

# 'OUR STORY' BETWEEN UNIVERSAL HISTORY AND NATIONAL HISTORY. FROM EUSEBIU OF CAESAREA TO BOSSUET

JEAN-MARIE MOEGLIN  
ACADÉMIE DES INSCRIPTIONS ET BELLES-LETTRES - SORBONNE  
UNIVERSITÉ - ÉCOLE PRATIQUE DES HAUTE ETUDES-PSL  
FRANCE

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## ABSTRACT

The end of Antiquity saw the construction of a collective Christian “we” in the context of the shaping of universal history by authors such as Eusebius of Caesarea and Orosius. During the early Middle Ages, this collective Christian “we” did not prevent the development of particularistic “we’s”, enabling various groups to write “our history”, although this was limited to the contemporary period and did not challenge the preponderance of the collective “we” of Christians on their way to the Parousia. From the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, we see a break between universal history, which is still very much alive, and the emergence of a ‘national’ history that makes the ‘national’ community a full player in history. Another collective “we” could then assert itself as a decisive actor in history, in competition with the Christian “we” at work in universal history. But it was not until the modern era that historians truly emphasised this national “we” and made it the decisive actor in the history they were telling.

## KEYWORDS

Writing history, universal history, national history, community, Church, Empire, kingdom, city.

## CAPITALIA VERBA

Historia scripta, historia universalis, historia nationalis, communitas, Ecclesia, Imperium, Regnum, urbs.

History is the daughter of its time. While a dynastic-territorial order was being established in Europe in the modern era, gradually transforming itself in the contemporary era into a system of sovereign national states democratic aims, a new model of history was being asserted that sought to anchor a national identity in the uninterrupted continuity of a country's history.

It was now a question of writing "our history", in other words of tracing the destiny of a country from its immemorial origins, whose inhabitants constitute themselves as a people at the same time as they see themselves as the heirs and descendants of all those who are supposed to have built, populated and established the borders of this country in the course of its very long history; a history made up of alternating defeats and triumphs, but whose march could not stop before the advent of a perfectly completed nation-state; a utopia, of course, whose precise contours remain all the more unclear because no date can be set for its advent, but an indispensable referent for this historiographical model, that of "our history".

At a time when this model, under the impact of the profound geopolitical transformations taking place in the world, of the questioning of a supposed European-centrism, of the difficult construction of a united Europe, is both contested and competed with by new approaches favouring a global or transnational history, and exalted by certain political currents, it is useful to look back at its genesis.

In a way, the current debate between a purely national history and a history that aims to be global and transnational is simply the resurgence of a very old debate. From the Middle Ages to the modern era, the model of a "national history" was forged in the context of a long-standing tension within historiographical production between an established tradition of universal history, which was dominant for a long time, and whose referent was the whole world as God created and populated it, and a new tradition of history which sought to establish the people and the country to which the author and his readers belonged as the ultimate referent of a history which was "our history". It is the development and the stakes of this tension that I would like to highlight.

Firstly, I will show how, at the end of Antiquity, a collective Christian "we" was constructed as an actor in history, firmly anchored in a system of universal history. Secondly, I will show how a variable-geometry, multi-dimensional "we" developed during the High Middle Ages, enabling diverse groups to write "our history" without breaking away from the framework of universal history on the road to parousia. Thirdly, I will show how, from the eleventh-thirteenth centuries onwards, there was a split between the universal history that was continuing its career and the emergence of a "national" history that made a "national" community both the subject and the actor of history. Finally, in the fourth and fifth sections, I will show how this national history, from the end of the Middle Ages to the second half of the eighteenth century, saw the emergence of a "we" that was at once the subject, actor and author of history, and which became aware of its existence precisely by becoming the recorder of its own history.



## 1. The origins of universal history

With the Christianisation of the Roman world in the first quarter of the fourth century, history was henceforth conceived as a story whose unfolding was in no way anarchic, but guided by Divine Providence; a long march that was to lead to the Parousia and the definitive advent of the heavenly city.

This new universal history has two founding fathers: Eusebius of Caesarea and Orosius.

Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 265 - 339) wanted to place Christian time in the context of universal history, and even to make universal history Christian time.

This involved two complementary operations. The first was to draw up a universal chronology. To do this, he composed (around 300/310 for the first version, later revised and continued until 325) a universal chronicle in two parts, of which the Latin West has only known the "Chronological Canons and Abridged Universal History of the Greeks and Barbarians" thanks to the Latin translation by Saint Jerome,<sup>1</sup> continued until the accession of Theodosius I in 379.<sup>2</sup>

Its organising principle is the idea that universal history is a synchronic history of universal empires and different kingdoms, all expressed by a graphic system of columns, each corresponding to an empire/kingdom whose name appears in the upper margin.

Initially, there was a parallel chronology, starting with Abraham, of the three "kingdoms" (*regna*) – Assyrian, Sicyonic, Egyptian – and of the Hebrew people. Each time a new kingdom appears, it takes its place in the tables with the appearance of a new column, while those that have been absorbed by more powerful disappear. These successive kingdoms and empires finally give way to the Roman Empire, in the midst of which God had chosen to give birth to Christ and which would soon convert to Christianity, suggesting the possibility of a merger between the Church (of the elect) and the Roman Empire.

This was the second pillar of Eusebius' historical work. This was a *Historia ecclesiastica*, a History of the Church understood as a history of the Church of the elect on the way to the advent of the city of God, both the subject and the driving force of this history of the world.<sup>3</sup> Eusebius thus provides the meaning of this universal

1. Greek texts: *The Greek Christian Writers. Eusebius' History V*, ed. Rudolf Helm. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1913-1926; translation of Jerome: *The Greek Christian Writers. Eusebius' History VII*, ed. Rudolf Helm. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1911.

2. See Jeanjean, Benoît; Lançon, Bertrand. *Saint Jérôme, Chronique - Continuation de la Chronique d'Eusèbe, années 326-378. Suivie de quatre études sur Les Chroniques et chronographies dans l'Antiquité tardive (IV<sup>e</sup>-VI<sup>e</sup> siècles)*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2004; see also Inglebert, Hervé. *Les Romains chrétiens face à l'histoire de Rome*. Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1996.

3. *Eusebius Caesariensis secundum translationem quam fecit Rufinus, Historia ecclesiastica, Eusebius Werke, Kirchengeschichte*, ed. Eduard Schwartz. Leipzig: Hinrichse Buchhandlung, 1903-1909: GCS 9/1-3; on the work itself, see, in an extensive bibliography, the summary articles by Crouzel, Henri. "La théologie de l'histoire selon Eusèbe de Césarée", *Qué es la Historia de la Iglesia*, José Ignacio Saranyana, Enrique de la Lama, Miguel Lluch-Baixaoli, eds. Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 1996: 89-109; Perrone, Lorenzo. "Eusebius of Caesarea as a Christian Writer", *Caesarea Maritima. A Retrospective after Two Millennia*, A. Raban, K.G. Holum, eds. Leiden - New York - Cologne: Brill, 1996: 515-530; Thelamon,



history for which the chronological canons had established the framework: the extension to the whole earth of the Church of the elect and its march, in spite of all obstacles, towards the Parousia. Eusebius shows Christians that this history is their history, “our” history, which, guided by divine Providence, is approaching the realisation of its ultimate ends. The *historia* form that he had given to this work, that is to say that of a continuous narrative highlighting the ins and outs and the coherence of history, as opposed to the chronicle which only gave events and dates, made it possible to show this history of ‘our’ triumph against all the pagan and impious persecutors inspired by the Devil.<sup>4</sup> For Christians past, present and future, this story was indeed “our” story.

This ecclesiastical history, written in Greek between 305 and 324, was translated into Latin in 402/403 by Rufinus of Aquileia and continued until the death of Theodosius I in 395, making it accessible to the Western Latin world.

A few decades later, in 416-417, the Spanish priest Orose wrote his *Historia adversus paganos*<sup>5</sup> at the request of Saint Augustine. His starting point was the observation that, since Adam’s sin, man has constantly oscillated between respect for divine law and the attraction of sin, which provokes God’s punishment in the form of calamities, wars, massacres and natural disasters. The Church is the only institution capable of appeasing God’s wrath, but people tend to persist in their infidelity. Hence the sack of Rome in 410. But God did not want the Roman Empire to fall, because he had chosen it to carry out the work of Christ’s incarnation, and this empire had become Christian. Despite this long series of punishments, Orose shows that the Church of the elect, gathered within the Roman Empire, is still on the way to the advent of the city of God.

It is on this basis that Orosius strongly affirms his identity as indissociably Roman and Christian; the Roman people have become the bearers of the Church of the elect. Being a Roman citizen and being a Christian overlap, and it is this

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Françoise. “Écrire l’histoire de l’Église: d’Eusèbe de Césarée à Rufin d’Aquilée”, *L’historiographie de l’Église des premiers siècles*, Bernard Pouderon, Yves-Marie Duval, eds. Paris: Beauchesne, 2001: 207-235; Morlet, Sébastien. “Écrire l’Histoire selon Eusèbe de Césarée”. *L’information littéraire*, 57 (2005): 3-15.

4. *Cumque iam refulgentibu in modum clarissimorum siderum ecclesiis ubique terrarum, vigente etiam per omne hominum genus fide, qua cuncti pariter in salvatorem ac dominum nostrum Iesum Christum integre et constanter crediderant, ille totius bonitatis aemulus daemon, utpote veritatis inimicus et salutis humanae hostis perpetuus, omnia molimina contra dei ecclesiam versans, qui prius externis eam persecutionibus et hostilibus oppugnaverat, omnia molimina contra dei ecclesiam versans, qui prius externis eam persecutionibus et hostilibus oppugnaverat, nunc malignis quibusdam viris et deceptoribus repperitis intestino bello eam quater nititur, scilicet ut fraudulentis fallaces que homines nostrae religionis simulato tantum nomine induti fidelium quidem, si quos forte persuasionis suae fraude deciperent, pessumdarent, ignorantibus vero fidei nostrae mysterium perversis et feralibus suis vel gestis vel adsertionibus inpeditis a desiderio verae fidei et salutis longius submoverent [...]. Etenim ipso confestim tempore, quo coeperat, opprobrii huius flamma restincta est. Permansit autem apud singulorum mentes veritas, quae suis semper viribus nitens convincit et arguit falsitatem nec passa est adulterino maledicorum furo ecclesiae castitatem pudicitiam que lacerari, in tantum ut ex illo ad nostra usque tempora nullus tam scaevae mentis extiterit, qui honestam et castimoniam plebis nostrae ore sacrilego concinnatis macularet opprobriis.* (Rufinus/Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*: book IV, ch. 7).

5. Orosius. *Historiarum aduersum paganos libri vii*, ed. Marie-Pierre Arnaud-Lindet. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1990-1991. 3 volumes.



indissociably Roman and Christian “we” to which Orosius refers<sup>6</sup>. To become Christian is to become Roman, just as to become Roman is to become Christian and to join in this march towards the coming of the kingdom of God, which is fundamentally “our history”.

## 2. Universal stories and particular stories: a ‘we’ with variable geometry

Distributed in this way by hundreds of manuscripts, the chronicles of Eusebius and Orosius transmitted to the Middle Ages a system of universal history that was dominant until the eleventh-thirteenth centuries and remained fundamental at least until the eighteenth century.

However, this system of universal history did not stand still; on the contrary, in the Middle Ages there was an enormous diversity of universal chronicles.<sup>7</sup> This diversity can be explained by the fact that the Eusebo-Orosian model was born in a given political context, that of the Roman Empire that had become Christian, and that it had to be adapted to other contexts, to meet the challenges that were:

- The end of the Western Roman Empire and the building of barbarian kingdoms on its ruins.
- The two restorations of the Roman Empire, first by Charlemagne in 800 and then by Otto I in 962.
- The Gregorian upheaval of the last quarter of the eleventh century.
- The Papacy’s claim to imperial authority, which really took hold around 1200.

To meet these challenges, many authors adapted the model of universal history provided by Eusebius and Orosius. Each writer constructed his chronicle according to the material at his disposal and the political project he wished to promote in a given context. Hence the extreme diversity of the hundreds of universal chronicles that have survived, despite attempts at standardisation, the most notable of which is undoubtedly the development in the thirteenth century of the genre of the chronicle of popes and emperors, for which Martin de Troppau provided the main model around 1270.

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6. *Mihi autem prima qualiscumque motus perturbatione fugienti, quia de confugiendi statione securo, ubique patria, ubique lex et religio mea est. [...] 3 Latitudo orientis, septentrionis copiositas, meridiana diffusio, magnarum insularum largissimae tutissimae quae sedes mei iuris et nominis sunt quia ad Christianos et Romanos Romanus et Christianus accedo. 4 Non timeo deos hospitis mei, non timeo religionem eius necem meam, non habeo talem quem pertimescam locum, ubi et possessori liceat perpetrare quod uelit, et peregrino non liceat adhibere quod conuenit, ubi sit ius hospitis quod meum non sit; 5 unus Deus, qui temporibus, quibus ipse innotescere uoluit, hanc regni statuit unitatem, ab omnibus et diligitur et timetur; eadem leges, quae uni Deo subiectae sunt, ubique dominantur; ubicumque ignotus accessero, repentinam uim tanquam destitutus non pertimesco. 6 Inter Romanos, ut dixi, Romanus, inter Christianos Christianus, inter homines homo, legibus inploro rempublicam, religione conscientiam, communionem naturam. Vtior temporarie omni terra quasi patria quia quae uera est et illa quam amo patria in terra penitus non est. Orosius. *Historiarum* ...: vol. II, l. 5, ch. 2.*

7. See the overall presentation given by Inglebert, Hervé. *Le Monde, l’Histoire. Essai sur les histoires universelles*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2014.



However diverse they may be, these universal chronicles remain fundamentally oriented on the model provided by Eusebius and Orosius: they had established that the Roman Empire was the ultimate political configuration that was to frame the march of mankind towards eternal salvation during what Saint Augustine (in the *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* dated 389), taken up by Isidore of Seville, had defined as the sixth age of the world. It was this model that had to be taken up and adapted.

What then became of the Christian “we” of the Church of the Elect, which Eusebius and Orosius had established as the ultimate central actor in the unfolding of universal history? Its redefinition was all the more necessary because the Eusebian-Orosian conception of the Roman people as the political face of the Church of the Elect was called into question by the irruption of the barbarian peoples. At the same time as they were establishing their kingdoms, they wanted to mark their entry into a Christian history common to all peoples, to graft themselves onto the ecclesiastical history of Eusebius, to show that this was also “our” history.

