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MEMORY, ORALITY AND LITERACY IN AN EARLY MEDIEVAL SOCIETY*

Modern society places a high premium on literacy. The shock-horror headlines which greet successive surveys of educational performance are informed by the close links between literacy, social stability and economic development in modern societies. Such concerns have inevitably affected the academic agenda. The past half-century has seen the growth of a 'literacy industry'. Some scholars, primarily anthropologists and historians, have attempted to assess the long-term results of literacy on cultural, social and political organization. A range of shifts in human capability have been linked to literacy; one particular claim has been that literacy allows the growth of a deeper sense of the past, the creation of a sphere of historical knowledge which does more than simply reflect and legitimate current political and social institutions, and exists independently of them.¹

It is hardly surprising that those scholars dealing with actual historical societies have expressed reservations about such large-scale shifts being the result of changes in literacy in isolation. A sense of difference between the past and the present, for example, cannot be seen as an inevitable result of the growth of writing. There has been a shift from a 'strong' thesis about the inevitable implications of literacy to a 'weak' thesis that stresses the complex interaction between literacy and other factors, and the gradual, often imperceptible, pace of change. There has been a focus on literacy as a social practice, rather than literacy as a technology sweeping extant cultural patterns aside. Part of the stimulus has been the transformations in human communications in the late twentieth-century world which have highlighted the subjectivity

* Thanks are due to Mary Garrison, Rosamond McKitterick, Elisabeth van Houts and Chris Wickham for comments on earlier versions of this article and discussions of early medieval literacy, and to Jayne Innes for her help.

¹ Useful overviews can be gleaned from H. J. Graff (ed.), *Literacy and Social Development in the West* (Cambridge, 1981); B. V. Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge, 1984). There are fuller bibliographies and discussions of the vast literature in both these works and many of the historical studies cited below. The classic point of departure is the path-breaking article by J. Goody and I. Watt, 'The Consequences of Literacy', in J. Goody (ed.), *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1968), esp. 44–9, for literacy and the sense of the past.

of print culture and modern, western understandings of literacy. The emergence of new technologies has meant that we can no longer see the printed page as a fixed endpoint towards which previous developments in communications have been relentlessly heading. Rather than projecting our contemporary definition of literacy backwards, written practices need to be placed in the their contemporary social and cultural contexts.² We certainly must beware of too close an identification of the ability to read with the skill of writing, long a restricted and specialized craft. In any case, there is a world of difference between the sophisticated command of vocabulary and tradition necessary to read Virgil or Keats, and the pragmatic use of written documents to validate legal rights or social position. The delineation of a social history of reading has thrown up new challenges: for most Europeans before the nineteenth century, reading was reading aloud, and literate messages were received and interpreted within the contours of a group rather than by individuals.³

The 'weak' thesis has been particularly important in that it has encouraged historians to look at non-literate forms of record and communication in a positive light. The written word needs to be related to the mass of non-written practices which surround, envelop and rival it. Anthropologists and historians have demonstrated the adaptability, durability and frequent vitality of orality as a medium of communication even after the advent of writing. Indeed, the heroic view of a triumphant literacy pushing previous practices aside is being replaced by an understanding of the ways in which oral practices survive the challenge of literacy, and can indeed shape the cultural and social contexts within which literacy is adopted.⁴ While there are, and have been in history, wholly non-literate societies, no society is wholly literate: oral

² An instructive example is B. Street, 'Orality and Literacy as Ideological Constructions: Some Problems in Cross-Cultural Studies', *Culture and History*, ii (1987). The fundamental statement of the 'weak' thesis is R. Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (Oxford, 1988). The most influential recent statement of the 'strong' thesis is W. J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London, 1982).

³ Classic studies are R. Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, 1992); M. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066–1307* (Oxford, 1979; 2nd edn, 1993); the fruitful scholarship on ancien régime France summarized in R. Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections on Cultural History* (London, 1990); R. Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors and Libraries in Western Europe in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. L. G. Cochrane (Cambridge, 1994).

⁴ For example, Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece*, and her more detailed case study, *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, 1989), for historians; Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality*, for anthropologists.

communication (not to mention gesture) continues to function as an alternative to, or a partner of, the written word. As historians by definition deal with societies where writing is known, but also where literate practices are far from universal, an understanding of the differential access to, and control of, writing can illuminate social and political organization. With reference to perceptions of the past, it has long been understood that historical writing can have an immediate social and political function, and be a way of arguing a case about the present. More recently, research has begun to move beyond formal historiographical writing and narrow intellectual milieux and to investigate social memory — the shared views about the past which inform the identity of a social group and thus act as a potent guide to action in the present.⁵ The creation and transmission of social memory is a process in which writing often has only a marginal role. Not that a social memory constitutes simply the shared culture of a group: it relates to the past and is transmitted and transmuted from generation to generation. That is, it is vital to distinguish between oral communication or testimony (that is the transmission of information by oral means) on the one hand and oral tradition (which involves transmission by oral means over historical time) on the other.⁶

This study focuses on one individual and his literary output, as a route into the various social memories circulating in an early medieval society, and the interrelation between orality and literacy in their creation and dissemination. The monk Notker lived in a world shaped by the political and cultural dynamism of the Carolingian dynasty; he flourished in the second half of the ninth century and is known through the rich literary tradition of his abbey, St-Gallen in modern Switzerland. Notker was a formidable intellectual figure with wide-ranging interests, leaving musical,

⁵ The seminal work is E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), dealing with the modern period; cf. the useful essays in P. Magdalino (ed.), *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-Century Europe* (London, 1992), for the Middle Ages. J. Fentress and C. Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford, 1992), is a useful discussion combining medieval and modern, and bringing together research on memory and oral history.

⁶ Rather than seeing oral tradition as concerned exclusively with 'oral literature' I use the term in its literal sense, to refer to material relating to the totality of a social group transmitted orally over several generations: for discussion, see D. Henige, *Oral Historiography* (London, 1982), esp. 2, although his stress on the need for universality throughout society is problematical when we have social specialization or differentiation.

poetic, legal and historiographical works, and serving the best part of his life as schoolmaster at St-Gallen, where he took responsibility for the monastery's library. He is best known as the author of the *Gesta Karoli* (*Deeds of Charlemagne*), which was written at some point between December 883 and May 887.⁷ This work deals with the recent past of his society; it is largely based on material which had been orally transmitted over at least one generation. These oral traditions are both inviting and problematical, not least as they have been reworked within the literary parameters of a written text. While acknowledging the individualities and peculiarities of the text and author, and the monastic context of their experience of orality and literacy, it is possible, with care, to reconstruct some fundamental characteristics of social memory beyond the monastery wall from this literary work. It is thus of interest to a wider audience than those already familiar with Notker's work.

I

Social memories are not exclusive, but multitiered and overlapping, as individuals are potential members of an array of different groups. Therefore, although early medievalists have recently been particularly concerned with the creation of ethnic and national identity, social memory in the early Middle Ages should not be tacitly reduced to national founding myths — regions and localities, families and social classes, monasteries and lordships, all likewise defined collective action in the present with reference to shared views about the past.⁸ The problem is how to uncover

⁷ Notker of St-Gallen, *Gesta Karoli*, in *Notker von St-Gallen, Die Taten Karls des Großen*, ed. H. F. Haefele (Hanover, 1959). My translations are based on those of L. Thorpe, *Two Lives of Charlemagne* (London, 1969), which should be used with care. I make no attempt to give a complete Notker bibliography: the most important discussions of his life and works are cited in the course of my discussion of the *Gesta Karoli*; however, W. von den Steinen, *Notker der Dichter und sein geistige Welt*, 2 vols. (Berne, 1948), i, remains fundamental. See also S. Rankin, 'Ego itaque Notker scripsi', *Revue bénédictine*, li (1991).

⁸ Recently, increasingly sophisticated research into 'ethnogenesis' has largely concentrated on the earlier part of the period; R. Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung: Das Werden der frühmittelalterlichen Gentes*, 2nd edn (Cologne, 1977), was the starting-point. For a vigorous survey of the various levels of collective action in medieval society, and an important assertion of the importance of lay collective action in general, see S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300* (Oxford, 1984). For social memory in the Middle Ages, see Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 144–72.

these various layers of identity and memory. Literary historiography is inevitably problematical even at the level of national identity; beneath that, written sources often have little direct relationship to the creation and transmission of a shared past.⁹ Indeed, one recent scholar, Michael Richter, has gone so far as to make the evidential problem virtually intractable, arguing that the written documentation used by historians is essentially an artificial gloss, reflecting the thoughts of churchmen and with little relationship to a scarcely Christian and almost wholly oral secular world.¹⁰ He cites abundant evidence for the Carolingian church's unease about a set of social practices involving public recitation of song and story, usually in a context of boozy banqueting. Rather than demonstrating the failure of the church in the face of an oral counter-culture upon which it had declared war, this evidence needs to be situated in the context of the redrawing of the boundaries of sacred and secular. Primarily, it turns on concerns about the dividing line between cleric and layman.¹¹ The assumed antagonism between church culture and oral tradition is particularly open to question. Astoundingly, Richter offers no developed discussion of the actual content of the surviving written fragments of an orally transmitted vernacular poetry, epics like *Beowulf* and the *Hildebrandslied* which would have been the mainstay of any secular warrior culture. Recent studies of this material have found a successful synthesis

⁹ P. J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton, 1994), is already well on the way to becoming a classic which exemplifies many of these trends. For the problems of reading Latin historiography, W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History: Jordanes, Bede, Gregory of Tours and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, 1988), and the responses in A. Scharer and G. Scheibelreiter (eds.), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter* (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung, xxxii, Vienna and Munich, 1994). For the possibility of devising new approaches to such material, see especially C. Wickham, 'Lawyer's Time: History and Memory in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century Italy', in H. Mayr-Harting and R. I. Moore (eds.), *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. H. C. Davis* (London, 1985); H.-W. Goetz, 'Historiographisches Zeitbewußtsein im frühen Mittelalter: Zum Umgang mit der Zeit in der karolingischen Geschichtsschreibung', in Scharer and Scheibelreiter (eds.), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*.

¹⁰ M. Richter, *The Formation of the Medieval West: Studies in the Oral Culture of the Barbarians* (Dublin, 1994); the summary of his approach in *The Oral Tradition in the Middle Ages* (Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental, lxxi, Turnhout, 1994).

