Literary Epigraphy in the Carolingian Monastery[[1]](#footnote-1)

by Francesco Stella

*The matter of poetic epigraphy*

In a culture like the Carolingian one, whose driving force in comparison to the preceding decades was primarily the exponential multiplication of means of communication, attention paid to public writings inevitably takes on a central role: the old, rather persistent image of a literary rebirth primarily characterized by an imitative revival of ancient literature is not conducive to an exploration of the many paraliterary expressions that are proof of the extraordinary vitality of this communicative impulse. According to my own reading experience, Carolingian poetry is entirely dictated by a concrete relationship with social reality, and it is difficult to find Carolingian poems that cannot be traced back to an at least seemingly concrete motivation, to a real context rather than an imaginary or fantastical one, to an actual goal for which writing is an expression or tool. Literary epigraphy—that is, epigraphy handed down primarily through manuscripts—is in fact one of the manifestations wherein the nature of use of Carolingian literature becomes more explicit. This is precisely why, like the other expressive forms of this vast poetic corpus, it can never be reduced to simple imitation or rewriting: because we have at least the partial possibility of reconstructing the environment in which it was really located. And even when we are uncertain whether all the epigraphs attested in the manuscripts were or were not actually used or about which physical spaces may have held them, it still seems clear that—aside from the exceptions that we can identify—we are nevertheless looking at texts that were composed to be read by others, and not simply for practice or imitation. At a conference in Bologna some years ago,[[2]](#footnote-2) Luce Pietri clearly showed that from Paulinus of Nola to Ambrosius, to Paulinus of Périgueux and Venantius Fortunatus, a genuine genre of epigraphs in verse, written by poets on secular or ecclesiastical commission, was being developed; and that in Cimitile, Milan, and Tours attestations in later documents and the results of archaeological excavations have confirmed the actual use of those compositions, already widely demonstrated by internal evidence like the authors’ concern for location, the dimensions of the entablature, and even the colour of the letters of the epigraphs and cartouches, or by specific texts such as Paulinus of Nola’s letter 32 *de aedificiis*. Pietri’s arguments were revived at a conference in Spoleto by Guglielmo Cavallo,[[3]](#footnote-3) who in referring to the Augustinian expression *versus publice scripti* (*Serm*. 319, 8) reminded us that opportunities to avail oneself of these inscriptions—which were also challenging in a literary sense—included, for the *illitterati* but not only for them, reading and explanation by an inside guide, typically provided by the *aedituus* or *ostiarius*, as several texts by Gregory of Tours also confirm.[[4]](#footnote-4) In a masterful essay from 2012,[[5]](#footnote-5) Peter Stotz, investigating a number of verse inscriptions on plates, reliquaries, crosses, and chalices from medieval Germany and Finland, sets out about a dozen sample categories of the way in which inscriptions, not so much those on stone as those on artefacts, communicate cultural elements or poetic form—such as rhythmic contrafactum, quotation, fortuitous textual coincidence, reuse of common poetic formulas, reflection of scholarly readings, specific format of a type of inscription, deixis, typological interpretation of the painted figure or shape of the artefact, first-person form that recalls the riddle scheme, epigraphic appeal to a passer-by, apostrophe to or among depicted figures, simple caption, correction, reflection dictated by an image, and wordplay with signifiers—often identifying intertextual relationships as incontestable as they are unlikely and coming to the conclusion that the driving force was always an ‘überpersönliche, allenfalls kanoniserte Formulierungstradition’, if not *Zufall*,[[6]](#footnote-6) which makes analyses of purely textual links unsupported by other evidence seem dubious.

Rosamund McKitterick omitted inscriptions from the attestations examined in her overview of writing in the Carolingian period,[[7]](#footnote-7) which were partially taken into consideration only in a recent essay from 2015 in which Florian Hartmann asserts the influence of the Lombards’ (in particular Liutprand’s) strategy of epigraphic propaganda over the Carolingians.[[8]](#footnote-8) Robert Favreau showed that the engraving of these poems is in some cases still demonstrable: regardless of archdeacon Pacificus’ controversial epitaph, this is true at least for an Alcuinian line that is found in a good six ecclesiastical inscriptions,[[9]](#footnote-9) for an epigram by Theodulf for Germigny-des-Près, for Alcuin’s epitaph for Pope Adrian,[[10]](#footnote-10) for Hincmar’s inscriptions whose usage is attested by Flodoard of Reims, and for Sedulius Scotus’ epitaph for Hildebert, archbishop of Cologne in 862. But this list could be further updated to include examples such as the *Versus Augienses*, i.e. the ‘Reichenau verses’, which we find were published in the *Poetae* of the *Monumenta* and later on in other places, but which we can also read at Saint George in Oberzell, Reichenau.[[11]](#footnote-11) The list would become enormous if we considered *tituli librarii,* which I have had the chance to examine already elsewhere. But while the question of their actual usage, from Edmond Le Blant[[12]](#footnote-12) and Giovanni Battista de Rossi[[13]](#footnote-13) onwards, has provoked some uneasiness among epigraphists, who are justifiably concerned about defining the limits of the material available to them, this remains a secondary concern for a literary scholar who can be equally interested in these texts whether the engraving’s entablature is preserved or not. Particularly as history takes it upon itself to contradict our most rational expectations: such as when it was discovered that one of Venantius Fortunatus’ inscriptions, whose use on stone is demonstrable or at least highly probable, is in fact one of the lengthiest and most clearly anti-epigraphic pieces that the poet composed.[[14]](#footnote-14) Moreover, who would believe in the actual engraving of Pope Adrian’s epitaph could we not see it for ourselves at St Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican?

*Carolingian monastic epigraphy: Saint-Riquier*

The Carolingian monasteries that may be considered the most important centres of this kind of literary production are chiefly Tours, Fulda, Saint Gall, Reichenau, Saint-Amand, and most of all Saint Riquier, although a significant number of sites may be included due to individual cases or small groups of texts.

The least studied of these *corpora* is certainly Saint Riquier’s, about which we have only a few—albeit analytical and precise—pages by Günter Bernt, the author in 1968 of the only volume dedicated to early medieval Latin literary epigraphy.[[15]](#footnote-15) The Centula abbey was subject to detailed archaeological reconstructions, also following recent excavations,[[16]](#footnote-16) but not much attention was paid to its literature—if we exclude the hagiographies of Saint Richarius and the reformer Angilbert and works by him (such as the *de ecclesia Centulensi*, SS XV) and Ariulf (*Chronica* III 3), which help us to reconstruct the abbey’s appearance and history. The Saint Riquier *corpus* consists of a collection of poems that Traube titled the *Carmina Centulensia*. These preserve a substantial number of epigraphs, handed down by a codex from Gembloux, now in Brussels (10470-473 and 10859). The first group (IV-XV) appears in the series attributed to Micon, a monk and deacon who also compiled a famous prose anthology. It consists of engravings from the church of Mary—one of the three poles of the famous triangular cloister at Centula—such as number 4, which a colophon clarifies is about individuals who are *Zonatim picti discipulique sui*, whom Hubert attributed to the altars of the apostles arranged in a group around the altar of the Virgin, or from the *scriptorium* (where as usual the difficulty of the scribe’s work was lamented and the reading, day and night, of the Rule of Saint Benedict was encouraged) or on a series of crosses (with brief references to teleological interpretations).

