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The Concept and Genres in the Middle Ages

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JOACHIM KNAPE

*HISTORIA, TEXTUALITY AND  
EPISTEME IN THE MIDDLE AGES*

THE MIDDLE AGES: AN AGE OF LITERARY HISTORIOGRAPHY

In his book *Konstruktion der Vergangenheit. Eine Einführung in die Geschichtstheorie*, first published in 1987, Chris Lorenz defines the subject as follows: "The theory of history is the theory of the science of history. The answer is far from being self-evident for two reasons. First, the word 'history' has two different meanings: on the one hand it means 'what has actually happened' (Latin: *res gestae*), on the other hand it means 'the investigation of what has actually happened' (Latin: *historia rerum gestarum*)." – "The second reason implies that the scientific character of investigations of history cannot be taken for granted". – "The relationship between history and literature or rhetoric, for example, has often been cited as an objection to its scientific character".<sup>1</sup>

This initial definition given in Lorenz's very successful book raises some questions concerning the Middle Ages which, among others, I shall pursue in the following essay. Was there any "theory of history" in the Middle Ages? Was there any "science of history"? If this were indeed the case, then what was its scientific character, not least as regards to the other sciences? What were the roles of literature and rhetoric? Was there anything like "history" at all in the Middle Ages or is "history" rather a modern construct with which we seek to explain the world?

I intend to give proof of a difference. I shall begin with Lorenz's modern translation of *historia rerum gestarum* as "investigation of what has actually happened", and first of all I would emphasise that *historia* does not mean "investigation", but "narration" – a considerable difference. I shall take as my starting point the "Sprachspiele" (language games), to quote Wittgenstein, that is what it was possible to say in the Middle Ages, and what was not. There were both words and concepts which were unknown in the Middle Ages. The concept "history" belongs among them, alongside the words "America", "culture" and other terms. The examinations undertaken in the field of the history of

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from the abridged German translation of Lorenz 1997 (Dutch original: *De constructie van het verleden. Een inleiding in de theorie van de geschiedenis*. Amsterdam 1987).

concepts to date support these findings.<sup>2</sup> Because "history" as a category was unknown during the Middle Ages, it was impossible to come up with phrases such as: "History claims its victims" or "He is responsible before the face of history". In the Middle Ages the only thing you possibly could have said was: "He is responsible before the face of God". Herein the cosmology of the epoch, which was in principle a religious one, finds its expression.

History is an invention of the eighteenth century. It is a modern, scientifically and philosophically established universal category. Today history is a collective abstract which describes the whole mundane universe of events in space and time. "History" – in this sense – is a collective noun, because its originally singular meaning for a single narrative changed into a summarising and singularic expression which comprises many histories in early modern times. Since the eighteenth century "history" at the same time has turned into an abstract noun, i.e. a category with a philosophical dimension.<sup>3</sup>

The medieval word *historia* must strictly be distinguished from the modern notion.<sup>4</sup> It was used to describe historiography in general, as well as individual historical narratives, which were first and foremost written in prose. Among all scientific disciplines, rhetoric was the one responsible for these works.<sup>5</sup> This did not change until the middle of the eighteenth century when the new class of historians was institutionalised. The classical definition that was valid up to that time was the one introduced by Cicero in his main work on rhetorical theory, *De oratore*. Cicero's definition consists of the following five classical statements concerning the literary genre *historia*:

1. Textually a *historia* is organized according to the narrative criteria of the course of time.
2. It tells us "the truth", following a postulate of realism and reflection (*Widerspiegelung*) of reality.
3. It takes place in the semiotic state of social memory (manifested in its linguistic form as histories).
4. Its function is didactic.
5. It serves to visualise the past in the present: one might even say it makes real presences of the past. (*De oratore* 2.36.)

The formula *historia magistra vitae*, especially, was quoted favourably during the Middle Ages, meaning that the historiographical narration was regarded as a teacher for life.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Burke 1969, p. 1; Koselleck 1975, pp. 593–595; Koselleck 1979; Knappe 1984; Knappe 1988, pp. 15–34.

<sup>3</sup> Knappe 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Knappe 1984.