¹¹ Cf. J. L. Nelson, 'Making Ends Meet: Wealth and Poverty in the Carolingian Church', *Studies in Church Hist.*, xxiv (1987), and the general approach of R. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (London, 1989).

of aristocratic and Christian values rather than a window into an archaic and unchanging Germanic world.¹² The rigid and absolute dichotomy of 'written-church-Christian' versus 'oral-secular-unChristian' which lies at the centre of Richter's model is thus flawed. And from a social memory viewpoint, Richter's account is inadequate, as instead of allowing for variety of cultural practice it reduces all non-written tradition to the oral epic. That the primary function of the oral epic was the preservation of historical knowledge, and that there were no means of preserving oral tradition other than through epic cycles, is questionable.¹³

In any case, the base assumption that the written word was marginal in Carolingian society is conservative. At Notker's St-Gallen, the Carolingian period was no dark age. The legal documents recording St-Gallen's property dealings and legal conflicts survive in the original; their ubiquity on a local level stands at the heart of recent reassessments of the literacy of Carolingian society.¹⁴ Richter's argument that the charter was a legal superstructure written by priests and irrelevant to the oral pronouncements and ritual which actually transacted business would miss the point, even if it were correct.¹⁵ Demonstrating that written

¹² The classic treatment is P. Wormald, 'Bede, *Beowulf* and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy', in R. T. Farrell (ed.), *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1978).

¹³ The debate about orally transmitted poetry is entering a new phase with works such as K. O'B. O'Keeffe, *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse* (Cambridge, 1990); D. H. Green, *Medieval Reading and Listening: The Primary Reception of German Literature, 800–1300* (Cambridge, 1994). For discussion, drawing examples from many different contexts, see R. Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Cambridge, 1977). The time is ripe for more work on the importance of oral epics in early medieval aristocratic culture: I attempt a general sketch in 'Trojans or Teutons? The Carolingians and the Invention of the Germanic Past', in M. Innes and Y. Hen (eds.), *Uses of the Past in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

¹⁴ See especially R. McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge, 1989), 77–134, whose discussion of the role of writing in lay society is based on the St-Gallen material; on disputes and the importance of written documents, see W. Davies and P. Fouracre (eds.), *The Settlement of Disputes in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1986). For reassessments of early medieval literacy, see R. McKitterick (ed.), *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1990).

¹⁵ Contra M. Richter, 'Quisquis sit scribere, nullum potat abere labore: Zur Laienschriftlichkeit im 8. Jahrhundert', in J. Jarnut, U. Nonn and M. Richter (eds.), *Karl Martell in seiner Zeit* (Beihefte der Francia, xxxvii, Sigmaringen, 1994), the number of charters, their production for transactions not involving the church or, indeed, before monasteries were founded, and their use as evidence in court cases, all emerge from the briefest look at Carolingian cartularies. In any case, Richter's argument that charters were not dispositive in narrow legal terms can be challenged empirically from the very evidence he uses.

documents were familiar even within village communities, and that they acted as important points of reference in local legal proceedings, does not make the average small-scale landowner literate in a modern sense. But it does place him in a context where the written word was important: this was not a world of pristine orality.

This in itself means that many received views about the role of the written word in early medieval society are in need of revision. Michael Clanchy's seminal work on medieval literacy, for example, focuses on changes in the twelfth century, but sees writing as marginal to the earlier period. Clanchy's path-breaking account of the quantitative growth of legal documentation and the resulting qualitative changes in attitudes and actions remains persuasive. Brian Stock's work on high culture treads a similar path. Like Clanchy, Stock argues that writing does not simply replace oral communication; rather, the high Middle Ages see the emergence of new patterns of communication, based on a symbiosis between oral and literate, but within which the written word has emerged as the central practice. Where Clanchy and Stock are mistaken is in their definition of these new patterns against what they see as an early medieval oral stasis. If we accept that the written word had an important role in early medieval patterns of communication, we cannot see the important changes which take place in the high Middle Ages as wrought by the arrival of writing in a society where it had previously been virtually absent, nor write of 'the implications of literacy' (to use the title of Stock's book).¹⁶ Instead, we must realize that we are describing a shift in the role of writing within a long-established and durable cultural system — a dynamic change in the interplay between orality and literacy.

Examining the role of writing in early medieval society points to the difficulty of applying modern definitions of literacy to pre-modern practice. Reading was normally a public recitation to an audience, but having said that, silent or (better) individual reading was not wholly unknown before the high Middle Ages. (Reading was a physical activity centring on the mouth rather than the

¹⁶ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*; B. Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, 1983). Note that both have had to revise their views of the early medieval period to a limited extent in the past decade, as is made clear by a comparison of the 1979 and 1993 editions of Clanchy's work, and of Stock's monograph and the essays collected in his *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (London, 1990).

eyes, and so any notion of silence is relative.)¹⁷ Independent reading is best evidenced in the monastic rules and can be seen as, in this period, defined by monastic practice and usually concerned with rumination on a sacred text; however, it was not confined to monks. Both public recitation and individual rumination were intimately linked with the memory. Learning to read began with memorizing the Psalter, while the repetitive performance of public reading likewise tended to embed texts in the memory. Writing about literacy in the abstract is thus dangerous as it homogenizes culturally distinct and socially diverse practices. In the province of Alemannia where Notker's St-Gallen was located, the gulf between written and spoken was made more concrete by a linguistic divide: the written word was, almost without exception, Latin, but the inhabitants of this region spoke a dialect of Old High German.¹⁸ Different social and cultural levels thus had different registers of orality and literacy — and élites could use their control of the strategic resource of literacy to entrench their own position.¹⁹

These different registers of orality and literacy articulated different social identities. Identity is never monolithic or static;

¹⁷ I follow M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1990), especially the discussion of different types of reading (170–3); P. Saenger, 'Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society', *Viator*, xiii (1982) (more wide-ranging than the title suggests); also his 'Physiologie de la lecture et séparation des mots', *Annales ESC*, xlv (1989); D. H. Green, 'Orality and Reading: The State of Research in Medieval Studies', *Speculum*, lx (1989). For solitary reading (accompanied by murmur) in monastic circles, see P. Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West*, trans. J. Contreni (New York, 1976), 109–22, 461–3, 466–7, voicing the older interpretation that monastic practice marked a decisive move away from the ancient practice of public recitation; certainly the evidence does undermine any attempt to exclude solitary meditation in the early Middle Ages. J. Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (London, 1978), esp. 15–22, 89–96, 99–101, 150–3, is a splendid introduction to reading in monastic culture. See McKitterick, *Carolingians and the Written Word*, *passim*, for lay readership and possession of books, and the role of written law; J. L. Nelson, 'Literacy in Carolingian Government', in McKitterick (ed.), *Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe*, for law and government.

¹⁸ Notker's society is thus different to the Romance world which has been at the centre of most recent discussions, where thinking on literacy has been much influenced by linguistic scholarship which has stressed that in the ninth century romance vernacular was still in essence a register of Late Latin. We need more research on the practical effects and results of the Latin–vernacular divide in the Germanic regions.

¹⁹ For recent discussions which shed light on this dimension, see J. M. H. Smith, 'Oral and Written: Saints, Miracles and Relics in Brittany, c.850–1250', *Speculum*, lxvi (1990); R. Balzaretto, 'The Monastery of San'Ambrogio and Dispute Settlement in Early Medieval Milan', *Early Medieval Europe*, iii (1994); J. L. Nelson, 'Women and the Word in the Early Middle Ages', *Studies in Church Hist.*, xxvii (1990).

individuals have sets of identities which are deployed according to context. In the Carolingian period, the culture of aristocratic society trumpeted that the Franks were God's chosen people and their empire a new Israel, a tradition with an obvious debt to the written word and above all to the Bible.²⁰ Yet this was a manufactured tradition which rested on a misrepresentation of the past. The duchy of Alemannia had emerged in modern Switzerland and southern Germany as a 'peripheral principality' of the Frankish polity long before the advent of the Carolingians; the inhabitants of pre-Carolingian Alemannia by the seventh century defined themselves as ethnically 'Aleman', an identity reflected by the redaction of a written law code. In the eighth century, Frankish and Carolingian 'reconquest' went hand in hand, the final stage with the slaughter of a significant proportion of the Aleman nobility at Cannstadt in 746 and a subsequent influx of Franks. Within the Carolingian empire, rulers dealt with the region's aristocracy as a collectivity; this ensured the continuity of the province as one of the building-blocks out of which the nascent 'Germany' of the late and post-Carolingian period was made. Historians are now sceptical about the possibility of surviving Aleman 'nationalism' ensuring the survival of Alemannia as a province.²¹ Notker, for example, was a descendent of the Aleman gentry and, when he thought about the different regions of the Carolingian empire, he saw himself as Alemannian; but

²⁰ There is some discussion of these processes in M. Innes and R. McKitterick, 'The Writing of History', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *Carolingian Culture: Emulation and Innovation* (Cambridge, 1994). On the cultural dynamics of Frankish politics, see the stimulating comments of J. L. Nelson, *The Frankish World, 750–900* (London, 1996), xiii–xxxi.

²¹ The literature is vast and complex, and best approached for the Anglophone via the judicious summaries of T. Reuter, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages, 800–1056* (London, 1991), esp. 130–5; there is also discussion in P. J. Geary, *Aristocracy in Provence: The Rhône Valley at the Dawn of the Carolingian Era* (Stuttgart, 1985), esp. 2–5. J.-P. Poly and E. Bournazel, *The Feudal Transformation, 900–1200* (London, 1991), 217–31, overestimate the 'ethnic' element. See K.-F. Werner, 'La Genèse du duchés en France et en Allemagne' (1981) and 'Les Duchés "nationaux" d'Allemagne au IX^e et X^e siècles' (1979), in his *Von Frankenreich zur Entfaltung Deutschlands und Frankenreichs* (Sigmaringen, 1984). Useful on the St-Gallen experience is R. Sprandel, *Das Kloster St. Gallen in der Verfassung des karolingischen Reiches* (Forschungen zur oberrheinischen Landesgeschichte, vii, Freiburg, 1958), esp. 9–27. Fundamental on Carolingian conquest is the work of M. Borgolte, *Geschichte der Grafschaften Alemanniens in fränkischer Zeit* (Vorträge und Forschungen Sonderband, xxxi, Sigmaringen, 1984); also his *Die Grafen Alemanniens im merovingischen und karolingischen Zeit: Eine Prosopographie* (Sigmaringen, 1986); see also the useful essays in F. Quarthal (ed.), *Alemanni und Ostfranken im Frühmittelalter* (Veröffentlichung des Alemannisches Instituts Freiburg-im-Breisgau, xlviii, Bühl and Baden, 1984).

this identity is compatible with an unquestioning acceptance of Frankish politics. When Notker wrote about the framework of public politics, about rulers and bishops, he identified himself with the Franks.²² That is, by the Carolingian period 'Aleman' and 'Frank' were not opposing or mutually exclusive identities: the one related to a European social and political stage; the other to a provincial tradition of collective action. Thus, Notker's sense of being Alemannian is clearest when he was writing about local events or customs.²³ It is unclear whether historical traditions about a specifically Aleman past survived, although Notker did preserve some priceless pieces of information about the later stages of the history of pre-Carolingian Alemannia.²⁴ The very paucity of our knowledge of the area's early history reflects the fact that whatever was remembered in the ninth century was remembered without the aid of writing. Even Notker's *Gesta Karoli*, although full of very local material, places its discussion in a resolutely Frankish frame: it is equivalent to a twelfth-century English historian omitting all reference of the Anglo-Saxons. This is largely because, in writing a work on Charlemagne, Notker was placing his literary persona in the framework of public politics which was dominated by Frankish

²² Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, I:10 (ed. Haefele, 13), is the only mention of Alemannia, in a list of Charlemagne's dominions; politics is discussed in terms of the Franks. But Notker does demonstrate a sense of local, 'Alemannian' identity: see H.-W. Goetz, *Strukturen der spätkarolingischen Epoche im Spiegel der Vorstellungen eines zeitgenössischen Mönches: Eine Interpretation des 'Gesta Karoli' Notkers von Sankt Gallen* (Bonn, 1981), 11–16; see, for example, Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II:12 (ed. Haefele, 74–5), for a *vir de Durgowe* (man of Thurgau) as one of Notker's *comprovinciales* (compatriots).

