Two Latin Epitaphs

I. Master John’s Epitaph for Bishop Cummian

An epitaph by Master John for Bishop Cummian has been edited twice in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, once by Dümmler and again by Strecker. In the transcription that follows, made from photographs of the stone in the crypt at Bobbio, letters in ligature are represented with an oblique stroke, as R/A, and abbreviation marks are represented with macrons, as “.”

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+HIC SACRABEATIMEMBR/ACU[*]
MIANISOLV/NTVR *
CVIVSICAE/LVM/PENET/R/ANSANIMAC/S
ANGELISGAVDET *
ISTEFVITMA/GNVS/SDIGNITA
TEGENERE/FORMA [^]
HVNCMISITSC/OT/HIAFINESAD
ITALICOSSENEM *
LOCATVR/BEBOV/IOD/NICON *
TRICTVSAMORE *
VBI/VENERANDIDO/GMACOLVM
BANISERVANDO *
VIGILANSIE/INV/NANSINDEFES
SVSSIDV/LEORANS *
OLIMPIADIS/QVATVOR
VNIVSQVECIRCO/LOANNI *
SICVIXITFELICITERVTFELIX
MODOCREDATVR *
MITISPVDENVISFRATRI/BVS
PACEFICVSVNCTIS *
HVICAETATISAN/NIFVERVNT
NOVIESDENI *
LVSTRVNOQVOQVE/NVM/MENSES
QVEQVATVORSIMVL *
AT/PATEREGREGIEPOTENS
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2. I owe thanks to Professor Đáibhí Ó Cróinín for photographs of the stone and to Dr Martin Kauffmann and Dr Prydwyn Piper for helpful discussion.
The text that follows is arranged in lines of verse with words separated by spaces. To the right of the text Arabic numerals mark lines of verse, words, syllables, and letters reckoned first with ligatured letters and abbreviations as single characters and second with ligatured letters and abbreviations as separate letters.

+ HIC SACRA BEATI MEMBRA CUMMIANI SOLVVNTVR * 6 15 36+2
CVIVS CAELVM PENETRANS ANIMA CVM ANGELIS GAVDET * 7 16 39+3
ISTE FVIT MAGNVS DIGNITATE GENERE FORMA * 6 15 34+1
HVNC MISIT SCOTHIA FINES AD ITALICOS SENEM * 7 15 35+2
LOCATVR EBOVIO DOMINI CONSTRICTVS AMORE * 5 5 16 34+2
VBI VENERANDI DOGMA COLYMBANI SERVANDO * 5 15 35
VIGILANS IEIVNANS INDEFESSVS SIDVLE ORANS * 5 15 38
OLIMPIADIS QVATTVOR VNIQVSQV CIRCOLO ANNI * 5 17 38
SIC VIXIT FELICITVT VT FELIX MODO CREDATVR * 7 15 37
MITIS PRVDENS PIVS FRATRIBVS PACEFICVS CVNCTIS * 10 6 15 41+1
HVIC AETATIS ANNI FERVN VT NOVIES DENI * 6 14 32+1
LVSTRVM QVOQVE VNMVM MENSESQVE QVATTVOR SIMVL * 6 14 39+1
AT PATER EGREGIE POTENS INTERCESSOR EXSISTE * 6 16 39
PRO GLORIOSISSIMO LIVTPRANO REGE QVI TVVM * 6 15 37+1
PRAETIOSO LAPIDE TYMBVM DECORAVIT DEVOTVS * 15 5 16 38
SIT VT MANIFESTVM ALMVM VBI TEGITVR CORPVS * 7 15 37
DEPOSITVS EST HINC DOMINVS CVMMIANVS * 5 13 25+10
EPISCOPVS DECIMO QVARO KALENDAS SEPTEMBRES * 5 15 25+15
FECIT + IOHANNES MAGISTER 19 3 8 22
108 280 661+39

+ Here the sacred members of blessed Cummian are unbound [or ‘freed’ sc. in death], whose soul penetrating heaven rejoices with angels.
This man was great in dignity, race, form.
Scotia [i.e. Ireland] sent him to Italian territories as an old man.
He is located in Bobbio bound by love of the Lord, where by keeping the teaching of venerable Columban, by performing vigils, fasting, not worn out, sedulously praying, for four Olympiads with the cycle of one year he lived so happily that he may be believed happy now, gentle, prudent, pious to the brothers, pacific to all.
For this man there were of age nine times ten years, also one lustrum and four months together.
Now, outstanding father, be a powerful intercessor
for the most glorious king Liutprand, who your
tomb decorated, devout, with a precious stone,
so that it might be manifest where a holy body is covered.
The lord Cummian was laid down hence,
a bishop, on the fourteenth of the kalends of September.
+ Master John made [this].