<sup>5</sup> Melville 1986, pp.170ff., *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> Melville 1986, pp.164, 168 and 218ff.

If history is a post-enlightenment, modern theoretical construction, which, among other things, replaces "God" as an authority, and in which the whole of the world is regarded as a quasi-scientific model, then what about the time, when this model was not yet available? I would suggest that we should not jump to conclusions and claim that there was history even then, though nobody yet knew it. I would suggest that we should take seriously the absence of the category "history" and reap the methodological benefits of concentrating upon aspects of the specifics, and the difference between the medieval epoch and the present. Gert Melville has taken important steps in this direction, most of all in his contribution on *Der Zugriff auf Geschichte in der Gelehrtenkultur des Mittelalters*<sup>7</sup> published in 1986. Melville brings out clearly the specific character of historical knowledge during the Middle Ages despite two failings. Firstly, he does not detach himself methodologically from history as a category, suggesting therefore coherence of the world, whereas according to the theoretical sources of the time the subject matter of history are *singularia* (particulars).<sup>8</sup> Secondly, he fails to restrict the term *historia* decidedly enough to the meaning 'narration'. In fact, historical knowledge in the Middle Ages had nothing to do with the philosophy of history, nor with the theory of history. Therefore we have to differentiate between the old age of historiography and our new age of history, that is of historicism or historism.<sup>9</sup>

Accessing the matters we file under history today means, where the Middle Ages are concerned, accessing the discourse about things on a certain time level, the level of the past. The mode of discourse is historical narration as it has been handed down to us in numerous written sources, which we call annals, chronicles or histories. An implication of their narrative character is that they must deal with actions, the heart of any narration. Paul Veyne's statement regarding modern "historiography" must also be generally valid as an heuristic principle for the Middle Ages: "The historical field is completely vague, with one restriction: everything included therein must actually have happened. Whether the texture of this field is dense or not so dense, intact or full of gaps, is not of any relevance".<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> "Access to history in the scholarly culture of the Middle Ages".

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Melville 1986, pp. 187f.

<sup>9</sup> Knappe 1996, cols. 164–166.

<sup>10</sup> Veyne 1990, p. 21.

A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CASE: THE PROSIMETRUM-VERSION OF THE HISTORY OF THEODERIC IN THE 'SAXON WORLD CHRONICLE' (THIRTEENTH CENTURY)

Among historical texts is one of the first world chronicles written in German, the *Saxon World Chronicle*, dating from the thirteenth century. I shall examine the prosimetrum-version (C<sup>1</sup>) of this work, with a special focus on the Theoderic-sequence.<sup>11</sup> The Gothic king Theoderic (c. 454–526) is especially interesting on the grounds that he was a highly ambivalent figure for German historiography in the Middle Ages: he was an Arian heretic and tyrannous ruler of Rome strongly opposed to the pope on the one hand, and a Germanic hero highly venerated and magnified in popular and vernacular heroic poetry under the name of Dietrich of Berne (Berne = Verona) on the other.

How does the editor of the chronicle C<sup>1</sup> proceed in the case of the Dietrich-sequence? Having compiled and collected information, i.e. textual constituents of sources, he arranges his material chronologically. The period of time under consideration is limited by two biographical dates, by the first reference to Dietrich of Berne and by the date of his death. Within this frame the reader and listener may find a whole host of historical information. We can recognize a uniform pattern: the actions of individuals or groups in the past are recorded. A brief outline of the plot sections follows. In Theoderic's time, the Roman emperors are subordinated to the Emperor of Constantinople. The Gothic King Dietrich of Berne conquers Italy. Deeds of Pope Hilarius are described. King Arthur of Britain conquers different countries and disappears for good on the island of Alanonie. Deeds of Pope Simplicius are described. In Britain Merlin the sorcerer performs mysterious miracles. The emperor Zeno comes to power. Dietrich of Berne is raised at the court of Zeno in Constantinople. In Italy, Odoacer emerges out of a power struggle as a Roman king, following an intrigue between commander Aetius and the Roman empress. The reaction of the Roman Emperor Augustulus to Odoacer. Dietrich of Berne intervenes in Italy and, after a long struggle for power with Odoacer, emerges victorious in Ravenna. The Saxons conquer Britain. The deeds of St. Germanus and Lupus in Britain are described. Deeds of Pope Gelasius are described. The African king Hereritus persecutes the Christians. Deeds of Pope Felix the Third. Emperor Anastasius succeeds Zeno on the throne. Dietrich becomes king in Italy. Dietrich intervenes in the struggle for the papal throne in favour of Symmachus.

