In Search of the Medieval Voice

In Search of the Medieval Voice: Expressions of Identity in the Middle Ages

Edited by

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and Paola Scarpini

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Preface

The gloom overlaying most if not all of the world's economies as the credit crunch first began to bite could not stifle the ebullience and sparkle of the conference which took place at the University of Sheffield's Humanities Research Institute from the 14th to the 15th June 2008. Organised by four young medievalists from the University's Faculty of Arts and Humanities, it aimed to provide a theatre for dialogue between young postgraduate and early career researchers from a wide variety of disciplinary and theoretical backgrounds covered by the 'Medieval Studies' appellation—an academic constituency recently identified by the UK Higher Education Funding Council's celebrated Research Assessment Exercise for evincing particular richness and quality.

In addition to being hugely enjoyable, 'Locating the Voice: Expressions of Identity in the Middle Ages' certainly achieved its twin aims: to foster and promote cross-disciplinary exchange across the broad field of Medieval Studies, and to provide a forum for methodological debate, review of case-studies, and interpretations of various expressions of identity in medieval culture.

The prime focus—on the problematisation of 'voice', here defined as spoken language, tonality and song performance, but also as authorial production expressed in textual form—invited contributions ranging across manuscript studies, intertextuality, rewriting and literary transmission, and on to musicology, archaeology, linguistics and gender theory. The expression of identity through text, image, song and speech could thus be explored from a multiplicity of theoretical and methodological perspectives.

Three prime themes were identified: *Reconstructing Speech and Song* scrutinised the use of language as a medium for the establishment of identity, examples being provided from a monastic rule, the study of cadences of speech, and the phenomenon of tonality as found in the motet (expressing the identity of a learned environment). *Author, Audience and Intertext* looked into animal symbolism, textual authority and the respective roles of extra- and intradiegetic audiences, but also took in the individual identity of the author, the uses of rewriting (and what rewriting does to a canonical or source text) and the use and recycling of known or familiar themes, texts and stories. The third and final theme, *Evolving Identities*, looked at the changing representation of devils and of the Tiburtine Sybil, reviewed some archaeological clues to early expressions of 'Britishness',

and—finally!—explored what happens to identity after death (via the post-mortem clothing used on funeral effigies).

The papers contributed afforded useful insights into many aspects of the culture of the Middle Ages, allowing an animated audience of researchers, students, and teachers to establish or identify connections across the different academic disciplines represented. A highlight of the conference was Professor Jocelyn Wogan-Browne's lively plenary address on 'Multilingualism and Multivocalism in a Medieval Text'. Participants from France, Finland and the UK met in an atmosphere of convivial industry and good humour. One wishes that more conferences (especially those organised by older and more experienced scholars) could emulate the efficiency and smooth organisation of this one…

In Search of the Medieval Voice: Expressions of Identity in the Middle Ages provides ample confirmation, if it were needed, that budding scholarship in the very broad field of Medieval Studies is in rude good health, even today. The co-editors of this exciting volume are to be congratulated for their initiative in organising such a well-managed and intellectually stimulating conference, and for bringing to press this absorbing collection of papers selected from the many contributions. These are the teachers and professors of the future; it is a privilege to write this preface for a volume giving voice to a whole new generation of medievalists in the making.

Peter Ainsworth
Professor of French, University of Sheffield

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Last, and by no means least, we would like to express profound gratitude to Camilla Umar of cutoutandkeep (www.cutoutandkeep.co.uk) who unstintingly provided both advice on editorial matters and also typeset this volume and designed the dust jacket.

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Lorna Bleach completed a BA in French and German (2005) followed by an MA in French Research, both at the University of Sheffield. At present, she is undertaking her PhD at the University of Sheffield, writing a thesis on intertextuality and symbolism in Old French Romance, concentrating on the twelfth century manuscript of *Partonopeu de Blois*. Her publications include a review of "The Arthur of the French: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval French and Occitan Literature" in the *Forum for Modern Language Studies* (vol. 45, no 1, Jan 2009). She is also currently working on the AHRC 'Online Froissart Project' as an XML encoder and research assistant.

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Katariina Närä completed a BA in English and French (2001), and then MA in Medieval Studies (2002), at Royal Holloway University of London, and PhD at the University of Sheffield (2007). She worked as AHRC Postdoctoral Research Associate in the 'Online Froissart Project' at the Department of French, University of Sheffield until recently, and is now undertaking some research for the University of Exeter Business School. Her publications include ''Tout ce que il appartenoit a une noble et haulte dame: representations of aristocratic female characters in Jean Froissart's *Chroniques* Book IV", in *Medieval Chronicle* VI, ed. by Erik Kooper (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), and catalogue entry (commissioned) for the Exhibition Catalogue of *Sigismund, Rex et Imperator: Art and Culture under the last ruler of the Luxembourg Dynasty 1387–1437*; Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest (18 March–18 June 2006), and Musée national d'Histoire et d'Art, Luxembourg (13 July–15 October 2006), for British Library MS Harley 4380.

