

Repairing the loss of the past: the use of written, oral and physical evidence in the *Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis (c.1113–42)*

Charles C. Rozier

Durham University

Abstract

This article examines attitudes to sources in the *Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis (c.1113–42). It is argued that as an experienced student of writing history, Orderic had learned to privilege written accounts over oral sources when dealing with the distant past. It is demonstrated that when a shortage of written accounts forced him to draw on longstanding oral traditions for events up to 500 years before his own time, Orderic introduced these accounts with discomfort, and sought to evaluate what he had heard with analogous written sources and physical (archaeological) remains. Orderic's discourses on the nature, use and limitations of his sources are used to build a picture of how much Orderic felt it was possible to know about the past, how he attempted to reconcile the gaps in what could be known and, ultimately, how he imagined his role as historian.

The surviving works of Orderic Vitalis (1075–1142) provide modern readers with a unique insight into the philosophy of history during the European middle ages.¹ Born in 1075 at Atcham in Shropshire, Orderic travelled to Normandy to become an oblate monk at the monastery of Saint-Évroul-Nôtre-Dame-du-Bois in 1085.² There he remained until his death in c.1142, partaking in the devotional life of a Benedictine monk, and expressing himself intellectually as a student of theology, biblical exegesis, poetry, music and, most of all, history. Orderic began writing about the past in the ten-nineties, probably by adding short entries into the annals of Saint-Évroult (now Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS. Latin 10062, fols. 138–161v).³ Around the same time, he copied the whole of an existing work, the *Deeds of the Norman Dukes* by

* Versions of this article were delivered at the Swansea University History Department Seminar and the Aberystwyth Department of History and Welsh History Research Seminar. Research was carried out at Swansea University, via a College of Arts and Humanities-funded grant for manuscript and fieldwork research in Normandy. The author would like to thank the attendees for their feedback, and also Simon John, Peter Lambert, Daniel Power, Daniel Roach, Anne-Sophie Vigot and Björn Weiler for their guidance and advice. Any errors are the author's own.

¹ For Orderic's life and works, see M. Chibnall, 'General introduction', in *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis* (hereafter *Ecclesiastical History*), ed. M. Chibnall (6 vols., Oxford, 1969–80), i. 1–128; D. Roach and C. C. Rozier, 'Interpreting Orderic Vitalis', in *Orderic Vitalis: Life, Works and Interpretations*, ed. C. C. Rozier and others (Woodbridge, 2016), pp. 1–15.

² On Orderic's family and childhood, see 'E. van Houts, 'Orderic and his father, Odelarius', in *Orderic Vitalis: Life, Works and Interpretations*, pp. 17–36.

³ For Orderic's entries, see J. Weston and C. C. Rozier, 'Descriptive catalogue of manuscripts featuring the hand of Orderic Vitalis', in *Orderic Vitalis: Life, Works and Interpretations*, pp. 385–98, at pp. 391–2.

William of Jumièges (d. after 1070), making numerous additions to William's text (now Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale, MS. 1174 (Y.14)) according to his own personal interests.⁴ Shortly after completing this work in c.1113, Orderic began writing his *Ecclesiastical History*, for which he is now best known, and which provides the basis of the discussion which follows.⁵ The *Historia* was originally written by Orderic across four manuscripts. Three now survive in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MSS. Latin 5506 I and II and 10913, while the contents of the lost fourth volume are preserved in Rome, Vatican Library MS. Reginensis Latina 703B. Comprising thirteen books in its final form and six volumes in Marjorie Chibnall's edition for Oxford Medieval Texts, Orderic's *Ecclesiastical History* is one of the most important sources for the study of society, politics and culture in England and Normandy during the period c.1050–1140.

Orderic's tendency to comment on the process of historical research and the purposes towards which he wrote ensure that his works have attracted significant attention within academic discussions on the development of historical writing in the medieval west. The first modern edition was completed by Auguste le Prévost and Léopold Delisle between 1838 and 1855, and included a lengthy introductory commentary on Orderic's sources, models and methods, which praised the narrative imagination of Orderic's work and his exhaustive approach.⁶ Similarly, Chibnall's twentieth-century edition (1968–80) included comprehensive commentary on Orderic's historiographical methods and sources, and praise for Orderic's 'careful and thorough reading, pondering and analysing'.⁷ Antonia Gransden's great survey of English historical writing provided a shorter summary of these same topics, asserting that Orderic was 'very learned', and 'well read in the literary sources of history' and praised Orderic for his 'concept of history' and 'breadth of vision' in comparison to other contemporary authors.⁸ Other surveys of medieval historiography by Bernard Guenée and Matthew Kempshall drew on Orderic's works for numerous illustrative examples in the development of the medieval genre.⁹ More recent studies of Orderic's life and works have continued to place great emphasis on the analysis of his methods and aims in the writing of the past.¹⁰

The prevailing discussions of Orderic's historiography have focused a great deal of attention on identifying his sources and evaluating his treatment of reliable or unreliable evidence. Chibnall's edition of the *Ecclesiastical History* identified over 100 literary sources and numerous additional documentary records, including property transfers, ecclesiastical councils and letters.¹¹ Chibnall also wrote at length on Orderic's use of oral testimony,

⁴ On Orderic's additions, see *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni*, ed. and trans. E. van Houts (2 vols., Oxford, 1992–5) (hereafter *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*), i, pp. lxxviii–lxxix.

⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*.

⁶ *Orderici Vitalis Ecclesiasticae Historiae Libri Tredecim*, ed. and trans. A. le Prévost (5 vols., Paris, 1838–55), v, pp. lv–lvii. For Delisle's introduction, see pp. i–cvi.

⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, i, 1–128, at p. 48. See also M. Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis* (Woodbridge, 1984).

⁸ A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England* (2 vols., 1974–82), i, 151–65, at p. 160.

⁹ B. Guenée, *Histoire et culture historique dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris, 1980); M. Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History, 400–1500* (Manchester, 2011).

¹⁰ *Orderic Vitalis: Life, Works and Interpretations*. See also A. J. Hingst, *The Written World: Past and Place in the Work of Orderic Vitalis* (Notre Dame, Ind., 2009); L. V. Hicks, 'Monastic authority and the landscape in the *Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis', in *Authority and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Chronicles*, ed. J. Dresvina and N. Sparks (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 102–20; D. Roach, 'The material and the visual: objects and memories in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Orderic Vitalis', *Haskins Society Jour.*, xxiv (2013), 63–78; D. Roach, 'Orderic Vitalis and the first crusade', *Jour. Medieval Hist.*, xlii (2016), 1–25.

¹¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, i, 48–77, 217–21.

and his ability to access eyewitness informants by drawing on Saint-Évroul's networks of secular patronage.¹² More recently, Roach has shown some of the ways in which Orderic used material objects as sources for his narrative,¹³ while Amanda Jane Hingst and Leonie Hicks have provided similar insights into Orderic's use of monuments and features in the landscape.¹⁴

These discussions within Orderic scholarship mirror the broader concerns of modern scholars in their analysis of how medieval historians categorized and evaluated the range of sources available for their work, including various forms of written, oral and material evidence.¹⁵ There is a consensus within this discussion that medieval authors privileged eyewitness evidence over written accounts, particularly in the writing of recent events. Peter Damian-Grint has argued that information derived from written sources was 'officially regarded by medieval authors as extremely weak', and that this engendered an 'attitude of doubting the authority of the written word'.¹⁶ Similarly, Elisabeth van Houts and Chris Given-Wilson have cited numerous medieval authors in order to highlight the value placed on eyewitness testimony.¹⁷ Crucially for this discussion, however, Van Houts has acknowledged that there were limits to the durability of what she termed the 'chain of informants'. She argued that the reliability of oral history was open to question after three to four generations (or between ninety and 120 years) after the events described, which in turn may be explained by the importance of being able to know and therefore judge the reliability of the primary witness.¹⁸ As argued by Björn Weiler in relation to written and oral sources: 'The further back in time an author had to go, the more fragmentary the information at his disposal'.¹⁹

The discussion which follows argues that when he came to narrate the distant past, Orderic was acutely aware of the weaknesses of longstanding oral traditions and prized written sources above all others. Focusing on Orderic's account of the early medieval history of his home community of Saint-Évroul, it is argued that a lack of written sources gave Orderic a profound sense of what Guenée has termed 'displacement' between the present and a past which could only be known in a fragmentary way.²⁰ Orderic's regular commentary on the nature and use of his sources in this early history of Saint-Évroul provides important insight into his views on the nature of the historian's task and on his categorizations and treatment of evidence. These force us to re-evaluate the existing discourses on how medieval audiences attempted to engage with the past, their reasons for doing so, and the impact that this search for ancient sources had on their own sense of what it meant to study and write history.

