

ARTICLE

REVISITING *MONTAILLOU*EWA DOMANSKA¹ 

ABSTRACT

Based on extensive scholarship in English and French, this article offers an analytical survey of both the laudatory and critical reception of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s *Montaillou* (1975). I revisit the Latin text of Jacques Fournier’s register and compare it with relevant fragments in the French and English translations of *Montaillou*. This comparison provides a starting point to comment on Le Roy Ladurie’s novelistic writing style and the “hypnotic effect of narrative” achieved by the book. It also enables me to address historians’ criticisms of how Le Roy Ladurie used historical sources. In the second part of the article, I discuss anthropological history and the history of mentality as subdisciplines of contemporary historical writing, and I situate *Montaillou* within this tradition. Following Charles Tilly, I argue that Le Roy Ladurie’s work is an example of “retrospective ethnography,” a term that more accurately describes Le Roy Ladurie’s traditional approach to anthropological research, particularly the method of participatory observation. I also highlight prosopography as a method in Le Roy Ladurie’s study of social relations in the medieval village. In conclusion, I reflect on the contemporary relevance of *Montaillou* for supporting human dignity and agency as well as the “humanity of history” needed in times of social and political upheaval.

Keywords: Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, historical sources, narrative, anthropological history, microhistory, history from below, human condition, human agency

A tribute to Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (1929–2023),
the historian who made a small village and its forgotten inhabitants world-famous

1. This article is an elaborated and updated version of the introduction to the Polish edition of *Montaillou* that was published as “*Montaillou—ziemia obiecana błędów*” [*Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error*], in *Montaillou—wioska heretyków 1294–1324* [*Montaillou: The Village of Heretics, 1294–1324*], by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, transl. Ewa Dorota Żółkiewska, 2nd ed. (Poznań: Vesper, 2014), 5–23. I would like to thank Veronika Čapská, Krzysztof Pomian, Dariusz Andrzej Sikorski, Agata Stankowska, Jacek Kochanowicz (1946–2014), and the anonymous reviewers who provided valuable comments and suggestions on an earlier version of the text. I am grateful to Ethan Kleinberg for his time and helpful feedback. My heartfelt thanks to Elizabeth A. Boyle for her thorough and dedicated editing work. The translation of this article was enabled by financial support from the Faculty of History, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland. Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own.

The recent passings of three of the founding fathers and mothers of my intellectual heritage, which is based, on the one hand, on narrativism and, on the other hand, on anthropological history/microhistory (that is, Hayden White in 2018; Natalie Zemon Davis in 2023; and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie in 2023) has been a difficult experience of alienation and loss. These scholars were gurus and the subjects of research for scholars who worked on doctoral dissertations in the 1980s and early 1990s while engaging in debates about the narrative/narrativist and anthropological turn in historical theory and practice. A nostalgic revisiting of *Montailou* after all these years reminded me of what I cherished and still find attractive in their approach to history: the existential dimension of everyday life stories of ordinary people. In this context, Hans Kellner formulated a particularly noteworthy problem:

Perhaps it is a question here of what kind of world one chooses to be a part of, an ethical question, in other words. So I ask myself, what sort of world are the *mentalité* historians choosing? What future follows from this choice? . . . [I]t is always worthwhile to ask what version of the future does any vision of the past entail?²

In his realistic utopia of a village inhabited by people who, with their flaws and vices, are very human, Le Roy Ladurie sublimated the everyday lives of the village's inhabitants. He venerated interpersonal bonds, especially those rooted in genuine feelings, regardless of whether they involved illegal relationships. He longed for a normalcy that expresses itself spontaneously and frankly. Particularly important to him were family ties, friendships, neighborly relations, and bonds with animals and the land. Indeed, Montailou was the everyday life of common people for whom "Heaven was when you were happy in this world, Hell was when you were miserable, and that was all."³

Le Roy Ladurie remained true to his belief in prioritizing human beings. This perspective, along with his worldview, converged with the beliefs of Montailou's inhabitants, who expressed toward the surrounding nature "a feeling tinged with anthropocentrism."⁴ Le Roy Ladurie was close to the *terre des hommes* that he researched on both the micro level and the macro level: "My wish for our planet, where the majority of people are poor peasants, is the opposite of most futuristic Utopias: namely a rural and probably impossible one. I should like, in the twenty-first century, to see the whole world looking more like the Aveyron in about 1925. It would not be at all bad as a brave new world."⁵

2. Hans Kellner, "An Interview with Hans Kellner," in *Encounters: Philosophy of History after Postmodernism*, by Ewa Domańska (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 48–49.

3. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montailou: The Promised Land of Error*, transl. Barbara Bray (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 320.

4. *Ibid.*, 288.

5. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "The Rouergue through the Lens," in *The Mind and Method of the Historian*, transl. Siân Reynolds and Ben Reynolds (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 210. Aveyron is a region of southern France with a particularly charming landscape and settlements that have preserved the atmosphere of medieval villages. Vast and sparsely populated, in the technologized present day, it is a reminder of the premodern world. The atmosphere of this region has been discussed extensively in the context of François Truffaut's famous film *The Wild Child (L'enfant sauvage)*, (1970). Based on a true story, the film is about Dr. Jean Itard, who, in 1800, discovered a feral boy (whom he named Victor of Aveyron) in the woods there and tried to educate him.

From our present perspective, what is the value of *Montaillou* as a classic of modern historiography and what is its value for future historians and historical research? Le Roy Ladurie's masterpiece, with its focus on the existential dimensions of everyday life and interpersonal bonds, remains a powerful model for contemporary historians. In an era marked by global crises and profound social changes, microhistory still provides a valuable lens for understanding humanity. By focusing on individual lives, this approach underscores human dignity while emphasizing social and political agency.

MONTAILLOU: THE PROMISED LAND OF ERROR

"Montaillou is not a large parish," Le Roy Ladurie began his story: "At the time of the events which led to [the local bishop Jacques] Fournier's investigations, the local population consisted of between 200 and 250 inhabitants."⁶ Among them were Béatrice de Planissoles and Pierre Clergue, who, thanks to a best-selling book by a French historian, have become popular historical heroes.⁷ Interrogated by Fournier on 22 August 1320, Béatrice told the official of her intense relationship with the curate of Montaillou, Pierre Clergue. The record of this testimony in the inquisition register was the basis for Le Roy Ladurie's construction of this dialogue:

Béatrice de Planissoles, at the beginning of her relationship with Pierre Clergue, was haunted by the fear of having an illegitimate child (i.243–4): "*What shall I do if I become pregnant by you?*" she said to the priest. "*I shall be ashamed and lost.*"

Clergue had an answer for everything. He told his sweetheart that he had a special herb which acted as a contraceptive, both masculine and feminine. He said: "*I have a certain herb. If a man wears it when he mingles his body with that of a woman he cannot engender, nor she conceive*". . . .

One day, said Béatrice, I asked the priest: "Leave your herb with me."

"No," he said, "I won't, because then you could be united carnally with another man, and thanks to the herb avoid becoming pregnant by him!"

6. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 3. The French edition, which was published by Gallimard in 1975 and includes a lengthy introduction, begins differently: "Deux mots d'abord, à propos de la démographie du village, sur laquelle je serai bref, me réservant d'y revenir, quant aux composantes, en un chapitre ultérieur" (Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* [Paris: Gallimard, 1975], 25). Further references to the original French book are derived from this first edition, which, in subsequent citations, I identify as Ladurie, *Montaillou* (FR).

7. This phenomenon was a subject of concern for John H. Elliott, who, referring to another popular hero of the microhistorical story, wrote: "I am disturbed about a society in which Martin Guerre . . . looms larger than Martin Luther" (quoted in Richard L. Kagan and Geoffrey Parker, "John Elliott," *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy* 21 [2023], 205). See also Natalie Zemon Davis, "Martin Luther, Martin Guerre, and Ways of Knowing," *Common Knowledge* 25, no. 1–3 (2019), 171–75. Additionally, Jerzy Topolski, who wrote that the border between "great" and "small" history is accepted, asked: "Why should, for example, Queen Isabelle of Castile be worthy of remembrance and not this Béatrice de Planissoles?" (*Od Achillesa do Béatrice de Planissoles: Zarys historii historiografii* [From Achilles to Béatrice de Planissoles: An Outline of History of Historiography] [Warsaw: Rytm, 1998], 146). His own book ends by stating that "it is worth going into history just to uncover the existence of Béatrice de Planissoles" (ibid., 155). Topolski has created from this personage an indicator of the development of historiography.

