

Authorities in the Middle Ages

Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture



Edited by
Albrecht Classen and Marilyn Sandidge

Volume 12

Authorities in the Middle Ages

Influence, Legitimacy, and Power in Medieval Society

Edited by

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DE GRUYTER

ISBN 978-3-11-029449-1
e-ISBN 978-3-11-029456-9
ISSN 1864-3396

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2013 Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston
Printing and binding: Hubert & Co. GmbH & Co. KG, Göttingen
☼ Printed on acid-free paper
Printed in Germany

www.degruyter.com

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Sini Kangas, Mia Korpiola, and Tuija Ainonen

Foreword

Authority (Lat. *auctoritas*) is a somewhat elusive and multifaceted term. In fact, “[t]he chameleonic qualities of authority”¹ may be the reason why the word does not appear in any form (*auctores*, *auctoritas*, *auctoritates*, *authority*, *autorité*) in several general encyclopedias on the Middle Ages.² As authority does not easily render itself to succinct, yet comprehensive definitions, this may have contributed to a reluctance to include the word or a tendency to omit it altogether. Moreover, as perceptions and definitions of authority have varied in time and place, sensitivity to the historical and cultural context is also necessary in order to avoid anachronism.³

In certain other encyclopedias, authority is only discussed in the context of texts, their authorship, and power to influence by esteem and reputation. As an author had to write his/her own text with reference to those of others, relying on sources that gave a clear and reliable account of the truth was essential. Ultimately, this element of veracity made God the fount of all authority in the Middle Ages, while Scripture and the Church Fathers were also considered highly authoritative as witnesses of truth.⁴

The authorship of texts is one aspect of medieval authority, certainly, but hardly a comprehensive one. The Latin etymology of the word *auctoritas* was *augere*, to augment, and in ancient Rome, *auctoritas* had several meanings, many of which were legal. An *auctor* was a source, a person who initiated

1 Leonard Krieger, “Authority,” *Dictionary of the History of Ideas. Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas*, ed. Philip P. Wiener et al., vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1968): 141–62; here 141.

2 *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformationstid* 1 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1956); *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Joseph R. Strayer, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1982); Joseph Dahmus, *Dictionary of Medieval Civilization* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1984); Wilhelm Volkert, *Adel bis Zunft: Ein Lexikon des Mittelalters* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1991).

3 See Krieger, “Authority” (see note 1), 141.

4 G. Bernt, “Auctores,” *Lexikon des Mittelalters* I (Munich and Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1980), 1189–90; G. Bernt, “Auctoritas,” *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 1 (Munich and Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1980), 1190; George Ferzoco, “Authors and Authority,” *The Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Robert E. Bjork, vol. 1 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 209; Jaime García Álvarez, “Auctoritates,” *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages* I, ed. André Vauchez, trans. Adrian Watford (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2000), 130; Jaime García Álvarez, “Auctoritates,” *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du Moyen Âge*, ed. André Vauchez, vol. I (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1997), 147. See also the introduction by Albrecht Classen in this volume.

acts and in whom information or acts originated. The *auctor* also validated or guaranteed the transactions of others unable to conclude them themselves, thus “authorizing” them. Various legal technical terms referred to anything from the authority of the head of the family (*auctoritas patris*) to that of the senate (*auctoritas senatus*) or of the tutor (*auctoritas tutoris*). In addition, *auctoritas* signified prestige or persuasive moral power, commanding respect and obedience in others by personal qualities.⁵

With the onset of Christendom, several new religious authorities were introduced: divine, Christ’s, Scriptural, patristic, and church authority. The authority of tradition was reduced in favor of new sources of prestige and power. In the course of the Middle Ages, the number of theological authorities grew considerably.⁶ Authoritative texts and writers also appeared in other sciences (philosophy, law, medicine, etc.). Some were new, some new but dressed in old clothes, while others were overtly transmitted from Antiquity. At first, vernacular literature did not have an authoritative position, but rather its value lay in “transmitting stories and knowledge.” However, the subjective power of the “authorial self” started to be valued in the course of the later Middle Ages, and some vernacular writers gained an increasingly prominent role as models and authorities in their own right.⁷

Considering the scope of the term already in antiquity, definitions concentrating mainly on authorship and texts represent too narrow an approach. However, few encyclopedias have attempted definitions of authority that broaden the scope of the term to encompass a more general usage beyond authorial voices and textual traditions. Authority has been defined as “a quality by which a given being increased his natural condition.” Thus, the use of the term *auctoritas* was extended both to persons or institutions having or receiving it and even to texts or documents expressing it.⁸ Authority could be a God-given gift, an innate charismatic quality, ancestry or prestige, but it could also be legally invested in its holder by solemn rites, rituals or acts of empowerment. A person or thing with authority was considered credible. He, she or

⁵ Adolf Berger, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Roman Law*. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, 43.2 (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1953), 368–69; Krieger, “Authority” (see note 1), 141–46.

⁶ Krieger, “Authority” (see note 1), 147. See also the article by Sverre Bagge in this book.

⁷ Ferzoco, “Authors and Authority” (see note 4), 209. See also the article by Cristian Bratu, “*Je, aucteur de ce livre*: Authorial Persona and Authority in French Medieval Histories and Chronicles,” in this book.

⁸ Jaime García Álvarez, “Authority” (see note 4), 134. See also the original French, Jaime García Álvarez, “Autorité” (see note 4), 152.

it was also perceived as capable of legitimately ruling, governing, conferring dignities, and effectively performing various (legal) actions.⁹

Divine and religious authority defined and formed the world order, constituting social order together with other secular authorities. Thus, in its wider societal context, authority is discussed in connection with terms such as power (Lat. *potestas*) or majesty (Lat. *maiestas*). While power could be seized suddenly by sheer brutality or force, authority inferred a broadly held legitimate aspect and an ability to influence others by other means than coercion. Although late medieval philosophical thought (Aristotelianism, nominalist philosophy) came to criticize the notion of authority by means of reason (Lat. *ratio*), this did not alter the fact that medieval people were situated in hierarchical structures, created by authority and power relations.¹⁰

In modern sociology, the link between authority and power developed very strong. In the writings of the founding fathers of the discipline such as Weber and Marx, the two terms could be used synonymously in various contexts. For Max Weber (1864–1920), authority represents socially a constructed form of power, the ability to give orders with expectation of obedience. Members of the society submit to authority without coercion, irrespective of their individual aims or goals, if they can agree on its legitimacy. This kind of social authority is a tangible manifestation of the sources of power, tradition, charismatic leadership and legal culture, and it may thus remain effective only as far as its root cause exists.¹¹ Obedience to authority is based upon the internalization of communally shared and accepted norms. The process of sharing does not, however, equally include everyone involved. Individual chances of participation in ongoing societal negotiation are directed—and perhaps biased—by class and status-based hierarchies.

Among the followers of Weber, Michael Mann has raised the number of the ideal types of power to four by adding authority to the list as an independent

9 Jean Gaudemet, “Autorité,” *Dictionnaire du Moyen Âge*, ed. Claude Gauvard, Alain de Libera, and Michel Zink (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), 113–14; García Álvarez, “Authority” (see note 4), 134. For the original French, see Jaime García Álvarez, “Autorité” (see note 4), 152. See also the discussion of authority and power by Sverre Bagge, “From Fist to Scepter: Authority in Norway in the Middle Ages,” in this book.

10 Gaudemet, “Autorité” (see note 9), 113–14; García Álvarez, “Authority” (see note 4), 134; García Álvarez, “Autorité” (see note 4), 152–53.

11 Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie* (Tübingen: Paul Siebeck, 1922); “Politik als Beruf,” *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Wolfgang J. Mommsen, vol. 17 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1992).

component.¹² According to Mann, authority is a kind of exercise of power that institutions and groups consider beneficial. It is thus based upon shared notions of respect and adhesion to communal norms and hierarchical structures. Authority, like any other sources of power, is socially constructed and rooted in ideology or economical, military or political influence.¹³

Karl Marx (1818–1883) promulgated ownership of capital and production equipment as the sources of authority and power (which he treats as synonymous), as well as social inequality, which he saw as the source of misery and strife.¹⁴ Whereas the criticism of capitalism has had a major impact on economic theories and political science, Marx's ideas of class struggle represent the first social historical definition of the division of authority in industrial societies.