¹² *Ecclesiastical History*, i. 867; Chibnall, *World of Orderic Vitalis*, pp. 58–85.

¹³ Roach, 'Material and the visual'.

¹⁴ Hingst; Hicks, 'Monastic authority'.

¹⁵ Guenée, pp. 78–85; P. Damian-Grint, *The New Historians of the 12th-Century Renaissance: Inventing Vernacular Authority* (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 68–74; E. van Houts, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe, 900–1200* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp. 19–62; C. Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: the Writing of History in Medieval England* (2004), pp. 6–20; Y. N. Harari, 'Eyewitnessing in accounts of the first crusade: the *Gesta Francorum* and other contemporary narratives', *Crusades*, iii (2004), 77–99; E. Lapina, 'Nec signis nec testis creditur ... : the problem of eyewitness in the chronicles of the first crusade', *Viator*, xxxviii (2007), 117–39; Kempshall, pp. 183, 51, 63, 123.

¹⁶ Damian-Grint, pp. 68–9.

¹⁷ Van Houts, *Memory and Gender*, pp. 20–37; Given-Wilson, pp. 6–13.

¹⁸ Van Houts, *Memory and Gender*, pp. 6, 44. On the reliability of witnesses, see Given-Wilson, pp. 11–12.

¹⁹ B. Weiler, 'Monastic historical culture and the utility of a remote past', in *How the Past Was Used: Historical Cultures, c.750–2000*, ed. P. Lambert and B. Weiler (Proc. British Academy, ccvii, 2017), pp. 91–120, at p. 98.

²⁰ Guenée, pp. 81–2.

In the sixth book of his *Ecclesiastical History*, Orderic attempted to narrate the early history of the monastery of Saint-Évroul. This section covers the first foundation of the monastery in the seventh century, down to its refoundation in 1050 as the community to which Orderic and his contemporaries belonged.²¹ By the time he chose to compose this section in the eleven-thirties, Orderic had been writing the *Ecclesiastical History* for around twenty years.²² Up to this point, his work had primarily focused on the history of his own times; of major events in England and Normandy during the later eleventh and early twelfth centuries, as seen and interpreted through the story of how the monastic community at Saint-Évroul had been refounded in 1050 and developed thereafter. Orderic knew, however, that this community occupied the site of a much older religious house which had been established in the seventh century by the hermit St. Évroul, and which had flourished for roughly 300 years until a devastating raid on the monastery by followers of the duke of Orléans in the nine-forties, during which the relics of Évroul and most of the monastic community had been translated to Orléans.²³ The triumphal recovery of these relics in 1131 by Abbot Warin of Saint-Évroul presumably influenced Orderic's decision to divert the narrative of his sixth book towards a more detailed look back at the history of the site at Saint-Évroul before 1050.²⁴ Modern commentators have observed that medieval historians often wrote in order to claim legitimacy through continuity, and the nature of Orderic's writing in his early history suggests that he was attempting a similar exercise here.²⁵ If he could reconstruct a plausible narrative of Évroul's life, his successors, the dispersal of Évroul's relics in Orléans and the relics which were purported to have remained at Saint-Évroul, then Orderic would be able to present a convincing justification for the return of the relics in 1131.

Due to the nature of his subject matter, much of Orderic's early history concerned events located beyond the limits of reliable oral history. However, Orderic also admitted to an almost complete lack of written sources. His comments on what this meant for his historical method reveal much about his grading of evidence, and in particular, highlight a marked preference for using written records.

Complaints about the unavailability of evidence appear on eight separate occasions in Orderic's reconstructed early history of Saint-Évroul.²⁶ These range from short admissions that he wanted to know more about certain 'deeds of men of old' which, if unrecorded, would 'pass into oblivion',²⁷ to more despairing commentary. One of the best examples of this occurs at the end of Orderic's biography of Évroul. Commenting on the tradition which held that the saint had founded fifteen monasteries as featured in an earlier version of his *Life*, Orderic noted that by the twelfth century nothing was known of these communities:

²¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 264–343.

²² On the chronology of composition, see *Ecclesiastical History*, iii, pp. xiii–xx.

²³ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 314–25.

²⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 306–7, and n. 1.

²⁵ S. Boynton, *Shaping a Monastic Identity: Liturgy and History at the Imperial Abbey of Farfa, 1000–1125* (2006); J. Raaijmakers, *The Making of the Monastic Community of Fulda, c.744–c.900* (Cambridge, 2012); C. C. Rozier, 'Symeon of Durham as cantor and historian at Durham Cathedral Priory, c.1090–1129', in *Medieval Cantors and their Craft: Music, Liturgy and the Shaping of History*, ed. K. A.-M. Bugyis, A. B. Kraebel and M. E. Fassler (York, 2017), pp. 190–206.

²⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 266–7, 282–3, 284–5, 290–1, 302–3, 306–7, 322–3, 334–5.

²⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 284–5: 'antiquorum res gestae obliuioni traditae sunt'.

The names of the places where St Évrout built his fifteen monasteries, and the names of the father whom he placed over the communities of monks as vicars of Christ, have all been lost during the varied changes of four hundred years, under the many princes who have ruled over Gaul.²⁸

In concluding his expanded version of the *Life of St. Évrout*, Orderic reflected on the availability of evidence for the history of the community in the years which followed. Again, he emphasized a complete lack of evidence on Évrout's successors, in something of a confessional tone: 'in truth I know nothing at all of the abbots who succeeded this holy man in the monastery of Ouche [Saint-Évrout] after his death, or how many there were in the next four hundred years, or what befell the monks and their neighbours'.²⁹ This commentary shows that his apparent lack of source materials had given Orderic a profound sense of detachment from his own position and the period in which Évrout and his successors had lived. The ways in which Orderic explained the reasons for this sense of rupture provide valuable insight into his own awareness of the nature and purpose of the historian's task.

Having studied and written on past events for the majority of his adult life up to his writing of the early history of Saint-Évrout, Orderic would have been particularly aware of how important written accounts were to the preservation of historical events in the long term, beyond the limits of oral transmission. Elsewhere in his writing, Orderic described his pleasure at having read new and important sources for historical events at Worcester, Cambrai and Crowland, which he then worked into his own writing.³⁰ Likewise, he described how he had been delighted to see a new version of the *Life of Saint William of Gellone* (William of Orange) by Anthony, a monk visiting Saint-Évrout from Winchester, and noted that he had duly copied the saint's life into pages of the *Ecclesiastical History* so that a version might be kept permanently at Saint-Évrout.³¹ The need to preserve written records for the benefit of future generations is a regular theme of Orderic's writing throughout the *Ecclesiastical History*.³² Benjamin Pohl has recently argued that Orderic saw the need to commit the past to writing, as part of his monastic vocation.³³ Orderic then, considered it his duty to preserve the past for the eyes of future readers, writing:

It is fitting that, since new events take place every day in this world, these should be systematically committed to writing for the glory of God, so that – just as past deeds have been handed down by our forebears – present happenings should be recorded now and passed on by the men of today to future generations.³⁴

For Orderic, the consequences of those neglecting this process, or those causing disruption to it, resulted in the kinds of problems that he would come to face during his attempted reconstruction of the early history of Saint-Évrout.

²⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 284–5: 'Nomina locorum in quibus pater Ebrulfus xv monasteria construxit, et uocabula patrum, quos idem coenobialibus turmis uicarios Christi praefecit uariis mutationibus rerum per cccc annos abolita sunt. Quae sub multis principibus a Lothario magno et Childeberto contigerunt, qui usque ad Philippum et Ludouicum eius filium in Gallis regnauerunt'.

²⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 302–3: 'Verum ex quo prefatus heros transiit e mundo, qui uel quot succesores illi fuerint per cccc annos in Vticensi cenobio, seu quales euentus petulerint prouinciales uel coenobitae penitus ignoro'.

³⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, ii. 186–8, 322–51.

³¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 218–27, at pp. 218–19.

³² *Ecclesiastical History*, ii. 132–3 (twice), 176–7; iii. 8–9, 50–1, 94–5, 260–1, 290–1, 302–7; iv. 104–5, 332–3; v. 188–9, 190–1; vi. 136–7.

³³ B. Pohl, "'One single letter remained in excess of all his sins': Orderic Vitalis and cultural memory", in *Orderic Vitalis: Life, Works and Interpretations*, pp. 333–51.

³⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, i. 130–1: 'Decet utique ut sicut nouae res mundo cotidie accidunt, sic ad laudem Dei assidue scripto tradantur, et sicut ab anterioribus preterita gesta usque ad nos transmissa sunt; sic etiam presentia nunc a presentibus futurae posteritati litterarum notamine transmittantur'.

Orderic blamed the loss of written records for the past on two factors: external attack and internal neglect. In describing Orderic's attempts to explore the early history of Saint-Évroul, Robert Bartlett wrote that: 'For Orderic, the doings of the saint Évroul lay on the other side of the fiery chasm of Viking savagery'.³⁵ Vikings, described repeatedly by Orderic as 'Danes', feature heavily in Orderic's attempts to explain his lack of sources throughout the *Ecclesiastical History*. Midway through the early history of Saint-Évroul, he explained that:

during the terrible disturbances that accompanied the ravages of the Danes the records of former times perished in the flames, along with churches and other buildings; and all the ardent labour and desire of later men has been unavailing to restore them.³⁶

Orderic's understanding of what Bartlett described as 'Viking savagery' drew heavily on his experience of having relied on the written accounts of early Norman history by his predecessors, Dudo of Saint-Quentin and William of Jumièges.³⁷ William's account in particular, which depicted a 'raging madness' ('ferali rabie') of raiders burning monastic houses and towns, and local populations burying or carrying off relics to safer locations, provided Orderic with a ready-made explanation of how written records had perished during earlier centuries.³⁸ It also helped him to explain his sense of what Guenée described as the 'point of displacement' from the past, and, added to the notable lack of written sources, perhaps helped to exacerbate Orderic's sense of how knowledge of the past had come to be lost.³⁹

Orderic did not blame the absence of all written records on Viking attacks. Worse than this was the accusation that former generations had failed to preserve the written records that had previously existed, either through inattention, disinterest or carelessness. Having noted the 'terrible disturbances' quoted above, Orderic then explained that Viking raiders were not entirely to blame:

Some things indeed, which were saved from the hands of the barbarians by the care of our forebears, have since perished (shameful to relate) by the abominable neglect of their descendants, who took no pains to preserve the profound spiritual wisdom recorded in the writings of the Fathers. With the loss of books the deeds of men of old pass into oblivion, and can in no ways be recovered by those of our generation, for the admonitions of the ancients pass away from the memory of modern men with the changing world, as hail or snow melt in the waters of a swift river, swept away by the current never to return.⁴⁰

Elsewhere in the early history of Saint-Évroul, Orderic related an account of how a lengthy written record of the life and miracles of Évroul had been lost by fire. He

³⁵ R. Bartlett, 'The Viking hiatus in the cult of saints as seen in the 12th century', in *The Long 12th-Century View of the Anglo-Saxon Past*, ed. M. Brett and D. A. Woodman (Aldershot, 2015), pp. 13–25; J. Barrow, 'Danish ferocities and abandoned monasteries: the 12th-century view', in *The Long 12th-Century View of the Anglo-Saxon Past*, pp. 77–93.

³⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 282–3: 'In nimis enim procellis quae tempore Danorum enormiter furuerunt, antiquorum scripta cum basilicis et aedibus incendio deperierunt, quae feruida iuniorum studia quamuis insatiabiliter sitiant recuperare nequeunt'.

³⁷ *Dudo of St Quentin: History of the Normans*, trans. E. Christiansen (Woodbridge, 1998); *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*; on Dudo's historical method, see B. Bachrach, 'Writing Latin history for a lay audience c.1000: Dudo of Saint Quentin at the Norman court', *Haskins Society Jour.*, xx (2008), 58–77.

³⁸ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, i. 16–27, at pp. 18–19.

³⁹ Guenée, pp. 81–2.

⁴⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 282–5: 'Nonnulla vero quae per diligentiam priscorum manibus barbarorum solleter surrepta sunt, damnabili subsequentium negligentia pro pudor interierunt, qui sagacem spiritualium profunditatem patrum libris insertam seruare neglexerunt. Codicibus autem perditis, antiquorum res gestae obliuioni traditae sunt; quae a modernis qualibet arte recuperari non possunt, quia veterum monumenta cum mundo praetereunte a memoria presentium deficiunt, quasi grando vel nix in undis cum rapido flumine irremeabiliter fluente defluunt'.

described a 'huge book' ('grande uolumen') which had been burned after being left on an altar. Orderic provided an evocative re-imagining of the event, recounting in some detail how the flames had spread from candle to altar-cloth to book, 'Whilst the members of the community were busy about other things'. He asserted that 'All lamented the irreparable loss of this record of the past', and wrote of those culpable that, 'When they had passed away the darkness of ignorance covered their descendants, irretrievably hiding all knowledge of past events'.⁴¹

This description of how important the written record was is significant, given Van Houts's suggestion that oral traditions were often used to replace lost hagiographical books.⁴² This is exactly what happened in the case of Orderic's version of Évrout's life. Orderic asserted that the illiterate community were unable to replace the burned book,⁴³ but had 'handed on to their juniors by word of mouth what they had seen and heard'. Although he claimed that, after several generations, these traditions had been lost to the 'darkness of ignorance' which was responsible for 'irretrievably hiding all knowledge of past events', Orderic also stated that 'some things' had been committed to writing by an unnamed 'certain learned man', enabling him to provide a summary of the life and miracles of Évrout in the sixth book of *Ecclesiastical History*.⁴⁴ Although its transmission to Orderic might raise doubts about the accuracy of this written account, the fact that this *Life* had come to Orderic in written form gave it a heightened authority, and allowed him to use its contents as a basis for the entire first half of his early history of Saint-Évrout.

In his complaints about the lack of written records for earlier centuries, Orderic was making a very pertinent point about the categorization of evidence. For Orderic, the distant past could only be explored through the use of written records, to which he attached a sense of permanence and, with this, a heightened reliability. Orderic's challenge in writing the early history of Saint-Évrout was in negotiating the gaps between these existing written accounts. His ability to discover, utilize and legitimize a number of non-written accounts for the early medieval history of the monastic site, and his commentary on what it meant to commit these traditions to writing, form the basis of the next section of analysis on Orderic's work.

