

Monastic Practices of Shared Reading as Means of Learning

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Introduction

The activity of reading was, in many ways, the basis of the educational experience in the early Middle Ages and beyond, as has been long acknowledged by scholars.¹ Many studies have been dedicated to the importance of reading in the monastic world; these studies, however, tend to focus on the individual experience of the *lectio divina*, and on the way in which it was linked to meditation and, sometimes, the composition of literary works.²

¹ E. LESNE, *Histoire de la propriété ecclésiastique en France, 5, Les écoles de la fin du VIII^e siècle à la fin du XI^e* (Lille, 1940), pp. VIII-XII; M.D. CHENU, *Introduction à l'étude de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Montréal and Paris, 1950; 1993⁵: *Publications de l'Institut d'études médiévales* 11), p. 67, M. TEEUWEN, *Vocabulary of Intellectual Life in the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2003: *Études sur le vocabulaire intellectuel du Moyen Âge* 10), p. 292.

² See J. LECLERCQ, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (Paris, 1957; New York, 1996³), especially pp. 15-16; D. ROBERTSON, *Lectio divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading* (Collegeville, 2011), I. ILLICH, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon* (Chicago, 1993); and L.T. JOHNSON, *Reading Matthew with Monks: Liturgical Interpretation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Collegeville, 2015).

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The Annotated Book in the Early Middle Ages: Practices of Reading and Writing, ed. M.J. TEEUWEN and I. VAN RENSWOUDE, *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy*, 38 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), pp. 531-559.

The aim of the present contribution is to illustrate some of the ways in which reading with an educational purpose could be a shared activity, involving social interactions of different kinds.

I will focus on the early Middle Ages, analysing selected sources dating from the end of the sixth century to the end of the eleventh century, based on the assumption that from the twelfth century onwards teaching becomes increasingly characterised by structured, regulated procedures, allowing us to be quite well informed about the learning practices. In the early Middle Ages, on the other hand, the way in which teaching and learning concretely took place is less well documented and well known. I would like to argue that one of the reasons for this is the flexible, sometimes even informal, nature of the educational process in early medieval monastic contexts.

The close connection between reading and education is attested by the vocabulary used in medieval sources: *legere*, from its original meaning ‘to read’, came to indicate the educational experience, where a master read, explained and commented upon a text for the benefit of one or more pupils. A good example of this is offered by a letter sent in 1078 by Anselm, then abbot of Bec, to Maurice, a former monk and pupil of his. Anselm declares “*audivi quod legas a domino Arnulfo*”, which can be translated as “I have learned that the lord Arnoul is giving you lessons”.³ In the twelfth century, John of Salisbury even suggested to adopt a new term, *praelectio*, to describe the activity of reading in an educational context, in order to distinguish it from the reading by oneself:

Sed quia legendi verbum aequivocum est, tam ad docentis et discantis exercitium quam ad occupationem per se scrutantis scripturas, alterum, id est quod inter doctorem et discipulum communicatur, ut verbo utamus Quintiliani dicatur praelectio. Alterum quod ad scrutinium meditantis accedit, lectio simpliciter appelletur.

But because the verb *legere* is equivocal, applying to both the activity of teacher and learner and to the occupation of one who studies writings on his own, we may

³ Anselmus Cantuariensis, *Epistola 64 ad Mauritum*, in: *L'œuvre de S. Anselme de Cantorbéry*, 6, *Lettres 1 à 147: Pendant le priorat et l'abbatit au Bec*, ed. H. KOHLENBERGER and H. ROCHAIS (Paris, 2004: *L'œuvre d'Anselme de Cantorbéry* 6), p. 192. Trans. in: J. MURPHY, “The teaching of Latin as a second language in the 12th century”, in: *Studies in Medieval Linguistic Thought: Dedicated to Geoffrey L. Bursill-Hall on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday on 15 May 1980*, ed. G.L. BURSILL-HALL, E.F. K. KOERNER, H.-J. NIEDEREHE, and R.H. ROBINS (Amsterdam, 1980), pp. 159-175, at p. 168.

call the former, that is, communication between teacher and taught, by Quintilian's word *praelectio*, lecturing, and reserve the simple word *lectio*, reading, for the latter, which abuts on reflective investigation.⁴

This makes clear that, next to the notion of individual meditative reading (*lectio*), there was also a concept of relational, shared reading with an educational purpose. John represents this latter activity as based on 'communication', that is, on the transmission of knowledge through social interaction, and it is only in connection with this 'educational reading' that he uses terms directly linked to the domain of learning, such as *doctor* and *discipulus*.

The link between reading and learning was of course influenced by the crucial role attributed to the Scriptures in Christian culture, which led many authors, from saint Cyprian to John Cassian, Gregory the Great, Smaragdus and Alcuin, to develop the idea that reading was a way to hear God's voice, and therefore an important means to progress spiritually.⁵ The educational value attributed to reading did not apply exclusively to the Scriptures: the *Rule of saint Benedict* recommended reading the Fathers' commentaries of the Scriptures, Cassianus's *Collationes*, the *Lives of the Fathers*, and other works capable of edifying the reader ("*aliud quod aedificet audientes*"),⁶ and Isidore went so far as to defend the usefulness of studying grammar, if for good purposes.⁷

In monastic environments, reading was expected to be a part of daily life, at least by means of listening to someone reading.⁸ The fifth-century *Rule of the Four Fathers* mentions "ownership of books and shared exegetical activities as a part of monastic routine", as phrased by Albrecht Diem,⁹ and the *Rule*

⁴ Iohannes Saresberiensis, *Metalogicon*, c. 24, in: *Ioannis Saresberiensis Metalogicon*, ed. J.B. HALL (Turnhout, 1991: CCCM, 98), p. 51. Trans. in: John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, ed. J.B. HALL and J.P. HASELDINE (Turnhout, 2013: *Corpus Christianorum in Translation* 12), pp. 173-174.

⁵ B. STOCK, *After Augustine: The Meditative Reader and the Text* (Philadelphia, 2001), p. 105; ROBERTSON, *Lectio divina*, pp. XI-XIII.

⁶ Benedictus de Nursia, *Regula*, c. 9, in: *La Regola di san Benedetto e le Regole dei Padri*, ed. S. PRICOCO (Milano, 1995), pp. 167, 215 and 270 respectively.

⁷ "*Grammaticorum autem doctrina potest etiam proficere ad vitam dum fuerit in meliores usus assumpta*" (Isidorus Hispalensis, *Sententiarum libri tres*, c. 13, ed. in: *PL* 83, col. 688).

⁸ L. BLEACH, K. NARA, S. PROSSER, and P. SCARPINI, *In Search of the Medieval Voice: Expressions of Identity in the Middle Ages* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2009), p. 6.

⁹ A. DIEM, "The emergence of monastic schools: The role of Alcuin", in: *Alcuin of York: Scholar at the Carolingian Court*, ed. L.A.J.R. HOUWEN and A.A. McDONALD (Groningen, 1998: *Germania Latina* 3), pp. 27-44, at p. 29. See *Regula quattuor patrum*, c. 4: "*si habere videtur*

of Augustine refers to the practice of listening to someone reading aloud during meals.¹⁰ The *Rule of saint Benedict* establishes public readings during meals and offices, and even allocates time for private reading; moreover, reading appears as a crucial tool in the process of self-representation, both within the monastery and in dealing with the outside world. The *Rule* itself was, in fact, supposed to be read (and explained, since the use of the verb *legere* can indicate both activities)¹¹ often to – and by – the monks, so that they could not claim to ignore it, and to the novices at various key moments of their training.¹² Even the guests who visited the monastery were welcomed by a reading intended to edify their spirit (“*legatur coram hospite lex divina ut aedificetur*”).¹³ In this sense, reading played an important role to shape interactions within the community itself and between it and the outside world.

I have argued elsewhere that learning in monastic environments can be approached as a social process, that gradually transformed newcomers into full members through the daily social interactions that took place within the community, by means of imitation, reciprocal correction and exhortation, and participation in shared activities.¹⁴ I believe that shared reading is a typical example of such an activity, and I will illustrate it by analysing the social dynamics involved in the reading, explaining, commenting or discussing of a text in a group, as attested by some early medieval sources. Albeit a very rich source of information on educational processes, marginal annotations will not be treated here. Rather, I will focus on sources that allow us to integrate what we learn from them, helping us to understand the interplay between orality and written word in early medieval monastic educational practices.

aliquid sive in rebus sive in codicibus”, “*residentibus vero fratribus, si fuerit aliqua de Scripturibus conlatio*”, ed. in PRICOCO, *La Regola di san Benedetto e le Regole dei Padri*, p. 20.