There are many internal indications of the designer’s and carver’s complete control
over this inscription. Let us begin with orthography. The spellings Scotthia 4 for Scotia,
sidule 7 for sedule, Olimpiadis 8 for Olimpiades, circolo 8 for circulo, pacificus 10 for
pacificus, and hypercorrect pratioso 15 for pretioso, differ slightly, but not barbarously,
from the norms of Classical Latin, though lustrum 12 is an error for lustrum.

Second, prosody. If scanned as dactylic hexameters in the Classical tradition there
would be hiatus in cum angelis 2, circolo anni 8, quoque unum 12, and manifestum
alnum 16, and many errors of quantity. Our poet, however, composed not quantitative
metrical, but rhythmic syllabic hexameters, like the Late Latin poet Commodian, a
seventh-century Hiber-Latin epigrapher for Eolalius clericus in Mérida, the seventh-
century Hiberno-Latin poets Laurentius and Vergilius, the eleventh-century Cambro-
Latin poet Euben, and the eleventh-century Anglo-Latin poet Ælfric Bata. 3

A third internal indication of control is that the poet’s words for numbers exhibit their
values by their positions. Between uniusque | ‘of one’ 8 and novies deni ‘nine ten’ 11
there are nineteen words.

From quattuor | 8 to quattuor | 12 there are twenty-seven words, one fourth of the 108
words of the entire inscription.

A fourth form of evidence, comparably impressive, is the way in which the poet made
personal names and place-names exhibit their alphanumeric value.

From | Hic 1 to fines | ad Italicos 4 there are 135 characters, coincident with the alphanumeric
value of FINES ITALICOS, 6+9+13+5+18+9+19+1+11+9+3+14+18 or 135.

From the beginning of the poem to | Ebouio 5 there are sixty-four syllables, coincident
with the alphanumeric value of EBOVIO, 5+2+14+20+9+14 or 64.

From Scotthia | 4 to | Colombani 6 there are seventy-two letters, coincident with the alphanumeric
value of SCOTHIA, 18+3+14+19+8+9+1 or 72.

From | Hunc misit Scotthia 4 to | Colombani 6 there are eighty-five letters
carved on the stone, coincident with the alphanumeric value of COLVMBANI,
3+14+11+20+12+2+1+13+9 or 85.

The entire inscription contains 108 words, coincident with the alphanumeric value
of CVMMIANVS, 3+20+12+9+1+13+20+18 or 108. In Depositus est hinc dominus
Cummanus episcopus decimo quarto kalendas Septembres * fecit + Iohannes magister
there are 108 characters and spaces between words.

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3 David Howlett, The Celtic Latin Tradition of Biblical Style, Dublin: Four Courts, 1995,
Acrostics, Celtic Latin Colophons’, Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies 35 (1998), p. 27-44 at 28-34,
A fifth form of evidence, equally impressive, is the way in which the poet made the numbers of his chronology exhibit their values. His statement *Olimpiadis quattuor uniusque circolo anni* 8 means that Cummian lived in Italy for four Olympiads and one year or seventeen years, coincident with the seventeen lines from the beginning of the poem to *Depositus est hinc dominus Cummianus* | 17.

In *decimo quarto kalendas Septembres* * the fourteenth of the kalends of September*, that is 19 August, which precedes the nineteenth and last line of the inscription arranged as above.

The poet’s statement *Huic aetatis anni fuerunt nouies deni lustrum quoque unum menses quattuor simul* 11-12 means that Cummian lived nine times ten years and one lustrum and four months or ninety-five years and four months, coincident with the ninety-five words from the beginning of the poem to *Depositus est hinc dominus Cummianus*, coincident also with the ninety-five letters thence to the end of the inscription.

