



MARCUS BULL

EYEWITNESS  
*and*  
CRUSADE NARRATIVE

Perception and Narration in Accounts of the  
Second, Third and Fourth Crusades

# Eyewitness and Crusade Narrative

## Crusading in Context

*Series Editor*  
William J. Purkis

The crusading movement was a defining feature of the history of Europe, the Mediterranean and the Near East during the central and later Middle Ages. Ideas and practices associated with it touched the lives of people within and beyond Christendom and the Islamic world, regardless whether they were ever directly engaged in, witnesses to, or victims of acts of crusading violence themselves.

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# Eyewitness and Crusade Narrative

Perception and Narration in Accounts of  
the Second, Third and Fourth Crusades

Marcus Bull

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Jonathan Riley-Smith

*In memoriam*



# Contents

Acknowledgements	viii
Abbreviations	x
Introduction: Medieval and Modern Approaches to Eyewitnessing and Narratology as an Analytical Tool	1
1 Memory and Psychological Research into Eyewitnessing	72
2 The Second Crusade: The <i>De Expugnatione Lyxbonensi</i> and Odo of Deuil's <i>De Profectione Ludovici VII in Orientem</i>	126
3 The Third Crusade: Ambroise's <i>Estoire de la Guerre Sainte</i> and Points of Comparison and Contrast	193
4 Geoffrey of Villehardouin's and Robert of Clari's Narratives of the Fourth Crusade	256
Conclusion	337
Bibliography	346
Index	386



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Finally, an acknowledgement of two scholars who made a big difference for me. I had always hoped that one day I might have the chance to register my appreciation of Rosalind Hill (1908–97) in some way; and although she is best known for her edition (with Sir Roger Mynors) and translation of the *Gesta Francorum*, a First Crusade text, and this book begins with the Second, this seems an opportune moment. In her late seventies and well into her eighties,

### *Acknowledgements*

Rosalind would unfailingly attend the ‘Crusades and the Latin East’ seminars at the Institute of Historical Research; and what struck me at the time and remains an abiding memory is her great interest in and kindness towards the assembled postgraduate students, me included. British academic life is much the poorer for the passing of the generation whose values Professor Hill personified.

Jonathan Riley-Smith’s death in 2016 was a loss keenly felt by many. It is a characteristic of unusually kind and generous people that they leave those around them in their debt, even though they would not for one minute dream of calling in that debt to their own advantage. Jonathan was such a person. This book is dedicated to his memory.

Chapel Hill, February 2018

## Abbreviations

CCCM	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis
<i>Conquête</i>	Geoffrey of Villehardouin, <i>La conquête de Constantinople</i> , ed. and trans. E. Faral, 2nd edn, 2 vols (Les classiques de l'histoire de France au moyen âge, 18-19; Paris, 1961)
<i>De expugnatione</i>	<i>De expugnatione Lyxbonensi: The Conquest of Lisbon</i> , ed. and trans. C. W. David, rev. J. P. Phillips (New York, 2001)
<i>De profectione</i>	Odo of Deuil, <i>De profectione Ludovici VII in orientem</i> , ed. and trans. V. G. Berry (New York, 1948)
<i>Estoire</i>	Ambroise, <i>The History of the Holy War: Ambroise's Estoire de la Guerre Sainte</i> , ed. and trans. M. J. Ailes and M. C. Barber, 2 vols (Woodbridge, 2003)
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
<i>MGH SS</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores in Folio et Quarto</i> , ed. G. H. Pertz et al. (Hanover, Weimar, Stuttgart, and Cologne, 1826–)
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus, series Latina</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols (Paris, 1844–64)
RC	Robert of Clari, <i>La Conquête de Constantinople</i> , ed. and trans. P. Noble (British Rencesvals Publications, 3; Edinburgh, 2005)
<i>RHGF</i>	<i>Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France</i> , ed. M. Bouquet, rev. L. Delisle, 24 vols in 25 (Paris, 1840–1904)
RS	Rolls Series: Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages (London, 1838–96)

## Introduction: Medieval and Modern Approaches to Eyewitnessing and Narratology as an Analytical Tool

There is a category of historical evidence that historians are wont to characterize, and indeed to essentialize, as ‘eyewitness’. This is not just a technical term of art. The idea of being an eyewitness to something is deeply embedded in a wide range of cultural situations. We do not need to have a formal grounding in common law, for instance, to appreciate that the reliability of a witness who claims to have seen an event is normally greater than that of someone who is merely passing on hearsay. As is discussed in more detail below, sight and light are the basis of countless metaphors for understanding, realization and many other cognitive operations. So when we say that a historical source is ‘eyewitness’, we are making very large claims about it, even though the underlying assumptions about what we are saying have been surprisingly little studied relative to the importance of this category to the ways in which historians evaluate and deploy their evidence. All historical evidence that is the result or residue of human agency – as opposed to, say, tree-ring data and some types of archaeological deposit – has some experiential basis. But the particular appeal of eyewitness evidence is that, all other things being equal, it seems to close the gap between record and experience more than any other trace of the human past. It is through eyewitness evidence that we seem to get closest to validating the powerful instinct that people in the past must have led lives grounded in moment-by-moment sensory experience that was every bit as real to them as our lived experience is to us. In this way the category of eyewitness evidence seems to plug historical inquiry into basic human capacities that transcend cultural differences across time and space – or at least do so enough to grant us a meaningful point of entry into societies which in many respects can strike us as very dissimilar from our own. Eyewitnessing appears to be a powerful common denominator that permits us to understand and empathize with people in the past.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The most suggestive and theoretically informed discussion of premodern eyewitnessing is Andrea Frisch’s *The Invention of the Eyewitness: Witnessing and Testimony in Early Modern France* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004). See also her ‘The Ethics of Testimony: A Genealogical Perspective’, *Discourse*, 25 (2003), 36–54. Frisch seeks to challenge the dominant scholarly view that eyewitness experience acquired a new epistemological prestige in the early modern period as a result of European encounters with the New World. Frisch’s attention to legal paradigms is interesting, if narrow in its scope. And her central argument that premodern eyewitness testimony should be seen as dialogic and performative, a social interaction charged with ethical meaning, rather than simply the articulation of knowledge gained from past experience, is



We need, therefore, to unpack the assumptions that we build into the category of evidence that we label 'eyewitness'. In order to do so, and to examine the mechanisms whereby the experiences of people who took part in a historical event are transposed into narratives about it, this study focuses on a selection of texts written in connection with the Second, Third and Fourth Crusades.<sup>2</sup> Individually and collectively, the chosen texts raise questions about the ways in which eyewitnessing informs substantial and detailed narratives that tell complex stories. The overall argument of this book is that, whereas we tend to appraise the eyewitness quality of a narrative source primarily in terms of the relationship of the source's author to the events that the source narrates, there is more to be gained from looking inwards into the workings of the eyewitness narrative as text. This is not to argue that the history of events, *histoire événementielle*, is trivial or unimportant, or that the reality of the past simply collapses

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insightful. But her remarks about medieval conditions are based on too slender a body of evidence, and nudge too far towards caricature of (p. 83) the 'feudal mechanisms for establishing the credibility of testimony', to convince. For the scholarship with which Frisch takes issue, and which remains some of the most stimulating explorations of premodern eyewitnessing, see S. Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago, 1991), esp. pp. 128–45 on Bernal Díaz; A. Pagden, *Eyewitness Encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven, 1993), esp. pp. 51–87 on the 'autoptic imagination'; *idem*, 'Ius et Factum: Text and Experience in the Writings of Bartolomé de Las Casas', in S. Greenblatt (ed.), *New World Encounters* (Berkeley, 1993), pp. 85–100. See also R. Adorno, 'The Discursive Encounter of Spain and America: The Authority of Eyewitness Testimony in the Writing of History', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 49 (1992), 210–28. For a thoughtful study of a medieval observer's reactions to a no-less unfamiliar world, see P. Jackson, 'William of Rubruck in the Mongol Empire: Perception and Prejudices', in Z. von Martels (ed.), *Travel Fact and Travel Fiction: Studies on Fiction, Literary Tradition, Scholarly Discovery and Observation in Travel Writing* (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 55; Leiden, 1994), pp. 54–71.

<sup>2</sup> The Latin eyewitness texts relating to the First Crusade are the subject of a valuable study: Y. N. Harari, 'Eyewitnessing in Accounts of the First Crusade: The *Gesta Francorum* and Other Contemporary Narratives', *Crusades*, 3 (2004), 77–99. Harari's definition of an eyewitness text as those (p. 77) 'whose main purpose is to narrate what their authors have seen and experienced and that accordingly privilege factual accuracy over skill of writing and breadth of interpretation' is too narrow, however, and his resultant taxonomy too rigid. For a long-term view, see the same author's 'Scholars, Eyewitnesses, and Flesh-Witnesses of War: A Tense Relationship', *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, 7 (2009), 213–28; 'Armchairs, Coffee, and Authority: Eye-witnesses and Flesh-witnesses Speak About War, 1100–2000', *Journal of Military History*, 74 (2010), 53–78. For a general survey of medieval eyewitness historiography, which, however, underestimates the amount and significance of such works before the later twelfth century, see P. Ainsworth, 'Contemporary and "Eyewitness" History', in D. M. Deliyannis (ed.), *Historiography in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2003), pp. 249–76.

into its textual representations. But it is to suggest that event-centred historical reconstructions that are substantially grounded in narratives such as those that feature in this study would do well to ‘go the long way round’, methodologically speaking, when validating their truth claims with reference to a given source’s supposed eyewitness status. A fuller appreciation of the textual means by which this eyewitness, or ‘autoptic’, quality impresses itself upon narrative sources can deepen our understanding of both the past as lived experience and the means by which we are granted access to that experience.

A helpful point of entry into thinking about eyewitnessing is a well-known post-medieval narrative with a medieval setting. Kurosawa Akira’s *Rashōmon* (1950) is, alongside the same director’s *Seven Samurai* (*Shichinin no Samurai*, 1954), among the best-known Japanese period films in world cinema. Its setting and central plot device were inspired by two short stories by the popular writer Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892–1927).<sup>3</sup> It narrates from several viewpoints mutually exclusive versions of the story of the murder of a minor nobleman and the rape of his wife by a bandit in a remote forest clearing. Although the film’s pared-down *mise-en-scène* does not mandate a precisely fixed period setting, the fact that some of the action takes place within the ruins of the Rashōmon, or Rajōmon, the gate that was the main southern entrance into Kyōto, Heian Japan’s capital city, points to a time shortly after the collapse of the Heian political system and of Kyōto’s importance in the mid 1180s.<sup>4</sup> The film’s many ambiguities and subtleties are activated by placing what did, or did not, take place in the clearing within not one but two narrative frames. These are set off not only from the action in the forest but also from one another by means of starkly contrasting diegeses, or scenic settings: first, a courtyard-type space, characterized by clean geometric lines and bright sunlight, in which various of the characters, including the murder victim himself speaking through a medium, address an unseen and unspeaking judge; and second, the gloomy setting of the ruinous city gate that gives the film its name, under which a woodcutter who claims to have stumbled upon the scene of the crime and a priest who has also given evidence in the courtyard earlier that day are grilled by an inquisitive and aggressively cynical commoner – effectively the audience’s surrogate in the search for answers about what really happened – as they shelter from pounding rain.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> ‘Rashōmon’ and ‘In a Bamboo Grove’, in Ryūnosuke Akutagawa, *Rashōmon and Seventeen Other Stories*, trans. J. Rubin with an introduction by H. Murakami (London, 2006), pp. 3–19.

