A Heated Conversation: Who was Isabel de Aubigny, Countess of Arundel?

John A. Nichols

Late in the year 1252, the Benedictine-chronicler Matthew Paris related a conversation between King Henry III of England and Isabel de Aubigny, countess of Arundel. When Henry was in London, Paris records that Isabel made her way to the city at considerable trouble and expense to meet with the King. The audience took place in a private room and Henry listened calmly to the Countess' plea about a "certain wardship" owned by Isabel but held by the King. There is no doubt about this disputed wardship because corroborating records survive.[1] According to Paris, however, Henry refused to give Isabel what she claimed was legally hers. At this point in the audience, Paris provides the reader with a heated conversation between the King and the Countess. She challenged Henry: "Why, my lord king, do you avert your face from justice? One cannot now obtain what is right and just in your court; moreover, without fear or shame you oppress the nobles of the kingdom in diverse ways."[2]

Given the unusualness of this challenge to the King by a woman, what can this tell us about oral records – about the veracity of the sources, about who is allowed to translate spoken words into print and why, about the participants in an oral account, about the issues involved, and even about how scholars today can insert themselves into the intricate oral exchanges supposedly taking place in the medieval past? Indeed can this conversation even be justified as being accurate in the first place?

It is unlikely that Matthew Paris was present at the confrontation between the King and the Countess; therefore, he was recording words communicated to

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[1] Thomas Tout, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Medieval England: The Wardrobe, the Chamber, and the Small Seals*, 6 vols. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1920-33), vol. 6, p. 25. At issue was a one-quarter knight's fee held by the earl of Arundel and it belonged to Isabel as part of her widow's dower. Thomas de Ingoldesthrop died in 1252 and he held several lordships including one knight's fee of the honor of Haughley. Since the heir was a minor Henry claimed the wardship and took possession of the entire inheritance.

[2] Matthew Paris, *English History From the Year 1235 to 1273*, trans. J. A. Giles 3 vols. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853; New York: Ams Press, 1968), vol. 2, pp. 528-529. For the Latin text see Henry Richards Laurd (ed.), *Matthew Parisiinsis Monachi Sancti Albini Chronica Majora 1248-1259*, 5 vols. (London: Longman, 1880), vol. 5, pp. 336-337. While the latter is the work Matthew Paris is most associated with, his *Historia Anglorum* is not only based on the *Chronica Majora* but is also available in English translation as cited above.

him through the testimony of others. So regardless of what is written, Paris would be getting the account filtered through the voices of one or more persons who were present so that the verbatim rendering of the words credited to both the principals may not be exact. A recent dissertation on the analysis of chronicles has shown that conversations were carefully crafted by Matthew Paris, as well as by others, to emphasize the chroniclers' take on the matter.[3]

Thus, whether Paris put the words of the conversation in Isabel's mouth is debatable.[4] Nevertheless his views are well known and frequently mentioned by scholars who cite his works. For example, he was most critical of both royal and ecclesiastical bureaucracy, the new mendicant orders, and reform. This Benedictine monk also disliked anything he thought were transgressions against his order as well as the crown's disregard of feudal rights and the encroachment of foreigners on matters English. These views by Matthew Paris can easily be verified by consulting any part of his works.[5]

The modern scholar, of course, has the advantage of looking at a specific section in any medieval chronicle and abstracting from it whatever bears on one's interest. Indeed, when I was researching various documents about the life and actions of the Countess of Arundel, my only interest was the confrontation, not its place in the chronicle. I gave little thought to what Paris recorded previous to this entry or what he wrote after it. Medieval readers of his *Chronica Majora,* however, would have read each item in sequence, as Paris wrote them, which I assume, is how the author would have expected them to be read. By doing so, one comes away understanding the entry in context as composed by the author rather than what could appear to a modern reader as an isolated incident.[6]

By my going back and reading all the entries both before and after the "heated conversation," I discovered that Paris had placed Isabel's speech into a series of events where Henry requested monies for his undertaking of a crusade to the Holy Lands. The King had assembled in council ecclesiastical prelates to

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[3] I was made aware of this thanks to an E-mail to me from Elizabeth Freeman dated 19 October 2000. See her dissertation entitled "Cistercian Historical Writing in England, 1150-1220," Ph.D. diss. (University of Melbourne, 1999).

[4] Paris was not a scribe mechanically writing what was being said at one occasion or another. In an interesting article suggested to me by Derrick Pitard, a colleague at Slippery Rock University, was of an early fifteenth-century inquisition trial held in Norwich. The scribe, "Johannis Excester, clerici, notartarii publici ... presencia" who dutifully notes the statements of the accused in Latin. The testimony was in Middle English but it was Johannes' job to record in the legal language of his day. On occasion, however, in an effort to keep the original words of speaker the scribe inserted the Middle English phrase right into a "massively Latinate record." See: Steven Justice, "Inquisition, Speech, and Writing: A Case from Late Medieval Norwich," *Representations* 48 (1994), pp. 1-29.

