Introduction
Carolingian cultures of dialogue, debate and disputation

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This collection of articles on the theme of Carolingian cultures of dialogue and debate may seem a contradiction in terms. After all, it has recently been argued that by the end of the fourth century, Christianity had created authoritative structures of knowledge in which public disputation was replaced by catechism-like exchanges. This also spelled the end of classical dialogue, that is, the searching and open-ended exchange of ideas as it had been practised in the ancient world since the days of Socrates. Medievalists, on the other hand, have maintained that something resembling a public sphere emerged in the so-called 'high' Middle Ages; the lively and wide-ranging debates engendered by the Investiture Controversy have been cited as a case in point. A superficial combination of both perspectives, however different, yields the early medieval west in its traditional guise as a convenient and static backdrop that articulates previous declines and subsequent 'rises' of phenomena connected with modernity. For obvious reasons, this image needs to be discarded, but not simply by arguing for greater continuity, or by attempting to rehabilitate a period of roughly five centuries that was 'actually' much more culturally complex than has been hitherto assumed. On the contrary, we should make the most of the scholarly debates outside the orbit of *Early Medieval Europe*, for these raise questions that can be fed productively into our own analytical framework.

This is why this themed edition on Carolingian dialogues and debates opens with an extensive contribution on late antique Christian dialogue. It is also the reason why in this Introduction we shall take some time to explore the common ground between ancient historians and early

medievalists, as well as the differences in their approach. To put it suc-
cinctly, all are concerned with the larger issues involved, such as the im-
pact of Christianity, or with the shifting balance between oral and
written culture. Nonetheless, recent debates among historians of late an-
tiquity have mostly revolved around the question of whether the new re-
ligion did indeed put an end to a brilliant culture of open debate.
Recently, this contention has been challenged head-on with regard to late
antiquity and Byzantium, with much attention to the literary complexity of
the relevant sources.[1] The post-Roman west, however, is not part of these
reconsiderations, largely because of the general assumption that all the
venues that might have enabled public debate vanished along with the
Roman empire. Whereas Augustine and his flock had remained attuned
to empire-wide religious contestation, Alcuin of York was representative
of a restricted palace-connected elite, with great ideals concerning literacy
and reform that had, however, little practical effect on society at large.

Hence, it is still widely held that early medieval society offered little
room for criticism and debate. This tenacious image is based on the
preconception that the expression of divergent points of view was
unthinkable in a period in which 'the Church' was dominant and religious
diversity was oppressed. Free expression of opinion is supposed to have
disappeared, along with the possibilities of an open exchange of ideas,
the very moment Emperor Justinian closed the doors of the Academy of
Athens. While it should be noted that 'free expression of opinion' is an ide-
alistic construction in the first place, it cannot be denied that religious
unity at the level of kingdoms and empires was indeed the professed ideal
during much of the early Middle Ages. Yet this ideal had to be constantly
negotiated, debated and reformulated, if it was ever to be achieved.[2]
Scholars, bishops and rulers were intent on establishing orthodoxy and
defending it against heresy, that much is true, but orthodoxy, as is well
known, does not exist in and by itself. It develops in a dialectical relation-
ship with 'heresy'– a position that is not only held by modern sociologists
of religion, but was acknowledged in the early Middle Ages as well. Debate
with heterodox thinkers was considered necessary to arrive at the 'truth'.

Criticism and divergent opinions were welcomed in the political and re-
ligious arenas of debate (at least in theory), as long as they served the
uncovering and defence of truth and arguably benefitted the common
good. Another widely held notion concerning the absence of debate in
the early Middle Ages that we need to address from the outset is the

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[1] A. Cameron, *Dialoguing in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2014); P. Van Nuffelen,
'The End of Open Competition? Religious Disputations in Late Antiquity', in P. Van Nuffelen
and D. Engels (eds), *Competition and Religion in Antiquity* (Brussels, 2014), pp. 148–71.

