

Chapter Title: CONCLUSION: REWRITING THE PAST

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CONCLUSION: REWRITING THE PAST

“God, that is forgere of alle thingus” (Eccl 11.5)
– John Wycliffe, c. 1382¹

In the end, the connections between monastic forgeries and historical writings in the tenth through twelfth centuries were close: both sought to rewrite the past. Creatively rewritten documents supported partisan interpretations of the past. Furthermore, forgeries (and other modifications) were deployed to meet specific needs within a story. They could make stories fit together with local traditions of the community. It helped, but was not required, to have older models to imitate to make claims to antiquity and, therefore, to authenticity. Forgeries had to appear genuine, but their content also had to be credible. Monastic notions of “reform” provided rhetoric (especially key words) and, above all, an inherently revisionist viewpoint which gave monastic composers goals for their stories, such as affirming regular foundation or greater freedom from diocesan jurisdiction. Such motives help explain why monks were unusually keen to rewrite their communal pasts over the course of the eleventh century. This rewriting could involve what modern historians call “forgery” or other inventions to achieve more useable pasts.

While the latitude to invent supporting documents or texts may seem potentially wide, in practice it was constrained by several factors. Most importantly, monks distinguished truth from lying – and history from fable. Indeed, they inherited such categories from Saint Augustine and Isidore of Seville and elaborated them further. Moreover, monks such as Eadmer were very aware of these ideas – indeed he had copied Augustine’s dictum

¹ John Forshall and Frederic Madden, eds. *The New Testament in English according to the version by John Wycliffe: about A.D. 1380*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), 3:70. A later version amends this phrase to “makeris of thingus.” Both words translated the Latin *fabricare*, see Hans Kurath et al., eds., *Middle English Dictionary online*, s.v. “forger,” <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary>.

“it is at no time whatsoever right to tell a lie,” during his youth.² However, between these poles there existed a large middle ground of compositional tactics, which were used to convey varying degrees of authority and authenticity. Much found in monastic cartularies or texts relating the past can be described using the medieval notion of *argumentum*: plausible narration. But being plausible and being convincing, especially to authorities, was not the same. In “Twice Told Tales,” I explored how three different monastic “stories” from the early, middle, and later eleventh century managed to convince authorities to favor the houses where they were composed. These monastic stories could be contested, especially by rivals who they were designed to de-privilege (sometimes literally). In part III, I explored how monastic forgeries succeeded and failed and how plausible narratives, or *argumenta*, could become convincing histories. In the later twelfth century, scrutiny increased as written records proliferated and authorities became more concerned about the form and content of documents issued in their names. Also, literacy spread beyond monks to include other clerics and laymen. The rise of non-monastic interpreters of the past meant that other stories were increasingly competing with monastic stories by addressing (and sometimes persuading) more varied audiences.

Changes in documentary culture challenged both monastic forgers and historians in the twelfth century. Instead of fooling most of the people most of the time, monastic forgers now could only fool some of the people some of the time. The craft of forging could, and did, adapt to new methods of validation and the expectations of a more rigorous documentary culture. Likewise, monastic stories, or *argumenta*, had to conform to changed circumstances in order to be convincing, or else they would be rejected or even forgotten. Present concerns were ever shifting and so rewriting the past had to be ongoing for monastic stories to remain relevant. Thus, some *argumenta* had afterlives and were incorporated into narrative histories. Such transformations of monastic forgery and historical writing reveal much about monastic ideas about the past and how to rewrite it. But in the larger picture, was there anything distinctive about the tales told in the long eleventh century? To answer this question, we should reconsider how and why monastic forgeries and stories became less effective, and how medieval monks responded.

² Harley 5915, f. 12r: “in diuina religione numquam omnino esse mentiendum.” Gullick, “The Scribal Work of Eadmer,” 175: “This newly identified one-leaf fragment written by Eadmer is possibly his earliest extant scribal work, dating from in or about the mid-1080s and perhaps a year or two before 1085.”

