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Typology of Medieval Historiography Reconsidered: a Social Re-interpretation of Monastic Annals, Chronicles and Gesta

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Abstract: The present article is devoted to the question whether it is possible to reconsider the accepted chronology of medieval historical writing by revising typological theory and by using statistical reasoning. Firstly, I argue that the choice of using a certain genre by medieval historians is closely related to the social perceptions of their own group, while shifting typological preferences are also very likely to reflect changes in these attitudes. Secondly, statistical analysis has shown that the thematic interests expressed by these authors in each of these idioms are equally subject to strong influences from contemporary world-views. The latter observation was made following statistical analysis of a selection of annals from the Southern Low Countries, which has shown that even the contents of the most rigid type of historiography was subject to strong fluctuations, which I related to the changing situation of medieval monastic communities in medieval society. Consequently, our approach of medieval historical texts should be inspired by a more careful analysis of their social setting.

1. Introduction: the paradox of historiographic typology

For a long time now, historians have applied themselves to the study of the forms and presentation modes of a host of medieval texts, especially when they can be grouped according to different parameters, such as social conditions, time, space, audience, genres, and so on. In the field of studies involving me-

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dieval historiography, there are quite a few obstacles that have somewhat hindered the rapid evolution that has occurred in research on medieval fiction, legal texts, liturgical narratives and hagiography. The main problem here is twofold: firstly, it lies with the identification of the different idioms of the *genre*, obviously an important aspect of the interpretation of the narrative as an expression of group-related consciousness, audience involvement and the like. As we know them, most historical narratives have received their denomination in the last few centuries: in the Middle Ages, annals, chronicles and gesta seldom carried a name that was widely used or even accepted. More often, the works were known by the names of their authors, who acquired status and authority through some or other aspect of their life or work. Less important works, like annals, often remained nameless except for some vague denominations. As nineteenth-century historical research was very little concerned with the type of texts it used, but more or less concentrated on the factual contents, it seemed of no matter to discern different types properly[1]. This, of course, has caused much confusion among later generations, who used the denominations 'chronicle', 'annals' and 'histories or gesta' at random. It has been demonstrated that the genre of a historical narrative does matter for the interpretation of its contents and structure. Consequently, it remains to be seen whether or not previous designation can still be justified, and, more importantly, to what extent some interpretative models can hold their claim to being relatively unbiased. Historical evidence suggests an intimate relation between the typological evolution of historiography and changes in social interaction, be it in a small-scale, nuclear environment, or in society as a whole. Secondly, there is not only the question of explaining the emergence of different modes of representing the past, but also the puzzling problem of several types of historical representation (representing a different step in a narrative social evolution) being written at the same time in groups of the same structure. Perhaps previous scholarship has allowed historians to determine why a certain group in society chose to represent itself at a certain time in a certain idiom, but there has hardly been done any research on the synchronic emergence of several types, i.e. why monks chose to represent themselves at the same time in different idioms.

In the present article, I will demonstrate one of the many ways to reconsider the typology of monastic historiography. Firstly, there is the problem of origin, reason for existence and evolution of the different *genres*, and the question whether or not these can be according to a chronological timetable. Secondly, I will try to demonstrate the utility of statistical reasoning in re-interpreting the intentions of the authors as members of a social group. The problem will be elucidated with the aid of a case study, namely the annalistic production in Benedictine *milieux* from the Southern Netherlands.

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[1] GUENEE, B., Histoire, annales, chroniques. Essai sur les genres historiques au moyen âge, in: *Annales. Economies. Sociétés. Civilisations*, 28 (1973), p.997.

2. Medieval historiography: interpreting form and social motivation in one model

Typologically, three distinct *genres* can be discerned within the historiographic production of medieval monastic communities: if we discount autobiographies and short, occasional notes, it seems justified to follow most scholars in assuming that annals, chronicles and histories or gesta are the main types. What is common about these texts is easy to determine: they are the expression of the author's will to provide the monastic community and any other potential audience with a linear historical narrative. The form of the narrative is largely due to the needs of the time in which it was written.

Formally, annals are nothing but *aide-mémoires* for the learned, who only need to refresh their memory in order to recall what they acquired as knowledge from other sources. With the aid of chronicles, monks learn to approach their subject according to a distinctively rigid scheme, in which the historical events are arranged following a strict chronology and a host of time-related constructions. Finally, the gesta represent a somewhat freer approach to the historical subject, as the narrative is constructed following the evolution of a central topic (be it the succession of abbots, the history of a bishopric, or a nation).

2.1 Annals

The first genre to emerge in monastic environments in the European Middle Ages were the annals. These texts, always constructed for the most part by adding short, chronological notes of (for the most part) contemporary events to an often discontinued succession of similar entries, have the advantage of being easily accessible because of their brevity, but they lack depth and are often fairly cryptic. Structurally, annals are the expression of a historiography not concerned with the history of salvation or the description of the *series temporum*, the phased succession of time. Even if the annalistic production from the twelfth century onward come to resemble more and more the chronicles of the time, their main goal is to be located in different aspects of the monastic experience[2].

The most common and oldest setting for this type of text appears to be the computistic table. Scholars have agreed long since on their origins, stating that their main reason existence is to be found in the liturgical context they were embedded in[3]. The problems involved with the reconciliation of the Jewish lunar calendar (determining the Easter date) and the Roman solar calendar

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[2] McCORMICK, M., *Les annales du haut moyen âge*, Turnhout, 1975, p.12-13.
[3] INNES, M. and McKITTERICK, R., The writing of history, in: McKITTERICK, R. ed., *Carolingian culture: emulation and innovation*, Cambridge, 1994, p.200-201.

necessitated the spreading of computistic treatises or Easter tables among all ecclesiastical institutions of some importance[4]. In every monastery at least one or both was available, especially after Bede succeeded in introducing the Dionysian table as a proper means of calculating dates and times. In spite of his efforts to introduce a simple but effective universal history in the monastic literature, it was his method proper that really influenced later annalists. He did that by giving a systematic touch to the practise of annalistic writing.

The first texts on the continent date from the end of the seventh and the early eight centuries, but they lack consistency and involvement from any group whatsoever. The annalistic style, which appears to be introduced by Anglo-Saxon monks[5], involved the recording of remarkable events of some importance in the margins of the Easter Tables. Rather swiftly, the laconic marginal notes in computistic tables (*annales minores*) were superseded by another type of annalistic writing, the *Annales Paschales*. The difference lies mainly in the care for the historical text, which in the first case was often degraded to a second-class form of cursory reading as opposed to the systematic, year-by-year inscriptions of the latter. Bede was not only successful because the grace of his computistic achievements and systematic ambitions, but also because of the interest the elite paid to the potential of historical narrative. Indeed, the subsistence of annalist writing throughout a major part of the Middle Ages is largely due to the emergence of an alternate expression, which had very obvious roots in a princely initiative. The extreme contradiction that emerges from the inclusion of annalistic notes (obviously the result of a linear view of time) in computistic tables (oriented toward the circularity of time) would not have lived long were it not that the early Carolingian rulers moulded the genre into a political statement[6]. The Carolingian court and its immediate surroundings emulated the genre toward the end of the eighth century to provide itself with a glorious past. The *Annales Regni Francorum* (741-829) present an early example of semi-diachronic, semi-synchronic historiography and are especially important because they created a precedent for later monastic annalists. In fact, the main impetus for what was to become a fairly exclusive monastic activity in the West came from a secular authority, soon, however, to find itself in anarchy. As the monasteries in the ninth-century empire were important centres of culture, showing more stability than bishoprics and the like, all of the known annals, bar the *Annales Majores* (as the *Annales Regni*

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[4] McKITTERICK, R., Constructing the past in the early Middle Ages: the case of the Royal Frankish Annals, in: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society. VIIth Series*, (1997), p.106-108.

[5] GANSHOF, F.L., L'historiographie dans la monarchie franque sous les Mérovingiens et les Carolingiens. Monarchie franque unitaire et France Occidentale, in: *La Storiografia altomedievale 10-16 aprile 1969. Tomo secondo (Settimane di studio dell centro Italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo XVII)*, Spoleto, 1970, p.668.

[6] McKITTERICK, R., *Constructing*, p.111.

Francorum are also known) and some sporadic continuations, were written in monastic scriptoria[7]. By combining a seemingly contradictory element in a liturgical environment with a distinctive political undertone, the annals were a genre with great potential, even in times of hardship and instability. It was an ideal vehicle for telling an unquestionable truth: by managing historical events in such a fashion that the strict chronology represented and followed the history of salvation, one could claim those events and their representation to be part of God's plan for mankind[8]. This, of course, enhanced the authority and the narrative power of the annalists and their patrons. It appears, however, that social upheaval put an end to the social construction behind the Carolingian annals. From 850 onward, most annals die a silent death, being reduced again to notes *in margine* of computistic texts, or to a contingent series of facts with no internal connection whatsoever[9]. The decline of centralised political power in the West deprived the monastic writers of their main topic, and most historiographic activity ceased. The monastic life had not yet adapted itself to a view of the past that put its own community at the centre of human history[10].