<sup>4</sup> For this process, see W. W. Farris, *Heavenly Warriors: The Evolution of Japan’s Military, 500–1300* (Harvard East Asian Monographs, 157; Cambridge, MA, 1992), pp. 289–307; P. F. Souyri, *The World Turned Upside Down: Medieval Japanese Society*, trans. K. Roth (London, 2002), pp. 29–46.

<sup>5</sup> See D. Richie (ed.), *Focus on Rashomon* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1972); D. Richie (ed.), *Rashomon: Akira Kurosawa, Director* (Rutgers Films in Print, 6; New Brunswick, NJ,

*Rashōmon* attracted a great deal of critical attention when it was released. It was awarded the Golden Lion, the top prize, at the 1951 Venice Film Festival, and it thus played a significant part in opening up Japanese cinema in particular and Japanese culture in general to global audiences after the isolation of the post-war years. *Rashōmon* inaugurated a brief but highly creative period during which Japanese filmmakers, principally Kurosawa himself and Mizoguchi Kenji, produced what is probably the richest corpus of filmic explorations of the premodern world in the history of cinema.<sup>6</sup> Interpretations of the film are many and varied. Viewed as a product of its particular time and place, it can be read as a parable about Japan's militaristic past, uncertain present and hoped-for future – this last element represented by the discordantly upbeat and sometimes criticized coda to the main action in which the woodcutter undertakes to care for an abandoned baby whom he, the priest and the commoner have chanced upon in the *Rashōmon*'s ruins. The film can also be seen as a commentary on the Allied Occupation of Japan, or SCAP, still in place in 1950 and arguably represented by the unseen authority-figure in the courtyard scenes. It is noteworthy that the bandit, played by Mifune Toshirō, gestures in his wild and over-exuberant physical and vocal manner to Japanese stereotypes of Westerners, especially so when juxtaposed against the nobleman, who for the most part embodies the cold self-control of the Japanese warrior class. *Rashōmon* can be read as a critique of contemporary constructions of masculinity, and it is also about some of the different forms that sexual violence can assume. Kurosawa himself was generally reluctant to volunteer a definitive interpretation of his film; when pressed, he tended to suggest that it made an ethical point about the human propensity for egotistical mendacity and self-deceit.<sup>7</sup> The clichéd summary verdict on *Rashōmon*, however, has been that it concerns something called 'the relativity of truth'; that is to say, it captured a certain post-war anxiety about the absence of fixed points of moral reference in human affairs as well as presciently anticipating

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1987); D. Richie, *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, 3rd rev. edn (Berkeley, 1998), pp. 70–80; S. Prince, *The Warrior's Camera: The Cinema of Akira Kurosawa*, rev. edn (Princeton, 1999), pp. 127–35; M. Yoshimoto, *Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema* (Durham, NC, 2000), pp. 182–9; S. Galbraith IV, *The Emperor and the Wolf: The Lives and Films of Akira Kurosawa and Toshiro Mifune* (New York, 2001), pp. 127–42; B. Davis, R. Anderson and J. Walls (eds), *Rashomon Effects: Kurosawa, Rashomon and Their Legacies* (Routledge Advances in Film Studies, 44; Abingdon, 2016). Some of Kurosawa's own reflections on the film are to be found in his *Something Like an Autobiography*, trans. A. E. Bock (New York, 1983), pp. 180–9.

<sup>6</sup> For Mizoguchi's *jidai-geki*, or period films, in the four or five years up to his death in 1956, see M. Le Fanu, *Mizoguchi and Japan* (London, 2005), pp. 49–67, 105–10, 114–27; T. Sato, *Kenji Mizoguchi and the Art of Japanese Cinema*, trans. B. Tankha, ed. A. Vasudev and L. Padkaonkar (Oxford, 2008), pp. 101–29, 134–9.

<sup>7</sup> See *Something Like an Autobiography*, p. 183.

the later postmodernist insistence that objective knowledge of the world and of the past is in fact impossible.

Whatever the interpretive loading that the film is made to bear, however, two aspects of its foundational meaning-making project and the manner in which it invites responses from its audience are pertinent to the present study. The first is the basic plot artifice that grabs the viewer's interest; the presentation of multiple, irreconcilable versions of what happened violates our assumptions that eyewitnesses of an event are, or at least should be, reasonably accurate and reliable sources of information. True, we seldom insist on absolute uniformity among various witnesses to an event, and we typically tolerate minor discrepancies of detail and emphasis, but there is generally an expectation that different versions should converge on certain irreducible elements, what are sometimes termed plot cruxes or kernel events, which between them encapsulate and characterize what happened. This expectation is all the greater when an eyewitness is not simply someone placed in the role of observer but is her- or himself a protagonist in the action. The interactions of the three principals in the forest, the bandit, the nobleman and the woman, are in every version of events those of fully-engaged participants: this is *their* story, or rather stories. And while the woodcutter's role seems on the surface to be that of a passive and disinterested observer – a point-of-view shot during his second go at recalling his experience would seem to situate him just behind the tree line gazing through the leaves into the clearing – there is some suggestion in his exchanges with the commoner in the outer framing narrative that he may have played a more active role, at the very least purloining the nobleman's expensive dagger which was left at the scene and which may have been the actual murder weapon, and possibly even committing the murder himself.

We usually accept that a casual outside observer might miss or distort basic details, but how could people so intimately caught up in such memorable and personally consequential events seem to get it all so wrong? Indeed, the film itself plays with this very expectation in setting up a clear contrast between the principals, whose versions are full and circumstantial and focus on the all-important question of what happened in the clearing, and the minor contributions of other eyewitnesses, who can only flesh out brief and peripheral moments of little or no value as evidence. If these marginal scenes were excised from the film, their loss would scarcely affect the main plot. Thus, the constable who arrests the bandit is only in a position to recount the circumstances of the arrest. The priest, for his part, is an important figure in the outer framing narrative, complicating the antagonistic dynamic between the woodcutter and the commoner; but as a witness within the courtyard frame his contribution is self-highlighting in its triviality as he merely recalls fleetingly passing the nobleman and his wife on the forest path at some unspecified point before they encountered the bandit further down the road. If *Rashōmon* had been made as a film in which the audience is invited to solve a



puzzle as it pieces together fragmentary clues volunteered by those people, such as the constable and the priest, on the margins of the action, it would conform to more familiar genre expectations, those of the detective story or murder mystery. But it would almost certainly have been a lesser achievement. For it is in getting the eyewitness-participant principals themselves to disagree in fundamental ways about their recent, vivid, physical and life-changing experiences that Kurosawa profoundly destabilizes our normally unexamined expectations: expectations, that is to say, about how we lock on to the world around us by means of our perceptions of it, how we remember and narrate our experiences, and how in our routine social interactions we tend to repose trust in the self-narration of others whose perceptual and mnemonic capacities, whose own purchase on the world, we presume to be very similar to our own.

In addition, and following on from this, the film resolutely refuses to steer the viewer towards one preferred version of events. Each main account is framed and narrated in the same ways and presented as entire unto itself as an ethical space, obeying its own logic of cause and effect and of character motivation within the parameters of the particular storyworld that it constructs. True, the fact that the nobleman speaks through a medium might give us pause as far as his testimony is concerned, even if we choose to suspend disbelief and tell ourselves that recourse to mediums was standard late Heian judicial practice. But his version of events stands or falls by the same criteria of belief or disbelief that apply to the others as long as we accept that his stated reason for killing himself, as he does in his telling, namely his shame at being dishonoured by the bandit's rape of his wife, is as plausible a motivation as those that inform the other accounts. There is no voiceover commentary to privilege one version over another, nor are significant differences present in the framing and sequencing of shots to nudge viewers in a particular direction. In addition, each of the three principal's tellings seems to enhance its plausibility by owning up to responsibility for the death of the nobleman, rather than trying to evade blame or point the finger at someone else, as one might expect: the bandit gleefully and defiantly confesses in the courtyard; the wife claims she plunged the dagger into her husband, although the nature of what would in common law parlance be called her *mens rea* is left open; and the nobleman admits to suicide, as we have seen.

The experience of showing the film to groups of students suggests that many viewers instinctively gravitate towards the woodcutter's second version of events in the clearing: it is placed last, thereby appearing to resolve the contradictions created by the competing versions that precede it; it is full of circumstantial detail, synthesizing in a seemingly plausible and coherent manner some of the motifs and diegetic bits and pieces, such as the dagger, that circulate within and between the three principals' accounts; and, on the surface at least, the woodcutter would seem to lack the principals' egotistical investment in spinning the story in a certain way. There are also built-in plausibilities, or reality effects, absent from

the other renderings.<sup>8</sup> So, whereas in the bandit's telling the swordfight that he has with the nobleman is a demonstration of ultra-masculine skill and bravado in obvious keeping with his own self-image (as well as with the conventions then governing the stylized depiction of duelling in Japanese cinema), when the two men come to blows in the woodcutter's version, they are depicted as timorous, emasculated and rather pathetic figures, not only reduced to looking and acting like children but also brought down to the level of animals in their panicked, desperate scrambling around on the forest floor. This looks like what fighting someone to the death, shorn of its epic, masculine performativity, might actually be like.

But is the woodcutter such a privileged and reliable witness? After all, he is the only character who gets to tell his story twice, and he compromises his credentials in the process. His first version, as told to the unseen authority-figure in the courtyard, simply has him walking through the forest – a sequence shown in a famous montage – and literally stumbling over the nobleman's body after the fact; whereas it is only in his second version, which he is eventually goaded into volunteering by the commoner's cynicism, that he emerges as an eyewitness in the fuller sense of the word. Even then, as we have seen, doubts emerge as to the true nature and extent of his involvement in what took place. So, *pace* many students' instinct to search for a resolution and to attach their faith to that version of events which seems best able to provide it, a preference for the woodcutter's tale really comes down to the triumph of hope over reason – the desire or expectation that, somewhere in all this confusion, the truth will ultimately prove accessible after all because there was somebody there to witness it.

