The Medieval Chronicle II

Edited by
Erik Kooper

Offprint • Sonderdruck • Tiré à part • Separata

Amsterdam - New York, NY
2002

GIOVANNI VILLANI AND THE AETIOLOGICAL MYTH OF TUSCAN CITIES

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Abstract

The Florentine merchant and famous chronicler Giovanni Villani (ca. 1276-1348) was the author of a long *Cronica* (Chronicle) concerning Florentine and world history from the Tower of Babel to 1346. The first four books of his narration were devoted to the origins of Florence and of the most important cities in Tuscany. The writer related the foundational myths for each urban community using etymological assonances of their names, following the example of Isidore of Seville and of medieval encyclopaedism. His sources were classical historians and the local chronicle tradition. Villani revised motifs found in these texts according to his own interests. He intended to provide Florence with a myth of the city's origins based on the Roman tradition, and to tell the stories of the foundation of other Tuscan cities as support for his prediction of Florentine greatness.

Giovanni Villani was undoubtedly one of the most important Florentine chroniclers of the communal era.[1] His lifetime spanned the most dynamic period of Florentine medieval history.

From what we can discover about his biography (especially from his chronicle), it is clear that he was very much a typical well-to-do Florentine merchant, and his literary work reflected his 'bourgeois' vision of his city's and world's history.

Born in Florence no later than 1276, the young Villani formed an association with the Peruzzi company, one of the leading trading and money-lending firms in the Tuscan city at the end of the thirteenth century. In 1300 he became one of the shareholders in this important group, at the same time that he joined the *Arte del Cambio* (Bankers' Guild).

During the same year he went to Rome for the Jubilee as an agent of his company at the Papal court. Between 1302 and 1307 he travelled widely in Flanders, where he looked after the interests of his company's branch office in Bruges. Following a common path for Italian merchants of his day, he served an itinerant apprenticeship in international commerce and banking until, in his early thirties, he had acquired the means to establish himself in his native city and to devote himself to civic affairs. In 1307 he returned to Florence and, between 1316 and 1341, followed a public career during which he served as Prior (a member of

the *Signoria*, the supreme magistracy of republican city government) in 1316, 1321-22 and in 1328.

By 1308 he was no longer a shareholder in the Peruzzi bank and, around 1322, moved his investments to the rival firm of the Buonaccorsi. During the first thirty years of the century Villani was a successful man of affairs. In the last decade of his life, however, he saw the sudden collapse of his fortunes and social position.

In 1338 the bankruptcy of the Buonaccorsi ruined him and brought him the further humiliation of imprisonment for debt. The subsequent failure of the Bardi and Peruzzi companies, which struck a crippling blow to the commercial life of Florence, additionally embarrassed his financial position. The temporary political eclipse of the Popular Party[2] in Florence during the tyranny of the Duke of Athens, Walter of Brienne (1342-43), and the subsequent installation of a more democratic regime, effectively removed Villani from the active participation in civic affairs. The Black Death claimed him as one of its victims in 1348.

Villani authored a long *Cronica* (Chronicle), which was divided into twelve books (thirteen in the most recent critical edition[3]) and written during the 1320s-1330s. This work set Florence and its history against the background of world history, following the example of the Mendicant Orders' historiography (Von Den Brincken 1986: 77-103). In it the chronicler revived characteristics identified with the early universal medieval chronicle (*Weltchronistik*), telling events in Florence, Italy and Europe from the Tower of Babel to 1346.

Only six books described events from the writer's own lifetime. Books number one to six, in particular, were devoted to ancient and less recent history. Villani's originality rests in his blending of local tradition with historical narrative, and is coloured by the typical view of an international merchant and an experienced financier.

G. Porta's recent critical edition of Villani's *Cronica* facilitates an analysis of this work. In addition, several studies have analysed the author's writing technique, his purposes and style, the reading public to whom the narration was addressed, and the later transmission of the famous text.

