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IDENTITY AND EMOTIONS IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES¹

As soon as the Declaration of Independence of the new United States was signed, Congress commissioned a small group consisting of Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and John Adams to encapsulate the new nation's identity in a seal. Jefferson (as Patrick Geary has recently reminded us) proposed the figures of Hengist and Horsa on the obverse.² He thought of those legendary warriors of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* as real historical figures, "from whom We [the Americans] claim the Honour of being descended and whose Political Principles and Form of Government We have assumed."³ In Jefferson's view, the fledgling nation was literally the heir of Anglo-Saxon 'democracy', picking up a tradition of freedom buried but not destroyed by the Norman conquest. He considered Anglo-Saxon to be: "[the language] which we speak, in the earliest form in which we have knowledge of it," and the key "to a full understanding of our ancient common law, on which, as a stock, our whole system of law is engrafted."⁴ For the same seal, however, Franklin had entirely different associations: he proposed the Old Testament scene of Moses parting the Red Sea, with Pharaoh brandishing a sword as the waves closed over him. The comparison of the Americans with the chosen people was reinforced by the accompanying motto, "Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God."⁵ Adams, inspired by a still different tradition, proposed an image illustrating the labors of Hercules: "The Hero resting on his Clubb. Virtue pointing to her rugged Moun-

¹ I dedicate this paper to Herwig Wolfram, whose work on ethnogenesis, self-presentation, and group identity has revolutionized the field of early medieval history. I thank the members of the Tagung to which this paper was first presented, and especially Walter Pohl and Ian Wood, for their stimulating questions and suggestions. For an initial bibliography on modern identity theory, I am grateful for the help of Robert Rosenwein.

² Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* I, 15 (ed. Bertram Colgrave/R. A. B. Mynors, Oxford 1969) 50. See Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton-N.Y. 2002) 6. All translations here are mine unless otherwise indicated.

³ Letter of John Adams to his Wife, August 14, 1776, quoted in Richard S. Patterson/Richardson Dougall, *The Eagle and the Shield: A History of the Great Seal of the United States* (Washington-D.C. 1976) 18. Much of the information on the Seal discussed below is indebted to Patterson and Dougall's definitive study. For Hengist and Horsa, see Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* I, 15, ed. Colgrave/Mynors 50.

⁴ Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia, August 4, 1818 (ed. Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson, Writings*, Library of America, New York 1984) 466; see Allen J. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English, and Teaching the Tradition* (New Brunswick/London 1990) 15–19, 203–207. In a letter to Edmund Pendleton, Philadelphia, August 13, 1776, ed. Peterson 752, Jefferson asks: "Has not every restitution of the antient [sic] Saxon laws had happy effects? Is it not better now that we return at once into that happy system of our ancestors, the wisest & most perfect ever yet devised by the wit of man, as it stood before the 8th century." See also Jefferson, *Summary View of the Rights of British America*, (1774), ed. Peterson 106, where he likens the Americans to the Saxons, who "left their native wilds and woods in the north of Europe, had possessed themselves of the island of Britain, then less charged with inhabitants, and had established there that system of laws which has so long been the glory and protection of that country."

⁵ Franklin note, quoted in Patterson/Dougall, *Eagle* 14. Jefferson also wanted an Old Testament scene, but on the reverse: "The Children of Israel in the Wilderness, led by a Cloud by day, and a Pillar of Fire by night," as reported in the Letter of John Adams to his wife, August 14, 1776, in: Patterson/Dougall, *Eagle* 18.

tain, on one Hand, and perswading him to ascend. Sloth, glancing at her flowery Paths of Pleasure, wantonly reclining on the Ground, displaying the Charms both of her Eloquence and Person to seduce him into Vice.”⁶ Finally, Pierre Eugène Du Simitière, the artist whom Adams consulted about the design, had yet another image in mind. He proposed a shield, the details of which I will discuss more fully below. Here I wish simply to point out that on the shield’s right side was a figure of Liberty, on its left, in Du Simitière’s words, “an American Soldier, compleatly accoutred in his hunting Shirt and trowsers, with his tomahawk, powder horn, pouch &c.”⁷