*Rashōmon* is only one among a number of works of art that in various ways exploit the device of conflicting perceptions, memories and narrativizations: other examples include Robert Browning's long poem 'The Ring and the Book' (1868–9), Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879–80), G. K. Chesterton's short story 'The Man in the Passage' (1914) and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929). But in its formal structure and its unwillingness to offer the viewer the easy closure of a resolution – at least on the narrative level of the events in the forest – *Rashōmon* stages the problems of eyewitness perception and eyewitness narrative in particularly compelling, almost 'textbook', terms. This makes it an excellent point of entry into the questions that this book will

<sup>8</sup> The notion of the 'reality effect' (*l'effet du réel*) was introduced by Roland Barthes: see 'The Reality Effect', in his *The Rustle of Language*, trans. R. Howard (Berkeley, 1989), pp. 141–8. Cf. his remarks on 'indices' in his groundbreaking study 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', in his *Image, Music, Text*, trans. S. Heath (London, 1977), pp. 79–124, esp. 91–7. For a succinct overview, see R. Bensmaia, 'Reality Effect', in D. Herman, M. Jahn and M.-L. Ryan (eds), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (Abingdon, 2005), p. 492.

address. There are probably only a handful of examples of what has been termed the ‘Rashōmon effect’ in premodern history because the surviving sources seldom cluster in sufficient depth around events that were as compactly bounded in space and time and as readily observable as are the small-scale human confrontations played out in the clearing. And even when there are such source concentrations, they are more often than not derived from other written texts or are in conversation with oral traditions, not direct, independent and unmediated witnesses. Possible examples of the Rashōmon effect at work might include certain episodes during the First Crusade, the murder of Thomas Becket, and some of the more notorious incidents during the Spanish conquest of the New World such as the capture and execution of Atahualpa.<sup>9</sup> But it is important to stress that *Rashōmon*’s lessons extend far beyond the small number of recorded moments in premodern history for which we have multiple more or less discrepant and more or less independent sources that record, or are otherwise informed by, one or more eyewitnesses’ perceptions.<sup>10</sup> Larger questions emerge. What do we think we mean when we describe someone as an eyewitness? What are the expectations and assumptions that we pack into the word eyewitness – that is to say, the very expectations and assumptions that are so profoundly destabilized in *Rashōmon*? What is an eyewitness source, and why are we so often disposed to privilege it over other sorts of historical evidence? Should eyewitness sources be read in particular ways, and what challenges of interpretation do they pose?

The once fashionable primers of historiographical method typically held up eyewitness evidence as a – sometimes *the* – privileged route into reconstructing the past.<sup>11</sup> And while more recent verdicts tend to be rather more guarded, eyewitness evidence, broadly conceived, retains its status as a central plank of historical research.<sup>12</sup> Much of the potency of the word eyewitness derives from

<sup>9</sup> On this last, my thanks to my former student Phillip Caprara, who wrote a very insightful paper for me on the autoptic quality of contemporary accounts of the arrest and murder of Atahualpa.

<sup>10</sup> For a striking modern-day example of the Rashōmon effect at work among numerous eyewitnesses, in this instance those present at a notorious *contretemps* between Ludwig Wittgenstein and Karl Popper during a seminar in Cambridge in 1946, see D. Edmonds and J. Eidinow, *Wittgenstein’s Poker: The Story of a Ten-Minute Argument Between Two Great Philosophers* (London, 2001), esp. pp. 13–16.

<sup>11</sup> F. M. Fling, *The Writing of History: An Introduction to Historical Method* (New Haven, 1920), pp. 61–87; A. Nevins, *The Gateway to History* (Boston, 1938), pp. 173–7; G. J. Garraghan, *A Guide to Historical Method*, ed. J. Delanglez (New York, 1946), pp. 282–92; H. C. Hockett, *The Critical Method in Historical Research and Writing* (New York, 1955), pp. 44–50; L. Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method*, 2nd edn (New York, 1969), pp. 53, 56, 141, 149–70. But cf. the rather more cautious approach to eyewitness testimony in A. Johnson, *The Historian and Historical Evidence* (Port Washington, NY, 1926), pp. 24–49.

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. R. J. Shafer (ed.), *A Guide to Historical Method*, 3rd edn (Homewood, IL,

the fact that when historians apply the term to their sources, they are stepping outside the technical and methodological boundaries of their discipline and plugging into much larger circuits of linguistic and cultural practice. The effect is to make the mobilization of eyewitness evidence seem simply a matter of common sense. The portmanteau word ‘eyewitness’ is first attested in English in the sixteenth century.<sup>13</sup> But the close combination of the two elements that the word captures goes back much further. Its equivalents in other European languages – for example, in the primary sense of the person who sees, *témoïn oculaire*, *testigo ocular*, *Augenzeuge*, *ooggetuige*, *øyenvitne* – suggest that the tight and natural-seeming juxtaposition of the acts of seeing and of bearing witness transcends linguistic difference. Each of the two elements carries with it powerful associations that are magnified still further when they are combined.

One indication of the cultural importance of sight is that, in English as in many other languages, seeing is not confined to its literal semantic range. It extends figuratively into innumerable metaphors involving intangibles and abstractions, as well as mental actions of all kinds: ‘I see what you mean’, ‘She glimpsed the truth’, ‘What is your perspective on what happened?’, ‘This changes his worldview’, ‘Watch yourself’, and so on.<sup>14</sup> This is not intended as a ‘sightist’ observation at the expense of blind or visually-impaired people, simply a recognition of the fact that sight is much the most deeply sedimented and wide-ranging figurative resource among the five senses, especially so when

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1980), pp. 153–62; M. C. Howell and W. Prevenier, *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods* (Ithaca, NY, 2001), pp. 65–8; D. Henige, *Historical Evidence and Argument* (Madison, WI, 2005), pp. 44–50, 53–4, 58–64. In discussing the many discrepant eyewitness accounts of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, Henige (p. 48) refers to ‘the omnipresent Rashomon effect’. But it must be remembered that this remark better suits the richness of the modern historical record than the much thinner coverage of medieval eyewitness evidence. There were numerous witnesses to Lincoln’s murder and what happened immediately afterwards: see *We Saw Lincoln Shot: One Hundred Eyewitness Accounts*, ed. T. L. Good (Jackson, MS, 1995). For an interesting example of another memorable modern event, in this instance one in which eyewitness accounts were confirmed or disconfirmed by subsequent scientific discoveries unimaginable at the time, see W. H. Garzke Jr, D. K. Brown, A. D. Sandiford, J. Woodward and P. K. Hsu, ‘The Titanic and the *Lusitania*: A Final Forensic Analysis’, *Marine Technology*, 33 (1996), 241–89; T. C. Riniolo, M. Koledin, G. M. Drakulic and R. A. Payne, ‘An Archival Study of Eyewitness Memory of the Titanic’s Final Plunge’, *Journal of General Psychology*, 130 (2001), 89–95.

<sup>13</sup> *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. C. T. Onions, 3rd edn rev. G. W. S. Friedrichsen, 1 vol. in 2 (Oxford, 1978), s.v. ‘eye-witness’, suggesting a first attestation in 1539. The range of meaning would seem to have expanded from the witness her- or himself to the fact or product of her/his observation in the seventeenth century

<sup>14</sup> M. Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, 1993), pp. 1–3. Cf. S. A. Tyler, ‘The Vision Quest in the West, or What the Mind’s Eye Sees’, *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 40 (1984), 23–40.

we further factor in the many metaphorical applications of light and darkness. Sight is, alongside bodily orientation in space and physical motion, among the basic building blocks of what George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have termed the ‘metaphors we live by’.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, it is closely bound up with questions of bodily situatedness and movement in that it typically seems the most responsive and versatile of the senses: to a large extent at least, the eye responds to the conscious will of the viewer, and attention can be purposefully directed towards a particular object. Sight is thus the sense that we tend to feel most effectively positions us as active subjects apprehending the world as opposed to passive recipients of the world’s acting upon us. When historians use the term eyewitness evidence, they are implicitly appealing to these powerful associations, for the expectation is that in the act of generating the source to hand the historical observer has more or less seamlessly made a transition from simple sensory perception to cognitive apperception, in other words from the workings of physiology to cultural articulation. She or he has introduced into the source some expression of the understanding and interpretation that the metaphorical acceptations of sight and light capture.

Witnessing is such a resonant idea because it is flexible, adapting to a wide range of human situations and needs. In the section (#10) of his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (first published in 1748) concerning miracles, David Hume observed that ‘there is no species of reasoning more common, more useful, and even necessary to human life, than that which is derived from the testimony of men, and the reports of eye-witnesses and spectators’.<sup>16</sup> That is to say, much and probably most of our knowledge of the world and the beliefs that this knowledge subtends reach us from what others reveal to us about their own experiences. This pooling of information locks us into the world as we believe it is, given that our general day-to-day experiences of human interaction tend to reassure us that there is a tolerably close correspondence between the testimony we receive from others, unless we happen to suspect mendacity, incapacity or error on their part, and how we believe the world is or plausibly might be. In the helpful formulation of C. A. J. Coady, whose 1992 study of testimony remains the best philosophical exploration of the subject: ‘The judgements of others constitute an important, indeed perhaps *the* most important, test of whether my own judgements reflect a reality independent of my subjectivity.’<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> See G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, rev. edn (Chicago, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding: A Critical Edition*, ed. T. L. Beauchamp (Oxford, 2000), p. 84. On Hume’s approaches to testimony, see C. A. J. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 79–100.

<sup>17</sup> *Testimony*, p. 12. For the workings of ‘natural’ testimony in ordinary social interactions, as well as in more formal, especially legal and quasi-legal, settings, see pp. 27–48. As Coady points out, testifying can extend to the reporting of intangibles and abstractions such as mental states and moral positions: *ibid.*, pp. 63–75.

As Coady suggests, there may well be an egotistical or individualist slant within people's self-awareness that predisposes them to overestimate the extent to which their knowledge of the world derives from their own experience, and correspondingly to underestimate their reliance on what they learn from others.<sup>18</sup> In other words, we are prone to exaggerate the extent to which we feel, epistemologically speaking, masters of the world around us. This has important implications for our understanding of historical eyewitness evidence, for it is deceptively easy to project this same sort of epistemological over-confidence onto the historical observer. Such a projection is made all the easier by the fact that 'eyewitness evidence' is not a precise and technical term of art but a very large and baggy category that subsumes a wide variety of human experiences and observer-observed relationships. As Marc Bloch noted, eyewitness evidence is usually nothing of the sort on a strict understanding of the term. His example is that of a general whose official account of the victory recently won by his forces necessarily draws on much more than the memories derived from his own sensory experiences, even if he enjoyed a good view of the battlefield. In order to craft a coherent account of what happened, he must also have recourse to the testimonies of informants such as his lieutenants.<sup>19</sup> Bloch was here drawing upon the well-worn *topos*, familiar since Antiquity, to the effect that battles represent the limit case of individuals' inability to grasp the scale and complexity of what is going on around them.<sup>20</sup> But his larger point extends to all varieties of historical action and testimony. If anything, Bloch's claim that a 'good half of all we see is seen through the eyes of others' would seem to be an understatement.<sup>21</sup>

As we shall see, none of this study's chosen texts – in this respect they are broadly representative of medieval eyewitness narratives in general – are autobiographical memoirs in the sense that they consistently foreground the author's personal circumstances, perceptions and subjective reactions within the larger frame of the narrated action. In most of the sequences that our texts narrate, the eyewitness author is not 'there' at all in the sense of being overtly situated within the action *in propria persona*, still less precisely positioned relative to the action in such a way that he is able to bring an observant and tightly focused 'camera eye' to bear on what is happening. In some cases we can draw on external

<sup>18</sup> *Testimony*, pp. 6–14.

