1 Introduction: Epitaph for an Era

1 *Epitaphium Arsenii*

This is a book about one text: the *Epitaphium Arsenii*, a dialogue written by Paschasius Radbertus, monk of Corbie and well-known biblical commentator, who lived from c. 790 until c. 860.[1] He wrote this funeral oration ('epitaph') for his deceased abbot Wala, who went by the name of Arsenius. The *Epitaphium*'s first book was written not long after Wala's death in 836, the second roughly two decades later. The two books were structured as a conversation between three monks of Corbie, with the author in the role of a narrator called Pascasius. This was the author's monastic byname which, together with his birth name Radbert, he used in the dedications of his many works of exegesis. There were other instances when he identified himself simply as *Radbertus levita*, or *Radbertus abbas*.[2] For practical purposes, and to distinguish the historical figure and author from the dialogue's narrator, I shall refer to him as Radbert, even though a conflation was clearly intended. Through the narrator Pascasius, the author Radbert portrayed himself as an actor in his own narrative.

That the *Epitaphium Arsenii* was planned as one work from the outset becomes clear from the systematic manner in which Radbert used his main model, the funeral oration composed by Bishop Ambrose of Milan in 378 for his brother Satyrus. Furthermore, there is the presence throughout of the Prophet Jeremiah, which holds the two books together, as well the persistent theme of the nature of loyalty (*fides*) to God and to the earthly ruler. Nevertheless, the two books are very different in tenor and approach, and this difference is deliberately emphasised, because the second is presented as having been added considerably later. Pascasius and his fellow monks perceived Wala's contested participation in the rebellions from the distance of a dismal present. Yet this 'nowadays' (*hodie*) continued to be shaped by the recent past of the 830s, when a totally confused leadership

[1] The years of his birth and death are tentative; see Ganz, '*Epitaphium*', pp. 539–40.
[2] See below, pp. 57, 134–5.

failed to heed Wala's salutary advice. As Pascasius expressed it: 'This is why, up to the present day, none of the rulers can show the *respublica* the ways towards justice'.[3]

These are the bare outlines of Radbert's *Epitaphium Arsenii*, the topic of a book that I embarked on in 2009, when I had finished *The Penitential State*, a study of the ninth-century narratives about Louis the Pious and the two rebellions of the early 830s.[4] It all started with the process of making my own working translation of this text, for by then, I was well aware that much more could have been said about this remarkable 'Epitaph for Arsenius'. What better way to get to know it properly than translating it from beginning to end? Getting to know the *Epitaphium* and its author better made me realise that this was first and foremost a source for a wider debate about Louis that followed the emperor's death in 840, rather than a eyewitness report on the rebellions of the early 830s. Radbert's second book, written at the earliest in the mid-850s, tells us a lot about his concerns when he had only recently been deposed as abbot of Corbie, and rather less about Wala's thought and motives two decades before. This does not detract from the value of the *Epitaphium* as a source for Carolingian political history and discourse. On the contrary, treating Radbert's second book consistently as a text of the 850s turns it into an even more valuable source of information, albeit for the reign of Charles the Bald, rather than for that of his father Louis.

Radbert's productive hindsight inspired this book's main title: *Epitaph for an Era*. Its subtitle, *Politics and Rhetoric in the Carolingian World,* reflects my aim to show that political and literary history not only go well together, but are in fact mutually indispensable in the analysis of a text like the *Epitaphium Arsenii*. There is a fruitful middle ground between the traditional extremes: a text like this has served as a convenient yet disjointed source of information concerning Carolingian politics, on the one hand, but might also become a disembodied subject of literary analysis and theorising on the other. Political and literary historians need to join forces, and here I use the expression 'political history' in the widest possible sense. Ninth-century issues of authority and power are by definition also religious, social, cultural, economic and institutional, to name but a few modern categories. I have tried to include all these aspects, and often felt like an amateur, which is as it should be.

[3] *EA* II, c. 6, p. 66: 'Inde est quod adhuc hodie nemo principum explicare potest reipublicę vias ad iustitiam.'

