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Christian LOHMER, Letters in Frutolf's *Chronicle*: Entertainment, Information, Authenticity,
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Letters in Frutolf's *Chronicle*: Entertainment, Information, Authenticity Christian LOHMER

Abstract:

This paper deals with the Benedictine monk Frutolf of Michelsberg († 1103), who is the author of one of the first world chronicles in medieval Central Europe. It investigates Frutolf's intentions when inserting real or fictitious letters into his sequence of historical observation. Three sets of letters in the chronicle are investigated. The first is the letter of Alexander the Great to his teacher Aristotle: this letter serves as an example of a good and successful pre-Christian king who was at once a mythical superhero and a prototype for the successful crusader. The second set comprises five major letters concerning the recent history of the Investiture Contest, in copies collected at Bamberg. The third, a letter written by the crusading princes in 1099, reflects vividly how Frutolf's continuator dealt with his sources: as a participant on the crusade of 1101, he expressed his greater knowledge of the crusading movement by altering the end of Frutolf's autograph to give his own version of events.

“No clear line can be drawn between the ‘historical’ and ‘literary’ aspects of medieval letters...and their worth as historical sources must always be evaluated in the light of their literary character.”¹ “The great age of medieval letter writing, [collecting and copying] was in the eleventh and twelfth centuries”, Giles Constable observed.² Many scholars at the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* have tilled that historical and literary field—Wilhelm Wattenbach, Bernhard Schmeidler, Carl Erdmann and Hans-Martin Schaller, to name but a few. So did my humble self when helping Kurt Reindel with his edition of the letters of Peter Damian in four volumes. Constable continues: “...the principle of selection was extremely important. Most medieval letter collections were regarded as literature, and their contents was chosen with care”.³ The term “literature” comprises the idea that they originated as oral messages and ended up in front of a later recipient—a flow of information from the private to the public sector, for simple information or pure entertainment. Both aspects apply to my talk.

The Benedictine monk Frutolf of Michelsberg († 1103) was the author of one of the first world chronicles of the Middle Ages in Central Europe. He wrote it shortly before his death. We are lucky, because about two-thirds of the original 300 folios of his autograph have

¹ Giles Constable, *Letters and letter-collections* (Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental 17) (Turnhout 1976) p. 11–12.

² *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, ed. Giles Constable. (Harvard historical Studies 78) (Cambridge, Mass., 1967) vol. 2, p. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

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survived. Since his chronicle had been continued by Ekkehard of Aura, a fellow monk, it was formerly known as Ekkehard's chronicle.⁴ As universal historian or world chronicler, Frutolf traced history from creation to his own times.

Very little is known of Frutolf of Michelsberg's life and career. All we can reconstruct we must deduce from clues within his own works as well as from surviving references to him in few contemporary sources. That he was Bavarian is suggested by the form in which he rendered German names in his chronicle and from his handwriting.⁵ Thomas McCarthy, a very promising young scholar, musicologist and medievalist today teaching in Florida, has found out some more links to Bavaria and especially to Regensburg. In his English translation of Frutolf's chronicle (on which I draw on in parts),⁶ McCarthy points out that the music treatise and tonary⁷ by Frutolf—as well as a biblical glossary⁸ that may have been compiled by Frutolf—might largely be derived from manuscript sources available at St Emmeram in Regensburg.⁹ Finally, Frutolf's keen interest in the study of the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, especially computistics, geometry, astronomy and music) might well have originated there.¹⁰ Anyway, as we shall have to keep in mind, Frutolf was a most learned and creative writer.

If Frutolf was originally a monk educated in the Bavarian monastery of St Emmeram at all, then he must have moved to Bamberg—a noted centre of learning in the eleventh and twelfth

⁴ *Ekkehardi Uraugiensis chronica*, ed. Georg Waitz (MGH SS 6) (Hahn 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. 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> (always deduct one folio when using the digital version: for example, fol. 54r in the manuscript appears incorrectly as fol. 53r in the digital version).

⁵ It is similar to Otloh of St Emmeram's handwriting from Regensburg in Bavaria and has been described as "schräg-ovaler Stil": Hartmut Hoffmann, *Bamberger Handschriften des 10. und 11. Jahrhunderts* (MGH Schriften 39) (Hanover, 1995), p. 74.