The first part of Orderic's early history of Saint-Évrout consists of a biography of Évrout, the founding father and patron saint of the monastery, accounts of some miracles attributed him, and depictions of the religious community that he had founded in the forest of Ouche.⁴⁵ Although Orderic lamented the loss of written sources, Chibnall has shown that this section of the text was based almost entirely on an existing *Life of St. Évrout* that had been salvaged after the burning of the longer

⁴¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 290–3: 'Incolis uero alia curantibus flamma lichinum usque ad mappulam altaris absumpsit, et ignis edax inde altaris linteamina casu corripuit, et librum cuius exemplar a nobis usquam reperiri nequit, et quaeque ibidem comburi potuit, quae circa uel super aram errant concremauit. Omnes igitur irreperabile damnum de notitia praeteritorum planxerunt, et quia illiterati erant heremicolae non scripto reparauerunt, sed eloquio iunioribus de his quae uisu uel auditu perceperant intimauerunt'.

⁴² Van Houts, *Memory and Gender*, pp. 46–7.

⁴³ The term 'illiterate' here ('illiterati') probably refers to their inability to write and produce a replacement copy, rather than suggesting that they were unable to read the lost book.

⁴⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 290–3, referring to the version of Évrout's *Life* described by Chibnall as *Vita B*: 'Ipsius quoque deficientibus ignorantiae caligo nepotes obtextit, et indaginem transactorum irretitabiliter abdidit, nisi ea tantum quae sollicita cuiusdam sophistae in uita sancti patris ad legendum in ecclesia strictim congescit'.

⁴⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 264–303.

version, as described above.⁴⁶ Orderic used this existing written *Life* as a foundation to his account, which he then expanded wherever possible.

Without exception, all of Orderic's additions to the pre-existing written *Life* derive from oral traditions. As such, Chibnall dismissed them as nothing more than a 'luxurious crop of legends', which she believed offered little of value to our understanding of Saint-Évroul during the early middle ages.⁴⁷ More recently, however, archaeological research carried at the ruins of Saint-Évroul, has revealed evidence of habitation as early as the eighth century.⁴⁸ This would appear to support Orderic's claim that his own monastery had occupied the same location as the community founded by Évroul (d. 706).

While the precise historicity of the oral traditions recounted by Orderic may be called into question, the ways in which he sought to justify their inclusion in his *Ecclesiastical History* provide important material for evaluating his attitudes towards written, oral and even physical remains of the distant past. Here and elsewhere in his early history, Orderic introduced additions based on oral testimony through a consistent formula: first emphasizing the incomplete nature of the written sources, then recording the identity of his informants and noting all that he could on the origin and subsequent transmission of the account in question, and finally proceeding to record the additional account. This had the effect of justifying the decision to commit each tradition to the more permanent written form, and highlighting Orderic's acknowledged discomfort in using oral evidence after such a lengthy transmission period.

In total, Orderic made five additions to the existing *Life of St. Évroul* in his account.⁴⁹ The first consists only of a short note on the names of Frankish kings that Évroul is claimed by Orderic to have served.⁵⁰ Orderic's second interpolation is much more informative to his use of sources. It purports to record the location of Évroul's first entry into monastic life, which was otherwise unrecorded in written sources. Orderic began by justifying his interpolation, stressing the inadequacy of the existing written source: 'The writer of his life does not name the monastery in which Évroul took refuge, so I think it proper to leave a brief record for others of what I have learnt on this subject from the lips of older men'.⁵¹

The story held that Évroul had acted as a patron of the monastery of Deux-Jumeaux (Bayeux), giving land, advice and encouragement to its members.⁵² Following convention, Orderic emphasized the age of his informants, even if he could not give reassurances on their identity which might further augment their reliability.⁵³ However, Orderic did strive to add additional plausibility to this tradition by drawing on physical evidence which was visible in his own times. Orderic noted that he had personally visited the site at Deux-Jumeaux, and described the condition of the site in his own time (then ruined)

⁴⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii, pp. xv–xvi, 264, n. 2; Chibnall, 'Early history', pp. 36–8.

⁴⁷ M. Chibnall, 'The Merovingian monastery of St. Evroul in the light of conflicting traditions', *Stud. Church History*, viii (1972), 31–40, repr. in M. Chibnall, *Piety, Power, and History in Medieval England and Normandy* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 315–25; *Ecclesiastical History*, iii, p. xv. See also Chibnall, *World of Orderic Vitalis*, pp. 101–8.

⁴⁸ A.-S. Vigot, 'Archaeological investigations at the abbey of Saint-Évroult-Notre-Dame-des-Bois', in *Orderic Vitalis: Life, Works and Interpretations*, pp. 375–84.

⁴⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 264–5, 266–9, 268–9, 274–5, and 280–93.

⁵⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 264–5, n. 3.

⁵¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 266–7: 'Relator uitae monasterium ad quod prefatus uir confugit, proprio nomine nobis non distinguit. Vnde quod de hoc didici seniorum narratione, dignum duco futuris breuiter enotare'.

⁵² *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 266–9.

⁵³ Given-Wilson, p. 11.

by noting a 'great mass of stones forming the foundations of ruined walls' and concluding that these remains gave 'clear proof' that there had been a 'house of a great community' there.⁵⁴ Although brief, this interpolation shows Orderic updating his base text with information derived from oral traditions, and then attempting to augment the veracity of this oral tradition by comparing it with his own personal knowledge of the physical remains.⁵⁵ Hicks has recently highlighted 'the visibility of the past' as a key theme in the writing of Orderic and his contemporaries.⁵⁶ His description of the ruins at Deux-Jumeaux reinforces this argument. He was able to add proof to the oral traditions attached to Évrout's cult by noting what must have been a highly visible monument to the distant past among any who visited the locale in his lifetime.

Two further interpolations by Orderic, concerning the establishment of a hermitage at Montfort and a spring in the forest of Ouche, suggest that he had drawn on further traditions associated with particular locations.⁵⁷ This is indicated by his note that 'later generations' had built a church in honour of Évrout at Montfort 'which stands there to this day' (just thirteen kilometres east of his own community at Saint-Évrout-Nôtre-Dame-du-Bois), and by his acknowledgement that the site of the spring had 'to this very day' ('usque in hoderium') been developed into something of a pilgrimage site by those who had experienced visions and been healed after drinking from the spring.⁵⁸

The final interpolation made in Orderic's account is much longer than the previous four and consists of multiple elements.⁵⁹ The overall topic concerns the purported establishment of a monastery by Évrout, close to his hermitage in Ouche. Seeking to establish an historical framework from the written sources that he did have, Orderic began this interpolation with a lengthy note on the Frankish kings, popes and Roman emperors who ruled around the time of Évrout's death, 'so that they [readers] may know in what times the blessed father Évrout passed the eighty-year span of his glorious life on earth'.⁶⁰ Orderic noted that he had used information 'sought out and taken from chronicles' ('de cronicis rematus hausi') which can be identified with near certainty as the annals which he himself had helped to update at Saint-Évrout, and which include the erroneous date that Orderic gave for Évrout's death in his revised *Life* (596, rather than the beginning of the eighth century).⁶¹ Next, Orderic laid the foundations for his inclusion of the oral tradition, by giving an extended commentary on the loss of written records, parts of which have been quoted above. Orderic noted that he would then 'relate some things that I have learned not from written sources, but from the oral

⁵⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 268–9: 'ingens congeries lapidum in fundamentis edificiorum et ruinis maceriarum evidens testimonium dat, quod magnae dignitatis hominum habitatio Baiocensem pagum illustrauerat'.

⁵⁵ On Orderic's possible visit to Deux-Jumeaux, see *Ecclesiastical History*, i. 27.

⁵⁶ L. V. Hicks, 'Coming and going: the use of outdoor space in Norman and Anglo-Norman chronicles', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, xxxii (2009), 40–56, at p. 49.

⁵⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 268–71, 74–7.