*Epitaphs*

A second group consists of epitaphs of figures such as Nithard (33)—this text refers to a tomb painting[[17]](#footnote-17)—or Angilbert himself, which are characterized by precise information such as the names of the deceased and the days of their demise. These unveil a style that is rather more casual than the standard Carolingian one, as can be seen in the poetry by Micon himself or his confrere Fredegard (from no. 68 on), *procurator pauperum* in around 866. Number 34 recalls, for instance, the *flaccentia membra* of Ermenrich, *callenti more catorum*,[[18]](#footnote-18)rather bluntly commended for skills he acquired by dint of practice rather than through specialist expertise: *quamvis arte carens, tamen usu iure calebat:* */ praecipuus scriba, vivax lector fuit atque* */ insuper occentor nec non numerato opimus*; 36, those of the monk *geometricus* Donadeus, *mechanica doctus in arte*; and 40, the foreigner Israhel. For more or less all of these deceased men, the epitaph, which in 42 is self-proclaimed a *titulus*, urges the reader to pray, in keeping with the typical forms of the genre; and for many of them we encounter the tradition of versifying the date of death. A sort of internal formulary is also created, which sees the recurrence of attributes such as *veridicus* and identifications such as *astu pollebat* at the beginning of the poem, and not only in the typical locations of the ‘here lies’ or the appeal to the reader. But elements of social customs also emerge: such as clapping at the funeral (43, 7: *et manibus plausis flebat tunc contio praesens*), which allows us to locate the composition of the *titulus* at a point in time after the funerary rites. It is almost never the deceased who speaks: exceptions in this regard are the epitaphs of Godelenda (47) and Gervide (65), both in first person.[[19]](#footnote-19) In some instances, allusions are made to the hope of resurrection in original ways, such as in 59, for Adalelm, who is wished a tranquil interment (*donec / accensus redeat corporis ad speciem*)*,* or unusual circumlocutions are invented to describe permanence on earth, as in no. 100 for Magenard, who *desivit in hac <c>nephosa caligine mundi*, with interference of the Greek that recalls the Paschal hymns of John Scotus Eriugena. Others are copies of inscriptions with one section in prose, with personal information, and another in verse, a homage to and prayer for the deceased (93, 94, 96, 98, 99, 100, 110). In one of these cases (100), sceptics were proven wrong, as it enabled the discovery of the engraved plate, along with others, in the Carolingian cemetery discovered by accident during construction works on the abbey in 1693, and conveniently transcribed by a correspondent of Mabillon, whose letters are still to be found in the National Library of Paris.[[20]](#footnote-20) However, the two texts do not correspond perfectly, which can help us to understand that inscribed poetic epigraphy and literary poetic epigraphy are often unfaithful adaptations of each other. History and life at court surface, other than in the epitaph to Nithard, in 122, which recalls Eridadus killed by Danish arrows, or in 141 for Rudolf, likened to a candle in Charles’ candelabra (in the year 866), whose following inscription introduces us to the emperor’s *auletas*. A borderline case, where we may perhaps speak accurately of pseudoepigraphy, is carmen 166, which Micon writes in the form of an epitaph to an ostiary, who—as was the case in the monasteries—was also in charge of wardrobe and furnishings. *Hic quidam levita cubat sub tegmine ponti* / *custos ecclesiae fidus ubique bene, / sunt cui commissae vestes ac vasa sacrata.* Following this is a prayer to the custodian priest to not let too many people in, so as to not *sanctam commaculare larem*. It is important for the place where the Lord’s body is broken to stay as clean as possible. Then he asks, in return for these lines, for a *cuppa* (cup) and *nec non copello*[[21]](#footnote-21) *desuper imposito*, promising to ‘fight against’ (*contra certare parabo*: against intruders, we imagine) if the request is granted, and to worry less (*stat mihi cura levis*) in case of refusal. The epitaph has a joking tone that does not easily permit serious interpretation, although it is possible that here, too, we are being side-tracked by preconceptions and it could be more easily understood if instead of considering it an epitaph, as Traube did, we interpret it as a plate of residence, similar to those for the abbot’s house, obviously understanding *cubat* in the sense of rest and not death.

*Vestments and furniture*

Other inscriptions refer instead to items of clothing, like the belt: these are numbers 50 and 52, which ask God for a check, close-fitting as a belt, on the vices of the wearer, and which in the commentary that I prepared for the 1995 anthology I realized I could use as evidence of not so much—as Bernt proposes—a ‘good luck (guter Wünsch)’ as a relationship with reality that always keeps in mind the double terrestrial and spiritual dimension of all objects. And if each object finds a balance between its immediate function and that of its *signum*, in Christianized medieval culture this link to the hidden dimension also absorbs the magical properties generally associated with everyday matter, and in any case with the inscriptions that introduced them and communicated their *virtus* to their users and the general public. Other texts in this category concern furniture: on the bed (54), where Christ is called on to chase away the devil, *zabulus lubricus*; on the dining table—where the consumption of food is constantly associated with the nourishment and purification of the soul—with the corresponding blessing of foods and beverages; or on the washbasin, where it is hoped that by washing one’s face heavenly Grace washes the soul. Another double couplet on the bath (*Super lavacro*), or more likely on the washbasin (86), instead focuses on the filthiness of the devil, who must not sully the purity of God’s creation; number 70 on the lantern reminds the bearer (*gestator*) of the evangelical precept to not hide the light shut away in one’s soul. Ten technically elaborate lines on the hourglass praise its maker, who constructed it thinking of lessening his brethren’s labour. Again in 134 *In quodam gestatorio*, an everyday object appears, a kind of sedan-chair where people sat, whose ability to shelter the user from bad weather is praised: *decutit ardorem solis pluviamque ferenti / hoc tegmen capitis tempore disparili*. And the final adjective, used only very rarely and never in similar contexts, confirms that even the humblest and most ordinary of occasions were felt to be a chance for expressive experiment and stylistic risk-taking. 135 is carved or painted on a *muscarium*, a fly-swatter[[22]](#footnote-22) whose twofold use is celebrated: swatting flies and giving shade (*nam muscas pellit umbraculumque facit*), or rather making the user cool by fanning *ferventi tempore*, when the air is muggy. Talking objects also include the little bed in 144 (where there is a prayer to banish the devil, whose influence on nocturnal dreams is clearly feared), the chalice of 129, which speaks in first person to remind us of its ability to quench thirst, the lamp made by the abbess Hruodona (867), and again the lantern of 147, made of horn so that it will not break easily if dropped. Here, too, we see the emergence of a continuity of expressive schemes dating back to the riddle and already canonized, following Symphosius, as of the insular collections of early medieval *Aenigmata* and then of Alcuin.[[23]](#footnote-23) But the recourse to poetic tradition as expressive repertoire should not make us think—as Bernt suggests—that these are variations on exactly the same subject: I think it more reasonable to hypothesize different inscriptions for objects that are different, though of the same type. It is typical of our literary, serial mentality to think that two texts about a lamp are two poetic variations on the same object: but it would be hoped that a monastery the size of Saint-Riquier had more than one lamp, each perhaps with its own personalized inscription, just as its cemetery housed many dead, each with a different epitaph. Even when different epitaphs are found for the same person, as transpires for Rudolf (141, 142, and 143 on his lamp), it is highly possible that these are inscriptions engraved on different sides of the same tomb.[[24]](#footnote-24) The use of the first person, which on the part of the object recalls the techniques used in riddles, is sometimes employed by the author of the *titulus*, who flaunts his own restoration work, such as 127, in which Odulf attests that he recovered a ciborium that was formerly *manibus … vastatus iniquis* / *nec non foedatus turpiter heu nimium.*