The violent social, religious and military clashes in the late ninth and early tenth century did not yet create an apt environment for historiographic renewal. In the second half of the tenth century, the genre really began to flourish, be it closely followed by the earliest monastic chronicles and gesta[11]. It remains clear, therefore, that annals could only exist when applied to a certain, well-established social concept. The amazing *structural* success of annalistic historiography from the second half of the eleventh century onward can only be explained by the emergence of a confident, but conflict-ridden religious-institutional system, which stimulated the members of the ecclesiastical elite to reflect on their own position in history and in contemporary events. Despite the obvious lack of causality, the genre seems to reflect the upturns in social awareness of medieval monks. Artificially engendered in the ninth century, the genre proved more worthwhile from circa 1050 onward. The main problem with annalistic historiography was that its central theme remained inscribed in the area of secular history[12]. From a narrative point of view, there was no room for an explicit and internally continuous exposition of the self and of the his-

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[7] McCORMICK, M., *Les annales*, p.14-18 and GRUNDMANN, H., *Geschichtsschreibung im Mittelalter. Gattungen – Epochen – Eigenart*, Göttingen, 1965, p.26-27.

[8] McKITTERICK, R., *Constructing*, p.110.

[9] 'Annales sunt res singulorum annorum.' (Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, I, 44).

[10] NELSON, J.L., The 'Annales of St.Bertin', in: GIBSON, M.T. and NELSON, J.L. ed., *Charles the Bald. Court and Kingdom*, Oxford, 1990², p.28 and LÖWE, H., Geschichtschreibung der ausgehenden Karolingerzeit, in: *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters*, 23 (1967), p.2 and 16.

[11] BAUTIER, R.H., L'historiographie en France aux Xe et XIe siècles, in: *La Storiografia* (see above), p.802.

[12] PATZE, H., Klostergründung und Klosterchronik, in: *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte*, 113 (1977), p.89-90.

torical dimension of the social constellation around and within the monastery. Annals reflect the strong social experience of the monks, but does not allow them to express this at great length; moreover, the central theme of the texts is and remains the world. They allow the historiographer to take advantage of a principle of continuity, focus on the secular aspects of life, especially on rulers and their conflicts (hardly ever on their government) and reflect a rather modest social-narrative experience. The dry registration of ascensions, wars, deaths, and so on is definitely not the ideal space for exposing or developing monastic insights. Thus, the main impetus for writing history in an annalistic form is to be located in an increased self-confidence within monastic circles, but its form does not respond to these impulses. The aspects of social confidence are to be sought in the initiative to create and in the internal thematic variations (which we will discuss in the second section of this article). The monks of medieval Europe never strove to defend their claims on property, sacral stature and self-consciousness with the aid of annals. Being an aid to orient the reader or listener in his already acquired knowledge of the past, the genre added this up with additional fragments and referential facts, relevant only in a broader context. After a certain period of time, the heyday of Benedictine monasticism was over, and quite a few thirteenth- and fourteenth-century historians finished their entries in the annals with a disconnected series of trivia, thus denying the logical usefulness of the work of their predecessors.

2.2 Chronicles

The chronicle represents one step higher on the narrative ladder. Isidore of Seville describes the genre as the *temporum series*[13], i.e. the description of events following a strict chronological principle, be it with the aid of refined methods of temporal segmentation or with broadened, more explicit contents. Unlike quite a few annals, the chronicler's work depends heavily on the historic memory from earlier generations[14], but the essential point in chronicle-writing is the technique of reconstructing (not just contemplating) the sequence of facts with the aid of a strict chronology, added to certain narrative concepts (like *regna*, *aetates*, and so on) that bring more depth to the story[15].

There are indications that structures or active *groups* in society could and would no longer be ignored. Indeed, in the final decades of the eleventh and especially in the twelfth century monastic chronicles reflect the need for a narrative which expresses not only the fact that individuals have lived and broken up or restored stability (a primitive view that only recognises stability

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[13] *Etymologiae*, V, 28.

[14] VAN HOUTS, E.M.C., *Local and regional chronicles*, Turnhout, 1995, p.14.

[15] GUENEE, B., *Histoire et culture*, p.204 and WARD, J.O., Some Principles of Rhetorical Historiography in the Twelfth Century, in: BREISACH, E. ed., *Classical Rhetoric & medieval Historiography*, Kalamazoo, 1985, p.106.

versus instability, and the actors responsible for both), but also tries to elucidate the qualities of everyday *government*. The historiography of the twelfth century shows an important tendency to incorporate the non-conflictual *action* of the civil and ecclesiastic government in the historical narrative. The monastic environment is not only brought to light when threatened from the outside, but succeeds in propagating a history of *continuity through policy* in reconstructing the abbey's history. Thus, the community can gradually reclaim its own past. This appreciation of tension, but also, and more importantly, of the 'daily routine' of government are signs of a major evolution in monastic historiography. It remains to be seen, however, to what extent the chronicle fit the need to develop a group-related consciousness. We will see that local chronicles could not represent fully the community as an entity, whereas universal chronicles had serious problems in incorporating the monastery's history in the history of salvation. Still, chronicles have the great advantage of being directly related to the present: without an explicit motivation, founded in contemporary needs, chronicles would not have existed[16].

2.2.1 Universal chronicles

Universal chronicles are the response of historiographers to the need for a handy, inexhaustive but narratively elaborated overview of history from the Creation or the Incarnation, dividing time in conceptually justifiable units. The attempted reconciliation of the theory of history and historiography reaches its pinnacle here, where the past is interpreted as a succession of events in sacred time. In this genre we hardly encounter statements that differ completely from the other two genres, but its greatest merit seems to lie in its success due to its accessibility and its universal ambitions. The medieval monasteries were very keen on possessing this type of chronicle, as it allowed them to explain clearly why historiography was useful to the reclusive life of the monks and as its contents were part of a divine plan which always merited scrutinising[17]. The first Christian examples of this genre go back to the fourth century, when Eusebe of Cesarea made a much-admired attempt at reconciling the vague and hardly chronologically documented history of the Christian movement and the referential sequence of secular history and its main actors (the succession of

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[16] 'Medieval historiography… was essentially universal in a way, but rather restricted way, presenting only select sections which were stamped by the view of the contemporaries and the conviction that their own age was nearest to God.' (GOETZ, H.W., On the universality of universal history, in: GENET, J.P. ed., *L'historiographie médiévale en Europe. Actes du Colloque organisé par la Fondation Européenne de la Science au Centre de Recherches Historiques de l'Université Paris I du 29 mars au 1er avril 1989*, Paris, 1991, p.261).

[17] ONDRACEK, C., Die lateinischen Weltchronicken bis in das 12. Jahrhunderts, in: KNEFELKAMP, U. ed., *Weltbild und Realität: Einführung in die mittelalterliche Geschichtsschreibung*, Pfaffenweiler, 1992, p.2.

emperors, kings, and the like)[18]. When chronologists finally decided upon a reliable chronology based on the Christian principles of *Gliederung*, Bede could come up with a convincing and widely disseminated example of universal history[19].

We can safely assume that monastic historiographers as a group did not emulate the genre before the end of the twelfth century. True, there are many universal histories from before that period, but none of these are the result of a sustained movement. More specifically, most of them are individual enterprises, much copied, little emulated. Only during the final decades of the eleventh century did authors begin to conceive of the compilation as a legitimate mode for writing history[20]. Due to the exponential increase of sources, historians felt the need for making a resume of relevant old, difficultly accessible and forgotten sources. Suddenly, a great number of monasteries, even small ones, tried to add new information to this great body of work, contributing facts about the own community, thus making the genre an element of the twelfth-century Renaissance. The success of even the smallest of continuations on greater enterprises like the *Chronicle* of Sigebert of Gembloux (finished in 1111) proves the immense impact of the genre[21].

Unlike what has been stated in the past, I believe that the monastic universal histories from the twelfth century often did not really reflect the start of a lasting tradition. The technical refinement of the greater universal histories often prevented scholars from take notice of the meagre dimensions of aetates, regna and other principles of *Gliederung* in most twelfth-century chronicles[22]: few authors were really concerned with reconstructing the past as a reflection of the history of salvation, but instead they attempted to provide the reader or the listener with a manageable overview of the world's history. Few learned principles really emerge in these texts[23], and the main goal of the historiographers was certainly not to introduce the profane into a sacralised past[24].

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[18] The χρονικοι κανονες (see GANSHOF, F.L., *L'historiographie*, p.660).

[19] KRÜGER, K.H., *Die Universalchroniken*, Turnhout, 1976, p.13.