Rarely is the moment of birth of a people so clearly and immediately connected to its need for identifying signs and symbols. Not only were many of the ‘features of ethnicity’ – language, arms, dress, myths of heroic ancestry, notions of common law – that medievalists have recognized in classical and early medieval authors still being trotted out in the late eighteenth century, but the very sources of medieval origin myths – whether Biblical or classical – continued to have relevance.⁸ We can see such signs creating and reinforcing the affective associations that constitute the ‘we-feeling’ of a group. Indeed, this ‘feeling of unity’ was graphically expressed in Du Simitière’s proposal for the shield dominating his design: it contained a smaller shield divided into six, each part containing a symbol for “the Six principal nations of Europe from whom the Americans have originated,” namely England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Germany, and Holland. Around them, in the border between the inner and outer shields, were thirteen tiny shields with the initial letter or letters of the original thirteen states, “linked together by a chain [of gold].”⁹

No one yet has explained precisely why people choose to rally around certain symbols that resonate for them, though the fact that ‘things’ have a social life alerts us to the plasticity of their meanings. That things can generate identity as well as value and prestige should not surprise.¹⁰ Nor do we understand the equally subjective factors that lead people to think in terms of ‘we’. Yet it seems almost certain that emotions are involved everywhere in these processes. Recent theories of self and identity put emotions at center stage, as the ‘glue’ that holds the narratives of self together;¹¹ as the capacities that allow us to undertake new roles;¹² or as the signals that allow us to monitor our place in the ‘we’ of the group.¹³

⁶ Letter of John Adams to his wife, August 14, 1776, in: Patterson/Dougall, Eagle 18.

⁷ Du Simitière’s proposal (August 1776), in: Patterson/Dougall, Eagle 20.

⁸ See Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, trans. Thomas J. Dunlap (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1988) 28, where the Goths are assimilated to both biblical and classical traditions. The signs of ethnicity were as ambiguous and fluid in the eighteenth century as they had been in the early medieval period: John Adams reported to his wife (in: Patterson/Dougall, Eagle 18) that he and Franklin wondered if “This Dress and these Troops with this Kind of Armour” were indeed “peculiar to America”, since he saw “a Book, containing an Account of the Dresses of all the Roman Soldiers, one of which, appeared exactly like it [the dress of Du Simitière’s ‘American Soldier’].”

⁹ Du Simitière’s proposal, quoted in: Patterson/Dougall, Eagle 19–20. For ‘Wir-Gefühl’, see for example Walter Pohl, Introduction: strategies of distinction, in: *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities*, 300–800, ed. Walter Pohl/Helmut Reimitz (The Transformation of the Roman World 2, Leiden/Boston/Köln 1998) 12.

¹⁰ See the articles in: *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge 1986).

¹¹ Jeannette M. Haviland-Jones/Patricia Kahlbaugh, Emotion and identity, in: *Handbook of Emotions*, ed. Michael Lewis/Jeanette M. Haviland-Jones (New York/London 2000) 294–295.

¹² See Keith Oatley, *Best Laid Schemes: The Psychology of Emotions* (Cambridge/New York/Paris 1992) 20, where, like other cognitivist psychologists, the author speaks of emotions as “states of action readiness.” Oatley is particularly strong in emphasizing emotions’ place in the processes of role-taking and goal fulfillment.

¹³ Thomas J. Scheff, *Microsociology: Discourse, Emotion, and Social Structure* (Chicago/London 1990).

This paper is an initial and tentative foray into a large topic: the place of emotions in identity in the early Middle Ages. I shall begin with a relatively wide panorama, then focus quite narrowly on the writings of Gregory the Great. From time to time – when it seems helpful – I shall bring in some modern psychological theory to guide the discussion.

