The art of truth. Historiography and identity in the Frankish world

Over recent decades research on ethnicity and identity in the early Middle Ages has developed a new way of looking at the relationship of "Texts and Identities". One of the results of research into early medieval ethnicity has been the observation that ethnic identity did not constitute an objective fact or phenomenon, but that it was rather the result of subjective identification. Therefore, the extant texts cannot be interpreted as sources which simply reflect ethnic structures, but should be understood above all as media through which ethnic identities were devised and propagated. Using this approach, histories, origin myths and other myths, but also, for example, legal traditions have been analysed as "mythomoteurs" (to use the phrase coined by A.D. Smith), giving meaning to particular communities. Several case studies have shown that in the early Middle Ages, large-scale ethnic processes were often promoted by texts which were intended to demonstrate the existence of lineages and alliances that stretched far beyond the personal and regional horizons of individual group members.

In this respect, there is still a lot of rethinking and reorienting to do, especially in the context of the transmission and reception of texts written in the Frankish regna of the Merovingians and the Carolingians, where the relatively high number of surviving texts has long been regarded as a succession of complementary parts which constitute a single "grand narrative" of the history of 'the'

---

1 Having been part of the Texts and Identities group from the beginning of the project, my work on Historiography and identity in the Frankish World has profited from the people involved much more than can be documented in footnotes. I should like to thank above all the founders of this cooperation, Mayke de Jong, Rosamond McKitterick, Walter Pohl, and Ian Wood, not only for having had the idea but also for their continuous advice and support for my research during so many years. Of course I also have to thank all the other participants of "Texts and Identities". The liveliness and engagement of this group of scholars is, I think, well documented in this volume and it is therefore easy to imagine what pleasure it was for me during the last seven years to have had the privilege of being part of it.

2 I should also like to thank Peter Brown who lent his characteristically elegant advice with regard to the title.

3 Anthony D. Smith, The Ethnic Origins of Nations (London 1986); for a critical discussion of the ethnosymbolic position developed by Smith see Pohl, L’europa mettica.

Franks.\footnote{5} In older scholarship the differences in description and depiction of the origins of the Franks in Gregory of Tours’ Histories, Fredegars Chronicle and the Liber historiae Francorum were often overlooked because these works were considered as independent, free-standing narratives and thus not compared directly. In a more “Texts and Identities”-oriented approach, however, these works should rather be seen as reactions to each other and as offering competing definitions of Frankishness.\footnote{6}

This approach, however, leads us not only to engage in the textual comparison of these sources, it also alerts us to the potential of the study of their transmission. It is above all the way and form in which these texts were transmitted that shed an entirely new light on the question of the nature of the relationship between texts and ethnic and political identities. Some of the most important Frankish historical sources have come down to us via different routes of transmission and in a number of (either abbreviated or augmented) versions. They have also often been combined with other texts so as to form greater historical compendia.\footnote{7} Only a comparison of the different historiographical compilations enables us to appreciate how frequently very similar texts and historiographical traditions could be employed in devising, through their varying contextualisations, very different identities.\footnote{8} These – sometimes quite subtle – distinctions in textual content and transmission, however, have remained largely unexamined by scholars of this period. Moreover, where these different versions have received attention, it was often with the aim to establish the best reading, or Urtext, of a work. Most attention was therefore paid to the similarities, rather than the differences, between various versions. In the older research tradition, variation was often seen as deviation from the hypothetical Urtext, and the copyists and scribes were blamed for their lapses in concentration, their mistakes, and for their general lack of understanding of the texts. For research on processes of identity formation in the Frankish world, however, comparing the differences in textual transmission is of crucial importance. Such comparison provides the key to unraveling the complex process of écriture and réécriture of collective history and memory in constructing and formulating social, political

\footnote{5} Cf. Ian N. Wood, Conclusion: in praise of uncertainty, in: Integration und Herrschaft. Ethnische Identitäten und soziale Organisation im Frühmittelalter, ed. Walter Pohl/Maximilian Diesenberger (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mit


\footnote{7} The study on historiographical manuscripts and compendia from the early Middle Ages was pursued above all by Rosamond McKitterick who has made it popular far beyond the circle of manuscript-scholars in numerous books and articles: See now: Rosamond McKitterick, History and Memory in the Carolingian World (Cambridge 2004); cf. also: ead., Introduction: sources and interpretation, in: The New Cambridge Medieval History 2, 700–900, ed. ead. (Cambridge 1995) 3–17, ead., The Frankish Kings and Culture in the Early Middle Ages (Aldershot 1995); ead., Books, Scribes and Learning (Aldershott 1994); ead., The Carolingians and the Written Word (Cambridge 1989).

and ethnic identity.\textsuperscript{9} It seems obvious that historians who were engaged in such projects in the early Middle Ages never approached their material carelessly. The use of biblical narratives or patterns in historical works originating in the Frankish \textit{regnum} enriched the meaning of the present thus creating an intricate tension between the historical authority of a text and its contemporary meaning.\textsuperscript{10}

This area of tension in which, in the Middle Ages, \textit{historia} was and had to be written and read, may be illustrated by an episode in the history of transmission of one of the central texts of Frankish historiography, Gregory of Tours's \textit{Historiae}. This episode—which also serves to exemplify the above-mentioned observations regarding original works and their transmission—concerns the reception of Gregory's work more than 400 years after his death. In the year 1027, a natural phenomenon was observed on the Aquitanian coast, commonly referred to in medieval sources as 'blood rain'. This phenomenon occurs when European rain mixes with Sahara sand that has been transported across the Mediterranean by southern winds. The Aquitanian duke of the time, William the Great, immediately informed King Robert II of the event and urged him to consult the scholars of his realm regarding the possible meaning of this sign. The king thereupon dispatched couriers to the intellectuals of his kingdom, requesting them to search for similar occurrences in \textit{quibusdam historiis} and to provide his messenger with the interpretation of this phenomenon. One of the scholars who responded to King Robert's request, and whose response has been preserved, was Fulbert of Chartres. Fulbert's reply consisted of a number of extracts from different works, but he recommended a passage from Gregory's \textit{Historiae} particularly strongly. Fulbert even provided the king with the full reference for this passage, namely Book 6, Chapter 14 of the \textit{Historiae}. He moreover promised to send the king more information later, but explained that because of the urgency of the request he had first turned to Gregory for an answer \textit{propter auctoritatem religionis suae}.\textsuperscript{11}