[5] Joseph Dahmus, "Matthew Paris." in *Seven Medieval Historians* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1982), pp. 165-204.

[6] Paris, *English History*, vol. 2, pp. 518-539 and *Chronica Majora,* vol. 5, pp. 324-354.

secure three years worth of tithes from all churches in England.[7] He had a mandate from Pope Innocent IV to do this, but the princes of the church were unwilling, according to Paris, to grant this request and had appealed to the Pope that the mandate for the tithes be revoked.[8] Henry, obviously angered by this, tried to obtain support by having bishops and abbots meet with him privately to change their minds. Paris has the master of the Hospitallers in England and the bishops of Salisbury, Ely, and Winchester being confronted, but all still standing firm in their resolve not to pay the tithes since as a group the princes of the Church wanted to wait the outcome of their appeal to Pope Innocent. Desperate for money, Henry then turned to his secular vassals and demanded pecuniary and military aid for his proposed Crusade. Matthew's entry on this request has the lords responding that they would wait on the appeal by the prelates, "and that they would not differ or secede from the resolution expressed by them."[9]

As the council is dissolving Paris has Isabel appear for her private audience at Westminster. In her speech she says: "Where are the liberties of England, so often granted, so often committed to writing, so often redeemed?" In such a memorable sentence, Isabel's words, as filtered by Paris, echo the letter written by the prelates to Henry informing him of their appeal to Rome. In it they wrote: "henceforth keep inviolate the charter of our liberties, **so often granted,** [just as she had said 'so often granted'], and so often sworn to be observed."[10] What his subjects are saying, according to Paris, is that they were willing to support the King, but in exchange they wanted him to abide by the conditions of the Magna Carta signed by him and his father, King John. So when Isabel says to him, "By no means, my lord, have the nobles of your kingdom given me a charter, but you have given me that charter, which your father granted to me, and which you agreed and swore to observe faithfully, and to keep inviolate."[11] Thus Henry, according to this speech, becomes a violator of the liberties as promised in Magna Carta.

Also, the Countess is a more than a qualified spokesperson for the nobles, since she had inherited liberties from both her husband and father's sides of the family. The earl of Warrene, Isabel's father, and earl of Arundel, Isabel's husband, gave her extensive holdings throughout all of England. This shared wardship was but one small privilege that she possessed. Compared to her vast estates it was of little value, but she felt Henry had wrongfully taken the whole wardship when in

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[7] A.J. Forey, "The Crusading Vows of the English King Henry III," *Durham University Journal*, 65:3 (June 1973), n. s. 34:3, p. 234. Popes usually granted a king who vowed to go on a crusade two years to collect "crusade income" from the ecclesiastical establishment to pay for the expenses of the undertaking. Normally the starting date for the collection of money was two years before the proposed day of departure. In Henry's case, Pope Innocent IV approved the collection of tenths from the English clergy starting in April 1252 with the commencement fixed at 24 June 1256. Matthew Paris had it wrong. The clergy were not trying to prevent the collection so much but questioned when the start of the collection should occur.

[8] Paris, *English History*, vol. 2, p. 520.

[9] Ibid., p. 528.

[10] Ibid., p. 521.

[11] Ibid., p. 529.

fact he only had the right to a portion of it. Out of principle, therefore, Isabel wanted through this audience to advance her claim for the recovery of what was legally hers. If Henry was unwilling to give in on this small matter as she said "you have always proven yourself to them [meaning his vassals] a shameless transgressor of those liberties," then her other more substantial holdings could also be in jeopardy.[12]

Why did Matthew elect to record a conversation of the Countess and Henry rather than just describe the audience? The answer, in part, may be found with reference in a recent article by Bjoin Weiler where he points out that once a background for an event is established "Matthew rarely voices his own opinion, but lets others, of greater authority, speak on his behalf."[13] And so it seems apparent that Paris gave such opportunity to Isabel to speak not only for herself but also on behalf of the privileges of others. Matthew made the confrontation even more memorable by drawing attention to her gender when he interjects: "Whereupon the countess, although a woman, replied with an undauntedness beyond a woman," to be the spokesperson for the nobles of England. Even the King acknowledges her spokesperson role when he asks, "What is this, my lady countess? Have the nobles of England agreed with you and given you a charter to be their spokeswoman and advocate, as you are so eloquent?"[14]

