Vorscholastik: The contribution of the Carolingian monk Paschasius Radbertus of Corbie (c. 790–860) to early medieval philosophy

This article reconsiders the historical–philosophical significance of the monk and abbot of Corbie Abbey (est. 657), Paschasius Radbertus (c. 790–860). Radbert is contextualised within the cultural and academic setting of the Carolingian period of the eighth and ninth centuries while taking into account the diverse scholarly accomplishments of his contemporaries such as Alcuin of York (c. 740–804), Rabanus Maurus (c. 780–856), Walafrid Strabo (c. 809–849) and John Scottus Eriugena (815–877). The characteristic absence of contributions regarding Radbert in otherwise comprehensive introductions and editorial works in medieval philosophy is subsequently surveyed. It is shown that only a few introductory works of note contain references to Radbert, while the current specialised research is also relatively limited. Reconsidering depictions of Radbert in several older commentaries, notably Martin Grabmann’s (1875–1949) Die Geschichte der Scholastischen Methode I (1957), it is suggested that Radbert’s philosophical importance could be traced to Vorscholastik or the earliest development of scholasticism, as presented in his extensive commentary Expositio in Matheo Libri XII – without diminishing the ecclesiastical weight of his dispute with Ratramnus (d.c. 868) regarding their interpretation of the Eucharist in their similarly titled but disparate treatises De corpore et sanguine Domini, for which Radbert is generally better known and accordingly reflected in studies of early medieval intellectual history.

Contribution: This article contributes to scholarship in early medieval philosophy by reassessing the philosophical influence of Paschasius Radbertus, based on the most recent specialised analyses and older modern receptions of his texts De corpore et sanguine Domini and Expositio in Matheo Libri XII.

Keywords: Carolingian period; De corpore et sanguine Domini; Mayke de Jong (1950–); Gillian R. Evans (1944–); Expositio in Matheo Libri XII; Martin Grabmann (1875–1949); Willemien Otten (1959–); Paschasius Radbertus of Corbie (c. 790–860); Rabanus Maurus (c. 780–856); Ratramnus of Corbie (d.c. 868).

Introduction

How does the Carolingian monk Paschasius Radbertus1 of Corbie (c. 790–860) fit into the early medieval landscape of philosophy and the broader Western history of ideas? Could his name be mentioned in the same vein as his (in)famous contemporary John Scottus Eriugena and other eminent Carolingians2 such as Alcuin of York, Rabanus Maurus and Walafrid Strabo? What was Radbert’s most definitive contribution to medieval philosophy in particular? In an attempt to answer these questions, this article3 reappraises Radbert’s life and work,

1 Like many other medieval monks who received a sobriquet or moniker at their base monasteries, Paschasius Radbertus was primarily known as ‘Paschasius’: the byname most likely referred to the penitent deacon in the Dialogues of Pope Gregory the Great (590–604), because Radbertus, in characteristic modesty, chose to remain a deacon and refused to be ordained a priest (cf. De Jong & Lake 2020:x). In medieval scholarship, the moniker, original first name and location (or ‘medieval surname’) are normally used in titles, initial references to and the bibliography of a particular thinker, after which only one is typically prioritised: Appleby (2005:1–46), De Jong (1935–43), De Jong and Lake (2020:2–5), Otten (2000:137–138) and Cabaniss (1967:3), for example, use ‘Radbertus’ while Brown and Flores (2007:208), Matts (2019:177) and Evans (2002:44) preferred ‘Paschasius’. Other scholars, for example, Contreni (1995) 2006:709–757, choose to consistently use both names in full. Following the first preference, De Jong (2019) and De Jong and Lake’s (2020) abbreviation of the Latin version to simply ‘Radbert’ in English is practical and maintained here.

2 The term ‘Carolingians’ refers to a group of diverse politicians and thinkers who worked at or were associated with successive Carolingian courts from around 780 to the end of the ninth century. For an internal periodisation of medieval philosophy from 410 to 1464 (including the Carolingian [742–877] and post-Carolingian [877–1088] periods), see Beukes (2020:xix). In medieval scholarship, the moniker, original first name and location (or ‘medieval surname’) are normally used in titles, initial references to and the bibliography of a particular thinker, after which only one is typically prioritised: Appleby (2005:1–46), De Jong (1935–43), De Jong and Lake (2020:2–5), Otten (2000:137–138) and Cabaniss (1967:3), for example, use ‘Radbertus’ while Brown and Flores (2007:208), Matts (2019:177) and Evans (2002:44) preferred ‘Paschasius’. Other scholars, for example, Contreni (1995) 2006:709–757, choose to consistently use both names in full. Following the first preference, De Jong (2019) and De Jong and Lake’s (2020) abbreviation of the Latin version to simply ‘Radbert’ in English is practical and maintained here.

