

Reinhard Lamp

Florilegium: Four Sepulchral Brasses to Civilians

**John Asger (senior), d. 27.2.1436
Norwich, Norfolk**



effigy: 87,5 x 28 cm

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Site

The brass stems from St. Laurence church in Norwich, but the three remaining separate pieces are now kept in the Bridewell Museum of that city.

Biographical information

John Asger was a merchant and became mayor of Norwich in 1426.

Description

The figure of a man stands praying. He is clad in a mantle buttoned over the right shoulder, falling in beautiful folds over the left arm. Underneath he wears a long, baggy-sleeved, fur-trimmed gown, which falls in boldly asymmetrical folds. The belt is weighted down over his left hip, doubtless by a civilian's short sword, which would be concealed underneath the mantle. The man's head is much worn, but the effigy is graceful and imposing.

The lower part of the effigy is missing; the figure ends at the rim of his mantle.

The second remnant is a semicircular brass-plate, which probably surrounded the figure's head. It contains four lines of Latin text, arranged so as to follow the curve of the plate. The text is worn, especially in the right-hand side, where it is practically extinguished.

A third element is a small, curved, oblong brass-fillet with indecipherable scratches on it that probably once were words, a prayer-scroll most likely. It does not feature in this study.

There used to be another text, which is now lost, but happily was recorded. It may well have been a marginal inscription. As it is made up of eight verses it points to a distribution of one verse each in the top and bottom fillets and three each on either side.

It must have been a fine brass.

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A) Lost and recorded Text¹

- 1 { Sis testis Criste quod non iacet hic Lapis iste
- 2 Corpus ut ornetur sed spiritus ut memoretur
- 3 Queris qui iacet hic John Asger marmore strictus
- 4 Sit precor hic illic ubi semper sit Benedictus
- 5 Quondam Burgensis fuerat mercator onustus
- 6 Post Norwicensis Maior moderamine iustus
- 7 Hunc tulit a terris Februi penultima Mensis
- 8 Anno Milleno C quater ter & X quoque seno }

Clear Text

[arranged according to versification, and with appropriate punctuation]

- 1 Sis testis, Christe, quod non iacet hic lapis iste
- 2 Corpus ut ornetur, sed spiritus ut memoretur.
- 3 Quæris quis iacet hic? John Asger, marmore strictus.
- 4 Sit – precor – hic, illic, ubi semper sit, benedictus.
- 5 Quondam burgensis fuerat, mercator onustus,
- 6 Post Norwicensis Maior, moderamine iustus.
- 7 Hunc tulit a terris Februi pænultima mensis
- 8 Anno Milleno C quater ter et X quoque seno.

Translation

- 1 Be my witness, Christ, that this stone is not lying here
- 2 As decoration of the body, but in honour of the spirit.
- 3 You ask who lies here? John Asger, constricted by the marble.
- 4 Let him, I pray, be blessed, here, yonder, wherever he may be.

¹ The text has been documented by J. WEEVER, *Ancient Funerall Monuments* (1631), fo. 803, and is reported by FRANCIS BLOMEFIELD, *An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk*, London, 1806, Vol. IV, p. 266.

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- 5 In the past he was a burgher, a burdened merchant,
6 Afterwards he was Mayor of Norwich, a man of just ruling.
7 The last but one day of the month of February carried him away,
8 In the year one thousand four times a-hundred and thrice ten,
plus six.

Comment

2 *memoretur*: *memorare* in medieval Latin had taken on the meaning of "to remember".

5 *onustus*: means "heavy-laden, burdened", and suggests that the deceased was dedicated to his work and was weighed down by responsibilities.

7 *pænultima*: points to an (elliptical) *dies* or *lux*, saying "day".

Stylistic Appreciation

The poem consists of eight hexameters, of good scansion.² This favourable impression is enhanced by the fine rhyme-system. In the following representation of the poems, the cæsuras and the rhymes are indicated.

1	↔	Sis testis, Christe,	↔↔↔	quod non iacet hic lapis iste	
2		Corpus ut ornetur,	↔↔↔	sed spiritus ut memoretur.	
3	↔↓	Quæris quis iacet hic?		John Asger, marmore strictus.	↓
4	↔↑	Sit – precor – hic, illic,	↔	ubi semper sit, benedictus.	↓
5	↓	Quondam burgensis		fuerat mercator onustus,	↓
6	↑	Post Norwicensis		Maior, moderamine iustus.	↑
7		Hunc tulit a terris	↔	Februi pænultima mensis	
8		Anno Milleno	↔	C quater ter et X quoque seno.	

2 *Christe* (v. 1) comes under cæsura-licence, so that it does not mar the impression. V. 7 *Februi* is not a prosodic flaw, and has correct scansion, as the two consonants *-br-* do not necessarily lengthen a syllable, leaving the poet some freedom of movement.

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The poem breaks up into three units. The first two verses have leonine rhymes, the cæsuras being linked with their respective verse-end words, but there are several more internal rhymes. The middle verse-couples (vv. 3–6) are distinct from the first group in that they have cæsura-rhymes and – different – verse-end rhymes. The last pair of verses reverts to the initial order, being again linked by leonine rhymes. Thus the criterion for grouping the verses is grounded on versification.

The formal structure is paralleled by the contents. The poem begins with staple epitaph-formulas,³ in which Christ is asked to bear witness, to be

3 "This text was used ... for the 1408 brass to John Lumbarde at Stone, Kent (the inscription is now lost, but is recorded in J. Weever, *Ancient Funerall Monuments* (1631), 333) and on the brass to Sir John de Brewys at Wiston, Sussex. The ... sentence (Es (or Sis) testis Christe quod non iacet lapis iste corpus ut ornatur [sic impressum, instead of *ornetur*] sed spiritus ut memoretur) is found ... on brasses of 1413 at Havant, Hampshire, 1414 at Southfleet, Kent, 1420 at Merton College, Oxford, 1494 at St. Mary Magdalen, Oxford and 1498 at Algakirk, Lincolnshire..." SALLY BADHAM, "Status and Salvation", pp. 413–465. This lost inscription on the brass to John Asger and also the one to an unidentified civilian in St. Mary Retcliffe, Bristol, need to be added to the list.