Taken aback by Isabel's attack, Henry was embarrassed and silent; eventually he asked, "Do you not ask this favour because you are my kinswoman?" And in fact Isabel and Henry were related by marriage in that Elizabeth, the King's sister, was the wife of John, earl Warenne and Surrey, the brother of the Countess.[15] So when Henry said of the Countess "do you not ask this favour because you are my kinswoman?" he was stating the truth since they were in fact kin by the marriage practices of thirteenth-century England.[16]

Paris knew of the relationship between Isabel and Henry because he was a close acquaintance of the Countess. It seems certain since Paris could not have been present during the conversation that the source of what was said probably came from Isabel herself.[17] In a flyleaf of a manuscript in Trinity College Dublin, Paris wrote instructions to a person named G to write "please, to the Lady Countess of Arundel, Isabel, that she is to send to you the book about St. Thomas [a Becket] the Martyr and St. Edmund [of Abingdon] which I translated and illustrated."[18] Isabel as one of Matthew Paris' patrons commissioned him to

[12] John A. Nichols, "Why Found a Medieval Cistercian Nunnery?" *Medieval Prosopography* 12:1 (Spring 1991), p. 20.

[13] Bjorn Weiler, "Matthew Paris, Richard of Cornwall's Candidacy for the German Throne, and the Sicilian Business," *Journal of Medieval History* 26:1 (2000), p. 83.

[14] Paris, *English History*, vol. 2, pp. 528-529.

[15] Ibid., p. 231. They married in 1247.

[16] Judith M. Bennett, *Women in the Medieval English Countryside* (New York: Oxford Press, 1987), p. 53.

[17] Richard Vaughan, *Matthew Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), p. 13, lists her as one of Paris' "known friends and informants."

[18] Ibid., p. 170 which cites MS. E; 40 (Dublin: Trinity College).

provide her with an Anglo-Norman translation of the life of St. Edmund. Paris wrote the Latin life of St. Edmund no earlier than 1247 and he provided the Countess with a vernacular translation of it no earlier than 1250.[19] Paris wrote "*Ici commence la vie saint Eadmunt le confessur, arcevesque de Canterbire, translate de latin en romanz par la requesre la cuntesse de Arundel.*"[20]

What probably happened is that after leaving London and her audience with Henry, Isabel stopped at Matthew Paris' monastery of St. Albans on her way home, since that the abbey was but twenty miles north of the city. Since it was near the Christmas season there is even reason to believe she may have stayed at St. Albans' guesthouse for more than a few days. It is also known that Paris started his yearly reporting of events soon after the new year, so what transpired in late 1252 would have been easy to recall when the item was chronicled.[21]

Yet in spite of the patronage Isabel provided Paris, could she really have been so bold as to confront the king as we are told in the Chronicle? Here is one example of many that proves her determination to achieve an objective. After the death of her mother, Maud, in 1249, the Countess took it upon herself to found a monastery of the Cistercian Order.[22] To do so was no easy task as the Order was in the process of obtaining papal approval to accept no longer the care of new female foundations. If the Countess of Arundel had lived in the mid-twelfth century and had wanted to found an affiliate monastery of Cistercian nuns, she would have had difficulty doing so as the Cistercian General Chapter was just being organized to deal with matters of administration. There were women following the customs of Citeaux, but there was no filiated status as yet to recognize any woman's house as Cistercian.[23] In the second decade of the thirteenth century, however, convents were allowed to join so long as they were wealthy enough to be fully cloistered. The demand was so great on the Order that within a short time the abbots of the General Chapter reversed themselves and passed resolutions in 1220, 1225, and again in 1228 prohibiting further admissions of nunneries. The prohibition needed to be repeated because founders circumvented the law by obtaining papal briefs forcing the General Chapter to admit new convents. After a number of frustrating years, the Order finally received

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[19] Ibid., pp. 165-166 which dates the Latin version to the years 1247 to 1253. Vaughn believing 1247 is the more likely date for the Latin since there is a reference in the *Historia Anglorum* to a letter by Bishop Richard Wyck describing the translation of St. Edmund's body on 9 June 1247. Also a note about Blanche of Castile still alive in 1253 puts the Latin version no later than 1253. The vernacular version would come later and Vaughn holds to the 1250 date as it was a literal translation from the Latin.

[20] A. T. Baker, "La Vie de Saint Edmund," *Romania*, 55 (1929), p. 342.

[21] Antonia Gransden, "Matthew Paris and the St Albans School of Historiography" in *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to 1307* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 356-379.

[22] Marham Cartulary, Norfolk and Norwich Record Office, Hare 1/232x., fol. 2r and Paris, *Chronica Majora*, vol. 5, p. 215.