[20] MELVILLE, G., Le problème des connaissances historiques au Moyen Age. Compilation et transmission des textes, in: GENET, J.P. ed., *L'historiographie*, p.25. Some modest attempts at writing universal history had already seen the light in the tenth century (see VON DER BRINCKEN, A.D., *Studien zur lateinischen Weltchronistik bis in das Zeitalter Ottos von Freising*, Düsseldorf, 1957, p.141-144).

[21] GUENEE, B., L'historien et la compilation au XIII siècle, in: *Journal des Savants*, (1985), p.122-129 and 134-135.

[22] BRETT, M., The use of universal chronicle at Worchester, in: GENET, J.P. ed., *L'historiographie*, p.277.

[23] KRUGER, K.H., *Die Universalchroniken*, p.17.

[24] *Ibidem*, p.19; for example, Sigebert of Gembloux tried to demonstrate that the *translatio imperii* had been successful through the mediation of the Carolingians and lived on in the German Empire; this explains why his interest for the Germanic tribes declines swiftly after 800 (GOETZ, H.W., *On the Universality*, p.253-256).

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More often, we see that the thematic variation within these texts is comparatively high and deserves an appreciation from a non-formalistic, social point of view. Indeed, speaking in social-constructivistic terms, we witness the broadening of social perception. The monks who wrote these chronicles presented the past as an amalgam of different forces in society, which interacted vigorously, but were to be discussed as entities in their own right. Thus, the biographies of kings, clerics and abbots go along with their conflicts (the most primitive scheme, often seen in annals), but great stress is also laid on the importance of their policies. The value of continuity is appreciated in a way that makes clear to the audience that the governmental actions of the protagonists were as important as the restoration of peace and stability. In other words, the breaking points and conflicts in history were no longer the central themes in history, but it was in fact the way leaders and rulers avoided them that benefited from most of the attention. Politics (in every sense of the word) was at the top of the historian's list. From a monastic point of view, this promoted the value of the community as an entity worthy of mentioning in a broader set of events and institutions. It is clear that the rising importance of alternative monastic and religious movements, the institutionalisation of the Church as a whole, the difficulties and emancipation from the Investiture Crisis onward and a prosperous economic situation promoted a strong historical self-consciousness.

For the most part the universal chronicle of the twelfth century is a prime example of the manner in which historical narratives and chronological-theoretical principles were joined together in one text, without interfering with each other. On one hand, the popularity of the genre is due to the social revaluation of the community and on the other hand it can be attributed to the scientific interest in chronology. The moment the traditional monastic life began its downward slide at the end of the twelfth century[25], theory and practise no longer met. Universal histories ceased to be the central genre of monastic (and especially Benedictine) historiography and were replaced by the greater compendia from mendicant authors. The few universal histories that were written after the final decades before 1200 show a particularly strong decline in interests as the author's own period approaches, which indicates his reliance on older compilations and the general disinterest in his own period from a social point of view[26]. The decline of historiography on this level is not complete[27],

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[25] The depression after the twelfth-century upswing is not only due to internal factors, but also involved the whole of society (SPÖRL, J., Wandel des Welt- und Geschichtsbildes im 12. Jahrhundert ? Zur Kennzeichnung der hochmittel-alterlichen Historiographie, in: LAMMERS, W. ed., *Geschichtsdenken und Geschichtsbild im Mittelalter. Ausgewählte aufsätze und Arbeiten aus den Jahren 1933 bis 1959*, Darmstadt, 1961, p.286).

[26] CLASSEN, P., Res Gestae, Universal history, Apocalypse, in: BENSON, R.L. and CONSTABLE, G. ed., *Renaissance and Renewal in the twelfth century*, Oxford, 1982, p.399 and GOETZ, H.W., *On the universality*, p.253.

[27] VON DER BRINCKEN, A.D., *Studien*, p.137, 141 en 143, assumes that the decline of universal history is due to shrinking international interests (because of political instability),

but it is clear that the universal history underwent a transition from offering a general overview of history to blandly compiling the authors from the past[28]. All theoretically proposed time-divisions were dropped due to their dysfunctional representation models of the *historia salutis* (which was soon to become *scientia salutis*), except in a few cases, and the genre only survived in the light of particular needs[29]. Mendicant orders used them for predicatory purposes, while other monastic writers were commissioned by the lay elite or applied the method to regional or national themes[30]. One can easily acknowledge the devaluation of the author's environment in these texts, as the history of a particular community was of little interest for the whole of a monastic order[31]. In the best of cases, the chronicler devoted quite a few lines to the history of his own community, but he often did that by isolating this from the rest of the narrative. Its inappropriateness becomes painfully clear.

In fact, fourteenth- and fifteenth-century chronicles with universal ambitions only remained universal because they merely expressed the ambition to cover a large portion of the world's history, thus encompassing the sacral dimension of salvation history. Their main goal is reduced to describing a whole (human history) in a strictly chronological environment[32], which proved to be a much asked-for tool. The literary sophistication of most of the early chronicles was dropped in favour of a business-like approach, most of all stressing the fact that historiography was the result of serious research and educated choices in the process of compiling the historical facts[33]. The infamous '*Verschulung der Geschichtsschreibung*'[34] was the result of the changing needs for historical

a limited interest in chronology and the increasing demand for compendia, not universal histories.

[28] Three types succeeded each other: Von Der Brincken and scholars after her described the *Series temporum*, chronicles written mainly out of chronological interest (8th-11th century). After that, shorter, synchronic narratives known as the *Mare historiarum* would be fairly popular. From circa 1100 it would be common knowledge that 'La chronique, c'est peut-être du moins beau style que l'histoire, mais c'est du plus sérieux' (GUENEE, B., *Histoire et chronique*, p.8) Finally, the *Imago Mundi* type with strong compendistic features became popular at the end of the twelfth century (ONDRACEK, C., *Die lateinischen Weltchronicken*, p.6).

[29] BREZZI, P., Chroniques universelles du moyen âge et histoire du salut, in: GENET, J.P. ed., *L'historiographie*, p.240.

[30] Being 'ein totes Gleis der Historiographiegeschichte', the type would still have a tremendous impact on regional historiography through the practise of preaching (JOHANEK, P., Die lateinischen Weltchronicken und regionale Geschichtsschreibung im Spätmittelalter, in: PATZE, H. ed., Geschichts-schreibung und Geschichtsbewusstsein im späten Mittelalter, Sigmaringen, 1987, p.326 (citation)-328).

[31] VON DER BRINCKEN, A.D., *Studien*, p.211.

[32] KRÜGER, K.H., *Die Universalchroniken*, p.34-35.

[33] BREZZI, P., *Chroniques*, p.241 and RYDING, W.W., *Structure in medieval Narrative*, The Hague and Paris, 1971, p.62-63.

[34] ONDRACEK, C., *Die lateinischen Weltchronicken*, p.11; 'compiler une chronique est devenu le rêve de l'érudit médiéval' (GUENEE, B., *Histoire et chronique*, p.9).

narratives and of the decline of strong central actors like the papacy, the empire and even the monastic community itself. Universal history became a scholarly discipline, be it with a strong tendency to overestimate the importance of one's own environment, of one's own region, nation or order in the author's own period[35]. This shift in a central theme to be put at the centre of universal history was the result of shifting group identities, which could no longer be monopolised by the many historian-monks and a few clerics. Nations, dynasties, towns, regular orders and the like claimed a historiography that put them at the centre of history, thereby reflecting a situation in real life, where monasteries and bishoprics lost their intellectual, economic, social and political dominance or important weight to other forces in society. From the end of the twelfth century onward, traditional monastic orders were on the decline, and so too was the need for a cultural system, where monastic authorship reflected cultural progress, continuity, or decline[36].

2.2.2 'Small' and local chronicles

The local chronicle as a genre is quite rare in Western monastic milieux. There is little evidence of parallels in Roman, Byzantine or early Christian literature, and the few examples that have been described in the past are often to be denominated as gesta. Around the end of the eleventh century, most monasteries came to be more involved in local and international politics, and some sensed the need for a historiographic narrative, which would claim a place in history for the community[37]. Authors were very keen on stressing the sacrality and the continuity of their monastery and its inhabitants as a group and found the annals to be inapt on a structural level. Chronicles will, as it appears, prove to be a temporary answer during the twelfth century. Their main goal was, of course, to include historical facts (or assumptions and fictions represented as facts) in the main stream of human history and the history of salvation. The effort required by this holistic approach is to be seen as an important phase of group-related social consciousness. It proved, however, nearly impossible to provide the audience with a narrative that placed the community among the whole of history without pushing the abbey's history aside. The scale of historical events among and around the monastery simply did not fit in a semi-universal setting, and a deep textual problem was intimately sensed after a few decennia. In all,

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[35] It was '…den Hintergrund und ein wichtiges Korrelat für die regionale Geschichtsschreibung.' (JOHANEK, P., *Die lateinischen Weltchronicken*, p.329).

[36] PIAZZONI, A.M., *Guglielmo di Saint-Thierry: il declino dell'ideale monastico nel secolo XII*, Roma, 1988, p.69-70.