[2] F. Close, *Uniformiser la foi pour unifier l'Empire. La pensée politico-théologique de Charlemagne*
(Brussels, 2011).

supposed demise of (formal) rhetoric. George Kennedy, an authority in the field of classical rhetoric and its medieval *Nachleben* even went so far as to claim that formal speech was no longer regarded as an effective form of persuasion, because 'men's minds and actions were largely manipulated by a rhetoric of brute force and authority [. . .] not by logical argument'.[3] The general opinion is that classical rhetoric dwindled in the sixth and seventh centuries, because there were fewer opportunities for public speaking. With the decay and fragmentation of civic life, rhetoric lost its public function and oratory went into decline. Training in written argumentation became ever more important, and those elements of the rhetorical discipline that were still considered useful were redirected to written discourse.[4]

Certainly, there is much evidence that points in the direction of a weakening of classical rhetoric after the municipal schools closed. Yet, rhetoric is so much more than formal rhetoric in the classical tradition of Cicero, Demetrius or Quintilian, a point to which we shall return below. There continued to be venues for oral rhetoric and occasions for debate where one could show off one's skills in persuasive public speaking. We only need to think of assemblies and smaller-scale deliberative meetings at the courts, such as are described in *De ordine palatii*, or of discussions on orthodoxy during or in the margins of ecclesiastical synods, to imagine places and opportunities where training in oral delivery must have come in useful. Although debates were increasingly based on the interpretation of written texts, that interpretation was still communicated orally in public meetings, and those who could speak well in public received the admiration of their contemporaries. In 800, Alcuin's student Candidus reported to his teacher how much he had admired the outspoken speech that Theodulf of Orleans had delivered at the assembly of Rome in that same year. Candidus praised the 'free voice' of Theodulf speaking out in a public meeting.[5] On such eminently public occasions, rulers and their direct entourage were admired for their eloquence. When Agobard of Lyon reported on the assembly of Attigny in 822, he praised Emperor Louis who with God's inspiration interrogated those present, uncovered the truth in a most elegant manner, and 'announced this faithfully, by his own word of mouth'.[6] The most

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[3] G.A. Kennedy, 'Forms and Functions of Latin Speech', in G.M. Masters (ed.), *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 10 (Chapel Hill, 1984), pp. 45–73, at p. 45. In the revised edition of his *Classical Rhetoric* of 1999, Kennedy expressed a much more nuanced view on rhetoric in the early Middle Ages.

[4] J.J. Murphy, 'Quintilian's Influence on the Teaching of Speaking and Writing in the Middle Ages and Renaissance', in *idem*, *Latin Rhetoric and Education in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Aldershot and Burlington, 2005), pp. 158–83.

[5] Alcuin, *Ep.* 225, discussed in J.L. Nelson, 'The libera vox of Theodulf of Orléans', in C. Chandler and S.A. Stofferahn (eds), *Discovery and Distinction in the Early Middle Ages* (Kalamazoo, 2013), pp. 288–306.

[6] Agobard, *De dispensatione*, c. 2, ed. L. Van Acker, CCCM 52 (Turnhout, 1981), p. 121: 'quod utique laudabiliter inspirante Dei gratia quaesivit, eleganter invenit, fideliter ore suo annuntiavit'.

impressive address at Attigny, however, was delivered by Abbot Adalhard of Corbie, by then an old and experienced orator. According to his biographer, Adalhard's eloquence was such that it was 'utterly suited for persuasion and dissuasion'.[7] Secular magnates also took an active part in such public discussions; especially the contentious issue of the use of ecclesiastical land for military purposes was debated hotly from the 820s onwards, with churchmen wanting to set limits to this, while the *saeculares* argued that the *res publica* could not do without it.[8]

The end of what, precisely?