[23] Constance H. Berman, *The Cistercian Evolution: The Inventing of a Religious Order in Twelfth-Century Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), pp. 93-106.

the answer to its dilemma in 1251: in the future it could ignore papal briefs, which forced unwanted incorporations.[24]

Given this negative attitude of the General Chapter in the middle of the thirteenth century, it would require a person of exceptional ability and influence to obtain affiliation for a convent of nuns. Isabel needed to marshal all her forces to achieve her objective. While no record exists of her actually petitioning Rome for a papal brief, we know that the Countess was certainly capable of doing so because on at least one occasion it is documented that Isabel fought for and received rights inherited from her husband for the presentation of candidates to be priors of Wymondham monastery.[25] Moreover, the monks at Citeaux knew her family since ten marks went annually to the abbot of that house from the Warenne estates.[26] We have already heard that Isabel had strong and powerful friends who were members of both the English temporal and ecclesiastical hierarchy. Additionally she was related to men and women who were able to bring great pressure to bear on the affairs of their day. It should come as no surprise that the General Chapter of Citeaux in 1250 and again in 1251 approved the incorporation of Marham Abbey as a nunnery of the Cistercian Order with all the rights and privileges of membership.[27]

On St. Bartholomew's Day, 1252, Marham was formally filiated to the family of Waverley, the motherhouse of the Cistercian Order in England. Isabel gained papal permission to enter the abbey and be present at the ceremony of incorporation, which was presided over by the abbots of Waverley and Beaulieu. The Waverley Annuals record her making an offer of four marks and a cask of wine to the monks, which the Countess had the foresight to give to the abbot as an expression of gratitude.[28] In the same year, on September 3, the foundation grant which was given

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[24] J. M. Canivez, ed., *Statuta Capitulorum Generalium Ordinis Cisterciensis,* 8 vols. (Louvain, 1934-41), vol. 1, p. 517 (1220:4), vol. 2, p. 36 (1225:7), vol. 2, p. 28 (1228:16); Louis J. Lekai, *The Cistercians: Ideals and Reality* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1977), pp. 351-352; and John A. Nichols and Lillian T. Shank, eds., *Distant Echoes: Medieval Religious Women*, vol. 1 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984), p. 239.

[25] H. T. Riley, ed., *Abbatum monasterii Sancti Albani*, 2 vols. (London, 1863-76), vol. 1, p. 407; W. Dugdale, ed., *Monasticon Anglicanum*, new edn. J. Caley, H. Ellis, and B. Bandinel, 6 vols. in 8, (London, 1817-1830; reprint Westmead, Eng., 1970), vol. 3, pp. 323-325 and Susan Wood, *English Monasteries and Their Patrons in the Thirteenth Century* (Oxford: University Press, 1955), p. 61.

[26] *CLR Henry III*, 3:235 and Nichols, "Why Found a Medieval Cistercian Nunnery?" p. 20.

[27] *Statuta Capitulorum Cisterciensis.* vol. 2, p. 355 (1250:43), vol. 2, 364 (1251:26): "Inspectio abbatiae monialium de Maranlit [Marham] in Anglia, quam petit incorporari nostro Ordini nobilis comitissa de Harundel [Arundel], de Savalleia [Waverley], et de Belloloco [Beaulieu] abbatibus iterato committitur in plenaria Ordinis potestate, qui ad locum etc., et quid inde, etc. et sit filia Cistercii sicut requirit comitissa praedicta. Abbas de Savalleia hoc collegae suo denuntiet."

[28] Henry R. Luard, ed., *Annales Monasterii de Waverleia*, 2 vols. (Rolls Series, No. 36, 1865), vol. 2, pp. 344-345.

by Isabel to the abbey was inspected and confirmed by Henry III and was further endorsed by her brother, John, earl of Warenne.[29]

This background gives us a way to judge the "heated conversation" between Isabel and Henry, but four questions must be recognized before conclusions are advanced. First, did Matthew Paris fabricate the audience with Henry to make his displeasure with the King known? I think not. Paris was interested in reporting a steady stream of information that came to him on a regular basis. He had to condense and edit what he felt was important and omit what was of less consequence. Matthew would not manufacture an event but he was certainly capable of altering information to solidify an argument that previous entries in his chronicle had developed. Therefore, it seems safe to assume that Isabel, countess of Arundel, really met with Henry over a wardship she believed was rightfully hers. Moreover corroborating records prove that there was a disputed wardship between the two.[30]

The second question is why Isabel and not someone else? This can be answered by saying that Matthew Paris found in the Countess a champion who could advance his views. Paris certainly was aware of Isabel's past successes related to the difficult founding of the Cistercian convent at Marham, as well as the fact that she was his patron and acquaintance when she commissioned the translated *Life of St. Edmund*.