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present. The next group informs us about the man's identity and life and has a prayer for the welfare of his soul. In the last stanza comes the information about the date of demise, important for the annual celebration of the obit for the deceased.

B) The existing text

Transliteration

Legend	Is in the inscription	Signifies
<u>underlining</u>	superscript-bar	abbreviation mark
<u>underdotting</u>	letters illegible	reading insecure, conjecture
<i>italics</i>	ligature	
^	flourish	abbreviation mark
(...)	text needing intervention	expansion
[...]	text needing intervention	correction or alteration
{[...]}	letters worn away	conjecture

- 1 Qui me conspici^p certo scire potestis
- 2 {Q}uod sum vos eritis qu^ui fueram velu{t} { }
- 3 Ut mereat veniam precibz me queso iuuetis
- 4 Ad vos non veniam sed vo{s} {nd}...{m}{e}...{v}eniet{is}
- 5 Parce sibi dne dicatis vel miserere
- 6 Ne possim flere sed letar{i} {sine fine}
- 7 Da requiem cunctis deus {X} ubique sepultis
- 8 Ut sint in requie r ppter tua vulne{r}{a} {quinque}

Transcription

- 1 Qui me conspici^{p(ro)} certo scire potestis
- 2 Quod sum vos eritis qu^{[1]im} fueram velut {[estis]}
- 3 Ut mereat veniam precib(us) me qu[æ]so iuuetis
- 4 Ad vos non veniam sed vos ad me venietis

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- 5 Parce sibi d(omi)ne dicatis vel miserere
- 6 Ne possim flere sed lætari sine fine
- 7 Da requiem cunctis deus [ecce] ubique sepultis
- 8 Ut sint in requie (prop)ter tua vulnera quinque

Clear Text

[with appropriate punctuation added]

- 1 Qui me conspici^p, pro certo scire potestis:
- 2 Quod sum vos eritis, olim fueram velut estis.
- 3 Ut merear veniam, precibus me – quæso – iuuetis!
- 4 Ad vos non veniam, sed vos ad me venietis.
- 5 'Parce sibi, Domine!', dicatis, vel 'Miserere!'
- 6 Ne possim flere, sed lætari sine fine!
- 7 Da requiem cunctis, Deus – ecce – ubique sepultis,
- 8 Ut sint in requie, propter tua vulnera quinque.

Translation

- 1 You who contemplate me, you may assuredly know:
- 2 What I am, you shall be, and I once was as you are.
- 3 In order that I may gain pardon, I beg you to help me with your prayers!
- 4 Towards you I shall not come, instead you shall come towards me!
- 5 Please, say: 'Spare him, Lord!', or 'Have pity!'
- 6 So that I might not weep, but rejoice without end.
- 7 Grant all men their rest, my God, lo!, wherever they be buried,
- 8 So that they may be in peace, thanks to your five wounds.

Commentary

The script has suffered severely from wear, so that many words are hardly, and some no longer, legible. Sometimes, delicate rubbing brought to

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life the hint of shadows of what were letters. The situation is difficult for any analyst.

2 **oiiii**: This word is illegible, incomprehensible. The conjecture is for [*olim*]. The upper part of the metal fillet is extremely worn away, so here the upper end of an 'l' may have disappeared. [*olim*] would fit the context, and also satisfy the exactions of prosody.

5 *sibi ... dicatis*: BLOMEFIELD has *meis ... delictis* – that, however, is nowhere near the original, is pure phantasy. HAINES⁴ has *tibi* instead of *sibi* – which makes no sense, either.

7 *flere*: BLOMEFIELD has *fiere* – the word does not exist. The suggestion is for a printer's error. Or rather mistaken reading.

7 *ecce*: In the original there is a capital 'X', extremely faint, worn away to a shade. And at this instant there is a break in the metre of the line as far as it is legible, with part of a foot missing. The inference is that this shape is a logogram and needs expanding. The conjecture is for an 'X', pronounced [eks], and may mean *ecce*, "there, lo, behold!". In medieval Latin, *ecce* was pronounced [ektse], and thus the 'X' can be assumed to be pronounced, with the second syllable added and the following hiatus taken into the stride.⁵

Either this conjecture is sound, or there is some very wrong scansion, but that is much less likely. Instead we have here a rather brilliant contrivance.⁶

4 HERBERT HAINES, *A Manual of Monumental Brasses*, (Adams & Dart Bath), 1861, reprint 1970, p. 93.

5 Normally, the hiatus between the two adjacent vowels (*ecce ubique*) ought to have been avoided, but in prosodic straits that is permissible.

6 BLOMEFIELD has not noticed this logogram, but HAINES saw it, and transcribed it as *et*, which would make the line say "and wherever they may be buried". It makes sense, but the prosody would be in tatters – precisely the flaw that HAINES criticized in this instance, writing: "The versification is often very faulty, as the above examples shew!"

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Stylistic appreciation

The following diagram shows the rhyme-system of the second poem.

1	↓	Qui me conspicitis,		pro certo scire potestis:	↓
2	↑	Quod sum vos eritis,		olim fueram velut estis.	↑
3	↓	Ut merear veniam		precibus me quæso iuuetis!	↓
4	↑	Ad vos non veniam,		sed vos ad me venietis.	↑
5		<i>Parce sibi, Domine!</i> ,	X	<i>dicatis, vel Miserere!</i>	
6		Ne possim flere,		<i>sed lætari sine fine!</i>	
7		Da requiem cunctis,	↔	Deus, ecce, ubique sepultis,	
8		Ut sint in requie,	↔	propter tua vulnera quinque.	