It is unlikely that Gregory would have objected to Fulbert's use of his work, for a number of reasons. For although he probably had not anticipated that his \textit{Historiae} would still be quoted as a moral and religious authority more than 400 years after their composition, it was this kind of authority to which Gregory had aimed to lay claim with his work, which was never intended as 'a history' of the Franks.\textsuperscript{12} The complex strategies that Gregory used in asserting such religious and spiritual

\textsuperscript{9} An author who has influenced and inspired the approach, I present here is: Patrick J. Geary, esp. with his Phantoms of Remembrance. Memory and Oblivion in the First Millennium (Princeton 1994); on early medieval ethnicity see also his: The Myth of Nations. The Medieval Origins of Europe (Princeton 2002).


authority have been described by Martin Heinzelmann in his book on Gregory’s Histories. But the way in which Fulbert quoted Gregory would also have met with the latter’s approval, who, in a dramatic appeal at the end of his Historiae, beseeched the readers and copyists of his work to change nothing in the original reading of the text. Judging from Fulbert’s use of Gregory, he may indeed have heeded this request, because he appears to have used a copy that was fairly close to Gregory’s original. Such textual scruples, however, were far from common in Fulbert’s days. Despite the horrible fates, involving the Devil himself and “the second coming of ... Christ and the Day of Judgement...”, which Gregory threatened to all who would omit or rewrite passages from his work, this was exactly what happened. No historiographical work from the early Middle Ages was subjected to so varied and fragmented a transmission as Gregory’s Histories. In Fulbert’s time alone, and excluding Fulbert’s own, comparatively faithful copy, there existed at least two other versions of the work, which were the result of the very treatment for which Gregory had put such high penalties. Interestingly, whereas all of these versions are still extant in a number of early medieval manuscripts, the version of Gregory’s text which Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison, Gregory’s editors for the Monumenta Germaniae Historica series, deemed the “best and most complete”, was only preserved in a single manuscript, produced at Montecassino as late as the end of the eleventh century.

The oldest reworked version of Gregory’s text probably originated within a few decades after his death and has been preserved in four manuscripts from the end of the seventh and the beginning of the eighth century. Another manuscript of this version was copied around 800. The version preserved in this group of manuscripts includes only the first 6 books of Gregory’s Historiae and these, in turn, lack several chapters. Ever since Thierry Ruinart’s work on this version, published at the end of the seventeenth century, the genesis of the six-book version of Gregory’s Histories has been explained in terms of a conscious effort to erase or reduce the clerical or ecclesiastical content of the

---

15 The chapter which deals with blood rain is counted as chapter 14 of the sixth book only in the full versions of Gregory’s Historiae, whereas in the reworkings that were produced in the Merovingian and Carolingian period, where particularly in the sixth book of the Historiae lots of chapters were left out, the chapter is counted as chapter 8 of the sixth book, cf. Gregory of Tours, Historiae, Index, liber VI (ed. Bruno Krusch/Wilhelm Levison, MGH SS rer. Merov. 1, 1, Hannover 1951) 264; for the Merovingian and Carolingian reworkings cf. below.
18 Manuscript-groups B, C and D in the classification of Bruno Krusch.
19 Monte Cassino, Archivio dell’Abbazia cod. 275, cf. Bourgain, Gregorius Turonensis 154; Bourgain/Heinzelmann, L’œuvre de Grégoire de Tours 277; from this version, however, fragments from the seventh century survived, cf. ibid. 278.
20 Cambrai, Bibl. municipale 624 (684) (B1); Leiden, Bibl. univ. Voss. lat. Qu. 63 (B3); Paris, BN lat. 17654 (B4); Paris, BN lat. 17655 (B5), cf. Bourgain/Heinzelmann, L’œuvre de Grégoire de Tours 282; Bourgain, Gregorius Turonensis 155.
21 Bruxelles, Bibl. royale 9403 (B2); cf. Bourgain/Heinzelmann, L’œuvre de Grégoire de Tours 282; Bourgain, Gregorius Turonensis 155.
work, in order to put a greater emphasis on the history of the Frankish kings. 22 Until relatively recently, the same point of view was taken by the influential Walter Goffart. 23

Such a distinction, however, cannot easily be made, especially since the dividing line between political and ecclesiastical narratives is extremely faint in the Merovingian period. In a number of his works, Peter Brown has pointed out the difficulties in making such a distinction between secular and ecclesiastical spheres in the late antique and early medieval period. Moreover, he has shown that, in this period, the establishment of spiritual authority was often closely linked to attempts to justify or consolidate social and political power. 24 With regard to Gregory, Ian Wood has demonstrated in three recent articles how Gregory’s Histories are imbued by the author’s desire to justify his position as bishop of Tours. 25 In order to do this, Gregory carefully drew out the noble origins of his family, which he portrayed as one of the holiest and most distinguished families of Gaul. The spiritual traditions of Gregory’s own family became subtly interwoven in his history of Gallia. 26

Elaborating on these insights, I have suggested elsewhere that it was Gregory’s “individuality”, his positioning of himself as author and actor within the framework of his text by means of descriptions of his own family, and its political and spiritual networks, which the compilers of the six-book version sought to remove from the Historiae. 27 A detailed comparison of the original with the six-book version shows that the passages omitted were mainly those by which Gregory located himself, his familial network and its traditions in his Histories. Therefore, the aim of the compilers of the six-book recension appears to have been not so much to emphasise Frankish politics as to downgrade Gregorian politics. This they achieved by detaching the work from its place and role in Gregory’s spiritual and social network, his family’s influence in southern Gallia, and its ties with the Austrasian regnum under Sigibert I, Brunhild and Childeric II. Such an analysis of the nature of the omissions in the six-book version does not only concur with the geographical shift in political and social power to the northwest of Francia and the centres on Seine and Oise with the rise of Chlothar II. 28 It is also congruent with the damnatio memoriae of Brunhild and her descendants at this point in time. Finally, in leaving out the last four books of Gregory’s Historiae, the compilers excluded those nar-

