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Conclusion

The whole of this volume has been devoted to the analysis of texts written by individuals for a variety of purposes, many of them reacting to specific historical circumstances and not necessarily intending to inform posterity about the author himself. These texts and their authors, therefore, have afforded all the contributors to the volume an opportunity to examine some of the facets of the personality displayed or inadvertently revealed. As Walter Pohl insisted in his introduction, there is no lack of 'ego' in any of these early medieval texts. As we have seen, however, the complexity of that ego may be difficult to pin down, not least because of the subtlety and cleverness of each author, their skill in exploiting the language and genres at their disposal, and the degree to which they could adopt a character required of the genre in which they chose to write.

This book is not a series of studies about whether or not an author betrays genuine emotions, hints of private life, feelings and convictions, though such flashes of sympathy between the author and his reader have not been ignored. Rather we have sought fully to understand these authors on their own terms and have used the notion of 'ego trouble' as a methodological tool for analysing individuals in the past. We have embraced their contradictions and conflicts, paradoxes, perceptions and troubled existence, perplexities and efforts to make sense of their own world, and sought to elucidate the thinking and individuality of a range of authors from the fourth to the tenth centuries in their own historical, cultural, social, religious and intellectual contexts. In short, we have historicized the concept of the individual and endeavoured to take into account the many elements (highlighted by Walter Pohl in his introduction) that might be considered as contributing to the make-up of an individual, namely, consciousness, self-perception, soul, intellect, reason, free will, emotions, intention, memory, imagination, physical presence, gender, social role and status. Identity, that is, the 'dynamic interface between self and society', has proven a useful notion, moreover, as a means of understanding an individual in his or her social context.

At one level it might be considered an absurdity that we should ever have needed to produce a volume on 'Ego Troubles in the Early Middle Ages' for it ought never to have been assumed that the notion of an individual could be absent in the early Middle Ages, any more than it is absent in any other epoch. We have been obliged to tilt at windmills that are not of our own making but are nevertheless such an established feature of the historiographical landscape that we cannot pretend that they are a mirage. However ludicrous it might seem to suppose that individuals had no sense of self in the early Middle Ages, this is what has been maintained in the past by an older scholarly generation who had the attitude that somehow the men and women we have considered in this volume were part of a 'Dark Age of no-self'. As Walter Pohl stressed in the introduction to this volume, the individual does not have to be discovered or be born in any particular stage in the past. It is the historian's task to determine notions of self, the varying importance attached to such notions, and how individual identity and self-image differ over time and between different social groups even within the same period.

Yet this book has emphatically not just been an attempt to bridge notional and inappropriate gaps between the ancient and the 'real' medieval individual (who allegedly can only be found after c. 1100) as presented in older surveys and studies. Men and women in the early Middle Ages were no more 'so overwhelmed by their God and by rigid collectives' that they could not develop a sense of self than any other human being. It might be argued, nevertheless, that the early Middle Ages is distinctive in the variety of ways in which the self is expressed, manifested in the range of texts that we have discussed. The chapters in this book, indeed, are an eloquent indication that the genres of text in which such self-knowledge might be reflected or expressed were no more limited than in later centuries. Texts and their interpretation have consequently dominated the discussion. The immediate context for the production of these texts has proved to be the key to understanding them, their authors, and the authors' ego troubles.

