

Chapter Title: RETHINKING MEDIEVAL FORGERIES

Book Title: Forgeries and Historical Writing in England, France, and Flanders, 900-1200

Book Author(s): Robert F. Berkhofer <suffix>III</suffix>

Published by: Boydell & Brewer, Boydell Press. (2022)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv24tr8rg.8>

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RETHINKING MEDIEVAL FORGERIES

“In divine religion it is at no time whatsoever right to tell a lie.”
– St. Augustine, *Against Lying*, ch. 41

Although lying was thought to be wrong throughout the Middle Ages, it is unclear if such blanket condemnation extended to forgery. Furthermore, modern historians’ thinking has been shaped by presumptions about – and preoccupations with – forgeries. Consequently, this chapter explores forgeries from a broad perspective because previous analyses have been potentially confusing. It begins by considering problems scholars have had in defining “forgery” of texts and objects and why such definitions matter. Then, it treats patterns of medieval forgeries which help delineate the bounds of this study, including situating the three monastic centers analyzed in part II. The final section analyzes connections between forgeries and histories in the Middle Ages, raising key issues for understanding medieval monastic attempts to rewrite the past.

DEFINING MEDIEVAL FORGERY

For modern medievalists, the term “forgery” has broad meaning: it includes not just frauds and fakes intended to deceive but potentially any artifact containing unoriginal elements or later modifications regardless of the reason. It has become a technical term, referring to a text or object which is not what it claims to be. Yet, “forgery” has defied clearer definition – even in relation to its opposites “authentic,” “genuine,” or “original.” When it comes to reading medieval sources, there are many intermediate gradations to consider, including copying, imitation, revision, interpolation, and fabrications which preserve traces of “original” text. Diplomats, who specialize in studying charters, have devoted the most time and energy to analyzing these differences. They have been trying to create usable

categories ever since the early modern period, when a desire to separate true from false documents became central to the discipline.¹ In particular, Jean Mabillon (1632–1707) developed methods to discern “legitimate instruments from spurious, certain and genuine from uncertain and suspect.”² In the late nineteenth century, different national traditions produced diplomatic handbooks which elaborated rules for distinguishing forgeries from genuine charters in the quest for “original” (and, thus, reliable) sources.³ Attempts by the *International Committee on Diplomatic* (formed 1970) to adopt consistent terms, and, more importantly, attempts to develop uniform fields for coding charters digitally beginning in the 1990s, have caused some convergence of definitions of forgery, though linguistic and national differences remain. The current standard is the *Vocabulaire internationale de la diplomatie*, which provides its terms in five languages (French, English, German, Italian, and Spanish) and equivalences in seven other Romance and Slavic languages.⁴ But even with a standard guide to terms, diplomatists have trouble defining forgery. The most respected current handbook, *Diplomatique médiévale*, offers eight definitions of “acte faux” and warns that the term covers a “réalité multiforme” – which confounds traditional definitions.⁵ Overall, because diplomatists privilege “original” or “authentic” documents for evidentiary purposes, “forgery” is usually defined by opposition, and therefore, negatively. As a result, even careful diplomatic categorization of forged charters offers only a partial guide to “forgery.”

¹ Daniel Papebroch, *Propylaeum antiquarium circa veri et falsi discrimen in vetustis membranis*, AASS Aprilis 2 (Antwerp, 1675), 1–31.

² Jean Mabillon, *De re diplomatica libri VI...* (Paris: L. Billaine, 1681), 1: “Quam ob rem magnopere interest ad antiquariam forensemque disciplinam haec tractatio: magnamque à re publica gratiam inierit, quisquis certas et accuratas tradiderit conditiones ac regulas, quibus instrumenta legitima à spuriis, certa et genuina ab incertis ac suspectis discernantur.”

³ Harry Bresslau, *Handbuch der Urkundenlehre für Deutschland und Italien*, 2 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1958, orig. 1889), most widely known from 2nd ed., 1912–1931; Arthur Giry, *Manuel de diplomatie* (Paris: Hachette, 1894), reprinted twice (1925 and 1965).

⁴ María Milagros Cárcel Ortí, ed. *Vocabulaire internationale de diplomatie*, 2nd ed. (Valencia: University of Valencia Press, 1997).

⁵ Oliver Guyotjeannin et al., eds., *Diplomatique médiévale* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1993), 369: “Les mots ‘acte faux’ recouvrent une réalité multiforme. Les définitions qui suivent ont pour but de donner à chacun des actes qualifiés généralement de ‘faux’ un ordre de grandeur dans la falsification, tout en tenant compte du vocabulaire particulier de la critique diplomatique.”

No matter what criteria diplomatists have used, the potential scope of medieval “forgery” has seemed vast – from seemingly innocuous emendations of texts to wholly fabricated charters. Consequently, some scholars conclude that forgery was common in the Middle Ages. Often such claims have relied on broad definitions of forgery rather than its widespread practice. Richard Kaeuper emphasized the many flavors of forgery: “between the absolute poles of the ‘genuine’ and the ‘spurious’ were many more subtle gradations: poor copying, alteration, improvement, bringing up to date.”⁶ Meanwhile, Patrick Geary stressed the many formats of forgery: “Not only were charters, diplomas and other legal instruments commonly forged or interpolated...but so too were collections of secular and canon law...theological treatises, historical, biographical and hagiographical writings, liturgical texts, letters, relics, tombs and inscriptions,” to which one might add counterfeiting of coins and seals.⁷ Many shades of forgery across multiple media is not, however, the same as a large number of forgeries. Indeed, estimating the frequency of forgery in the Middle Ages has remained troublesome.

But was there a medieval concept of “forgery”? Of course, historians can use modern terms to study premodern societies which lacked such ideas. Nonetheless, the existence of a word or concept for “forgery” in the Middle Ages is a crucial matter. Indeed, for some scholars it is *the* problem: did medieval people understand “forgery” as wrong? This fundamental issue will be considered throughout this book; however, it is certain that medieval people did have words for a closely related concept: falsity. Many of the modern European words for falsity derive from the Latin word *falsus*, including French *faux*, German *Fälsch*, and English “false” – in the latter case deriving from Old English word *fals*, meaning “fraud, trickery,” usually referring to false weights or counterfeit money.⁸ Of course, the ordinary usage of *falsus* to mean “not true” was prevalent throughout the Middle Ages and acquired nuances as medieval notions of “truth” and “lying” in all their complexity developed. For medieval clerics, the touchstone patristic texts about lying were written by Saint Augustine, who wrote two treatises on the topic (*On Lying* and *Against Lying*), in which he condemned all lying

⁶ Richard Kaeuper, “Forgery,” *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph R. Strayer (New York: Scribner, 1985) 5:137.

⁷ Patrick Geary, “Forgery,” *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, ed. André Vauchez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 559.

⁸ Angus Cameron, ed. et al., *Dictionary of Old English: A to G online* (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2007), s.v. “fals.” The adjective “fals” appears seven times in the Old English corpus, all referring to counterfeiting or false weights. The noun “fals” appears sixteen times, usually false weights and measures in law codes.

as wrong.⁹ However, the question of whether some lying might have a good purpose received renewed attention from twelfth-century theologians, who were especially concerned to sort out the roles of action and intention in sin.¹⁰ Medieval theological (and ethical) distinctions about truth and falsehood were numerous, subtle, and constant. Some historians who have written about medieval forgers have taken the prevalence of medieval Latin terms such as *falsus*, *falsificare*, *falsator*, and related words such as *fabricare*, to mean that medieval writers understood (and condemned) forgery as a sin and crime. Even though “falsity” and “forgery” are not the same, medieval *falsus* sometimes referred to texts and objects which later ages would deem “forgeries.”

Defining “forgery” is, however, of great significance to modern historians even if an exact medieval equivalent did not exist. “Forged” texts and objects, no matter how defined, have carried with them the stigma of being bad evidence for historians influenced by positivist methods. This stigma has existed ever since the nineteenth century, insofar as historians wished to recover the past “wie es eigentlich gewesen,” following Leopold von Ranke, and sought to recover a chronology of actions and events that had happened, which for many English-speaking historians meant a series of facts.¹¹ This study, however, does not dismiss forgeries as poor evidence; rather it sees forgeries as useful sources for the shared ideas and practices of their medieval creators.

What can we learn from such an approach? There are at least two reasons to care. First, forgeries are extremely good evidence for medieval *mentalité*. Although forgeries do not help much in establishing events, modified (or invented) documents do reveal real shifts in their creators’ thinking. Furthermore, forged charters have a special documentary status: they were prospective, made with one eye towards the future even as they refashioned the past (a quality shared by all forgeries). The inventor always had to consider the future acceptability of his invention. When originals exist and, therefore, modifications are detectable, the contrast of authentic and

⁹ Augustine, *De mendacio* and *Contra mendacionem*, ed. Joseph Zycha, *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, 41 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1900).

¹⁰ Marcia L. Colish, “Rethinking Lying in the Twelfth Century,” in *The Fathers and Beyond: Church Fathers Between Ancient and Modern Thought*, ed. Marcia L. Colish (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), XV:1–18.

¹¹ Leopold von Ranke, *The Theory and Practice of History*, ed. George Iggers et al. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 86. Iggers, xi–xiv, xvii–xviii critiques the common translation “as it actually happened” suggesting that *eigentlich* would be better read as “essentially.” See also Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 21–31.

forged materials can provide before and after snapshots of creators' intentions. Second, forgery of charters was sufficiently common that one might study Europe-wide patterns. What historians lack is a longitudinal study of medieval forgery. In 1986, the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* held an international congress of 150 scholars on the subject, published as the six-volume set *Fälschungen im Mittelalter*.¹² Although lacking a synthetic treatment of forgery, its studies treated every country in Europe and every period of the Middle Ages, confirming the widespread diffusion of medieval forgery.¹³ Furthermore, the amount of scholarship on charters ("Diplomatische Fälschungen") was so great that it filled two of the six volumes.