*The priest said that out of jealousy of Pathau, his cousin, who had been my lover before him.*⁸

Historians quickly took up this steamy plot, continuing Le Roy Ladurie's investigations and debating what this herb was and where, as a matter of fact, the medicament, which was "wrapped up and tied in a piece of linen cloth the size and length of . . . the first digit of the little finger of her hand, and which had a long string,"⁹ was placed during intercourse (despite the fixation of the scribe, who, in the Latin report, twice noted that it was placed "between the breasts" [*inter mamillas*]).¹⁰ They have also wondered whether it was treated by lovers as a contraceptive (in the form of a sort of tampon with a threat), a magical amulet,

8. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 172–73. According to the Latin original of Béatrice's testimony, this passage reads as follows: "Item dixit quod a principio quando eam dictus sacerdos primo carnaliter cognoverat, ipsa dixit dicto sacerdoti: 'Et quid ego faciam si impregnare vobis? Ero confusa et perditā.' Cui dictus rector respondit quod ipse habebat quamdam herbam quam si homo defferret quando comiscebatur cum muliere, vir generare non posset nec mulier concipere. . . . Et, ut dixit, aliquando ipsa rogavit dictum sacerdotem quod dimitteret sibi dictam erbam, qui respondebat quod non faceret quia, ut dicebat, ipsa posset coniungi cum alio homine, et non impregnaretur ab eo, si dictam erbam portaret, et propter hoc, ne cum alio homine cimmisceretur, timendo ne impregnaretur ab eo, nolebat ei dimittere dictam herbam, ut dicebat. Ut et ipsa dixit, hoc dictus sacerdos faciebat principaliter propter Ramundum Clerici alias vocatum Pathau, qui primo tenuerat eam, antequam dictus secerdos, cognatus germanus dicti Ramundi Clerici, habuisset eam, quia predicti duo erant zelotipi de ea." ("Le Registre d'inquisition de Jacques Fournier, évêque de Pamiers (1318–1325)," in *Manuscrit n° Vat. Latin 4030 de la Bibliothèque Vaticane* [Toulouse: Privat, 1965], 1:243–44). The fragmentary translation of the source text reads as follows: "She said that when they began their relationship, she said to the priest, 'What will I do if I become pregnant by you? I will be dishonored and lost.' The rector told her that he was in possession of an herb which, when it is taken by a man when he lies with a woman, acts so that the man cannot generate and the woman cannot conceive. . . . The speaker said that when she asked the priest to give her the herb, he said that he wouldn't because she could then have sexual relations with another man and not get pregnant by him if she should wear that herb" ("Beatrice de Planissoles (1320)," in "Christian Heterodoxy," in *Other Middle Ages: Witnesses at the Margins of Medieval Society*, ed. Michael Goodich [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998], 212–13). In the French edition of *Montaillou*, this fragment reads:

Béatrice de Planissoles, par exemple, au début de ses relations avec Pierre Clergue, est hantée par la perspective d'une grossesse illégitime: *Que ferai-je si je suis enceinte de vous?* dit-elle au prêtre. *Je serai confuse et perdue* [. . .] Clergue a réponse à tout [. . .] Du tac au tac, il rassure sa belle amie, elle-même un peu sorcière . . . : il l'informe qu'il possède une herbe spéciale, qui fait fonction de contraceptif, à la fois masculin et féminin [. . .] *Je possède une certaine herbe*, dit Pierre à Béatrice. *Si l'homme la porte quand il mêle son corps à celui de la femme, il ne peut engendrer; ni, elle, concevoir* [. . .] *Un jour, poursuit Béatrice, je fis une prière au prêtre:*

— *Laisse-moi ton «herbe» en dépôt permanent.*

— *Non, me répondit-il, je n'en ferai rien, parce qu'autrement tu pourrais l'unir charnellement avec un autre homme, tout en évitant, grâce à l'herbe que je t'aurais confiée, devenir enceinte de lui!*

Le prêtre disait cela, note Béatrice toute songeuse, *par jalousie pour Pathau, son cousin germain, qui l'avait précédé comme amant auprès de moi.* (Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou* [FR], 247–49)

Le Roy Ladurie emphasized that he did not use the translation of the register into French done by Jean Duvernoy and that "tous les textes reproduits ci-après dans ce livre, sont traduits par moi de l'original latin" (all of the texts cited in this book were translated by me from the Latin) (Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou* [FR], 10n1). In the passage quoted above (and its translation), readers are already dealing with the author's dramatization of a fragment of the registry and rendering it into a dialogue.

9. "Beatrice de Planissoles (1320)," 213. See also Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 173.

10. "Le Registre d'inquisition de Jacques Fournier," 244.

or, indeed, even an erotic toy.¹¹ The fact is, however, that it seems to have been effective because neither Béatrice nor any of the other women involved with the amorous priest were troubled with unwanted pregnancies.

It is difficult to believe that this story, which is so close and understandable for contemporary readers who are familiar with the ongoing discussions of different contraceptive methods, changing family models, priests breaking their vows of chastity, and moral crisis in a postmodern and even posthuman world, is about people living at the beginning of the fourteenth century and comes from the preparation of an inquisition register. This extraordinary book by Le Roy Ladurie, who been lauded as “one of the most—if not the most—original, versatile, and imaginative historians in the world,”¹² is full of intimate images that portray everyday life in a Pyrenean village. The transmission of details from the sources enabled Le Roy Ladurie to reconstruct “an ethnography of the sheep-raising regions of the Pyrenees in the first quarter of the fourteenth century”¹³ and write “a monograph of the sexual life of a village.”¹⁴ These details also enabled Le Roy Ladurie to render historical justice for those social groups whose histories have been mistreated in history textbooks and bring life back to “real flesh and blood peasants.”¹⁵ Articulating the goal of his reflections, Le Roy Ladurie wrote, the “Albigensian heresy provides an opportunity for the study not of Catharism itself—that is not my subject—but of the mental outlook of the country people.”¹⁶ This project, which is in the spirit of Lucien Febvre, not only focuses on showing mentalities but also presents a collective biography by reconstructing the biographies of many of the village’s inhabitants.¹⁷

Montaillou—the last refuge of the Cathar heresy in France—was not, however, a typical settlement: there was no serfdom, and there were no large fields

11. See John M. Riddle, *Eve's Herbs: A History of Contraception and Abortion in the West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 22–24. Riddle emphasized the importance of Béatrice’s testimony for broadening knowledge of medieval contraceptive methods: although it is known that methods to prevent pregnancy have been used for centuries, the witness stated both that they were used and that these measures were utilized not only by the upper classes but also by lower ones. Béatrice, a chatelaine, was indeed nobility, but she lived in Montaillou and spent her life among the peasants (Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 15). More has been written about the *sexual morale* of Béatrice by David Zbiral in “The Norm-Deviation Model Reconsidered: Four Cases of ‘Alternative’ Sexual Morals Judged by the Inquisition,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 3, no. 2 (2010), 220–28.

12. Lawrence Stone, “In the Alleys of Mentalité,” *New York Review of Books*, 8 November 1979, 20.

13. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 103.

14. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou* (FR), 242: “une monographie sur la sexualité villageoise.” The sentence is translated differently in the English edition, where the word “monograph” is omitted (Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 169).

15. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou* (FR), 9: “les paysans de chair et d’os.”

16. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 231. As Lola Sharon Davidson demonstrated, “heretical beliefs are not simply the power claims of particular groups but rather themselves the expression of confused social relations during a period of accelerated social change” (“Montaillou: Cosmology and Social Structure,” *Journal of Religious History* 35, no. 4 [2011], 516).

