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Abstract:

The manuscript Avranches, Bibliothèque patrimoniale, 159 is an extraordinary piece of evidence for the writing of universal chronicles in twelfth century Normandy. It contains the “working-copy” of the chronicle of Robert of Torigni (1106-1186), abbot of Mont Saint-Michel, an update and continuation of the universal chronicle of Sigibert of Gembloux (1030-1112). The purpose of this paper is to elucidate the visual and textual features that make Avranches 159 Robert of Torigni's *Liber Chronicorum*. With his chronography, Robert of Torigni aimed to join the authoritative Eusebius-Jeromian tradition of chronicle-writing. Whilst maintaining the visual unity of the manuscript, Robert altered its chronographic structure to include the Anglo-Saxon and the Anglo-Norman past as the realization of the divine plan. As contextualized in the visual totality of Avranches 159, Robert of Torigni's chronography appears as a sophisticated textual project that aimed to integrate Henry II's dynastic past into universal history to enhance the legitimacy of the English king.

Keywords: Medieval Historiography, Universal Chronicles, Normandy, England, Robert of Torigni, Henry II, Manuscript Culture

Résumé:

Le manuscrit Avranches, Bibliothèque patrimoniale, 159 est un témoignage exceptionnel de l'écriture des chroniques universelles au XIIe siècle. Il contient la « copie de travail » de la chronique de Robert de Torigni (1106-1186), abbé du Mont Saint-Michel, qui était la révision et la continuation de la chronique universelle de Sigebert de Gembloux (1030-1112). Le but de cet article est d'analyser les caractéristiques visuelles et textuelles qui font du manuscrit

Avranches 159 le Liber Chronicorum de Robert de Torigni. L'abbé du Mont Saint-Michel avait l'objectif d'inscrire son œuvre dans la tradition de la chronique universelle d'Eusèbe de Césarée et Jérôme, qui date du IV^e siècle. En conservant l'unité visuelle du manuscrit, Robert changea la structure chronologique pour inclure le passé anglo-saxon et anglo-normand dans le contexte eschatologique du plan providentiel de Dieu. Contextualisée dans la complexité visuelle d'Avranches 159, la chronographie de Robert de Torigni apparaît comme un projet textuel sophistiqué qui avait pour finalité d'intégrer le passé dynastique d'Henri II Plantagenêt dans l'histoire universelle afin d'accroître la légitimité du roi anglais.

Mots-clés: Historiographie médiévale, Chronique universelle, Normandie, Angleterre, Robert de Torigni, Henri II, culture manuscrite

Riassunto:

Il manoscritto Avranches, Biblioteca patrimoniale, 159 contiene la "copia di lavoro" della cronaca universale di Roberto di Torigni (1106-1186), abate di Mont Saint-Michel, scritta in continuazione della cronaca di Sigeberto di Gembloux (1030-1112). L'obiettivo di questo saggio è quello di analizzare Avranches 159 elucidando le caratteristiche testuali e visuali che rendono questo manoscritto il Liber Chronicorum di Roberto di Torigni. L'abbate di Mont Saint-Michel, con il suo contributo storiografico, intendeva continuare l'autorevole tradizione cronachistica di Eusebio di Cesarea e San Girolamo risalente al IV secolo. Pur mantenendo l'uniformità visuale del manoscritto, Roberto modifica la sua struttura cronografica per includere il passato Anglo-Sassone e Anglo-Normanno concepiti come realizzazione del piano provvidenziale di Dio. Contestualizzata nella complessità visuale di Avranches 159, la Cronografia di Roberto di Torigni appare come un sofisticato progetto testuale con l'obiettivo di integrare il passato dinastico di Enrico II Plantageneta nella storia universale per accrescerne la legittimità.

Parole chiave: Storiografia medievale, cronache universali, Normandia, Inghilterra, Roberto di Torigni, Enrico II, cultura manoscritta

Zusammenfassung:

Das Manuskript Avranches, Bibliothéque patrimoniale, 159 ist ein außergewöhnliches Zeugnis der Weltchronikschreibung in der Normandy des zwölften Jahrhunderts. Es besteht aus dem "Arbeitsmanuskript" des Liber Chronicorum, in welchem Robert von Torigni (1106-1186), der Abt von Mont Saint-Michel, die Weltchronik des Sigebert von Gembloux (1030-1112) überarbeitete und fortschrieb. Das Ziel dieses Artikels ist es, die visuellen und textlichen Merkmale zu erläutern, die das Manuskript ausmachen. Mit seiner chronographie stellte sich Robert in die Tradition der wegweisenden Chronikschreibung von Eusebius und Hieronymus. Während er die visuelle Einheit des Manuskripts beibehielt, änderte er dessen chronographische Struktur, indem er die angelsächsische und anglo-normannische Geschichte einbezog und als Verwirklichung des göttlichen Planes deutete. Im Gesamtkontext der visuellen Erscheinung von Avranches 159 erscheint Roberts Weltchronik als ein durchdachtes Textprojekt, das die Geschichte der Dynastie Heinrich II. in die Weltgeschichte zu integrieren sucht, um die Rechtmäßigkeit des englischen Königs zu stützen.

Schlüsselwörter: mittelalterliche Geschichtsschreibung, Weltchroniken, Normandie, England, Robert von Torigni, Heinrich II, manuskriptkulturen

In medieval manuscript culture, the visual fruition of the text was not separated from the experience of reading. The visual apparatus of the book served a mnemonic function which was functional to the very understanding of the text¹. This is particularly true for universal chronicles. Hinging upon a theological and exegetical rationale, universal chronicles were ambitious endeavours that aimed to represent the totality of the history available to the redactor in the form of writing². The late-antique chronicles of Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339), translated into Latin by Jerome (347-420), were considered the foundation of the genre³. As argued by Anna-Dorothee von den Brincken, the chronicles of Eusebius-Jerome implied in their horizon of the events (*Berichtshorizon*) biblical history in an attempt to synchronize secular time and Christian time. The *ordinatio* of these chronicles constituted a chronographic framework which reckoned the regnal years of multiple dynasties⁴. Because of their ambitious scope, annalistic universal chronicles were characterized by an inherent coherence between form and content⁵. Through the visualization of multiple chronologies, the account of the past occurred via textual and visual devices within the manuscript. The Eusebius-Jeromian tradition, reinvigorated and popularized during the twelfth century by Sigebert of Gembloux (1030-1112), offered a remarkable example of the alignment – both ideal and practical – of the visual structure of the manuscript with the text⁶. Writing during the investiture controversy⁷, Sigebert started his *continuatio* from 381, when Jerome had interrupted his own writing, and carried on the *series temporum* until 1111. Following the chronographic model designed by Eusebius and Jerome, Sigebert arranged the chronology of the major European dynasties into nine synoptic columns which, from the outset of the chronicle, listed the regnal years of Romans, Persians, French, British, Vandals, Visigoths, Ostrogoths and Huns. Each lemma in the columns consisted of the regnal year and, on the line beneath it, it included a brief historical entry⁸. Sigebert replaced the old dynasties that had described the political landscape of antiquity with a new set of dynasties representing more closely the historical development of the political powers emerging in contemporary Europe⁹. For this reason, Sigebert's *Chronographia*

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1. MOSTERT, 2012, pp. 35; Broadly on the same issue, CARRUTHERS, 1990, p. 7-33.
 2. CAMPOPIANO, 2017, pp. 7-29; INGLEBERT, 2014, pp. 519-521; ID., 2011, pp. 75-101; ALLEN, 2003, pp. 17-42; BREZZI, 1991, pp. 235-245; KRÜGER, 1976, p. 13; VON DEN BRINCKEN, 1957; VANDERPUTTEN, 2001, pp. 141-178; on the relationship between the Bible and historiography, see KRETSCHMER, 2014, pp. 1-24; HARRIS, 2011, pp. 84-104.
 3. ALLEN, 2003, pp. 23-26; GUENÉE, 1980, p. 203; VON DEN BRINCKEN, 1957, pp. 62-63.
 4. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-66; VON DEN BRINCKEN, 1988, pp. 199-211.
 5. SCHMALE, 1993, pp. 111-112; ID., 1978, pp. 1-17; GOETZ, 2013, p. 25; *Ibid.*, pp. 139-165.
 6. CHAZAN, 1999; ID., 2005, pp. 25-35; GOETZ, 2002, pp. 143-153.
 7. CHAZAN, 1999, pp. 78-92, pp. 110-120; GOETZ, 2008, pp. 313-315; on the investiture controversy, TELLENBACH, 1993, pp. 135-278; BLUEMENTHAL, 1988.
 8. Sigebert of Gembloux, *Chronographia sive Chronica*, L. C. BETHMANN (ed.), pp. 168-374; CHAZAN, 1999, pp. 154-155; BURGESS, KULIKOWSKI, 2013, p. 266.
 9. CHAZAN, 1999, pp. 327-328; GOETZ, 2008, pp. 182-184.

is considered a watershed in the Eusebius-Jeromian tradition of chronicle-writing, establishing a new representation of universal history¹⁰.