For anyone working on such early medieval topics it must come as something of a surprise to learn that the genre of dialogue became extinct in late antiquity. Supposedly, the rise of Christianity put an end to the public and open-ended exchange of views that had been the hallmark of classical dialogue. To cite Simon Goldhill, in his introduction to *The End of Dialogue in Late Antiquity*:

> The dialogue is only very rarely evidenced as a form for normative Christian writing, despite the strategic place of conversion and theological discussion in Christian communities. The catechism and other question-and-answer structures are not in any significant sense a dialogue: they are forms of exchange to aid controlled learning and to produce certain, fixed responses.[9]

For Richard Lim, the new religion indeed spelled the end of dialogue, albeit for different reasons. In classical antiquity, Lim argues, the dialogue belonged to the elitist literary culture of *paideia*. It was highly influential, yet also a 'boutique literary genre', and therefore very different from the inclusive Christian *sermo humilis* that aimed to reach as many people as possible, including those from lower social strata. Put briefly, the inherent elitism of the dialogue, as Lim called it, was ill-suited to a religious communication that aimed at the masses, so the demand for this particular literary form gradually disappeared.[10]

As Averil Cameron recently pointed out, the freedom, democracy and open-ended exchange with which Goldhill and others identify 'real', that

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[7] Paschasius Radbertus, *Vita Adalhardi*, c. 63, *PL* 120, col. 1540: 'ad persuadendum vero vel dissuadendum promptissima'. Throughout this text, there is praise of Adalhard's *eloquentia*.

[8] See De Jong, below in this issue.

[9] S. Goldhill, 'Introduction: Why Don't Christians Do Dialogue', in *idem* (ed.), *The End of Dialogue in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 5.

[10] R. Lim, 'Christians, Dialogues and Patterns of Sociability in Late Antiquity', in Goldhill (ed), *End of Dialogue*, p. 171.

is, Socratic, dialogue is mostly a modern ideal.[11] A related and equally vexed question is whether the dialogues transmitted through texts in any way reflect 'real' public debates and discussions. Since all dialogues available to historians are literary constructs, including the ones that are presented as spontaneous and open-ended, a sharp distinction between literary and *viva voce* dialogue is not helpful. What we are able to grasp are the cultural ideals of how a dialogue should proceed.[12]

In a critique published only a year after Cameron's, Peter Van Nuffelen primarily engages with Richard Lim's *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity* (1995).[13] This influential book no doubt inspired the more recent verdict on the 'end of dialogue', but its central argument ranges more widely: it is about once wide-open intellectual horizons being narrowed by the increasing dominance of Christian orthodoxy. From the late fourth century onwards, the intellectually demanding public disputation that had been the prevailing norm and practice began to be replaced by statements of religious consensus. First, such debates became staged operations in which the victory of orthodoxy was decided from the beginning, and they just survived as literary exercises, with an even more predictable result. According to Van Nuffelen, however, this transition from once spontaneous and oral events to stilted literary productions represents an evolutionist projection on Lim's part. After all, any knowledge of the supposedly impromptu earlier disputations comes from literary accounts, which may have been just as fictitious as their fifth- and sixth-century successors. And instead of taking the latter to be mere literary productions and therefore not representative of any real-life exchange, a careful study of these texts in fact shows how much public disputation was still valued as a way of gaining truth and knowledge.[14]

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[11] Cameron, *Dialoguing*, esp. pp. 10 and 37.
[12] As forcefully argued by Cameron, *Dialoguing*, who concentrates on Byzantium.
[13] Van Nuffelen, 'The End of Open Competition?'.
[14] As demonstrated in recent studies by Olga Weijers and Alex Novikoff. O. Weijers, *In Search of the Truth. A History of Disputation Techniques from Antiquity to the Early Modern Period* (Turnhout, 2013); A.J. Novikoff, *The Medieval Culture of Disputation. Pedagogy, Practice and Performance* (Philadelphia, 2013). A selection of other relevant studies on (aspects of) dialogue and debate in the (high and late) Middle Ages that have appeared in the last fifteen years: C. Dartmann, A.N. Pietsch and S. Steckel (eds), *Ecclesia disputans. Die Konfliktpraxis vormoderner Synoden zwischen Religion und Politik*, Historische Zeitschrift, Beihefte 67 (Berlin and Boston, 2015); M.A. Polo de Beaulieu, *Formes dialoguées dans la littérature exemplaire du Moyen Age* (Paris, 2012); L. Melve, *Inventing the Public Sphere. The Public Debate during the Investiture Contest (c. 1030–1122)* (Leiden, 2007); C. Cardelle de Hartmann, *Lateinische Dialoge, 1200–1400: Literaturhistorische Studie und Repertorium*, Mittellateinische Studien und Texte 37 (Leiden, 2006); G. Donavin, C. Poster *et al.* (eds), *Medieval Forms of Argument: Disputation and Debate* (Eugene, 2002). A monograph or edited volume devoted to dialogue and debate in the earlier Middle Ages is, however, still a desideratum. Although there are excellent studies on conflicts and controversies in this period (such as M. Becher and A. Plassmann (eds), *Streit am Hof im frühen Mittelalter* (Göttingen, 2011)), these show little to no attention to the literary form, structure and modes of argumentation and persuasion of debates and dialogues, such as we do find in similar studies on the topic in late antiquity and the later Middle Ages.