In this paper I will examine some of the initial chapters of the work, including selections from books I, II, III and IV, which scholars have traditionally considered less reliable and, unfairly, less interesting. In fact, the author did not write this section of the *Cronica* based on his own experience; rather, he drew upon the writings of previous chroniclers, classic historians and ancient literary sources of the Florentine tradition. In it, however, the author reported his aims in writing the whole narration and gave some keys by which to interpret the story of Florence. He

introduced the origins of the city as an important preface to the later books relating contemporary events.

The first and second books, the most 'mythical' ones of the whole *Cronica*, were functional and completely consistent with the following development of the historical text. In them the aetiological myths of Tuscan cities rose again, foretold and defined the outlook of the region's history as an epiphany of Florentine greatness. The writer himself expressed it in the opening chapter of the first book:

> ... because our [the Florentines'] beginnings go back a very long way, the recounting in brief of other ancient histories seems to me necessary to our undertaking; and it may be diverting, useful and of comfort to our citizens that are and will be to consider that, in being virtuous and of great achievement, they are the descendants of a noble progeny and virtuous people, such as were the ancient, good Trojans and brave and noble Romans.[4]

Furthermore, Villani gave his reasons for writing in the second prologue of his *Cronica*, a later preface posed in the middle of the ninth book that reflected the deeper self-consciousness of the chronicler now far advanced in his work. He asserted that in this text he drew the inspiration for telling his city's history from his stay in Rome in 1300. The fundamental motivation was his wish to provide Florence with an ancient narrative that would explain the city's origins and describe its development just as the ancient authors, especially Virgil, Lucan, Valerius and Paul Orosius, did for Rome. Following the example of classical historians, he meant to make Florence's past familiar to the Florentines and to explain to them how the little settlement situated on the Arno's banks became one of the richest and most populated centres of Christian Europe. Florence — he wrote —, 'daughter and creature of Rome ... was rising and about to perform great things like Rome in her decline' (IX, xxxvi: 58-59).

In this statement Villani adopted the traditional motif of the new Rome. However, his association of the rising Florence with the *Urbs* seems deeply original. In fact he did not think of the Tuscan metropolis as the descendant of the Imperial Eternal city but, rather, as the progeny of the republican city-state.

He wanted to tell the story of a community's growth that showed itself in economic prosperity, commercial richness and communal institutions.

What therefore were the noble origins of Florence? They must be seen in the mythical paleo-genesis of the neighbouring town of Fiesole. Fiesole, in its turn, derived from the mythical cosmogony and was first the ancestor and then the enemy of Roman *Florentia*.

According to tradition, Fiesole was founded after the chaos resulting from the Tower of Babel and from the division of the world into three

parts (Asia, Africa and Europe). The town was built by Attalans, a descendant of Noah's son, Japhet, and father of Dardanus, the founder of Troy. Attalans erected the first settlement of Fiesole on the advice of the astrologer Appollino, and the city's name derived from its position as the oldest city (*Fia Sola*) of the third part of the world known as *Europìa*. Then he bequeathed it to his son Italus; and Fiesole remained the beacon of Italy until Rome's foundation (I, ii-iii, v-xi: 5-7, 8-17).

As a result of the destruction of the Dardanian Troy by the Achaei, the Trojan Aeneas came to Italy to rejoin his ancient Fiesolan mother. His descendants gave rise to Rome (I, xiv, xxii-xxvi: 20-21, 32-42). The progeny of Attalans and the Fiesolan origin served as the basis for the Trojan heritage of the Eternal *Urbs*.

At the time of the Catiline conspiracy, when Rome was ruled by the 'Consuls', the brave but tyrannical leader of the famous plot against the Senate, a man whom Villani associated with the nobles (*magnati*) of his contemporary Florence, found refuge in Fiesole, which was historically the 'anti-Rome', even though Rome had Fiesolan origins (I, xxx-xxxi: 47-49).