The great majority of texts surviving from the early Middle Ages, apart from letters, remain anonymous. In many cases this may well be the consequence of transmission, with the author's name simply not being recorded by a particular copyist. In others, however, the anonymity may be deliberate. In the case of the Royal Frankish annals for example, there is rarely any sense of the author's deliberate projection of his own personality or direct opinion into the narrative. An exception is the possible change of author or authors suggested by the appearance from 797, that is in the entries for the years 797, 799, 802, 806, 807, 812, 817, 818, 820, 826–829, of words suggesting a sympathetic identification of the writer with the Franks. This is signalled by the use of such words as *nos*, *nostros*, *nobis* referring to military victories achieved by 'our men'. Even here, however, the author is identifying him- or herself with the Frankish *gens* rather than as an individual. Yet the question of authorship and responsibility for sections remains an important aspect of the production of the annals in the light of the authors' apparent wish for anonymity. Such anonymity might be regarded as a reflection of the professed humility that was so widespread, at least in monastic circles, in the early Middle Ages. It could also have added the semblance of objective authority to their account.¹ Self-identification as author, or acknowledgement of authorship could, therefore, be a matter of choice and it is necessary for us to determine, wherever possible, whether this is the case and what its implications might be. Aethicus Ister, for example, offers a curious instance of the limits to finding and defining a concrete authorship in relation to a very learned text as well as the degree to which the text itself is concerned with the boundaries of 'humanity' and what the author thought comprised 'human identity' in relation to an attempt to adapt antique traditions to the realities of his own world. Antique traditions also determined major elements of Eugenius of Toledo's self expression. Someone like Bede, Atto of Vercelli or Rather of Verona might be seen as remarkable demonstrations of authorial identity within the conventions of their own day. Bede offered a short autobiography and auto-bibliography at the end of his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*. Atto of Vercelli took care to have his works collected together in the manuscript still preserved in the Vatican (Vat. lat. 4322). Rather of Verona took a similarly close interest in the preservation and sometimes destruction of his literary works. Yet as Paul Hilliard, Rob Meens and Irene van Renswoude have made clear, even these apparently spontaneous presentations, especially the auto-bibliography, have a literary tradition going back to the classical period and cannot be taken at face value. Self-scrutiny or self-presentation, moreover, as Rather discovered, was much harder than the analysis of, and proffering of advice to, others. Even apparently transparent self-presentation, confession and self-justification as is offered by Thietmar of Merseburg in his *Chronicle* has to be assessed, as Hans-Werner Goetz demonstrates, not only within the literary conventions of the genre in which Thietmar chose to write, but also the expectations and predilections of his intended audience.

All the authors discussed in this book were insistent in one way or another about their self-identification, though some, such as Sisebut or Alcuin, appear to have sought to define their own identity even to themselves. In Sisebut's case, his personality and sense of duty reflect the fusion of many opposites: religious devotion and political expediency, militarism and quasi-pacifistic Christian piety, brutal anti-Jewish policy and poetic refinement. In Alcuin's discourse of admonition, cultural archetypes play an inspiring role. The use of bynames, adoption of an alternative *persona* or aspiration to be compared with a particular person or identification with a patron saint, as we saw in the cases of such authors as Alcuin, Paschasius or Atto, could prove to be effective as a strategy of emulation and enhancement of the message the author wished to convey. A strategy of pseudonyms or anonymity could be a tactic for concealment and ambiguity and a symptom of the ego troubles with which this book has been concerned. As we saw in the case of Einhard, however, apparent authorial control of a narrative such as the *Vita Karoli* could also operate as a protective strategy. David Ganz demonstrates that Einhard's silences, as much as what he does say, actually reveal a concept of personality conceived in correspondence to rhetorical theory about how people were to be described. Texts thus determine the emphases of other texts.

Some authors, like Gregory the Great, on the other hand, sought to transcend their own individuality and to project an ideal that purported to offer counter characteristics in opposition to their own self-understanding. Bruno of Querfurt, as Ian Wood shows, seems to deploy hagiography about others as a means of exploring his

¹ See Paul Klopsch, Anonymität und Selbstnennung mittellateinischer Autoren, in: *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch* 4 (1967) 9–25; Paul Gerhard Schmidt, Perché tanti anonimi nel medioevo? Il problema della personalità dell'autore nella filologia mediolatina, in: *Filologia mediolatina* 6–7 (1999–2000) 1–8. I owe these suggestions and references to Jan Ziolkowski.

own hopes, fears and concerns. Sidonius Apollinaris proved even more elusive, despite the range of his extant poems and letters purporting to offer straightforward reactions and attitudes to barbarian-Roman relations, imperial loyalism or cultural conservatism. Tom Kitchen, on the contrary, has thrown a new light on Sidonius's ironic detachment and sense of humour, and the way in which he responded to the demands of context. Convention and conventional presentation, as in the case of Agobard of Lyon, do not need to obscure the voice of an individual.