23 Goffart, From Historiae to Historia Francorum.
27 For this and the following see: Reimitz, Social networks 255ff.
ratives which contained the political framework for the rule and overlordship of the Burgundian King Gunthramm, as well as that of his Austrasian successors, King Childebert II and his mother.29

That it was the social and political context around the middle and in the second half of the seventh century which informed the contents of the six-book version can also be deduced from its manuscript transmission. Towards the end of the seventh century, interest in Gregory’s work was particularly strong in the new cultural and political centres of northern Gallia. Accordingly, the four oldest manuscripts of the six-book recension, produced around 700, seem to have been written in monastic and cultural centres of the ruling elites in the northern and northeastern parts of the Frankish realm like Corbie or Luxeuil.30 That Gregory’s stories about Frankish kings retained their ambivalence in the six-book version31 in this context of dissemination, close to the new centres of royal power, also indicates that Gregory’s Historiae had not simply been reworked into a history of the Franks and their kings. The six-book recension preserved the character of Gregory’s original work, which presented a collection of case histories that dealt again and again with the problem of negotiating social positions and which could therefore be used in developing social rules and strategies.32 Incidentally, one reason for the popularity of Gregory’s Histories may also be explained by the distinctive Gospel-based form which Gregory’s account acquired from the moment when he enters the narrative as bishop of Tours. This particular literary strategy might have served to highlight the relevance that these narratives had to the present-day situation of the contemporary reader. However, in order to conserve the relevance of Gregory’s lessons (which were especially relevant in the context of episcopal politics), it was necessary that his narrative should be freed from Gregory’s particular personal, social, and geographical perspective.33

That the seventh- and eighth-century versions of Gregory’s Histories did not aim to present a Frankish recasting of the work can also be shown by a comparison of the representation of the Franks and their social and political networks in the original with that of the six-book recension. The use of the word Franci did not increase, nor become more specific in the six-book recension, and the Roman word for the setting of Gregory’s Historiae, Gallia, was not brought up to date either.34 That Frankish chroniclers of the seventh and eighth centuries could think such interventions necessary can be inferred from the contents of two other historical works from the Merovingian period


30 For the oldest manuscripts cf. above n. 19; Heinzellmann/Bourgain, L’œuvre de Grégoire de Tours 282ff.; Heinzellmann, Gregory of Tours 197ff.; Bourgain, Gregorius Turowensis 155; for Paris BN lat. 17655 from Corbie, whose first three folios are written in a Luxeuil script see David Ganz, Corbie in the Carolingian Renaissance (Beihfte der Francia 20, Sigmaringen 1990) 38ff.; 124; for the suggestion that Paris, BN lat. 17654 was written in Jouarre see Rosamond McKit- terick, Nuns’ scriptoria in England and Francia in the eighth century, in: Francia 19 (1992) 1–35.


33 Especially as a reaction to the increasing royal use of strategies of ecclesiastical and religious power since Chlothar II, the Histories could have aided the assertion of ecclesiastical interests in the seventh century context of the “redistribution of resources between bishops, monasteries and the king”, as Janet Nelson put it (Queens as Jezebels 39); see also De Jong, Monastic prisoners 307ff.; Le Jan, Convents, violence and competition for power; Rosenwein, Negotiating Space 59ff.; Wood, Merovingian Kingdoms 197ff.

which used the six-book recension for their account of Frankish history up to the end of the sixth century: the Chronicle of Fredegar and the Liber historiae Francorum.\footnote{5} In Fredegar’s Chronicle, which originated around 660,\footnote{6} a section from the six-book recension was integrated as part of a “chain of chronicles”,\footnote{7} in which a sizeable portion of Gregory followed excerpts from the Liber generationsis, the Chronicle of Jerome and Hydatius. In some of the oldest manuscripts of the Chronicle, this section was even marked with the title: liber quartus, quod est scarpsum (!) de cronica Gregorii episcopi Toronaci.\footnote{8}

In contrast to its six-book source, however, the emphasis in the Fredegar Chronicle has undeniably shifted towards a history of the Frankish kings and their people. This is particularly obvious from one of the most remarkable additions to Gregory’s text, namely, an exposition of the Frankish \textit{origo}, in which the descent of the Merovingian kings is traced back to the heroes of Troy.\footnote{9} This passage in the Chronicle also shows the extent to which the contents of this work deliberately challenged Gregory. Gregory had accompanied his account of the origin of the Frankish people with a long discussion of old Roman sources, which he prefaced with a statement of his own position: \textit{De Francorum vero regibus, quis fuit primus, a multis ignoratur}.\footnote{10} In the passage in the Fredegar Chronicle, the same words are used to introduce the Frankish \textit{origo} ... but only to reject them on the basis of the greatest possible spiritual and literary authorities: \textit{De vero Francorum regibus beatus Hieronymus scripsit, quod prius Virgili poetae narrat historia: Priamum primum habuisse regi}.\footnote{11}

Furthermore, this new interest in the Franks is not only reflected by the inclusion of the Frankish \textit{origo}, it can also be inferred from the nature and number of references to \textit{Franci} in the Chronicle, which provide a stark contrast with Gregory’s text. To illustrate this, the story of the conflicts between Franks and Saxons and Chlothar I may be useful, as it provides good evidence of the multiplication of the term \textit{Franci} in Fredegar’s Chronicle. In Gregory’s Historiae, as well as in the six-book recension, the Franks are labeled as \textit{Franci} only once in the description of the lengthy negotiations preceding the fight.\footnote{12} In the much shorter account of this episode in the Chronicle, however, the term \textit{Franci} has been added no less than three times. On top of this, the same story helps identify a distinct redefinition of Gregory’s use of the word \textit{Franci} in the Chronicle. Gregory started his chapter with the remark that (555) \textit{post mortem Theudovaldi, the regnum Franciae was taken over by}
Chlothar. This is one of the rare instances where Gregory uses this word. In the Chronicle of Fredegar, by contrast, the author appears to have wanted to avoid the use of the word Francia in this narrow sense. He therefore changed the opening of this section to: *Ipsoque anno Theodebaldis obit, regumque eius Chlotharius accepit.* A number of instances of this attempt to broaden the term Franci and Francia can be found throughout the Chronicle. They could be explained in terms of an Austrasian chronicler’s reaction to the process of reserving the term Franci for the western ruling elite of the Seine-Oise area. Such a redefinition of Frankishness had taken place since the reorientation of Frankish politics under Chlothar II and is recorded also by other hagiographical texts from the second half of the seventh century.