This is what Bede the Venerable did when, in 731, he wrote his *Historia gentis Anglorum ecclesiastica*.<sup>8</sup> He recounts how a people who were originally barbarians and pagans were able, thanks to Pope Gregory the Great and the action of divine Providence, to join the Church of the Elect and become part of the history of salvation. In the prologue, he addresses a king whom he knows to be eager to learn about the deeds of his ancestors, especially “the illustrious men of our people” (*nostrae gentis uirorum inlustrium*); and Bede ends his prologue by addressing all his readers: he has compiled this history “for the instruction of posterity” (*ad instructionem posteritatis*), i.e. “our descendants”; and what they will read is “the history of our nation”.<sup>9</sup> Of course, he goes on to praise Pope Gregory the Great, recalling the decisive role he played in bringing “our – that is to say, the English – people from the power of Satan to the faith of Christ”.<sup>10</sup> And when, at the end of Book V, after an annalistic summary of his History, Bede evokes his life and lists his works, he refers to his *Historia ecclesiastica nostrae insulae ac gentis in libris VI*.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to Bede’s work to show how a barbaric and pagan people, the *gens Anglorum*, was able to integrate into the Church of Christ, it was even possible to show that a formerly barbaric people who had become Christians had become

8. Bede the Venerable. *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Introduction and notes by André Crépin, critical text by Michael Lapidge, trans. by Pierre Monat and Philippe Robin. Paris: Cerf, 2005 (Sources chrétiennes, vol. 489-491). On the genre of *origo gentis*, cf. more generally Plassmann, Alheydis. *Origo gentis. Identitäts- und Legitimitätstiftung in früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Herkunftserzählungen*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006 (*Orbis mediaevalis. Vorstellungswelten des Mittelalters*, 7), and Coumert, Magali. *Origines des peuples. Les récits du Haut Moyen Âge occidental (550-850)*. Paris: Brepols, 2007.

9. [...] *Praeterea omnes, ad quos haec eadem historia peruenire potuerit nostrae nationis, legentes siue audientes, suppliciter precor [...]*. (Bede the Venerable. *Ecclesiastical History...: prologue*, vol. I, 102).

10. *De quo nos conuenit, quia nostram, id est Anglorum, gentem de potestate Satanae ad fidem Christi sua industria conuertit, latiore in nostra historia ecclesiastica facere sermonem. Quem recte nostrum appellare possumus et debemus apostolum quia, cum primum in toto orbe gereret pontificatum et conuersis iam dudum ad fidem ueritatis esset praelatus ecclesiis, nostram gentem eatenus idolis mancipatam Christi fecit ecclesiam* (Bede the Venerable. *Ecclesiastical History ...: book II, ch. 1, vol. I, 268*).

11. *Bede the Venerable, Ecclesiastical History ...: book V, c. 24, vol. III, 192*.



the true leading people of this march of the world towards the Parousia, the new backbone of ecclesiastical history at the same time as the political structure it had established had become the new bulwark of the true faith.

Some authors have shown that the Frankish people replaced the Romans, with whom they shared the same Trojan origin, to become the people behind the Roman Christian empire, within which the Church of the elect was progressing towards universal salvation; in the Carolingian era, *populus christianus* and *ecclesia* were largely synonymous with *gens Francorum*.<sup>12</sup>

From then on, the collective history of all Christians on the march towards the advent of the city of God certainly remains the reference horizon of the story being written; it is always "our" history. However, the "we" used by historians now marks the membership of a community with variable geometry, organised in concentric circles between which there are no watertight partitions, from the monastic or episcopal community to which the author of the history belongs, to the community of all Christians, via the community defined on a basis that can be both ethnic and political, in which the author recognises himself and to which he attributes a particularly eminent role in the march of mankind towards the advent of the city of God.

In his *Historiae*, Gregory of Tours was already referring fundamentally to an "we" characterised by adherence to the orthodox Catholic faith as opposed to the faith of the Arian heretics: *nos vero unum atque invisibilem Dominum confitemur*, and he was showing how the Franks were integrating into the history of salvation just as they had integrated into the Roman Empire.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, however, Gregory was also evoking a "we" that reflected a particularistic sense of belonging, that of a civic and episcopal community, or even a cultural or political community in a more or less broad sense, extending as far as Gaul and the Merovingian kingdom, *ad reges nostros*, "our" kings, he wrote.

This same tension is found and accentuated in later authors. Faced with a universalist "we" that unites all Christians, there are "we" that refer to communities of varying nature and extent, organised in concentric circles whose respective boundaries are difficult to distinguish.<sup>14</sup>

The *Annales regni Francorum* (741-829), for example, which is intended to recount the deeds of the Franks and their leaders, evokes a "we" that refers first and foremost to a Frankish ethnic identity and the political identity of

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12. See de Jong, Mayke. "Ecclesia' and the early medieval polity", *Staat im frühen Mittelalter*, Stuart Airlie, Walter Pohl, Helmut Reimitz eds. Vienna: ÖAW, 2006: 113-126. On the difficulty of defining a Frankish identity, see in particular Nelson, Janet L. "Frankish Identity in Charlemagne's Empire", *Franks, Northmen and Slavs. Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe*, Ildar H. Garipzanov, Patrick J. Geary, Przemysław Urbańczyk, eds. Turnhout: Brepols, 2008: 71-83.

13. See Heinzelmann, Martin. *Gregory of Tours, history and society in the sixth century*. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press, 2001.

14. See Eggert, Wolfgang; Pätzold, Barbara. *Wir-Gefühl und Regnum Saxonum bei frühmittelalterlichen Geschichtsschreibern*. Weimar: Böhlau, 1984; many of the examples analysed in the following paragraphs are mentioned in this book.



the Frankish kingdom, but when it comes to relations with non-Christian peoples, it also refers to a superior Catholic religious identity.<sup>15</sup> This “we” refers fundamentally to the fact that the Franks saw themselves as the spearhead of the Catholic Church, defending and promoting the cause of God against the pagans, particularly when they defended and extended the borders of the Frankish empire, the *imperium Francorum*, “our empire”, and integrated other peoples into it. The *Vita Willibrordi*, written by Alcuin around 785-797, relates how the saint baptised the future Pepin the Short and predicted his future triumphs, a prophecy that came true in full: everyone knows how successfully he defended the Christian faith and “how much he enlarged the borders of *our Empire*”.<sup>16</sup> A century and a half later, for Widukind of Corvey, the *nostri* opposed to the Slavic and Hungarian barbarians referred firstly to the Saxons, but more broadly to the members of the East German/French kingdom and even more broadly to Catholics defending the true faith.<sup>17</sup>

This same ethnic, political and religious “we”, of varying scope, can be found in the chronicle of Thietmar of Merseburg, written in the first quarter of the eleventh century.<sup>18</sup> Thietmar uses the term “we” to refer to the church of Merseburg, of which he is bishop, but he can extend this “we” to all the inhabitants of the German kingdom. It reflects a real emotional attachment,

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15. *Annales du royaume des Francs*, eds. Michel Sot and Christine Veyrard-Cosme. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2022 (2 vols.); some examples: *Barcinona civitas Hispaniae, quae iam pridem a nobis desciverat, per Zatum praefectum ipsius nobis est reddita* (year 797, vol. I, 64; but in the second version of the *Annales*, the “we” disappears and the passage becomes *Barcinona civitas Hispaniae in limite Hispanico sita, quae alternante rerum euentu nunc Francorum nunc Sarracenorum ditioni subiciebatur, tandem per Zatum praefectum, qui tunc eam inuaserat, regi reddita est*, vol. II, 88); *Insulae Baleares, quae a Mauris et Sarracenis anno priore depraedatae sunt, postulato atque accepto a nostris auxilio nobis se dediderunt et cum Dei auxilio a nostris a praedonum incursione defensi sunt* (year 799, vol. I, p.70); under Louis the Pious, the emperor’s men resisted a joint attack by the Abodrites and the Scandinavians, *quibus cum nostri fortiter restitissent, omissi castelli obpugnacione discesserunt* (year 817, vol. II, 164); in 818, Louis the Pious received an embassy from a people *who nuper a Bulgarorum societate desciverant et ad nostros fines se contulerunt* (vol. II, 170); in the year 820, part of the Carantanians joined a secession *idem et pars Carantanorum, quae ad Liudewiti partes a nobis defecerat, facere curauit*, while a treaty *inter nos et Abulaz regem Hispaniae* was broken in 818, Louis the Pious received an embassy from a people *who nuper a Bulgarorum societate desciverant et ad nostros fines se contulerunt* (vol. II, 170); in 820, part of the Carantanians joined a secession *idem et pars Carantanorum, quae ad Liudewiti partes a nobis defecerat, facere curauit*, while a treaty *inter nos et Abulaz regem Hispanie* was broken (vol. II, 178).

16. *Scit namque omnis populus, quibus nobilissimus victor celebratur triumphis, vel quantum terminos nostri dilatavit imperii, vel quam devote christianam in regno suo propagavit religionem, vel quid pro defensione sanctae Dei ecclesiae apud extraneos exercuit gentes*, Alcuin. “Vita Willibrodi”, ed. Walter Levison, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum. Passiones vitaeque sanctorum aevi Merovingici*, eds. Bruno Krusch and Walter Levison. Hannover - Leipzig: Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1920: VII, 113-141, here 134.

17. “Die Sachsengeschichte des Widukind von Korvei”, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum*, eds. Paul Hirsch and Hans Eberhard Lohmann. Hannover: Hansche Buchhandlung, 1935: LX, 1-154. For example, while Otto was at the beginning of his reign struggling with his rebellious brother Henry, in the year 938 *antiqui hostes nostri Ungarii subito irruunt in Saxoniam* (“Die Sachsengeschichte...”: 78) and the Slavs were planning a general uprising the following year: *Barbari autem labore nostro elati nusquam ab incendio, caede ac depopulatione vacabant [...]* (“Die Sachsengeschichte...”: 84).

18. “Thietmari Merseburgensis episcopi chronicon”, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Germanicarum. Nova series*, ed. Robert Holtzmann. Berlin: Weidmann, 1935: vol. 9.



albeit of varying degrees, to a broadly defined community and to those who make it up. But this does not prevent Thietmar from asserting that he belongs to the community of members of Christ's Church. In fact, the ethnico-political community to which he refers as "we" is none other than the spearhead of this Church of Christ in struggle against the forces of evil. Thus, after a severe defeat, Thietmar does not lose hope, because he firmly hopes that God will not abandon his people for good: *Nos vero [...] sibi [God] per Christum reconciliet et, ne quid tale ulterius paciamur, clemens custodiat.*<sup>19</sup> Christ is indeed *dominus ac Deus noster*,<sup>20</sup> while the devil is *insidiator noster Callidus*.<sup>21</sup>

Thietmar provides a good illustration of the characteristics of this variable-geometry "we", organised in concentric circles, from the monastic or canonical community to which one belongs to the *communitas regni*, but always with reference to a higher and ultimate circle, the "we" that brings together all the members of the Church of the Elect. This "we" may therefore reflect a particularistic feeling of pride with an ethnic-political component, or even appear to be frankly partisan by expressing the feeling of belonging to a party fighting against another,<sup>22</sup> it nevertheless remains referred to the ecumenical "we" of the members of the Church of Christ, of which it is intended to be the spearhead.<sup>23</sup>

19. "Thietmari Merseburgensis ...": book VII, c. 21, 422.

20. "Thietmari Merseburgensis ...": book I, c. 28, 34.

21. "Thietmari Merseburgensis...": book IV, c. 67, 206.

22. The *Liber de Bello Saxonico*, by a certain Bruno, who took sides violently with the Saxons who rebelled in the 1070s against Emperor Henry IV, refers to *nostra parte* to evoke the camp of the rebels (*Inde, factum est, ut in nostra parte pater, in adversa filius esset, hinc frater unus, illinc staret alius. Brunos Buch vom Sachsenkrieg*, ed. Hans Eberhard Lohmann. Leipzig: Hiersemann, 1937: c. 37, 38-39). He frequently refers to the *nostrates, nostri, nostrum agmen, noster exercitus, nostra virtus*. He extends this from just the Saxon rebels to all those who opposed Henry IV. But the author associates this "we" with the community of true Christians, as is clear from this notation regarding the death of Bishop Eppo of Zeitz (5 May 1078), who remained a supporter of the imperial camp: *et quia nobis inconciliabilis permansit, Deo irreconciliatus ab hac vita migravit (Brunos Buch ...: c. 77, 77).*

23. The *Chronicon* of Hermann of Reichenau (mid-eleventh century) relates how the *Theutonici*, who intervened in southern Italy in 1053 at the request of the Pope against the Normans, suffered a serious defeat (*Domnus papa, habita Romae post pascha synodo, contra Nordmannos, ut proposuerat, exercitum movit. [...] Sicque 14. Kalend. iul. valida pugna confligentes, prima acie a Theutonicis pene victi sunt. Sed succenturiatis copiis ex insidiis nostros circumvenientes, Italis citius terga vertentibus, Theutonicisque maxima ex parte, sed non inulte, occumbentibus, occulto Dei iudicio – sive quia tantum sacerdotem spiritalis potius quam pro caducis rebus carnalis pugna decebat; sive quod nefarios homines quam multos, ad se ob impunitatem scelerum vel questum avarum confluentes, contra itidem scelestos expugnandos secum ducebat; sive divina iusticia alias, quas ipsa novit, ob causas nostros plectente – quamvis nimis cruentam hostes adepti sunt victoriam. Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores. Annales et chronica aevi Salici*, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz. Hannover: Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1894: V, 132). Here we find a contrast between the *Theutonici*, who are the *nostri*, the *Itali[ci]* and the *Nordmanni*. But the author shows that the defeat can only be explained by a mysterious judgement of God who did not give victory to those who were nevertheless apparently his representatives on the battlefield. Similarly, the *Annales Altahenses Miores* introduce a primarily ethno-political "we" with the German kingdom as its frame of reference, but when they report the sudden death of Emperor Henry III, they do not fail to refer this "we" to the community of all Christians subject to the mysterious judgements of God: *Cum enim Romanum imperium vigeret tranquilla pace, offensus peccatis nostris Deus se dignum imperatorem gravi*



With the end of the invasions by the pagan peoples of the periphery and their Christianisation, this ultimate goal is no doubt given less prominence by historians of the eleventh-twelfth centuries.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, it features prominently in crusade accounts,<sup>25</sup> and even outside a crusading context, it remains present in the background. For Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis, for example, the “we” refers first and foremost to the Dionysian community whose destiny was at the heart of his concerns as an abbot, a man of power and a historian, but it extends to the *communitas regni* that Suger describes as mobilised and united to resist the German invasion in 1124. For “the defence of its land” (*terre sue defensione*), they would all have to be massacred like pagans (*tanquam Sarracenos inmisericorder trucidare*)<sup>26</sup> [for Suger, Muslims are assimilated to pagans]), he wrote, showing that, beyond the particularistic “we”, there is always a latent opposition, often left virtual, but which remains fundamental between the “we” that unites all true Christians and the “they” of the barbarians and pagans to whom we can eventually assimilate enemies and rebels. And contemporary *chansons de geste* glorify “our” emperor from the outset by depicting Charlemagne battling the pagans (Muslims) of Spain.<sup>27</sup>

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*percutsit morbo* (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores*, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz. Hannover: Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1895: XX, 808).

24. Thus for Tudebode, author of a *Historia de Hierosolymitano itinere*, he and his crusader companions (*nostrī milites*) the *Christiani* represent the entire Christian world confronting the enemies of God that are the Turks; as the hour at which *dominus noster Ihesus Christus* had suffered the passion, they prepare to take the holy city, and the first to scale the wall is *noster miles Christi* (*Petrus Tudebodus - Historia de Hierosolymitano itinere*, ed. John Hugh Hill, Laurita L. Hill. Paris: P. Geuthner, 1977, 139-140).