FORGERY AFTER 1200

One must recognize that criticism and forgery existed in a dialectical relationship, and so increased scrutiny also stimulated the development of new means of deception. In particular, the rise of specialist papal and royal chanceries producing official documents offered both peril and opportunity. Chancery production of documents curtailed beneficiary redaction, always of great use to forgers seeking favorable grants, while it simultaneously provided consistent models to imitate. Indeed, the stronger the models of authority were, the greater incentive a daring forger had, since, as long as the more rigorous physical or stylistic demands for verisimilitude could be met, the more convincing an accepted imposture would ultimately be. So, forgers had to become more technically adept. This dialectic partly explains why forgery is less useful today, because even though digital technology makes it much easier to fool the eye, the hyper-fractioning of postmodern media and authority means that there are so many models to imitate that each has reduced power to convince on its own.³ Then as now, changes in technologies of replication could cause major shifts in forgers' and critics' activities. One such significant medieval shift, discussed in chapter five, was the rise of the *inspeximus* or the *vidimus*: an authorized copy of a document which could be used as a legal substitute for it. This practice began in the late twelfth century and became quite popular in England and on the continent in the thirteenth century.⁴ Ironically, the triumph of royal or papal documentary authority also led to continuing cycles of reauthorization, as monks sought reconfirmations by successive kings or popes to ensure prior arrangements remained secure. The *inspeximus* and *vidimus* were designed to streamline this increasingly tiresome repetition, since once the necessary privileges had been authoritatively copied there was little need to revisit the originals. They created a *prima facie* substitute for an ancient privilege, but in so doing afforded two chances for forgers' intervention: rewriting the supposed original to be validated or, if more daring, forging the putatively authoritative *inspeximus* itself. Thus, layers of forgery and authentication recursively multiplied.

The increase in written records, especially for use at law, eventually also became a problem. For both practical and ethical purposes, courts began to limit the use of documentation, in effect creating an historical event horizon, which restricted written evidentiary assertions to more recent

³ Zdenko Mandusic, "Forgery," *Chicago School of Media Theory Blog*, <https://lucian.uchicago.edu/blogs/mediatheory/keywords/forgery/>.

⁴ Nicholas Vincent, "The Charters of King Henry II." Bertrand, *Les écritures ordinaires*, 35–6, 81–4.

(and, ideally, more certain) claims. For example, during Edward I's *Quo Warranto* proceedings in 1290 (when all landholders were supposed to show written deeds for their land), the king eventually had to concede that documentary proof would in future not be required for any date earlier than the accession of King Richard I in 1189. The creation of this limit to "legal memory" was partly a response to documentation burgeoning beyond control.⁵ But such limits prevented a favorite trick of forgers: inventing supposedly ancient or foundational deeds to disguise innovative claims. Such false foundations were no longer admissible (at least in English royal courts) and so written proof had to come from more recent (and, presumptively, more verifiable) times.

Nonetheless, confidence in written documents began to increase in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. A significant indicator of change was a marked increase in procedures for repressing forgeries in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, especially the reforms of the papal chancery undertaken by Pope Innocent III (1198–1216).⁶ The origins of various measures of prevention and detection were analyzed in chapter five; however, these comprehensive reforms represent a turning point and, furthermore, they were triggered by the revelation of significant amounts of forgery.

In a letter of May 19, 1198 to Archbishop William of Reims and his suffragans, Innocent III described discovering a nest of forgers in Rome, who could reproduce his and Celestine III's seals and who had penned many forgeries.⁷ This letter was the first of several treating forgery and one of the reasons the pope implemented substantial changes in chancery practices of tracking documents, largely unprecedented in Rome though known elsewhere.⁸ He created a system of chancery marks to be placed on all official documents which indicated the scribe, the corrector (a newly created position), the engrosser, registration of the act, and even the beneficiary or the proctor of the beneficiary who had requested the document – all in aid of tracking each stage of its issuance and production.⁹ He was seizing the initiative to curtail problems raised in Alexander III's decretal on *Scripta authentica* and apparent since Guerno's confession. Indeed,

⁵ Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 44–5, 329–32; he also points to the persistence of oral claims and those made with ritual objects.