Since the days of Marx and Weber, researchers have continuously recognized class, wealth and status as prominent indicators of authority in human societies. From the 1970s onward, the scope of the term has expanded significantly, as novel approaches to authority, social stratification, socio-cultural dimensionality and networks have gradually framed a new fulcrum for the research. A well-known example of this shift is Norbert Elias's theory of the civilization process, which defines authority as the elite's segregation from the masses by its capability to choose among cultural trends and fashions a set of manners, behavior and style, which gradually becomes a social preference and framework for what is understood as decent and civilized human existence.¹⁵

According to the present paradigm, the idea of authority is flexible and fluid. Authority encompasses not only such classical dimensions as influence, ideology, policymaking, and responsibilities in society, but it is also closely interlinked with such aspects as gender, age, race, ethnic background, and education. Whereas some of the authority-related components may be

¹² Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: A History of Power from the Beginning to A.D. 1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 6.

¹³ Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* (see note 12), 22–32.

¹⁴ Karl Marx, *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie* (Hamburg: Verlag Otto Meisner, 1867); Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei: Veröffentlicht im Februar 1848* (London: Working Press, 1999).

¹⁵ Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation: Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1976), 64–109; see also Albrecht Classen, "Introduction" and id. "Sexual Desire and Pornography: Literary Imagination in a Satirical Context. Gender Conflict, Sexual Identity and Misogyny in "Das 'Nonnenturnier'", *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: New Approaches to Fundamental Cultural-Historical and Literary-Anthropological Theme*, ed. Albrecht Classen. *Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, 3 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 1–142, 649–90.

acquired, many cannot. Even more paradoxically, the individual components may coexist, converge and overlap, as well as contradict and collide.

As we understand the status quo, authority may not exist without the social context and all the subgroups involved in its making. According to the theories of Michel Foucault and Manuel Castells, the sources of authority have become strongly situational. Accordingly, authority may rarely reside in the orbit of a single institution or person, but because of its partial and contextual nature, it is continuously negotiated, re-negotiated and shared by various interested parties.¹⁶ These parties have their access to power structures through new forms of social media.¹⁷

In the twenty-first century, historians emphasize the gradual nature of change, longevity of tradition and the importance of the *longue durée* in the interpretation of the human past. Whether strong or weak, direct or indirect, legitimate or coerced, shared or seized, authority is very much seen as an institution based upon and limited by norm and tradition. As such, authority functions in a society to maintain and conserve rather than revise. Gender historians have addressed this perspective in several interesting studies, including Judith Bennett's theory of patriarchal equilibrium, which states that although female experiences have changed over the past centuries, women's status as compared to that of men has remained remarkably unchanged.¹⁸

The present volume discusses and analyzes a plethora of sources of authority in various parts of Europe during the long Middle Ages. The authors of the book look at a variety of ways that authority was construed and negotiated—occasionally even denied—in connection to other parallel and/or rival authorities. The scope of this book includes textual traditions, religion, and rulers, but it also goes beyond this. The goal is to form a picture of the medieval understanding of authority: how it was established, granted or seized, how it was constructed, contested or maintained, and what were its manifestations and definitions?

This book is divided into two different spheres, the ecclesiastical and the secular. The first part of the book examines the human relationship with the divine, and the attempts to interpret and transmit the celestial authority into human affairs. The timeline of the investigations spans from late antiquity, with Maijastina Kahlos's article on the uses of the past in the search for

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité. La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 85–97.

¹⁷ Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 196–99, 260, 470–71.

¹⁸ Judith Bennett, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 54–71.

authority for Christianity itself, through the early debates leading towards the Reformation, with Sean Otto analyzing the use of the same established and accepted authority (Augustine) to pursue opposing ends. Medieval authors were aware that textual authorities were fluid and changeable: Csaba Németh takes us through a literary process of fabricating an authorial text and Robin Sutherland-Harris draws our attention to the authority of oral testimony, written charters, and cartulary material in general. No medieval account of authority is complete without a consideration of the medieval papacy and the authority it demanded and was granted in the Middle Ages. Ken Grant examines the rhetoric of demands for papal authority, while Sini Kangas re-examines the question of the role of the papacy in the movement of the First Crusade. The significance of the support of the papacy and local ecclesiastical authorities is evident when Johnny Jakobsen analyzes the Dominican role in transmitting theological teaching to the Northern and Eastern fringes of medieval Europe. The northern dimension is also present in Jill Bradley's research on the visual strategies for the establishment of authority in baptismal fonts, which were adapted to the local circumstances.

In the second part the object of research is the interaction between people in the medieval world. The formation and endurance of authority are at the core of our investigations. What were the strategies that enabled medieval people to command respect and obedience and granted them prestige and moral power? Sverre Bagge guides us through the changing perception of secular authority from expressions of physical prowess to ritual signs and acts of empowerment in Old Norse sagas. Kirsi Kanerva looks at the deceased and their power over the living in Icelandic saga literature. Cristian Bratu and Albrecht Classen examine literary texts, Bratu observing the author as authority in French histories, and Classen analyzing the genre of travel writing and the significance of traveler as an accepted and yet also disputed authority figure. Mollie Madden and Alexandra Vukovic both examine the top of the secular hierarchy, Madden focusing on royal authority and its demands for obedience in Gascony, and Vukovic on the strategies of a Serbian queen in political power struggles. In the concluding Charlotte Vainio observes the possibilities of wives to use legal authority on their own. In these articles there are many overlapping and recurring themes, which interact with the issue of authority. The studies in theology, philosophy, history, law, gender, politics, literature and art history all offer another contribution to the concept of authority. Only through observing the different manifestations and uses of authority, be it personal, textual, or visual, can the full image of the elusive term "authority" start to emerge. Like a medieval stained glass window, the picture is a complex network of interlock-

ing pieces, available only when all the different colors are placed together to interact with each other.

Acknowledgements

There are several colleagues to whom we owe our deepest gratitude for their help during the long process of the book production. We thank Prof. Albrecht Classen and Prof. Marilyn Sandidge, who offered much appreciated encouragement throughout the process with their learned comments, expertise, and generous help in reading the entire manuscript several times and helping to revise it where necessary; Dr. Maijastina Kahlos for her thoughtful comments and efforts in arranging a round of peer-reviewing; Dr. Anu Lahtinen for her valuable comments regarding medieval female authority, and Daniel Gietz and now Jacob Klingner from the publishing house De Gruyter in Berlin. Dr. Philip Line, diligently and with great efficiency, not only corrected the language of the articles written by authors who use English as their second language, but also offered insightful comments on the substance. Research assistant Anne Tucker did much of the hard work of practical editing. Our special thank-you goes out to all the authors who dedicated their time and expertise, not only for writing their own articles but also for peer-reviewing other articles in this book.

We wish to acknowledge the generosity of the Thure Gallén Stiftelse (Foundation), the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies, the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, and the Niilo Helander Foundation. Their generous help allowed us to arrange an international conference “Seeing, Hearing, Reading and Believing. Authorities in the Middle Ages” in Helsinki, 20 – 23 September 2010. The current publication is an offshoot of this interdisciplinary conference, its intellectual atmosphere, and the contacts made during the meeting. In addition, Glossa, the Society for Medieval Studies in Finland, and several individuals from the board of directors deserve our gratitude, especially Jesse Keskiäho, for his assistance, Jenni Kuuliala, for developing the visual appearance and web presence for the conference, and treasurer Piia Lempiäinen.

We also want to thank each of our families for their patience and understanding.