These studies hinted at sharing among monastic forgers. Certainly, significant transfers of monastic ideas and texts occurred during the tenth to twelfth centuries. Strong proof of transfers can be found in the "rolls of the dead," commemorative documents circulated among monasteries over great distances to accumulate prayers for departed worthies. Most famously, the memorial roll of Abbot Vitalis of Savigny, who died in 1122, traveled to monasteries all over Normandy, England, and the kingdom of France between the Loire and Marne.¹⁴ These shared texts indicate the wide intellectual geography of medieval monasticism. Furthermore, the rolls of the dead imply that similar exchanges between centers of forgery were possible. Recent work on religious confraternities suggests that the exchange of personnel between monastic houses to copy texts may have been even greater than previously thought.¹⁵ Broad patterns of forged texts and objects may be recoverable. *Fälschungen im Mittelalter* highlighted the varieties of forgeries, including all manner of text (bulls, letters, laws, indulgences) and many sorts of objects (coins, seals, wine, cloth, medicines, relics, tombs, *objets d'art*). One should also add invented traditions about saints, founders, and ancestors. Recovering any patterns inevitably requires synthesizing masses of technical scholarship. The overview of forgery patterns offered below, therefore, can only be regarded as provisional. Nonetheless, trying to describe patterns has analytic value, though one must be wary of importing too many positivist assumptions.

¹² See Horst Fuhrmann's foreword FiM 1:5–6.

¹³ Colin Morris, book review of FiM, *English Historical Review* 105 (1990): 684–6 noted the lack of an overall synthesis.

¹⁴ AN L 966, no. 4 (Musée AE II, 138); Jean Dufour, ed. *Recueil des Rouleaux des Morts: VIII^e siècle vers 1536*, 2 vols. (Paris: De Boccard, 2005–2006) 1:514–86, no. 122 and esp. map 7, 710–4. See R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven: Yale, 1953), 21–2, 118–20 for another example.

¹⁵ Johan Belean, "'Capitulum commune est': Confraternities and Benedictine Congregational Structures Prior to the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215" (paper, International Medieval Congress, Leeds, July 2017).

In attempting to define forgery more usefully, I will begin with texts before considering objects. The term “forgery” has encompassed a very broad range of writing practices: everything from minor substitutions to lengthy narrative inventions, texts which involve mis-readings as well as deliberate impostures about the past. In comprehending this diversity, it is better to think about “textual modification” rather than “forgery,” even though this could potentially include all material alterations (erasure, strike outs, correction, transformation of appearance) as well as all changes of content (emendation, substitution, interpolation, wholesale invention). Within the capacious bounds of “textual modification,” “forgery” is a term usually applied to documents, especially on one end of a pole opposite a fully authentic, genuine “original.” Just like a spectrum of colors, there are many intermediate shades of modification between “original” and “forgery.” Of course, most documents (and most texts) fall somewhere in the middle, between the poles. Indeed, the two extremes constitute only a very small fraction of surviving medieval documents. Such a spectrum might begin with “original” documents, fully genuine in form and accurate in content. Next would be “copies” of originals, with varying degrees of accuracy, perhaps also including imitations (a practice cultivated by medieval *scriptoria* seeking to develop a particular style). Then it would proceed to “alterations” of documents. Such “alterations” could be further divided, based on whether most or only part of the form and/or content of the “original” remained. Small “alterations” would include erasures, substitutions, and minor interpolations, as well as renovation of damaged documents or updating their phrasing. Large “alterations” would affect most of the form or content, including wholesale removals, substitution of largely new text or a completely different format, major interpolations, and rewritten acts only preserving traces of the original phrasing or format. Finally, one arrives at “forgeries,” including various fakes and frauds and even blatant inventions *ex nihilo*. Such a spectrum has the advantage of flexibly describing intermediate degrees of textual modification.

It is necessary to make three clarifications about the spectrum just described. The first is that “textual modification” can vary greatly in scale. The smallest amount might be inadvertent errors in copying, or a deliberate but very subtle one-word change; for example, changing the name of a charter’s recipient. Other creations could be quite elaborate; consider the grand impostures of Ademar of Chabannes, who invented a founding bishop-saint, relics, a complete *vita*, a house history, and numerous charters to support sweeping claims to aggrandize the position of his house in the 1020s.¹⁶ Second, there is the terminology of the spectrum. These

¹⁶ Richard Landes, *Relics, Apocalypse, and the Deceits of History: Ademar of Chabannes, 989–1034* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

terms do not conform to the technical distinctions of diplomatic. In my view, there is still no clear way to describe documents of middling reliability in diplomatics. So, while the spectrum might be useful, it lacks the precision diplomatists prefer because it resists sharply defined categories. Third, the spectrum creates special difficulty for historians hooked on positivism, because it does not correlate “originals” with good evidence (the best witnesses to past events and actions), nor does it condemn or dismiss forgeries as bad evidence (relating things that didn’t happen). Indeed, the original/forgery dichotomy need not be aligned with good/bad evidence at all, since the usefulness of evidence shifts depending on what is being studied. Overall, the spectrum suggests that one should beware creating neat categories for forgeries because the hybridity of medieval sources exposes the limits of any categorization very quickly.

THE MATERIALITY OF FORGERY

Understanding medieval forgeries also involves understanding them in relation to objects and as material creations themselves. The most obviously relevant objects are seals: the graphic impressions made in wax (or metal) commonly affixed to charters in the central Middle Ages. The study of seals has often been subsumed under charters because they were viewed merely as signs of validation/authentication for documents. But how seals provided authentication was part of, not distinct from, the documents which bore them. As Brigitte Bedos-Rezak argues, making a sealed charter was a process that created meaning as an integrated or unified set of signs, which should not be disaggregated.¹⁷ In addition, sealed charters drew on the medieval traditions of exchanging symbolic objects (including knives, rods, rings, etc.) to make agreements. Seals physically and symbolically joined oral and ritual practices with literate ones. However, the forging of seals seems, at first glance, not the same as forging charters, since—as authenticating signs—they provided greater surety than mere text alone. They were “visible and tangible objects symbolizing the wishes of the donor.”¹⁸ Indeed, they were also powerful symbols of the identity/personality of the owner. In the medieval west, especially from late Carolingian times onwards, seals bore images of their owners, at first great rulers such as kings, emperors, and popes and then others. The images and written legends on seal impressions also conveyed the owners’ authority to documents to which they were

¹⁷ Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego Was Imago*, 23–9.

¹⁸ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 284.

affixed.¹⁹ Yet the process of making seals also opened up possibilities for forgers. Impressions in various colors of wax (or in metal) were made using a matrix, usually made of metal, which bore the negative (or intaglio) of the image being produced.²⁰ The seal matrix was designed to make the same impression multiple times. It was a physical means of replication and so was open to forgers' or thieves' abuse – as is any copying technology. Consequently, throughout the Middle Ages seal matrices were closely guarded and often ceremonially destroyed when their owner died.²¹

Medieval attitudes about counterfeiting coins are also relevant to forgery. The process of making coins was similar to seals: coins were impressions in metal made using dies, which were equivalent to seal matrices. Both seals and coins were inscribed surfaces, combining legends (words) with images. Furthermore, faking coins was counterfeiting – a crime recognized throughout the Middle Ages in a way that forging of documents was not. Medieval laws against counterfeiting had been adapted imperfectly from the Roman law. The Roman law of counterfeiting had its origins in the late Republic in the *Lex Cornelia de falsis* of Sulla (81 BC), now lost. In later years of the principate, penalties against counterfeiting gold coins with the imperial image and superscription became more severe: free men were condemned to the beasts in the amphitheater and slaves to crucifixion.²² This change slowly began a process whereby such counterfeiting came to be regarded as an offense against the ruler's person and, ultimately, a form of sacrilege. Theodosius issued a constitution in 389, in which those guilty of the crime of *falsa moneta* were to be regarded as guilty of treason – and consequently suffer the terrible penalties reserved for it.²³ Though the full rigor of capital punishment seems not to have been applied even by Theodosius himself, this more “political” view of counterfeiting – that it was treason against the ruler – survived in the laws of the early medieval west, stripped of any nuances.²⁴ Thus, severe penalties for counterfeiting became common throughout medieval Europe.

¹⁹ Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego Was Imago*, 31: “Seals, in embodying the characters of their owners, their fame, their authority, their authenticity (all three qualities are interchangeable in the period under consideration), impressed the charter with their strength.”

²⁰ Michel Pastoureau, *Les sceaux*, Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental 36 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), 31–39.

²¹ Pastoureau, *Les sceaux*, 40.

²² See summary of Ulpian, Digest 48.10.9. See also Institutes 4.18.7 about falsification of documents and seals.

²³ Theodosian Code 9.21, “De Falsa Moneta”; for treason 9.21.9: “Falsae monetæ qui, quos vulgo paracharactas vocant, maiestatis crimine tenentur obnoxii.”

²⁴ Philip Grierson, “The Roman Law of Counterfeiting,” in *Essays in Roman Coinage Presented to Harold Mattingly*, ed. R. A. G. Carson and C. H. V. Sutherland (Oxford:

Likewise, because seals also bore images of rulers, falsifying seals (especially royal seals) was more harshly regarded than the falsifying of texts in documents. So, for example, the common law treatise known as *Glanvill* (c. 1187–9) listed the *crimen falsi* as a crime of *lèse-majesté*, or treason, for which the penalty was death or loss of limbs.²⁵ *Glanvill* (perhaps under the influence of the learned law) also defined the *crimen falsi* very broadly:

The general crime of falsifying (*crimen falsi*) includes several specific crimes such as the making of false charters (*falsa carta*), false measures or false money (*falsa moneta*), and other similar offences of which one element is falsifying for which a person ought to be accused and, when convicted, condemned.²⁶

Yet *Glanvill* insisted on distinctions about charters:

If anyone is convicted of making a false charter, it is necessary to distinguish whether it is a royal or a private charter. If it is a royal charter, the convicted person shall be condemned as for the crime of *lèse-majesté*. But if it is a private charter, then the convicted is to be more leniently dealt with as in other minor crimes of falsifying, where punishment of the guilty involves only loss of limbs to an extent dependent on royal will and clemency.²⁷

Falsifying royal charters was serious because they bore the king's seal and so, like coins, the king's image. Certainly, counterfeiters and forgers of royal seals in later medieval England continued to receive very harsh sentences, though these were sometimes commuted to the king's profit.²⁸

Oxford University Press, 1956), 240–61.

