



Different roles of Empire(s) in the Universal Chronicle of Frutolf of Michelsberg († 1103): ‚Contemporary‘ observations, historical functions, philosophical and theological implications

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Frutolf, a monk of the Benedictine monastery of Michelsberg in Bamberg, wrote five years before his death in 1103 a universal or world chronicle of about 300 folios [i]. In this compilation we can trace more than 70 different sources which in most cases he found in the nearby library of Bamberg Cathedral. This diocese was founded less than a century before by emperor Henry II and its cathedral was endowed with a worthy collection of manuscripts of all kinds of scholarly interest [ii]. Besides theological manuscripts Frutolf found a vast collection of historical sources, among them a considerable amount of annals and chronicles. About 40 of them have survived and many more from the 11th century are attributed to be part of the foundation endowment. Frutolf came into contact here with his predecessors as universal historians, first Eusebius in the latin translation of Jerome, then Orosius, Augustin, Isidore of Sevilla and the venerable Bede, in Carolingian times Paulus Diaconus, Freulf of Lisieux, Regino and in his century Hermann of Reichenau – just to mention some of the outstanding compilers of voluminous chronicles.

The genre of universal chronicles had been revived in the 11th century. It offered a new frame for the assessment of political power and their secular or clerical representatives [iii]. Yet for centuries no-one in Eastern Franconia accomplished a task like the one undertaken by Frutolf: an extensive compilation of the history of the world since creation to his own times, structured around a complex system of chronological observations.

Older editions of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* have always concentrated on the verification of written sources only. When these had been directly derived from earlier published sources, which are called *fontes formales*, they were presented in small print or even left out completely. And the titles of the works copied or inserted in the texts to be edited were given in abbreviations without explaining them. In many cases modern scholars have huge problems in unraveling them. Rosamond McKitterick in her magisterial study of “Perceptions of the Past in the Early Middle Ages” quite rightly deplored this purely positivist and minimalist way of investigating and publishing [iv]. To understand a medieval historian’s way of thinking one has to make a survey of all the sources available to him and to consider, what he copied and what he left out, how he dealt with the bulk of information, the *fontes materiales* [v]. These questions have to be kept in mind when considering Frutolf’s achievement.

The monk Frutolf was a bookworm, he devoured all facts he could find to build a complete and flawless chronology of the succession of reigns and empires. And very often he felt the urge to correct the calculations of his predecessors. This is one side of his – the pedantic teacher’s task of dealing with calculations as part of the *quadrivium*. Yet to understand Frutolf’s philosophy of history, the other side of his personality as historian, it is best to set off by respecting him as a contemporary witness. This methodological approach is in my experience the best way of investigating Frutolf’s concept of past empires and reigns – his way of creating a specific concept of God’s influence on history from creation to what we nowadays call the times of the investiture contest, which had just begun.

We should not call Frutolf a small-minded person, because he strictly reports what he hears and reads in Bamberg – away from the mainstream of information transfer. He does not take sides, even if there are two kings, namely Henry IV and Rudolf of Rheinfelden, the Swabian Antiking elected in the Great Saxon Revolt. And he judges in the same way the fact that there are two popes, Gregory VII and Clement III (Wibert of Ravenna) who outlived three more of Gregory's successors. What we – who think that we know better – consider as a cardinal conflict of reigns in *temporalibus* and *spiritualibus*, was reported objectively by our Franconian contemporary witness. When writing his chronicle in 1098/99 (and perhaps in the years before) and finishing or completing it in the years till his death in 1103, the first reports about the liberation of the Holy Land reached him not only by hearsay but also in form of a letter[vi].