As can be seen, this second poem is structured quite differently from the first one. Both its first two verse-couples (vv. 1–4) are paired with cæsura-rhymes and (different) end-rhymes. After these four verses come two whose rhymes are arranged in saltire, i.e. their cæsuras rhyme with the verse-end words of the following (or previous) line (v. 5 *domine* goes with v. 6 *fine*, and v. 6 *flere* with v. 5 *miserere*). The last two verses each have their own leonine rhyme.

The poem therefore has three rhyme-systems. This produces a lively, sparkling text, quite in keeping with its interesting linguistic structure.

Whereas in the first poem a friend of the commemorated addressed the passers-by, here it is the deceased himself. At first he also indulges in formulaic phrases, and, in vv. 3–4, in a play on the two meanings of the word *veniam* (1° "the remission of sin", 2° "I shall come"), and then begs the living for adjutory prayer.

In the second half of the poem, his soul addresses God, begging for mercy, and at the end sends up a prayer for all humans, wherever they may be buried – this is without doubt the greatest line.

What meets the eye immediately in this text is therefore the variation of speech-levels, and of addressees of speech. The epitaph abounds in subjunctives and imperatives conveying hopes, aims, orders, but also at times opens up the world of reality to form sweeping wishes – "for all

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and sundry", "wherever they may be buried". It contains questions and answers, implorations – this is language of the liveliest style, its manifold structures quite in accordance with the interestingly varied versification.

References

BADHAM, SALLY, "Status and Salvation. The Design of Medieval English Brasses and Slabs", in: *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, Volume XV, Part 5, 1996, Ashford, Kent, pp. 413–465.

BLOMEFIELD, FRANCIS, *An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk*, London, 1806, Vol. IV, p. 266. (Contains both poems.)

HAINES, HERBERT, *A Manual of Monumental Brasses*, (Adams & Dart, Bath), 1861, reprint 1970, p. 93. (Contains the 2nd poem)

WEEVER, JOHN, *Funerall Monuments*, 163, fo. 803. (Contains the record of the 1st poem.)

Rubbing: Reinhard Lamp

Photography: Bodo Margraf, Welt (Eiderstedt)

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Richard Byll, d. 2.10.1451, & wife Marjorie Holy Trinity, Hull, East Yorkshire

Biographical information

"Richard Byll, merchant and alderman of the city of Hull, died of the plague 2nd October 1451. His will, made the day previous to his death and proved on the 12th October, shows he was possessed of much wealth. He desires his 'body to be buried in the Chapel of Holy Trinity and near the tomb of William Procktour'. To his wife Marjorie he bequeathed the residue of his property and half the furniture, jewels, cups, and silver spoons, the other half to his children, viz. son Richard and two daughters unnamed. Richard was also to have his gold-rings and a cross of gold. Mention is made of his two ships, the *Trinitie* and the *Anthony*."⁷

Description

The brass shows the half-effigies of a civilian and his wife, praying. The man has high-shaven hair and wears a wide-sleeved robe, the woman has covered her side-cauls with a veil and is clad in a kirtle. Evangelists' symbols are in the corners, and there is a shield with the merchant's mark.⁸

Underneath is a foot-inscription of four double lines of Latin verse.

Appreciation of the Script

The script is Gothic minuscule, with capitals letters for verse-beginnings and personal names, and (strange and unsystematic preference) for words beginning in 's' in most instances. The lettering is rough, often indistinct, the cæsura-markers irregular, the superscript bar in v. 3a sitting above the wrong letter. There are two Latin mistakes in vv. 3b, 4a, both probably due to inattentive copying.

So the engraving must be classed as of low quality.

⁷ Reg. Test, vol. II., fo. 233.

⁸ The artist has composed his card without the evangelists' symbols, and the merchant's mark he placed between the two figures.

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Postcard designed and produced by Anthony Fox †, of Scarborough

Text**Transliteration**

Legend	Is in the inscription	Signifies
<u>underlining</u>	superscript-bar	abbreviation mark
'	apostrophe	abbreviation mark
small script		text needing intervention
(...)		expansion of abbreviations and ligatures
[...]		author's correction or alteration
{[...]}	text missing	authors's conjectural reconstitution

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- 1a { } ic Ricarde iaces Byll pluris plene favoris
 b Terra clause taces nup possessor honoris
 2a { } Aldermann' eras m'cator & istius urbis
 b Dilectus steteras genosus eras quia turbis
 3a Peste cadens ense necis obrute luce Secda
 b Octobris Mense ungraus ad regna iocunda
 4a { } Anno Millesno C quater Semel I recitati
 b Et quinquageno vivas sine fine beatis

Transcription

- 1a {[H]} ic Ricarde iaces Byll pluris plene favoris
 b Terra clause taces nup[er] possessor honoris
 2a {[A]} Aldermann(us) eras m(er)icator & istius urbis
 b Dilectus steteras gen[er]osus eras quia turbis
 3a Peste cadens ense necis obrute luce s(e)c(un)da
 b Octobris Mens[e] migrans ad regna iocunda
 4a {[A]} Anno Millesno C quater semel I recitat[is]
 b Et quinquageno vivas sine fine beatis

Clear Text

[Appropriate punctuation added]

- 1a Hic, Ricarde, iaces, Byll, pluris plene favoris,
 b Terra clause taces, nuper possessor honoris!
 2a Aldermannus eras, mercator et istius urbis.
 b Dilectus steteras, generosus eras quia turbis.
 3a Peste cadens, ense necis obrute, luce secunda
 b Octobris mense, migrans ad regna iocunda
 4a Anno milleno C quater semel I recitatis
 b Et quinquageno. Vivas sine fine beatis!