²³ For Notker's sense of distinct local custom, see *Gesta Karoli*, I:32 (ed. Haefele, 44–5): a deacon at Aachen continues to follow *consuetudinum cisalpinorum* (southern alpine custom; for this as Notker's term for his area, cf. I:10, 13, and II:17, 81). This parallels the legal evidence which shows a sense of unwritten and vernacular Alemannian custom, and also the continuing influence of the Alemannian law code: see, for example, *Die Urkunden Ludwigs des Deutschen*, ed. P. Kehr, 2 vols. (Monumenta Germaniae Historica [hereafter MGH], *Diplomata regum Germaniae ex stripe Karolinorum*/Die Urkunden der deutschen Karolinger I, cxxiv, Berlin, 1932–4), charter no. 124, for unwritten vernacular custom. There is useful discussion of the Alemannian law code in C.-D. Schott (ed.), *Beiträge zum früh-Alemannischen Recht* (Veröffentlichung des Alemannischen Instituts Freiburg-im-Breisgau, xlii, Bühl and Baden, 1978). Although there is a general problem about the relationship between written law and practice, it is significant that monasteries like St-Gallen produced manuscripts and kept library copies of the law code.

²⁴ Significantly not in the *Gesta Karoli* but in his additions to the chronicle of Ercanbert: Ercanbert, *Breviarum regum Francorum*, ed. G. H. Pertz (MGH Scriptores, ii, Hanover, 1829), 327–9. Here, a distinct sense of 'Alemannian' identity is evident in Notker's discussion of ninth-century politics, underlining the co-existence of two tiers of identity, reflected differently in different writings for different audiences.

political identity. Notker was writing 'public history' in that he was presenting an argument about public affairs to a contemporary public.²⁵ Had he been telling a different story to a different audience he might have placed his material in a different, Alemannian framework.

II

At the time Notker wrote, Charlemagne had already been dead for three-quarters of a century. He addressed his work to one of the current generation of Carolingians, Charlemagne's great-grandson, Charles the Fat. The *Gesta Karoli* can be read as royal counsel, a 'mirror for princes' based on historical examples.²⁶ Recent scholarship has stressed the underlying clarity of its intellectual vision and found coherent ideas about the correct ordering of society, church and politics.²⁷ That these qualities should need such concerted demonstration is no surprise to any reader of Notker. The humour and anecdotal style which are his hallmarks encourage a negative judgement of his abilities. However, David Ganz, in the most sympathetic discussion, has stressed the degree to which the chaotic surface of the *Gesta Karoli* was itself an authorial choice. Notker was engaged in a conscious reaction against the neat classicizing order of Einhard's *Vita Karoli* (*Life of Charlemagne*), the model for medieval royal biographers. Notker was presenting history as a confusing mass of events which could only be understood in terms of divine agency — always there, but often difficult for mortals to comprehend.²⁸

²⁵ I borrow the term from J. L. Nelson, 'Public Histories and Private History in the Work of Nithard', in her *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge, 1986), esp. 208. See also K.-F. Werner, 'Gott, Herrscher und Historiograph: Die Geschichtsschreiber als Interpret des Wirken Gottes in der Welt und Ratgeber der Könige, 4–12 Jht.', in E.-D. Hehl, H. Seibert and F. Staab (eds.), *Deus qui mutat tempora: Festschrift A. Becker* (Sigmaringen, 1987).

²⁶ H. Löwe, 'Das Karlsbuch Notkers von St. Gallen und sein zeitgeschichtlicher Hintergrund', *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Geschichte*, xx (1970), is the best discussion of this element. See also Goetz, *Strukturen*, 98–113; T. Siegrist, *Herrscherbild und Weltansicht bei Notker Balbulus: Untersuchungen zu den Gesta Karoli* (Geist und Werk der Zeiten, viii, Zurich, 1963), 71–108.

²⁷ See Goetz, *Strukturen*, 69–84; Siegrist, *Herrscherbild und Weltansicht bei Notker Balbulus*, 109–44; H. Löwe, 'Von Theodorich dem Grossen zu Karl dem Grossen', *Deutsches Archiv für die Erforschung des Mittelalters*, ix (1951), 399–400.

²⁸ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, ed. O. Holder-Egger (MGH Scriptores rerum Germanicum [hereafter SRG], Hanover, 1911). See D. Ganz, 'Humour as History in Notker's *Gesta Karoli Magni*', in E. B. King (ed.), *Monks, Friars and Nuns in Medieval Society* (Sewanee, 1988). Cf. the works of the sixth-century bishop, Gregory of Tours, who

But, if the *Gesta Karoli* is an intellectual work which needs to be read in the context of 'high thought', Notker's style and content invite us to ask whether Latin culture was hermetically sealed. After all, early medieval texts were 'soft' — in that in a manuscript culture which rested on public reading the audience was far more active in determining the content of a work than in modern literary culture. Contact with the audience was far more direct and personal; authors were not addressing an impersonal literary public but a series of collectivities *as* collectivities.²⁹ Content could change with context in manuscripts, the shifting combinations (and often compilations) of material placed together, and the relative freedom enjoyed by scribes to adapt or edit the texts they copied. Modern editorial culture — the process by which medieval texts are reconstructed — reifies medieval reality in creating *a* text.³⁰ A 'soft' text is not necessarily a closed literary world, nor are our expectations of a fixed — or even a finished — work always helpful.³¹ This should encourage us to place this author and his work in a variety of oral contexts and to adduce the processes by which information included in the *Gesta Karoli* was transmitted to him. While the material as we now have it is very different in its context, phrasing and presentation to pristine oral tradition, its content still admits analysis.

An anecdote in the *Gesta Karoli* graphically demonstrates the interpretative problems. Notker recounts a meeting between

(n. 28 cont.)

could have written classical *historiae* but instead shows the confusing nature of earthly events, explainable only in terms of divine agency: G. de Nie, *Views from a Many-Windowed Tower: Studies of Imagination in the Works of Gregory of Tours* (Amsterdam, 1986); Goffart, *Narrators of Barbarian History*, 112–234. For comments on Notker's anecdotal style, see H. Löwe, review of H.-J. Reischmann, *Die Trivialisierung des Karlsbildes der Einhard-Vita in Notkers Gesta Karoli Magni* (unpublished dissertation, Constance, 1984), *Mittelalterliches Jahrbuch*, xxi (1986); F. Lošek, 'Die Spinne in der Kirchendecke — Eine St.Galler Klostergeschichte (Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, 1, 32)', in Scharer and Scheibelreiter (eds.), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*. The anecdotal style was something of a St-Gallen tradition: cf. Ratpert, *Casus Sancti Galli*, ed. G. Meyer von Knonau, *Mitteilungen zur vaterländischen Geschichte*, xiii (St-Gallen, 1872), or I. von Arx (MGH Scriptores, ii, Hanover, 1829), 59–74; also Ekkehard IV, *St. Galler Klostergeschichte*, ed. H. F. Haefele (Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters — Freiherr vom Stein-Gedächtnis, x, Darmstadt, 1980). I must thank Mayke de Jong for her suggestions on this point.

²⁹ Cf. A. Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception*, trans. J. M. Bak and P. A. Hollingsworth (Cambridge, 1988), esp. 1–38.

³⁰ For some useful comments, E. van Houts, 'Medieval Latin and Historical Narrative', in R. I. A. Nip *et al.* (eds.), *Media Latinatis: Festschrift L. J. Engels* (Instrumenta Patristica, xxviii, Turnhout, 1996).

³¹ Cf. the comment of Nelson, 'Public Histories and Private History', 227. Notker's work finishes in mid-anecdote and was supposed to have another book.

Charlemagne and his grandson at which Charlemagne prophesied a great future for the boy. The prophecy, Notker tells us, is impossible to translate from the vernacular, so he has borrowed a suitable Latin saying from the *Vita Ambrosii* (*Life of Ambrose*).³² Can we do anything with this passage other than reject it as a literary invention? Modern concepts of accurate reporting are a hindrance here: invented direct speech as practised in ancient rhetoric was enthusiastically embraced by medieval writers.³³ But Notker's disarming directness in his use of the technique here underlines his sense of history as exegetical, repetitive and divinely structured. His concept of literary truth is centred around the conformity of reported actions to remembered textual models.

The *Gesta Karoli* needs first to be placed in the context of its composition and subsequent performance. In terms of its ultimate literary structure, Notker's work rests firmly on Einhard's division of his biography of Charlemagne into three books.³⁴ Einhard's *Vita Karoli* underpinned the whole Charlemagne tradition as it was to develop across Europe; it reverberated around St-Gallen as public reading: 'If Einhard was a school text and Notker a schoolmaster, it seems reasonable that Notker's *Gesta* represents his exposition of Einhard'.³⁵ Notker takes his themes from Einhard but supplies anecdotal demonstrations. Thus, Notker begins with Charlemagne's patronage of scholars and Alcuin and the court school; Einhard had stressed the importance of the court in revitalizing culture, and named Alcuin.³⁶ This

³² Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II:10 (ed. Haefele, 65–7). The meeting is ahistorical.

³³ See R. Ray, 'The Triumph of Graeco-Roman Rhetorical Assumptions in Pre-Carolingian Historiography', in C. Holdsworth and T. P. Wiseman (eds.), *The Inheritance of Historiography, 350–900* (Exeter, 1986); R. Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1991), for general comments.

³⁴ Ganz, 'Humour as History', is the crucial discussion of the relation to Einhard. The precise workings of Einhard's own division are a controversial matter which I will not discuss here. A copy of Einhard's *Vita Karoli* had found its way to St-Gallen from the personal library of Abbot Grimald: P. Lehmann, *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge Deutschlands und der Schweiz I: Die Bistümern Konstanz und Chur* (Munich, 1918), no. 20, 87–9; B. Bischoff, 'Bücher am Hofe Ludwigs des Deutschen und die Privatbibliothek des Kanzlers Grimalt', in his *Mittelalterliche Studien III* (Stuttgart, 1981), 199, 200 (on Einhard).