<sup>19</sup> M. Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, trans. P. Putnam with an introduction by J. R. Strayer (Manchester, 1954), p. 49. See pp. 48–78 for Bloch's discussion of historical observation.

<sup>20</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, VII.44, ed. and trans. C. Forster Smith, 4 vols (Loeb Classical Library, 108–10, 169; Cambridge, MA, 1928–30), iv, p. 86; trans. M. Hammond, *The Peloponnesian War*, with an introduction and notes by P. J. Rhodes (Oxford, 2009), p. 388. Cf. A. J. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography: Four Studies* (London, 1988), pp. 18–23.

<sup>21</sup> *Historian's Craft*, p. 49.



evidence to deduce that the author could not have been present at a given event or was at least unlikely to have been so. In other cases the physical proximity of the author to the narrated action may be suspected with greater or lesser degrees of confidence, but this is not expressly stated in the text. A minority of scenes or episodes include the sort of circumstantial detail that might seem to suggest that the author is recalling a direct eyewitness experience. But in some of these instances, perhaps the majority, we would probably do better to treat what we are reading as attempts to mimic the subjective texture of vivid recall rather than as direct evidence of the workings of eyewitness memory. When historians categorize a source as eyewitness, there is a tendency to allow this designation to blanket the material as a whole, whereas authorial autoptic perception may well inform only a small portion of the global content. We should always remember that when we label the authors of sources as eyewitnesses, we are for the most part simply saying that they found themselves placed in situations in which they were optimally exposed to the testimony of others, with intermittent opportunities for ‘topping up’ their knowledge with their own personal experience. Paradoxical as it might seem, being an effective historical eyewitness would normally seem to have had less to do with visual acuity or some happy knack of being in the right place at the right time, and more to do with being a good listener. But such is the resonance of the term eyewitness that when we apply it to a historical source, it can easily inflate our estimation of its unmediated experiential basis.

A good deal of medieval history-writers’ understanding of the value of eyewitness experience, their own and that of informants whom they considered trustworthy, was inherited from their ancient Greek and Roman predecessors, although there were some differences of emphasis, as we shall see. It was stock etymological wisdom among ancient historiographers that the word *ἱστορία*/*historia* derived from the Greek verb *ἵστορεῖν*, ‘to inquire’, ‘to observe’, with the result that it was felt to be incumbent upon the historian to establish his personal credentials as a researcher in order to pronounce authoritatively and credibly upon his chosen subject. Often this involved rhetorical appeals to good character and impartiality, as well as references to the time, effort and expense involved and the difficulties overcome – more practical and logistical than conceptual and epistemological – in the process of researching and writing.<sup>22</sup> Where the historian’s subject matter was the recent past, moreover, mention could also be made of his own perceptions or those of others, with the experience of sight assuming a standard, though not automatic, pride of place over hearing and the other senses.<sup>23</sup> It is noteworthy that Herodotus chose very early in his *Histories*

<sup>22</sup> J. Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 128–33, 148–74.

<sup>23</sup> Marincola, *Authority and Tradition*, pp. 63–87, 281–2; L. Pitcher, *Writing Ancient History: An Introduction to Classical Historiography* (London, 2009), pp. 57–64.



to illustrate the supposition that people believe the evidence of their eyes more readily than what they hear in his story of how Candaules, the king of Lydia, improbably arranges for his favourite guard, Gyges, to spy on his naked wife in order to prove his boastful claims about her great beauty; Candaules's explanation to Gyges assumes the force of an obvious and incontestable cliché when he observes that 'it's true that people trust their ears less than their eyes'.<sup>24</sup>

Occasional notes of caution were sounded about the uncritical use of others' testimonies: as Thucydides observed, it could be very hard work to appraise evidence rigorously 'as eyewitnesses on each occasion would give different accounts of the same event, depending on their individual loyalties or memories'.<sup>25</sup> Thucydides stages the mutability of the eyewitness's gaze in a remarkable passage that forms part of his account of the Athenians' ill-starred campaign against Syracuse in 413 BC. The Athenian land forces look on helplessly from the harbour as they watch the progress of the naval battle that will decide their fate. Various groups have different lines of sight on the action, and their responses to what they think they see play out in their different cries and bodily movements, until a collective understanding of the disastrous Athenian defeat gradually emerges:

For the Athenians everything depended on their ships, and their anxiety for the outcome was intense beyond words. Localized action varied throughout the theatre of battle, and so inevitably the men lining the shore had varying perspectives: the action was quite close in front of their eyes, and they were

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See also G. Nenci, 'Il motivo dell'autopsia nella storiografia greca', *Studi classici e orientali*, 3 (1955), 14–46; G. Schepens, *L'autopsie dans la méthode des historiens grecs du Ve siècle avant J.-C.* (Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België. Klasse der Letteren, 93; Brussels, 1980). For the innovative quality of historical works that derived a substantial amount of their subject matter from the author's personal experiences, see J. Marincola, 'Genre, Convention, and Innovation in Greco-Roman Historiography', in C. S. Kraus (ed.), *The Limits of Historiography: Genre and Narrative in Ancient Historical Texts* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 309–20, esp. 316–17.

<sup>24</sup> Herodotus, [*The Histories*], I.6, ed. and trans. A. D. Godley, 4 vols (Loeb Classical Library, 117–20; Cambridge, MA, 1920–5), i, p. 10; trans. R. Waterfield, *The Histories*, with introduction and notes by C. Dewald (Oxford, 1998), p. 6. Cf. Polybius, *The Histories*, XII.27, ed. and trans. W. R. Paton, rev. F. W. Walbank and C. Habicht, 6 vols (Loeb Classical Library, 128, 137–8, 159–61; Cambridge, MA, 2010–12), iv, p. 444; trans. R. Waterfield, *The Histories*, with introduction and notes by B. McGing (Oxford, 2010), p. 443: 'We are naturally endowed with two instruments, so to speak, to help us acquire information and undertake research. Of the two, sight is, as Heraclitus [a predecessor of and probable influence on Herodotus] says, much more reliable, eyes being more accurate witnesses than ears.' See also Lucian, 'How To Write History', c. 29, in *Lucian: A Selection*, ed. and trans. M. D. MacLeod (Warminster, 1991), p. 224.

<sup>25</sup> Thucydides, *History*, I.22, i, p. 38; trans. Hammond, *Peloponnesian War*, p. 12.

not all looking at the same arena. So if some saw their own side winning in their particular part of the battle, they would take instant encouragement and begin calling out to the gods not to deprive them of this hope of salvation; others who had witnessed an area of defeat turned to loud cries of lament, and from the mere sight of what was happening were in more abject terror than the actual combatants. Yet others, focused on a part of the battle which was evenly balanced, went through all the agonies of suspense: as the conflict lasted on and on without decisive result, their acute anxiety had them actually replicating with the movement of their bodies the rise and fall of their hopes – at any point throughout they were either on the point of escape or on the point of destruction. And as long as the battle at sea remained in the balance you could hear across the Athenian ranks a mixture of every sort of response – groans, cheers, ‘we’re winning’, ‘we’re losing’, and all the various involuntary cries let out by men in great danger.<sup>26</sup>

In general, however, even though there was a lively tradition in ancient philosophy of questioning the reliability of the senses and the status of the knowledge derived from them, among historians reservations about eyewitness testimony simply attached to questions of the witness’s possible bias and partiality, not to more basic matters of human perception and cognition.<sup>27</sup> The result was that when historians, as they often did, sought to establish their credentials as impartial and scrupulous authorities in contrast to the shortcomings of others, they were implicitly assuring the reader that the evidence gathered from the experience of their own eyes was impeccably reliable.

The trust reposed in the historian’s own sensory perceptions was magnified by an extension of ‘autopsy’ (αὐτόπτης) in the strict sense of direct visual apprehension of a given event (ὄψις) to include more wide-ranging personal experiences that aided a feeling of proximity to and understanding of the historical reality in question.<sup>28</sup> Public affairs such as politics, diplomacy and war were considered the proper stuff of written history, and it was therefore routinely assumed that only those with personal experience of such matters were equipped to pronounce upon them.<sup>29</sup> As Polybius, the ancient historian whose methodological remarks on this score are the most considered and developed, observed:

<sup>26</sup> Thucydides, *History*, VII.71, iv, pp. 142–4; trans. Hammond, *Peloponnesian War*, pp. 403–4.

<sup>27</sup> See Marincola, *Authority and Tradition*, pp. 64–6; G. Schepens, ‘History and *Historia*: Inquiry in the Greek Historians’, in J. Marincola (ed.), *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography* (Chichester, 2011), pp. 42–4.

<sup>28</sup> Marincola, *Authority and Tradition*, pp. 133–48. Cf. Schepens, ‘History and *Historia*’, pp. 39–55. See also M. G. Bull, ‘Eyewitness and Medieval Historical Narrative’, in E. S. Kooper and S. Levelt (eds), *The Medieval Chronicle II* (Leiden, 2018), pp. 1–22.

<sup>29</sup> But for useful remarks cautioning against too homogenized a view of the backgrounds and circumstances of Greco-Roman historians as ‘statesmen’, see C. W. Fornara, *The*

The point is that, just as it is impossible for someone who lacks military experience to write about warfare, it is impossible for someone who has never acted in the political sphere or faced a political crisis to write good political history. Nothing written by authors who rely on mere book-learning [Polybius is here particularly attacking his bookish *bête noire* Timaeus] has the clarity that comes from personal experience, and nothing is gained by reading their work.<sup>30</sup>

Such experience extended to visiting historically resonant locations such as battlefields.<sup>31</sup> One suspects that such a capacious understanding of autopsy, one that included the right sort of career path and opportunities for a kind of historical tourism as well as individual personal experiences and interviewing reliable third parties, was in part a self-serving way of justifying the fact that historiography was the preserve of a socially exclusive elite. There is some support for such a view: for example, the fourth-century BC writer Theopompus, whose historical works, including a history of Alexander the Great's father Philip of Macedon, are substantially lost, was believed to have had the leisure to devote much of his life to his work, to have been able to spend very large amounts of money in conducting research, and to have had the social *entrée* to cultivate personal connections with important politicians, generals and intellectuals.<sup>32</sup> But more seems to have been at stake than indulging the opportunities of privilege. As Polybius shrewdly remarked, because the answers one elicits from respondents are only as good as the framing of the questions one poses, appropriate life experience was necessary to be able to extract the most useful information from witnesses to events.<sup>33</sup>

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*Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 48–56. And for a sense of the quite narrow parameters within which experience might be considered an aid to understanding, see Polybius, *Histories*, XII.25f, iv, pp. 420–2; trans. Waterfield, *Histories*, p. 436.

<sup>30</sup> Polybius, *Histories*, XII.25g, iv, p. 422; trans. Waterfield, *Histories*, p. 436. See also *ibid.*, XII.22, iv, p. 402; trans. Hammond, *Histories*, p. 431. Cf. Lucian, 'How To Write History', c. 37, pp. 230–2.