Emotions can be used as identity markers, much like hair styles and arms. Archaeological excavations confirm in part the custom that Tacitus (55–116/20) reports about Germanic cremations, namely that a man's armor and sometimes his horse were included in the funeral pyre.¹⁴ But hardly anyone has noticed that the section in which Tacitus makes this observation is the second of only two passages in the *Germania* where he speaks of emotions: "They quickly dispose of laments and tears (*lamenta ac lacrimas*)," he says, "but they take their time setting aside sorrow and sadness (*dolorem et tristitiam*)."¹⁵ Tacitus then takes the opportunity to remind his readers that "women may properly mourn (*lugere*), while men must remember (*meminisse*)."¹⁶ The other passage that concerns emotions comes when Tacitus speaks of the Germanic institution of slavery: he remarks that some slaves may be killed by their masters, but only out of "impulsive anger" (*impetu et ira*), not for the sake of discipline.¹⁷ Anger, sorrow, and sadness: these are not a good harvest of emotions when we consider that Tacitus's vocabulary could – when he spoke of *Romans* – seethe with feelings of every sort. In just the first few pages of his *Histories* we find mention of hate (*odium*), love (*amor*), hope (*spes*), joy (*gaudium*), and sadness (*maestus*) in connection with Tacitus himself or the Senate and people of Rome.¹⁸ In the *Annales* the Senators sob openly (*magno fletu*) as Tiberius plays the grieving father.¹⁹ It is true that in these historical works Tacitus is seeking motives for action, while in the *Germania* he is describing stasis. We would be wrong to imagine that emotions served as a sign of identity from this evidence in Tacitus alone. But other writers suggest the same thing, and even more forcefully.

In Orosius (380/90–after 416), for example, the 'other' is emotional, while Christians are not. Pilate is so oppressed by anxieties (*angoribus coartatus est*) that he kills himself,²⁰ while Domitian, full of pride (*in tantam superbiam*), kills the "most noble men" of the Senate out of envy and greed (*invidiae simul ac praedae causa*).²¹ These are miserable emotions indeed. But they are, at least, recognizably human. Barbarians, on the other hand, simply rage. Ninus, king of the Assyrians, "taught barbaric Scythia, until then unwarlike and inoffensive (*innocentem*), to stir up its dormant ferocity (*torpentem saevitiam*), to realize its strength (*uires*), and to drink, not as heretofore the milk of domestic animals, but the blood of men."²² The "awakened" Scythians are beasts, not human beings.²³ In fact, we see a threefold division of men in Orosius: those who are calm and tranquil are Christian; those who seethe with emotions are elite,

¹⁴ Tacitus, *Germania* 27 (ed. Maurice Hutton, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge-Mass./London 1963) 300; for one use of this passage in modern historiography, see Malcolm Todd, *The Early Germans (The Peoples of Europe, Oxford/Cambridge-Mass. 1992)* 79–81.

¹⁵ Tacitus, *Germania* 25, ed. Hutton 298.

¹⁶ Tacitus, *Historiae* I, 1–4 (ed. Clifford H. Moore, Loeb Classical Library, London/New York 1925) 2–8.

¹⁷ Tacitus, *Annales* IV, 9 (ed. John Jackson, Loeb Classical Library, London/Cambridge-Mass. 1970) 18.

¹⁸ Orosius, *Historiae adversum paganos* VII, 5 (ed. Carl Zangemeister, CSEL 5, Wien 1882/Hildesheim 1967) 446.

¹⁹ Orosius, *Historiae* VII, 10, ed. Zangemeister 463.

²⁰ Orosius, *Historiae* I, 4, ed. Zangemeister 42–43; the translation here is borrowed from Paulus Orosius, *The Seven Books of History against the Pagans* (trans. Roy J. Deferrari, Washington-D.C. 1964) 21.

²¹ Cf. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* I, 1 (ed. Harold E. Butler, Loeb Classical Library, London/New York 1920) 18: "[thinking and learning are] natural to men, ... just as birds are born to fly, horses to run, and beasts to rage (*saevitiam*)."

pagan Romans; those who rage ferociously are “rebellious slaves and fugitive gladiators,”²² Jews,²³ and barbarians.