The transfer of knowledge about recent events was provided by books or smaller manuscript collections in quires. Regarding his complete oeuvre one should deduce that his political position was not influenced by a lack of information but by his personal way of seeing God's ministry of mankind's *fortuna*, man's fate within the context of universal, imperial and Christian history. God's providence controlled the rise and fall of empires[vii]. In Frutolf's case world history was a narrative of the past[viii], not dominated by political, theological or philosophical concepts as we can find them in later universal chronicles – especially if we take Otto's of Freising chronicle into account – the benchmark of medieval historiography. My concern is to show that Frutolf's perception, concept and conception was a traditional one of instruction and in parts one of entertainment – despite the temptation of modern approaches to discover a linguistic or cultural turn in historical compilations. Indeed, one can identify in the chronicle of Frutolf what Joyce Hill and Rosamond McKitterick have defined as an „intertextual dialogue“.

This argument is supported by Frutolf's role in a Bamberg monastery. He was a master of novices in a Benedictine abbey in a Franconian bishop's town, with no perceptible ambition to express his vision of the past in a persuasive or manipulative sense – he was a teacher and above all a scholar. His motives for the selection of particular events in the past were precise information about a mainly linear development of history, following certain well-known rules – the succession of eras and reigns therein up to his quarrelsome and exciting times of the Investiture Contest, culminating in the expectance of the last judgement at some unforeseeable point of time.

Let us summarize these methodological reflections: Frutolf's studies in Bamberg Cathedral library supplied him with written information. By selecting his sources and by picking out pieces of information fitting his intention as a universal historian he started an intertextual dialogue. The result was a general arrangement of arguments in a linear narrative of consecutive events, with the overall aim to instruct his readers. Half of the chronicle, the times before the empire of the Romans, gave chronological orientation in synchronized parallel columns with annual regnal years of rulers, separately labelled. Secular reigns and empires were juxtaposed with Hebrew lists from the Old Testament, as long as the latter

were available. From the 42nd year of Octavian – Augustus onwards, the complicated counting of the synchronous years of reign was substituted by listing the *Anni Domini* – as they were introduced in Western historiography by Bede.

Only when Frutolf felt the urge to entertain did he interrupt his consecutive style of informing with digressions. Then he suspended his linear view of human progress by lengthy *excursus* or insertions as e.g. the story of Alexander the Great in Antiquity. Later in the early Middle Ages, the chronicle includes half a dozen of *origines gentium* – histories of peoples, Germanic tribes or ethnic groups; the as Huns, Lombards, Goths and even Amazones, in Frutolf's recent times Franks and Saxons. Here we can perceive a view of history which repeats itself in cycles – *de origine gentium* or the birth of nations and their successful route to power or in our terms: their way to reign, to create small 'empires'. The biblical succession of generations is repeated in their histories. Frutolf was no predecessor of a social cycle theory, but cultural philosophers in 2014 apply similar strategies [ix].

The prevailing structural elements of Frutolf's chronicle were defined by the Old Testament and the fathers of the church, namely the theory of four universal empires and of six ages [x]. The four "universal empires" – Assyrian, Median and Persian, Greek or Macedonian and finally Roman – were seen by Jerome when reflecting on a vision of the prophet Daniel [xi]. The six ages of biblical epochs, as interpreted by Augustin, and the six ages of man, as defined by Isidore of Sevilla, were applied to human history by the venerable Bede [xii]. "The late antique chronicle tradition ... continued to exercise a direct influence on later chroniclers right into the twelfth century. Perhaps as important, late antique chronicles were not just being used as sources by medieval chroniclers, but were also being read and recopied in their own right" [xiii]. Two philosophical questions remained: Firstly, why were the traditional schemes of the four empires and the six ages still so prevalent to form a framework for universal histories up to the 12th century, and secondly, why or how could history continue after the end of the Roman empire? Theologically trained historians like Frutolf found the answers in the fact of consecutive changes [xiv] according to God's providence [xv] and in the idea of *translatio imperii* – the transferring of the Roman empire to the Frankish kings and their successors [xvi].

Let's have a closer look at the details which can be found in the autograph version of his universal chronicle and respectively, in a very good and more complete copy of uncertain origin, today preserved in Prague [xvii]. It will be quite exciting to find our philosophical and theoretical preliminary considerations tested.

