

LARS BOJE MORTENSEN

CHANGE OF STYLE AND CONTENT
AS AN ASPECT OF THE COPYING PROCESS

A RECENT TREND IN THE STUDY
OF MEDIEVAL LATIN HISTORIOGRAPHY.¹

In the famous *History of the Franks* — dating from the end of the sixth century — Gregory of Tours finishes off with a plea to his reader :

even if you are an acknowledged master in all these skills [i.e. the liberal arts], and if, as a result, my style seems uncouth to you, despite all this, do not, I beg you, do violence to what I have written. You may cast it into verse if you wish to, supposing it finds favour in your sight ; but keep it intact.²

The opposite request is actually more usual in Medieval Latin historiography. As an example one can quote Cosmas of Prague from the early twelfth century. In the prologue to his *Bohemian Chronicle* he addresses his patron in these words :

If you, dearest brother, appreciate me as your friend, if you are touched by my prayers, prepare your mind and take in hand an erasing-knife, a piece of chalk, and a pen so you can erase what is superfluous and add what is missing. Please replace poor phrases by correct ones ; in that manner my shortcomings will be nullified by your elegance. I am not ashamed to be

¹ An introductory bibliography of the new trend is found in note 4 below. For discussing various points with me I am grateful to Michael Harbsmeier and Richard Pierce.

² GREGORIUS TURNONENSIS, *Historiarum lib. X*,31 (ed. R. BUCHNER, Darmstadt, 1974): *si in his omnibus ita fueris exercitatus, ut tibi stilus noster sit rusticus, nec sic quoque, deprecor, ut avellas quae scripsi. Sed si tibi in his quiddam placuerit, salvo opere nostro te scribere versu non abnuo.* The English wording is a slightly adapted version of L. THORPE's translation, London, 1974.

corrected by a friend, indeed, I demand to be emended by friends with loving care.³

The straightforward interpretation of these passages would probably see Gregory's words as a simple wish not to be forgotten by posterity and Cosmas's as a topos of modesty, not to be taken too seriously. These elements are no doubt present. Both texts, however, reflect an interesting feature in the working conditions of Medieval historians, and that feature is my main topic in this paper. I am thinking of the inextricable linking of changes in style and contents with the material reality of the handwritten book. To put it differently : three areas of research, i.e. codicology, stylistics and analysis of contents which — for many good reasons — tend to be kept apart, deserve to converge now and then. In fact, if they do not, the full force of passages such as the above can hardly be appreciated.

What Gregory wanted to say was something like this. If the reader is interested in reproducing the information put into this book he can do one of two things : make a faithful copy of the whole text, leaving nothing out and changing no phrases. Or he can write another version, for instance in verse, but then he is asked not to lay the foundations for that other version by making changes in the present book (such as marking up, erasing, substituting phrases, inserting marginal suggestions). The present fair copy should serve as an exemplar only for fresh copies of exactly the same text, not as a working copy for different versions. Similarly, Cosmas of Prague was talking about the fair copy at hand. If his patron disliked the style of his book, he could change it directly in that copy. The more elegant version resulting from this process of correction would then become the exemplar for subsequent copies.

No text could feel safe in a culture of handwritten books. Even with the best intentions of accurate work, no scriptorium or private scribe could avoid individual variations of lay-out and script, errors of co-

³ COSMAS PRAGENSIS, *Chronica Boemorum* I, praefatio (ed. B. BRETHOLZ, Berlin, 1923): *Tu autem, frater karissime, si me tuum amicum diligis, si meis precibus tangeris, precinge lumbos mentis et accipe in manum ratorium, calcem et calamum, ut quod superest radas et quod non est desuper addas ; inproprie dicta proprietate muta, ut sic mea inscicia tua sublevetur faciecia. non enim ab amico corrigi erubesco, qui etiam ab amicis nimio affectu emendari exposco.*

pying, not to speak of variations conditioned by the quality of the exemplar or by the framework or intentions behind the production of a new copy of a text. From this there is only a blurred transition to areas of conscious textual editing. Historical prose literature was particularly apt to be remoulded on purpose. Updates and corrections would naturally creep into existing copies ; moreover omissions, abbreviations as well as rephrasings and additions would often be attractive for a manufacturer of a new copy. These mechanisms are most easily recognized in chronological literature such as world chronicles, lists of rulers and *Annales*. But they are equally present in much of the narrative literature. There, in addition to changes of content, we are faced with stylistic change. To that I shall return shortly.