⁵⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 270–1: 'Illum igitur uenerabiles uiri locum deseruerunt, ibique posteri basilicam quae adhuc perdurat in honore sancti Ebrulfi condiderunt', and pp. 27–47. For the use of 'to this day' and similar wording, see Roach, 'Material and the visual'; D. Roach, 'Saint-Évrout and southern Italy in Orderic's *Historia Ecclesiastica*', in *Orderic Vitalis: Life, Works and Interpretations*, pp. 78–99.

⁵⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 280–7.

⁶⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 280–3: 'ut satis eluceat quibus temporibus octogenaria floruerit in mundo uita sancti patris Ebrulfi'.

⁶¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 282–3. For the annals, see Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS. Latin 10062, fos. 145v–147. On the date of Évrout's death, see *Ecclesiastical History*, iii, pp. xv–xvi and Chibnall, 'Early history', p. 33.

traditions of old men'.⁶² The age of his informants is repeatedly stressed throughout the ensuing account, clearly demonstrating Orderic's attempt to enhance the credibility of his narrative by bridging the gap between the events and his own time through the age of his informants.⁶³

aged men passed on by word of mouth to their sons some of what they had seen and heard, and these in their turn preserved them tenaciously in their memory and transmitted them to the next age. They compose and relate to their brethren tales worth of remembrance ... Hear now, then, what I as a boy heard from the older monks.⁶⁴

In sum, Orderic's account reports that although the precise locations of the fifteen monasteries founded by Évrout remained largely unknown, a local tradition gave certain clues towards one of these foundations. This tradition asserted that the church of St. Mary on the Charentonne, barely 200 metres from Orderic's home foundation, had been founded in Évrout's lifetime by King Childebert and his queen. The story held that Childebert had learned of the 'renown of holy father Évrout' ('fama beati patris Ebrulfi') and travelled to his monastery to grant the unlikely figure of ninety-nine estates to the community. While there, he founded a church, located by Orderic 'on the hill between the River Charentonne and the wood' ('in colle qui inter riuum Carentonae et siluam'), which subsequently developed into a cell of nuns, with a cemetery for 'monks and great lords' ('cimiterium monachorum et sullimium uirum') attached to it.⁶⁵ As he had done with regards to Deux-Jumeaux, Orderic sought to augment the veracity of this tradition by relating it to additional, physical evidence. In this case, he noted that in his own time 'There are still vestiges of noble usage in the church of the Virgin Mary; and up to the present day fine tombs, which are believed without doubt to be those of eminent persons, are preserved there'.⁶⁶ Here again, Orderic appears to have been drawing on local traditions associated with a particular place and physical remains, and then linking these with what he already knew about the early history of the region.

Orderic's additions to the existing *Life of St. Évrout* suggest that he followed a strict hierarchy of sources. The most important was the principal written source, in this case the existing *Vita B*, which was supplemented through small additions from the annals at Saint-Évrout. Orderic added depth to these existing written records by drawing on longstanding oral traditions but showed some discomfort in doing so. These interpolations were justified by Orderic's complaints on the lack of alternative written accounts, and legitimized by emphasizing the age of his informants. On two occasions, Orderic showed that archaeological evidence from ruined buildings and tombs could also be used to augment the veracity of these oral traditions. Important to note here is Orderic's sense of his own reliability as a witness to this physical evidence. As a named informant of the

⁶² *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 282–3: 'Nunc ad quaedam nitor enarranda regredi, quae non scripto sed seniorum relatione didici'.

⁶³ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 282–3, 284–5, 290–1.

⁶⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 284–5: 'Quaedam tamen annosi senes uisa uel audita filiis ore facundo retulerunt, quae nichilominus et ipsi tenacis glutino memoriae retinuerunt, et sequenti aeuo diuulgauerunt. Digna itaque relatu serentes fratribus suis insinuant, per quae dura mortalium corda creatoris ad amorem incitant, ne pro abscondito in terra talento cum torpenti seruo damnationem incurrant. Igitur quae priscis a patribus iamdudum puer didici auscultate, et mirabilem Deum in sanctis suis mecum magnificate'.

⁶⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 286–7.

⁶⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 286–7: 'Vnde in predicta aede uirginis matris plurima insignis habitationis indicia panduntur, et usque in hodiernum diem honorabiles ibidem sarcophagi seruantur, qui spectabilium fuisse personarum sine scrupulo credentur'.

clerical orders, Orderic fulfilled two important criteria for acting as a reliable eyewitness.⁶⁷ His apparent grading in the reliability of sources, which progresses downwards from written, to physical, and then oral evidence, provides important clues towards understanding how he attempted to negotiate what Van Houts has termed the ‘problems of bringing remoteness of time and place’ in the writing of the distant past.⁶⁸

The second section of Orderic’s early history of Saint-Évroul, concerning the story of the site after the death of Évroul, posed even more significant problems for his use of evidence. As noted above, Orderic began this section of the narrative by claiming to know ‘nothing at all of the abbots who succeeded this holy man’, nor ‘of how many there were in the next four hundred years, or what befell the monks and their neighbours’.⁶⁹ Seeking to explain the absence of sources, he returned to the theme of Viking devastation, providing a dramatic re-imagining of events based on the accounts of Dudo and William of Jumièges.⁷⁰ Orderic described how the raiders had ‘destroyed many monasteries where religion flourished’, and claimed that ‘many districts were wholly laid waste by repeated massacres’.⁷¹ Seeking to re-imagine what this experience may have been like, Orderic described how ‘Amid this terrible devastation the defenceless monks often trembled with fear, not knowing what to do, and in their afflictions they gave voice to their grief with continual lamentation, groaning as they prepared for death in their hiding-places’.⁷² Orderic knew from William’s writings that the monastic communities at Jumièges and Saint-Wandrille had been moved along with their relics to safer locations during this period.⁷³ By providing this dramatic picture of widespread destruction, Orderic was able to prepare his audience for the ensuing gaps in the written history of the community at Saint-Évroul, and to justify his resultant recourse to oral traditions.

Due to an absence of sources for the period before c.900, the second half of Orderic’s early history of Saint-Évroul largely concerns the translation of Évroul’s relics away from the site in the tenth century, and the continued habitation within the ‘abandoned’ monastery. These events cover roughly a hundred-year period from the mid tenth to the mid eleventh century, and are much closer to the time in which Orderic was writing than his previous additions to the *Life of St. Évroul*.

Orderic explained that he had used the tract *On the Translation of St. Évroul* as a source for his account of events after the saint’s death.⁷⁴ This text, which outlined the transmission and dispersal of Évroul’s relics after the tenth-century raid, had been written by the monks of Rebais, who had obstructed the return of the relics to Saint-Évroul in 1131. Orderic’s use of this source posed him some problems in the grading of evidence. On the one hand, it provided a valuable written account of the course of events. However, mindful of the dispute with Rebais, Orderic wrote that he did ‘not wholly approve’ of the tract, and claimed that it had been written by ‘an anonymous author who, it seems

⁶⁷ Given-Wilson, pp. 11–12.

⁶⁸ Van Houts, *Memory and Gender*, p. 33.

⁶⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 302–3: ‘Verum ex quo prefatus heros transiit e mundo, qui uel quot succesores illi fuerint per cccc annos in Vticensi cenobio, seu quales euentus petulerint prouinciales uel coenobitiae penitus ignoro’.

⁷⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 304–5.

⁷¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 302–3.

⁷² *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 302–5: ‘In tanta desolatione inermes monachi quid facerent nescii sepe contremuerunt, in miseriis afflicti sedulo ploratu dolori sui satisfecerunt, finemque suum in latebris gementes prestolati sunt’.

⁷³ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 304–5.