[4] The translation, which I completed in collaboration with Justin Lake, is forthcoming at Manchester University Press, as *Confronting Crisis in the Carolingian Empire: Paschasius Radbertus' Lament for Wala.*

What I present here is a focused exploration of one particular text, as a route towards a better understanding of its author and the world he lived in. Least of all is this book a comprehensive study of Radbert as an author. There is no way I can do justice to the massive oeuvre of this prolific and original biblical commentator, even though some of his other works will now and then enter upon the scene. These include in particular his *Vita Adalhardi*, written not long after Wala's brother Adalhard's death in January 826, and, to a lesser extent, the commentaries on Lamentations and St Matthew's Gospel. Throughout the subsequent chapters of the book, however, I keep the *Epitaphium* centre stage.

In what follows, I intend to confront the difficulties of this text head-on, and to make the most of them. To name just one contentious question: how can one distinguish between the author and his subject, and get at the historical Wala? The answer is, only to a limited extent, yet Radbert's identification with Wala/Arsenius and his one-time mentor's ideals gets us closer to any historical reality than the traditional use of the *Epitaphium*'s second book as a repository of facts about the rebellions against Louis does. It has also been treated as a star witness to Carolingian clerical misogyny, and as proof that Radbert was behind the Pseudo-Isidorian forgeries. Until recently, the *Epitaphium* was seen as an expression of the typically clerical reform ideals that precipitated the reign of Louis into the crisis of the 830s: the so-called *Reichseinheitspartei* (the party for a united empire), as it was called in twentieth-century German historiography.[5] Apart from the anachronism inherent in this particular notion, there is the more general problem that a text that should be situated in the context of the 850s has been used as a straightforward source for the rebellions of the 830s.[6] This has also meant an almost exclusive focus on the second book, because of its polemics and politics, while the first book was deemed too monastic and inward-looking for consideration. This is a mistake, for the Wala/Arsenius of the first book is equally principled and uncompromising, and his ideals are as radical.[7] The difference between the two books is that the first is holding back in an emphatic way, with regular references to the need to remain silent, while the second appears to be written by an author with no holds barred. In fact, there were definite limits, also for Radbert. As I shall argue, he

[5] For a fundamental critique and overview of the discussion hitherto, see Patzold, 'Eine "loyale Palastrebellion"' and '"Einheit" versus "Fraktionierung"'; also De Jong, 'The Two Republics'. But old habits die hard: Hindrichs, 'Zwischen Reichseinheit und adeligen Machtegoismen'. The title sums up the old paradigm of Carolingian decline.

[6] Especially in recent discussions about Radbert as Pseudo-Isidore; see below, pp. 199–205. But see Ganz, '*Epitaphium*', p. 539, who dates the second book 'to 856, or even later', and Krüger, *Studien*, p. 65, who opts for 'etwa 852'.

[7] As argued rightly by Ganz, '*Epitaphium*'.

seems to have left his reticent earlier book largely intact, using it as a foil for its much more explicit and polemical successor. In other words, both parts of the *Epitaphium* should be taken into account, for they are complementary, and their different literary approaches were designed to make them work in tandem.

The *Epitaphium* has been transmitted in only one manuscript, from Corbie (Paris, BnF lat. 13909), produced not long after the mid-850s, when the work was completed. It has therefore been taken as a text for internal consumption, intended for an audience that was limited to Radbert's own monastic community. This impression is reinforced by the fact that, as far as I can see now, the *Epitaphium* left no traces in later texts.[8] All this raises questions about the audience Radbert had in mind. Was this really an idiosyncratic and private work, primarily written for the author's own satisfaction, and at best for the benefit of his own monastic community?[9] There is much about its content that points in a different direction. In my view, Radbert aimed his sharp literary arrows at a wider constituency, namely his peers, whose unfavourable opinion of Wala was worth changing, and who, once persuaded, could be expected to extend their support and patronage to Radbert himself. This court-connected elite included prelates as well as lay magnates active in the 850s, who had good reason to be affected by Radbert's arguments. After all, these revolved around the dilemmas of fidelity to God and to one's ruler, which some had already experienced during the rebellions against Louis the Pious, while others were confronted with them in a turbulent present.