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Translation

- 1a Here you lie, Richard Byll, a man full of qualities,
 b Shut about by earth you are, and silent now, you who recently were the holder of honour!
- 2a You were aldermann, and also merchant of this town.
 b Always beloved you stood out, in high favour, because you were noble, and generous with the common folk.
- 3a You fell victim to the Plague, undone by the sword of death, in the second daylight
 b Of the month of October betaking yourself to the happy realms,
- 4a In the year one thousand four times a-hundred and one – counted out aloud –
 b And fifty. May you live without end in company of the blessed!

Commentary

Astonishingly, his wife is depicted, but not mentioned in the epitaph.

1a, 2a, 4a: The first letters of these verses are missing, but easily reconstituted.

2b *steteras*: an interesting choice. The verb *stare* has many meanings, the principal one being “to stand”. A secondary meaning is “to stand out, be conspicuous”, and yet another means “to be in high favour” – both are perfectly applicable in the context as praising Byll’s character. There is even a third sense that might be seen to add its overtone, namely “to lie at anchor”. This may well have been intended additionally by the poet, who must have known that Byll was a ship-owner. The word therefore glitters with its manifold meanings and adds sense and beauty to the poem.

2b *generosus*: The word does have the sense of “generous”, but normally the first meaning is “genteel”. That seems to be intended here, in a moral sense, and both meanings should therefore be kept in the translation.

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2b *quia*: The subjunction so far away from its syntactically correct position before *generosus* can be accorded poetic licence. (This position is also encountered in the inscription to Thomas Brounflet, of Wymington.)

3a *obruite*: The word belongs to the set of vocative-constructions by which the deceased is addressed, i.e. to *Ricarde, plene, clause*, translating “you who were undone”. *obruite* belongs to *ense*, so makes “overwhelmed by the sword”.

3a/b The final syllables of the cæsura-words *ense* and *mense*, here short, occupy positions normally reserved for long (“stressed”) syllables; this, though, comes under cæsura-licence.

4a *recitatis*: The word lacks the final ‘s’, but the rhyme with *beatīs* proves that the engraver had forgotten it – there would have been room enough for it. The years in the date-line would be understood as being “counted, called out aloud”, but the grammatical concordance is questionable.

4b *beatīs*: Better – indeed, correct – Latin would have been *cum beatīs*, instead of the simple ablative. Prosody again demanded precedence over grammar.

Stylistic Appreciation

The poem is made up of four double-lines, thus of eight hexameters. They scan well, and in addition the verses have a complex system of rhymes:

1a	↓	Hic Ricarde <i>iaces</i>	Byll, pluris plene favoris,	↓
1b	↑	Terra clause <i>taces</i> ,	nuper possessor honoris!	↓
2a	↓	Aldermannus <i>eras</i> ,	mercator et istius <i>urbis</i> .	↓
2b	↑	Dilectus <i>steteras</i> ,	generosus eras quia <i>turbis</i> .	↑
3a	↓	Peste cadens, <i>ense</i>	necis obrute, luce <i>secunda</i>	↓
3b	↑	Octobris <i>mense</i>	migrans ad regna <i>iocunda</i>	↑
4a	↓	Anno mill <i>eno</i>	C quater semel I <i>recitatis</i>	↓
4b	↑	Et quinquag <i>eno</i> .	Vivas sine fine <i>beatīs</i> !	↑

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As can be seen, the *cæsuras* of each verse-pair are linked, and so are the verse-ends. The rhymes are rich, namely disyllabic, and such a system is very difficult to contrive. The poet even manages the unwieldy date-lines, albeit with some difficulty, which craves the reader's indulgence. The all-too-wide positioning, which seems to be this poet's fashion, makes uneven syntax, encumbering understanding, but is due to the heavy claim of priority ceded to metric and rhyme.

The quality of this text is that it is not overburdened with eulogy. It therefore can win our heart with the moral qualities of the deceased, and especially gains our empathy at the mention of the terrible illness that befell him at the time, as it probably happened to many others, too. It is rare that such specific indication of the cause of death is made on sepulchral inscriptions.

The poem – small as it is – has well-chosen wording, which by its double-meanings adds an enriching semantic undercurrent. The most conspicuous stylistic element is the direct apostrophe of the departed, which is kept through to the very end. This is a rare phenomenon on funerary monuments of the 15th century, and correspondingly makes its impression on the reader, adding to its human appeal.

References

Reg. Test., vol. II, fo 233.

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Richard Bartlot (d. 1462) & wife Parnell Stopham, Sussex

Height of the Effigies: 90,6 cm

Inscription Plate: 61,8 x 9,3 cm

Biographical information⁹

The family traces its ancestry far back: One Adam Barttelot is on record in 1296 as being from Kingston and Preston. In the 14th century, John Barttelot married into the much older Stopham family. According to one tradition a Stopham was in the Conqueror's army, another account says that the Stophams were the Saxon founders of the village. The family is extant and lives in Stopham House.

Description

Before the altar-rail in Stopham church lies the brass to Richard Bertlot and his wife. He is dressed in a calf-long, fur-trimmed, high-collared mantle, which falls open in front, showing fur-lining. It is belted and baggy-sleeved, and over it he wears a livery-collar draped around his neck. Between his praying hands he holds his staff of office as Marshal of the hall of the Earl of Arundell.¹⁰ His head is high-shaven. He stands on a grassy mound, with one clover-leaf rising up between his feet, which are shod in pointed soft-leather shoes.

His wife was the heiress of Walton. She stands beside her husband, wearing a high-belted gown, with fur-trimmings at the collar and on the cuffs. She has the pointed horned headdress of her time, the veil falling behind her head.

The figure is markedly static and mechanical, both together are a staple design.

Above their heads are two shields.

⁹ Part of the biographical information is from BERTRAM, *Embellishments*, pp. 334–362.