Albrecht Classen

Introduction: The Authority of the Written Word, the Sacred Object, and the Spoken Word: A Highly Contested Discourse in the Middle Ages

With a Focus on the Poet Wolfram von Eschenbach and the Mystic Hildegard von Bingen

The Authority of the Church

Anyone who approaches one of those massive, towering medieval Gothic cathedrals, studies its fabulous, richly decorated facade, and thereupon enters the monumental church building, will be quickly awed by the highly spiritualized space. These spiritual interiors draw the spectator or parishioner all the way down the central nave toward the altar, and then from there invite him or her to look up to the enormous stained glass windows, such as those in Tours in France, in Cologne in Germany, Milan in Italy, or Lincoln in England. Witnessing that religious space, being part of it in an aesthetic and spiritual manner, we would no longer need to ask what the highest authority was in the Middle Ages. Not the architect, not the bishop, not even the Pope, but very simply, God. Every element of a Christian church, whether built in a Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, or Baroque style, conforms to that ultimate purpose, that is, the glorification of God, providing Him with an appropriate space where the pious and devout can come and worship Him, submitting themselves to the tutelage of the clergy as the worldly representatives of His authority.¹

If all that were not enough, then the Gregorian chant, the liturgy, and the mass performed by the priest would complete the daunting picture of the divine authority that controlled all life here on earth during the Middle Ages and beyond. Indeed, it is a huge shadow that the cathedral casts, both then and even today, as if to leave no doubt as to who was completely in charge in

¹ See the contributions to *Negotiating Community and Difference in Medieval Europe: Gender, Power, Patronage, and the Authority of Religion in Latin Christendom*, ed. Katherine Allen Smith and Scott Wells. *Studies in the History of Christian Traditions*, 142 (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

both this and the other world.² In fact, we would not be far off if we identified the Gothic cathedral as one of the most impressive material manifestations of heavenly Jerusalem here on earth, truly a bold architectural enterprise, almost tantamount to human hubris, and yet still fully in conformity with the ideology embraced by the Church, which claimed absolute authority on earth assisting all Christians to find the way to the afterlife.³ Religious space itself constitutes absolute authority, while even the clergy operate “only” as its functionaries.⁴ As the “Mother” of all Christians, the Church enjoyed, indeed, a pervasive control and influence throughout the Middle Ages.⁵ As a consequence the papacy wielded the highest, if not the most threatening, authority, despite many conflicts, tensions, and extensive strife within the institution itself and among many contenders for the Holy See throughout the period.⁶

We could almost end right here, without having really started, because in the Christian world view nothing else seems to have mattered more, and if everyone during that time period had simply embraced that notion, not much would have happened in the Middle Ages. Both the historical annals and the libraries of literary texts would have been rather thin, perhaps even dry and boring, because divine hierarchy would have provided all answers and directed

2 There are many critical studies that confirm these observations, see now, for example, Roland Recht, *Believing and Seeing: The Art of Gothic Cathedrals*, trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Christopher Wilson, *The Gothic Cathedral: the Architecture of the Great Church 1130–1530*. Rpt. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008). For a history of everyday life in the shadow of the Church's authority, see Gerd Althoff, Hans-Werner Goetz, and Ernst Schubert, *Menschen im Schatten der Kathedrale: Neuigkeiten aus dem Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998).

3 Wilhelm Schlinck, “The Gothic Cathedral as Heavenly Jerusalem,” *The Real and Ideal Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Art: Studies in Honor of Bezalel Narkiss on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Bianca Kühnel (Jerusalem: Center for Jewish Art, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1998), 275–85.

4 See the contributions to *À la recherche de légitimités chrétiennes: Représentations de l'espace et du temps dans l'Espagne médiévale, IXe–XIIIe siècle. Actes du colloque tenu à la Casa de Velázquez, Madrid, 26–27 avril 2001*, ed. Patrick Henriët. Annexes des cahiers de linguistique et de civilisation hispaniques médiévales, 15 (Lyon: ENS éditions; Madrid: Caa de Velázquez, 2003); Dawn Marie Hayes, *Body and Sacred Place in Medieval Europe, 1100–1389*. Studies in Medieval History and Culture, 18 (New York and London: Routledge, 2003).

5 Megan McLaughlin, *Sex, Gender, and Episcopal Authority in an Age of Reform, 1000–1122* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 127–28.

6 Walter Ullmann, *Die Machtstellung des Papsttums im Mittelalter: Idee und Geschichte*. Trans. Gerlinde Möser-Mersky (Graz, Vienna, and Cologne: Verlag Styria, 1960); Karl F. Morrison, *Tradition and Authority in the Western Church, 300–1140* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969).

people in their worldly affairs. God's hierarchy would have completely stifled all human attempts to establish any authority of their own.

Fortunately, if we may say so, human history is mostly made up of other stuff, reflecting a wide range of constant disagreements, internecine conflicts, protests, riots, political coups, uprisings, counter movements, revolts, and wars.⁷ Each one of these radical movements or uprisings represented profound challenges to the central authorities in the Middle Ages, above all to the Church, but also to the ruling class, the nobility. Universities and individual scholars, as well as alternative religious groups such as the beguards and beguines, then the *Devotio moderna*, in their own way deeply challenged the authority of the Catholic Church.⁸

As impressive as it certainly was, the Gothic cathedral thus served only as an icon of an enormously powerful institution: it did not represent total hegemony, despite all attempts by the Catholic Church to quash any opposition and alternative opinions. The struggle for authority ran throughout the entire Middle Ages, from the time of the Arian-Athanasian conflict to the rise of the Cathars and Waldensians, to the challenge of the Lollards and Hussites, and finally to the Protestant Reformers.⁹ Many efforts have already been made to come to terms with this amorphous topic, whether we think of the contributions to Fourteenth Biennial St. Louis Symposium on German Literature (1999/2001),¹⁰ the Odense conference proceedings *Text and Voice: the Rhetoric of Authority in*

7 Morrison, *Tradition and Authority* (see note 6). See the contributions to *Reform and Authority in the Medieval and Reformation Church*, ed. Guy Fitch Lytle (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1981); and the contributions to *Negotiating Community and Difference in Medieval Europe: Gender, Power, Patronage, and the Authority of Religion in Latin Christendom*, ed. Katherine Allen Smith and Scott Wells (see note 1). See also the seminal studies by Walter Ullmann, *The Papacy and Political Ideas in the Middle Ages*. Variorum Reprints: Collected Studies Series, CS44 (London: Variorum Reprints, 1976).

8 For recent comments on this large discourse, see the contributions to *Autorität und Wahrheit: Kirchliche Vorstellungen, Normen und Verfahren (13.–15. Jahrhundert)*, ed. Gian Luca Potestà. Schriften des Historischen Kollegs, 84 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012).

9 See, for instance, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages: Selected Sources*, trans. and annotated by Walter L. Wakefield (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Michael Frassetto, *The Great Medieval Heretics: Five Centuries of Religious Dissent* (New York: BlueBridge, 2008). Many of these issues are now nicely addressed by Morimichi Watanabe, *Nicholas of Cusa: A Companion to His Life and His Times*, ed. Gerald Christianson and Thomas M. Izbicki (Farnham, Surrey, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 11–74.

10 *The Construction of Textual: Authority in German Literature of the Medieval and Early Modern Periods*, ed. James F. Poag and Claire Baldwin. University of North Carolina Studies in the Germanic Languages and Literatures, 123 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

the Middle Ages (2004)¹¹ or of those assembled in the volume *Negotiating Community and Difference in Medieval Europe: Gender, Power, Patronage, and the Authority of Religion in Latin Christendom* (2009).¹² Authority is also closely associated with “authorship,” particularly in literature, in theological texts, in philosophy, in the visual arts, and in scientific texts. The further back we look, the less information we get about individual authors or artists, but the issue was, nonetheless, of critical importance, especially with regard to the biblical text. The contributors to *Autorentypen* offered highly insightful explorations of the various types of medieval authors, from clerics to goliards, chroniclers, and mastersingers, city scribes and secular poets, demonstrating how difficult it can be to come to terms with the whole concept of authorship.¹³

Moreover, during the Middle Ages those who still believed in ancient or folkloric wisdom, healing powers, magic, or charms never completely disappeared.¹⁴ Even the Christian Church acknowledged that phenomenon many times, when it allowed syncretism to creep into its own artworks, whether in the form of pictorial apotropaism or playful sculpture (corbels, misericords, gargoyles, capitals, baptismal fonts, etc.).¹⁵ Moreover, early-medieval charms, late-medieval folk customs and rituals, and even the fanciful inclusion of the “green man” or of the “wild man” in medieval art confirm this observation, clearly reflecting the fragile relationship between the dominant Church and the people.¹⁶

We all know of the major conflicts raging throughout the Middle Ages, involving Christians, Muslims, and Jews, and it is not necessary here to

11 *Text and Voice: the Rhetoric of Authority in the Middle Ages*, ed. Marianne Børch (Odense: University Press of South Denmark, 2004).