First I want to stress the fact that putting each existing version of a narrative historical text into focus is a rather recent approach. Many basic facts about different versions have, of course, been known for centuries, but previous scholars have for various reasons focused more on a reconstructed primary text rather than on the flexibility of the textual tradition, on the channels through which historical knowledge spread, and on Medieval historians' practical working conditions. However, in the course of the 80s — and I shall mention one major name only : Bernard Guenée — this aspect has increasingly received scholarly attention, and it is my claim that it will be the predominant trend in the next decades.⁴ To support that claim I have stated this development in a rather

⁴ The first overall view of medieval historiography which emphasizes practical working conditions as much as ideology is the modern classic by B. GUENÉE, *Histoire et Culture historique dans l'Occident médiéval*, Paris, 1980. An interest in analysing each version of an historical work emerges clearly in the acts from a Paris symposium held in 1989, especially in an important article by G. MELVILLE, *Le problème des connaissances historiques au moyen âge. Compilation et transmission des textes in L'Historiographie médiévale en Europe* (ed. J.-P. GENET, 1991), p. 21-41. A large-scale practical implementation of the new approach is to be found in the series on Geoffrey of Monmouth: *The Historia regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth. 1. Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS. 568* (ed. N. WRIGHT), Cambridge, 1985. 2. *The First Variant Version: a critical edition* (ed. N. WRIGHT), Cambridge, 1988. 3. *A Summary Catalogue of the Manuscripts* (J.C. CRICK), Cambridge, 1989. 4. *Dissemination and Reception in the Later Middle Ages* (J.C. CRICK), Cambridge, 1991. 5. *Gesta regum Britannie* (ed. & tr. N. WRIGHT), Cambridge, 1991. In this series full attention is paid to the characteristics of style, content and codicological context of each existing tex-

crude form, viz. in a table which is divided into four main periods of research in Medieval Latin historiography. They are : an antiquarian period from ca. 1500-1820, a critical period from ca. 1820 to 1950, a period concerned with history of ideas from ca. 1950 to 1990, and finally a present trend of history of texts. With such a rough division there are obviously a number of reservations that spring to mind. First of all a table of this kind tends to give the impression of very clear breaks and no continuity in the history of scholarship. Obviously, this is not so. I am not trying to belittle the continuity of the tradition, but in an attempt to explain in what sense we stand on the threshold of a new approach, it might be helpful with a slightly overstated categorization of past fashions. Granted that, I foresee another criticism, i.e. concerning my choice of dates. I hasten to say that convincing cases for the beginning of historicism before 1800, or in the 1840s etc can no doubt be made. I chose the 1820s because of the pioneer project *Monumenta Germanica historiae*. Similarly, 1950 is a convenient inauguration date for the history-of-ideas approach because Helmut Beumann's famous study of Widukind of Corvey came out that year.⁵ But the precise dates are not important. The four periods are intended to denote main streams of interests and approaches, and no claims are made about precise dates or any exclusivity of approach within each period.

tual unit. By such painstaking documentation the authors provide scholars working on other traditions with a stimulating *repertorium* of change mechanisms a medieval text had to face. How much can be extracted by an analysis of a single manuscript containing various historical texts is brilliantly shown by R. SCHNELL, *Liber Alexandri Magni: Die Alexandergeschichte der Handschrift Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, n.a.l. 310*, München, 1989 (Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 96).