If Cummian died aged ninety-five after living at Bobbio for seventeen years he arrived there aged seventy-eight. In the poet’s statement *Iste fuit magnus dignitate genere forma hunc misit Scotia fines ad Italicos senem* 3-4 there are from *Iste* to *senem* seventy-eight characters and spaces between words.

More extraordinary still is that from the beginning of the poem to *circolo anni* | 8 there are 354 characters and spaces between words, coincident with the number of days in a lunar year, and from *circolo anni* 8 to *Depositus est hinc dominus Cummianus* there are 365 characters and spaces between words, coincident with the number of days in a solar year.

The entire inscription contains exactly 700 characters.

The nineteen lines of the inscription divide by extreme and mean ratio at 12 and 7, at the end of line 12, exactly at the point at which the poet shifts from praise of Cummian in the third person singular to direct address to Cummian in the second person singular. The remaining seven lines divide by the same ratio at 4 and 3, at the end of line 16, the point at which the poet shifts from address to Cummian to description of his interment. The last three lines divide by the same ratio at 2 and 1, at the end of the account of Cummian’s interment and the beginning of Master John’s signature.

Finally let us consider epigraphy. From a first glance at the stone one might infer that the carver did not exercise complete control over his medium, as the inscription appears to be oriented in the opposite direction from the surrounding decoration, and the last line of the inscription appears to be squeezed in smaller size into insufficient space. If, however, one supposed that the stone was designed for the lid of a sarcophagus and the chrismon flanked by upright birds marks the head of the stone and the upright urn marks the foot, then the inscription would appear the right way up to the eyes of a dead man rising. The text at the end of the inscription, + IOHANNES MAGISTER, the only text not in rhythmic syllabic hexameters, is appropriately, modestly, in smaller script than the praise of the subject, Cummian the bishop. A further indication of unified order is that in the inscription on the stone the first line begins with one incised cross and the last line begins with another incised cross. On the stone surrounding the inscription the inner border contains fifty relieved crosses and the outer border contains fifteen roundels with flowers and sixteen roundels with clusters of grapes and vine leaves, alternately with grapes on the left and leaves on the right, then with leaves on the left and grapes on the right. Together crosses,
flowers, and grapes and leaves total eighty-one elements, coincident with the alphanu-
meric value of the name IOHANNES, 9+14+8+1+13+13+5+18 or 81. Within the inscrip-
tion in Depositus est hinc dominus Cummianus * episcopus xiiii kalendas Septembres fecit
there are before | + Iohannes magister eighty-one characters and spaces between words.

As ordinary stone masons do not often describe themselves with the title magister one
infers that our carver was working within the Irish tradition of Saint Columba of Iona,
namesake of Columbán ‘little Columba’, the founder of Bobbio, in which the highest
members of the order performed tasks regarded in later times as lowly drudgery. If
Columba, and after him Eadfrith of Lindisfarne, Dunstan of Glastonbury and Canterbury,
and Æthelwold of Abingdon and Winchester, worked diligently as scribes, ‘preaching
with the pen’, so may magister Iohannes, if a senior member of the community of
Bobbio, have preached with his chisel.

Reference to Liutprand king of the Lombards fixes the date of the inscription to the
years 712-744. Cummian is usually supposed to have died c730. From the beginning of
the inscription to Depositus est hinc | dominus Cummianus there are 734 characters and
spaces between words, an indication, perhaps, of the date of this remarkable work.