⁷⁴ *Acta Sanctorum ordinis sancti Benedicti*, ed. J. Mabillon (9 vols., Paris, 1668–1701), v. 226–7.

to me, was ill informed about matters and dates'.⁷⁵ Instead, he stated that he wished to 'make a special effort to record in writing the tradition I have received from my seniors about how the body of the holy confessor Évrout was translated'.⁷⁶ Here, then, Orderic appears to have been more willing to place oral traditions above the written record, but a strong case can be made that his only reason for doing so was because his report of these traditions had bolstered the position of his own institution in its dispute with Rebas. As he had done in the expanded *Life of St. Évrout*, Orderic made an exceptional case for the inclusion of these oral traditions, and even described this action as a 'special effort'.

Orderic did not shy away from narrating the removal of Évrout's relics to Orléans in the mid tenth century. His principal aim in relating this story was to demonstrate the completeness of his version of events: to show that he knew when and where Évrout's relics had been taken and into whose hands they had been transferred, and thus to prove that the relics obtained in 1131 were indeed the true remains of Évrout. While the text *On the Translation of St. Évrout* claimed that the relics had been removed from Normandy for safekeeping, Orderic depicted their removal as an act of wartime brigandage.⁷⁷ His account began with a summary of the circumstances through which Duke Hugh of Orléans had come to be involved in Normandy, again drawing extensively on the written account given by William of Jumièges.⁷⁸ Echoing, and probably gaining inspiration from what he had written on the ravages of the Vikings, Orderic provided a dramatic picture. He claimed that while Hugh was camped at the nearby town of Gacé, two of his retainers, Herluin the chancellor and Ralph of Drachy had visited the monastery at Saint-Évrout. Although he cannot have known what this scene had looked like, Orderic tried to recreate it, based on his own experiences of monastic life, describing how:

The simple monks welcomed their coming, and gladly offered them all the hospitality in their power. They escorted them as friends through their chapels and oratories and private buildings, showing to their cost their reliquaries containing the relics of their saints.⁷⁹

Once Hugh had ordered his men to attack the churches of Normandy, Herluin and Ralph returned to Saint-Évrout and plundered the site. Orderic again provided a re-imagined depiction of the scene:

By force of arms they broke into the church while the monks, who expected no evil, looked on in dismay, forced their way into the sanctuary and the holy tombs, took the three bodies of St Évrout, St Évremond and St Ansbert from their sepulchres and, wrapping the bones in deerskins, carried them away with other relics of saints. Their minions went all over the monastery, and as the monks wept and lamented, impiously seized everything of use that they could find. Their greed was unrestrained, and they respected no-one there, seizing books and

⁷⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 306–7: 'Lectiuncula siquidem reperitur apud Resbacum quam non satis approbo, edita nimirum ab auctore ignaro, cui non plene ut opinor patuit rerum et temporum certitudo'.

⁷⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 306–7: 'ideoque precipue conabor litteris mandare quae a senioribus audiui, qualiter corpus sancti confessoris de loco suo translatus est Ebrulfi'.

⁷⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 314–15, n. 1.

⁷⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 306–9; *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, i. 104–21.

⁷⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 308–9: 'Tantorum itaque uirorum aduentu simplices monachi letati sunt, et omne illis officium karitatis pro posse suo benigniter exhibuerunt. Per capellas et oratoria sua atque priuatas aedes eos familiariter deduxerunt, philacteriasque suas cum sanctorum reliquiis ad sui damnum illis ostenderunt'.

vestments and all kinds of furnishings both of the monks and of their servants, and ransacking and carrying away everything that the monks had previously shown them, as I have described.⁸⁰

Mindful of his ambition to demonstrate the continuity of his account, Orderic gave careful descriptions of how Évrout's bones and several other relics, including books, a small silver-covered altar, a pastoral staff and charters had been divided up by Herluin and Ralph.⁸¹ While Orderic gave no more details of their fate, it can be assumed that the relics given to Herluin made their way to St. Peter's church in Orléans, where Herluin was, according to Orderic, 'priest and abbot' ('sacerdos et abbas').⁸² Those given to Ralph were passed on to Rebais, and are likely to have been the same relics that were reclaimed by Orderic's community in 1131.⁸³ The detail provided by Orderic here suggests that the story of these relics may have come to him through careful association with these objects, in a similar fashion to other objects of memory whose histories are reported elsewhere in the *Ecclesiastical History*.⁸⁴

Orderic claimed that the religious community at Saint-Évrout, 'lamenting, followed their master's bones in the company of their enemies', where they were eventually established in a newly-built church dedicated to Évrout (presumably with some of their relics).⁸⁵ However, he also reported a tradition which claimed that the monastic buildings at Saint-Évrout had not been left entirely empty. In a short description of the site before its refoundation in 1050, located at the beginning of the *Ecclesiastical History* and composed around twenty years previously, Orderic had already noted that the decayed abbey buildings were inhabited by two 'aged clerics' ('senes clerici') followed by four monks from the monastery at Bec, shortly before 1050.⁸⁶ Returning to this theme in more detail during his sixth book gave Orderic the chance to re-emphasize the continued habitation of Évrout's foundation, even after the dispersal of his relics. The most notable aspect of these accounts are that they were entirely based on Orderic's oral traditions, incorporated into his writing using the techniques of *inventio*. Described by Justin Lake as 'the practice of "discovering" material appropriate to a narrative' and then 'adopting the standard of plausibility', the *inventio* concept had provided a defining characteristic of medieval history-writing.⁸⁷ Orderic's use of the convention in this part of his narrative provides evidence of his advanced historiographical knowledge, but also suggests that he may have been more comfortable working away from written sources than he had claimed in his earlier lamentations.

⁸⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 314–17: 'Basilicam quoque stupentibus et nil mali suspiciantibus cenobitis cum armatorum uiolentia ingressi sunt, archana templi et sacra busta mox adierunt, tria corpora sanctorum Ebrulfi et Ebremundi atque Ansberti de mausoleis sustulerunt, et coriis ossa ceruinis inuolunta cum aliis sanctorum reliquiis asportauerunt. Satellites autem illorum ubique difusi sunt, et quicquid humanae uitae commodum reppererunt, flentibus monachis et uociferantibus irreuerenter rapuerunt. Ibi nimirum repeccatis habenis omnino relaxatis neminem reueriti sunt, sed libros et uestes uariamque suppellectilem tam monachorum quam clientum eorum diripuerunt, et perscrutantes omnia quae pridem monachis ut dictum est ipsis pendentibus compererant sustulerunt'.

⁸¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 322–3.

⁸² *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 320–3.

⁸³ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 322–3.

⁸⁴ Roach, 'Material and the visual'.

⁸⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 317–21, at p. 319: 'Vticensis itaque modo et clientes eorum natale rus deseruerunt, et associati hostibus plorantes ossa magistri secuti sunt'.

⁸⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, ii. 14–15.

⁸⁷ J. C. Lake, 'Truth, plausibility and the virtues of narrative at the millennium', *Jour. Medieval Hist.*, xxxv (2009), 221–38; Kempshall, pp. 265–349.

In this section, Orderic provided a lengthy invented speech by an ‘old man’ (*senex uenerabilis*) named Ascelin, who, he claimed, had been prior of the community during the attack.⁸⁸ While Ascelin encouraged the inhabitants of the community to follow Évrout’s bones into exile, he himself refused to leave. Orderic later returned to add that Ascelin was accompanied by some of the local population of the region, and by several students who Orderic describes as having been children at this time.⁸⁹ This included a tradition that during the time of Duke Richard I of Normandy (942–96) Ascelin had explored the tombs of the departed saints with a stonemason, in the hope of discovering ‘precious relics, which were buried in this church by the early fathers’ (*preciosas reliquias nouimus quae in hac basilica reconditae sunt a priscis patribus*), and filled ‘several caskets and reliquaries’ with dust gathered from the saints’ tombs, before moving the remnants to a secret location.⁹⁰

Orderic stated that knowledge of these events had been preserved by the ‘boys’ who had made up Ascelin’s community, and that ‘It was from them, indeed, that the story was told to me many years later’.⁹¹ Even if Ascelin had lived to the end of Duke Richard’s reign, it is extremely unlikely that anyone alive in the nine-nineties had survived down to Orderic’s arrival at Saint-Évrout in 1085. The first Ascelin was succeeded by a second prior, also named Ascelin and described by Orderic as nephew of the first, and who, according to Orderic’s account, had pursued a successful clerical career outside of Normandy.⁹² It may be that Orderic had here confused the two, or alternatively, that he had simply exaggerated the proximity of his own informants to the actual events described.