⁶ Bertrand, *Écritures ordinaires*, 361–2.

⁷ Othmar Hageneder and Anton Haidacher et al., eds., *Die Register Innocenz' III. 1. Pontifikatsjahr, 1198/99. Texte* (Graz: H. Böhlau. Nachtf., 1964), 333–5, no. 235; Comp. III 5.11.1 = X 5.20.4.

⁸ Zutshi, "Innocent III and the Reform of the Papal Chancery," 100–1.

⁹ Zutshi, "Innocent III and the Reform of the Papal Chancery," 92–99.

there had been rising concern about how to establish the authenticity of documents as legal proof during the twelfth century. Canonists began to absorb Roman law notions about public instruments and link them to contemporary scribal practices, first for notarial records in southern France and Italy in the 1140s and 1150s, and then for sealed charters in northern Europe in the 1170s and 1180s.¹⁰ However, Innocent III's concept of forgery (he used the words *falsitas* and *falsarius* constantly) was quite capacious. It included leaving out or providing incorrect information to obtain privileges.¹¹ He expressly condemned the script-dictating and creative rewriting which monks had employed in the long eleventh century.¹² He even took steps to prevent anyone claiming to have received a false document unknowingly as an excuse.¹³ Rewriting ancient privileges, which monks of an earlier age perceived as acting in "good faith," thus became inherent acts of bad faith. They became always false rather than potentially true. The application of the true/false dichotomy to documents would only strengthen in subsequent years.

Therefore, the changes implemented by Innocent III were not merely about detection and prevention (though they treat these issues elaborately); they also reflected a change in thinking about documents. Paul Bertrand argues that this was a major shift in mentality. He stresses that the status of documents after 1200 (and especially after 1250) was substantially different because charters were increasingly thought to have juridical authority on their own. In other words, the "credibility gap" was closing: documents had become acts, imbued with authority (and authenticity) by their issuers, and could be used on their own as proof. Of course, such changes in the status of written acts had consequences for views about creatively rewriting them. The fabrications which had been tolerable before 1200 became impermissible afterwards, because documents became more closely associated with issuing authorities and were products of increasingly institutionalized, routinized chanceries, whose practices had evolved

¹⁰ Roumy, "Les origines canoniques," 337–47. Peter Landau, "Die Anfänge der Prozessrechtswissenschaft in der Kanonistik des 12. Jahrhunderts," in *Der Einfluss der Kanonistik auf die europäische Rechtskultur 1: Zivil- und Zivilprozessrecht*, ed. Orazio Condorelli et al. (Köln: Böhlau, 2009), 7–24.

¹¹ Zutshi, "Reform of the Papal Chancery," 87.

¹² Comp. IV 2.2.2. = X 25.1.3; Zutshi, "Reform of the Papal Chancery," 88: "Genuine papal documents which their beneficiaries had 'improved' by alterations (that is, erasures and additions) were likewise classed as forgeries. They presented a particular problem of detection, but one with which Innocent III was familiar."

¹³ Zutshi, "Reform of the Papal Chancery," 92.

to assure their inherent validity.¹⁴ This mental shift also explains the increasing definition and punishment of *crimen falsi* in the later Middle Ages (not just in canon law), because such activities were increasingly conceived as opposed to truthfulness – as inherently false. Thereafter, the extensive theological, philosophical, and legal thought about “truth” and “lies” could be mobilized to condemn certain kinds of rewriting. The role and function of documents, their copies, and their relation to (hi)stories was transforming, partly because of the increasingly perceived threat to authority posed by what we might finally call “forgery” in something reminiscent of the modern sense. Significantly, one sees the rise in pejorative meanings of the word “forger” as duplicitous in English after the fourteenth century, which previously had just meant “maker” more neutrally, as Wycliffe used it in his Bible.