II. Alcuin’s Epitaph for Pope Hadrian I

In an earlier issue of this journal I edited, translated, and analysed a little philosoph-
ical treatise De Substantia Nihili et Tenebrarum by Fredegisus, who served as messenger
among Alcuin, Charlemagne, and Arno bishop of Salzburg.4 The treatise, though written
by Fredegisus sometime after he had become an archdeacon on Wednesday, 15 April 800,
and Charlemagne had become emperor on Christmas Day 800, is presented as though
addressed by Charlemagne to the Irish scholar Dúngal. The present essay considers an
earlier composition from the Carolingian court, written by Alcuin, but presented as though
addressed by Charlemagne to the late Pope Hadrian I,5 who died on Saint Stephen’s Day,
26 December 795.6 Though the text survives in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France,
mss latin 2773 f. 23, 9347 f. 49, 10307 f. 23, and 16897 ff. 33-34, and in Pauli contin-
uatione III (S.S. rer. Langobard. 214),7 it is edited here from the inscription on black
marble in the portico of Saint Peter’s in the Vatican,8 rightly considered a masterpiece of
Carolingian art. In the transcription that follows letters in ligature are represented with an
oblique stroke, as T/E, and abbreviations are represented by macrons, as ἡ.

5 Alcuin’s authorship was established definitively by Liutpold WALLACH, ‘Alcuin’s Epitaph of
6 Because of the statement factumque est uespere et mane dies unus in Genesis 1.5 the begin-
ing of a day was reckoned in the Hebrew tradition from sundown, but in the Roman tradition from
midnight. The evening of Christmas Day, on which Hadrian I is sometimes said to have died, would
be reckoned as Saint Stephen’s Day by the Hebrew system, but VIII kalendas Ianuarias by the
Roman system.
7 Duemmler, Tituli, p. 113-114.
8 For an account of the stone see Joanna Story et al., ‘Charlemagne’s Black Marble: The
I owe thanks to Dr Story for photographs and for helpful discussion of the epitaph.
Charlemagne’s Epitaph for Pope Hadrian I, in the portico of St Peter’s in the Vatican, Rome.
Photo copyright: Joanna Story.
HIC PAT/ER ECCLESIAE ROMAE DECVS INCLYTVS AVCTOR
HADRIANVS REQVIEM PAPA BEATVS HABET
VIR CVI VITA DÍS PIETAS LEX GLORIA CHRISTVS
PASTOR APOSTOLICVS PROMPTVS AD OMNE BONVM
NOBILIS EX MAGNA GENITVS IAM GENT/E PARENTVM
SED SACRIS LONGE NOBILIOR MERITIS
EXORNARE STVDENS DEVOTO PECTORE PASTOR
SEMPER VBÍQVE SVO TEMPLA SACRATA DÍS
ECCLÉSIAS DONIS POPVLVS ET DOGMATE SÇO
IMBVIT ET CVNCTIS PANDIT AD ASTRA VIAM
PAPÆRIBVS LARGVS NVLLI PIETATE SECVDNDVS
ET PRO PLEBE SACRIS PERVERIL IN PRECIVS
DOCTRINIS OPIBVS MVRIS ERERERAT ARCES
VRBS CAPVT ORBIS HONOR INCLYTA ROMA TVAS
MORS CVI NIL NOCVIT XPI QVÆE MORT/E PEREMPTA EST
IANVA SED VITÆ MOX MELIORIS ERAT
POST PATREM LACRIMA/NS KA/ROLVS HA/EC CARMINA SCRIBSÍ
TV MIHIV DVLCLIS AMOR T/E MODO PLANGO PATER
TV MEMOR ESTO SEQVITVR T/E MENS MEA SEMPER
CVMM XPIO TENEAS REGNA BEATA POLI
TE CLERVS POPVLVS MAGNO DILEXIT AMORE
OMNIVS VNVLIS AMOR OPTIME PRAEVSVL ERAS
NOMINA IYNGO SIMVL TITVLIS CLARISSIME NOSTRA
HADRIANVS KAROLVS REX EGO TVQ-PATER
QVISQ LEGAS VERSVS DEVOTO PECTORE SV/PPLEX
AMBORVM MITIS DÌC MISERERE DÌS
HAEC TVA NVNC T/E NEAT REQVIES CARISSIM/E M/EMBRA
CVMM SÇIS ANIMA GAVDEAT ALMA DÌ
VLTIMA QVIPPE TVAS DONEC TVBA CLAMET IN AVRES
PRINCIPÉ CVMM PETRO SVRGE VIDERE ÐM
AVDITVRVS ERIIS VOCEM SCIÓ IVDICIS ALMAM
INTRA NVNC DÌNI GAVDIA MAGNA TVI
TVNC MEMOR ESTO TVI NATI PAT/ER OPTIME POSCO
CVMM PATRE DÌC NATVS PERGAT ET IST/E MEVS
O PTE REGNA PATER FELIX CAELESTIA XPI
INDE TVVM PRECIVS AVXILIARE GREGEM
DVMM SOL IGNICOMO RVTILVS SPLENDESCIT AB AXE
LAVS TVA SÇE PATER SEMPER IN ORBE MANET
SEDIT BEATAE MEMORIAE HADRIANVS PAPA
ANNOS XXIII MENSES X DIES XVII OBIT VII KL IÁN