<sup>31</sup> Polybius, *Histories*, III.57–9, ii, pp. 148–56; XII.25e, iv, pp. 418–20; trans. Waterfield, *Histories*, pp. 173–5, 435; Lucian, 'How To Write History', c. 47, p. 238. But cf. Thucydides's remarks about the dangers of misreading historically resonant sites: *Histories*, I.10, i, p. 18; trans. Hammond, *Peloponnesian War*, p. 7; Marincola, *Authority and Tradition*, pp. 67–8. For ancient historians as travellers, see G. Schepens, 'Travelling Greek Historians', in M. G. Angeli Bertinelli and A. Donati (eds), *Le vie della storia: Migrazioni di popoli, viaggi di individui, circolazione di idee nel Mediterraneo antico. Atti del II Incontro Internazionale di Storia Antica (Genova 6–8 ottobre 2004)* (Serta antiqua et mediaevalia, 9; Rome, 2006), pp. 81–102.

<sup>32</sup> Fornara, *History in Ancient Greece and Rome*, p. 49; Marincola, *Authority and Tradition*, pp. 87, 148–9; Schepens, 'History and Historia', p. 49.

<sup>33</sup> Polybius, *Histories*, XII.28a, iv, pp. 452–4; trans. Waterfield, *Histories*, p. 445.

It has been convincingly argued that in relation to all the ancient works of history that once existed but are now lost or known only from fragments (sadly, the great majority), the surviving corpus of substantially intact texts over-represents the sort of historical writing that focused on recent political and military events and thereby particularly lent itself to authorial appeals to eyewitness evidence.<sup>34</sup> This was, nonetheless, an important strand among the strategies of authorial self-fashioning and validation that were bequeathed to medieval historians. Because ancient Greek historians tended to be more expansive about their methodologies and sources than their Latin counterparts, western medieval historiographical culture drew much of its inspiration from the works of authors such as Josephus and Eusebius that both cast themselves as continuations of Greek traditions of historical writing and were available in late antique Latin translations. In his *The Jewish War*, for example, Josephus positioned himself as the heir of Polybius in his insistence that participation in the events that one narrates lends one's account the important quality of vitality or vividness (*ἐνάργεια*), which enhances its credibility. His leaning towards autopsy also informed the temporal and geographical scope of his narrative. As he insisted, 'I shall relate the events of the war which I witnessed in great detail and with all the completeness of which I am capable, whereas events before my time will be run over in brief outline.'<sup>35</sup>

The influence of Greco-Roman models on medieval historical writing plays out in innumerable ways, but is especially visible in the many prologues and other forms of front matter in which the author, in referring to the example set by ancient writers, positions himself in relation to his predecessors in a spirit of emulation or the continuation of tradition.<sup>36</sup> There was, however, a shift in historians'

<sup>34</sup> Schepens, 'History and *Historia*', pp. 52–4.

<sup>35</sup> Josephus, *The Jewish War*, I.6, ed. and trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, 3 vols (Loeb Classical Library, 203, 210, 487; Cambridge, MA, 1997), i, p. 10; trans. G. A. Williamson, *The Jewish War*, rev. E. M. Smallwood (Harmondsworth, 1981), p. 29. See also *ibid.*, I.8, i, pp. 12–14; trans. Williamson, *Jewish War*, p. 30: 'Of the fate of the captured towns I shall give an exact account based on my own observations and the part I played.' For an indication of Josephus's influence upon medieval historical writers, see the approving reference to him by Rahewin, Otto of Freising's continuator, in *Gesta Frederici seu rectius Cronica*, ed. F.-J. Schmale, trans. A. Schmidt (Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters, 17; Darmstadt, 1965), p. 394; trans. C. C. Mierow, *The Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa* (Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching, 31; Toronto, 1994), p. 171.

<sup>36</sup> Numerous such examples could be cited. See e.g. the *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*, which is themed around the deeds of Alfonso VII of León-Castile (1126–57) and was probably written during his lifetime, perhaps (though this is uncertain) by Bishop Arnaldo of Astorga (1144–52): 'Forasmuch as the record of past events, which is composed by historians of old and handed down to posterity in writing, makes the memory of kings, emperors, counts, nobles and other heroes live anew, I have resolved that the best thing I can do is to describe the deeds of the Emperor Alfonso just as I

methodologies and self-presentation, in that the ancient extension of autopsy into authorial life experience in the round tended to recede somewhat. This was a subtle change: it is important not to paint a caricatured contrast between mobile and cosmopolitan ancient historiographers searching out their material in a spirit of active inquiry, and their more sedentary and passive medieval counterparts trapped in a less interconnected world and obliged to wait for news to come to them in dribs and drabs. When due allowance is made for their very different social, cultural, religious and intellectual circumstances, writers as diverse as, for example, Gregory of Tours, Einhard, Liudprand of Cremona, Aethelweard and Otto of Freising were in their various ways the medieval equivalents of the ancient type of the autoptic historian: educated, mobile, wealthy, well connected and completely at home in the world of the powerful.

Nonetheless, the purchase of medieval historians' own experiences and travels on the subject matter of their works is clearly more uneven in its application and relevance than it is within the (admittedly much smaller and less variegated) corpus of surviving ancient historiographical texts. When, for example, William of Malmesbury reached the point in his *Gesta Regum Anglorum* at which he began to narrate events during the reign of the king of his own day, Henry I (1100–35), and apologized to the reader that he was 'a man far distant from the mysteries of the court' ('homo procul ab aulicis misteriis remotus'), he was seeking to explain the selectivity of his treatment and the fact that he was, so he claimed, ignorant of some of the king's more important achievements, even as he also complained of the large amount of information that he still had to contend with. He was not making a point about how his limited experience meant he could not form an understanding of royal politics *per se*, nor that he was ill-equipped to picture what events played out in *aulae*, not just halls as such but all the privileged spaces of elite political action, looked like.<sup>37</sup>

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learned and heard from those who witnessed them': 'Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris', ed. A. Maya Sánchez, in E. Falque Rey, J. Gil and A. Maya Sánchez (eds), *Chronica Hispana saeculi XII* (CCCM 71; Turnhout, 1990), p. 149; trans. S. Barton and R. Fletcher, *The World of the Cid: Chronicles of the Spanish Reconquest* (Manchester, 2000), p. 162: translation slightly revised.

<sup>37</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols (Oxford, 1998–9), i, p. 708: translation slightly revised. William's disclaimer is somewhat disingenuous, for we know that he both had royal connections and travelled unusually widely around England in search of written materials for his historical projects, journeys that must have required him to get permission for lengthy absences from his abbey at Malmesbury: see R. M. Thomson, *William of Malmesbury* (Woodbridge, 1987), pp. 14–16. For the hall or palace as the metonym *par excellence* of the workings of elite power, cf. the remarks of the anonymous author conventionally known as the Astronomer that whereas for the first parts of his narrative of the reign of Louis the Pious he derived his information from a monk named Adhemar who had grown up with the emperor, the later

Similarly, William's close contemporary Orderic Vitalis seems to be making a straightforward point about the spatial reach of his competence as observer and researcher, not admitting to the wrong sort of life experience, when he states in the general prologue to his monumental *Ecclesiastical History*:

For although I cannot explore Alexandrine or Greek or Roman affairs and many other matters worthy of the telling, because as a cloistered monk by my own free choice I am compelled to unremitting observance of my monastic duty, nevertheless I can strive with the help of God and for the consideration of posterity to explain truthfully and straightforwardly the things which I have seen in our own times, or know to have occurred in nearby provinces.<sup>38</sup>

Orderic's self-fashioning in this passage is quite subtle, for his construction 'res alexandrinās seu grecas uel romanas' cannot simply be read as a remark about the limitations of the geographical range of his work, even though it is set up in implied contrast to his secure grasp of events 'in nearby provinces' ('in uicinis regionibus'). If meant merely as samples of the numerous places that Orderic had never visited, the series seems oddly precise and eccentric relative to those parts of the world that Orderic knew best, the English marches of his childhood memories and the Norman-French borderlands where his monastery of St-Évroult was situated. Rather, Orderic is here gesturing towards the broad subject matter of ancient history and positioning himself in relation to it even as he implicitly acknowledges that, although his epistemological range, the reach of his autopsy, is more restricted than that of the ancient histories he implicitly evokes, this does not itself diminish his competence as an historian functioning within his tighter spatial boundaries. (The irony is, of course, that the

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portions directly drew on what he had witnessed or been able to ascertain 'since I was in the midst of palace affairs' ('quia ego rebus interfui palatinis'): Astronomer, 'Vita Hludovici Imperatoris', in *Thegan, Die Taten Kaiser Ludwigs/Astronomus, Das Leben Kaiser Ludwigs*, ed. and trans. E. Tremp (MGH Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum, 64; Hanover, 1995), p. 284; trans. A. Cabaniss, *Son of Charlemagne: A Contemporary Life of Louis the Pious* (Syracuse, NY, 1961), p. 31. See also Wipo, 'Gesta Chuonradi II. Imperatoris', in *Die Werke Wipos*, ed. H. Bresslau, 3rd edn (MGH Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum, 61; Hanover, 1915), p. 3; trans. T. E. Mommsen and K. F. Morrison, 'The Deeds of Conrad II', in *Imperial Lives and Letters of the Eleventh Century*, ed. R. L. Benson (New York, 1962), p. 53, where the author argues that any errors that may have crept into his work must be the responsibility of those informants on whom he had to rely because he was frequently absent from his lord Conrad II's chapel due to illness.

<sup>38</sup> Orderic Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. M. Chibnall, 6 vols (Oxford, 1968–80), i, pp. 130–2; translation revised. Chibnall renders *alexandrinās* as 'Macedonian', which makes good sense but directs attention more to the geographical than the historiographical thrust of Orderic's remarks.



*Ecclesiastical History* spectacularly broke the geographical bounds of the sort of local history anticipated in this prologue, and that as a result Orderic found himself drawing upon a rich variety of sources including numerous narrative texts, charters, letters, inscriptions, oral reports and, to a limited degree, personal observation.)<sup>39</sup>

The contraction of the ancient understanding of autopsy meant that, if only by default, greater emphasis than before was placed on eyewitness observation in the specific sense of the visual perception of action and events.<sup>40</sup> Medieval history-writers were in particular nudged in this direction by the formulation of the most widely circulated and authoritative ‘dictionary’-like definition of history available to them, that to be found in Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies*. According to Isidore:

A history is a narration of deeds accomplished by means of which those things that occurred in the past are discerned. History is so called from the Greek term *ἀπό τοῦ ἰστορεῖν*, that is ‘to see’ [*videre*] or ‘to know’ [*cognoscere*]. Indeed, among the ancients no one would write a history unless he had been present and had seen what was to be written down, for we grasp with our eyes things that occur better than what we gather with our hearing. Indeed, what is seen is revealed without falsehood.<sup>41</sup>

In his sweeping, and to a large extent inaccurate, characterization of ancient historiographical practice, as well as in his significant narrowing of the semantic range of *ἰστορεῖν* to include only acts of visual perception and apperception, Isidore lost much of the sense of active inquiry and wide-ranging experience that ancient

<sup>39</sup> For Orderic’s work and working methods, see M. Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis* (Oxford, 1984), esp. pp. 169–208. See also the important collection of studies in C. C. Rozier, D. Roach, G. E. M. Gasper and E. M. C. van Houts (eds), *Orderic Vitalis: Life, Works and Interpretations* (Woodbridge, 2016).