[37] VAN HOUTS, E.M.C., *Local and regional chronicles*, p.17-19 and GOETZ, H.W., Von der res gesta zur narratio rerum gestarum. Anmerkungen zu Methoden und Hilfswissenschaften des mittelalterlichen Geschichtsschreibers, in: *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire - Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis*, LXVII (1989), p.702-703.

local monastic chronicles are a short-lived genre, reflecting a transitional experience of the group as well as of its place in society, and the explicit wish to portray both aspects in a history which brings broader aspects of life (be it within a limited margin of thematic possibilities) to light.

2.3 Histories and Gesta

Gesta represent the most difficult enterprise of medieval historiography. The genre is essentially created with the intention of describing the history of an institution, the succession of leaders and the development of a community in a chronological but also logical fashion: time is an important tool to measure the events against it, but ascensions and deaths of leaders, crises, acquisitions and other important events are as important for the construction of the narrative. Topically, geographically and temporally, all of the narrative is dictated by the evolution of the group in question[38]. The histories provided the public with a narrative overview of the history of an institution, often paired with some technical details on donations and acquisitions[39]. At the beginning of quite a few cartularies, a narrative, dealing with the foundation of the community was included; what some scholars call *Cartularchroniken* is an elaborated mixture archival sources (a cartulary) and the gesta per abbot, arranged in a chronological fashion, thus proving to be a genuine instrument for the community of legal self-defence, moralisation and self-consciousness[40].

The monastic experience already introduced the genre of the gesta and histories in the early Middle Ages, be it in rather marginal areas (Jura, sixth century; Wearmouth and Jarrow, eighth century). The spreading of this type is due to internal needs: each community would, at a certain time, be ready for a narrativisation of its history. This moment is often provided for at the time of a conflict, a crisis, or the death of an important abbot[41], but will never result in historiography unless the community has enough mental and physical resources to regain (part of) its strength, be it sometimes in an altered form. In the case of some annals and most chronicles, one can acknowledge the main interest of the author by isolating the different topics in his narrative; in the case of gesta, the main interest *is* the topic of the text.

Histories and gesta are the most elaborated expression of medieval monastic (and other) historiography: they include the essential characteristics of what theoreticians nowadays call textual reconstruction of the group or textual group-building and express in the most fluent manner the vision or the construction of the vision of a community of its past. The *historia* really is a *story*,

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[38] VAN HOUTS, E.M.C., *Local and regional chronicles*, p.27.

[39] *Ibidem*, p.19.

[40] *Ibidem*, p.8-10.

[41] *Ibidem*, p.29-30.

superseding the oppressing importance of the chronology with its own internal structures. This allows the historian to delve deeper into the causes (or forms of contingency) and consequences of one's actions, however without losing sight of the sequence of facts. *Gesta* base their narrative on the same principle, be it with more regard to the evolution of the community and the rigid structure of succession of the leaders: it is '[un] genre littéraire narratif constitué de séries de notices consacrées aux évêques successifs d'une cité ou aux abbés d'un monastère.'[42] Being an account of the *deeds* of the protagonists, be it good or bad, the genre represents a high level of social awareness, a sign of comprehension of the fact that daily government is necessary and stabilising.

The first influential gesta stem from papal (*Liber Pontificalis*) and episcopal (*Gesta episcoporum Mettensium* of Paul the Diacre, 783-786) environments, the latter still with a strong accent on the relations with the Carolingian dynasty, which claimed kinship ties with the earliest and holy bishops of Metz[43], thus proving the precocity of the genre at this stage. The production of gesta remained very limited, not only on a geographical level (mainly Lorraine and Saxony), but also quantitatively, and could only show up in monastic environments where the influence of reforms was strong and stimulated an artificial economical and intellectual upward movement (Lobbes) or where the monastery's resources and relative independence were strong enough to support the creation of an extraordinary narrative, closely tied to the development of the community (Saint-Bertins)[44]. Otherwise, the genre remained a dead letter until the second half of the eleventh century. At that time, monasteries had to cope with some resistance or tried to emancipate themselves as a group in their own right, but with a definite place in (and no longer at the margins of) society[45].

Gesta proved that the succession of abbots was continuous: the authority and legitimacy of the present community was ensured, and in fact tinged with sacral lustre, due to the holiness of its founders. Government, even in its most basic forms, becomes a sacral duty, which renders all claims on acquired or received possessions unquestionable. The moral justness and dignity of the successors of the first leader no longer necessarily stems from their personal capacities, but is often attributed to their clever management and acquisitions[46].

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[42] SOT, M., *Gesta episcoporum, gesta abbatum*, Turnhout, 1981, p.13.

[43] GANSHOF, F.L., *L'historiographie*, p.656-657 and GRUNDMANN, H., *Geschichtsschreibung*, p.39-40.

[44] UGE, K., Creating a usable past in the Xth century: Folcuin's Gesta and the crises at St. Bertin, in: *Studi Medievali*, XXXVII (1996), p.890 and SOT, M., *Gesta episcoporum*, p.39.

[45] CONSTABLE, G., Past and Present in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Perceptions of time and change, in: *L'Europa dei secoli XI e XII fra novita e tradizione, sviluppi di una cultura (Atti della decima settimana internazionale di studio. Mendola, 25-29 agosto 1986)*, Milano, 1991, p.140-141.

[46] The same idea also goes for Flodoards *Historia Remensis ecclesiae* (10th century), see ZIMMERMANN, H., Zu Flodoards Historiographie und Regestentechnik, in: JÄSCHKE,

Holiness is acquired by continuous succession and by just government, which makes of the gesta the ideal tool for justifying the reason for the existence of the present group. Gesta, as they were written, were always conceived to let the contemporary group benefit from their contents[47].

The first monastic gesta to emerge on a large scale are the *fundationes*, the foundation histories. They expose and legitimise the foundation of the monastery, with great emphasis on the juridical and moral righteousness of this action. Often, the tale is heroically conceived, and covers the first two or three generations[48]. Not only new foundations from the end of the eleventh century had their first years chronicled, also very early sixth- and seventh-century monasteries had their origins retraced, often with the aid of hagiographic and archival sources. Remarkably, the genre only became successful when jurists began to question the value of narrative sources as a means to claim certain rights legally[49]. The monks needed a defence against ambitious noblemen, the clergy, and the rising impact of money, trade and new exploitation methods on the economy, other monasteries and new religious movements[50]. Even more importantly, they also felt the need to justify their claims internally. One could begin to question the legitimacy of one's own group, which was to be avoided at all costs: this implied the creation of gesta, which shared their wide thematic interests with the universal chronicles from the first half of the twelfth century. Especially when internal reform came to its end, the need for a narrative legitimisation was very strong: regular monks lost a lot of their spiritual and other appeal to the newer orders and the clergy, and saw a sharp decline in their revenues. They became less popular, and lost a lot of their impact. Fearing *oblivio* on the grounds of their own existence, the monastic group conceived an adaptation of the gesta principle in which the group not only defined its own existence, but also tried to eliminate external influences from the narrative, thus representing the monastery as a community on its own[51]. This regressive reaction to the crisis of monasticism in the latter part of the twelfth century is quite

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K.U. and WENSKUS, R. ed., *Festschrift für Helmut Beumann zum 65. Geburtstag*, Sigmaringen, 1977, p.205-206.

[47] It appears unjustified to represent the monastic gesta as an offspring of the episcopal gesta (for a classic example, see GRUNDMANN, H., *Geschichts-schreibung*, p.40-41).

[48] KASTNER, J., *Historiae fundationum monasteriorum. Frühformen monas-tischer Institutionsgeschichtsschreibung im Mittelalter*, München, 1974, p.85.

[49] RUYFFELAERE, P., Kloosterhistoriografie in het graafschap Vlaanderen in de twaalfde eeuw, in: CLOET, M. and DAELEMANS, F. ed., *Godsdienst, Mentaliteit en Dagelijks Leven. Religieuze geschiedenis in België sinds 1970 – Religion, Mentalité et Vie Quotidienne. Histoire religieuse en Belgique depuis 1970. Handelingen van het colloquium van 23 en 24 september 1987 – Actes du colloque des 23 et 24 septembre 1987*, Brussel – Bruxelles, 1988, p.33.

[50] *Ibidem*, p.35 and KASTNER, J., *Historiae*, p.83.

[51] BARROW, J., How the Twelfth-Century Monks of Worchester Percieved their Past, in: MAGDALINO, P. ed., *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-Century Europe*, London en Rio Grande, 1992, p.54 and 73-74.

remarkable. From the thirteenth century onward, the foundation histories, but also the inclusion of the monastery's history in chronicles, were mainly replaced by a fully-fledged account of the community's history[52], based on the idea that internal succession and policies were the main themes in monastic history. The external world only came into sight on very specific occasions (e.g. dedications of churches by bishops); wars were only interesting when they caused trouble to the community, and so on. Historical events were only of importance when they affected the community and when they had consequences for the present group[53]: mostly written after a deep crisis, the monastic chronicler provided the audience with an emotional catharsis, thus '…enabling the community to overcome, actually and psychologically, the degradation of its position…[through] self-representation.'[54] Holiness, continuity and other values expressed in these texts were very popular in monastic environments, as they were very closely related to the basis principles of liturgical *memoria*[55]. After the chronicle proved to be insufficient to its original goal, which was to reassess the place of the monastery in the whole of society, the genre became the symbol of the regression and gradual isolation of medieval Benedictine monasticism.