Whether any of the textual evidence reflects 'real' disputes is a moot point, but it surely becomes clear that in this period in which there supposedly was no room anymore for the real and open-ended exchange of ideas, it was precisely this that remained the norm for Christian authors who set out to persuade their opponents. There was of course a tension between this ideal and reality, but this 'was sustained by a belief in the power and moral propriety of persuasion and reason'.[15]

These modern dichotomies – oral versus literate, reason versus authority, and open social competition versus closed group identities – have not just been projected onto late antiquity. They have also been essential in articulating the differences between modern and pre-modern societies in general, and of the position of the Middle Ages within the grand narrative of western history. More specifically, these set oppositions have long informed the dominant image of the western early Middle Ages as a period of political chaos and cultural stagnation, inspiring some lively debates among early medievalists, primarily on the impact of literacy on political communication, on the existence and perception of state-like structures and on the participation of the clergy in the latter.[16] This has yielded a different perspective on the Carolingian world, not just with regard to the wider impact of Christian-Latin literacy on society, but also concerning the importance of religious institutions, both for the governance of this huge polity as well as for the cultural cohesion of its diverse elites. 'The Church', as it was once called, turns out to consist of a great number of 'churches' (*ecclesiae*), monasteries and episcopal communities that were very much part of the Carolingian fabric of politics. This has consequences for any consideration of dialogue and debate in this period.

What was 'public' about public debate?

Modern historians of the early Middle Ages have been thinking about the nature of the public domain, mostly from the perspective of political history. For example, Stuart Airlie has reflected on the staunch ethos of public service of the Carolingian aristocracy, and of the *palatium* as an eminently public place in the minds of ninth-century

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[15] Van Nuffelen, 'The End of Open Competition?', p. 160.
[16] M. de Jong, 'The Two Republics : *Ecclesia* and the Public Domain in the Carolingian World', in R. Balzaretti, J. Barrow and P. Skinner (eds), *Italy and Early Medieval Europe: Essays Presented to Chris Wickham*, Past and Present Book Series (Oxford, forthcoming), with references to older literature. But see S. Esders and G. Folke Schuppert, *Mittelalterliches Regieren in der Moderne oder modernes Regieren im Mittelalter?*, Schriften zur Governance-Forschung 27 (Baden-Baden, 2015).

authors, even if the monarch never visited.[17] As Chris Wickham has argued, until the turn of the first millennium AD there existed a culture of the public; even in the early medieval west with its relatively weak states, the notion *publicus* remained a pervasive one, primarily associated with royal property, law courts, royal officials and assemblies, both great and small.[18] Ecclesiastical institutions should be added to this list, also as dependencies of the royal court, and therefore an integral part of a new 'topography of power' in which public debates, both face-to-face and written, could take place. A council/synod of bishops is not at first glance a forum for resolving 'public', that is state-related, issues, and even less so a monastic community, yet if one keeps in mind the extent to which the Carolingian state depended on episcopal governance and on royal access to monastic property, such ecclesiastical institutions cannot be ignored in discussions about the nature of an early medieval public domain. Many of the issues debated in these ecclesiastical gatherings, such as heresy or deviant religious practice, used to come under the heading of 'theology', but have now become part of mainstream political and social history.

