corbiniani.* Since the major forms appear in such low percentages, it does not seem likely that Arbeo was carefully seeking them.

Cursus can also be measured by the method of internal comparison developed by Tore Janson. He determines whether particular cadences are favored by comparing their observed frequencies to the frequencies that would be expected from a random juxtaposition of their components (i.e., the product of the probabilities of each element occurring separately). The significance of any discrepancy is tested by the chi-square formula :

$$\text{chi-square} = \left(\frac{\text{observed frequency} - \text{expected frequency}}{\text{expected frequency}}\right)^2.$$

By comparing the value obtained from this formula with the values listed in chi-square tables in standard statistical handbooks, it is possible to discover whether or not a given distribution is likely to be due to chance. For most purposes statistical significance is not assumed unless the probability of chance occurrence is less than 5 %. [8]

---

7. Omitted from this and from subsequent tabulations are sentences ending with questions, exclamations, or quotations from other authors.

8. Tore Janson, *Prose Rhythm in Medieval Latin from the 9th to the 13th Century* (« Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, Studia Latina Stockholmiensia », 20), Stockholm, Almquist & Wiksell International, 1975, *passim,* esp. pp. 19-34, 116-17.

Internal comparison reveals little evidence of *cursus* in Arbeo's *lives*. No possible cadence in the *vita Haimhrammi* is significantly favored or slighted. The chi-square value for all cadences occuring five or more times and for " other " (all remaining cadences) is only 2.9, while a value of 25.0 or more would have been required for statistical significance. The *vita Corbiniani* shows more variation : apparently favored cadences consist of the unmetrical sequence where a proparoxytone word is followed by a five syllable paroxytone word [9] and also of *tardus* ; apparently avoided is the unmetrical sequence of a proparoxytone word followed by a four syllable proparoxytone word. Yet these and much smaller anomalies are insignificant according to the standard chi-square test, since they yield a value of 18.0, which falls below the 22.4 required. The variations observed are best explained as the result of chance, since there is no metrical reason why this particular collection of cadences should be singled out in this way for favor and disfavor. Overall, the two *lives* together yield a chi-square value of 10.9, well below the 28.9 required for statistical significance.

Therefore Arbeo's use of *cursus* appears extremely doubtful. By the traditional method of external comparison, he must be classified as an unrhythmical author. By Janson's method of internal comparison, the *vita Haimhrammi* exhibits no non-random patterns and the *vita Corbiniani* only some very dubious biases that are apparently chance aberrations. It is better to disregard rhythmical considerations in analyzing Arbeo's language.

Texas Tech University   John HOWE.
Lubbock, Texas

---

9. There are in fact two ways through which the ungainly combination of a proparoxytone word followed by a five syllable paroxytone word could be construed as a rhythmical cadence : 1) if the final word contains an " i " which could have been pronounced as a consonant rather than as a vowel, e.g. " existeret Corbinianus " (= *velox*) ; or 2) if a secondary accent is postulated, e.g. " tránsmittebántur " (a rhythm akin to *planus*). However, the former case occurs only in one of the nine examples of this cadence found in the *vita Corbiniani*, while the latter does not explain the phenomenon observed, because if a secondary accent existed it would have transformed into *planus* cadences all final five syllable paroxytone words, not just those following a proparoxytone word. Thus there is no metrical reason to favor the cadence.