The continuators of the Eusebius-Jeromian chronicle were conscious that their endeavour was meant to continue the memorial proceedings of salvation history¹¹. Writing in Normandy in the second half of the twelfth century, Robert of Torigni (1110-1186) took up the *chronographus*'s task by following Sigebert's example¹². Robert joined the authoritative Eusebius-Jeromian tradition by interpolating Sigebert's chronicle with the events concerning the ecclesiastical and political history of Normandy and England and by continuing the *series temporum* up to 1186¹³. Until recently, scholarly judgement towards Robert of Torigni as a historian has been meagre. Raymonde Foreville described him as a fatalist and utilitarian historian, complaining about his credulous attitude towards portents¹⁴. Modern scholarship has aimed to rehabilitate Robert's contribution, acknowledging his political approach to history-writing, especially in the update and continuation of William of Jumièges's *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*¹⁵. However, Robert's Chronography has been neglected until very recently. David Bates has renewed attention onto the Chronography arguing that the chronicle's ambitious plan was to provide the ground for an interpretation of England as a unitary kingdom under Angevin rule¹⁶. Except for Bates's important contribution, there has been no comprehensive analysis of Robert's approach to universal chronicle-writing. This has allowed historians to interpret the chronography as a mere instrument of political advancement which, according to Leah Shopkow, had no ambition or interest in interpreting contemporary events¹⁷. The editors of the chronography too reserved a conflicting judgement on Robert's work. Whilst Leopold Delisle praised the chronicle's achievements without reservation¹⁸, Richard Howlett acknowledged its historiographical relevance only for the years between King Stephen's death in 1154 and 1170¹⁹. In his recent edition of the chronography, though recognizing Robert's purpose

10. VON DEN BRINCKEN, 1957, pp. 182-183; CHAZAN, 1999, pp. 105-106; GOETZ, 2003, pp. 152-153.

11. VON DEN BRINCKEN, 2008, p. 80; BREZZI, 1991, pp. 235-237; INGLEBERT, 2014, pp. 519-521.

12. For Robert of Torigni's life, see MORLAIS, 1881; POHL, 2018, pp. 94-122; CHAZAN, 1999, pp. 327-328.

13. The most recent edition of the Chronography is Robert of Torigni, *The Chronography of Robert of Torigni*, T. N. BISSE (ed. and trans.), 2 vols., 2020; the previous editions are the following: Robert of Torigni, *Chronica Roberti de Torigneio, abbatis Monasterii Sancti Michaelis in Periculo Maris*, R. HOWLETT (ed.); Robert de Torigni, *Chronique de Robert De Torigni abbé du Mont-Saint-Michel*, L. DELISLE (ed.). In this paper the text of the Chronography will be cited with Bisson's edition. When referring to Howlett's and Delisle's editions, they will be cited with mention only of the editors' name.

14. FOREVILLE, 1967, pp. 141-153.

15. *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni*, E. VAN HOUTS, (ed.), 2 vols.; VAN HOUTS, 1981, pp. 114-115; SHOPKOW, 1997, p. 207; GIBSON, 1981, p. 176; VAN HOUTS, 1994, pp. 115-118.

16. BATES, 2012, pp. 175-184.

17. SHOPKOW, 1997, pp. 107-108.

18. Robert of Torigni, L. DELISLE, vol. 2, pp. XIII-XIV.

19. Robert of Torigni, HOWLETT, p. XII.

of continuing Sigebert's chronicle as a grand design²⁰, Thomas Bisson did not really problematise Robert's method and strategy, stressing instead his commitment to the simple recording of events²¹.

Nonetheless, Robert of Torigni considered the chronography his major historiographical oeuvre which he kept updating until the end of his life. Since the working-copy of the chronography has survived in Avranches, Bibliothèque patrimoniale, ms 159²², it is possible to assess in detail Robert's engagement with his work. In this regard, manuscript evidence should not be considered a mere support to the text. Michael Johnston and Michael van Dussen have argued that a cultural approach to manuscript production proves beneficial to understanding how meaning was constructed through visual devices²³. Following this thread, Andrea Worm has recently highlighted the visual dimension of universal history showing how the visualization of history conveyed an interpretation of the unity and order of the past²⁴. Therefore, a thorough analysis of the visual and palaeographic features of the manuscripts does cast a new light not only on the practice of universal chronicle-writing but also on its politico-ideological implications.

Avranches 159 is a valuable source to assess Robert's method and approach to universal chronicle-writing. It is worth asking whether Robert of Torigni saw the visual apparatus of the Eusebius-Jeromian and Sigebertian chronicles as meaningful to his own project. All the editors of Robert's chronicle have observed that the twelfth-century circulation of the chronography, as extant in Avranches 159, comprised the whole collection of chronicles including Eusebius-Jerome's²⁵. The manuscript of what I would call Robert's *Liber Chronicorum* reflected an awareness of *longue durée* in the representation of the past. However, such awareness was not merely the result of the circulation of the chronicle. Robert himself conceived the chronicle as a textual project which included his own, updated, continuation within the authoritative Eusebius-Jeromian tradition. The purpose of this paper is thus to analyse the textual and visual strategies implemented by Robert of Torigni in the redaction of his chronicle in Avranches 159. In the first part, the article will explore the evidence emphasising Robert's continuity with the Eusebius-Jeromian tradition. In the second half, the article will instead elucidate Robert's strategies in interpolating Sigebert's chronicle with the account concerning the Anglo-Saxon and early Anglo-Norman past. When removed from the context of the manuscript, Robert's interpolations might appear as the attempt to insert "national" history into the wider historiographical framework of Sigebert's chronicle²⁶. However, a close analysis of Avranches 159 in its textual and visual complexity will illustrate the

20. Robert of Torigni, I, p. XXIV.

21. *Ibid.*, p. L-LI.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. LXI-LXIII; POHL, 2014, pp. 45-86.

23. JOHNSTON, VAN DUSSEN, 2015, p. 4; see also NICHOLS, 2015, pp. 34-59.

24. WORM, 2013, p. 249; *Id.*, 2018, pp. 29-52.

25. There are only a few exceptions. Robert of Torigni, I, pp. LXXXIX-XC; Robert de Torigni, L. DELISLE, pp. III-LIII; Robert of Torigni, HOWLETT, pp. XXXIX-XLIX.

26. CHAZAN, 1999, p. 328, p. 467.

more composite spectrum of Robert's interpretative strategies and the political implications of his chronicle-writing. Ultimately, this analysis will also cast new light on the practices and the rationale underlying the writing of annalistic universal chronicles in the twelfth century.

Avranches 159 as a *Liber Chronicorum*

Robert of Torigni started writing his chronicle while he was still a monk at the abbey of Bec. In 1154 he was appointed as abbot of Mont Saint-Michel and, despite his engagement in the affairs of the monastery, he continued working on the chronicle until his death in 1186. Although the Bec exemplar of the chronography is now lost, it is possible to identify in Paris, BnF, ms lat. 17545 the manuscript that Robert requested from the bishop of Beauvais and used to produce his own updated redaction of Sigebert's chronicle²⁷. Evidence that such request was made is provided by a letter, written presumably in 1183, which Robert wrote as a reply to abbot Roger of Bec (d. 1179), who had asked him to dispatch an updated continuation of his chronicle to Bec²⁸. In the letter Robert confirmed that the work he had begun before his abbatial appointment at Mont Saint-Michel was still stored at Bec in the "chronicles" he had acquired *cum magno labore* from the bishop of Beauvais²⁹. At a close scrutiny, the Beauvais manuscript comprises a specific edition of Sigebert's chronicle which includes not only the chronicles of Eusebius, Jerome, and pseudo-Prosper of Aquitaine, but also an abridged version of the *Chronographia*³⁰. After moving to Mont Saint-Michel in 1154, Robert required a copy of the work that he had carried out at Bec shortly before 1154. This manuscript – Avranches, Bibliothèque patrimoniale, ms 159 – was written over a period of thirty years which makes it the veritable working copy of the chronicle and, after the entry for the year 1156, the authoritative text of Robert's work circulating widely both in Normandy and England³¹.