¹⁰ Augustinus Hipponensis, *Regula tertia vel Praeceptum*, c. 3: “*cum acceditis ad mensam, donec inde surgatis, quod vobis secundum consuetudinem legitur, sine tumultu et contentionibus audite*” (“listen to the customary reading from the beginning to the end of the meal without commotion or arguments”), ed. in: G. LAWLESS, *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 84-85.

¹¹ Cf. LECLERCQ, *The Love of Learning*, p. 14.

¹² Benedictus de Nursia, *Regula* c. 66 and c. 58, pp. 262 and 242 respectively.

¹³ Benedictus de Nursia, *Regula*, c. 5, p. 232.

¹⁴ M. LONG, “High medieval monasteries as communities of practice: Approaching monastic learning through letters”, forthcoming in *Journal of Religious History*.

Epistolary sources, as has long been acknowledged, are very useful to study the social dynamics of education,¹⁵ and sometimes also offer information about reading practices. They tend to inform us, however, more of the social exchanges that followed individual reading than of oral practices such as group discussions of a text. In order to overcome this challenge, it can be useful to look at letters that offer information on the genesis of literary works which are the result of the shared reading and discussion of a text. I will now compare three such letters, written respectively at the end of the sixth century, in the first half of the eighth century, and around the middle of the ninth century.

Three Accounts of 'Discourses around Texts' in Educational Environments

The first attestation is Gregory the Great's famous representation of the genesis of his *Morals on the book of Job* in a letter to Leander, Bishop of Seville, around 591. A group of monks from Gregory's monastery of Saint Andrew had joined him during his period as papal ambassador in Constantinople, creating what has been called by Mark DelCogliano a "traveling monastery".¹⁶ The letter, which serves as prologue of the work, recalls how the addressee joined the monks' insistent demand that their former brother would explain to them the biblical book of Job, with precise requests:

Tunc eisdem fratribus etiam cogente te placuit, sicut ipse meministi, ut librum beati Job exponere importuna me petitione compellerent et, prout veritas vires infunderet, eis mysteria tantae profunditatis aperirem. Qui hoc quoque mihi in onere suae petitionis addiderunt, ut non solum verba historiae per allego-riarum sensus excuterem, sed allego-riarum sensus protinus in exercitium moralitatis inclinarem, adhuc aliquid gravius adiungentes, ut intellecta quaeque testimoniis cingerem et

¹⁵ Cf. M. MÜNSTER-SWENDSEN, "The model of scholastic mastery in northern Europe c. 970-1200", in: *Teaching and Learning in Northern Europe 1000-1200*, ed. S.N. VAUGHN and J. RUBENSTEIN (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 318-356, and P. DEPREUX, "Des liens noués lors des années de formation: observations sur les rapports entre maître et élève", in: *La culture du haut moyen âge, une question d'élites?*, ed. F. BOUGARD, R. LE JAN, and R. MCKITTERICK (Turnhout, 2009), pp. 303-314.

¹⁶ M. DELCOGLIANO, "Introduction", in: Gregory the Great, *Moral Reflections on the Book of Job*, 1, *Preface and Books 1-5*, ed. B. KERNS and M. DELCOGLIANO (Collegeville, MN, 2014: *Cistercian Studies Series* 249), p. 8.

prolata testimonia, si implicita fortasse viderentur interpositione superadditae expositionis enodarem.

It was then that you added your voice to those of the brothers, as you yourself remember, when they begged me to give an exposition of the book of Holy Job, revealing the mystery of its riches insofar as the Truth should teach me. Moreover, to this burden that they asked me to assume, they added as well that I should not only search the literal words for the allegorical sense but that I should then bend the allegorical sense to the exercise of moral action, a more serious obligation still. I should accompany what I have learned with the support of other texts from Scripture, and after these texts I should add another exposition to tie them together, when they are difficult to understand.¹⁷

Gregory never states that he was asked to teach, probably in order to show himself humble. On the contrary, he even styles himself as a pupil, explaining that the undertaking in question would only have been possible insofar as God taught him (the verb used is *infundo*, ‘to pour into’), step by step, to reveal the mystery of the text. However, this very idea shows that the explanation of the book of Job does, in fact, constitute the transmission of a knowledge which has, in turn, been received. Even in practical terms, the activity appears as the most typical kind of educational practice, where a master comments upon a text for the benefit of his pupils – although, of course, in this case the ‘pupils’ are not young boys but adult monks, and therefore the teaching can be more thorough and difficult, involving the allegorical and moral interpretation of the text as well as the explanation of its literal sense. It may be worth mentioning that Bede the Venerable (732-735), another famous teacher on which I will focus shortly, described Gregory’s explanation of the *Moralia in Job* as teaching:

Sed eundem librum, quomodo iuxta litteram intelligendus, qualiter ad Christi et ecclesiae sacramenta referendus, quo sensu unicuique fidelium sit aptandus, per XXX et V libros expositionis miranda ratione perdocuit.

¹⁷ Gregorius Magnus, *Moralia in Iob, Epistola ad Leandrum*, c. 1, in: S. Gregorii Magni *Opera, Moralia in Iob, libri I-X*, ed. M. ADRIAEN (Turnhout, 1979: CCL 143), p. 2. Trans. in: Gregory the Great, *Moral Reflections on the Book of Job*, pp. 48-49.

So in thirty-five books of exposition he taught in a marvellous manner the literal meaning of the book, its bearing on the mysteries of Christ and the Church, and the sense in which it applies to each of the faithful.¹⁸

In Gregory's account, orality is presented as the natural medium of teaching: he declares "*unde mox eisdem coram positis fratribus priora libri sub oculis dixi*" ("and so the brothers straightway sat down in front of me, and I began my oral exposition of the text").¹⁹ The teaching is recorded in writing by the monks in the forms of notes, which are subsequently revised by Gregory in order to produce a literary work. As we shall see, many monastic authors considered the note-taking of what the master said an important part of the educational experience. Gregory distinguishes between his oral explanations (for which he uses the verb *dicere*, 'to say') and proper literary composition, which took place through oral dictation (the technical verb is *dictare*). To these must be added the revision of the written text produced by the monks:

Unde mox eisdem coram positis fratribus priora libri sub oculis dixi et, quia tempus paulo vacantius repperi, posteriora tractando dictavi, cumque mihi spatia largiora suppetere, multa augens pauca subtrahens atque ita, ut inventa sunt, nonnulla derelinquens ea, quae me loquente excepta sub oculis fuerant, per libros emendando composui.

And so the brothers straightway sat down in front of me, and I began my oral exposition of the text. When I found more leisure I dictated a commentary on the later chapters of the book. Still later, a greater amount of available time allowed me to edit the notes taken while I was speaking.²⁰

Gregory shows an almost philological preoccupation in explaining not only how the book came to be, but also how it was influenced by the circumstances in which it was produced. In particular, he explains that he did not revise the third part of the book because of the lack of time, and left it as it was, a simple transcription of what he had said. The theme of the interplay between oral and written is crucial, since in referring to the first two parts of his work Gregory

¹⁸ Beda Venerabilis, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, II, c. 1, in: *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. B. COLGRAVE and R.A.B. MYNORS (Oxford, 1969: *Oxford Medieval Texts*), pp. 126-127.

¹⁹ Gregorius Magnus, *Moralia in Iob, Epistola ad Leandrum*, c. 2, p. 3. Trans. in: Gregory the Great, *Moral Reflections on the Book of Job*, pp. 49-50.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

describes his efforts to make the text as homogenous as possible, striving to adapt what had been produced in different ways – and failing to do so in the final part, possibly because of his election as pope:

Multa augens pauca subtrahens atque ita, ut inventa sunt, nonnulla derelinquens ea, quae me loquente excepta sub oculis fuerant, per libros emendando composui. Quia et cum postrema dictarem, quo stilo prima dixeram, sollicite attendi. Egi ergo, ut et ea quae locutus sum studiosa emendatione transcurrens quasi ad similitudinem dictatus erigerem et ea quae dictaveram non longe a colloquentis sermone discreparent [...]; quamvis tertiam huius operis partem, ut colloquendo protuli, paene ita dereliqui, quia, cum me fratres ad alia pertrahant, hanc subtilius emendari noluerunt.