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Sian Prosser graduated in English Language and French from the University of Glasgow and completed an MA in Medieval Studies at the University of Leeds. She is now writing a PhD thesis at the University of Sheffield on the British Library manuscripts of the *Roman de Troie*, with the support of the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Forthcoming publications include "Strangers in the Sepulchre, Exchanging Glances: Depictions of the Anniversary of Hector's Death in the Illuminated Manuscripts of the *Roman de Troie*", in *Ex/change: Transitions and Transactions in French Literature* (Peter Lang, 2010). She is currently working at the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, where she is digitising and cataloguing medieval manuscript fragments from Ripon Cathedral Library.

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Paola Scarpini completed a BA in French and English (2005) at the University of Piemonte Orientale (Italy), then a MA in French Research (2007), at the University of Sheffield where she is currently working towards her PhD. Her thesis is a study of the comic (re)writing and the use of parody in the twelfth century Old French poem *Ipomedon*. In addition, she is completing a two-year MA in Medieval French literature at the University of Geneva (Switzerland), with a dissertation on the intertextuality in Hue de Rotelande's *Protheselaüs*. Forthcoming publications include "Quand les topoi ne sont plus les mêmes: le cas d'Ipomedon de Hue de Rotelande" in *Stealing the Fire in French and Francophone Literature and Film*, French Literature Series, 37 (Rodopi, 2010).

Introduction

Lorna Bleach & Katariina Närä

Few concepts are as polysemic as identity. The term 'identity' in modern western societies refers generally to those characteristics used to identify, define and distinguish persons in order that they may be individually recognised. Caroline Walker Bynum provides the following definition for the meanings of the word 'identity' in modern critical usage:

> "Identity can mean individuality or personality. In this sense, identity is that which makes me particularly, distinctively, even uniquely me. But identity is also used in current debates to mean something almost the opposite; it can mean identity position. In this sense, my identity is that which signals group affiliation – often race or biological sex but sometimes also statuses generally as more socially shaped, such as class, language group, or religion. Finally, identity can mean spatiotemporal continuity. In this sense, identity refers to the fact that I am the same person I was a moment ago. This third understanding of identity carries the connotation of oneness or integrity."[1]

However, it is also acknowledged that these characteristics, as well as the very notions of identity, vary with time, place and culture. As Harald Kleinschmidt has noted, in a large number of cases concepts have a history of their own, that is, their logical boundaries, and are consequently specific to groups, places and periods.[2] Kleinschmidt continues by noting that Michel Foucault's idea of "spaces of communication" also applies to the difficulty of defining concepts across space and time.[3] He interpreted Foucault's term "spaces of communication" as reconstructed social groups and units of time and space within which successful direct communication is possible. In other words, according to Kleinschmidt, Foucault designated spatial, temporal or social units within which every person communicates his or

1 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone, 2001): 163.

2 Harald Kleinschmidt, *Understanding the Middle Ages: The Transformation of Ideas and Attitudes in the Medieval World* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000): 1.

3 Ibid, 2.

her thoughts about a certain subject matter through standardised sequences of known words without intermediating translations or interpretations. Consequently then, since most concepts change, "they are specific to certain spaces of communication, and it becomes difficult to communicate them across the boundaries of these spaces of communication."[4]

Is it therefore possible to discover what identity means within the context of the Middle Ages or are we simply too far removed from this 'space of communication'? The plethora of works that have tackled this subject over the years would suggest otherwise, and amply demonstrate that the notion of identity has long been a multi-faceted and intriguing concept. Indeed, the act of applying this idea to the medieval world requires us to re-work our modern idea of identity, to accept it as a way of expressing individuality, but not necessarily something that addressed individual personality alone.

Despite the use of identity as a key word in titles of academic and popular publications, it is rarely considered in one of its purest and simplest forms, that is, the manner in which identity is proposed and propagated to others. By looking at the notion of voice in conjunction with identity, it has been the intention of the editors of this collection to bring together examinations of identity as manifested by diverse groups of people across space and time. In locating this voice, in both a number of research fields and under its various guises, we have thus gone some way in identifying both the voice itself and the people responsible for creating it. The present book is not obviously bound to a single critical field and in this way, the volume places its emphasis on voice and expressions of identity focusing on voice, whether corporeal, i.e. spoken language, tonality and song performance, or authorial, expressed in textual form.

A benefit of focusing much of the discussion and ensuing work on the unifying notion of voice is the very extent and depth of its multi-faceted nature. "Voice" can be applied to a broad range of concepts, intrinsically related to the notion that all created work had, at its instigation, a creator who had a desire to make his voice, or his message known to others; he wanted to share his creative output. As can be seen by the discussion in the articles that follow herein, the creator's voice can be passed down to us today. The textual voice is expressed in rubrics on manuscripts, in lyrics and in romance, and in relation to other texts and authors. Equally, the voice of the creator manifests itself in art and book illumination. Finally,

4 Ibid, 2. See also Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir* (Paris, 1969) : 216-31.

the voice of the people can be heard both in sound-scapes and through their formation, the way in which they make their identity known.