When one reflects on medieval “forgeries” during the eleventh century, one must recognize the fluidity and multiplicity of forms and uses. Indeed, heterogeneity of charters suggests that large variations in practice were common, precisely because standard formats had not yet been insisted upon by authorities.¹⁵ These variations were anathema to early professional historians, who insisted on distinguishing “authentic” charters from “forged” ones. Such categories have their utility, but like all categories, their usefulness depends on their assumptions. Medieval “forgeries” resist such positivist categories, which can be too reductive about their value as evidence. The rich semantic meanings of medieval “charters” were highly adaptable and situational. Monks (and others) could propose a variety of arguments, using sources of varying degrees of authenticity, and with motives ranging from utter sincerity (“good faith”) to willful attempts to deceive and manipulate. But there were also limits, from the practical to the ideological, which constrained what monastic “forgers” could or would do. In the end, the believability of the text being produced – which depended on form, content, audience, and the situation – would determine how useful or memorable it would be.¹⁶ One major factor in believability was how the text fit into a context, especially a story or argument about the past it was created to support.

¹⁴ Bertrand, *Écritures ordinaires*, 362: “Avant le XIII^e siècle, le faux est une réalité un peu plus tolérable parce que le réécriture diplomatique semble toujours acceptable, mais aussi parce que la charte n’est pas encore enrobée d’autorité juridique. Ensuite, ce ne sera plus possible.”

¹⁵ Marco Mostert, “Forgery and Trust,” 52–3.

¹⁶ Compare Koziol, *The Politics of Memory and Identity*, 399: “In this aristocratic society, ‘truth’ could not be ‘objective.’ Truth served power, honour, and standing.”

IMPERFECT PASTS AND PERFECT PRESENTS

Turning from forgeries to historical writing, there were clearly shifts in the twelfth century which affected monastic historians in England, France, and Flanders. Many scholars of English historiography emphasize the long-term effect of the Norman Conquest in provoking various new forms of historical writing in the early twelfth century. As Martin Brett observed, one of the “earliest literary consequences” of the coming of Norman abbots to monastic centers of learning in England was the production of a Latin life of a local saint. This activity provided a powerful stimulus to monastic historical writing.¹⁷ One should also consider cartularies as a step towards historicization, as their compilation encouraged recycling and re-presenting archives, which could lead to rewriting the communal past. The strong commemorative and communal discourses in early cartularies suggest that a desire to produce a usable, local past was very influential. Such desires, as Elisabeth Van Houts observes, meant that historical writing and forgery were closely related phenomena. Such efforts could vary from the “entirely legal” writing down of sworn testimony (as happened with Domesday Book) to “creative historical documentation,” in the form of pseudo-original charters arising from wishful monastic thinking.¹⁸ Constance Bouchard also argues for close connections between the two types of writing projects as means for organizing the past.¹⁹ If one steps back from concern about what actually happened, one can appreciate that forgery, cartularies, and historical writing arose out of common thought processes and scribal practices. It was the desire to rewrite an imperfect past to achieve a more perfect present.

Regional patterns of historical writing seem to parallel the rise of functionalist cartularies for specific purposes as well as greater resistance by authorities to forgeries. In Normandy, such well-known writers as Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni wrote massive histories (framed as duchal or ecclesiastical histories), and a host of lesser figures wrote local house histories and hagiographies in the twelfth century, when cartularies also flourished.²⁰ In Champagne, Count Henry ‘the Liberal’ began a “history project” around 1160, having his chaplain Nicholas of Montiéramey seek

¹⁷ Martin Brett, “The Use of the Universal Chronicle at Worcester,” in *L'historiographie médiévale en Europe*, ed. Jean-Philippe Genêt (Paris: CNRS, 1991), 277–85.