17. John H. Arnold has argued that the testimonies recorded in the inquisition registry are themselves autobiographical and considers these questions by analyzing the testimony of Béatrice de Planissoles; see *Inquisition and Power: Catharism and the Confessing Subject in Medieval Languedoc* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 197–214. This book also contains interesting reflections on the “production” of this testimony; see *ibid.*, 74–115.

that the inhabitants would have tilled; rather, there were pastures. A central role was played by the kinship-based *domus* (*ostal*, in the local dialect). The village featured fairly egalitarian relationships, and it is difficult to document the effects of severe social divisions, as is demonstrated by, among other things, the rather free intimate relations between the village's inhabitants. These concerned cohabitation, extramarital liaisons, and homosexual affairs.¹⁸ The inhabitants, living according to the tenets of Cathar belief and the customs developed by the experience of daily life, did not seem to fear either the secular authorities or the church authorities. Full of heretics, the county of Foix, to which Montailou belonged, "was undoubtedly 'the promised land of error,'" as Le Roy Ladurie called it.¹⁹

Published in 1975, *Montailou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* has had unusual scholarly and publishing success, and the number of copies sold (translated into many languages and numerous editions) has exceeded two million.²⁰ The

18. The potential existence of "interspecies relationships" between shepherds and their sheep are worth mentioning, particularly with regard to Le Roy Ladurie's note on the subject in the French edition of his text: "Je ne parle pas de la bestialité" (*Montailou* [FR], 215n1). The English translation also treats this topic: "There are no references to bestiality traceable in the Fournier Register, usually so detailed about different forms of 'deviance'; but this proves nothing one way or the other" (Le Roy Ladurie, *Montailou*, 149n1).

19. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montailou* (FR), 13: "avait été, pendant plus de cent ans, la 'terre promise de l'erreur.'" The edition of the title of the book used in this article is: *Montailou: The Promised Land of Error*. In the original, Le Roy Ladurie used the phrase "la terre promise de l'erreur," which suggests misguidance (departure from the faith) and "straying from the promised land." However, I decided to leave this title in this article in accordance with the English translation, suggesting that Montailou was not only a village, an area on which errors in faith (that is, heresy) spread, but also that the book itself contains errors that transgress against the dogma of the field of historical research.

20. It is worth noting here that the English edition is an abridged translation of the 1975 French original. Years after it was published, Le Roy Ladurie commented that the American edition of *Montailou* is much shorter than the original and should be rather call "a version" of the book. In his opinion, American *Montailou* has "the scandalous character," "which appealed to a certain voyeurism when it was published, especially in its American edition, which was mutilated by an unscrupulous editor who took it upon himself to cut out all the 'boring' parts and keep the 'sexy' ones" (Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "An Interview with Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie," interview by Paul J. Archambault, *Courier* 30 [1995], 20–21). The American edition is stripped of pictures and the bibliography takes up a page and a half (in the French version, it is more than twelve pages). Instead of being on its own page, a dedication (in French, "A Madeleine") addressed to Madeleine (Pupponi), Le Roy Ladurie's wife, was placed above the book's publication information on the copyright page. Through this, it becomes less noticeable that Madeline Le Roy Ladurie was the author of two photographs included in the French original of views of contemporary (that is, from the 1970s) Montailou as well as of the ruins of the castle there. In the English edition's introduction, there is a short note that "this introduction was specially written for the English edition of *Montailou*, which is a shorter version of the French" (Le Roy Ladurie, *Montailou*, vii). The given abbreviations refer to omissions of entire passages of the text as well as of footnotes in the rearranged parts, omissions that constitute a loss for researchers of the theory and history of historiography. These footnotes refer to, for example, the works of anthropologists that enable one to analyze how their ideas inspired Le Roy Ladurie. After the sentence that reads "Montailou is the physical warmth of the *ostal*, together with the ever-recurring promise of peasant heaven" (Le Roy Ladurie, *Montailou*, 356), a footnote referencing Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown's *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1952), where the author comments on the influence of religion in the formation of social institutions, has been omitted (see, by comparison, Le Roy Ladurie, *Montailou* [FR], 625). Their omission may also affect the translation, since in the original Le Roy Ladurie was not so much speaking about paradise (heaven) as about the afterlife ("la promesse cyclique d'un au-delà paysan"), which also refers to a passage from Radcliffe-Brown's book (*ibid.*). A fragment referring to Marshall Sahlins and references to his 1972 book *Stone Age Economics* have also been omitted (*Montailou* [FR], 615; *Montailou*, 355).

publication of the book enjoyed favorable circumstances, especially given the atmosphere of Europe in the 1970s. In France, there had been a noticeable revival of regionalism (including Occitan) and feelings of nostalgia for country life.²¹ Also of great significance was the atmosphere of social discontent and uncertainty after 1968, which inspired both nostalgia for the past and the left-wing views of researchers practicing *nouvelle histoire*.²²

In the humanities, changes occurred in response to this new atmosphere. In historical studies, there arose a noticeable resistance to quantitative historical research, which took place in the context of the linguistic turn and related discussions surrounding such topics as the relationship between history and literature, a return to narrative, and the rising significance of cultural history (and the influence of cultural and social anthropology on historical research), which overlapped with the rising interest (especially in the late 1960s) in the history of ordinary people, subaltern groups, and the colonized, women's history, the history of everyday life, the history of mentality, family history, the history of the body, oral history and witness testimonies, and the problem of memory.²³ Since the appearance of key works for students of the humanities by Hayden White (*Metahistory*, published in 1973) and Clifford Geertz (*The Interpretation of Cultures*, published in 1973), attention began to be paid to the rhetorical dimension of historical writing and the imaginary component for building knowledge about cultures, which, in the narrative, are not so much "found" as they are constructed. In this atmosphere, as Pierre Nora has written, "history has become our replaceable imagination . . . , a realistic novel in a period in which there are no real novels."²⁴

THE INQUISITION REGISTER AS A LITERARY WORK

Le Roy Ladurie could not have written *Montaillou* if, thanks to the outstanding expert on Catharism Jean Duvernoy,²⁵ he had not turned his attention to an unusual

21. See Pierre Nora, "Les avatars de l'identité française," *Le Débat* 2, no. 159 (2010), 13, and Vera Mark, "In Search of the Occitan Village: Regionalist Ideologies and the Ethnography of Southern France," *Anthropological Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (1987), 64–70.

22. Between 1949 and 1956, Le Roy Ladurie was a member of the French communist party, and, between 1960 and 1963, he was a member of the Parti Socialiste Unifié. He reflected on these times in *Paris-Montpellier P.C.-P.S.U., 1945–1963* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982). See also his last published memoir, *Une vie avec l'histoire: Mémoires* (Paris: Tallandier, 2014). See Hélène Chaubin, "Le Roy Ladurie Emmanuel," *Le Midi Rouge* 13 (June 2009), 13–14. Jacques Revel discussed the moods impacting the practice of history after 1968 in his introduction to *Histories: French Constructions of the Past*, ed. Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt (New York: The New Press, 1995), 34. See also François Dosse, *New History in France: The Triumph of the Annales*, transl. Peter V. Conroy Jr. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 139, and Sudhir Hazareesingh, *Intellectuals and the French Communist Party: Disillusion and Decline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

23. See Krzysztof Pomian, "History: From Moral Science to the Computer," *Diogenes* 47, no. 185 (1999), 34–48, and Krzysztof Pomian, "L'heurs des Annales: La terre—les hommes—le monde," in *Les lieux de mémoire*, vol. 2, *La Nation—Héritage, historiographie, paysages*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 377–429.

24. Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," transl. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989), 24.

25. Jean Duvernoy, *Le catharisme: La religion des cathares* (Toulouse: Privat, 1976); Jean Duvernoy, *Le catharisme: L'histoire des cathares* (Toulouse: Privat, 1979).

source—the inquisition registers containing testimonies conducted by the bishop of Pamiers, Jacques Fournier, in his fight against the Cathar heresy. According to Le Roy Ladurie,

I was struck by the extraordinary quality of this collection, a meticulous record of the town's gossip: a certain woman said A, this man has said B. I discovered that under the weight of indirect statements of the “culprits,” there were real dialogues between ordinary people. . . . So, at first a friend of mine and I made a film of this story for the French TV and that film had some success. And finally I decided to write a book: *Montaillou*. . . . This register is equally admirable as *Tristan and Isolde* as a great and unrivalled magnificent piece of literary work—especially in the Latin text—the content is absolutely incredible.²⁶

Elsewhere, he added: “For information about the mental outlook of the peasants of Montaillou the Fournier Register, though not entirely comprehensive, is of outstanding value. One reason for this is the fact that it focuses on one village, though at the same time it throws important corroborative light on neighbouring parishes.”²⁷

Fournier (who later became Pope Benedict XII) was known for “his obsessional, fanatical and competent pursuit of all kinds of suspects.”²⁸ According to Le Roy Ladurie, “he proceeded, and succeeded, essentially through the diabolical and tenacious skill of his interrogations; only rarely did he have recourse to torture.”²⁹ Between 1318 and 1325, as head of the Inquisition Tribunal in Pamiers, he personally participated in the exhaustive and long-running interrogations of 418 suspected heretics and 160 witnesses.³⁰ These interrogations were documented in this inquisition register, which included the testimonies of twenty-five inhabitants of Montaillou and the surrounding areas. As Le Roy Ladurie explained, “maniacally detailed, examining the beliefs and deviations, it brought to light the daily life of the commune. Montaillou in and for itself.”³¹ He added, “as

26. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, “Immobile History: An Interview with Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie,” interview with Alexander von Lünen, in *History and GIS: Epistemologies, Considerations and Reflections*, ed. Alexander von Lünen and Charles Travis (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 19.

27. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 231. See a different-sounding and expanded version in the French edition: Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou* (FR), 346.

28. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, xi–xii.

29. *Ibid.*, xiii.

30. *Ibid.*, xiv. The interrogations were recorded in several tomes, two of which were lost and one of which is located in the Vatican Library. The Latin register was published in 1965 by Jean Duvernoy, “Le Registre d’inquisition de Jacques Fournier, évêque de Pamiers (1318–1325),” in *Manuscript n° Vat. Latin 4030 de la Bibliothèque Vaticane*, 3 vols. (Toulouse: Privat, 1965). This edition contained a number of errors that were identified in reviews (see Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou* [FR], 19) and that were corrected in the 1972 edition of the register: *Le Registre d’inquisition de Jacques Fournier, évêque de Pamiers (1318–1325): Corrections* (Toulouse: Privat, 1972). The French translation first appeared in the form of extracts as *Inquisition à Pamiers: Interrogatoires de Jacques Fournier, 1318–1325* (Toulouse: Privat, 1966). It later appeared in a full three-volume edition as Jacques Fournier, *Le Registre d’Inquisition de Jacques Fournier, évêque de Pamiers (1318–1325)*, 3 vols. (Paris: Mouton, 1978). Nancy P. Stork is involved in an ongoing project devoted to publishing English translations of Fournier’s inquisition records, and several confessions are already available online (<https://www.sjsu.edu/people/nancy.stork/jacquesfournier/>).

31. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou* (FR), 20–21: “Maniaque du détail, il éclaire, par-delà les croyances et les déviances, la vie même de la communauté. Voici donc Montaillou, en soi et pour soi, au fil des enquêtes de Jacques Fournier.”

for me, I only regrouped the data; I changed their organization in the spirit of a village monograph.”³² These attempts at “regrouping” and “reorganization” are not, however, innocent. Le Roy Ladurie did not admit, moreover, to fictionalizing his sources, which is manifested in, among others things, the conversion of the original Latin text into dialogue and its reporting mode into first-person utterances.³³ Le Roy Ladurie maintained that he discovered that, “under the weight of indirect statements of the ‘culprits,’ there were real dialogues between ordinary people,” but he often designed those dialogues himself. The narrative is leading in a manner that allows one to forget that we are dealing with testimonies and that the conversations between the accused and the interrogator proceeded “in the form of an unequal dialogue.”³⁴

Absorbed in the magical atmosphere of the medieval village and fascinated by the history of the daily life of its inhabitants, we cannot, however, forget that the described events took place in a climate of antihetical repression and presents, in a picturesque manner, heroes who have been accused of departing from “the true faith” and then threatened with the stake. First, the suspected heretics were arrested. On 15 August 1308, the day of the Assumption of the Virgin, a manhunt took place: “Geoffroy d’Ablis, the Inquisitor of Carcassonne, arrested the whole population of the village of Montailou with the exception of children.”³⁵ They were then detained in harsh conditions, for each suspected heretic was placed “(in) a narrow cell, with shackles on their feet and food consisting of black bread and water.”³⁶ The suspected heretics were then persecuted with meticulous and long interrogations before being sentenced to “imprisonment of varying severity, wearing yellow crosses, pilgrimages, [and] confiscation of property.”³⁷ In two cases (those of Wilhelm Fort and Wilhelm Bélibaste), the accused were burned at the stake.³⁸ In fact, Le Roy Ladurie’s sources were witnesses to the brutal intrusion of the Inquisition into village life. Frustrated by the idyllic aura of the story, Pieter Lagrou noted, “what it [the register] revealed was trauma and survival strategies when facing persecution, not the *longue durée* of the peasant mentality.”³⁹ Actually, the intimate narration neutralizes the negative phenomena and person of the “devil of the Inquisition”—that is, investigating officer Fournier—who was unrivaled “at bringing the lamb forth,” victims in the name of the only truth.⁴⁰

32. *Ibid.*, 21: “Je les ai simplement regroupées, réorganisées, dans l’esprit de la monographic villageoise.”

33. In an earlier note, I included fragments from the English translation of the original French version of *Montailou* alongside the Latin text of the register. This highlights the strategy of dramatizing the story by changing the reporting style to dialogue.

34. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montailou*, xv.

35. *Ibid.*, xii. See also *Montailou* (FR), 20n2.

36. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montailou* (FR), 17: “cellule étroite, fers aux pieds, alimentation de pain noir et d’eau.”

37. *Ibid.*, 17–18: “mur plus ou moins strict, port des croix jaunes, pèlerinages, confiscations des biens.”

38. *Ibid.*, 18, 18n1.

39. Pieter Lagrou, “‘Historical Trials’: Getting the Past Right—or the Future?,” in *The Scene of the Mass Crime: History, Film, and International Tribunals*, ed. Christian Delage and Peter Goodrich (London: Routledge, 2013), 11.

40. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montailou*, xiii. Speaking on this subject, Arnold stated: “It is clear that we need a methodology for dealing with inquisitorial records which is also a reflection upon the

Additionally, numerous reviews have noted an issue, which Le Roy Ladurie undervalued, regarding the claimed possibility of giving voice to historical figures in light of the challenges posed by translating the spoken Occitan dialect into written Latin and the editorial modifications made to the testimonies of the accused and witnesses.⁴¹ They also point to numerous distortions in the citation and translation of phrases that Le Roy Ladurie gathered from the register and to the modernization of the French language spoken by the heroes of the book. Moreover, it should be recalled that only one volume of the register has survived to the present day and the contents of the others that were lost are not known and could influence the interpretation of the book's problems. Taking all of this into consideration, critics have warned readers that "Le Roy Ladurie gives testimony . . . which, regrettably, cannot be trusted."⁴² Lagrou even noted that "*Montaillou* is methodologically a very poor production."⁴³ Lagrou, whose work deals with comparative studies of the victims of genocide, complained that Le Roy Ladurie had forgotten about the horrors of the Inquisition. As such, Lagrou issued a warning to future researchers: "Historians, beware of the Le Roy Ladurie syndrome."⁴⁴

THE HYPNOTIC EFFECT OF THE NARRATIVE

The American historian Fredric L. Cheyette, who was fascinated by Le Roy Ladurie's book, asked, "Can a history of medieval peasants become a best seller?"⁴⁵ The publication of *Montaillou* has shown that it can. Cheyette's review and those of many other authors express the enthusiastic opinion that *Montaillou* is a masterpiece in which Le Roy Ladurie "lets these peasants speak for themselves," for "in no other book have medieval peasants, or indeed any medieval people, come so vividly to life."⁴⁶ The charm of Le Roy Ladurie's great book lies in its novelistic style as well as its pastoral and almost utopian character (especially when it comes to its vision of a past world).⁴⁷ Critics have described it as

ethics of historical enquiry" regarding their interpretation ("The Historian as Inquisitor: The Ethics of Interrogating Subaltern Voices," *Rethinking History* 2, no. 3 [1998], 383).

41. Le Roy Ladurie described three stages of editing the testimonies: first, a rough draft was written during the interrogation; then, this rough draft was used as the basis for the preparation of the original and its presentation to the accused in order for changes to be made; finally, the corrected text was written as the final version (*Montaillou* [FR], 18). Le Roy Ladurie was aware of the problems caused by the scribes translating the answers of the accused given in Occitan into Latin (*Montaillou*, xvii, note 2).

42. David Herlihy, review of *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294–1324*, by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, transl. Barbara Bray, *Social History* 4, no. 3 (1979), 520. See also Susan Stuard, "An Unfortunate Construct: A Comment on Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou*," *Journal of Social History* 15, no. 1 (1981), 152–55.

43. Lagrou, "Historical Trials," 11.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Fredric L. Cheyette, review of *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error*, by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Library Journal* 103, no. 10 (1978), 1060.

46. *Ibid.*

47. I wrote more about this topic in *Mikrohistorie: Spotkania w międzyświatach* [Microhistories: Encounters In-Between Worlds], 2nd ed. (1999; Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2005).