<sup>40</sup> But see the description by King Alfred’s biographer Asser of the site of the battle of Ashdown (‘which I have seen for myself with my own eyes’), fought about fifteen years before Asser first entered Alfred’s service and more than twenty before Asser was writing: *Life of King Alfred*, c. 39, ed. W. H. Stephenson, rev. edn (Oxford, 1959), p. 30; trans. S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser’s Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 79.

<sup>41</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum sive Originum Libri XX*, I.41 [*De Historia*], ed. W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Oxford, 1911), i, sp; trans. S. A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach and O. Berghof with M. Hall, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 67: translation revised. For this passage, see the valuable study by A. Cizek, ‘L’Historia comme témoignage oculaire: Quelques implications et conséquences de la définition de l’historiographie chez Isidore de Séville’, in D. Buschinger (ed.), *Histoire et littérature au moyen âge: Actes du Colloque du Centre d’Études Médiévales de l’Université de Picardie (Amiens 20–24 mars 1985)* (Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 546; Göppingen, 1991), pp. 69–84.



notions of autopsy had captured. The emphasis was instead placed on history conceived as the reflex of the mechanisms by means of which information reached the historian. And even though Isidore's ideal of historical writing based exclusively on the author's personal participation in events and his own eyewitness observations was very difficult to effect in practice, at least over anything more than brief bursts of autobiographical reminiscence, it easily commended itself as a rhetorical posture to enhance the historian's authority and the credibility of his narrative in the round.<sup>42</sup> One consequently finds in medieval historical writings numerous prologues, dedicatory epistles and other forms of prefatory utterance that ring the changes on the epistemological primacy of sight and articulate variations of the 'sooner by the eyes than by the ears' *topos*. For example, Einhard, whose *Life of Charlemagne* (probably composed in the 820s) was very widely read and copied, claimed that no one could write a more truthful account of those matters of which he had first-hand experience and knew 'with the faith of one's eyes' [*oculata fide*].<sup>43</sup> In the following century, in opening his *Antapodosis* Liudprand of Cremona apologized to his addressee, Bishop Recemund of Elvira, that for two years he had put off making good on Recemund's request that he write a history of all the rulers of Europe, 'not as one who, reliant on hearsay, can be doubted, but as one who is reliable, like one who sees'.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> See Otto of Freising and Rahewin, *Gesta Frederici*, II.43, p. 370; trans. Mierow, *Deeds*, p. 159, where Otto of Freising gestures towards Isidore in invoking the 'custom of the ancients' (*antiquorum mos*) that those who experienced events were the ones who wrote about them. It is noteworthy that Otto enhances the status of eyewitness authority by retaining *videre* from Isidore's translation of the Greek root verb (*histeron* in his rendering) but not *cognoscere*: 'Unde et historia ab histeron, quod in Greco videre sonat, appellari consuevit.' See also M. Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History, 400–1500* (Manchester, 2011), pp. 183–5.

<sup>43</sup> Einhard, *Vie de Charlemagne*, ed. and trans. M. Sot, C. Veyrard-Cosme *et al.* (Les classiques de l'histoire au moyen âge, 53; Paris, 2015), pp. 90–2; trans. D. Ganz, *Einhard and Notker the Stammerer: Two Lives of Charlemagne* (London, 2008), p. 17; translation revised. See also Wahlafrid Strabo's observation that in addition to reflecting his reputation for learning and honesty, the truth of Einhard's account was cemented by his having taken part in almost all the events that he narrated: *Vie de Charlemagne*, pp. 94–6; trans. Ganz, p. 15 (which understates the force of 'utpote qui his pene omnibus interfuerit'). Cf. Kempshall, *Rhetoric*, pp. 157–9.

<sup>44</sup> Liudprand of Cremona, 'Antapodosis', I.1, in *Die Werke Liudprands von Cremona*, ed. J. Becker, 3rd edn (MGH Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum, 41; Hanover, 1915), pp. 3–4 ('non auditu dubius, sed visione certus'); trans. P. Squatriti, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona* (Washington, DC, 2007), pp. 43–4; translation revised. See also *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, II.20, ed. and trans. A. Campbell with a supplementary introduction by S. Keynes (Cambridge, 1998), p. 36: 'For I will not speak of what he [King Cnut] did in separate places, but in order that what I assert may become more credible I will as an example tell what he did in the city of St Omer alone, and I place on record that I saw this with my own eyes.'

In a similar vein, Geoffrey Malaterra, who was a fairly recent arrival to southern Italy and Sicily when he wrote his history of Count Roger of Sicily and his brother Robert Guiscard in or soon after 1098, felt that he had to exculpate himself to his addressee Bishop Angerius of Catania by claiming that errors of chronology or omissions were to be ascribed not to the author himself but to his informants, in particular when it came to events that had taken place before he arrived in the area. His implication is that he would have been able to exercise much greater quality control had eyewitness participation in, or at least greater proximity to, the action been possible.<sup>45</sup> In offering a summary of the reasons why Prince John's intervention in Irish affairs in 1185 was a fiasco, Gerald of Wales, who had been in Ireland at that time, reasserts his eyewitness credentials by quoting John 3:11: 'We speak of what we know. We bear witness to what we have seen.'<sup>46</sup> And a similar epistemological leaning is evident in William of Malmesbury's contrasting treatments of two (on the face of it similarly impressive and politically significant) ecclesiastical councils that took place in England only a few months apart. Of the earlier council, that held at Winchester in April 1141, William expresses the belief that because he had taken part in the proceedings and his memory of them was very good, he is able to narrate the full truth of what had transpired ('integrum rerum ueritatem'). But about the latter, at Westminster in December, he is much more guarded: 'I cannot relate the proceedings of that council with as much confidence as those of the earlier one because I was not present.'<sup>47</sup> As these and many similar remarks make plain, there was a clear tendency among medieval historians to believe that personal eyewitness was the single most secure and valuable resource at their disposal.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Geoffrey Malaterra, *De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardi ducis fratris eius*, ed. E. Pontieri, 2nd edn (Rerum Italicarum Scriptores, 5:1; Bologna, 1927–8), p. 3; trans. K. B. Wolf, *The Deeds of Count Roger of Calabria and Sicily and of His Brother Duke Robert Guiscard* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2005), pp. 41–2.

<sup>46</sup> Gerald of Wales, *Expugnatio Hibernica: The Conquest of Ireland*, II.36, ed. and trans. A. B. Scott and F. X. Martin (Dublin, 1978), p. 238. Cf. the implication of remarks by Thietmar of Merseburg that personal experience creates a moral obligation to tell the truth about it: Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, VI.78, ed. R. Holtzmann (MGH Scriptores rerum Germanicarum, ns 9; Berlin, 1935), p. 368; trans. D. A. Warner, *Ottonian Germany: The Chronicon of Thietmar of Merseburg* (Manchester, 2001), p. 289.

<sup>47</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, ed. and trans. K. R. Potter (London, 1955), pp. 52, 62. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 26–7 for William's remarks concerning the Council of Oxford in June 1139 at which he tells us he was present.

<sup>48</sup> See Elisabeth van Houts's useful ranked taxonomy of the types of non-written evidence mobilized by medieval historians in 'Genre Aspects of the Use of Oral Information in Medieval Historiography', in B. Frank, T. Haye and D. Tophinke (eds), *Gattungen mittelalterlicher Schriftlichkeit* (ScriptOralia, 99; Tübingen, 1997), pp. 297–311; expanded in her *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe, 900–1200* (Basingstoke,

In practice, however, writers understood that the sort of expectations as to accuracy, amplitude and coherence that William of Malmesbury encapsulated in the term *integra ueritas* could not always be met on the basis of authorial autopsy alone. Already in the ancient period historians had lamented the physical constraints under which they worked and had fantasized about being able to be everywhere all at once;<sup>49</sup> and their medieval successors likewise appreciated that, as was almost invariably the case, they needed to cast their net of sources as widely as possible if they were to write the history of public affairs in ways that suitably foregrounded the actions of third-party principals and aimed for a spatio-temporal reach greater than that of their own personal experience. The result was an often eclectic approach to the gathering of information that blended various types of sources of information in the interests of making the most of what were frequently acknowledged to be inadequate resources. An important exemplar was provided by Bede, himself following the lead of models such as Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* and Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, which was available to him in Rufinus's Latin translation.<sup>50</sup> In the dedicatory epistle that begins his own *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede offers his addressee, Ceolwulf, king of the Northumbrians, a quite full and painstaking itemization of the sources (*auctores*) upon which he had drawn.<sup>51</sup> For the longer-range portions of his work, Bede states that he had consulted writings gathered 'here and there' (*hinc inde*): he does not mention the authors by name, but we know that he drew upon Orosius, Constantius, Gildas and others, in very large part thanks to the unusually rich library resources available to him in his twin monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow.

Bede also drew on archival materials in Canterbury and Rome, in written copies or in oral summary, through the good offices of Albinus, the abbot of the monastery of SS Peter and Paul in Canterbury whom Bede acknowledges as a major source of encouragement to write the *Ecclesiastical History*, and of his go-between Nothhelm, a priest from London (and future archbishop of Canterbury) who conducted research on Bede's behalf during a visit to Rome. Once Bede reaches the all-important threshold moment of the arrival of Augustine's mission to the Anglo-Saxons in 597 – that is to say, a span of a little more than 130 years before

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1999), pp. 19–39. Cf. S. John, 'Historical Truth and the Miraculous Past: The Use of Oral Evidence in Twelfth-Century Latin Historical Writing on the First Crusade', *English Historical Review*, 130 (2015), 263–301, esp. 287–91.

<sup>49</sup> See Polybius, *Histories*, XII.27, iv, p. 446; trans. Waterfield, *Histories*, p. 443: 'Ephorus [a fourth-century BC historian], for instance, remarks on what an outstanding experience it would be if we could be personally present at all events as they happen.'

<sup>50</sup> For Eusebius's use of sources, including writings, oral report, tradition and his own autopsy, in the context of his ambitions for his *Ecclesiastical History*, see Kempshall, *Rhetoric*, pp. 59–64.

<sup>51</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), pp. 2–6.

Bede was planning and writing the *Ecclesiastical History*, which he finished in 731 – his preface appeals to a kind of apostolic succession of elite ecclesiastical tradition as passed down from the time of the earliest evangelization of the English. Here named individuals and institutions are singled out, each typically dominating what Bede could discover of a part of the Anglo-Saxon world with which he was generally unfamiliar: thus Albinus himself for Kent and some other places; Bishop Daniel of Winchester for much of the south and south-west; the monastery of Lastingham, which although situated in Yorkshire preserved the memory of the evangelization of Mercia and Essex by its founders, Ched and Chad; an Abbot Esi, together with the writings and traditions of people in the past, for East Anglia; and Bishop Cyneberht, alongside other ‘trustworthy men’ (*fideles uiri*), for the kingdom of Lindsey (the area approximating to the later Lincolnshire).