A similar use of the word Franci is made in the Liber historiae Francorum, which originated some six decades after Fredegar’s Chronicle, in 726/27. Like the Chronicle, the Liber historiae Francorum used the six-book version of Gregory’s Histories as the main source for its account of Frankish history up to the death of Chilperich I (in 584). Moreover, the Liber historiae Francorum (which, in fact, is even attributed to Gregory of Tours in a number of eighth- or ninth-century manuscripts), also contains a version of the Frankish origin myth. However, in the Liber historiae Francorum the origo-account is placed before the excerpt from Gregory, and is introduced by a sentence which could be seen as a reaction to Gregory’s unsuccessful search for documentation about the first kings of the Franks (*De Francorum vero regibus, quis fuerit primus, a multis ignoratur*). In answering this problem, however, the text leaves little room for doubt concerning the origin of the Frankish kings: *Principium regum Francorum eorumque origine vel gentium illarum ac gesta proferamus.* The Frankish origin myth which follows incorporates some elements of Gregory’s discussion of the question of the origin of Frankish kings, yet presents these in the form of a continuous and clearly structured history of the Frankish kings and their people from the time of the destruction of Troy onwards. The certainty and clarity with which the author of the Liber historiae Francorum presents this genealogy matches his confident portrayal and understanding of contemporary Frankish identity in the rest of the work.

In comparison to Gregory, the author of the Liber historiae Francorum employs the term Franci to refer to the Neustrian political elite concentrated in centres along the Seine and the Oise. In contrast to these ‘original’ Franks he chose to designate the Franks of the eastern part of the Merovingian realm as Austrasii vel Franci superiores. Furthermore, he projected this political-geographical division of the Frankish world into the past, building it into his adaptation of Gregory’s account. Thus, the story of Chlothar’s succession to Theudebald’s throne, mentioned above, is also included in the Liber historiae Francorum, but—like Fredegar—its author chose to avoid the association of

---

44 Gregory of Tours, Historiae IV, 14, ed. Krusch/Levison 145: *Igitur Chlothacharius post mortem Theudovaldi cum regno Franciae suscepisset...*

45 Cf. Reimitz, Social networks 239 with note 53.


50 Liber historiae Francorum 1–4, ed. Krusch 241–244; Wood, Defining the Franks; McKitterick, History and Memory 9ff.

51 Liber historiae Francorum 1, ed. Krusch 241.

52 Cf. Reimitz, Die Konkurrenz der Ursprünge.

the term *Francia* with the eastern part of the Merovingian regnum. Instead, he replaced Gregory’s use of *Francia* with the broader statement that, after the death of Theudebald, Chlothar *regnnumque eius cum thesauris multis accepit*. However, he had already defined Theudebald’s regnum more closely in the sentence leading up to this statement: Theudebald, he wrote, succeeded his father in *regnunm in superiores Francos in Auster*, and is subsequently referred to as *rex in Auster*.

Therefore, in contrast to the six-book recension, both the Chronicle of Fredegar and the Liber historiae Francorum were intended to offer a specific interpretation of Frankish ethnicity and identity in relation to both their own past and Gregory’s Histories. In particular, the subsequent development of these works – in the form of their later transmission and influence – illustrates their importance in constructing and conferring concepts of Frankish identity, for rather than reflecting a static reality of stable identities, they formed part of a process of negotiating conflicting and changing identities. The nature and contents of these identities cannot be understood merely on the basis of the texts’ contents, but must be reconstructed on the basis of their transmission and reception.

The large number of early medieval manuscripts of both the Chronicle of Fredegar and the Liber historiae Francorum shows that the identities that they projected were such that they could solicit interest and imitation. Consequently, both of these works became themselves historiographical sources and later served the legitimisation efforts of the rule of Pippin III before and after his rise to royal power, as well as the further ascent of the Frankish dynasty under Charlemagne. For example, because of its emphasis on the eastern part of the Frankish realm and its positive portrayal of the political role of the Arnulfings and Pippinids (whom the Carolingians would later regard as their ancestors), the Chronicle of Fredegar provided a useful historiographical foundation for any elaborations or continuations of Frankish history into the times of Charles Martell and his successors. In addition, the Carolingian Continuations of the Chronicle of Fredegar could build upon the broad definition of *Franci* in the Chronicle, which, in turn, was also used to support the claim in the Continuations that the Carolingian kings ruled by the consensus of all of the Franks. A similar, perhaps even more affirmative concept of Frankishness and Carolingian rule was painted in the Annales regni Francorum. In their account of the political ascent of the Carolingians from 741 onwards (which, especially with regard to the first part of the Annales treating the period up to the 790s, is as triumphant as it is selective), the assertion that the Frankish kings acted in accord with the wishes of the Franks forms the central theme of the narrative. It must be observed, however, that, due to the political success of the Carolingians during the second half of the eighth century, such a use of the term *Franci* would have been increasingly linked with its establishment as synonymous with ‘political achievement and integration’. Moreover, it was this same Frankish success which fuelled the increase in discussions of Frankish origin and identity that can be discerned in the rearranging and rewriting of historiographical texts from this period.
But the Continuations of the Chronicle of Fredegar did not simply retain the historiographical definition of *Franci* found in the Chronicle. In fact, already from the first decade of the ninth century onwards, the *Continuationes Fredegarii* are preserved not only as part of Fredegar’s chain of chronicles, but also, for example, in a group of three historiographical compendia of the ninth and tenth centuries. Paris, BN lat. 10911; Wien, ÖNB lat. 473; St Petersburg, NLR lat. F.v.IV.4, in which they were included as continuations of the *Liber historiae Francorum*. It in itself, this combination is not as curious as the name *Continuationes Fredegarii* might suggest, because the contents of the first ten chapters of the Continuations correspond with the last ten chapters of the *Liber historiae Francorum*. Rather than building on the original *Liber historiae Francorum*, however, the Continuations followed a later version of it which originated about ten years after the original *Liber historiae Francorum*. In this later version, the Neustrian perspective of the Liber had been neutralised in favour of an even stronger Austrasian-Carolingian outlook. It is, therefore, all the more remarkable that the Continuations follow the Neustrian version of the *Liber historiae Francorum* in the three manuscripts mentioned above.