3. Annals as parameters of social perception: a case study for the Southern Netherlands

3.1 The paradox of social-constructivist typologies

Graph I illustrates the preceding paragraphs with an overview of monastic annalistic activity throughout the Middle Ages in the Southern Netherlands[56]. It appears quite clearly that the domination of annals in the eighth and ninth centuries can hardly be described as a quantitative success; the real pinnacle of

[52] RUYFFELAERE, P., *Kloosterhistoriografie*, p.38 and IDEM, Les Historiae fundationum monasteriorum et leurs sources orales aux XIIe siècle, in: *Sacris Erudiri. Jaarboek voor Godsdienstwetenschappen*, XXIX (1986), p.245-246.

[53] This explains why the monks of Saint-Bertins were asked to subscribe the Gesta of their abbots like a chart, thus proceeding to a catharsis after the tumultuous battle against the aspirations of the Flemish count (UGE, K., *Creating*, p.897-899).

[54] *Ibidem*, p.903.

[55] '…[une] réalisation perpétuelle des origines', in: SOT, M., Généalogies et familles. Historiographie épiscopale et modèle familial en occident au IXe siècle, in: *Annales. Economies. Sociétés. Civilisations*, 33 (1978), p.438 and Arguments hagiographiques et historiographiques dans les 'Gesta episcoporum' (IXe-XIIe s.), in: *Hagiographie, cultures et sociétés, IVe-XIIe siècles. Actes du Colloque organisé à Nanterre et à Paris (2-5 mai 1979)*, Paris, 1981, p.95 and 97.

[56] Each score represents certified proof of annalistic activity in a certain century. This implies the inclusion of several scores for annals with a redaction of several centuries.

annalistic writing can only be situated in the second half of the eleventh and early twelfth centuries. At that time, annals were only a minor aspect of the historiographic production in the Southern Netherlands. The increasing role of annals as a means of recalling and representing the past can only be measured against a sudden, but general upward turn in interest the past, not determined by typological favouritism. The main point about this observation is that the strict sequential (i.e. chronological, not logical) evolution of genres is a fiction. The choice authors made when starting their research has, of course, much to do with the purpose of the upcoming text, but is also very intimately connected with the structures of social perception, inhering in the community. The latter can be ascribed to economic, social, mental and perhaps political situations involving that particular community, and, in the case of the younger movements, that particular order. Still, when more than one genre gets established in a single group (like Benedictine monasticism), the question to be asked is whether the internal structures of the different types converge when conceived at a single point in the socio-perceptual history of the community. Do the annals from the twelfth century still work with a generally conflict-determined idiom (as in the eighth and ninth centuries), or do they follow the general evolution of historical representation ?

Annals, when looked upon from a quantitative point of view, reach their highest point during the twelfth century, when they are most likely to capture some of the thematic diversity, inherent in the chronicles and histories of that time. Still, even in times of varied thematic interest, they reflect a rather meagre social spectrum, and this situation appears to be typical of quite a few smaller centres of historiography, where there was no need for an elaborate account. As the twelfth century brought renewal, mental structures and social change were perceived by many, but only a few of them took pains to accommodate or create the community's historical narrative to the new standards. As far as monasteries were concerned, the annalistic historiography was the easiest to conceive, approached liturgical schemes the most, and had no ambitions to replace the old and recent universal historiography, which most historians found impossible and unnecessary to emulate. As the regression of Benedictine life struck the monasteries hard from the end of the twelfth century, the ambition of most scriptoria became less holistic. The general tendency of monastic historiography is quite simple: as Benedictine authors were giving way to other colleagues (lay intellectuals, clergy, newer orders), their ambitions became less, and the modest efforts they made to present their decreasing role in society resulted in rather lacklustre narratives.

Not only the number of annals produced, but also their contents indicate a perceptive evolution, which can only be determined with the aid of statistical tools. If we separate each remark in the texts on a temporal (the date mentioned in the text) and a thematic basis (i.e. the labelling of each remark from a pre-set series of themes), we can determine how many words were attributed to a cer-

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tain aspect of life. The following step is to investigate the stabilising quality of grouped thematic entries: the preponderance of the worldly theme in texts often indicates less interest in the monastic community and in the religious world as an institutional whole; on the other hand, when the church claims the greater part of the historical work, it seems clear that this implies a situation of regression, where the historian no longer appreciates interaction with the outside world, but prefers to portray the community as autarkic. At the centre of both, we are confronted with interesting examples of interaction, portrayed in the centre of a stable, governed, occasionally conflict-laden world. The first movement should be early medieval, the second late medieval, and the third is to be situated somewhere in between, say, the latter part of the eleventh and the early twelfth century.

Graph II shows that the twelfth century really is the most important century for the monastic chroniclers. Especially chronicles would become a rather stable genre, modelled according to the external appearance of the greater universal chronicles. The process of self-identification would reach its pinnacle here, where thematic diversity is the main common factor in annals, chronicles and gesta. Still, the most popular genre seems to be the chronicle, a short-lived reassessment of the community's past in a universal setting. Shortly after that, as we can see in graph III, the gesta and histories took over on the community's level, and quite a few of the so-called chronicles from the second half of the twelfth century onward are in fact gesta, being the description of the history of an institution, modelled on its internal evolution. This forces us to reinterpret quite a number of typological labels, often given in the nineteenth century. Thus, we can safely assume that the average 'chronicle' from the thirteenth, fourteenth or fifteenth century, dealing mainly with the history of an institution, monastic order or with their leaders is to be defined as a 'gesta'. Gradually, chronicles will become the work of erudite scholars, determined to provide a wide audience (within or outside the order they belong to) with an overview of general history. Even non-Benedictine monastic authors tended to prefer the gesta as a means of expressing group-related historical consciousness. Not only did historians no longer invest much interest in the outside world when writing about their own environment, but the description of the latter also witnessed a serious decline in intellectual and material resources, thus resulting in a general *malaise*.

3.2 Solving the paradox ? Statistical evidence for the continuous registration of social experience

Over twenty annals from the Southern Netherlands, dating from the eighth to the fifteenth century, have been analysed in order to present a (still somewhat fragmentary) overview of the evolution of annalistic historiography. By extension, we can also appreciate social interaction in these texts by means of a

simple calculation. I grouped all remarks following the distinction church – world – nature – culture per year, counted the words and calculated the median, the common average, the standard deviation, the average deviation and the reliability of these scores *per year, per topic*[57]. These results assist us interpreting the scores and correcting extreme values (i.e. exceptionally long passages that disturb the general construction of the text) and allow us to discern the stabilising factor(s) in the text. This way, it will be fairly easy to see what really mattered in the construction of these texts, without regard for the title, intention or other textual aspects of the text. This way, the historian's unconscious predilection for a certain social concept ((a) a strictly secular setting, due to a lack of self-representation in a historical sense, (b) a combined view on interaction or (c) a secluded, self-centred version of history) can be revealed in a convincing manner.

We can see how annals evolve from a basic expression of an early, pre-social representation of the past, to becoming a hallmark of regression and narrative decline from the second half of the twelfth century on by way of being an atypical emanation of historiographic practise with a relatively broad thematic intrest at the end of the eleventh century and the beginning of the twelfth. From the eighth century to the fifteenth, monastic annals from the Southern Netherlands were created, added to or completed. In their external

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[57] The first formula is that of the *standard deviation*, an index which indicates to what extent the scores deviate from the average (with x representing the sum of the scores and n the number of scores):

$$\sqrt{\frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n}(x_i - \bar{x})^2}$$

Extreme scores can, however, disturb the standard deviation. The *average deviation* corrects this by calculating the average of the absolute deviations of scores as opposed to their average value:

$$d = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{k}\left|x_i - \bar{x}\right|$$

The reliability interval represents the *range* of scores at both sides of the common average. If this calculation results in a relatively high score, we can assume that scores fluctuate vehemently throughout the text, thus making one or more thematic segments unstable (and, consequently, less reliable for the construction of a historical narrative. This leads us to assume that confidence in social agents should result in stable scores in the thematical segments that cover their activities). The formula includes the entire population (n), the standard deviation σ and $(1 - alfa)$ (*alfa* being the level of significance that is needed for the calculation of the level of reliability (formula: 100.(1-*alfa*)%)). Here, our objective is 95 %; with *alfa* being 0.05, the zone beneath the curve that equals $(1 - alfa)$ or 95% roughly equals 1.96:

$$\bar{x} \pm 1.96\left(\frac{\sigma}{\sqrt{n}}\right)$$

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appearance, they show only marginal similarities to the chronicles and gesta. Whereas the genres converged in the twelfth and thirteenth century, there has been little research on the subsequent evolution of the annalistic genre, and why monks kept using and creating its examples until the final decades of the fifteenth century, if not longer. As a type, the annals belong to an early medieval stage of historical writing, wherein a particular group can not claim its place in history, but its internal interests and main structure evolved with the social perception of the monks, thus becoming a very flexible idiom (table IV).

