Memorable crises: Carolingian historiography and the making of Pippin's reign, 750-900

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APPENDIX THREE

The composition of Erchanbert’s Breviary

Thus far, the Breviary has not attracted much scholarly attention. ¹ Although most of its content was considered too unoriginal, because it had been copied directly from the Liber historiae Francorum, other elements were deemed too fantastical to merit serious attention from scholars whose chief interest went out to objective historical fact. ² The text’s most recent edition by Georg Pertz was based on these principles, which are now considered outdated as we tend to focus more on the reality of the text, rather than the reality its author allegedly sought to describe. Pertz only edited what he considered to be the original elements in the Breviary, which resulted in a patchy reflection of the Breviary’s original design and purpose. However, if the whole text is taken into account, including its purposeful selection from the Liber historiae Francorum, a very specific perception of the past is revealed, conveying a powerful message about the origin and formation of Carolingian authority, which culminates in the reign of Pippin the Short. Indeed, unlike other ninth-century historiography, the Breviary has very little interest in the deeds of Charlemagne or Louis the Pious; the focus is on Pippin and his acquisition of the kingship. The compiler had recognized in Pippin a new Clovis, just as Gregory of Tours had recognized in Clovis a new Constantine. But however astute the comparison may have been, the underlying vision was, by contemporary standards, hopelessly outdated. As one of Charlemagne’s poets recounted: ‘our worldly ways have changed back to those of antiquity; Golden Rome, revived once more, is restored to the world!’ ³ By climbing the imperial dais, Charlemagne had vastly expanded the Carolingian historical horizon, which rendered Pippin a king in the company of emperors.

¹ The most useful and elaborate study of the text remains the introduction to Ussermann’s edition of 1790: ‘monitum ad sequens opusculum’, xxxix-xl.
² Pertz, ‘Erchanberti Breviarium’ [introduction], p. 327.

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The extant manuscripts suggest that the *Breviary* did not circulate outside Alemannia, where it was probably composed. The most elaborate redaction of the text probably consisted of three sections. Its earliest textual witness, Rome, BAV Reg. lat. 713, only contains a section of the text, covering the outgrowth Carolingian power from mayor of the palace Pippin I to Charles Martel. In the manuscript, this section was copied onto the excess pages of an older copy of the *Chronicle of Fredegar* (belonging to group three, running up to c. 660) and was probably intended as a continuation. As discussed in chapter two, compilers often cut the narrative of the *Continuations* short after the reign of Charles Martel, allowing them to begin the royal history of the Carolingians with the narrative of the *ARF*. If the compiler of Rome, BAV Reg. lat. 713 had started out with similar intentions, they were never realized: instead of continuing the combination of the *Continuations* and the *Breviary* with the *ARF*, a copy of the *Liber historiae Francorum* ended up being appended to it, written on a new quire and by a different, albeit a more-or-less contemporary, hand. The wear and tear of the final folio of the quire to contain the *Breviary* (fol. 63v) suggests that the manuscript once ended at this point. In other words, the *Liber historiae Francorum* was probably not part of the compilation's original design and must have been added at a later date.

If the assumption is correct that the compiler of *Rome*, BAV Reg. lat. 713 chose to cut the narrative of the *Breviary* short with the reign of Charles Martel, just as compilers often did with the narrative of the *Continuations*, then the *Breviary*'s ending in BAV Reg. lat. 713 does not point to a compositional break in the *Breviary* itself. The *Breviary*'s exemplar may well have continued to the thirteenth year of the reign of Louis the Pious, at which point the author added the following calculation: ‘From King Chlothar [r. 584-629] to the currently thirteenth year of Emperor Louis corresponds to a total number of 232 and ten

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4 This assumption is based on the specific references to Alemannian history in the text and on the fact that all three manuscripts originate from Alemannia. Erchanbert, *Breviary*, ed. Ussermann, p. xli: ‘Illis namque temporibus ac deinceps Gotefredus dux Alamanorum, caeterique circumquaque duces, noluerunt obtemperare ducibus Francorum, eo quod non potuerunt regibus Merovaeis servire, sicuti antea soli erant. Ideo se unusquisque secum tenuit, donec tandem aliquando post mortem Gotefredi ducis, Carolus caeterique principes Francorum paulatim ad se revocare illos arte, qua poterant, studuerunt.’

