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‘I, Agobard, unworthy bishop’

Agobard, archbishop of Lyons from 816 to 839, certainly seems to belong to that group of the querulous and outspoken who display the ‘ego trouble’ that the conference on which this book is based set out to analyse. In a conference set in Vienna, it was tempting to compare him to The Grumbler in Karl Kraus’ apocalyptic *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit*. But Agobard was not a satirist, nor was he fanatically concerned with the purity of language. He was an archbishop and in the texts that have come down to us he is a bishop all the way through. This need not mean that the man is lost in his office but how can we see him in his texts? What are we looking at, texts, or an individual? What do we think an ‘individual’ is in the early Middle Ages? How do we respond to what seem to be flashes of individual identity when we glimpse them in the ‘Dark Ages’? After all, this era is part of the ‘faceless millennium’ and its texts pose so many sheerly technical problems of dating, provenance, ascription, etc. that cultural games can seem to be peculiarly difficult for the early medievalist.¹ It is thus a temptation, or at least it is for some of us, to identify with, to respond instinctively to sparks of human incident when we glimpse them: Bede’s astonished outrage on hearing that he’d been accused of heresy by some drunks at a party; Paul the Deacon measuring his own shadow at Charlemagne’s palace of Thionville; Thietmar of Merseburg’s account of his youthful enforced journey to the Vikings, with its details on the clothes he wore and on the exact day of the week when it took place.²

Vignettes of this type seem to leap out of the text and reach out directly to us, as John Keats, a thousand years later, seeks to do in the little poem about his hand, which ends: “see here it is –/I hold it towards you”. Keats’ genius ensures that his hand seems to be within our reach, but his hand stays in the text.³

All this seems to capture that scent of human flesh that the ogre-historian must seek out, in Marc Bloch’s famous formulation. As Jinty Nelson has said, “unconditionally, the historian’s craft, more so than ever in these post-modern times, must include the identifying of individual agency.”⁴ But that is not quite what this volume sets out to do. And, in order to give the egos that we are to study a clearer profile we may well need sharper, steelier tools, than our instinctive response to textual traces of moments of human warmth. One reason why we respond to these traces is that our “concern for the individual Subject ... is a desire, ultimately, to cheat the silence of death”, as John Arnold has put it, but he has also warned us of the difficulties of gaining access to the subject.⁵ Perhaps such moments, from Bede, Paul, Thietmar and others, can be interpreted in the light of the terminology deployed by Roland Barthes in his book on photography, *Camera Lucida*: the studium, the general structure, and the element that breaks the studium, the sharp, emotional element that Barthes names the punctum. Such moments as these from Bede, Paul and Thietmar can be seen as examples of the punctum:

¹ Gerd Tellenbach, *Zur Bedeutung der Personenforschung für die Erkenntnis des Mittelalters* (Freiburger Universitätsreden, Neue Folge 25, Freiburg im Breisgau 1957) 6; Paul Fouracre/Richard Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France. History and Hagiography 640–720* (Manchester/New York 1996) 39–41. On medieval texts and the self, see Part 1 of *Writing Medieval History*, ed. Nancy Partner (London 2005), and Walter Pohl’s introduction to this volume.

² Bede, *Epistola ad Plegwinam* 1, 17 (ed. Charles W. Jones, *Bedae Venerabilis Opera pars 6, Opera didascalica*, CC SL 123C, Turnhout 1980) 613–626, at 617, 626; Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum* I, 5 (ed. Georg Waitz, *MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. sep. ed.* [48], Hannover 1878) 55; Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon* 23, 24 (ed. Robert Holtzmann, *MGH SS rer. Germ., N.S.* 9, Hannover/Berlin 1935) 160; see also the contribution of Hans-Werner Goetz in this volume.

³ John Keats, *This living hand, now warm and capable* (ed. John Barnard, *John Keats, The Complete Poems*, second edition, Harmondsworth 1977) 459.

⁴ Janet L. Nelson, *Bertrada*, in: *Der Dynastiewechsel von 751. Vorgeschichte, Legitimationsstrategien und Erinnerung*, ed. Matthias Becher/Jörg Jarnut (Münster 2004) 93–108, at 95; Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (Manchester 1992) 22.

⁵ John H. Arnold, *The historian as inquisitor*, in: *Rethinking History* 2, 3 (1998) 379–386, at 382, and see expanded discussion in *id.*, *Inquisition and Power. Catharism and the Confessing Subject in Medieval Languedoc* (Philadelphia 2001) 74–110 and 197–214. I am grateful to John Arnold for discussion on this.

“A photograph’s punctum is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me).”⁶ Barthes’ little book casts a long shadow. A collection of essays on autobiography and postmodernism takes as one of its mottoes Barthes’ arresting re-action to seeing a photo of himself: “I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels that he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter.” For the post-modernists in this collection, this is a springboard for reflections on questions such as “how do I take myself as a subject for representation?” particularly with regard to photographs/visual representation(s).⁷ But for my part, Barthes’ line reminds me of a much older, and more famous, line, *Vespasian’s* “I must be turning into a god”.⁸ Surely this is uncannily close to Barthes, in its rueful contemplation of an image in process of becoming, a recognition of the transformation of the self into a frozen image, into a representation. We needn’t think that Barthes set out to echo *Suetonius* here, but he and *Vespasian* are echoing each other in the face of human experience, one bounded by dying and death. As historians, we deal with the spectres and the gods, i.e., the transformed, the effaced, the traces of human beings.