⁵ *Widukind von Korvei*, Weimar, 1950.

MAIN TRENDS IN THE STUDY OF MEDIEVAL LATIN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Period	1500-1820	1820-1950	1950-1990	1990-
Characterization	antiquarian, accumulative, rhetorical	critical, systematic	history of ideas, hermeneutic	history of texts
Textual version in focus	the one that happened to be found in print	primary, original	primary, original	each existing version
Medieval historian seen as	model, point of departure	informant, bad historian	artist, author, ideologue	artist, scholar, editor, sieve of information
Repetition of material from other medieval historians	accepted, not systematically identified	identified and judged as superfluous	accepted and interpreted as part of the <i>oeuvre</i>	seen as a practical measure and offering an opportunity to mould the material
Own discourse intended as	supplement	substitute	interpretation	mapping of circulation and of historians' working conditions
Scholarly command of Latin	great, active	great, passive	receding, but increasingly supported by translations	receding further, but supported by translations and better tools

I shall now turn to two examples of textual flexibility from which I hope it will appear that the combination of codicology, stylistics and historical analysis of contents can deepen our understanding of Medieval Latin historical literature.

Around the turn of the millenium Dudo of St. Quentin, a highranking cleric, founded Norman historiography with his semi-official narrative on Norman dukes from the pagan Hasting to the recently deceased Richard I (died 996). Dudo took his role as founder very seriously inasmuch as he provided the story of Vikings going native in Normandy with a full-scale geographical and Biblical framework. Moreover, he composed the work in a very elaborate style, and added numerous pieces of poetry. This combination of prose and poetry — a prosimetrum — was actually very rare in historical literature, and Dudo even excelled by presenting more than 2000 lines in no less than 32 different quantitative metres.⁶ Apparently he felt that nothing less would do if the Normans were to be accepted as an object for serious historical writing. The people's transformation from pagan brutality to Christian clemency is carefully prepared in the second book which deals with duke Rollo. His conversion does not happen overnight, but is built up gradually through reflection, doubts and a god-sent dream. He appears to be divinely chosen long before he is actually baptized at Rouen.

In the decades between 1050 and 1070 another Norman historian, William of Jumièges, turned out an abbreviation of Dudo's four books with an addition of three new ones, bringing the narrative up to the dramatic events in the reign of William the Conqueror.⁷ Why did William of Jumièges care to recast Dudo's impressive work before telling the more recent story himself? Why did he not simply refer the reader to Dudo, and say « when you have read the beginning of Norman history in Dudo, you can read on in my book ». I do not think there is one simple answer to this. In such cases we should probably be looking for at least three kinds of answers, viz. a practical, a stylistic, and an ideological. Or, put differently, when a Medieval historian is copying

⁶ K. FRIIS-JENSEN, *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet*, Roma, 1987 p. 32.

⁷ For details on the phases of William's work see the recent edition by E. VAN HOUTS, *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*. Vol I, Introduction and books I-IV, Oxford, 1992, p. xxxii-xxxv.

information from a predecessor he is producing a new book (in the physical sense of codicological unit), but often adjusting style and contents in the process.

Let us consider the practical (or codicological) side first. A simple reference to Dudo would not be very helpful in a world of handwritten books. If William's history was going to be successful (which it eventually was) and to spread widely, his text would surely come into hands of people who did not possess a Dudo, or have the means to copy one, not to speak of the difficulties in locating an exemplar in another monastery. Identifying and finding works was no easy matter. William, in other words, provided a natural service for possible readers when he reproduced an essential Dudo as a necessary preliminary to his own work. Another possibility would have been to make a complete copy of Dudo as an introduction, but William may have felt that such a procedure implied a risk : a future scribe could be tempted to copy only one of the two works and thus fragment the story William wanted to tell.⁸