Thus I added a great deal of material while removing very little and leaving most of it exactly as I found it; in this way I formed the material into books. While I was dictating the later parts, I remained conscious of the style in which I had spoken the earlier parts, and I worked in such a way that I could correct my spoken words so carefully as to transform them into a virtual likeness of the words later dictated, and the dictated words then did not seem greatly different from those I had spoken. [...] The third part, however, is another matter. I left it almost as it was, that is, as I spoke it. In getting me to speak of other matters the brothers virtually refused to allow me to correct the earlier draft further.²¹

What is particularly interesting for the purpose of the present article is that Gregory represents the activity as dialogical and interactive, explaining that the monks' requests shaped the discourse and the resulting literary work: "*quibus nimirum multa iubentibus dum parere modo per expositionis ministerium, modo per contemplationis ascensum, modo per moralitatis instrumentum volui*" ("they certainly demanded a great deal; I so tried to meet their wishes by explaining the literal sense, or the higher sense tending to contemplation, or a moral precept").²² This kind of teaching emerges therefore as flexible and influenced by the active role of the learners, whom Gregory represents not only as shaping the discourse through their questions, but also as the origin of the inspiration for the work itself.

Of course, it must be considered that this representation is influenced by the need to show humility and to represent the literary work as the product of

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

someone's insistent request, in accordance with a long-lived *topos*.²³ Moreover, the fact that the recipients of this teaching were adults makes more plausible the active role attributed to them. This is not, however, a unique case. As I will try to show, other early medieval sources as well attest the idea that monastic teaching had to be adapted to the circumstances and the individuals involved, that the learners could (and often did) play an active role, and that the dynamics of the social interactions were a very important element of the learning process.

Another early medieval account of monastic education which resulted in literary production can be found in the letter addressed in 735 by a pupil of Bede, Cuthbert, to one of his former fellow-students, Cuthwin, to inform him of the death of their former master. This letter offers an affectionate representation of the great scholar's last moments, in which teaching was crucial. Cuthbert recounts that Bede, whom he calls "beloved father and our master" ("*dilectus pater ac noster magister*"), continued to give daily lessons ("*nobis suis discipulis quotidie lectiones dabat*") despite the illness he suffered from.²⁴ He describes the sadness that the knowledge of Bede's grave conditions brought to the disciples during their activities – that is, during their reading: "*altera vice legimus, altera ploravimus, imo semper cum fletu legimus*" ("we read and wept by turns, or rather, we wept continually as we read"). Once again, reading is presented as the fundamental activity of the pupils, and one which is carried out collectively.

All the actions of Bede are represented as motivated by the desire to teach and to offer to his pupils, whom he calls "my children", something useful to read – that is, to learn:

In istis autem diebus duo opuscula multum memoria digna, exceptis lectionibus quas cotidie accepimus ab eo et canu Psalmorum, facere studuit, id est a capite Evangelii sancti Iohannis in nostram linguam ad utilitatem ecclesiae Dei convertit, et de libris Rotarum Isidori episcopi exceptiones quasdam, dicens: "Nolo ut pueri mei mendacium legant, et in hoc post meum obitum sine fructu laborent".

During those days there were two pieces of work worthy of record, beside the lessons which he gave us every day and the chanting of the Psalter, which he de-

²³ E.R. CURTIUS, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. C. BURROW and W.R. TRASK (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford, 2013: *Bollingen Series*, 36), p. 85.

²⁴ Guthbertus, *Epistola de obitu Bedae*, ed. in: *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, p. 580.

sired to finish: the Gospel of saint John, which he was turning into our mother tongue for the great benefit of the Church [...] and a selection from Bishop Isidore's book *On the Wonders of Nature*, for he said: "I cannot have my children learning what is not true, and losing their labour on this after I am gone".²⁵

Cuthbert, whose purpose in this letter is to give an idealised portrait of Bede, possibly functional to his canonisation, recollects that even as his conditions worsened, Bede continued to teach and dictate, explaining that he felt the need to pass on all he could to his pupils before dying: "*totum tamen illum diem docebat, et hilariter dictabat, et nonnunquam inter alia dixit: 'Discite cum festinatione; quia nescio quamdiu subsistam, et si post modicum tollet me Factor meus'*" ("but he went on teaching all that day and dictating cheerfully, and now and then said among other things, 'Learn quickly, I know not how long I shall endure, and whether my Maker will not soon take me away'"). In the account, one of the disciples addresses him by saying: "*Adhuc, magister dilectissime, capitulum unum deest; et videtur mihi difficile tibi esse plus te interrogare*" ("There is still one chapter short of that book you were dictating, but I think that it will be hard on you to ask any more questions"). This suggests that the literary composition in question was the product of Bede's teaching, and, more precisely, of his interactions with the students. Much as in the case of Gregory's explanation of the book of Job, it is possible to describe this teaching as a shared discourse, ultimately leading to the production of a text which can be considered the fruit of a collaborative effort, both on an intellectual and a practical level.

A less well-known figure is that of Ercanbertus, a monk at Fulda who around 846 composed a commentary on the Gospel of John, which records his master's teaching on the subject and provides us with a third attestation of oral practices of teaching by means of commenting upon a text. In the letter that serves as prologue for the work he explains that, working from his memory, he tried to record as faithfully as possible what his master Ruodulfus, who is the addressee of the letter, had said in class ("*scripsi autem, ut ab ore vestro accipi, nihil addendo vel minuendo, in quantum me emula non retardavit oblivio*" – "I put down the words that came forth from your mouth, without adding or eliminating anything, in so far as my memory served me").²⁶ One may wonder

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Ercambertus Fuldensis, *Epistola 34 ad Ruodulfum*, in: *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* III, ed. E. DÜMMLER (Berlin, 1899: *MGH Epp. Karol.* 5), pp. 358-359. Trans. in: M.M. GORMAN, "From the

whether he may have used some notes taken in class on a wax tablet (and then transcribed onto parchment), as it is the case for other works of this kind,²⁷ but he does not mention it, perhaps in order to stress the direct connection between the oral teaching and the resulting literary work. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that students did not take notes in Ruodulfus's classes, perhaps because, as we shall see, the master produced a (albeit partial) record of his own. This would explain Ercanbertus' fear that the teaching in its entirety would be lost forever unless he reconstructed it ("*dolui quippe, si traditio vestra dulcissime aptissimeque prolata aliquando nullo scribente oblivioni penitus traderetur*" – "I suffered because I could not stand to think that your teaching, which was set forth in an attractive and very fitting style, would one day cease to exist unless someone wrote it down").²⁸ Ercanbertus did get access to this one authorised record of the teaching, his master's glosses, which, however, only existed from a certain point onward of the text that the master commented:

Ab illo enim loco usque in finem libri glosas vestras, quas fecistis incipientes a loco superio memorato, operi meo aptavi. Reputans supervacue me laborare, si ea quae iam vestro labore faciente nobilius et commodius conscripta sunt, aliis vellem proferre sermonibus.

From here to the end I made use of your notes on the Gospel which you had written down from this point. It seemed pointless for me to write down my own comments, since yours had already been set down in a noble and fitting form.²⁹

We will never know why the master's glosses only began from a certain point of the gospel of John: maybe the idea that the commentary of the text could be worthy of record only dawned on Ruodulfus after he had been teaching for some time. This would suggest, once more, that classroom practices were not set in stone, but rather evolved to adapt to the circumstances, and that orality represented their natural medium.

The relationship between master and disciple is represented in a very positive light: not only does the salutation of the letter read "*amantissimo ac omni*

classroom at Fulda under Hrabanus: The commentary on the Gospel of John prepared by Ercanbertus for his 'praeceptor' Ruodulfus", *Augustinianum* 44 (2004), pp. 471-502, at pp. 478.

²⁷ GORMAN, "From the classroom", p. 474.

