



Samu Niskanen, *The Letter Collections of Anselm of Canterbury*, (Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia 61), Brepols: Turnhout 2011. 348 pp.

Thus everyone possesses characteristics of his own, the whole of which is different in every other person. For, persons differ amongst themselves as everyone's collection of properties differs from others'.<sup>1</sup>

The Long Twelfth Century has been heralded as the age in which a new or renewed interest in the personal surfaces. A definite awareness of reality in its particular, unique, concrete and empirical dimensions pervades much of the intellectual production of the day. Ego-documents, philosophical and theological treatises, literature, *vitae*, canonization records and letter collections all testify to this growing sensibility. Obviously, the twelfth century's understanding and handling of the personal was far from a subjectivist undertaking. The discussion on the theme between Colin Morris and Caroline W. Bynum some thirty years ago still poignantly reflects the dual nature of 'individualism' at that point. Bynum observed that it might be better to rephrase 'individualism' in terms of a 'search for the self.' This quest for the *homo interior* is the exploration of an individual that bears or embodies an however general nature.<sup>2</sup>

This general nature is understood as the 'exemplary' or 'topical' dimension of the personal in its medieval context.<sup>3</sup> To name a few very well-known examples, Othloh of Saint Emmeran's (ca. 1010–after 1070) *Libellus de tenationibus suis* of 1032, Guibert of Nogent's (ca. 1055–1124) *De vita sua* of 1116, and Eadmer's (ca. 1060–ca. 1126) *Vita Anselmi* of 1125 all interpret and structure (auto)biographical circumstances within an exemplary and recurring narrative of conversion in which these individual data embody either devilish or divine

<sup>1</sup> Anselmus Cantuariensis, *De processione spiritus sancti*, F. S. Schmitt ed., in: *Sancti Anselmi Opera Omnia*, 6 vols, F. Frommann: Stuttgart – Bad Cannstatt 1968–1984, 2.217: 'Possidet ergo uniusquisque suas proprietates, quarum collectio in alio non est eadem ad similitudinem diversarum hominum personarum. Per hoc enim hominum personae diversae sunt ab invicem, quia uniusquisque proprietatum collectio non est in alio eadem.'

<sup>2</sup> Caroline Bynum, 'Did the Twelfth Century discover the individual?', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31 (1980), 1–15; Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual 1050–1250*, Oxford University Press: Oxford 1991 [1972], esp. at 67.

<sup>3</sup> As this terminology is for example used in Michael E. Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders. The Development of the Concept of Miracle, 1150–1350*, Aldershot: Ashgate 2007.

intervention.

The duality that marks the personal also appears from the above quoted passage of Anselm of Canterbury's (ca. 1033–1109) theological treatise *De processione spiritus sancti*. The idea of a collection of properties that defines the *persona* points forward to future analyses in scholastic philosophy of non-abstract, non-essentialist particular realities, as with Gilbert of Poitiers (also: Porretanus or de la Porrée, ca. 1075–1154) the *totum quo*, or *haecceitas* with John Duns Scotus (ca. 1265–1308). However, at the same time *persona* is treated alongside and attached to the general notion of *homo*: *hominum personae*, that in the wider framework of this passage of *De processione* is viewed as an abstract, general, exemplary reality.

Anselm's work, from what Francisco Santi termed as 'intellectual autoreferentiality' in *Cur Deus homo* to the private tone and particular engagement in his letters, displays a multifaceted discernment of the personal.<sup>4</sup> Letters play an important part in this framework. As a genre, epistolography is commonly connected with the exploration of the personal in the Twelfth Century Renaissance. The art of writing letters flourished, with authors like, apart from Anselm, also Hildebert of Lavardin (ca. 1055–1133), Geoffrey of Vendôme (ca. 1065/70–1132), Ivo of Chartres (ca. 1040–1115) or Peter the Venerable (ca. 1092–1156) among many others. It is not in the least due to their correspondence that many of the protagonists of the age stand as witnesses to the expression of the personal and the particular 'individualism' of that fascinating period.

Following this research tradition, Samu Niskanen states in the introductory part to his text-critical study *The Letter Collections of Anselm of Canterbury* that (pp. 42–43)

...the spirituality of the day emphasized individual experience more strongly than before, a change reflected in devotional texts in particular. This stance permeates all Anselm's literary output, and even his treatises are sometimes intensely personal in appearance.