¹⁰ This is BERTRAM's interpretation of the strange vertical line running down the figure's front (p. 339). That could well be, but is it not an incongruous attitude for a person to be praying?



Left:

I) Quarterly: 1) Sable three sinister gloves argent (2,1) [Bartlot]; 2) quarterly per fess indented, argent and gules, four crescents counter-charged [Stopham]; 3) azure three chevrons argent, underneath the apex of the first, a mullet (T?) for difference [Lewkenor]; 4) gules three stag's heads caboshed (2,1) or [Doyley].

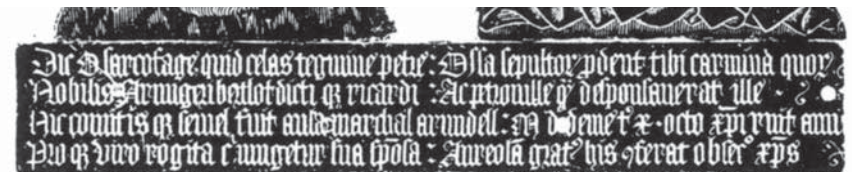
II) Quarterly: 1,4) (T?) three raven's heads upright, erased (T?) [?], 2, 3) Argent a double-headed eagle displayed sable [Siggeston].¹¹

Text

Below the two figures is an inscription-plate of four double-lines of Latin verse. On the right-hand rim a small width of the material seems to be broken off, taking with it the line-end markers and the last letter(s) of v. 3b.

Appreciation of the Script

The script is incised Gothic minuscule, verse-ends and cæsuras having markers. Capitals are reserved for line-beginnings, even names have small initials, the exception being for Bartlot's title of nobility. The characters are clearly engraved, except for the usual indistinction about the minims of 'n', 'm', 'u'. The 'e' is always recognizable. The 'i' is often dotted. Not only the 'r' appears in two shapes, as is not unusual, but also the 'a'. The characters are evenly spaced, also the distribution of the text



¹¹ These shields are not described in Mill Stephenson's (Heseltine's) list. For more precise information about this highly complex piece of heraldry see BERT-
RAM, pp. 336-8.

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over the lines is well-measured. Abbreviations are numerous and come in many shapes. All in all, this is a beautiful piece of script.

Transliteration

Legend	Is in the inscription	Signifies
<u>underlining</u>	superscript-bar	abbreviation mark
<i>italics</i>	ligature	
' , °	apostrophe, various marks	abbreviation mark
small script		text needing intervention
(...)		expansion of abbreviations and ligatures
[...]		author's correction or alteration
[/]	interstice	interstice deleted
{ }	text missing	
{[...]}	text missing	author's conjectural reconstitution

1a **Dic** **Q** sarcophage quid celas tegmine petre :

b **Ossa** sepultor -pdent tibi carmina quoy **S**

2a **Nobilis** Armigeri bertlot dicti qz ricardi :

b **Ac** petrouille q desponsauerat ille **S**

3a **Hic** comitis qz semel fuit aula marchal arundell :

b **M** d deme t' x octo xpi ruit ann{ }

4a **Pro** qz viro rogita c'iungetur sua sposa :

b **Aureola** grat - his -ferat obsec^o xps **S**

Transcription

1a **Dic** **Q** sarco[ph]age quid celas tegmine petr[æ] :

b **Ossa** sepultor(um) (pro)dent tibi carmina quor(um)

2a **Nobilis** Armigeri Bertlot dicti:[/](ue) Ricardi :

b **Ac** Petronill[æ] quem desponsauerat ille

3a **Hic** comitis:[/](ue) semel fuit aula marchal Arundell :

b **M** D deme t(er) X octo (Christi) ruit ann[i]{{s}}

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4a **Pro**:[/](ue) viro rogita c(on)iungetur sua spo(n)sa :

b **Aureola**m grat(us)¹² his (of)ferat obsec(ro) (Christu)s

Clear Text

[with appropriate punctuation]

1a – Dic, O sarcophage, quid celas tegmine petræ?

b – Ossa sepulcorum prodent tibi carmina! Quorum

2a Nobilis Armigeri Bertlot, dictique Ricardi

b Ac Petronillæ, quem desponsauerat ille.

3a Hic comitisque semel fuit aula marchal Arundell.

b M D deme ter X octo Christi ruit annis.

4a Proque viro rogita coniungetur sua sponsa:

b Aureolam gratis his offerat – obsecro – Christus!

Translation

1a – Speak, oh sarcophagus, what are you hiding under your stone cover?

b – The bones of the buried will offer up to you their songs! Among these

2a The noble Esquire Bertlot, called also Richard,

b And of Parnell, whom he married.

3a The former was (to put it briefly!) at the court of the Earl Marshal of Arundel.

b In the year fifteen-hundred of Christ's – take off thrice ten and eight – he broke down.

4a Beg for this man that he be conjoined with his spouse!

b May Christ by His Grace grant these two His halo, I ardently pray.

12 I owe this expansion to JEROME BERTRAM.

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Commentary

3a *comitis aula marchal arundell*: "at the court of the Earl Marshal of Arundel" – the genitive-endings of the last words were simply omitted, because these are not Latin words.

William the Conqueror appointed the Earls of Hereford and of Arundel "Marshals of England". This office consisted originally in supervising the king's horses, and later took on ceremonial duties, and when the function of High Constable was abolished, the Marshal presided over the court of chivalry, and as such had to administer the country's heraldry. The function of "Earl Marshal of England" was annexed to the Dukedom of Norfolk as hereditary title in 1672 by the then king.

3a *semel*: means "once", but may be stretched to mean "once for all, in one word".

3b *deme*: "deduct" – deduction is a rare procedure in date-lines; normal is an addition of figures.

