**‘I am the victim of my own genius:’ The Influence of Ovid’s Exilic Epistolary Verse on the Exile Poetry of Ermoldus Nigellus (829)**

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Taking the verse-epistles of minor Frankish poet Ermoldus Nigellus as its case study, this paper considers the isolation of a Classically-knowledgeable scholar living amongst ‘the barbarians’ – a side-effect of the Carolingian *renovatio,* the policy of unifying imperial administration through Latin literacy. Studying Classical texts gave court-scholars an exclusive comradery amongst their peers, set apart intellectually from the common man. When assigned to the outposts, away from their colleagues, they felt isolated and distinctively ‘other’ compared to the locals. Unlike his model Ovid’s, Ermoldus’s erudition may have seen him removed (*relegatio*) as a reward – even as he laments to the contrary.

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Long winded version in case the above makes no sense or needs tweaking:

Sometime after 829, court poet Ermoldus Nigellus was exiled from Aquitaine to the wilderness of Strasbourg; there he composed poems which illustrate a thorough knowledge of Roman and Late Antique poetry, Scripture, and contemporary literary sources available to a jobbing poet in the court of a sub-king. These poems praise effusively the might of the emperor Louis the Pious in the *ordo* of universal history (both secular and sacred) and, with luck, would allow Ermoldus to return home. He never tells us his crime explicitly – only that he was small-fry caught up in the wrong place, at the wrong time. This paper will re-evaluate Ermoldus’s work with his two short verse-epistles to Pepin of Aquitaine in particular as its case studies. It considers Ermoldus’s theme of exile, particularly in connection with the themes of ‘here’ and ‘there.’ This paper will consider briefly the context in which Ermoldus wrote his poems in exile and his models of Ovid (especially his own exilic epistolary verses, *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto*) and Theodulf of Orleans. The main analysis of this paper focuses on  the language of exile and especially the loneliness of the exiled scholar – the cultured man amongst ‘the barbarians’ on the frontiers. In this regard, it will demonstrate that Ermoldus and his poetry represent not just the physical separation suffered by an exile in the Carolingian period, but the intellectual separation necessitated by their role as instruments of the Carolingian *renovatio,* that is, the drive of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious to create a uniform empire through Latin literacy in their administration and amongst their religious leaders. Many of these scholars at courts large and small were devoted to emulating Classical styles in prose and especially poetry; and a happy by-product of their education was enjoyment of the poetry and skills of those Classical authors they admired amongst an exclusive circle of peers, set apart from the common man. When assigned to the outposts of empire, physically from their peers and colleagues, they felt isolated and distinctively ‘other’ in comparison to the locals – from whose number they may have originally come. Ermoldus’s poetry has been met with criticism by contemporaries and modern critics alike – but the misfire of his elegy and his unwavering self-confidence in his skills as a poet has more to do with the long distance between himself and the centre rather than necessarily weak compositional skills. He may not have been a *talented* writer, but he was a *clever* and *creative* writer – he does not slavishly copy Ovid’s language nor even all of his imagery of exile. Instead, he drawd on and adapts from his models images and words to flatter his king and emperor and cleverly to associate local sights, scenes, and political resources and might with those of the Classical world, demonstrating hybrid Classical-Carolingian vigour in his work. Ermoldus’s words may have led to his exile, but unlike Ovid, who offended Augustus with his scandalous *Ars Amatoriae*, Ermoldus’s erudition may have seen him removed (*relegation*) as a reward – even if the poet laments to the contrary.