THE REPRESENTATIONS OF EMOTIONS CONNECTED TO DREAMS AND VISIONS IN PRE-CAROLINGIAN CONTINENTAL AND ANGLO-LATIN NARRATIVES

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Introduction

Emotions and dreams, both psychological phenomena according to modern understanding, were already seen as linked in ancient thought. Barbara Rosenwein has in her recent studies argued that it should be possible to write a history of emotions, or rather, a history of what she calls “emotional communities,” that is, a study of the cultures and discourses of emotion of the communities which provide the original context for our sources. Her work focuses on communities in seventh-century Gaul, and deals with all kinds of emotions. While her analysis in many places emphasises practical and political explanations for the cultures she discusses, one of her general conclusions is that “emotional styles have much to do with modes of religious expression.” In my own studies on the history of ideas about dreams and

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1 This article first took form as a more general survey on the topic, delivered as “Emotions and Dreams in the Early Middle Ages: Theories and Representations” at the International Medieval Congress in Leeds in 2006. I wish to thank my colleagues in Rome and in Helsinki, especially Alaric Hall, for helpful comments and critique on the different versions of this article. I naturally retain sole responsibility for any omissions and failings.


visions, I have examined the problematic relationship between the influence of patristic theological ideas and that of literary conventions on early medieval (hagiographical) narratives, and the ways in which the intended nature and use of the individual texts may have affected the balance of these influences. Here, I pick up on the recent interest in the history of emotions, alongside the wider importance of the relationship between ideology and literary models in early medieval texts, to investigate the ideas and models pertaining to the significance of emotions in oneiric experiences, and their incidence in early medieval hagiography. This case study examines in a specific context aspects of Rosenwein’s general conclusion on the connections between “modes of religious expression” and emotionality in texts.

I begin by reviewing the philosophical and theological ideas of Antiquity about the role of emotions in dreams and visions. I then discuss two distinct ideas of—or models for—the significance of fear in visionary phenomena, mainly on the basis of Merovingian texts, before discussing these models and related problems of interpretation in pre-Carolingian Anglo-Latin narratives. I find it fitting to offer this

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4 I have found that the Anglo-Latin texts of the early eighth century, in spite of their small number, exhibit more instances of the influence of theological ideas about the dangers of dreaming than the more voluminous contemporary Continental material, something I have tentatively attributed to the smaller and more learned (at least in Pope Gregory’s writings) immediate audiences of these texts; see Jesse Keskiaho, “The Handling and Interpretation of Dreams and Visions in Late Sixth- to Eighth-Century Gallic and Anglo-Latin Hagiography and Histories,” *Early Medieval Europe* 13 (2005): 246–247, and Jesse Keskiaho, “Eighth-Century Anglo-Latin Ecclesiastical Attitudes to Dreams and Visions,” *Ennen ja nyt* 4:4 (2004), <http://www.ennenjanyt.net/4-04/referee/keskiaho.pdf>, passim. On Gregory’s influence on dream-stories in Anglo-Latin hagiography, without comparison with Continental narratives, see Malcolm R. Godden, “Were It Not that I Have Bad Dreams: Gregory the Great and the Anglo-Saxons on the Dangers of Dreaming,” in *Rome and the North. The Early Reception of Gregory the Great in Germanic Europe*, ed. Rolf H. Bremmer Jr., Kees Dekker, and David F. Johnson, Medievalia Groningana 4 (Paris: Peeters, 2001), 93–113, at 110. I wish to thank Rob Meens for pointing me to this article, of which I was unaware when writing the studies referred to above.

5 As I compare the Anglo-Latin materials with Continental Latin texts, I shall not here examine Old English texts, such as *The Dream of the Rood*. Note that the present paper speaks interchangeably of visions and dreams (or oneiric experiences), reflecting the ambiguity prevalent not only in medieval usage but also in late antique theory—Macrobius, for example, discusses waking visions alongside meaningful dreams. See, e.g., John S. Hanson, “Dreams and Visions in the Graeco-Roman World and Early Christianity,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung* 2.23.2, ed. Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 1395–1427, at 1408; Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Les revenants. Les vivants et les morts dans la société médiévale* (sine loco: Gallimard, 1994), 252; Guy G. Stroumsa, “Dreams