I offer such reflections as a general framework for what follows, which is only an impressionistic survey of *Agobard’s* ‘ego’. Questions of ego, of the self as constituted in and through writings, demand to be investigated with a rigour, that should be philological as well as theoretical, that I lay no claim to here. As *David Ganz* has said about *Einhard*, “Our best guide to *Einhard’s* ideology is the meticulous exploration of his vocabulary” and this holds true for the texts produced by the individuals who were the focus of this gathering.⁹ *Agobard* the writer deserves a detailed study, of his vocabulary, sources, etc., and this paper is not that study. This is partly because *Agobard* wrote a lot and, despite the existence of *Egon Boshof’s* fine work deserves a fresh look, and we can hope that *Courtney Booker*, who has been working on translating *Agobard* into English, and who thus has necessarily had to grapple with the particular texture of *Agobard’s* writings, will provide such a study.¹⁰

Nevertheless, it seems worthwhile to consider *Agobard* under the heading of ‘ego trouble’. He is indeed a member of the awkward squad and this has long been recognised. *Louis the Pious* certainly came to think badly of him and had him packed off into exile. *Michael Wallace-Hadrill* characterised him as “a suspicious man ... too radical – and rude with it”, while *Egon Boshof’s* study of him summarises the extreme reactions that *Agobard’s* texts have provoked in the modern era.¹¹ But it is *Philippe Depreux* who has pounced upon one of the juiciest ego-moments in *Agobard’s* output. This is his departure from the palace of *Attigny* in 822 as he described it in about 823. *Agobard* had been chatting, about Jewish matters and other things, with three great courtiers, *Adalhard*, *Wala* and *Helisachar*: “You [i.e. these three] went in to the presence of the emperor and I stood before the door. After a while you signalled that I could enter, but I heard nothing except the permission to depart.” As *Philippe Depreux* has so rightly said, *Agobard* stands here for us, the historian: always standing outside, not sure what is going on, only catching fragmentary statements.¹² But standing outside the door with *Agobard* and then entering the royal presence to be given a terse message rather than dialogue with the emperor is actually a valuable experience for us, for our historical imagination. *Agobard* himself was haunted by the royal palace, as we shall see, but for now, we should try and listen to the voices here, without our getting caught up in *Barthes’* ideas on the grain of the voice as expression of corporeality or in *Derrida’s* strictures on

⁶ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (London 1993) 26–27.

⁷ Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 14, cited and discussed in Paul Jay, *Posing: Autobiography and the subject of photography*, in: *Autobiography and Postmodernism*, ed. Kathleen Ashley/Leigh Gilmore/Gerald Peter (Amherst 1994) 191–211, at 192–199.

⁸ *Suetonius, Vespasian* 23 (trans Robert Graves, *The Twelve Caesars*, Harmondsworth 1957) 285.

⁹ *David Ganz, Einhard’s Charlemagne: The characterisation of greatness*, in: *Charlemagne. Empire and Society*, ed. Joanna Story (Manchester/New York 2005) 38–51, at 39. One must, of course, remember that an author’s vocabulary may not always carry traces of his or her reading; *Agobard* can be connected with a ninth-century manuscript of *Tertullian* (now in Paris) but “no quotation or even significant echo of *Tertullian* has been detected in *Agobard’s* own writings”, *Donald Bullough, Was there a Carolingian anti-war movement?*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 12 (2003) 365–376, at 369.

¹⁰ *Egon Boshof, Erzbischof Agobard von Lyon* (Köln/Wien 1969); some texts of *Agobard* are already available on Professor *Booker’s* website: www.history.ubc.ca/people.php?people=49 (of which I have made grateful use as I have of further translations by other scholars on the Carolingian section of the *Internet Medieval Sourcebook*: www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook1h.html).

¹¹ *John Michael Wallace-Hadrill, The Frankish Church* (Oxford 1983) 232; *Boshof, Agobard* 1–16.

¹² *Agobard, De baptismo mancipiorum Iudaeorum* (ed. Lieven Van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, CC CM 52, Turnhout 1981) 111–117, at 115; *Philippe Depreux, Lieux de rencontre, temps de négociation: quelques observations sur les plaids généraux sous le règne de Louis le Pieux*, in: *La royauté et les élites dans l’Europe carolingienne*, ed. Régine Le Jan (Lille 1998) 213–231, at 231.

phonocentric illusions of authenticity which have dominated western culture and which have resulted in “a wholesale mystique (the ethos of speech as self-presence and the consequent devaluation of writing)”¹³

First, there is Agobard’s own voice. He draws attention to his speaking: before he went in to see Louis, he had been speaking to the three grandees, “grumbling against Jews rather than making speeches against them” (*musitantem potius quam loquentem*). Tone of voice mattered at court. After Louis dismissed him, he did not go to the three courtiers (*Ad vos postea non accessi*); he was “lamed by embarrassing shame”. Silence on Louis’ part had produced silence on Agobard’s part. But he goes on to break this silence in writing, writing that “made no effort to hide his indignation”, as Mayke De Jong has said.¹⁴ Agobard’s frankness about his ‘embarrassing shame’ may itself have been embarrassing or, at least, designed to sting his readers into forming an emotional community with him. Agobard tells them that they can hear more about his emotional state if they want to; the bearer of the letter can tell them more.¹⁵ Agobard is thus happy for his personal emotional re-action to his rebuff at court to be performed by another and, if his readers request it, then they accept this turning up of the volume.