In Fiesole the followers of the Roman rebel who was killed in a battle in the plain of Pistoia were besieged by the consul Metello and his captain Fiorino (I, xxxii-xxxiv: 49-53). After having conducted six years of an unfruitful siege, Fiorino, a nobleman from the *Urbs*, was murdered by the Fiesolans during a sally (I, xxxv: 53-54); but Julius Caesar, a representative of Rome, arrived and defeated the rebellious town within a couple of years (I, xxxvi-xxxvii: 55-57). At the end of the siege and after the destruction of Fiesole, the great Caesar decided to build a new city which owed its loyalty to Rome and, at the same time, had to be a reflection of it and of its republican rule. He founded the new town on the soil where Fiorino died. There, from the fecund blood of this man, the famous sword-shaped white lily appeared and became the symbol for the new city. That *civitas* was originally called 'la piccola Roma' (the 'Little Rome') and then, in the eponymous hero's honour, *Floria* or *Florentia*.[5]

Nevertheless the foundation and the subsequent survival of Florence were linked to the destruction and the ritual assimilation of Fiesole. In fact, five-hundred years later, Totila, *flagellum Dei* (the scourge of God), mistaken for Attila in Martin Polonus' Universal Chronicle and in Florentine tradition, destroyed Florence and other Italian cities. The despot, a new manifestation of Catiline, was in Villani's vision a prefiguration of the 'tyrants' chronologically near to or contemporary with him, such as Manfred, son of the emperor Frederick the Second, or Walter of Brienne. Not by mistake Totila immediately decided to rebuild Fiesole and to fortify it on the Florentine side (III, i-ii: 95-99). In the narration of Villani and in his Florentine sources Totila was another threat

to the *florentina libertas,* the last emblem of the apocalyptic regenerative ability of the menacing and unconquerable Fiesolan *populus.* The struggle between the symbols of good and evil, between the Florentine *romanitas* and the Fiesolan tyranny, rose up again.[6]

During the 'Gothic' period the seeds of the Florentine *romanitas* remained hidden but maintained their regenerative potentialities. Following the death of Totila and during a period of wars against the neighbouring enemy, Florence was founded again by Charlemagne, who rebuilt it with a plan according to which sacred buildings recreated the toponymy of Cesar's city (IV, i-iii: 143-52). To complete this re-foundation, however, the destruction of Fiesole was necessary. In 1010 Florence conquered its archetypal and mythopoietical antagonist (V, vi: 171-73); and then, in 1125, destroyed its rival for the last time (V, xxxii: 216-17). In this way the descendants of Fiorino assimilated the Fiesolan heritage and made a synthesis of two different communities, thereby providing the ground for the future greatness of the Arno city (V, vii: 173-74).

After having destroyed the city, the victors accepted Fiesolan citizens inside their walls. In the vision that Villani offered Florence acquired from the Dardanian Fiesole its unrefined warlike courage and ancient bravery. Florence, however, overcame the 'barbarian' qualities of the Fiesolan people thanks to its direct filiation from Rome.

So the city of the Lily, daughter of the *Urbs,* was founded twice: the first time by Caesar, the first Roman (still republican) emperor, and the second time by Charlemagne, the Roman Christian *princeps.* The second builder confirmed the noblesse of Florence's origins and laid the basis for its subsequent glory. The Carolingian foundation of the town, which was not reported in the previous Florentine chronicle tradition, and thus was probably inserted by Villani, must be attributed to the universal and therefore imperial tendency of Florence.[7] The alliance of the city with France, the image of Charlemagne as a prefiguration of the dukes of Anjou (as protectors of the city), the political events connected with the arrival of Charles of Valois to Florence (1301), and the Guelph ideology of the chronicler, must surely be linked up with the reference to the Frankish sovereign as the re-builder of the city. Nevertheless, Charlemagne was considered in Villani's mythopoiesis for Florence more as an emperor and a neo-roman founder than as a precursor of the French *signori.*[8]

The conferment of political institutions to the city by the Christian emperor (even if — for Villani — an emperor of 'French' and not German tradition) at the moment of its new foundation was very important in legitimating local communal rule. The acknowledgement of

universal authorities (i.e. Empire and Papacy) was one of the main factors in constituting Villani's version of the myth of Florence.