The recognition or declaration of personal identity to serve particular historical circumstances, and the consequent adoption of a fascinating series of identities, which as Matthew Gillis demonstrates, were so fundamental in Gottschalk of Orbais's suit against Hraban Maur in 829, has to be compared with the kind of construction of identity and manipulation of language we witness in so many of the other authors discussed in this book. Augustine, as both Kate Cooper and Richard Corradini show, is a prime example of this, but we should also register how influential Augustine's own presentation of a relational self, a self embedded in a network of social reciprocities, became in its turn. If for no other reason, the case of Augustine establishes an expectation of contradictions, of an emulation of many models, and a recognition not only of coexistent complexities but also of changes over time or according to circumstance. For Paul the Deacon, for instance, his manifold experience was both cause and consequence of his complex personality, and he himself contributed substantially to the range of contemporary discourses of identity. Similarly, Ermold's self-depiction reflects Carolingian ideology as it existed for, and was interpreted by, the individual as well as the tensions inherent in performing in either a literary or political sphere according to such elite ideology.

Many of our authors offer us a variety of texts through which we can discern them. But even in cases where we have but one text, such as the Manual Dhuoda composed for her son William, or Angilberga's will, the self-understanding and expression of multiple and shifting identities is clear. For both women, as much as for many of the men considered in this volume, the public and private dimensions of their identities were specifically interlaced and connected.

We have offered many instances of early medieval human beings who were unquestionably conscious of their own selves, who have shown us how they distinguished between themselves as members of any given group or the society they lived in and themselves as individuals. We have explored the ways in which we can affirm consciousness, self-perception, soul, intellect, reason, free will, emotions, intention, memory, imagination, physical presence, gender, social role and status about the individuals we have discussed, from their own writings. If texts are designed for a purpose other than revealing anything about the author himself, it makes it more difficult for the modern historian. Yet texts designed ostensibly to tell us about the author are equally complex and have as great, if not greater, potential to mislead. Thus far from ignoring the clever, even devious methods of assertion, posturing, modesty, apology, obfuscation, concealment, mimesis, role playing and manipulation of genre that they deployed in their writings, such tactics have been seen by us all as fundamental indications of the ego and the ego troubles of the individuals with whom we have been concerned. All had in common their Christian convictions and the cultural and religious discipline their education within the Christian tradition had imposed. All nevertheless, or in consequence, achieved their own special balance between self-assertion, self-fashioning, and social and intellectual discipline, and adopted particular textual strategies to do so.

It is fitting to end with Rather's summary of the difficulties they encountered in so doing:

"... I want to inspect what I have lately been, what I am now, what I have not been, what I am not now, what I ought to be or what I ought to have been, but I am unable to see. I ponder where and how I contracted this blindness ... I am unfocussed by such a film of my own noxious habits that I cannot see what I desire and what I summon to my mind like a fleeting dream."²

² Rather, *Meditationes cordis exilio cuiusdam Ratherii sive praeloquia* 6, 25 (ed. Peter L.D. Reid/François Dolbeau/Bernhard Bischoff, CC CM 46a, *Ratherius Veronensis Opera*, Turnhout 1984) 3–196, at 193. The English translation is taken from Peter L.D. Reid, *The Complete Works of Rather of Verona*. Translated with an introduction and notes by Peter L.D. Reid (*Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 76, New York 1991) 205: ... *dum quid dudum fuerim, quid modo sim, quid non fuerim, quid non sim, quid esse debeam, quidve debuerim, conspicerem volo, nec valeo, cecitatem hanc unde, ubi vel qualiter contraxerim cogito. ... tanta noxiae consuetudinis a meipso obnubiler albugine, ut non modo videre, quod cupio et veluti somnium advolans ad mentem reduco.*

