

Walafrid Strabo – Poem to Empress Judith

(ca. 834–835)

[ed. Ernst Dümmler, MGH, *PLAC*, 2 (Berlin, 1884), 379–80, no. 24.]

Translated by

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Courtney M. Booker

University of British Columbia

(cbooker@interchange.ubc.ca)

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| | <i>Temporis infausta sub potestate dolendi</i> | In an inpropitious time under the dominion of suffering, |
| | <i>Dum fraudis commenta pios populumque patremque</i> | when the falsehoods of deceit were oppressing both the pious people |
| | <i>Opprimerent, sanctamque fidem delere pararent</i> | and [their] father, and were at the point of destroying the holy faith, |
| | <i>Proscriptam exiliis, odio, vi, carcere, ferro,</i> | [which itself had been] outlawed by exile, hatred, force, prison, and iron, |
| 5 | <i>Tunc iacuere boni nebula meroris opaci,</i> | then good men lay hidden by a cloud of grief, |
| | <i>Solaque per gremium regni nutantis ineptos</i> | and a singular treachery vehemently spread the improper designs |
| | <i>Perfidia exeruit fervore tyrannidis ausus.</i> | of a faithless tyranny throughout the heart of the kingdom. |
| | <i>Dum mihi sollicito et recti pro parte gementi</i> | When enormous concerns flowed quite frequently into that breast of mine, |
| | <i>Saepius ingentes fluxere in pectora curae,</i> | [!] who was worried and lamenting for the side of Good, |

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| 10 | <p><i>Nec requies praesaga mihi per somnia, donec</i></p> <p><i>Haud dubia virtute deus, prisci atra timoris</i></p> <p><i>Nubila decutiens, nitidum sperare serenum</i></p> <p><i>Edocuit, tenebris dum nox includeret altis</i></p> <p><i>Pallida, quod terram et longum quod inane vocamus.</i></p> | <p>no comfort came to me</p> <p>through prophetic dreams, until God</p> <p>with His virtue beyond any doubt,</p> <p>driving away the dismal clouds</p> <p>of old fear, informed [me] to expect</p> <p>a bright, clear sky,</p> <p>when the pale night was enclosing</p> <p>with deep darkness</p> <p>that which we call the Earth</p> <p>and the "great void."</p> |
| 15 | <p><i>Dum sopor internis animalia fessa medullis</i></p> <p><i>Solvit, et angores longi curasque diei,</i></p> <p><i>Munere divino, moderamine temperat aequo,</i></p> <p><i>Visa libri series coram pulcherrima longi</i></p> <p><i>Ante meos vultus, metricis qui versibus omnem</i></p> | <p>When sleep relieves beasts,</p> <p>tired to their inner marrow,</p> <p>and, by a divine gift, may soften,</p> <p>by an even moderation,</p> <p>the anxieties and troubles</p> <p>of a long day,</p> <p>[I came] face to face with a most beautiful</p> <p>sight; before my gaze [were] the contents</p> <p>of a great book, which had</p> <p>its entire surface filled</p> |
| 20 | <p><i>Rite superficiem gestabat in ordine plenam.</i></p> <p><i>Dumque avidus rerum cautus per singula lector</i></p> <p><i>Irem, animadverti seriem de casibus ipsam</i></p> <p><i>Et regni et regis textu resonare pedestri.</i></p> <p><i>Caesaris hic nomen quadam sub imagine versum,</i></p> | <p>with poetic verses</p> <p>in the proper sequence.</p> <p>And when I, the reader, eager and wary,</p> <p>went through each of the verses,</p> <p>I discerned that the very content</p> <p>[of the book which I was reading]</p> <p>spoke, in prosaic wording, about</p> <p>events of the king and the kingdom.</p> <p>Here, under a certain image,</p> <p>the name of Caesar was changed,</p> |
| 25 | <p><i>Proque sacro semper Ludowici Equitatus illic</i></p> <p><i>Nomine scriptus erat, neque me cognominis huius</i></p> <p><i>Turbabat novitas, cum causa videlicet ipsa</i></p> | <p>and for that ever-sacred name of Louis</p> <p>there was written <i>Equitatus</i>,</p> <p>and the newness of that name</p> <p>did not disturb me,</p> <p>since that condition clearly</p> <p>described the person,</p> |

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| | <i>Personam exprimeret, notis notissima gestis.</i> | things being most well-known by [their] familiar deeds. |
| | <i>Namque legebatur geminae discessio fraudis,</i> | For [within the book] was read the division of dual deceit, |
| 30 | <i>Impietas, raptusque duplex, patientia victrix,</i> | sin, and two-fold rape, victorious patience |
| | <i>Rectoris rerumque decus reparabile semper.</i> | and the ever-retrievable honor of the governor and [his] belongings. |
| | <i>Cumque oculi, sensus, aures, atque intima cordis</i> | And when [my] eyes, senses, ears, and the innermost chamber |
| | <i>Antra siti arderent relegendo sive legendo,</i> | of my buried heart burned from reading and re-reading, |
| | <i>Frater ab aspectu librum, miracula cuius</i> | a monk, snatching [it] away, held far from [my] view the book, |
| 35 | <i>Praebuit, eripiens memori superaddidit ore:</i> | to whose wonders he added for remembering even more by a speech: |
| | <i>'Tristor ex oculis humor, quam tota decebat</i> | "Tears sadder than it was right for any breast to bear fall from the eyes |
| | <i>Pectora, non longae passuri damna ruinae.'</i> | of one who will not suffer the misfortunes of a long overthrow." |
| | <i>Evigilans, pariterque volens retinere quod hausit,</i> | Vigilant, and at the same time wishing to remember that which I took in, |
| | <i>Vix versus in fine duos, et nomen adauctum</i> | in the end I remembered the two verses— [they] scarcely having suffered |
| 40 | <i>Mente recordabar, reliquorum obliviam passus.</i> | the oblivion of the rest—and that name, having grown in [my] mind. |
| | <i>Nominis auspicio pacis spem protinus auxi:</i> | I further increased the hope of peace by the omen of the name: |
| | <i>Veloces virtutis opes Equitatus ille</i> | That <i>Equitatus</i> foretells a quick means of strength, |
| | <i>Portendebat, idemque sequens assertio firmat,</i> | and consequently the same statement confirms, |
| | <i>Tristari nimium tolerantem pondera dura</i> | that oppressive burdens ought not sadden the overly tolerant man, |
| 45 | <i>Non debere, citos facturum in laeta recursus.</i> | [who] will make the rapid returns to joy. |

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| | <i>Haec ego cum videam factis impleta, quid ultra</i> | Although I saw these things fulfilled |
| | <i>Occulerem? placuit vobis offere probanda,</i> | in deeds, what more might I have been |
| | <i>Quae nobis longi nutribant gaudia voti.</i> | concealing? It is pleasing that things |
| | <i>Augustae pauper decies dat munera quina</i> | which should be further examined, |
| | | [and] which for me nourished the joys |
| | | of a great desire, be given to you. |
| | | Seeking the grace of her Highness, |
| | | the poor Strabo gives ten times five gifts, |
| 50 | <i>Strabo petens veniam, signat quam calculus idem.</i> | which this same amount [of verse] |
| | | signifies. |