“a romantic book, almost a sentimental one,”⁴⁸ and have indicated its origin in the tradition of the republican-romantic paradigm of history represented by Jules Michelet. These opinions find their justification, among other things, in the poetic conclusion of *Montaillou*:

Montaillou itself is much more than a courageous but fleeting deviation. It is the factual history of ordinary people. It is Pierre and Beatrice and their love; it is Pierre Maury and his flock; it is the breath of life restored through a repressive Latin register that is a monument of Occitan literature. Montaillou is the physical warmth of the *ostal*, together with the ever-recurring promise of a peasant heaven. The one within the other, the one supporting the other.⁴⁹

Polish medievalist Jerzy Strzelczyk wrote that Le Roy Ladurie’s book is “an anatomy of a medieval village” and a “true vivisection of the community of Montaillou.”⁵⁰ This metaphor highlights a combination of meticulous analysis and an (experimental) operation carried out on “a living body.” Readers are offered a vigorous story, one full of realistic details that help to reconstruct daily life in the village. The dialogues invigorating the narrative as well as the panoramic descriptions provide an occasion for reflections on fourteenth-century peasant culture, touching on, among other things, issues of sexuality (then dominated by family relationships), relations to the earth, space and time, the dead, and faith.⁵¹ Touching on these universal themes, Le Roy Ladurie asked: “What was it that made a citizen of Montaillou ‘tick’ in the period 1290–1325? What were the fundamental motivations, the centres of interest which, over and above such basic biological drives as food and sex, gave his life meaning?”⁵²

Historians have admired Le Roy Ladurie’s literary artistry, but many have also mentioned his subjective approach to the people described in his text.⁵³ Reading the book, there is no doubt as to which side he favored. Indeed, he treated the heretics with unconcealed sympathy, presented Pierre Clergue as a person

48. P. S. Lewis, review of *Montaillou, village occitan, de 1294 à 1324*, by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The English Historical Review* 92, no. 363 (1977), 372.

49. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou* (FR), 625: “Montaillou, . . . c’est aussi beaucoup plus, beaucoup mieux qu’une déviance passagère et courageuse. Montaillou, c’est l’événementiel des petites gens; le tremblement de la vie, restituée par une texte exemplaire et répressif. . . . Montaillou, c’est l’amour de Pierre et Béatrice, et c’est le troupeau de Pierre Maury. Montaillou, c’est la chaleur charnelle de l’ostal, et la promesse cyclique d’un au-delà paysan. L’un dans l’autre. L’un portant l’autre.” In the original French text, the repetition of the phrase “Montaillou, c’est” makes the passage sound even more poetic.

50. Jerzy Strzelczyk, “Heretycy, inkwizytorzy, historycy: Anatomia wioski średniowiecznej” [Heretics, Inquisitors, Historians: An Anatomy of a Medieval Village], in *Pax et bellum*, ed. Karol Olejnik (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1993), 265.

51. See Davidson’s sociological study of Montaillou, which is titled “Montaillou: Cosmology and Social Structure.”

52. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 353.

53. The writing style of Le Roy Ladurie and other scholars has been discussed in Bruno Auerbach, “L’écriture de l’histoire et l’inscription du lecteur: *Montaillou* (1975) entre logiques scientifiques et éditoriales,” *Cahiers du CRHQ* 3 (2012), <https://www.yumpu.com/fr/document/read/52083322/c3a7-auerbach-crhq-cnrs>; Philippe Carrard, “The New History and the Discourse of the Tentative: Le Roy Ladurie’s Quotation Marks,” *Clio* 15, no. 1 (1985), 1–15; and Philippe Carrard, *Poétique de la Nouvelle Histoire: Le discours historique en France de Braudel à Chartier* (Lausanne: Payot, 1998), 90ff.

with “irresistible personal charm,”⁵⁴ wrote of “the appealing personality of Pierry Maury,”⁵⁵ and displayed special considerations of the “bold and passionate” Béatrice.⁵⁶ Leonard E. Boyle accused Le Roy Ladurie of displaying a lack of responsibility toward the presented personages, who Boyle felt Le Roy Ladurie treated not as people but rather as puppets in order to present the main themes of the book—that is, issues of ecology, morality, magic, and body language.⁵⁷ The often-legitimate complaints of professionals, however, are not able to challenge the “hypnotic, almost magical effect” that this book has on readers, an effect that is noted by even its most virulent critics.⁵⁸

It is difficult to say whether Le Roy Ladurie depended more on presenting historical phenomena or on depicting the meanders of human existence. However, this history of mentalities practiced in *Montaillou* enables us to link these two kinds of interest. According to Le Roy Ladurie, “it took the great waves of repression after 1308 to break up the network of Cathar *domus* in Montaillou, and to turn the village into a tragic rat-race where everyone worked to encompass his neighbour’s ruin, thus, mistakenly, hoping to avert his own.”⁵⁹ He also recalled “the harsh repression”⁶⁰ of the village that was “shamefully oppressed by the conscientious policeman”⁶¹ and that had its origins in “the ambition of a totalitarian Church.”⁶² These reflections are interspersed with scholarly considerations addressing strictly historical and/or methodological topics. Le Roy Ladurie thus argued that

the case of Montaillou corresponds to the models put forward by the Russian economist A. V. Chayanov in his *Theory of the Peasant Economy*, and applying to rural life almost everywhere in the West before the time of Adam Smith. In this kind of society every *homo oeconomicus* is the organizer of one family economic unit. . . . The general features of the *domus* in the Pays d’Aillon correspond to those of this “domestic system.”⁶³

Nonetheless, in *Montaillou*, Le Roy Ladurie devoted far fewer pages to scientific discourse than to literary, novelized content.

54. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 156. See also *ibid.*, 59ff and 153ff.

55. *Ibid.*, 120.

56. *Ibid.*, 177. In defiance of this one-sided fascination with the actions of Fournier, Lewis asked: “But should one always be on the side of the rebels?” (review of *Montaillou*, 373).

57. Leonard E. Boyle, “Montaillou Revisited: Mentalité and Methodology,” in *Pathways to Medieval Peasants*, ed. J. A. Raftis (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1981), 127. This is one of the most critical reviews of *Montaillou*. Eleanor Searle has noted that this is an important review that “amounts to a devastating picture of ‘mentalité’ scholarship when done without the fastidious care that it in particular requires” and offers ten instructive “lessons” on how one should use sources that should be taken to heart by every medievalist (review of *Pathways to Medieval Peasants*, ed. J. A. Raftis, *Speculum* 59, no. 1 [1984], 199).

58. Lewis, review of *Montaillou*, 372.

59. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 30.

60. *Ibid.*, 356.

61. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou* (FR), 625: “odieusement opprimé par le policier consciencieux.”

62. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 23.

63. *Ibid.*, 354.

RETROSPECTIVE ETHNOGRAPHY AND PROSOPOGRAPHY

In the 1960s, Le Roy Ladurie practiced structural history and promoted total history, studying the rhythm of social changes. In his research on French history, he was also known for using historical demography and quantitative history, and he became a pioneer in the use of computer programs for historical research. This was a time when Le Roy Ladurie, who also authored *Les paysans de Languedoc* (1966), believed that “hard” statistical data allows for the scientific reconstruction of the past.⁶⁴ He was also interested in examining the history of the climate as a “history without people.”⁶⁵ Le Roy Ladurie described himself as a “social historian” (*historien d’histoire sociale*),⁶⁶ a “demographer of the past” (*d’un démographe du passé*),⁶⁷ and a “historian of rural society” (*un historien du monde agricole*).⁶⁸ For him, history was a field that belonged to the social sciences and that had undergone a “scientific transformation” (that is, scientification through the use of statistical methods, among other things), which had restored it to its rightful place among the sciences.⁶⁹

In the 1970s and 1980s, Le Roy Ladurie played a key role in the turn to anthropology that was taking place among the historians of the *Annales* school and in the historiography of other countries. This consisted of shifting his interests from social (and socio-economic) history toward cultural history (and anthropology).⁷⁰ In the domain of the *Annales*, this change was associated with Fernand Braudel’s departure in 1969 and the arrival of Jacques Le Goff and Le Roy Ladurie as the journal’s new leaders. In the face of these changes, Le Roy Ladurie’s goal was to link ethnography and history—disciplines dealing with permanence and change, space, and time. For him, this was not a turn but rather a change in focus resulting

64. See Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Le territoire de l’historien*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1973). See also Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The Territory of the Historian*, transl. Ben Reynolds and Siân Reynolds (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). The articles contained in this book show the French historian’s research interests at the time.