Assimilating emotions with the vicious ‘other’ is far less curious than Jefferson’s identification of American revolutionaries with Hengist and Horsa. A tradition extending at least from the Stoics saw the *pathé* (or, in Latin translation, *perturbationes*,²⁴ *affectus*,²⁵ or *passiones*²⁶) as uncontrolled and contrary to reason. Early Christian writers such as Origen (c. 185–253/4) and Evagrius (346–399) adopted and modified the Stoic view by incorporating the emotions (or, actually, Stoic “pre-passions”) into their conception of “bad thoughts” (*cogitationes*).²⁷ Later Gregory the Great hardened the “thoughts” into a list of cardinal sins.²⁸ Thereafter, emotions had two overlapping roles in medieval texts: they were sins, to be sure, but they were also feelings elicited by and expressed toward others.²⁹

The latter was Augustine’s chief concern. Apart from lust, which he understood as an emotion that ought to be extirpated entirely, Augustine (354–430) accepted the emotions as part of human nature.³⁰ In the *City of God*, emotions form the foundation of a comparison of two different types of men: the first, who is rich, “is wracked by fears (*timoribus*), consumed by sorrows (*maeoribus*), burnt up with desire (*cupiditate*); he is never secure, never tranquil.” The second, who represents the “ordinary man” (*mediocrem*), is beloved by his family (*carissimum suis*) and rejoices (*gaudentem*) in the friendliest amity with his relations, neighbors, and friends.³¹ Augustine could not even imagine God as unfeeling, though he denied that God felt any agitation: *Quid es ergo, deus meus?*, he asked in his *Confessions*, answering with a list of adjectives and verbs that invoked the emotions, among other things, as a matter of course: “You love (*amas*) but do not burn, you are jealous (*zelas*) but untroubled, you repent (*paenitet*) yet do not grieve (*doles*), you are angry (*irascaris*) but calm.”³² This was Augustine’s way of explaining how his own existence depended on God, how his own nature lay in God’s: “I would not be, my God, I would not exist at all, unless you were in me. Or rather, I would not be unless I were in you.”³³ Self-identity in Augustine was assimilated to God’s identity, and both were emotional beings. There are savage ‘others’ in Augustine’s vision of the world – Marius and Sulla vented their “ferocity” (*ferocitatem*) on their own body politic, for example.³⁴ But even murderers in Augustine’s works are capable of feeling: when King

²² Orosius, *Historiae* VII, 5, ed. Zangemeister 444: the *serui rebelles* and *fugitivi gladiatores* who terrify Rome are associated with Vergil’s “*furor impius*” (*Aeneid* I, 294).

²³ Orosius, *Historiae* VII, 12, ed. Zangemeister 467: *Iudaei quasi rabie efferati*.

²⁴ As in Cicero, *Disputationes Tusculanae* III, 4, 7 (ed. John E. King, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge-Mass./London 1945) 232: *perturbationes animi ... quae Graeci pathé appellant*.

²⁵ As in Seneca, *De Ira* I, 1, 1 (ed. John W. Basore, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge-Mass./London 1963) 106, where anger (*ira*) is the most frenzied of all the emotions (*affectus*).

²⁶ See n. 36 below.

²⁷ Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (The Gifford Lectures, Oxford 2000), presents a detailed description of this process.

²⁸ Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob* XXXI, 45, 87 (ed. Marcus Adriaen, *Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina* 143B, Turnhout 1985) 1610.

²⁹ Note that John Adams’s idea for the seal of the United States (see n. 6 above) drew from this tradition.

³⁰ On Augustine’s notions of lust and emotions in general, see Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind* 372–417.

³¹ Augustine, *De civitate dei* IV, 3 (ed. Bernard Dombart/Alphons Kalb, *Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina* 47, Turnhout 1955) 100–101.

³² Augustine, *Confessiones* I, 4, 4 (ed. Pierre de Labriolle, *Les Belles Lettres*, Paris 1977) 5.

³³ Augustine, *Confessiones* I, 2, 2, ed. de Labriolle 4: *Non ergo essem, deus meus, non omnino essem, nisi esses in me. An potius non essem, nisi essem in te*. Cf. Acts 17:28.

³⁴ Augustine, *De civ. dei* III, 29, ed. Dombart/Kalb 95, preceded by the question: “What fury of foreign nations (*gentium*), what savagery (*saevitia*) of barbarians can be compared to this of the victory of citizens over citizens?”