³⁵ Ganz, 'Humour as History', 173. For the Charlemagne tradition, R. Folz, *La Souvenir et la légende de Charlemagne dans l'empire germanique médiéval* (Paris, 1950); P. Lehmann, 'Das literarische Bild Karls des Großen vornehmlich im lateinischen Schriftum des Mittelalters', in his *Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 7 vols. (Stuttgart, 1959), i. Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 154–62, give a stimulating account for the Anglophone.

³⁶ See Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, I:1–3 (ed. Haefele, 1–5).

parallelism of content, and the agreement between the two texts on particular details or individuals, is absolutely typical of the relationship between the two works.³⁷ The importance of written texts as the points of departure which structure Notker's anecdotes is confirmed by similar parallels between Notker and two other works of royal history, the Royal Frankish Annals (an account of the early Carolingian rulers written at Charlemagne's court)³⁸ and the biography of Charlemagne's heir, Louis the Pious, written by Thegan.³⁹ That is, public reading of these familiar texts underpins the structure of Notker's work, and Notker's technique of composition rests on an interaction between performed text and remembered story.

This explains some of the more problematical stories. An old soldier had told Notker when he was a boy about Charlemagne's campaigns in the middle Danube against the Avars. In the *Gesta Karoli*, Notker retells some of these tales, describing how the Avars' lands were fortified by nine rings of stockades each hundreds of miles apart.⁴⁰ This description is not only ahistorical,

³⁷ For example, Einhard includes a chapter on Charlemagne's building projects and mentions the Aachen palace and a bridge over the Rhine at Mainz; Notker includes a pointed anecdote about public building, and mentions in particular Aachen and the Mainz bridge: see *ibid.*, I:30, 40–1; cf. Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c.17 (ed. Holder-Egger, 20). Examples could be multiplied.

³⁸ Notker illustrates Charlemagne's relationship with Byzantium by telling a story about the visit there of a local bishop. While this is the kind of tradition which would be preserved locally, Notker (unusually) names the bishop in question, suggesting that his memory of the tradition, and his feeling that it was a significant event worth including in a public history, rests upon a notice of it in the Royal Annals: *ibid.*, II:6, 54–6; *Annales Regum Francorum* (s.a. 812), ed. F. Kurze (MGH SRG, Hanover, 1895), 136. There is no explicit notice in the St-Gallen library lists of a text of the annals, but the work was normally transmitted as part of a historical compilation (so possibly part of the book on Frankish history, Lehmann, *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge*, no. 16, 76). Einhard and Thegan, both read at St-Gallen, more often than not had the annals appended to them in manuscript.

³⁹ Thegan, *Gesta Hludovici Imperatoris*, ed. G. H. Pertz (MGH, Scriptores, ii, Hanover, 1829). Haefele notes some verbal parallel between Notker and Thegan at 91, n. 1, and thematic points of departure at 91, n. 4 and 92, n. 2. Where Thegan's most memorable passage describes Louis 'never baring his teeth in a smile' in the midst of festivities, Notker tells a story which centres on Louis facing down a jester, not laughing at his joke: Thegan, *Gesta Hludovici Imperatoris*, c.19 (ed. Pertz, 595); Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II:21 (ed. Haefele, 91–2). The joke is explicated by H. Haefele, 'Studien zu Notker's *Gesta Karoli*', *Deutsches Archiv für die Erforschung des Mittelalters*, xv (1959). When Notker turns to discuss Louis, he begins, '*Adhuc referendum est de bonitate Hludovici prioris*': *Gesta Karoli*, II:20 (ed. Haefele, 90); Thegan's work was entitled *de bonitate Hludovici imperatoris* in the library list (Lehmann, *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge*, 89). For St-Gallen's acquisition of Thegan, see Bischoff, 'Bücher am Hofe', 211.

⁴⁰ Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II:1 (ed. Haefele, 49–51).

but also reliant upon a literary source: there is a clear link with Virgil's account of the nine rings of the Styx in the *Aeneid* (6.438–9).⁴¹ However, if just one classical work had reverberated around St-Gallen's schoolroom, that work would have been the *Aeneid*; and as the Franks saw themselves as descendants of Trojans and Romans, Virgil's work was of interest to a wider audience.⁴² We cannot know where the description of Avar fortifications became coloured by the *Aeneid*, but the process of interaction is clear. Oral traditions were coloured by written models and were subject to literary interference. This was a two-way process. Not only were oral traditions arranged according to literary models, but texts could also be understood with reference to oral tradition.

One of the most complex of Notker's anecdotes is his account of Charlemagne's rebellious illegitimate son, Pippin, who Notker knew of through Einhard. Notker gives a slapstick account of the discovery of Pippin's plot against Charlemagne, making him a hunchback (as did Einhard) and also a dwarf. He (wrongly) has Pippin exiled to St-Gallen, then explains that exile to St-Gallen was an especially severe punishment as the abbey was extremely poor.⁴³ Notker was well aware from his written sources that Pippin was actually imprisoned at Prüm. How does Pippin get to Prüm? Another conspiracy against Charlemagne is discovered (Notker again got the details from Einhard), whereupon Charlemagne seeks Pippin's advice about what punishment to mete out to the guilty men. When Charlemagne's messengers find Pippin gardening at St-Gallen, he answers cryptically: 'If Charlemagne had thought my advice worth having he would not

⁴¹ L. Halphen, *Études critiques sur l'histoire de Charlemagne* (Paris, 1921), 134. W. Pohl, *Die Awaren: Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa, 567–822* (Munich, 1988), 306–8, discusses the historical *hring*; it seems clear that Notker had heard the term but misunderstood what it actually signified, looking for a literal 'ring'.

⁴² For Virgil at St-Gallen, see Lehmann, *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge*, 89. Grimald was enthusiastic enough a Virgilian to have the *Georgics* and the *Eclogues* copied: Bischoff, 'Bücher am Hofe', 197. Little work has been done on the reception of the Trojan origin legend. In some manuscripts Trojan and Roman history was presented as a precursor to Frankish history, and it was certainly read by some lay aristocrats. For its importance, see Innes, 'Teutons or Trojans?'.

⁴³ Notker plays on St-Gallen's poverty throughout his work, aiming to secure imperial patronage: in addition to the story of Pippin, see the still more pointed story at II:10, 66–7. Notker's belief that Pippin was held at St-Gallen was almost certainly mistaken: Pippin the Hunchback was not commemorated in the necrology at St-Gallen; neither Ratpert nor Ekkehard in their house-histories mention him, and at this date St-Gallen was distant from the centres of royal power.

treat me so harshly. I have no advice to give. Tell him just this: what you have found me doing . . . I am digging up useless weeds so that vegetables may grow more freely'. Of course, while the messengers are perplexed, Charlemagne saw the point: kill all the conspirators (the weeds) to clear space to reward the loyal (the vegetables). Pippin's reward for his good counsel was a transfer to Prüm, a rich, royal abbey.⁴⁴ This story is borrowed from classical literature, via Livy and Valerius Maximus.⁴⁵ The whole episode could be reduced to a cut-and-paste of scraps of Einhard, the Royal Annals and Valerius, with Notker's vivid imagination acting as the glue. There is no *need* for *any* oral tradition here. However, there is reason to suppose an oral tradition linking a Pippin to St-Gallen. Notker's literary construction was thus a mistaken attempt to identify shadowy local memories with a figure from written historiography.⁴⁶

Could the precise construction of oral and literate traditions which is typical of Notker have occurred outside a monastery? We cannot assume that half-remembered literary motifs were totally alien to the aristocracy or make a hard-and-fast distinction between a literate monastery and an oral, secular world (especially given the constant interaction between the two). If the paradigm of public reading defining oral tradition upon which Notker's work rests is 'monastic', this simply underlines the proximity between the monastery and the traditions of the society beyond its walls — for many of Notker's oral traditions are in origin clearly 'extra-monastic'. Literary 'interference' of this type can take place after quite limited or shallow exposure to written traditions, especially where writing is identified with a social élite or a conquering group.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II:12 (ed. Haefele, 71–4).

⁴⁵ Ganz, 'Humour as History', 178.

⁴⁶ Local tradition remembered a different Pippin, like the Hunchback a son of Charlemagne: see K. Schmid, 'Zu historischen Bestimmung des ältesten Eintrags im St. Galler Verbrüderungsbuch', in *Alemannica: Festschrift für Bruno Boesch* (Alemannisches Jahrbuch 1973–5, Bühl and Baden, 1976), 522–6. Note also the inclusion of Pippin the Hunchback in the St-Gallen confraternity book: P. Piper, *Libri Confraternium St. Gallenses, Augiensis, Fabariensis* (MGH, Libri Memoriales, I, Berlin, 1884), 15; for a reproduction, see Schmid, 505, with commentary at 503–11. I suggest that Notker elided the two obscure eponymous half-brothers and identified local memories of a Pippin, son of Charlemagne, with the Hunchback in Einhard: cf. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance*, 155–7, for a similar case of elision.

⁴⁷ See the fascinating comments of Henige, *Oral Historiography*, 81–7, which centre on the problems faced by the ethnohistorian in finding oral tradition uncontaminated by this type of influence.

III

The second oral context in which Notker can be placed concerns the sources of his information. Notker has been judged by posterity a 'gossiping monk'.⁴⁸ This is very close to the literary persona that he projects of a toothless stammerer (itself a reworking of the description of Einhard as a tiny man in the preface to the *Vita Karoli*).⁴⁹ The *Gesta Karoli* was meant to be read as a collection of orally transmitted stories, as monastic gossip. In his now-lost preface, Notker acknowledged three principal sources.⁵⁰ He used the word *auctores* to describe these oral testifiers. In the surviving portion of his text, two of these authorities are identified by name: he acknowledged his fellow monk and companion since boyhood, Werinbert, as the source for the information contained in Book I, which dealt with Charlemagne's care for learning and the church; for Book II, a discussion of the martial deeds of Charlemagne, his source was Adalbert, Werinbert's father. Notker had been reared alongside Werinbert in Adalbert's household, and the two boys had entered the monastery together. Adalbert had entertained the young Notker with soldiering tales: 'When I was a child he was already a very old man. He brought me up and used to tell me about these events. I was a poor pupil, and often used to run away, but in the end he forced me to listen'.⁵¹ There is a neat parallel between Notker's attribution of an informant for each book and the subject matter: Werinbert represents St-Gallen's tradition about Charlemagne's church policy; Adalbert martial reminiscence about secular politics.⁵² Notker's third book, which was to have dealt with Charlemagne's notoriously complex personal and familial life, is lost. Although the surviving text does not explicitly identify the informant for this section, Notker does specifically acknowledge his debt to his own erstwhile master (*domnus*), Grimald, sometime abbot of St-Gallen and a key figure at the courts of Louis the Pious and Louis the German; indeed, Notker makes a link between Grimald and Charlemagne's court.⁵³ Grimald was the main link with the

⁴⁸ Most famously by Halphen, *Études critiques*, 104–42.