To return to the question posed earlier in the introduction, that of whether we are too far removed from the "space of communication" belonging to the Middle Ages, one is obliged to answer that no, we will never know the exact thoughts and message that people wanted to convey. Equally, it is highly unlikely that we will ever know how people physically spoke and communicated, and how their voices actually sounded, but what we can say is that by looking and researching the ways in which peoples' voices were heard both aurally and through its representation in physical media such as literature and art, we can go some way to understanding how voice and thus identity impacted upon, and moulded, the people of the Middle Ages.

This volume represents the selected findings of an interdisciplinary Medieval Studies conference devoted to bringing together postgraduate and early career researchers from various disciplines. It has ably demonstrated the many collaborative possibilities within the field and has promoted cross-disciplinary discussion and exchange, thereby providing a forum for methodological debate, case-studies and interpretations of various expressions of identity in medieval culture.

The diverse articles that follow draw upon the disciplines of history, theology, musicology, archaeology and literature, and encompass a broad variety of sources from the early to the late medieval period, to produce a collection varied in its scope and approach. Despite the breadth and diversity of the chapters, there is a strong emerging theme of identity that provides a coherent link across disciplines, and more importantly perhaps, the articles also show how an interdisciplinary approach can create a stimulating framework for analysis. The book is divided into three distinct – although interrelated – sections that will focus on different aspects of the overarching theme of voice and identity: the first entitled *Reconstructing Speech and Song*, the second *Author, Audience and Intertext*, and the final part *Evolving Identities*. This distinction is designed to provoke a productive and ongoing dialogue between individual papers and those in immediate proximity, but also to draw attention to the differences between various expressions of identity in the Middle Ages, whether they are evoked through literary or documentary accounts.

The first section, entitled *Reconstructing Speech and Song*, contains three chapters looking at the ways in which identity can be expressed through the use of, and engagement with, language, and subsequently how language can then be perceived and performed in different ways. There are twenty-five extant early medieval monastic rules and these are a hitherto

little studied aspect of textual evidence, and Neil Allies in his article *The "Sermo Plebeius" and the Spoken Language in the Monastic Rule of Isidore of Seville* successfully argues for the usefulness of these rules and their potential to be a valuable source when studying spoken Latin during the time in which they were in use. His focus rests on the seventh-century rule written by Isidore of Seville, and Allies suggests that the rule was created specifically for a community of monks who were drawn from all levels of society, therefore implying that monastic rules reflected the spoken language of the period, to the extent that there was actually a conscious attempt by the authors to write in a low register language. He goes on to discuss levels of literacy at the time, in conjunction with any provisions that may have been made to educate the monks, subsequently examining the implications of illiteracy for a rule that needed to be fully understood by its audience. Given the centrality and importance of the rule in their daily lives, it was vital that there was no ambiguity and misunderstanding. Finally, Allies discusses Isidore of Seville's rule in more detail, looking at register, syntax and vocabulary, concluding that ultimately, this neglected source could provide useful evidence for philologists aiming to decipher the state of the contemporary spoken language in monastic communities in Visigoth Iberia.

The second article by Eduardo Aubert, *Locating the Sound of the Medieval Voice: an Analytical Framework*, examines how medieval voice may have actually sounded with regard to cadences of speech and inflexions. He argues that during a time when the majority of communication took place via oral means, voice must have been very rich and diverse in its output, containing many nuances and inflexions. In addition, given the propensity for oral story telling in medieval societies, he invites us to ask how medieval society identified with the written word and subsequently transformed it into sound. Furthermore, Aubert is interested in the ways in which medieval people spoke, how they sounded, and the patterns that may have emerged throughout various strata of society at differing times. The article provides a helpful contribution to the field by setting out an analytical framework necessary to start answering these questions raised, as well as showing the importance and relevance of the study for future scholars.

Aubert's article neatly leads on to the final article in this section, *Thirteenth-Century Motets: The Craft of the Cleric* by Margaret Dobby. She picks up on Eduardo's discussion of tonality in medieval speech, and takes this a step further in her examination of motets as expressions of a learned environment, within the context of a practical demonstration

of medieval musicology. Dobby tackles the rather difficult questions of who had the ability to compose these motets, who might they be, who were the potential audience and what techniques were used in their composition. She argues that despite numerous works, there remains very little contemporary information about the context of their composition and creation. In the first part of the article Dobby discusses the evidence that has already been gathered from treatises or literary texts of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries in order to contextualise the motets and facilitate their analysis. The second part goes on to look at the information that can be found within the pieces themselves, examining the concept of voice through an analysis of the melody's structure. Finally, there follows a detailed analysis of a motet that neatly demonstrates the skilled compositional techniques involved, and illustrates one method of creating the upper parts of a motet.