²⁸ Ercanbertus Fuldensis, *Epistola 34 ad Ruodulfum*, p. 359. Trans. GORMAN, "From the classroom", p. 478.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

dilectionis officio excolendo Ruodulfo preceptori Ercambertus suus devotus alumnus” (“to the most beloved teacher, who is to be respected in every way, Ercambertus his devoted student”), but the teaching is characterised as sweet as honey (“*melliflua lectio*”) and the letter-writer declares that Ruodulfus helped him for the love of Christ (“*pro cuius amore meae vilitati succurrere voluistis*”) and that he treasured in his heart the faith and paternal love of his teacher (“*conservato vobis quod ex me esse videtur in antro pectoris mei fide et amore paterno*”). Ercambertus’ fellow-students are only mentioned in a negative light, when he explains that it was ultimately the fact that none of them undertook the task of recording the commentary that prompted him to embark in the project, overcoming his fear of not being able to do it well enough. This may be understood in light of the idea that Ercambertus was representing himself as the only student whose love for his master, and whose admiration for his teaching, was so great that it allowed him to overcome the fear of the undertaking. Through this letter, I believe, Ercambertus is not only asking Ruodulfus to approve the text (and, if necessary, to correct it), but also to endorse its author’s role as a privileged disciple.

The Social Dynamics of Learning: condiscipuli, conlectori, and magistri

The three texts examined so far offer some insight into the way in which the social interactions between teacher and learners shaped the ‘discourse around a text’ which constituted the basis of the learning experience: not only the teacher’s work is represented as arising from the desire to meet the needs of the students (or to comply with their requests), but the oral exchanges of questions and answers emerge as a very important aspect of teaching.

The active role played by the learners emerges both in an account narrated by the teacher (Gregory) and in one written by a pupil (Cuthbert). Gregory’s letter, if considered in its entirety, actually represents the relationships between him and his monks as remarkably balanced, almost equal: the author even represents himself as inferior to his brothers, since their contemplative life is superior to his active one: he recalls that they allow him not only to find peace in their company, but also to progress spiritually by following their good example.³⁰ The monks are therefore represented as being beneficial for Gregory as,

³⁰ Gregorius Magnus, *Moralia in Iob, Epistola ad Leandrum*, c. 1, p. 2: “*Ubi me scilicet*

or perhaps even more, he is to them through his teaching: there is, in short, a reciprocal exchange. As we shall see in other sources, the impression is that the more experienced the learners are, the more active their role, and the more balanced the exchange with the ‘teacher’, up to the point that, sometimes, no clear hierarchy is discernible.

In order to analyse these instances of ‘balanced learning’ it is useful to look at the dynamics of the relationships between fellow-students. Cuthbert’s letter allows us some introductory remarks, since it is addressed to a former co-disciple to whom Cuthbert wished to send an account of the last moments of their former master. In addition, the text refers to a previous epistolary exchange between the two and to a gift sent by Cuthwin to Cuthbert, which shows that they had kept in touch after Cuthwin’s departure from the monastery.³¹ Such an enduring relationship between former fellow-students is not a unique case, as attested by many early medieval sources: the spread of the specific term *condiscipulus* (‘fellow-disciple’ or ‘fellow-student’) itself is telling.³²

The term *condiscipulus* is used in some versions of Cuthbert’s salutation; even more interesting is the fact that in all the versions Cuthwin is addressed as *conlector*, ‘fellow-reader’.³³ This term is rare, and its use goes back to Au

multi ex monasterio fratres mei germana vincti caritate secuti sunt. Quod divina factum dispensatione conspicio, ut eorum semper exemplo ad orationis placidum litus quasi anchorae fune restringerer, cum causarum saecularium incessabili impulsu fluctuarem. Ad illorum quippe consortium velut ad tutissimi portus sinum terreni actus volumina fluctusque fugiebam, et licet illud me ministerium ex monasterio abstractum, a pristinae quietis vita mucrone suae occupationis extinxerat, inter eos tamen per studiosae lectionis alloquium, cotidiana me aspiratio compunctionis animabat (“Naturally, many of my brothers from the monastery followed me, for they loved me like the brothers they were. I think that this happened under the guidance of divine providence, that I might always be securely bound by their example to the quiet beach of prayer like an anchor cable when I was tossed about by the never ending cycle of worldly cares. I fled to their companionship as though to the bay of a sheltered harbor, escaping the rolling swell and waves of worldly occupations. Although the ministry had torn me away from the monastery and eliminated me from the sublime peace of that life by the sword of its occupation, I was daily encouraged by the exhortations of attentive reading among my brothers to sighs and compunction”, trans. in Gregory the Great, *Moral Reflections on the Book of Job*, p. 48).

³¹ “*Munusculum quod misisti multum libenter suscepi; multumque gratanter literas tuae devotae eruditionis legi*” (“The present which you sent me I received with much gratitude, and it was with great pleasure that I read your letter, full of religion and sound learning”).

³² As a simple keyword search in databases of medieval texts, such as the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, the Library of Latin Texts, the *Patrologia Latina*, and the *Corpus Corporum: Repositorium operum Latinorum apud universitatem Turicensem*.

³³ The texts printed in *PL* (vol. 95), John Allen Giles’s 1843 edition of the works of Bede,

gustine,³⁴ who in his *Confessions* employed it to refer to his fellow-students: “*ut quid mihi illud, o vera vita, deus meus, quod mihi recitanti adclamabatur prae multis coaetaneis et conlectoribus meis?*” (“for what does it matter to me, O my true Life, my God, that they acclaimed my performance as superior to those of my contemporaries and fellow students?”).³⁵ Moreover, a letter from Evodius to Augustine uses the terms *condiscipulus* and *conlector* together:

Puer ipse, de quo agitur, tempore, quo solvebatur, exhibitus quodam modo pergit. Nam videtur per somnium condiscipulus et conlector ipsius, cum quo mihi excipiebat, qui iam ante octo menses corpore erat exemptus, venisse. Cum interrogaretur ab eo, qui eum tunc cernebat, cur advenisset, ait ille: ‘Ad amicum meum hinc duendum veni’. Et ita factum est.

This same youth, in connection with whom these questions are brought forward, departed this life after having received what may be called a summons at the time when he was dying. For one who had been a companion of his as a student, and reader, and shorthand writer to my dictation, who had died eight months before, was seen by a person in a dream coming towards him. When he was asked by the person who then distinctly saw him why he had come, he said, “I have come to take this friend away”; and so it proved.³⁶

It is difficult to say whether this classic tale of friendship between fellow-students that endured even beyond death may have exerted an influence over the Middle Ages, although accounts of this kind are certainly common in medieval

and the edition in the Loeb Classical Library report the salutation as “*Dilectissimo in Christo collectori Cuthvino Cuthbertus condiscipulus, in Deo aeternam salutem*” (“To Cuthwin, his dearly beloved fellow-reader in Christ, Cuthbert, his fellow-disciple, eternal safety in God”), while the edition in the Oxford medieval texts series only reads “*Dilectissimo in Christo conlectoris Cuthvino Guthbertus diaconus in deo aeterno salutem*”, which is translated as “To his beloved in Christ and fellow teacher Cuthwin, greetings in the name of the everlasting God from Cuthbert the deacon”.

³⁴ *Conlector*, in: C. DU CANGE et al., *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, 10 vols. (Paris, 1678; reprinted Niort, 1883), 2, col. 508B.

³⁵ Augustinus Hipponensis, *Confessiones, liber I*, c. 17 (27), ed. in: Augustine, *Confessions*, 1, *Introduction and text*, ed. J.J. O’DONNELL (Oxford, 2012), p. 13, trans. in: Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. H. CHADWICK (Oxford, 1991: *Oxford World’s Classics*), p. 20.

³⁶ Evodius Uzaliensis, *Epistola ad Augustinum*, c. 10, ed. in: *S. Aureli Augustini Hipponensis Episcopi epistulae*, 3, *Ep. CXXIV-CLXXXIV*, ed. A. GOLDBACHER (Wien and Leipzig, 1904: CSEL 44), p. 495. Trans. in: *The Confessions and Letters of Augustine*, trans. P. SCHAFF (Buffalo, 1887: *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series 1), p. 1033.

sources.³⁷ Bede – and therefore, potentially, his pupils – knew some of Augustine’s letters, but these did not all circulate together, as a letter-collection. Some were probably transcribed together with other works to which they were thematically related, and, for example, the epistolary exchange between Augustine and Jerome circulated on its own.³⁸ Therefore, it is not possible to establish a direct link between Evodius’s letter and Cuthbert’s, but this is certainly an interesting coincidence, suggesting that in both the environments where the texts originated the activity of shared reading (and writing) with an educational purpose was very important.