So much for Agobard’s voice, for now. What about the voice of the emperor? The voice of the ruler was a special thing and the ruler’s deployment of his voice was something noted by contemporaries. Einhard takes care to tell us that Charlemagne had a light voice; his explicit surprise at the discrepancy between Charlemagne’s heavy frame and his voice suggests that it is true; the fact that he mentions it at all shows that he saw this element as an important one in his evocative representation of the late emperor.¹⁶ Agobard notes that Louis pronounced the reform agenda at Attigny with his own voice: *fideliter ore suo annuntiavit*.¹⁷ Bishop Frothar of Toul, in a letter to abbot Hilduin, revealed his close observation of Louis’ spoken words and silent gestures and he distinguished between the two.¹⁸ Amalarius of Metz understood that, in Constantinople, hearing the emperor’s actual voice was a privilege.¹⁹ In trying to catch the ruler’s voice these courtiers were not so much concerned with the legally potent *verbum regis* as with the voice as a sign of authenticity, authentic closeness to the ruler and an authentic note in their representation.

The other side of this was that voices had to be controlled. Agobard himself, as we have seen, distinguished between grumbling and speaking out. He also says that, when he himself made an intervention at Attigny, he spoke “carefully, as one does with great men”, and he contrasted this with the relaxed speech of the great ones themselves there (*primores nostri iocundissime loquerentur*).²⁰ All this speaks of levels of formality, control and nuance in the palace, around the emperor’s person. We may have been misled by Einhard here. His vignette of Charlemagne seeing friends while dressing and of himself and Hilduin chatting away to each other near the doors of the royal bedchamber suggest a certain level of informality at court, though in fact they also suggest urgency; inhabitants of the palace were time-poor.²¹ But Einhard was a supreme courtier, an insider, while Agobard was not. The latter’s account of being ushered into the imperial presence only to be bundled out again after a terse word from Louis is a sharp reminder to us that not everyone who attended the palace enjoyed the ruler’s *familiaritas*. Agobard’s Attigny was hardly the stiffly regulated Versailles but the palace was still a court with formality and explicit grading and controlling of access.

¹³ Christopher Norris, Derrida (London 1987) 63–96, at 84.

¹⁴ Agobard, *De baptismo mancipiorum*, ed. Van Acker 115; I have benefited from the vivid renderings of this text by Mayke de Jong as well as from her comments on Agobard in her book, *The Penitential State. Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814–840* (Cambridge 2009), and I am grateful to her for letting me read sections of it. On voices, Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London 1977) 179–189; Norris, Derrida 63–96.

¹⁵ Agobard, *De baptismo mancipiorum*, ed. Van Acker 115.

¹⁶ Einhard, *Vita Karoli magni* 22, 25 (ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. sep. ed. [25], Hannover/Leipzig 1911) 27, 30.

¹⁷ Agobard, *De dispensatione ecclesiasticarum rerum* (II) (ed. Lieven Van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, CC CM 52, Turnhout 1981) 121.

¹⁸ Frothar, *Epistola* 11 (ed. Michel Parisse, *La correspondance d’un évêque carolingien. Frothaire de Toul [ca 813–847]*, Paris 1998) 112.

¹⁹ Amalarius, *Versus marini*, lines 48–50 (ed. Ernst Dümmler, MGH *Poetae latini aevi Carolini* 1, Berlin 1881) 426–428, at 428; Michael McCormick, *The Origins of the European Economy* (Cambridge 2001) 141.

²⁰ Agobard, *De dispensatione ecclesiasticarum rerum* (IV), ed. Van Acker 122.

²¹ Einhard, *Vita Karoli magni* 24, ed. Holder-Egger 29; Einhard, *Translatio et miracula SS. Marcellini et Petri II*, 1 (ed. Georg Waitz, MGH SS 15, 1, Hannover 1887) 238–264, at 245.

We shall return to the palace later. For now, I hope to have shown that Agobard fits into our themes and can shed light on them. But who is this Agobard? In looking at his texts, we should be wary of imposing a unity on them by seeing them as produced by an individual with a consistent identity. With Agobard it is tempting to hear something particularly resonant in his insistence, in one of his best-known texts (*Against the Law of Gundobad*), on the equal community of Christian believers: “the slave and the master, the poor and the rich, the uneducated and the learned, the lowly worker and the exalted emperor.”²² Do we catch here, in this early text (c. 817/818), a pre-echo of Agobard’s later concerns that even the emperor himself, as a member of the Christian community, cannot escape the all-embracing discipline of penance? This is unlikely, not least because this self-same text also speaks the language of hierarchy, a hierarchy in which the ruler occupies a lofty place and in which Agobard is his lowly but faithful servant (*mihi tamen servo vestro, licet ultimo, tamen fidei*).²³ Of course, it was precisely the emperor’s prominence as a Christian office-holder that was to make the question of his penance so urgent in the 830s, but that was not on Agobard’s mind in 817–818. Even Agobard’s most notorious views may not have been a reflection of a consistently urgent personal agenda; indeed, Johannes Heil has argued that his anti-Jewish polemic was not an essential belief but was instrumentalised and stemmed from a temporary agenda.²⁴