3b *ann[is]*: Owing to damage, the rim of the plate is broken off, taking the end of the word with it. However, the outward edge of the letter remains visible, which can thus be reconstituted as an 's'. The plural *annis* was often used in the Middle Ages for the singular.

4a *coniungetur*: Normally, *rogare*, or the intensified form *rogitare*, governs a subjunctive; here, however, we have a (passive) future.

Stylistic Appreciation

The poem consists of eight hexameters, arranged in pairs, to be read consecutively, in double-lines. The scansion is perfect in most verses, given that abbreviations need to be expanded, as within vv. 1b, 2b, and most often so in v. 4b.

In this text, the elasticity of composition in a late-medieval epitaph shows up particularly clearly. The language is excellent.

Here follows a diagram of the system of prosody. In bold type appear long syllables, underlined are the principal, "stressed" syllables.

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1a	– Dic , O sar co pha ge ,	quid ce las teg mi ne pe træ?
1b	– Os sa se pul tor um	pro dent ti bi car mi na! Quo rum
2a	No bi lis Ar mi ge ri	Bert lot , dic ti que Ri car di ,
2b	Ac Pe tro nil læ ,	quem de spon sa ve rat il le.
3a	Hic com i tis que se mel	fu it au la mar chal A run dell.
3b	Em de de me ter ix •	oc to Chri sti ru it an nis.
4a	Pro que vi ro ro gi ta	con iun ge tur su a spon sa:
4b	Au re o lam gra tus	his of fe rat – ob se cro – Chri stus!

The poem has a system of leonine rhymes, i.e. the cæsura-word rhymes with the end-word of the verse.

1a	– Dic, O sarcophage,	↔	quid celas tegmine petræ?
1b	– Ossa sepulcorum	↔	prodent tibi carmina! Quorum
2a	Nobilis Armigeri	↔	Bertlot, dictique Ricardi,
2b	Ac Petronillæ,	↔	quem desponsaverat ille.
3a	Hic comitisque semel	↔	fuit aula marchal Arundell.
3b	M d deme ter ix •	↔	octo Christi ruit annis.
4a	Proque viro rogita	↔	coniungetur sua sponsa:
4b	Aureolam gratus	↔	his offerat – obsecro – Christus!

Some of these rhymes are really difficult to contrive, but the author does not even balk at high obstacles. Thus, names are not avoided, and twice are remarkably well bound up with a rhyme-word, the laurels going to the pair *semel* – *Arundell*. Also the date-line deserves attention. The author manages to couch this notoriously difficult line in correct scansion, and into the bargain to make it rhyme: 'x' here being meant to be read [iks] – not in the normal English pronunciation [eks]. That is supported by the fact that the last word cannot be other than *annis*, the missing letters being identified as *-is*, and producing a rhyme – of sorts. Other rhymes are simple, though, monosyllabic, often relying on identical declension-endings, nothing spectacular.

Even more honour goes to the complex syntax, which characterizes the text. Thus, three verses (1b, 2a, 2b) form one sentence, which elegantly runs on across the line-ends. There is an apostrophe (in v. 1a), personal

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intercession, an intercalation (– *obsecro* – v. 4b). These forms of speech contribute towards the liveliness and elasticity of the style.

The choice of expressions is select, varied, and most effective. Nothing in the text is in any way staple formula. Examples are many: *carmina* (v. 1b) for 'inscriptions'; *desponsaverat* (v. 2b) for 'took for wife', instead of the habitual expression *et uxoris eius* – or something in this vein; the subtraction in the formulation of the date, instead of the normal addition; *aureolam* (v. 4b), "His halo", all these elements bespeak highest stylistic refinement.

And above all, and what catches our ears and mind and holds our wondering attention, is to see a question addressed to the tomb, supposedly by the onlooker, and – more astonishingly even – to have the tomb answer, as if it were a living subject, which now tenders all the information about the deceased. And there is even more of this in v. 1b, where the bones are also presented as being active, delivering their songs (*prodent carmina*), spreading word about the persons they were. Not enough, the tomb, after talking about Richard's past, goes on to speak about his yet living wife, whose reunion with her departed husband is prayed for. And at the end, the intercessory prayer for the salvation of both their souls can perhaps even be seen as coming from the tomb.

This animation in the figure of the tomb is strange and most fascinating. Such a poetic stance is quite remarkable, and extremely rare – or is it not unique even? Its rhetoric is most effective and makes this poem unforgettable. We have here a poetic masterpiece before us.

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Hugh Bostok & wife Margaret, c. 1450 St. Helen's, Wheathamstead, Hertfordshire

Inlaid brass figures.

Measures: male effigy: 89,3 x 25,5 cm; female effigy: 87,7 x 32,0 cm; inscription-plate: 10,5 x 83,3 cm; Purbeck slab: 192,5 x 91,0 cm.

Site

The brass lies on the floor of the North transept of Wheathamstead church.

Biographical information

Hugh Bostok and his wife Margaret Macry were the "parents of the celebrated abbot of St. Albans, John of Wheathamstead (or Bostok)."¹³ They lived at Mackerys, or Makeriesend. The house still survives – a fine Jacobean building – to the north-west of the parish of Wheathamstead.

Description

Hugh Bostok is depicted standing on a mound, praying, in a baggy-sleeved, high-collared mantle that reaches to his calves. The effigy is basically symmetrical, but on closer scrutiny one sees that the man leans slightly over to his left, towards his wife, with incident increase in volume and differentiation of folds of his mantle. He wears his hair high-shaven. Beside him stands his wife, in a long, high-belted mantle-gown, which covers her feet completely in its swirls. The sleeves are near-identical to her husband's. Her hair is arranged in a horned headdress, which is covered by a kerchief.

The brass is a staple design.

Underneath the two figures' feet is a foot-inscription of three lines of Latin verse. Below this inscription plate are two empty indents whose shapes indicate that here were brasses of children-groups – the Bostoks "...appear to have had issue three sons and as many daughters"¹⁴.