*Locales*

But one of the most interesting roles of these epigraphic collections is that of a guide to the monastery premises, which the inscriptions allow us to walk through with a certain amount of detail, and not only in the spaces designated for sacred ceremonies, which are described by Angilbert in the *De ecclesia Centulensi*. Apart from the locations of crypts and altars, discussed in depth by Bernard and Hubert, we find instead, in 88, one of the few attributed to the hospital worker Fredegard, three couplets *In sessione peregrinorum*, in which Christ is described as one of the seated strangers. It refers to the *domus peregrinorum et pauperum*, an accommodation consisting—as set out by the famous Plan of Saint Gall—of a great hall with benches, sleeping quarters, and annexes with furnaces and pantries, very distinct from the *hospitale* for the rich who passed through, which was necessarily fitted with heating, rooms for servants, and stables. The same place, the hospital for the poor, is referred to in 119, which introduces a structural innovation to the epigraphic schemes in these collections: *the dialogical epigraph*. Here, the first speaker calls on the porter to give as much as he can, and Christ answers, seated in human aspect and foreign attire as in 88, blessing the cohort of brethren that serves him and hopes for the flight of the great Enemy. The dialogical scheme is highlighted with some refinement by the adoption of the epanaleptic couplet, wherein the first half of the first hemistich is repeated in the second half of the second. In the form of a dialogue, this time with the Muse, an epitaph—or possibly an epicedium—is even introduced: no. 32 for young Leutgaudus, a student at the school. In fact, the initial couplet invites the *Fistula*, as the muse of song is often metonymized in this collection, to tell us the facts, the *causa*, of the young man. And the Muse, thus indicated by the manuscript, replies. She mourns for the youth’s metric ability, which rivalled Porphyrian’s (a choice indicative of a kind of education), and his goodness of spirit, and summarizes his biographical information: born over the Seine, buried in this world on the calends of May in his eighteenth year. His soul entered Olympus, assisted by the merits of the saints to whom he often addressed prayers, which are referred to here with the Commodian Latin formula *suppetia*.[[25]](#footnote-25) The closing, with its appeal to the reader and call to prayer, seems to suggest a concrete destination for this epitaph, due to the originality of its approach.

Also dedicated to pilgrims and foreigners is 136 on a *domus peregrinis adtitulata*: *illis ostensa qua manet humanitas*, a line that can be interpreted not so much in a social sense, as might be misunderstood by a modern reading that sees the stranger as the place where the very heart of humanity resides, but perhaps evangelically and theologically as the guise in which the humanity of Christ manifests most clearly—also through a coordinated reading with the other two inscriptions. This attention to *humanitas*, this time in a more cultural sense, moreover shines through to some degree in the epitaph of Flodegerus (146), about whom it is remembered that *humanis floruit eloquiis*.

114 *In quadam mansione* brings us to a *domuncula*, also attested at Saint Gall, where the brethren who were gravely ill—today we would say terminal—withdrew to render their *extremos spiritus* unto Christ, assisted by the angel Gabriel who preserved them for heaven, where they were awaited by the *messores clypeati* (an imaginative metaphor for the apostles[[26]](#footnote-26) interested in their souls): this is the place that the Plan of Saint Gall also allocates to the seriously ill.[[27]](#footnote-27)

One plaque even gives a warning from the vantage point of a fruit cellar (78 *In domo pomorum*). A curse *in mansione cuiusdam* (70) wishes for any trespasser in the residence to turn deaf and mute, but also wishes for the resident to remain silent about all that he hears here.

No. 13, which the manuscript titles *Item similiter de prosperitate*, and which follows a couplet for a cross, is correctly attributed by Traube to a map divided into continents, which was probably found in the *scriptorium*: *hic mundi species perituri picta videtur, / partibus in ternis qui spatiatus inest, / quarum Asia primumque locum hinc Europa secundum / possidet extremum Africa deinde suum.*

More conventional are the epigraph for the *scriptorium* (5, *in domo scriptorum*, cited earlier, and also no. 15, which as usual laments the difficulty of the task of transcription, unknown to those who do not practice it: *Scribentis labor ignaris nimium levis extat, / sed durus notis sat manet atque gravis*); 6 *In lectrico*, or ‘on the lectern’, according to the title corrected by Traube in a way that to me seems debatable and unnecessary;[[28]](#footnote-28) and 111 *In quodam oratorio*, which again takes up the Alcuinian topos of slumber to be chased away on dark nights, cleansing the eyes from the gloomy haze of tiredness: *noctibus in furvis pulso iam corpore somno / et geminis detersa oculis caligine tetra, / quo sol iustitiae lucem tribuat renitentem / gratis in hac servis parva vigilantibus aede*, etc. It is these very epigraphs, like many others, that lead us back to the transmission of a topical catalogue that falls into the category of ‘monastic literary epigraphy’: the constant association of specific poetic motifs in specific spaces of the monastic site constitutes none other than the topical structure of a genre in the making. We cannot, in this instance, avoid thinking of Alcuin’s inscription no. 98 IIII: *discute torpentes, frater, tibi pollice somnos, / et contende prior tecta subire dei*. In Alcuin, the motif is also used in carmen 97, a beautiful lyric on slumber and its temptations, which prevent us from contemplating the lights of the stars, and urges the young monk to make use of *collyrium salutis* to win this difficult battle.