The mixture of Dietrich-tales and narration of other events continues in similar fashion. The sequence ends with Dietrich's fight against Pope John and Dietrich's death; devils carry him to the fiery mountain Volcano. I shall return the example of Dietrich and the *Saxon World Chronicle* throughout the following essay.

<sup>11</sup> Text in Knappe 1983, pp. 28–36.

HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

The material collected in such chronicles is historical knowledge, which in the Middle Ages "did not undergo independent integration into the circle of science".<sup>12</sup> Considering the subject with which we have to deal, we do not have to use the term "history". At the core of my considerations is a methodological suggestion: in examining older historiography, we should do entirely without the modern category of history and similar retrospective projections. If we assume that medieval historiographers dealt with history, we miss the opportunity of investigating each individual case. For every work, we should inquire into the concrete collection of elements of historical knowledge, how this knowledge was used in literary terms, which theories were adopted during the process of production and which objectives motivated the collection of this knowledge. In this context I shall emphasise the following four aspects.

1. The epistemological aspect: in the Middle Ages there was historical knowledge, which was perceived as such. It is to be clarified what kind of knowledge this was.
2. The semiotic aspect: this knowledge was encoded through different media. Linguistically it was handed down in texts, which were subsumed under the Latin name *historia* (i.e. historiography).
3. The functional aspect: historical knowledge was heteronomous. It was not treated as autonomous knowledge, and therefore history was not established as a *scientia* with its own separate discipline, unlike powerful theology, for example. At the university of Tübingen, for example, 'history' was not separated as an independent subject until 1750.<sup>13</sup> For this reason I use the term *episteme* in connection with medieval historiography instead of the Latin word *scientia*, with the same meaning. Although *scientia* also means 'knowledge' as well, today the immediate connotation of the term is 'science'; but the science of history is precisely what we are **not** dealing with.
4. The methodological aspect: the position of historiography outlined thus far resulted in particular and specific historiographical methods in the Middle Ages.

<sup>12</sup> Melville 1983, p. 157.

<sup>13</sup> Bauer 1997, p. 120; cf. Fulda 1996.

*On the epistemological aspect*

In order to clarify the type of knowledge we mean in discussing historical knowledge in the Middle Ages, first of all we have to acquaint ourselves with its different epistemological sectors.<sup>14</sup> As regards the estimation of the value of knowledge, in the Middle Ages metaphysical knowledge stood at the top of the hierarchy of knowledge, especially since it was put to use in the area of theology and philosophy. In its shadow stood the secret arts; yet as we learn from the source Martin of Troppau, there is one longer passage about the magician Merlin in the Dietrich-sequence of the *Saxon World Chronicle*. In the hierarchy of knowledge, worldly knowledge follows next. It may be subdivided into the wider spheres of linguistic knowledge (the *trivium*), knowledge of natural history and general knowledge (the *quadrivium*; the *physical/medicina*), political and practical knowledge (*artes mechanicae*, including the fine arts).<sup>15</sup> Hereby we have established a macrosystem of the upper sectors of knowledge. Among them, *historia* is not a science, as Laetitia Boehm and Hans-Werner Goetz have pointed out.<sup>16</sup> The "literary arts" are only perceived generically and systematically;<sup>17</sup> they do not have an epistemic position of their own right, but an "eccentric position in relation to the canon of the *scientiae*" among disciplines being defined again and again.<sup>18</sup> In his survey of the medieval "system of knowledge", Tuomas M.S. Lehtonen assigns poetry (principally understood as mediator of fictitious subjects) the position of an auxiliary component of practical philosophy, which Isidore of Seville subdivided into the moral, political and legal aspects (*Etym.* 2.24).<sup>19</sup> Historical knowledge, as historical literature asserts, constitutes an area of its own which is functionally subordinated both textually to the *trivium*, and informationally to several other disciplines, which the histories "serve in a subsidiary way"<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> Knowledge: term for socially codified information as a part of social memory, not cognitive substance as a part of individual consciousness; "Bezeichnung für allgemein verfügbare Orientierungen", i.e. "term for universally available orientations" (Mittelstraß) in a society; in academic disciplines these are statements about facts which need justification. Research into the Middle Ages into as well as sociology of knowledge (Wissenssoziologie) has to deal with everything "that is regarded as 'knowledge' in a society, without looking at its absolute validity or invalidity" (Berger and Luckmann 1966); Mittelstraß 1996.