In contrast to nearly all the 32 major universal chronicles before the year 1000, Frutolf did not begin his world chronicle with the six days of creation [xviii]. Only Eusebius and his translation and continuation by Jerome did start with Moses, and Frutolf first followed suit: *EPYTHOME EUSEBII DE SEQUENTI OPERE* – "Excerpt from the following book of Eusebius." *MOYSEN GENTIS HEBRAICE DUCTOREM, QUI PRIMUS OMNIUM PROPHE TARUM ante adventum Domini Salvatoris divinas leges sacris litteris explicavit ... (A fol. 1r / Pr fol. 2r) –*

“Moses, the leader of the Hebrews, who was the first of the prophets to explain divine law in sacred books” [xix]. Yet the monk Frutolf realized the theological problem that Abraham was born in a less peaceful world under the reign of Ninus. So Frutolf added to Eusebius – Jerome a long chapter on the creation of the world and the first generations of mankind: *SEX DIEBUS RERUM CREATURAM DEUS FORMAVIT* (A fol. 3v / Pr fol. 3v) – “In six days God finished creation.” Then Frutolf continued with quoting Jerome: *Anno igitur NINI regis Assyriorum XLIII. et Europis regis secundi Syciniorum XXII. natus est Abraham de Thare septuagenario* (A fol. 6v / Pr fol. 5v) – “Under the reign of the Assyrian king ... Ninus Abraham is born.”

The six ages, taken from Bede, gave structure to his universal chronicle.

Hic finitur etas tercia habens annos nongentos quadraginta, et fiunt simul anni trium etatum IIDCCCLXXXVIII. Quarta etas dehinc incipit a David (A fol. 28r / Pr fol. 13v). – “Here the 3rd age ends. It has 940 years. The (first) three ages together comprise 2,888 years. From here the 4th age of David begins” [xx].

In contrast and addition Frutolf employed the scheme of the four “universal empires”: *HUCUSQUE FERUNT HYSTORIÆ REGNUM Assyriorum stetisse a primo anno Nini per annos mille ducentos XXX et novem; ex hinc Medorum incipit regnum* (A fol. 34v / Pr fol. 20r). – “Thus far the history books inform us that the reign of the Assyrians lasted from the 1st year of Ninus for 1.239 years; subsequently the reign of the Medes begins [xxi].”

Fol. 36^v and 37^r of the autograph A (cf. Pr fol. 22r) confront us with quite a few basic problems the chronicler had to cope with. When Frutolf met the challenge of differing biblical reports in the Latin Bibles, the Septuagint and the *veritas Hebraica*, probably the Vulgate, he reflected on his historical method of compiling and composing. We have to be aware that the *Vetus Latina* or Old Latin Bibles were widely spread in the 11th century:

Hęc secundum Hebreos. Has igitur diversitates in hystoriis inveniens, sed neutram partem veluti nullius auctoritatis homuncio reprehendere presumens utriusque notavi opinionem, ut studiosiorem lectorem reddam cautiorem. Nunc regum tempora, ut in cronicis inveni, sicut et hucusque / perducta sunt, transcurram, in ultimo tantum Israheliticorum, hoc est in Osee, Hebreorum voluminum sequar auctoritatem (cf. Pr 22r) [xxii].

Let me paraphrase it: “Finding diversities in history books and not willing to take one side, I noted both opinions and leave it to the cautious reader. Now I will skip the periods of the reigns, as I found them in the chronicles and I am going to follow the authority of the last Book of the Hebrews (Osea).”

This folio 37r in the autograph A (cf. Pr fol. 22r) also shows the widest range of nine synchronous columns: And here we can find united three of the four “universal empires” in juxtaposition to Jewish history [xxiii]:

IUDA/ISRAHEL/MED./ÆGYPT./ALB /ATHEN./LACED./CHOR./MAC.

XXXI I XXV VI II III XVIII XXII XVIII

The Roman Empire began with Julius Cesar, followed by Octavian, who later is called *Augustus*, according to Frutolf and his *fons formalis* Jerome: *ROMANUM CEPIT IMPERIUM PER GAIUM IULIUM CESAREM. ... Octavianus, qui postea appellatus est Augustus, filius Actie sororis Iulii Cesaris, regnavit post Iulium annis LVI, a quo Romani principes appellati sunt Augusti* (Pr fol. 79r and 78v)[xxiv].