The second section focuses upon textual traditions and is entitled, *Author, Audience and Intertext*. All four contributions look at the way in which identity and ideas have been created and moulded by the author who subsequently disseminates his message to a varied audience. This is partly achieved by the use of intertexts and a manipulation of voice, enabling the author to confirm his authority and status, and demonstrating his knowledge and prowess at establishing an individual identity in a literary milieu that excelled at imitation and rewriting.

The first article by Lorna Bleach concentrates on an Old French romance from the twelfth century, *Partonopeu de Blois*, and examines the ways in which its anonymous author treated and manipulated his sources, as well as trying to locate where he found them. In doing so, we begin to build up a picture of a complex narrative interwoven with many voices, both symbolic, textual, and those drawn from other, less obvious sources. Added to this, we see an investigation of the way in which the poet plays upon the audiences' awareness of known literary conventions and the inherent symbolism surrounding everyday items drawn predominantly from the natural world.

The second article, by Abbey von Gohren, expands on the idea of the authorial voice, and focuses more strongly on the message behind the written word by looking at textual authority in Matfre Ermengaud's *Breviari d'Amor*. She looks at the way in which the thirteenth century was a period of extraordinary innovation in literature where authors started to adopt a new role and began to express themselves and their own opinion, in an expansion of their traditional roles as collators and commentators of sources. In doing so, she expounds upon work previously done on the

ways in which literature began to move away from its bias towards external sources and instead focussed on the internal authority expressed directly by the author; this is aptly and successfully expressed through the case-study of the *Breviari d'Amor* which in fact, as we are shown, draws both upon the author's own confidence and the use of external sources.

Paola Scarpini's chapter on Hue de Rotelande's *Ipomédon* introduces us to the idea of identifying the readers and listeners of the text in terms of an extra- and intradiagetic audience. It also looks at the poet's motivation for writing for an audience both within and outside of the text, looking at his manipulation of the given norms of romance. This feeds into Scarpini's work on the role of parody and irony in the text and her conclusions as to the complicity, or equally the distance of the audience from the narrative action.

Finally, Joanne Young concludes the section by completing a literary analysis of another Old French Romance, *Florimont*, this time addressing it in terms of its intertextual properties and discussions. It neatly summarises points from previous papers by assessing how successful the poet, Aimon de Varennes, was in creating and maintaining his own individual identity in this culture of rewriting. Furthermore, it goes on to prove how details are carefully selected in order to cater for a known audience, providing them with comic moments. By changing the voices of his predecessors to suit his own agenda, and harmoniously introducing a chorus of other works, he creates a rich romance, full of intertextual references.

The final part of this book, *Evolving Identities*, introduces us to yet more fields in this interdisciplinary study of identity in the Middle Ages. This collection of four chapters relates to the main theme by showing how medieval identity was able to evolve and adapt, introducing elements of both change and continuity. The first two chapters focus primarily on literature, looking at the opinions and thoughts of medieval people as expressed through the medium of text and image, whereas the two latter chapters approach the theme through material culture and documentary evidence.

Katariina Närä, in her article *'I make þe als master and merour of my mighte'*: *Medieval Representations of the Devil*, introduces us to this theme by looking at representations of the devil in relation to power in late medieval English literature and art, and how these evolved over time. She looks at the popular tradition of the devil as a fallen angel, and how this change of identity from heavenly creature to the king of hell established the devil as a real power on earth. This in turn reflected how medieval society identified with the concept behind the figure, and how the evolving

ideologies were expressed by the physical identity and voice granted to the devil. Närä also demonstrates how there was a conscious effort by theologians to reduce the devil's power and influence on the medieval mind, and how this consequently had an effect on the representation of the devil in literature.

The theme of voice is strongly present in the second chapter. Julien Abed, in *Reading the Voice of the French Tiburtine Sybil*, examines the French manuscript tradition of the Tiburtine Sybil and how the different manuscript witnesses portrayed the prophet, the voice of prophecy, and the elements of change and evolution which are present. He shows first of all how the nine manuscripts researched provide evidence of how the Tiburtine was perceived in the Middle Ages, and secondly how the content, rubrics and margins, and textual variants of these manuscripts grant means to discover her changing and evolving character – sometimes a paragon of divine knowledge, sometimes a mere propagandist delivering updated prophecies. Abed demonstrates that the text of the Tiburtine Sybil was not a purely prophetic one, but that it could be mixed with romances, historical and moral works, suggesting that whilst the Sybil was imagined in the context of soteriology and personal eschatology, she was also seen as a prophetic mouth which could foretell events that would happen in the secular world.