Third, was it possible for her to have a private audience with the King? Paris supplies the answer in that Henry was meeting individual prelates and lords in private over his money problems and Isabel could surely have scheduled one as well. Would he have seen a young, kinswoman in private? Paris says as much when he refers to Countess as both kin and as a "young woman [who] replied in a manner befitting one of mature years." Based on her family history, it is likely that Isabel was at most twenty-six years of age when the meeting took place.[31] So while Matthew Paris' description of her relationship to Henry and her age are correct, we can never know for certain who was at this "private" audience other than the King and Countess.

Finally, were the words exchanged between the two as reported? Probably not, since it seems certain Matthew Paris was getting his information second hand as told to him by Isabel, if not others, who heard of the audience. Does that mean he misrepresented the resolve and boldness of the Countess to seek what she felt was legally hers? I do not think so. Other aspects of her life prove her determination. Matthew Paris was probably not far off when he has Isabel countering

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[29] *CCAR Henry III* 1:403; *Monasticon Anglicanum*, vol. 5, pp. 743-744; Hare I/232x, Marham Cartulary, fol. 2v; and John A. Nichols, "The History and Cartulary of the Cistercian Nuns of Marham Abbey:1249-1536," Ph.D. diss. (Kent State University, Ohio: 1974) which has the full Latin text of the foundation as well as the calendaring of the cartulary.

[30] *Close Rolls*, vol. 7, p. 357 and Scott Waugh, *The Lordship of England: Royal Wardships and Marriages in English Society and Politics 1217-1327* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 254, n. 81-84.

[31] Nichols, "Why Found a Medieval Cistercian Nunnery?" p. 2.

Henry's denial by saying: "Since you deny me what justice demands, how can I hope that you will grant me a favor at my request?" Having previously said to the King that he would be held accountable for his actions "before the awful judge of all" and asking for the "Lord, the God of vengeances [to] avenge us...," it should come as no surprise when she finished speaking that Isabel, without asking Henry's permission to leave, left the chamber and returned to her home. [32]

As a postscript to this oral account, the whole embarrassing situation may have been based on misinformation about the facts of the wardship, or simply that Henry was trying to take total possession of a ward's estate without anyone challenging him in doing so. But one year later the Close Rolls document that the King surrendered one-quarter of the disputed wardship and pardoned the Countess thirty-marks fine that she had incurred in appealing her case. The sole condition Henry imposed on Isabel was that the Countess of Arundel never again repeats the *opprobria* – reproaches she said to him at Westminster.[33] It seemed that the King was distressed about accused injustice and wanted to espouse a reputation as a just king.[34] It is ironic that Matthew Paris' oral reporting of this "heated conversation" between Henry and Isabel makes a private matter into a public affair. The chronicling of this not only harmed the King's reputation but also elevated the status of this young Countess. Isabel's damning words are remembered more than Henry III's setting of the matter right. More importantly, Matthew Paris found in Isabel de Aubigny, countess of Arundel, a strong woman whose "voice" still survives. What we have, then, is a significance conversation between a subject and her sovereign made more interesting because she is a woman whose voice could be ignored, but was not. This is a small, but significant chapter in medieval European oral history.

[32] Paris, *English History*, p. 529.

[33] *Close Rolls*, vol. 7, p. 357, Scott Waugh, *Lordship*, p. 254 and D.A. Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1996), p. 80, n. 23. Citing MS Westminster C/60/51, m. 10.

[34] Ibid. Citing P.R.O. memoranda rolls, E/368; E/159.

Matthew Paris on his death-bed
(B. M. Roy, MS 14 C vii, fol. 218b)

Appendix:

Nota dicta Ysabellae comitissae de Harundel.

Tempore quoque sub eodem, domino rege adhuc moram Londoniis continuante, venit ad eum in cameram suam Ysabella comitissa Harundelliae, relicta comitis Harundelliae H[ugonis] et ejusdem regis cognata, ut pro jure suo de quadam custodia ipsam contingente verba faceret sibi profectura. Rex autem vultum ei primo protendens serenum, postea cum verbis asperioribus objurgans, nihil, quod postulavit comitissa favorabiliter exaudivit; vendicavit enim sibi rex custodiam cujusdam custodiae, ratione particulae ipsum regem contingentis. Unde ipsa comitissa, licet mulier, non tamen muliebriter respondit imperterrita; "0 domine rex, quare avertis faciem tuam a justitia? Jam in curia tua quod justum est nequit impetrari. Medius inter Deum et nos constitueris, sed nec te ipsum nec nos sane regis, nee ecelesiam veritus es multipliciter perturbare, quod non tantum in praesentiarum sed multotiens est experta. Nobiles insuper regni modis variis vexare non formidas vel erubescis." Quod cum audisset rex, corrugans nares et subsannans, voce dixit elevata; "Quid est hoc, O domina comitissa? confeceruntne magnates Angliae cartam, et pepigerunt tecum, ut fieres eorum, quia eloquens es, advocata et prolocutrix?" Ad quod comitissa, licet juvencula, non tamen juveniliter respondit; "Nequaquam mihi, domine, regni tui primates cartam confecerunt; sed tu cartam, quam confecit pater tuus, et tu ealm concessisti, et jurasti observare fideliter et irrefragabiliter, et multotiens ut eam observares a fidelibus tuis pecuniam de libertatibus observandis eorum extorsisti, sed tu semper eis impudens transgressor extitisti. Unde fidei laesor enormis et sacramenti transgressor mani-