Avranches 159 can be split into two parts: the first part was redacted by only one scribe with an elegant and uniform hand and it consists of the whole collection of chronicles from Eusebius of Caesarea to the entry for the year 1156

27. Sigebert of Gembloux, p. 292; Robert of Torigni, R. HOWLETT, p. XXIV; Robert de Torigni, L. DELISLE, I, p. I; Robert of Torigni, I, p. XXV; the digitalised manuscript can be found here: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8514431r>.

28. The letter is extant in London, British Library, Cotton ms Domitian A VIII, fol. 70v (http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_domitian_a_viii_fo71r); the letter is followed by the requested entries of Robert's chronicle. Robert of Torigni, I, p. XXV; for an edition of the letter, see Robert of Torigni, II, pp. 316-317; see also POHL, 2016, p. 350.

29. Robert of Torigni, II, p. 316: *Reliqua vero quae fecit antequam ad Montem venire, apud vos sunt in chronicis quae cum magno labore habui de episcopo Belvacensis*, London, British Library, Cotton ms Domitian A VIII, fol. 70v (http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_domitian_a_viii_fo71r).

30. CHAZAN, 1999, p. 324.

31. POHL, 2014, p. 20; Robert of Torigni, I, p. LXXXIX; Robert of Torigni, R. HOWLETT, p. XLIV.

of Robert's chronicle³². The second part, instead, is characterized by a much higher degree of script variability as it is possible to identify at least twelve different hands alternating at different intervals in the manuscript³³. Already when working on the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* (GND) Robert was at the head of an editorial plan supported by a group of scribes working under his direction³⁴. As demonstrated by Benjamin Pohl, after 1163 Robert himself wrote some corrections and made additions to the manuscript with his own very informal hand³⁵. Although Robert was not a trained scribe, he actively controlled the redaction of the chronography, both in the copy of the exemplar and in the progressive update of the *series temporum*³⁶. Despite his engagement as abbot of Mont Saint-Michel, Robert showed great attention to his work.³⁷ In fact, Robert personally looked after the redaction of the manuscript which he envisaged as his own *Liber Chronicorum*.

Robert's claim of continuity with the Eusebius-Jeromian tradition was not only a rhetorical stratagem, but it informed the practical representation of the chronicle as a text. In the prologue Robert defined his endeavour as *chronographia* which, he explained, is a "description of time"³⁸. In this capacity, Robert not only established himself as Sigebert's continuator³⁹, but he also allocated his chronography within an authoritative consensus of *chronici*, both *antiqui et moderni*⁴⁰. To further stress the continuity with the timeline initiated by Eusebius, Robert proceeded in laying out the chronological span of the *series temporum* as compiled by his illustrious predecessors⁴¹. The first portion of Avranches 159 is in fact characterized by a great care in reproducing the chronological structure first devised by Eusebius of Caesarea⁴². In Avranches 159, Eusebius's canons are redacted as an annalistic grid whose synchronic columns, providing the regnal years of the late-antique dynasties, occupy most of the page. In the side margins the manuscript reports the general chronological references, *i.e.* Abraham's year before the Incarnation or the *anno domini*. The names of each ruling dynasty

32. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 3r-206v. The manuscript can be found in digital copy at this link: https://emmsm.unicaen.fr/emmsm/bvmsm/Avranches/Manuscripts/01-BVMSM-Avranches_mss.xml/Avranches_BM_159.html.

33. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 206v-236v.

34. WESTON, 2018, pp. 158-159; POHL, 2014, p. 79.

35. For a full discussion, see POHL, 2014, pp. 79-77; Robert of Torigni, R. HOWLETT, p. LXI; Robert de Torigni, L. DELISLE, p. LI; Sigebert of Gembloux, *Chronographia sive Chronica*, pp. 293-294; Thomas Bisson has expanded on Pohl's analysis but argued that Robert wrote in multiple scripts. See BISSON, 2019.

36. POHL, 2014, p. 58.

37. POHL, 2018, pp. 94-122.

38. Robert of Torigni, I, p. 2: *De chronographia, id est temporum descriptione*.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5: *Omnibus modernis chronographis Sigisbertum Gemblacensem praeferens, et eius studium uehementer admirans, illius chronographiae de serie temporum aliquid continuare conabor*.

40. Robert listed chroniclers such as Cyprian bishop of Carthage, Eusebius, Jerome, Sulpicius Severus, Prosper of Aquitaine, Gregory of Tours, and, among the *moderni*, Marianus Scotus, Sigebert of Gembloux. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-5.

41. Robert of Torigni, I, pp. 4-5.

42. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 7v-8r.

are instead drawn in red and blue ink in the upper margin of the folio, and they are encapsulated in narrow columns delineated in blue and green ink⁴³. Immediately below are their respective regnal years which are supplied with concise historiographical entries highlighted by *litterae notabiliores*⁴⁴ (fig. 1).

Echoing the previous passage outlining the structure and chronology of the Eusebius-Jeromian tradition, in the prologue Robert expounded Sigebert's chronographic framework, meticulously describing the position of the dynastic columns, their chronology and, moreover, the visual appearance of the page⁴⁵. In this way, Robert not only emphasised the dating efficacy of Sigebert's *ordinatio*, but he also acknowledged the crucial role of the layout as a chronographic matrix that visualized the coherence of the *series temporum* on the manuscript page. In fact, Sigebert's chronicle too follows the same careful chronological layout established for the previous texts, only replacing the ancient and late-antique dynasties with the names of the early medieval *gentes* which appear in rubrics on the top margins⁴⁶. The same calligraphic hand kept the layout throughout the manuscript, as also Robert's chronicle, albeit up to 1156, is redacted maintaining the same chronographic apparatus, the same pattern of inks signalling the entries, and roughly the same *mise en page*⁴⁷. The continuity of Eusebius' and Sigebert's *ordinatio*, listing the chronology of synchronic dynasties, contributed to the visual coherence of the whole manuscript and conveyed the progressive unfolding of the secular order of power since the first biblical king Ninus.

In the second portion of Avranches 159, the chronographic structure remains paramount albeit it is not reported with the same care. The changes of hand occur not only at the junctures from one quire to the other⁴⁸, but more frequently within the same quire or even the same folio⁴⁹. Usually, the changes of hand coincide with a variation in the manuscript layout even though the chronographic *ordinatio* is not significantly affected. For instance, in the entry for the year 1161 the new hand did not alter the main structure of the layout but only added paragraph markers to the usual *litterae notabiliores* distinguishing the entries⁵⁰. Under the year 1168 there is a new change of hand which coincides with both a transition to a new quire and with a change in the layout of the manuscript. In contrast with the previous layout, the entries are no longer identified by paragraph markers but by illuminated uncials and rustic capitals⁵¹.

43. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 9r-v.

44. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 21r-23r.

45. Robert of Torigni, I, pp. 4-5: *Ponit autemin fronte pagine libri sui primum nomina regnorum diuersorum, uidelicet Romanorum, Persarum, Francorum, Britannorum, Wandalorum, Wisigothorum, Ostrogothorum, Hunorum. Postea supponit regnis nomina propria regum; deorsum uero per mediam paginam annos singulorum principum; in margine nomina Romanorum pontificum, et annos Domini respondentes recta fronte annis predictorum regum.*

46. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols., 74r-169r.

47. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 169r-206v.

48. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 218r, 226r.

49. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 208r, 211v.

50. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 221v.

51. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 218r.

Fig. 1: Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 20v-21r.

Although the changes of hands did not allow the uniform continuation of the layout elaborated by the first scribe, the later scribes maintained the *ordinatio* as closely as possible, copying the main chronographic devices extant in the Beauvais manuscript (fig. 2).