The next part of Orderic’s account described how, after the departure of the second Ascelin, the community at Saint-Évrout faded into decay. Again, he provided an evocative image of the events: ‘During this time, the inhabitants died or departed, Saint-Évrout reverted to waste, and when the men were gone a great wood grew over the oratories and living quarters, to be for many years the abode of wild beasts’.⁹³ Despite this sense of fracture in Orderic’s narrative, he then recorded a further tradition, which held that continuity of religious life at the site was reinstated through a priest named Restold, who experienced a vision ordering him to restore religious life at Saint-Évrout. Restold travelled initially to the church of Évrout in Montfort, and then later established himself in the church of St. Mary on the Charentonne through the patronage of a knight named Wazo of Montfort.⁹⁴ Returning to his theme of abandonment, Orderic again described what Restold had found at Saint-Évrout: ‘Roofless walls were hung with ivy and the ruins of ancient buildings were visible to the eye. There was a thick growth of wood within and without, for no-one had lived there for the past fifty years’.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 316–9.

⁸⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 324–9.

⁹⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 324–9, at pp. 326–9: ‘Pixidas uero plures protulit ac philacteria, in quibus erant sacra cum inscriptionibus suis pignora’.

⁹¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 328–9: ‘Ab ipsis nimirum post multos annos haec audiuimus’.

⁹² *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 328–9.

⁹³ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 328–9: ‘Interea obeuntibus uel abeuntibus incolis Vticus in solitudinem rediit, et remotis hominibus in oratoriis et domibus ingens silua creuit, et habitatio ferarum multo tempore ibidem extitit’.

⁹⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 328–35.

⁹⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 330–1: ‘Maceriae siquidem discoopertae erant nisi retibus aedarae, et ruinae antiquorum aedificiorum spectantibus patuere. Condensa silua creuit intus et extra, ubi nemo habitauerat per annos quinquaginta’.

Orderic's account of Restold's restoration at the church of St. Mary is relatively detailed, citing numerous facts, including Restold's Beauvais origins, his initial journey to a church of Saint-Évroul at Montfort, the identity and patronage of the secular individual named Wazo, an account of a peasant-tracker named Duilet, and even the name of a bull, Fala, whose wanderings had revealed the previously hidden location of Évroul's first monastery. Orderic did not name his sources for this section, but the proximity of the events to within 100 years of Orderic's own lifetime increases the likelihood that he was drawing on familiar oral traditions, which must have been commonly known among Orderic's intended readership of Saint-Évroul monks.

As he had done in his additions to Évroul's *Life*, Orderic here used material evidence to boost the veracity of the oral traditions related to Wazo. He described Wazo's construction of the new stone church on the Charentonne upon old foundations, and claims that during the work 'they found many tombs of persons of rank, in which, as the older men assert, the bodies of kings and bishops, recognisable by certain tokens found there, had been buried'.⁹⁶ The level of detail given in the account suggests a well-developed oral tradition, probably preserved through association with the material remains of the ruined monastery. The claim that Wazo's men had found 'certain tokens' offers a further and tantalizing glimpse into the recovery of artefacts and perhaps also the transmission of historical narratives around them.⁹⁷

Orderic's description of the pre-1050 restorations at Saint-Évroul in his sixth book makes little mention of the final refoundation of the community in 1050. This, Orderic noted, had been described in the earlier sections of his work, and does not seem to have required further comment. As noted above, Orderic had included a short summary of life at Saint-Évroul before 1050 at the beginning of the *Ecclesiastical History*. This held that after William, son of Giroie, one of the eventual benefactors of the refounded community, had returned from pilgrimage to Jerusalem, he entered the monastery of Bec, and then gave to this community the old monastic church of St. Peter, which was then restored to working order by the future Archbishop Lanfranc and three other monks of Bec.⁹⁸ Echoing the later descriptions of the ruined site in his sixth book, Orderic described how the Bec monks had found the monastery 'then deserted, and a thick growth of ivy covered the outer wall of the church'. He also noted that the Bec monks had found there 'Two aged clerks, Restold and Ingran', who were 'serving God in humble poverty, as best they might in this wilderness'.⁹⁹ This short note in Orderic's third book, completed during the second decade of the twelfth century, suggests that he knew of the tradition surrounding Restold and Ingran at an early stage in the writing of the *Ecclesiastical History*.¹⁰⁰ It also suggests that Orderic may have learned of traditions surrounding Restold and Ingran used in his sixth book via certain individuals who could remember the foundation of the reformed monastic community in 1050. Such close proximity to the events described meant that Orderic regarded these traditions as

⁹⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 332–3: 'Ibi multa mausolea nobilium personarum repperunt, in quibus regum et pontificum corpora ob insignia quaedam quae ibidem repperunt, condita fuisse seniores asserunt'.

⁹⁷ For Orderic's ability to do this elsewhere in his writing, see Roach, 'Material and the visual'.

⁹⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, ii. 14–15.

⁹⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, ii. 14–15: 'Tunc locus ipse desertus erat, et succrescens edera maceriam aecclisiae cooperiebat. Duo soli sense clerici Restoldus et Ingranus ibidem morabantur, et tanta heremo sub paupere uita Deo pro posse suo famulabantur'.

¹⁰⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, i. 31–3; ii. pp. xiv–xv.

much more reliable oral testimony than the various accounts preserved earlier on the history of the site.

The final section of Orderic's early history of Saint-Évroul brought events into his own time. It recorded Abbot Warin's journey to Rebais, undertaken in 1130–1. Earlier, Orderic's account of the translation to Orléans had noted the dispersal of relics belonging to SS. Évroul, Évremond and Ansbert, before observing that 'When relics are moved in this way, strangers who preserve them make mistakes'.¹⁰¹ As a prelude to Warin's journey to Rebais, Orderic described how in his own time, 'The monks of Saint-Évroul lamented because they were without their patron's body'.¹⁰² He knew that a tooth and a vertebra of Évroul had been recovered by Prior Fulk of Saint-Évroul and by William of Montreuil before 1130, and, mindful of the importance that he had attached to the preservation of events in writing earlier in the same book, wrote down short notes on the circumstances by which these relics had been recovered. Prior Fulk's transaction was simple: he was gifted the tooth by a chaplain who had been attached to Rebais.¹⁰³ William, however, had been given the vertebra through more protracted circumstances. Fulbert, a canon of Paris, stole it from the chapel of Henry I of France, gave the bone to another Fulk, a priest of Maule who mistakenly ate poison, but recovered after he had prayed to Évroul, at which point he decided to give the remains to William of Montreuil, prior of Maule, who then passed the relic to the monastery of Saint-Évroul to be placed in a silver reliquary.¹⁰⁴

The account of Abbot Warin's journey was derived from first-hand eyewitness testimony, either via Warin himself, or through the monks Odo of Montreuil and Warin of Séz, who accompanied him on the journey, all of whom Orderic knew well.¹⁰⁵ Orderic described a series of protracted negotiations between Abbot Warin and Noël, abbot of Rebais. Noël first agreed to give up Évroul's relics, then backtracked, and the relics were only returned at the order of Count Theobald of Champagne. Orderic then gave a lively description of the repatriation, parts of which he must have witnessed in person:

The silver vessel in which the relics of St Évroul were preserved was broken open, the relics were reverently laid out, and the right arm, with a casket full of broken pieces of bone, was handed over. Then the monks of Saint-Évroul returned to Normandy, reaching their abbey on 26 May. A great crowd of about four thousand men and women assembled there, coming to share the benefits of this great patron, and pouring out their prayers they strove to win intercession with God.¹⁰⁶

With this scene, which Orderic had no doubt witnessed for himself, the narrative of the early history of Saint-Évroul, the life of its patron saint and accounts of his relics was complete.