<sup>15</sup> Overview in: Goetz 1936; Lawler 1984, pp. 447–450; G. Bernt, J. Verger, P. Schmitt 1986, cols. 2032–2036.

<sup>16</sup> Boehm 1965; Goetz 1985.

<sup>17</sup> Mehtonen 1996, p. 80.

<sup>18</sup> Melville 1986, p. 189.

<sup>19</sup> Lehtonen 1995, pp. 41–61; Mehtonen (1996, p. 23) asserts that during the twelfth century *poetics* takes an "independent status".

<sup>20</sup> Melville 1986, p. 186.

From a contemporary viewpoint we may characterise historical knowledge as empirically founded knowledge about action.<sup>21</sup> The historiographer collects knowledge about the actions of individuals or groups authorised to act.<sup>22</sup> Augustine writes about the *actiones hominum*, for example those which occurred in the past.<sup>23</sup> The basic epistemological question regarding the conception of reality and truth in an epoch is of outstanding importance. Even in the field of the *scientiae*, the Middle Ages accepted dimensions of reality that differ from the prevailing doctrine adhered to in the modern age. With regard to knowledge of action, interaction between human beings and beings of a solely spiritual nature (such as God, angels, demons etc.) was therefore quite natural in the Middle Ages, as we can see in the Dietrich-sequence of the *Saxon World Chronicle*.

Knowledge of action can, of course, interact with the other systematically accepted sectors of knowledge, i.e. with the theological, political or any other such specialist area. Yet the historiographer always focuses on action, on interaction between authorised agents (i.e. beings who control the power necessary to authorise their actions). So at the same time he or she focuses on the events which constitute complexes of action. This is the historiographer's perspective. It is also important that action often leads to the formation of institutions (empires, types of government, organized groups etc.). Actions and their institutional emanations, *hominum instituta*, as Augustine calls them, are thus of interest to the historiographer.<sup>24</sup> Therefore actions are at issue in the case of Theoderic the Ostrogoth, both the actions of the man and of his contemporaries, which are concentrated in the form of important events. At the same time the formation of institutions is at issue, that is Theoderic's foundation of the Ostrogothic empire in Italy and his influence upon pre-existing institutions, i.e. the Roman church and papacy.

*On the semiotic aspect*

The apt way to represent knowledge of action is narration; that is, to enter the grammatical realm of verbal phrases. In her study of narrative theory in the Middle Ages, Päivi Mehtonen describes narration as "an instrument of

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Lorenz 1984, pp. 33–39.

<sup>22</sup> With regard to the reading of texts, the grammarian had to pay attention to the emphasis on this kind of knowledge even in the antique school syllabus. Quintilian calls this act of interpretation *historice* (1.9.1), consisting of the historical explanation of facts (*enarratio historiarum* 1.8.18; see also 1.4.4).

<sup>23</sup> Augustine, *Confessiones*. Book 11, pp. 307f.