3 The article’s objective is modest, namely to reassess Radbert not from the periphery of medieval philosophy but its ‘canon’. In terms of scope and methodological orientation, it is akin to ideengeschichte (a term difficult to translate in English, pointing towards the ‘idea-historical’, ‘historical-philosophical’, ‘discursive’ or an ‘intellectual history’), which is a more limited form of historiography that...
expressly as a thinker from the Carolingian period in the early Middle Ages. Radbert is unquestionably one of the most important literary and intellectual figures of the Carolingian Renaissance but is better known as an author of biblical exegesis (especially regarding his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Expositio in Matheo Libri XII), cf. Paschasius Radbertus of Corbie 1984 [c. 822 – c. 856]), ‘theologian’ (for instance, his treatise on the Eucharist, De corpore et sanguine Domini, cf. Paschasius Radbertus of Corbie 1969 [c. 843]), and historical biographer (particularly the Vita Adalhardi [cf. De Jong & Lake 2020] and Epitaphium Arsenii [cf. De Jong 2019]), than as a philosopher or authentic exponent of philosophy. As such, Radbert is given little to no coverage in standard summaries of medieval philosophy. To the degree that Radbert is thought of as an intellectual figure with lasting influence, this is typically based on De corpore et sanguine Domini, which anticipated what would eventually become the official church position on ‘transubstantiation’ since the early 13th century. However, it is argued infra that the division between theology and philosophy from the 12th century onwards distorts Radbert’s philosophical significance, because Expositio in Matheo Libri XII (thus an exegetical work) was an important contribution to the early development of the scholastic method, itself a profoundly philosophical enterprise.

Against this background, the article’s research justification holds that the striking lack of references to Radbert in otherwise highly inclusive contemporary introductions and editorial works, with little to consult outside of the applicable specialised domains in early medieval research, point towards a missed intellectual opportunity, given the early Middle Ages – who thus merits an accessible reappraisal. Reconsidering several older studies, notably the relevant passages in the first volume of early 20th-century scholar Martin Gräbmann’s Die Geschichte der Scholastischen Methode (1957), it is suggested that Radbert’s philosophical significance could be traced to what only later came to be known as scholasticism, specifically regarding its earliest development (or Vorscholastik), as established in his extensive commentary Expositio in Matheo Libri XII, a work consisting of 12 volumes and written over a period of around three decades (c. 822 – c. 856). This rehabilitative emphasis is put forward without discounting the ecclesiastical significance of Radbert’s dispute, for which he is more generally known, with his colleague Ratramnus of Corbie (d.c. 868) regarding their interpretation of the Eucharist in their similarly titled but opposing treatises De corpore et sanguine Domini.

Radbert’s Carolingian context: Alcuin, Rabanus, Erigena and Walafird

Alcuin of York (730–804) set foot in the new Carolingian world from the Anglo-Saxon setting of Northumberland. Given the chaos which swept over continental Europe the previous two centuries, the centre of administered learning shifted away from Europe to Ireland and northern England during the eighth century. The reawakening of classical antiquity was one of Charlemagne’s deepest aspirations: he thus sought out the most outstanding academics of his time to provide impetus to this rebirth – indeed as far as from Anglo-Saxon England and Ireland. The Carolingian Renaissance, which gained momentum from around 780, was therefore characterised by the influence of Irish and Anglo-Saxon thinkers at the first Carolingian courts. In 782,


5. The transitional phase from the post-Roman to the Carolingian period (530–742) could involve the characterised as the ‘Dark Ages’ proper: there is, for example, virtually no record of systematic philosophical activity during these two centuries. The transition was typified by social, religious and political instability in terms of the division between theology and philosophy from the 12th century onwards distorts Radbert’s philosophical significance, because Expositio in Matheo Libri XII (thus an exegetical work) was an important contribution to the early development of the scholastic method, itself a profoundly philosophical enterprise.

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Alcuin accepted an invitation by Charlemagne to become executive principal of the palace school in Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle; cf. Figure 1). There he developed into a prestigious educator: some of the most outstanding figures from the Carolingian Renaissance were tutored directly by him, including Rabanus Maurus (c. 780–856). On Charlemagne’s order, Alcuin set out in 789 to participate in the reforming of monasteries throughout the Carolingian empire, conforming them to their Irish counterparts’ putative uniformity and academic achievement. Although Alcuin’s role in the Carolingian monastic reform movement should not be overstated, over the next two decades he played a noteworthy role in the restructuring of Benedictine monasteries in Western Europe to correspond to this ideal, in spite of their cultural and geographical diversity, as well as furthering the Carolingian objective to rehabilitate the philosophical, scientific, architectural and artistic accomplishments of classical antiquity. Alcuin opened the intellectual history of the ancients with characteristic Anglo-Saxon erudition and concretised the Greek and Roman legacies in exceptional libraries within the more streamlined version of Benedictine monasticism. The reformed monasteries, with their newly established schools and libraries, later accompanied by cathedral schools, provided the institutional environment wherein the liberal arts would be practised for almost three centuries, until the establishment of the first university in Bologna in 1088. Alcuin unlocked the Carolingian door for one Irishman in particular, John Scottus Eriugena (815–877), as well as Rabanus and Walfrid Strabo (c. 809–849).

Eriugena arrived at the Carolingian court, now that of Charles II, in the 840s. He can justifiably be regarded as the only genuinely speculative Carolingian philosopher (cf. Carabine 2000:13–14). Furthermore, Eriugena was the first Latin translator of Pseudo-Dionysius’ (c. 500) whole extant oeuvre in Greek, presented as the Corpus Dionysiacum. His Periphrasis (864–866), a work that was repeatedly denounced, concretised the Greek and Roman legacies in exceptional cultural and geographical diversity, as well as furthering the role in the restructuring of Benedictine monasteries in the Carolingian empire from the 830s onwards. As a hallmark of his conciliatory approach, Walfrid even succeeded in appeasing the predestinarian dissent Gottschalk Van Orbaïs’ (c. 808–868) theological participation in the revolts of 828 and 832 against Louis the Pious. Walfrid became abbot of Reichenau Abbey (est. 724) at the uncommonly young age of 29. In Alcuin’s footsteps, Rabanus, Eriugena and Walfrid contributed to an intellectual environment wherein their contemporary Radbert was sculpted into an authentic Carolingian who made an independent contribution to the early medieval history of ideas. The question is what that contribution was, and if Radbert’s legacy is to be restricted to only a single yet consequential event: the circulation of his treatise De corpore et sanguine Domini in 822.