We should be particularly wary of trying to detect consistency in Agobard’s texts. Many of them were occasional; seventeen of the twenty-five texts in Van Acker’s edition are letters, or were classified by Dümmler as such for the *Monumenta*. Further, these surviving texts are only a part of what Agobard wrote. For example, he refers to *singuli breves indiculi* that he sent to Wala and Hilduin and these have not been preserved.²⁵ Such writings were themselves responses to a steady stream of communications directed at Agobard, often from the palace. When envoys from the palace actually came to Lyon, to sort out Jewish affairs, Agobard shrewdly avoided a meeting but fired off a letter to them; it has not survived.²⁶ So many occasional writings; so many lost texts. Our picture is partial and limited and manuscript evidence does not suggest wide copying of Agobard’s works.²⁷

But it is precisely their occasional nature that makes these texts so ripe for investigation in our current context, as Agobard is constantly explaining why he is writing and seeking to justify himself. His voice is thus clearly audible in these texts, but that voice changes because he can, he has to, adopt different tones, different styles of address, on varying occasions. As an author, Agobard was a good actor, varying his tone to suit occasion and audience, and grasping the importance of role, of persona. Thus, his tone of address to the emperor Louis in a formal letter (effectively a dedication, the treatise against Felix) is rather different from that in two of his polemical texts, on the Law of Gundobad, and on the Insolence of the Jews, but even they are varied, with the tone in the latter having more of an edge.²⁸ A rather different tone again is directed at Louis in his 829 text *On the Division of the Empire*. All this does not mean that Agobard’s view of Louis had changed. It was Louis who had changed, and that was the problem as Agobard noted bitterly (*mutata voluntate convulsa sunt statuta*).²⁹ But throughout these diverse texts and episodes Agobard remained the same: a bishop addressing the ruler on topics of importance for the Christian community. Thus we do find a consistency in Agobard, not a

²² Agobard, *Adversus legem Gundobadi* (III) and cf. (V) (ed. Lieven Van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, CC CM 52, Turnhout 1981) 20, 22, on the necessity of penance for all.

²³ Agobard, *Adversus legem Gundobadi* (V), ed. Van Acker 22.

²⁴ Johannes Heil, Agobard, Amolo, das Kirchengut und die Juden von Lyon, in: *Francia* 25 (1998) 39–76.

²⁵ Agobard, *Contra praeceptum impium de baptismo Iudaicorum mancipiorum* (ed. Lieven Van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, CC CM 52, Turnhout 1981) 185.

²⁶ Agobard, *De insolentia Iudeorum* (ed. Lieven Van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, CC CM 52, Turnhout 1981) 192: *Tamen direxi missos nostros et litterulas ad illos.*

²⁷ Most of his work has come down to us in one manuscript, of ninth-tenth century date, Paris, BN lat. 2853; see Van Acker, Introduction (ed. Lieven Van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, CC CM 52, Turnhout 1981) xlvi–lx. Some brief annalistic notices may well stem from Agobard and may even be in his own hand: see Hartmut Hoffmann, *Autographa des Mittelalters*, in: *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 57 (2001) 1–62, at 13–14.

²⁸ Agobard, *Adversum dogma Felicis* (ed. Lieven Van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, CC CM 52, Turnhout 1981) 71–111, at 73; Agobard, *Adversus legem Gundobadi*, ed. Van Acker; Agobard, *De insolentia Iudeorum*, ed. Van Acker 194, and see below.

²⁹ Agobard, *De divisione imperii* (ed. Lieven Van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, CC CM 52, Turnhout 1981) 245–250, at 249.

biographically linear consistency of the unchanging essence of a personality, but the consistency of a persona and that persona was rooted in an office. Bishops had to deal with all aspects of the Christian community and so their concerns were various but the office was fixed; amidst mutability, bishops did not change and so Agobard could look back at earlier bishops as timeless examples for himself and his audience. Thus he quotes a lengthy episode from Paulinus' Life of Ambrose in which that mighty bishop stands up to the emperor on the question of dealing with the Jews.³⁰