Bede changed the dating of years from synoptic lists of rulers to years from the incarnation of the Lord. Frutolf's direct sources from Late Antiquity followed the old calendar system, and so it was Frutolf's task to change the method of counting the years from the time of Christ's birth, which happened in the 42nd year of *Octavianus Cęsar Augustus*. The victory of the reign of Jesus Christ over the pagan gods is described in the following words: *EO IGITUR TEMPORE, HOC EST ANNO XLII. Octaviani Cesaris Augusti, ex quo autem Egyptus in provinciam redacta est et Cleopatra cum Antonio victa anno XXVIII, quando firmissimam pacem ordinatione Dei Cesar Augustus composuit, nascitur in Bethleem Iuda dominus noster Ihesus Christus, verus Deus et homo, cui pax ista famulabatur anno ab initio creationis mundane secundum Hebraicam veritatem ter millesimo nongentesimo sexagesimo secundo, secundum septuaginta vero interpretes eorumque sectatores V ducentesimo primo, a diluvio IICCCVI, ab Abrahe nativitate IIXIII, a Moyse et egressu filiorum Israel de Egypto IDVIII, a Salomone et prima templi edificatione millesimo XXXI, a reedificatione [templi], que sub Dario facta est, DXVIII, ab urbis Rome conditione DCCLI, Olimpiadis centesime nonagesime quarte anno tercio* (Pr fol. 84v). On the occasion of this central change of transcendental reigns Frutolf re-collects his entire system of calendrical calculations: He begins with worrying about the two differing versions of the Old Testament. Then as fixed points in time he adds the years after the deluge, the birth of Abraham, the exodus of Moses and the Israelites, the constructions of the First Temple of King Solomon and of the Second Temple, the founding of the City of Rome and eventually the Olympiads[xxv].

Digression as part of the narrative is suggested by lengthy *excursus* as e.g. the Life of Alexander the Great (*Excerptum de vita Alexandri Magni*) or the Legend of the Amazones (*De Amazonibus*) (Pr 116v), one of the *Origines gentium* – a very special kind of reign[xxvi].

Charlemagne's coronation as Emperor in A.D. 800 is the central clue to understand the *translatio imperii Romanorum ad Francos: Hucusque Romanum imperium a temporibus Constantini Magni Helene filii apud Constantinopolim in Grecorum imperatoribus mansit; ex hoc iam ad reges immo ad imperatores Francorum per Karolum transiit* (only A fol. 142r / erased in [the best copy] Pr fol. 174v!). – "Thus far the Roman Empire stayed with the Greek in Constantinople, from the times of Constantine the Great, the son of Helen. From now on it passed on to the kings, well, to the Emperors of the Franks in the person of Charles (Charlemagne)."

ANNO DOMINICÆ INCARNATIONIS DCCCL, AB URBE VERO condita millesimo DLII. Karolus Magnus rex Francorum, Pippini regis filius, LXXIII. loco ab Augusto Romanorum imperator consecratus est anno regni sui XXXIII. sicque imperavit annis XIII (A fol. 142r / Pr fol. 174v). – “In the year 801 (which is our year 800) ... he was consecrated Emperor in the 73rd place since Augustus” [xxvii].

Louis the Child (893 – 911), the last East Frankish ruler of the Carolingian dynasty, succeeded his father as king at the age of six. Considering the principle of the *translatio imperii* to the succeeding Saxon kings and Emperors he had to be part of the Augustus succession line as 78th ruler: *Ludewicus Arnolfi imperatoris filius LXXVIII. loco ab Augusto admodum puer imperium suscepit et XII annis regnavit (A fol. 150r / Pr 180v)* [xxviii].