25. Arnulf of Milan, who wrote in his *Liber gestorum recentium*, around 1072-1077, the history of Milan and the Kingdom of Italy from 931 to 1077, refers explicitly to his membership of the community constituted by the Church of Milan, the urban community and the Kingdom of Italy, at a time when these identity references were shaken by the serious crisis of the Milanese *Patavia*: *Nichil a me igitur, carissime quisquis es, preter quod polliceor exigas, videlicet verbis prolatam communibus simplicem gestorum narrationem, que nostri reges nostrique gessere pontifices, nostri quoque concives in urbe Mediolano vel extra, compatriote vero nostri in regno Italico, que ipse vidi vel quemadmodum a videntibus aut paulo ulterius audivi, prout etiam de thesauris prodeunt memorie, cum nichil sit, quod a me ultra sperare debeas* (Milanensis, Arnulfus. “Liber gestorum recentium”, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi*, ed. Claudia Zey. Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1994: LXVII, 117).

26. Suger, *Vie de Louis VI le Gros*, ed. Henri Waquet. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2007 (1<sup>st</sup> edition: 1929): 222.

27. *Carles li reis, nostre emper[er]e magnes, / Set anz tuz plains ad estet en Espaigne* (“Charles the king, our great emperor, spent seven whole years in Spain”). *Das altfranzösische Rolandslied*, ed. Edmund Stengel. Leipzig: T. Weicher, 1900: I, 1, v. 1-2. The opening lines of the *Chanson de Guillaume* (mid-twelfth century) do the same with Louis: *Plaist vus oïr de granz batailles e de forz esturs, / de Deramel, uns reis sarazinurs, / cun il prist guere vers Lowis, nostre empereür?* (“Do you want to hear about great battles and mighty fights, / of Deramel, a Saracen king, / with whom he waged war against Louis, our emperor?”). *La chanson de Guillaume*, éd. François Suard. Paris: Librairie générale française, 2008: v. 1-3.



### 3. 'National' history versus 'universal' history?

Whatever the affective intensity of the affirmation of a particularistic "we", it remained linked and articulated to the march of the Church of the elect, "our" march, towards the advent of the heavenly kingdom. When, for example, in the 1220s, a German author gave an account of universal history from the creation of the world to his own time, he was clearly marking the break in universal history represented by the death of Caesar and the advent of Augustus; it was at this point that "our" history was revealed: "We are finishing these accounts and we want to start a better history, when *we* have gone from being sons of the Devil to being sons of God. Which *we* must preserve at all costs. But *we* trust in the one who patiently took upon himself *our* weakness and *our* sins, even to the point of suffering death: *our* Saviour Jesus Christ".<sup>28</sup>

But if the *Saxon Universal Chronicle* could continue to feature this "we", it was because the system of universal history created by Eusebius of Caesarea and Orosius, far from remaining fixed and intangible, had been able to transform itself and adapt to new social and political circumstances.

The extraordinary revival of world history in the period 1050-1125 should be interpreted in this light. The movement began at the heart of the Ottonian/Salian empire, the Reichenau monastery, and expanded and adapted to other important cultural centres of the empire, most notably Bamberg, before finding other points of expansion at the beginning of the twelfth century. These included the abbey of Gembloux, not far from Liège, still within the empire but on its French-speaking periphery in the north-west, and the monastery of Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire, known as Fleury, in the heart of West Francia, now the kingdom of France.

Over and above the Gregorian upheaval and the questioning of the eschatological mission that the Roman Empire had assigned itself in the march of mankind towards the Parousia, the challenge that this system of universal history faced was that posed by the emergence of independent kingdoms, notably France and Germany, which had emerged from the rubble of the Carolingian Empire and which intended to build themselves on a basis that could be called "national". Was the construction of a "national" history against a "universal" history then at stake?

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28. *Dise mere sollen hebben ende, we willen ener beteren rede beginnen, wo we van des duvels kinden to godis kinden sint gemaket. Dat mote we mit groten arbeiden beholden. Darto hebbe we trost an deme de unse crancheit an sich ane sunde wolde nemen unde vor unse sunde duldich wart wante an den dot: unse leve heilant Jêsus Christus.* ("This story must now end and we want to start talking about something else, when we were transformed from children of the Devil into children of God. This is what we want to address with a lot of work, trusting in the one who took our infirmity upon himself who was without sin, our beloved saviour, Jesus Christ"). "Sächsische Weltchronik", *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Deutsche Chroniken*, ed. Ludwig Weiland. Hannover: Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1877: II/I, 88, lines 9-13); on this passage, cf. Menzel, Michael. *Die Sächsische Weltchronik – Quellen und Stoffauswahl*. Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1985: 197, also 201.



Was the construction of “national” histories incompatible with universal history? A priori, no, because universal history is certainly the story of the long march of humanity from the creation of the world to the parousia; but at the same time, this universal history is not opposed to, or even gives rise to, particular histories. It was indeed legitimate to focus attention within this universal history on a particular event, or on the decisive action of one man, or that of a succession or lineage of men, or of a particular people or kingdom. Universal history could therefore, without denying itself, be the matrix of these particular histories.

In fact, in the second half of the eleventh century, universal history undertook to respond to the challenge posed by the assertion of kingdoms claiming to constitute a *communitas regni* and to give it a “national” foundation. If we look at the two most important texts that mark the extraordinary development of universal history in this period, the chronicle of Frutolf of Michelsberg in Bamberg and the chronicle of Sigebert of Gembloux, we can see that both took up the schema of synchronic history derived from Eusebius of Caesarea, adapting it both to their own purposes and to the new political situation at the time. And in a way, Frutolf in the east and Sigebert in the west, they helped to create a “national history” linked to universal history.

Frutolf of Michelsberg, unlike Sigebert of Gembloux, to whom I shall return later, does not make room in this synchronic history inherited from Eusebius-Jerome for the new kingdoms that appeared following the barbarian invasions. His author’s manuscript<sup>29</sup> shows that he retained as a framework the “years” of the Roman Empire from Augustus to the Greek emperors, whose succession of “years” (*anni*) he indicated in the margin (alternately left and right). From the political ascension of Pepin of Herstal, he simply added a second column for the years of the Carolingian mayors of the palace, which became, after the transfer of the Empire to the Franks under Charlemagne, a double column for the years of the Roman emperors and the Frankish kings (which were identical). On the death of Louis the Pious, however, he abandons the succession of emperors and retains in the margin only the single column of years of the kings of East Francia, starting with Louis the Germanic, presented as the successor of Louis the Pious. It continues with the succession of his descendants and successors through Henry the Oisealer, while from Otto I onwards the succession of German kings merges with that of the emperors. But this combined perfectly with the idea that the Roman Empire was the embodiment of the universal

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29. Jena, Thüringer Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, Ms. Bos. q. 19 (available online at <[https://collections.thulb.uni-jena.de/receive/HisBest\\_cbu\\_00028550?derivate=HisBest\\_derivate\\_00013187](https://collections.thulb.uni-jena.de/receive/HisBest_cbu_00028550?derivate=HisBest_derivate_00013187)>); cf. Heiden, Katharina. “Der Jenaer Autograph der Chronik des Frutolf von Bamberg mit der Fortsetzung des Ekkehard von Aura”, *Welt-Zeit: Christliche Weltchronistik aus zwei Jahrtausenden in Beständen der Thüringer Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Jena*, ed. Martin Wallraff. Berlin - New York: De Gruyter, 2005: 81-89.



Christian “we”; this is how Frutolf described the Christians persecuted by the Roman emperors as *nostri*.<sup>30</sup>

Frutolf’s graphic scheme therefore demonstrated from that the history of the Roman Empire was merged with the history of the German kingdom, the true heir to the Roman Empire refounded by Charlemagne, even before the Ottonian sovereigns recovered the imperial title. This largely explains its success in Germany.<sup>31</sup>

For French historians, reconciling the norms of a universal history rooted in the reference to the necessary and providential role of the Roman Empire with the affirmation of a kingdom of France that had become *de facto*, if not *de jure*, independent of that Roman Empire, was not as obvious. Despite this, the chronicle of Sigebert of Gembloux enabled a history of France worthy of the name to emerge from within universal history, i.e. the history of the Roman Empire.<sup>32</sup>

Sigebert questioned the eschatological necessity of the Roman Empire all the less because he was a resolute supporter of the emperor Henry IV: but, extending the programme of synchronic history of Eusebius of Caesarea, the *contemporality regnorum* illustrated by the *ordo titulorum*, a sort of running title of his chronicle, he considered that the permanence of the Roman Empire was compatible with new kingdoms which, *a priori* temporarily, could be tolerated by God. This had been the case when the barbarian kingdoms of the fourth to the sixth centuries had been formed; when Charlemagne became Roman emperor, Sigebert formed a single *Romanorum et Francorum* column alongside the column of the Greeks; but when the Carolingian empire broke up after the death of Louis the Pious, the *regnum Francorum* or *Francia* regained its column and its autonomy alongside the Roman empire.

Sigebert’s scheme could therefore be easily adopted by French chroniclers. Sigebert’s chronicle was widely circulated in France during the twelfth century, before forming the basis of new universal chronicles written in France from the end of the twelfth century onwards, which gave a prominent place to the history of France.

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30. For example, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores*, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz. Hannover: Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1893: VI, 109: *Unde Gallienus tam claro Dei iudicio territus, pacem nostris dedit*, a phrase taken by Frutolf from Bede’s *De temporum ratione* (*Unde Gallienus tam claro dei iudicio territus pacem nostris reddidit, sed ob meritum tamen vel propriae libidinis vel paternaе theomachiae innumera barbaris adsurgentibus Romani regni detrimenta sustinuit [...]*). *Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Auctores Antiquissimi. Chronica minora. Saec. IV. V. VI. VII.*, ed. Theodor Mommsen. Berlin: Weidmann, 1897: XIII, 292), which was itself inspired by Jerome’s chronicle.

31. Cf. Deutinger, Roman. “Lateinische Weltchronistik des Hochmittelalters”, *Handbuch Chroniken des Mittelalters*, Gerhard Wolf and Norbert H. Ott, eds. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016: 77-103.

32. For all that follows, see Chazan, Mireille. *L’Empire et l’histoire universelle : de Sigebert de Gembloux à Jean de Saint-Victor (XII<sup>e</sup>-XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle)*. Paris: Champion, 1999.



This model of the chronicle/universal history as a global history of the world, which nevertheless made room for the individuality of kingdoms/peoples/nations, was to be confronted from the twelfth to the thirteenth century with the affirmation of a new model, that of a history that could be called territorial or even national, which was constructed independently of, or even against, universal history.

In fact, it is no longer the Eusebio-Orosian tradition of synchronic history, recovered and continued, that is at its foundation, but the double pillar constituted on the one hand by the recovery of the history of the *origo* of the people considered as providing the ethnic foundation of these new kingdoms, and on the other hand the guiding thread constituted by the uninterrupted succession of its kings. The latter is often the subject of a “genealogisation” that integrates the uninterrupted succession of kings and princes into a single dynasty, thanks to the invention of a *reditus regni*; this work is often carried out in princely necropolises, workshops for the formation of dynastic traditions, before it is opened up to a wider public at the same time as it moves from Latin to the vernacular.

This new history of kings and even of a dynasty, in which the history of a people and a country is embedded, can no longer be confined within the framework of universal history. To overstate the case somewhat, I would say that in France there is a split between universal history and national history, whereas in the Empire they remain combined.

This new model of national history was not only built on a different foundation from that of universal history; it also provided a different narrative, one that had to be primarily “national”.

This is illustrated by the example of the Battle of Fontenoy in 841 and the Treaty of Verdun in 843, two linked events that have long been considered retroactively as key dates in the birth of the modern Europe of nation states.

In their own time and in the decades that followed, these two events had very different historiographical echoes:<sup>33</sup> while the Battle of Fontenoy was set up as a resounding event, a terrible bloodbath and a disastrous turning point in the hitherto conquering and glorious history of the Franks, the Treaty of Verdun was regarded as a provisional internal settlement, a fairly insignificant episode that threatened to sink into oblivion. It was only with the rise of world history in the second half of the eleventh century that the war of succession of the sons of Louis the Pious and its settlement became part of world history, where they would remain until the twentieth century.

But this is also where we see the fundamental divergence that is being created between universal history and a new model of national history called for - and

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33. I would refer you to my two articles “The Treaty of Verdun (843). Les enjeux d’une mémoire”. *Francia*, 50 (2023): 129-168, and “La bataille de Fontenoy (841). Heurs et malheurs de la fabrique d’un grand événement” (forthcoming in *Mélanges en l’honneur de Dominique Barthélemy*).



which is both the cause and the consequence - by the establishment of a new dynastic-territorial order.

Siebert de Gembloux had clearly identified the settlement of the war of succession of the sons of Louis the Pious as the key moment in this new inflection in universal history, when, alongside the Roman Empire, which retained its providential mission, other kingdoms had reappeared, including the *regnum Francorum* or *Francia*.<sup>34</sup> French universal chronicles have followed this to the letter. But in the French "national" historiography that developed from the beginning of the twelfth century to the end of the thirteenth century, Siebert of Gembloux's version of the Battle of Fontenoy and the Treaty of Verdun was long rejected, and the Battle of Fontenoy – a resounding event that was in fact left unreported – was transformed into a glorious national victory won by Charles the Bald against all his coalition brothers, the first victory of the "nation France", while the Treaty of Verdun tended to disappear from history.

According to this version, the brothers of the French king Charles the Bald, Lothaire, Louis and Pepin (in fact Charles' nephew), all united against him, wanted to take away his kingdom, but Charles, with the powerful help of the French barons, gloriously crushed them at Fontenoy. The Battle of Fontenoy had saved France.

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34. 840. 2. 10.

*Ludowicus imperator moritur, et Lotharius suum imperium usurpans, imperat annis 15.*

841. 1. 11.

*Karolus et Ludowicus, filii imperatoris, dolentes se a fratre suo Lothario debita regni parte privari, contra eum insurgere parant.*

842. 2. 12.

*Cometes in signo Aquarii apparuit. Tribus fratribus de regni partitione discordantibus, conseritur inter eos pugna in pago Alciodorensis, apud villam Fontiniacum; et tanta cedet utrimque facta est, ut nulla aetas meminerit, tantam stragem hominum factam fuisse in gente Francorum, et ita eorum vires ibi attenuatae sunt, ut iam nec suos terminos ab externis tueri possint. Victoria tamen Karolo et Ludowico provenit.*

843. 3. 13.

*Fratribus nondum a bello desistentibus, consilio optimatum tandem de pace agitur, et de partibus singulorum 40 primores eliguntur, qui in unum convenientes regnum aequaliter dividerent; et ita pax in annum sequentem induciatur. Ludowicus interim pergens in Saxoniam, validissimam libertorum conspirationem dominos suos opprimere volentium fortiter conspuicuit, auctoribus factionis capitali sententia damnatis.*

844. 4. 14.