To the right of the text columns of figures number verse lines, words, syllables, and letters reckoned two ways, first with ligatures as single letters and abbreviations not expanded, and second with ligatures as two letters and abbreviations expanded.
Here the father of the Church, the glory of Rome, the renowned author, Hadrian the blessed pope has rest, a man for whom [there was] life, God, piety, law, glory, Christ, an apostolic shepherd, prompt at all good,
noble, born from a great race of forebears, but nobler by a long way in sacred merits, a shepherd being eager with a devout breast to adorn always and everywhere temples consecrated to his own God; churches with gifts and peoples with holy teaching he imubes, and for all he opens the way to the stars; to paupers generous, to no man second in piety, and for the common people always thoroughly vigilant in sacred prayers, doctrines, with resources he had erected your fortresses on the walls, he [your] honour, renowned Rome, city, head of the world, for whom death, which was destroyed by the death of Christ, brought no harm, but was soon the gate of a better life.

Weeping after the father, I Charles have written these songs.

You, for me sweet love, you now I lament, father.
You be mindful of me; my mind follows you always.
With Christ may you hold the blessed realms of the pole.
You the clergy, the people loved with great love;
you were one love for all, best bishop;
I join our names, together with titles, most clearly [or ‘honourably’, if not vocative ‘brightest one’].

Hadrian, Charles, I the king and you the father.

You whoever may read the verses, suppliant with a devout breast, say of both men, ‘Gentle God, be merciful’.
May this rest now hold your members, dearest one;
with the holy ones of God may [your] holy soul rejoice,
until indeed the last trumpet may call to your ears, ‘With the prince Peter rise to see God’.
You will be bound to hear, I know, the holy voice of the Judge, ‘Enter now into the great joys of your Lord’.
Then be mindful of your son, best father, I ask, and with the Father say ‘May this my son proceed’.
O seek, happy father, the celestial realms of Christ.
Thence aid your flock with prayers.
While the sun glowing red shines splendidly from the fiery-haired axis your praise, holy father, remains always in the world.
Hadrian the pope of blessed memory sat twenty-three years, ten months, seventeen days; he passed away on the seventh of the kalends of January.

The orthography is by Classical standards perfect, with the possible exception of b for expected p in scribsi 17, with which one can compare in the corpus of The Roman Inscriptions of Britain conlabos 430 for expected conlapsos, dilabsum 747 and 791 for expected dilapsum, and conlabsum 1738 and 1988 for expected conlapsum.9 One can

compare also the spellings *describi, scribisse, scribta, and scribtrarum* in manuscripts of the works of the first Anglo-Latin author Aldhelm (†709).\(^\text{10}\) The spelling *inclytus* 1 and *inclyta* 14 is well recorded from the Classical period along with *inclytus* and *inclitus*.

The prosody is by Classical standards competent, with no examples of hiatus or synizesis, and one example of correct elision in *perempta est* 15. The quantities in *ecclēsiae* 1 and *ecclēsias* 9 may be compared with the short e in *ecclesia* in Aldhelm *De Pedum Regulis* 133 and *Carmen Ecclesiasticum* 3.27, and in Alcuin’s *Vita Sancti Willibrordi* 3.2. The quantities in *Hadriānus* 2 and *auditūrus* 31 are unusual, but not unique. In Late Latin the first *a in papa* is normally short, but *pāpa* 2 may derive from the long first syllable of *πάπας*. The *e of Petro* is normally short, but *Pētro* 30 may derive from the long first syllable of *Πέτρος*, unless the liquid r is taken to lengthen the first syllable, as in *sācris* 6, but not in *sācrata* 8 and *sācris* 12. Liquid r is taken to lengthen the first syllable of *pātrem* 17, but not of *lācrimans* 17 and *pātre* 34.