The last example takes us back to our starting point: *Inter hæc quæ gesta sint totus iam mundus sui commotione testatur. Sed quia quidam dicunt ipsius papæ auctoritate et consilio / Rûdolfum in regno sublimatum, quidam vero negant Heinricum regem ab eo fuisse excommunicatum, eiusdem papæ dicta quædam super his potissime non incongruum videtur annotare. (A fol. 179r-v / Pr fol. 206r)* [xxix].

To A.D. 1076: “Meanwhile the whole world bore witness to these things through its disorder. But since some say that Rudolf (of Rheinfelden) was elevated to the kingship on the authority and counsel of that same pope (Gregory VII), and since some even deny that King Henry (IV) had been excommunicated by him, it will not seem especially out of place to record certain words of that same pope on this matter [xxx].” – In other words: If peace in the Empire is at stake and people dissent, one should listen to both sides and in the end consult the pope. Besides Frutolf’s efforts to achieve historical balance in his report he was looking for completeness, too [xxxi]. His experience of the investiture contest was our starting point to investigate his assessment of the role of empires. Without the theological basis of God’s providence, in Frutolf’s eyes empires are futile.

The end of history was expected to come in the 7th and 8th age – the times of peace and the last judgment – but this was not Frutolf’s historical or visionary interest any more. The Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation, dealt with these questions, and it was half a century later that bishop Otto of Freising discussed these aspects explicitly in his universal chronicle – based in very large parts on Frutolf.

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[i] *Ekkehardi Uraugiensis chronica*, ed. Georg Waitz (MGH SS 6) (Hannover, 1844), pp. 1–276. The autograph of Frutolf's chronicle today is Jena, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, Bose q. 19 (no digitized copy available on the internet). See Bettina Klein-Ilbeck and Joachim Ott, *Handschriften der Thüringer Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Jena* vol. 2 (Wiesbaden, 2009), pp. 91–93 (manuscript siglum used in the examples: *A*). The most reliable manuscript from the twelfth century, copied directly from the autograph, is Prague, Knihovna Národního muzea v Praze, XVII D 25, which is available online at: <http://www.manuscriptorium.com/apps/main/en/index.php> (when using the digital version add for your search the shelf-mark XVII D 25 and always deduct one folio: e.g. fol. 42r in the manuscript appears incorrectly as fol. 41r in the digital version – manuscript siglum used in the examples: *Pr*). I would like to thank Director Ing. Tomáš Psohlavec on behalf of manuscriptorium.com for the permission to publish select photographs within the context of scholarly research (communicated by telephone Sept. 4th, 2014). – Cf. *Chronicles of the Investiture Contest: Frutolf of Michelsberg and his continuators. Selected sources translated and annotated* by T. J. H. McCarthy (Manchester Medieval Sources) (Manchester, 2013), pp. 85-137.

[ii] Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, Kaiser-Heinrich-Bibliothek. <http://www.staatsbibliothek-bamberg.de/index.php?id=1387> gives a survey of the digitizing project including links to the graphic reproductions of the printed catalogues. <http://bsbsbb.bsb.lrz-muenchen.de/~db/ausgaben/index.html> presents a list of the digitized manuscripts with permalinks.

[iii] Norbert Kersken, “Geschichtsschreibung und Macht: Beobachtungen zu Texten des 7.-11. Jahrhunderts”, *Macht und Spiegel der Macht: Herrschaft in Europa im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert vor dem Hintergrund der Chronistik*, ed. by Norbert Kersken and Grischa Vercamer (Wiesbaden, 2013), pp. 41-63, here p. 54.

[iv] Rosamond McKitterick, *Perceptions of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (The Conway lectures in medieval studies) (Notre Dame, IN, 2006), pp. 1-5.

[v] In this place we cannot follow all the written traces Frutolf might have discovered. That will be the task of the upcoming edition.