12 *Negotiating Community and Difference in Medieval Europe: Gender, Power, Patronage, and the Authority of Religion in Latin Christendom*, ed. Katherine Allen Smith and Scott Wells (see note 1).

13 *Autorentypen*, ed. Walter Haug and Burghart Wachinger. *Fortuna vitrea*, 6 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1991). See, especially, the studies by Wachinger, Ursula Peters, Peter Johaneck, Volker Honemann, and Horst Brunner.

14 Irmgard Hampp, *Beschwörung, Segen, Gebet: Untersuchungen zum Zauberspruch aus dem Bereich der Volksheilkunde*. Veröffentlichungen des Staatlichen Amtes für Denkmalpflege Stuttgart, Reihe C: Volkskunde, 1 (Stuttgart: Jäck, 1961); Verena Holzmann, “*Ich beswer dich wurm vnd wyrmin ...*”: *Formen und Typen altdeutscher Zaubersprüche und Segen*. Wiener Arbeiten zur germanischen Altertumskunde und Philologie, 36 (Bern, Berlin, et al.: Peter Lang, 2001); Wolfgang Beck, *Die Merseburger Zaubersprüche*. *Imagines Medii Aevi*, 16 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2003).

15 Wolfgang Ernst, *Beschwörung und Segen: Angewandte Psychotherapie im Mittelalter* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2011).

16 *The Pagan Middle Ages*, ed. Ludo J. R. Milis, trans. Tanis Guest (Woodbridge, Suffolk, et al.: Boydell Press, 1998).

discuss the countless wars among kings, barons, dukes, and other military leaders, all of them vying for authority, influence, control, and wealth. The Hundred Years War between England and France might be one of the best examples, but the *Reconquista* on the Iberian Peninsula also illustrates the fundamental issue at stake here: the fight for absolute authority over lands and the struggle by the Christians against their religious neighbors.¹⁷ The history of the Middle Ages seems to comprise a never-ending series of violent conflicts, especially when it seems that there was not one ruler who could completely rely on the support of all of his people all the time.

Moreover, there was also a very real struggle for authority within the world of philosophers, theologians, medical doctors, artists, and writers, all competing for the greatest influence at their own institutions, in public, and at court. One most impressive example would be the bitter conflict between Peter Abelard (d. 1142) and many of his contemporaries at the various Parisian and other French schools. In short, the exploration of authority at any given time immediately takes us to the core of that culture and illustrates most glaringly where the critical power positions rested, what the central points of disagreement were, who controlled the resources, and who could make his or her voice heard the best.¹⁸

17 Philippe Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, trans. Michael Jones (New York: Blackwell, 1984). See, most recently, David Whetham, *Just Wars and Moral Victories: Surprise, Deception and the Formative Framework of European War in the Later Middle Ages*. History of Warfare, 55 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009); Alessandro Vanoli, *La reconquista*. Universale paperbacks Il mulino, 566 (Milan: Il Mulino, 2009); Juan Antonio Cebrián, *La aventura de la Reconquista: La cruzada del sur* (Madrid: La esfera de los libros, 2009).

18 There is much research on authority in the Middle Ages, representing the wide range of relevant topics; see, for instance, *Discourses of Authority in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Walter Stephens (Hanover, NH, and London: University Press of New England, 1989); Cynthia J. Brown, *Poets, Patrons and Printers: Crisis of Authority in Late Medieval France* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1995); *The Growth of Authority in the Medieval West: Selected Proceedings of the International Conference, Groningen 6–9 November 1997*, ed. Martin Gosman, Arjo Vanderjagt, and Jan Veenstra. Mediaevalia Groningana, 25 (Groningen: E. Forsten, 1999); *The Construction of Textual Authority*, 2001; *Citation and Authority in Medieval and Renaissance Musical Culture: Learning from the Learned*, ed. Suzannah Clark and Elizabeth Eva Leach. Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Music, 4 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005); *Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals*, ed. Noël Adams, John Cherry, and James Robinson. Research Publications, 168 (London: British Museum, 2008). The term “authority” is actually often used in a very general sense for all kinds of literary-historical, historical-sociological studies; see, for instance, the contributions to *Author, Reader, Book: Medieval Authorship in Theory and Practice*, ed. Stephen Patridge and Erik Kwakkel (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

Perhaps surprisingly, the questions touched upon so far appear, *mutatis mutandis*, quite similar to those that we have to face today. After all, authority concerns all human interaction, and, moreover, touches on man's general need for and quest for a divine force, the ultimate limit, and source, of all human existence. Those people who can gain the closest proximity to that source of power—whether priests, ministers, rabbis, or imams—have traditionally enjoyed the highest respect or authority. In this regard not much has changed since the Middle Ages. Aura and charisma have always been of a timeless nature. When kings visited a city, for instance, sick people, believing that a personal encounter with their venerated sovereign might make them well again, crowded around him to experience the power of the *touche royale*.¹⁹ Similar power was attributed, of course, to shrines, altars, relics, and the clergy at large, inspiring thousands of people to go on pilgrimages, often as far as Jerusalem and the Sinai.²⁰

Today, people still throng to see their head of state when she or he appears in public, and the tabloid press plays its own part in creating and sustaining the veneration, if not worship, of outstanding athletes, rock stars, actors, or politicians, as well as ecclesiastics, if only rarely philosophers, authors, or painters. However, charisma can also be easily destroyed or dissipated when external or internal circumstances radically change, as in the case of the (in)famous U.S. golfer Tiger Woods in 2010. Others continue to enjoy lasting fame, if not worship, beyond their death, such as Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, and Michael Jackson.²¹

19 Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France*. Trans. J. E. Anderson (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1973). The phenomenon was still seriously discussed in the late seventeenth century, see John Browne, *Adenochoi-radelogia, or, An anatomick-chirurgical treatse of glandules & strumaes, or Kings-Evil-swellings: together with the royal gift of healing, or cure thereof by contact or imposition of hands, performed for above 640 years by our kings of England, continued with their admirable effects, and miraculous events ...* (London: Tho. Newcomb for Sam. Lowndes, 1684); see also the contributions to *Charisma und religiöse Gemeinschaften im Mittelalter: Akten des 3. Internationalen Kongresses des "Italienisch-deutschen Zentrums für Vergleichende Ordensgeschichte" in Verbindung mit Projekt C "Institutionelle Strukturen religiöser Orden im Mittelalter" und Projekt W "Stadtkultur und Klosterkultur in der mittelalterlichen Lombardei. Institutionelle Wechselwirkung zweier politischer und sozialer Felder" des Sonderforschungsbereichs 537 "Institutionalität und Geschichtlichkeit,"* Dresden, 10.–12. Juni 2004, ed. Giancarlo Andenna. Vita regularis, 26: Abhandlungen (Münster: Lit, 2005).

20 This is impressively documented in the *Encyclopedia of Medieval Pilgrimage*, ed. Larissa J. Taylor, Leigh Ann Craig, et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010).

21 John Potts, *A History of Charisma* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); *Charisma und religiöse Gemeinschaften im Mittelalter* (see note 19).