*Sergius Romanae ecclesiae 103<sup>us</sup> presidet. Ad huius electionem confirmandam Ludowicus filius imperatoris Lotharii a patre missus, ab eodem papa in regem Langobardorum unctus est. Mauri Beneventum occupant. Descripto in tres partes regno, fratres ad urbem Galliae Viridunum conveniunt, et inter se pacificantur; et datis et acceptis invicem sacramentis, quisque ad descriptas sibi partes regni tuendas revertuntur. Karolus accepit occidentalia regna a Britannico oceano usque ad Mosam fluvium; in qua parte extunc et modo nomen Franciae remansit. Ludowico orientalia regna cesserunt, omnis scilicet Germania usque ad Rheni fluentia, et aliquae trans Rhenum civitates cum adiacentibus pagis, propter vini copiam. Lotharius, qui maior natu erat et imperator appellabatur, omnia Italiae regna tenuit cum ipsa Roma, nec non et Provintiam, et mediam partem Franciae inter Scaldim et Rhenum, quae mutato nomine ab eo denominatur Lotharingia. Post factam ergo divisionem Karolus regnat in Francia annis 34, Ludowicus frater eius in Germania 33. (Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptores,...: VI, 339). This text by Siebert is based on a combination of passages from the *Annals of Fulda* and the chronicle of Reginon of Prüm, with a few additions of Siebert's own.*



In the early 1270s, Primat de Saint-Denis's *Roman des Rois*, the first national history in French, established the success of this history.<sup>35</sup> It continued to appear in Robert Gaguin's *Compendium* at the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>36</sup>

35. *Après la mort l'empereor Loys (qui par seurnon fu apelez li Debonaires, qui fu fiuz Kallemanne le Grant), dui de ses fiuz, Lothaires et Loys, assemblerent granz oz de toutes les parties de leur roiaumes contre Challe le Chauz leur frere qui estoit rois de France (voirs est qu'il n'estoit leur freres que de pere, car il fu fiuz de la darrene dame qui out à non Judith). Moult avoient seur lui grant envie, pour ce que il avoit à sa part le plus noble des roiaumes. Tant assemblerent de genz que il aplovoient de toutes parz aussi comme langostes. Et quant Kalles sout ce, il manda ses barons et leur demanda quel conseil il i voudroient metre, et il li respondirent tuit d'un cuer et d'une volenté que en nule maniere ne souffreroient que il entrassent en leur contrées ne es termes du roiaume. Moult fu li rois liez de si bele response et moult les en mercia. Son ost apareilla et ala contre ses anemis qui ja estoient en l'arceveschié de Rains, et estoient venu à une vile qui a non Fontenois. Si granz oz avoient et si merveilleus que il habundoient de toutes parz ausi comme la gravele de la mer, droitement la vigile de l'Ascension. Et quant ce vint l'endemain, le jor meismes de la feste, li ost des ll rois s'apareillierent pour combatre, car il cuiderent trover l'ost Kalle desporveu et desarmé pour la sollempnité du haut jor, et sanz faille si estoient-il. Sus leur corurent soudainement par l'enticement du deable et les commencierent à escrire forment de toutes parz. Et François toutesvoies s'armerent si tost com il pourent plus et les reçurent hardiement à quelque meschief. Longuement et asprement se combatrent d'une part et d'autre, et tant en i out d'ocis de chascune partie que memoire d'ome ne recorde mie que il eust ainques en France si grant occision de crestiens. A la parfin, si comme Diex le vout, orent François victoire de leur anemis.* ("After the death of Emperor Louis (whose nickname was the Good, who was the son of Charles the Great), two of his sons, Lothair and Louis, assembled a large number of people from all parts of their kingdom against their brother Charles the Bald, who was king of France (although he was only their brother by their father, for he was the son of the second lady, whose name was Judith). Many had great envy of him, for he had received as his share the noblest of the kingdoms. They gathered so many people that they seemed to rain down from all sides like locusts. And when Charles heard this, he summoned his barons and asked them what counsel they would give him, and they all replied with one heart, and one will that in no way would they suffer them to enter their regions or the interior of the kingdom. The king was very pleased with such a fine response and thanked them warmly. His army prepared and went against his enemies who were already in the archbishopric of Reims, and had come to a town called Fontenois. They had such a large army and were so marvellous that they filled the whole countryside as far as the sea, on the eve of the Ascension. And when the next day came, the very day of the festival, the army of the two kings prepared for battle, for they thought they would find the army of Charles unprepared and unarmed because of the solemnity of the great day, and indeed they were right. They attacked them suddenly at the instigation of the devil and made great cries resound on all sides. And the French nevertheless armed themselves as soon as they could and received them boldly with some damage. For a long time and bitterly they fought on both sides, and so many in number of the dead on each side that no man can remember that there was ever such a great slaughter of Christians in France. In the end, as God willed, the French had victory over their enemies.") *Grandes Chroniques de France*, ed. Jules Viard. Paris: Société de l'Histoire de France, 1920-1953 (10 vols.): vol. IV, 164-167. On Primat's work, see Guenée, Bernard. *Comment on écrit l'histoire au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle : Primat et le 'Roman des roys'*. Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 2016.

36. *Sublato e vita ludouico pio lotharius et ludouicus bauarius in carolum insurgunt quem nobiliori paterna possessionis parte institutum haereditate esse dolebant. Augebat indignationem quod Carolus posteriore patris uxore natus par illis in capienda haereditate factus esset. Itaque exercitum quam maximum quisque potest comparat. Ea re cognita carolus consilio a francis proceribus capto cum eos ad id bellum paratissimos fore cognovisset numeroso exercitu collecto adversus hostes (qui iam apud fontanetum altissiodorensis agri vicum castra habebant) non fracto animo progredit. In conspectu hostium cum venisset, quia pridie esset dominicae ascensionis carolus ratus hostem festo die quieturum negligentius suos agere permisit. Sed instructi ad pugnam fratres acies producunt. Carolus inopinatio licet congressu paulatim commotus, suos tamen uiriliter hortatur. Nec territus miles irruentem in se hostem ferociter excepit; fit pugna atrox atque diuturna. In ea longe plurimi ex utroque exercitu ceciderunt quam apud francos uno praelio occubuisse usque lectum sit. Nam tanta ad hoc bellum ex orbe christiano diversarum partium studio copia confluxerat quantam magna pars europae uix cogere in unam aciem potuisset. Caedes procul dubio ea fuit ut a victo non longe dissimilis uictor esse putaretur. Carolus tamen fugientibus fratribus superior euasit [...]. Gaguin, Robert.*



Admittedly, when confronted with the universal histories which, by reprinting the chronicle of Sigebert of Gembloux, accurately identified the opponents at Fontenoy, this version eventually faded away and gave way to their account; but its birth and enduring success show that national history was now being constructed largely independently of universal history.

Wasn't it to be expected, then, that national history would appropriate the model of "our history" that universal history had hitherto retained control of?

#### 4. 'We' in French 'national' history (thirteenth-fifteenth century)

For the author who uses it, the particularist "we" referred to the feeling of belonging to a group which is normally also that of the intended recipients of the story he is writing. As a result, this "we", which expresses an experience and a feeling, is called upon when recounting contemporary or slightly earlier events experienced by the author and his readers and which call into question the group to which they belong. There was no reason for it to be used for events and actors in history well before the author's time. In this respect, it is significant that the second version of the *Annales regni Francorum* replaced *nos / nobis* with *Franci*: while the author of the first version was contemporary with the events, this was no longer the case for the author of the second version.<sup>37</sup>

This "we" of belonging to a community of diverse nature and variable geometry therefore had a value that lay primarily in the present the author and his readers; it was not projected into history. The "we" at work in history remained fundamentally the universal Christian "we" of the Church militant on the march towards the advent of the heavenly city. These two "we" could thus quietly coexist, on the understanding that the universal and atemporal Christian "we" overhung and constituted the obligatory point of reference for all the other particularist "we" anchored in the present of their author and audience.

The emergence of "national history in the face of universal history calls this peaceful coexistence into question. National history is based on the idea of the permanence over the centuries of a country and a people indissolubly united to a dynasty of princes. In the face of the universal and timeless Christian "we", is there not a risk that a "national" "we" will emerge that is no longer confined to the reality of contemporary life, but will be projected from the present into an immemorial past?

Given the division between universal history and the history of France referred to above, the problem is particularly acute for the history told by the first historians of France; was it this history that became "our history"?

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*Compendium de Francorum origine et gestis*. Paris: Pierre le Dru, 1495 (1<sup>st</sup> edition), cited here from the Lyon edition: Jean Trechsel et Josse Bade, 1497: book V, f. xxvif.

37. See note 15.



The history of the kings of France and of France is the product of a twofold, interlocking process that began in the twelfth century and was long carried out at Saint-Denis, the necropolis of the kings of France, and secondarily at Saint-Germain-des-Prés, of writing the histories of the reigning kings, one after the other, that of bringing together these royal biographies in great histories of the kings of France and the French, written first in Latin from the twelfth to the thirteenth century and then, from the thirteenth century, also in French.

It is important to see whether and how authors who set out to write “our” history come to identify the history of the kings of France and the French (the “facts of the French”) with “our” history.

The result of this analysis is that the decisive shift from a “history of” to “our” history is at best only prefigured from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, the monk of Saint-Denis, Rigord, wrote a short chronicle of the kings of France as part of a universal chronicle based on the *contemporality regnorum* of Sigebert’s chronicle, from which Rigord takes the beginning.<sup>38</sup> In this text, which is preserved in the form of a poor, mutilated copy in a single manuscript,<sup>39</sup> Rigord explains that he is going to write the history of “our” people of the kingdom of the French from its Trojan origins to Philip Augustus,<sup>40</sup> but

38. *De contemporalitate regnorum aliquid, Deo juvante, dicturi de origine singularum gentium primum pauca dicamus sequentes vestigia majorum, ducti per semitas historiarum, ponentes in primo capitulo regnum Romanorum; in secundo, Persarum; in tercio, Guandalorum; in quarto, Anglorum; in quinto, Longobardorum; in sexto, Guisiguotorum, id est occidentalium Guothorum; in septimo, Ostroguothorum, id est orientalium Guothorum; in octavo, Hunorum, in nono, Turchorum et Turchomannorum; ultimo, de regno Francorum, unde et a quibus originem traxit diffusius aliquantulum dicere usque ad tempora nostra breviter proposuimus.* Quoted by Delaborde, Henri-François. “Notice sur les ouvrages et sur la vie de Rigord, moine de Saint-Denis”. *Bibliothèque de l’École des chartes*, 45 (1884): 585-614, here 601-602. Rigord takes up the beginning of Sigebert’s chronicle but diverts it in favour of the kingdom of the French and limits himself to this introductory passage in which Sigebert reports that, confronted with barbarian peoples, the Roman Empire, once so glorious, had almost fallen into ruin (*et qui olim cum aliis gentibus pro sola gloria certabant, modo saluti suae vix satis consulere poterant [...]*).

39. Soissons, BM, Ms. 129 (120) [available online: <<https://arca.irht.cnrs.fr/ark:/63955/md90dv141118>>].

40. Under the title *De regno Francorum et origine ipsorum* Rigord says he wanted to write the *Hystoriam gentis nostrae, regni scilicet francorum a prima origine ipsorum ex relatu fideli cronographorum quantumcumque brevis colligere potuimus, in hoc breui libello compendiose digessimus incipientes ab excidio troiano et perducentes ordinem historie per duces et reges paganos et postea per reges christianos maiores domus usque ad philippum secundum qui cepit regnare anno domini M C LXXIX (...)* (Soissons, BM, Ms. 129 (120): f. 133<sup>v</sup>). Once again, this is a departure from Sigebert’s chronicle, which referred to the Franks not as the ancestors of the French but as a new people bearing the Roman Empire, whereas Rigord is concerned to establish the origin of the French living under King Philip Augustus:

Sigebert of Gembloux (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptorum,...*: VI, 300):

*Originem gentis nostrae, regni scilicet Francorum, notificemus aliis ex relatu fideli maiorum. Post illud famosum et cunctis saeculis et gentibus notum Troianae civitatis excidium, victoribus Grecis cedentes reliquiae Troianorum, pars eorum cum Aenea ad fundandum Romanum imperium ad Italiam perrexit; pars una, scilicet duodecim milia, duce Antenore in finitimas Pannoniac partes secus Meotidas paludes pervenit, ibique civitatem aedificaverunt, quam ob sui memoriam Sicambriam vocaverunt. In qua multis annis habitaverunt, et in magnam gentem coaluerunt, et crebris incursibus Romanum solum incessentes, usque ad Gallias ferocitatis suae vestigia dilataverunt [...].*

Rigord (ms. of Soissons: f. 133<sup>v</sup>):

*De regno francorum et origine ipsorum* (rubric):



this “we”, which Rigord borrowed from Sigebert, does not appear again in what is admittedly only a brief summary of the history of the French.

If we now turn to the *Grandes Chroniques de France* and examine the use of “we” (*nous, nostres...*) by Primat and his successors, we find that, as a general rule, Primat and his successors take the reference to “we” from their sources without adding it themselves, but without deleting it; something they could have done and which should not be underestimated.

Thus, whereas the author of the second edition of the *Annales regni Francorum* had transformed the sentence in the *Annales regni Francorum* devoted to the capture of Barcelona, Primat does not make this correction. This is not necessarily a simple oversight on the part of a compiler who remained too close to his source.

There is even a tendency, albeit rare, to reinforce the presence of a French “we”.

One example is Primat’s account of Louis VII’s ill-fated crusade, which repeats the account given by William of Tyre. The latter commented on the name of the city of Sathalie as follows: “Our people (*nostri*), who do not know the Greek language, mistakenly call it Sathalie and thus call all this part of the sea [...] golfe de Sathalie (*Gulphus Sataliae*)”.<sup>41</sup> Primat adapts this passage: *Li Grezois l’apelent Athalie, [...]. Mais Nostre François li midrent non le goufre de Sathelie*.<sup>42</sup> *Nostri* has therefore become “our French”.