²⁵ *Glanvill*, 3, I.2: "Crimen quod in legibus dicitur crimen lese maiestatis...crimen falsi et si qua sunt similia."

²⁶ *Glanvill*, 176, XIV.7: "Generale crimen falsi plura sub se continet crimina specialia, quemadmodum de falsis cartis, de falsis mensuris, de falsa moneta, et alia similia que talem falsitatem continent super quam aliquis accusari debet et convictus condemnari."

²⁷ *Glanvill*, 177, XIV.7: "Si quis convictus fuerit de falsa carta, distinguendum est utrum fuerit carta regia an privata. Quia si fuerit carta regia, tunc is qui super hoc convincitur condemnandus est tanquam de crimine maiestatis. Si vero fuerit carta privata, tunc cum convicto micus agendum sicut in ceteris minoribus criminibus falsi, in quorum iudiciis consistit reorum condemnatio in membrorum solummodo amissione, pro regia tamen voluntate et principalis dispensationibus beneficio."

²⁸ G. E. Woodbine and S. E. Thorne, eds, *Bracton de legibus et consuetudinibus Angliae*, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968–77) 2:337 (*crimen falsi*, mentioning both coins and seals, as *lèse-majesté*); 3:307 (forfeiture of property for forging king's seal); Henry Summerson, "Counterfeiters, Forgers and Felons in English Courts, 1200–1400," in *Expectations of the Law in the Middle Ages*, ed. Anthony Musson (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001), 105–16.

Overall, counterfeiting coins and falsifying seals carried considerably greater risk because as symbols of authority and identity they were regarded more highly than mere text alone. Furthermore, it was recognized that the technology of replication itself (the seal matrix, the coin dies) could be used to spawn many fraudulent copies, and accordingly those who dared to exploit them were always severely punished. Medieval people clearly understood false replication of coins and seals as major mischief and regarded it as a serious crime.

What of other fraudulent objects, such as relics or art? Of course, all medieval relics might be viewed as fakes from a scientific or atheist viewpoint. But such skepticism does not advance the understanding of medieval people very much. More interesting are relics which were regarded as fraudulent by medieval people, who otherwise sincerely believed in them. Such doubts were sometimes expressed during disputes over possession of relics between competing religious foundations, which might involve theft of relics or the sudden (re)discovery of a relic.²⁹ Specific hagiographic genres evolved for the moving (*translatio*), finding (*inventio*), or discovery (*revelatio*) of relics, often at the site of a church's foundation or its subsequent location.³⁰ However, early medieval criteria for determining sanctity (and thus the status of relics) were flexible. Indeed, the papal process for canonization was only developed in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.³¹ Importantly, relics and their reliquaries usually bore labels asserting their authenticity, including strips of parchment/papyrus, medallions, or metallic seals. Unfortunately, relic tags are understudied and there is no catalogue or list of them at present.³² There were also inscriptions attesting to the resting places of relics, which could be added long after initial construction, though such "restitutions" or "restorations" should not necessarily be regarded as duplicitous.³³ But of course, all signs of authentication could be manipulated by forgers.

An unusual window onto medieval doubts about relics is provided by Guibert of Nogent's *On the Saints and Their Relics*, little known in his time,

²⁹ Patrick Geary, *Furta Sacra: The Theft of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) provides numerous examples.

³⁰ Martin Heinzelmann, *Translationsberichte und andere Quellen des Reliquienkultes*, Typologie des sources du Moyen Âge occidental, 33 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979), 43–62 (*translatio*), 77–80 (*inventio*, *revelatio*).

³¹ Pope Alexander III (1159–81) began to claim exclusive jurisdiction in the 1170s; Pope Innocent III laid out procedures, see Brenda J. Bolton, "Signs, Wonders, Miracles: Supporting the Faith in Medieval Rome," *Studies in Church History* 41 (2005): 157–78.

³² Paul Bertrand, "Authentiques de reliques: Authentiques ou reliques?" *Le Moyen Âge* 112, no. 2 (2006): 363–74; Heinzelmann, *Translationsberichte*, 83–88.

³³ Robert Favreau, *Les inscriptions médiévales*, Typologie des sources du Moyen Âge occidental, 35 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979), 44–49.

but which reveals a profound critique of certain relics. Most infamous were the supposed “baby teeth” of Christ claimed by the monks of Saint-Médard-de-Soissons, which Guibert deemed blasphemous.³⁴ For Guibert, these fake relics were obnoxious in multiple ways. First, there was a major theological problem: asserting that the “baby teeth” were still on earth implied that Christ has not been resurrected wholly in his body. Furthermore, such fakes were deceiving simple worshippers, redirecting proper piety into false (and even manipulative) paths. Moreover, the frauds were also offensive because his fellow monks, who should know better, were the ones perpetrating the deception. Error and sin were multiplying! Yet while Guibert sternly condemned these particular fake relics, he nonetheless thought relics credible and spiritually efficacious in general. Modern readers, however, rightly suspect that tales of miraculously “finding” relics often offered cover stories for fake relics.

Objects which were not overtly sanctified were also fabricated. Although today many of these might be regarded as “art,” they are hard to understand in terms of modern art forgery (faking a Monet, for instance), which relies on different assumptions. However, for a society in which art served to make the invisible into the visible, it was possible to give the imaginary (or greatly desired) a material form.³⁵ Some objects possessed symbolic, performative, or historical significance beyond the ordinary. So, for example, the monks of Saint-Denis created objects to reinforce links with various monarchs buried in their church. A supposed “throne of Dagobert” (constructed in the ninth century and refurbished significantly in the twelfth) affirmed a connection with their seventh-century Merovingian patron.³⁶ A *vexillum* (banner) taken from the altar of the monastery helped Abbot Suger attribute battle prowess to the young Louis VI in 1124, and it later became amalgamated with the *oriflamme* battle standard of Charlemagne.³⁷ Such fakes reveal the general importance of material forgeries,

³⁴ Guibert of Nogent, *De sanctis et eorum pigneribus*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievals* 127 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1993), 79–175, trans. Jay Rubenstein, *Monodies and On the Relics of Saints* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 187–290; see book 3 for the critique of Saint-Médard.

³⁵ Herbert L. Kessler, *Seeing Medieval Art* (Peterborough: Broadview, 2004), 19–44; Michel Pastoureau, *Une histoire symbolique du Moyen Âge occidental* (Paris: du Seuil, 2004), 11–25.

³⁶ William W. Clark, “‘The Recollection of the Past Is the Promise of the Future.’ Continuity and Contextuality: Saint-Denis, Merovingians, Capetians, and Paris,” in *Artistic Integration in Gothic Buildings*, ed. Virginia Chieffo Raguin et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 95–9.

³⁷ AN K 22, no. 4. Robert Henri Bautier and Jean Dufour, ed., *Receuil des actes de Louis VI, roi de France (1108–1137)*, 4 vols. (Paris: de Boccard, 1992–4) 1:458–66, no. 220.

be they seals, coins, relics, or *objets d'art*. The symbolic functions of objects in a society with varying degrees of literacy (and limited trust in writing), made creating them desirable because they could be more effective than text alone in assuring credibility or authority.

Considering the materiality of forgery is useful because it reveals medieval understandings of the relationship between objects and the past. Christopher Wood argued that medieval people understood art and artifacts in specific ways and especially that “the reception of historical artifacts in premodern culture was shaped by the powerful presumption in favor of their mutual substitutability.”³⁸ Thus, one object could legitimately stand in for another. Wood argued that this view changed because of the rise of mechanical means of reproduction (movable type, woodcuts, etc.) in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These copying technologies inherently undermined the older medieval understanding of “historical” objects. Early modern people developed a new sense of materiality, a stricter referentiality, and rejected “substitutes” which had been permissible for medieval people. For Wood, this was the difference between a modern (rational) and premodern (irrational) understanding of objects in time.³⁹

However, what about seals, coins, art, or other objects which medieval people *themselves* deemed fake? What happened when they rejected one artifact as a “substitute” for another? As Wood acknowledged, it is worth taking such forgeries seriously because they reveal notions about the past.⁴⁰ Consequently, he explored how artifacts were accorded credulity or skepticism by premodern people, arguing that they were most concerned with

Note that Charlemagne and the *vexillum* were not directly connected in the charter. Guillaume le Breton's *Philippidos* II, v. 32–9, in *Oeuvres de Rigord et de Guillaume le Breton*, vol. 2, ed. Henri François Delaborde (Paris: Renouard, 1885), 285, a panegyric to Philip Augustus (1180–1223), assumed the connection.

³⁸ Christopher S. Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 15.

³⁹ Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction*, 13: “Mechanized replication created the distinction, fundamental to modern culture, between rational and irrational thinking about time. The time-bending referential rhetoric of the image was from this point on quarantined inside a new institution, the work of art. The artwork, the merely fictional image, became the new natural habitat of anachronistic thinking. Outside such fictions, the once-universal temporal confusion was carefully untangled, redistributed into the poor binarism of error and truth. Under the new regime of print, the substitution was criminalized as a forgery. Anachronism became the attribute of bad scholarship and good art.”