In the Southern Netherlands, the first peak in annalistic writing is to be situated in the first half of the ninth century, namely in Saint-Amand, Arras, Saint-Bertins and Lobbes. The entries are extraordinarily short, as they only take real notice of instabilities in society, not of governmental actions, and limit their main interest to the worldly sphere. The *Annales Sancti Amandi* show a spectacularly unreliable median, which is apparent in the church-related items: the important facts from the history of the monastery and the Christian world are occasionally mentioned, but without there being any system behind it. Some facts the historian(s) must have known are not present, others are. They are noted at random, and this is much less the case with the worldly conflicts and actors. Ninth-century annals do not assist the community in shaping and affirming its own history and existence. The only stabilising factor in the historical narrative is the outside (secular) world, and its turbulent history.

During the tenth and eleventh century, the median of most annals remains mainly axed on the worldly sphere (*Annales Lobienses*, *Annales Leodienses*), but the 'church'-score tends to alleviate a little, with lesser fluctuations, and, consequently, a more continued interest in the matter. The *Annales Elnonenses* indicate the direction in which the progressive examples will evolve: as years go by, the importance and stabilising role of the church increases significantly, not to replace the worldly factor, but to go alongside it. Even if the annals did not lend themselves typologically and externally to efficient self-affirmation, the general tendency in the monastic world-view did pierce through the net of rigid typology. The discontinuity of the annals' structure causes them to keep some focus on the conflictual events, but this tendency does not mean much, compared to the other evolution. At Voormezele (currently Belgian West Flanders) however, the segmented analysis of the continuous redaction indicates that there could have been a far more radical evolution. Here, the annalists contemplate the foundation of the monastery *in extenso* (an already announced departure from the principle of contemporary redaction), using hagiographic sources, then applying historiography as a source, they tend to emulate the ninth-century worldly exclusivism. Afterwards, that is to say for their own period, the authors recognise the importance of the community and evaluate the ecclesiastical history of their time in a fairly positive light. It is, however, conspicuously clear that the group is not yet sufficiently developed to be the subject of a history, so instead the focus lies in general events in the church and a

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few monasteries in the region. Finally, the self-conscious attempt at re-evaluating the particular group in society shows signs of sclerosis, when the general theme focuses entirely on the ecclesiastical aspects of life. Here, we see how the declining importance of the monastery stimulates a narrativisation of the reaction the monks enacted: mentally, they retired completely from the outside world. The same evolution, which is characterised by a complete reversal of dominance from the worldly to the church-related sphere, is also to be seen in the *Annales Blandinienses*, the *Annales Sancti Jacobi minores* and the *Annales Laubienses*. The same goes for the annals from the monastery of Saint Peter in Ghent, where the eleventh-century turning point in ecclesiastical affairs was strongly appreciated: whereas structurally determining elements proliferate at the end of the eleventh century, the general length of the annotations remains fairly stable and indicates a remarkably focused (but perhaps unconscious) desire to structure the text according to current opinions concerning several main actors in society.

Soon however, the monastic writers lost interest in the outside world, and though they recognised the need of indicating the difference between themselves and rivalling alternatives, they did not go any further than to declare for themselves who they were from an internal point of view, not as opposed to others. Very few annals were newly conceived after the twelfth century, but quite a number were continued up to and including the fourteenth. The statistical preponderance of the 'church'-scores increases or remains on a high level, and the fourteenth-century Annals Elmarenses still follow the same path. This indicates how strong the perception of the specific period influences its perception and representation of the past.

4. Conclusion

In the past few decades, there has been a definite willingness among scholars to study the historiographic narratives of the Middle Ages as a model of *constructing* and *representing* the past. As it was my original intention to uncover the main types and the intentions behind the choice of type, my attention was inevitably drawn to a formalistic approach, which attempted to build a chronology of successive genres. Whereas this approach has allowed me to uncover quite a number of important facts and givens on the genre, it still suffers from its own restrictions.

There can be no doubts about the legitimacy of the typological, three-fold division, set in a group- and environment-related setting. This approach, however correct its basic claims may be, presents a still somewhat rough image of medieval historiography. As I have tried to demonstrate, there appear to be rather more complex mechanisms at work. In the first place we can easily acknowledge the social dimension of the choice of a narrative genre, not just by

situating it in a level of cultural development, but also by claiming its relatedness to a certain point in an evolution of group-related consciousness. Consequently, the first amendment to the present typological approach should be the fragmented description of the evolution of historiography in several group-related clusters, something that until now was only achieved in smaller case studies. It will become less and less justifiable to make overviews of historiography as a genre in the Western world. Annals, chronicles and gesta have been present in the typology of quite a number of identifiable groups and human environments throughout the Middle Ages, but the impetus to create them in a particular setting has to be reconsidered for each separate case. We can no longer speak of *the annals* as a medieval genre and describe its general characteristics: only the phrase 'annalistic writing as a means of describing the past' can still be justified, as each group had other reasons, other moments at which it thought of itself as being ready for that kind of historiography. Admittedly, this radical approach still needs to be corrected by further research. But the evidence is clear: the most striking example is the evolution of the histories or gesta as a genre, which underwent so many different evolutions and adaptations in such a vast number of milieux, that we can no longer speak of a general type, to be described in other than very general terms.

Secondly, I firmly believe that the initial introduction of a genre in a certain group is crisis-related, be it in a positive (the second half of the eleventh century for Benedictine monasticism, and the introduction of the chronicle as a structurally applied means for describing the past) or a negative sense (the decline of the traditional monastic world after about a century). However self-conscious some abbey's gesta may seem, it often also hides in its inner structure a mental situation, which often reflects a rather negative attitude toward the outside world and a sense of low self-esteem on the part of the monks as members of human society. In the latter part of the Middle Ages, this is no longer a signal of ascetic reclusion and a back-to-basics ethic, but rather the indication of dwindling social influence and narrative power. This observation could, of course, lead us to shed new light in the character of these texts.

Thirdly and finally, the situation described above is rendered somewhat impenetrable due to a third factor introducing itself when several genres are practised at the same time. As annals, chronicles and gesta were commonly written from the end of the twelfth century onward, one could assume that not everyone had the same literary ambitions in creating a vision of the past. If the original introduction of a genre corresponds to a certain phase in social consciousness, does this perpetuate itself in later emanations, even if the social perception of a group has changed ? As far as we can deduce from the analysis of annalistic writing, this seems not to be the case: indeed, after a genre is intro-

duced, it tends to follow a general trend in group-related visions of the past and self-definition, rather than to stick rigidly to its own original destination[58].

IV. Quantitative analysis of some major trends in Benedictine annalistic literature from the Southern Low Countries

This table shows the corpus of analysed texts. The titles are those, commonly used among scholars, but I have seen to it that only genuine annalistic historiography was included. Further information on editions, literature and so on can be retrieved from the online database Narrative Sources, a repertory of narrative texts from the Southern Low Countries (http://www.narrative-sources.be); the code in the first column is the identification device used there.

NaSo	Location	Source	Date
A080	SAINT-AMAND	Annales Sancti Amandi	8th-9th centuries
A081	Ib.	Annales Sancti Amandi breves	9th century
A082	Ib.	Annales Sancti Amandi brevissimi	9th century
A089	ARRAS	Annales Vedastini	9th century
A087	SAINT-BERTINS	Annales Sithienses	9th century
A072	LOBBES	Annales Laubacenses	9th-11th centuries
A076	LOBBES	Annales Lobienses	10th-11^{h} centuries
A067	SAINT-AMAND	Annales Elnonenses	10th-13th centuries
A074	LIEGE	Annales Leodienses	11th century
A066	GHENT – Saint-Peter's	Annales Formoselenses	11th-12th centuries
A061	ANCHIN	Annales Aquicinctini	11th-13th centuries
A063	GHENT – Saint-Peter's	Annales Blandinienses	11th-14th centuries
A085	LIEGE – Saint-Jacob	Annales Sancti Jacobi Leodiendis minores	11th-14th centuries
A073	LOBBES	Annales Laubienses	11th-16th centuries
A086	TOURNAI	Annales Sancti Martini Tornacensis	12th century
L013	LIEGE – Saint-Jacob	Annales sive Chronicon S. Jacobi Leodiensis ab a. 988-1193	12th century