Whereas in the past religiously minded people went on pilgrimages to sacred shrines, whether Santiago de Compostela, Rome, Jerusalem, or Mecca, today they tend to seek out also (or only) the shrines of deceased pop stars or famous athletes. The more authority an individual enjoys, the more his or her subjects, adherents, fans, or supporters believe in his or her absolute power or source of influence. Even the most rational and non-religious people would have to admit that they are aware of a certain extra-human quality in authority figures, or associated with a specific space. Ultimately, investigating what authority might have meant in the Middle Ages will reveal a critical aspect of the commonly shared cultural framework of that society and culture.²² Basically, we are dealing with a rich and variegated discourse of authority, that is, with competing forces that worked hard to impose their claims on authority and hence to dominate their society.²³ In the world of politics and the conduct of war, authority was of prime importance, affecting both European society internally and the global relationship between Christians and Muslims during the Crusades, not to mention ongoing conflicts with the Jewish population.²⁴

There would be many ways of approaching the topic, and one could draw from an infinity of possible sources to deal with the issue at hand. Dante Alighieri's (ca. 1265–1321) *Divina Commedia* immediately comes to mind, and so also the wide range of courtly romances, from Chrétien de Troyes to Thomas Malory (1405–1471), spanning the time from the late twelfth to the late fifteenth century. By the end of the twelfth century Marie de France

22 C. Stephen Jaeger, *Enchantment: On Charisma in Art, Literature and Film* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), addresses this topic in a highly interdisciplinary fashion, crossing many centuries, and moving freely from the Middle Ages to the postmodern world.

23 See the contributions to *Authority & Community in the Middle Ages*, ed. Donald Mowbray, Rhiannon Purdie, and Ian P. Wei (Stroud: Sutton, 1999); to *Aspects of Power and Authority in the Middle Ages*, ed. Brenda Bolton and Christine Meek. *International Medieval Research*, 14 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007); and to *Authority and Subjugation in Writing of Medieval Wales*, ed. Ruth I. Kennedy and Simon Meecham-Jones. *The New Middle Ages* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

24 Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Dissent and Order in the Middle Ages: The Search for Legitimate Authority*. *Twayne's Studies in Intellectual and Cultural History*, 3 (New York: Twayne Publishers; New York and London: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992); Christopher Hatch MacEvitt, *The Crusades and the Christian World of the East: Rough Tolerance*. *The Middle Ages Series* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); see also the contributions to *La notion d'autorité au Moyen Age: Islam, Byzance, Occident: Colloques internationaux de La Napoule, session des 23–26 octobre 1978*, organized by George Maddisi, Dominique Sourdél, and Janine Sourdél-Thomine (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1982).

(1145–1198) operated powerfully with claims on authority of her own, later followed by Christine de Pizan (1363–ca. 1430) in the early fifteenth century, fighting back against the pervasive misogyny of her time, thus placing her own authority in contrast to that which her male predecessors had enjoyed for far too long. We could also turn our attention to intellectual giants such as Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) or Albertus Magnus (d. 1280), and yet we would not reach any final understanding of authority in the Middle Ages, because there was no agreement on who held the highest rank at that time, excepting only God, of course. Once again, we are dealing with a complex discourse of competing participants, and cannot simply compare one category with another.

For the purpose of these introductory remarks, to discuss what authority could have meant in the high Middle Ages, I will focus on just two major texts from very different backgrounds, Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival* (ca. 1205) and Saint Hildegard of Bingen's (1098–1179) *Scivias*, along with her letters to various individuals. In my own contribution to the present volume I will add a further perspective by studying immensely important and influential texts from the late Middle Ages, Marco Polo's *Travels* (ca. 1300) and John Mandeville's *Travels* (ca. 1340–1360). Altogether I hope to establish a solid framework for the larger issue at hand, bringing together a group of voices that have never been heard together in the context of "authority."

Whereas the first two referred to above sought out their authority mostly within the divine sphere, the other two operated energetically to place themselves in the center of their own writings, regularly insisting on the eye-witness quality of their accounts. What we are encountering here are four different models of authority, two older and two younger, each of them representing, despite numerous similarities, very different individual literary genres and approaches to the critical question at hand.

Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*

Wolfram von Eschenbach's literary fame rests on his *Parzival* (ca. 1205) and his *Wilhelm*, apart from a fragmentary *Titirel* and some dawn songs.²⁵ The literary work by this highly respected Middle High German poet (d. ca. 1220) has been studied from a myriad of perspectives, and so also has his use of sources,

²⁵ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*. Nach der Ausgabe Karl Lachmanns revidiert und kommentiert von Eberhard Nellmann. Übertragen von Dieter Kühn. Bibliothek des Mittelalters, 8/1 and 2 (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994). The commentary by Nellmann proves to be extraordinarily helpful.

which still proves to be somewhat unfathomable.²⁶ Here, however, we have an ideal opportunity to explore a significant approach to authority by a writer who knows how much he is indebted to the literary tradition and yet is fully intent on going his own way, drawing a wide range of registers and deliberately confounding anyone who might want to get on his trail. After all, Wolfram, closely following the model set up by the French poet Chrétien de Troyes in his *Perceval* (ca. 1170–1190), presents the life of the young man Parzival, who is destined to assume the throne of the Grail kingdom. At first he fails in his quest and he subsequently undergoes a long series of trials and tribulations, but ultimately he learns his lesson and is then prepared to ask a crucial question addressed to his ailing uncle Anfortas, who is thus healed and can release the throne to his nephew. The central motif in his *Titarel* consists of an ominous text written on a long dog's leash by means of gems studded into the fabric, which the female protagonist Sigune reads but then loses because the dog runs away—a motif that has no parallels in world literature.²⁷

In his *Parzival* Wolfram tells the story of the Grail and how the young hero Parzival slowly develops the mental and spiritual maturity required to take over the role of king from the ailing Anfortas. But Wolfram's genius was not to be content with this single-strand motif, and instead to create an enormously rich tapestry of narrative elements that criss-cross and interact with each other, combining worldly with spiritual, courtly with religious features in a most fascinating and far-reaching manner. But like all medieval writers, Wolfram was most hesitant to claim originality, although it was certainly there in his later *Titarel*; instead, he tried hard at numerous points, as most other medieval authors tended to do, to refer his readers/listeners to his sources, and in this process

26 For a convenient introduction in English, with solid bibliographies of the primary and secondary material, see Marianne Wynn, "Wolfram von Eschenbach," *German Writers and Works of the High Middle Ages: 1170–1280*, ed. James Hardin and Will Hasty. Dictionary of Literary Biography, 138 (Detroit, Washington, DC, and London: Gale Research, 1994), 185–206. Wolfram's use of Chrétien and other sources was studied as early as 1936, see Bodo Mergell, *Wolfram von Eschenbach und seine französischen Quellen*. 2 vols. Forschungen zur deutschen Sprache und Dichtung (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1936).

27 Albrecht Classen, *Utopie und Logos: Vier Studien zu Wolframs von Eschenbach*. Beiträge zur älteren Literaturgeschichte (Heidelberg: Winter, 1990); Robert Braunagel, *Wolframs Sigune: Eine vergleichende Betrachtung der Sigune-Figur und ihrer Ausarbeitung im "Parzival" und "Titarel" des Wolfram von Eschenbach*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 662 (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1999); Alexander Sager, *Minne von maeren: On Wolfram's "Titarel."* Transatlantische Studien zu Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit, 2 (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2006). Oddly, despite the wide availability of these studies in relevant research libraries, modern Wolfram scholarship has mostly ignored them, ironically trying to establish its own authority in this regard.

might even have made up one of the most unusual sources of the entire Middle Ages.²⁸