In the third chapter, we see a progression from textual to visual aspects of identity. Pam Walker, as her title *Wives, Widows and Women: Voicing Identity in death through Clothing on Medieval Funeral Monuments* suggests, examines medieval funeral monuments and how clothing worn on these effigies can be interpreted as a sign of identity, but also how there was a shift in identity depending on who made the choice of clothing for any particular monument. Her article therefore contributes to a little researched area concerning funeral monuments and monumental brasses as it engages with a wider issue of representation on tomb effigies, often ignored by historians of dress who use funeral monuments as evidence of medieval dress in their descriptions and chronological outlines of medieval dress. Walker's main argument focuses on medieval women's expressions of their own identity as shown by their choice of clothing in tomb effigies, although she also recognises the possibility that sometimes the clothing depicted on a funeral monument echoed their husbands' status or indeed was the husband's choice, therefore transferring the identity reflected in the monument from that of the woman to another person.

The final chapter also contributes to the study of expressions of identity via visual and documentary evidence. Kirsten Jarrett's work, based on

recent archaeological findings, explores the cultural exchange between British and Anglo-Saxon communities and analyses the construction of a "British" identity, and also the mutability of "being British" within changing historical conditions. She argues that whereas traditional interpretations of the early Middle Ages envisage monolithic identities, with invading Saxons conquering and replacing the indigenous Britons, recent archaeological approaches to the period are forcing us to abandon oversimplified accounts, and to recognise that the construction of identities was both more nuanced, and their expression more varied, than we have previously imagined. Jarrett's research focuses on examining changing and evolving practices, and she draws upon archaeological evidence from south-west Britain in the period ca. 350-700 to support her argument that ethnicity, rather than being based on biological "fact", was (re)constructed. She also examines the role of the church in the dissemination of national identity.

Ultimately, these articles, born out of an interdisciplinary conference, come together to form an intriguing and interesting way of looking at identity in the Middle Ages. This book reflects our desire to reconcile apparently disparate ideas in adjacent fields of study that seemed to us to be of value beyond disciplinary confines. We also wished to broaden the subject matter beyond the domain of literature, already familiar to us, so in this book, from the authorial to the pictorial voice, from the voice of national identity to the physical attributes a medieval voice may have had, each of the contributors has shown how in locating the medieval voice in their own field of research, they have begun to create a multi-disciplinary approach to individuality and identity as expressed in the medieval world.

Part I
Reconstructing Speech and Song

Chapter One

The *Sermo Plebeius* and the Spoken Language in the Monastic Rule of Isidore of Seville

Neil Allies

Þā stōd on stæðe, stīðlīce clypode
Wīcinga ār, wordum mǣlde.
Se on bēot ābēad brimlīÞendra
ǣrænde tō Þām eorle Þǣr hē on ōfre stōd

[Then stood on the shore a Viking herald, cruelly calling out
and making a speech,
delivering menacingly the sea-pirates'
message to the Earl who stood on the opposite shore][1]

The scene from the Old English poem above describes a moment shortly before the Battle of Maldon in 991 AD, when a Viking warrior and the Saxon earl, Byrhtnoth, exchange pre-battle taunts. Although a simple scene, it highlights how good written texts are at hiding the realities of language use. How did the Viking communicate with the Saxon earl? Did they speak the same language, or were their languages mutually intelligible and, if so, to what extent? Similar problems are faced by all historians of languages that are no longer spoken. This paper will argue that the twenty-five surviving early medieval monastic rules[2] represent a potential, yet so far largely neglected, source of evidence for the spoken Latin in the period, a time traditionally seen as being transitional from a language recognisable as Latin to one recognisable as Romance. The focus of this study will be the early seventh-century monastic rule written by Isidore of Seville, one of three such preceptive texts that survive from Visigothic Iberia.[3]

Ancient authors were rarely explicit about language use. This means that much of what we know must be gleaned implicitly, although advances in comparative and historical linguistics mean that ancient dialects are to a certain extent able to be hypothetically reconstructed.[4] Despite the fact that textual evidence often carries with it various methodological problems, it cannot be ignored. Most obvious are variations in vocabulary

and phonology, the latter in particular relying on "errors", or deviations from expected orthography, which might reflect the spoken practices of the author. In many cases this is perfectly sensible, especially with epigraphy.[5] With manuscripts, however, there exist more practical issues such as scribal corrections, variants and in most cases the lack of an autograph. It must always be borne in mind that texts typically represent a written standard, or at the very least an attempt to achieve a written standard, and therefore do not always reflect spoken reality.