Mithridates ordered the death of all Romans in Asia, “what groans there were of the dying, what tears of the spectators and perhaps even of the executioners.”³⁵

Isidore of Seville (c. 560–636) drew harder boundaries. He too claimed “unemotional emotions” for God, but for Isidore such passions were just “a manner of speaking” rather than a matter of wonder: “For He is not touched by those passions (*passiones*) – lust (*libido*), anger (*iracundia*), desire (*cupiditas*), fear (*timor*), grief (*maeror*), envy (*invidia*) and others – that disturb human minds. But when it is said that God is angry (*irasci*) or jealous (*zelare*) or sad (*dolere*), it is said according to our usage. For with God, with whom tranquility is perfect, there is no emotion (*perturbatio*).”³⁶ But in a famous passage, he linked God’s feelings – here not at all tranquil – to both the brute unfeeling of the Huns and the need for Christians to restrain their own passions: “[The Huns] are the rod of God’s fury (*furoris Dei*), and as often as his indignation goes forth against the faithful, they are scourged by [the Huns] so that, corrected by their afflictions, they may restrain (*coerceant*) themselves from worldly desire (*cupiditate*) and sin and possess the inheritance of the Celestial Kingdom. Moreover, this nation (*gens*) is so savage (*horrida*) that when it suffers hunger during war, it cuts the vein of a horse and thus sates its hunger by drinking blood.”³⁷ This is a neat way to identify groups on the basis of emotion – or its bestial lack – all under the aegis of a providential and furious God.

What can we make of these various emotional categorizations? In the cases that we have just reviewed – apart from Augustine’s searching attempt to find himself in God, God in himself – they appear at first glance to be no more than name-calling. But a second look shows something more: they are, as it were, the vapor trails of what I call ‘emotional communities’. Let me take a moment to explain the term.

Cognitive and social constructionist psychological theories, however different in approach, agree that emotions are not effusions of an isolated self but rather are the products of a social order. The cognitivist, who postulates that emotions are judgments – non-verbal, to be sure – of pleasure or pain, well-being or woe, recognizes that different societies encourage people to interpret pleasure and pain in different ways. The social constructionist, who notes that core emotions are exceptionally pliable, goes so far as to assert that societies elicit emotions and fabricate their modes of expression. Both paradigms are extremely useful for historians, for they allow us to understand emotional rhetoric as part of a larger complex of emotional expression. But the notion of ‘society’ in both of these theories is extremely abstract. This is why I propose the idea of emotional communities. These are social groups of every sort, but the researcher looking at them is concerned with the emotions that they imply, generate, encourage, and discourage. People move (and used to move) from one emotional community to another in the course of their lives and even in the course of one day. Sometimes – indeed often – these communities have different emotional expectations, but people normally adapt easily to them. There may be a core identity, a *Traditionskern* of self that never changes, but it must be pliable enough to navigate within and between emotional communities.

In *Microsociology*, sociologist Thomas Scheff proposes a theory that bridges the micro and macro levels of social bonds, from dinner-table conversation to nation-states. Arguing that the “maintenance of bonds” is “the most crucial human motive”, he sees people involved in a continuous process of “attunement.” Every human interaction,

³⁵ Augustine, *De civ. dei* III, 22, ed. Dombart/Kalb 91.

³⁶ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* VII, 1, 24 (ed. Wallace M. Lindsay, Oxford 1911): *Non enim adtingunt eum ullae passiones, ut libido, iracundia, cupiditas, timor, maeror, invidia, et cetera quibus mens humana turbatur.*

³⁷ Isidore, *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Wandalorum et Suevorum* 29 (ed. J.-P. Migne, PL 83, Paris 1879) 1065–1066.

every conversation, is a forum where, beyond the content of the words, a kind of emotional “mind-reading” takes place. In amicable situations, you attempt not to shame others and they you; in conflict, you engage in mutual degrading, evoking embarrassment. Of course, very often we talk past each other and engage in self-deception about the emotional meaning of our encounters. But whether we read the situation rightly or wrongly, pride and shame are the key emotions, and social solidarity is built on their regulation. In Scheff’s scheme, here derived from Charles Horton Cooley, self-identity is always in process, depending, in Cooley’s words, on the “imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance[;] and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification.”³⁸ I do not follow Scheff in thinking that nation-state relations are just “selves” writ large; he has them going to war over perceived slights and humiliations.³⁹ But I do think that he is right to see that groups depend on a cohesion – that ‘we-feeling’ – that is created and maintained by emotional signals.