⁴⁹ See Ganz, 'Humour as History', 173, n. 14.

⁵⁰ Notker refers back to his introductory preface in the preface to book II (48).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Cf. Siegrist, *Herrscherbild und Weltsicht bei Notker Balbulus*, 18, on Werinbert and Adalbert as *Klostertradition* and *Volksmund*.

⁵³ He claims that Grimald had been educated by Alcuin, Charlemagne's own favourite advisor in Notker's eyes (I:8, 11). That Ekkehard, *Casus Sancti Galli*, c.33

courtly world of high politics: where Werinbert symbolized the monk and Adalbert the soldier, Grimald became a type for the courtier.

Einhard had framed his *Vita Karoli* within the context of relations between lord and man, as a repayment to a generous patron (*nutritor*) to assure continued remembrance.⁵⁴ Notker plays the same theme but in a new key: that of monastic memory. At the beginning of Book II he remembers Adalbert. But as Notker remembered Adalbert he also remembered his son Werinbert in a far more immediate way. Notker tells us that his closest friend 'died seven days ago, and on this very day, the thirtieth of May, we, his bereaved sons and disciples must pay tribute to his memory'.⁵⁵ The seventh day after a death occupied a central place in the Carolingian liturgy of death.⁵⁶ Here, the requirements of liturgical remembrance are incorporated into written history. Notker's most important reader, Charles the Fat, recognized their importance. One of the many pieces of coded guidance for Charles came in Notker's account of his house's former poverty and lack of royal patronage: Louis the German had rectified this through his munificence.⁵⁷ Charles followed Notker's hint in that he confirmed the grants made by Louis in a royal charter which was enacted on 30 May 887.⁵⁸ The date is of the utmost significance, for it was the day indicated by Notker as dedicated to Werinbert's memory.⁵⁹ The *Gesta Karoli* can thus

(n. 53 cont.)

(ed. Haefele, 76), names Iso and Marcellus as Notker's teachers need not invalidate his appellation of Grimald as his *dominus*. Note that this explicit acknowledgement of Grimald is given in the context of a story about Charlemagne's court, strengthening my hypothesis. On Grimald's political career, see D. Geuenich, 'Beobachtungen zu Grimald von St.Gallen, Erzkapellan und Oberkanzler Ludwigs des Deutschen', in H. Spilling and M. Borgolte (eds.), *Litterae Medii Aevi: Festschrift J. Autenrieth* (Sigmaringen, 1988).

⁵⁴ Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, 'Preface' (ed. Holder-Egger, 1).

⁵⁵ Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II: 'Preface' (ed. Haefele, 48).

⁵⁶ See Ekkehard, *Casus Sancti Galli*, c.44 (ed. Haefele, 100), for a nice story, involving Notker, which turns on this. For general discussion, A. Angendendt, 'Theologie und Liturgie der mittelalterlichen Toten-Memoria', in K. Schmid and J. Wollasch (eds.), *Memoria: Der geschichtliche Zeugniswert des liturgischen Gedenkens im Mittelalter* (Münster, 1984); F. Paxton, *Christianising Death: The Making of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, 1990).

⁵⁷ Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II:10 (ed. Haefele, 66–7).

⁵⁸ *Die Urkunden Karls III*, ed. P. Kehr (MGH, *Diplomata regum Germaniae ex stripe Karolinorum/Die Urkunden der deutschen Karolinger II*, 2 vols., Berlin, 1936–7), no. 159.

⁵⁹ First noticed by Löwe, 'Das Karlsbuch Notkers', 285–6. Cf. J. L. Nelson, 'History Writing at the Courts of Louis the Pious and Charles the Bald', in Scharer

be read as an attempt not only to give counsel, but also to educate the monks' patron, Charles, in their traditions.

Notker's account of Charlemagne's care for the church has long been recognized as having its roots in St-Gallen. The monastic viewpoint is apparent in the recurrent jokes on themes of episcopal pride and wealth.⁶⁰ Virtually each chapter begins, 'There was another bishop . . .', or, 'And a certain bishop . . .'. Notker is recording well-known monastic gossip and there is an expectation that readers and listeners will be familiar with much of the material.⁶¹ This was not just 'in-house' gossip, precisely because royal monasteries like St-Gallen were not cut off from the outside world.⁶² The concentration on bishops owes much to St-Gallen's own complex relationship with the nearby episcopal see of Constance, for it was through Constance that much of the gossip about neighbouring bishoprics such as Strasbourg, and above all the metropolitan see of Mainz, is likely to have come.⁶³ That St-Gallen was also bound in a community of prayer with a vast number of other churches is graphically illustrated by the abbey's confraternity book: regular messages between churches passed on the names of dead brothers and sisters whose souls were to be prayed for, and whose names were to be recorded. This kind of social interchange created a network through which the gossip about bishops and churches, which makes up much of Book I, could have been transmitted.⁶⁴

The presence of such tradition within the *Gesta Karoli* is scarcely surprising. However, we cannot see a wholly monastic tradition, least of all in the case of St-Gallen, which, after all, was 'lord and neighbour' to the lay world around it.⁶⁵ Monastic

(n. 59 cont.)

and Scheibelreiter (eds.), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, 442, on the 'Dionysian code' in Hincmar's historical advice for Charles the Bald.

⁶⁰ See most recently Goetz, *Strukturen*, 45–51.

⁶¹ Siegrist, *Herrscherbild und Weltsicht bei Notker Balbulus*, 31–9, discusses this stylistic trait.

⁶² Royal monasteries thus differ from the nunneries which form the basis of Julia M. H. Smith's stimulating study of 'The Problem of Female Sanctity in Carolingian Europe, c.780–920', *Past and Present*, no. 146 (Feb. 1995).

⁶³ Not least as Notker himself was close to Bishop Solomon of Constance: see P. Ladner, 'Notker im Spiegel seiner Urkunden', *Deutsches Archiv für die Erforschung des Mittelalters*, xli (1985).

⁶⁴ Piper, *Libri Confraternium St. Gallenses, Augiensis, Fabariensis*, for St-Gallen's place in a network of prayer, especially the formulae for its workings (143); the regular exchange of such *rotuli* has fundamental importance for our understanding of communication.

⁶⁵ Sprandel's phrase in *Das Kloster St. Gallen*, 57, cited by McKitterick, *Carolingians and the Written Word*, 79.

rules saw Benedictinism as a retreat from the world, but in a Carolingian royal monastery retreat was necessarily compromised and partial; in fact, the tension between royal needs and the ideal of retreat stands at the heart of contemporary monastic practice.⁶⁶ The intimacy of the interaction between the monastery and the world beyond its walls is illustrated by Notker's inclusion of stories about the Devil and demons. Not only do they use motifs which have often been seen as having 'popular' elements, and that certainly have affinities with folklore traditions, but Notker's recounting of them is also informed by a tradition of monastic literature discussing the Devil, indeed, by a theology of the diabolical.⁶⁷ We cannot, therefore, see the monastery as a learned island in a sea of superstition; both St-Gallen and the countryside around it shared a single culture, informed by folklore traditions and monastic theology. The label 'popular culture' is in many ways inadequate, as it implies cultural levels and discontinuities, and a definition of lay belief against a learned, 'high' culture, which simply are not present in ninth-century St-Gallen.⁶⁸

The *Gesta Karoli* allows us to identify some of the mechanisms through which this interaction between the monastery and the countryside took place. Notker recounts the experiences of craftsmen under the monastery's lordship and the occasional visits of monks and clients of the monastery to court.⁶⁹ St-Gallen's charters and literary traditions provide additional information, allowing us to locate Notker socially and demonstrating that familial contacts were assiduously maintained through his career as a monk.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ For this aspect as central to Carolingian monasticism, see Mayke de Jong, 'Carolingian Monasticism: The Power of Prayer', in R. McKitterick (ed.), *New Cambridge Medieval History II: c.700–c.900* (Cambridge, 1995); Matthew Innes, 'Kings, Monks and Patrons: Political Identity at the Abbey of Lorsch', in *Les Élités ecclésiastiques et laïques dans l'Europe carolingienne* (Lille, forthcoming).

⁶⁷ H. Haefele, 'Teufel und Dämon in den *Gesta Karoli*', *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde*, li (1955); also Goetz, *Strukturen*, 62–8.

⁶⁸ Cf. Smith, 'Oral and Written', with a good bibliography on these issues at 310–11. One fundamental critique of the model of distinct levels of 'popular' and 'high' culture is P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, 1981).

⁶⁹ Straculf, the glazier and *servus* of the monastery, working at Aachen: Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II:22 (ed. Haefele, 93). Cf. also the visit of the monk Tancho (I:29, 39), and the stories about Liutfrid, the rapacious *praepositus* at Aachen (I:31, 42–4), recognizably coming from a similar source.

⁷⁰ For example, Ekkehard, *Casus Sancti Galli*, c.29, c.43, c.79 (ed. Haefele, 70, 96–8, 164) (all stories about Notker).

The fact that Werinbert, Notker's closest monastic brother, had been Notker's childhood companion and the son of his master demonstrates that monastic and familial circles overlapped at the most significant point. Notker acknowledges the erstwhile head of the *familia* in which he grew up, Adalbert, as source for Book II as a whole. Moreover, virtually all the laity mentioned by name in the *Gesta Karoli* are members of the *familia*, the kin and clients, of Adalbert's own master, Gerold.⁷¹ Notker was well aware that this worldly history imbibed in boyhood conflicted at points with the traditions of the monastery where he spent his entire adult life. In a story about the political clout and mercifulness of Gerold's sister Hildegard and her role in the rise of one Isanbard, Notker notes that Isanbard was remembered at St-Gallen as a member of a family which had persecuted St Otmar, one of the abbey's heroes.⁷² He was thus scarcely likely to have been fondly remembered. Yet Notker goes on to recount the story of Isanbard's rise and expects Hildegard to be praised for her part in it — his note about Isanbard is an aside not a condemnation. Notker is willing to tell both sides. It has been argued that twelfth-century Cistercian monasticism used public reading to purge the secular past from the minds of converts, to reprogram memory through Biblical saturation, and so to create a new man, an internally focused monk. This is a vivid demonstration of the possibilities of monastic memory, but it is wholly alien to Notker's world.⁷³

IV

It cannot be claimed that these oral registers in Notker's work reflect the totality of oral tradition in his society. His experience

⁷¹ For Gerold: Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II: 'Preface', II:2 (ed. Haefele, 48, 51). His sister Hildegard, Charlemagne's wife: *ibid.*, I:4, I:13, I:17, II:8 (6, 17, 21, 60–1). His brother Udalrich: *ibid.*, I:13, 17. Counts Isanbard and Warin, mentioned in a story centring on Hildegard's political clout (II:8, 60–1). Gerold was *dominus* to Adalbert (II: 'Preface', 48) who is explicitly mentioned as the source for II:1 (49–51). For the prosopography of Gerold's family, see Borgolte, *Die Grafen Alemanniens*, 119–26, with full bibliography and cross-references. In English, J. B. Ross, 'Two Neglected Paladins of Charlemagne: Eric of Friuli and Gerold of Bavaria', *Speculum*, xx (1945), collects the information about Gerold's career.