⁴⁰ Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction*, 12, on forgeries: “sites of great chronological density, not as aberrations but as moments where the deep structure of thinking about artifacts and time are revealed.”

identification through resemblance or types (creating what he called “replica chains”).⁴¹ The major shift was that “authority” – that is, the link between an artifact and its creator – became more important after the Middle Ages. Indeed, it might make sense to distinguish “eras” of writing based on changes in duplicating technologies: a “scribal” period of artisanal/manual copying; a “print” period of mechanical copying, and a “digital” period of computerized copying.⁴²

A common feature of what modern scholars call “forgeries” (be they texts, seals, coins, or objects) was that they were products of medieval creativity. The contours of this creativity have been outlined by Mary Carruthers, who called them the “craft of thought.”⁴³ For her, the process of creation (*inventio* in Latin, a combination of finding, inventing, making) was a craft: it involved both physical and mental processes related to hand-work. Indeed, the modern English verb “to forge” derives from the Old French verb *forgier* and the Latin *fabricare* and its earliest meaning was to fashion an object, most typically out of metal at a forge as blacksmiths did.⁴⁴ Indeed, the forge itself was an important physical and metaphorical locus of creativity, especially for art and music, during the Middle Ages.⁴⁵ Thus, craftsmanship (and materiality) were an inherent part of any medieval creative process including writing, for which the production of pen, ink, script, parchment, and quires were all craft endeavors. Moreover, organizing books – not to mention reading and meditating on a text – were all undertaken partly as physical processes as well.⁴⁶ One should, therefore, be wary of separating texts or objects from the material circumstances of their

⁴¹ Wood, *Forgery, Replica, Fiction*, 25–59, ch. 2, esp. 34–42.

⁴² For scribal culture and copying, Daniel Hobbins, *Authority and Publicity Before Print: Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), esp. 152–82; for print culture, Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁴³ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. 7–24.

⁴⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “forge.”

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Eva Leach, “Nature’s Forge and Mechanical Production: Writing, Reading, and Performing Song” in *Rhetoric Beyond Words: Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Carruthers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 72–95, esp. 72–5.

⁴⁶ Malcolm B. Parkes, “The Influence of *Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* on the Development of the Book,” in *Scribes, Scripts, and Readers: Studies in the Communication, Presentation, and Dissemination of Medieval Texts*, ed. Malcolm B. Parkes (London: Hambleton, 1991), 35–70.

production. Medieval forging, like all medieval making, had a conjoined material and intellectual basis.

PATTERNS OF FORGERY

But what about patterns in the surviving sources? How many forgeries were there? Where and when were they created? The answers to these questions have important implications but also reveal the limitations of contemporary scholarship. For texts, the extent of forgery can be most easily estimated by considering a well-studied subset: charters. Traditional diplomatics often suggested that the percentage of forgery among surviving documents was high. In 1983, Giles Constable surveyed diplomatic handbooks, which tended to question documents with any non-genuine element, and found estimates ranging from 10% of charters to as high as two-thirds. Constable himself noted problems with these estimates, observing that “scholars disagree, however, over the precise rate and diffusion of forgery in the Middle Ages” and as a result “almost every century has been called a high point of medieval forgery.”⁴⁷ Nonetheless, he still asserted that “the golden age of medieval forgery, however, was by general consent the eleventh and twelfth centuries.”⁴⁸ Since then, databases have revolutionized the ways in which medievalists analyze charters. Most of these projects are national enterprises that remain incomplete, but even so they show the extent of charter forgery and related activities (such as interpolation) more clearly than ever before. In general, these projects indicate that rates of forgery were substantially lower. Since the three monasteries central to this study were in medieval Flanders, France, and England, it is helpful to review what projects there reveal.

For Flanders, Georges Declercq conducted an analysis of forgery using the *Thesaurus Diplomaticus*, a database of charters from Flanders before 1300 published in 1998.⁴⁹ His findings should be taken seriously, as this database is one of the most complete for any country in Europe and based on systematic research throughout the twentieth century.⁵⁰ For the period before 1200, Declercq found 185 forged or significantly modified acts out

⁴⁷ Giles Constable, “Forgery and Plagiarism in the Middle Ages” *Archiv für Diplomatik* 29 (1983): 11. See also Bresslau, *Handbuch der Urkundenlehre* 1:15; Ahaser von Brandt, *Werkzeug des Historikers; eine Einführung in die historischen Hilfswissenschaften*, 7th ed (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1973), 98.

⁴⁸ Constable, “Forgery and Plagiarism,” 12.

⁴⁹ CETEDOC, *Thesaurus Diplomaticus*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998).

⁵⁰ Alphonse Wauters et al., eds., *Table chronologique des chartes et diplômes imprimés concernant l’histoire de la Belgique*, 11 vols. (Brussels: M. Hayez, 1866–1971), and see <https://www.diplomata.belgica.be/>.

of nearly 6000 acts, slightly over 3%. Declercq also observed distinctions about the severity of forgery. He found that the vast majority of acts were minorly interpolated or slightly modified and that wholly forged acts were relatively small in number.⁵¹

Can similar results be achieved for larger regions? Since the 1980s an ongoing project has strived for a full-text database of all surviving charters in France written before 1121, now incorporated in the online resource *Télma*.⁵² In 2001, the first inventory of this project was published, including an analysis of acts that were either forgeries (*pseudo-originals*) or of doubtful or suspicious authenticity (*douteux* or *suspecté*).⁵³ This partial database remains the best indicator of the rate of forgery in medieval France. As was true in Flanders, forgeries were only a small subset of the database's 4911 acts: only 287 acts (5.8%) were forged, dubious, or suspicious. Although small given traditional claims, the editors observed that forgery loomed larger for certain subsets. Among royal acts, there were 84 forged, suspect, or dubious charters (11.8%). Papal acts showed even greater activity: the 42 forgeries constituted 22.9% of the surviving corpus. The editors argued that because papal and royal diplomas have been more intensely studied, their defects were more frequently exposed. If correct, this implies that the extent of undetected forgery may be greater. Furthermore, the *Télma* database does not include cartularies (books of charter copies), which were a major venue for creative rewriting.

There are multiple projects for England. For early England, one can use the *Electronic Sawyer*, a database of all known early English charters, web-accessible after June 2007.⁵⁴ As of 2020, there were 1875 numbered items in the database, of which 294 were surviving single-sheet charters before 1100. Of these 294 single-sheet charters, 40 (2.1% of the total corpus, 13.6% of the single-sheets) were considered forgeries, with the remaining 254 deemed "very probably original" or "contemporaneous copies." However, Simon Keynes cautioned that about one-third of the single-sheets

⁵¹ Georges Declercq, "Centres de faussaires et falsification de chartes en Flandre au moyen âge," in *Falsos y falsificaciones de documentos diplomaticos en la edad media*, ed. Angel Canellas López (Saragossa: Real Sociedad Económica Aragonesa de Amigos del Pais, 1991), 65–85 at 66–8.

⁵² *Chartes originales antérieures à 1121 conservées en France*, <http://www.cn-telma.fr/originaux/index/>.

⁵³ Benoît-Michel Tock et al., eds. *La diplomatie française du Haut Moyen Âge: Inventaires des chartes originales antérieures à 1121 conservées en France*, 2 vols. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001). The following summary derives from 1:35–7.

⁵⁴ *The Electronic Sawyer*, <http://www.esawyer.org.uk/index.html>, which includes a history of the project.

have defects, that is, some textual modifications (including forgery).⁵⁵ Unfortunately, for post-Conquest England there is no comprehensive database for charters. However, an estimate of the extent of English forgery from 1066 to 1215 can be gleaned from editions of royal, papal, and episcopal charters. David Bates' edition of the acts of William I indicated that of 211 acts redacted for English beneficiaries, 59, or about a quarter of them, were forged in some way.⁵⁶ Richard Sharpe incorporated all Anglo-Norman royal acts from 1066 to 1154 in a database.⁵⁷ This database includes texts of at least 2843 known royal acts, of which 232 (or 8.16%) were outright forgeries, and another 156 (or 5.49%) acts were heavily modified acts with some plausible parts. In the 1990s, Nicholas Vincent undertook a digital edition of the acts of Henry II (1154–89) now comprehending over 3500 acts.⁵⁸ Of these, 542 are single sheets (or photographs), of which Vincent has argued that “less than a dozen can be dismissed as blatant forgeries, with a suspicion of forgery hovering over a further 20 or so.”⁵⁹ This would make forgeries no more than 6% of surviving single sheets. Julia Barrow analyzed forgeries in the *English Episcopal Acta* series (which I supplemented from recent volumes) and showed that between 1% and 3% of all episcopal acts were forged on average, with significant variations by period and location.⁶⁰

At best, such counts only offer approximations, since the numbers are skewed by patterns of documentary survival, especially for large monastic

⁵⁵ Simon Keynes, “Charters on Single Sheets,” <http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/kemble/index.php> (Accessed 3/15/2017): “About 300 Anglo-Saxon charters (of one kind or another) survive in what would appear to be their ‘original’ form, written on single sheets of parchment. About 200 of these charters satisfy all of the available tests of authenticity, are written in hands judged to be contemporary with the given date, and thus constitute a foundation for our knowledge and understanding of Anglo-Saxon palaeography, diplomatic, and much else besides. Others prove on inspection to be later copies, or forgeries, made sometime during the long Anglo-Saxon period (before the end of the eleventh century), but as such are no less significant in their different ways.”

⁵⁶ David Bates, *Regesta regum Anglo-Normannorum: The Acta of William I, 1066–1087* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 43.

⁵⁷ Richard Sharpe, *The Writs and Charters of William II* and *The Writs and Charters of Henry I*, <https://actswilliam2henry1.wordpress.com/>.

⁵⁸ Nicholas Vincent, “The Charters of King Henry II: The Royal *inspeximus* Revisited,” in *Dating Undated Medieval Charters*, ed. Michel Gervers (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), 93–103.

⁵⁹ Nicholas Vincent, “Regional Variations in the Charters of Henry II (1154–89),” in *Charters and Charter Scholarship in Britain and Ireland*, ed. Marie Therese Flanagan and Judith A. Green (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 71 n6.