*The role of Alcuin*

Alcuin of York, who we find at the root of many expressive forms of Carolingian and medieval culture, is also the father of the Carolingian literary epigraph, as well as the public figure who most successfully managed to operate a fruitful osmosis between the motifs and styles of his epigraphic output and the generative nuclei of his intellectual and poetic world. His production of literary inscriptions includes dozens of pieces, which underlie all the other Carolingian collections—those of Rabanus Maurus for Fulda and other locations, widely inspired by Alcuinian models, the one from Saint-Riquier, which even ends with an imitation of Alcuin, etc.—just as his biblical *titulus* (that is, a poem summarizing the Bible) scheme was imitated, altered, and reproduced for centuries in competition with Theodulf’s. In the Dümmler edition of Alcuin’s carmina, the epigraphs comprise numbers 86-115, excluding the scriptural *tituli*, but many numbers contain several inscriptions (up to 18), and others are even scattered among the earlier nuclei of the edition (e.g. 64, *Fornax*), for a total of about 170 pieces, still excluding the *tituli librarii,* that is, the headlines of texts in manuscripts. The study of this material was brilliantly initiated by Luitpold Wallach in two chapters of *Alcuin and Charlemagne*,’ and by Günter Bernt on pages 194-202 of the monograph *Das lateinische Epigramm* (1968), [[29]](#footnote-29) but still awaits special attention.

We are all aware that there were important precedents before Alcuin. These include, on the one hand, the poetic models from the tradition that connects Paulinus of Nola, and even before him, Damasus, the most imitated,[[30]](#footnote-30) to Venantius Fortunatus; and on the other, the epigraphic compilations studied by Silvagni: the *Cantabrigiensis, Laureshamensis*,[[31]](#footnote-31) and *Cantuariensis*, in addition to what is known as the *Martinellus* of Tours—handed down by a good 90 witnesses[[32]](#footnote-32)—and to collections that are not specifically epigraphic, among them the Par. Lat. 8071, almost all from the Carolingian period,[[33]](#footnote-33) which proves the existence of an intense and widespread impulse to commission epigraphic apparatus. Some of these collections have been handed down in manuscripts that also contain Alcuinian poems[[34]](#footnote-34) and certainly served as models for epigraphic composition, as demonstrated by Bischoff’s discovery in 1984 of a formulary for epitaphs by abbesses in the eighth century, drawn from royal inscriptions.[[35]](#footnote-35) The driving force behind their composition was undoubtedly the royal commissions of various monasteries, sometimes also confirmed by epistolary documentation.[[36]](#footnote-36) Alcuin wrote for Saint-Amand, for Saint-Vaast, for St. Denis, definitely for Tours, for Fleury and Metz, for St. Avold,[[37]](#footnote-37) for Corméry, for Nouaillé (Vienne, Nobilicum), for Sankt Peter in Salzburg, for Köln, for Jumièges (Gemeticum), for Roma, for Gorze, and for other churches whose identities cannot be confirmed. This wide dissemination of poetic and epigraphic forms of communication extended his influence for a very long time across many genres: the *tituli librarii*, for one. And Cecile Treffort has shown that the models for the Alcuinian epigraphs were most of all from Alcuin’s own *Carmina*.[[38]](#footnote-38)

A recurring setting, which obviously gives rise to iterated formulas, is the restoration of a sacred place, church or altar, by an abbot or another commissioner who wishes to leave a record of the project.[[39]](#footnote-39) Alcuin’s poetic inscriptions introduce a gallery of founders and restorers, which makes up both a sort of prosopography of the revival—the twenty-seven cathedrals, the forty-seven and possibly more monasteries[[40]](#footnote-40) of which the sources speak—as well as a geography of ecclesiastical commissioning. The most typical example of this subgenre, on which we will not linger, is no. 89[[41]](#footnote-41) *In ecclesia sancti Vedasti in pariete scribendum*, which describes, with devoted care, the restoration completed by Abbot Radon in around 790 after the monastery fire. Alcuin’s gaze brushes over the gates, the altars covered in precious metals, the *pallia* hung on the walls, and the lamps, the sacred silver furnishings, even the beautiful paraments for the priests, because that kind of decorum and beauty—which confers dignity on the offering of faith and the institution that mediates it—must exist everywhere, in each aspect and element of the surroundings. A historian would find materials and inspiration for socio-archaeological itineraries here; a hagiologist would identify sets and subsets of recurring saints or isolated cults. A scholar of literature, if able to look past the repetitiveness of these schemes, which were later adopted in a reductive and obsessive manner by Rabanus Maurus, could find a gateway to the relationship of writing with everyday reality, whose fading from the literature of the period is often lamented. Alcuin, who reveals an unexpected richness of spirit—in all senses of the word— to those who spend time with him, does not disappoint. Moreover, even studies of the schemes would provide literary material: to give just one example, the identification of the Jeromian formulaic epithet which is almost always used to designate the apostle John in his epigraphs, *symmista*, or ‘initiated into the same mysteries’,[[42]](#footnote-42) helps us to see which, of the many possibilities, was the primary image that this Saint Alcuin and his imitators were proposing to the public, to the reader who was regularly addressed and often involved in the act of worship. And even the title *in pariete scribendum* reveals the stage at which these epigraphs were recorded in the manuscript: before being engraved on stone and wood or painted on a wall and fabrics, that is, according to the author’s own written template, as we can see from the use of the gerundive, frequent in these formulas. But much more compelling are the free or unexpected interpretations, such as no. 92, which seems to be an inscription for individual bathing in a wooden washtub: the text seems initially to hide the riddle structure, both because of the first person approach and the actual recall of an epigram-riddle by Symphosius, thus present in Alcuin’s poetic memory (89):[[43]](#footnote-43) *Nudus erat hospes, placeat cui ludere mecum* / *atque fovere meo corpora fonte sua. / Qui pisces quondam gelidis generavit in undis, / nunc calidus homini forte minister erit, etc.* But the recollection of what once carried wood, i.e. boats, and is now in turn poured into wood, i.e. the tub, and earlier flowed over meadows and is now shut in at home, is an elegiac reproduction of a play on the typical ambivalence of riddles; while the prayer to distract the eyes from what the hand of the first man was covering is a call to modesty, addressed to the poem’s addressee, who we discover only on the last line to be the *puer*, the serving boy. This appeal, as usual, brings the reading of medieval Latin lines back to its double horizon, but without the use of doctrinaire devices, and instead with an entirely Alcuinian lightness: *hoc natura docet, hoc et persuasit honestas*.[[44]](#footnote-44) At Saint-Denis and Corbie, there is a record of baths located near the cloister, whose use must have been overseen by the abbot, as required by the monastic regulations of 817;[[45]](#footnote-45) and in Murbach it seems that the statutes ultimately called for the substitution of the communal bath with an individual one, of which the privileged Alcuin is evidently speaking.

Similarly distinctive—and I would say elegant—touches can be found in no. 93, *titulus* of a place, perhaps an oratorium where youths were invited to learn songs of praise from the voice of a master, and more generally, to dedicate themselves to studying while they were young, because *nec bene namque senex poterit vel discere, postquam / tondenti*[[46]](#footnote-46) *in gremium* [sic] *candida barba cadit*. This suddenly presents us with a scene from a Carolingian barber’s, but continues on in a game of exhortations crossed with images of old age and youth, which in my opinion indicates the loss of a couplet, just as on l.11 there is a mechanical lacuna, and which above all introduces us to one of the liveliest emotional currents in Alcuinian poetics.

