

Norse and Gothic, Slavonic, Basque and Greek,
Church and pigLatin, Occitan,
Arabic, Saxon, Erse, Franconian . . .
the tongues they spoke at Aachen were twisted
into Celtic knots tied and untied
like Chinese puzzles by red-haired monks
the new emperor invited in
to teach his court how to read and write

strings of words laced into dispute
about the nature of reality
and worse the reality of nature
(how *did* that Universal Cat bear
so many and such particular kittens and how *were*
they all to be fed?) as less articulate brothers
more physical than metaphysical
a less ruminative intelligence

were laced into plate and mail to defend the faith
or more often to settle property
ambiguations and that vague thing honor
(pawning their castles first if they were smart)
joining the legal decrees chronicles
accounts and legends quickly filling the shelves
sententiae becoming *compendia*
compendia becoming *summae*

cloistered logical equivalents
to flying buttresses and soaring arches
populated with lifelike figures arranged
in perspective and tiered to illustrate
in stone both unity in diversity
and the strength of character manifest
in the proportions of divine reason
as it appears in the utmost human scale

not to prove true what the faithful knew
needed no rational demonstration
but to bring to light brick by brick
article by article questions
raised in constructing monuments options
available and choices made in order
to achieve concord among the elements
put in the lists by conflicting authorities.