Foreword

This volume is based on an international symposium held in Vienna in May 2007 that focused on different aspects of the construction of authorial-identities in the early Middle Ages. The investigative papers presented in Vienna have subsequently been revised and expanded in the light of our collective discussion, and the Editors also commissioned a number of additional papers from scholars not able to attend the original symposium. We were not so much concerned with the definition of the individual in the early Middle Ages, nor whether an author betrays genuine emotion, hints of a private life, feelings or convictions. Rather, we have historicized the concept of the individual and sought, through an analysis of what they wrote, to uncover all the elements that contribute to the make-up of an individual. Identity, or the dynamic interface between self and society, has proved to be a crucial means of understanding an individual in his or her social context. The notion of 'ego trouble', furthermore, is used in this volume as a methodological tool to analyse the texts written by individuals in the past, whether ostensibly designed to tell us about the author, or constructed for a purpose other than revealing anything about the author him- or herself. We have explored the textual (re)constructions of relationships and contact between social groups and individual subjects. As can be seen from the studies in this volume, these constructions were not unproblematic, but evoked conflict and confusion. Constructing an individual identity often led people to go down unexpected paths to achieve their own special balance between self-assertion, self-fashioning and the social and intellectual discipline within which they wrote. The textual strategies and struggles related to this process left their mark on individuals and their identities. This volume addresses a sampling of these Egos and their corresponding troubles.

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