festus esse comprobaris. Ubi libertates Angliae totiens in scripta redactae, totiens concessae, totiensque redemptae? Ego igitur, licet mulier, omnesque indigenae et naturales ac fideles tui appellamus contra te ante tribunal tremendi Judicis. Et erunt nobis testes caelum et terra quoniam inique nimis nos tractas insontes, et nos Deus ultionum Dominus ulciscatur." Ad haec rex siluit confusus, quia dictante propria conscientia cognovit quoniam a tramite veritatis non exorbitavit comitissa, et ait; "Nonne postulas gratiam eo quod mihi cognata sis?" At illa; "Ex quo mihi quod jus expostulat denegasti, quomodo spem concipiam ut mihi gratiam facias postulanti? Sed et contra illos ante faciem Christi appello, qui te fascinantes et infatuantes consiliarii tui sunt, et te a via veritatis avertunt, suis tantummodo commodis inhiantes." His igitur auditis rex siluit, satis civiliter redargutus. Comitissa autem nec licentiata, nec licentiam postulans, magnis laboribus et sumptibus inaniter factis, ad propria remeavit. Rex autem perseverans incorrigibilis, nec his nec aliis verbis salubribus adquievit.

Latin text: Henry Richards Laurd (ed.), *Matthew Parisiinsis Monachi Sancti Albini Chronica Majora 1248-1259*, 5 vols. (London: Longman, 1880), vol. 5, pp. 336-337.

Complete English Translation of the Countess of Arundel's speech:

About the same time, too, whilst the king was still staying in London, there came to him in his private room Isabella, countess of Arundel, widow of H[ugh], earl of Arundel, a kinswoman of the king's, to plead for her rights in the matter of a certain wardship belonging to her. At first the king assumed a calm look, but afterwards reproached her with harsh words, and would not turn a favourable ear to any of the countess's requests; for he claimed to himself the charge of the said wardship, by reason of a small portion of it, which did belong to him. Whereupon the countess, although a woman, replied with an undauntedness beyond a woman, "Why, my lord king, do you avert your face from justice? One cannot now obtain what is right and just at your court. You are appointed a mediator between the Lord and us, but you do not govern well either yourself or us, neither do you fear to vex and trouble the Church in many ways, which has been proved not only now, but ofttimes of old also; moreover, without fear or shame you oppress the nobles of the kingdom in divers ways." The king, on hearing this speech, laughed derisively, and curling his nostrils, said, with a raised voice, "What is this, my lady countess? have the nobles of England agreed with you and given you a charter to be their spokeswoman and advocate, as you are so eloquent?" To this the countess, although a young woman, replied, in a manner befitting one of more mature years: "By no means, my lord, have the nobles of your kingdom given me a charter, but you have given me that charter, which your father granted to me, and which you agreed and swore to observe faithfully, and to keep inviolate; and many a time have you extorted money from your subjects whilst promising to observe their rights and liberties, but you have always proved yourself to them a shameless transgressor of those liberties; whereby it is plainly proved that you have broken both your faith and your oath. Where are the liberties of England, so often granted,

so often committed to writing, so often redeemed? I, although a woman, and all of us your natural and faithful subjects, appeal against you, before the tribunal of the awful judge of all; and heaven and earth will be our witnesses, since you treat us with injustice, though we are innocent of crime against you, – and may the Lord, the God of vengeance, avenge us." At these words the king was put to shame and silence, as he knew by the dictates of his own conscience, that the countess had not deviated from the path of truth, but at length he said: "Do you not ask this favour because you are my kinswoman?" To which she replied, "Since you deny me what justice demands, how can I hope that you will grant me a favour at my request? But I also appeal before the face of Christ against those who are your advisers, who bewitch and infatuate you, and turn you from the paths of truth, being eagerly intent only on their own advantage." After listening to this civilly reproachful speech, the king was silent, and the countess, without obtaining, or even asking for permission, returned home, after having been put to great trouble and expense to no purpose. The king, however, continued incorrigible, and could not listen to these or other salutary counsels.