<sup>24</sup> Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, p. 63; Boehm 1965, p. 684; Melville 1982, p. 90.

representation".<sup>25</sup> *Narratio*, as a part of textual theory, has always been part of rhetorical theory. Since Cicero's forceful call for a *narratio historica* in *De oratore* (2.51–65), historiography written in prose belongs among the tasks of the orator and in the theoretical realm of rhetoric.<sup>26</sup> Philipp Melanchthon, who dealt with narrative theory in his famous *Rhetorica*, published in 1519, still formulated the standard definition as follows that: "A narration is the rendition of an event or simply the representation of what is done" (*Narratio [est] expositio rei gestae, uel simplex eius propositio quod agitur*).<sup>27</sup> In the *De oratore*, Cicero distinguished between three genres of historiography. Between simple annals (*annales*) on the one hand and plain narrative *historiae* on the other he placed – as the third and most important category – prose-*historiae* fashioned according to the highest rhetorical standards, such as the *historiae* written by Thucydides and other famous historiographers. (*De oratore* 2.52–56.)

According to the classical ideal a *historia* had to be written in prose. At the height of the Middle Ages the vernacular literary system centred on orality and therefore on texts written in verse. As a result, the first chronicles in German were pieces of poetry written in verse. These verse-chronicles followed in the footsteps of the great epic poems and heroic hymns and, of course, followed the literary rules established by them. In the case under consideration, the prosimetrum-version of the *Saxon World Chronicle* adopted verses taken from such a metrical chronicle, the first German World Chronicle, the *Chronicle of Emperors (Kaiserchronik)*, word-for-word. It is because of this mixture of verse and prose that it is referred to as the "prosimetrum" chronicle.

#### *On the functional aspect*

Let us now approach the question of the function of historiography in the Middle Ages. At the risk of failing to do justice to special cases and exceptions from the rule, I shall offer a general answer. The first elementary function of historiography is its archival function, which means that it is the medium of social memory (*memoria*).<sup>28</sup> The purpose of histories is to collect, to arrange and to document knowledge of action, that is, data, facts, people, actions and knowledge about the crystallisations of actions, i.e. about events and institutions. To perform this function, historiography even developed its own literary modes, such as annals, which are strongly restricted in a literary sense.

<sup>25</sup> Mehtonen 1996, p. 12; concerning the *modus narrativus* see also Minnis 1984, (index).

<sup>26</sup> Concerning the theory of *narratio* in relation to historiography in the Middle Ages cf. Minnis 1984, index; Melville 1986, pp. 171ff.

<sup>27</sup> Melanchthon, *De rhetorica libri tres*, p. 66.

<sup>28</sup> Melville 1986, pp. 166ff.; for "social memory" cf. Assmann and Assmann 1994, pp. 114–140.

The knowledge collected in this way is now ready for further use. This is a function which, together with others, is still applicable to historiography.

In the Middle Ages, historiography served to cope with the present: it was not an antiquarian examination of the past. In order to arrive at a "human field of observation/perception" and to level out the two separate time levels, "statements about the past" were regarded as "cognitively equal to knowledge about the present itself".<sup>29</sup> There is no history, because looking back was only relevant in connection with an examination of the present situation. Taking shape as something which still lived on, e.g. as *monumenta*,<sup>30</sup> facts cast their shadows out of the past onto the present. These were what the historiographers took up as a link for their work. The main difference to our times is that this did not lead to any theory of history, because "history" was not yet a subject authorised to act. The point of view of the modern historian is, or should be, inductive. Out of the chain of particulars and through observation of their interconnections he or she seeks to derive historical regularities and to explore "history" as an arena of action. This is a notion alien to the Middle Ages. The manifold medieval histories do not allow us inductively to derive a theory of history which is immanent and autonomous.

Nevertheless medieval histories were exploited theoretically. "Everything which has been lived through and experienced" was at the disposal of the *scientiae*.<sup>31</sup> The epistemological function of the histories was to supply material for argumentation. "Therefore it was sufficient for the *historia, res [...] gestas scribere, non rerum gestarum rationem reddere*",<sup>32</sup> thus merely to 'tell things which have happened without giving more detailed information about them' or, in other words, 'to pass a judgement on things which have happened'. (Otto of Freising: *Chronica* 6.23) Historiography, therefore, had an affirmative function for other socially relevant models. In the Middle Ages, collecting historical knowledge served to support theories which lay outside this knowledge, yet not a theory of history. The theories supported by historical knowledge were the prevailing theories which were maintained and discussed within the framework of the seven upper sectors of knowledge: that is theological, philosophical, "mythical", cosmological or political theories, for example theories on the work of God or on changes of phenomena<sup>33</sup> or of the sense; on the legitimation and operation of politics, of institutions, the law

<sup>29</sup> Melville 1986, p. 170; Melville distinguishes between the present of historical knowledge and the present of histories ("present seen through different perspectives") by means of the three terms "anaphorical, cataphorical, or hyperphorical orientation". Melville 1986, pp. 199ff.