De corpore et sanguine Domini (822–843): Radbert and Ratramnus

Born between 785 and 790 and brought up as an orphan at the nunnery Notre-Dame de Soissons, Radbert became a monk at and later the abbot of Corbie Abbey (est. 657, cf. Figure 1) in Picardy, a Merovingian royal monastery containing an excellent library (cf. Ganz [1995] 2006:804). At Soissons, he was educated by its later abbess, Theodara (d. 846), the youngest sister of two monks from the nobility and blood relatives of Charlemagne, Adalhard (d. 826) and Wala (d. 836), who acted as abbots of Corbie from 781 and 826, respectively (cf. De Jong 2019:19–34; Casten 1986:13–41). Under Adalhard’s guidance, Radbert started the novitiate at Corbie in 812. By the time of Adalhard’s death in 826, master Radbert was the principal of the monastery school and a respected lecturer in biblical exegesis (cf. Contreni [1995] 2006:721). In that capacity, he was able to successfully advance the appointment of Wala as his late brother’s successor.
In 822 (cf. Matis 2019:177), Radbert circulated a treatise on the Eucharist, which initially was intended for use by Corbie Abbey’s sister monastery in Corvey (in present North Rhine-Westphalia; cf. Figure 1). The objective of this first in a series of the same-titled treatises was to educate new converts from Saxony at the Corvey nunnery on the importance of the proper understanding of the sacrament. Titled *De corpore et sanguine Domini* (hence *DeSD*; Paschasius Radbertus of Corbie 1969 [c.843]), the document was deemed important from the outset as it was the first commentary from the Latin Christian West dealing exclusively with the Eucharist (cf. Phelan 2010:271). However, Radbert’s technical exegesis of the relevant passages from scripture led to diverse interpretations, 13. Just how complex Radbert’s exposition was becomes apparent in Otten’s (2000:141–154) nuanced analysis. Radbert effectively maintained Ambrose’s (c. 339 – c. 397) view that the Eucharist points to a mysterium because it indeed contains the verum corpus of the crucified Christ (cf. Otten 2000:148–149). He subsequently distinguished figura (external form) and veritas (internal truth), arguing that the form of the bread and wine should not be confused with the internal truth of it, namely that the external bread and wine, when received at the

resulting in disagreement in the Carolingian court itself (cf. De Jong & Lake 2020:4). To avoid further misinterpretations, Radbert reworked the original document between 831 and 833. Charles II nevertheless decided in 843, with the authoritative support of Rabanus, to establish a comprehensive consensus in the empire regarding the correct interpretation of the Eucharist (cf. Matis 2019:176). Although Radbert was considered to be an exceptionally competent exegete at this stage, he was subsequently called up by Charles II in 843 to present his interpretation with yet another adaptation of the original treatise of 822 and the reworked version of 831–833 (cf. Chazelle 2001:210).

With the completion of this refinement in the same year, strategically presented as a gift to Charles II (albeit with exactly the same title as the original and reworked versions), Radbert’s interpretation of the Eucharist came under fire again (cf. Ganz [1995] 2006:779). His former student at Corbie and successor as principal of its monastery school, Ratramnus (d.c. 868), answered Radbert’s interpretation (without mentioning him by name) with a detailed commentary, explicitly supported by Rabanus, with (again, for obviously polemic reasons) the same title. In 843, there were, as a result, four documents bearing the title De corpore et sanguine Domini: Radbert’s three versions of 822, 831–833 and finally 843 and Ratramnus’ commentary dated the same year. Radbert presented the same argument in all the versions of his original text of 822, which echoed throughout the following centuries regarding (later15 correspondingly called) the doctrine of transubstantiation.16 He was, on the patristic trail left by Ambrose, the first medieval exponent of this interpretation in his attempt to demonstrate philosophically that Christ is substantial and fully present at the moment of consecration at the sacrament of the altar. The bread and wine become, in this transubstantiated sense, the true body (verum corpus) of Christ. Ratramnus countered this interpretation with his accent on the symbolic and (even) metaphorical functioning of the bread and wine (thus as ‘signs’). Ratramnus used the same distinction between figura and veritas as Radbert but provided it with a sharper empirical context: figura accordingly points to ‘that which can be recognised by the senses’ and veritas that ‘which is known to be true’, a deduction based on the former recognition by the senses. The bread and wine could, as a result, not be the real body and blood of Christ because it is not recognised as such by the senses. The sensory experience of the bread and wine never changes: the bread and wine are at the time of receiving the sacrament precisely what they were before, namely bread and wine, and not the real, historical and incarnated body of Christ (cf. Chazelle 2001:32–36). However banal this may seem, the point was that something else was required for the sacrament to be truly functional: namely, on Augustine’s trail, faith. Although Ratramnus had no intention to let this difference in interpretation develop into a formal controversy (e.g. not mentioning Radbert by name), it was clear to their contemporaries whose interpretation was critically exposed. Although Radbert was not formally reprimanded (because it was not an official controversy), Ratramnus’ version was welcomed to such an extent that Radbert’s position at Corbie Abbey was considerably weakened. Nevertheless, in the absence of any official proceedings, Radbert was appointed abbot of Corbie in September 843. He attempted to reform the monastery on several levels in this capacity, however, with negligible success.