65. Part of the first volume of the book *Le territoire de l’historien* is titled “L’histoire sans les hommes: Le climat, nouveau domaine de Clio” (History without People: The Climate as a New Province of Research). This part is devoted to climate research.

66. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, “Amenorrhoea in Time of Famine (Seventeenth to Twentieth Century),” in *The Territory of the Historian*, 257; Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, “L’aménorrhée de famine (XVII^e–XX^e siècles),” in *Le territoire de l’historien*, 1:333.

67. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, “History That Stands Still,” in *The Mind and Method of the Historian*, 5; Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, “L’histoire immobile,” in *Le territoire de l’historien*, vol. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 11.

68. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, “Balzac’s Country Doctor: Simple Technology and Rural Folklore,” in *The Mind and Method of the Historian*, 147; Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, “Le médecin de campagne: Technologie douce et folklore rural,” in *Le territoire de l’historien*, 2:203.

69. Le Roy Ladurie, “L’histoire immobile,” 33–34; Le Roy Ladurie, “History That Stands Still,” 26–27.

70. On the evolution of Le Roy Ladurie’s approach, see André Burguière, “De L’histoire totale à l’histoire globale,” in *L’École des Annales: Une histoire intellectuelle* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2006), 167. The reasons for the changes in the approach of the *Annales* school are described in François Dosse, “L’anthropologie historique,” in *L’histoire en miettes: Des Annales à la “nouvelle histoire”* (Paris: La Découverte, 1987), 163. See also Miyase Koyuncu Kaya, “Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s Approach to History,” *Balkesir Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 12, no. 22 (2009), 140–54.

from an evolution of his interests. He had already undertaken similar research, as evidenced in such works as “Le verdure du bocage” (1972). Here, he used the journal of a sixteenth-century nobleman, Gilles de Gouberville, to present a rural micro-community and to consider issues related to running farms, breeding animals, trade, prevailing relations between lords, servants, and subjects, and matters of customs and beliefs. For Le Roy Ladurie, the most important element of this investigation was a specific historical source that he described as “a goldmine for historical anthropology.”⁷¹ Thanks to this source, Gouberville could play the role of the “native informant.”⁷² At one point, Le Roy Ladurie’s years of reflections on the history and culture of French peasants took on what François Dosse has described as “ethnological garb” (*l’habit ethnologique*).⁷³

Montaillou, together with Carlo Ginzburg’s *Il formaggio e i vermi* (1976), Natalie Zemon Davis’s *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983), and Robert Darn-ton’s *The Great Cat Massacre* (1984), is considered to be a classic of microhistory and a masterpiece of anthropological history. It is worth remembering here that there are significant differences in how anthropological history is practiced by historians in different countries (especially in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, and the United States).⁷⁴ In French terminology, anthropological history is called “historical anthropology” (*l’anthropologie historique*). Le Roy Ladurie (especially in his early works) used the term “historical ethnography” (*l’ethnographie historique*). In France, historical ethnography constitutes both a branch of the history of mentalities, which has been popular with and practiced by many generations of *Annales* school scholars, and a specific version of social history characteristic of the *Annales* movement. One could say, in fact, that it is an anthropologically and sociologically oriented kind of history of mentalities. While Le Roy Ladurie was working on *Montaillou*, this study of mentalities, conducted within the framework of historical anthropology, was regarded as the most fruitful field of research.

French historians have conceived anthropological history as the history of the ordinary, commonplace, and everyday, or what Gil Bartholeyens has called

71. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, “In Normandy’s Woods and Fields,” in *The Territory of the Historian*, 133. For the French edition of this text, see Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, “La verdure du bocage,” in *Le territoire de l’historien*, 1:187–211.

72. *Ibid.*, 171. In another study carried out at the same time as *Montaillou*, Le Roy Ladurie used the writings of Edme Rétif and, like the reconstruction made on the basis of Gouberville’s journal, described the daily life, family structure, customs, and mentalities of people living in the eighteenth-century countryside. See Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, “L’ethnographie à la Rétif,” in *Le territoire de l’historien*, 2:337ff; Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, “Rétif de la Bretonne as a Social Anthropologist: Rural Burgundy in the Eighteenth Century,” in *The Mind and Method of the Historian*, 211ff. It is worth mentioning that, even before the publication of *Montaillou*, Le Roy Ladurie released a preview of it in the form of an article that was published not in a historical journal but in an anthropological one: Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, “La domus à Montaillou au XIV^e siècle,” *Ethnologie française* 3, no. 1–2 (1973), 43–62.

73. François Dosse, “Expansion et fragmentation: La ‘nouvelle histoire,’” in *Les courants historiques en France, 19^e–20^e siècle*, ed. Christian Delacroix, François Dosse, and Patrick Garcia (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 410.

74. I elaborate on this topic in “Historia antropologiczna: Mikrohistoria” [Anthropological History: Microhistory], in *Powrót Martina Guerre’a* [The Return of Martin Guerre], by Natalie Zemon Davis, transl. Przemysław Szulgit, ed. Ewa Domańska (Poznań: Zysk i S-ka, 2011), 195–234.

“l’anthropologie historique comme histoire de l’ordinaire.”⁷⁵ Anthropological history, which focused on the human being and symbolized the “return of the actor,”⁷⁶ is, in my view, of particular importance after years of focusing on quantitative history and the history of climate, which marginalized human agents. Historians’ maneuvers between the micro scale and the macro scale enable them to show complex interdependencies between subject and system. Indeed, microhistory manifests not only a return of an individual subject but, first of all, an agent’s return. In anthropological histories, individuals are not victimized; they are not impotent, but they are represented as acting (quite often as resisting a social order) and as cobuilding the system. Such a feature places this trend of historical research in the framework of emancipatory historiography and presents it as a decolonizing practice that participates in the struggle for social and cognitive justice (even if some authors of microhistories do not intend this).

There are constant terminological confusions between “microhistory,” “ethnohistory,” “anthropological history,” and “historical anthropology,” terms that are sometimes used as synonyms. I’d prefer to distinguish between them, so, at least for the purpose of this article, I refer to “anthropological history” (which is a modernized term of ethnohistory) in order to stress that this is a subfield of history and a trend of contemporary historical writing that is practiced by historians and that takes inspiration from anthropology’s approaches to studying the past (for example, Robert Darnton, Natalie Zemon Davis, and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie).⁷⁷ Historical anthropology belongs to the field of anthropology, and it is practiced by anthropologists (for example, Marshall Sahlins) who use historical sources to study ethnic communities’ pasts. From anthropology, historians practicing anthropological history have gained, among other things, a “bottom-up” approach to the past and a focus on micro-scale perspectives. They have also adapted anthropological methods (such as field studies) to historical considerations and made efforts to present events from “the native’s point of view.”⁷⁸ These scholars tend to focus on topics that are characteristic of ethnographic research, such as ordinary people, popular culture, rural culture, daily life, customs and habits, and worldviews. They typically also use historical sources (such as diaries, letters, testimonies, sermons, inquisition records, local stories, pictures, music and songs, artifacts, and photographs) that allow ordinary people (who are unknown and/or marginalized by great History) to speak. These specific sources also enable scholars to

75. Gil Bartholeyns, “Le paradoxe de l’ordinaire et l’anthropologie historique,” *L’Atelier du Centre de recherches historiques* 6 (2010), <https://journals.openedition.org/acrh/1928>. This article contains a comprehensive bibliography.

76. Jacques Revel, “L’émergence de la micro-histoire,” in *L’histoire aujourd’hui: Nouveaux objets de recherche, courants et débats, le métier d’historien*, ed. Jean-Claude Ruano-Borbalan (Auxerre: Editions Sciences Humaines, 1999), 244: “retour de l’acteur.”

77. This is a broad definition that is also offered by the author of many texts about French historical anthropology, André Burguière. See Burguière’s “The New *Annales*: A Redefinition of the Late 1960’s,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 1, no. 3/4 (1978), 196, and “L’anthropologie historique,” in *La nouvelle histoire*, ed. Jacques Le Goff, Roger Chartier, and Jacques Revel (Paris: Retz, 1978), 37–61.

78. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922; London: Routledge, 2014), 24.

reconstruct the lives of individuals and social groups and to write their cultural biographies.