<sup>30</sup> For the term *monumentum* see Melville 1986, pp. 163 and 165.

<sup>31</sup> Melville 1986, p. 170.

<sup>32</sup> Melville 1986, p. 170.

<sup>33</sup> "Hugo von St. Victor etwa hob insbesondere die Funktoren der *mutationes* hervor: *locus, forma* und *tempus*." Melville 1986, p. 177.

and so forth. Mainly religious theories could be substantiated thereby. Thus Hugo of St. Victor says: *longum est per singula vanitatem hujus mundi demonstrare*.<sup>34</sup>

Such a functionalisation of historiography is, for example, quite evident in the *Book of Kings* (Augsburg, before 1275). This chronicle was handed down to us along with a compendium of laws, the *Swabian Mirror* (*Schwabenspiegel*); the works were intended to be read together.<sup>35</sup> In addition to the theories which predate historiography we have already mentioned, there were ethical convictions and regulations which were illustrated or transmitted didactically by the historical material – partly via negative evidence. All of these theories are set in advance.

The historical material which had been collected could also have some influence on other texts atomistically, for instance as examples in religious treatises. Historiography, however, also developed some elaborate literary genres of its own, most of all in those types of chronicles (chronicles of tribes, cities, monasteries, countries or of the world, and even biographies) in which the material was arranged literarily according to predetermined models and theoretical views.

#### *On the methodological aspect*

Histories *re-present* past realities for posterity. As regards content and function, this commitment turned out to be problematic for historiography for two methodological reasons, even in the Middle Ages: a) because of aspects of the heuristic method and b) of aspects of textualisation.

In classical works of rhetoric a lot of space was devoted to the heuristic method (Latin: *inventio*). Yet for historiography there was no binding or definitive model for methodological inquiries into the facts and for their interpretation.<sup>36</sup> Therefore there was only a very limited repertoire of methods available to the medieval historiographer, which can be summed up in the following three points:

<sup>34</sup> Hugo of St. Victor, *De vanitate mundi*, col. 711.; Melville 1986, p. 180.

<sup>35</sup> *Das Buch der Könige alter ê und niuwer ê*. Ed. by H. F. Massmann. In *Land und Lehenrechtbuch*. Vol. 1. Ed. by A. Daniels. Berlin 1860 (= Rechtsdenkmäler des deutschen Mittelalters 3).

<sup>36</sup> The best overview concerning the whole complex is found in Melville 1982, pp. 86–146; Schmale 1985; for “invention” see Copeland 1991, (index).

1. The principle of linguistic tradition. Historical knowledge is drawn from language, i.e. linguistic sources; however there was hardly any archaeological control on the basis of non-linguistic references.
2. The principle of authorities. These linguistic sources may be oral (autopsy of witnesses) or, as is more usually the case, the reference is handed down by credible authors in historiographical writing.
3. The principle of collation. Historical knowledge is filtered by collation, i.e. as many sources as possible have to be available for comparison. Correspondences in content determine whether the historical knowledge may be regarded as acceptable; no method of textual criticism had been developed yet.<sup>37</sup>

A central problem for the historiographer were the specific laws of literary codification, all those linguistic and literary rules with a claim in their own right. To find the acceptable historical knowledge beneath the veil of literary packaging was often an heuristically insoluble problem.<sup>38</sup> Texts are ruled by a compulsion to be literary. This is not only a problem for the person seeking for plain facts in the texts, but also for anyone who wants to write a *historia* himself. There is, of course, always the postulate of the reflection (*Wider Spiegelung*) of reality or literary realism (expressed in the medieval demand for “truth”). Histories are supposed to refer to reality. For some authors the creation of mere likelihood was already enough. As far as the textualisation was concerned, it was up to the individual author to define the limits of truth. In fact, all possible means of representation which served the rhetorical principle of *evidentia* (meaning visualising or recalling) were allowed for in the different genres of texts, including even fictitious orations and dialogues, and illustrations by the use of examples or descriptive or wildly fictitious interludes.