A second example concerns the account of the reign of Charles IV le Bel in the *Grandes Chroniques*. The continuator of Primat’s account relates how Charles de Valois took control of La Réole during the so-called War of Saint-Sardos. His source

*Hystoriam gentis nostre regni scilicet francorum a prima origine ipsorum ex relatu fideli cronographorum quantumcumque breuius colligere potuimus, in hoc breui libello compendiose digessimus, incipientes ab excidio troiano et perducentes ordinem hystorie per duces et reges paganos et postea per reges christianos maiores domus, usque ad philippum secundum qui cepit regnare anno domini m<sup>o</sup> c<sup>o</sup> lxxix<sup>o</sup>. Post illud famosum et cunctis seculis et gentibus notum troiane ciuitatis excidium uictoribus grecis cedentes reliquie troianorum, pars eorum cum enea ad fundandum romanum imperium, ad italiam peregit, pars uero altera cum francione, turco et anthenore in finitimas pannonie partes, iuxta meothidas paludes peruenit. Procedente uero tempore uehementer in eodem loco populo troianorum multiplicato, causa multitudinis turchus cum suis ab aliis recedens, in Scitia inferiore se transtulit et ibi regnauit et suos troianos mutato nomine de nomine suo uocante turcos a quibus descenderunt orientales gothi qui cum rege suo totila romam ceperunt et occidentales gothi qui cum rege suo olarico aquitaniam et hispaniam usque ad rodanum tenuerunt et guandali qui cum rege suo gesserico romam et affricam uastauerunt et dani uel normanni cum cum bier costa ferrea filio loebroci regis danorum et hastingo nequissimo principe [...]*

41. *Hanc nostri, idiomatis Greci non habentes periciam, corrupto vocabulo Sataliam appellant, unde et totus ille maris sinus a promuntorio Lissidona usque in insulam Cyprum Atalicus dicitur, qui vulgari appellatione Gulfus Satalie nuncupatur [...]. Tyrensis, Willelmus. “Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum”, *Chronicon*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens. Turnhout: Brepols, 1986: l. 16, c. 26.*

42. *Li Grezois l’apelent Athalie, dont la montaigne, qui est près d’iluec, et dure dès le mont de Lissodone juques en l’île de Chipre et est apelée en Grece Athalique. Mais Nostre François li midrent non le goufre de Sathelie, et ensint la claime l’on ore communément. Li rois, quant il ot seigné une piece, il laissa en la vile sa gent a pié. Ses chevaliers et ses barons prit uoc lui et se mit en mer. Il laisserent Isaura et Cecile a senestre ; à destre, remet l’île de Chipre [...]. (“The Greeks called it Athalie, after the mountain Athaliki, which is near there and stretches from Mount Lysidonos to the island of Cyprus. But our French gave it the name Gouffre de Sathelie, and this is the name by which it is commonly known. When the king stayed there for a while, he left his footmen in the town. He took his knights and barons with him and set sail. They left Isaura and Cecilia on the left; on the right, he left the island of Cyprus [...].”) *Grandes Chroniques de France*: vol. 6, 36.*



appears to be the continuator of Guillaume de Nangis's universal chronicle, who reported the episode as follows:

*Audiens vero comes Valesii fratrem praedictum regis Angliae cum Anglicis in villa quae dicitur Reguia, quae vulgari Gallicorum dicitur La Riolle, cum pugnatorum suorum potentia residere; illuc cum exercitu applicuit. Sed cum quidam de nostris nimis prope portam accessissent, et incaute illos de villa ad pugnam provocassent, occiso domino de Florentino cum quibusdam aliis militibus, turpiter sunt devicti. Quod graviter ferens dictus comes Valesii, erectis machinis et caeteris ad destructionem villae necessariis instrumentis, obsidionem posuit contra villam, ita ut ex nulla parte pateret in villam ingressus vel egressus. Videntes vero illi de villa sibi et suis undique periculum imminere, quae pacis erant protinus obtulerunt.<sup>43</sup>*

This account is given in *the Grandes chroniques de France*:

*Quant le conte de Valoys entendit que le frere du roy d'Angleterre avec ses Anglois estoit à la Rirole, il aproucha de la ville pour la assegier. Si en ot aucuns de l'ost, desquies le seigneur de Saint Florentin estoit chevetaine et ducteur, qui estoient deputez à garder les issues et les entrées, qui se combatirent à ceulz de la Rirole et ceulz de la Rirole à eulz. Mais il furent chaciez et embatuz arrière en la ville, par quoy noz gens furent encouragiez et s'approchèrent plus près des portes. Ceulz de la ville apperçurent leurs anemis entalentez de eulz mal faire, issirent à greigneur nombre et quantité qu'il n'avoient fait devant ; et nostre gent françoise viguerusement les reçurent, si les enchacierent comme devant ; mais pour ce qu'il s'approchèrent trop près des portes, il furent surpris et vaincus. En celle bataille fu occis le seigneur de Saint Florentin et pluseurs autres nobles et non nobles, dont le conte de Valois, messire Charles, fu merveilleusement corroucié et irié, et fist drescier ses engins et ses perrieres, et assega la ville de toutes pars [...] Et quant ceulz de la ville se regardèrent et virent en si grant péril comme de perdre corps et biens, il envoierent ambassadeurs pour traitier de pais, laquelle fu ordonnée en telle manière : premièrement la ville serait rendue, et des habitans de la ville ceulz qui vouldroient estre encore souz la seigneurie du roy d'Angleterre.<sup>44</sup>*

The author of the *Grandes Chroniques* obviously embellished this episode to the benefit of the French, transforming a bitter defeat which provoked the fury of the

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43. *Chronique latine de Guillaume de Nangis et de ses continuateurs*, ed. Hercule Géraud. Paris: Imprimerie de Crapelet, 1843: vol. II, 57.

44. "When the Count of Valois heard that the brother of the King of England with his Englishmen was at La Rirole, he approached the town to secure it. If there were some of the army, of which the lord of Saint Florentin was captain and leader, who were deputed to guard the exits and entrances, who fought against those of Rirole and those of Rirole against themselves. But they were chased and embattled back into the town, so our people were gored and came closer to the gates. Those of the town, perceiving their enemies intent on harming them, came out in greater number and quantity than they had done before; and our French men vigorously received them, and chased them as before; but because they approached too close to the gates, they were surprised and defeated. In this battle, the lord of Saint Florentin and several other nobles and non-nobles were killed, and the count of Valois, Sir Charles, was marvellously corrupted and angered, and stopped repairing his engines and catapults, and sieged the town from all sides [...] And when the people of the town saw themselves in such great danger of losing their bodies and possessions, they sent embassies to deal with the peace, which was ordered in such a way: firstly the city would be returned, and of the inhabitants of the city those who wished to remain under the seigniory of the King of England". *Grandes Chroniques de France*,...: vol. 6, 34-35.



Count of Valois into a military action worthy of praise but a little too bold and which therefore went badly wrong; but he took advantage of this to transform the *nostrī* in his source into *noz gens* and he introduced on his own initiative a *nostre gent françoise* which was not in his source.

However, such changes are rare. The history of France has not become “our” history; it is a history of the kings of France and of the French people written by Primat and his followers in the third person.

The writers of the histories of the individual kings of France had, *a priori*, more freedom to transform a history of the king and the French written in the impersonal mode into the history of “our” king and “us”. But here again, we have to recognise that although this reference to a “we” that unites the author and his readers, and which appears to be “the French”, is not entirely absent from their accounts, they nevertheless remain generally faithful to the impersonal mode.

For example, Michel Pintoin, known as Le Religieux de Saint-Denis, author of a chronicle of the reign of Charles VI, almost never uses the word “we”, but simply contrasts the “French” (*Gallici, Francigene*), to whom he obviously belongs, with the “English” (*Anglici*). So his tone is basically impersonal. Despite this, there are a few exceptions that deserve a closer look.

Michel Pintoin’s first use of the word *nous* is when he refers to the work of French people, albeit as part of a Christian crusade. In this case, the French *nous* and the universal *nous* of Christians cannot really be distinguished. This was the case when Pintoin recounted the Barbary crusade led by the Duke of Bourbon and the difficult siege of Mahdia: “Indeed, despite the shots, arrows and stones that were hurled at them relentlessly from the top of the ships and with the help of machines, the inhabitants tried to keep *ours* away from the ramparts”.<sup>45</sup> The same is true of his account of the disaster at Nicopolis, in which he refers to the crusaders as *nostrī* or *nostrates* and cites “our sins” (*peccatis nostris exigentibus*)<sup>46</sup> as the reason for the deaths of many crusaders. Once again, in these passages, *nostrī* refers to both Christians and the French.

Other instances, however, show a more determined assimilation of the *nostrī* to the French; they are nevertheless reserved for particular occasions, above all clashes clearly identified as “national” between the French and the English. This was the

45. *Nam cives telorum jactu, sagittarum inunissione, contorsione lapidum, non tantum de navibus, sed machinis jaculatoriis emissarum cum horrendo impetu torquebantur, et nostros ab accessu muri propellere nitebantur, fiebatque ibidem strages magna. Nam quidam machinarum ictu in frustra conterebantur minuta, quidam trans loricas sagittis confossi subito deficiebant corruentes* (*Chronique du Religieux de Saint-Denis*, ed. and trans. Louis François Bellaguet. Paris: Éditions du CTHS, 1994 (anastasic reproduction, 1<sup>st</sup> edition: 1842): here vol. I/I, 662).

46. *Chronicle of the Religious...: vol. II, 494 (nostrī ad tentoria redierunt); 496 (Nostrates, qui auctoritate et claritate generis ceteros superabant...); 498 (is Basatus, statu nostrorum cognito, et inde factus audacior, nuncios de Nycopoli sibi missos ad suos cito remisit cum hiis verbis...); 500 (Unde nostrī ad iracundiam provocati, ut fidelium relatione notum fuit, ex concepto dolore iniquitatem inauditam pepererunt, quam scribere sicis oculis non valemus), 504-506 (appendentes cuspides contra nostros, que ipsi plurimum nocuerunt [...] cum cominus nostrī post accedentes et demissis lanceis in hostes insurrexissent [...] nostrique se mutuo ad audaciam adhortantes [...] Ingenti cede peracta, se recollegerunt in unum christiani); 516 (Sic dati sunt incliti nostrī gentibus in opprobrium et hostium expositi ludibrio, et antiquam ducentes ex generosis proavis sanguinis dignitatem, o benigne Jhesu, peccatis nostris exigentibus, traditi sunt in commocionem capitis Sarracenis).*



case, for example, when Pintoin reported on the heroic death of Lord Guillaume du Chastel during a reckless expedition to England; “some of *our* people, wishing to acquire the reputation of valour...”, wrote Pintoin, before going on to report how Lord du Chastel ended his life accompanied by “many regrets from the French”.<sup>47</sup> The same pattern can be found when Pintoin reports that the Count de la Marche’s expedition attempting to land in England came up against the local peasants, who were incensed and “forced *our* people to retreat”,<sup>48</sup> or when he recounts how the Count of Saint-Pol unsuccessfully attacked the English garrison at Calais, whose members had resorted to cunning “in order to rush upon *our* people in a more damaging manner.”<sup>49</sup> And Pintoin always refers to “us” when he recounts the Duke of Burgundy’s vain efforts to take Calais, which the English managed to annihilate by gathering together enough men-of-war “to be able, not only in the shelter of their walls but also in the open, to withstand the assaults of *ours*”.<sup>50</sup> This use of the word “we” is echoed in his reference to the Duke of Orléans’ symmetrical undertaking, also a failure, against the English in Bordeaux, “made more aggressive by the retreat and unfortunate situation of *our* people”.<sup>51</sup> When he refers to the various battles fought, with varying degrees of success, by the French and Genoese against the English in 1416-1417 in front of Harfleur, Pintoin again mentions the *nostri*.<sup>52</sup>

On the other hand, Pintoin does not mention ‘us’ when he recounts the deplorable defeat of the French at Azincourt, even when he ends his account with a long evocation of the glory of the *Franci*/French, of which the vanquished of Azincourt did not prove worthy; in so doing, he establishes the true continuity that characterises the history of the *Franci*/French, but without identifying with an ‘us’.

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47. *In robustiores hostes ad viam planam servandam deputatos primum prelium commissum est; qui mox succedentibus sociis impenetrabiles facti sunt. Ideo quidam ex nostris, ad strenuitatis titulum acquirendum, circum vicina fossata collateralia, quanquam expertes profunditatis, transmeare conati sunt, ut eos lateraliter invadentes segregarent [...] Sic ejus strenua et honesta studia mors immatura, felicibus ejus invidens actibus, miserabiliter prevenit, et in flore gratissime juventutis, dum in virilem evadebat etatem, cum multis Francorum suspiriis vitam finivit (Chronique du Religieux ...: vol. III, 176-178).*

48. *Quod percipientes rustici, nec fracti animo, nituntur resistere et numero fere octo milium adunati, cum ensibus, arcubus et baculis ferreis protinus accurreront, et emittentes sagittas, nostros retrocedere coegerunt et respiscere ab incepto. Quia tunc Gallici dubitabant ne rusticos major numerus hostium sequeretur, se ilico posuerunt in acie ordinata, balistarios commode collocantes, qui, non diu protracta mora, tractu suo rusticos fugere compulerunt, multos ex eis vulnerantes. Ex hiis tamen non audivi aliquem interfectum, nisi unum, qui eum suum indomitum calcaribus et contra calcar recalcitrantem urgens, cum ad nostros invitum pervenisset [...]. Chronique du Religieux ...: vol. III, 224.*

49. *Ut dampniosius in nostros irruerent, sicut rei exitus comprobavit (Chronique du Religieux ...: vol. III, 258); and Pintoin reports further on how the Earl of Pembroke, informed by his spies, left Calais with three thousand men and nostros ilico invasit (Chronique du Religieux ...: vol. III, 260).*

50. *Ut non solum infra menia, sed eciam in campestribus nostrorum possent impetus sustinere (Chronique du Religieux...: vol. III, 450).*

51. *Ex recessu et nostrorum infausto casu animosiores effecti (Chronique du Religieux...: vol. III, 456).*

52. *Chronique du Religieux...: vol. V, 756 (Utrinque atrox prelium commissum est, quo pedestres partem maximam equorum subsidiariorum nostrorum graviter vulneraverunt et inhabiles reddiderunt); Chronique du Religieux...: vol. VI, 40 ([...] hostes, reiteratis vicibus, sagitarum ymbre dempsissimo perdurante, nostris appropinquare temptaverunt [...]); Chronique du Religieux...: vol. VI, 98 ([...] Nam tandem superiores effecti, inclitos nostros, pro dolor! jugum odibile redempcionis subire coegerunt [...]).*



The absence of any reference to “we” in the story of the Azincourt disaster is perhaps not without significance; Pintoin repeatedly deplores the disunity of the French and blames this disunity, which led to civil war, for the misfortunes of France and the French; it was precisely because the French were unable to stand united against the King of England at Azincourt that they suffered such a terrible disaster. It is therefore when he formulates the explanation for the Azincourt disaster, namely the disunity of the French, that the “we” comes back: “it is also known to all dwellers of the kingdom that it was the obstinate quarrelling of the princes that gave the enemies the audacity to invade our country”.<sup>53</sup>

French ventures against foreigners may also benefit from the use of “we”. For example, when the people of Liège rebelled against their rightful lord, the bishop, and were confronted by the Duke of Burgundy, Pintoin did not hesitate to use “we”.<sup>54</sup> This is also the case when he reports how the Angevin army crushed the army of Ladislas of Durazzo.<sup>55</sup>

Pintoin reports how a band of brigands who had been scouring the countryside were defeated by surprise by the king's troops: “our men took the bridles off their horses and threw themselves on them”.<sup>56</sup> Expeditions carried out in the context of civil war, in which the sovereign is involved by the party that then has his person at its disposal by taking advantage of his madness, obviously pose a particular problem. We note that Pintoin does not mention “we” when he reports the siege of Bourges in 1412;<sup>57</sup> but he does so when he reports two years later, in a reversed political configuration, the siege of Arras by the royal army,<sup>58</sup> which is perhaps not unrelated to Pintoin's political choices.

