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The moving tablet of the eye

Eye movements have been described since antiquity, but their detailed measurement is a more recent preoccupation. The characteristics that can be readily observed in others are those involving both eyes; they were remarked upon by Aristotle and examined in detail in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Analyses of what we now call inflow and outflow were linked to these studies. Involuntary movements of the eyes were described at around the same time. In the second century, Galen gave a lucid account of the six extraocular muscles and indicated the axes around which the eye could rotate. From the late eighteenth century there was much debate concerning the occurrence of ocular torsion. Some degree of experimental precision was introduced with the use of afterimages as stabilized retinal images. They were applied to determine both how the eyes move and the positions that they adopt after movement. Clarification of the discontinuous pattern of eye movements was made in the context of vertigo almost a century before they were measured during reading. The study of eye movements has tended to involve the phenomena of either nystagmus or scanning (reading), and the two lines of enquiry have often proceeded independently.

Nick Wade  
University of Dundee