The occasional nature of his texts gives Agobard the opportunity to put himself into his writing, often as a baffled innocent, a puzzled Christian who asks simple questions and seeks only the truth. If only Louis the Pious could explain away to him, Louis' *servus ultimus*, the contradictions between the law of Gundobad and Christian unity.³¹ Or if only he, Agobard, could avoid naming the outrageously rude *missi* who came to Lyons and worked for the Jews rather than against them. But, as he says to Louis, this is not possible and so, entrusting himself to Louis' goodness and patience, he has to tell Louis what would be dangerous to pass over in silence.³² Above all, Agobard speaks as a bishop. He writes to archbishop Ebbo of Reims as a fellow bishop engaged on a common episcopal project; he writes in similar vein to bishop Bernard of Vienne (*frater et coepiscopus*), recalling a conversation that they had had.³³ He writes as their bishop, to the clergy of Lyon.³⁴ It is presumably that same clergy that had criticised him on his attitude to the heretic Felix of Urgel. These were the *fratres ... inter nos* who accused him of being jealous of Felix and his text on this displays some anxiety and agitation as his identity is questioned and challenged.³⁵ He can be seen in these texts as performing his role as a bishop. Thus not only does he quiz those unenlightened inhabitants of his diocese who believe in the power of storm-raisers and the weather racketeers from 'Magic Land', he reproduces his case in a text that is also part of the pastoral effort.³⁶ All this means that there is some real weight behind his pastoral language in 829 when he writes to Louis, as the great crisis gets under way, "I call almighty God to witness that I only dare to write all this because I am more anxious than I can say over the dangers that now seem to loom over you, and in particular over your soul."³⁷ I do not mean to say that I think that Agobard was being sincere here; what would that mean? How can we judge it? Pastoral cares and political concerns could co-exist in such writings; we need not seek for a single, 'authentic' consistency in such personal expressions and writings.³⁸ But he is consistent in his pose as a concerned bishop. This was his role. As we know, not all bishops drew the same conclusions about their role in the 830s as Agobard did; that was where politics came in. Several bishops stood by the beleaguered Louis as crisis engulfed him in 833 and the rhetoric of consistent pastoral discipline administered by a coherent body of bishops that we find in Agobard and those who supported him was challenged by contemporaries.³⁹

³⁰ Agobard, *De Iudaicis superstitionibus et erroribus* (ed. Lieven Van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, CC CM 52, Turnhout 1981) 197–221, at 200–201; on the complexities of the actual case, see John Moorhead, *Ambrose, Church and Society in the Late Roman Empire* (London/New York 1999) 185–191.

³¹ Agobard, *Adversus legem Gundobadi* (V), (VI), (VII), ed. Van Acker 21–23.

³² Agobard, *De insolentia Iudeorum*, ed. Van Acker 191.

³³ Agobard, *De spe et timore* (ed. Lieven Van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, CC CM 52, Turnhout 1981) 143–147, and see also 427–454; Agobard, *De privilegio et iure sacerdotii* (ed. Lieven Van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, CC CM 52, Turnhout 1981) 51–69, at 53.

³⁴ Agobard, *De modo regiminis ecclesiastici* (ed. Lieven Van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, CC CM 52, Turnhout 1981) 325–334.

³⁵ Agobard, *Adversum dogma Felicis*, ed. Van Acker 71–111; Boshof, *Agobard* 57–60.

³⁶ Agobard, *De grandine et tonitruis* (ed. Lieven Van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, CC CM 52, Turnhout 1981) 1–15, at 4, for example; Paul Dutton, *Charlemagne's Mustache and Other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age* (New York/Basingstoke 2004) 169–188.

³⁷ Agobard, *De divisione imperii*, ed. Van Acker 247.

³⁸ See the stimulating general reflections in Michael Clanchy, *Abelard. A Medieval Life* (Oxford 1997) 326–335, and the more specifically relevant points on fears among observers such as Agobard of 'mendacious signs' in Philippe Buc, *The monster and the critics: a ritual reply*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 15 (2007) 441–452, at 445–446.

³⁹ *Annales Bertiniani a. 833* (ed. Félix Grat/Jeanne Vieillard/Suzanne Clémencet, *Annales de Saint-Bertin*, Paris 1964) 9; *Astronomer, Vita Hludowici imperatoris* 49, 52 (ed. Ernst Tremp, *Astronomus, Das Leben Kaiser Ludwigs*, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. sep. ed. 64, Hannover 1995) 480–482, 500–502; a bleak view of the bishops en masse was taken by Thegan, *Gesta Hludowici imperatoris* 43 (ed. Ernst Tremp, *Thegan Die Taten Kaiser Ludwigs*, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. sep. ed. 64, Hannover 1995) 1–277, at 230.

None of this means that we need doubt that, as a highly placed bishop, Agobard was concerned about the centre of the Christian realm. This centre was the palace. As we have seen, Agobard was not a highly placed courtier; he was not one of the intimates of the palace. But he had a very good sense of how the palace worked and, above all, of its central importance in the web of communication that gave the realm coherence on a political level.⁴⁰ His very distance from the palace enabled him to manipulate its image as moral and conceptual centre to his own rhetorical and political advantage to ever more devastating effect. We can see this clearly in his writings of the 820s on the Jewish communities. Here, he deftly deploys his persona as puzzled innocent as he confesses himself baffled by what has come out of the palace. Louis' envoys arrived in Lyons, Agobard tells the emperor, brandishing what certainly looked like official messages, read out in Louis' sacred name and bearing his seal. But Agobard is unimpressed by this fully functioning apparatus of the written word in Carolingian government. He could not believe that the messengers and their documents were accurately transmitting Louis' own intentions and he felt the same about the follow-up messages relayed by the doubtless ever more exasperated envoys.⁴¹