Meanwhile, specialism takes its toll, so the earlier Middle Ages remain a static backdrop for the rise of dynamic new phenomena. One example is Leidulf Melve's *Inventing the Public Sphere* (2007), an audacious study that put the issue of public opinion and the public sphere firmly on the agenda of medieval research in the last decade. Melve aims to show that the large corpus of letters and treatises on investiture generated since the late eleventh century did indeed constitute the beginnings of a public sphere (*Teilöffentlichkeit*) in Jürgen Habermas's sense of the word, namely a part of society that is informally and broadly engaged in a critical public debate, creating the kind of public opinion that could not be controlled by the state. Early modernists have spent much time arguing that all this was already in evidence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; in a similar vein, Melve has adapted Habermas's model in order to make it more applicable to the Middle Ages. Curiously, the invention of the public *sphere* according to Melve begins right after the period in which the public *domain* starts to disintegrate according to Wickham. This is not surprising, for these two authors are talking about related, but by no means identical matters. Wickham's interest is in the coherence of a political elite that remained committed to the public

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[17]   S. Airlie, 'The Palace of Memory: The Carolingian Court as Political Centre', in S. Rees Jones, R. Marks and A. Minnis (eds), *Courts and Regions in Medieval Europe* (York, 2000), pp. 1–20. Also S. Airlie, 'The Aristocracy at the Service of the State in the Carolingian Period', in S. Airlie, W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (eds), *Staat im frühen Mittelalter* (Vienna, 2006), pp. 93–111 (amongst other articles gathered in S. Airlie, *Power and its Problems in Carolingian Europe* (Farnham, 2012)).

[18]   C. Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome. A History of Europe from 400–1000* (London, 2009), p. 562.

domain as defined by the ruler and his presence in terms of the common good; this was the central point of reference for any members of the elites that were associated with legitimate kings or emperors. It was the real legacy of Rome, which dominated Europe until the first millennium, at which point political fragmentation set in. By contrast, Melve's public sphere as it emerged during the Investiture Controversy is a more informal phenomenon, a *Teilöffentlichkeit*, that is, an intermediate zone between official, government-controlled communication on the one hand and the private domain on the other. More recently, Melve has explored the emergence of such a public sphere, albeit a more modest one, in the Carolingian world as well, with the divorce case of Lothar II and Theutberga as the main example.[19]

There are limits, however, to the extent to which Habermas's theory can be adapted in order to show that there was 'already' a public sphere in a pre-modern period, for it is based on implicit assumptions about the inevitable rise of modernity in the shape of western civil society. As Peter von Moos has pointed out, *Öffentlichkeit* in German intellectual tradition is a specific and ideologically loaded concept, associated with the opposition between the publicly visible and the secret, and with face-to-face societies. It is quite different from the English 'public', with its connotations of the common weal and civil society.[20] These diverging modern research traditions and their usages should be taken into account. Valiant attempts have been made to turn the public sphere into a more neutral and less westernized concept, a flexible tool for exploring 'a sphere where collective improvements (the common good) are at stake', which neither belongs to the official domain, nor to any area of social life that could be qualified as 'private'.[21] In this more flexible way of thinking

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[19] L. Melve, '"Even the very laymen are chattering about it": The Politicization of Public Opinion, 800–1200', *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 44.1 (2013), pp. 25–48. For further reflections on the notion of *Öffentlichkeit* and an attempt to construct a typology of public debates in the early medieval period (and late antiquity), see D.G. König, 'Öffentliche religiöse Auseinandersetzungen unter Beteiligung spätantik-frühmittelalterliche Höfe – Versuch einer Typologie', in Becher and Plassmann (eds), *Streit am Hof*, pp. 17–44.