A similar gap, if it is one, concerns epigraph no. 105, part V, which in the text conspicuously repeats, among others, several passages of 104 IV, where the brethren are invited to enter singing, but with a drastic distinction between the *amicus ovans*, the only one authorized to enter, and the stranger, here qualified with adjectives describing the devil: *fur, falsiloquus, alienus*.[[47]](#footnote-47) The youths must hurry (*currite, vos, iuvenes, Christi properantes ad aulam,* l. 10) and not let themselves be taken in by the pleasure of jest, carnal love, play, *petulantia*,[[48]](#footnote-48) or laughter, dedicating themselves to sacred knowledge until they have come of age, an obsession that anyone perusing Alcuin’s poetry will discover recurs like a leitmotif of his internal elegy. But the titbits of the Alcuinian catalogue—which is familiar with serial production, when necessary, but if desired can deploy unexpected creativity—reveal, as in the case of the washtub, poetry dedicated to spaces of everyday use. 96, for example, is divided into two parts. The first focuses on the dormitory (*In dormiturio*), which is formally an invocation so that the one who subdues the force of the winds and waves grants the brethren sweet rest, and appeases the fears awakened by the black power of the devil: *et quos inmittit somno vis nigra timores* / *conpescat clemens domini, rogo, dextra potentis*. But the most curious section is the second part, on the toilet (*In latrinio*), which urges the reader to refrain from the sin of gluttony due to the unpleasant results that this vice may provoke. This is far from being, as some have written, an expression of a proximity to life that borders on the grotesque, and that cannot escape a comic—though unintended[[49]](#footnote-49)—effect. It is an essentially exceptional example in ancient and medieval epigram—with the possible exception of three brutally moralistic texts by Agathias (A.P. IX 642-644), written to celebrate the construction of a public latrine in Myrina[[50]](#footnote-50)—that I believe demonstrates how Alcuin, with the same ease with which he confronted all aspects of reality, managed to put his own Christian culture on the line, understanding it not as a doctrine but as a hermeneutical resource, by reading a transcendent meaning into all elements—even the humblest—of life, and by reconstructing a way of being, a behaviour that this acknowledgment entailed. Paradoxically, the most realistic point of Alcuinian poetry actually becomes its most allegorical manifestation, just like, less daringly, Micon’s inscriptions on the belt. Particularly as this kind of focus is not an isolated incident in the author’s consciousness, but finds at least one parallel in a letter from the abbot to his protégé Dadon,[[51]](#footnote-51) where he returns to the subject with the same thought: *quod comedisti et bibisti hodie stercus est, quod non dico tangere, sed etiam horrescis videre*. The moral that was, however, obtained from the epigram was not understood so much as a statement on the insignificance of the body, in the Neoplatonic sense that is reflected in the expressionistic violence of *Inferno* 28, 26 f., but as an exhortation to sobriety, analogous to the original use of the motif in Cynic-Stoic reasoning.

A similar, although milder, warmth is found also in some of the epigrams composed for the monastery of Fleury, among them no. 101 II, for the *mansa*\* bought by the abbot Magulfus, a church dedicated to Saint Peter and Saint Benedict. Here we find a note to the reader—inserted, as is often the case, during the call to the dedicatory prayer—that introduces us to the ways in which one might avail oneself of epigraphic texts, in other words reading out loud: *Tu quoque, qui titulum recitas, rogitare memento, / obsecro pro patre Magulfo, lector amice*.

The joking side of Alcuin’s personality and of a certain tone of Carolingian poetry resurfaces in another epigraph from or for Fleury (105 II), a multi-assonant couplet, probably inspired by Anglo-Saxon traditions, which also presents us with lexical *hapax*: *semper in aeternum faciat haec clocula tantum / carmina, sed resonet nobis bona clocca cocorum*. In question here is the hand bell, since if *clocca* has meant ‘bell’ as far back as the letters of Boniface and Lullus,[[52]](#footnote-52) according to Erhardt-Siebold[[53]](#footnote-53) *clocula* is not just a random diminutive but specifically suggests the ‘Klosterglocke’, called upon to make songs (sacred hymns, we imagine) ring out forever, and likened rather unsuccessfully to the apparently just as appreciated serving bell, the *clocca cocorum* or ‘Speiseglocke’.[[54]](#footnote-54)

We are presented with the very same choice between stomach and spirit in 111, which sources hand down with texts about the church of Saint Peter in Salzburg, but which the editor rightly separated from the group:[[55]](#footnote-55) here Alcuin places the *viator* that passes *per stratam* at a crossroads that is not the one between rhetoric and philosophy, but rather between the tavern and the library, as we understand from the text, although it is missing a line. Alcuin leaves the reader with a free choice: between *aut potare merum sacros aut discere libros*, drinking wine or reading books (holy, of course), *elige quod placeat*. But know that if you wish to drink, you will pay, while if you wish to learn you will not spend a penny: *gratis quod quaeris habebis*. And this should not surprise us either: at Saint-Riquier, which due to its extension actually resembled something closer to a village than an abbey, the 2500 individual houses were grouped into neighbourhoods, called *vici*, specialized according to trade as in medieval cities (founders, blacksmiths, shoemakers, tanners, cellarmen, cobblers, etc.[[56]](#footnote-56)) and one of them was appointed the *vicus cauponum*. But taverns were also reported at Saint-Vaast and Saint-Philibert-de-Granlieu, in addition to at Compiègne: it is just that we were used to thinking of them as destinations for pilgrims and merchants, particularly during the abbey market, and not as an alternative option for uncertain monks.[[57]](#footnote-57) Speaking in 112 of an *aula pulchra*, whose owner he addresses, Alcuin invites the *viator praegelidus*, paralysed by the cold but nonetheless *ovans*, ‘elated’, as all the figures of this Alcuinian Christmas crib necessarily are—to *sua sembra fovere*, to warm himself in a house protected by the cross but where the door is always open to friends, *haec pateat caris iam ianua semper amicis / qui laeto quaerant pectore namque patrem*. And this reminds us of the existence of a calefactory, called the *pisalis*, adjacent to the medieval cloisters, which receives the heat from an underlying hypocaust, like at Saint Gall.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Of course, this geography of taverns and washtubs, kitchens and toilets, flyswatters and warming rooms, is not part of the mental imagery that we typically associate with noble Carolingian culture. However, out of these marginal categories, this paratextual literature, an everyday landscape emerges that the generation’s grandiose intellectualism tends to obscure from sight. What we needed to discover it was Alcuin’s warmth, first imitated and then parodied in the *Carmina Centulensia*.