As shown by Benjamin Pohl, the involvement of a team of scribes redacting the chronography in Avranches 159 highlights Robert's role as the intellectual head-planner of the text and as supervisor of the manuscript's redaction⁵². However, this plurality of redactors also raises questions on Robert's authorial role in the writing of the chronicle. David Rollason has shown that twelfth-century history-writing was often a collaborative endeavour involving the active contribution of a group of writers working together in a "historical workshop"⁵³. In many regards, Robert's chronicle is the product of the Mont Saint-Michel historical workshop which – at least for the chronography – was firmly under Robert's control. When the first portion of the manuscript was completed shortly after 1157, the copying proceeded at a considerably slower pace, possibly because the first scribe was no longer available to carry on his work⁵⁴. Even so, the changes of hand suggest a pause in the redaction of the manuscript which resumed, with the work of a different scribe, perhaps only when Robert's follow-up notes were ready to be transcribed. This is further shown by the many erasures and revisions that are mostly extant in the second part of the manuscript⁵⁵. The revisions to the text of the chronography are indeed crucial to assess Robert's political intent. A comparison between Avranches 159 and the manuscripts containing the so-called second redaction of the chronography has shown that Robert's revisions mainly concerned the most pressing events at the time of writing: the papal schism and the Becket dispute. Despite Howlett's and Bisson's reservations on the second redaction⁵⁶, the manuscripts containing this intermediate redaction, which circulated in the troubled decade between 1159 and 1169, report a favourable description of Frederic Barbarossa's deeds in Italy (1155-1190) and an ambiguous silence on the papal schism (1159)⁵⁷. Revising Avranches 159 after 1170, Robert redeemed these silences and replaced them with a loud anti-schismatic voice in favour of Pope Alexander III.

52. POHL, 2014, p. 79.

53. ROLLASON, 2015, p. 101; for a definition of historical workshop, see BRETT, 1981, p. 124.

54. Howlett himself admitted the « very considerable carelessness of the style ». See Robert of Torigni, R. HOWLETT, p. 187, n. 2.

55. Some revisions are found also in the first portion of the manuscript. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 167r, 173r, 174r-v, 177v, 179v, 180v, 185r, 186v, 187r, 190r-v, 191r, 193r, 198r, 199v, 200r-v, 205r, 206v, 207v, 208r, 209v, 210v, 211r, 213r-v, 214v, 215r-v, 216r-v, 217r-v, 219v, 221r, 222r, 224r, 225v, 231r, 233r, 235v, 236v.

56. Except for the now lost Valasse manuscript, the second redaction is extant in only a few manuscripts: Paris, BnF, ms lat. 4992, Paris, BnF, ms lat. 14663 and London, BL, ms Royal 13 C XI. Leopold Delisle identified an intermediate redaction between the first redaction, produced in Robert's last years at Bec or shortly after his election as abbot of Mont Saint-Michel (1154), and the final redaction (1182 × 1185). See Robert de Torigni, L. DELISLE, I, pp. LIII-LIV. Against Delisle, see Robert of Torigni, I, p. CVI; Robert of Torigni, R. HOWLETT, p. XLVI-XLVII.

57. PASSABÌ, 2019, pp. 329-331.

Fig. 2: Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 216v-217r.

For example, the second redaction does not report Barbarossa's sack of Rome in 1167 which, instead, appears in Avranches 159 not incidentally in correspondence of a change of hand⁵⁸. Robert's revisions were in fact stimulated by Henry II's shifting political position between 1159 and 1169. After having gravitated close to the schismatic side before 1170, in the aftermath of Becket's murder (1170) Henry rearranged his allegiance in support of the Church⁵⁹. The scribes redacting the second part of the manuscript worked under Robert's supervision which, as the writing approached the contemporary years, became tighter and spurred constant revisions to match the changing political environment.

Nonetheless, Robert's interest hinged on keeping the visual structure of the manuscript as uniform as possible. The presence of lavish illuminations in the first part of Avranches 159 may apparently seem to break the visual linearity of the *Liber Chronicorum*. Since the mid-eleventh century the *scriptorium* of Mont Saint-Michel had been a vibrant hub for the production of illuminated manuscripts⁶⁰. The first portion of Avranches 159 is indeed a bright example of the Mont Saint-Michel illumination workshop. The transition from one chronicler to the other is often emphasised by large historiated initials that break the visual flow of the manuscript. The late-antique chronicle collection, in fact, opens with a beautiful, illuminated U representing St. Jerome in the very act of writing/translating Eusebius's chronicle⁶¹. At the end of Jerome's letter, another historiated capital signals the beginning of Eusebius's preface drawing inside the uncial "M" Moses returning with the Tables of the Law and addressing the people of Israel (Exodus 34, 29-32)⁶². The illuminations were part of the manuscript editorial plan as the scribe copying the first, and most luxurious, portion of Avranches 159 had specifically left the appropriate space on the page. This is even more striking at the beginning of Eusebius' chronicle where an astonishing illuminated "P" represents Eusebius writing his chronicle⁶³. After the visually solemn beginning of Eusebius' chronicle, Avranches 159 abandons the two-columns layout, as extant in the prefatory material, and presents a full-page layout both for the chronological columns and the historical entries⁶⁴. The illuminations resume when the two-columns format reappears with Sigebert's prologue. In fact, the latter begins on a new folio and opens with an historiated initial representing an abbot who, holding his pastoral staff, dictates to another monk sitting at the *scriptorium*⁶⁵.

58. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 216v-217v; Robert of Torigni, I, pp. 260-261.

59. PASSABÌ, 2019, pp. 342-344; on Henry II and the Church, see DUGGAN, 2007, pp. 154-183; VINCENT, 2012, pp. 257-299.

60. DOSDAT, 2006; AVRIL, 1967, pp. 202-238; ALEXANDER, 1970.

61. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 4r. The piece of parchment written by Jerome reads the very beginning of Eusebius's chronicle: *Prim(us) Assyrior(um) rex Nin(us) Beli fili(us) regnauit omni Asie*.

62. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 5r.

63. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 7v.

64. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 8r-69r.

65. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 70r.

Historiated initials are extant only in the prefatory material, for within the text of the chronicles the scribes kept the highest degree of visual uniformity⁶⁶. However, slight variations in the visual pattern can still be detected within the *series temporum*, along with the scribe's intention to emphasise specific entries. For instance, differently from the other illuminated capitals, the entries concerning the death of William the Conqueror (1087) and Lanfranc of Bec (1089) are signalled by small historiated initials representing a man's face inside the circumference of the capital "O"⁶⁷. Although the illuminations seem to break the visual unfolding of Avranches 159, they were carefully planned in the editorial design of the manuscript. The historiated initials were indeed functional to the chronicles for they visually interpreted the text next to which they stood. Both Neil Wright and Benjamin Pohl have commented on the illumination supplementing the copy of Henry of Huntindon's letter to Warin attached to Robert's prologue as visually describing the exchange of books between the two historians⁶⁸. As argued by Pohl, given Robert's role as supervisor of the manuscript's redaction, the illuminations are evidence of an intrinsic relationship between text and image⁶⁹. As a result, although they appear as breaking the linearity of the chronologies, the illuminations do not disrupt the visual and interpretative uniformity of the manuscript. At least for the first portion of Avranches 159, they in fact complement the very unfolding of the *Liber Chronicorum*.

To further stress continuity outside the prefatory material, the textual succession of the chronicles is marked by rubrics that simply describe the transition from one chronicle to the other⁷⁰. For example, the transition from Eusebius' chronicle to Jerome's is marked by the rubric "*Explicit chronica Eusebii, incipit chronica ieronimi*"⁷¹. In Paris, BnF, ms 17545, Robert's exemplar, the same rubric is phrased differently: "*Hucusq(ue) historia(m) scribit Eusebius pamphyli martyris contubernalis cui nos ista subiecimus*"⁷². This change took place after Avranches 159 was produced at Mont Saint-Michel since the manuscripts containing the first redaction, the one redacted at Bec before Robert moved to Mont Saint-Michel, retained the original reading⁷³. This suggests that the scribe,

66. Historiated initials are found also in the prologue and prefatory materials attached to Robert's chronography. See Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 169r, 170v, 174v.

67. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers who drew my attention onto this. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 162v-163v.

68. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 174v. WRIGHT, 1991, p. 73; POHL, 2015a, pp. 150-152.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 152. For a recent analysis of the relationship between text and image in history-writing, see *Id.*, 2015b.