In all three manuscripts, an ensemble of three texts is found: first the *Liber historiae Francorum*, followed by the *Continuationes Fredegarii* up to the death of Charles Martell, and thirdly the *Annales regni Francorum*, running from 741/2 until 829. In the manuscripts from Vienna and St Petersburg, a number of other texts were added to this trio, but the manuscript from Paris contains only these three works. The Parisianus is a beautiful manuscript, described by Bernhard Bischoff as dating from the second quarter of the ninth century and originating from north-western France. Its contents are carefully aligned. Thus, in order to avoid repetition between the last chapters of the *Liber historiae Francorum* and the first ten chapters of the Continuations, only chapters 11 and following of the latter work were included in the manuscript, but were counted as Chapters 52–55 of the *Liber historiae Francorum*. That Paris BN lat. 10911 was copied by two scribes simultaneously is suggested by the fact that, after the end of the Continuations, there originally followed a number of empty leaves until the end of the quire. After these empty leaves (which acquired their texts only around 1200) the *Annales regni Francorum* take over the historical narrative in the subsequent quire in the same careful, though sometimes slightly archaic style. Although the manuscript was copied after 829, some features of the script are reminiscent of a classical Carolingian minuscule from around 800.

This appropriation of the Neustrian-Merovingian past to complement the Carolingian success story may not match the usual assessment of the texts, in particular of the Continuations as a sequel to the Austrasian-Pippinid historiography of the Chronicle of Fredegar. Yet such an annexation of the Merovingian past by Carolingian historians is in tune with other historiographical tendencies which existed during the reign of Louis the Pious. Another example is the composition of the *Gesta Dagoberti* during the 830s, which was aimed at persuading aristocratic groups of their links with the...
ruling family and other aristocratic groups in western Francia. I have argued elsewhere that a similar motive may also have inspired the compilation of the Paris-compendium in which the Carolingian rise to power is anticipated and embedded in a narrative in which the omnes Franci of the Annales regni Francorum are historiographically defined as the elites of the Western parts of the Frankish realm. The continuation and further expansion of such historiographical efforts to form a West-Frankish identity in the kingdom of Charles the Bald are well-documented in a number of texts as well as other historiographical compendia. Not least the other two above-mentioned historiographical compendia could be regarded as examples for the further development and expansion of historiographical resources during his reign, like those transmitted in the Paris Manuscript. The contents of the second oldest manuscript of the aforementioned group of compendia, Wien, ÖNB lat. 473, can also be explained in terms of an attempt to appropriate the Neustro-Frankish history of the western regions of the empire. In the Viennese manuscript, the Liber historiae Francorum, Continuationes and Annales regni Francorum were combined with some other texts. On the basis of the selection, form and order of these texts, this manuscript can be linked with the coronation of Charles the Bald in 869 in Metz in the regnum Lotharit. The short catalogue at the end of the manuscript which summarizes the codex’s historical narrative from Priamus to Louis the Pious in a mere three pages provides one of the most important arguments for such a hypothesis. In it, the development of Carolingian rulership and power is described as a continuous Neustro-Burgundian successio of Merovingian kings and maiores domus after Chlothar II. Thus, by erasing its Austrasian elements, Carolingian history is depicted as an uninterrupted, western Frankish affair.

This interpretation is also supported by the manuscript’s particular version of the Liber historiae Francorum, in which the Neustrian perspective was emphasised even more, while a number of references to Austrasian or Burgundian kings after Chlothar I were simply deleted. The result was the concentration of the text on the Neustrian kings after Chilperich I, by which the accession of Chlothar II to a Neustro-Burgundian regnum Francorum could be underlined. Indeed, in the Viennese version, Chlothar is not elected to the kingship by the Franci of Austrasia and Burgundy (as he is in the version of the Liber historiae Francorum in Paris, BN lat. 10911), but by the Franks from Burgundy and Neustria. On top of this, not only are the Austrasian kings left out of the narrative, but also all references to those Franks who in the Paris version of Liber historiae Francorum would be

---


67 Reimitz, Der Weg zum Königtum.

68 As the compendium from St Petersburg dates from the first third of the tenth century it can only be a copy of a History book for Charles the Bald, cf. below n. 74.

