

LECTIO I: ÆLFRICI BATAE COLLOQVIA (c. 1000)

ÆLFRIC BATA (a Hebrew nickname meaning ‘barrel’ – indicative of either physical stature or drinking habits) was a student of the better known Anglo-Saxon homilist, Ælfric of Eynsham. Following the example of his teacher, Bata was the author or redactor of several pedagogical Latin dialogues (colloquies = *con* + *loquor*, ‘to speak with, discuss’) composed to instruct students in the art of (speaking) the Latin language (*qualiter scolastici ualeant resumere fandi aliquod initium latinitatis sibi* [p. 39]). As Scott Gwara notes in the introduction to the edition that we will read (*Latin Colloquies from Pre-Conquest Britain*, Toronto, 1996): ‘Parts of the *Colloquia* arguably reflect the classroom procedure in an Anglo-Saxon monastery. The *magister*, responsible for teaching rudiments of grammar, exposition, and the necessary biblical and liturgical pieces, ran the class; by Bata’s testimony, an older boy could aid him. Learning meant memorizing ‘set-texts’ called *accepti* (*loci*?). The oblates would read the *accepti* again and again to memorize them thoroughly (*firmare*)’ (p. 5).

The *Colloquia* are part of the development of Latin learning during the tenth-century Benedictine Reform. Consider Ælfric of Eynsham’s description, in the Old English preface to his *Grammatica*, of the state of Latin learning before the reform: ‘Is nu for ði godes þeowum and mystermannum georne to warnigenne, þæt seo halige lar on urum dagum ne acolige oððe ateorige, swaswa hit wæs gedon on Angelcynne nu for anum feawum gearum, swa þæt nan engisc preost ne cude dihtan oððe asmeagean anne pistol on leden, oðþæt Dunstan arcebisceop and Aðelwold bisceop eft þa lare on munuclifum arærdon.’¹ The *Colloquia* reflect this effort to sustain Latin learning. As a pedagogical tool, they complement grammatical treatises (such as Ælfric’s *Grammar*) and offer an opportunity to internalize the knowledge acquired through the rote study of Latin syntax and morphology. But ‘conversational Latin’ is not the only goal of this text, for Bata’s division of his work into two parts – the *Colloquia* and the *Difficiliora* – suggests a shift from the exigencies of mundane, concrete affairs (*Surge, frater mi, de tuo lectulo, quia tempus nunc nobis surgendi et manus nostras lauandi* [p. 39]) to a more literary, ‘hermeneutic’ style (*Loquamur nunc silenter et sobrie aliquid alacritatis et utilitatis de caelesti tripudio* [p. 92]).²

We will read from both sections of the text, beginning with the simpler dialogues with which the *Colloquies* begin and proceeding to some of the more literary dialogues (or rather, monologues) with which they close. Some pointers: by virtue of the dialogue form, the *imperative* (often with a corresponding vocative) is used frequently; do not let the absence of a main *indicative* verb throw you. Also, remember that ML sometimes uses a subordinating *quia* (or *quod*) to introduce indirect speech (after verbs of speaking, thinking, etc.); the verb in such clauses may be indicative or subjunctive.

¹ Ælfrics Grammatik und Glossar, ed. J. Zupitza (Berlin, 1880), p. 3. ‘Now God’s servants and monks are to be cautioned earnestly that in our day holy learning not grow cold and perish, as happened among the English just a few years ago, such that no English priest was able to compose or decipher a letter in Latin until Archbishop Dunstan and Bishop Æthelwold restored that learning to the monastic life.’

² On the ‘hermeneutic’ style, see Michael Lapidge, ‘The Hermeneutic Style in Tenth-Century Anglo-Latin Literature’, *Anglo-Saxon England* 4 (1975): 67–111.