On the whole, therefore, Pintoin knew how to identify as “we” the French, good subjects of the king, fighting together against the English invader, or at least against rebels to the king within the kingdom and foreign enemies outside; this use remains very sparse, however, and does not transform Pintoin's chronicle into “our story”. It is true that the story Pintoin was telling was the tragic tale of a civil war in which both sides would not hesitate to call on foreign aid, resulting in the ruin of the kingdom of France and the victory of a foreign king; this was not very conducive to the use of an “we” as the subject and object of the story.

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53. *Univervis eciam notum est regnicolis contencionem principum obstinatam regnum nostrum invadendi hostibus prestitisse audaciam* (*Chronique du Religieux...*: vol. V, 580).

54. *Chronique du Religieux...*: vol. IV, 162-164 (*qui [the people from Liège] omnes, jubente duce, substiterunt pede fixo, unde possent tela et missilia tormentorum obsidionalium ad nostros emittere*); *Chronique du Religieux...*: 168 (*quod nostri tandem inferiores extitissent, nisi equites opem eis maturato, ut promiserant, tulissent...*); *Chronique du Religieux...*: 170 (*In principio namque pugne, sicut hostes decreverant, ut nostri cicius dispergerentur, vexillum ducis temptantes eripere [...] Ut sic crevit tunc ex alieno timore nostris audacia [...]*).

55. *Non cum astucia aliqua nostri continuaverunt conflictum* (*Chronique du Religieux...*: vol. IV, p.394).

56. *Nostri laxis habenis in eos insurrexerunt* (*Chronique du Religieux...*: vol. IV, 404).

57. *Chronicle of the Religious...*: vol. IV, 678.

58. *Jam nostri antea didicerant ducem Burgundie venturum in proximo* (*Chronique du Religieux...*: vol. V, 374); this is also the case when Pintoin reports how the king's captains seized Marcoussis held by the Burgundians: *Quod percipientes oppidapi, et timentes ne tandem, castris edificis paulatim ruentibus, sub eis suffocarentur, quia ex nostris egerant stragem magnam vallidis obtinuerunt precibus ut exirent libere* (*Chronique du Religieux...*: vol. VI, 182).



This observation certainly applies even more to the French translation of Michel Pintoin's chronicle of Charles VI in the chronicle attributed (improperly) to Jean Juvénal des Ursins. Half a century later, this chronicle was written by an author committed to the cause of the king's officers, who were presented as those who had recognised and tried to avoid the mortal danger posed by the civil war, insofar as it gave the old English enemies the opportunity to carry out their plan to conquer the kingdom of France.<sup>59</sup> This denunciation of civil war as a mark of the reign of Charles VI in no way argued for the introduction of a "we" as the subject of history. In fact, this "we" is not to be found in the narrative of the chronicle of Jean Juvénal des Ursins, which is written in a uniformly impersonal style, with one exception that should perhaps not be considered anecdotal. The chronicle gives a double account of the battle of Azincourt. After recounting it impersonally for the first time, it gives a second account, introducing it as follows: *Sur ceste matière aucuns autres ont escrit en la manière qui s'ensuit*;<sup>60</sup> and, this time, the "we" occurs on numerous occasions *nos gens, et tous nos seigneurs de France, nos gens et les anglois* writes the author.<sup>61</sup> Of course, this hapax represented by the insertion of a "nous" can simply be explained by the fact that the author of the chronicle simply took a literal version of the new relationship available to him, which was written in this way. However, it is perhaps possible to hypothesise that the author subtly wanted to indicate to his readers that, in this most dramatic episode of the reign of Charles VI with regard to English aggression, it was indeed "we" who were the victims because, as the whole chronicle showed, "we" had not been able to overcome our divisions.

Apart from this passage, the chronicle of Jean Juvénal des Ursins provides a narrative that avoids the use of a "we". We can speculate that the author, writing after the end of a civil war whose spectre he intended to ward off, did not want to use a "we" that would necessarily have been partisan; he did not want to openly commit himself to either of the two parties whose obstinacy had provoked the disastrous civil war. The "we" of Azincourt was an exception, and not necessarily

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59. Cf. on this author Schwitter, Thomas. *Erinnerung im Umbruch - Die Fortsetzung, Drucklegung und Ablösung der "Grandes Chroniques de France" im 15. und frühen 16. Jahrhundert*. Heidelberg: University Publishing, 2022.

60. ("On this subject, others have written in the following manner"). Juvénal des Ursins, Jean. "Histoire de Charles VI", *Nouvelle collection des mémoires consacrés à l'histoire de France*, Joseph-François Michaud, Jean-Joseph-François Poujoulat, eds. Paris: Guyot Frères, 1836: vol. II, 339-569, here 519.

61. *Nos gens, et tous nos seigneurs de France estoient sur les champs [...]*. ("Our people, and all our lords of France, were on the fields [...].") Juvénal des Ursins, Jean. "Histoire de Charles ...": 520; *Nos gens et les Anglois estoient près les uns des autres*. ("Our people and the English were close to each other.") Juvénal des Ursins, Jean. "Histoire de Charles ..."; *nos gens delibererent de combatte le lendemain [...]*. ("our people deliberated to fight the next day [...].") Juvénal des Ursins, Jean. "Histoire de Charles ..."; *et avoient nos gens le soleil en l'œil [...]*. ("and our people had the sun in their eyes [...]."); *Quand les Anglois les virent en tel estat, ils s'approchèrent d'eux, tellement que nos gens ne le sceurent oncques [...]*. ("When the English saw them in such a state, they approached them, so much so that our people never knew [...].") Juvénal des Ursins, Jean. "Histoire de Charles ..."; *et firent iceux anglois à cheval un si grand et merueilleux cry qu'ils espouventerent tous nos gens [...]*. ("and made the English on horseback shout so loudly and marvellously that they frightened all our people [...].") Juvénal des Ursins, Jean. "Histoire de Charles ...".



an unintentional one, because it was the decisive disaster which, as a result of the civil war, had struck all the French and France.

At the very end of the fifteenth century, Robert Gaguin wrote a *Compendium de Francorum origine et gestis*; he wrote out of patriotism and a desire to renovate, first and foremost stylistically, the old account of French history embodied in the *Grandes Chroniques de France*. But he too wrote a narrative in which the history of France was written in the third person. At most, there are a few instances of a "we" whose use does not seem very different from that found a century earlier in Michel Pintoin. It may appear in the account of crusade events. He reports how Louis VII won a victory against the Turks, who were preventing *nostros* from getting water by throwing arrows and stones at them.<sup>62</sup> There are also several instances of "we" when Gaguin refers to the two crusades led by Saint Louis. This use of the word occurs in situations where the French and Christians/defenders of the true faith are one and the same. However, the reference to "we" can also appear when Gaguin evokes the battles of the kings of France and the French against rebels or external enemies. This is the case, for example, in his account of the Battle of Cassel in 1328, when he recounts how the Flemish almost took Philip VI's French by surprise, so much so that part of the royal army was already preparing to flee: "they hastened to march on ours and were so urgent that when a clamour arose among our people, some of them were preparing to flee towards Saint-Omer".<sup>63</sup>

In this new history of the kings of France, France and the French that Gaguin wants to write, references to a "we" referring to all the French people of the past, present and future do exist, but it has to be said that, like his predecessors, they remain rare. The history of France that these authors write has not become 'our' history; it remains fundamentally an impersonal history of the kings of France and the French.

How can this be explained? In fact, what our authors continue to write is still the history of the deeds of the kings of France, into which the history of the French is certainly inserted, but this history of the kings of France is still not quite "our" history, because it is the kings who make it and not "we".

In a way, this hypothesis can be verified *a contrario* by observing how 'our history' was constructed at the same time in Augsburg, in other words within the framework of an independent or quasi-independent urban community, such as those that managed to survive in Germany in the fifteenth century in the interstices of the dynastic and territorial order that was being established.

In Augsburg around 1460, a wealthy and influential merchant by the name of Hector Müllich,<sup>64</sup> a member of Augsburg's ruling elite, was very interested in

62. *Ludovicus vero inde transiens ad flumen Venandri castra ponit, cupidus manum cum Turcis conferre. Dum eo loci stationem haberet miles francus, ab altera fluminis ripa iaculis fundisque hostis nostros aquacione prohibebat* (Gaguin, Robert. *Compendium ...*: f. 37<sup>r</sup> (Lyon ed., 1497), and f. 32<sup>v</sup> (Paris ed., 1495).

63. [...] *In nostros ire festinant tamque infesti aderant cum a nostris sublato clamore pars sanctum audomarum uersus fugam parabat* (Gaguin, Robert. *Compendium...:* f. 55<sup>r</sup> [Lyon ed.]).

64. On Hector Müllich see Weber, Dieter. *Geschichtsschreibung in Augsburg - Hektor Müllich und die reichsstädtische Chronistik des Spätmittelalters*. Augsburg: H. Mühlberger, 1984. On Augsburg society, see



the history of his city. It had just been edited by a monk from St Ulrich and Afra, Sigismund Meisterlin, commissioned by a member of the city council, the patrician Sigismund Gossembrot, with the agreement of the other city leaders, including Müllich.<sup>65</sup> Müllich was so interested in this work that in 1457 he copied a manuscript of it himself, complete with superb miniatures.<sup>66</sup> In the same manuscript, he also added a fairly brief continuation in the form of a fifth book<sup>67</sup> extending to 1456. Müllich later felt the need to write a second version of Meisterlin's continuation, this time considerably expanded and continued until 1487.<sup>68</sup> For this work he used an Augsburg chronicle from 1348 to 1406. The normal expression for the city of Augsburg and its council is the impersonal "those of Augsburg" (*die von Augspurg*) used by Meisterlin, which is used both in the chronicle from 1348 to 1406 and in the two editions of Müllich's continuation of Meisterlin's chronicle. However, in the second continuation, Müllich also introduces the "we", which was not present in his first version and in the chronicle from 1348 to 1406.<sup>69</sup> It may even happen that he

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Rogge, Jörg. *Für den Gemeinen Nutzen - Politisches Handeln und Politikverständnis von Rat und Bürgerschaft in Augsburg im Spätmittelalter*. Tübingen: Studia Augustana, 1996; Adrian, Dominique. *Augsbourg à la fin du Moyen Âge - la politique et l'espace*. Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2013.

65. I refer to the developments and references in my article: "Les élites urbaines et l'histoire de leur ville en Allemagne (xiv<sup>e</sup>-xv<sup>e</sup> siècles)", *Les élites urbaines au Moyen Âge*. Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne, 1996: 351-383; among recent productions cf. Pataki, Z. A. "Ein Bürger blickt auf seine Stadt. Zur Rezeption und Funktion des Stadtbildes bei Hektor Müllich 1455/57", *Stadtgestalt und Öffentlichkeit. Die Entstehung politischer Räume in der Stadt der Vormoderne*, S. Albrecht, ed. Cologne - Vienna: Böhlau - Weimar, 2010: 121-146; Feistner, Edith. "Vom Kloster zur Stadt: Sigmund Meisterlin und die Gründungsnarrationen von Augsburg, Nürnberg und Regensburg", *Reformen vor der Reformation. Sankt Ulrich und Afra*. Gisela Drossbach, Klaus Wolf, eds. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018: 169-186; Meer, Marcus. "Heraldry, Historiography and Urban Identity in Late Medieval Augsburg. The Cronographia Augustensium and the Gossembrot Armorial", *Urban History Writing in Northwest Europe (15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries)*, Bram Caers, Lisa Demets, Tineke van Gassen eds. Turnhout: Brepols, 2019: 159-186; Wolf, Jürgen. "Augsburger Chronistik in Handschrift und Druck. Geschichtsschreibung als Fundament und Ausdruck eines neuen Denkens", *Gewissheiten im Wandel. Wissensformierung und Handlungsorientierung von 1350-1600*, Christap Bertelsmeier-Kierst, ed. Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020, 143-162.

66. Augsburg, Staats- und Stadtbibliothek, 2 Cod Halder 1 (available online: <<https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/details/bsb00090375>>).

67. Augsburg, Staats- und Stadtbibliothek, 2 Cod Halder 1: f. 106<sup>r</sup>: *Von kayser Karl zu Prag und was die weyl zu Augspurg beschehen sey das erst capitel des fünfften buchs. Das hat der Meysterlin nit gemacht*. ("about Emperor Charles in Prague and what happened during that time in Augsburg, the first chapter of the fifth book. Meisterlin did not deal with this.")

68. *Die Chroniken der schwäbischen Städte. Augsburg*, 3. *Die Chroniken der deutschen Städte vom 14. bis in's 16. Jahrhundert*, 22, eds. Matthias Lexer, Friedrich Roth. Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1892: 1-273, 331-376; cf. Weber, Dieter. *Geschichtsschreibung in Augsburg...*; on the manuscripts, see the *Die deutschen Geschichtsquellen* website: <<https://www.geschichtsquellen.de/werk/3545>>.

69. In this way, we can compare the accounts given in the three works of the disputes between Augsburg (and other cities), Emperor Charles IV and the Dukes of Bavaria in 1373-1374.

- 1<sup>st</sup> continuation of Meisterlin's chronicle:

[1373] *Dar nach schickt kayser karl sein rett in daz reych un wolt ain schatzung haben von den reychstetten; also müst die hieig statt augspurg geben sechs un dreysig tausent guldin, und die iuden hie zechentausent guldin und ander reichstett musten im all gros gut geben; da gab man hie leipting hin ain guldin um fünff guldin, und wart der krieg verricht; die berichtnuß macht marquart patriarch von agla. Do beschact ain ratt hie die iuden insunderhait um zechentausent gulden des si wol gwalt hetten, un darum gut prieff von ainem kayser hetten; des wart der kayser*



supplements his source, which had forgotten to mention the role of the people of

*gewär un must im das gelt geben. Dar nach nach der iar zall unsers herrn m ccc lxxv das man merklin hangenor das haupt ab slug auf dem perlach pey dem storck umb mit nacht pey prinnenden schaben un das was von der stewart wegen und des iars wart.* ("[1373] Subsequently, Emperor Charles sent his councillors throughout the Empire and wanted to levy a tax on the imperial cities. Thus, the city of Augsburg had to pay thirty-six thousand florins, and the Jews ten thousand florins. Other imperial cities also had to give him large sums of money. The tax was one florin for every five florins, and the war ended. This agreement was arranged by Marquart, Patriarch of Aquileia. The Council then imposed a special tax on the Jews of ten thousand florins, as they had every right to do by virtue of a letter of privilege from the emperor. But when the emperor was informed of this, he demanded that the money be handed over to him. Then, in the year of our Lord 1375, Merklin Hangenor was beheaded on the Perlach, by torchlight, at night. This was due to the tax and the events of that year.") Augsburg, Staats- und Stadtbibliothek, 2 Cod Halder, f. 107<sup>r</sup>.