This is not an exhaustive list, for there are many passages in the body of the text that must have been based on other sources of information. But its symmetries are meant to situate Bede’s research within a clear three-way matrix: written sources; information supplied by individuals who stand out by virtue of being named and whose trustworthiness is a compound of their personal relationship to Bede himself, their elite status within the Anglo-Saxon Church, and their careful cultivation of memories of their predecessors; and behind these foregrounded figures a hazier but important body of memories, sometimes fixed within a specific institutional setting such as the monastery of Lastingham, but more often a freer-floating ‘tradition of those in the past’ (*traditio priorum*) that at its outer limits dissolved into an even more imprecise category of ‘common report’ (*fama uulgans*). When Bede’s preface turns, however, to his home region of Northumbria, about which he knew much more and which duly enjoys a disproportionate amount of coverage in the *Ecclesiastical History*, he is aware that two shifts of emphasis come into play: he can draw on his own experience, and he has recourse to a much greater number, countless even, of informants.<sup>52</sup> As he notes: ‘But what happened in the church of the various parts of the kingdom of Northumbria, from the time when they received the faith of Christ up to the present, apart from the matters of which I had personal knowledge, I have learned not from any one source but from the faithful testimony of innumerable witnesses, who either knew or remembered these things.’<sup>53</sup> Written texts continue to be important for the Northumbrian portions of the work, particularly what had been written about St Cuthbert at Lindisfarne. But the most important methodological lesson to be learned by those many later historians who looked to Bede for inspiration and whose projects were likewise set, in whole or substantial part, in their own localities, their own Northumbrias, was

<sup>52</sup> For a mapping of the place names supplied by the *Ecclesiastical History*, which reveals a clear weighting towards the north-east, see D. Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1981), p. 30.

<sup>53</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 6.

the essential epistemological binary between the sort of knowledge that one could obtain directly (in Bede's phrase *per me ipsum*) and the indisputable testimony of reliable witnesses (*certissima fidelium uirorum adtestatio*).

Numerous examples of this binary appear in medieval historians' programmatic utterances. William of Malmesbury, for example, who was particularly conscious of following in Bede's footsteps, observes in the prologue to the first book of his *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, which serves as a general preface to the whole work, that whereas the reliability of his narrative, which begins with the end of Roman rule in Britain and the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons, substantially rests on that of his (written) authorities (*auctores*), his selection of material from more recent times is derived from what 'I either saw myself or heard from men who can be trusted'.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Henry of Huntingdon, another self-conscious heir to the tradition of Bede, in the opening of the seventh book of his *Historia Anglorum*, flags up the transition from reliance on old books and *fama uulgans* to the means by which he knows of recent events (Book VII begins with the reign of William Rufus, 1087–1100, and was first written in the early 1130s). He announces that 'Now, however, the matters to be studied are those that I have either seen for myself or heard about from those who did see them.'<sup>55</sup> Formulations of this sight-report binary were not confined to those writers who deliberately fashioned themselves on Bede as their principal model. They appear in a wide variety of texts, for example in the remarks of two historians of the twelfth-century Mezzogiorno, Falco of Benevento<sup>56</sup> and the writer

<sup>54</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, p. 16. The alliteration and assonance within William's formulation, 'uel ipse uidi uel a uiris fide dignis audiui', suggests that it expressed what he believed was an obvious and thus neatly compressible and catchy truism.

<sup>55</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, VII.1, ed. and trans. D. E. Greenway (Oxford, 1996), p. 412. See also the similar statement in the general prologue, in which Henry states that having followed Bede and other authors he has brought the story 'down to the time of what we have heard and seen': *ibid.*, p. 6, where Greenway's translation, 'our own knowledge and observation', loses some of the force of the pairing of the senses in 'nostrum ad auditum et uisum'. For the complex chronology of the text's composition, see Greenway's discussion at pp. lxvi–lxxvi. For a rather different emphasis on Henry's part, see his observations towards the beginning of his *De contemptu mundi*, an epistolary meditation on the transience and moral pitfalls of earthly existence that he inserted into a revised version of the *Historia Anglorum* in the 1140s, and which draws many of its illustrative examples from recent events and the careers of prominent people known to Henry and his addressee Walter, probably the archdeacon of Leicester: 'Rather I shall speak with utter simplicity, so that it may be clear to the many ... and I shall speak of events that you and I have witnessed' ['de his que tu et ego uidimus']: *ibid.*, p. 584.

<sup>56</sup> Falco of Benevento, *Chronicon Beneventanum: Città e feudi nell'Italia dei Normanni*, ed. and trans. E. D'Angelo (Testi mediolatini con traduzione, 9; Florence, 1998), p. 22; trans. G. A. Loud, *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily* (Manchester,

conventionally but almost certainly incorrectly known as Hugo Falcandus;<sup>57</sup> in Eadmer's statement of purpose at the beginning of his *Historia Novorum in Anglia*;<sup>58</sup> Rodulfus Glaber's *Five Books of the Histories*;<sup>59</sup> Wipo's *Deeds of Emperor Conrad II*;<sup>60</sup> and Helmold of Bosau's *Chronicle of the Slavs*.<sup>61</sup>

In a similar vein to William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon, William of Jumièges, in the dedicatory letter of his *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* addressed to William I of England in about 1070, deployed the sight-informant binary in order to set up a contrast in relation to his written sources. He had relied on a guide text, the history of Dudo of St-Quentin, for the earlier portion of his narrative as far as the time of Duke Richard II of Normandy (996–1026); after this point, we are told, he had included material 'partly related by many persons trustworthy on account equally of their age and their experience, and partly based on the most assured evidence of what I have witnessed myself, from my own store'.<sup>62</sup> It is true that one encounters several instances of authors praying in aid written sources in addition to personal observation and the reports of informants: for example, in Lampert of Hersfeld's account of the foundation of the church of Hersfeld, written in the 1070s,<sup>63</sup> and John of Salisbury's *Historia Pontificalis*

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2012), p. 142: 'testor, nihil aliud posuisse, preter quod viderim et audiverim, scripsisse'. For the extent of Falco's reliance on his own observations and the testimony of others, see G. A. Loud, 'The Genesis and Context of the Chronicle of Falco of Benevento', in M. Chibnall (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Studies XV: Proceedings of the XV Battle Conference and of the XI Colloquio Medievale of the Officina di Studi Medievali* 1992 (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. 182–3.

<sup>57</sup> Hugo Falcandus, *La Historia o Liber de Regno Sicilie e la Epistola ad Petrum Panormitane Ecclesie Thesaurium*, ed. G. B. Siragusa (Fonti per la storia d'Italia, 22; Rome, 1897), p. 4; trans. G. A. Loud and T. Wiedemann, *The History of the Tyrants of Sicily by 'Hugo Falcandus' 1154–69* (Manchester, 1998), p. 56: 'partim ipse vidi, partim eorum [qui in]terfuerunt veraci relatione cognovi'.

<sup>58</sup> Eadmer, 'Historia Novorum in Anglia', in *Historia Novorum in Anglia et Opuscula Duo*, ed. M. Rule (RS 81; London, 1884), p. 1; trans. G. Bosanquet, *Eadmer's History of Recent Events in England* (London, 1964), p. 1: 'statui ea quae sub oculis vidi vel audivi ... commemorare'.

<sup>59</sup> Rodulfus Glaber, 'The Five Books of the Histories', I.4, in *Opera*, ed. and trans. J. France, N. Bulst and P. Reynolds (Oxford, 1989), p. 8: 'prouit certa relatione comperimus uel uisuri superfuimus'.

<sup>60</sup> 'Gesta Chuonradi', p. 8; trans. Mommsen and Morrison, *Imperial Lives*, p. 57: 'prouit ipse vidi aut relatu aliorum didici'.

<sup>61</sup> Helmold of Bosau, *Cronica Slavorum*, ed. B. Schmeidler (MGH Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum, 32; Hanover, 1937), p. 2; trans. F. J. Tschan, *The Chronicle of the Slavs* (New York, 1935), p. 44: 'quae aut longevis viris referentibus percepi aut oculata cognitione didici'.

<sup>62</sup> William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, ed. and trans. E. M. C. van Houts, 2 vols (Oxford, 1992–5), i, pp. 4–6.

<sup>63</sup> Lampert of Hersfeld, 'Libelli de institutione Herveldensis ecclesiae quae supersunt', in *Lamperti monachi Hersfeldensis opera*, ed. O. Holder-Egger (MGH Scriptores rerum



from the mid twelfth century.<sup>64</sup> But more often than not the sight-reliable informant nexus was set up in contrast to the use of written authorities, not simply as a complement or amplification of it, and in terms that seem intended to suggest a qualitative shift of methodological orientation and epistemological ambition on the author's part. This is particularly evident in those cases in which, either by virtue of their choice of subject matter or because of some external factors beyond their control, writers had to concede that in the absence of written evidence on which to base their histories they had no choice but to become flexible and creative. A good case in point is Lethald of Micy's *Miracles of St Maximinus*, written in the early 980s, in which, confronted by the absence of adequate written records for the early history of the monastery of Micy, the author states that he directed his attention to the question of how best to deploy what he had himself seen and the truthful accounts of reliable informants.<sup>65</sup>

Does the frequent pairing of *visus* and *auditus* as complementary means to gain access to the past suggest that they were believed to be epistemologically equivalent, despite the recurrence of the trope about the superiority of the eyes that we have already noted? To some extent a projection of the perceptual and mnemonic capacities of the eyewitness onto third-party informants was implied by the semantic ranges of the Latin noun *testis* and verb *testificari* and their vernacular equivalents. In the same way that the English word 'witness' suggests both the experience of perception and the subsequent articulation of that experience, as in the bearing of witness, so the *testes* whose names, for example, appear in countless medieval documents were both witnesses to the transaction set out in the text and witnesses to the fact that the transaction had taken place; in this latter capacity their testimony could, potentially, be required to settle a legal dispute at some future date. The dual sense of being a witness would also have been very familiar from numerous reference to both witnessing-as-seeing and the bearing of witness in the Bible, especially the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles. It is reasonable to imagine that when medieval historians drew upon the *testimonium* of others, they were imaginatively projecting onto their interlocutors the same depth and acuity of eyewitness understanding that they would have expected to achieve had they been present themselves. In such cases, the informants were effectively autoptic surrogates. Thus, for example, Falco of Benevento invoked

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Germanicarum in usum scholarum, 38; Hanover, 1894), pp. 344–5: 'quae olim me contigit ... vel legisse vel a probissimis viris audisse, quae etiam ipse expertus sum'.

<sup>64</sup> John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis*, ed. and trans. M. Chibnall (London, 1956), p. 4: 'quod uisu et auditu uerum esse cognouero, uel quod probalium uirorum scriptis fuerit et auctoritate subnixum'.