Ratramnus’ version of DcsD gained the upper hand on at least three possible grounds.16 Firstly, he quoted and annotated the patristic sources thoroughly and consistently, especially regarding Augustine, while even Radbert’s last reworked version of 843 lacked a similar scope of referencing, including his preferred source, Ambrose. Secondly, and as a result of this, version (particularly that of Zwingli) that the bread and wine are signs of Christ’s presence and have no theological basis other than semiotically. When only accidental features change in the bread and wine, nothing substantially changes – Quidort’s point exactly. The most thorough work on medieval doctrines on the Eucharist is Bakker’s (1999) two-volume La raison et le miracle: Les doctrines eucharistiques (c. 1250 – c. 1400), while the work of Plotnik (1970) is very useful because of its accessible format.

Because of the more favourable reception of his version of DcsD, Ratramnus presented a second influential theological work, again ordered by Charles II and circulated since 850 onwards: De praedestinazione presented a summary of existing interpretations of God’s knowledge of future contingents and the resulting teachings on divine predestination, as embedded in patristic texts and post-Roman theologies. As both his version of DcsD and this work focused on an interpretation (rather than an uncritical validation of authoritative readings) of the relevant biblical texts, the two works were positively reappraised in the initial phases of the Reformations of the early 16th century. Radbert, after 843, on the other hand, finalised his second book on the Vita Wulfi (after having completed the Vita sancti Albani before the onset of the dispute), a two-volume commentary on the theological significance of the virgin Mary (De partu virginis) and a series of three books on Psalm 45. Whatever one may think of the two monks’ views, their dispute was far more sophisticated than the controversies of the preceding generation. Both consistently and spontaneously employed the analytic and discursive techniques provided by philosophy, including ‘argumentation, drawing or rejecting distinctions, the key to define issues on an abstract level, use of examples and counterexamples, and drawing out consequences of positions’ (King 2006:34) – indeed, philosophical discourse was an integral part of their debate, as it was of everything else that would since the early 12th century progressively be distinguished as ‘theology’.

Footnote 14 continued...

16. The term ‘transubstantiation’ was used informally since the 11th century (inter alia, by the bishop of Le Mans, [1096–1097], Hildebertus van Lavardin [c. 1055–1138]), but was only employed officially after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, subsequently designating a firm dogmatic position in the Catholic teaching on the sacrament of the altar. The bread and wine are simultaneously considered to be ‘signs’ and ‘things’ and should thus be accepted in faith as a commemoration (therefore as an interpretation) of the meaning of the cruified body of Christ (cf. Otten 2000:147–148). Radbert’s version of DcsD was recently translated by Vanlaer and Senut (transl. 2020) in Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 16. Ratramnus’ version was translated in English six decades ago by McCracken and Cabaniss (1957:118–147).

Footnote 15 continued...

15. Two examples are Marsilius of Inghen (c. 1340–1396); cf. Bakker 2001:247–264; Beuke 2000c:8–11; and Jean Quidot (also called Johann of Paris, c. 1205–1306; cf. Beuke 2019:128). Brugiglia 2015:412–415. Quidot’s distinctive interpretation of in panem (so-called because of the parameters of Christ’s ‘becoming bread’ is the Eucharist ‘from becoming’ flesh in the Incarnation, hence criticized by Hervaeus Natalis [c. 1250–1323] and elaborated on by William of Ockham [c. 1285–1348]; cf. Plotnik [1970:59–64]) had the objective to embed his Aristotelian interpretation of causality also theologically: only the accidental features of the bread and wine change, not its full substance (thus, at odds with Constitution 1 of the Fourth Lateran Council). The key feature of this ‘transubstantiation’ theory (or ‘transsubstantiation’) is that the substance of the bread and wine does remain in the Eucharist; however, ‘it does not remain in its own supposit but is drawn into the substance of Christ’ (Plotnik 1970:57). Quidot essentially extended (Augustine’s and) Ratramnus’ interpretation and anticipated the 16th-century Protestant

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Radbert was suspected of indifference towards tradition: in fact, the students at the monastery school, under the guidance of one Fredugard, formally challenged his knowledge of and loyalty to the patristic sources (cf. Otten 2000:141, 158). The disagreement with Ratramnus, the questioning of his loyalty to tradition by his students and the broader resistance to his reform initiatives by the young monks at Corbie took their toll. After only 6 years as abbot, Radbert stepped down in 849 and withdrew to the nearby monastery at Saint-Riquier to continue his academic work. A decade later he returned to Corbie, where he died shortly after. Radbert was buried in the Church of St John in Corbie and later, on the pope’s order, reburied in the proximate Church of St Peter. Recent interpretations prioritise DcsD as Radbert’s fundamental contribution to the intellectual Middle Ages, especially regarding his role in medieval church history – because the doctrine on the eucharist from the early 13th century onwards was clearly based on his expositions of 822, 831–833 and 843. However, if portraits of Radbert in older 20th-century commentaries are reconsidered, it becomes clear that there is more to the monk’s legacy than this dispute. The following two sections thus re-examine Radbert’s philosophical trail via older analyses, finding his intellectual impact on the central and later Middle Ages not only in DcsD but the stylistic qualities of his exegetical method, as manifested in Expositio in Matheo Libri XII. Such a reconnaissance would have to start with an account of the current state of research.