70. The beginning of Eusebius' chronicle is marked by the rubric *Explicit prefatio in Chr(isti) nomine lib(er) incip(it) chronicorum Eusebii a s(an)c(t)o Ieronimo de greco i(n) latinum translatus*. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 7v. Bisson too emphasises the importance of the rubrics in Robert's chronicle. Robert of Torigni, I, pp. XLII-XLIII.

71. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 61v.

72. Paris, BnF, ms lat. 17545, fol. 59v.

73. For example, cf. London, BL, Arundel ms 18, fol. 50r; on the first redaction of Robert's chronicle, see Robert of Torigni, R. HOWLETT, p. XLIII-XLV; Robert de Torigni, L. DELISLE, I, p. LIV; Robert of Torigni, I, p. LXI.

who worked under Robert's supervision, aimed to reduce the authorial impact of Jerome's text, emphasised by the relative clause "*cui nos ista subieciimus*", and replaced it with a neuter incipit-explicit. It seems, therefore, that Robert wished to contain the "authoriality" of the chronicles only within their respective prologues. In this way, he limited the statement of authorship only to the *auctoritates* and highlighted the textual continuity of the chronicles within the manuscript.

Moreover, there is also evidence that Robert cherished a continuing interest in presenting his work as a continuation of the Eusebius-Jeromian tradition. At fol. 3v of Avranches 159 a later angular hand, writing only after 1184, provided a description of the content of the manuscript summarizing once again the chronological span covered by each chronicler⁷⁴. The following passage stresses even more the chronological context of reading of the manuscript. After stating the *auctoritas* of Paulus Orosius's *Historia adversos paganos* (c.375-c.420), the scribe reported a computistical calculation of the years elapsed from Adam to Ninus, under whose rule Abraham was born, and then from Abraham to Caesar Augustus, under whose rule Christ was born, who ushered in a new season of peace for the Empire⁷⁵. After this passage, another chronological excerpt from Orosius presented a complex synchronization of the extremes of Christ's life according to various systems of chronology: from the creation (*ab orbe condito*) and the foundation of Rome (*ab urbe condita*) to the imperial and consular years⁷⁶. These passages provide a brief yet meaningful computistical framework which acted as an introduction to Avranches 159 and the texts contained therein, thus aligning the secular chronologies unfolding in the chronicles with the broader eschatological context of Salvation history and its universal timeline⁷⁷ (fig. 3).

74. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 3v; Robert of Torigni, II, pp. 124-127: *In hoc volumine ista continentur. Cronica Eusebii, Cesariensis episcopi, quam incepit ab Abraham et regno Nini et Semiramidis, et perduxit usque ad vicesimum annum imperii Constantini imperatoris, quam transtulit Jeronimus de Graeco in Latinum. Exinde idem Jeronimus perduxit usque ad mortem Valentis imperatoris, et continent cronica Eusebii et Jeronimi MMCCCXCIII annos. Fiunt ab Adam usque ad xiiii. Valentis annum, id est ad consulatum ejus sexies et Valentiniani iterum, omnes anni V^{MDLXXIX}. Secuntur cronica Prosperi in ordine historiae, quae continent annos lxxvij. Sequitur exinde cronographia Sigiberti, Gemblacensis monachi, quam incepit a CCCLXXXI Dominicae incarnationis anno, et perduxit usque ad MC annum ejusdem incarnationis Dominicae, quo anno primus Henricus rex Anglorum cepit regnare.*

75. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 3v, Robert of Torigni, II, pp. 126-127: *De historia Orosii quam fecit de ormesta mundi. Sunt ab Adam primo homine usque ad Ninum magnum [que(m) ut] dicunt regem quando natus est Abraham anni tria milia .c. lxxxiij qui ab omnibus historiographis vel omis[i] vel ignorati sunt. A Nino autem vel ab Abraham usque ad Cesarem Augustum, idem usque ad Natiuitatem Christi [quae] fuit anno imperii Cesarii quadragesimo duo cum facta pace cum Parthis [Iani] porte clausae sunt et bella toto orbe cessarunt, colliguntur anni duo milia xv'. Paulus Orosius, Pauli Orosii hispani presbyter historiarum libri septem, I, 1, col. 670.*

76. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 3v.

77. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 3v; Robert of Torigni, II, pp. 126-127: *Item Orosius, ab orbe condito usque ad urbem condita[m] anni iiii milia .cccc. lxxxiij; ab urbe condita usque ad Natiuitatem Christi anni dccxv colliguntur. Ergo ab origine mundi usque ad aduentum domini anni v milia cxcix. Ieronimus ab urbe condita usque ad extremum huius operis anni fiunt mcxxx, hoc modo sub regibus anni ccxl, sub consulibus anni ccclxiii, sub Augustis et Cesaribus anni dxxvi. Colliguntur omnes anni usque ad consulatum Valentis sexies et Valentiniani iunioris iterum Augusti a quinto decimo Tiberii anno et predicatione domini nostri Ihesu Christi anni cccli.*

Fig. 3: Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 3v-4r.

Fol. 3v was added to the manuscript only at a later stage when the work was thought to be near to completion⁷⁸. This is made clear not only by the fact that Robert's chronicle has 1184 as its ending date, but also because it mentions the possibility to offer the chronicle – *i.e.*, a copy of Avranches 159 – to Henry II⁷⁹. The presentation of Robert's *Liber Chronicorum* to King Henry openly underlines the relationship between king and abbot as one of prospective patron and historian, a relationship that Robert understood as being at the heart of his history-writing⁸⁰. Although Robert was able to draw on the chronicle to garner Henry's favour, diminishing its scope to mere political opportunism does not do justice to Robert's most ambitious oeuvre. Fol. 3v does not simply provide a summary of the contents of the manuscript, but it represents a chronographic and conceptual frame establishing Robert's chronicle as a textual and ideological continuation of the *Liber Chronicorum* which included the whole Eusebius-Jeromian tradition. Moreover, by stating to offer the whole collection of chronicles – from Eusebius to his own chronography – to Henry II, Robert showed how his textual project was meant as a token of patronage which had the English king as its main recipient.

Further evidence of Robert's ambition to join an authoritative tradition of chronicle-writing is shown by the manuscript London, British Library, Arundel 18. Although this manuscript was written either at the end of the thirteenth century or at the beginning of the fourteenth, Arundel 18 presents a copy of the first redaction of Robert's chronicle since a rubric at the beginning of the manuscript identifies the Norman historian as still being a monk at Bec⁸¹. The manuscript contains the usual collection of chronicles, though it stops exactly at the entry for the year 1099, before Robert's continuation⁸². The Arundel manuscript includes an additional prologue which is an *unicum* in the transmission of Robert's chronicle⁸³. This prologue precedes Jerome's letter to Galienus, and it contains a few excerpts taken from Jerome's *De Viris Illustribus* and the *Institutiones* of Cassiodorus. The first passage, extracted from Jerome's work,

78. The folio's recto contains the end of the two lists of books stored at Bec's library. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 1r-3v. See also CLEAVER, 2018, pp. 171-205.

79. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 3v, Robert of Torigni, II, pp. 126-127: *Ab eodem anno Robertus abbas Sancti Michaelis de Periculo Maris fecit historiam continentem res gestas Romanorum, Francorum, Anglorum, usque ad presens tempus, continentem scilicet annos usque ad annum dominice incarnationis mclxxxiiii quem librum presentavit karissimo domino suo Henrico regi Anglorum continentem istam historiam et reliquas in hac pagina notatas scilicet Eusebii, Ieronimii, Prosperi, Sigiberti et propriam quae in fine ponitur.*

80. VAN HOUTS, 1994, pp. 15-18; ID., 1980, pp. 106-118; GIBSON, 1981, p. 175; BATES, 2013, p. 56. According to Bisson, Robert's intention to produce a presentation copy dates earlier than the 1150s. Robert of Torigni, I, pp. LV-LVI.

81. London, BL, Arundel ms 18, fol. 12v: *Explicit prefatio. In Christi nomine incipit liber cronicor(um) Eusebii pamphili cesaree palestine ep(iscop)i et beati Jeronimi et Prosperi presbit(er)or(um). Et Sigiberti Gemblacensis et Robertii Beccensis monachor(um). Jesus. Maria. Johannes.*

82. London, BL, Arundel ms 18, fol. 135r; Robert of Torigni, I, p. LXI; Robert de Torigni, L. DELISLE, I, p. III; Robert of Torigni, R. HOWLETT, p. XLIX.