Source: Matthew Paris, *English History: from the Year 1235-1273*. transl. J. A. Giles, vol. 2 (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853, reprint AMS Press, 1968), pp. 528-529.

ORAL HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE AGES
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Edited by Gerhard Jaritz and Michael Richter

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Cover illustration: The wife of Potiphar covets Joseph: "... erat autem Joseph pulchra facie et decorus apectu: post multos itaque dies iecit domina oculos suis in Ioseph et ait dormi mecum." ("... And Joseph was [a] goodly [person], and well favoured. And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me."), Gen. 39: 6-7 (KJV). Concordantiae Caritatis, c. 1350. Cistercian abbey of Lilienfeld (Lower Austria), ms 151, fol. 244v (detail). Photo: Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit (Krems an der Donau).

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Preface

Oral culture played an instrumental role in medieval society.[1] Due to the lack of any direct source evidence, however, research into the functions and importance of oral communication in the Middle Ages must confront a number of significant problems. Only indrect traces offer the opportunity to analyze phenomena that were based on or connected with the spoken word. The 'oral history' of the Middle Ages requires the application of different approaches than dealing with the 20th or 21st century.

For some decades Medieval Studies have been interested in questions of orality and literacy, their relationship and the substitution of the spoken by the written word.[2] Oral and literate culture were not exclusive and certainly not opposed to each other.[3] The 'art of writing' was part of the 'ars rhetorica' and writing makes no sense without speech.[4] Any existing written statement should also be seen as a spoken one, although, clearly, not every oral statement as a written one. Authors regularly wrote with oral delivery in mind. 'Speaking' and 'writing' are not antonyms.

It is also obvious that "the use of oral communication in medieval society should not be evaluated . . . as a function of *culture populaire* vis-à-vis *culture savante* but, rather, of the communication habits and the tendency of medieval man

[1] For the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, cf. Willem Frijhoff, "Communication et vie quotidienne à la fin du moyen âge et à l'epoque moderne: réflexions de théorie et de méthode," in *Kommuniation und Alltag in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Helmut Hundsbichler (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), p. 24: "La plupart de gens vivait encore pour l'essentiel dans une culture orale et les procédés d'appropriation des idées passaient de préférence par la parole dite et écoutée, quand bien même on était capable d'une lecture visuelle plus ou moins rudimentaire."

[2] See Marco Mostert, "New Approaches to Medieval Communication?" in *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*, ed. Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), pp. 15-37; Michael Richter, "Die Entdeckung der 'Oralität' der mittelalterlichen Gesellschaft durch die neuere Mediävistik," in *Die Aktualität des Mittelalters*, ed. Hans-Werner Goetz (Bochum: D. Winkler, 2000), pp. 273-287.

[3] Peter Burke calls the construct of "oral versus literate" useful but at the same time dangerous: idem, "Mündliche Kultur und >Druckkultur< im spätmittelalterlichen Italien," in *Volkskultur des europäischen Spätmittelalters*, eds. Peter Dinzelbacher and Hans-Dieter Mück (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1987), p. 60.

[4] Michael Clanchy, "Introduction," in *New Approaches to Medieval Communication*, ed. Marco Mostert (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), p. 6.

to share his intellectual experiences in the corporate framework."[5] Oral delivery was not "the sole prerogative of any socioeconomic class."[6]

For all these reasons, it is important to analyze the extent of and context, in which 'speech acts,' auditive effects, and oral tradition occur in medieval sources .[7] Research into the use of the spoken word or references to it in texts and images provides new insight into various, mainly social, rules and patterns of the communication system. It opens up additional approaches to the organization and complexity of different, but indispensably related, media in medieval society, and their comparative analysis.[8]

The spoken word is connected with the physical presence of its 'sender.' Speech may represent the authenticity of the given message in a more obvious way than written texts or images. Therefore, the use of 'speech acts' in written or visual evidence also has to be seen in context with the attempt to create, construct, or prove authenticity. Moreover, spoken messages contribute to and increase the lifelikeness of their contents, which may influence their perception by the receiver, their efficacy and success. Being aware of such a situation will have led to the explicit and intended use and application of the spoken word in written texts and images – to increase their authenticity and importance, too.

If one operates with a model of 'closeness' and 'distance' of communication with regard to the level of relation of 'senders' and 'receivers,' then the 'speech acts' or their representation have to be seen as contributors to a 'closer' connection among the participants of the communication process.[9] At the same time, however, speech might be evaluated as less official. One regularly comes across 'oral space'

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[5] Sophia Menache, *The Vox Dei. Communication in the Middle Ages* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 19.