The state of Radbert research, anno 2022

Radbert is a relatively unacknowledged thinker from the early Middle Ages: except for what eventually turned out to be the lasting nature of his version of DcsD, his broader historical impact is still underevaluated in contemporary medieval philosophy scholarship. This statement could be substantiated by a comparative reading of the most significant introductions, companions and dictionaries published in the field over the past two decades. These kinds of works, also intended for a nonspecialised readership, are often helpful as barometers for the evaluation of a particular thinker’s standing on the margins or completely outside the canon19 of medieval philosophy. The dictionary of Brown and Flores (2007:208) contained a cryptic examination of one paragraph, which focuses on DcsD only and which is comparable to the length of deliberations on other lesser-known thinkers in the particular work. A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages by Gracia and Noone (eds. 2006) contains an assessment (although not on Radbert as such but broad developments in the Latin Christian West from 750 to 1050), offered by King (2006:33–34) – again, the focus is on DcsD only and which is comparable to the length of deliberations on other lesser-known thinkers in the particular work.

17. One may add, counter-intuitively so for the modern reader, that Ratramnus’ interpretation confirmed more closely to the mediated nature of the Carolingian worldview than that of Radbert. To an even greater extent than in the central and later Middle Ages, the mediated nature of all things was the defining feature of the world in the early 9th century. Everything in this world was a sign of a higher order, mediating the divine and the mundane, representing not itself but an elevated and wholly different reality (cf. Colish 1997:72–73). By interpreting the Eucharist as a signified and indeed metaphorical event, Ratramnus thus played in on a Carolingian matrix. This may be the reason why it took another four centuries for Radbert’s interpretation to be formally reconsidered in the central Middle Ages – and only then to the extent that it effectively provided the keystone for the Catholic dogmatic position and resulting doctrine, as articulated in Constitution 1 of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.

18. See De Jong and Lake (2020:5–6; cf. Matts 2019:117–177). Two centuries later it became progressively clear that Radbert’s interpretation of the Eucharist would eventually become the dogmatically dominant position: he was thus canonised pre-emptively in 1073 by Pope Gregory VII (1020–1085, pope 1073–1085). Two decades ago, Otten (2000:137–156) convincingly showed that the traditional understanding of a direct conflict or controversy between Radbert and Ratramnus on the Eucharist is exaggerated. It was a difference of opinion, an informal dispute and, officially speaking (cf. Noble [1995] 2006:580), nothing more. Neither of the two monks had the intention that their interpretations would be taken as official treatises: Ratramnus analysed Radbert’s interpretation without calling him by name and Radbert never referred to Ratramnus in any of the reworked versions of the original document. Moreover, both monks simply (albeit in a highly scholarly manner) addressed the patristic sources (Ambrose via Radbert, although, as far as his students were concerned, not nearly adequately and Augustine via Ratramnus): if there was something controversial about the two monks’ interpretations, it was the positioning of at least these two church fathers’ on the Eucharist should thus apply. Lastly, there were no direct contacts between either: although Ratramnus’ version enjoyed far greater acceptance, Radbert was not disciplined, at least not explicitly. He did suffer indirectly from the dispute, as indicated by his short term as abbot of Corbie. Ratramnus became the succeeding principal of the monastery school in 843 and held this position until his death around 868. In addition to Otten’s analysis, Phelan (2010:271–288) has suggested that Radbert’s monks did not present incommensurable interpretations but essentially the same teaching with disparate accents: in Radbert’s version, the Eucharist functions as an instrument of salvation; in Ratramnus’, as one of unity.

21. For an exposition on the [problem of the] ‘canon’ in medieval philosophy, see Beukes (2002:1–6; 2011b:3). The following sections are consequently not building a case for only Radbert but the many solitary or non-canonnised thinkers in the medieval history of ideas. They are the ‘lesser’ ones on whose shoulders the ‘giants’ or cannonised thinkers stood – in this case, the giant Anselm of Canterbury on the shoulders of the lesser Radbert of Corbie: ‘We are like dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants; we perceive more and see farther than they, but not because we have better vision, nor because we are taller than they, but because they have lifted us up and added their gigantic height to ours’ (Bernard of Chartres [d.c.1224] on his predecessors, quoted via Livingstone 2006:1).

19. For an exposition on the [problem of the] ‘canon’ in medieval philosophy, see Beukes (2002:1–6; 2011b:3). The following sections are consequently not building a case for only Radbert but the many solitary or non-canonnised thinkers in the medieval history of ideas. They are the ‘lesser’ ones on whose shoulders the ‘giants’ or cannonised thinkers stood – in this case, the giant Anselm of Canterbury on the shoulders of the lesser Radbert of Corbie: ‘We are like dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants; we perceive more and see farther than they, but not because we have better vision, nor because we are taller than they, but because they have lifted us up and added their gigantic height to ours’ (Bernard of Chartres [d.c.1224] on his predecessors, quoted via Livingstone 2006:1).
he is being subordinated to other Carolingians who do feature in these introductory works.