83. I am grateful to prof. Bisson for having drawn my attention onto this prologue. London, BL, Arundel ms 18, fol. 9r; Robert of Torigni, II, pp. 124-125.

introduces Eusebius as an erudite of the Holy Scriptures and it lists his most influential works, both in Latin and Greek⁸⁴. Following this, we find a passage taken verbatim from Cassiodorus which provides a definition of *chronica* as *imagines historiarum*, images of history, and identifies Eusebius as the writer of a *commemoratio temporum* translated into Latin by Jerome⁸⁵.

This additional prologue is relevant for it frames both textually and conceptually Robert's *Liber Chronicorum* in a similar way as folio 3v in Avranches 159. By introducing the genre of *chronica* with Cassiodorus's words and identifying Eusebius of Caesarea as its founder, the Arundel scribe provided the reader with a key to understand the whole collection of chronicles as bound by an ideal fil rouge connecting the texts in the manuscript as parts of a chronological and textual whole. Since the prologue survives only in Arundel 18, a late copy of the first redaction of the chronography, it is difficult to establish whether it was part of Robert's editorial plan, or whether it was a later addition made by the Arundel scribe. In both cases, nevertheless, its presence shows how Robert's chronicle was envisioned as belonging to an established tradition of chronicle-writing and, more specifically, in ideal and textual continuity with the Eusebius-Jeromian chronicle. In this sense, Robert's textual project of the *Liber Chronicorum*, containing universal chronicles following the tradition of Eusebius and Jerome, was thoroughly successful. Both the mini-prologue of Arundel 18 and the text on fol. 3v of Avranches 159 played a similar function: they not only represented an introduction to the manuscript's content, but they more broadly provided a theoretical outline to frame the manuscript itself, whose collection of texts was to be understood in its totality.

Thus, Avranches 159 was not just a collection of chronicles but the work in progress of an ambitious textual project reaching full maturity after Robert's appointment as abbot of Mont Saint-Michel. The whole corpus of chronicles was part of a sophisticated editorial plan in which the continuity with the Eusebius-Jeromian tradition did not just cast an aura of *auctoritas* to corroborate Robert's elaboration of the universal past. Rather, it was a structural element of the chronography, which shaped Robert's approach to universal chronicle-writing. The interpretative double-rail of secular history and Salvation history found its realization in the whole manuscript as a memorial shrine of the universal order of secular powers. The chronographic structure, which visually unified the chronicles and their synchronic timelines, allowed the visualization of time *uno in conspectu*, in one single sight – the sight of the manuscript.

84. London, BL, Arundel ms 18, fol. 9r: *Scripturis divinis studiosissimus et divine bibliothecae cum Pamphilo diligentissimus*; Robert of Torigni, II, pp. 124-125; cf. Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus ad Dextrum*, in *Patrologie Latine*, XXIII, cols. 726-727.

85. Robert of Torigni, II, pp. 124-125; Cassiodorus, *De Institutione Divinarum Litterarum*, in *Patrologie Latine*, LXX, col. 1133; London, BL, Arundel ms 18, fol. 9r: *Chronica vero, quae sunt ymagines historiarum breuissimeque commemorationes temporum, scripsit Graece Eusebius; quae transtulit Hieronymus in Latinum, et usque ad tempora sua deduxit eximie*.

Breaking the continuity:

Robert of Torigni's interpolations in Avranches 159

As we have seen, Robert intended his work to be a contribution to the *Liber Chronicorum* of the Eusebius-Jeromian chronicle-tradition, which saw the unfolding of time as the synchronic succession of dynasties framing the God-ordained political order. As a result, we must take seriously Robert's interpolations into Sigebert's chronicle. Were they just, as Mireille Chazan put it⁸⁶, a mere update providing the "national" past of Normandy and England? Or did Robert have a grander plan in mind? A scrutiny of the visual and textual context of the interpolations in Avranches 159 will elucidate Robert's strategy in the rewriting of the universal past, even at the cost of breaking the visual coherence of the manuscript.

An instance of this can already be found in Robert's prologue. In Avranches 159, Robert's chronicle does not take off at the end of Sigebert's chronicle as extant in the Beauvais manuscript⁸⁷. Instead, Robert decided to start his chronicle with Henry I's accession to the English throne at the entry for the year 1100⁸⁸. The prologue states that Sigebert's chronicle ended with the annal of the year 1100 after which followed a continuation up to 1182. The latter numeral is reported outside the ruled margin and upon an erasure as if it had been added only at a later stage, when a nearly finalized version of Robert's chronicle was available⁸⁹. However, its position in Avranches 159 is quite unusual: the entry for the year 1100 is split into two halves with Robert's prologue oddly sitting in the middle⁹⁰. An illuminated uncial D placed on the left-hand margin visually highlights a new stage in the *series temporum*, even though the text of the prologue follows the first lines of Sigebert's entry for the year 1100. A rubric crowded in the right-hand margin reminds the reader of Robert's continuity with Sigebert's "description of time" and points out its end with the entry for the year 1184, hence two years later than the date stated on the next page⁹¹. Writing after 1184, the rubricator signalled the end of the prologue with another rubric which, directly addressing the reader, points out that the *consequentia chronographiae*, the continuation of the chronography, should be found later on the twelfth folio after the introductory material⁹². Robert had in

86. CHAZAN, 1999, pp. 327-328.

87. Sigebert's chronicle stopped on the year 1111, yet the Beauvais manuscript reports a brief continuation until 1114 inclusive of Sigebert's obit extracted from Anselm of Gembloux's continuation. Paris, BnF, ms lat. 17545, fol. 154v. Anselm of Gembloux, *Anselmi Gemblacensis Continuatio*, G. H. PERTZ (ed.), p. 375.

88. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 169r; Robert of Torigni, II, pp. 60-65.

89. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 170r.

90. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 169r.

91. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 169r, Robert of Torigni, I, pp. 2-3: *Explicit chronica Sigiberti monachi Gemblacensis. Incipit prologus Rotberti in ea quae secuntur de temporum descriptione usque ad millesimum centesimum lxxxiii annum.*

92. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 170v: *Explic(it) p(ro)log(us). Consequentia(m) chronog(ra)phiae invenies in antea in XII^{mo} folio, hic (est) inicio sc(ri)ptoris; quaeda(m) licet n(on) indigna memoria int(er)ponunt(ur).* As anticipated, the same rubricator signalled the resumption of Robert's chronicle in fol. 180v.

fact attached to the prologue his treatise *De immutatione ordinis monachorum*⁹³, Henry of Huntingdon's letter to Warin summarizing Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, itself introduced by a large historiated initial⁹⁴, and some excerpts concerning the geography of Britain and its most important saints⁹⁵. Therefore, Robert's chronicle did interrupt the visual and textual flow of the *series temporum*. It is possible that Robert decided to anticipate the beginning of his chronicle to 1100 only at a later stage. Thomas Bisson argued that Robert's original plan was to continue Sigebert's chronicle after the annal for 1114 as shown in the earliest redaction of the chronography⁹⁶. Although it is difficult to establish precisely at what stage Robert had finally made up his mind, when Avranches 159 was being redacted he had already decided to start his chronicle with Henry I's coronation even at the expense of chronological and textual coherence. In this way, Robert found a clumsy yet practical compromise to preserve the linearity of the chronological account and, at the same time, state his own intervention in the *Liber Chronicorum*.

Robert of Torigni clarified his contribution in the prologue by identifying the gaps left in the *series temporum* of his predecessor. Sigebert's chronicle reported only the Anglo-Saxon kings mentioned by Bede; it neither mentioned the British kings who had preceded the Bedan account, nor it provided the continuation of the Anglo-Saxon dynasty which followed Bede's death⁹⁷. The Norman abbot further reprimanded Sigebert for being silent about the Norman dukes. However, according to Robert, these omissions were not due to conscious negligence, but to the unavailability of the "three histories" which he, instead, possessed: namely, Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and, of course, his own redaction of William of Jumièges's *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*⁹⁸. Robert's contribution thus consisted of setting in their appropriate chronological place the names, successions, and the most important deeds of the Norman dukes, the archbishops of Rouen and of other neighbouring provinces, along with those of the English kings⁹⁹. In doing so, Robert made extensive use of the *HA* since, as pointed out

93. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 170v-174v; Robert of Torigni, II, pp. 250-275.

94. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 174v-178v.

95. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 178v-180r.