In view of the complexities of what notions of the personal might mean, the importance of a letter collection of someone of the social and intellectual status of Anselm of Canterbury can hardly be underestimated.

Set within its cultural context of epistolography and letter collections, Niskanen's impressive study focuses on the interrelation of the manuscripts through which Anselm's letter collection has reached us. By doing so, he aims at providing the necessary framework and tools for a critical edition that were absent in F. S. Schmitt's critical edition (1946–1951). As Niskanen concludes throughout his study concerning the latter's edition (p. 289), 'it is impossible to undertake systematic textual research on the letters on the basis of Schmitt's edition'. Therefore, Niskanen's study (p. 22) 'seeks to establish a store and framework of information essential to the execution of a critical edition'.

Methodologically, Niskanen opts for a diversified textual criticism. While

<sup>4</sup> Francisco Santi, 'Biografia, autobiografia, autoagiografia nei secoli XII-XIII', *Hagiographica* 12 (2005), 377–387, here 378.

making use of the traditional genealogical procedure (K. Lachmann – P. Maas), the weaknesses of the latter mode of operation are undercut by computer-based analyses that apply the Compression-based method by Roos, Heikkilä and Myllymäki (abbreviated as RHM). The problem with the genealogical approach is that it cannot account for contamination or horizontal transmissions, while the RHM (further extended with the *Bootstrap method*) allows for measuring these. This is all the more important because horizontal transmission is a common occurrence in the case of letter collections: letters could easily be removed or replaced in a body of texts, and authors could make themselves various versions of their own work. The RHM method is not meant to replace traditional tools in Niskanen's study, but to be used alongside a multifaceted approach involving standard textual criticism, paleography, codicology, and the study of the historical context.

Niskanen traces the textual tradition on the basis of two principal groups of collections. He names the first group the 'major collections' and the second group the 'minor collections.' To the 'major collections' pertain two and possibly three collections of Anselm's letters, namely a hypothetical collection  $\alpha$  (the existence of which cannot be ascertained), the Bec collection  $\beta$  (the only one that can be fully restored) and the Canterbury collection  $\omega$ . Whereas the first group involves manuscripts that derive from the great collections that were composed during Anselm's lifetime or soon thereafter, the second group concerns three interrelated manuscripts that exist independently from the former group. Their importance resides in the fact that they shed light on how Anselm's correspondence was first transmitted outside Bec and Canterbury, and that they became important tools especially when the initial group around Anselm had disappeared.

From reestablishing the transmission of Anselm's letters on the basis of the major and the minor collections, Niskanen proposes a number of principles that should guide a future critical edition. These principles concern the choice of textual witnesses, the choice of base manuscripts for the editorial text and the requirements they need to fulfill, what letters to include and finally the function of the *apparatus criticus*. Witnesses should only include manuscripts that exist independently and those, although depending on other manuscripts, however, do display (p. 289) the 'editorial and scribal individuality in circles under Anselmian influence'. The base manuscript for the editorial text should not be chosen from the witnesses to the minor collections or to be sought among the witnesses to the major collections that only contain a reduced number of letters.

In view of these principles further three manuscripts remain as apt candidates: *E* and *L* (for the Bec correspondence) and *L* (for the Canterbury correspondence). These manuscripts contain a large number of letters, they are the most closely connected with the 'Anselmian sphere of influence' and stemmatically nearest to the collections they witness. Niskanen furthermore proposes to include only letters from and to Anselm in the critical edition. Finally, as to the *apparatus criticus*, it should for example serve to mention textual variants that may be revealing of other authorial versions or support the editorial text where it needs to diverge from the base manuscripts. Ultimately Niskanen

states (p. 293), very promisingly, that if

...in the process of editing, errors – or any other evidence – emerge that uncover stemmatic qualities undetected by the sample-based study, these will be listed and discussed in the introduction to the edition, *already under construction* [my italics].

Dominique Bauer, PhD  
Higher Institute of Architecture Sint-Lucas, Belgium  
dominique.bauer[at]architectuur.sintlucas.wenk.be