⁶⁰ Julia Barrow, “Why Forge Episcopal Acta?” The percentage varies wildly by volume; for example, Canterbury, 1070–1136 (including Rochester), 26 acts out of 97 (26.8%).

foundations. So, we must be careful about using this information. Collectively, these projects indicate that the frequency of forgery from 900 to 1200 was lower than traditionally claimed. One notable exception might be papal acts. Harald Zimmermann, while editing papal acts across Europe from 896 to 1046, found that out of 566 documents, 168 were suspicious, and 68 were forged (together 41.7% of the total). Notably, only 31 documents, less than 5.5%, survive as single sheets.⁶¹ This pattern suggests that one should look to cartularies or other copies when searching for creative rewriting, as I do in part II.

What about fake objects? How many were there in the Middle Ages? It is very hard to estimate the prevalence of object forgeries, let alone count them. Seals are still only partly catalogued.⁶² Even at the *Archives nationales* in Paris, where Louis Douët-D'Arcq and Georges Demay accumulated files on 11840 European seals, most remain to be digitally processed.⁶³ In France, traditional sigillographic studies have been only slightly refined by the *Télma* database, which includes 1277 acts which bore seals or traces of sealing, including 59 pseudo-originals (4.6%).⁶⁴ Meanwhile, there was no common format for seal description in Britain at all until 1990.⁶⁵ A collective database project begun in the late 1990s (not yet available) is attempting to catalogue more than 300,000 surviving British seals from before 1500.⁶⁶ Brigitte Bedos-Rezak and John McEwan

⁶¹ Harald Zimmermann, *Papsturkunden 896–1046*, 3 vols. (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1988–1989) 1:x, states that of 566 documents, 168 “als Fälschungen verdächtigt sind” and another 66 “verfälscht wurden.” Of the remaining 332 probably authentic, only 31 are originals. Note that 11 “neuzeitliche Fälschungen” were not edited.

⁶² For British catalogues, P. D. A. Harvey and Andrew McGuinness, *A Guide to Medieval British Seals* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 120–1. For French catalogues, consult “Les sceaux” in the “Salle des inventaires virtuelles” of the AN, <https://www.siv.archives-nationales.culture.gouv.fr/siv/>.

⁶³ Louis Douët-d'Arcq, *Collection des Sceaux*, 3 vols. (Paris: Henri Plon, 1863–8); Pastoureaux, *Les Sceaux*, 9–20. Some 8800 seals have been added since.

⁶⁴ Robert Henri Bautier, “Le cheminement du sceau et de la bulle des origines mésopotamiennes au XIII^e siècle,” in *Chartes, sceaux et chancelleries: Études de diplomatique et de sigillographie médiévales*, 2 vols., ed. Robert Henri Bautier, *Mémoires et documents de l'École des Chartes* 34 (Paris: H. Champion, 1990) 1:123–82 and Benoît-Michel Tock et al., eds. *La diplomatique française* 1:28–30 and 2:255–79 (table of seals) from which I derived my count, updated by the website, <http://www.cn-telma.fr/originaux/index/>.

⁶⁵ Robert Henri Bautier, *Vocabulaire international de la sigillographie*, Pubblicazioni degli archivi di Stato. Sussidi 3 (Rome: Libreria dello stato, 1990), 17–35.

⁶⁶ R. H. Ellis, *Catalogue of Seals in the Public Record Office*, 3 vols. (London: HM Stationary Office, 1978–86), P. D. A. Harvey, “Seals and the Dating of Documents,”

have also undertaken digital databases.⁶⁷ But none of these projects can be searched by degrees of authenticity. Likewise, it is extremely difficult to estimate other material fakes, such as coins, relics, art, or objects. Numismatists are still trying to comprehend the output of medieval coins in different regions, let alone determine how prevalent counterfeiting was.⁶⁸ While modern art historians and archeologists have developed sophisticated tools for evaluating medieval objects – thereby uncovering numerous “forgeries” often in the guise of “renovations,” or “restorations” – so far as I know there is no way to count false (or suspicious) images or artifacts effectively. At present, one can only wonder if forging objects was as prevalent as forging charters was.

Although the amount of medieval forgery remains uncertain, there are still opportunities to explore patterns among surviving sources. As argued in the introduction, patterns of forgery – or to use less prejudicial language: the desire to rewrite documents creatively – seem to parallel monastic reforms, as well as shifts in law and literacy. Historians have noticed that monastic forgeries seem to appear in bunches. One good example is Abbo of Fleury, who campaigned for his monastery’s *libertas* in the 990s. He eventually was rewarded with a sweeping papal “immunity” in 997, although it was based on documents he had earlier forged. But he did not work alone. Abbo shared specific forged texts with his brethren at Saint-Denis, Saint-Vaast-d’Arras, and St. Augustine’s, Canterbury – who all attempted to acquire freedom from diocesan control later on.⁶⁹

Such patterns should and can be recovered with careful research. Indeed, a lot of research of “forgeries” has already been done, if one realizes that existing scholarship can be re-deployed to illuminate patterns of forgery. Consider, for instance, the widespread distribution and influence of the pseudo-Isidore decretals. The forgers called the ‘pseudo-Isidore’ were active as part of the rebellion by Lothar I and a group of clerics against Louis the Pious, including the betrayal at the “Field of Lies” in 833, which led to Louis’ deposition (though he regained power in 834 and began reprisals).⁷⁰

in *Dating Undated Medieval Charters*, ed. Michel Gervers, 207–210 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000).

⁶⁷ Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego Was Imago*, 31 n48 and 203 n105; 29 n45 listing her separate articles using a database of 500 northern French seals. For McEwan’s project: <http://digisig.org/>.

⁶⁸ W. A. Oddy et al., “Forgeries of Medieval English Gold Coins: Techniques of Production,” *The Numismatic Chronicle* 172 (2012): 235–52 provides an overview of counterfeiting.

⁶⁹ Marco Mostert, “Die Urkundenfälschungen Abbos von Fleury,” *FiM* 4:287–318.

⁷⁰ Courtney M. Booker, *Past Convictions: The Penance of Louis the Pious and the Decline of the Carolingians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009);

By 838, the clerical faction had drafted supposedly early papal and council decisions, using models at the abbey of Corbie under the direction of Abbot Wala (826/7–836) and Paschasius Radbertus, a monk who later became abbot (844–54, d. 865).⁷¹ The efforts of this faction probably began as early as 833 in concert with Pope Gregory IV, who supported Lothar's bid to rule a unified empire.⁷² The use of these fabrications flourished in the ninth century. Whatever their Carolingian origins, the "pseudo-Isidore" complex proved reusable for many purposes, including protecting suffragan bishops from intervention by metropolitans, provincial synods, or lay rulers. It also invented the idea of a "primate," who was supposed to have status equivalent to a patriarch (above archbishops, though below the pope). Furthermore, the "pseudo-Isidore" texts favored papal power, which helps to explain their later popularity with eleventh-century papal reformers. In consequence, they were widely copied and influential long after the immediate political circumstances had faded and are found in over 200 medieval manuscripts throughout Western Europe, making them some of the most highly successful medieval "forgeries" ever produced. They were especially influential on the development of canon law, as they were the earliest, most extensive collection of precedents arranged in chronological order.⁷³ As we shall see, they were also known to the monks studied in part II.

Mayke de Jong, *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁷¹ Klaus Zechiel-Eckes, "Auf Pseudoisidors Spur, oder: Versuch einin dichten Schleier zu lüften" in *Fortschritt durch Fälschungen? Ursprung, Gestalt und Wirkungen der pseudoisidorischen Fälschungen*, ed. Wilfred Hartmann and Gerhard Schmitz, MGH Studien und Texte 31 (Hanover: Hahn, 2002), 1–28; see also in same volume: Horst Fuhrmann, "Stand, Aufgaben und Perspektiven der Pseudoisidorforschung," 227–62, esp. 254–6.

⁷² Eric Knibbs, "Pseudo-Isidore at the Field of Lies: 'Divinis praeceptis' (JE 2579) as an Authentic Decretal," *Bulletin of Medieval Canon Law*, new series. 29 (2012): 1–34 at 33: "'Divinis preceptis' is evidence that the men we know of as Pseudo-Isidore began their project before 833. By that date work on *Hispana Gallica Augustodunensis*, the most central component of the forgery complex, had advanced far enough for them to quote a letter of Innocent I from its pages."

⁷³ Horst Fuhrmann, "The Pseudo-Isidorian Forgeries," in *Papal Letters in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Wilfried Hartmann and Kenneth Pennington (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University Press, 2001), 137–95, esp. 140–4, though composed before the work of Zechiel-Eckes, cited above. See also his *Einfluß und Verbreitung der pseudoisidorischen Fälschungen: Vor ihrem Auftauchen bis in die neuere Zeit*. MGH Schriften 24, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1972–4) 1:64–136.

LOCATING THREE CENTERS OF FORGERY

The preceding overview of forgeries in Flanders, France, and England helps situate the three monasteries studied here: Saint Peter's, Ghent, Saint-Denis, and Christ Church, Canterbury. For Flanders, the vast majority of surviving forgeries came from older Benedictine monasteries. Furthermore, nearly 70% of the known forgeries dated from the eleventh and twelfth centuries. After 1200, the rate of forgery declined, becoming negligible by 1300.⁷⁴ At some houses forging seemed particularly frequent: Saint-Amand and Saint-Bertin around 900, Saint-Vaast-d'Arras around 1000, and Saint Peter's, Ghent in the eleventh century, which became a "nest of forgers," comparable to other major European centers of forgery, such as Saint-Denis, Fulda, and Monte Cassino.⁷⁵ Of the 185 forged, interpolated, or modified charters Declercq found in Flanders, 118 came from Saint-Peter's. At Saint-Peter's, his count revealed that of the 118 acts, 85 were "pseudo-originals" (wholly forged charters). There is much to depress a positivist historian at Saint-Peter's: of the 92 known acts before 1050, only 35 are above suspicion, 32 are outright forgeries, and at least 15 others have significant modifications. Traditional evidentiary criteria would dismiss more than half as unreliable. Declercq also considered copies of documents, principally those found in the *Liber Traditionum* from the 1030s, which will be the focus of chapter two. It contained notices of some 200 charters with frequent modification of acts, though wholesale invention seemed less common.⁷⁶ This concentration of forgeries at Saint Peter's demands explanation. It was an influential monastery and enjoyed the patronage of the counts of Flanders. Saint Peter's also had a renowned scriptorium which trained scribes and sent texts throughout northwest Europe.