<sup>65</sup> Lethald of Micy, 'Liber miraculorum S. Maximini abbatis Miciacensis', *PL*, 137, cols. 795–6: 'quae vel ipse viderim, vel probatorum veridica relatione cognoverim'. For Lethald's text, see T. F. Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of the Saints: The Diocese of Orléans, 800–1200* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 211–16.



the *testimonium* of those who had been present at the anointing of Prince Robert II of Capua in 1128 in support of his belief that 5,000 people had been present at the occasion.<sup>66</sup>

On the other hand, the kind of complete and explicit equivalence between seeing for oneself and having others seeing for you that one encounters in, for instance, Henry of Huntingdon's formulation that we have already noted, to the effect that his treatment of recent affairs would be based on what he himself had seen or what he had heard from those who had themselves been eyewitnesses ('uel ab his qui uiderant audiuius'), was quite unusual.<sup>67</sup> More common was a studied imprecision about the exact relationship between one's informants and the material that they had to offer: it was often sufficient just to have 'been there', as in, for example, Hugo Falcandus's prefatory remarks that some of the events that he is going to recount he had seen himself, whereas others he had learned from the trustworthy reports of those who 'had taken part' ('[qui in]terfuerunt').<sup>68</sup> The criteria by which a witness was judged to be trustworthy were typically age, education, social status, moral reputation and familiarity with the author, not visual or mnemonic acuity as such. Moreover, to be 'present' at an event was necessarily an imprecise notion, less a case of being granted opportunities for camera-eye visual perception, and more a cultural immersion in a given moment and a receptivity to the back-and-forth, the 'buzz', of other participants' observations and reactions.

So, even as sight and hearing were often juxtaposed in historians' methodological remarks, there was nonetheless a built-in imbalance between the two perceptual modes. Personal observation was believed to entail greater precision, a quality that lent itself to being emphasized by means of pronouns, as in 'I myself saw', and by intensifying constructions such as 'with my own eyes' or 'with ocular trust'. This contrasted with the much baggier category of informants, some but not all of whom might themselves have been eyewitnesses to what they recounted. The use of phrases such as 'with my own eyes' suggests that the eyewitness historian was typically imagined close to but not caught up in the action: it is the role of observer that is highlighted, not participant. But exceptions to this sense of distance between observer and observed can be found, for example when the narrator presents himself as immersed in unusual or stressful collective situations in which his identification with other members of a beleaguered and threatened group is affirmed in acts of perception that assume a

<sup>66</sup> Falco of Benevento, *Chronicon Beneventanum*, p. 90; trans. Loud, *Roger II*, p. 177. Cf. *Chronicon Beneventanum*, p. 136; trans. Loud, *Roger II*, pp. 197–8 for a similar reference to 'the mouths of those who were there' in relation to the performance of Roger II of Sicily's forces at the Battle of Nocera in 1132.

<sup>67</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, VII.1, p. 412.

<sup>68</sup> *La Historia o Liber*, p. 4; trans. Loud and Wiedemann, *History*, p. 56.

representative quality. That is to say, he casts himself as seeing on behalf of his co-sufferers. At the beginning of his account of the First Crusade, for example, Fulcher of Chartres, after drawing the reader's attention to his own eyewitness credentials ('oculis meis...perspexi'), emphasizes the sufferings and tribulations that the Franks had had to overcome during the expedition. Fulcher does so in order to invite the reader's wonder at the manner in which 'we, a few people' ('nos exiguus populus') prevailed against greatly superior opponents.<sup>69</sup> In the prologue to his account of the murder of Count Charles the Good of Flanders and its consequences, Galbert of Bruges expresses a similar sense of participating in a momentous collective experience when he recalls that the genesis of his text was his being caught up in the aftermath of Charles's death:

Nor was there a good place or time to write when I turned my spirit to this work, for our place [*noster locus*: Galbert principally means Bruges but also Flanders more generally] was so upset then by fear and anxiety that all the clergy and the people, without exception, were in immediate danger of losing both their goods and their lives. It was there, surrounded by impediments and so narrowly confined, that I began to compose my mind, which was tossing as if it had been thrown into Euripus [a narrow, turbulent channel of water], and constrain it to the mode of writing...I rest secure in the knowledge that I speak a truth known to all those who endured the same danger with me, and I entrust it to our posterity to be remembered.<sup>70</sup>

This degree of narratorial immersivity in and identification with collectivities in times of particular peril is, however, fairly unusual. The typical eyewitness gaze presupposed a degree of detachment from the thick of the action; the eyewitness

<sup>69</sup> Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Hierosolymitana (1095–1127)*, ed. H. Hagenmeyer (Heidelberg, 1912), pp. 116–17; trans. M. E. McGinty in E. Peters (ed.), *The First Crusade: The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and Other Source Materials*, 2nd edn (Philadelphia, 1998), p. 48. For Fulcher, see esp. V. Epp, *Fulcher von Chartres: Studien zur Geschichtsschreibung des ersten Kreuzzuges* (Studia humaniora, 15; Düsseldorf, 1990). See also Harari, 'Eyewitnessing', 79–82.

<sup>70</sup> Galbert of Bruges, *De multro, traditione, et occisione gloriosi Karoli comitis Flandriarum*, ed. J. Rider (CCCM 131; Turnhout, 1994), p. 3; trans. J. Rider, *The Murder, Betrayal, and Slaughter of Glorious Charles, Count of Flanders* (New Haven, 2013), pp. 2–3. Cf. Galbert's related observations about his improvised working methods 'in the midst of such a great uproar of events and the burning of so many houses' while the siege of Charles's murderers was taking place around him in Bruges, in *De multro*, c. 35, p. 81; trans. Rider, *Murder*, pp. 65–6. For Galbert's circumstances and self-fashioning as a writer, see J. Rider, *God's Scribe: The Historiographical Art of Galbert of Bruges* (Washington, DC, 2001), esp. pp. 16–49; *idem*, "'Wonder with Fresh Wonder': Galbert the Writer and the Genesis of the *De multro*", in J. Rider and A. V. Murray (eds), *Galbert of Bruges and the Historiography of Medieval Flanders* (Washington, DC, 2009), pp. 13–35.

can step back, so to speak, and take it all in. This relative distancing seems to have been grounded in the belief that one's own autopsy, in theory at any rate, granted access to the sort of epistemological penetration and the confidence born of subjective personal experience that even the best informed and most reliable of third-party informants could never fully replicate.<sup>71</sup> In this connection, it is significant that even first-hand individual informants are not as a rule expressly named as sources. The exceptions tend to relate to stories about miracles and wonders or to a broader category of the unusual or coincidental, typically the stuff of arresting but tangential *obiter dicta*, not the 'routine' substance of public events in the political, military or ecclesiastical spheres.<sup>72</sup> *A fortiori*, longer chains of information are seldom traced out.<sup>73</sup> An exception that helps to prove the rule, atypical both in its featuring very well-known figures and as an example of what we would nowadays term the uncanny, is a story told by William of Malmesbury in anecdotal mode. This, he insists, is not idle chit-chat ('non friuolo auditu hausi') but a true account that had been passed on to him by someone who swore that he had heard the story from none other than Abbot Hugh of Cluny (who had been dead more than ten years when William was writing). The narrative concerns Hugh's first encounter with Hildebrand, the future Pope Gregory VII (1073–85), and turns on Hildebrand's apparent ability to read Hugh's mind, a knack so unnervingly acute that he is able to upbraid Hugh for the unfairly harsh first impressions that he had formed of him but had not articulated out loud.<sup>74</sup>

Guido Schepens has observed of ancient historians' attitudes to source criticism, in the basic sense of their categorization and evaluation of the material at their disposal, that they attached greater importance to the subjective process of discovery and less to the objective traces of the past in themselves. Research was principally a series of experiences, not an end product.<sup>75</sup> Much the same

<sup>71</sup> For the idea that personal experience created a surplus of historical material, see e.g. Falco of Benevento's statement of the commonplace view that it would be far too time-consuming and onerous to narrate everything of significance that one had seen oneself: *Chronicon Beneventanum*, p. 118; trans. Loud, *Roger II*, p. 189.

<sup>72</sup> But see Asser's explicit reference to the testimony of King Alfred himself concerning the reasons for the lesser status accorded to queens in Wessex compared with elsewhere, a situation that Asser characterizes as exceptional among the Germanic peoples: *Life of King Alfred*, c. 15, pp. 11–12; trans. Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, p. 71.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. John, 'Historical Truth', 279–81. For an example of a named witness to a miracle see Rodulfus Glaber, 'Five Books of the Histories', IV.19, p. 202, where Glaber reports Bishop Ulric of Orléans's particular experience of the miracle of the Holy Fire at the Holy Sepulchre while on pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

<sup>74</sup> *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, c. 263, I, p. 486. Cf. Orderic Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History*, v, pp. 8–10, cited in John, 'Historical Truth', 281.

<sup>75</sup> G. Schepens, 'Some Aspects of Source Theory in Greek Historiography', in J. Marincola (ed.), *Greek and Roman Historiography* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 100–18.

can be said of medieval historians' approaches: what might seem to be their methodological leaning towards eyewitness evidence on pragmatic grounds is actually rooted in the idea that historical writing was the end result of various types of experience, among which the 'sightist' assumptions that we have noted are embedded in moment-by-moment perception and cognition as well as in language tended to assume pride of place. That said, there are of course many instances in which the circumstances in which the historian was writing or his distance from his subject matter made it prudent to downplay or simply ignore the question of autopsy. Not all history was about recent events in one's own part of the world. In the majority of such instances, the question of autopsy could simply be disregarded as irrelevant to the historian's purposes.

There were, moreover, liminal cases in which the writer chose as a matter of particularly assertive authorial self-fashioning, or in anticipation of his readers' suspicions about his methodology, to minimize, and even to rebut, the value of eyewitness evidence. A particularly clear example, remarks made by Guibert of Nogent, has been thoughtfully explored by Elizabeth Lapina in a study of the role of eyewitness authority in narratives of the First Crusade.<sup>76</sup> Guibert's *Dei Gesta per Francos* was a telling of the First Crusade that largely drew upon the anonymous first-hand account known as the *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum* or a variant very close to the text as we now have it. As is well known, Guibert, alongside other learned historians of the crusade in northern France in the first decade or so after the fall of Jerusalem to the crusaders in 1099, was scornful of both the *Gesta*'s perceived lack of conceptual sophistication, in that it did not offer a sufficiently developed theological framework in which to situate the crusaders' achievements within the scheme of providential history, and, related to this, its supposedly crude style, which was regarded as unfitting for such an elevated subject.<sup>77</sup> Other writers who, like Guibert, did not participate in the crusade and also drew heavily upon the *Gesta*, Baldric of Bourgueil and Robert the Monk, made similar observations. But it is Guibert, the most methodologically self-conscious of the three, who works hardest to establish his trust in the truth value of the *Gesta*'s basic story matter while maintaining that his own retelling is superior. For Guibert, hearing (which subsumed the act of reading) was not necessarily inferior to seeing as a route to understanding, as attested by the many authoritative Lives of saints written by those who had not known their

<sup>76</sup> E. Lapina, "'Nec signis nec testis creditur...': The Problem of Eyewitnesses in the Chronicles of the First Crusade', *Viator*, 38 (2007), 117–39. This is an important and original contribution to our understanding of medieval history-writers' approaches to autopsy. In Lapina's discussion, however, there is some blurring of the important distinction between authorial eyewitness in itself and the historian's use of others' eyewitness testimony, oral or written.

<sup>77</sup> See J. S. C. Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (London, 1986), pp. 135–52.