⁷² Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II:8 (ed. Haefele, 60–1).

⁷³ J. Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memory: Studies in the Reconstruction of the Past* (Cambridge, 1992), 169–91. Cf. the use of the Psalter to block out classical culture in the original Benedictine rule in sixth-century Italy: Riché, *Education and Culture*, 115.

was restricted to a narrow, aristocratic and monastic world, and even then his material was selected by the literary frame within which it was recorded. Yet to deny any insight into the workings of orality and memory beyond the monastery would be to throw out the baby with the bath water. Analysis of those oral processes identified within Notker's work allows not only understanding of the mechanics of oral tradition and the ways in which the past was filtered, processed and recreated, but also a demonstration of the specific commemorative role of monastery and monk.

Notker's oral traditions are first and foremost *familial* traditions, in that they are derived from the patrimonial units in which he lived: from Adalbert's household and from St-Gallen. Our current understanding of familial identity is confined to the highest echelons of the élite: in the Carolingian period, aristocratic kin groups did not assume a legally defined fixed shape or centre on an external focus such as a castle, but coalesced electively around significant individuals as they rose to and fell from political prominence.⁷⁴ Notker's testimony is valuable as he comes from a gentry family. Yet Adalbert transmitted the aristocratic, familial identity of Gerold's kin group to the young Notker, who was no blood relation of either Gerold or Adalbert. There are clear elements in Adalbert's stories of a collective experience and identity shared by Gerold's retainers and transmitted by them in turn to their followers. Familial identity cemented collectivities of clients and followers as well as kinsmen.⁷⁵ This reinforces research which has suggested that familial structures might be important in 'vertical' integration, linking those involved in the circles of high politics with local contacts and friends.⁷⁶

The second point about familial tradition is the role of women in its creation and transmission. The political identity of Gerold's

⁷⁴ S. Airlie, 'The Aristocracy', in McKitterick (ed.), *New Cambridge Medieval History II*, and R. Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir dans le monde franc (VII^e-X^e siècles): essai d'anthropologie sociale* (Paris, 1994), provide powerful syntheses. Cf. Gerd Althoff's important discussion of 'group-creation' in early medieval society, *Verwandte, Freunde und Getreue: Zum politischen Stellenwert der Gruppenbindung im frühen Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 1990).

⁷⁵ More study of the interactions between lordship, clientage and kinship would be invaluable. These collectivities, although expressive of lordship, could condition its exercise: see the story reported by Thegan, *Gesta Hludovici Imperatoris*, c.28 (ed. Pertz, 597), where a lord is mocked by his *domestici* for his cowardice, discussed by J. L. Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (London, 1992), 60.

⁷⁶ As was demonstrated by R. [Le Jan] Hennebicque, 'Structures familiales et politiques au IX^e siècle: un group familiale de l'aristocratie franque', *Revue historique*, cclxv (1981).

familia centred on a woman: Hildegard, Gerold's sister and Charlemagne's wife from 772 until her death in 783. Hildegard appears at Charlemagne's side throughout the *Gesta Karoli*, although in reality she was just one among the emperor's series of women.⁷⁷ Many of Notker's stories turn on Hildegard's political influence. These stories have been seen as present-minded, containing coded messages for Charles the Fat and his queen, who, like Hildegard, was of Aleman descent. This makes sense within the literary context of Notker's work, although the historical basis of some of the 'Hildegard traditions' has recently been demonstrated.⁷⁸ What surely is of the utmost significance is that these stories, coded messages or not, were told about Hildegard and her kin, the relations of Gerold, Adalbert's master. St-Gallen had no real reason to remember Hildegard fondly — she was not a benefactor of the abbey and her memory was not cultivated there.⁷⁹ Her high profile in the *Gesta Karoli* can only be explained with reference to the role of Adalbert as a conduit for political anecdotes. Hildegard's importance was not informed by her gender alone: it also rests, above all, on her quite literal proximity to the political centre, her *Königsnähe*.⁸⁰ Notker's stories indicate that Hildegard was an effective dispenser of patronage to Gerold and his kin. Hildegard was, moreover, a conduit for memory as well as a focus of identity. This may have been a gender role.

⁷⁷ For Charlemagne's women, see J. L. Nelson, 'La Famille de Charlemagne', *Byzantion*, lxi (1992); also her discussion of 'Women at the Court of Charlemagne: A Case of Monstrous Regiment?', in J. C. Parsons (ed.), *Medieval Queenship* (Stroud, 1994).

⁷⁸ Cf. K. Schreiner, 'Hildegardis regina: Wirklichkeit und Legende ein karolingischen Herrscherin', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, lvii (1975), 13–15. Borgolte, *Die Grafen Alemanniens*, 151–2, demonstrates the historicity of the anecdote recorded in Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II:8 (ed. Haefele, 60–1), from the charter evidence.

⁷⁹ In contrast to the neighbouring monastery of Reichenau where she was fondly and conspicuously remembered. For the development of the cult of Hildegard, see Schreiner, 'Hildegardis regina'; R. Folz, 'Tradition et culte de Hildegarde', in P. Riché et al. (eds.), *Actes du colloque 'Autour de Hildegarde'* (Paris, 1987). It centred on abbeys where Hildegard was remembered as a patron: Reichenau, Kempten and St-Arnulf's at Metz. She was not commemorated at St-Gallen until the tenth century, that is after (as a result of?) the *Gesta Karoli*. See *MGH Necrologia Germaniae* 1, ed. F. L. Baumann (Berlin, 1888), 466: 'and the venerable Hildegard, included for the love of God', a tenth-century addition to the notice of the death of Charlemagne — evidently the date of her own death was not known at St-Gallen. See also N. Gaedeke, 'Die memoria für die Königin Hildegard', in *Actes du colloque 'Autour de Hildegarde'*, 32–4. But Ratpert had remembered Hildegard and her brother Gerold in writing before Notker: Schreiner, 'Hildegardis regina', 13.

⁸⁰ For a brief but stimulating discussion, see J. L. Nelson, 'Kingship and Royal Government', in McKitterick (ed.), *New Cambridge Medieval History* II, 399–402.

Aristocratic and royal women characteristically acted as repositories of family memory, as educators of children and intercessors for, and commemorators of, dead menfolk.⁸¹ On an aristocratic level, for instance, we have a fascinating tract of motherly advice begun in 841 by Dhuoda for a fifteen-year-old son at the court of Charles the Bald. Dhuoda presents her handbook as a substitute for the (oral) guidance she would have given had the exigencies of politics not removed her son from her presence. She gives her son a list of (paternal) relations to pray for and briefs him in family history, laying particular stress on his godfather and lord, whom, she hopes, he will eventually succeed.⁸²

Notker was no more an outside observer disinterestedly watching the transmission of family identity than a modern anthropologist in the field can gather neutral data impartially, unimplicated in a web of social relationships. After all, commemoration of kin was the *raison d'être* of Carolingian monasticism: Gerold, Adalbert and Werinbert were remembered in the necrology at St-Gallen, their souls granted prayers of intercession.⁸³ Such institutional arrangements placed family memory on a formal basis, addressing it to God as well as kin. But it did not wholly abstract memory from the kin group, as the presence of Notker and Werinbert at St-Gallen demonstrates. The oblation of children like Notker and Werinbert as monks had an important place in the continuing

⁸¹ See most memorably *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, c.23 (ed. W. H. Stevenson, Oxford, 1960, 20); cf. c.19, c.75 (23, 58); also J. L. Nelson, 'Gender and Genre in the Women Historians of the Early Middle Ages', in J. P. Genet (ed.), *L'Historiographie médiévale en Europe* (Paris, 1993), 151–2; and Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir*, 54–7, on women and memory; McKitterick, *Carolingians and the Written Word*, 223–7, on women and education. S. F. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500–900* (Philadelphia, 1984), 100–1, discusses some of the evidence about education. I am currently preparing a fuller study of the relationship between gender roles, family identity and education.

⁸² Dhuoda, *Liber Manualis*, ed. P. Riché, *Dhuoda: manuel pour mon fils* (Sources chrétiennes, ccxxv, Paris, 1975), now translated into English by C. Neel as *Handbook for William* (Lincoln, Neb. and London, 1991). For analysis, see J. Wollasch's magisterial 'Eine adlige Familie des frühen Mittelalters: Ihr Selbstverständnis und ihre Wirklichkeit', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, xxxix (1957); P. Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1984), 36–54; M. Claussen, 'God and Man in Dhuoda's *Liber Manualis*', *Studies in Church Hist.*, xxvii (1990). The stress on paternal relatives in Dhuoda's work has not been sufficiently noted by historians of family structures: here it is clear that we have a patrilineal consciousness, which suggests, at the very least, that traditional ideas about bilateral, clan-like, descent structures, as typical of the Carolingian aristocracy, must be modified to allow for malleability around 'practical kin' (Dhuoda's maternal kin were of little practical use to her in southern Gaul where she found herself after marriage).

⁸³ See Baumann (ed.), *MGH, Necrologia Germaniae* 1, 471, 474, 480.

relationships of reciprocal patronage between church and aristocratic family.⁸⁴ If the church was primarily concerned with the timeless commemoration of forefathers' souls, monks such as Werinbert also remembered stories about family exploits; if, within the family, it was primarily political tradition that was remembered, mothers such as Dhuoda also advised their sons to pray for their kin. For this reason it would be mistaken to assume tension rather than symbiosis between the roles of women and the church, or to see a historical transition from one practice to the other.⁸⁵

In the *Gesta Karoli*, Notker does not explicitly articulate the familial identity which rested upon the traditions he reworked. Rather, as he seeks to write a history of public affairs, familial and monastic traditions in his memory allow him to flesh out the bare notices of Einhard and the annals. Setting aside the familial context, Book II makes it clear that for Notker activity on military campaign granted authority to speak on public affairs. Thus, stories such as Notker's famous account Charlemagne's capture of the Lombard capital, Pavia, become the central points of political memory.⁸⁶ Notker was conscious of the implications of this particular way of constructing the past. In one of his stories he offers a 'type' for martial oral tradition. He recounts how one Eishere had entertained him with stories of spitting nine Avars at a time on his spear. Notker deconstructs Eishere for us: his name is broken down to signify *Eis*, a large part, and *here*, army. Notker's character fits his etymology: Eishere, true to his name,

⁸⁴ The seminal treatment of social interaction between church and laity was B. H. Rosenwein's study of the networks of reciprocity revealed by Cluny's charters, *To Be the Neighbour of Saint Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny's Property, 909–1049* (London, 1989); there is also much to be gleaned from the painstaking and methodologically innovative study of the Fulda material by E. Friese, 'Studien zur Einzugsbereich der Kloster von Fulda', *Die Klostersgemeinschaft von Fulda im früheren Mittelalter*, ed. K. Schmid et al., 3 vols. in 5 (Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften, viii, Munich, 1978), ii.3, 1003–1269. On child oblation, a stimulating short summary is J. L. Nelson, 'Parents, Children and the Church in the Early Middle Ages', *Studies in Church Hist.*, xxxi (Oxford, 1994), 105–12, but see above all Mayke de Jong, *In Samuel's Image: Child Oblation in the Early Medieval West* (London, 1996). One aristocratic kindred placed a boy named *Sibigelt*, 'family-offering', in 'their' monastery: see Nelson, above, 110; Friese's detailed examination, above, 1086–8.