What might be the apex of this interpenetration between the requirements of the local setting, Alcuin’s expressive repertoire, and the liveliest currents of his poetry is perhaps glimpsed in no. VI of series 104, dedicated to the hermitage of Corméry (Cormaricum), near his locale of Tours—eight miles from Saint Martin to be precise, as Alcuin specifies in a letter to the archbishop Arnon.[[59]](#footnote-59) Here, the author contrasts the *cellula* built in the hermitage in the forest (*silvestri… in heremo)* with the *nova culmina* that arise in the *urbes* *egregiae*, in the cities that were already sung of in the books of the ancient bards but were clearly undergoing expansion or reurbanization during the years of the Carolingian impetus. Alcuin, without lingering on the contrast, pauses to celebrate the peace of the cloister where the *theosophica iura*, the sacred studies, flourish and where the *clancula dicta senum*, the mysterious words of the ancients, are contemplated. While in the city schools—and this seems to be a portrait of the twelfth century—they sell and turn over thousands of lies, also from the ancients and created to trick their fellow men, here religious research is done, *quaeritur hic verum … sacrum*, and done through a *famen pacificum*, where even the tone of the message hints at the option of a radical and perfect life, and the monastery becomes a School of the arts, *syllogistica claustra*. While the big cities are dominated by a drunkenness that drowns intelligence, and the servant barely manages to carry his master back in his arms (a painting worthy of Bruegel), in the woodland hermitage long fasts continue until evening, and only sacred foods nourish the hearts of the scholars.

Given this epigraph, it is hard not to think of Alcuin’s famous ode to his *cella*, which Waddell called ‘the loveliest’ lyric of the medieval period, the abbot’s farewell to an unspecified monastery, perhaps the one where he spent his youth, his *sacra iuventus.* Appearing both there and here, for those who still had doubts about the author of the texts, are the same positive terminology (*sophia*, *sacri libri*) and above all the same tone of voice: *pacificis sonuit vocibus atque animis* in the abandoned monastery, the sign of an irretrievable age, and *famine pacifico* in our epigraph from Corméry. It is the formulation of a monastic ideal deeply rooted in a rural context and in the model of a community of studying, a school, that small sacred city that finds one of its most unexpected expressions in the affection with which the poetic inscriptions—which we have leafed through a sample of here—guide us through the spaces of that existential model. These epigraphs leave behind a trace that, much more than the treatises or theological and political output that until now have attracted so much interest, restores to us the lives of men who dwelt in the silent corners of history; it helps us reconstruct the link that unites the conditions of material life with their echoes in the spiritual plain and in the individual states of mind of figures who seem so far away. The entry of poetic motifs into epigraphic composition corresponds somehow to the very same cultural impetus that attests, through graphic evolution, to the influence of literary standards on the epigraphic writing of the period, consistent with the direction common to all Carolingian movement: on the one hand, the recovery of writing as a public form of communication and privileged instrument for the acquisition and sharing of knowledge, and on the other, its reflection in the concept of reality as writing, which we may find our way around only insofar as it is translated into a linguistic sign.