69 Reimitz, Ein karolingisches Geschichtsbuch.

70 Cf. the edition and the commentary of the text in the manuscript: Reimitz, Ein karolingisches Geschichtsbuch 52f.; cf. also the edition in: Domus Carolingiae Genealogiae (ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, MGH SS 2, Hannover 1829) 310ff.
referred to as *Franci superiores*, in other words, Austrasians.\footnote{Cf. the examples in Reimitz, *Der Weg zum Königstum*: for a digital edition of the three history books, which allows to compare the different versions of the Liber historiae Francorum see Drei fränkische Geschichtsbücher aus der Karolingerzeit; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale lat. 1091, Wien, ÖNB lat. 473, St. Petersburg, NLR lat. F.v.IV.4, ed. Richard Corradini/Karl Giesriegl/Helmut Reimitz (http://www.oew.ac.at/gema/dbfg.htm, forthcoming).} In short, the *gesta* from Clovis to Chlothar II follow a selective path through Merovingian history. By eliminating the Austrasian dimension of Frankish rule and topography, the *gesta regum Francorum* (as the Liber historiae Francorum is called in a number of ninth-century manuscripts) narrow the scope of the narrative down to Chilperic and his descendants. This serves an important purpose: by omitting mentions of the Austrasian competition, it is suggested that the Neustrian kings had been able to establish their dominion as far as the Rhine. To translate this historical strategy to the political context of 869, the version of the Liber historiae Francorum in this compendium attempts to argue that the *regnum Lotharii* had always belonged to the western Frankish kingdom.\footnote{Reimitz, *Der Weg zum Königstum*.} The *regnum Lotharii*, however, only belonged to Charles the Bald’s western Frankish kingdom for about a year. Consequently, it is not strange that the models of historiographical legitimisation and Frankish identity preserved in the Vienna manuscript were not further used or built upon in the Frankish kingdoms under the Carolingians.\footnote{The third manuscript in this group, St Petersburg, NLR lat. F.v.IV.4, copied in the first half of the tenth century, evidently originated from the same branch of transmission as the Paris compendium, but introduces us to a new stage in the appropriation of Frankish history. Matthias Tischler argued recently and convincingly for a localisation of the compendium’s production in Soissons around 920/930.\footnote{For the reception of the features of this compendium in the chronicle of Benedict of St Andreae cf. Tischler, Einharts *Vita Karoli* 476ff.} He explains the Reims influence on the style of the script as a result of the close connections between Soissons and Reims at the time when Abbo of Soissons was in charge of the affairs of Hugo, son of Heribert II of Vermandois. Hugo had been made archbishop of Reims whilst still a minor.\footnote{For Hugo as archbishop of Reims see Michel Sot, *Un historien et son église. Flodoard de Reims* (Paris 998) 579–66; cf. Tischler, Einharts *Vita Karoli* 1167ff., Ernst Tremp, *Die Überlieferung der Vita Hludowici des Astronomus* (MGH Studien und Texte 1, Hannover 991) 50ff.; Rosamond McKittrick, Charles the Bald and his library. The patronage of learning, in: *English Historical Review* 95 (1980) 28–47; cf. now ead., *History and Memory* 58, 112.} An intensified interest in Carolingian history at Soissons at that time, in particular in Louis the Pious’s reign, is also attested by the work of Odilo, who died after 930. For his *Translatio S. Sebastiani* he was able to utilize chapter 40 of the *Vita Hludowici* and the Annales regni Francorum for 826.\footnote{For the career of Heribert I see Schwager, *Heribert II*. 6ff. with further literature.} His father, Heribert I, had, along with Fulco of Reims, played a decisive role in the royal election of the Carolingian Charles the Simple.\footnote{For the counts of the Vermandois and Heribert II cf. Helmut Schwager, *Graf Heribert II. von Soissons, Omois, Meaux, Madrie sowie Vermandois (900/06–930) und die Francia (Nord-Frankreich) in der ersten Hälfte des 10. Jahrhunderts* (München, 996); Ordnung der Welt nach dem Mittelalter. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politischen Geschichte, ed. Helmut Schwager, *Graf Heribert II. von Soissons, Omois, Meaux, Madrie sowie Vermandois (900/06–930)*, ed. Helmut Schwager, *Graf Heribert II. von Soissons, Omois, Meaux, Madrie sowie Vermandois (900/06–930)*; see also Gerda Heydemann, *Heiligen aan de wandel. Martelaren uit de Romeinse catacombe* Inter duas lauros in het Frankenrijk, in: Millenium. *Tijdschrift voor Middeleeuwse studies* 8 (00) –8.} In the conflict between Charles and Robert I, Heribert II switched sides in 923 and...
then, after the death of Robert, supported the new king, Rudolf of Burgundy, who was crowned king in Soissons in 923. When Heribert took Charles the Simple prisoner, he was rewarded by Rudolf with the installation of his younger son Hugo as archbishop of Reims. But Heribert’s systematic augmentation of his own position of power soon led to conflicts with Rudolf, so that in 927/28 Heribert even had Charles, whom he had still been holding prisoner, set free, paid homage to him, and led him to Reims. However, having allied himself with Rudolf once more, Heribert duly had Charles III returned to custody.

It is easy to imagine that, in the troubled times of the late 920s, those in the sphere of influence of the counts of Vermandois in Soissons and in Reims would have been interested in a historiographical compendium such as the one we find in the St Petersburg compendium. Themes such as the balance of power between the Frangi (defined as the political elite along the Seine and the Oise) and their kings, the deposition of kings who ruled only in name, indeed even the deposition, imprisonment and restoration of kings and an emperor were questions of the highest possible relevance for contemporary politics in the early decades of the 10th century. The manuscript therefore originated within a network of prominent families in western Francia who were seeking to emphasise the identification of their area of influence with the former political centres of the Frankish kingdom under the Merovingians. At a time when some of the regional principes, such as the Vermandois, were themselves of Carolingian descent, Carolingian tradition also played a key role, as the members of the ruling class could employ it to legitimate their position as equal and worthy political partners of the king.

It is important to note that neither the choice of the traditions appropriated as resources of identification nor their employment to establish new identities were in any way haphazard. A comparison of the two compendia in the manuscripts from Paris and St Petersburg demonstrates the large role played by the endeavour to achieve authenticity in the appropriation of historiographical traditions. As mentioned above, the fact that the pages following the end of the Continuationes in the Paris manuscript originally remained empty and the Annales regni Francorum took up the continuation of the history book only with the next quire means that the two parts of the manuscript were copied independently. There is nothing to suggest such a method of production in the compendium from St Petersburg, but pages were nevertheless left blank between the Continuationes and the beginning of the Annales regni Francorum; not, as one would expect, at the end of the quire, but in its middle. As a result, in the St Petersburg manuscript an annual table running from 532 to 810 was inserted into the space which had been left blank in the Paris manuscript. In it, a number of small entries were made referring to the successions to power and deaths of Carolingian rulers from 697 onwards. It is possible that the manuscript’s Vermandois context could have played a role.