The composition is symmetrical, the first sixteen lines a single sentence in the third person about Hadrian, the central eight lines in the first person as spoken by Charlemagne in the second person addressed to Hadrian, and the last sixteen lines in the second person addressed to the reader and to Hadrian, the last two lines being prose.

In the first and third parts much of the diction has been arranged in parallel and chiastic patterns. In the first part, first parallel:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>ecclesiae</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>pietas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>sacris</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

then chiastic:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>Romae</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>inclytus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>pastor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>nobilis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D’</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>nobilior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C’</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>pastor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B’</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>inclyta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A’</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Roma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the third part, first parallel:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>26</th>
<th>Deus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>nunc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>gaudeat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>tuas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

then chiastic:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>27</th>
<th>tua</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>cum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>scio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D  32  tui
e  33  tunc memor esto
d’ 33  tui
c’ 33  posco
b’ 34  cum
a’ 38  tua

In the entire composition, first parallel:

A  7  deuoto pectore  A’ 25  deuoto pectore
B  8  semper  B’ 38  semper
C 14  orbis  C’ 38  orbe
D 16  ianua  D’ 40  ianuarias

then chiastic:

A  2  Hadrianus … papa
B  2  beatus
C  3  gloria
D  3  Christus
E  5  magna genitus
F  8  Deo
G  9  sancto
H 17  patrem
I 17  Karolus … scribsi
J 18  amor te modo plango pater
K 19  te
L 20  cum Xpisto teneas regna beata poli
K’ 21  te
J’ 22-24  amor … eras … iungo … Hadrianus
I’ 24  Karolus … ego
H’ 24  pater
G’ 28  sanctis
F’ 28  Dei
E’ 32-35  magna … natus
D’ 35  Xpisti
c’ 38  laus
b’ 39  beatae
a’ 39  Hadrianus papa

From the beginning of the poem the twentieth word is *Christus* l 3. After *Xpisti* l 35 there are twenty words to the end of the poem. Between *Christus* l 3 and *Xpisti* 15 there are seventy words. Between *Xpisti* l 15 and *Xpisto* 20 there are half that many, thirty-five words. Between *Xpisto* l 20 and *Xpisti* 35 there are one hundred words.

From the beginning of the poem there are thirty-three syllables to *Deus* 3. From *Deus* l 3 there are thirty-three words to *Deo* 8. From *Quisquis 25 to Deus* l 26 there are sixty-six letters (33 × 2). From *Deus* l 26 the sixty-sixth letter is the first of *Dei* 28. From *Dei* l 28 the sixty-sixth letter is the first of *Deum* 30.
Between pater 1 and patrem 17 there are one hundred words (20 × 5). From patrem 17 to pater 18 there are eighty letters and spaces between words (20 × 4). From pater 18 to pater 24 there are forty words (20 × 2). From pater 33 the twentieth letter is the first of Patre 34. From Cum Patre 34 to pater 35 there are twenty syllables. From pater 35 to pater 38 there are twenty-words. From pater 38 to the end of the poem there are twenty letters and spaces between words.

The poet made words for numbers illustrate their value by their position. In the first eight couplets the 101 words divide by duple ratio 2:1 at secundus |. The eleven words of the sentence in lines 25-26 divide by duple ratio at 7 and 4, at amborum | ‘both [of two]’. In the last line the tenth syllable is the last of X decem. There are seventeen letters before | dies XVII. There are seven words before VII septimo.

Reckoning ligatures as single letters and abbreviations not expanded the twenty-four lines of text from Hic | pater 1 to tuque pater 24, representing the twenty-three years and ten months during which Hadrian was father of the Church, contain exactly 795 letters, coincident with the year of Hadrian’s death, 795.