Another consideration of William's was no doubt Latin style. Stylistically the seams between the Dudonian and the original parts of his history do not show. He strove for unity, and he struck a note very different from Dudo's somewhat overloaded style. If William disliked Dudo's poetry — which in fact does not add anything to the historical narrative as such — the easy way would be to copy the prose faithfully and leave out the poetry, something which was actually done in some Medieval copies of Dudo.⁹ But William did not settle for the excerpting strategy, instead he abbreviated and rephrased almost everything in his own more modest words. He does not say much about style. In the preface Dudo is called a learned man (*peritus vir*) and William characterizes his own style as *scholasticum dictamen*, probably as a contrast to a more mature diction.¹⁰ I do not think we should be fooled by his

⁸ William's choice was actually undone by one later redactor who replaced William's paraphrase of Dudo with the complete original (VAN HOUTS, 1992, p. xx).

⁹ FRIIS-JENSEN, 1987, p. 33 and VAN HOUTS, 1992, p. xxxv.

¹⁰ *Hucusque digesta, prout a Rodulfo comite, huius ducis fratre, magno et honesto uiro, narrata sunt, collegi, que scholastico dictamine conscripta relinquo posteris* (IV,20). The two translations I have consulted both go wrong here, I think, when they take *scholasticum dictamen* as a positive rather than a negative, modest description of William's style ; the Danish one by E. ALBRECHTSEN, *To normanniske krøni-*

reticence. The comparatively straightforward style is carefully chosen as a counterpoise to Dudo and was an important part of William's *mise-en-scène* of himself as a serious and matter-of-fact historian.

The other aspect of that is of course the actual compression of the contents of Dudo's history in William's hands. He explains it himself in the preface where he points to the useless fables about Rollo, his dream etc. The bulk of Rollo's history is indeed omitted, but again we should not be too credulous of William's own words because other changes are at least as important. This goes for the omission of geographical and Biblical framework, and it also goes for some additions made. One in particular springs to mind (3,7-8), viz. an elaborate account of the refounding of the monastery in Jumièges. Such insertions about local matters relevant to the author, editor or scribe is a very typical flexible feature in the Medieval copying of historical literature.

A reasonably full account of William's behaviour should include all three explanations, i.e. it should be seen from a codicological perspective, from a stylistic perspective, and from an ideological perspective. If we left out the codicological perspective we would not be able to explain why he did not simply refer to Dudo, perhaps with a small essay criticizing his style and some of the contents; were we to leave out a stylistic consideration, we would be at a loss to explain the unity of the work and the efforts apparently wasted on rephrasing everything, and without the ideological side we would not be able to appreciate the exact nature of his omissions and additions.

I think this three-layer model is useful in most situations where we are dealing with Medieval historians who are reusing other historians' material. I would like to offer another example in which the stylistic

ker, Odense, 1980, p. 65 reads « ... som jeg overgiver til eftertiden nedskrevne med skolet pen » (« written by a schooled pen »); VAN HOUTS translates p 135 « written down in the language of learning » (i.e. Latin in contrast to vernacular). Not to be modest about one's own style would be highly irregular in a Medieval Latin context. Nor would such an interpretation tally well with a later passage *gestis inelimito stili nitore in propatulum expressis* (VI,1, quoted from J. MARX's edition 1914). A translation of *scholasticum dictamen* as « a schoolboy's diction » would bring out the modesty intended by William as well as cover the Latin meaning and connotations of *scholasticus*.

transformation is reversed : the primary text was written in a low style and then was recast in a high one.