In France, chronological and geographic patterns of forged charters indicate that the monastery Saint-Denis was an important nexus. Jean Dufour highlighted centers forging Carolingian royal documents from 840–997, including Saint-Denis, Saint-Martin-de-Tours, Orléans, Saint-Germain-d'Auxerre, and Cluny: all places with great scriptoria where composition was taught.⁷⁷ The *Télma* database supports his analysis and adds to the list Saint-Arnoul of Metz, Saint-Maximin of Trier, and the cathedral chapter

⁷⁴ Declercq, "Centres de faussaires," 65–70.

⁷⁵ Declercq, "Centres de faussaires," 67: "Saint-Pierre-de-Gand, que l'on pourrait qualifier de 'nid' de faussaires."

⁷⁶ Declercq, "Centres de faussaires," 66–8.

⁷⁷ Jean Dufour, "Etat et comparaison des actes faux ou falsifiés intitulés au nom des Carolingiens français (840–987)," *FiM* 4:204.

at Langres.⁷⁸ As in Flanders, most of these were older Benedictine houses. Saint-Denis ranks among the top six *scriptoria* in terms of overall survivals and was one of only two houses (the other was Cluny) with a significant amount of forgery.⁷⁹ Saint-Denis' forgers were certainly exceptional. My count of the 200 surviving charters benefitting Saint-Denis before 1121, reveals that 22 (11%) have been deemed "pseudo-originals."⁸⁰ A catalogue by Daniel Sonzogni of all documents that had existed in the archives of Saint-Denis prior to 1000 reveals 63 of 267 known acts (23.6%) as forged or interpolated.⁸¹ Such numbers only serve to underline infamous cases of forgery at Saint-Denis, including a dossier of privileges used at the Roman synod of 1065, the focus of chapter three. Repeated rewriting of charters occurred there from late Carolingian times through the twelfth century and beyond. Indeed, the eleventh-century dossier was recopied into the *Cartulaire blanc* c. 1180/90, by which time it had been thoroughly absorbed into house tradition.⁸² Such activities make Saint-Denis another house worthy of close study.

Likewise, Christ Church, Canterbury has been revealed as a significant center of forgery. Michael Clanchy argued that: "In England the greatest period for forging documents was the century after the Norman Conquest, when the old houses of Black monks had to convince the incomers of their ancient dignities and privileges."⁸³ In particular, he highlighted the monasteries of Westminster, Gloucester, Ramsey, Battle Abbey, and Christ Church and Saint Augustine's at Canterbury. The *Anglo-Saxon Charters* volumes (linked to *E-Sawyer*) show a substantial number of forgeries or highly interpolated acts (more than 10% of survivals) at these houses. One might add to the list houses where more than 20% of acts are suspect, such as Rochester (7 of 37 acts), Winchester, New Minster (9 of 34), Saint Paul's London (11 of 31), Malmesbury (8 of 50), Saint Albans (7 of 17), though these are small samples.⁸⁴ Although the places with the most surviving Old English

⁷⁸ Tock et al., eds, *La diplomatie française* 1:37.

⁷⁹ Tock et al., eds, *La diplomatie française* 1:24, table 13 lists *scriptoria* with the most surviving charters: Marmoutier (836), Saint-Victor de Marseille (330), Cluny (318), Saint-Denis (200), Saint-Florent-de-Saumur (162), and Nouaillé (160).

⁸⁰ Using Tock et al., eds, *La diplomatie française* 2:134–9.

⁸¹ Daniel Sonzogni, *Le chartrier de l'abbaye de Saint-Denis en France au haut Moyen Age: Essai de reconstitution*, *Pecia* 3 (2003):9–210. My count of acts designated + "forgeries intégrales" or (+) "actes subreptices ou récrits."

⁸² AN LL 1157–8.

⁸³ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 318–9.

⁸⁴ Alistair Campbell, ed., *Charters of Rochester*, *Anglo-Saxon Charters* 1, (London: British Academy, 1973), the forgeries may be underestimated in this early volume; Susan E. Kelly, ed., *The Charters of St. Augustine's, Canterbury and Minster-in-Thanes*,

charters, Winchester, Old Minster (225) and Worcester (275), have not yet been fully edited, the third largest corpus, Christ Church, Canterbury has. Of the 184 pre-Conquest acts of Christ Church, it is extraordinary that at least 113 survive as single-sheet charters (only 19 exist at Winchester and 22 at Worcester), of which the editors deemed only 83 to be fully authentic.⁸⁵ Thus, Christ Church has both the largest corpus of “original” and “forged” single-sheets from before 1066. For the post-Conquest period, Sharpe’s database of Anglo-Norman royal acts indicates substantial concentrations of forged or highly interpolated acts (over 20%) benefitting Westminster, Durham, Rochester, Winchester, New Minster, and especially Battle Abbey (over 50%).⁸⁶ Barrow’s analysis of the *English Episcopal Acta* series (encompassing more than 600 acts) noted that “monastic houses were responsible for the overwhelming majority of forgeries, and Benedictine foundations were far ahead of all other orders.”⁸⁷ What old Benedictine houses had in common were extensive archives from the pre-1066 period. But the monks of Christ Church, Canterbury were bolder inventors, willing to rewrite their past creatively both before and after the Norman Conquest.

So, Saint Peter’s, Saint-Denis, and Christ Church were all prolific centers of forgery. Studying these three monasteries together has an advantage: it avoids artificial national divisions (England, France, Low Countries, etc.) that have sometimes guided scholars, but which did not (yet) exist in the Middle Ages. Of course, regional differences and local variations must be respected, especially as so much forgery and history writing served local ends.⁸⁸ Indeed, “histories” and “archives” may only have meaning at specific places and times, because they were contingent on continued performance, reinforcement of memory, and re-inscription.⁸⁹ Perceptions of the past

Anglo-Saxon Charters 4, (London: British Academy, 1995); Sean Miller, ed., *The Charters of New Minster, Winchester*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 9, (London: British Academy, 2001); Susan E. Kelly, ed., *The Charters of St. Paul’s, London*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 10 (London: British Academy, 2004).

⁸⁵ My count from *Charters of Christ Church*.

⁸⁶ Sharpe, *Writs and Charters of William II* and *Writs and Charters of Henry I*.

⁸⁷ Barrow, “Why Forge Episcopal Acta?” 22–3 and appendix 1, 28–36.

⁸⁸ Norbert Kersken, *Geschichtsschreibung im Europa der “nationes”: Nationalgeschichtliche Gesamtdarstellungen im Mittelalter* (Köln: Böhlau, 1995), 822–76; Van Houts, *Local and Regional Chronicles*, 14–16.

⁸⁹ Roger Chartier, *Inscription and Erasure: Literature and Written Culture from the Eleventh to the Eighteenth Century*, trans Arthur Goldhammer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Mary Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Francis X. Blouin, Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, *Processing the Past: Contesting Authority in History and the Archives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

could be intensely local, especially when adapting to ever-changing circumstances. In consequence, exploring the local, peculiar, and transient aspects of monastic rewriting of the past is an important goal of the studies in part II. Nevertheless, some shared ideas seem to have existed, which suggest a significant connection between medieval forgers' and historians' activities.

FORGERY AND HISTORY

Many scholars have analyzed forgeries, but their work was frequently technical or only dealt with specific instances. Such pointillist studies are valuable, since they expose the fraudulent texts and objects which this book considers collectively. Some scholars have viewed forgery as a subject of study for its own sake, though most were paleographers or diplomatists seeking criteria for evidentiary exclusion.⁹⁰ A few, however, tried to explain the phenomenon of forgery in general, and their studies provide essential orientation for this one. Scholars of forgery have often paired forgery with related subjects. For example, Horst Fuhrmann's pioneering study grew out of his interest in canon law and the influence of the pseudo-Isidorian decretals.⁹¹ His findings provoked him to organize the *Fälschungen im Mittelalter* conference. Several scholars concentrated on the religious aspects of forgery and notions of truth, particularly medieval forgers' intentions. Giles Constable studied forgery and plagiarism together, arguing that they "hold up a mirror to the period in which they were created" and, thus, were evidence about shared faith and ideas.⁹² Anthony Grafton investigated the relationship between forgery and the rise of source criticism after the medieval period.⁹³ Such studies demonstrate that forgery can throw light on many subjects, including medieval notions of law, sin, and textual production. These wider significances explain why forgery has remained fascinating to medievalists.

It is also important to study the relationship between medieval forgeries and historical writings for at least three reasons. First, because it is a fairly direct way to analyze how medieval people made sense of their past and what they thought it could (or should) have been. Second, monks' use

⁹⁰ L. C. Hector, *Paleography and Forgery* (London: St Anthony's, 1959).

⁹¹ Horst Fuhrmann, "Die Fälschungen im Mittelalter: Übergungen zum mittelalterlichen Wahrheitsbegriff" *Historische Zeitschrift* 197 (1963): 529–54, with discussion by Karl Bosl, 555–67, Hans Patze, 568–73, and Auguste Nitschke, 574–9 and response by Fuhrmann, 580–601.

⁹² Constable, "Forgery and Plagiarism," 1.

⁹³ Anthony Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 22–25, 48–51.

of forgeries highlights the assumptions of medieval historical writers, including their evidentiary paradigms. Third, the relationship between forgery and historical writing has been relatively neglected by historians; even the mammoth *Fälschungen im Mittelalter* collection offers little in this regard. On the other hand, there has been considerable work on medieval historical narratives by literary scholars, who usually treat forgery while considering issues of fiction, reference, or truth.⁹⁴ Such concerns provide conceptual guidelines for this study, which are treated below under three headings: faith, fact, and fiction.