[vi] Cf. *Die Kreuzzugsbriefe aus den Jahren 1088-1100: eine Quellensammlung zur Geschichte des ersten Kreuzzuges*. Mit Erläuterungen ed. by Heinrich Hagenmeyer (Innsbruck, 1901) nr. 18, pp. 167-174: “Epistula (Dagoberti) Pisani archiepiscopi et Godefridi ducis et Raimundi de S. Aegidii et uniuersi exercitus in terra Israel ad papam et omnes Christi fideles” and commentary pp. 371-403; Id., “Der Brief der Kreuzfahrer an den Pabst und die abendländische Kirche v. J. 1099 nach der Schlacht bei Askalon”, *Forschungen zur Deutschen Geschichte* 13 (1873), pp. 400-412.

[vii] McKitterick, *Perceptions of the Past*, pp. 13-15.

[viii] Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, 1987); Joachim Knape, "Historiography as Rhetoric", *The Medieval Chronicle II. Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on the Medieval Chronicle*, ed. by Erik Kooper (Amsterdam – New York, NY, 2002), pp. 117-129.

[ix] Cf. Peter Sloterdijk, *Die schrecklichen Kinder der Neuzeit: Über das anti-genealogische Experiment der Moderne* (Berlin, 2014).

[x] K. H. Krüger, *Die Universalchroniken* (Typologie des sources du Moyen Âge occidental 16) (Turnhout, 1985), pp. 23-27; further elements of textual construction and principles of chronological organization like the calculation of the years since creation, synchronious columns, the citing of olympiads etc. can be ignored here: cf. McKitterick, *Perceptions of the Past*, pp. 7-19 on Jerome's widely spread seminal chronicle and T. J. H. McCarthy, *Chronicles of the Investiture Contest*, pp. 21-29.

[xi] Dan. 2,31-36; see also Mireille Chazan, "Les lieux de la critique dans l'historiographie médiévale", *Études d'historiographie médiévale* (Publications du Centre Régional Universitaire Lorrain d'Histoire – Site de Metz 35, 2008) pp. 417-435, here 428-429 and id., "La méthode critique des historiens dans les chroniques universelles médiévales", *ibid.*, pp. 437-477, here pp. 466-467 and p. 469.

[xii] Beda, *De temporum ratione* ch. 66.

[xiii] R. W. Burgess and Michael Kulikowski, "The History and Origins of the Latin Chronicle Tradition," *The Medieval Chronicle VI. Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on the Medieval Chronicle*, ed. by Erik Kooper (Amsterdam – New York, NY, 2009), pp. 153-177, here p. 171.

[xiv] Cf. Beryl Smalley, *Historians in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1974), p. 95.

[xv] A similar answer is given by Goetz, *Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsbewusstsein*, p. 199.

[xvi] McCarthy, *Chronicles of the Investiture Contest*, pp. 29-31.

[xvii] See n. 1 – The pictures are taken from the internet presentation of the Prague manuscript.

[xviii] Dorothea von den Brincken, *Studien zur lateinischen Weltchronistik bis in das Zeitalter Ottos von Freising* (Düsseldorf, 1957) table 3, p. 252 and McKitterick, *Perceptions of the Past* pp. 9-10 with footnote 10.

[xix] See above n. 1 for the manuscripts and slides 1 and 2 in the appendix.

[xx] Slide 3.

[xxi] Slide 4.

[xxii] Slide 5.

[xxiii] Slide 5.

[xxiv] Slide 6.

[xxv] Slide 7.

[xxvi] Christian Lohmer, “Letters in Frutolf’s Chronicle: Entertainment, Information, Authenticity”, (2013) <http://mittelalter.hypotheses.org/2294> and Peter Stotz, “Alexander der Grosse – Nebst allen andern: Die Bühne der Weltgeschichte in einer Bamberger Handschrift”, *Filologia mediolatina* 21 (2014) (upcoming) – see slide 8.

[xxvii] Slide 9.

[xxviii] Slide 10.

[xxix] Slide 11.

[xxx] Translation by McCarthy, *Chronicles of the Investiture Contest*, pp. 114-115; see also McCarthy’s assessment pp. 35-41.

[xxxi] Hans-Werner Goetz, *Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsbewusstsein im hohen Mittelalter* (Orbis mediaevalis 1) (Berlin, ²2008), p. 115 and p. 247 to Frutolf’s thoughts on political correctness.