Another type of sources which contains attestations to the way in which the interactions between fellow-students shaped the learning process are didactic dialogues – a literary form that is recurrent in monastic culture.³⁹ For the early Middle Ages two interesting examples are Alcuin’s *Dialogue of the Frank and of the Saxon* and Aelfric Bata’s *Colloquies*. The first text, while not directly set in a monastic environment, is worth mentioning both as an authoritative model and because we know that it was used in early medieval monasteries.⁴⁰ Alcuin’s dialogue “extends the traditional question-and-answer framework often used in elementary grammars (including Donatus’ *Ars minor*), into a lively dialogue between teenagers”, to use Vivien Law’s words.⁴¹ It is interesting that Alcuin chose to give such importance to the exchanges between the two students, instead of representing the master talking to a pupil. Although the text is of course a fictional construction, I believe that it was putting into scene an ideal of learning, not just for the contents, but also for the learning practices: a pupil could learn from an older fellow-student by asking him questions,

³⁷ J.-C. SCHMITT, *Les revenants: Les vivants et les morts dans la société médiévale* (Paris, 1994: *La bibliothèque des histoires*), pp. 213, 218-221.

³⁸ Cf. J.C. THOMPSON, “The medieval manuscript tradition of Augustine’s works: An overview from 400 to 1200”, in: *The Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine*, ed. K. POLLMANN and W. OTTEN, 3 vols. (Oxford, 2013), 1<check>, pp. 51-58, at p. 55.

³⁹ Cf. M. BREITENSTEIN, “‘Ins Gespräch gebracht’: Der Dialog als Prinzip monastischer Unterweisung”, in: *Understanding Monastic Practices of Oral Communication (Western Europe, Tenth-Thirteenth Century)*, ed. S. VANDERPUTTEN (Turnhout, 2011: *Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy* 21), pp. 205-229.

⁴⁰ See A. GROTTANS, *Reading in Medieval St. Gall* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 73: “At St. Gall, Notker Balbulus recommended using Alcuin’s grammar, *Dialogus Franconis et Saxonis de octo partibus orationis*, over those of Donatus, Nicomachus, Dositheus or Priscian”. About Alcuin’s influence on the monastic schools see also DIEM, “The emergence of monastic schools”.

⁴¹ V. LAW, “Grammar, Latin (study of)”, in: *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. LAPIDGE, J. BLAIR, S. KEYNES, and D. SCRAGG (Chichester, 2014), pp. 221-223, at p. 222.

something that was also useful to the latter, since it was an opportunity to test his memory and his understanding. In fact, in the text the master himself encourages the discussion and even, it seems, the debate between the two students (see for example: “*sed vestram vos intrate disputationem*” – “but now start your discussion”), suggesting that he considers it a useful exercise.⁴² If the two pupils are indeed represented as ‘model students’, the stress on their eager inquisitiveness, which ultimately leads the master to exclaim: “*vestra curiositas modum non habet*” (“Your inquisitiveness has no measure!”), takes on a special meaning. The younger student admits that he is eager to learn to the point of being greedy (*avidus*), and even accuses the older one of being possessive with his knowledge and unwilling to share it (*invidus*), although, actually, he appears remarkably patient, answering all the many questions he is asked. Lastly, there is a reference to the fact that the differences in age affected the reciprocal roles of the pupils, although in this case it may well be ironic, considering that the difference is very small: the young Franc declares that the Saxon should answer the questions because he is older than him, being fifteen while he is but fourteen (“*Eia, Saxo, me interrogante responde, quia tu majoris es aetatis. Ego XIV annorum; tu ut reor XV*”).

It is interesting to compare the ways in which the social dynamics within the classroom are represented in this text with the portrayal offered in Aelfric Bata’s *Colloquies*, written around the year 1000. Here again, and even more so, the dialogue is lively, sometimes downright funny (it includes, for example, the description of a drinking party and of bargains between two students, as well as some colourful insults). Most probably, this had the purpose of making the text more agreeable for the students reading it and using it to learn.

The interactions among the pupils emerge as a crucial part of the learning process: their day, as it is represented in the *Colloquies*, is marked by reciprocal exhortation, with the students addressing each other as *frater* (‘brother’), sometimes accompanied by a *dilecte*, ‘dear’, and the group as *mei socii* (‘my classmates’). See, for example, the opening of the first *Colloquium*: “*surge, frater mi, de tuo lectulo, quia tempus est nobis surgendi*” (“get out of bed, my brother, because it’s time now for us to rise”).⁴³ If we accept that the monastic

⁴² P. SWIGGERS, “Alcuin et les doctrines grammaticales”, *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l’Ouest* 111.3 (2004), pp. 147-161, at p. 148, and especially footnote 6, where he lists various examples of reference to the notion of *disputatio* in the dialogue.

⁴³ Aelfricus Bata, *Colloquium*, 1, ed. in: *Anglo-Saxon Conversations: The Colloquies of Aelfric Bata*, ed. S. GWARA and D.W. PORTER (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 80-81.

conception of education included adaptation to behavioural patterns, then the pupils, by instructing one another in turn, are helping each other to learn. It is clear that different levels of talent and maturity played a role in these interactions, among the students themselves and in their relationships with the master, who sometimes appointed a boy to watch over his fellow-students.⁴⁴

There are also specific references to the shared activities of the pupils, namely reading, singing, writing, and participating in the life of the classroom in general. A boy reproaches one of his fellow-student by saying “*nec vis nobiscum legere, nec sponte discere, nec voluntaria cantare, nec scribere in tabula, nec in scedula nec in ullo pergameno nec in nulla quaternione, nec hic intus cum sociis tuis manere*” (“you do not want to read with us, nor are you willing to learn. You do not want to sing willingly, or write in your tablet or on a vellum scrap or on a parchment or in a quire. You do not stay indoors here with your classmates”).⁴⁵ It is clear that the shared and social nature of these activities is very important, and elsewhere in the text we learn why: the students often learned from one another and helped each other, as we can see in the case of the pupil who does not know how to sharpen his pen and asks his fellow-students.⁴⁶

Of course, the role of the master remains very important, and the students are represented as turning to him in case of difficulties they cannot solve themselves, much as the Saxon and the Frank did with their master. While in the Carolingian text the focus was on theoretical problems, such as the nature of the parts of the discourse, here everything revolves around a text, which a pupil is trying to read and which he brings to the master for help:

Doctor bone, utinam velles ostendere plane mihi vel aperte manifestare lectionem hanc, seu hoc testimonium, sive istam mystica scripturam, quia hanc sententiam non possum intelligere sine doctore. Valde difficilis est mihi ad intellegendum, et non habeo tam profundam doctrinam, ut animadvertere valeam haec sacra mysteria.

Deduc huc, ut videam quantam mysticam obscuritatem habeat sententiam haec, et docebo te de omnibus his sacramentis, ut recte et manifeste ea sumere et intelligere valeas et in memoria semper custodite.

⁴⁴ Aelfricus Bata, *Colloquium*, 20, pp. 120-123.

⁴⁵ Aelfricus Bata, *Colloquium*, 3, pp. 82-84.

⁴⁶ Aelfricus Bata, *Colloquium*, 14, pp. 112-113.

Good teacher, I wish you would show me clearly or plainly reveal to me this reading, or this testimony, or this mystical scripture, because I'm not able to understand this text without a tutor. It's very difficult for me to understand. I do not have deep enough learning to discern these holy mysteries.

Bring it here so I can see how much mystic obscurity this text might have. I'll teach you about all these sacraments so that you can take them up and understand them correctly and clearly be able to keep them in your memory forever.⁴⁷

It seems that on this occasion the students are reading on their own and individually (since the boy only talks in the first person about his reading and his difficulties, instead of referring to a shared reading) a text about the sacraments, whose contents they are supposed to learn and memorise. In case of difficulty, the master offers a private consultation, that is, a brief one-on-one teaching tailored to the needs of that particular student. This kind of teaching was eminently oral because of its flexible and customised nature; in addition, although in didactical texts the oral exchanges are always represented in Latin for educational purposes, the possibility that at least a part of the questions or of the answers, especially in the earliest stages of education, took place in the vernacular should always be kept in mind.⁴⁸

Before moving on to reflect on the notion of one-on-one teaching in early medieval monastic environments, it may be useful to briefly mention another theme that emerges in Aelfric's *Colloquies*, namely the fact that pupils did not always interacted with a single *magister*, but often enough with a plurality of *magistri*, who also interacted with each other, making the picture of social dynamics more complicated than it is often believed to be.