The local chronicle tradition influenced Villani's work. In tracing his line of aetiological development and presenting his mythopoietic narration we find that Villani (like the probably later Florentine chronicler Ricordàno Malispini) was doing little more than restating what he had discovered in his sources concerning the origins of Fiesole and Florence.

The most important source was a text called the *Cronica de origine civitatis* (that Villani probably knew in a vernacular version), which was a sort of compilation of popular legends, mythological traditions and historical events, written at the beginning of the thirteenth century by a second-rate writer who freely incorporated material from classical and medieval authors. Villani, however, also read the *Libro Fiesolano,* an Italian interpretation of the aforementioned narrative, and the thirteenth-century *Gesta florentinorum* by Senzanome.[9] In these accounts of events, which adumbrated some of the cherished beliefs of Florentines about their origins, Villani found much of his information and gave it a renewed and finalised expression.

Nevertheless, the great debt of the chronicler to the patrimony of ancient local narrative does not mean that he accepted it entirely or uncritically. In this regard we can mention his refusal to include the legend ascribing his fellow-citizens' factiousness to the influence of an ancient and famous simulacrum of Mars. The writer proposed, rather, that the merging of two incompatible peoples, the Florentines and the Fiesolans, caused dissension among Florentines themselves (II, v: 67-68; IV, i: 143-46; V, vii: 174).

On the other hand, the apparent contradiction in exalting both the illustrious but contrary visions of Fiesolan and Florentine origins — a contradiction which in the *Cronica de origine civitatis* was partially due to a non-critical combination of two different municipal memorialistic heritages — is solved by Villani in an organic revision of the tradition as a whole. The aetiology of Fiesole was a necessary antecedent to the foundational myth of Florence in the way that Florence was destined to replace its rival town.

Continuing with the examination of the chronicle, we find that the author also dedicated a large section to illustrating the aetiology of Tuscany's other great cities. This narration, which assumed an etymological form in the tradition of Isidore of Seville, is consequential and functional to the narration concerning Florence's origins.[10] In this part of his text Villani used the technique of assonance: Pistoia, founded by the heirs of the tyrannous Catiline, acquired its name from a great mortality (*pistolentia*) which occurred on the site where the city was reputed to have been

founded during the struggle between Romans and Catilinaries (I, xxxii: 51). Arezzo, the ancient Aurelia, praised for the ability of its ancient vase makers, took its name because it was destroyed and then ploughed (*arata*) by Totila (II, x: 76). Pisa, ancient Alfea, was a city where the Romans collected taxes and incomes from navigators. They subsequently weighed these revenues on two balances (*pese*) which lent their name to the city's plural form, *Pisae*. Villani defines it as a prosperous but not a fortified city; thus, for him, it lacked an important element of urban identification (II, xi: 76-77).

Villani recognised Lucca, called Fridia in antiquity, as exceptional because it was the first city in *Tuscia* to convert to Christianity and to have a bishop. Consequently it was the Light (*Luce*) of Tuscany. It is curious, however, that, while mentioning these qualities of Lucca's etymology, the author used half of the paragraph dedicated to this city to tell how its bishop Frediano started a pilgrimage to the Florentine tomb of the martyr Miniato, where he performed a miracle (II, xii: 77-78).

Villani remembered Luni as an ancient and famous city, but it was condemned to be abandoned to its swampy shores (II, xiii: 78-79). Perugia, the Tuscan city for ancient writers (Zorzi 1998: 89-93, 105-8), acquired its name from its founder, the Roman consul *Persus*, and its beginning from a maniple of Roman soldiers banished as rebels (II, ix: 75-76). Viterbo is seen as *Vita Erbo*, that is 'life for ill people'. It was a spa resort in which ancient Romans were cured (II, xiv: 79). Another centre inhabited by elder people was Orvieto, *Urbs Veterum*, due to the fact that it hosted ancient citizens who came from the *Urbs* in search of a healthier environment (II, xv: 80).