Some texts have always been seen to be more useful than others, for reasons such as the inability of an author to write in a high literary register or a purposeful attempt to represent non-literary registers.[6] The former includes writers such as the fourth-century nun Egeria, whose *Peregrinatio* has often been used as evidence for developments in the spoken language, despite her origins being controversial;[7] the latter, writings from Christian authors written to be comprehensible to as wide an audience as possible, and so texts that consciously refer to dialectal features.[8] Isidore, for example, often does so in his *Etymologies*, referring to peculiar uses of the Hispani, Itali, uulgi or rustici, although what exactly these terms refer to is not always clear.[9] Monastic rules, meanwhile, have been little studied by scholars for purposes linguistic or otherwise.[10] There exist various historiographical reasons behind this neglect, such as a traditional focus on the Rule of Benedict, the lack of study of post-Roman literature in general, as well as an avoidance of works popularly considered "non-literary". The literary output of Visigothic Iberia, in addition, remains relatively off the radar for many scholars.

Monastic rules are reflective of the spoken language of the period due to the audience for which they were originally intended and a conscious attempt by their authors to write in a low-register. Indeed, the development of sociolinguistic theory has increasingly shown how speakers and authors adapt their writing style for the benefit of their audience.[11] Since early Christianity was a missionary movement, its literature, often both theological and catechistic, had to communicate with a universal audience. Despite elite conversion becoming increasingly popular after the fourth century, the religion was characteristically plebeian and a large part of the audience for such literature therefore included the uneducated and illiterate.[12] It is well established that the written Latin of many early Christian works was in a language distanced from its Classical Latin predecessor,[13] and some have even argued for the existence of a peculiar language of "Christian Latin".[14] Indeed, Augustine famously quipped: "it is better for the grammarians to chastise us than for the people not to understand".[15] In

this way, it mirrored the Greek *koiné* of the New Testament, a situation of *Zwischenprosa*, meaning a language somewhere in between the spoken and literary varieties but containing elements of both.[16] The philologist Michel Banniard has argued that this notion of "vertical communication" was clear in the minds of authors such as Augustine, Isidore of Seville and Gregory of Tours, by which he meant the ability, or "passive competence", of the illiterate to understand texts even if the written language was not exactly the same as their spoken variety.[17]

However, whilst Augustine professed such literary proletarianism, many of his works are written in a Latin unmistakeably classicising. Indeed, his contemporary Jerome was so passionate about classical, pagan, literature, that he was famously faced with the accusation in a dream of being "a lover of Cicero, not a Christian".[18] Although some early Christian authors clearly struggled in the reconciliation of faithfulness to the rhetorical ideals of Classical Latin with the perceived simplicity of some Christian writing, audience intelligibility remained an issue that was reflected in various genres. The Rule of Isidore must be understood within this context because of the seventh-century audience for which it was written. Geographically, Isidore was probably writing for a community or communities near modern Badajoz in southern Spain,[19] and by this period the locals would have been native Latin speakers. Monasteries attracted members from all levels of society and the presence of converts from the elite are amply alluded to in the monastic rules, as are converts from lower down the social scale. In terms of the audience of Isidore's monastic rule, then, whilst there were undoubtedly wealthy converts who might have arrived educated and literate, there were also converts from other social strata who would have lacked such skills.

However, early medieval literacy is complex: "against a presumed decline in literacy, cautious historians are more likely to highlight regional diversity and sometimes surprising continuity in the uses of the written word".[20] Compared to other regions in the post-Roman west, literacy levels amongst the lay population in Visigothic Iberia are generally seen as higher than elsewhere[21] and, although it is difficult to speak of a decline when previous attainments of literacy are uncertain,[22] it is probable that the period saw a decrease in literacy levels, a skill which could not been particularly widespread in the first place. That said, there nevertheless exists evidence to suggest at least sustained levels of pragmatic literacy amongst the lay population such as the extraordinary inscribed slates from central and southern Iberia,[23] or the scene from the anonymous sixth-century *Life of Fructuosus* which refers to records (*rationes*) kept

by a shepherd.[24] The physical presence of written texts is also evident in Visigothic monasteries and Isidore, for example, has a whole chapter in his monastic rule concerning books,[25] whilst other literary sources reveal the importance of written texts to individual monks.[26]

Although it is tempting to see these as indicators of widespread literacy, there is a difference between pragmatic literacy and the ability to read a substantial text.[27] Indeed, Brian Stock's concept of a textual community, meaning a community where written texts occupy a central importance, does not require literacy from all, or even a majority of its participants; a society can remain literacy-orientated, depending on the ability of a minority.[28] Moreover, illiteracy amongst converts is regularly evidenced: Isidore states that a declaration of devotion could be made either out loud or in writing, hinting that people could not always do both.[29] Whilst written texts enjoyed a level of importance, a high level of orality remained the norm; Isidore mentions the public recitation of texts and advises that oral presentations take place after private reading lest texts are not properly understood[30] and that scripture should be read during meal times by an elected monk.[31] Fructuosus of Braga, in his contemporary monastic rule, also advocates public readings over private ones, and the need to explain orally the precepts of the Church Fathers.[32] As such, teaching of scripture was predominantly through oral means. What is puzzling is that none of the Visigothic monastic rules makes provision for training new converts how to read. Another sixth-century text has a scene where boys "studying letters" shout at a drunken monk, hinting that there might in some cases have existed some educational structures for child oblates,[33] but given that only a few could have possessed some level of literacy prior to entering a monastery, this lack of provision seems odd if the ability to read was such an integral part of a monk's life.[34] Whilst it is true that reading, often in the form of private *lectio divina*, was an expected part of a monk's daily life,[35] Isidore often gives a choice between reading and another activity, for example that a monk can work, read or pray after dinner.[36]