¹⁸ Van Houts, “Historical Writing,” 116–7.

¹⁹ Bouchard, *Rewriting Saints and Ancestors*, 52: “Cartularies and chronicles, very different for modern historians, were for high medieval chroniclers both ways of organizing and presenting the past.”

²⁰ Van Houts, “Historical Writing,” 117–20 provided a summary.

out and copy at least half a dozen histories from nearby monasteries for his personal library.²¹ Such efforts highlight growing interest of lay nobles in historical writing.²² For Flanders, Steven Vanderputten has shown using the *Narratives Sources* database that there was a substantial uptick in monastic historical writings at the turn of the twelfth century and afterwards. Furthermore, such efforts became more localized and drew more heavily on hagiographic and archival material, becoming more specialized “histories” thereafter.²³ However, such historical writings often lacked the focus on communal identity so evident in monastic writings in the eleventh century. Instead, other identities – of a place, a ruling dynasty, or even a “people” – were stressed by *gesta* or local and regional chronicles.

Overall, one should consider not merely the rise in historical narratives (or charters or cartularies) in the twelfth century, but also changes in their discourses. Shifts in literate culture paralleled shifts in educated culture more generally, such as the rise of the “new logic” or the “new theology” or the “new law” and other transformations during the twelfth century.²⁴ The influence of the cathedral schools and the rise of lay literacy promoted new habits of thought, learning, or practice, all of which encouraged re-interpretation of the past. Of course, there were fits and starts, as scribes and their audiences experimented with new uses of the written, and one should be wary of evolutionary models which employ overly clear transitions, even for monastic histories.²⁵ Nonetheless, shifting modes of written expression changed how the past could be rewritten. Such rewriting included a wide spectrum of activities, such as making “corrections” when trying to copy accurately, “finding” or “inventing” sources to support a traditional story, or deliberate attempts to deceive or manipulate readers or authorities. Thus, medieval historians (and especially monastic ones) continued to try to forge more perfect presents and futures out of imperfect pasts, but they had to use different approaches.

²¹ Theodore Evergates, *Henry the Liberal: Count of Champagne, 1128–1181* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 96–8. For manuscripts, see Patricia Stirnemann, “Reconstitution des bibliothèques en langue latine des comtes de Champagne,” in *Le moyen âge à livres ouverts. Actes du Colloque* (Lyon, 24 et 25 septembre 2002) (Lyon: Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon, 2002), 37–45.

²² Patricia Stirnemann, “Private Libraries Privately Made,” in *Medieval Manuscripts, Their Makers and Users*, eds. Henry Ansgar Kelly et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 185–98.

²³ Steven Vanderputten, “Benedictine Local Historiography from the Middle Ages and Its Sources: Some Structural Observations,” *Revue Mabillon* 15 (2004): 107–29.

²⁴ John Cotts, *Europe’s Long Twelfth Century: Order, Anxiety, and Adaptation, 1095–1229* (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 1–13, 151–82.

²⁵ Steven Vanderputten, “Monastic Literate Practices in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Northern France,” *Journal of Medieval History* 32, no. 2 (2012): 101–26.

Some scholars contrast monastic historiography from 900 to 1150 with early and later historical writings. Rosamund McKitterick insists on the special character of Carolingian historical writings, and also asserts they were distinct from high medieval historiography.²⁶ Chris Given-Wilson argues that chroniclers from 1270 to 1440 departed from their monastic predecessors, because they attempted to reach secular audiences and did so often using the vernacular.²⁷ Much earlier, Jon E. Lendon characterizes Roman historians as using different notions of truth and narration than medieval historical writers.²⁸ Much later, Anthony Grafton emphasizes that the Italian Renaissance was formative for practices of reference and citation, which he strongly contrasted with the preceding medieval period.²⁹ Perhaps all these historians are overstressing the distinctiveness of their chosen era – a flaw of which this book might equally be accused – but nonetheless they all regard monastic historians of the central middle ages as different from earlier or later European history writers.