¹³ JEAVONS, p. 15.

¹⁴ CUSSANS, p. 338.

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Above the effigies and below the children's brasses were shields. Only the top sinister shield is extant, showing "Argent three bats sable", being the arms of the Heyworths of Mackerye End, therefore not the Bostoks' arms and not belonging to the commemorated.¹⁵ The other shields are lost, their indents empty. ANDREWS reports: "The drawing of the brass in the Dimsdale Collection (VII, 270), made by Oldfield c. 1795, shows the first shield to have been 'Sa, on a fess couped arg, a mullet for difference' [Bostok], and the second and third to have been [Bostok] impaling 'arg, a rose or cinquefoil between 2 lions passant guardant gu' [Mackery]. The fourth, presumably [Mackery], was then lost."

As the foot-inscription does not provide the date of death, some other text, probably a marginal inscription, may well have been lost.

Appreciation of the Script

The script of the foot-text is in incised Gothic minuscule. The 'i' is undotted, the 'u' just about recognizable. There are hardly any abbreviations. All verses (except v. 1b) have a dot to mark the cæsura; v. 2b has its dot and cæsura after the first two words.



Transliteration

- 1a *Hic pater hic mater · soror hic iacet hic quoq; frater*
 b *Pastoris pecorum prothomactris angligenarum*
 2a *Bostok hugo patri · Macey margareta qz mater*
 b *Nomen erat · suumle gentus trahit a genitore*
 3a *Hinc qui pertransis · rogo femina vir puer au sis*
 b *Ut pariter recubant in pace precare quiescant*

¹⁵ ANDREWS, p. 66.

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Transcription

- 1a Sic pater hic mater · soror hic iacet hic quo(que) frater
 b Pastoris pecorum protomartyris Angligenarum
 2a Bostok Hugo patri · Macry Margareta[m] matri
 b Nomen erat · simile genitus trahit a genitore
 3a Hinc qui pertransis · rogo femina vir puer an sis
 b Ut pariter recubant in pace precare quiescant

Clear Text

[with appropriate punctuation]

- 1a Hic pater, hic mater, soror hic, iacet hic quoque frater
 b Pastoris pecorum protomartyris Angligenarum.
 2a Bostok Hugo patri, Macry Margareta[m] matri
 b Nomen erat; simile genitus trahit a genitore.
 3a Hinc qui pertransis – rogo – femina, vir, puer an sis:
 b Ut pariter recubant in pace – precare! – quiescant!

Translation

- 1a Here my father, here mother, my sister lies here, and here, too,
 lies my brother – the entire family
 b Of the Pastor of the flock of the English people's protomartyr,
 2a My father's name was Hugo Bostok, and mother was called Margareta Macry:
 b The son draws the same from his progenitor.
 3a Thou that passest by here, beest thou woman, man, or boy – I
 entreat thee –
 b Pray that they may both equally rest in peace.

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Commentary

1a *pater; mater:* The syntax of the complex phrase is disturbed. One must understand the family-terms as an enumeration followed by an ellipse, which needs to be expanded by “– the entire family” (of the pastor etc). This discordant structure may be felt to be the reflection of the poet's emotion.

The family-terms define the author of this epitaph, namely John Bostok, since in addition he makes himself known as abbot of St Alban's, the abbey that took its name from Alban, the English protomartyr, i.e. the first Christian to be martyred in England. As also the abbot's brother and sister are mentioned, the tomb must have been a family-vault.

1b *Angligenarum* is a nonce-word, saying “of the English people”, and is probably coined after the Old-Saxon *Englacynn*, of identical meaning, the word *cynn* being the equivalent of Latin *genus*, “kind; origin; gender; category etc”.

3a/b *Hinc qui pertransis* etc.: Here is an excellent variant of the well-known request for adjutory prayer addressed to the onlooker, as it appears in several inscriptions.¹⁶

The particularity of this inscription, though, lies in the fact that, whereas in similar uses of this formula males are appealed to, here the sister is included, and the mother is given an equal rank to the man, receiving her full name.

16 There are several variants which appeal to males only, such as in the text of John Lyndewode, Linwood (see the article “Wool-merchants” in the series “Florilegium”, *PegOn* 1/2010, p. 155–172):

Ergo qui transis – magno, medio, puer an sis:

The purest form of this request for adjutory prayer is perhaps that on bishop Bowthe's brass in East Horsley:

Quisquis eris qui transieris: sta, perlege, plora!

Sum quod eris, fueramque quod es. Pro me – precor – ora!

The oldest of these inscriptions is the one in Pamber Priory, Hampshire. It surrounds a slab of the 12th century which is decorated in the middle by a twig with stylized leaves, a sheep at the bottom and a four-cusped ornament with four circles at the top. The text is almost identical, with the exception of the beginning, where it has “Si quis eris qui transieris”. See BADHAM, “Status and Salvation”, pp. 454–455.

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Stylistic Appreciation

The poem consists of three pairs of hexameters, which are separated by a scroll, and to be read line by line.

Here follows the diagram of the poem's prosody.

1a	Hic pa ter, hic ma ter,	so ror hic , ia cet hic quo que fra ter	
1b	Pas to ris pe co rum	pro to mar ty ris Ang li ge na rum.	
2a	Bos tok Hu go pa tri,	Ma cry Mar ga re ta que ma tri	
2b	No men e rat si mi le	ge ni tus tra hit a ge ni to re.	
3a	Hinc qui per tran sis	– rogo – fe mi na, vir , pu er an sis:	
3b	Ut pa ri ter re cu bant	in pa ce – pre ca re! – qui es cant!	

There are several departures from classical ruling.

1b *protomartyris* is here given two short first syllables, whereas the word has a long first syllable.