Faith – Problems of Intention, Sin, and Pious Fraud

Modern scholars have struggled to come to terms with forgery, invention, and creativity in historical writings of the Middle Ages. One key difficulty has been the motives and intentions of medieval writers, who were often anonymous. Why did monks forge charters? Why did they put forgeries in their historical narratives? Did they understand their actions in some way to be wrong? Answering the last question is easiest. Blatant forgery, that is, the wholesale invention of new and previously unknown documents, was understood as a crime by medieval monks and their contemporaries. Clear proof can be found in authorities' reaction to forgeries. For example, the Le Mans forgeries (created in the 840s/850s), which sought to subordinate a local monastery to the bishop of Le Mans, were rejected forcefully by King Charles the Bald and episcopal assemblies in 862–3.⁹⁵ They had seen through the deceptions. Such failures of forgers are enlightening because they show the limits of credibility. During the twelfth century, various authorities moved to condemn forgery and to prevent it more aggressively. Popes became more suspicious of documents after the 1120s and over the next century changed issuing procedures to forestall forgery. Around the same time, secular rulers became concerned with forged documents. In the south, notarial tradition and Roman law provided models for authenticating and registering acts, offering some means for detecting and preventing forgery.⁹⁶ In the north, first in England and then elsewhere, royal chancery procedures evolved to provide better guarantees, by

⁹⁴ Monika Otter, *Inventiones: Fiction and Referentiality in Twelfth-Century English Historical Writing* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁹⁵ Walter Goffart, *The Le Mans Forgeries: A Chapter from the History of Church Property in the Ninth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 145–7 and 240–52.

⁹⁶ Petra Schulte, *Scripturae publicae creditur: Das Vertrauen in Notariatsurkunden in kommunalen Italien des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2003), 4–11, 27–33.

issuing acts in duplicate or by enrolling or registering them.⁹⁷ Everywhere in northern Europe, seals were increasingly used to authenticate documents. Gradually over the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, barriers were raised and forgery became more difficult – a shift examined in chapter five. Nevertheless, blatant forgery had always been recognized as wrong in the Middle Ages and, when discovered, severely punished.⁹⁸ Authorities reserved especially savage punishments for those guilty of “*crimen falsi*” by analogy with counterfeiting, as mentioned above. The new theology of the twelfth century also may have raised consciousness about forgery since it stressed intention as well as action in its treatment of sin. While the act of forging a document (as opposed to a seal or coin) may not have been as severe a crime in law, deceit was recognized as wrong and duplicitous intention made the forger a sinner.

But what of textual modifications which did not reach the level of blatant forgery: making less precise clauses more precise, updating style, interpolating documents to bring them into line with memory or oral tradition, or retelling well-known stories with new details? And what if the intention was not to deceive, but rather to restore order or truth? As Giles Constable pointed out, medieval clerics were deeply concerned with truth; however, “the most interesting forgers, and those who have attracted the attention of scholars, forged for the advantage not of themselves but of a cause or institution, or for the sake of some higher purpose.”⁹⁹ Intention was stressed by Carlrichard Brühl, who argued that many, even most, medieval forgeries were “pious frauds” because their creators were sincere: that is, they believed what they wrote was true even if modern historians regard their writings as false.¹⁰⁰ Some scholars argue that such documents constitute the overwhelming majority of “forgeries” and describe them as piously motivated, as trying to restore “order” or as “honest forgery.”¹⁰¹ They argue that such texts were not intended to be duplicitous, even if they are considered inauthentic by modern critical methods. Other historians, more cynical about monastic motives, argue that monks knew they were doing wrong all along. Elizabeth A. R. Brown insisted that no medieval person attempted

⁹⁷ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 321–6; see also 328–33, where he argued such writing practices were transformative rather than reactive.

⁹⁸ Constable, “Forgery and Plagiarism,” 14–18 gives examples.

⁹⁹ Constable, “Forgery and Plagiarism,” 7.

¹⁰⁰ Carlrichard Brühl, “Der ehrbare Fälscher: Zu den Fälschungen des Klosters S. Pietro in Ciel d’Oro zu Pavia,” *Deutsches Archiv* 35, no. 1 (1979):209–28.

¹⁰¹ For restoring “order,” Fuhrmann, *Einfluß und Verbreitung der pseudoisidorischen Fälschungen* 1:65–136; for “honest forgery,” Marjorie Chibnall, “Forgery in Narrative Charters,” *FiM* 4:345.

to justify forgery as modern scholars do, and, rather she argued that “the words used to designate the act and actor – *falsare, falsatio, falsificatio, falsaria, falsator* – unambiguously indicate that what was done was false and that the person who was responsible for the act was a falsifier – and thus a deceiver and wrongdoer.”¹⁰² The deceitful intention of the forger was recognized by medieval people as a sin and a crime, which she argued must not be confused with analyzing forgers’ pious motives or any *post hoc* justification of their activities. This argument works well for outright forgeries, wholly concocted and designed to deceive, but less well for minor interpolations which might have been considered merely corrective. Even so, issues of motive, intention, and justification of medieval forgeries are closely tied to faithfulness in many ways. Likewise, medieval historical writing – especially by medieval monastics – was closely connected to issues of faith and truth, which should be remembered when analyzing them.

Fact – Truth Value and Historicity

Perhaps the search for motive and intention in texts that were usually anonymous or collective is not the best explanatory strategy. Could such activities simply be regarded as an aspect of medieval creativity? Was forgery (by any definition) simply a part of the (history-) writing process? Michael Clanchy saw forgery as an inherent part of English literacy, or as he put it: “Forgers re-created the past in an acceptable literate form.”¹⁰³ Still, connections between medieval forgery and historical writing have been difficult to understand partially because modern historians’ views about them have been so negative. Forgeries have often been regarded as “bad evidence” by historians searching for “facts,” because forgeries manifestly did not provide them. But distinctions of historical science (especially diplomatics) have their utility and their limitations. One distinction is between charters containing statements which are not true (a *faux intellectuel*) and those which are physically defective (a *faux matériel*).¹⁰⁴ This apparently straightforward content/form distinction, however, breaks down considerably when confronting the bewildering variety of medieval documents.

One merely needs to look at the guidebook, the *Vocabulaire internationale de la diplomatie*, for terms to see how hard it is to apply such distinctions in practice. Not surprisingly, the *Vocabulaire* is most concerned

¹⁰² Elizabeth A. R. Brown, “‘*Falsitas pia sive reprehensibilis*’: Medieval Forgers and Their Intentions,” *FiM* 1:101–119 at 106.

¹⁰³ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 319.

¹⁰⁴ P. Herde and A. Gawlik, “Fälschungen: A: Lateinischer Westen,” in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, 10 vols (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977–99) 4, cols. 246–53, *BREPOLiS Medieval Encyclopaedias - Lexikon des Mittelalters Online*, <http://www.brepolis.net/bme>.

with the two opposite poles of the spectrum I proposed earlier: the blatant forgery and the fully authentic original. It defines an “acte faux” or “faux” negatively by opposition to the authentic as “an act which is not sincere, an act which does not present the characteristic of diplomatic authenticity.”¹⁰⁵ The equivalents it offers are “forgery” (English), “Fälschung” (German), and “documento falso” (Spanish/Italian). In contrast, an “acte authentique” possesses proper form and validation (as determined by diplomatic, critical methods) such that one can give full faith (“pleine foi”) to its content.¹⁰⁶ Such acts are called “authentic” in English and more precisely “rechtsförmliche Urkunde” in German. However, the *Vocabulaire* offers a bifurcated view of “authenticity,” which divides form from content. An act is “sincère” or possesses “authenticité diplomatique” if it was composed, expedited, and validated by regular procedure and possesses correct form. The English equivalent listed is “genuine document,” the German “echte Urkunde.”¹⁰⁷ However, an act that has proper form (diplomatic authenticity) may lack “authenticité historique” or “véracité” if the content does not conform to historical reality.¹⁰⁸ The German given is “historische Glaubwürdigkeit” and, strikingly, no English term is offered. In other words, a formally “authentic” document may be “false” or lacking historical truth-value. So, there are two distinctions: authentic/forged (form) and true/false (content). Although confusing, this scheme reinforces the point that forgery is not the same as falsity. In general, diplomatics has been more successful with “material” forgeries; however, “intellectual”

¹⁰⁵ Cárcel Ortí, ed., *Vocabulaire internationale de la diplomatie*, 41, no. 111: “Une acte faux, un faux, est un acte qui n’est pas sincère, un acte qui ne présente pas le caractère de l’authenticité diplomatique.” My translation.

¹⁰⁶ Cárcel Ortí, ed., *Vocabulaire internationale de la diplomatie*, 23, no. 9: “Un acte authentique est un acte établi dans les formes requises et pourvu des marques de validation nécessaires pour donner pleine foi au contenu.”

¹⁰⁷ Cárcel Ortí, ed., *Vocabulaire internationale de la diplomatie*, 41, no. 108: “Un acte est présumé *sincère* (*sincérité* ou *authenticité diplomatique*) si, délivré après une procédure régulière quant à son commandement, son expédition et sa validation, il répond dans sa forme à ce pour quoi il se donne.” It further distinguishes diplomatic authenticity from juridical authenticity in no. 109: “Un acte est *authentique* (*authenticité juridique*) s’il établi dans les formes requises et avec les marques de validation nécessaires pour que pleine foi soit donné à son contenu.” (English: “authentic document”; German: “formgerechte Urkunde.”) Thus, a forged act possessing the proper validation might be juridically authentic even if not diplomatically authentic.

¹⁰⁸ Cárcel Ortí, ed., *Vocabulaire internationale de la diplomatie*, 41, no. 110: “Un acte sincère (ou diplomatiquement authentique) peut ne pas offrir d’*authenticité historique* (=veracité), notamment s’il présente des faits une version non conforme à la réalité.” This is potentially tautological as it presumes a historical “reality” independent of historians’ interpretations of the past constructed using sources.

forgeries – those which are manifestly false – trouble modern historians more because they are inherently counter-factual.