---


82 Cf. above p. 96 with n. 64.

83 St Petersburg, NLR F.v. IV. 4, fol. 35r–36v.
in the entry of these Annals, since they end in 810 with an entry mentioning the death of Pippin of Italy, the ancestor of Heribert of Vermandois.\textsuperscript{8}

The way in which the blank pages of the Paris history book were utilised in the St Petersburg manuscript indicates not only to which lengths its scribes went in order to prevent the authenticity of the historiographical representation being endangered, but also the possibilities available to the compilers to manipulate the interpretation of already established historical resources, above all through the appending and juxtapositioning of additional texts.\textsuperscript{85}

Even more striking than the incorporation of additional short annalistic entries into the compendium is the inclusion of both imperial Vitae: Einhard’s Vita Karoli,\textsuperscript{86} and Astronomer’s Vita Hludowici, in the Petersburg manuscript.\textsuperscript{87} It is worth noting that with the inclusion of Astronomer’s work in the compendium, a text was selected which was not only topically and stylistically cohesive with the Vita Karoli, but which also drew substantially on the text of the Annales regni Francorum between 814 and 829.\textsuperscript{88} However, in many instances the reports which the Astronomer appropriated from other texts were supplemented. For instance, in the report about Einhard’s translation of the relics of Marcellinus and Petrus, the unfriendly tone of the Annals’ brief note about the event is duly amended. Einhard is even referred to as praiseworthy, and his undertaking thrown into a much more favourable light.\textsuperscript{89} However, the role and definition of the Franci are also lent a markedly different accent in the Astronomus’ representation.

Whereas the Franci are described as also living east of the Rhine in Germany in Einhard’s Vita Karoli,\textsuperscript{90} the Astronomer calls the inhabitants of these areas Germani or populi Germanici.\textsuperscript{91} In his version, the regnum Francorum includes all of Germany and Gallia, though Gallia continues to be divided into Aquitania, Burgundia and Francia.\textsuperscript{92} From this Francia came, according to the Astronomer’s version, the rassi ex gente Francorum with whom Charlemagne sent his minor son Louis, King of Aquitaine, to rule Aquitaine.\textsuperscript{93} Clearly the Astronomer’s text takes inspiration from the Liber historiae Francorum as much in its regional classification as in its representation of the political role of the Frankish nobility. The concept of Frankishness, however, becomes more acutely demarcated and distilled in his work, which can be seen as a reaction to a development that it had become more widespread in the process of expansion under the Carolingians, as described in the Annales regni Francorum or Einhard’s Vita Karoli.

Such additional efforts to identify the meaning of the term Frankish with greater precision were by no means deemed universally necessary when the Astronomer was writing and compiling his text.

\textsuperscript{84} The text has been edited under the title Annales Bavariici breves (ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz, MGH SS 20, Hannover 1868) 8; but nearly one century ago Friedrich Kurze, Die Annales Laubacenses und ihre nähere Verwandtschaft, in: NA 39 (1914) 13–41, at 41, suggested to call them Annales regum Suessionenses, for there is nothing in the text which links it with Bavaria, cf. also Lothar Boschen, Die Annales Prumienses. Ihre nähere und weitere Verwandtschaft (Düsseldorf 1972) 134ff., 144ff.


\textsuperscript{86} Tischler, Einharts Vita Karoli 163ff.

\textsuperscript{87} Thegan, Gesta Hludowici imperatoris; Astronomus, Vita Hludowici imperatoris (ed. Ernst Tremp, MGH SS rer. Germ. NS 64, Hannover 1995); Tremp, Überlieferung 128ff.; For a new look at the Astronomer: De Jong, Bride-shows revisited.

\textsuperscript{88} The two texts can be easily compared in the edition and translation of Ernst Tremp, where the full passages of the Annales regni Francorum, which were used by the Astronomer, are printed below the edited text.

\textsuperscript{89} See the discussion in the Introduction in Astronomus, Vita Hludowici, ed. Tremp 75ff.

\textsuperscript{90} Einhard, Vita Karoli magni (ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. separatim editi [25], Hannover 1911) 13.

\textsuperscript{91} Astronomus, Vita Hludowici 20, ed. Tremp 342; ibid. 40, ed. Tremp 435; ibid. 45, ed. Tremp 461; cf. De Jong, Bride-shows revisited.

\textsuperscript{92} Astronomus, Vita Hludowici 29, ed. Tremp 382; ibid. 49, ed. Tremp 482.

\textsuperscript{93} Astronomus 3, ed. Tremp 291.
in the West Frankish Kingdom around 840. To the producers of the Paris historiographical compendium made at the same time, the historiographical definition of Franci employed in the Liber historiae Francorum apparently seemed perfectly adequate. Towards the end of the ninth century, however, and especially from the tenth century onwards, the Astronomer’s re-localisation of the Franci was indisputably becoming an important resource for identification in the region described as Francia in the text. As Ernst Tremp has shown, a significant concentration in the transmission and reception of the text in precisely this region can be observed from this point onwards.94