Of course this is a ploy to give Louis the chance to disavow his own envoys but Agobard's stance here is that of a writer and bishop who knows what Louis really meant; that is, he knows what was really going on in the palace. And Agobard does this again, in the letter to the powerful magnate count Matfrid of Orleans. In this severe vision of palace corruption Agobard imagines what other people imagine the palace to be. Instead of fearing the palace as place of royal justice those who are guilty of corruption comfort themselves in the knowledge that the palace is a place of networking: "If any complaint about me comes to the palace, the case will be referred to advocates (*causadici*). There I shall find plenty of relatives and friends, thanks to whom I shall surely manage to avoid the royal wrath, since a gift made behind the scenes will soothe any anger, and he who ought to be feared will not see past these people acting as a screen to conceal our foolishness." This reads like a mischievous parody of the positive image of palace networking to be found in the *De ordine palatii* and Agobard's text thus takes its place in the ninth-century discourse of the palace as conceptual centre of the realm.⁴² Agobard manipulates the distance between centre and periphery to shrewd rhetorical effect in this text. Out in the regions in Agobard's vicinity, the necessary healthy fear of the centre has faded: "Fear of kings and of the laws has fallen into slumber" (*Quievit timor regum et legum ...*).⁴³ The centre's reach outwards has thus become enfeebled while the periphery's corruption now stretches into the centre itself in the network of patrons protecting their self-serving clients. But Agobard then goes on to strike a personal note in saying that his own count, Bertmundus of Lyons, runs a tight ship in his county. We do not have to grant this personal note a value of truth or sincerity, though Bertmundus does seem to have been a tough figure.⁴⁴ Agobard is making a case; his region, far from being the hotbed of corruption that it was earlier in the text, becomes in its strictly administered purity another stick with which to beat the palace.

All this may seem pretty rich coming from Agobard, given his own resistance to envoys from the centre, but consistency was not the point here. We should note, however, a consistency of concerns: distrust of the centre expressed in vivid depiction of what is really going on there. Agobard was a ventriloquist, able to throw

⁴⁰ Stuart Airlie, *The palace of memory: The Carolingian court as political centre*, in: *Courts and Regions in Medieval Europe*, ed. Sarah Rees Jones/Richard Marks/Alastair J. Minnis (Woodbridge 2000) 1–20; Mayke de Jong, *Sacrum palatium et ecclesia. L'autorité religieuse royale sous les Carolingiens (790–840)*, in: *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 58 (2003) 1243–1269.

⁴¹ Agobard, *De insolentia Iudeorum*, ed. Van Acker 192.

⁴² Agobard, *De iniusticiis (Ad Matfredum)* (ed. Lieven Van Acker, *Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia*, CC CM 52, Turnhout 1981) 223–227, at 226: *Si querela de me ad palatium venerit, causa ad causadicos dirigitur. Illic inveniam parentes vel amicos plures, per quos indubitanter fiet, ut regalem offensionem nullam incurram, quia donum absconditum extinguet iras et his, qui timendus est, aliis interpositis non videbit insipientias nostras.* (the free translation here is indebted to that of W. North available at: www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook1h.html). Compare Hincmar of Rheims, *De ordine palatii* IV (ed. Thomas Gross/Rudolf Schieffer, *MGH Fontes iuris Germanici antiqui in us. schol. sep. ed.* [3], Hannover 1980) 66; on the core of this text as reflecting Adalhard of Corbie's understanding of Aachen and empire, Janet L. Nelson, *Aachen as a place of power*, in: *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Mayke de Jong/Frans Theuws/Carine van Rhijn (*The Transformation of the Roman World* 6, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2001) 217–241, at 226–232.

⁴³ Agobard, *De iniusticiis*, ed. Van Acker 226.

⁴⁴ Agobard, *De iniusticiis*, ed. Van Acker 226; on Bertmund and his connections, Karl Ferdinand Werner, *Hludovicus Augustus: Gouverner l'empire chrétien – Idées et réalités*, in: *Charlemagne's Heir. New Perspectives on the Reign of Louis the Pious (814–840)*, ed. Peter Godman/Roger Collins (Oxford 1990) 3–123, at 49.

his voice, via a text, into the palace even if he himself or his message could not get through and this could be dangerous for Louis. Agobard sought to impose his own definition of what was said and thought in the palace and on what came out of it. Thus, in his text *On the Insolence of the Jews*, he warned Louis that local Jews were showing off fancy women's outfits that, they claimed, had been sent to them by Louis' own relatives and by the wives of palace courtiers (*ostendunt vestes muliebres, quasi a consanguineis vestris vel matronis palatinorum uxoribus eorum directas*).⁴⁵ The palace is here reduced to the status of a shopping mall. This accusation is one in a series asserting that Jews claimed to enjoy privileged access to the palace, including what may have been a particularly bitter pill for Agobard, namely that "they approach your presence and depart from it with honour". Agobard was careful to say that these were Jewish claims but via these claims he was able to tarnish the palace. Despite the fears expressed in his texts that his messages were not getting through to the palace, and that his voice was not being heard there, he was able to reach into the palace on the plane of representation through the devices that we have seen, and his adopted persona as righteously outraged outsider should be seen as one of these devices.⁴⁶