⁶ T. J. H. McCarthy, *Chronicles of the Investiture Contest: Frutolf of Michelsberg and his continuators* (Manchester Medieval Sources) (Manchester, 2013). I am deeply indebted to Prof. Dr. Thomas McCarthy of New College of Florida for his insights in his introduction, his excellent phrasing and his patient advice and support in stylistic questions.

⁷ *Breviarium de musica* and *Tonarius*; cf. also: T. J. H. McCarthy, 'Literary practice in eleventh-century music theory: the *colores rhetorici* and Aribo's *De musica*', *Medium aevum* 71 (2002), 191–208, and id., *Music, scholasticism and reform: Salian Germany 1024–1125* (Manchester Medieval Studies) (Manchester 2009)

⁸ *The Glosa in vetus et novum testamentum*; cf. T. J. H. McCarthy, 'Biblical scholarship in eleventh-century Michelsberg: the *Glosa in vetus et novum testamentum* of MS Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, 504', *Scriptorium* 62 (2008), 3–45. The Karlsruhe manuscript is available online: see <http://digital.blb-karlsruhe.de/id/1161183>, fols 119v–152v, for the *Glosa*.

⁹ They were disseminated in south-eastern Germany primarily through this Bavarian monastery. Furthermore, Frutolf's report on Pope Leo IX's visit to Regensburg in 1052 is closely based upon St Emmeram sources and forgeries, and in some parts Frutolf is the only source.

¹⁰ Otloh of St Emmeram and his fellow monk William (d. 1091), who later became abbot of Hirsau, pioneered quadrivial studies at St Emmeram during the mid-eleventh century.

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centuries—at some time during the second half of the eleventh century. His monastery of Michelsberg, founded in 1015, is situated close to Bamberg Cathedral and there he found most of the sources for his chronicle, as we can conclude from surviving manuscripts today in the Bamberg State Library. One of his contemporaries called him *magister*, another *prior*, and this is nearly all we know of his professional life.¹¹ In any case, we can see from Frutolf's writings, but especially from the erasures and corrections in his autograph, that he was keen on re-calculating reported history and zealous in correcting his predecessors when compiling his chronicle.

Compilation, often without revealing informants or sources, was the normal scholarly way of writing in Frutolf's day. The material that spans his own time indicates that he was much more interested in political than ecclesiastical history. He treats the Investiture Contest as more of a political event than a religious one, and he tries to avoid taking sides, even if he prefers the part of Henry IV.

Unfortunately, what made me most unhappy in preparing the edition of this universal chronicle was that we do not know Frutolf's sources for the reports of the last fifty years of his text. This is most disappointing to the modern editor, but nevertheless Frutolf deserves respect when regarding him as a contemporary witness and historian. Some material relevant to these years, which cannot be traced directly, must have originated in reports that reached Frutolf in Bamberg. So, despite decades of effort, a definite conclusion about the nature of his sources still remains elusive. But, as all medievalists remember, a medieval chronicle is a report of the continuation of creation and biblical history, and thus a semi-theological book.

Yet we can find some fine pieces of entertainment, narrative and oral history inserted in his time-line. One part that moves beyond pure information consists of the *historiae gentium* of the Goths, Huns, Amazons, Saxons and others. The second method of distracting his readers is represented by letters, three sets of which are discussed here. The first deal with the life of Alexander the Great, the second consists of five contemporary letters concerning the Investiture Contest and the third is a highly topical report of the First Crusade, which represents contemporary history for Frutolf.

I. The first example: The *nativitas et victoria Alexandri magni regis* (historically fictitious and known from incunabula prints as *Historia de preliis*).

This is an excerpt from Alexander's life and therefore Frutolf calls it *Excerptum de vita Alexandri magni*. In large parts this text reminds the reader of an antique letter collection. Frutolf excuses his digression from the strict time-line of the chronicle by a convincing explanation: "Because we can read that Alexander has performed many miraculous deeds, which delight many people (*que scire multi delectantur*), we should inform the reader a bit (*summatim*) about his life, in order to satisfy those yearning for entertainment (*delectationi*)

¹¹ Haimo of Bamberg, the author of *De decursu temporum*, ed. Hans Martin Weikmann (MGH Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 19) (Hanover 2004), lb. I c. 4 p. 139.