In the course of this book I shall address the question of Radbert's audience from various perspectives, without being able to answer it in any watertight way. At this point, I shall simply state my view of the matter in brief, for future reference. There is of course a difference between an intended audience and an actual one: Radbert may have wanted to reach a larger group, without ever succeeding. I am also aware of the time-honoured tendency to view Carolingian moralising as 'merely' the business of clerics; that I hold another view should be known from my previous book, and I am surely not alone in this.[10] More recently, I have argued that the *Epitaphium* is part of what one might call a Carolingian culture of public debate, and it certainly addresses the concerns of those members of the elite who defined their own worth, as

[8] Ganz, *Corbie*, p. 113, with reference to the 'obscurity and allusiveness of the style'.
[9] Ganz, '*Epitaphium*' is inclined to this view; also Kempshall, *Rhetoric*, p. 204.
[10] De Jong, *Penitential State*. The interdependency of the clerical and lay spheres is also a persistent theme in the work of McKitterick, Nelson and Patzold; for a clear and concise discussion, see Noble, 'Secular Sanctity'.

well as their standing in the eyes of their peers, in terms of public service.[11] The men and women whose lives were bound up with this 'ministry' (*ministerium*) to God and to their ruler were Radbert's intended audience, especially the great and good, who, because of their own standing, would be capable of making and breaking the reputations of their peers. This restricted group might include some monks and nuns, but it was not just them that Radbert sought to impress with his moral fervour and literary fireworks. He wrote a work aimed at those 'in the know', insiders who wielded political clout, deliberately excluding a wider readership by his demanding style and use of aliases. Of course, such exclusiveness did not facilitate a wide manuscript dissemination.

Once one accepts these premises, the *Epitaphium* becomes much more than a narrative of the two rebellions, or a sharp critique of the Emperor Louis and Judith, his second spouse.[12] It not only addresses the dilemmas concerning faith and loyalty (*fides*) that had been posed by the revolts of 830 and 833, but also, albeit indirectly, the conflicts between Louis's successors in the early 840s, in which Radbert had become involved as abbot of Corbie. Furthermore, it reflects a new awareness among members of the elite of the complex nature of political order, and a sharper articulation of the public domain (*respublica*) and its office-holders, be they ecclesiastical or lay magnates. This becomes especially visible in the second book, and is one of the reasons why it should clearly be dated to a later phase of the author's life. His hindsight should be of intrinsic interest to historians, rather than be stripped off in the name of historical accuracy. This also goes for the first book, which does its own share of looking back to a different age. It dates from the late 830s, after the major monastic reforms of Louis's reign, and looks back at an earlier age when the mighty Adalhard and Wala had ruled their monks like kings. This world had disappeared by then, and so had the tight personal union between Corbie and Corvey, the monastery the two brothers had founded in Saxony in 822. Together with Wala's death in faraway Italy, this was another reason for grief and lament when Radbert began to write his commemoration and defence of Arsenius.

Inevitably, my previous research interests and experience have shaped my perspective on the *Epitaphium*, and the questions I have asked of this text. Having started as an historian of monasticism, I then concentrated on the interface between religion and politics, mainly with a focus on historical narratives and biblical commentary. Although not a literary

[11] See the themed issue of *Early Medieval Europe* (25/1, 2017) on Carolingian cultures of dialogue, debate and disputation, edited by Irene van Renswoude and myself.
[12] For a pioneering article on this topic, see Ward, 'Agobard of Lyons and Paschasius Radbertus'; recently, Dohmen, *Die Ursache*, pp. 125–80.