What Agobard could not do, however, was to get access to the actual palace itself. By 829, he seems to have recovered some prominence in the public arena; one of the great reform councils summoned by the emperors for that year was to be held in Lyons.⁴⁷ Louis' purging of the court and his sons' hostile re-action to this in 829/830 triggered a text from Agobard in which he fulfilled his own pastoral duty to warn the emperor of the dangerous political situation. But this warning was not itself a hostile act against Louis; Agobard was not committed to the cause of the rebellious sons and nor did he attend the stormy assembly held at Nijmegen in late 830 that witnessed the return of Louis to full power.⁴⁸

None of this suggests that Agobard enjoyed much more access to the palace at the start of the 830s than he had in the 820s, but that was to change. The great revolt of 833, where Agobard was a prominent supporter of Louis' sons, at last brought him into the palace itself. He no longer needed to rest content with projecting critiques on to the palace; he now had direct access to it and could work to change it. Thus the palace plays a central role in the texts he wrote to justify the sons' revolt, the texts we know as the *Liber apologeticus*, part one of which was written at the time of the massive defection from the old emperor at the Field of Lies in June 833, while the second part was written soon after as part of the proceedings against Louis held at Compiègne in October 833.⁴⁹

From our point of view, one of the most striking features of this text is its impersonality; Agobard draws no attention to his own voice or person here. This contrasts with his intervention in the earlier crisis of 829/830, where he spoke of his own need to write (*pro qua haec scribere praesumo, nisi quia doleo, quantum dicere non possum*).⁵⁰ But the *Liber apologeticus* completely eschews this 'ego' language; there is no use of the first person and both books deploy the resounding language of proclamation: "Hear this, all nations ..." is the opening of book I while book II closes with "now let the whole community hear ..." ⁵¹ Agobard himself vanishes while carrying out that "duty of the bishops" (*ministerium episcoporum*) as it was so clearly spelt out in another text of 833, the bishops' account of Louis' penance.⁵² But in their impersonality both books of the *Liber apologeticus* are essentially a polemical view of recent history through partisan eyes. Through Agobard's eyes the walls of the palace can be seen to have been made of glass. He was thus able to see right into the heart of the palace, into the imperial bedroom itself. Initially the emperor had been "peaceful and flourishing in his household and palace" but marriage to a younger wife soon proved too much for him and he let the marriage bed grow cold, with the result that his young wife turned elsewhere for pleasures that became lecherous. Agobard is the only

⁴⁵ Agobard, *De insolentia Iudeorum*, ed. Van Acker 194; Heil, Agobard 48, note 36.

⁴⁶ Agobard, *De insolentia Iudeorum*, ed. Van Acker 194, and see also id., *De dispensatione ecclesiasticarum rerum*, ed. Van Acker (IV) 123: *Utrum vero audita retulerint domno imperatori, nescio*; Heil, Agobard 44.

⁴⁷ Boshof, Agobard 198.

⁴⁸ Boshof, Agobard 201–215.

⁴⁹ Boshof, Agobard 228–253; Egon Boshof, *Ludwig der Fromme* (Darmstadt 1996) 196–200.

⁵⁰ Agobard, *De divisione imperii*, ed. Van Acker 247; see also Agobard, *De privilegio apostolicae sedis* (ed. Lieven Van Acker, Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia, CC CM 52, Turnhout 1981) 301–306, at 303.

⁵¹ Agobard, *Liber apologeticus I* (ed. Lieven Van Acker, Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia, CC CM 52, Turnhout 1981) 307–312, at 309; *ibid.* II, ed. Van Acker 313–319, at 319.

⁵² *Episcoporum de poenitentia, quam Hludowicus imperator professus est, relatio Compendiensis* (ed. Alfred Boretius/Viktor Krause, MGH LL Capitularia regum Francorum 2, Hannover 1890–1897) no. 197, 51–55, at 51.

source that we have that accuses Louis, through his failure in the marriage bed, of directly contributing to his wife's turning to sexual sin.⁵³ This accusation, made in 833 as an explanation for the troubles of 830 and after, gives Agobard's work a distinctive profile and timbre but it appears in a text that is, as we have seen, presented impersonally and it makes its impact as part of a carefully articulated system of objective values of rulership. Among these values was the purity of the palace. As the centre on which the well-being of the realm pivoted, the palace's purity was the urgent concern of all; if it was impure the whole realm was impure (*videntes maculatum stratum paternum, sordidatum palatium, confusum regnum*).⁵⁴ Agobard's knowledge of what did and did not go in the royal bed might seem surprisingly intimate but his text was only the written version of what was already known and had already been broadcast (*cognoverunt ... multitudo palatii et regni, ac finum terrae*).⁵⁵

Agobard and the reformers had been unable to get real access to the palace. Maddeningly, the wrong sort of people were able to reside in the palace, no matter how often they had been made to leave. The wicked Judith was the most notorious example of this: she had polluted the palace and had duly been expelled but she had then been "recalled to the palace as if she was its legitimate mistress" (*tanquam legitima domina, revocata est in palatium*).⁵⁶ But Judith was not the only loathsome presence in the palace: the wrong sort of bishops had also filled it, bishops who had failed in their duty to preach to the playgirl empress but had instead merely watched her antics as compromised spectator participants.⁵⁷ The emperor's sons and their supporters had, in their zeal to save their father and the empire, come to the palace and freed it from pollution but, as we have seen, this relief proved temporary.⁵⁸