As such, an early medieval Visigothic monastery, reflecting the early medieval population in general, should be seen as constituting various shades of literacy. Whilst there were certainly monks who could read and write well, there would also have been those who lacked any ability, as well as monks who were somewhere in-between. In light of this, a monastic rule had to be understood by its audience; it occupied such a central place in a monk's existence that it could not have been written in a language that might have confused or been misunderstood. Although it is not fair to say that monastic rules had no style whatsoever, they were certainly written

with an eye to clarity and an avoidance of higher literary styles that would have meant that it was not understandable to some of its listeners; any literary techniques are predominantly surface level and accessible to all, such as word play or phonological schemes.[37] It cannot be presumed that the knowledge needed to understand the more artificial literary language, at this time still based on a rhetorical education, was necessarily common.

The suggestion here is not necessarily that if a person were illiterate then they would not be able to understand the literary language; Roger Wright has made much out of the theory that the written language would have been made intelligible by reading it aloud as Romance.[38] This is an interesting supposition, although not without its difficulties.[39] It is not possible to fully explore this issue here, but the main question is that if the spoken language were increasingly distanced from the classical literary language, to what extent could an uneducated Visigoth, for example, have understood Augustine's writing, or the Vulgate? Perhaps he could have understood them rather well, or perhaps the language would have presented difficulties. It has even been suggested that some audiences might have liked the language of preachers to have been "over their heads" to give the religion an added sense of mystery.[40] Indeed, since literary Latin had always been to some extent so artificial, the question could even be asked of the extent to which an uneducated Roman might have understood the language of Cicero's speeches? This is far from the scope of the present discussion but the point remains: monastic rules, as didactic texts that governed daily lives, had to be understood by their audience, which included a variety of educational backgrounds. The content had to be clear and intelligible to all and its language reflected this.

So far, the discussion has focused on the idea that a monastic rule is to a large extent reflective of the spoken language because it makes theoretical sense. Is there any other evidence that supports this assertion? Most obviously, there is that fact that Isidore tells us so:

> "Plura sunt praecepta vel instituta maiorum, quae a sanctis Patribus sparsim prolata reperiuntur, quaeque etiam nonnulli altius vel obscurius posteritati composita tradiderunt, ad quorum exempla nos haec pauca vobis eligere ausi sumus, usi sermone plebeio vel rustico, ut quam facillime intelligatis quo ordine professionis vestrae votum retineatis".
>
> [Many of the teachings and instructions of the forefathers are found spread amongst the writings of the Fathers of the Church, and some have collected them together and handed them down for future generations in a lofty and obscure (altius vel obscurius) language. Following their

> example, I have ventured to select a few of them for you, but using a plain and simple (usi sermone plebeio vel rustico) language, so that you can most easily understand and retain the recommendations of your monastic profession].[41]

Isidore's profession to have written in a lower register of language, in this case what he terms the *sermo plebeius*, is typical of early Christian writers, and highlighting the language as such was an act of humility that extended back into the Latin tradition.[42] By the early medieval period, such an assertion was popular with writers of all genres and part of the literary *topoi*.[43] However, there exists an important distinction between Isidore's confession and that of his contemporaries. Many post-Roman writers apologise for their language out of a purposeful sense of linguistic and literary *humilitas*, consciously unsuccessful in their attempt to attain the benchmark of Classical Latin prose. However, Isidore clearly felt no such qualms. Not only is there no apologetic overtone or negative connotation for having written in the *sermo plebeius*, but he was also clearly both an accomplished and prolific writer, synonymous with a literary "Renaissance" in Visigothic Iberia,[44] and whose works cross various genres: epistolary correspondence, theological writings, poetry and technical treatises, notably his monumental *Etymologies*.[45] From this array of literature, it is possible to see Isidore employ a variety of literary styles and evidence that he was well-versed in the canons of Classical Latin prose and capable of writing in a high register of language, typical of a Latin rhetorical education. In essence, Isidore is not writing in the *sermo plebeius* because he knows of no other way in which to write. Rather, he is writing in this way because it is his active choice to do so.