Important centres of Etruscan tradition were Cortona, Chiusi, Populonia and Volterra. The chronicler recognised their indubitable ancient origin. He, however, presented them as decaying communities which had peaked in classical times but declined thereafter.[11]

Villani's attitude toward Siena was entirely negative. First of all he defined it as a 'quite new city', founded in the epoch of Charles Martel, when he organised a raid to Apulia to defend the Church against the Longobards. During the expedition, this sovereign of the *Franceschi* decided to leave elder people (*senes*), ill soldiers and other men who could not carry arms and who would have represented a burden in the raid in Siena. The famous name and motto of this Tuscan city, *Sena Vetus*, derived from the city's core of 'marginalized' people. The concession of the diocese, which was a necessary condition for the transformation of a town into a *civitas*, came later, thanks to the mediation of a woman, an innkeeper from Siena, who had been kind to an important prelate (II, xix: 81-82).

Apart from his 'new semantics' for individual cities, Villani devoted two paragraphs of the *Cronica*'s second book to a narration of Tuscan history. According to Villani, *Tuscia* was an ancient country inhabited by a working people who modified their environment to make it more fertile and more suitable for colonisation. The region was considered the sacred land of incense (*tuscio*)[12] during the rule of the Etruscan king Procena (living in Chiusi). It was already rich and powerful when Rome was still in its infancy. One of its most typical and famous products, wine, was produced in its heartland. Even the Gauls relocated in their effort to obtain it. The real reason that they went to Rome was to plunder the grounds from which the precious and tasty drink came (II, vi, and vii: 69-74).

It is evident that, when describing the original characteristics of *Tuscia* and of its cities, Villani's interpretation is primarily focused on Florence.[13] If Tuscany is defined as a noble and active land, it is because the ability of its inhabitants was destined, in time, to appear predominantly in the works of its eminent citizens, that is of Florentines.

In Villani's work, as in his sources, the aetiological myth of each city was influenced by historical contingencies and by alliances among Tuscan communes of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In this sense his etymology of the place names which previously existed in the *Chronica de origine civitatis,* such as Fiesole, Florence, Lucca, Siena and Pistoia,[14] should be seen parallelly to political events of that period. In fact, Lucca was an ally of Florence against Siena, Pisa and Pistoia in the battle of Castel del Bosco of 1222, which marked the beginning of Florence's supremacy in Tuscany. Despite the influence of the powerful Lords of Northern Italy and Pisa, in the first half of the fourteenth century Florence wished to dominate Lucca and to maintain it. Consequently the city's name received a flattering etymology in the *Chronica de origine civitatis* and, subsequently, in Villani's text. Undoubtedly much less honourable were the origins of Siena and Pisa, the Ghibelline centres which had been long-time enemies of Florence.

If, however, Villani accepted these political contingencies, he reinterpreted them in order to exalt Florence. In fact, thanks to its distinct beginnings, the Arno's city became greater than any other city in *Tuscia* because only Florence was a child of Rome. Recounting in a new version the *historie* of its origins, Villani created a municipal mythography, a genetic nucleus of belongings and self-consciousness. For Florentine people this nucleus became a common codex of collective identity, the actualisation of a past genetically active in the interpretation of the present, and intended as an aetiological patrimony of the urban community as a whole.

Villani rewrote municipal memory in order to recall a past which was a consequence of the present: a symbolic anticipation of contemporary events. He gave no importance to the veracity of these popular narratives and mythical etymologies. He aimed at illustrating the 'truth' which justified their elaboration, that is, the need to anchor to the founder and authoritative antiquities the glorious evidence of his rising city. In the same way, the corpus of legends which Villani found in his sources, in the *Cronica* became a providential instrument of cultural 'discipline' in service of the Guelph Party and Florentine Popular rule.