- Chronik der Stadt Augsburg 1348-1406:

*In der jarzal unsers herren im 1373 jar vor sant Martins tag do sant der von Wirtemberg und her Bortz von Rissenburg und der von hohenloch ir bottschafft gen Auspurg von kaiser Karls wegen; die wurden an den raut, daz man ain erber pottschaft mit vollem gewalt santi gen Kirchhain.... Die redten mit den purgern und sprachen, ez wölt der kaiser haben von den von Auspurg 45 tusent guldin; wölten die von Auspurg willig sin, so wölten si des kaisers gewaltig sin umb 9 tusent guldin, und daz nun die stat geben solt 36 tusend guldin halb uf die liechtmess und halb uf sant Jörgen tag dem nechsten uff des kaisers gnade. Und darumb musten 60 purger burg werden, das allez geschach [...].* ("In the year of our Lord 1373, before the feast of Saint Martin, the Lord of Württemberg, Lord Bortz of Rissenburg and the Lord of Hohenlohe sent their ambassadors to Augsburg in the name of Emperor Charles. This delegation was received by the Council, and it was decided to send an embassy with full powers to Kirchhain. There, the lords' ambassadors spoke with the burghers and declared that the emperor wanted 45,000 florins from the people of Augsburg. If they agreed to pay voluntarily, they were confident of obtaining a reduction of 9,000 florins from the emperor, which meant that the city would have to pay 36,000 florins, half on Candlemas and the other half on the following St George's Day, subject to imperial pardon. To guarantee this payment, 60 citizens had to stand surety. And that is how things went [...].") *Die Chroniken der schwäbischen Städte. Augsburg, 1 (Die Chroniken der deutschen Städte vom 14. bis in's 16. Jahrhundert, 4)*, ed. F. Frensdorff. Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1865: 21-125, here 36-37.

[...]

*In der jarzal unsers herren in dem 1374 jar [...] do was her Marquart von Randegg und patriarch zu Aglay zu Auspurg, do santen die herren von Bairn iren geschworn raut zu [...] und retten von ainer richtung; dem was also, daz sich der patriarch von Aglay der richtung annam [...]. Darnach an dem nechsten fritag nach sant Ulrichs tag, do komen die burger von Auspurg gen Dillingen zu dem patriarchen, der rait mit dem bischoff und mit den burgern gen höchsteten; dar warn die herzogen von Bairen komen und komen aller sach uberain. [...] Die richtung prachen die herzogen von Bairn; die stat Augspurg hielt die richtung mit grozzen eren und werten sich der herzogen von Bairn etc.* ("In the year of our Lord 1374, Lord Marquart de Randegg, Patriarch of Aquileia, came to Augsburg. The lords of Bavaria then sent their sworn council [...] to discuss an agreement. As a result, the Patriarch of Aquileia undertook this arbitration. [...] Then, on the Friday after the feast of Saint Ulrich, the citizens of Augsburg went to Dillingen to the patriarch, who left with the bishop and the burghers for Höchstädt. The dukes of Bavaria had already arrived there, and all parties reached a general agreement. [...] The Dukes of Bavaria did not respect the agreement; the city of Augsburg accepted the decision with great honour, and defended itself against the Dukes of Bavaria, etc.") *Die Chroniken der schwäbischen Städte. Augsburg, 1 ...*: 40-41.

[...]

*Zu derselben zit fiengen die purger zu Augspurg ir juden und legten die gefangen, baidiu, frawen und man. Die gaben zechen tusend guldin, die gab man dem kaiser zu unrecht, wann die juden warn der stat Auspurg und hetten auch des kaisers prieff darumb; die prach der kaiser und darzu all ander prieff, wann er was ain durchächter der cristenhait.* ("At the same time, the burghers of Augsburg arrested their Jews and threw them in prison, both women and men. They paid ten thousand florins, which were handed over to the emperor against the law, because the Jews belonged to the city of Augsburg and this was guaranteed by an imperial privilege. But the emperor violated it and all the other privileges, for he was an enemy of Christianity.") *Die Chroniken der schwäbischen Städte. Augsburg, 1 ...*: 42.

- Müllich Chronicle, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition:



Augsburg, by using the expression “we of Augsburg” (*wir von Augspurg*), instead of

[1373] *An sant Martins tag waren des kaisers rät, zwen behmisch herren ainer von Ryssenburg und der von Goldnitz und der von hohenloch bei dem von Wirtenberg; sie schrieben her, das man ein treffenlich botschaft zu in schickte gen Kirchen; das dätten die von Augspurg, also sagten sie, der kaiser wölt ain schatzung von stetten haben, und ward mit grosser not auf das nächst getädigt, das wir dem kaiser solten geben 36 000 guldin und tausent guldin zu ratschatz, und der kaiser wolt besonder haben 10 000 gulden von juden hie, und ward uns doch verhaissen, die juden uns in die tädung zu lan, aber graf Eberhart von Wirtenberg was ain verräter in den sachen und gab die stett dar, und mussten die juden die 10 000 guldin dem kaiser auch geben, doer die Bairen und der von Wirtenberg wolten über und gezogen sein; da mussten wir 60 burger hie zu pürgen setzen, ob wir sollich gelt auf zil nit zalten, so solten sie alle mit pfärden laisten zu kirchain; do zalten wir herrn Kraften von Hohenlochs diener zu Nördlingen 18000 guldin mit guldin und trinckgeschirr auf 600 marck, die marck Umb 51/2 guldin, die andern 18000 guldin gaben wir den herrn von Bayren zu Fridperg; do geschach an den stetten des reichs, das nie gehört was worden. Got der understand alles übel!* (“[1373] On St Martin’s Day, the emperor’s advisors - two Bohemian lords, the lord of Ryssenburg and the lord of Goldnitz - and the lord of Hohenlohe came to the landgrave of Württemberg. They wrote to ask for a delegation to be sent to Kirchhain. The people of Augsburg did so. The councillors then declared that the Emperor wanted to levy a tax on the cities, and it was finally agreed with difficulty that **we** should pay him 36,000 florins, as well as one thousand florins for the Council’s expenses. The Emperor also demanded 10,000 florins from the Jews of Augsburg, even though **we** had been assured that it would be up to **us** to tax them. But Count Eberhard of Württemberg behaved like a traitor and abandoned the cities of the Empire. So the Jews also had to pay the 10,000 florins to the Emperor. This was done under threat from the lords of Bavaria and Württemberg. **We** had to provide 60 burghers as guarantors, and if **we didn’t** manage to raise the sum in time, they would be sent to Kirchhain with their horses as collateral. We then paid 18,000 florins to the servants of Lord Kraft of Hohenlohe in Nördlingen, in cash and gold and silver crockery worth 600 marc, each marc valued at 5 ½ florins. The remaining 18,000 florins were given to the lords of Bavaria in Friedberg. Never before had imperial cities suffered such treatment. May God judge all this injustice!”)

[....]

*Nach Cristi gepurt 1374 jar am 13. Tag julii ward der krieg verricht zwischen den herrn von Bayren und der stat Augspurg; die richtung macht der patriarch Marquard des gotshaus zu Aglay; wir hieltens allzeit, aber die Bair hieltens nie kan tag. [...] Do fiengen die von Augspurg ir juden und mussten in 10 000 guldin geben. Des ward kaiser Karl innen und schuf, man solt die 10 000 guldin wider herausgeben den herren von Bayren. Und wir hetten doch vom keiser gut brief, das wir die juden wol beschätzin mochten; es half nichts, der kaiser was nit gerecht.* (“After the birth of Christ, on 13 July 1374, the war between the lords of Bavaria and the city of Augsburg ended. The peace agreement was negotiated by Patriarch Marquard of Aquileia. **We have** always respected this agreement, but the Bavarians did not respect it for even a single day. [...] So the people of Augsburg arrested their Jews, who were forced to pay 10,000 florins. When Emperor Charles IV heard about it, he ordered that the 10,000 florins be handed over to the lords of Bavaria. However, **we had** a letter in due form from the emperor authorising us to tax the Jews. But it was useless because the emperor was not fair”). *Die Chroniken der schwäbischen Städte. Augsburg*, 3: here 14-16.

Another example from 1381:

- Augsburg Chronicle 1348-1406

*Bischoff Burckhart von Auspurg was in der gesellschaft der Leon; diu stat Augspurg prach dem bischoff ab allez daz an der rinkmur stund und darzu allen sein pfaffen was si an der rinkmur hetten (...).* (“Bishop Burckhart of Augsburg was a member of the Society of the Lion. The city of Augsburg had everything he had on the city wall destroyed, as well as everything his priests had on that wall (...).”) *Die Chroniken der schwäbischen Städte. Augsburg*, 3 ...: 69.

- 2<sup>nd</sup> redaction of the Continuation of Meisterlin by Müllich:

*Darnach widersagt die gesellschaft mit dem leo den reichsstetten und tetten an ainander gross scheden mit dem prand. Und unser bischof Burckhart von Elerpach was auch in der gesellschaft und was auch wider uns. Da prachen wir den chorherren ab ire heuser und alles, das an der stat maur stund [...].* (“Subsequently, the Lion society challenged the cities of the Empire and they caused great damage to each other. And **our own** bishop, Burckhart von Ellerbach, also belonged to this society and he was also against us. So we had the canons’ houses razed and everything on the city wall [...].”) *Die Chroniken der schwäbischen Städte. Augsburg*, 3 ...: 24.



“those of Augsburg”<sup>70</sup>

This is more than just an expression of urban patriotism; it affirms the identification between the destinies of the city, the author of the chronicle and its potential readers<sup>71</sup>. Müllich shows that the history of Augsburg has become “our” history. This history of Augsburg can and must now be written in the first person plural, using a collective “we”, *wir von Augspurg*; when Emperor Frederick III came to Augsburg, “he publicly promised to let us enjoy our ancient rights (*bei unserem alten Herkommen*)”, i.e. that set of rights and freedoms anchored and guaranteed in and by a long history<sup>72</sup>,

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70. For example, in 1378, Müllich’s source mentions the military operations of the towns against the Landgrave of Württemberg without mentioning the specific role of Augsburg; Müllich adds: *Do zugen die reichstett zu veld mit gewalt in des von Wirtenberg land und tätten gross schaden mit prand und raub, darbei waren wir von Augspurg mit macht [...]*. (“Then the imperial cities went on an armed campaign against the lands of the Lord of Württemberg and caused great damage by burning and looting. **We, the people of Augsburg**, took part [...].”) *Die Chroniken der schwäbischen Städte. Augsburg*, 3...: 22. Another example: Müllich reports how the people of Augsburg entered into an alliance with the dukes of Bavaria-Munich: *Item die von Augspurg sint zu hertzog Albrechten zu München und zu hertzog Hannsen und Sigmunden, seinen sünen, in pund kommen und haund sich also veraint zehen jar, ob der alt herr sturb, dannocht sol die ainung mit den jungen herrn 10 jar weren und ainander helfen mit aller macht. doch so hond die herren ausgenommen die von Sachsen, die von Prandenburg und den pfaltzgrafen; so haben wir von Augspurg ausgenommen den kaiser und die rechstett, wie die nit zu helfen Item der obgeschriben ainung ist hertzog Ludwig zornig worden dann er uns selbs gern bei ime in ainung gehabt hett, und hat in allem seinem land gepotten [...]*. (“The people of Augsburg allied themselves with Duke Albert of Munich and his sons, the Dukes John and Sigismund, for a period of ten years. If the old lord were to die, this alliance would remain valid with his sons for ten years, and the parties undertook to support each other with all their might. But the dukes excluded the princes of Saxony and Brandenburg and the Count Palatine from the application of this alliance. We people of Augsburg excluded the emperor and the imperial cities, for whom there would be no obligation to help. This agreement angered Duke Louis, as he would have liked to have us in his alliance himself, and he therefore ordered throughout his lands [...].”) *Die Chroniken der schwäbischen Städte. Augsburg*, 3 ...: 142. Later, Müllich mentions a mortal enemy of the town: *Item wir von Augspurg haben ainen veint gehabt, der uns fast gross laid tätt, une hiess hanns Ristler, aus diser stat pürtig [...]*. (“Similarly, **we people of Augsburg** had an enemy who did us great harm; his name was Hans Ristler and he was a native of this city [...].”) *Die Chroniken der schwäbischen Städte. Augsburg*, 3...: 164; the same applies to Duke Ludwig of Bavaria-Landshut: *Hertzog Ludwig was uns von Augspurg gar veind darumb, das wir nit in ainung mit im komen wolten, und tätt uns oft gross gewalt und verhangt oft raubern und böswichten über uns [...]*. (“Duke Louis **was very** hostile towards us because we did not want to enter into his alliance and he often **did us** great violence and often sent bandits and scoundrels against us [...].”) *Die Chroniken der schwäbischen Städte. Augsburg*, 3...: 202; *Wir von Augspurg hetten uns oft wöllen verrichten mit hertzog Ludwigen, das wolt der kaiser nit und empot uns zu durch graf Haugen von Werdenberg, er wolt sich selb nit verrichten mit hertzog Ludwigen, wir wären dann auch begriffen in der richtung. Sollichs empot er uns auch zu bei unsern botschaften, die bei im waren.* (“**We people of Augsburg** had often wanted to make **peace with** Duke Louis, but the emperor opposed it and he made it known to **us** through Count Haug of Werdenberg that he would not make peace with Duke Louis without **us** also being included in the agreement. He made it known to **us** through **our** envoys who were with him.”) *Die Chroniken der schwäbischen Städte. Augsburg*, 3...: 206.

71. Another form of identification between the destinies of the city and those of the chronicler can be found in Müllich’s contemporary, Burkard Zink, who also wrote a chronicle of Augsburg (*Die Chroniken der schwäbischen Städte. Augsburg*, 4...: 1-330), who also spoke of “we” (*wir, uns von Augspurg*) and who staged the identification between his own destiny and that of Augsburg by structuring his life according to his accession to the status of citizen of Augsburg and his chronicle of Augsburg according to his life, cf. on this Moeglin, Jean-Marie. “Les élites urbaines et...”: 351-355.

72. *Er versprach uns do öffentlich bei unserm alten herkommen beleiben zu lassen.* (“He publicly promised to let us keep our old customs.”) *Die Chroniken der schwäbischen Städte. Augsburg*, 4...: 240.



“our history”. It is true that Hector Mülich belonged to the ruling circles of the city - he was a member of the elite club known as the *Herrentrinkstube* – whose coats of arms he had copied into his manuscript of Meisterlin’s chronicle, those who made this history as those responsible for the policies of the powerful Free City of the Empire that was Augsburg in the mid-fifteenth century.

In France, on the other hand, the kings remained the great actors in history and their historians did not yet dare to take the step that would lead them to write a history of France that would bring to the fore a “we” that would be the subject, actor and narrator of its own history.

## 5. The advent of ‘our history’ (sixteenth-seventeenth centuries)

This step was taken in France in the second half of the sixteenth century by the historians of the so-called “perfect history”<sup>73</sup>. From then on, and for a long time to come, historians will equate the history of France with “our history”.

How can this change be explained? The explanation could lie in the fact that these historians now see France as a living person through the centuries with whom the author and readers can identify as part of a collective “we”; it is France itself that is writing, through the historian author, and telling itself (i.e. its French readers) “its” history.