Why is this the case? McKitterick and Marenbon (1998:96–97) provided a cue: ‘The period from 800 to 1100 is even more neglected by historians of medieval Western philosophy than the rest of the Middle Ages [...]’; however, ‘[T]he names of some of those besides Eriugena and Anselm who considered philosophical questions in the early Middle Ages are known [...]’, followed by an extensive list of Carolingians and post-Carolingians, with, of course, the exception of Radbert. Thus, apart from the Carolingian and post-Carolingian contexts as such being underrepresented in medieval scholarship, Radbert is not included even in a comprehensive list of thinkers from these two under-rated idea-historical periods. The reason for that is, taking McKitterick and Marenbon’s second remark into count, that Radbert is evidently not considered a philosopher proper – but a theologian. On the one hand, that is true: Radbert did not contribute to the primary index of medieval philosophy regarding cosmology, epistemology, metaphysics, psychology and ethics (including political theory). On the other hand, up to the last decades of the 11th century, there was no fixed borderline between philosophy and (what would only from that time slowly but progressively be referred to as) theology. Until the development of scholasticism within the institutional framework of the upcoming universities of the early 12th century, there were no philosophers vis-à-vis theologians: all academics were still considered to be exponents of one administrated form of learning and tuition called philosophia. Even pura et vera ‘philosophers’ – thus, those who formally contributed to the given index – were as much theologians as they were literary theorists, linguists, natural scientists and jurists. And ‘theologians’, such as Radbert, who thus did not formally or substantially contribute to that index, utilised the full repertoire of (medieval) philosophy to address theological issues (in debates on, e.g. the Eucharist, regarding causality and the relation between substance, matter, form and accidental features). It is unclear how this trend of overlooking Radbert based on an implied distinction between theology and philosophy before the 12th century established itself in the later modern scholarship. If one wants to engage the primary index of medieval philosophy regarding cosmology, epistemology, metaphysics, psychology and ethics (including political theory). On the one hand, that is true: Radbert did not contribute to the primary index of medieval philosophy regarding cosmology, epistemology, metaphysics, psychology and ethics (including political theory). On the other hand, up to the last decades of the 11th century, there was no fixed borderline between philosophy and (what would only from that time slowly but progressively be referred to as) theology. Until the development of scholasticism within the institutional framework of the upcoming universities of the early 12th century, there were no philosophers vis-à-vis theologians: all academics were still considered to be exponents of one administrated form of learning and tuition called philosophia. Even pura et vera ‘philosophers’ – thus, those who formally contributed to the given index – were as much theologians as they were literary theorists, linguists, natural scientists and jurists. And ‘theologians’, such as Radbert, who thus did not formally or substantially contribute to that index, utilised the full repertoire of (medieval) philosophy to address theological issues (in debates on, e.g. the Eucharist, regarding causality and the relation between substance, matter, form and accidental features). It is unclear how this trend of overlooking Radbert based on an implied distinction between theology and philosophy before the 12th century established itself in the later modern scholarship. If one wants to engage the broader significance of Radbert’s legacy, it appears that the only route is to go back in the reception history to a point where that implied distinction was not made, which would be in commentaries from at least the first half of the 20th century.

The most recent specialised research on Radbert is also comparatively limited. It comprises the eminent scholar of the early Middle Ages, De Jong’s (2019) outstanding Epitaph for an Era.22 De Jong and Lake’s (2020) translation and annotation of Radbert’s funeral oration for Wala, reminiscent of Cabaniss’s (1967) translation and commentary of Radbert’s vitae of both Adalhard and Wala; Vaillancourt’s (transl. 2020) translation of De corpore et sanguine Domini; Appleby’s (2005:1–46) survey of the place of the body in Radbert’s thought; Matis’ (2019:139–175) chapter on Radbert’s use of Song of Songs as an exegetical leitmotif (although Radbert never wrote a commentary on it); and Phelan’s (2010:271–289) fresh juxtaposition of Radbert and Ratramnus in the Eucharist dispute. Remarkably, Radbert was also one of a handful of monks presented as case studies in a relatively recent survey of developments in medieval monasticism (in eds. Blanks, Frasetto & Livingstone 2006; cf. Stofferahn 2006:49–69).

**Radbert’s contribution to the earliest development of scholasticism: *Expositio in Matheo Libri XII* (826–856)**

Exploring the 12 books of *Expositio in Matheo Libri XII* (Paschasius Radbertus of Corbie 1984 [c. 822 – c. 856], hence *EMLXII*) is not possible within the limited scope of this article. However, its sheer size, and the fact that it has never been translated out of Latin, make in-depth analyses and applications of *EMLXII* a potentially fruitful source for further research, as Heydemann (2021:79–83) recently displayed in her analysis of Carolingian interpretations of 2 Timothy 2:4, employing sections of Volume X as Radbert’s thematic contribution to Carolingian exegeses of the particular text. *Expositio in Matheo Libri XII* was edited in three volumes by Beda Paulus in 1984 in *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (56, 56A, 56B). The 12 volumes were both Radbert’s first and last project: he had completed volumes I to IV by 831 (ed. Paulus 1984:viii) and the remaining eight volumes only after he resigned as abbot in 849 (De Jong 2019:39).23

Evans thus had good reason to not only include Radbert in her introduction but to specifically highlight *EMLXII*, not overstating *DcsD* and rather focusing on Radbert’s exegetical style and method. Whatever Evans’ unique considerations were in terms of the unconventional nature of her introductory work, the fact remains that the reception over the past decades focused on *DcsD* as Radbert’s primary, if not exclusive, contribution to the intellectual Middle Ages, while on occasion taking into secondary account the weight of his *vitae* of Adalhard and Wala (as De Jong 2019; De Jong & Lake 2020 did again recently). In the recent scholarship, the import of *EMLXII* thus features as an exception to the rule, as in Evans’ reception. However, this was not always the case: two common features of the older literature point precisely in this direction – firstly, these older appraisals of Radbert typically do not distinguish between philosophy and theology preceding the 12th century; secondly, they do not isolate *DcsD* as Radbert’s primary contribution but present a balanced reception wherein *EMLXII* plays a significant role without necessarily discounting the (especially for church history) import of Radbert’s version of *DcsD*.