It must, however, be stated that for Villani the *civitates* of Tuscany were not founded with the purpose of being subjected by his prosperous native city. Villani's *Cronica* did not yet express an ideology of the territorial state. On the contrary, the necessary efforts to acquire control of the minor centres in the city's neighbourhoods and to improve the *comitatus* subject to Florence required financial obligations which, as a merchant, he judged unfruitful. In Villani there was, thus, a mixture of universality and municipal closure. The expansive geographical dimensions of his *Cronica*, and his wish to insert the Florentine events among those of Europe as a whole, reflect the fact that in the fourteenth century Florentine merchants were interested in the whole continent, and that the story of Europe was, for the writer, the story of Florence too.[15]

Nevertheless Villani's *Cronica* expressed his wish to maintain the political *status quo*. The greatness of Florence was due to its history as a city-state and to its guild-based form of government, with the dominant position held by the merchant-class to which the chronicler belonged and to which he spoke in the vernacular.

Contemporary Florence seemed to Villani to have accomplished all of its potential in its identification with its mother Rome. Precisely because of this he could start to recount its story by writing a chronicle of its past and present. According to Villani, the main Tuscan republic should not invest too much in military expenses, in order that it could continue its excellence in Italian and European trade. In the conservative opinion of the merchant-chronicler, the municipal dimension was the foundation and the limit of Florentine magnificence. In its economic prosperity, which he described by indicating the large number of shops and craftsmen's workshops in another part of his work (XII, xciv: 197-202), Villani saw the individual and original characteristics of Florence's destiny, prefigured by the defeat and assimilation of Fiesole.

This destiny, in a perfect synthesis, was the goal of a long and important evolution which made his city the first Italic daughter of Rome, a foundation of the Christian and Universal Empire, the most faithful ally of the Papacy and the Church, the communal symbol of the Guelph alliance, and a great economic centre in medieval Europe.

Notes

1. The 'communal era' is the period (ca. XI-XIV century) during which cities, towns and villages of North-Central Italy ruled themselves as a city-states. These republican governments remained, in the cities, until the political advent of seigniorial *régimes* and regional states, and in small centres until the beginning of the domination by greater urban communes.

My best thanks are due to Caroline M. Fisher who read the English text and gave me important advice.

2. In Italian communes the *Pars Populi* was, in a broad sense, the party of artisans, merchants, trade leaders and new rich people who had their political and economic basis in guild organisations. It often had a territorial, ward and religious origin, and was the opposite of the *Societas Militum*, i.e. the party of ancient aristocratic families which founded their social eminence in lordship over rural populations, in landholding, in military traditions and in the use of violence (*magnati*). By 1250 the *Pars Populi* acquired the supremacy in many communal cities, and turned out the *magnati* from urban rules.

3. Porta's edition of 1991; 111 manuscripts of the text are still available (Guenée 1980: 250).

4. *Cronica* I, i: 3-5, in the translation of Green (1972: 14). References to the *Cronica* are by book, chapter and page.

5. II, i: 59-62. See also II, iii-v: 64-68.

6. In Villani's sources is a probable permanency of the Greek-Gothic war's memory, maybe in the version of the Byzantine historian Procopius of Caesarea; see Benvenuti (1995b: 28-29).

7. But a tendency present in many chronicles concerning communal cities of Northern Italy.

8. The imperial favour towards Florence was extended by the chronicler to Otto I, who granted a *comitatus* to the city (V, i: 161).

9. In this way Villani made a re-lecture of Livy, and inherited the legend of Troy and Rome based on the works of Daretes the Phrygian, integrated with Virgil and Paul Orosius, the *Historia Romana* of Paul the Deacon and the famous commentary of Servius to Virgil, together with the legend of Catiline known in Florence from the first half of the thirteenth century and drawn from Sallustius' *Bellum Catilinarium*. He also read hagiographic texts and the local annalist tradition (twelfth century) concerning the origins of Fiesole and Florence. On the sources of the *Cronica*, see Ragone (1998: 16-18); Benvenuti (1998: 16-17). About the important question concerning the relations between Villani and the Florentine chronicler Ricordàno Malispini, see the bibliographies provided in Benvenuti (1995c: 210, n. 14), Maissen (1994: 628-39) and Ragone (1998: 14-15).