Assuring his audience that his narrative epic was based on reliable sources played a significant role in his efforts to gain an authoritative voice. Much ink has been spilled over the last two hundred years to determine whom Wolfram really had in mind, whether it was Chrétien de Troyes, or the mysterious Kyot. Some scholars have also pointed out that he might have been principally influenced by Guiot de Provins, but no consensus has ever been reached, nor does it seem meaningful to pursue that question any further.²⁹ There are a range of likely Oriental sources, Latin texts, and some French, apart from Chrétien's poems. Chrétien, curiously enough, is mentioned only once by name (827, 1–2), and then even dismissed as an unreliable source, whereas the true authority for the original account about the Grail was supposed to be the above-mentioned Kyot (827, 4), whom he identifies as a Provençal, a converted Jew.³⁰ Wolfram mentions him repeatedly in *Parzival* (416, 20 ff., 431, 2; 453, 1 ff., 827, 1 ff.), placing considerable importance on this figure, although verification of his existence has proved (so far) to be impossible.³¹ However we try to approach the Kyot issue, it will remain an almost unsolvable crux

28 D. H. Green, "Oral Poetry and Written Composition: An Aspect of the Feud Between Gottfried and Wolfram," D. H. Green and L. Peter Johnson, *Approaches to Wolfram von Eschenbach: Five Essays*. Mikrokosmos, 5 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1978), 163–264; here 170–73; Christopher Young, *Narrativische Perspektiven in Wolframs "Willehalm": Figuren, Erzähler, Sinngangsprozess*. Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literaturgeschichte, 104 (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2000), 122–36. He concludes, addressing *Willehalm* only, but it certainly also applies to *Parzival*, 128: "Durch die ironische Umformuierung verschiedener Topoi zum Thema Wissen und Nicht-Wissen sowie Erzählen-Können und Nicht-Erzählen-Können tritt die Figur des Erzählers hervor, die ihre alleinige Kontrolle über den Gang und die Art des Erzählens immer eindringlicher behauptet."

29 Jochen Bertheau, *Wolframs von Eschenbach Parzival [sic] und seine französischen Vorlagen: Neue Funde zum Kyot-Problem*. Mannheimer Studien zur Linguistik, Mediävistik und Balkanologie, 17 (Frankfurt a. M.: Haag + Herchen, 2004), offers a rather strange argumentation, extensively reviewing older scholarship, drawing many spurious inferences, and suggesting, ultimately, that Guiot de Provins influenced Wolfram deeply.

30 See, for instance, Carl Lofmark, "Wolfram's Source References in 'Parzival,'" *Modern Language Review* 67 (1972): 820–44; id., "Zur Interpretation der Kyotstellen im 'Parzival,'" *Wolfram-Studien* 4 (1977): 33–70; Rüdiger Schütz, "Die Echos der Verschwiegenheit: Ein semiotischer Zugang zum Kyotproblem in Wolframs von Eschenbach Parzival," *Osnabrücker Beiträge zur Sprachtheorie* 42 (1990): 168–85.

31 Joachim Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*. 8th rev. ed. Sammlung Metzler, 36 (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 2004), 244–47. See also Ulrich Ernst, "Kyot und Flegitanis in Wolframs Parzival: Fiktionaler Fundbericht und jüdisch-arabischer Kulturhintergrund," *Wirkendes Wort* 35 (1985): 176–95; Herbert Kolb, "Guido militiae Templi magister," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen* 223 (1986): 337–44.

insofar as the perhaps only playful allusion to Kyot belongs to the heart of Wolfram's literary enterprise predicated on deliberately mystifying references. But what would we truly gain by tracing this enigmatic reference back to an actual Provençal or French author?

Granted, there would be some value in comparing Wolfram's *Parzival* with such an important source. Scholarship has generally argued that Wolfram tried to hide his dependence on Chrétien through the Kyot mask and/or that he aimed to appease his audience's possible concerns regarding the veracity and probability of his text. We could also imagine that Wolfram deliberately played a literary game here and hoped that his audience would recognize the artificiality of a source that bordered on the ridiculous. Joachim Bumke goes so far as to suggest that the play with Kyot as a source belongs to the fictional fabric of *Parzival* and correlates the poet's own struggle to learn the truth about his life with his protagonist's endeavors to find the Grail.³² Overall, however, at present the only reasonable perspective we can pursue would be to investigate how Wolfram played with and achieved authority by means of citing Kyot.³³ Kevin Brownlee and Walter Stephens rightly emphasize in this regard, "the Text presupposes an ongoing, unfinished *working* of language in which, since reading and writing are inseparable, the reader's interpretation cannot be completely subordinated to or determined by the Author's intentions."³⁴ In other words, the search for sources achieves only so much, and if pursued too far, loses sight of the authority of the text itself.

Shortly before we hear of Kyot the first time, the narrator indicates how much he desires to gain recognition for his work.³⁵ But then Wolfram introduces the elusive man from Provence, whom he identifies as a sorcerer, "Kyôt la schantiure,"³⁶ whose art as a writer quite apart from his necromantic skills, helps many people to gain joy and insight.³⁷ In other words, Kyot stands out as a uniquely empowered individual who commands access to secret knowledge of the greatest importance. The account of *Parzival* used by Kyot was originally written in Arabic ("heidensch," 416, 27) and then

32 Bumke, *Wolfram von Eschenbach* (see note 31), 247.

33 Gertrud Grünkorn, *Die Fiktionalität des höfischen Romans um 1200*. Philologische Studien und Quellen, 129 (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1994).

34 Kevin Brownlee and Walter Stephens, "Introduction," *Discourses of Authority in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. Kevin Brownlee and Walter Stephens (Hanover, NH, and London: University Press of New England, 1989), 1–19; here 2.

35 Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, ed. Lachmann and Nellmann (see note 25), 416, 1.

36 "Kyôt laschantiure hiez," Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, ed. Lachmann and Nellmann (see note 25), 416, 21. All the translations from the German are mine.

37 Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, ed. Lachmann and Nellmann (see note 25), 416, 23–24.

translated into French (not Provençal, i.e., Occitan!). Wolfram emphasizes that he could read that version, thereby claiming the status of a linguistic authority.³⁸ However, he does not simply operate as a translator; instead he indicates that he had personal contacts with Kyot and seems to have discussed the text with him: “Kyot asked me to keep it a secret.”³⁹

Apparently, as we learn, the story of the Grail represents a secret of the greatest importance that should not be divulged so easily to ordinary people. Yet, despite the shroud of a sacrosanct account Wolfram knows only too well that it needs to be divulged, precisely because of its fundamental importance for all people: “one has to speak about it.”⁴⁰ In order to underscore the extraordinary relevance, the narrator mentions that Kyot discovered the text in a Toledo archive or library, written in Arabic,⁴¹ which he then had translated into French. But *Parzival*, or the story of the Grail, is not simply an entertaining account; instead it carries religious importance, because only a true Christian would be able to gain a grasp of its meaning. We may assume that Kyot used to be a Jew, since he had converted to Christianity, “it helped that he had been baptized; otherwise we would not have learned anything about this story.”⁴² Wolfram acknowledges the central part Arabic culture played in the discovery of this report about the Grail, but he also affirms, in the same breath, “no heathen cunning could have been of use to learn about the nature of the Grail.”⁴³

Only then do we learn about the origin of Kyot’s text, which he had found in Toledo—he had not written it himself, he had merely translated it, serving as a mediator of arcane knowledge! The true discoverer of the Grail had been the Syrian Flegetânîs, a descendent of King Solomon, and hence a member of the Jewish faith: “originated from the Israelite tribe.”⁴⁴ Wolfram leaves us in no doubt as to his contempt for those who adhere to the old, pre-Christian faith, insofar as baptism created the only safeguard, or shield, against the horrors of

³⁸ Ibid., 416, 28–29.

³⁹ “Mich batez helen Kyôt,” Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, ed. Lachmann and Nellmann (see note 25), 453, 5.

⁴⁰ “Daz man dervon doch sprechen muoz,” Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, ed. Lachmann and Nellmann (see note 25), 453, 10.

⁴¹ Ibid., 453, 11–19.

⁴² “Ez half daz im der touf was bî: / anders wær diz mæer noch unvernumn,” Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, ed. Lachmann and Nellmann (see note 25), 453, 18–19.

⁴³ “Kein heidensch list möht uns gefrumn / ze künden umbes grâles art,” Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, ed. Lachmann and Nellmann (see note 25), 453, 20–21.