The word *sermo* has recently been argued to be particularly associated with Christian usage.[46] Latin, similar to many other languages, had various words to differentiate the terms "language" and "speech", notably *lingua*, *sermo* and *oratio*; Romance was to eventually borrow from the Greek idiōma, "peculiarity". In using the word *sermo*, it seems clear that Isidore was referring to the idea of "speech" rather than "language"; that is, the quotidian spoken and conversational *sermo* rather than the institutionalised *lingua*. A distinction between the two terms has been understood in modern linguistics since Ferdinand de Saussure: "whereas speech is heterogeneous, language is homogenous".[47] Of course, the semantic realities in Latin are unlikely to be as simple as "*sermo* equates with lower register, *lingua* with a higher one." In later Latin especially, the concept of the *lingua rustica* or its variants were frequently employed to refer to what would be classed as

a lower register standard of spoken language, and it is probable that there was some overlap.[48] For a long time in classical Latin the various forms of *lingua*, *sermo* and *oratio* were also in competition with each other. *Oratio* most frequently referred to the idea of public speaking, and Isidore only uses the term in his monastic rule in this context. However, there appeared to have existed a general consensus that *sermo* most popularly referred to spoken language, often limited to conversation. A cursory glance at the Oxford Latin Dictionary, for example, shows that despite occasionally being used synonymously with *lingua*, *sermo* more frequently referred to spoken conversation.[49] Isidore demonstrates this distinction when he says "there was one language (*una* […] *lingua*) of all nations, called Hebrew; the patriarchs and prophets used this not only in their speech (*non solum in sermonibus suis*) but also in their holy writings".[50] This suggests a model of institutionalised "language", further divided into varieties of spoken speech and writing.

It is interesting to ask the question of exactly what would have been standard language for a writer such as Isidore. He clearly wrote his monastic rule in a different type of language to his other texts, but this does not mean that he would have perceived this language as somehow incorrect. The problem of using terms such as "standard" vs. "non-standard" is that they are multivalent. Isidore would have had many standards of language, depending on his audience, and it will be shown below how he was able to adapt his language to suit. In essence, whether a language is standard or not depends entirely on the expectations of the recipient. The first-century BC *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, for example, describes a man verbally assaulting a youth in the baths after being pushed by his slaves. The man uses a language in such a way as to disturb the youth, who was not used to such talk after having spent so much time with his tutors.[51] Although the passage has been used by linguists for its lower register features, evidently both characters had different expectations of language standards that were suitable for such an environment.

If the idea of language "standard" is too vague for academic study, then the idea of "register" is not. When early Christian authors use various adjectives to describe their language, they are roughly synonymous: *simplex*, *plebeius*, *pedestrius*, *humilis* etc. These hint not at what might have once been called a vulgar language, but rather one that remains unaffected by a heavily adorned literary style, widely intelligible and therefore more reflective of the spoken language than other, more manipulated, texts. However, two important points must be taken into account. Firstly, the use of an adjective such as *plebeius* by an author is not immediately

synonymous with a lower register of language; the concept of Christian *humilitas* needs to be taken into account. Secondly, no text can ever be fully representative of the spoken language for the simple fact that there exist so many standards of speech; rather, in order to be understood a text must use features that are recognisable to all, although not necessarily used by all. At best, then, a written text can illustrate features that were perhaps common in spoken varieties or indicative of it, rather than be a true representation.

The term "register" also requires further thought. Describing registers of literary style is inherently difficult for the precise reason that register is a subjective term; a high register for one person might be considered particularly unremarkable by another, or perhaps even as low by the next. Features of higher registers are taken here to imply two points. Firstly, they comply with the taught norms of Classical Latin literature and rhetoric, which had been institutionalised in grammatical works such as those of Donatus and Julian of Toledo's *Ars Grammatica*. A traditional Roman education system was still available in Visigothic Iberia and some authors were evidently aware of the classical canons.[52] Such features could include the use of archaic vocabulary or the employment of structures that were more typical of Classical Latin prose; the use of the classical metrical hexameter by Sisebut in his poetic *Carmen de lunae*, rather than the stress-based *clausulae* that had come to dominate later Latin, is an example of this. Secondly, stylistic language often implies the manipulation of syntax in order to achieve effect. The idea of "de-familiarisation" (*ostranie*) used by the Russian Formalists, and later by the Prague School, to separate "literary" language from "normal" language has not been without its critics, yet it is an undeniable feature of some written texts that the language is consciously manipulated so as to achieve a stylistic effect. This is particularly the case for much Latin prose. Features such as purposeful alliteration and the (dis-)placement of certain words to achieve effects of emphasis or contrast are well-known.[53] In a synthetic language such as Latin, whose conjugations and declensions mean that word order is much freer, this can mean the employment of a syntax that is comparatively distanced from what would be expected in natural, spoken, language.

It is not possible to examine all of the features of Isidore's monastic rule that differentiate it from his other writings. However, a brief comparison will be made between the monastic rule and his *Laus Spaniae*, the preface to his *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suavorum*, traditionally seen as being of a high literary register. In the monastic rule, transitive verbs are normally accompanied by their subject and there is a lack of