I am thinking about the famous anonymous eye-witness account of the First crusade, usually called *Gesta Francorum*. On all stylistic levels — vocabulary, syntax, narrative structure — it is a very simple text, at least judged by 12th-century rhetorical standards. That it is hardly the artless, naive diary it was once thought to be is not our primary concern here ; though I should mention that I am convinced by the most recent studies by Hans Oehler and Rosalind Hill which show that the earliest version we know is the work of one man, and that it was probably not written during events but rather a few years later.¹¹ One need not be a trained historian to discover that among the leaders of the crusading army our author favours Bohemund of Taranto, indeed that he formed part of Bohemund's party and was of the same southern Italian extraction. Bohemund is constantly praised, the campaign is viewed entirely from his standpoint, and the other important knights play only minor roles. Most significantly, perhaps, the capture of Antioch in 1098 — the city to be held by Bohemund — stands at the center of the narrative whereas the real objective of the crusade — the capture of Jerusalem — is treated somewhat more cursorily than one would expect.

The story of the spread in Europe of accounts of the First crusade has not been written, but I am sure it would be a fascinating one, not least because it would yield much material to the study of the flexibility of historical accounts in a world of handwritten books.¹² The *Gesta Fran-*

¹¹ H. OEHLER, *Studien zu den "Gesta Francorum"* in *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch*, 6 (1970), p. 58-97 & *The Deeds of the Franks and the other pilgrims to Jerusalem*, ed. R. HILL, Oxford, 1962 (repr. 1972). The edition by L. BRÉHIER, *Histoire anonyme de la première croisade*, Paris 1924 (repr. 1964) is based on the idea of an original lay diary which has been worked over and interpolated by one or more clerics.

¹² In addition to the study by OEHLER, two excellent beginnings have been made: J.O. WARD, *Some Principles of Rhetorical Historiography in the Twelfth Century in Classical Rhetoric & Medieval Historiography*, ed. E. BREISACH, Kalamazoo, 1985, p. 103-165 (*Studies in Medieval Culture* 19) ; and R. HESTAND, *Il cronista medievale e il suo pubblico. Alcune osservazioni in margine alla storiografia delle crociate*, in *Annali della facoltà di lettere e filosofia dell' università di Napoli*, 27 (1984-1985), p. 207-227. WARD's contribution is particularly strong on stylistic analysis, whereas

corum played a key role for much of the subsequent tradition. When Bohemund travelled to France in 1106 in order to reap the fruits of his fame as a crusader, to marry into the royal family, and not least to advocate a new crusade (this time against Constantinople), he surely brought this text with him as part of the propaganda ; the suggestion has even been made that it was composed for that very occasion.

One 12th-century copy of the *Gesta Francorum* displays a few textual changes, mostly of style. The word order has been changed, the vocabulary has occasionally been improved. By modest means the scribe has also exalted another leading crusader, Duke Robert of Normandy. This was done, for instance, by correcting an original wording such as « the duke of Normandy » into « the most galant knight, duke Robert of Normandy » and similar textual surgery. Another branch of the textual tradition represents a more thorough overhaul of the style, and is equally interested in the Norman duke.¹³ Alterations such as these could either be made directly in the copying process or be prepared by interlinear and marginal additions in the exemplar. The *Gesta Francorum*, however, underwent several, more radical transformations, such as must have been made with one or more intermediate drafts before a new fair copy of the story of the First Crusade was ready. In the decades after the text was first brought to France, no less than three authors undertook to rewrite it in their own style. One was Robert the Monk who explains the reasons for changing the narrative in these terms :

An abbot of the name N — a most learned and virtuous man — showed to me an historical work with this material. However, he rather disliked it. Partly because it lacked the beginning of the story which took place at the Council of Clermont, partly because the narrative of such wonderful material remained uncultivated and the literary style was uncouth and vacillating.¹⁴

HIESTAND offers a lucid typology of twelfth-century texts (and versions of texts) on the First Crusade.

¹³ HILL, 1972, p. xxxix-xl ; cf. also HIESTAND (1984-1985), p. 214-215.