2a: *Hugo* is regarded here as beginning with a consonant, rendering the second syllable of *Bostok* long by position.

Margaretaque comes with a long second syllable, but ought to have a short one. However, this name completely defies metre.

2b *simile* is a special case, with its long and stressed last syllable; caesura-licence is accorded here.

3a *rogo* ought to have a long last syllable – but that would disrupt the metre of the verse.

In all these cases it is legitimate to call for indulgence.

The first line is spectacular, because here the poet manages to fit all the family-terms perfectly into the metre. This is so difficult because, although three of them look alike and all four of them are disyllabic, they do not have the same syllable-quantities: *pater* and *soror* have two short syllables, but *mater* and *frater* have each a long 'a' in the middle. The poet has juggled them all beautifully into line.

If the versification is impressive, an even greater achievement of this poem is its intricate system of rhyme. Here is the diagram showing its end-, caesura- and interior rhymes.

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1a	Hic pater, hic mater,	soror hic , iacet hic quoque frater	
1b	Pastoris pecorum	protomartyris Angligenarum.	
2a	Bostok Hugo patri ,	Macry Margaretaque matri	
2b	Nomen erat; simile	genitus trahit a genitore.	
3a	Hinc qui pertransis ,	rogo, femina, vir , puer an sis :	
3b	Ut pariter recubant	in pace – precare! – quiescant!	

As can be seen, all verses have leonine rhymes, verse-end and caesura-word rhyming, all (with one exception) being rich, disyllabic rhymes. But they also have internal rhymes, sometimes linking a verse's hemistichs additionally (e.g. in v. 1b), sometimes occurring within a single hemistich, as in vv. 1a, 1b, 2b. There is, moreover, interior rhyme, as in v. 2a, where all three words relating to the woman begin with the same syllable.

Not enough with such an astounding performance of rhyme, the poet enriches his verses with a spectacular array of sound-effects, which demands yet another diagram.

1a	Hic pater, hic mater,	soror hic , iacet hic quoque frater	
1b	Pastoris pecorum	protomartyris Angligenarum.	
2a	Bostok Hugo patri ,	Macry Margaretaque matri	
2b	Nomen erat; simile	genitus trahit a genitore.	
3a	Hinc qui pertransis ,	rogo, femina, vir , puer an sis :	
3b	Ut pariter recubant	in pace – precare! – quiescant!	

The first verse has the three family-appellatives *pater*, *mater*, *frater*, producing a resounding concentration on the importance of the family for the poet. And the word *hic*, which appears four times in the first verse, relentlessly points to the tomb before the onlooker.

Family-cohesion is the core of this poem. It is not often seen in sepulchral texts that so much care is taken to name the parents, both father and mother, who are here given the same rank, set in the same verse, and to remember the brother and sister. And the adjutory prayer for grace is intended to encompass all members of the family.

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Five times each the syllables 'pa' and 'ma' occur within the poem. If isolated from their context, arranged side by side and spelt out aloud by themselves, they may be imagined as forming the poet's cries of lamentation over the loss of his parents – "Papa!" "Mama!" –, with the several more consonants 'p' in word-beginnings added on as stuttering approaches. These wails come interspersed with many shrill vowels [i:] in accentuated syllables, particularly in vv. 1 and 3, and within this configuration would seem shrieks of pain. These powerful sound-effects convey to us the poet's bereavement.

Poetic composition runs parallel to the message of this poem, not only accompanying, but strengthening it considerably. Correspondence between content and language, with ensuing mutual enhancement, is a touchstone of literary quality.

We have here before us a small, but exceedingly fine poem. Beside being a masterly piece of versification, it is an ingenious composition of consonance, unobtrusive, seemingly uncontrived, allowing us to relate to the torments of irreparable loss, to partake of a moment of timeless truth beyond the borders of historic contingency.¹⁷

Authorship

Much more than about the commemorated is known about their son John, who had an important clerical career. He had been Prior of Tynmouth in Northumberland before becoming (the 33rd) abbot of St. Alban's, succeeding in that office William Heyworth (1402–1420), whose family also came from Wheathamstead, curiously¹⁸. John Bostok (or of Wheathamstead, as he tends to be called) richly endowed the abbey, sponsoring the building of a window and the reglazing of part of the church, had a chapel built (as his burial-place), and donated many

17 CUSSANS has quite a different opinion as to the poetic quality of this text: "The writer, probably the abbot John, appears to have aimed in his leonine verses, rather to secure a jingling rhyme, / than to produce a composition in classical Latin." p. 337–38. He unhappily lacks the requisite understanding for medieval poetry, which is filled with sensibility, piety, wisdom, attains feats in versification and achieves literary masterpieces.

18 There is also a brass commemorating John and Elizabeth Heyworth and their nine children in Wheathamstead church, from 1520. (JEAVONS, p. 10)

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and costly vestments, pictures, and articles of church-plate. Also, he founded the library. When he resigned his staff after about 20 years, he was re-instated for a second term, so he "remained in office there from 1420–64 during the reign of Henry VI, his patron and friend. ... John is known to have written epitaphs for monks who died at the abbey, and it is probable that he wrote this one for his parents."¹⁹

The reason for the attribution of authorship is his being mentioned directly as Hugo's and Margaret's son. This would be one of the very few cases where the author of a medieval inscription can be identified.

John Bostok is also presumed to be the author of the inscription on the Frowyk brass at South Mimms.²⁰ WEEVER says it was "composed by John Whethamsted, Abbot of St. Albans". CAMERON writes (more reservedly) that it is "supposedly composed by Abbot John of Wheathamstead (to whom is also attributed the inscription to his own parents on their brass in Wheathamstead)".²¹ There is no explicit and undoubted testimony of John of Wheathamstead being the author of Frowyk's poem, but the masterful handling of the language clearly points in that direction.

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