historian by training, over the past years I have grown increasingly intrigued by the ninth-century use of authoritative literary models and rhetorical strategies, be they classical or late antique and patristic. My own discovery of this field began when I was researching the book that would become *The Penitential State*, which is about the discursive fallout of one particular event, namely the public penance of Louis the Pious in 833. Jinty Nelson's exemplary studies of Nithard and Dhuoda made me think of my next book, in which I could once more concentrate on one author and his world, as I had so much enjoyed doing in the early 1980s.[13] I was not the only one to see the wider social and political vistas that opened when one engages closely with one early medieval author and his world. Stuart Airlie explored Nithard and Agobard, and Simon MacLean published a translation of Regino of Prüm's *Chronicle* that doubles as an in-depth study of history and politics in late Carolingian Europe.[14] A conference in Vienna in 2008 under the heading 'Ego Trouble' discussed the self-referential nature of early medieval Christian discourses, and the wider implications thereof for the use of such texts by historians.[15] In this context I wrote my first article on the *Epitaphium Arsenii*, which turned out to be a pilot study for this book.[16] Meanwhile, working shoulder to shoulder with senior and junior colleagues in the network 'Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages' taught me a lot. This holds true especially of Irene van Renswoude and her PhD research on frank speech,[17] but also for other one-time members of 'T&I', such as the authors of a recent themed issue of *Early Medieval Europe* on Carolingian cultures of dialogue, debate and disputation.[18]

In the course of writing *Epitaph for an Era*, I have profited from a recent upsurge of interest in Radbert's tribute to Wala as a text to be considered in its entirety. This ranged from Chiara Verri's investigation of its first book as a highly idiosyncratic instance of hagiography, to Courtney Booker's analysis of the work as evidence for a new authorial sensibility stimulated by the Carolingian reception of ancient drama.[19] My own approach is a different one, however. It is the political and religious

[13] De Jong, 'Growing Up in a Carolingian Monastery', on Hildemar of Corbie, and 'Internal Cloisters', on Ekkehard IV of St Gall. Both are based on articles published in Dutch in 1980–3.
[14] MacLean, *History and Politics*.
[15] Corradini et al., *Ego Trouble*.
[16] De Jong, 'Becoming Jeremiah'.
[17] Van Renswoude, 'Licence to Speak', forthcoming at Cambridge University Press as *The Rhetoric of Free Speech in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*.
[18] *Early Medieval Europe* 25/1 (2017), ed. De Jong and Van Renswoude, with contributions by Robin Whelan, Irene van Renswoude, Janneke Raaijmakers, Rutger Kramer, Warren Pezé and myself.
[19] Verri, 'Il libro primo'; Booker, *Past Convictions*, pp. 42–50; Booker, 'Hypocrisy'; Kempshall, *Rhetoric*, pp. 196–208.

world in which this work's two books originated that has captivated me most, together with the self-referential narrative of an author who evoked a turbulent past that he himself had helped to shape. My interest in this rich text was first kindled by David Ganz's seminal 1990 article on the *Epitaphium Arsenii* and the rebellions against Louis the Pious, with its even-handed discussion of Radbert's religious and political ideals, and its firm refusal to neglect the first book, as historians had tended to do.[20] Ganz's pioneering exploration of Carolingian Corbie and its library has been tremendously helpful,[21] as has Peter von Moos' multi-volume study of the late antique and medieval literature of consolation. Both provided me with an essential framework of information when I began to work on the *Epitaphium* in its wider Carolingian context.[22]

2 Two Books, One Creation

The main model for Radbert's epitaph for Arsenius was the funeral oration written by Ambrose of Milan (d. 397) for his brother Satyrus.[23] This poignant two-book meditation on grief in the face of overwhelming loss resonated with Radbert and the other monks who had recently lost their beloved Arsenius. Ambrose's work is especially present in the *Epitaphium*'s beginning, and towards the very end of its second book. It furnished Radbert with an overall framework for his own epitaph, as well as with a two-book structure. This structure seems to have been planned from the outset, which means we are dealing with one work. I have already signalled the presence of Jeremiah in both books. Arsenius is likened to this prophet at the very beginning of the first book, where the narrator, Pascasius, reminds his fellow monks that 'our most unhappy times made another Jeremiah of him'.[24] In the second book, this latter-day Jeremiah comes into his own as a prophet of doom, warning his contemporaries about the impending disaster caused by their disobedience to God.