[6] Ibidem, p. 21. Cf. also Jan-Dirk Müller, "Zwischen mündlicher Anweisung und schriftlicher Sicherung von Tradition. Zur Kommunikationsstruktur spätmittelalterlicher Fechtbücher," in *Kommunikation und Alltag in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Helmut Hundsbichler (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), p. 400: "Offensichtlich sind schriftliche und nichtschriftliche Tradierung von Wissen weiterhin relativ unabhängig voneinander, nachdem die Schrift längst dazu angesetzt hat, Inseln der Mündlichkeit oder praktisch-enaktiver Wissensvermittlung zu erobern. Die Gedächtnisstütze kann die Erfahrung nicht ersetzen, sondem allenfalls reaktivieren. Sie ist sogar nur verständlich, wo sie auf anderweitig vermittelte Vorkenntnisse stößt."

[7] Cf. W.F.H. Nicolaisen, ed., *Oral Tradition in the Middle Ages* (Binghamton: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1995).

[8] See, esp., Horst Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen, Schrift und Bild. Kultur und Gedächtnis im Mittelalter* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1995), passim.

[9] See also Stefan Sonderegger, ">Gesprochen oder nur geschrieben?< Mündlichkeit in mittelalterlichen Texten als direkter Zugang zum Menschen," in *Homo Medietas. Aufsätze zu Religiosität, Literatur und Denkformen des Menschen vom Mittelalter bis in die Neuzeit. Festschrift für Alois Maria Haas zum 65. Geburtstag,* eds. Claudia Brinker-von der Heyde and Niklaus Largier (Bern et al.: Peter Lang, 1999), p. 665: "Jedenfalls darf man sich bewußt bleiben, daß auch in den Texten des deutschen Mittelalters die Reflexe gesprochener Sprache eine bedeutende Schicht ausmachen, die besonders dann immer wieder hervortritt, wenn es um einen direkten Zugang zum Menschen geht, um einVerstehen aus unmittelbarer Partnerschaft heraus ..."

that has become institutionalized or more official by the application of 'written space.'[10] Simultanous employment of such different levels and qualities of messages must often have had considerable influence on their efficacy.[11]

The papers in this volume are the outcome of an international workshop that was held in February, 2001, at the Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest. Participants concentrated on problems of the occurrence, usage, and patterns of the spoken word in written and visual sources of the Middle Ages. They dealt with the role and contents of direct and indirect speech in textual evidence or in relation to it, such as chronicles, travel descriptions, court and canonization protocols, sermons, testaments, law-books, literary sources, drama, etc. They also tried to analyze the function of oral expression in connection with late medieval images.

The audiovisuality of medieval communication processes[12] has proved to be evident and, thus, important for any kind of further comparative analysis of the various levels of the 'oral–visual–literate,' i.e. multimedia culture of the Middle Ages. Particular emphasis has to be put on methodological problems, such as the necessity of interdisciplinary approaches,[13] or the question of the extent to which we are, generally, able to comprehend and to decode the communication systems of the past.[14] Moreover, the medievalist does not come across any types of sources in which oral communication represents the main concern.[15] Instead, she or he is confronted, at first glance, with a great variety of 'casual' and 'marginal' evidence.

We would like to thank all the contributors to the workshop and to this volume. Their cooperation made it possible to publish the results of the meeting in the same year in which it took place. This can be seen as a rare exception, at least in the world of the historical disciplines. The head, faculty, staff, and students of the Department of Medieval Studies of Central European University offered various help and support. Special thanks go to Judith Rasson, the copy editor of

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[10] This, e.g., could be well shown in a case study on the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela: Friederike Hassauer, "Schriftlichkeit und Mündlichkeit im Alltag des Pilgers am Beispiel der Wallfahrt nach Santiago de Compostela," in *Wallfahrt und Alltag in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, eds. Gerhard Jaritz and Barbara Schuh (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), pp. 277-316.

[11] Cf. Bob Scribner, "Mündliche Kommunikation und Strategien der Macht in Deutschland im 16. Jahrhundert," in *Kommunikation und Alltag in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, ed. Helmut Hundsbichler (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1992), pp. 183-197.

[12] Wenzel, *Hören und Sehen*, p. 292.

[13] Cf. Ursula Schaefer, "Zum Problem der Mündlichkeit," in *Modernes Mittelalter. Neue Bilder einer populären Epoche*, ed. Joachim Heinzle (Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1994), pp. 374 f.

[14] Frijhoff, "Communication et vie quotidienne," p. 25: "Sommes-nous encore en mesure de communiquer avec la communication de jadis?"

[15] Michael Richter, *Sprache und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter. Untersuchungen zur mündlichen Kommunikation in England von der Mitte des elften bis zu Beginn des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1979), p. 22.

this volume, who took particluar care with the texts of the many non-native speakers fighting with the pitfalls of the English language.

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