The hermeneutical intention of the older generation of modern scholars is clear: if Radbert is remembered only for...
his role in the Eucharist debate, there would be no reason to consider him an authentic exponent of *philosophia* proper. However, when *EMLLX* forms part of a more comprehensive evaluation of Radbert’s legacy, he has to be considered an influential Carolingian beyond the scope of a debate he initially lost and only got the upper hand in almost four centuries after his death. The older reception therefore presents a balanced approach by accounting for the influence of *EMLLX* on the earliest development of what later manifested in Anselm's (c.1078) *Proslogion* as a method, one which became the standard paradigm for textual exegesis from at least the early 12th to the first half of the 14th century. The scholastic method, as it was called only later, indeed combined brevity and completeness, stating as much as possible with as little as possible, even if it eventually meant presenting multivolume works on a certain topic. This method would indeed become indicative of the characteristic direction medieval philosophy took during that highest curve in the development (and eventually the demise) of accordingly so-called scholasticism.24

Examples of these older studies are Ebert’s (1880:230–244) *Allgemeine Geschichte der Literatur des Mittelalters im Abendlande*, which, in its solemn focus on *EMLLX*, was one of the first modern introductions that engaged Radbert’s legacy beyond the Eucharist dispute; likewise, the relevant section in the first volume of Manitus’ (1911:401–411) *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters* found a balanced midway in its reception of both *DcsD* and *EMLLX*; the same applies to Henri Pelletier’s *Pascase Radbert* (1938; the modern [or at least ‘most recent’, De Jong 2019:35] monograph on Radbert) and his earlier contribution to *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* (13[2]; cf. Pellet 1908:1628–1639; to be certain, Pellet discussed *EMLLX* first, before briefly turning to *DcsD*25; also, McCracken and Cabaniss’ (1957:90–93) relevant section in their *Early Medieval Theology* presented a non-prioritised perception of the two texts. This unprejudiced focus on *EMLLX* vis-à-vis *DcsD* is also present in a remarkable series of passages contained in the first unit of a two-volume study on the development of scholasticism by an eminent German scholar from the first half of the 20th century, Martin Grabmann’s (1875–1949) *Die Geschichte der Scholastischen Methode* (1957).26 Grabmann’s reception of Radbert can be represented as representative of these older receptions that made no implied distinction between theology and philosophy before the 12 century, as one would find in more recent interpretations. The two volumes of *Die Geschichte der Scholastischen Methode* were posthumously edited and composed of Grabmann’s publications and unpublished manuscripts on scholasticism, presented from 1909 to 1949 (cf. publisher’s Vorwort, second title page and vii–ix, in Grabmann 1957). The first volume covers developments only after Augustine (who Grabmann curiously but explicitly, if not polemically, excluded from the medieval corpus), specifically from Boethius (c. 477–524; ‘der letzte Römer und der erste Scholastiker’, Grabmann 1957:148–177) onwards, ending with an exhaustive section on Anselm, to whom Grabmann (1957:258) rightly refers as the authentic founder of the scholastic method (‘Der Vater der Scholastik’; cf. Grabmann 1957:258–340).

In the fourth section of this first volume, titled ‘Die Überlieferung und Weiterbildung der patristischen und boethianischen Anfänge der scholastischen Methode in der Vorscholastik’, Grabmann (1957:178–257) isolates two phases in the earliest phases of the development of scholasticism: *Vorscholastik* (which can possibly be translated as ‘proto-scholasticism’, cf. Grabmann 1957:178–214) indicating the relevant post-Roman and Carolingian contributions from Bede onwards (‘Die wissenschaftliche Arbeitsweise im karolingischen Zeitalter’) and *Am Vorabend der Scholastik* (‘the dawn of scholasticism’), referring to post-Carolingian developments up to Anselm in the 11th century (‘Methodische Strebungen und Strömungen in der Theologie des 11. Jahrhunderts’). Radbert was accordingly located in *Vorscholastik*, a subperiod which Grabmann (1957:178–214) qualified with reference to Eriugena in particular (‘1st Scotus Eriugena der Vater der Scholastik?’ (pp. 202–210), a rhetorical question he answers in the negative). However, Grabmann (1957:198–200) singles out Radbert as the most significant contributor to *Vorscholastik*, next to Eriugena. While giving proper attention to the contributions of Alcuin (pp. 193–195), Rabanus (pp. 195–196) and Walafrid (pp. 197), he remarkably highlights *EMLLX* as ‘the best exegetical work of the ninth century’ (‘Der Matthäuskommentar des Paschiasius Radbertus ist die beste exegetische Arbeit des 9. Jahrhunderts’; Grabmann 1957:198[4]). Given Rabanus’ reputation as the leading ninth-century commentator on Matthew, this statement is very significant. Although Grabmann (1957:198–200) thoroughly acknowledges the import of *DcsD* for medieval church history from the early 13th century onwards (i.e. after the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215), his main focus is on Radbert’s import for his own time – that is, regarding *Vorscholastik*. Grabmann’s statement and subsequent exposition were fundamentally based on Anton Schönbach’s reading of Radbert in his *Über einige Evangelienkommentare des Mittelalters* (cf. Grabmann 1957:198–199; Schönbach 1903:142–174). Schönbach (1903:145–147) depicted the multivolume *EMLLX* as representative of a new style of multifaceted, polygonal and compulsory27 works that, parallel with the

24 Elaborating on scholasticism and the scholastic method as such falls beyond the scope of this article: for recent translations of and introductions to *Monologion* and *Proslogion*, see Davies and Evans (eds. & transl. 1998) and Hopkins and Richardson (eds. & transl. 2000); for recent overviews of the development of the scholastic method from Anselm onwards, see Evans (ed. 1984), the contributions in Davies and Lethow (eds. 2006), Logan (2009), Rogers (2008), Vaughn (2012) and Visser and Williams (2009).