Orderic's early history of Saint-Évroul provides just one short section of his *Ecclesiastical History*, whose overall contents offer a much more comprehensive narrative

¹⁰¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 322–3: 'In huiusmodi permutantionibus exteri cultores falluntur, sed beniuolentia pleni facilem ueniam non maliciosi erroris consequuntur'.

¹⁰² *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 336–7: 'Vticensis monachi corpus patroni sui non se habere dolerunt'.

¹⁰³ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 336–7.

¹⁰⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 336–9.

¹⁰⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 338–9.

¹⁰⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, iii. 342–3: 'Vas argenteum in quo beati Ebrulfi pignora clausa erat frangitur, reliquiae reuerenter extrahuntur, brachium dextrum cum pixide plena fracturis ossium erogatur. Vticensis itaque in Neustriam redierunt, atque Vticum vii kal Iunii preuenerunt. Magna multitudo utriusque sexus fere ad quatuor millia conuenit, ac ad suscipienda tanti patroni beneficia occurrit, et eius ante Deum suffragia promereri fuis precibus satagit'.

of the foundation and growth of monastic life at Saint-Évroul in Normandy. This section provides an important snapshot, however, of Orderic's working methods as a historian. Most notably, it demonstrates the varying ways in which Orderic evaluated and deployed a range of sources in order to compose a coherent narrative that he knew to be incomplete. These sources included written accounts, oral traditions related to the distant and the more recent past, and also physical remains. The three main types of sources operated within a visible hierarchy of reliability that Orderic imposed on his presentation of this evidence.

This discussion has suggested that while writing the distant past, Orderic preferred to use written records. He based both sections of his early history on previous written sources, namely the existing *Vita B* of Évroul and the tract *On the Translation of St. Évroul*. When he reached the limits of what could be known from these accounts, Orderic composed dramatic laments on the lack of additional textual witnesses, which provide some of the most heartfelt and dramatic commentary on the process of historical research in the entire *Ecclesiastical History*. As shown by Pohl, these laments highlight Orderic's belief that it was the duty of the literate classes to produce and safeguard written records for the benefit of subsequent generations.¹⁰⁷ They show that Orderic considered written accounts produced by literate clerics as more reliable than dubious oral traditions whose origins could not always be known. More than this, Orderic's commentary also shows that, having gained over thirty years' worth of experience in the writing of history, by the time he came to write on this topic he was very personally invested in the process of recording events for posterity, and, probably influenced by this experience, was clearly frustrated when he had reached the limits of what it was possible to know.

In contrast to this articulated preference for written accounts, Orderic's use of oral traditions could appear strained. When making additions to the *Life of St. Évroul*, Orderic showed his reluctance to employ what might be considered mere rumour, such was the distance in time between the events described and their reception in Orderic's own time. This is shown in his complaints at the lack of written sources, emphasizing the age of his informants as a means to increase their trustworthiness and bridge some of the temporal divide, and in some cases, also comparing the oral traditions with physical remains. This last point supports previous observations by Hicks and Roach that Orderic had an advanced awareness of the value that could be placed on particular places and material objects in the preservation of the past, and may also indicate that Orderic was able to discover the past through dialogue with an extensive network of informants who knew this evidence best.¹⁰⁸

Importantly, Orderic's preference for written sources appears to have been applicable only when he was writing about the distant past. He was more at ease when utilizing oral traditions for events which took place within the limits of reliable oral memory, and used them to compile with confidence an almost completely unbroken narrative of continued habitation at Saint-Évroul from the time of Prior Ascelin down to the ten-fifties, and additions on Évroul's relics to the eleven-thirties.

This consideration of Orderic's use and categorization of sources in his early history of Saint-Évroul highlights his advanced capabilities in finding, evaluating and compiling a wide range of problematic evidence into something approaching a coherent and persuasive narrative.¹⁰⁹ When his sources ran out, Orderic showed his narrative skill,

¹⁰⁷ Pohl.

¹⁰⁸ Hicks, 'Monastic authority'; Roach, 'Material and the visual'.

¹⁰⁹ On this process, see Given-Wilson, pp. 14–16.

using the convention of *inventio* to produce emotive descriptions of the destruction of monastic communities during the Viking period, narrating the dramatic ruin of Saint-Évroul in the nine-forties, and picturing periods of decline among its monastic buildings in the period that followed. All show signs of Orderic drawing on analogous written sources, and from his own personal experiences of having visited similar monastic ruins at other locations.

Orderic's narrative of the early history of Saint-Évroul as it appears in the sixth book of his *Ecclesiastical History* confirms that his oeuvre as a whole occupies an important place in the development of western historical writing during the middle ages. Alongside such figures as Eadmer of Canterbury, William of Malmesbury and John of Worcester, Orderic was one of a number of Anglo-Norman authors who have been seen to have revitalized the production of written histories during the early twelfth century; a period which has been described as having witnessed 'one of the greatest epochs in the long tradition of historical writing in Britain, both qualitatively and quantitatively'.¹¹⁰ Orderic's commentary on the purposes of this writing in the early history of Saint-Évroul contributes valuable material for assessment of the causes of this historiographical turn, which has largely been seen as a response to the conditions of the Norman conquest by members of a newly mixed Anglo-Norman realm, struggling to account for changes to society, culture and identity since 1066.¹¹¹ In particular, his insistence on the importance of written histories suggests that his drive to narrate the past might be also associated with Michael Clanchy's thesis on the transition from oral to written memory during the same period, but which makes little mention of the increase in history-writing.¹¹² For Orderic, producing written records of the past was worthy of a life's work. In the final preface to the *Ecclesiastical History*, composed towards the end of the eleven-thirties, he reflected on this task:

I set about composing an account of the events which we witness and endure. It is fitting that, since new events take place every day in this world, they should be systematically committed to writing to the glory of God so that – just as past deeds have been handed down by our forbears, [so] present happenings should be recorded now and passed on by the men of today to future generations.¹¹³

It is this task with which Orderic's early history of Saint-Évroul is immediately concerned, and for which we, as Orderic's 'future generations', should be so grateful.

¹¹⁰ G. Martin and R. M. Thomson, 'History and history books', in *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, ii: 1100–1400, ed. R. M. Thomson and N. J. Morgan (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 397–415, at p. 397. For similar claims, see R. W. Southern, 'Aspects of the European tradition of historical writing, iv: the sense of the past', *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.*, 5th ser., xxiii (1973), 243–63, at p. 246; Damian-Grint, p. 44; E. van Houts, 'Historical writing', in *A Companion to the Anglo-Norman World*, ed. C. Harper-Bill and E. van Houts (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 103–21, at pp. 120–1; Roach and Rozier, pp. 1–2.

¹¹¹ See, e.g., Southern, pp. 246–56; M. Brett, 'The use of universal chronicle at Worcester', in *L'Historiographie médiévale en Europe*, ed. J.-P. Genet (Paris, 1991), pp. 277–85.

¹¹² M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066–1307* (2nd edn., Oxford, 1993), pp. 100–1.

¹¹³ *Ecclesiastical History*, i. 130–1: 'appeto nunc dictare de his quae uidemus seu toleramus. Decet utique ut sicut nouae res mundo cotidie accidunt, sic ad laudem Dei assidue scripto tradantur, et sicut ab anterioribus preterita gesta usque ad nos transmissa sunt'. On the date of this preface, see *Ecclesiastical History*, i. 130–1.