The above-mentioned research strategies are present in Le Roy Ladurie's approach. Indeed, he also contributed to anthropological history through his use of a research method that is known in the field of political and social history as "prosopography." It is evidenced in, among other things, his considerations of relations between kinship ties and the "inheritance" of heresy. The approach proposed in *Montaillou* features the characteristic traits of what is known as the mass (as opposed to the elitist) school of prosopography, as described by Lawrence Stone.⁷⁹ This is a tool for the study of collective biography, which is interested in examining social structures, mobility, and the roles played by social groups, tracing these groups' various stages of evolution, and then using this research to build generalizations. It is characterized by the study of origin, education, marriage, property status (which helps in terms of the common features of the studied group), relationships between group members, and defining career types.

In the case of ethnographically oriented historical research, one can speak of retrospective ethnography (that is, ethnography investigating the past, which is sometimes called ethnohistory), and it is under this label that Le Roy Ladurie is often placed.⁸⁰ Despite these innovations and the unquestionable methodological sophistication that characterizes Le Roy Ladurie's approach to historical reflection, from the point of view of history of anthropology, he practiced traditional ethnography (more precisely, village ethnography), together with its method of "observational participation," which anthropologists typically consider a relic of the past, although it is still utilized and considered cognitively effective.⁸¹ Renato

79. Lawrence Stone, "Prosopography," *Daedalus* 100, no. 1 (1971), 46–79. In this article, Stone referred to French historians, noting that, with the use of computers, they began utilizing prosopography, combining it with statistical research methods. Footnote 57 in Stone's article refers to, among other sources, a 1969 article by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Nicole Bernageau, and Yvonne Pasquet titled "Le conscrit et l'ordinateur. Perspectives de recherche sur les archives militaires du XIXe siècle français" and published in *Studi Storici*. Tilly stated that prosopography—that is, the study of collective biography—is "the single most influential innovation in the historical practice of the postwar period" and is made particularly important in that it "revealed the pattern of events and social relations while maintaining contact with individual experience" ("The Old New Social History and the New Old Social History," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 7, no. 3 [1984], 367). Recently, Peter Burke declared that the analyses offered in his book *Exiles and Expatriates in the History of Knowledge, 1500–2000* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2017) are based on prosopography. See also Garry D. Carnegie and Karen M. McBride, "Prosopography and Microhistory: Illuminating Historical Actors," in *Handbook of Historical Methods for Management*, ed. Stephanie Decker, William M. Foster, and Elena Giovannoni (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023), 245–63.

80. Tilly wrote about this in "The Old New Social History," 382–83. Tilly indicated that George Caspar Homans, the author of *English Villagers of the Thirteenth Century* (1941), was a pioneer of retrospective ethnography ("History of and in Sociology," *The American Sociologist* 38, no. 4 [2007], 327). Tilly identified Le Roy Ladurie with the practices of retrospective ethnography in "Anthropology, History, and the *Annales*," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 1, no. 3/4 (1978), 211. This trend has also been practiced by Keith Thomas, who declared it his mission to create a "retrospective ethnography of early modern England, approaching the past in the way an anthropologist might approach some exotic society" (*The Ends of Life: Roads to Fulfillment in Early Modern England* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 2). See also Michaela Hohkamp, "Neu gelesen: Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*," *WerkstattGeschichte* 29, no. 84 (2021), 151–55.

81. In Mexico in 1980, in a conversation Enrique Krauze conducted with Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Octavio Paz, Le Roy Ladurie said, "during the 1970s—perhaps also influenced by the

Rosaldo commented on Le Roy Ladurie's traditionalist approach and compared it to that of Edward E. Evans-Pritchard. He also criticized Le Roy Ladurie for, in his opinion, "borrow[ing] ethnography's disciplinary authority to transform fourteenth-century peasants' 'direct testimony' . . . into a documentary account of village."⁸²

The ethnographic approach is suggested by the title of the book's French edition: *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324*, which suggests that it is about the Occitan ethnic group.⁸³ One of Le Roy Ladurie's goals was to present the medieval village of Montaillou as "a highly representative sample of the peasantry of former Occitania, illustrating what was most vivid and most explicit within it."⁸⁴ This approach is also evident in the representation of a community that has remained—in Le Roy Ladurie's opinion—in a certain state of immobility. From this point of view, *Montaillou* is a type of *ethnohistoire immobile*.⁸⁵ Le Roy Ladurie attempted to show how the peasant culture he described lacks historical dimensions. This history of the village, according to Le Roy Ladurie, goes on without History.⁸⁶ Indeed, its inhabitants live on an "island in time" that is "cut off from the past" and present and believe that "*there is no other age than ours.*"⁸⁷

events of 1968—we realized that the obsession with computer data and quantities is not everything in life. Humans do not live solely by statistics; there are also love, death, and other vital experiences within small communities. This is what I sought to express in my book *Montaillou*. Here I must say, though it may astonish you, that certain Mexican phenomena had a strong influence on me. In writing my book, I was greatly inspired by reading a study on Tepoztlán by an American anthropologist. For me, Montaillou is a French Tepoztlán" ("Historias, tiempos, civilizaciones: Entrevista con Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie y Octavio Paz," *Letras Libres*, 30 November 2023, <https://letraslibres.com/entrevistas/enrique-krauze-entrevista-emmanuel-le-roy-ladurie-octavio-paz/>). Le Roy Ladurie was referring to Robert Redfield's *Tepoztlán—A Mexican Village: A Study of Folk Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930). The book features chapter titles that echo themes common to ethnographic studies of village life, including: "The Organization of the Community," "The Rhythms of the Social Life," "The Ritual of Life and Death," "The Division of Labor," and "Magic and Medicine." Readers will find that *Montaillou* explores similar topics.

82. Renato Rosaldo, "From the Door of His Tent: The Fieldworker and the Inquisitor," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 78. Similarly, Kathleen Biddick was very critical of the outdated ethnographic research practices displayed by Le Roy Ladurie and other microhistorians: "Ladurie rhetorically homogenizes voices of fourteenth-century peasants speaking before the Inquisitorial tribunal with the privilege of the contemporary French historian. Claire Sponsler, a medieval critic, has further claimed that medievalists are holding out as the 'last' ethnographers in their resistance to contemporary ethnographic critique. Medievalists, according to her, preserve ethnographic practice uncritically, thus resisting the efforts of anthropologists to understand the specific imperial genealogies of ethnography as a disciplinary practice" (*The Shock of Medievalism* [Durham: Duke University Press, 1998], 106).

83. These ethnic indicators are lost in the titles of the English editions: *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294–1324*, and *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error*.

84. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, "Nota preliminar para los lectores de lengua castellana," in *Montaillou, aldea occitana de 1294 a 1324*, transl. Mauro Armiño (Barcelona: Taurus, 2019), <https://reader.digitalbooks.pro/book/preview/119027/libro-4>: "Montaillou medieval es una muestra muy representativa del campesinado occitano de antaño en lo que tenía de más vivo y truculento."

85. The use of this term is a reference to the title of Le Roy Ladurie's famous inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1973, "L'histoire immobile."

86. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou* (FR), 624.

87. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou*, 282.

Another characteristic trait of ethnographic tales has to do with how the narratives are stylized—that is, authors of such works adopt a style that makes it seem as if they are reporting events as they are happening. One can get the impression that the author is presenting things that were previously recorded on tape or written during field studies. The historian takes on the role of a narrator-reporter by adopting a first-person narration style, which in turn makes it feel as if they are spying and eavesdropping on the presented personages and commenting on their behavior. For example, Le Roy Ladurie wrote, “here is Jacques Authié addressing the shepherds of Arques and Montailou and adapting for their benefits the Cathar myth of the Fall.”⁸⁸ Later, he described how, “one day, to the south of the hill where the local château stood, Alzaïs Fauré of Montailou, carrying an empty sack on her head, met Bernard Benet of the same village.”⁸⁹

In *Montailou*, Le Roy Ladurie adopted the role of an ethnographer and reported events from the position of “a participating observer.”⁹⁰ He took this on, but only as a historian-narrator, since he obviously could not see or hear what was happening in Montailou. This fact raises an important question: How did he know that Jacques Authié described his visions by “addressing the shepherds” and that Alzaïs Fauré met Bernard Benet while “carrying an empty sack on her head”? Although the records in the registry give many details (for example, we can read in Alzaïs’s testimony that she saw Bernard “on the hill near the castle of Montailou”), they do not give these specific details; it would thus appear that Le Roy Ladurie has filled the story with fanciful details. This is another rhetorical method (however effective) that invokes *l’effet de réel* (to use Roland Barthes’s phrase)⁹¹ and gives the story an aura of authenticity. Thus, I would say that, in *Montailou*, the ethnographic method and ethnographic descriptions of past realities are used, but the book does not follow a premise of an anthropological project—that is, if one could consider the study of the systems of differences to be so. Instead of showing that “other people are other,”⁹² Le Roy Ladurie familiarized and domesticated the past, evoking a sense of its proximity and easy identification with the presented persons.