The poet writes ‘I join our names together with titles most clearly, Hadrian, Charles, I the king and you the father’, placing name adjacent to name and title to title, partly to illustrate the friendship and cooperation of the two men, and partly to illustrate the alphanumeric identity of their names. In the Insular tradition this phenomenon is exhibited in the value of the names of the father FIACHNAE, 6+9+1+3+8+13+1+5 or 46, added to the value of the name of the mother MUGAIN, 12+20+7+1+9+13 or 62, equalling the value of the name of the son, the Hiberno-Latin author CUMMIANUS, 3+20+12+9+1+13+20+18 or 108.11 It may be compared also with the way in which Muirchú moccu Maichténi made the value of the name of Patrick’s father CALFARNIO, 3+1+11+6+1+17+13+9+14 or 75, identical with the value of the name of his mother, CONESSA, 3+14+13+3+5+18+18+1 or 75, and wrote seventy-five syllables from one name to the other.12 It may be compared more closely with the way in which Fredegisus associated his name with the title of Charlemagne, FREDEGISVS 6+17+5+4+5+7+9+18+20+18 or 109 and IMPERATOR 9+12+15+5+17+1+19+14+17 or 109.13 Here the name HADRIANVS exhibits an alphanumeric value of 8+1+4+1+17+9+1+13+20+18 or 91 and the name KAROLVS an alphanumeric value of 10+1+17+1+14+11+20+18 or 91. From the beginning of the poem to the first Hadrianus | and from the last Hadrianus | to the end of the poem there are, with ligatures reckoned as single letters, ninety-one letters. From Karolus haec carmina scribsi | to | Karolus there are ninety-one syllables.

In line 39 the thirty-second letter is the last of papa, coincident with the alphanumeric value of PAPA, 15+1+15+1 or 32.

Including expanded abbreviations and separated ligatures there are in the central couplets from the space before | Post patrem to the space after pater | 333 letters and spaces between words.14

12 Howlett, Muirchú’s Life of Patrick, p. 140.
In this forty-lined composition the first line of part I, 1, contains forty letters, the first line of part II, 17, contains forty letters.

In accordance with a long Insular tradition of referring to the author at the golden section the thirty-eight lines of the poem proper divide by extreme and mean ratio at 23.5 and 14.5, at line 23.5, at Karolus rex ego. The 248 words of the poem proper divide by the same ratio at 153 and 95, at Karolus rex ego.

This analysis, though incomplete, is sufficient to illustrate a repertory of compositional phenomena shared by Alcuin, who wrote verse probably soon after Hadrian’s death, early in 796, and Fredegisus, who wrote prose probably soon after Charlemagne’s coronation as emperor, early in 801. The pseudonymous verse of Alcuin, put into the mouth of Charlemagne, might be understood as propaganda for the Carolingian court to be displayed in Rome. The pseudonymous prose of Fredegisus, addressed as from Charlemagne to Dúngal, might be understood as a serious philosophical discourse about the substance of nothing and shadows subverted as an in-house joke for the Carolingian court. If so, one might see both court propaganda and court banter elevated to the status of high art.

What connects these two inscriptions? Both share much of the same diction. Both compositions are in three parts, the first praise of the commemorated subject in the third person, the second direct address to the commemorated subject in the second person, before a calendrical conclusion in the third person. Both begin as verse and end in prose.

Columban, the first Irishman to become a Latin author whose works have descended to us under his own name, left Bangor about A.D. 590, and founded the monastery of Bobbio, where he died A.D. 615. About the time Columban left Bangor Cummianus Longus, the first Irishman who pursued a Latin literary career entirely in Ireland, was born, namesake of the Bishop Cummian commemorated in the first inscription. Liutprand, who commissioned the first inscription, consolidated the kingdom of the Lombards, enabling his successor to encroach on the papal patrimony, which induced Hadrian I to appeal to Charlemagne, who commissioned the second inscription, to defend the papacy. The first inscription was composed by Master John at Bobbio in 734, a year before the birth of Alcuin. When Alcuin was about sixty years old Pope Hadrian I died, the occasion that elicited the second inscription. That pseudonymous composition, put into the mouth of Charlemagne, was paralleled a few years later by Alcuin’s colleague Fredegisus, who addressed his composition as from Charlemagne to the Irish scholar Dúngal, who, when he died in 827, left his books, including the manuscript we know as the Antiphonary of Bangor, to the library at Bobbio.

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