[20] P. von Moos, *'Öffentlich' und 'Privat' im Mittelalter. Zu einem Problem der historischen Begriffsbildung*, Schriften der philsophisch-historischen Klasse der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften 33 (Heidelberg, 2004); see also P. von Moos, 'Das Öffentliche und Private im Mittelalter. Für einen kontrollierten Anachronismus', in G. Melville and P. von Moos (eds), *Das Öffentliche und Private in der Vormoderne. Norm und Struktur*, Studien zum sozialen Wandel in Mittelalter und frühen Neuzeit 10 (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna, 1998), pp. 3–86.

[21] S.N. Eisenstadt and W. Schluchter, 'Introduction: Paths to Early Modernities – A Comparative View', *Daedalus* 127 (1998), pp. 1–18, at p. 10. E. Noelle-Neumann broadens the concept of the public sphere even further by making active participation the most important criterion and by understanding public opinion as the outcome of social mechanisms of 'approval and disapproval of publicly observable positions and behaviours'. E. Noelle-Neumann, *The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion – Our Social Skin* (Chicago, 1993), p. 65. We were alerted to these two studies that offer new ways of thinking about the public sphere thanks to Melve, 'Politicization of Public Opinion'.

about the notion of 'public', the construction of a public sphere does not necessarily depend on external touchstones such as mass or distance to the centre of power, but rather on internal processes such as categorization and reflexivity, inviting debates on the common good or on criteria of inclusion and exclusion. According to Shmuel Eisenstadt and Wolfgang Sluchter, the influence of a public sphere 'rests on interpretations of the common good vis-à-vis the ruler on the one hand, and the private sphere on the other'.[22] Attractive though this concept is, for research into Carolingian public debates this does not get us much further, and not just because of the predominantly negative meaning of 'private' (*privatus*) in ninth-century sources.[23] The main problem is the tendency among modern historians to restrict the domain of politics to that of the secular, and to identify public opinion with the participation of the laity. Does opinion only get public once it escapes the confines of ecclesiastical institutions and reaches laymen? We think not.[24] As several contributions to this issue will show, this is not the best approach to a polity sustained by monastic wealth and ruled by kings with bishops and abbots.

Debate, dialogue, disputation

In current scholarship the terms disputation, debate and dialogue are at times used interchangeably. Indeed it is difficult to make a clear distinction between the three terms in a way that is historically accurate and does justice to the vocabulary of the sources. 'Debate' tends to be the modern generic term for any kind of discussion that is socially or intellectually relevant, be it public or private, collective or between two persons; such a debate might be conducted face-to-face, or through a written exchange of arguments. With regard to the early Middle Ages, 'debate' has become an umbrella term with a wide catchment area: it can refer to discussions conducted during public meetings such as assemblies and synods, as well as to the subsequent written acts and the discussion engendered by the latter; but also to issues that were discussed by just two persons via the exchange of written texts, or to a long-term exchange on a specific issue among more wide-ranging overlapping groups. In the latter case, we can speak of 'the debate on predestination', for example, or 'the debate on church property', even though these discussions were of a

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[22] Eisenstadt and Schluchter, 'Introduction', p. 10.
[23] See the article by De Jong, below.
[24] Melve, 'Politization of Public Opinion', p. 28, sees scandal spreading to laymen, rather than only to 'very small groups of churchmen', as public opinion being activated. We think this is a problematic distinction; see Wickham, *Inheritance*, pp. 416–17, for some pertinent remarks on the way in which the 'virtual' community of monastic and cathedral schools created a critical mass for a debate that was in the public eye.

different nature and participants made use of different media. As we have explained, exploring the range and impact of such debates, as well as the question of what may have made them 'public' is our main goal.