5 Collins, *Fredegar-Chroniken*, pp. 68-9. According to Collins, p. 71, the Vatican manuscript can be identified with the title entry ‘chronica diversorum temporum libri V et gesta francorum’ in a ninth-century library catalogue of Sankt Gallen (Becker, *Catalogi*, nr. 22). In the twelfth-century copy of this codex, Sankt Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek 547, the *Continuations* end on p. 652 with the words ‘explicunt Gesta Francorum’. The *Continuations* are followed by Erchanbert’s *Breviary*, which is in turn followed not by the *Liber historiae Francorum*, but by Einhard’s *VK*. The *Gesta Francorum* in the catalogue might therefore not refer to the *Liber historiae Francorum*, but to the final book of the *Chronicle of Fredegar*, or possibly the *Breviary*. It would mean that the current Vatican codex would have been reordered after the ninth century.
years’ – dating the text’s original composition to 827.\(^6\) Around 880, the Breviary was continued, allegedly by Notker the Stammerer, up to the reign of Charles the Fat.\(^7\) Although this continuation begins where the original narrative left off, its author made no effort to preserve the rhythm and thematic agenda of the original text.

This is different for the preliminary section that, as noted, consists of an epitomized version of the Liber historiae Francorum and thus extends the history of the core section of the Breviary back into time, all the way to Faramund, the legendary first king of the Franks. With that, the story of Carolingian success was firmly embedded into a much broader historical context, possibly to remind its audience that the Merovingians had also started out as vigorous rulers. With his very specific selection of the material copied from the Liber historiae Francorum, the author wished to juxtapose the reign of Pippin the Short with that of Clovis I. When exactly this preliminary section was added to the core section cannot be said with any certainty, since there is only one witness, which dates from the tenth century: Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek jur. Qu. 134. This manuscript contains all three sections – the preliminary section borrowed from the LHF, the core section from Pippin I to Louis the Pious, and a continuation up to Charles the Fat.

It is possible that preliminary section had been added at a later stage, as Ussermann believed, but it may also have been part of the original composition.\(^8\) The calculation – from Pippin I to Louis the Pious – supports Ussermann’s theory. In the Stuttgart manuscript, the core section of the Breviary also begins on a new line, with an enlarged initial.\(^9\) On the other hand, the author may simply have wished to calculate the years of Carolingian history, hence the demarcation in his text. Not a compositional break, therefore, but a historical break. Moreover, that this preliminary section, borrowed from the LHF, is absent in Rome, BAV Reg. lat. 713, can also be explained: as noted, the compiler cut the narrative of the Breviary short after the reign of Charles Martel’s reign: unaware of the interregnum (737-742) and Childeric III’s installation afterwards, the compiler states that Theuderic had reigned for six years (copied from the Liber historiae Francorum), yet argued that it was Theuderic whom Pope Stephen commanded to be abdicated.\(^7\) Simson, ‘Monachus Sangallensis’.

\(^6\) Erchanbert, Breviarium, p. xlix: ‘A Chlothario rege in præsens xiii anno Ludovici imperatoris constat in summa numerus annorum ccxxxii decem.’ To arrive at 827, the author needs to have had additional information, as the internal computation falls 29 years short. To account for these, it is possible that the author calculated from the start of Chlothar’s reign as king of Neustria, and not the moment of the Frankish reunification. Also, there is confusion about the final stage of Charles Martel’s reign: unaware of the interregnum (737-742) and Childeric III’s installation afterwards, the compiler states that Theuderic had reigned for six years (copied from the Liber historiae Francorum), yet argued that it was Theuderic whom Pope Stephen commanded to be abdicated.

\(^7\) Ussermann, ‘monitum ad sequens opusculum’, xxxix-xl. The question is whether this stylistic break should be interpreted as a historical break between the Merovingian and Carolingian periods, or whether it constitutes a compositional break. No stylistic break follows the computation of 827.

Martel; he may merely have used the *Breviary* to fashion a Carolingian continuation for the *Chronicle of Fredegar*. The composition of the *Breviary* can thus be summarized as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary</td>
<td>Faramund-Chlothar II</td>
<td>827–s.x?</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core</td>
<td>Chlothar II-Louis the Pious</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>‘Erchanbert’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuation</td>
<td>Louis the Pious – Charles the Fat</td>
<td>c. 880</td>
<td>‘Notker’</td>
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</tbody>
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Fig. 7: Erchanbert, *Breviary*: composition.