⁸⁵ Cf. the comments of Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance*, 48–80, which, although stimulating, are mistaken in their criticism of K. Leyser's classic discussion, *Rule and Conflict in an Early Medieval Society: Ottonian Saxony* (Oxford, 1979), 63–73.

⁸⁶ Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, I:17 (ed. Haefele, 81–8). Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, 155, see this passage as unusual in tone and imply that it *might* (unlike the rest of the *Deeds*) rest on orally transmitted heroic poetry.

was a huge man — ‘it was possible to believe that he came from the line of Enoch’ — as well as a soldier.⁸⁷ He is a model for the transmission of political knowledge. Notker’s vivid reminiscences about Adalbert (also an old soldier) and Eishere may also grant priceless insight into the first stages of the practical education of young males in Carolingian society. Notker was placed by his parents in the household of a noble patron, which seems to have been the usual practice, and training in riding and weapon-bearing were central to the education of any aristocratic boy.⁸⁸ The transmission of this kind of practical knowledge would have been bound up with the kind of martial lore contained in old soldiers’ anecdotes; listening to the tales of Adalbert and Eishere was a part of being taught how to ride, hunt and fight.⁸⁹

For men of Notker’s social standing, kings were distant beings invested with supernatural power; contact with them was rare and intermittent. There was the exceptional possibility of visiting

⁸⁷ Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II:12 (ed. Haeferle, 75). The historicity of Eishere is difficult, as no Eishere appears in the St-Gallen charters either as a donor or witness; the Eisker who witnesses once, in 866, would have been a very old man indeed to have fought the Avars under Charlemagne: H. Wartmann (ed.), *Urkundenbuch der Abtei St-Gallen*, II (Zurich, 1867), no. 517. The absence is significant, as witness-lists record social standing (which is precisely what Notker implies Eishere had) and not just patronage of St-Gallen.

⁸⁸ C. Dette, ‘Kinder und Jugendliche in der Adelsgesellschaft des frühen Mittelalters’, *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, lxxvi (1994), is a useful study. For young males placed in the care of a lord, see Hraban Maur’s adaptation of Vegetius, *De Re Militari*, ed. E. Dümmler, ‘De procinctu Romanæ militiæ’, *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*, III (1872), c.3, 444; and the other evidence assembled by Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*. For training in fighting and hunting, see Nelson, ‘Parents, Children and the Church in the Early Middle Ages’, 106; and note Einhard for Charlemagne’s sons, who were educated in hunting, riding and liberal studies: *Vita Karoli*, c.19 (ed. Holder-Egger, 23). There is much stimulating material on the importance of weapon-bearing and horse-riding in lay life in K. Leyser, ‘Early Medieval Canon Law and the Beginnings of Knighthood’, in L. Fenske et al. (eds.), *Institutionen, Kultur und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter: Festschrift für J. Fleckenstein* (Sigmaringen, 1984); J. L. Nelson, ‘Ninth-Century Knighthood: The Evidence of Nithard’, in C. Harper-Bill et al. (eds.), *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. Allen Brown* (Woodbridge, 1989); J. Jarnut, ‘Die frühmittelalterliche Jagd unter rechts- und sozialgeschichtlichen Aspekten’, *Settimane di Studio (Spoleto)*, xxxi (1985).

⁸⁹ Note that Louis the Pious, like Alfred of Wessex, learned ‘ancient songs’ as well as law and fighting in his youth: Thegan, *Gesta Hludovici Imperatoris*, c.19 (ed. Pertz, 595). That Notker eventually entered the church need not harm my argument: we do not know when it was decided that he would, and there is no reason why future churchmen should not have participated in the first stages of a warrior education; they would have had to learn to ride in any case, and for the ambivalence of attitudes towards clerical hunting and fighting, see F. Prinz, *Klerus und Kreig im früheren Mittelalter: Untersuchungen zur Rolle der Kirche beim Aufbau der Königsherrschaft* (Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, II, Stuttgart, 1971).

the palace, but other than that, the fleeting visits of kings as they travelled around their kingdoms were the main interface with the ruler. Notker's political imagination focused upon this experienced regality. He admitted as much: 'I am a lazy man myself, more sluggish than a turtle, and I have never travelled to the land of the Franks, but I saw the head of the Franks, in full regalia, in the monastery of St. Gallen. Two gold-petalled flowers stuck out from his thighs. The first of these rose up so high that it was as tall as the king himself; the second, growing gradually upwards, adorned the top of his trunk with great glory and protected him as he walked'.⁹⁰ Notker's distance from the political process makes him unusual among Carolingian historians, who were more often than not courtiers and as such able to comment critically on royal policy and to undercut princely foibles.⁹¹ Notker's deportment towards royalty is wholly different from that of a royal intimate, but it may be more useful for understanding how Carolingian kingship provided a cohesive focus for a vast empire. Certainly this distance — a distance which paradoxically made royal presence, when it occurred, all the more intense and charismatic — helps explain why the campaign played such a central role in the local consciousness of public affairs. Well-placed relatives might feed information back from the court, but it was only really on campaign that the gentlemen who were the backbone of the localities were at the forefront of public politics and saw the king as more than a gleaming figure glimpsed through a crowd.

These social structures underlie Notker's treatment of politics: his work is king-centred not only because he was writing royal

⁹⁰ Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, I:34 (ed. Haefele, 47). Notker is not alone here: royal visits are the high points of monastic memory as recorded by Ratpert and Ekkehard. For some comments, see K. Schmid, 'Brüderschaften mit den Mönchen aus der Sicht des Kaiserbesuchs im Galluskloster vom Jahre 883', in H. Maurer (ed.), *Churrätisches und St. Gallisches Mittelalter: Festschrift Otto P. Clavadetscher* (Sigmaringen, 1984); for a stimulating treatment of the making of royal charisma, J. L. Nelson, 'The Lord's Anointed and the People's Choice: Carolingian Royal Ritual', in D. Cannadine and S. Price (eds.), *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1987). For the poems specially composed for recitation in greeting the king on each visit to St-Gallen, see W. Bulst, 'Susceptula regum: Zur Kunde deutschen Reichsaltertümer', in his *Lateinisches Mittelalter: Gesammelte Beiträge* (Supplement zu den Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, philosophische Klasse K3, Heidelberg, 1987). Note especially Notker's poem for Louis the German in 857 (139–44); significantly, this is the visit recounted in *Gesta Karoli*, I:34 (ed. Haefele, 47).

⁹¹ For courtier's history, see Nelson, 'History Writing at the Courts of Louis the Pious and Charles the Bald'.

counsel, but also because political experience and political imagination were themselves king-centred. Local élites were far less fully integrated into the structure of royal politics when kings only rarely raised armies or visited, and, if royal charisma was thus not projected, political identity was likely to crystallize around other foci. Consequently, in post-Carolingian Italy and southern France a strong tradition of legal activity, resting on a dedicated infrastructure staffed by specialists, supplied a social memory and a usable past, which distant kings could not.⁹² In contrast, this type of law-based social memory was absent north of the Alps. Here, churches busily prepared house-histories and cartularies, but their institutional memories could not envelop all social relationships: in a world where the law was unprofessionalized and long-term legal memory remained the prerogative of church archives, it could not provide a collective past.⁹³ North of the Alps personal bonds leading eventually to the court remained ubiquitous even through the tenth century and kings were therefore the subject of political imagination.

The strength of the bonds between local élite and ruler is demonstrated by the Frankish, Carolingian framework within which the stories told by Adalbert took place. Hildegard had been married by Charlemagne to cement his rule over the province precisely because she was a descendent of the pre-Carolingian, Aleman, ducal dynasty. Yet Notker and subsequent generations did not remember her as such. This is not merely a function of Notker's editorial activity, because the stories themselves all turn on proximity to Charlemagne, not Aleman ancestors. Indeed, by the twelfth century the Aleman ancestors were wholly forgotten and, in local memory, Hildegard and her kin were Frankish interlopers who owed all to Carolingian patronage.⁹⁴ The utility of a political identity rested upon its ability to

⁹² Wickham, 'Lawyer's Time'; also T. N. Bisson, 'Unheroed Past: History and Commemoration in South Frankland before the Albigensian Crusades', *Speculum*, lxxv (1990).

⁹³ For house-histories: see M. Sot, *Gesta episcoporum, Gesta abbatum* (Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental, xxxvii, Turnhout, 1981) (with bibliography); for cartularies: important comments by Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance*, 81–114, on institutional memory generally, 115–33.

⁹⁴ For Hildegard as an Aleman, see Thegan, *Gesta Hludovici Imperatoris*, c.2 (ed. Pertz, 590–1), reciting a genealogy; for the politics of the marriage, see Nelson, 'Kingship and Royal Government', 400–1. For the later tradition of Hildegard's relations as Frankish interlopers, see K. Schmid, 'Eberhardus comes de Potamo: Erwägungen über das Zueinander von Pfalzort, Kirche und Adels Herrschaft', in H. Berner (ed.), *Bodman: Dorf, Kaiserpfalz, Adel*, 2 vols. (Sigmaringen, 1977), i, 325–35, on the *Ulrichsage*.

identify potential patrons at court: the Aleman past had little relevance by the ninth century as it had no place in the élite's experience of politics and kings. Thus, Alemannia's pre-Carolingian history is, in effect, a palimpsest. The advent of the Carolingian dynasty, and the energetic efforts of the Carolingians to blacken the name of the Merovingian dynasty they replaced, mean that the Merovingian period has suffered in the eyes of generations of historians. In the heartland of Frankish power, written narratives about the Merovingian period survived and the history of the seventh and eighth centuries can, with painstaking care, be pieced together. However, in a peripheral province like Alemannia there was next to nothing in the way of written pre-Carolingian tradition and the political processes which integrated the local élite into a Carolingian superstructure rendered indigenous oral tradition useless in practical terms by the ninth century. Pre-Carolingian tradition therefore survived only where it maintained its utility — above all in legal custom and through the veneration of pre-Carolingian saints as local patrons.⁹⁵ The cultural dynamics of Frankish conquest, so clear in Notker's *Gesta Karoli*, are similarly illustrated by a contemporary Latin poem on Charlemagne written by an anonymous monk at Corvey in Saxony, which, like Notker's *Gesta Karoli*, works up the bare details of Einhard and the annals and focuses on the person of Charlemagne, ignoring the history of the region.⁹⁶ The oblivion to which the later Merovingians are so often consigned is a direct result of the refocusing of social memory which took place under the Carolingians.

