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*IN PRAISE OF BALD MEN:*  
A TRANSLATION OF HUCBALD'S *ECLOGA DE CALVIS*

Thomas Klein

The words of Professor Raby are perhaps the best introduction to this translation:

Hucbald is best known for his amazing *Ecloga de Calvis*, a praise and justification of baldness dedicated to Hatto, the bald-headed Archbishop of Mainz.

This learned and impressive defence of baldness is the only philosophic treatment of it in verse (Synesius wrote of it in prose), and it has this peculiarity, that every word of the hundred and forty-six verses of which it is composed begins with the letter *c*. (*A History of Secular Latin Poetry*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1957], vol. 1, p. 249).

Seeing the bald head with its ring of hair as a sort of natural tonsure or crown, Hucbald (ca. 850-930) praises the inborn ability of bald men as clerics and kings, as well as warriors and doctors. He also calls our attention to two prominent biblical bald men: the prophet Elisha and, perhaps surprisingly, St. Paul. It should be noted that Hucbald was associated with the palace school of the great Carolingian king, *Carolus Calvus*, or, as we know him, Charles the Bald. Doubtless, the poem also found favor with Hucbald's patron.

The poem, of course, poses special problems for translators. While the language itself is generally straightforward, a direct rendering into English does little justice to Hucbald's technical feat. On the other hand, a translation comprised solely of words beginning with *c* is an impossibility: besides the articles, prepositions, pronouns, and so on, which must be used in English, there is no word in English for *calvus* that begins with *c*. I have taken a few liberties to solve this problem. I allowed myself to alternate *b*-lines (*b* picked for obvious reasons) with *c*-lines; furthermore, when faced with the word *calvus* in a *c*-line, I occasionally made a suitable substitute. The translation is based on Paul von Winterfeld's edition in *Poetae Latini aevi Carolini*, *Monumenta Germaniae historiae*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Weidmannos, 1899), pp. 267-271.

## In Praise of Bald Men

A brainless bloke has badly abused the bald,  
 Composing crude carols: so commend in chorus  
 The blameless bald, and bellow the ballad besides.

*Bless now the bald with bright ballads, O Bards.*

5 I will begin to braid the bald with bright ballads,  
 Conversely, to confuse the critic's kinky curls.  
 Let all brave Bards with ballads brightly bless the bald  
 And cast their kudos far; but confine for their crimes  
 Those brash baboons that bray abuse about the bald.  
 10 Let the cause of Kojak climb to constellations.  
 Bridle your bouche, beastly bristling barbarians,  
 Cutting the curl-less with your crafty canticles.  
 Let the balds' beauteous ballad be broadcast.

*Bless now the bald with bright ballads, O Bards.*

15 When that crown comes up around a clean crest,  
 It bodes this bald will be a bishop, or a brother,  
 And catch up the clear coronet that Christ concedes.  
 Burrowing the blights in his breast out like bristles,  
 His core contemplates the Creator, his corpus, the clouds.  
 20 With his oblation he bends to behold the blessed;  
 He casts aside and condemns crimes and corrupt cares.  
 The abodes of bliss, the blendings of blessed bands,  
 He conceives, and quickly acclaims the one Creator.

*Bless now the bald with bright ballads, O Bards.*

25 Conjointly caroling with clearest cadence, choirs  
 Of the bald debut in ballets without blemish.  
 Conforming in their crests, concordant corporally,  
 As bishops they busily build barns of believers;  
 With cornet clasped, they clang celestial clarions.  
 30 They brew a beneficial balm with a benediction;  
 They conjoin chrismed crowds into a corps of Christ.  
 As brothers they bashfully batten on banquets,  
 Carnivores in Christ, they are cloyed by his claret.

*[Bless now the bald with bright ballads, O Bards.]*

35 Continent cloisters collect them in crowds, chanting  
 Beatifics boldly for the blessed bridegroom.  
 Clear of curls, they enkindle the cornice of the clouds;  
 Baseness abandoned, bent on better business.  
 With care they compose the complete catholic canon,

## Ecloga de Calvis

Carmina convitii cerritus, carpere calvos  
 Conatus, cecinit: celebrentur carmine calvi  
 Conspicuo clari; carmen cognoscite cuncti.

Carmina, clarisonae, calvis cantate, Camenae.

- 5 Comere condigno conabor carmine calvos,  
 Contra cirrosi crines confundere colli.  
 Cantica concelebrent callentes clara Camenae;  
 Collaudent calvos, concludant crimine cluras  
 Carpere conantes calvos crispante cachinno.  
 10 Conscondat caeli calvorum causa cacumen.  
 Conticeant cuncti concreto crine comati  
 Cerrito calvos calventes carmine cunctos.  
 Consona coniunctim cantentur cantica calvis.