In this light, what men like Orosius or Isidore have to say about different groups is not just name calling but also a way for them to say something very real about the emotional communities in which they are operating. I can make this point most clearly by focusing on yet another author of the early Middle Ages, Gregory the Great, pope 590 to 604. What was his identity? What did emotions have to do with it?

In his recent book, “Authority and Asceticism”, Conrad Leyser points out that Gregory was both keen to exert his authority and convinced of his right to do so. He “was prepared,” as Leyser puts it, “to take the risk of claiming to be morally qualified to lead, to shoulder all the burdens of the faithful.”⁴⁰ Emotions, I will argue, were key to this role; it was because he understood himself to be a feeling being that Gregory considered himself fit to preside over others.

By the same token, Gregory downgraded those he considered unfit for power by denying them emotions. Thus in his Dialogues Gregory has no adjective for the *Franci* who invade Campania other than *saeuientes*. “Raging (*saeuientes*)” (he writes) they invaded the monastery of Fondi, looking for its prior and his hidden wealth, but miraculously – here Gregory repeats the word *saeuientes* – they were unable to find their man even though he was right in front of their noses.⁴¹ Similarly the Lombards were *saeuientes* when they entered the oratory of the church of St. Lawrence.⁴² And they were equally *saeuientes* in Valeria, where they invaded a monastery and hanged two monks from a tree.⁴³ Only one other group rage in the Dialogues: the false and furious monks who resent St Benedict’s disciplined adherence to the Rule.⁴⁴ But in Gregory’s Moralia we see that he closely associated the idea of bestiality with the Devil, the raging enemy (*inimicus saeuientis*) striving to conquer Job and, indeed, to oppose all good people in general.⁴⁵

³⁸ Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York 1902, reprint 1964) 184.

³⁹ See Thomas J. Scheff, *Bloody Revenge: Emotions, Nationalism, and War* (Boulder-Colo. 1994).

⁴⁰ Conrad Leyser, *Authority and Asceticism from Augustine to Gregory the Great* (Oxford 2000) 162.

⁴¹ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* I, 2, 4 (ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, trans. Paul Antin, SC 260 [=2], 265 [=3], Paris 1979/80) 2, 26.

⁴² Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* I, 4, 21, ed. de Vogüé 2, 58.

⁴³ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* IV, 22, 1, ed. de Vogüé 3, 78.

⁴⁴ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* II, 3, 3, ed. de Vogüé 2, 140.

⁴⁵ Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, praef. 4, 9, ed. Adriaen 15: *inimicus saeuientis*; *ibid.*, II, 41, 66, ed. Adriaen 99: *antiquus hostis ... contra bonos ... saeuuit*.

By contrast, Gregory thought of himself and those whom he trusted and identified with as emotional.⁴⁶ The first word that he says about himself in the Dialogues sets the tone: he is *depressus*: “Pressed down by the overwhelming tumults of the world,” he writes, “I sought a secret place, the friend of melancholy (*moerori*).”⁴⁷ This is how Gregory liked to present himself: beset by worldly cares and longing for the cloister.⁴⁸ But in fact he reveals just as much turmoil within that cloister as without. He tells, for example, of Eleutherius, originally abbot of San Marco at Spoleto but later a monk at Gregory’s own foundation, the monastery of St Andrew on the Caelian Hill. Eleutherius had brought a boy back to his monastery who, in his original home – a monastery of women – had been tormented by an evil spirit. Under Eleutherius’s tutelage, the child was cured. But, as Gregory put it, “the ancient enemy touched the soul of the old man overmuch with joy (*inmoderatus per laetitiam*) regarding the health of the boy.”⁴⁹ Eleutherius boasted to the brethren that the Devil might have been able to do his dirty work among a few nuns but dared not do so among true “servants of God.” At these very words the boy fell under the Devil’s spell. Gregory recounts the scene:

“When he saw what happened, the old man immediately gave himself over to lamentation (*in lamentum dedit*); and after he had mourned (*lugentem*) for a long time and the brethren had wanted to console him (*consolari*), he responded by saying, “Believe me, no bread will enter anyone’s mouth today until that boy is snatched from the demon.” Then he prostrated himself in prayer with all the brothers, and prayed until the moment that the boy was healed from his torment.”⁵⁰

Thomas Scheff would do well to read Gregory; pride does not always lead to self-affirmation and group solidarity. In a context where humility is prized, joy and communal success leads, as here, to an emotional and institutional crisis so severe that no one is allowed to eat until it is resolved. But Scheff is right to observe that “threats to the social bond generate intense feelings.”⁵¹ So, too, do affirmations of such bonds, as Gregory describes in a highly charged incident about himself.