One might argue that tales told by the powerful just were accepted because their authors were powerful, and only repeated as necessary for a nodding acceptance or submission. Although there is no easy way to prove this, passive acceptance of stories may have been as common as forgetting.³⁰ Still, I think that deliberate choice was influential in shaping archives and stories. Of course, modern scholars are evidentiary prisoners of medieval monks' selectivity, either deliberate or accidental, a point which has been made many times.³¹ Yet even if one concedes that elaborate monastic stories using forgeries were exceptional in the eleventh century, their counter-factual nature makes them valuable evidence of monastic intentions. Forgeries and creative rewriting (which modern scholars tend to under- or over-estimate, depending on how skepticism suits their own histories) reveal monastic understandings of the past. The efficacy of such

²⁶ Rosamund McKitterick, *Perceptions of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2006), esp. 1–5.

²⁷ Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon, 2004), 137–52, esp. 150–1.

²⁸ Jon E. Lendon, “Historical Thought in Ancient Rome,” in *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, eds. Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 60–77.

²⁹ Grafton, *Forgers and Critics*, 8–35. See also his *What Was History: The Art of History in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 62–122.

³⁰ Compare Vanderputten, *Monastic Reform as Process*, 14–30 on “social forgetting” and Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance*, 26–9, 128–33, 177–81 on “forgetting.”

³¹ Bertrand, *Écritures ordinaires*, 23–4 provided statistics on French cartularies based on the *Cartul-R* database; compare Patrick Geary, “Entre gestion et ‘gesta,’” in *Les Cartulaires*, eds. Oliver Guyotjeannin et al. (Paris: École des chartes, 1993), 13–26.

monastic stories seems to have been high in the eleventh century, and even with competition from other scribes in the twelfth century, they remained quite influential. The creation of sequels and *argumenta*, and especially counter-stories or responses, suggests that monastic stories had enduring relevance, and not just to the monks themselves.

I have argued for a broad view of “historical writing” that incorporates both humble and grand efforts to rewrite the past, because the thinking behind such efforts seems similar to me. However, even scholars using a narrow definition of medieval writing genres, in which *historia* was relatively rare, have noted the importance of rewriting the past.³² Such rewriting included what traditional diplomatists regard as “forgeries” as well as attempts to describe what happened in the past accurately. Indeed, both activities could have been regarded as “faithful,” especially prior to the mid-twelfth century.³³ But after 1200, forgery was discouraged as authorities developed new criteria for documentary authenticity and a stricter dichotomy between truth and falsity, which ruled out previously tolerable forms of creative rewriting.

So, how should historians today evaluate medieval monastic historical writings? Are they “histories” or are they something else? We need to be aware that labels and categories can only take us so far. There were many layers of meaning in medieval texts. Of course, the perceived hybridity of monastic historical writing in the tenth to twelfth centuries disturbs many modern (or even postmodern) historians, who feel that medieval monks lacked sufficient historical conscience. But how can this be correct for a society in which tradition, the ancient, and reverence for authority were all usually equated with the good, whereas invention, the new, and individual opinion were not? The reason for historians’ unease is clear: medieval monks had rules for writing their histories, but those rules were different than modern ones. Monks’ histories had to fit into grand narratives they knew: the history of their house, the history of the Church, or the universal narrative of human history. Such master or grand narratives presumed a “god’s eye” view and interpreted events in the context of revealed Biblical truths. Modernist historians also adopted an omniscient viewpoint, though in the post-Enlightenment period God was removed as they asserted the ideal that history could be objective, universal, and neutral – thus creating the third-person viewpoint of professional history.³⁴ While postmodernism

³² Emily A. Winkler and Christopher P. Lewis, eds. “Introduction,” in *Rewriting Histories in the Central Middle Ages, 900–1250* (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming).