Forgeries' lack of facticity was a key concern for historians as the professional discipline developed in the late nineteenth century, since a factual basis of history was generally thought to distinguish it from fable, myth, and fiction. For those inspired by positivism, the presentation of facts was the basis of historical science in the early twentieth century. Historical realists held that facts referred to what actually happened. From this viewpoint, "intellectual" forgeries were useless as evidence since they did not correspond to any past event. On the other hand, historical relativists viewed facts as contingent, or "a claim to knowledge established by the methods of historical inquiry."¹⁰⁹ This view shifted the focus to rules of evidence, which tended to discount any "material" forgeries because of their defects in form. Either way, forgeries were discarded or deemphasized – for example, volumes of charter facsimiles for teaching omitted forgeries entirely and early editions (notably the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*) relegated forged and dubious acts to the back of the volume, placing them outside of the corpus of genuine acts, which were arrayed by chronology.¹¹⁰ Thus, forgeries were excluded from the presumed factual, chronological sequence of events.

Even so, some early professionals were reluctant to abandon forgeries entirely. For Claude Lévy-Bruhl, forgeries could be recuperated as evidence because the primary task of the historian was to study what society had believed to be true, rather than what had happened. Therefore, the fraudulent mid-eighth-century Donation of Constantine could be said to be historical fact because it was believed to be genuine in the Middle Ages, even if modern methods determined it was a forgery.¹¹¹ Medievalists may have been especially vexed since dismissing all forgeries reduced the available pool of sources dramatically, especially for the early Middle Ages. I believe this problem led some medievalists to recognize the evidentiary value of forgeries, though usually reluctantly, as Marc Bloch did in *The Historian's Craft*: "Above all, a fraud (*mensonge*) is, in its way, a piece of evidence."¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Harry Ritter, *Dictionary of Concepts in History* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), "Fact" 153–60 at 153.

¹¹⁰ For instance, the acts of Pippin, Carloman, and Charlemagne in MGH DD Kar. 1 (pub. 1906) placed all acts deemed "unecht" (false, not real) at the end of the sequence of charters for each king.

¹¹¹ Claude Lévy-Bruhl, "Qu'est-ce que le fait historique," *Revue de Synthèse Historique* 42 (1926):53–9 at 56.

¹¹² Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. Peter Putnam (New York: Vintage, 1953), 93. Note that *mensonge* might also be translated as "lie."

In an early draft, Bloch continued this thought: “It expresses a mentality (*mentalité*); it gives information about the circumstances which inspired it.”¹¹³ So, forgeries, even if manifestly false, could still offer evidence about ideas and beliefs.

Both realist and relativist views of facts were questioned during the linguistic turn, as the role of language in the construction of fact (and reality) was increasingly recognized. The focus on the historian’s role in plotting a narrative (and the consequent selection, description, and interpretation of evidence) exploded older notions of facticity. Historical facts came to be viewed as constructions of historians. Facts were subordinated to interpretation in the game of representation, the utility of which postmodernism increasingly doubted.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, postmodernism questioned the empiricist assumptions of modernist methodologies. Diplomatic in particular might be viewed as guilty of “original sin” – a search for “original” or “authentic” charters that inherently devalued forgeries as evidence. Does such a critique destroy the usefulness of the spectrum of textual modification proposed earlier? Or does discarding positivist prejudices mean that forgeries can be rescued as evidence because “authentic” or “original” texts are deprivileged? Such questions about facticity and forgery force one to reconsider medieval historical narratives.

Fiction – Why It Differs from Forgery

Not just forgeries but medieval historical writings have also been discounted because they fail to meet modernist criteria for proper “history.” It was not merely medieval writers’ alleged laxity in using evidence, but other perceived failings as well. The most glaring problem was the hybridity of medieval historical writings. Prose might be mixed with poetry, mystical or sacred happenings might be recounted credulously as actual events, or authoritative “truths” might trump logic or reason. Such features led some scholars to conclude that medieval writers lacked ‘historical consciousness’ and to suggest their works were more akin to fiction than history and, so, should be analyzed using literary techniques.

Medieval forgeries and histories both reward close reading, postmodern approaches, and inter-textual analysis. Some scholars attribute their creativity to the closeness of medieval historical and literary narratives. As

¹¹³ Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire or métier d'historien*, ed. Étienne Bloch (Paris: Armand Colin, 1993), 128: “Surtout, un mensonge en tant que tel est à sa façon un témoignage. Il exprime une mentalité; il renseigne sur les circonstances qui l'ont inspiré.” My translation.

¹¹⁴ Alun Munslow, *The Routledge Companion to Historical Studies*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2000), “Facts” 107–9.

Gabrielle Spiegel has shown for vernacular histories in France, medieval historians had a good sense of conventions of oral epics and romances.¹¹⁵ Such transfers probably worked both ways. Dominique Boutet argues that medieval notions of history (“conscience historique”) heavily influenced literary genres. His goal was not genre-policing, but rather understanding the context of thought (and writing) that gave rise to medieval texts.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, there was a potential feedback loop, because successful literary/historical tales were shaped by, and could themselves shape, actions of the powerful – becoming what Robert Stein calls “reality fictions.”¹¹⁷

One should recognize the importance of literary conventions in medieval histories; however, one must be careful not to collapse the distinction between fiction and history, for medieval people did not do so. Even though writing *historialiter* meant avoiding rhetorical flourishes, this mode of writing did not preclude creatively (mis)remembering the past or incorporating texts from very diverse (even suspect) sources. Nor did it mean eschewing invented speeches for important actors, following the rhetorical model of ancient historians.¹¹⁸ Still, literature and history, even though both could function as entertainments, were not the same for medieval writers.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, they also could distinguish fiction from forgery (or falsity), even if they might not have done so in the manner that modern, professional history does. If one recalls Isidore of Seville’s definitions from the introduction, it is clear that medieval people had potential distinctions available. Indeed, making up stories (*fabula*) and proposing possible pasts (*argumentum*) were distinguished from writing histories (*historia*), because histories claimed to report events which had actually happened. Whether, when, and how such distinctions were made is, therefore, well worth investigating.

Another way to make sense of how histories employing forgeries were different than fictions for medieval people is to examine words used for composition in the Middle Ages. For example, the Latin word *texere*, which meant to weave (and is the origin of the word “text”), was very similar to *fabricare*, which meant to create fabric (before it came to mean to “fabricate,”

¹¹⁵ Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 63–9.

¹¹⁶ Dominique Boutet, *Formes littéraires et conscience historique: Aux origines de la littérature française, 1100–1250* (Presses universitaires de France: Paris, 1999), 13–31.

¹¹⁷ Robert M. Stein, *Reality Fictions: Romance, History, and Governmental Authority* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2006), 10.

¹¹⁸ Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2004), 167–8.

¹¹⁹ Nancy Partner, *Serious Entertainments* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 4–6, 194–211.

or make, either in general or deceptively).¹²⁰ Since the production of any text involved hand labor, including sewing parchment gatherings, analogies to the most common form of manufacture – weaving cloth – made sense. Medieval narratives were woven metaphorically, as compositions, and also literally, as folios were stitched together. Furthermore, while all medieval narratives could be said to have textures, historical narratives had textures of time. As has been argued for premodern India, such “textures of time” were recognizable to the audiences of historical texts, even if placed within an overtly different genre of writing. There were markers below the genre, “sub-generic markers” (or, if one continues the metaphor, strands woven into the larger fabric), which indicated a historical mode of expression was being deployed.¹²¹ If such “textures of time” were indeed recognizable, medieval writers could assert historical (and even truth) claims using particular textual strategies within larger narratives directed in other ways. If one adopts this approach, the importance of forgeries is apparent. Forgeries, to be successful, had to be woven into these “textures of time” (or situated by narrative strategies) in ways such that they would be believed. Once credible, they modified meaning to create a different interpretation of the past.¹²² Indeed, this use of forgeries provides strong evidence that such “textures of time” functioned and, thus, that historical modes of expression were distinct from fictional modes. A desire to shape the past was shared by forgeries and historical writings, and so they deserve to be studied together. In the end, the relationship between forgeries and historical writing is not about fiction; rather it is about how medieval writers rewrote the past to influence their present and future.

The intersection of forgeries with questions of faith, fact, and fiction makes studying them compelling to scholars of all periods. While this book focuses on the relationship of forgeries, cartularies, and historical writings in northwest Europe from the tenth to twelfth centuries, these larger concerns inform its argument. In the end, it is too simple to suggest that medieval historians were storytellers, and that good storytellers sometimes make up parts of their stories to improve them. This view ignores important

¹²⁰ Nick Groom, “Original Copies; Counterfeit Forgeries,” *Critical Quarterly* 43 (2001), 15–16.

¹²¹ Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600–1800* (New York: Other Press, 2003), 3–6, 252–4. For debate over “sub-generic markers” see the Forum on *Textures of Time* in *History and Theory* 46 (2007):366–427, esp. 371–80, 412–13, and 420–3.

¹²² Compare Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego Was Imago*, 20: “By being spoken and manipulated, charters served to represent a particular order; they asserted control over time and space. They can be conceived as literally producing and organizing social meaning.”

differences of forgery and fiction, as well as the medieval distinctions between *historiae*, *argumenta*, and *fabula*. One should not reject forgeries (or even discount them) from consideration just because modern historians employ evidentiary techniques unknown to medieval people. Indeed, it is the larger interplay of forgeries and historical narratives, their holistic meaning, which makes them worthy of study. Or to put it more plainly: forgeries cannot easily be used to reconstruct what *did happen*, but forgeries embedded in historical narratives do show what their composers believed *should have happened* and, thus, are perfect evidence for studying shared ideas – especially monastic mentalities. They offer distinctive and valuable access to medieval perceptions of past.