As mentioned above, there is only one Carolingian manuscript, from Corbie, in which the *Epitaphium* survives (Paris, BnF lat. 13909). It is thought to be from the third quarter of the ninth century and was certainly copied after the mid-850s. By the beginning of the thirteenth century, BnF lat. 13909 was in the library of the abbey of Saint-Arnoul de Crépy-

[20] Ganz, '*Epitaphium*'. [21] Ganz, *Corbie*. [22] Von Moos, *Consolatio*.
[23] Ambrose, *De excessu fratris*, pp. 209–325; Von Moos, *Consolatio*, I, pp. 137–46 and II, pp. 97–106; Biermann, *Leichenreden*, pp. 24–43, 57–81, 122–33; McLynn, *Ambrose*, pp. 69–78.
[24] *EA* I, prologue, p. 19: 'An ignoras, Severe, quod nostrae hunc infelicissimae vitae saecula Jeremiam alterum tulerunt ab illo?'

en-Valois, in Picardy; it ended up in the Bibliothèque nationale de France via the Maurist library of St Germain des Prés. It is small book of 111 folia (17.4 x 15.3 cm), prepared to the highest standards of book production in Corbie, with coloured uncial initials in red and green. Missing words have been added regularly, either in the margin or between the lines, by a contemporary but different hand.[25] This implies the existence of an exemplar against which it was corrected, possibly the autograph or Radbert's working copy. The other possibility is that these were authorial revisions, but this remains to be established by a palaeographer able to identify the correcting hand. The *Manuscrits datés des bibliothèques de France* calls it 'an original copy', which seems to allow for all these possibilities.[26]

Radbert is identified as its author only in a thirteenth-century hand; the same is true of the ninth-century copy of Radbert's *Vita Adalhardi*. The absence of the author's name is not unusual, but may also indicate an early circulation among insiders, as in the case of Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*, which was initially transmitted without the preface that identifies its author; this was added only at a later stage.[27] The transition to the second book (fol. 62r) is clearly marked in uncial script ('here ends the first book; the second one begins') as well as by a large initial, yet it is the same hand that continues the text, in the middle of the page, so there is no significant codicological break.[28] The text runs continuously, without chapter headings; these have been added by Jean Mabillon and are noted in the margin in Dümmler's edition, which I use here.[29]

The manuscript of the *Epitaphium* contains no other texts. The discussion between Pascasius and his fellow monks, usually as a threesome, is not visually structured in any way. In the running text, only the capital initials of the discussants' names, usually preceded by a space, indicate that another speaker is taking over. In Corbie, it was produced as a free-standing publication, as we would call it today: carefully prepared and corrected, and ready to be sent off to a third party as a single work, and a substantial one, given the c. 60,000 words it occupies in modern editions. At least three different scribes were

[25] Ganz, *Corbie*, pp. 56, 145; *Manuscrits datés* III, p. 345; Bischoff & Ebersperger, *Katalog* III, nr 4945, p. 213.
[26] 'Un exemplaire original de l'oeuvre', *Manuscrits datés* III, p. 344.
[27] On the *Vita Karoli* and its three stages and strands of transmission, see Ganz, 'Einhard's Charlemagne', p. 51, n. 19.
[28] BnF lat. 13909, fol. 62r; see https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9076783s/f2.image.r=latin%2013909, last consulted on 28 October 2018.
[29] See Weinrich, *Wala*, pp. 93–8, for some helpful corrections and additions to Dümmler's edition.

involved in its production: fols. 1–32v, 33r–49r, 49r–103r have been written by the first scribe, fols. 103r–110r by a second, and fols. 110r–112 by a third. It is significant for our understanding of the unity of intention in the production of the text that there is no change of hands at the transition from the first to the second book.[30] In other words, the earlier date of the first book can only be surmised from its contents, for it has been transmitted as an integral part of the completed *Epitaphium*. Towards the very end of BnF lat. 13909 (on fols. 110v and 111r) the parchment is damaged, and here the text becomes increasingly illegible. As far as I can make out, it is a final reflection on God's grace and eternal life, following Wala's death, so it could indeed be the end of the second book.[31] Somewhat puzzling is the change of scribes, twice, towards the very end of the manuscript. The very last hand (in the middle of 110r) starts with the passage about the Empress Ermengard's reporting on Wala's death; in this case, there is not just a change of hands, but also a clear break in the narrative.[32]

It has been suggested that the script of whomever copied fols. 49–103r, which includes the transition from the first to the second book, resembles that of the Corbie scribe Warembert, who signed his name to the end of a quire in Paris, BnF lat. 12296, the Corbie copy of the first four books of Radbert's commentary on Matthew. Furthermore, a similarity between the *Epitaphium*'s uncial rubrics and those of the Corbie copy of his commentary on Lamentations (Paris, BnF lat. 12994) has been noted.[33] This does not necessarily mean that these two works were composed at the same time, but does imply that a clean copy of each was produced in Corbie's scriptorium, together with other works by Radbert. The manuscripts can be set out in summary as follows:

Epitaphium Arsenii, BnF lat. 13909. Fols 49–103 possibly by the scribe Warembert, with uncial rubrics resembling those of BnF lat. 12274.