V

It has often been argued that 'structural amnesia' is characteristic of oral tradition: that which has no utility in terms of current social institutions, which cannot legitimate, explain or educate, is forgotten in a process of natural selection.⁹⁷ Notker would have

⁹⁵ For Carolingian rewriting, the classic examples are Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, c.1 (ed. Holder-Egger, 2); *Annales Mettenses Priores*, ed. B. von Simson (MGH SRG, Hanover and Leipzig, 1909). A full-length study of the workings of the process, on the lines of Geary's discussion of the reworking of social memory around the millennium in *Phantoms of Remembrance*, is a desideratum.

⁹⁶ See B. Bischoff, 'Das Thema des Poeta Saxo', in his *Mittelalterliche Studien III* (Stuttgart, 1981); H. Beumann, 'Einhard und das karolingische Tradition in ottonische Corvey', in his *Ideengeschichtliche Studien zu Einhard und anderen Geschichtsschreibern des früheren Mittelalters* (Darmstadt, 1962); Lehmann, 'Das literarische Bild', 168–9.

⁹⁷ See, for example, Goody and Watt, 'Consequences of Literacy', 44–9.

agreed; he believed that lasting historical remembrance needed writing. In this, he followed his literary model and drew on a long literary tradition: Einhard had feared that the lack of contemporary historiographers would leave the great men of his age without a *memoria*.⁹⁸ Notker records little that stretches further than three generations into the past, and virtually nothing before the Carolingians.⁹⁹ The disappearance of pre-Carolingian, Aleman tradition might be seen to bear out the thesis of oral 'structural amnesia', but only if we admit that the process was neither automatic nor instant. Aleman tradition did not vanish immediately or totally, even though it was replaced as the political identity of the élite. Moreover, we cannot entirely reduce the differing fates of Frankish and Aleman traditions to a contrast between written and oral modes of dissemination. The triumph of Frankish tradition was due to the political context within which it operated, rather than a fundamental characteristic of its written nature; Frankish identity won because the local élite bought into the Carolingian political edifice, not because Frankish tradition was written tradition.

An ahistorical present-mindedness, to which any sense of chronological depth and diachronic development is alien, has been seen as typical of orality. To a large extent the *Gesta Karoli* lacks any sense of chronological development or historical time, but could Notker, the teacher and writer, really have had an 'oral' mindset? Notker felt he had to use written historiography to supplement oral tradition: 'I propose to base the remainder of my story on an account given to me by a man who was not in orders and had little experience of book learning. It therefore seems a good idea to remind my readers at this point of a few facts about our forefathers as they are recorded by painstaking historians'. But Notker's use of 'book-learning' does not lead to a sense of chronology or historical development. Instead, it reinforces a providential historical scheme: Rome fell because persecutions unleashed barbarian invasions; the Merovingians briefly put things right before persecuting saints and thus

⁹⁸ 'Preface', in Einhard, *Vita Karoli*, ed. Holder-Egger, 1–2; see also Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II:16 (ed. Haefele, 80–1).

⁹⁹ For this as typical of medieval historiography in general, see B. Guenée, 'Temps de l'histoire et temps de la mémoire au Moyen Âge', *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de France, années 1976–7* (Paris, 1978), using evidence from the twelfth century and later. For a Carolingian author's worries, see *Loup de Ferrières: Correspondance*, ed. L. Levillain, 2 vols. (Paris, 1930), i, no. 6, 52–6.

unleashing a new wave of 'Hunnic barbarians' (the Avars), which only Charlemagne defeated. Other than his general sense of a providential cycle of virtue rewarded followed by sins punished, the only framework within which Notker places his historical material is that of the liturgy. His explanation for the decline of the Merovingian kingdom rests on the careers of three saints venerated at St-Gallen;¹⁰⁰ similarly, other events more than three generations distant are located with reference to the lives of saints revered at St-Gallen, rather than in terms of regnal or absolute chronology.¹⁰¹ Moreover, the 'flat' nature of Notker's depiction of Charlemagne's reign is a direct result of the structure of his literary model. Einhard had deliberately eschewed a narrative of Charlemagne's life, adapting classical models to allow a thematic treatment which could highlight his subject's virtues and moral characteristics. Notker's anecdotalization of Einhard makes the thematic structure harder to spot, but it is still there. Hence, Hildegard can, quite ahistorically, appear at Charlemagne's side whenever a queen is required, even though she fulfilled that function for just eleven years of a forty-six-year reign. Charlemagne is on one occasion mixed up with Charles Martel and on another wrongly seen as the ruler who first took the Merovingians' royal title.¹⁰² This kind of conflation around central figures who become 'types' is a phenomenon often associated with oral tradition, but Notker had written sources for these events. He was determined to think of the past in terms of personal links and contacts between important figures. When Louis the German is quite implausibly made to appear before Charlemagne as a young man, or Alcuin wrongly becomes a pupil of Bede, it was not because oral tradition had distorted chronology and led to inaccuracy. In both cases, Notker had access to written sources, but chose to establish legitimacy and a direct link to the

¹⁰⁰ Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II:1 (ed. Haefele, 49) (the saints are all commemorated in Notker's martyrology). I agree with Siegrist, Ganz and Goetz that Notker was essentially an Augustinian; historiographical sources for this version of the early Middle Ages might also have included Orosius and Fredegar.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, II:1, 49, for Columbanus, Desiderius and Gallus; II:8, 61, for Otmar. The only pre-Carolingian ruler mentioned is the last Merovingian, who only appears to let the Carolingians depose him: I:10, 12-13.

¹⁰² For Hildegard, see Siegrist, *Herrscherbild und Weltsicht bei Notker Balbulus*, 13; Goetz, *Strukturen*, 13-14. For Charlemagne and Charles Martel, see Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II:14 (ed. Haefele, 77). For Charlemagne and the last Merovingian, *ibid.*, I:10, 12-13.

past by placing himself in a chain of personal contacts.¹⁰³ Rather than explaining Notker's sense of the past in terms of a putatively 'oral' mindset, it is more helpful to stress that his ideas arise from a set of interactions between written and oral tradition which centre upon public reading and establish historical links in personal terms and with reference to liturgical memory.

That it is possible to explain Notker's sense of time and his understanding of the past in terms of such social and cultural constructs, and not as direct correlates of orality or literacy, underlines the problems of seeing writing as *the* transformative factor. It is indubitable that writing is *potentially* a force for a transformation in the technological possibilities of human communication and social reproduction, but it does not act on its own, independently of social structures and other technological constraints. The 'weak' thesis is thus correct to discuss literacy in its specific historical contexts — self-evidently so, in that contextual description is a fundamental element of historical study. None the less, it is not clear that it *necessarily* conflicts with the 'strong' thesis about the transformative effects of writing, so long as the latter is correctly stated as a set of possibilities and potentialities rather than as the automatic consequences of writing or an inevitable pattern of teleological development.

Ultimately, oral tradition, unlike writing, can be very radically reshaped by changes in social, political and cultural contexts, and can fall into oblivion without acts of conscious destruction. It needs a mnemonic, a social focus for memory. The attractive scope of theories about remembered formulae underpinning poetic tradition should not lead us to underestimate the variety of mechanisms by which stories can be transmitted over time without writing, and the different functions which oral traditions can fulfil.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, remarkably few — perhaps none — of the very many oral traditions recorded by Notker can be linked to the type of epic poetry which is often thought to be the backbone of early medieval secular culture.¹⁰⁵ Once the multifaceted nature

¹⁰³ Notker, *Gesta Karoli*, II:10, I:2 (ed. Haefele, 66, 3).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. the stimulating comments on African oral history by D. W. Cohen, 'The Undefined of Oral Tradition', *Ethnohistory*, xxxviii (1989), who is particularly critical of the tendency to reduce oral tradition to royal tradition.

¹⁰⁵ See E. Ploss, 'Das 9. Jahrhundert und die Heldensage', *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, lxxxix (1970), 22–5, for an important discussion, looking at Notker. Richter, *Oral Tradition*, esp. 45–56, and *Formation of the Medieval West*, *passim*,

of oral tradition is realized, its potential to survive and flourish, even after writing is introduced becomes clear. And in a conservative cultural context (like that of the early Middle Ages) there is no inherent reason for writing to threaten or encroach upon oral practices. Do we characterize the spoken text as oral or literate? Is writing initially much more than another device which informs human memory, albeit a more permanent and less malleable one than its predecessors? We have seen from Notker how written historical texts could act as a mnemonic for orally transmitted stories about historical figures and thus underlie oral traditions. The interplay between written and oral is apparent from the development of a mythical Charlemagne to which the *Gesta Karoli* is a prime witness.¹⁰⁶ There was plenty of oral material circulating about Charlemagne in his lifetime. The oral tradition preserved in Notker is the result of an editorial process by which certain oral testimony outlived its original historical context because of its functional utility and its relationship to a social mnemonic. In this case, it is material that relates to a monastic or aristocratic identity which becomes oral tradition and is transmitted to Notker; its preservation only occurs because Charlemagne has already become a legendary figure. But Notker's traditions also survive because they relate to the agenda set out by written sources, above all by Einhard — written sources which in an important way shape the legend of Charlemagne.

Literacy and orality are both means of communication. Whereas writing is also a means of preserving knowledge over time, oral communication on its own is not. Oral tradition can rest on a whole variety of different mnemonic techniques to transmit knowledge over time; literacy on writing alone. While it clearly is useful to distinguish the different potentialities and characteristics of oral and written communications and traditions, moving from this discussion to a delineation of the characteristics of 'orality' and 'literacy', reified into categories in their own right

(n. 105 cont.)

attempt to see performers described as *scurri* or *mimi* in the sources as professional performers of oral poetry on the line of the Scandinavian *skalds*, but in Notker (e.g., I:13, 17; II:21, 92) they look rather more like court jesters. In *Formation of the Medieval West*, 142, Richter, determined to see oral poetry as the basis of early medieval culture, argues that the palace cleric who was expert both at liturgical chant and at performing *cantileva iocularia* (described by Notker, I:33, 45) was a similar individual.

¹⁰⁶ For example, Folz, *La Souvenir et la légende de Charlemagne*, 13–15; Lehmann, 'Das literarische Bild', 169–72.

as types of society or mentality, is more problematic. It involves a move from social structures to social psychology. In Notker's world both literate and oral tradition were informed by, and worked within, the same cultural parameters of vocality and commemoration. These two central practices defined a cultural order and a symbiosis between oral and literate. Later cultural change saw a shift in the interplay between oral and literate which had typified Notker's world. It should be analysed in terms of this dialectic, not as a stage in a teleological transition from 'orality' to 'literacy'.

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