France is a person who has friends and enemies in history, who makes war and peace of her own accord: one speaks of the “enemies of France”, of the “ancient and capital enemies of France”. It has a destiny that must be fulfilled in history: the kings of France who guide it must comply with the absolute duties imposed by *l’immortelle conseruation de la France qui estoit deuant eux, et dureroit après eux*.<sup>74</sup> In the course of its history, France has suffered misfortunes and calamities; it is sometimes believed to be close to death;<sup>75</sup> but it always manages to rise again because divine Providence watches over its destiny and it cannot sink. This France, as a human being, is the object of an affective relationship; it has feelings of its own; it loves, it fears, it is afraid,<sup>76</sup> just as it is loved, admired, feared or hated by other nations.

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73. Cf. Huppert, George. *The Idea of Perfect History*. Paris: Flammarion, 1973 (original edition: Huppert, George. *The Idea of perfect History - Historical Erudition and Historical Philosophy in Renaissance France*. Urbana - Chicago - London: University of Illinois Press, 1970).

74. “the immortal preservation of France, which was before them and will last after them”. Du Haillan, Bernard de Girard. *Histoire de France*. Paris: P. L’Huillier, 1576: vol. I, 814.

75. [*la chevauchée de Reims d’Edouard III en 1359-1360 met la France en un très grand peril.*] *La France réduite à l’agonie ne souffroit point de delay, et pour si peu que son mal continuât elle alloit perir*. (“[Edward III’s attack on Reims in 1359-1360 put France in great peril]. France, reduced to agony, could not tolerate any delay, and even if her illness continued for a short time, she would perish”). Mézeray, François Eudes de. *Histoire de France depuis Faramond jusqu’à maintenant*. Paris: Denys Thierry, Jean Guignard and Claude Barbin, 1685 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.): vol. II, 451.

76. *La France estoit pleine de larmes et confusion, voyant ce malheur qui menaçoit son corps d’une grande combussion* [...]. (“France was full of tears and confusion, seeing this misfortune threatening her body with a great



The ultimate consequence of this transformation of France into an actor in its own history with whom the author and his readers identify is that the narrative becomes an autobiography of France over the centuries; a trend that began at the end of the sixteenth century and culminated in the great *Histoire de France depuis Faramond jusqu'à maintenant* published in the middle of the seventeenth century by François Eudes de Mézeray;<sup>77</sup> referring, for example, to the French disaster at l'Ecluse in 1340, he wrote: *si nous surpassions l'ennemy d'un tiers en forces, toutefois nous n'avions point là de Roy pour commander [...] nous fûmes entièrement vaincus. Plus de dix mille François servirent de pasture aux poissons;*<sup>78</sup> speaking of the defeat at Poitiers in 1356, he exclaims:

*Que toutefois les Anglois ne nous reprochent point cette Journée : nous l'avons véritablement perduë, mais l'honneur en est dû à ceux de nostre nation, car presque tous les Gens-d'armes d'Edouard estoient Gascons [...] Ceste funeste bataille n'épüisa pas seulement la France d'hommes, mais encore de richesses. Nostre Noblesse avoit apporté là [...].*<sup>79</sup>

This autobiographical story, "our story", which the historian recounts cannot leave him indifferent; filled with joy in the successes, suffering, along with his readers, in the difficult moments, he writes a passionate and impassioned history; *quand je suis venu à jeter les yeux après ces cruelles discordes, ces guerres sanglantes, et ces deplorables calamitez, sur le règne heureux de Charles VII, j'ay repris courage, et la passion*

battle [...]"). Belleforest, François de. *Grandes Annales et Histoire générale de France*. Paris: Gabriel Buon, 1579: vol. II, f. 1009<sup>v</sup>.

77. Before Mézeray, Scipion Dupleix, author of *Histoire générale de France*. Paris: Denys Bechet, 1621-1643: 3 vols., already featured this "we" of the French, as when he refers to the fact that the French were unable to intercept Edward IV's invading army at sea: *Si les François (qui ont de tout tems negligé la marine) eussent eu vne petite armée nauale, ils luy eussent empêché ou tellement retardé que la saison de faire la guerre se fût escoulée. Mais Dieu nous aiant donné la mer de tous cosés nous n'en scauons pas vser non plus que d'autres biens, dont par la faueur diuine nous sommes auantageusement partagés sur toutes les autres regions de la terre.* ("If the French (who have always neglected the navy) had had a small naval army, they would have prevented it or delayed it so much that the season for waging war would have passed. But God having given us the sea on all sides, we do not know how to use it any more than we do other possessions, which by virtue of the divine scarcity we share equally with all the other regions of the earth"). Dupleix, Scipion. *Histoire générale...*: vol. III, 83. Further on, he declares *un dommage manifeste en est arrivé à la France, lequel procède plutôt de nostre propre défaut que de la confédération des Suisses. C'est que depuis cela nous avons laissé abastardir l'infanterie françoise, et particulièrement celle de Gascogne qui remplissoit auparavant toutes nos armées avec grande gloire parmi toutes les nations estrangeres.* ("a manifest damage has befallen France, which comes rather from our own failure than from the confederation of the Swiss. It is that since that time we have allowed the French infantry, and particularly the Gascony infantry, which previously filled all our armies with great glory among all foreign nations, to be destroyed"). Dupleix, Scipion. *Histoire générale...*: vol. III, 117.

78. "Although we outnumbered the enemy by a third, we did not have a king to command [...] we were completely defeated. More than ten thousand Frenchmen served as pasture for the fish". Mézeray, François Eudes de. *Histoire de France ...*: vol. II, 400.

79. "However, the English should not reproach us for this day: we really lost it, but the honour is due to those of our nation, because almost all of Edward's men-at-arms were Gascons (...) This disastrous battle did not only exhaust France of men, but also of wealth. Our nobility had brought there". Mézeray, François Eudes de. *Histoire de France ...*: vol. II, 436-437.



que j'avois de voir la France triompher des Anglois, a dissipé agreablement mon déplaisir et m'a fait trouver mon travail moins difficile, wrote Mézeray once again.<sup>80</sup>

At the end of the seventeenth century, was the universal Christian “we” that Eusebius and Orosius had placed at the centre of universal history to give way definitively to the “national” “we” of the historians of a Europe organised within a fundamentally territorial and dynastic framework?

In reality, the advent of national history had not sunk the old system of universal history dating back to Eusebius and Orosius. In 1681, the bishop of Meaux, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704), a man trusted by Louis XIV and a rigid theorist of absolute monarchy as God's instrument on earth, addressed his *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*<sup>81</sup> to the Dauphin, Louis XIV's eldest son, for whom he was tutor. In it, he developed a vision of history that revived that of Eusebius of Caesarea and Orosius, bringing together the chronology of the great empires and the history of the Church, and portraying the inescapable triumph of the Church, which would come about despite all the punishments that God must regularly inflict on mankind

Bossuet's *Discourse on Universal History* is therefore a striking apotheosis of the work of constructing a universal history inherited from Eusebius and Orose; *tous les temps sont unis ensemble, et un dessein éternel de la divine Providence nous est révélé*;<sup>82</sup> the Church is this *force invincible* at work in history *depuis près de dix-sept cents ans*.<sup>83</sup> And it is indeed a “we” that is at the centre of history:

*Les mêmes promesses nous assurent la vie future. [...] L'Église sera sur la terre toujours immuable et invincible, jusqu'à ce que ses enfants étant ramassés, elle soit tout entière transportée au ciel, qui est son séjour véritable. Pour ceux qui seront exclus de cette cité céleste, une rigueur éternelle leur est réservée.*<sup>84</sup>

80. “When I came to cast my eyes, after these cruel discords, these bloody wars and these deplorable calamities, on the happy reign of Charles VII, I regained my courage, and the passion I had to see France triumph over the English pleasantly dissipated my displeasure and made me find my work less difficult”. Mézeray, François Eudes de. *Histoire de France ...*: vol. II, 506.

81. Bossuet, Jacques-Bénigne. *Discours sur l'histoire universelle à Monseigneur le Dauphin: pour expliquer la suite de la religion et les changements des empires: depuis le début du monde jusqu'à l'empire de Charlemagne*. Paris: Christophe David, 1681; on this text, cf. in particular Régent-Susini, Anne. *Bossuet et la rhétorique de l'autorité*. Paris: Champion, 2011; Régent-Susini, Anne. “De la pédagogie à l'apologétique : le *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* de Bossuet et ses récritures”, *L'apologétique chrétienne: Expressions de la pensée religieuse, de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, Élisabeth Pinto-Mathieu, Didier Boisson, dirs. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012: 289-312; Régent-Susini, Anne. “Perspectives dépravées, perspectives rectifiées : l'histoire universelle peinte par Bossuet”. *Littératures classiques*, 82 (2013/3), 201-216.

82. “all time is united together, and an eternal plan of divine Providence is revealed to us.” Bossuet, Jacques-Bénigne. *Discours sur l'histoire universelle ...*: 416.

83. “invincible force [...] for nearly seventeen hundred years.” Bossuet, Jacques-Bénigne. *Discours sur l'histoire universelle ...*: 394.

84. “The same promises assure us of the future life. [...] The Church will always be immutable and invincible on earth, until her children are gathered together and she is transported in her entirety to heaven, which is her true dwelling place. For those who will be excluded from this heavenly city, eternal rigour is reserved”. Bossuet, Jacques-Bénigne. *Discours sur l'histoire universelle ...*: 427.



Providence guides the course of the world, and the historian finds its hidden designs in the sequence of events: the Roman Empire had been the Church's great adversary, but the day came when *enfin l'empire romain a cédé [...]. Et Rome a été le chef de l'empire spirituel que Jésus-Christ a voulu étendre par toute la terre.*<sup>85</sup>

So back to Eusebius and Orosius, then? Not quite, because Rome has fallen and the kingdoms, the most eminent of which is the kingdom of France, have taken over:

*Quand le temps a été venu que la puissance romaine devait tomber, et que ce grand empire, qui s'était vainement promis l'éternité, devait subir la destinée de tous les autres, Rome, devenue la proie des Barbares, a conservé par la religion son ancienne majesté. Les nations qui ont envahi l'empire romain y ont appris peu à peu la piété chrétienne, qui a adouci leur barbarie ; et leurs rois, en se mettant chacun dans sa nation à la place des empereurs, n'ont trouvé aucun de leurs titres plus glorieux que celui de protecteurs de l'Église.*<sup>86</sup>

The only lasting empire is the celestial city to come.<sup>87</sup>

As Bossuet said to the son of Louis XIV, it was the kings of France who now had the mission from God to guide people along the path prescribed by the Church:

*Quand vous lisez si souvent dans leurs écrits que les rois entrèrent en foule dans l'Église et qu'ils en seront les protecteurs et les nourriciers, vous reconnaissez à ces paroles les empereurs et les autres princes chrétiens ; et comme les rois vos ancêtres se sont signalés plus que tous les autres en protégeant et en étendant l'Église de Dieu, je ne craindrai point de vous assurer que c'est eux qui, de tous les rois, sont prédits le plus clairement dans ces illustres prophéties.*<sup>88</sup>

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85. "at last the Roman Empire gave way [...] and Rome became the head of the spiritual empire that Jesus Christ wished to extend over the whole earth".

86. "When the time came for the Roman power to fall, and for this great empire, which had vainly promised itself eternity, to suffer the fate of all the others, Rome, which had fallen prey to the Barbarians, preserved its ancient majesty through religion. The nations that invaded the Roman Empire gradually learned Christian piety, which softened their barbarity; and their kings, each in his own nation in the place of the emperors, found none of their titles more glorious than that of protectors of the Church". Bossuet, Jacques-Benigne. *Discours sur l'histoire universelle...*: 431.

87. *On y voit ces fameux empires tomber les uns après les autres ; et le nouvel empire que Jésus-Christ devait établir y est marqué si expressément par ses propres caractères, qu'il n'y a pas moyen de le méconnaître. C'est l'empire des saints du Très-Haut, c'est l'empire du Fils de l'homme: empire qui doit subsister au milieu de la ruine de tous les autres, et auquel seul l'éternité est promise.* ("We see these famous empires falling one after the other; and the new empire which Jesus Christ was to establish is so expressly marked by its own characteristics that there is no way of ignoring it. It is the empire of the saints of the Most High, it is the empire of the Son of Man: an empire which must subsist in the midst of the ruin of all others, and to which alone eternity is promised"). Bossuet, Jacques-Benigne. *Discours sur l'histoire universelle...*: 434.

88. "When you read so often in their writings that kings will enter the Church in great numbers and that they will be its protectors and nurturers, you recognise in these words the emperors and other Christian princes; and as the kings your ancestors distinguished themselves more than all others by protecting and extending the Church of God, I will not fear to assure you that it is they who, of all the kings, are foretold most clearly in these illustrious prophecies". Bossuet, Jacques-Benigne. *Discours sur l'histoire universelle...*: 435.



And the speech on universal history ends with the announcement of a book devoted to the history of France, successor and heir to the empire of Rome, from Romulus to Charlemagne:

[...] pour ne plus parler des autres empires, vous voyez par combien de conseils imprévus, mais toutefois suivis en eux-mêmes, la fortune de Rome a été menée depuis Romulus jusqu'à Charlemagne. Vous croirez peut-être, Monseigneur, qu'il aurait fallu vous dire quelque chose de plus de vos Français, et de Charlemagne, qui a fondé le nouvel empire. Mais outre que son histoire fait partie de celle de France que vous écrivez vous-même, et que vous avez déjà si fort avancée, je me réserve à vous faire un second Discours, où j'aurai une raison nécessaire de vous parler de la France et de ce grand conquérant, qui, étant égal en valeur à ceux que l'antiquité a le plus vantés, les surpasse en piété, en sagesse, et en justice.<sup>89</sup>

And in fact, Bossuet, through his lessons to the Dauphin, was trying to put together a *History of France* in which, according to the reconstruction that can be made, he reported, like his contemporary Mézeray, the major events of French history by speaking in the first-person plural, "we".<sup>90</sup>

The universal Christian "we" had not yet disappeared, but the "national" "we" was asserting itself at the same time. The great liberal historians of the nineteenth century would complete this evolution; telling the story of France and the French, they would write "we" as a matter of course.

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89. "[...] to say no more about the other empires, you can see by how many unforeseen councils, which were nevertheless followed in themselves, the fortunes of Rome were led from Romulus to Charlemagne. You may think, Monseigneur, that I should have told you something more about your French and Charlemagne, who founded the new empire. But apart from the fact that his history forms part of the history of France which you yourself are writing, and which you have already advanced so far, I reserve the right to write you a second *Discours*, in which I will have a necessary reason for telling you about France and this great conqueror, who, being equal in value to those whom antiquity has most extolled, surpasses them in piety, wisdom and justice". Bossuet, Jacques-Benigne. *Discours sur l'histoire universelle...*: 560.

90. Bossuet, Jacques-Benigne. *Abrégé de l'histoire de France, par feu M. Bossuet, évêque de Meaux*. Paris: Desaint et Saillant, 1747 [lessons taught to the Dauphin between 1670 and 1680].