This story takes place in Gregory’s own monastery on the Caelian Hill. As usual, he was suffering from excruciating stomach pains. When such attacks came on, he was too weak to fast. On one Holy Saturday, shamed by the fact that even the boys were carrying out a fast while he could not, Gregory was bitterly unhappy: “I became enfeebled,” he writes “more out of mourning (*moerore*) than out of weakness (*infirmirate*).”⁵² His “very soul was sad” (*tristis*).⁵³ The solution that he lighted upon was to ask Eleutherius (the same man who had paid dearly for his joy over the health of the possessed boy) to go into the oratory and “to obtain by his prayers to the omnipotent Lord that the strength to fast be given me on this day.” Eleutherius did so, with warmth and conviction – that is, with tears – and when he had finished, Gregory reported a startling turn of events: “my stomach received such strength that I forgot about both food and pain entirely.”⁵⁴ The moment constituted nothing less than an identity crisis for Gregory:

⁴⁶ In Gregory the Great, *Registrum Epistularum* I, 16 (ed. Dag Norberg, *Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina* 140, Turnhout 1982) 16, God, too is emotional: Gregory attributes to Him the emotions of mourning (*maerore*), sadness (*contristatur*), joy (*gaudio*), and happiness (*laetatus fuerat*). Ibid. I, 17, ed. Norberg 17, he evokes God’s anger (*iram*).

⁴⁷ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* I, prol., 1, ed. de Vogüé 2, 10.

⁴⁸ As in his letter to the Byzantine princess Theoctista: Gregory the Great, *Registrum* I, 5, ed. Norberg 6.

⁴⁹ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* III, 33, 4, ed. de Vogüé 2, 394.

⁵⁰ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* III, 33, 5, ed. de Vogüé 2, 396

⁵¹ Scheff, *Microsociology* 7.

⁵² Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* III, 33, 7, ed. de Vogüé 2, 398.

⁵³ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* III, 33, 8, ed. de Vogüé 2, 398.

⁵⁴ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* III, 33, 8, ed. de Vogüé 2, 398.

"Who am I, who was I (*quis essem, quis fuerim*)?" he asks. His whole being had been so bound up with his pain that when it was gone, even though his weakness and pain remained in his memory, "I recognized nothing in myself of those things that I remembered."⁵⁵ We see in this episode Gregory's intense desire to be part of a group and share its norms; his isolation tore him apart with grief. Yet to become a normal member he had to give up part of his identity, and for a time he hardly knew who he was. He had been accustomed to likening himself to Job, stricken by scourges.⁵⁶ How could he feel himself when his pain was gone?

Moreover, it was precisely pain, sorrow, and torment that, Gregory thought – or, rather, felt – gave men like him authority over others and, in counterpoint, gave others the ability to change, obey, and gain their salvation. This is made clear in the case of Justus, a monk who had hoarded three gold pieces despite the monastic prohibition against private property. On his deathbed, Justus admitted his sin. "Struck by great sorrow (*nimio moerore*)," writes Gregory, who was not abbot of his monastery but nevertheless clearly in charge there, "I began to think what I might do to purify the dying man and how I might provide an example for the brethren still living."⁵⁷ His solution was to order all the other monks to shun Justus, who, upon his death, was to be buried in a pit dug out of excrement, with the three coins atop his corpse. When Justus learned why all the monks had been avoiding him, Gregory reports, "he immediately wept bitterly (*uehementer ingemuit*) over his guilt and departed his body in this sadness (*tristitia*)." The burial went forward as planned, and the monks, upset by it (*perturbati*), began to empty their closets of their secret possessions.⁵⁸