The text refers to *magistri* in the plural more than once: "*Rogo vos, pueri, et iubeo, ut duriter et instanter legatis quicquid heri didicistis a magistris vestris*" ("I beseech and command you, boys, read with concentration and vigour what you learned from your teachers yesterday"), "*cavete, ne nullus cras fra-*

⁴⁷ Aelfricus Bata, *Colloquium*, 17, pp. 117-118.

⁴⁸ Cf. S. REYNOLDS, *Medieval Reading: Grammar, Rhetoric and the Classical Text* (Cambridge, 2004: *Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature* 67), who devotes a chapter to "the role of the vernacular", pp. 61-72. Stephen Jaeger also discussed an episode where a master asked his pupil to explain what he has just read, and to do it not in Latin, but in his own language; see S. JAEGER, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe 950-1200* (Philadelphia, 1994: *Middle Ages Series*), p. 22, where he cites Liudgerus, *Vita Gregorii abbatis Traiectensis*, c. 2, ed. O. HOLDER-EGGER in: *Supplementa tomorum I-XII, pars III*, ed. W. WATTENBACH *et al.* (Hannover, 1881: *MGH SS* 15.1), p. 68.

trum nostrum accuset vos ad magistros vestros (“take care that none of our brothers accuses you to your masters tomorrow”), and “*numquam ego te sic docui fari, nec nullus ex doctoribus nostris*” (“I never taught you to speak like that, nor did any of your teachers”).⁴⁹ The reference to masters in the plural is not a unique feature of Bata’s *Colloquies*: it is also frequent, for example, in Hildemar of Corbie’s *Commentary on the Rule of Benedict*, written between 845 and 850.⁵⁰ Anna Grotans, in her work *Reading in Medieval St. Gall*, points out that the necrology of St. Gallen for 1022 “lists three other *magistri* who died of the plague at the same time as Notker Labeo”, and that “the St. Gall Plan provides lodging for three teachers”.⁵¹

However, the idea that many *magistri* may have existed at the same time is not generally accepted. In the introduction to the new edition of Bata’s *Colloquies*, David Porter explains that “the monastery school is under the personal control of a single senior monk, the *magister*”, and that the *magistri* mentioned in the sixth Colloquy “may have been only older students working under the direct guidance of the headmaster”.⁵² While I agree that there was probably one person ultimately considered responsible for the education of the pupils, I believe that simply equating the *magistri* with some older students may be an oversimplification. The person helping the master in the sixth *Colloquium* is clearly a monk, since he is addressed by the master as “brother” (“*frater*”), while he normally calls his pupils (including the one whom he entrusts with the surveillance of the class while he is away) “*pueri*”.

Hildemar of Corbie’s *Commentary on the Rule of Benedict* explains that the *magistri* to which he refers were older monks entrusted with the care and supervision of the children.⁵³ Although this text stresses mainly their role of surveillance (they allowed for the children to be guarded at all time, even when they needed to go to the bathroom), there are also references to the masters helping the children to perform their duties in the monastery. See for example:

⁴⁹ Respectively in Aelfricus Bata, *Colloquia*, 3, 6, and 25, pp. 82-83, 92-93, and 142-143.

⁵⁰ K. ZELZER, “Von Benedikt zu Hildemar: Zu Textgestalt und Textgeschichte der Regula Benedicti auf ihrem Weg zur Alleingeltung”, *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 23 (1989), pp. 112-130, at p. 126.

⁵¹ GROTANS, *Reading*, p. 64.

⁵² D. PORTER, “Introduction”, in: *Anglo-Saxon Conversations*, p. 8.

⁵³ Hildemarus Corbeiensis, *Expositio Regulae Sancti Benedicti*, c. 37, edited on the website ‘Hildemar Project’ (<<http://hildemar.org>> (accessed 12 October 2015)), which offers a slightly revised version of the Latin text edited in *Expositio Regulae ab Hildemaro tradita*, ed. R. MITTERMÜLLER (Regensburg, 1880), and an English translation which is the product of a collaborative effort of more than fifty scholars.

“*deinde collocantur infantes, et donec illi infantes collocant se, semper assistere ibidem debent magistri, qui eos custodiant*” (“thereupon the children are assembled and until those children put themselves into proper order, the masters, who watch over them, ought always to assist them in that place”). Isabelle Cochelin has argued that “in the older *vitae* and customaries, the masters in charge of the children had an educative role to fulfil (in the traditional sense of teaching singing, reading and writing)”, and this applies also, and perhaps even more importantly, to the adaptation to behavioural patterns by means of imitating more experienced monks.⁵⁴

We do not know nearly enough of the way in which the existence of various *magistri*, their different roles and levels of authority, influenced the social dynamics of learning, but Aelfric Bata’s sixth *Colloquium* offers some suggestive insight into the matter. As I already mentioned, the *magister* who seems to act as headmaster talks to a monk who supervises the pupils, and accuses him of being too indulgent, always excusing them. Perhaps this caretaker of an inferior level was closer to the students, and the headmaster’s role was essentially to check the results of the other *magistri*’s work by assessing the progresses of the pupils? In the *Colloquies*, the master does seem to appear mainly to test the boys and, if necessary, punish them. In the colloquy in question, the master treats the caretaker in a quite harsh way, disappointed that not all the students are able to recite their lesson; it is not surprising that the relationships between different people in charge of the pupils’ education may not always have been peaceful.

Between One-on-One Teaching and Shared Reading among Friends

One-on-one teaching is more frequently associated with the lay world, where preceptors could be hired by wealthy families to look after individual children, than with the monastic world. However, what has been said about the role of experienced pupils and teacher’s assistants makes one-on-one teaching through shared reading within monastic environments a more plausible possi-

⁵⁴ I. COCHELINE, “Beside the book: Using the body to mould the mind: Cluny in the tenth and eleventh century”, in: *Medieval Monastic Education*, ed. G.P. FERZOCCO and C.A. MUESSIG (London, 2000), pp. 21-34, at p. 28: “in the older *vitae* and customaries, the masters in charge of the children had an educative role to fulfil (in the traditional sense of teaching singing, reading and writing)”.

bility. For example, Hildemar, in the aforementioned *Commentary*, suggests that an adolescent who shows maturity should be freed from the care of the schoolmaster and entrusted to a monk “of good and venerable conduct”, who should watch over him. There is also a reference to the activity of reading:

Usque ad quintum decimum annum, sicut inferius dicturus est, debent illi infantes sub custodia esse, et sub omnibus, quibus iniunctum est. Deinde post XV annum, si visus fuerit ille infans bonus et sobrius, ita ut non sit illi necessitas, magistros habere, debet exire de illa disciplina, et debet illum abbas solummodo uni specialiter fratri bonae et sanctae conversationis commendare, qui illum custodiat, atque dare, non ut illi seruiat sicut manipulus, sed ut ille illum custodiat, i. e. cum illo sedeat, quando legit et quando obedientiam ubique agit.

Until age fifteen, as it will be said below, those children must be under supervision, and under all who are in charge of them. Then after the age of fifteen, if that child seems to be of good and sober appearance, so that it is not necessary for him to have masters, he must leave that discipline and the abbot must entrust and give him specially to one brother of good and venerable conduct who should take care of him, not so that he should wait on that older brother like a servant, but in order that that brother should watch over him. That is he should sit with him when he reads and when he performs obedience anywhere.⁵⁵

The main task of this ‘tutor monk’ seems to have been supervision, but it is not impossible that he was also supposed to offer an example for the teenager to imitate, and to help him perform his duties. It is rather interesting that of all possible activities, only reading is explicitly mentioned here, and it makes one wonder if the tutor monk could have provided help and correction in a reading (which was probably mumbled), and even answered the youngster’s questions in case of difficulties in understanding a text, much in the same way as the master in the example taken from Aelfric’s *Colloquies*.

Another kind of shared reading involved older and cultured monks, as attested in particular by letters. The Benedictine monk (and then abbot) Lupus of Ferrières wrote around 838 to the monk Reginbert:

⁵⁵ C. 63, edited and translated on the website ‘Hildemar Project’ (<<http://hildemar.org>> (accessed 26 February 2016). I depart from the English translation by Mariel Urbanus in one passage, following Mariken Teeuwen’s suggestion that *dare* goes together with *commendare*. I thank Mariken, as well as Irene van Renswoude, for their help with improving the translation.