88. *Ibid.*, 30.

89. *Ibid.*, 32.

90. See Karolina Polasik-Wrzosek, “*Badanie terenowe w praktyce etnohistoryka: Casus Emmanuela Le Roy Ladurie*” [Fieldwork in the Practice of an Ethnohistorian: The Case of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie], in *Obserwacja uczestnicząca w badaniach historycznych* [Participant Observation in Historical Research], ed. Barbara Wagner and Tomasz Wiślicz (Zabrze: Infortitions, 2008), 203–12.

91. Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect,” in *The Rustle of Language*, transl. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 141–48.

92. I refer here to Robert Darnton, who warned: “But one thing seems clear to everyone who returns from field work: other people are other. They do not think the way we do. And if we want to understand their way of thinking, we should set out with the idea of capturing otherness. Translated into the terms of the historian’s craft, that may merely sound like the familiar injunction against anachronism. It is worth repeating, nonetheless; for nothing is easier than to slip into the comfortable assumption that Europeans thought and felt two centuries ago just as we do today—allowing for the wigs and wooden shoes. We constantly need to be shaken out of a false sense of familiarity with the past, to be administered doses of culture shock” (*The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* [New York: Basic Books, 1984], 4).

All of my above remarks could easily be framed in a way that resembles the style that has characterized the classic narrativist/constructivist approach: Montaignou is invented rather than discovered (in various historical sources); the book is about an “imagined community” (to use Benedict Anderson’s concept).⁹³ As Le Roy Ladurie’s book demonstrates, historical writing is a kind of literary writing and historical text is a “literary artifact” (to use Hayden White’s phrase).⁹⁴ *Montaignou* is still one of the best-selling books precisely because of its compelling novelistic style, its well-designed protagonists, and the reality effect it achieves. Despite legitimate criticisms that have been raised primarily by experts who have expressed reservations about the author’s treatment of the sources and by anthropologists who have expressed skepticism concerning the way the ethnographic perspective is utilized in the book, *Montaignou* is one of the greatest achievements of modern historiography.⁹⁵ It is a book that never gets old, and because it touches on universal problems of the human condition that affect readers as much today as they did in the 1970s, readers can track the fates of the inhabitants of a small village, historians can debate issues of medieval mentality, daily life, and heresy, and researchers on the theory and history of historiography can consider the place and role of *Montaignou* in contemporary historical writing and analyze the different aspects of the ethnographic approach to the study of the past.

MICROHISTORY’S RELEVANCE FOR CRITICAL TIMES

Today, studying and practicing microhistory finds its relevance and role in shaping future projects. It helps to create various scenarios through images of the past and assists in generating what I call “historical prototypes” (that is, “realistic micro-utopias”), as exemplified by works such as *Montaignou*. Such works offer depictions of life in small human communities that are far from idyllic and are indeed rife with conflicts and dilemmas. These portrayals highlight the importance of community, neighborhood, friendship, hospitality, interpersonal and interspecies bonds, care for the land, unorthodox faith, and justice that does not always rest on law. This is a humanistic and “potential history” (to use Ariella Azoulay’s term)⁹⁶ that places its faith in humanity and, despite often recounting traumatic experiences, supports the hope for the possibility of influencing change. In this sense, it empowers the individual and their agency, even if it leads to death.

93. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

94. Hayden White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” *Clio* 3, no. 3 (1974), 277–303.

95. The village of Montaignou and its inhabitants are the subject of many books, including Matthias Benad, *Domus und Religion in Montaignou: Katholische Kirche und Katharismus im Überlebenskampf der Familie des Pfarrers Petrus Clerici am Anfang des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1990); Anne Brenon, *Inquisition à Montaignou: Guillaume et Pèire Maury, deux croyants cathares devant l’histoire, 1300–1325* (Cahors: L’Hydre, 2004); Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Anne Brenon, and Christine Dieulafait, *Autour de Montaignou, un village occitan: Histoire et religiosité d’une communauté villageoise au moyen âge* (Castelnaud-la-Chapelle: L’Hydre, 2001); and René J. A. Weis, *The Yellow Cross: The Story of the Last Cathars’ Rebellion against the Inquisition, 1290–1329* (New York: Knopf, 2001).

96. Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019).

This reinforcement of the ordinary person and presenting them in a space of free choices is perhaps the greatest success of microhistory.

Given the important criticisms of anthropocentrism, Eurocentrism, and humanism, and the vibrant discussions about the Anthropocene, climate change, and loss of biodiversity, it might seem that these are not the most interesting and innovative ideas. This is true, but as a scholar from East-Central Europe, and with a real war going on just over the border, I believe it is still crucial to promote historical knowledge that gives us insight into the human condition and emphasizes the importance of individual lives and experiences. In the context of this part of the world, where historical narratives are often shaped by the legacies of conflict and authoritarianism, *Montaillou's* bottom-up perspective is particularly relevant. It enables historians to uncover the voices and experiences of marginalized and/or underrepresented groups, offering a nuanced understanding of power relations, social dynamics, and cultural practices.⁹⁷

Perhaps history's most important task and challenge today is to demonstrate the possibility of creating and strengthening a sense of "shared humanity" (if such a thing exists), to show what it entails and how it has evolved, and to support the conviction that it is worth being human (a belief that is often not reinforced by political history, which—as Hegel once wrote—is a slaughterhouse). History might assist in defending humanity and emphasizing the desire to be human; it should still create knowledge about the past that holds value for individuals and communities in critical situations and prompts ethical behaviors (and this is by no means about history written to stir the heart).

Moreover, *Montaillou's* narrative style and ethnographic approach serve as a reminder of the importance of storytelling and creative writing in historical scholarship. By engaging with everyday life, beliefs, religion, and relationships with the dead, historians can create compelling narratives that transcend academic boundaries and reach wider audiences. This approach not only enriches our understanding of the past but also fosters a deeper connection with readers, making history more accessible and relevant.

Looking ahead, *Montaillou* can still inspire interdisciplinary research that integrates history, anthropology, sociology, and geography. The advent of digital history and data analysis offers new opportunities for computer-assisted source criticism, enabling historians to uncover conceptual nuances, conflicting testimonies, and discursive patterns in inquisitorial records and other sources.⁹⁸ By embracing these technological advancements, historians can build on the

97. See recent approaches to microhistory, including Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szigjártó, *What Is Microhistory? Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2013); "Microhistory and the Historical Imagination: New Frontiers," ed. Thomas Robisheaux and Thomas V. Cohen, with István M. Szigjártó, special issue, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 47, no. 1 (2017); Claire Zalc and Tal Bruttman, eds., *Microhistories of the Holocaust* (New York: Berghahn, 2017); Francesca Orsini, "Where to Find Indian Menocchios?," *Journal of South Asian Intellectual History* 1, no. 1 (2018), 1–12; "Global History and Microhistory," *Past and Present* 242, issue supplement 14 (2019); and Andrew B. Hargadon and R. Daniel Wadhvani, "Theorizing with Microhistory," *Academy of Management Review* 48, no. 4 (2023), 681–96.

98. David Zbiral and Robert L. J. Shaw, "Hearing Voices: Reapproaching Medieval Inquisition Records," *Religions* 13, no. 12 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13121175>.

foundational work of Le Roy Ladurie and others, pushing the boundaries of historical research and uncovering new insights into the human experience.

While the passing of Le Roy Ladurie marks a moment of reflection and sorrow, his intellectual legacies provide a rich foundation for the future of historiography. By continuing to explore the themes and approaches Le Roy Ladurie championed, historians can create more inclusive, nuanced, and engaging narratives that illuminate the complexities of the past, inform our understanding of the present and future, and, above all, improve “the humanity of history”⁹⁹ to meet contemporary needs. *Historicus vitae magister est* or *Historica vitae magistra est*.

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99. Alexander Lee, “Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and the Humanity of History,” Engelsberg Ideas, 8 January 2024, <https://engelsbergideas.com/notebook/emmanuel-le-roy-ladurie-and-the-humanity-of-history/>.