Whereas debate is a typically modern all-purpose word, 'dialogue' and 'disputation' are more specific terms that indicate the particular *form* of the discussion. The ultimate goal of both forms of discussion is (at least ideally) to find the truth, but it is reached via different techniques of argumentation and persuasion. The terms *dialogus* and *disputatio*, the Latin equivalents of 'dialogue' and 'disputation', could either refer to the question-and-answer format of a real, face-to-face conversation, or to the literary form in which the discussion was represented.[25] In modern literature the notion of 'dialogue' as a literary form is bound up with particular conventions that go back to the 'Socratic tradition' of Plato's dialogues, which is not necessarily the case in the medieval understanding of the term. When speaking of dialogue in modern parlance, we usually have an amicable discussion in mind, in which the conversation partners aim to find the truth via questions and answers, with respect for each other's position. This rather idealistic concept of dialogue can be encountered in studies of (modern) interreligious dialogue, but also, as we have seen, in the veneration of present-day classical scholars for the open-mindedness and oral character of Greek dialogue. When we speak of 'disputation', on the other hand, we usually mean a combative and competitive type of discussion. While participants in a dialogue aim to find agreement on a certain issue, disputants strive to win an argument and beat their opponent in verbal combat.

The difference between the two forms of discussion may thus seem clear: 'dialogue' is an amicable altercation, while 'disputation' is a verbal contest. Unfortunately this neat distinction does not at all accord with the Latin vocabulary of our medieval sources. Bede uses the word *dialogus* as an equivalent to *disputatio*, while Isidore defines *dialogus* simply as a conversation between two or more persons.[26] Our early medieval authors, moreover, label texts as *disputatio* that we tend to call dialogue. We only need to think of Alcuin's *Disputatio de rhetorica et de virtutibus*, commonly translated as 'Dialogue on rhetoric and virtues', to see where the problem lies. Our modern terminology and categorization offer inadequate tools to analyse the ideology and practice of debate in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. One of the main reasons must be that modern scholarly discourse is grounded in classical and later medieval usages of *dialogus* and *disputatio*, rather than in the early medieval

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[25] Isidore, *Etymologiae* VI.viii.2–3; Cardelle de Hartmann, *Lateinische Dialoge*, p. 32.
[26] Bede, *De orthographia* 341, ed. Ch.W. Jones, *Bedae opera*, CSEL 123A (Turnhout, 1975), I, p. 21: 'dialogos graece, disputatio latine'; Isidore, *Etymologiae* VI.viii.2: 'Dialogus est collatio duorum vel plurium'.

vocabulary just outlined.[27] Nonetheless, this tension can serve as a useful heuristic device to analyse the early medieval vocabulary of debate. For if we want to find out what the rules of debate were at the time, what the established norms of behaviour and normative (literary) traditions that governed how issues were to be discussed, we need to pay close attention to the words that were used, to understand how the disputants themselves perceived the activity they engaged in.

Inspired by recent publications, historians have become more interested in the undeniable impact of rhetoric on historiography.[28] But how important was the knowledge of rhetoric, in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, for the strategies of persuasion of the intellectual elites who took part in more wide-ranging and public debates? Did it matter that their arguments were delivered in an elegant and learned fashion, to their adversaries or supporters or to the Carolingian rulers and their entourages who served as arbiters in debates that threatened to create scandal and disorder? To find an answer to these questions we might be tempted to turn to rhetorical handbooks.

Formally, the discipline of rhetoric had no bearing on debate, as dialectic, and not rhetoric, was the 'art of disputation'. Rhetoric pertained to the continuous discourse of speeches, and not to the question-and-answer format of the dialogue and the disputation.[29] Nevertheless, rhetorical handbooks treat many topics that are relevant to the art of debate, such as the different types of argument and proof, while courtroom rhetoric was markedly dialectical in character in the first place. If we look at manuscripts of rhetorical treatises that were known and read in the early Middle Ages, however, such as Cicero's *De inventione* and the (fourth book of the) anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (long ascribed to Cicero), we see that these manuscripts hardly received any annotations in the margin that linked the rhetorical theory to actual practice. By contrast, manuscripts of dialectical treatises were often densely annotated, at least from the mid-ninth century onwards, in a way that attests to intensive study. These findings would suggest that we should rather turn to dialectic instead of rhetoric to come to a better understanding of the theory and practice of debate in the Middle Ages. We have no reason to doubt, however, that rhetoric

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[27] See the entries 'Debatte', 'Streitgespräch', 'Dialog', and 'Disputation' in *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (Stuttgart, 1977–99) and *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik* (Tübingen, 1992–2015); the definitions and typology of the terms is mainly based on classical, late medieval and early modern sources.