Si nulla mei status permutatio provenerit, satius est ut apud me sis et in Virgiliانا lectione, ut optime potes, proficias (abundabis enim otio, meaque prona in te diligentia), quam temetipso uteris magistro non tam fructuose quam laboriose proficias.

If no changes in the situation takes place, it is better for you to be with me and to advance in the study of Virgil as well as you can (for you will profit from my spare time and willingness to help you) than to be your own teacher and proceed with little effort but little profit.⁵⁶

Reginbert was Reichenau's librarian, and was certainly no beginner, although it seems probable that Lupus was planning to help him on a subject (Virgil) about which he knew more than Reginbert. Lupus was also the addressee of a letter written by his former master Hrabanus Maurus, who sent the commentary on the Epistles of Paul that his former pupil had requested, and referred to the aid that he had received from those who shared his reading ("*adiuvantibus etiam consortibus lectionis nostrae*"), suggesting the existence of enduring practices of shared reading at a high level in the monastery of Fulda.⁵⁷

There are also cases of shared reading where the existence of a clear hierarchy is not represented at all: the venerable Bede wrote to Egbert of York:

Memini te hesterno dixisse anno, cum tecum aliquot diebus legendi gratia in monasterio tuo demorarer, quod hoc etiam anno velles, cum in eundem devenires locum, me quoque, ob commune legendi studium, ad tuum accire colloquium.

I remember that last year, when I stayed in your monastery in order to read with you for a few days, you said that you also wanted to invite me this year as well

⁵⁶ Lupus Ferrariensis, *Epistola 7 ad Reginbertum*, in: *Servati Lupi Epistulae*, ed. P.K. MARSHALL (Leipzig, 1984), p. 17. Trans. in: *The Letters of Lupus of Ferrières*, trans G.W. REGENOS (The Hague, 1966), pp. 29-30.

⁵⁷ Hrabanus Maurus, *Epistola 23 ad Lupum Ferrariensem*, ed. E. DÜMMLER, in: *MGH Epp. Karol.* 3, p. 429: "*Collectarium in epistolas Pauli apostoli, prout potui, confeci. In quo, quantum mihi licui et possibilitas sivit, adiuvantibus etiam consortibus lectionis nostrae, ex sanctorum patrum dictis in unum collegi quod illi in diversis opusculis suis, prout oportunitas tractatus postulabat, posuere*" ("I have done my best to make the Commentary on the Epistles of Saint Paul. So far as has been possible for me, with the aid of those who shared our reading, I have collected from the works of different Fathers of the Church the teaching which concerned these particular epistles", trans. in: E. SHIPLEY DUCKETT, *Carolingian Portraits: A Study in the Ninth Century* (Ann Arbor, 1969), p. 163).

when you came to that same place, to a discussion with you, because of our shared passion for reading.⁵⁸

Reading emerges as a shared and relational activity, since Bede mentions that a past meeting with his friend had the specific purpose of reading together, and that now the shared passion for reading would hopefully bring the two friends together again to discuss what they read. Other sources attest that shared reading was a typical activity for friends: for example Gregory the Great, in the preface of his *Dialogues*, describes his friend Peter as his companion in the study of sacred scripture (“*ad sacri verbi indagacionem socius*”).⁵⁹ In view of this, it may be possible to re-read even accounts of learning and teaching in which the roles of master and disciple are explicitly assigned by paying attention to the active role of the pupil and allowing for the possibility of reciprocal exchanges of knowledge, especially in the cases of experienced learners, one-on-one teaching and friendship relationships.

Such is the case of the famous letter addressed by Anselm of Bec to the monk Maurice, already mentioned here as an example of use of the verb *legere* with the meaning of ‘teaching’. It is an exceptional attestation of practices of shared reading with an educational purpose:

Audivi quod legas a domno Arnulfo. Quod si verum est, placet mihi qui semper profectum tuum, sicut ipse ex parte expertus es, desideravi, nec unquam utique plus quam modo. Audivi quoque quod ipse multum valeat in declinatione, et tu scis quia molestum mihi semper fuerit pueris declinare, unde valde minus quam tibi expediret, scio te apud me in declinandi scientia profecisse. Hortor itaque et precor et ut filio carissimo praecipio, quatenus quidquid ab eo legeris et quidquid aliud poteris, diligentissime declinare studeas. Nec pudeat te sic in hoc studere, etiam quibus te putas non indigere, quasi nunc id recentissime incipias. Quo et ea quae scis, eius auditu confirmata securius teneas, et eo docente, si in aliquo falleris, id corrigas et quod ignoras addiscas.

I have learned that Dom Arnulf is giving you lessons. If this is so I am delighted; as you may have noticed, I have always wanted to see you make progress, and now

⁵⁸ Beda Venerabilis, *Epistola ad Ecgbertum episcopum*, ed. in: *Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, ed. and trans. C. GROCOCK and I. N. WOOD (Oxford, 2013: *Oxford Medieval Texts*), pp. 125-124.

⁵⁹ Gregorius Magnus, *Dialogorum Gregorii Papae libri quatuor de miraculis patrum italicorum*, I, *Praef.*, c. 2, in: Grégoire le Grand, *Dialogues*, 2, *Livres I-III*, ed. and trans. A. DE VOGÜÉ (Paris, 1979: *SC* 260), p. 10.

I desire it more than ever. I have also heard that he excels in declensions; now, as you know, it has always been a hard chore for me to decline with children, and I am aware that in this science you made less progress with me than you should have. I send you, then, as my dearest son, this word of advice, this plea: everything you may read with him, or in any other way, apply yourself to declining it with care. And do not be in the least ashamed to study in this way, even if you do not think you need to, as if you were just a beginner. For, with him, you are consolidating in yourself, as you hear them, things you already know, so as to remember them more firmly; and, under his instruction, if you do make an error, you will correct it and learn what you do not know.⁶⁰

This text contains many of the elements that have been pointed out in the previous pages, first of all the crucial importance attributed to the activity of shared reading in the educational process, and the fact that teaching practices involved oral discourses around a text.

It refers to a specific exercise called *declinatio*, whose origins lay in Antiquity. It is attested in a fundamental textbook of Western culture, Donatus' *Ars minor*, which offers various examples: a word, for instance *magister*, is firstly analysed (“*magister nomen appellativum generis masculini numeri singularis figurae simplicis casus nominativi et vocativi*”) and then inflected: “*declinabitur sic: nominativo hic magister, genetivo huius magistri ...*”.⁶¹ Here the noun is taken together with its adjective, which helps to understand how the complexity of the exercise could be increased; it must be considered that it also included verb conjugation together with noun's declension.⁶² Bernard Leblond has argued that *declinatio* could be an even broader exercise, involving not only grammar but also rhetoric (for example, the learner could experiment with possible variations of a given sentence). This would help understanding why a

⁶⁰ Anselmus Cantuariensis, *Epistola 64 ad Mauritium*, p. 180. The “Arnulf” mentioned was probably a monk of the abbey of Saint-Lucien (Beauvais), whose name is more frequently spelled as “Ernulf”; cf. R. SHARPE, “Anselm as author: Publishing in the late eleventh century”, *Journal of Medieval Latin* 19 (2009), pp. 1-87, at p. 27 n. 69, and Anselmo d'Aosta, *Opere: Lettere*, 2, *Arcivescovo di Canterbury*, ed. I. BIFFI, A. GRANATA, and C. MARABELLI (Milan, 1988: *Biblioteca di cultura medievale*), p. 161, n. 1. Trans. in: MURPHY, “The teaching of Latin”, p. 168.

⁶¹ Aelius Donatus, *Ars grammatica*, 1, *De partibus orationis, editio prima; vulgo: Ars minor*, c. 2, in: *Grammatici latini*, ed. H. KEIL, b vols. (Leipzig, 1855-1880), 4, pp. 355-356.

⁶² Cf. LECLERCQ, *The Love of Learning*, p. 120. The *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* offers various examples in which *declinatio* refers to the “*flexio, tam nominum quam verborum*”; see K. STÖGER, “*Declino*”, in: *Thesaurus linguae latinae*, 1- (Leipzig, 1900-), 5, col. 194.

mature learner could profit from what may otherwise seem too simple an exercise.⁶³

It is clear that one of the reasons for which orality was the most suitable medium for teaching is that exercises such as the *declinatio* were based on memory and supposed to be re-enacted. Writing down declensions and conjugations on the manuscript would not only have taken a lot of precious space, but also made the re-enactment of the exercise difficult, if not impossible. The only alternative to orality were, therefore, separate (and often ephemeral) writing supports such as wax tablets and scraps of parchments.