¹⁴ *Historia Hierosolymitana* (PL 155, col. 669-758) *Quidam enim abbas, nomine N, litterarum scientia et morum probitate praeditus, ostendit mihi unam historiam secundum hanc materiam, sed ei admodum displicebat: partim, quod initium suum quod in Clarimontis concilio constitutum fuit, non habebat ; partim quod*

Another was the bishop and poet Baudri of Bourgueil (1046-1130) who expressed similar sentiments :

However, I did not deserve myself to participate in this holy war, and I am not writing an eye-witness account. Somebody — his name is not on record — had published a very simple book on this subject. Still, it told a true story. But the noble contents were debased by lack of elegance and the uncouth and rude narrative at once repelled even simpletons.¹⁵

The third author who retold the story in a high style was Guibert of Nogent (1053-1124) in his *Gesta Dei per Francos*, and in fact he aims much higher than Robert and Baudri by composing a lofty prosimetrum — much like Dudo's *Norman history*. His prose in itself is also much more inaccessible.

How do these textual transformations reflect the three concerns outlined above — practical needs, style, and ideology ? Let us take the obvious first. Style was apparently a key issue. Robert, Baudri, and Guibert all talk about it in their prefaces, and they certainly display artful individual styles in the actual narrative. This goes for all levels, vocabulary, syntax, and not least overall rhetorical treatment of the material that makes for an easier flow of the narrative than the somewhat abrupt structure of the *Gesta Francorum*.

As regards ideology, there is not much to go on in their prefaces. They seem to approve of the received story, only Robert complains about the defective opening. But again : never trust a preface ! As has been established by Oehler, the national and ideological twisting of the story was at least as important for these three Frenchmen as stylistic ambitions. This tendency is plain as day in Robert and Baudri, but it also shows in Guibert, even if more sporadically. They changed two things : first, Bohemund was replaced as the main actor by the French knights such as Raymond of Toulouse, Geoffrey of Bouillon, Robert the

series tam pulchrae materiae inculta jacebat, et litteralium compositio dictionum incondita vacillabat (col. 669A).

¹⁵ *Historia Hierosolymitana* (PL 166, col. 1057-1152) *Non tamen huic beatae interesse promerui militiae, neque visa narravi ; sed nescio quis compilator, nomine suo suppresso, libellum super hac re nimis rusticanum ediderat ; veritatem tamen texerat: sed propter inurbanitatem codicis nobilis materies viluerat, et simpliciores etiam inculta et incompta lectio confestim a se avocabat* (col. 1064A).

Norman and others. Secondly, Jerusalem was put firmly at the center of the picture instead of Antioch.

Finally, the practical side. The arrival of the *Gesta Francorum* — whether directly or indirectly a part of Bohemund's propaganda in France in 1106 — stirred many minds. It was an exhilarating, fresh, and important story written by an eyewitness. People wanted to listen, they wanted to read, they wanted to copy. But on closer inspection it was a troubling text for the learned community in France. What kind of Latin was this? where were the French knights? why so little emphasis on the capture of Jerusalem? and where was the theological and historical framework for the Crusade and its glorious completion? So what I am suggesting is that we should also view the literary activities of Robert, Baudri, and Guibert as an alternative to making faithful copies of the *Gesta*. The composition of fresh texts took the place of direct copying. And the rewriters were successful — their works were subsequently copied many times, the *Gesta* sank into Medieval oblivion.¹⁶

We have begun to view textual flexibility as a great opportunity for Medieval historians, as something positive rather than as a series of omissions, interpolations, and stylistic exercises. This is an important development which builds on, and must constantly draw on results from earlier periods of scholarship. What it does better, I think, is to explain several Medieval learned phenomena — those related to the necessities of the handwritten book — which were largely neglected by previous fashions because they had other Medieval realities in focus.

University of Bergen

¹⁶ HIESTAND, 1984-1985, p. 227 presents numbers of known copies (collected from editions) in a table. His list shows a clear preponderance of copies of Robert the Monk. Only Guibert's text has received full codicological and palaeographical attention: R.B.C. HUYGENS, *La tradition manuscrite de Guibert de Nogent*, The Hague, 1991, p. 20-46 (*Instrumenta patristica* 21).