But now, with the revolution of 833, the right sort of people had come to the palace and this was to be definitive. Agobard's polemical text offered a history of the palace and a critique of the role of bishops, one that was perhaps all the more necessary as not all bishops were happy with the way events unfolded in 833. The second book of Agobard's polemic was actually written for the assembly held at the palace of Compiègne, a palace that held disturbing memories for the bishops assembled there.⁵⁹ Agobard was now finally at the palace and through his text reached back into what had been the inaccessible palace in order to support his current efforts to purify the centre. And it is here that we hear his own voice as a bishop. This is in his own certification of the penance of Louis the Pious. "I, Agobard, unworthy bishop of the church of Lyons, I was present at the venerable assembly at the palace called Compiègne."⁶⁰ He no longer needs to worry whether his words were being relayed to the centre, unlike in the 820s when he was unsure if Adalhard and Helisachar had passed on his concerns to the emperor and when he was not summoned to the Compiègne assembly of 823.⁶¹ Now he was in the palace and was writing the script for the great drama, explaining its origins and outlining its course. He could also write the future; he dates his *cartula* on the emperor's penance by the first year of Lothar's reign and points out that the assembly had to settle the future of the realm.⁶² In all this, and in its reference to the booklet of his crimes that was given to Louis as part of the apparatus of penance, Agobard's *cartula* is a touching witness to the belief in the power of texts and writing, though as historians, that is to say, slaves to texts, we would do well to recall the limits to such power. Agobard's *cartula* expressed a partial view, one that was soon to be challenged by events as the political tide flowed back in the old emperor's favour in 834. Of course, it is not a

⁵³ Agobard, *Liber apologeticus I*, ed. Van Acker 309; Elizabeth Ward, Agobard of Lyons and Paschasius Radbertus as critics of the empress Judith, in: *Women in the Church*, ed. W.J. Shiels/Diana Wood (Studies in Church History 27, Oxford 1990) 15–25, at 19; Mayke de Jong, Exegesis for an empress, in: *Medieval Transformations. Texts, Power and Gifts in Context*, ed. Esther Cohen/Mayke de Jong (Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions 11, Leiden/Boston/Köln 2001) 69–100, at 81.

⁵⁴ Agobard, *Liber apologeticus I*, ed. Van Acker 309.

⁵⁵ Agobard, *Liber apologeticus I*, ed. Van Acker 309.

⁵⁶ Agobard, *Liber apologeticus I*, ed. Van Acker 310, and the same point is made in *Liber apologeticus II*, ed. Van Acker 316: *regina, quae mutato habitu regali putabatur perdurare in habitu sanctimoniali ... reducta est in palacium*.

⁵⁷ Agobard, *Liber apologeticus I*, ed. Van Acker 311: *domina palatii senioris ... ludat pueriliter, spectantibus etiam aliquibus de ordine sacerdotum, et plerisque conludentibus*; De Jong, Exegesis 84–85.

⁵⁸ Agobard, *Liber apologeticus I*, ed. Van Acker 309–310; *ibid. II*, ed. Van Acker 316: *coniuncti ad palacium*.

⁵⁹ *Episcoporum de poenitentia relatio*, ed. Boretius/Krause 53; Boshof, Ludwig 184. Agobard does not seem to have attended an earlier meeting at Compiègne in the 820s, Boshof, Agobard 89; how he must have relished his untrammelled access to it in 833.

⁶⁰ Agobard, *Cartula de Ludovici imperatoris poenitentia* (ed. Lieven Van Acker, Agobardi Lugdunensis opera omnia, CC CM 52, Turnhout 1981) 321–324, at 323, and echoed at the end, *ibid.*, ed. Van Acker 324.

⁶¹ Agobard, *De dispensatione ecclesiasticarum rerum*, ed. Van Acker (IV) 123, and see note 43 above.

⁶² Agobard, *Cartula*, ed. Van Acker 323.

unique document. We know that the other bishops were also to draw up their own accounts of the penitential process of 833, as well as a corporate account which all were to sign.⁶³ Agobard's voice was only one in a chorus and his presentation of himself as "I, Agobard, unworthy bishop" is conventional. And yet it is Agobard's account that has come down to us and it is him that we hear: "I was present ... I agreed with those making judgements and agreeing I myself judged ... I was present ... I judged, and marking with my own hand, I signed."⁶⁴ Agobard's tongue and hand are long stilled; he reaches us through a manuscript that did not come from his desk. But his claim on the historian is insistent: "I was there." Where does that leave the historian?

⁶³ *Episcoporum de poenitentia relatio*, ed. Boretius/Krause 55; Agobard on the *libellus* given to Louis, Cartula, ed. Van Acker 324

⁶⁴ Agobard, Cartula, ed. Van Acker 323–324: ... *interfui ... et iudicantibus consensi, et consenciens ipse iudicavi ... interfui, et melioribus consonans et consentiens iudicavi, et manu propria signas subscripsi*. I am grateful to the audience at what was an exceptionally stimulating gathering in Vienna for questions and suggestions and my particular thanks go to Rosamond McKitterick and Irene van Renswoude for very helpful editorial comment.