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querentium)”.¹² This ‘brief’ (*summatim*) narration with a continuation in letter form extends—despite the loss of two sheets—over twenty-six folios in the autograph.¹³

Subsequently Frutolf continues with a letter allegedly written by Alexander to his former teacher Aristotle with the title *De mirabilibus rebus, quas Alexander vidisse dicitur (Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem)*.¹⁴ In it he describes his campaign against King Porus and the marvels and monsters he encountered in India.

Frutolf writes: “Well, in his journeys—and he undertook so many—he [Alexander] saw miraculous things. He wrote, as we are told, about them to his mother Olympias and to his teacher Aristotle. We have described some of them briefly in order that the reader may delight in reports of marvellous things (*ob delectationem noticie rerum mirabilium breviando perstringimus*), and you as readers have to find out if they are truth or lies.”¹⁵ This second excursus from his own stringency of positivistic reporting is legitimized by the same argument: entertainment. Here, Frutolf follows Cicero’s arguments in *De oratore*, which state: “...and about digression from the subject, when delectation [pleasure] has thus been granted, the return to the subject ought to be appropriate and elegant (*et ab re digressio, in qua cum fuerit delectatio, tum reditus ad rem aptus et concinnus esse debet...*)”.¹⁶ Frutolf acts according to Cicero’s order: after presenting an entertaining digression he returns to Greek history following Jerome’s universal chronicle, his primary source. – In Frutolf’s case apocryphal pseudo-antique letters interrupt his retelling of sober facts as fulfillment of God’s will in history.

Frutolf’s source for his narrative is the *Nativitas et victoria Alexandri Magni regis*, a Latin translation from a lost Greek source found in Constantinople by the archpriest Leo of Naples in the middle of the tenth century. Leo’s text has not survived in its original form. Nevertheless, Frutolf’s direct source—a manuscript brought to Bamberg Cathedral by Emperor Henry II in 1022—was closest to Leo’s lost original.¹⁷ “No version of the

¹² *Sed quia idem Alexander multa mire peregrisse legitur, que scire multi delectantur, libet de vita eius aliqua summatim decerpere, quibus delectationi querentium utcumque valeam satisfacere* (only Prague, XVII D 25, fol. 42r).

¹³ Jena, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, Bose q. 19: from before fol. 60 (2 fols missing in the autograph) to fol. 74v (with letter-‘appendix’ to fol. 86v) and Prague, XVII D 25, fols 42r–53v: http://www.manuscriptorium.com/apps/main/en/index.php?request=show_te_i_digidoc&virtnum=0&client= (search for fol. 41r—see n. 4 above).

¹⁴ Jena, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, Bose q. 19, fols 74v–86r, and Prague, XVII D 25, fols 54r–56v, with one quaternio missing at the end: http://www.manuscriptorium.com/apps/main/en/index.php?request=show_te_i_digidoc&virtnum=0&client= (search for fol. 53r—see n. 4 above). Both manuscripts have: *De mirabilibus rebus, que (!) Alexander vidisse dicitur*.

¹⁵ *IN HIS ERGO ITINERIBUS QUÆ ET QUANTA PERTULERIT ET* [spelling in capitals as in the autograph] *quam miranda conspexerit, ipse, ut fertur, ad matrem suam Olympiadem et magistrum suum Aristotelem scribit; de quibus aliqua ob delectationem noticię rerum mirabilium breviando perstringimus, ceterum veritatem ipsarum rerum iudicio legentium relinquimus* (Jena, Bose q. 19, fol. 74v; Prague, XVII D, fol. 54r).

¹⁶ Cicero, *De oratore* III, 53.203

¹⁷ *Der Alexanderroman des Archipresbyters Leo*, ed. Friedrich Pfister (Sammlung mittellateinischer Texte 6) (Heidelberg 1913) and Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, Msc. Hist. 3.