10. On the importance of etymology (especially in Villani) as a way to mythographic generations see Galletti (1999: 301, 307, 314-16).

11. II, xiii: 78; II, xvi-xviii: 80-81. About the decadence of Populonia and of the other ancient cities of the Thyrrenian coast, Villani wrote: 'tutte le cose del mondo hanno mutazione, e vegnono e verranno meno.' It is a possible echo of Rutilii Namatiani *De reditu suo* I, vv. 399-414: 'Proxima securum reserat Populonia litus ... Non indignemur mortalia corpora solvi: cernimus exemplis oppida posse mori.'

12. 'Toscana ebbe nome il paese e provincia, però che vi furono i primi sacrificatori a l'Idii con fummo d'uncenso, detto tuscio' (I, xxiii: 35).

13. Compare the very different etymologies of the same Tuscan cities in a Bolognese writer contemporary with Villani, Armannino, active in Fabriano (Marche) and author of the narration known as the *Fiorita* (Galletti 1999: 318-20).

14. *Chronica de origine civitatis* (Hartwig 1875): 61-62, 64.

15. Florence, for Villani, was similar to 'adornato albore fronzuto e fiorito dilatante li rami suoi infino a li termini del mondo' (XII, iii: 35).

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Abstract

One tends to consider Frankish history as it is presented by Gregory of Tours and Fredegar to be in the writing tradition of the historiography of late antiquity. But there is a difference. Gregory of Tours follows a theological and social concept, whereas with Fredegar we no longer find much of the traditional historiography. Indeed, we can say that Gregory subordinates the *Zeitgeist* to his idea of a divine plan of salvation, which to put into effect he felt the Franks to have received the vocation for.

Fredegar, however, stands for a new way of thinking, the beginning of which is shown in his chronicle: it is the barbarian and barbarianized world of the seventh century which in many respects determines his way of writing. Examples like the baptism of Clovis, the report of the battle against the Alamans and the investiture of a mayor of the palace show that Fredegar sees and understands the beginnings of the Merovingian past in the different light of the seventh century. Although — historically seen — this means distorting the past it seems to come closer to the reality of the fifth and sixth centuries than the way the more theoretically oriented Gregory of Tours does.

Im dritten Buch seiner Chronik berichtet der unbekannte Geschichtsschreiber — üblicherweise Fredegar genannt — über die Taufe des Frankenkönigs Chlodwig (Hist.Fr. III, 21). Als im Laufe der Zeremonie Bischof Remigius von Reims aus dem Evangelium vorlas und die Passion Christi schilderte, soll der mit dem weißen Gewand der Neophyten bekleidete König ausgerufen haben: 'Si ego ibidem cum Francis meis fuissem, eius iniuriam vindicassim' (Wenn ich mit meinen Franken dort zugegen gewesen wäre, hätte ich sein Unrecht gerächt)! Damit zufrieden resümiert der Chronist, daß Chlodwig so seinen Glauben und seine echt christliche Gesinnung zu erkennen gegeben habe!

Bei Gregor von Tours, der dem Geschehen um den Glaubenswechsel des Merowingers einigen Platz widmet (Chron. III, 21), wird man dieses Detail vergebens suchen. Chlodwig kommt bei der Taufzeremonie überhaupt nicht zu Wort, er ist ganz passiv dargestellt, demütig dem Sakrament und seinem heiligen Spender hingegeben. Dieser hat das Wort und legt mit starker Stimme die zukünftige Verpflichtung Chlodwigs fest.[1] Dessen Existenz hat nun einen anderen Sinn und eine andere Grundlage erhalten, was ihm durch die christliche Initiation bewußt werden soll. Und der barbarische König nimmt diesen im Transzendentalen verankerten Gehorsamsanspruch schweigend hin.