[28] See now above all M. Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History* (Oxford, 2011). Reviewed by J.L. Nelson in *History Workshop Journal* 74 (2012), pp. 233–42.

[29] Although compare Quintilian, who devotes a chapter to the 'altercatio' in his *Institutes of Oratory*, because, as he says, 'an orator cannot be called accomplished without ability in altercation' (6.4.3).

was relevant to the medieval practice of debate. Every form of speech, whether the continuous speech of the orator, or the questions and answers of disputants, needs to be persuasive if it wants to achieve anything at all. Instead of relying entirely on the theory of rhetoric as transmitted by rhetorical handbooks, it might be more fruitful to look elsewhere for models for debate that our medieval disputants may have turned to in order to find examples of persuasive strategies to convince others of their point of view. Here we could think of debate dialogues such as the (literary) disputation of Augustine and Pascentius, Jerome's invectives against Vigilantius,[30] or the imagined dialogues discussed by Robin Whelan in this issue. Here one could find examples of debate that offered useful rhetorical strategies to persuade or undermine one's opponent. These were strategies that would have come in handy in any debate.

Literary representations of the debates between church Fathers and their heretical opponents, such as the ones mentioned above, have been transmitted in codices that also contained medieval debate texts, which could be taken as evidence that these patristic texts indeed served as models for debate in the early Middle Ages. For this reason, this special issue opens with Robin Whelan's exploration of the patristic legacy of contentious literary dialogue that was so important for the Carolingian world on which the other contributions focus. Irene van Renswoude explores whether public disputation and dialectical enquiry could (again) have a part in the proceedings of councils around 800, and discusses the possible 'rules of engagement' of such confrontations. As she concludes, there was more room for dialectical altercations in smaller informal meetings than in the ponderous setting of synods or councils proper. The latter are the topic of Rutger Kramer's contribution, which investigates the way Carolingian *ordines* aimed at creating and maintaining an institutionalized context for debates that could actually push the agenda and effectuate useful *correctio*. Janneke Raaijmakers then takes the reader to the court-connected debate between Claudius of Turin and Dungal, and shows that Claudius's lasting reputation as a solitary Protestant *avant la lettre* was largely of his own making, and an integral part of his own strategies of persuasion. With Warren Pezé, we move from these two high-level biblical commentators competing for royal favour to the fallout of the predestination debate among lower clerics. They were not supposed to participate in this controversy but they did so all the same, and Pezé shows some of the tips of this iceberg. Finally, Mayke de Jong's

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[30] See J. Raaijmakers, 'Studying Jerome in a Carolingian Monastery', in M. Teeuwen and I. van Renswoude (eds), *The Annotated Book in the Early Middle Ages. Practices of Reading and Writing* (Turnhout, forthcoming).

contribution is on the *Epitaphium Arsenii*, a text that shows how especially in the politically divided Carolingian world of the 840s and 850s the commitment to the *res publica* became more articulately expressed. Conflict raised the awareness of shared public values among highly competitive court-connected elites, both ecclesiastical and secular.

The common denominator of these articles is that all the authors show that the rise of Christianity did not spell the end of dialogue and debate. The cultural practice of dialoguing and debating was alive and kicking in the early Middle Ages, and moved into new directions, led by traditions from the patristic and classical past. The authors, moreover, question the still generally accepted idea that a public sphere can only exist outside what we tend to refer to as 'the Church'. In order to contest this notion, they have joined forces to show that the Carolingian Church consisted of many different 'churches', plural. Any discussion of public debate in the ninth century needs to start from this point of departure: not the Church as an abstract notion or monolithic institution, but the bustling communities of local churches (monasteries, bishoprics, parishes, involving high and low clergy *and* lay people), and how these inserted themselves into controversies at the level of kingdoms or even empires. Rethinking the relationship between the political and the religious is not exactly new, but when it comes to the lively contribution of ecclesiastical communities, institutions and concepts to the Carolingian state, there is still a lot of work to be done. It is to this that this issue aims to contribute.

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