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Alexander-romance has had wider influence nor produced more vernacular progeny than this wretched little book”, David Ross wrote in his guide to medieval Alexander literature.¹⁸ The vernacular Alexander-romances of Western Europe have digested a second source, the letter of Alexander to Aristotle. Frutolf found this in the cathedral library at Bamberg too. This means that Frutolf deliberately copied a narrative in letter form. Thus he helped to disseminate the story, which was also circulated separately. This success was based on several factors. The Alexander of the late antique historians, who is to be found in Frutolf's chronicle before the two sources mentioned, seemed far less exciting than the hero of romances. The account of Alexander's march to the ends of the world and his encounters with the strangest creatures all captivated the imagination of ordinary people and made the story perhaps the most favorite literary theme of the Middle Ages—in Latin or the vernacular.¹⁹ Alexander became a mythical superhuman, a hero and good king before Jesus Christ's salvation, a nearly god-like figure, a prototype for the knighthood of the crusades. And these letters provided information, authenticity and entertainment, they guaranteed the practical and didactic conception of the universal chronicle.

II. Letters of the conflict between Henry IV and Gregory VII

“The detail in which Frutolf focused on the key years 1076–80 is reflected in his use of documentary sources”, that is, in letters that report the conflict between Henry and Gregory.²⁰ All those were taken from a lost letter collection at Bamberg dealing with the Investiture Contest and propagating papal interests. In the 1930s first Wilhelm Erben and then Carl Erdmann came to this conclusion.²¹ The textual variants of Frutolf's quotations from the letters mentioned show that his sources were close to the ones used in the *Codex Udalrici*, the famous letter collection compiled by the cathedral *custos* Udalric of Bamberg (c. 1125–1134). This Udalric, whose collection is currently being edited by Klaus Naß at the MGH, most probably used the same letter collection as Frutolf for most of the letters considered here.²² Frutolf ‘cited the German bishops’ renunciation of Gregory VII at the Council of Worms (1076),²³ a letter that Gregory VII wrote to the German princes in late

¹⁸ David J. A. Ross, *Alexander Historiatus: A guide to medieval illustrated Alexander literature* (Athenäums Monografien Altertumswissenschaft 186) (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), pp. 47–8; see also pp. 27–8 and George Cary, *The medieval Alexander*, ed. D. J. A. Ross (Cambridge, 1956), p. 38.

¹⁹ *The History of Alexander's Battles (Historia de preliis - The J1 Version)*, trans. R. Telfryn Pritchard (Mediaeval sources in translation 34) (Toronto, 1992), pp. 7–8.

²⁰ I owe these and words and some more phrases in most parts to Thomas McCarthy's introduction of his translation: *Chronicles of the Investiture Contest*, p. 33.

²¹ Wilhelm Erben, Review of: “Gustav Buchholz, Ekkehard von Aura. Untersuchungen zur deutschen Reichsgeschichte unter Heinrich IV. und Heinrich V., Erster Theil (1888)”, *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 10 (1889), 628–629 and Carl Erdmann, “Die Bamberger Domschule im Investiturstreit”, *Zeitschrift für bayerische Landesgeschichte* 9 (1936), 1–46.

²² The referring numbers of the letters in the forthcoming edition of *Codex Udalrici* (nos 187, 173, 190, 175, 189) have already been assigned by the editor Klaus Naß and will fully be quoted in my edition of Frutolf's universal chronicle.

²³ *MGH Constitutiones* 1 (ed. Ludwig Weiland), no. 58, p. 108, *Die Briefe Heinrichs IV.* (ed. Carl Erdmann), Anhang A, *MGH Deutsches Mittelalter* 1, p. 68, and *Briefsammlungen der Zeit Heinrichs IV.* (ed. Carl Erdmann)

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January 1077 explaining his actions at Canossa;²⁴ Gregory's letter of 1076 to the faithful in Germany justifying his excommunication of Henry;²⁵ the record of Gregory's Lenten synod of 1080²⁶, in which the pope attempted to explain with the benefit of hindsight what had been decided at Canossa four years previously; the decree of the Council of Brixen (1080),²⁷ with which Henry and thirty imperial bishops deposed Gregory VII,²⁸—altogether the major documents of the Investiture Contest as dealt with in the universal chronicle.

I would like to stress that these letter excerpts are almost the only sources quoted literally by Frutolf when dealing with the history of his own lifetime. This underlines his concern for authenticity of information as a contemporary witness. The Investiture Controversy put a monk's settled and safe world at stake.