The American theorist Hayden White has had to point out to historians that historiography still follows certain literary models.<sup>39</sup> In the Middle Ages this was never even a point of discussion. And critical thinkers already recognised one of the problems of truth: historical knowledge cannot be but an extract, an extract of textures which semiotically have to lead to distortions. Histories are not only determined by semiotic and literary means, but also by epistemological prerequisites, i.e. by the role attributed to histories.

<sup>37</sup> Knappe 1997, pp. 47–62.

<sup>38</sup> As regards the test of truth or factuality, I differentiate the following levels: 1. Test of probability, 2. Test of attestation (2.1. Questions concerning the associated textual area, 2.2. Questions concerning the value of the *auctor*, 2.3. Questions concerning the state of the tradition, 2.4. Questions concerning the image of the source with regard to other recipients, 2.5. Questions concerning controls on the sources). Knappe 1997, pp. 52ff.

<sup>39</sup> According to White there are four modes of emplotment, with four modes of argument and four ideological implications belonging to each of them: 1. Romance (ideological implication: anarchist), 2. Comedy (conservative), 3. Tragedy (radical), 4. Satire (liberal). (White 1973, p. 29; White 1986, p. 93.)



This means that histories (as I have already mentioned) did not serve to generate theories of their own that were inherent in history, but only to support social regulations and theories which already existed. In the Middle Ages, therefore, histories in their theoretical presuppositions were purely deductive. No conclusions were drawn from the events of the centuries: there was no history, and the models, the objectives of the evidence and the theoretical premises of historiography were fixed in advance. The historical material indeed was first of all "material", meaning material which supported existing presuppositions by illustrating and exemplifying them.

This fundamentally characterised the historiographical method of representation. From this originated the methods of projection which determined the structure of histories according to external models. A typical example is the Theory of Four Empires and of Six Ages. Two structural nets taken from Genesis and the Book of Daniel were projected onto complexes of action arranged on the axis of time: a model of periods of time (*sex aetates mundi*) and a model of the succession of political institutions (*quatuor monarchiae*).<sup>40</sup>

Today the principle of methodological and critical interpretation of the sources and continuous academic commentary on historical narrations is valid for historians. The differing methods of the Middle Ages and modern times can be sketched as follows. In the Middle Ages histories were generated from histories (one narration was transferred into a new narration by either a process of selection or supplementation). In the modern age the process is much more complex. Historiographical texts do not stand independently as pure narration; as a permanent corrective they have scientific metatexts (scientific research) at their side, which critically filter historical knowledge;<sup>41</sup> in addition, they are further corrected through the control provided by diplomatic or archaeological sources.

#### A RETURN TO THE CASE OF THE SAXON WORLD CHRONICLE

Let us return to the exemplary case from which we started out. The 'Saxon World Chronicle' has been handed down to us in four quite different versions (A, B, C<sup>1</sup>, C<sup>2</sup>).<sup>42</sup> Those versions reflect the variety of possibilities we find in the Middle Ages with regard to assimilating historical knowledge in a chronicle. The sequence of the prosimetrum-version (C<sup>1</sup>) examined also in section

<sup>40</sup> Since the establishment of patristics as an academic discipline both models have become widely known. Cf. Massmann 1854, pp. 363ff.

<sup>41</sup> Droysen: "Interpretation, that means: the nature of the historical method is to understand by research." Droysen 1977, p. 22; Rösen 1984, p. 38.