So far I have analysed the development and continuation of historiographical resources by following some stages of the transmission of the text-ensemble of the Liber historiae Francorum, the Continuationes and the Annales regni Francorum. This was, however, not the only history that was copied and further developed in the early medieval Frankish world. For instance in the archives of Rheims, where both the Paris-compendium and the exemplar from which the Petersburg-compendium was copied were kept,95 we have good evidence that other histories and historical collections were preserved in the library. Exactly at the beginning of the tenth century, when the St. Petersburg manuscript was copied, the library there would have had a number of alternative visions of the past to offer. There are still a number of extant historiographical compendia from Reims, which built on quite different textual traditions than the three manuscripts discussed, for example a manuscript, kept today in London, containing the Liber historiae Francorum in its Austrasian reworking, and followed by the Annales Mettenses priores.96 Similarly, we also find a history book in Rheims containing the chronicle of Fredegar, in which the story is continued by various Carolingian Annals.97 Hincmar of Reims himself probably incorporated his Annales Bertiniani into a big compendium which is still preserved in most of the manuscripts of the Annales Bertiniani, and of which the oldest exemplar, St Omer 697 and 706 is also likely to have been a historiographical export from Rheims.98 In this manuscript, both Hincmar’s and Prudentius’s annals make up the end of the compilation. The Annales regni Francorum are found in the same compilation,99 but these texts conclude the historical sweep of the codex beginning with Roman history texts,100 continuing with a Carolingian version of Gregory of Tours’ Historiae,101 together with Fredegar’s book IV and its continuation up until the death of Charles Martell.102 This compendium was almost certainly connected with the attempt to

94 Tremp, Überlieferung 9ff.
95 Cf. Reimitz, Der Weg zum Königtum.
97 Vatican, Reg. lat. 213: Fredegar-Chronicle with the Continuations to 768, continued by the so-called Fragmentum Chesnii (ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz. MGH SS 1, Hannover 1826) 33ff., fol. 149r–151v; and the Annales regni Francorum a. 791 (… Dei solutum postulaverunt pro salute exerciti et aditorio Domini nostri Iesu Christi et pro victoria et vindicta super Avaros.) to 806 (Sclauisque pacatis Karlus cum exercitum regressus in loco, qui dicitur Silli, super ripam.) fol. 151v–157v; for some observations on a particular interest in the Bavarian “regnum” under Tassilo in this compendium see the contribution of Max Diesenberger in this volume.
98 Saint-Omer, Bibliothèque municipale 697+706, a codex which is today preserved in two parts, of which the first part (cod. 697) contains: Eutrop, Historia Romana; Marcellinus Comes, Chronicum; Notitia Galliarum, and the second part (cod. 706): Gregory of Tours, Historiae; Fredegar IV cum continuationibus (1–24); Annales regni Francorum; Annales Bertiniani. Cf. to this manuscript and to the other manuscripts of the Annales Bertiniani: Annales de Saint-Bertin (ed. Félix Grat/Jeanne Vieillard/Suzanne Clémencet. Paris 1964) XXIIff.; McKitterick, History and Memory 50ff.; see also the discussion of the manuscript tradition in the English translation of the Annales Bertiniani: Janet L. Nelson, The Annals of St Bertin (Manchester 1991) 15ff.
101 Cf. Bourgain/Heinzelmann, L’œuvre de Grégoire de Tours 288; Bourgain, Gregorius Turonensis 156.
devise a specific identity resource in the Frankish kingdoms. It does not seem to have been used much for the affirmation and furtherance of political identities in the late- and post-Carolingian West. It was transmitted above all thanks to the important role it played in the historical argument put forward for the restoration of the diocese of Arras at the end of the 11th century. As a historiographical resource for the self-identification amongst the West Frankish elite in the late and post-Carolingian West the compendium of texts, as compiled in the St Petersburg history book, played a much more important role. This can be demonstrated in the manuscript itself, in which we find a genealogy of the Counts of Boulogne-sur-mer added as late as 1200, continuing a Merovingian and a Carolingian genealogy. Furthermore the texts in the compendium were used in later historiographical writings. Thus Ademar of Chabannes, Aimoin and those who continued his work, the Capetian Chroniclers in St Denis and St Germain de Prés, and – descending from these – the Chroniques de rois de France and the Grandes Chroniques can be shown in their own works to have built either directly or indirectly upon the whole history book or on its historiographical elements.

This success history, however, threatens to distract from the discontinuous process of adaptation and appropriation of the historiographical resources of the Frankish world, as witnessed by the different strategies of distinction in the three compendia. Still more importantly, the success of these histories can hide the fact that they appeared at the end of the Carolingian era as one model of shared memory among others, and should be seen as the product of sustained conflicts about collective history and identity. The comparison of the St Petersburg compilation with its counterpart in the compendium in Paris, BN lat. 10911 reveals the painstaking work and intricate strategies which underlay the creation and recreation of history in these struggles over memory. The transmission of the Liber historiae Francorum-Continuationes-Annales Regni Francorum-trio in combination with all of its visual and textual characteristics (which, judging from the St Petersburg-manuscript, could be preserved even into the third generation of manuscripts) also reflect an interest in authority. But a look at the Carolingian historiographic workshops shows that this search for authenticity did not only help to legitimize the propagation and promotion of a common history, but also its construction and compilation. The several strategies which could be employed in such endeavours may also be illustrated by the transmission of Gregory’s Historiae. In the later transmission of his text, Gregory’s arrangement of his histories in the form of case studies was preserved in as much as these case studies continued to form the building blocks of subsequent recensions and reworkings. Furthermore, however much the selection of particular case studies might vary in different versions, the contents of the individual chapters remained in most of the cases relatively constant. Whether we compare the work of Gregory himself, of the different compilers and users of his text, or of the anonymous authors of Carolingian compendia, what emerges is a common and distinctive method. This method

---


107 Cf. above p. 97, n. 68 and p. 99, n. 83, for a fuller discussion of the comparison of the two manuscripts with plates see: Reimitz, Der Weg zum Königtum.
might perhaps best be described as an art, namely ‘The art of truth’, which depended mainly on the ability to adapt and adopt history without compromising the authority of its representations; and this especially if and when history served as a source for the construction and creation of identity. Walter Pohl suggested some years ago that we should analyse ethnogenesis as corresponding to the formation of a discourse which seeks to articulate its meaning. Given the fundamental openness of identity processes, this would of course mean that the discontinuities and contradictions in dealing with traditions and resources for the construction of identity should be taken into account. As I have tried to show, in my analysis of a number of examples of Frankish historiography, the investigation of the transmission and reception of historiographical texts and concepts can form an important contribution to such a project. Above all, the analysis of the use and handling of historiographical resources enables us to track the continually fluctuating and dynamic relationship between discourse and identity through history.