Carmina, clarisonae, calvis cantate, Camenae.

- 15 Cum crescit calvi capitis cervice corona,  
 Consortem cleri consignat confore calvum,  
 Capturum claram Cristo cedente coronam.  
 Ceu crines capitis convellens crimina cordis,  
 Corde creatorem conspectat, corpore caelum.  
 20 Caelicolas cives cupiens contingere cultu,  
 Crimina cum curis condempnat cuncta caducis;  
 Caeli consensum, concentum caelicolarum  
 Concipiens cupide collaudat cuncta creantem.

Carmina, clarisonae, calvis cantate, Camenae.

- 25 Coniubilant calvi celso clamore canori  
 Continuantque choro castas cantare choreas.  
 Conformes capiti, concordi corpore cuncti  
 Complacitas cleri contendunt condere caulas,  
 Correpto cornu caelestia classica clangunt.  
 30 Conficiunt carum Cristi cognomine crisma:  
 Consociant cuneo conspersos crismate coetus.  
 Concordes caute celebrant convivia cenae;  
 Consaturant Cristi convivas carne, cruore.

[Carmina, clarisonae, calvis cantate, Camenae.

- 35 Conplures calvos cogunt castissima castra,  
 Caelica certatim celebrantes cantica Cristo.  
 Corpore crine carent, collustrant culmina caeli  
 Caelica concupiunt, cohibent curare caduca.  
 Componunt cartas, concinnant carmina clara,

40 They build up books and begloss their breviaries.  
 A calorific core they carry, chaste and constant,  
 By bridling their bodies, and they are brisk to bag  
 That cope, contending in the cenobitic course.]

*Bless now the bald with bright ballads, O Bards.*

45 Comrades co-command, climb to the clouds' crests, with crowns  
 Braided on their bold brows, in bands better-than-bronze.  
 Clement with cash, they care for their clients' concerns,  
 But barristers beware! the bald abide no badness—  
 Clearly, as kings or consuls their censure is keen,  
 50 For a balding bencher backs no bacchanalia:  
 No, he commands that these cozeners be crippled.  
 The blind had better break off bothering the bald,  
 Quit their cunning quips, Quit their corrosive cuts, Quit.

*Bless now the bald with bright ballads, O Bards.*

55 Conducting their keen cuirassiers into combat,  
 The bald battle as brothers, brave in basinet;  
 They coil their columns of quick-killing companies,  
 Bereave the bushy of their braids, bash them with boots,  
 With coruscating cusps, they cut the connection  
 60 Between body and brain. Bellowed behests are obeyed.  
 Acute in conflict, the clean-crested combatants  
 Beat, batter and bind the barbarians,  
 Catch captives, cut their careers at the cervix.

*Bless now the bald with bright ballads, O Bards.*

65 Cogitation, I can confirm, they cultivate:  
 Ken shall ye now that they can cure the common cold,  
 And e'en the blind—in bands—are bettered by the bald.  
 Chronic consumption, cancer too, capitulates;  
 Colic, the broil that burns the bowels, is brought to bay.  
 70 Scanning with scalpel, cruor cut through, chirurgeons  
 Bald banish bad blood by beneficial bleedings.  
 Can I commend completely? Contagions they curb,  
 And better the battered bodies of the broken.

*Bless now the bald with bright ballads, O Bards.*

75 A caveat for the curly—those commonly  
 Corrupt to the core: carp not at the Creator,  
 Break off bestrewing abuse about his beings.  
 The capable Creator of causes did construct  
 All that was built; the biggest bunch he bent beneath,  
 Carefully conferring their care to his creatures:

- 40 Catholicum canon certum conscribere curant.  
 Conmulcant carnem, congestant corde calorem  
 Constantem, castum; communi currere cursu  
 Contendunt celeres caelique capessere culmen.]  
 Carmina, clarisonae, calvis cantate, Camenae.
- 45 Conregnant calvi, conscendunt culmina caeli,  
 Conspicui, compti crisea cervice corona.  
 Clementes censu condunt consulta clientum:  
 Concinnose, cave: condemnant crimina calvi.  
 Censorem calvum censuram condere constat.
- 50 Cordacem calvum cordatum crede cavendum:  
 Calventem calvos caecari corpore censet.  
 Calvitium calvi caecatus carpere cessa;  
 Cessa calvastrum, cessa corrodere, cessa.  
 Carmina, clarisonae, calvis cantate, Camenae.
- 55 Conducunt calvi cuneos certamine claros.  
 Conpugnant calvi cristati casside coni,  
 Contorquent, crispant celeres cum caede catervas,  
 Comprendunt cirros, contundunt calce comatos,  
 Cuspide confodiunt; capulo concisa corusco
- 60 Colla cadunt; celebrant calvi clamore celeuma.  
 Commotus certare catus certamine calvus  
 Conculcat, caedit, crinitos cedere cogit,  
 Captivos captat, captos cervice coartat.  
 Carmina, clarisonae, calvis cantate, Camenae.
- 65 Comperies calvos column conferre cerebro:  
 Comperies calvos capitis curare catarros:  
 Comperies calvos caecas curare catervas.  
 Cronica cum cancro ceditque cacexia calvo;  
 Cardia cor carpens cassatur, colica cessat.
- 70 Contrectans calibem concisa carne coerchet  
 Corruptum capitis cocta cervice cruorem.  
 Cur complura cano? clandestina cuncta caduci  
 Corpore confutat, collapsaque corpora curat.  
 Carmina, clarisonae, calvis cantate, Camenae.
- 75 Corde cavus, cirrose, cave certare creanti  
 Convitiumque creaturae condicere cessa:  
 Condita cunctipotens causarum cuncta creator  
 Constituit, curamque cavens conferre creatis  
 Cetera curvavit, clarum consurgere calvi

80 The bald were like beacons, to which the balance should bow.  
 How can these cranks with cackling clamor caw,  
 "He built the bald in a beastly broken beaker?"  
 Contain that crude and carious calumny, quick!

*Bless now the bald with bright ballads, O Bards.*

85 Caitiffs confederate! How can you so curry  
 Their backs, when the bald have beaten out all badness?  
 Your cinders you cast on their crests, yet this carbon  
 Is the basis of the body, the bald believe.  
 With calid coals you consider cremating them,  
 90 But the bald have been baked in the blaze of the blessed.  
 Why castrate those that keep themselves corporally chaste?  
 For the blights of the bald have all been begelded.  
 Composers of cruel canticles, quit your caviling.

*Bless now the bald with bright ballads, O Bards.*

95 I must beware of binding black with bright in ballad;  
 Let us crush now their cunning into the quagmire.  
 That brute blowing bilge—block up his bagpipe.  
 The codex clearly confirms, he was a keen critic,  
 That bright-eyed bald, to whom all blessed things were bared.  
 100 He quickly condemned those clods and their crime was clear,  
 When they buffeted and bellowed before and behind,  
 And cackling called, "Quickly, climb up, climb up,  
 Baldy!" for bears then broke their bodies into bits.\*

*Bless now the bald with bright ballads, O Bards.*

105 Now culminate carols for one conspicuous  
 Baldy: by a baleful bill of bloodshed obliged,  
 He consistently crucified Christ's cultivators.  
 Banzai! we bawl: this once-bad bald was blinded by  
 A coruscating charisma. By Christ's cry quailed,  
 110 He bowed down broken, as if bored by barb of bow.  
 Quickly to climes clear past the clouds was he carried,  
 And there he beheld with unbleared beams his brightness.  
 Clearly, his *coeur* was a celestial crucible.

*Bless now the bald with bright ballads, O Bards.*

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\* Cf. 4 Regum 2.23-24: "[Eliseus] ascendit autem inde in Bethel: cumque ascenderet per viam, pueri parvi egressi sunt de civitate, et illudebant ei, dicentes: *Ascende calve, ascende calve*. Qui cum respexisset, vidit eos, et maledixit eis in nomine Domini: egressique sunt duo ursi de saltu, et laceraverunt ex eis quadraginta duos pueros." (*Biblia sacra: iuxta vulgatam Clementinam*, ed. Alberto Colunga & Laurentio Turrado, 8th ed. [Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1991]).