⁴⁴ “Ûz israhêlscher sippe erzilt,” Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, ed. Lachmann and Nellmann (see note 25), 453, 27.

Hell.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Flegetânîs had been privileged, to the great surprise of the narrator, to learn the greatest secrets in the stars. Here we finally learn the origin of the Grail myth: “he said that there was such a thing as the Grail. He read of its name without doubt in the stars. A bevy of angels brought it down to earth.”⁴⁶

The narrator subsequently comments that Flegetânîs wrote about this miracle, which later must have become known through obscure channels, but only in fragments, since Kyot then began to search for the original story.⁴⁷ At first he was not successful, although he rummaged through many chronicles in Britain, France and Ireland. Only in Anjou—an imaginary Wolframian kingdom—did he finally come across the original story, almost in the same way that Joseph Smith had received the *Book of Mormon* as a gift from angels in the early nineteenth century, and then published it in 1830.⁴⁸ Of course, all this proves to be a fictional strategy, which allows Wolfram to reconnect everything to his protagonist Parzival, and so he can finally return to his own account.⁴⁹ Can we therefore claim that Wolfram used Kyot only as a thinly veiled stand-in for himself, the most learned and highly authorized author?

In the last reference to Kyot, Wolfram re-emphasizes how much the master from Provence can be credited with having sent the true story to Germany, like a religious missive of the highest authority: “the true story has been sent.”⁵⁰ This then brings about, as he points out, the end of the “âventiur” (827, 11), which could mean both “the romance” as well as “the adventure,” or more properly, the quest itself. After all, the narrator announces himself: “I do no longer want to talk about,”⁵¹ because everything has been said about

⁴⁵ Ibid., 453, 28–29.

⁴⁶ “Er jach, ez hiez ein dinc der grâl: / des namen las er sunder twâl / inme gestirne, wie der hiez. / ein schar in ûf der erden liez,” Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, ed. Lachmann and Nellmann (see note 25), 453, 28.

⁴⁷ “Diz mære begunde suochen,” ibid., 455, 2.

⁴⁸ Albrecht Classen, “Reading, Writing, and Learning in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival*,” *A Companion to Wolfram’s Parzival*, ed. Will Hasty. Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1999), 189–202. In that study I reach the following conclusion, which I would like to repeat here for obvious reasons, 201: “True readers are the only ones who can, according to Wolfram, reach the grail, achieve salvation” For the *Book of Mormon*, see:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Mormon (last accessed on June 18, 2012).

⁴⁹ Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, ed. Lachmann and Nellmann (see note 25), 455, 23ff.

⁵⁰ “Diu rehten mære uns sint gesant,” ibid., 827, 10.

⁵¹ “Riht mêt dâ von nu sprechen wil,” ibid., 827, 12.

Parzival's life and the miracle has been achieved in him to combine both God's grace and worldly honor.⁵²

Wolfram places Kyot ahead of him, but he really speaks through him and thus assumes highest authority himself because his romance of Parzival and the Grail illuminates the fundamental path all human beings should take. Wolfram speaks with the voice of a priest, or rather, as one of the *vates*, endowed with prophetic, divine knowledge, imbued with arcane knowledge, learned through his personal contacts with Kyot's work, and through him with the text which the Syrian Flegetânîs had discovered in the stars, the greatest mystery of all mankind.

Ultimately, Wolfram claims that there is meaning in life, that Parzival has found the path toward that goal, and that the literary representation of that quest constitutes the fulfillment of the ancient dream of mankind. Although Wolfram does not resort to a clerical discourse, he certainly assumes the posture of one who speaks *ex cathedra*. Both Kyot and Flegetânîs, but not Chrétien, support his authority in this matter.⁵³ Carl Lofmark already recognized the crucial function of the Kyot reference, enabling Wolfram to express his pride in his accomplishment with this romance.⁵⁴ Here we can take one further step and recognize Kyot as the literary catalyst for Wolfram to establish the highest possible authority a lay writer could claim in the Middle Ages.⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid., 827, 21–24.

⁵³ Cf. Young, *Narrativeische Perspektiven* (see note 28), 185–87, examines the question of how Wolfram handled the role of the narrator in the *Willehalm*, and observes, quite insightfully, 186: “Diese Instanz [of the author/narrator] manipuliert verschiedene Topoi der Buchgelehrsamkeit und der historiographie, um ihre eigene Subjektivität zu entfalten. Diese Subjektivität ist zwar ohne die Erfindung der Fiktionalität nicht denkbar, bedeutet aber nicht, daß Wolfram sein Werk als fiktional verstanden wissen wollte. Vielmehr dient diese ‘fiktionale’ Subjektivität der Erzählerinstanz dazu, den Erzähler eine Stimme finden zu lassen, die denen der Figuren gewachsen ist.” We can apply this to our topic and add that Wolfram does not only establish most self-consciously his own subjectivity, but also his supreme authority as a *magister ludi*, as the one who understands, through Parzival, how to find the Grail, the goal of all life.

⁵⁴ Lofmark, “Zur Interpretation der Kyotstellen” (see note 30), 69.

⁵⁵ Albrecht Classen, “Noch einmal zu Wolframs ‘spekulativer’ Kyô Quelle im Licht jüdischer Kultur und Philosophie des zwölften Jahrhunderts,” *Studi medievali* Ser. 3. 46.1 (2005): 281–308.

Hildegard of Bingen

Much has already been said about the extraordinary work of the German mystic Saint Hildegard of Bingen, so here we can limit ourselves to a few remarks that will highlight the unique and yet powerful approach to authority assumed by this most remarkable twelfth-century female intellectual and mystic. The way medieval women—sometimes also men—reached out to the Godhead or, rather, were overwhelmed by His approach to them, reveals a variety of strategies. While Margery Kempe (ca. 1373–ca. 1440) resorted mostly to crying in an excessive, but also moving, way to convey her religious sentiments and experiences in her more or less autobiographical *Book*,⁵⁶ Hildegard relied heavily on classical epistolary writings, learned treatises, and visionary revelations, all in Latin, and so resorted to intimate components of the learned canon. Despite the enormous discrepancy between these two women, we must not ignore the enormous impact which Margery's crying had on her environment. In fact, her seemingly endless flow of tears provided her with an astounding source of authority, as vexing as it obviously was for her social environment.⁵⁷ Hildegard began her career as a nine-year old recluse at the Disibodenberg convent south of Mainz, Germany, but in 1147/1150 she left that institution and founded her own monastery on the Rupertusberg near Bingen, and in 1165 a daughter convent in Eibingen nearby. Not only did she write many important theological tracts and medical, gynecological treatises, hymns, and other texts, but, most importantly, also reflected at great length on her mystical visions, especially in her *Scivias* (Know Thy Ways).

Mystics often employed letters to communicate with the outside world about their spiritual experiences, other examples being Bridget of Sweden (1303–1373) and Catherine of Siena (1347–1380). Curiously, although representatives of a marginal vocation, these mystics all seemed to have taken an important place in medieval society; by means of their religious visions they successfully transcended their traditional gender limits and were able to leave their social constraints behind.

Hildegard knew exceedingly well how to utilize the epistolary genre to establish her own authority, drawing on traditional humility topoi, resorting to a wide arrange of learned strategies in composing her letters, and deliberately reconfirming her male addressees' authority, thus intriguingly creating a space

⁵⁶ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. B. A. Windeatt (London: Penguin, 1985).

⁵⁷ Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*. Studies in Medieval Mysticism (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004).

for herself. In her letter of 1146 to Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 – 1153), for instance, she skillfully blends profound expressions of admiration for his worldly honor and religious esteem: “you are held wonderfully in high honor by the power of God. You are a terror to the unlawful foolishness of the world; you burn in the love of God’s son; you are eager to win men for the banner of the Holy Cross to fight wars in the Christian army against the fury of the pagans.”⁵⁸ But then she immediately turns to her own concern and formulates her question regarding how to explain and interpret a vision that she had had.