III. The letter of Archbishop Daimbert of Pisa and the crusading princes to the Pope Urban II.

This is a last example of the lengthy quotation of a letter in the chronicle. It is a report, changed by Frutolf from a first person to a third person narrative, evidently to make things more plausible. 'As Frutolf had written it, this annal [of 1098] contained an extended quotation from the letter written by Archbishop Daimbert of Pisa, Duke Godfrey of Lower Lotharingia and Count Raymond of Toulouse to the pope.'²⁹ It is a proud report of the First Crusade after the siege of Nicaea to the victorious battle of Ascalon in 1099. Frutolf's use of this letter in the 1098 annal pre-empted the actual end of the crusade in 1099, a chronological disjunction that seems to have upset his continuator Ekkehard of Aura.³⁰ Before extending Frutolf's chronicle the continuator made various changes to its final annals. On fol. 184r of Frutolf's autograph he began drawing a line through the text. This correction looks rather coarse and crude, not the elegant expunction (underlining) as mostly seen in medieval manuscripts of that time. In addition, beginning to write on fol. 184v, Ekkehard erased (scraped clean) the subsequent complete folio and cut or tore out the following folio of the quire in order to commit his own version of events to parchment on fresh folios. The result was a greatly shortened annal of Frutolf's for 1098. These changes were probably the result of the continuator's better knowledge of the crusading movement, because he himself took part

– Norbert Fickermann) MGH Briefe der deutschen Kaiserzeit 5 (Weimar, 1950), no. 20, p. 50; *Imperial lives and letters of the eleventh century*. trans. Theodor E. Mommsen and Karl F. Morrison, 2nd edn (New York, 2000), pp. 147–9; cf. forthcoming: *Codex Udalrici*, ed. Naß, no. 187.

²⁴ *Das Register Gregors VII.*, ed. Erich Caspar (MGH Eppistolae selectae 2,1,) (Berlin 1920), lb. IV, no. 12, p. 313; cf. forthcoming: *Codex Udalrici*, ed. Naß, no. 173.

²⁵ *The Epistolae Vagantes of Pope Gregory VII.*, ed. and trans. Herbert Edward John Cowdrey (Oxford Medieval Texts) (Oxford 1972), no. 14, pp. 32–41 and forthcoming *Codex Udalrici*, ed. Naß, no. 190.

²⁶ *Das Register Gregors VII.*, ed. Erich Caspar (MGH Epp. sel. 2,2, 1923 (Berlin 1923), lb. VII, no. 14a, pp. 479–87, and forthcoming *Codex Udalrici*, ed. Naß, no. 175.

²⁷ *MGH Constitutiones* 1 (ed. Ludwig Weiland), no. 70, p. 118; *Die Briefe Heinrichs IV.*, ed. Carl Erdmann, Anhang C, MGH Deutsches Mittelalter 1 (1937), pp. 69–73, and forthcoming *Codex Udalrici*, ed. Naß, no. 189.

²⁸ McCarthy, *Chronicles of the Investiture Contest*, p. 33.

²⁹ McCarthy, *Chronicles of the Investiture Contest*, p. 45.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

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in a smaller crusade of 1101, spent about two months in the Holy Land and seems to have believed that he knew better when working with his predecessor's autograph in 1106. We only know from a single short contemporary copy of Frutolf's chronicle from Bamberg, now preserved at Karlsruhe,³¹ what Frutolf originally told us from Daimbert's letter.³²

For a last time Frutolf combined information, authenticity, entertainment and theological instruction in his universal chronicle—to demonstrate how God's will in history had been fulfilled and the places in the Holy Land had been rescued from Islamic oppression and liberated.³³ The further historical information that Frutolf gave us after Daimbert's letter is almost negligible, because he died shortly afterwards, in 1103.

³¹ See Karlsruhe, Landesbibliothek 504, fols 195r–197v (the annals for 1098–1101). Daimbert's letter begins on fol. 195r and the expunged text in the Jena manuscript on fol. 197v: <http://digital.blb-karlsruhe.de/id/1161183>

³² Here Frutolf had a copy of Daimbert's letter that was not part of the lost primary letter collection at Bamberg. But a similar version of the source is to be found in the later *Codex Udalrici*, ed. Naß forthcoming no. 259.

³³ There were few universal historians who were lucky and happy to experience the fruition of God's concept of history and mankind's role in the fulfilment of His plans.