NaSo	Location	Source	Date
R034	LIEGE – Saint-Jacob	Annales Sancti Jacobi (continuatio Reineri)	12th-13th centuries
A077	MARCHIEN-NES	Annales Marchianenses	12th-14th centuries
A083	GHENT – Saint-Bavon	Annales Sancti Bavonis Gandensis	14th century
A069	GHENT – Saint-Peter's	Annales Elmarenses	14th-15th centuries

I. SAINT-AMAND I: A080 Annales Sancti Amandi (8th-9th centuries)

MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABIL-ITY	
7	10,62	131,48	5,88	29,55	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
0	1,12	118,18	1,99	26,57	CHURCH
0	0,56	5,86	1,09	1,31	NATURE
7	8,92	27,03	5,14	6,08	WORLD

II. SAINT-AMAND II: A081 Annales Sancti Amandi breves (9th century)

MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABIL-ITY	
3	3,13	1,27	0,98	0,55	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
0	1,13	1,73	1,51	0,74	CHURCH
0	0,56	0,89	0,82	0,39	NATURE
0	1,43	2	1,77	0,85	WORLD

III. SAINT-AMAND III: A082 Annales Sancti Amandi brevissimi (9th century)

MEDIAN	AVE-RAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABIL-ITY	
3	2,7	0,63	0,56	0,4	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
0	0,8	1,25	1,12	0,76	CHURCH
0	0,6	0,92	0,84	0,57	NATURE
0	1,3	1,61	1,56	0,99	WORLD

IV. ARRAS: A089 Annales Vedastini (9th century)

MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABIL-ITY	
189	253,77	147,13	119,41	56,56	CULTURE
0	0	-	-	-	CHURCH
6	27	36,99	30	14,21	TOTAL
0	3,91	12,32	6,64	4,73	NATURE
0	0	136,68	107,19	52,54	WORLD

V. SAINT-BERTINS: A087 Annales Sithienses (9th century)

MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABIL-ITY	
17	17,53	11,59	9,47	2,44	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
0	1,42	4,1	2,43	0,85	CHURCH
0	1,54	5,32	2,67	1,12	NATURE
14	14,54	9,81	7,84	2,05	WORLD

VI. LOBBES I: A072 Annales Laubacenses (9th-11th centuries)

MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELIA-BILITY	
7	10,76	10,86	6,65	2,45	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
0	1,56	7,31	2,65	1,66	CHURCH
0	0,72	2,46	1,2	0,56	NATURE
6	8,48	7,65	5,56	1,72	WORLD

VII. LOBBES II: A076 Annales Lobienses (10th-11th centuries)

MEDIAN	AVE-RAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
21	31,85	73,98	22,41	11,49	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
0	5,17	21,5	8,14	3,33	CHURCH
0	0,28	2,6	0,53	0,41	NATURE
19	26,39	55,43	19,31	8,61	WORLD

VIII. SAINT-AMAND IV: A067 Annales Elnonenses (10th-13th centuries)

MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELIA-BILITY	
8	14,66	20,39	12,25	2,07	TOTAL
0	0,31	2,03	0,58	0,21	CULTURE
2	6,4	14,2	7,36	1,44	CHURCH
0	2	7,99	3,52	0,82	NATURE
2	5,81	13,55	7,02	1,37	WORLD

IX. LIEGE: A074 Annales Leodienses (11th century)

MEDIAN	AVE-RAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELIA-BILITY	
5	6,49	5,17	3,3	0,66	TOTAL
0	0,23	1,47	0,47	0,19	CULTURE
0	2,2	3,82	2,52	0,48	CHURCH
0	0,19	1,13	0,35	0,14	NATURE
3	3,84	5	3,54	0,65	WORLD

X. GHENT – Saint-Peter's I: A069 Annales Formoselenses (11th-12th centuries)

MEDIAN	AVE-RAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELIA-BILITY	
7	10,77	11	7,2	1,38	TOTAL
0	0,24	2,48	0,5	0,31	CULTURE
0	4,79	8,64	5,73	1,08	CHURCH
0	0,81	4,52	1,45	0,56	NATURE
4	4,9	5,67	4,24	0,72	WORLD

XI. GHENT – Saint-Peter's Ia: A069 Annales Formoselenses
(11th-12th centuries): 0-649

MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
10	15,55	14,07	10,75	2,91	TOTAL
0	0,68	4,05	1,31	0,83	CULTURE
4	8,74	12,05	8,92	2,4	CHURCH
0	0	-	-	-	NATURE
5	6,11	6,74	5,1	1,3	WORLD

XII. GHENT – Saint-Peter's Ib: A069 Annales Formoselenses
(11th-12th centuries): 650-1049

MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
5	7,2	8,16	4	1,57	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
0	1,87	3,69	2,67	0,71	CHURCH
0	1,07	6,33	1,85	1,22	NATURE
4	4,27	4,62	3,42	0,89	WORLD

XIII. GHENT – Saint-Peter's Ic: A069 Annales Formoselenses
(11th-12th centuries): 1050-1136

MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
8	10,45	4,79	3,97	1,37	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
4	4,96	5,94	4,2	1,7	CHURCH
0	2,27	4,34	2,57	1,23	NATURE
0	3,21	4,74	4,25	1,36	WORLD

XIV. GHENT – Saint-Peter's Id: A069 Annales Formoselenses
(11th-12th centuries): cumulated view on 1049-1306

MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELIA-BILITY	
14	18,05	14,58	10,39	3,2	TOTAL
0	0,05	0,43	0,1	0,1	CULTURE
7	10,6	14,23	9,43	3,12	CHURCH
0	0,47	1,77	0,88	0,38	NATURE
0	6,94	10,99	8,35	2,4	WORLD

XV. ANCHIN: A061 Annales Aquicinctini
(11th-13th centuries)

MEDIAN	AVE-RAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
10	15,73	19,72	10,91	4,51	TOTAL
-	-	-	-	-	CULTURE
8	11,66	20	10,7	4,59	CHURCH
0	0,4	1,88	0,78	0,42	NATURE
0	3,63	7,72	4,98	1,76	WORLD

XVI. GHENT – Saint-Peter's II: A063 Annales Blandinienses
(11th-14th centuries)

MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
8	14,67	21,07	11,81	1,97	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
0	5,81	13,51	6,84	1,26	CHURCH
0	1,63	7,13	2,86	0,27	NATURE
3	7,22	13,23	7,9	0,73	WORLD

XVII. GHENT – Saint-Peter's IIa: A063 Annales Blandinienses (11th-14th centuries): 0-649

MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
3	3,6	2,42	1,47	0,53	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
0	1,04	2,53	1,72	0,56	CHURCH
0	0,21	1,94	0,43	0,43	NATURE
3	2,33	1,3	1,05	0,28	WORLD

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XVIII. GHENT – Saint-Peter's IIb: A063 Annales Blandinienses
(11th-14th centuries): 650-1049

MEDIAN	AVE-RAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELIA-BILITY	
7	9,05	6,62	4,7	0,92	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
0	3,09	4,74	3,63	0,64	CHURCH
0	0,84	2,91	1,52	0,39	NATURE
3	4,36	5,79	4,82	0,79	WORLD

XIX. GHENT – Saint-Peter's IIc: A063 Annales Blandinienses (11th-14th centuries): 1050-1292 (and some fragments from the fourteenth century)

MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
12	27,23	30,21	19,63	4,71	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
7	11,62	20,47	11,51	3,19	CHURCH
0	3,34	11,09	5,29	1,74	NATURE
4	12,27	19,59	13,84	3,07	WORLD

XX. LIEGE – Saint-Jacob I: A085 Annales Sancti Jacobi Leodiensis minores
(11th-14th centuries)

MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
7,5	12,22	12,77	9,03	1,32	TOTAL
0	0,12	0,96	0,23	0,1	CULTURE
2	5,85	10,78	6,68	1	CHURCH
0	1,26	5,72	2,31	0,6	NATURE
2	4,97	7,9	5,35	0,8	WORLD

XXI. LOBBES III: A073 Annales Laubienses (11th-16th centuries)

MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
10	14,45	14,22	9,75	1,38	TOTAL
0	0,02	0,44	0,07	0,03	CULTURE
4	7,92	12,25	8,56	1,2	CHURCH
0	0,81	3,31	1,5	0,31	NATURE
2	5,68	9,29	5,92	0,91	WORLD

XXI. LOBBES IIIa: A073 Annales Laubienses (11th-16th centuries): 418-1049

MEDIAN	AVE-RAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
7	9,31	8,34	5,8	1,48	TOTAL
0	0,05	0,58	0,12	0,1	CULTURE
0	4,29	7,66	5,11	1,36	CHURCH
0	0,29	1,52	0,55	0,26	NATURE
3	4,65	6,2	4,2	1,1	WORLD

XXII. LOBBES IIIb: A073 Annales Laubienses (11th-16th centuries): 1050-1199

MEDIAN	AVE-RAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
17	24	19,39	14,17	3,61	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
9	13,94	16,87	12,92	3,13	CHURCH
0	2,12	4,91	3,39	0,9	NATURE
3	7,93	13,44	8,33	2,5	WORLD