96. According to Thomas Bisson, the only witness of this early redaction is Paris, BnF, ms lat. 4862, a twelfth-century manuscript produced at Savigny. For a discussion, see Robert of Torigni, I, p. XXIX-XXXI; Paris, BnF, ms lat. 4862, fols. 124v-125r; Robert of Torigni, II, pp. 60-65 (<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b107208615/f252.item>).

97. Robert of Torigni, I, pp. 6-7.

98. Henceforth these histories are abbreviated as *HA*, *HRB*, and *GND*. Robert of Torigni, I, pp. 6-7: *De ducibus Normannorum nichil aut parum dicit. Non tamen hoc fecit neglegenter sed quia carebat his tribus historiis*; see also Robert of Torigni, I, p. LXXXIII.

99. Robert of Torigni, I, pp. 6-7: *Ego uero, quia his habundo, nomina et successiones et aliquando facta eminentiora eorundem ducum et omnia nomina archiepiscoporum Rothomagensium et de episcopis eiusdem prouincie aliquantos locis conuenientibus usque ad mc annum incarnationis dominice cronis ipsius interserens. Similiter et de regibus Anglorum de quibus nullam mentionem facit me facturum non despero.*

by Bates, he intended to exploit the greater authority of the English historian¹⁰⁰. Robert had conceived his plan of interpolation already during his late years at Bec where he met Henry of Huntington in 1139 and received a copy of the *HA*¹⁰¹. The explicit mention of Henry's and the other histories not only confirms the bibliophile inclination of Robert's work¹⁰², but it also conveys the eminently textual character of his reconstruction of the Anglo-Plantagenet past within the Sigebertian *series temporum*.

Robert's interpolations do not only have a textual dimension but also a chronographic one, especially those concerning the Anglo-Saxon kings of England. Sigebert had suspended the succession of the Anglo-Saxon kings for he admittedly lacked other sources¹⁰³. In the Beauvais manuscript the end of the Anglo-Saxon regnal succession is emphasised by a rubric stating, quite irrevocably, the end of the English line¹⁰⁴. However, in Avranches 159 this rubric is not extant. By interpolating Sigebert's chronicle with passages extracted from the *HA*, Robert managed to carry on the dynastic-chronological line of the Anglo-Saxon kings from Eadberht I of Kent (d. 748) to Harold Godwinson (1022-1066)¹⁰⁵. By systematically integrating the Anglo-Saxon royal line in Sigebert's chronology, Robert established an ideal (and unchallenged) continuity with the Anglo-Norman and Angevin royal line as visualized in the manuscript. In fact, Robert was not the only historian to emphasise the dynastic continuity between the Anglo-Saxon past of England and Henry II. In the *Genealogia Regum Anglorum*, Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167) also presented the Anglo-Saxon kings as a Henry II's predecessors¹⁰⁶. Writing roughly at the same time as Aelred, Robert addressed, perhaps in a more structured way, the same discourse of dynastic legitimization¹⁰⁷. In Avranches 159 he kept the chronological column of the *rex Anglorum* whilst integrating both the missing past concerning the Anglo-Saxon kings and, significantly, the Norman dukes. For instance, Robert included the succession of King Edgar in the entry for 955 and its generous patronage towards the English church¹⁰⁸, and, more extensively, the account of the foundation of Normandy by the first Norman

100. Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, D. GREWAY (ed.); BATES, 2012, p. 174; BATES, 2013, pp. 53-54.

101. POHL, 2015a, pp. 145-167; On this occasion, Henry accessed a copy of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *De Gestis Britonum*. WRIGHT, 1991, pp. 71-113; see also BATES, 2013, p. 53.

102. STIRNEMANN, 1993, pp. 121-142; POHL, 2017, pp. 96-100.

103. Sigebert of Gembloux, p. 331: *Abhinc regnum Anglorum annotare supersedeo quia hystorias maiorum, quas sequar, non habeo*.

104. Paris, BnF, ms lat. 17545, fol. 112r: *Regnum Anglorum finitur*. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8514431r/f227.item>.

105. For the interpolations concerning the Anglo-Saxon kings, see Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 115r, 128r-v, 122r, 124v, 126v, 127r, 128r, 132r, 135r, 136v, 139r-v, 143r, 143v, 146v, 147v, 149r-v, 151r-v, 152r, 153v, 154f.

106. Aelred of Rievaulx, *Genealogia Regum Anglorum*, D. PEZZINI (ed.), p. 13; FREEMAN, 2017, pp. 113-146; see also HALLIER, 1969.

107. MEECHAM-JONES, 2006, p. 1; GILLINGHAM, 2001, p. 29; KING, 2007, p. 42.

108. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 139r-v; Robert of Torigni, II, pp. 162-163.

duke Rollo (ca. 927-933) in the entry for the year 876¹⁰⁹. In this way, Robert provided the missing account of the Anglo-Saxon and Norman past which, as elaborated within the visual and ideological framework of the manuscript, elevated the Anglo-Saxon kings and the Norman dukes to providential actors in the unfolding of the divine plan.

The Norman conquest of England thus represented the moment of juncture between the Norman and English pasts, the fulcrum of Robert's historical reconstruction. The rewriting of the account concerning the Norman conquest was urged on the first place by the realization of the inadequacy of the narrative provided by Sigebert. In fact, perhaps more in keeping with the genre of chronicle-writing, Sigebert had provided a brief and almost dismissive reference to the conquest, mentioning only the main battles involving Harald of Norway (d. 1066) and Harold Godwinson (d. 1066) at Stamford Bridge, and Harold's eventual defeat against William the Conqueror at Hastings¹¹⁰. Instead, Robert expanded the account dedicated to the Norman conquest by providing a lengthy narrative that included the premises of the invasion of England, a detailed description of the battle of Hastings, and the victory of the Normans which culminated with William's coronation at Westminster¹¹¹. In the chronography Robert preferred to provide a sympathetic account of Hastings, omitting the elements that would have diminished or taunted the perception of the battle as the providential victory of William the Conqueror¹¹². In fact, he highlighted William's heroism along with the providentialism of its outcome which established Norman dominion over England¹¹³.

The expansion of the narrative concerning Hastings coincides also with the expanded visualization of the event within the manuscript¹¹⁴. In Avranches 159 the account of the battle is anticipated to the entry for the year 1064 and it is stretched throughout the following two years¹¹⁵ (fig. 4). As opposed to Avranches 159, in the Beauvais manuscript, Robert's exemplar, the entry for the year 1065 consisted simply of a brief reference to the succession in the duchy of Lower-Lorraine¹¹⁶. The Montois abbot felt at ease with deleting this entry and dedicating the now empty space in the chronological grid to the account of the Norman conquest. Moreover, in the Beauvais manuscript Sigebert's text for 1064 started with a brief chronological entry reckoning the beginning of the

109. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 129r; Robert of Torigni, II, pp. 152-153. Cf. *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II, 2, (3)-(4), pp. 38-41; *Ibid.*, II, II, 11(17), pp. 62-67.

110. Sigebert of Gembloux, p. 361; For a recent account of the Norman Conquest, see BATES, 2016, pp. 164-210.

111. Robert of Torigni, II, pp. 198-205; For the passages interpolated from the *Historia Anglorum*, see Henry of Huntingdon, VI, 27-30, pp. 385-395; BATES, 2012, pp. 179-180.

112. For an approach to the political remembering of the Battle of Hastings, see MAZEL, 2015, pp. 17-18.

113. BATES, 2013, pp. 64-92.

114. In Arundel 18 a rubric, placed at the bottom margin of folio 135r, identifies the passage above as concerning the battle of Hastings and it reads thus: *Bellum Will(elm)i Bastard ducis Northmannor(um) cont(ra) Haraldum rege(m) Anglor(um)*. London, BL, Arundel 18, fol. 135r.

115. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 156r.