In Matthaeum, BnF lat. 12296, with scribe Warembert (also extant in Laon BM 67).

Expositio in Lamentationes, BnF lat. 12994, with uncial rubrics resembling those of BnF lat. 13909.

[30] Ganz, *Corbie*, p. 145; Bischoff, *Katalog* III, nr 4945, p. 213.
[31] In an email communication of 2 October 2011, David Ganz kindly shared his view that the manuscript has not lost much text: 'It now has 111 folia; 14 regular quires of 8 leaves would make a volume of 112 folia . . . '.
[32] *EA* II, c. 24, p. 96: 'Quod autem ad aeternae vitae gaudia angelicis sit ipse deportatus manibus, venerabili referente Ermengardi regina omnino cognovimus.'
[33] *Manuscrits datés* III, p. 345; on both manuscripts, see Ganz, *Corbie*, p. 145.

Vita Adalhardi and other Corbie saints' *vitae*, BnF lat. 18296, with the *Vita Adahardi* (fols. 36–67) as a distinct codicological unit.[34]

De corpore et sanguine, Arras BM 775.

To this list, the Rouen copy of the *Expositio in Matheo* (Ms. 141, formerly A 22) should also be added.[35] The similarities between these manuscripts merit further investigation. For the time being, I suggest that after having stepped down as abbot, Radbert not only intended to get his intellectual legacy copied, but also aimed to spread it judiciously in order to justify himself. The precision with which the manuscript has been produced and corrected does indicate an audience that was not in any sense 'private', however restricted it may have been. When it comes to private use, Walahfrid Strabo's personal compilation, a *vademecum* recently studied by Richard Corradini, springs to mind sooner than this carefully prepared copy of Radbert's tribute to Wala.[36]

Yet there is more to the *Epitaphium*'s one manuscript than meets the eye at first glance, for it is part of a batch of five so-called original manuscripts of Radbert's works: carefully corrected copies that were made either under the supervision of the author himself, or by someone who was correcting this particular copy against a master copy on his desk. Not only was it part of the batch of five manuscripts already noted, but these are part of a larger group from Corbie with a distinctive version of Caroline minuscule script that David Ganz has called 'the Corbie calligraphic minuscule of the ninth century'.[37] This group includes an impressive series of manuscripts of classical authors, also written in this distinctive script.[38] Although in Bischoff's view this script probably originated earlier in the ninth century, it emerged as fully formed in the early 850s, and soon became dominant. This was 'a distinctive and elegant scriptorium at the height of its powers';[39] Bischoff thought this increase in 'cultural labour', as he called it, was so systematic and marked that he wondered who the moving force behind it was. He opted for the librarian Hadoardus, but noted that this upsurge had already started during the last years of Radbert's abbacy.[40] If we are to follow Bischoff (and why should we not?), the earliest inception of this 'cultural labour' roughly coincides with our author's tenure as schoolmaster and abbot. In a recent

[34] Ganz, *Corbie*, p. 145; Bischoff, *Katalog* III, nr 5047, p. 231; *Manuscrits datés* III, p. 345.
[35] As David Ganz pointed out to me in an email communication of 26 June 2018; see also Ganz, *Corbie*, pp. 56 and 158. See also Bishop, 'The Script of Corbie'.
[36] Corradini, 'Pieces of a Puzzle'. [37] Ganz, *Corbie*, p. 58.
[38] Bischoff, 'Hadoardus and the Manuscripts of Classical Authors from Corbie', especially pp. 52–4.
[39] Ganz, *Corbie*, p. 56 [40] Bischoff, 'Hadoardus', p. 53.