The letter attests both that the *declinatio* was considered an exercise for children and beginners, and that Anselm believed that it could be useful also for experienced learners, in order to consolidate what they knew, test their knowledge and, if necessary, fill their gaps. It seems therefore that the same exercise could be carried out in different situations and with different aims. It is indicative that when Anselm refers to the *declinatio* in the context of the education of young pupils he assumes the presence of one master with multiple boys (“*pueris declinare*”), while the kind of activity that he is recommending to Maurice seems to be a shared reading between one master and one disciple. This is probably due to the fact that, in the latter case, the teaching was supposed to be adapted to Maurice, who was certainly no beginner.⁶⁴ In fact, the active contribution of this ‘pupil’ to the discourse was probably substantial, bringing the exercise close to the kind of conversations around a text which have been illustrated in the previous pages. It must also be considered that Anselm’s request does not imply that the *declinatio* had to be practiced exclusively, neglecting other forms of teaching and learning through shared reading. Rather, in the situation in question, the *declinatio* seems to be conceived as a complementary exercise.

In conclusion, I believe that this letter attests the flexible nature of monastic teaching in at least two ways. On the one hand, Anselm seems to believe that a monk was supposed to take advantage of the opportunities to learn which presented themselves, profiting from the specific expertise of someone with whom he had the chance to spend some time. On the other hand, Anselm’s

⁶³ B. LEBLOND, “Ci fait la geste que Tuoldus declinet”, *Annales de Normandie* 7 (1957), pp. 159-163.

⁶⁴ Other letters show that Anselm entrusted him not only with obtaining some books, but also with carefully transcribing a manuscript of the *De Aphorismo* and its glosses, which suggests that he had confidence in him and his reading and writing skills (cf. Anselmus Cantuariensis, *Epistolae* 42, 43, and 60, pp. 154, 155 and 174-175 respectively).

advice on the practices of learning through shared reading is adapted to the individual, since it takes into account Maurice's past experience, his knowledge and personal shortcomings.

Conclusive Remarks: Reading and Learning in Early Medieval Monastic Environments

Anselm's text is an exceptional case, as most early medieval letters dealing with reading in monastic environments do not go into details about the techniques of reading and learning. They rather tend to focus on the way in which certain individuals experienced reading, their reactions to it, and their desire to share their thoughts on the subject – which means that even individual readings were often embedded in social interactions. An example is offered by the letter that Lupus of Ferrières wrote to Einhard around 836, describing what he felt while reading a certain chapter of the City of God for the first time, and asking Einhard to read it and to give him his opinion:

Obsecro autem, legite libri sancti Augustini "De civitate Dei" XXI^{mi} titulum XXVII^{um}, et videte, si non his quae scripsi paria de eadem calamitate vir ille divini ingenii senserit; quae plane numquam ante legeram; sed cum postea ea percurrissem, admodum miratus sum mea tam similia sensu fuisse ut ab his colorem traxisse penitus viderentur.

I request, moreover, that you read the twenty-seventh chapter of the book XXI of saint Augustine's "City of God" and see if that inspired man of God did not express the very same views as I have on the subject of sorrow. I had really never read it before, but when I later came across it I was astonished to discover that my own thoughts coincided so closely with his as to have seemed entirely coloured by them.⁶⁵

It is possible to draw a parallel with monastic commentaries, which, especially in comparison with scholastic ones, attest a way of reading that is emotional

⁶⁵ Lupus Ferrariensis, *Epistola 5 ad Einhardum*, ed. in: MARSHALL, *Servati Lupi Epistulae*, p. 13; trans. in: *The Letters of Lupus of Ferrières*, p. 15.

and intimately personal, in the sense that it is perceived as directly addressing the individual's inner life and his personal experience.⁶⁶

This conceptualisation of reading was probably influenced by Augustine.⁶⁷ Next to the attention granted to solitary reading, the Bishop of Hippo's works also refer to the shared, relational dimension that reading could take on, particularly in the context of friendship relationships, as has been argued by Naoki Kamimura in his article "Friendship and the reading experience in Augustine".⁶⁸ See for example this brief excerpt taken from the *Confessions*:

Quam legere coepit unus eorum et mirari et accendi, et inter legendum meditari arripere talem vitam et relicta militia saeculari servire tibi [...] Tum subito repletus amore sancto et sobrio pudore, iratus sibi, coniecit oculos in amicum et ait illi: [...].

One of them began to read. He was amazed and set on fire, and during his reading began to think of taking up this way of life and of leaving his secular post in the civil service to be your servant [...] Suddenly he was filled with holy love and sobering shame. Angry with himself, he turned his eyes on his friend and said to him: [...].⁶⁹

I believe that this conceptualisation of reading influences the way in which the activity of shared reading is described in early medieval monastic sources, because the monks were not only interested in the methods of teaching and learning, but also, and perhaps even more, in the holistic experience of reading and its effects on the individual. Therefore, accounts of shared reading tend to have a narrative and personalised nature rather than a prescriptive and universally applicable one. This is linked to the flexible, sometimes informal, and even spontaneous, nature of a certain kind of monastic teaching, of which some examples have been illustrated here.

⁶⁶ Cf. LECLERCQ, *The Love of Learning*, pp. 84-85, and G. VERRUCCI, "La lettura emozionale in Bernardo di Clairvaux: Non verba sed affectus", in: *Doctor Virtualis: Rivista di Storia della Filosofia Medievale* 1 (2002), pp. 77-94.

⁶⁷ On whose theory of reading see B. STOCK, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA, 1996).

⁶⁸ N. KAMIMURA, "Friendship and shared reading Experiences in Augustine" in *Patristica, Supplementary Volume* 3 (2011), pp. 69-83.

⁶⁹ Augustinus Hipponensis, *Confessiones*, VIII, c. 15, p. 95, trans. in Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 143.

In fact, many of the sources that have been analysed attest that the discourse around texts which constituted the basis of teaching was continually shaped by the interactions between the people involved. The pupils played an active role through their questions, requests and needs, which oriented the teaching; in addition, the interactions among the students themselves represented an important form of learning. Taking into account the variety of social interactions involved in activities of shared reading allows us to notice the existence of many different kinds of teaching and learning in early medieval monasteries: next to the traditional picture of a master teaching to his classroom there were forms of one-on-one teaching and even of ‘horizontal learning’, that is exchanges of knowledge between peers, be they fellow-disciples or friends who met for the purpose of shared reading and study.

The way in which teaching and learning are attested is also influenced by the fact that the effort of re-construction and re-enactment of the discourse around a fundamental text was an integral part of the learning activity, as it is particularly clear in the case of the grammatical analysis of a text and of the exercise of the *declinatio*. The choice of the media of teaching (written or non-written) and of the supports for learning depended on the nature of what was being said or recorded: only the things which were supposed to have a general usefulness were entrusted to the durable parchment, and usually only by the hand of the master. Ephemeral writing materials served for texts which usefulness was limited in time (such as supports for learning or preparatory texts which would later be reworked in a more polished form), and orality appears as the natural medium for a learning based on memory and repetition.

This orality, however, usually revolved around texts, and therefore, as Marco Mostert pointed out in his contribution “Orality, non-written communication and monastic studies”, we should talk about “secondary orality” rather than primary orality, to use Walter Ong’s words.⁷⁰ In addition, in trying to reconstruct oral educational practices, we inevitably have to rely on written sources, which, apart from being paradoxical, is very difficult: in this paper I aimed to present a few examples of the way in which some early medieval

⁷⁰ M. MOSTERT, “Orality, non-written communication and monastic studies”, in: *Understanding Monastic Practices of Oral Communication*, pp. 367-388, at p. 387. The reference is, of course, to W.J. ONG, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York, 1982), pp. 135-138. Other studies on the matter are collected in *Viva Vox und Ratio Scripta: Mündliche und schriftliche Kommunikationsformen im Mönchtum des Mittelalters*, ed. C.M. KASPER and K. SCHREINER (Münster, 1997: *Vita regularis* 5).

monastic texts can help with the arduous task of studying the interplay between oral and written in teaching, learning and reading practices within early medieval monastic environments.