<sup>42</sup> Herkommer 1972.

two is interesting because of its technique of compilation. It is an extreme example of mechanical compilation of widely disparate source texts. In the Theoderic/Dietrich sequence, the following parts are skilfully joined together without transitions: A) Firstly, there is the German prose of the *Saxon World Chronicle*. B) Secondly, there are the thematically matching verses of the *Chronicle of Emperors* (*Kaiserchronik*, the first world chronicle written in German, and entirely in verse, which was composed at Regensburg in the middle of the twelfth century). C) Lastly, there are the corresponding passages from Martin of Troppau's (died 1278) Latin *Chronicon pontificum et imperatorum* which the prosimetrum-maker translated into German prose. (Troppau's *Chronicon* was widely known to contemporaries and gave an up-to-date account of events, structured according to the order of popes and emperors in the manner of annals).

As the modern historian Jansen points out: The *Saxon World Chronicle* is a "great product as a compilation, a poor one with regard to adding news of its own".<sup>43</sup> This means that the historiographer himself comes second. The editor of the prosimetrum-version binds himself to the postulate of reflection, and regards the literary act of compiling (*compilare*) as the best historiographical technique. He wants to comply with historiography's archival function and join together as much information as possible about the world history of the era of Theoderic/Dietrich. He has certainly considered this mechanical method of compilation to be the way in which truth is created. This results in a historiographical two-way reflection: the past realities of action are reflected in the sources and therefore his own work has to reflect these sources as accurately as possible. In a way it is amazing that a man who works as conscientiously as he does even incorporates long parts written in verse. In contemporary (prose-) historiography the use of verse was often looked down upon as a sign of fictitiousness.<sup>44</sup> Our editor, however, incorporates the verses of the *Chronicle of Emperors* into his texture unchanged. The reason is that he recognised in the author of the *Chronicle of Emperors* a historiographer as scrupulous as himself. Among other things, this is shown by his methodological consistency: events he narrates are always substantiated by dates and figures in a hyper-correct manner. This also is seen in his critical treatment of the heretic Dietrich of Berne.

The prose of the *Saxon World Chronicle* also critically refers to the widespread German heroic poetry with the sentence: *es wart ouch uon im manige lugene getan* (many lies have also been told about him). The editor juxtaposes a more credible source with the lies contained in heroic poetry, the sixth-century Latin *Historia Gothorum* by Jordanes (sixth century A. D.): *were die mere wollen wissen [...] der lese die historien gothorum* (those who want to

<sup>43</sup> Jansen 1914, p. 72.

<sup>44</sup> Herkommer 1972, pp. 213ff.; Knape 1984, pp. 63, 194.

know more [...] should read the histories of the Goths).<sup>45</sup> This critical approach towards historical knowledge about Theoderic/Dietrich had already been applied by other chroniclers earlier.<sup>46</sup> For example, the author of the *Chronicle of Emperors* about a hundred years earlier (vv.14195–97) criticised as unhistorical the chronological merging in heroic poetry of Attila/Etzel, ruler of the Huns, with the Gothic king Theoderic/Dietrich: *wer nu wolle beweren, daz dithrich ezzelenen sehe, der heiz daz buoch vurtragen* (whoever hereafter wants to assert that Dietrich has seen Etzel in his whole life should bring out the book).<sup>47</sup> This methodological principle of authorities, mentioned above, is of outstanding importance for the chronicler of Emperors. Again and again he emphasises that *die wârheit wir von den buochen haben* (v. 16044 and elsewhere).<sup>48</sup> The editor of the *Saxon World Chronicle* is quite close to him in more than this respect. Both chroniclers certainly also regarded Cicero's understanding of *historia* (according to the definition already specified above) as their guiding principle: "A *historia*, however, is [1.] a witness of the passing of the ages (*testis temporum*), [2.] a light for the truth of the facts (*lux veritatis*), [3.] the actual life of memory (*vita memoriae*), [4.] a teacher for life (*magistra vitae*). [5.] A messenger of the past (*nuntia vetustatis*), which through the voice of the orator alone can attain immortality." (*De oratore* 2.36.)

<sup>45</sup> Knappe 1983, p. 36, line 276.

<sup>46</sup> Massmann 1854, pp. 346, 933.

<sup>47</sup> In Knappe 1983, p. 36, lines 266–267; cf. Massmann 1854, pp. 341ff. and 932ff.

<sup>48</sup> Massmann 1854, p. 345.

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