Gregory's plan worked thus far, and again moved by sorrow (*tristis*) and "great pain" (*dolore graui*), he "began to seek a remedy for [Justus's] redemption," finding it in the imposition of a mass a day for thirty days on behalf of the dead man's soul.⁵⁹ The expedient worked: exactly thirty days later, Justus announced in a vision that "Until today I was doing badly, but now I am well."⁶⁰

This episode shows that Gregory saw himself as an emotional being and understood emotions as motives for actions, both good and (of course) bad.⁶¹ Moreover, he recognized that emotions were key to the 'we-feeling' of his monastic community. Thus he shamed Justus, isolating him from the other monks (for the good of everyone's soul, to be sure). What happened then goes some way in explaining why various signs of distinction can, if properly manipulated, generate a 'we-feeling'. Gregory turned three coins into the highly-charged symbols of monastic cohesion. Justus's association with them made him a pariah in the cloister, while the other monks regrouped, expressing their new identity graphically by "bringing out and revealing to the community all their smallest and vilest things, even those which were allowed to them by the Rule."⁶²

⁵⁵ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* III, 33, 9, ed. de Vogüé 2, 398.

⁵⁶ Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, *Epistola ad Leandrum* 5, ed. Adriaen 6: *Et fortasse hoc diuinæ providentiæ consilium fuit, ut percussus Iob percussus exponerem*. ("And perhaps it was by the counsel of divine providence that I, stricken, should expound on the stricken Job").

⁵⁷ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* IV, 57, 10, ed. de Vogüé 3, 188.

⁵⁸ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* IV, 57, 11–13, ed. de Vogüé 3, 192. I thank John Contreni for pointing out to me that the *fossa in sterquilinio* was more likely dug out of human excrement than dung, the Caelian Hill being an urban monastery.

⁵⁹ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* IV, 57, 14, ed. de Vogüé 3, 192.

⁶⁰ Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* IV, 57, 15, ed. de Vogüé 3, 192.

⁶¹ Note that *tristitia* was one of Gregory's seven principal sins in the *Moralia* (see n. 28 above; but it was also the foundation of Justus's salvation in the *Dialogues* (see n. 58 above).

⁶² Gregory the Great, *Dialogues* IV, 57, 13, ed. de Vogüé 3, 192.

Thus identities focus on things because they can be used – or manipulated – as markers of group pride or shame. But what is considered good or bad – the beliefs that lurk behind pride and shame – depend on the idiosyncratic particularities of context. Three coins shamed Gregory's monks, but when Frank Sinatra crooned about three coins in the fountain, they were symbols of love.⁶³ As the emotional, material, and ideational complexion of communities changes, old signs may lose their significance and new ones become charged with meaning; or old ones may take on new meanings. As individuals navigate within and across different communities, they tell new narratives about themselves, 'feeling their way' into unfamiliar situations. The question is not whether emotions have anything to do with identity but why we have taken so long to recognize the fact.⁶⁴

⁶³ "Three Coins in the Fountain", (1954); text available at http://www.vex.net/~buff/sinatra/cgi/arch.cgi/Three_Coins_in_the_Fountain.

⁶⁴ One good answer to this question is that there has been a dominant, but mistaken, historical 'grand narrative' of Western history: it postulates a 'childlike' phase of emotionality, associated with the Middle Ages, giving way to self-control in the modern period. This narrative was part of the discussion of early medieval ethnic identity as well. Thus Vilhelm Grönbech, *The Culture of the Teutons I* (London 1931) 19 wrote: "There is abundance of passion in the poetry of the Northmen [whom Grönbech considers equivalent to 'Teutons'], but it appears only as a geysir, up and down, never bursting out and flowing forth in lyrical streams." Modern students of ethnicity have shied away from emotions precisely to avoid such murky generalizations. Grönbech's view of emotional life, like that of the 'grand narrative', rests on a 'hydraulic' paradigm of the emotions that is no longer tenable in the light of today's social constructionist and cognitive models. It is thus an opportune moment for emotions to re-enter the historian's purview. For further discussion of both the grand narrative and the hydraulic view, see Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Worrying about emotions in history*, in: *American Historical Review* 107 (2002) 821–845.