³³ Compare Bouchard, *Rewriting Saints and Ancestors*, 31–6.

³⁴ For the distinctions between meta-narrative, grand narrative, master narrative, and narrative proper, Allan Megill, *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error*:

undermined both perspectives, we must recognize that the medieval and modernist viewpoints were not the same and had different effects on historical writing. Knowing the grand or master narrative for their works, medieval monks were willing to be creative in constructing their histories, especially in selecting texts to support their versions of events. Their grand and master narratives were less flexible, but the rules of composition and evidence were more so for any particular history. Thus, all sorts of media – documents, narratives, objects, and testimonies – could be used, including forgeries. Today, professional historians shun creativity in citation, still more making up sources; medieval monks were more creative in their use of sources. Their approach almost reverses the paradigm of modern historical practice, in which the rules of evidence are more rigid, but meta-narrative is more flexible, especially in the wake of postmodernism, which challenged all meta-narratives. But for medieval monks, grand and master narratives were not flexible; rather they were controlling. Imposing proper order on their narrative was more important than specific evidence.

Of course, modern scholars must be careful in reconstructing the work of medieval forgers and historians, lest their own assumptions undermine their analyses. For example, consider attempts to discover the people behind medieval fabrications. The temptation to link personalities to texts risks distortion. Just as one must beware the explanatory allure of what I call the “lone forger” theory, one must also beware the “lone historian” theory: over-attributing a history to a single “author.” Biographical explanation is so compelling because it seems to offer a key to an author’s intentions. However, within monastic scriptoria the material production of any text might literally involve many hands, which is widely acknowledged in analyses of cartularies but less so for histories.³⁵ But in such circumstances, does a modern desire to identify an individual author really make sense? Furthermore, authorship is not the only way to access intention. Forgeries are, by their counter-factual nature, evidence of the intention to shape a different past: to assert what should have happened rather than what did happen. The same reasoning holds for invented traditions in historical writings, which also seek to rewrite the past into a more usable or convenient

A Contemporary Guide to Practice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 169–70; he also discussed the problem of “immaculate perception,” 83–6. Compare Leonard Krieger, *Time’s Reasons: Philosophies of History Old and New* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 11–22 on “coherence” and history in the premodern period.

³⁵ Excepting art historians, see Laura Cleaver, “From Codex to Roll: Illustrating History in the Anglo-Norman World in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries,” *ANS* 37 (2014): 69–90 and Barenbeim, *The Art of Documentation*, 44–71.

form. Thus, one can find, even in anonymous texts, evidence of intention. Greater attention to collective production (or collaborative or conspiratorial production, depending on one's view) may help us better understand even texts we can attribute to particular "authors."

This book serves as a reminder that historians can read and interpret in multiple ways what medieval monastic storytellers were trying to communicate. Focusing on the message, much like "suspension of disbelief" at a play or a movie, allows one to take in a monastic "story" and its nuances, which can then be put alongside a modern, source-critical analysis. In the end, we learn more using both approaches together, even though traditionally they have been deployed separately for narratives or documents. A combined approach helps explain the proliferation of "forgeries," especially in the long eleventh century, because they could be integral to how medieval monks creatively rewrote their pasts. It also highlights differences in medieval and modern historical thinking. After the rise of the modern discipline, historians became more rigid about source use, as technologies of "scientific" criticism (paleography, diplomatic, codicology, sigillography, etc.) were developed to process evidence. Since the rise of post-modernism, historians have become more flexible about meta-narratives, as disciplinary foundational assumptions were relativized. In contrast, medieval writers presumed the reverse: more rigid grand narratives and more flexible source use. Such rules of the game helped determine whether an *argumentum* was convincing. Medieval monks looked forward and backward in time; however, they did so differently than modern historians do. Maintaining such double vision was – and is – demanding, but ultimately rewarding, since it sharpens our understanding of how the medieval past was rewritten.