XXIII. LOBBES IIIc: A073 Annales Laubienses (11th-16th centuries):
1200-1505

MEDIAN	AVE-RAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
12	15,51	10,8	8,32	2,5	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
7	9,76	10,99	7,79	2,55	CHURCH
0	0,44	3,64	0,85	0,85	NATURE
0	5,29	8,68	6,9	2,02	WORLD

XXIV. TOURNAI : A086 Annales Sancti Martini Tornacensis (12th century)

MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
8	12,07	14,24	8,19	3,67	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
0	2,9	4,02	3,21	1,04	CHURCH
0	1,4	4,6	2,53	1,19	NATURE
2	7,76	13,75	8,47	3,53	WORLD

XXV. LIEGE – Saint-Jacob II: L013 Annales sive Chronicon S. Jacobi
Leodiensis ab a. 988-1193 (12th century)

MEDIAN	AVE-RAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
14	26,3	35,72	21	6,25	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
5	15,57	32,1	18,02	5,63	CHURCH
0	3,45	8,41	5,36	1,48	NATURE
2	7,28	11,04	7,78	1,94	WORLD

XXVI. LIEGE – Saint-Jacob III: R034 Annales Sancti Jacobi (continuatio Reineri) (12th-13th centuries)

MEDIAN	AVE-RAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELIA-BILITY	
264	431,3	530,62	372,43	151,7	TOTAL
0	0,76	3,84	1,47	1,1	CULTURE
120	245,11	390,077	214,77	111,52	CHURCH
12	50,28	63,5	55,49	18,15	NATURE
36	135,15	175,11	149,03	50,064	WORLD

XXVII. MARCHIENNES a: A077 Annales Marchianenses (12th-14th centuries)

MEDIAN	AVE-RAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
6	9,67	10,23	6,86	1,06	TOTAL
0	0,15	1,14	0,3	0,12	CULTURE
2	4,64	8,39	4,75	0,86	CHURCH
0	0,23	1,26	0,3	0,12	NATURE
0	4,61	7,5	4,08	0,77	WORLD

XXVIII. MARCHIENNES b: A077 Annales Marchianenses (12th-14th centuries): 0-1049

MEDIAN	AVE-RAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
5	7,22	6,85	4,69	0,8	TOTAL
0	0,18	1,28	0,37	0,14	CULTURE
2	2,92	4,31	2,69	0,51	CHURCH
0	0,16	1,07	0,34	0,13	NATURE
2	3,92	5,97	4,18	0,8	WORLD

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XXIX. MARCHIENNES c: A077 Annales Marchianenses (12th-14th centuries): 1050-1306

MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELIA-BILITY	
14	18,05	14,58	10,39	3,2	TOTAL
0	0,05	0,43	0,1	0,1	CULTURE
7	10,6	14,23	9,43	3,12	CHURCH
0	0,47	1,77	0,88	0,38	NATURE
0	6,94	10,99	8,35	2,4	WORLD

XXX. GHENT – Saint-Bavon a: A083 Annales Sancti Bavonis Gandensis (14th century)

MEDIAN	AVE-RAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELIA-BILITY	
18	28,1	26,16	18,5	4,77	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
17	25,63	25,02	17,32	4,56	CHURCH
0	0	-	-	-	NATURE
0	2,47	12,34	4,59	2,26	WORLD

XXXI. GHENT – Saint-Bavon b: A083 Annales Sancti Bavonis Gandensis (14th century): 0-649

MEDIAN	AVE-RAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
19	44,79	116,09	42,44	29,13	TOTAL
0	4,23	-	-	-	CULTURE
12	31,03	86,66	34,44	21,75	CHURCH
0	0,15	-	-	-	NATURE
0	9,35	21,26	13,12	5,34	WORLD

XXXII. GHENT – Saint-Bavon c: A083 Annales Sancti Bavonis Gandensis
(14th century): 650-1153

MEDIAN	AVE-RAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
60	73,39	72,62	42,21	6,79	TOTAL
0	0,62	-	-	-	CULTURE
17	29,97	51,54	27,1	4,82	CHURCH
0	5,66	-	-	-	NATURE
27	37,12	46,92	29,79	4,38	WORLD

XXXIII. GHENT – Saint-Peter's III : A066 Annales Elmarenses
(14th-15th centuries)

MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
8	17,58	75,65	16,31	7,95	TOTAL
0	0,01	0,36	0,03	0,04	CULTURE
0	6,79	24,14	8,16	2,54	CHURCH
0	1,68	4,9	2,86	0,51	NATURE
4	9,09	72,13	10,86	7,58	WORLD

XXXIV. GHENT – Saint-Peter's IIIa: A066 Annales Elmarenses
(14th-15th centuries): 0-649

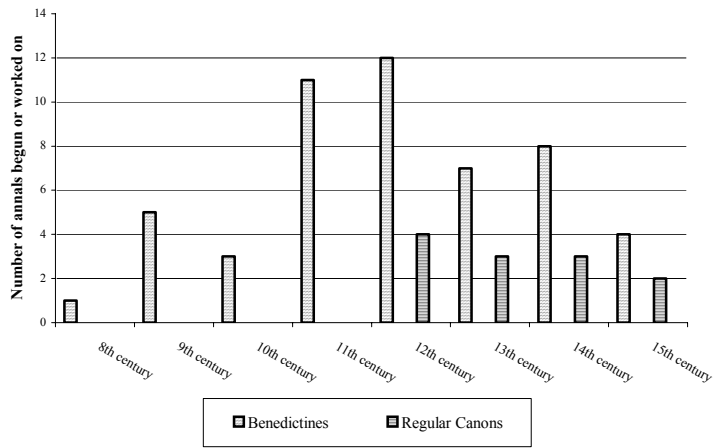| MEDIAN	AVER-AGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELIA-BILITY	
4	5,48	3,68	2,41	0,9	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
0	1,45	3,69	2,26	0,9	CHURCH
0	0,27	2,11	0,52	0,51	NATURE
4	3,75	2,24	1,4	0,56	WORLD

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XXXV. GHENT – Saint-Peter's IIIb: A066 Annales Elmarenses
(14th-15th centuries): 650-1049

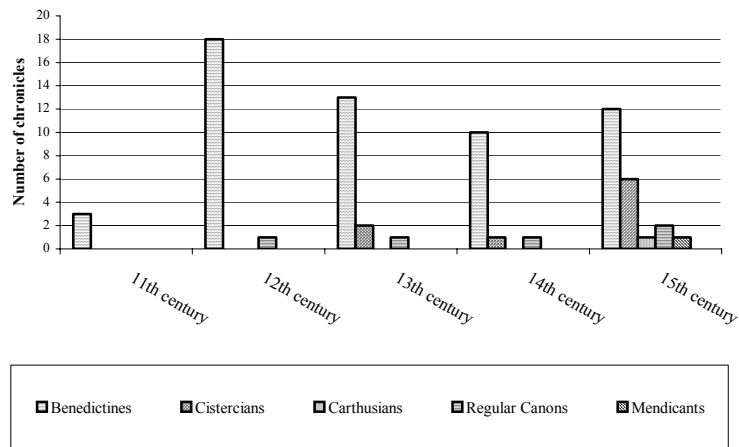| MEDIAN	AVE-RAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELI-ABILITY	
8	9,92	8,82	5,34	1,27	TOTAL
0	0,04	0,5	0,06	0,06	CULTURE
0	4,06	7,9	4,63	1,12	CHURCH
0	0,87	2,96	1,58	0,42	NATURE
3	4,95	6,89	4,77	0,99	WORLD

XXXVI. GHENT – Saint-Peter's IIIc: A066 Annales Elmarenses
(14th-15th centuries): 1050-1245 (and some posterior notes)

MEDIAN	AVE-RAGE	STANDARD DEVIATION	AVERAGE DEVIATION	RELIA-BILITY	
16	40,01	139,5	41,92	27,61	TOTAL
0	0	-	-	-	CULTURE
7,5	15,45	42,83	16,99	8,47	CHURCH
0	4,09	7,57	5,79	1,49	NATURE
0	20,47	134,92	29,9	26,7	WORLD

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I. Annalistic Production in monasteries from the Southern Low Countries

Number of annals begun or worked on (y-axis, 0–14)

x-axis: 8th century, 9th century, 10th century, 11th century, 12th century, 13th century, 14th century, 15th century

Legend: ☐ Benedictines ☐ Regular Canons

II. Production of chronicles in monasteries from the Southern Low Countries

Number of chronicles (y-axis, 0–20)

x-axis: 11th century, 12th century, 13th century, 14th century, 15th century

Legend: ☐ Benedictines ☐ Cistercians ☐ Carthusians ☐ Regular Canons ☐ Mendicants

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III. Production of histories and gesta in monasteries from the Southern Low Countries