She knows it was neither an illusion nor something she might have seen with her physical eyes. Instead she is completely sure of its nature, and confirms this without any hesitation, “I who am miserable and more than miserable in my womanly existence have seen great wonders since I was a child. And my tongue could not express them, if God’s Spirit did not teach me to believe.”⁵⁹ Hildegard submits herself to Bernard’s authority, especially, as she says, because she is nothing but a modest woman, unworthy, or so it seems at first, to be privy to God’s divine grace. But then she comes forth with her boldest possible claim, promulgating that she had been privileged by God to understand the Holy Scripture through her vision: “For in the text I know the inner meaning of the exposition of the Psalter and the Gospel and other books shown to me in this vision, which touches my heart and soul like a consuming fire, teaching me these profundities of exposition.”⁶⁰

Hildegard clearly recognizes what behooves her in Bernard’s eyes, and she plays with his male expectations almost coquettishly, admitting: “I am a person ignorant of all teaching in external matters,” yet then adds, most curiously: “I

58 For the English translation, see *Hildegard of Bingen, Selected Writings*. Trans. with an introd. and notes by Mark Atherton (London: Penguin, 2001), 3. For the Latin original, see Hildegardis Bingensis, *Epistolarivm*, ed. L. van Acker. 2 vols. *Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Medaevalis* 91 and 91 A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991): “qui mirabiliter in magnis honoribus uirtutis Dei ualde metuendus es illicite stultitie huius mundi, uexillo sancte crucis cum excelso studio in ardenti amore Filii Dei capiens homines ad bella pugnanda in christiana militia contra paganorum seuitiam.”

59 *Hildegard of Bingen, Selected Writings*, trans. Atherton (see note 58), 3; Hildegardis Bingensis, *Epistolarivm*, ed. van Acker (see note 58): “Ego, misera et plus quam misera in nomine femineo, ab infantia mea uidi magna mirabilia, que lingua mea non potest proferre, nisi quod me docuit Spiritus Dei, ut credam.”

60 *Hildegard of Bingen, Selected Writings*, trans. Atherton (see note 58), 4; Hildegardis Bingensis, *Epistolarivm*, ed. van Acker (see note 58), 4: “Scio enim in textu interiorum intelligentiam expositionis Psalterii et Euangelii et aliorum uoluminum, que monstrantur mihi de hac uisione, que tangit pectus meum et animam sicut flamma comburens, docens me hec profunda expositionis.”

am taught inwardly, in my soul. Therefore I speak as one in doubt.”⁶¹ Knowing exceedingly well that she, as a female mystic, would never be able to establish her own authority in the patriarchal society of her world, she appeals to Bernard: “I want you to reassure me, and then I will be certain!”⁶² She explicitly defers to his authority, asking him to decide whether she should speak out in public about her visions or not. Nevertheless, she is completely self-assured that these visions represent a “gift” which might empower her to overcome the root problem of all people, who are trapped in their material natures. Now, because of the vision, she perceives the unique chance to cast her own human limitations aside and to gain freedom, being lifted up by the Godhead Himself: “But now I raise myself up, I run to you, I speak to you.”⁶³ Without undermining or threatening Bernard, she subtly begins to claim her own authority and outlines how much power has been granted to her through that vision.

If we wonder where she might have drawn her strength to argue so powerfully regarding her newfound spiritual authority, we only need to turn to some sections in her *Scivias*, where she explains: “And I, a human being, neither ablaze with the strength of strong lions nor learned in their exhalations, remaining in the fragility of the weaker rib, but filled with mystical inspiration, saw: a shining fire, unfathomable, inextinguishable, fully alive and existing full of life.”⁶⁴ When she tried to learn more about the nature of her vision, she was instructed by a voice: “Of this mystery you may not see any more than is granted you through the miracle of belief.”⁶⁵ Knowing only too well how the male authorities in the Church would vehemently oppose her as God’s mouthpiece, she strategically positions herself over and over again as the weak woman dependent on

61 Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Writings*, trans. Atherton (see note 58), 4; Hildegardis Bingensis, *Epistolarivm*, ed. van Acker (see note 58), 4: “... quia homo sum indocta de ulla magistratione cum exteriori material ... sed intus in anima mea sum docta. Vnde loquor quasi dubit.”

62 Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Writings*, trans. Atherton (see note 58), 4; Hildegardis Bingensis, *Epistolarivm*, ed. van Acker (see note 58), 4: “Volo ... ut me consoleris, et certa ero.”

63 Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Writings*, trans. Atherton (see note 58), 4; Hildegardis Bingensis, *Epistolarivm*, ed. van Acker (see note 58), 5: “Nunc autem surgens curro ad te. Ego dico tibi.”

64 Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Writings*, trans. Atherton (see note 58), 9; Hildegardis Scivias, ed. Adelgundis Führkötter in collaboration with Angela Carlevaris. *Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis*, 43 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1978), 110: “Et Ego homo non calens in forma fortium leonum nec docta exspiratione illorum, sed manens in mollitie fragilis costae imbuta mystico spiramine, uidi quasi lucidissimum ignem in comprehensibilem, inexistinguibilem, totum uiuentem, totumque uitam existentem.”

65 Hildegard of Bingen, *Selected Writings*, trans. Atherton (see note 58), 10; Hildegardis Scivias, ed. Führkötter (see note 64), 111: “De hoc mysterio nonpoteris quidquam amplius uidere nisi ut tibi propter miraculum credendi conceditur.”

the help of the male learned clerics in order to comprehend what has happened to her. In fact, even the mystical voice resorts to that strategy: “Insignificant earthly creature! Though as a woman you are uneducated in any doctrine of fleshly teachers in order to read writings with the understanding of the philosophers, nevertheless you are touched by my light, which touches your inner being with fire like the burning sun.”⁶⁶ Having taken the metaphorical wind out of the sails of possible male detractors, Hildegard then quotes the voice as saying: “Do not be afraid, but tell the mysteries as you understand them in the spirit, as I speak them through you. May they be ashamed who should be showing righteousness to my people.”⁶⁷

Removing any doubt as to the meaning of the vision here, she relates the further words: “The ‘shining fire’ which you see represents the omnipotent living God, whose light-filled brightness is never obscured by any evil. He remains ‘unfathomable’, because he cannot be divided by any divisions, and he is without beginning or end, not to be comprehended by any glimmer of creaturely knowledge.”⁶⁸ This proves to be an amazing swipe at all male theologians, who endeavor with all their strength and intellect to grasp the meaning of God, without knowing that they are attempting the impossible because of the very nature of God. Hildegard, on the other hand, is graced with this extraordinary understanding—not knowledge!—through the vision, which actually grants her the highest possible authority on earth, superseding all members of the clergy, including the pope. As Hildegard insists, through the mystical vision, all people share the divine nature of the Godhead, but most people have forgotten this essential secret: “Human creature! You are a wholeness in every

⁶⁶ *Hildegard of Bingen, Selected Writings*, trans. Atherton (see note 58), 10–11; *Hildegardis Scivias*, ed. Führkötter (see note 64), 111: “O quae es misera terra et in nomine femineo indocta de ulla doctrina carnalium magistrorum, scilicet legere litteras per intellegentiam philosophorum, sed tantum tacta lumine meo, quod tangit te interius cum incendio ut ardens sol.”

⁶⁷ *Hildegard of Bingen, Selected Writings*, trans. Atherton (see note 58), 11; *Hildegardis Scivias*, ed. Führkötter (see note 64), 112: “Noli ergo esse timida, sed dic ea quae intellegis in spiritu, quemadmodum ea loquor per te, quatenus illi uerecundiam habeant.”

⁶⁸ *Hildegard of Bingen, Selected Writings*, trans. Atherton (see note 58), 11; *Hildegardis Scivias*, ed. Führkötter (see note 64), 112: “Nam ille lucidissimus ignis quem uides designat omnipotentem et uiuentem Deum, qui in clarissima serenitate sua numquam ulla iniquitate offuscatus est, incomprehensibilis manens; quia nulla diuisione potest diuidi, aut initio aut fine, aut ulla scintilla scientiae creaturae suae comprehendendi sicuti est.”