1. English version, updated and revised, of the contribution published in *Le Scritture dai Monasteri. Atti del II seminario internazionale di studio ‘I monasteri nell’alto medioevo’*, Rome, 9-10 May 2002, ed. Flavia De Rubeis and Walther Pohl, Rome, Istitutum Romanum Finlandiae 2003, pp. 123-144. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. L. Pietri, *Pagina in pariete reserata: epigraphie et architecture religieuse*, in *La terza età dell’epigrafia*, Colloquio AIEGL-Borghesi, Bologna, October 1986, ed. A. Donati, Faenza 1998, pp. 137-157. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. G. Cavallo, *Testo e immagine: una frontiera ambigua*, in *Testo e immagine nell’alto Medioevo*, 15-21 April 1993, Spoleto 1994 pp. 31-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *De virt. s. Iuliani* 2 (p. 263), *De virt. s. Martini* II 14 p. 163 and II 29 p. 170, II 49 p. 176, and I 2 p. 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. P. Stotz, *Beobachtungen zu metrischen Inschriften auf Werken des Schatzkunst: Formen, Gehalte, Traditionen,* originally presented at a conference in Halberstadt in 2004 (*Inschriften und Europäische Schatzkunnst*), whose proceedings were never published: it can therefore be read in P.S., *Alte Sprache-Neues Lied. Kleine Schriftem zur christlichen Dichtung des lateinischen Mittelalters,* Florence, SISMEL-Edizioni del Galuzzo 2012, 279-305, with 3 plates. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Essay cit., p. 290. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. R. McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1989, p. 171: ‘I have also had to leave for treatment or fuller discussion another time, and by others, many more kinds of evidence and other contexts and manifestations of literacy. One obvious omission is, of course, the evidence of inscriptions. Thanks to the new project for publishing the inscriptions for mediaeval Gaul, we may soon be in a position to assess his evidence’. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. [Florian Hartmann](about:blank), *Karolingische Gelehrte als Dichter und der Wissenstransfer am Beispiel der Epigraphik*, in *Karolingische Klöster. Wissenstransfer und kulturelle Innovation* ed. [Julia Becker](about:blank) - [Tino Licht](about:blank) - [Stefan Weinfurter](about:blank), Berlin, W. de Gruyter 2015, pp. 255-74. One opportunity for this influence would have been Charlemagne’s stay in Italy in 774 and 781, the authorial vessel, through the good offices of Adalard of Corbie in Italy under the regent Pepin, being Paulus Diaconus, passionate transcriber of epigraphs also by Anglo-Saxon kings in the *Historia Langobardorum,* composer of epigraphs for the Lombard kings, and author of the epigraphs of Hildegard, as well as of two of Charles’ daughters and two of his sisters. After him other fellow countrymen wrote them: Paulinus of Aquileia, Fardulf, and Peter of Pisa. Alcuin began to compose them only after these figures had left court. Adalard would also be behind the Corbie manuscript (De Rossi 76, pp. 168-169), which gathered models of epigraphs from Italy and was transcribed from the *Sylloge Centulensis* (ICVR pp. 72-94)*,* an antigraph from St Riquier, a monastery headed by Angilbert, poet chancellor of the Italian court from 781, which nonetheless ends with a composition by the ‘scotus’ monk Caidoc, therefore contemporary, which reuses Alcuinian models. The role of Alcuin, which Hartmann wishes to minimize somewhat, therefore comes back into play. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Hic decus ecclesiae promptus in omne bonum*, written for Saint-Denis: Liegi 1037, Toul 1126, Saint-Denis 1140, Beauvais 1283, Rouen 1110, Grandmont 1209: Favreau, *Les inscriptions médiévales* – *Reflet d’une culture et d’une foi*, in *Epigraphik 1988. Fachtagung für mittelalterliche und neuzeitliche Epigraphik*, Graz, 10.-14. May 1988, hrsg. von WalterKoch, Wien 1990, pp. 57-89, on p. 77; see also A. Petrucci, *Scrittura e figura nella memoria funeraria*, in *Testo e immagine nell’alto Medioevo*, 15-21 April 1993, Spoleto 1994 cit., pp. 277-296. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. On which see L. Wallach, *Alcuin and Charlemagne. Studies in Carolingian History and Literature*, Ithaca (N.Y.), Cornell Univ. Press, 1959, pp. 178-97, e S. Scholz, *Karl der Große und das “Epitaphium Adriani”. Ein Beitrag zum Gebetsgedenken der Karolinger*, in *Das Frankfurter Konzil von 749. Kristallisationspunkt karolingischer Kultur. Akten zweier Symposien (vom 23. bis 27 Februar und vom 13. bis zum 15 Oktober 1994) anläßlich der 1200-Jahrfeier der Stadt Frankfurt am Main* I *Politik und Kirche*, cur. R. Berndt, Mainz 1997, pp. 373-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. These have developed an impressive bibliography: see K. Koshi, *Die Buchmalerei der Reichenau zwischen Ost und West: Ikonographie anhand von den Wandbildern er Wunder Christi in St. Georg zu Reichenau-Oberzell*, in *Testo e immagine*, Spoleto 1994, pp. 595-629 and W. Berschin, *Die Tituli der Wanderbilder von Reichenau.Oberzell St.Georg*, „Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch“ 29/2 (1994), pp. 3-17, later in Id., *Mittellateinische Studien* Heidelberg, Mattes Verlag 2005 pp. XII-456, pp. 215-28 e ora [Walter Berschin](http://sip.mirabileweb.it/search-scholars/walter-berschin-scholars/1/759), [Ulrich Kuder](http://sip.mirabileweb.it/search-scholars/ulrich-kuder-scholars/1/28390) (adiuv.) *Reichenauer Waldmalerei 840-1120. Goldbach-Reichenau-Oberzell St. Georg - Reichenau-Niederzell St. Peter und Paul* Heidelberg, Mattes Verlag 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Inscriptions chrétiennes de la Gaule antérieures au VIII siècle*, t. I *Provinces gallicanes*, Paris 1856 pp. 4 ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Inscriptiones Christianae urbis Romae septimo saeculo antiquiores*, II/1, Romae 1888, pp. XLVIII-XLIX. Camille Julian (*Inscriptions romaines de Bordeaux*, 1890, vol. II, also includes texts by Venantius, as do Franz Xaver Kraus for Mainz, and Emile Hübner and José Vives for Spain: Favreau, *Fortunat et l’epigraphie*, p. 162). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Glastonsbury 700, on behalf of King Ino of Wessex: R. Favreau, *Fortunat et l’epigraphie*, in *Venanzio Fortunato tra Italia e Francia*, *Atti del convegno internazionale di studi*, Valdobbiadene 17 May 1990-Treviso 18-19 May 1990, Treviso 1993, pp. 161-173, on p. 165, from William Camden, *Britannia sive florentissimorum regnorum Angliae, Scotiae, Hiberniae et insularum adiacentium*, London 1607 p. 165; see Le Blant, cit., pp. 261-264 and 295-300. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. G. Bernt, *Das lateinische Epigramm im Übergang von der Spätantike zum frühen Mittelalter*, München 1968, pp. 295-305. Giuseppe Scalia does not go into this genre, which he calls ‘epigrammatic literature’, in *Le epigrafi*, in *Lo spazio letterario del medioevo. Il Medioevo latino*, vol. III *La circolazione dei testi*, Rome 1994, pp. 409-441, esp. p. 410 n. 3 (much less the manuals of ‘classic’ epigraphy such as R. M. Kloos, *Einführung in die Epigraphik des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1980 and R. Favreau’s overview *Les inscriptions médiévales*, Turnhout 1979). I dedicated chapter 1 of the first part of *La poesia carolingia latina a tema biblico*, Spoleto 1993, pp. 27-210 to poetic Carolingian epigraphs with a biblical theme. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Honoré Bernard, *Premières fouilles à Saint-Riquier*, in *Karl der Grosse* III *Karolingische Kunst*, Düsseldorf 1965, pp. 369-374; Id., *Une restitution nouvelle de la basilique d‘Angilbert*, ‘Revue du Nord’ 1989, pp. 307-361; Id*., L’abbaye de Saint-Riquier. Evolution des bâtiments monastiques du IXe au XVIIIe siècle*, in *Sous la règle de saint Benoît. Structures monastiques et sociétés en France du Moyen Age à l’époque moderne*, Abbaye bénédictine Sainte-Marie de Paris, 23-25 October 1980, Geneva, Droz 1982; a fine description, with a reproduction of the Parisian print of 1612, in J. Hubert-J. Porcher-W.F. Volbach, *L’impero carolingio* (Paris 1968), ed. It. 1968, reprinted in Milan, Rizzoli 1981, and J. Hubert, *Saint-Riquier et le monachisme bénédictin en Gaule à l’époque carolingienne*, in *Il monachesimo nell’alto medioevo e la formazione della civiltà occidentale*, IV Settimana di studio del CISAM, Spoleto 1957, pp. 293-309; B.Delmaire, *Saint-Riquier*, in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. Vii 1995, col. 1198. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Hic rutilat species Nithardi picta sagacis.* [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Catus* or *cattus* is a cat, attested by Niermeyer as of Rahewin, *Gesta Frid*. 4, 59, but used as an adjective it typically means ‘astute’. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. The suspicion that these are exercises emerges when doubles of epitaphs are found for the same person: 64 is also for Godelenda. But it is also possible that they are inscriptions on different sides or surfaces of the same tomb. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. N. 100 for Hildeland, carte Grenier XXVIII f. 134: see L. Delisle, *Le cabinet des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Impériale****:*** *étude sur la formation de ce dépôt comprenant les éléments d'une histoire de la calligraphie, de la miniature, de la reliure, et du commerce des livres à Paris avant l'invention de l'imprimerie*, Paris 1868, vol. II p. 332. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Usually *copellum* is a measure of grain, but in texts from much later (thirteenth century); here it is probably a diminutive of *cuppa*. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Everyday Latin term already used by Martial and Petronius. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. In particular, the self-description in first person and with a focus on the uses of the object: see Stotz p. 292. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Bernt, op. cit., p. 299 is of the same opinion. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Lat. cl. *suppetiae*. V. 12 (sanctorum) *quorum etiam supplex suppetia saepe petebat*. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. From Aug. *Serm*. 101, 3 (evangelical image). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. P. Riché, *La vita quotidiana nell’impero carolingio*, transl. It. Rome, Jouvence 1994, p. 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The manuscript has *In setico*, which Traube deleted and substituted: but *seticus* or *seticum*, attested from this era (Diploma of Charles the Bald I no. 58 p. 165 a. 844), means ‘rural abode’, as well as ‘urban site’, ‘emplacement by water of a mill’ and of a brewery or furnace, in any case a workshop and warehouse. *Lectricum*, however, means ‘lectern’ and is completely inappropriate for the text’s description: *Hic quidam residet calamis ornatus honestis / cum quibus assidue haud laborare piget*. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. No studies appear to have been dedicated to this aspect of Alcuinian production in the monastery: *Alcuin of York: Scholar at the Carolingian Court. Proceedings of the Third Germania Latina Conference Held at the University of Groningen, May 1995*, cur. L.A.J.R. Houwen-A.A. MacDonald, Groningen, Forster 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. According to Hartmann p. 267 these imitations were mainly based on mnemonic processes. On this subject see the specific study by [Maya Maskarinec](about:blank) *The Carolingian Afterlife of the Damasan Inscriptions* [EME](about:blank) 23 (2015) 129-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. BAV, Pal. Lat. 833, which De Rossi considers to be a merge of four different sources (one from Saint Pieter between the seventh and eighth centuries; one North Italian from the end of the eighth century; one with parts from Rome, Ravenna, and Spoleto from the seventh century; one Roman, datable to between 821 and 846) and is traceable, according to Fichtenau, to the abbot of Lorsch Ricbod, and according to Bischoff, to his successor Adalung and his journey to Rome in 823. Nick Everett wrote on the subject with new arguments: *Literacy in Lombard Italy 568-774*, ‘Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thoughts’ IV/52, p. 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. The most recent edition is F. J. Gilardi, *The Sylloge Epigraphica Turonensis de S. Martino*, Diss. Catholic University of America, Washington 1983, on which see L. Pietri, *Une nouvelle édition de la Sylloge Martinienne de Tours*, in ‘Francia’ 12 (1985), pp. 621-631. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. On these collections see Bernt, op. cit., p. 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. A. Silvagni, *Inscriptiones christianase urbis Romae septimo saeculo antiquiores. Colligere coepit Iohannes Baptista De Rossi, complevit ediditque Angelus Silvagni. Nova series, vol. I Inscriptiones incertae originis*, Romae, Befani MCMXXII pp. XVIII-XX: in particular the lost codices of St Bertin and Regensburg (Ratisbona), in addition to clm 19140 from the ninth century (no. 21 Silvagni). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. *Epitaphienforme für Äbtissinen (Ach*