25 Also, see Grégoire’s (1992–1995:295–301) ‘Paschase Radbert’ in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire* (Tome 12 Colonne 295); although published in the (now digitalised) dictionary between 1992 and 1995, the undated overview clearly was much written earlier. Grégoire also did not prioritise *DcsD* in his précis and referred substantially to *EMLLX* as well. The same applies to Ars’ (1993:1754–1756) appraisal of Radbert in the sixth volume of the most exhaustive German dictionary in the field, *Lexikon des Mittelalters*.

26 Indeed, ‘[a]ll too often, modern scholars ignore at their peril the absolutely massive accomplishments and enduringly useful information contained in studies such as Grabmann’s, and those by any number of German scholars from the late 19th and early to mid-20th centuries’ (acknowledging an anonymous peer-reviewer’s remark).

27 ‘(Radbert) justified the compulsory method of his commentary on Matthew by repeating Cicero’s story from the De inventione of the painter X(eu)xis who painted five of the prettiest girls he could find to create an adequate portrait of Helen of Troy. He used the same story but to a different end in his *Vita Adalhardi*’ (Contreni 1995:2006,717, referring to the Prologue of *EMLLX*).
historical-philosophical significance of the rise of encyclopaedic works such as that of Rabanus, thoroughly employed the available register of interpretations on a particular topic, synthesising it in a single event. This was not the scholastic method yet – but clearly a prelude to its development from Anselm onwards. For Schönbach and Grabmann Vorscholastik was, in this sense, of profound philosophical significance. This is the reason why Grabmann accentuated Radbert’s meticulous exegetical style, his ability to combine concision and historical-discursive density, working proto-scholastically forward on the strengths of tradition without being held captive by it: an approach developed with painstaking precision over more than three decades in the 12 volumes of EMLXII. This methodical and indeed stylistic quality must have been of direct significance for ‘all the great theologians of early- and high-scholasticism’ (Grabmann 1957:200). If Radbert’s exegetical ability was already noticeable in DcsD and other early treatises such as De fide, spe et caritate, it was, according to Grabmann, shadowing Schönbach, blueprinted by EMLXII. Grabmann (1957:200) concluded that Paschasius Radbertus:

Was probably the most erudite and capable scholar since Alcuin, one deeply versed in the texts of both the Greek and Latin fathers, notably also Augustine, an encyclopaedic and lively spirit, one that was able to unite theory and praxis and thoroughly internalize all tradition had to offer […] he did for his time what Origen did for all of Christian dogmatics. (author’s semantic translation of Grabmann 1957:200 [par. 1], also supra)

However, Grabmann did not pursue these remarks about Radbert any further, neither in the section on Radbert (Grabmann 1957:198–200) nor in the section on Anselm (Grabmann 1957:258–340). In what sense then, did Radbert’s exegetical method represent a stepping-stone on the path to the development of scholasticism, as Grabmann in this teleological understanding of the development of scholasticism maintained? Had Anselm indeed read EMLXII? If it cannot be confirmed, we must deduce that Grabmann’s highlighting of Radbert’s significance for the later development of scholasticism was based on stylistic considerations only.

There is no evidence that Anselm read EMLXII. A survey of Evans’ (ed. 1984) four-volume concordance of all Anselm’s works and their English translations by Davies and Evans (eds. & transl. 1998 [2006]) and Hopkins and Richardson (eds. & transl. 2000) shows that Anselm did not make any reference to Radbert, EMLXII or DcsD. Plus, if there was such a reference, however subtle, as a leading Anselm scholar Evans most likely would have mentioned it in her previously mentioned section on Radbert (thus, in Fifty Key Medieval Thinkers, Evans 2002:44–50). Grabmann, for his part, knew there was no such reference and that is why he did not further elaborate on any possible textual relation between Anselm and Radbert. He already stated his case: simply put, Vorscholastik was key in the early development of scholasticism and EMLXII was exemplary of it. As Evans did more than four decades later, in her highlighting of Radbert’s exegetical style and method, Grabmann concentrated on matters of style and composition, and, for the first time in a long time, Radbert was recognised as important beyond an infamous dogmatic debate on the Eucharist – indeed, as an encyclopaedic spirit and a Carolingian of philosophical consequence.

Conclusion

This article endeavoured, within a limited scope, to draw attention to the philosophical impact Paschasius Radbertus exerted on early medieval intellectual and religious culture. He should be considered an influential exponent of the development of the earliest stages of scholasticism and not be relegated to only his participation in the Eucharist debate of the ninth century. Based on the lack of references to Radbert in contemporary nonspecialised introductions and taking into account a limited specialised scholarship, he was depicted as a relatively unacknowledged thinker from the early Middle Ages; however, by reconsidering portraits in modern, less recent commentaries, of which Grabmann’s Die Geschichte der Scholastischen Methode I of 1957 could be considered representative, it was suggested that Radbert’s historical-philosophical significance could be traced to Vorscholastik or the earliest stages of the development of scholasticism, as established over more than three decades in Expositio in Matheo Libri XII. This reconstructive reading was presented without disregarding the ecclesiastical significance of the Eucharist debate in De corpore et sanguine Domini, as typically underscored in contemporary scholarship. The modest master from Corbie deserves to be remembered for more than his participation in an eventual influential dogmatic debate: certainly, also for his encyclopaedic exegetical style, which helped pave the way for the myriad of multivolume commentaries presented by the prestigious schoolmen of the central Middle Ages.

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