116. Paris, BnF, ms lat. 17545, fol. 147r: *Frederico duce mortuo Godefridus ducatu(m) recepit*.

Fig. 4: Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fol. 156v-157r.

third cycle of 532 years since the Nativity of Christ¹¹⁷. As extant in Avranches 159, Robert kept Sigebert's *computus* and implemented it to stress the providential character of the battle¹¹⁸. By paraphrasing the *HA*, Robert stated that, through the outcome of Hastings, "the Lord, master of all things, brought to completion what he had long foreseen for the English nation"¹¹⁹. Robert's choice of commencing his account in the entry for the year 1064 was not accidental. He knew exactly that the battle occurred in 1066 as he interpolated the following entry with Henry of Huntingdon's precise reference to the year along with the appearance of a comet¹²⁰. In this way, Robert conveyed the providential necessity of the conquest as a turning point for the balance of power in Europe. By acquiring the English crown, the Norman dukes fulfilled their role in God's plan which, to Robert's understanding, manifested itself through a portent and a chronological synchronicity. As sanctioned by God, the Norman dukes expanded their rule over England which made them the successors of the Anglo-Saxon kings. In fact, despite the alteration of Sigebert's chronicle and the consequential stretch in its manuscript transfiguration, the continuity of the chronology was not altered. In contrast, for Sigebert the Norman conquest had determined the re-introduction of the dynastic column of the English kings into the chronographic framework, since William the Conqueror had de facto rebooted the English royal chronology¹²¹. Although the lengthy account of the conquest does break the linearity of the *series temporum*, this visual disruption emphasised the momentous event and legitimized, both textually and visually, King William as the direct successor of the Anglo-Saxon kings.

If removed from their manuscript context, Robert's integration of Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman history into Sigebert's chronicle could appear as the rather modest attempt to insert the "national" history of England and Normandy into a universal framework¹²². However, this view risks being too narrow an understanding of the motives behind Robert's project. As we have seen, the Norman abbot engaged with Sigebert's chronicle and the Eusebius-Jeromian tradition explicitly in view of Henry II's newly-established kingship. This political lens should therefore be preferred in any attempt to interpret Robert's strategies within his work. In fact, in reporting the events that led to Geoffrey of Anjou's conquest of Normandy in 1144, Robert took a rather "anti-national" stance. He presented the account of Geoffrey's campaigns in

117. Sigebert of Gembloux, p. 361: *Ciclus magnus annorum dxxxii bis a nativitate Christi exactus, tercius incipit*; cf. Paris, BnF, ms lat. 17545, fol. 147r.

118. Avranches, Bibl. patrimoniale, ms 159, fols. 155v-156r. Cf. London, BL, ms Arundel 18, fol. 134v.

119. Robert of Torigni, II, pp. 198-199: *Dominator omnium rerum Dominus de gente Anglorum quod diu preuiderat ad effectum perduxit*; Henry of Huntingdon, VI, 27, pp. 384-385.

120. Robert of Torigni, II, pp. 204-205: *Anno milleno sexageno quoque seno, / Anglorum mete flammis sensere comete*; Henry of Huntingdon, VII, 30, pp. 394-395.

121. In the Beauvais manuscript this new chronological beginning is signalled by the presence of the rubric *Guillilm(us)* in correspondence of the first year of reign of King William I in the entry for the year 1067. Paris, BnF, ms lat. 17545, fol. 147v.

122. CHAZAN, 1999, pp. 327-328.

Normandy as the progressive pacification of the crisis caused by the Anarchy, which would reach its momentum with Henry's coronation at Westminster in 1154¹²³. Though loosely based on Orderic Vitalis's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the account concerning Geoffrey's early invasion of Normandy is Robert's own original work for it is not borrowed verbatim from other sources. In recounting the campaign undertaken by the Angevin count in September 1137, Robert simply reported that Geoffrey brought a large army to Normandy pushing as far as Lisieux, which was destroyed by a fire¹²⁴. However, he omitted that the city of Lisieux was set on fire by its very defendants as they feared the coming of their Angevin enemies¹²⁵. Robert's strategy here was to diminish the violence that Geoffrey's armies had waged throughout Normandy, the very violence that another Norman historian, Orderic Vitalis, so vividly voiced in his account of the events. For instance, Orderic reported that the Angevin invasion had caused the dissemination of mercenaries and bandits who "sullied their reputations with atrocious crimes, showing no respect to principle and, by every kind of wickedness, endangering body and soul, so that they appeared loathsome to God and man alike"¹²⁶. Orderic openly accused the Angevin troops of indulging in cruelties and wreaking havoc as they laid waste to the province of Lisieux¹²⁷. Robert, instead, provided a version of the events that legitimated Henry II and the Angevin power in Normandy and England, even at the cost of silencing Angevin violence against his own *gens*.

Conclusion

Avranches 159 is a true mirror of the endeavour of chronicle-writing as envisaged by Robert of Torigni. The Norman abbot did not simply aim to interpolate and continue Sigebert's chronicle, but he intended to join an authoritative tradition which dated back to Eusebius of Caesarea and Jerome. Such continuity was not just a rhetorical claim based on *auctoritas*. It was rather a method which allowed for a chronological and historical inquiry into God's plan as manifest in the unfolding of empires and kingdoms. The analysis of Avranches 159 has shown that the manuscript, as the artefact containing the text of the chronicles, actively contributed to the pursuit of Robert's design in its visual and textual complexity. Robert conceived his endeavour as a continuation – in the manuscript and as a manuscript – of the *series temporum* of his illustrious predecessors. In so doing,

123. CROUCH, 2000, pp. 59-67, 190-199, 257-253; CHIBNALL, 1994, pp. 94-116; POWER, 2004, pp. 388-394; DUTTON, 2011, pp. 40-57; WARREN, 1973, pp. 30-35.

124. Robert of Torigni, I, pp. 114-115: *Mense Septembris Gaufridus comes Andegauensis adduxit maximum exercitum in Normanniam usque Luxouias, quando combusta est eadem ciuitas. In redeundo cepit Sapum*. See also Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, M. CHIBNALL (ed.), VI, pp. 470-71; CHIBNALL, 1994, p. 97; DUTTON, 2011, p. 45.

125. Orderic Vitalis, VI, pp. 470-471.

126. *Ibid.*, VI, pp. 472-473.

127. *Ibid.*, VI, pp. 474-475: *Interea dum Andegauenses Luxouiensem pagum ut iam dictum est deuastarent, et paganorum more debachantes absque Dei metu execrabilia perpetrarent*.

Robert kept close control on the redaction of the manuscript which indeed was a *Liber Chronicorum*, a book of chronicles whose design envisaged the totality of the chronicles as a textual and visual whole. The device of the *contemporality regnorum*, as first elaborated by Eusebius and readapted by Sigebert, provided a practical and conceptual tool to structure, and thus intellectually grasp, the nature of time and the unfolding of events as the realization of the providential plan. Via its layout, illuminations, pattern of rubrication, and the construction of the text, Avranches 159 is evidence of a textual and visual architecture which in turn reveals Robert's continuity with the Eusebius-Jeromian tradition as the structural element of the chronography.

In light of this argument, the rewriting of Sigebert's chronicle acquires an even more significant role. Robert altered the *series temporum* he inherited from his predecessors to provide what he perceived was the missing past concerning the Anglo-Saxon kings, the Norman dukes, and the Anglo-Norman kings of England. By changing the chronographic structure and interpolating Sigebert's account, Robert enhanced the prestige of the Anglo-Saxon kings and the Norman dukes as ancestral witnesses of the greatness achieved by the contemporary – and newly established – Angevin dynasty. The perspective of presenting Avranches 159, or a more appropriate display copy, to Henry II illuminates the political implications of the chronography. It is thus necessary to revise the view that holds Robert's chronography as a largely derivative work useful only as a contemporary source. Nor can Robert's effort be fully explained with the monastic *compilatio* of the local and national past. Rather, the chronography enshrined a sophisticated textual project which aimed to reframe the historical place of Normandy and, more broadly, of the Anglo-Norman and Angevin realms within the chronological totality of the Eusebius-Jeromian chronicle tradition. Robert of Torigni reconstructed Norman, English and British history as a unitary past for the Angevin dynastic present of Normandy and England to emphasise the achievement of Henry II's kingship. On the other hand, the revisions, erasures, and the general decline of the manuscript's quality in the second part show that the chronography was a work-in-progress, a project that changed in the arduous attempt to catch up with the volatility of the twelfth-century political arena and, perhaps more frantically, with the very unfolding of time. The chronography was therefore an ambitious endeavour whose strategies, hinging on a political understanding of chronicle-writing, emerge only if the text is analysed in meaningful conjunction with its manuscript context. The analysis of Avranches 159 illuminates the complexity of Robert's engagement as a *chronographus* and, more broadly, it perhaps casts new light on the practice, method, and ambition of universal chronicle-writing in the twelfth century.

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