    *tes Jahrhunderts),* in B.B. *Anecdota novissima. Texte des 4. bis 16. Jahrhundert*, Stuttgart 1984, pp. 150-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. For example the monks of Saint-Vaast, Mon. Alc. 729 (Dümmler p. 308 no. 1), but also the marginal notes on 85 and 87ff. of the ms. Douai 753, twelfth century. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. On the river Moselle, not far from Saarbrücken. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. C. Treffort, *Mémoires carolingiennes. L’épitaphe entre célébration mémorielle, genre littéirare et manifeste politique (milieu VIIIe-début XIe siècle),* Rennes 2007, p. 150. Of the same opinion is Robert Favreau, in a discussion quoted by Hartmann p. 265 no. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. It is interesting that this activity of architectural renovation is associated with the cultural entrepreneurship of the first decades of Charlemagne, and remains a sign of this effort in many ways—from the transcription of codices to the renovation of a crypt, to the repair of a lamp, to the reinstatement of Latin orthography, and all the way to the reorganization of the garden at Reichenau, which Valafridus Strabo would then describe as a long and involved process, *culturae impulsus amore*. A formulaic epithet that seems made precisely to seal the great effort of the Carolingian century and summarize its unique impetus. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. J. Contreni, *The Carolingian Renaissance*, in *Renaissances before the Renaissances. Cultural Revivals of Late Antiquity and the Middle* Ages, Stanford 1984, pp. 56-74, on p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Erroneously LXXXVIII in Dümmler. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. 99, 19; 109, III 9; 110, 5; Rabanus 42, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. 89, 3 *Non est nuda domus, sed nudus convenit hospes*. Symphosius, for example, was clearly inspired by no. 64, for a furnace, which speaks in first person without naming itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. In his well-received *La vita quotidiana nell’impero carolingio*, Pierre Riché, who nonetheless does not use epigraphic material, pauses to remind us that, contrary to popular belief, the bath was a well-established medieval habit, especially on Saturdays, at least for the Germanic peoples. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. P. Riché, *La vita quotidiana nell’impero carolingio*, transl. It. Rome, Jouvence 1994, p. 229 ; specifics on the monastic setting in H. Atsma, *Die christlichen Inschriften aus Galliens als Quelle für Kloster und Klosterbewohner bis zum Ende des VI. Jahrhunderts*, France 4 (1976), pp. 1-57, and the recent A. Davril-E. Palazzo, *La vie des moines au temps des grandes abbayes*, *X-XIII siècles*, Paris 2000: these two contributions nonetheless entirely omit the period from the seventh to the ninth centuries that we are considering from their examination. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. I am using the lesson from the codex: Quercetan has *tondentem* instead. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. But not identifiable simply as the devil because of an indefinite pronoun on l. 5: *non fur, falsiloquus quisquam, non mente maligna*. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. ‘Impudence’: Greg. Magnus, *Hom. ev*. 9, 1 *se a carnis petulantia … custodiunt*. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Bernt, op. cit., p. 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. The content of 642 can be summarized thus: ‘all the luxury of mortals and their costly nutrients excreted here have lost the charm that they had shortly before. Pheasants and fish, meats ground in a mortar, a throng of mixed foods that seduce the palace, everything here becomes filth, the stomach expels everything that the famished gullet has received. It is too late for everyone to recognize that by glorifying their senseless humours they have purchased mud for the price of gold’. 643: Stomachache for gluttony. 644: Macarismos for the frugal countryman, little fed but quick of limb and able to defecate rapidly. Unhappy are the rich, who live in plenty and prefer feasts to health. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. MGH *Epist*. IV no. 65 p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. *Epist*. 76 (*Epist*. III p. 348); see also Willibald, *Vita Bonifacii* c. 8 (ed. Levison p. 53) and Alcuino, *Ep*. 226 (*Ep*. IV p. 370). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. *Rätse*l, p. 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Op. cit. p. 133 no. 285. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Hic tu per stratam pergens subsiste, uiator, / Versiculos paucos studiosa perlege mente. / Inuia, quam cernis, duplici ditatur honore: /Haec ad cauponem ducit potare uolentem. / 5 Elige quod placeat tibi nunc iter, ecce uiator, / Aut potare merum, sacros aut discere libros. / Si potare uelis, nummos praestare debebis, / Discere si cupias. Gratis, quod quaeris habebis. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Riché, *La vita quotidiana* p. 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. E. Lesne, *Les Eglises et les monastères, centres d’accueil, d’exploitation et de peuplement*, Lille 1943, pp. 391 and 414. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Riché, *La vita quotidiana* p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. *Mon. Alc*. p. 25, 512. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)