- 80 Concedens culmen, cui cedere cuncta coegit.  
 Cerritus cur collatrat clamore canino  
 'Considerat calvum collapsa cucurbita caeno?'  
 Conticeat citius caenosa calumpnia cuius.  
     Carmina, clarisonae, calvis cantate, Camenae.
- 85 Complex carnificum, corium convellere calvo  
 Cur censes? cordis convellit crimina calvus.  
 Cur censes capiti cineres conspergere calvo?  
 Cognoscet calvus cineri concreescere corpus.  
 Cur censes calido carnes carbone cremari?
- 90 Corda cremant calvi Cristi concocta calore.  
 Cur censes calvum castrari corpore castum?  
 Cordetenus cunctis castratur concito culpis.  
 Carmine carnificans calvum, compesce cavillum.  
     Carmina, clarisonae, calvis cantate, Camenae.
- 95 Carminibus caveo claris coniungere caeca:  
 Calcetur caeno calcanda calumpnia calce.  
 Caenosus caenosa canens concludito cannam.  
 Censetur certe censorem codice cautum  
 Clarividum calvum, cui conscia caelica cuncta.
- 100 Commotum calvum circumlatrante cacinno  
 Clamantes 'conscende citus, conscendito, calve'  
 Condempnasse cacos: confestim crimina clarent  
 Convitii, corrosa cadunt cum corpora carptim.  
     Carmina, clarisonae, calvis cantate, Camenae.
- 105 Carmina calvorum cumulentur carmine calvi  
 Conspicui, cuius crudelis cautio caedis  
 Constiterat Cristi cultores carnificare.  
 Coniubilent circumfulgente carismate calvo  
 Caecato cuncti! Cristi clamore citatus
- 110 Corruerat cito, confossus ceu cuspidi conti:  
 Confestimque capit conscensum culmine caeli;  
 Clarivido cernens conspectu cunctipotentem,  
 Confore cor cuius claret caeleste catinum.  
     Carmina, clarisonae, calvis cantate, Camenae.



- 115 Collect the choir— a chorus for a *chauve célèbre* !  
 The Blessed, we believe, beatified this bald  
 Critic; now consecrated censor of the cope,  
 He brooded on blots and blunders, bridled the basest  
 Colloquies, while calling for communalism.
- 120 Baffling the braided, he built great bodies of brethren.  
 He enkindled courage in committed Christians  
 By bringing them together, both body and brain.  
 Let the crazed not contemn a crest so commendable.  
*Bless now the bald with bright ballads, O Bards.*
- 125 Compress that cruel cad, captured for the crime of carping  
 At all the bald in bootless brute behavior.  
 Close up this convict who concocted this corrupt  
 Abuse, bind him in black and burdensome bondage.  
 The decapillated consul consents that the captive
- 130 Is better blinded—blinded bulldogs do not bark.  
 Keep quiet, cur, inculcating all my company!  
 At bay, Bowser, brashly bowwowing at the bald!  
 Keep quiet, cur! Quit crunching cruelly the clean-crested!  
*Bless now the bald with bright ballads, O Bards.*
- 135 Cynthia, complete your circle's compass when you  
 Behold the banding of the balds' bright brotherhood.  
 You can recognize in their crests the cosmic cope,  
 'Tis thus the bald do beautify your bending bounds.  
 Cynthia, kind companion, collect the candid
- 140 Bald while you abide, your begilded beams held back.  
 So crepuscular, then let your crescent be crescive.  
 Brighten then the bald, while their balding brows blush, as  
 Casques colored by a cloudless canopy's enkindling.  
*Bless now the bald with bright ballads, O Bards.*
- 145 Now close your clarions inside their cases: completed  
 Is this beauteous ballad, which so befits the bountiful Bald.

- 115 Conglomerate choros, calvo celebrate choreas.  
 Censuram celebrem calvum cambisse colendum  
 Comperimus: caeli consul consulta cauendi  
 Crimina consultat, caenosi cuncta cohercet  
 Colloquii, cunctis communia comoda censet.
- 120 Confundit cirros, collegia civica condit;  
 Conciliando, consponsorum Cristicolarum  
 Corda ciet, capiti corpus coniungere certans  
 Cerritus celebres cesset contempnere calvos.  
 Carmina, clarisonae, calvis cantate, Camenae.
- 125 Crudelem calvos casso conamine cunctos,  
 Carpere conantem compescite crimine captum;  
 Convitii commentantem commenta caduca  
 Concito convictum caecis concludite claustris:  
 Calvaster censor caecari crimine captum
- 130 Censet-caece canis cessa contempnere calvum!  
 Conquinisce, canis conpingens crimina calvis!  
 Conquinisce, canis collatrans carmine calvos!  
 Conquinisce, canis, cessans corrodere calvos! .  
 Carmina, clarisonae, calvis cantate, Camenae.
- 135 Concilium clarum calvorum cogere coetum  
 Cum cernis, calvum caeli comprehendito ciclum;  
 Calvitii culmen caeli cognoscito centrum.  
 Circuitum cosmi commendant cetera calvi.  
 Calvos consocia, candentes congere calvos,
- 140 Cinthia cessabit criseos conferre colores;  
 Cornua contenebrans cedet concreescere calvis.  
 Collucent calvi; calvorum cassida candet,  
 Conrutilans caeli ceu copia clara coruscat.  
 Carmina, clarisonae, calvis cantate, Camenae.
- 145 Conveniet claras claustris componere cannas.  
 Completur claris carmen cantabile calvis.

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