Identifying Latin models for the Old English texts of Northumbria is an area to which Matti Kilpiö has made an important (and still insufficiently noticed) contribution. The subject of the present note is briefer, later and humbler than that of Matti’s work, the crucifixion poem on the Ruthwell Cross. It is nonetheless of some interest as a glimpse of intellectual cross-currents, and of contacts between episcopal high culture and the architectural patronage of Yorkshire gentry, in the generation before the Norman Conquest.

The parish church of Kirkdale, in the Vale of Pickering, is now a relatively simple building of various dates from the eleventh century onwards, in a rural setting. Some significant pre-Viking sculpture, and recent archaeological investigations by Philip Rahtz and Lorna Watts, indicate that through the eighth and ninth centuries it must have been a minster of wealth and status. Thereafter, like most such places, it fell on hard times; the story of its revival is told by a remarkable inscription, and by some equally remarkable architectural features.

The dedication inscription (Fig. 1), now set over the south doorway in what may or may not be its original location, is carved on one side of a re-used stone coffin. This long, narrow shape, combined with the length of the text and the decision to incorporate a sundial, has dictated

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almost inevitably a layout comprising two rectangular panels set on either side of the sundial. The main text runs continuously from one panel to the other, with subsidiary texts below the dial and on its face:

+ Orm Gamal suna bohte S(an)c(tu)s Gregorius minster ðonne hit wes ðæl tobrocan 7 tofalan, 7 he hit let macan newan from grunde Criste 7 S(anctus) Gregorius, in Eadward dagum c(y)n(in)g 7 [i]n Tosti dagum eorl +
+ 7 Hawarð me wrohte 7 Brand pr(e)s(byter)
+ þis is dæges solmerca + ðæt ilcum ti[de] +

[+ Orm Gamalsson bought Saint Gregory’s minster when it was completely broken and fallen down, and he had it made new from the ground for Christ and Saint Gregory, in the days of Edward the king and the days of Tostig the earl (i.e., between 1055 and 1065). +
+ And Hawarð made me, and Brand the priest.
+ This is the day’s sun-marker + at each hour. +].

Although several other Anglo-Saxon dedication-inscriptions survive, this text is unique in its formulation, and has always been regarded as an elaborate anomaly. The possibility that it might have models lying

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Figure 1. Above: Kirkdale: Orm Gamalsson’s inscription (photo by John Blair). Below: York: Julia Fortunata’s coffin (Roman Inscriptions of Britain 1:231: reproduced by permission of the Administrators of the Haverfield Bequest.)

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4 Notwithstanding the nominative Gregorius, this is surely correct: the English names are likewise uninfluected.