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Sigebert of Gembloux

ca 1028–1112. Low Countries. Benedictine monk in Gembloux (Brabant, Belgium) and St. Vincent (Metz), probably originating from the Meuse-region in Lotharingia. Sigebert is the author of three Latin historical works *Gesta abbatum Gemblacensium*, *Chronica*, and *Libellus de viris illustribus* and of numerous hagiographical texts of which some display a strong historical character. He is also well known for his liturgical, computistical, polemical and theological texts.

Sigebert entered the episcopal abbey of Gembloux during the abbacy of Olbert, who had managed to make this abbey one of the leading intellectual centers in the diocese of Liège. Between 1049 and 1054, after completing his education in Gembloux, he became schoolteacher at St. Vincent, where he would stay for about two decades. At St. Vincent he wrote his first known hagiographical work, the *Vita Deoderici episcopi Mettensis*, on bishop Thierry of Metz who had founded this abbey in 968 (Wolfenbüttel, HAB, 76. 14 Aug. 2, fol. 1^r–5^v). This text with its strongly historical approach already witnessed his sympathy for the Ottonian and Salian imperial Church organisation, which was soon to be vigorously discussed in the Investiture Contest.

Then followed three texts, among which is a *passio* in verse on the 4th-century St. Lucia, whose relics the abbey had managed to obtain. His last works at St. Vincent were, after ca 1063, a *Vita Sigeberti regis* (most complete text in Brussels, KBR, 19598–99, fol. 13^r–14^v, fragments in two other manuscripts) and, shortly before his move back to Gembloux, the historical metrical laudatory poem *De laude urbis Metensis*, which he included in his earlier *Vita Deoderici*. His sacred biography of Sigebert III (d. 656) coincided with the beginning of the cult of this Austrasian king, especially at St. Martin in Metz, and showed a particular interest in the history of the Franks and empathy with the Lotharingian realm. In his poetic work on the town of Metz, he also praised the reformed monasticism of the abbey of Gorze.

Returned to Gembloux after 1071 and definitely before 1075, Sigebert continued his work as a hagiographer. His *De passione sanctorum Thebeorum* and *Vita Maclovii* can be considered as rewritings of older texts. The same holds true for his lives of St. Lambert (two versions) and of St. Theodard. Both martyred saints had been bishops of Maastricht (the forerunner of Liège as episco-

pal see of the diocese) in the second half of the 7th century, and their biographies therefore served very well in Sigebert's defence of the imperial Church. His most original hagiographical work was his *Vita Wicberti*, on the mid-10th-century noble founder of Gembloux, whom he also connected with the reformist monastic life at the abbey of Gorze.

At about the same time, presumably between 1072 and 1092, this life gave rise to Sigebert's *Gesta abbatum Gemblacensium*, in which he related the foundation story of Gembloux and its first five abbacies, with special attention to the abbots Erluin (d. 986) and Olbert (1012–48). This important piece of monastic, institutional historiography consists not only of purely narrative chapters but also contains several characters. It is preserved in Leipzig, UB, civ. Rep. II 68, fol. 13^v–57^v, where it follows after the *Vita Wicberti*, as well as in three early-modern copies. Parts of its contents consist of counterfeits in order to give more age and prestige to Gembloux, but the extent of Sigebert's forgeries remains a matter of debate. The *Gesta* were continued after 1136 by Sigebert's pupil → Gottschalk who described the next three abbacies in the history of Gembloux. In the meantime, Sigebert's concern for the promotion of the cult of St Wicbert remained important, as can be deduced from the fragmentarily preserved liturgical *Lectiones de Wicberto* which he composed between 1099 and 1110.

Between ca 1086 and 1106 Sigebert worked on his famous *Chronica*, his most influential historical work. This universal chronicle covers the period from 381, where → Jerome's *Chronicon* ends, to Sigebert's own days. It was conceived as both a history of the Empire and a history of the Church, and focussed in particular on the importance of Lotharingia. For the period preceding the 1030s, more than 70 sources have been identified, but his account from the second third of the 11th century onwards was based mostly on his own knowledge. In a second phase, Sigebert still continued his *Chronica* after 1105 until Henry V's imperial coronation in 1111. The most important manuscript of the *Chronica*, long erroneously considered as an autograph, is Brussels, KBR, 18239–40, fol. 2^r–55^v. An *editio princeps* was published by Robert Estienne (Paris 1513) on the basis of Leuven, UB, Res. 3 A 35915. In all, 65 manuscripts have been attested, of which more than 44 are preserved.

Abbot Anselm of Gembloux continued Sigebert's *Chronica* for the years 1112–35, after which some other monks extended it to the year 1148. Sigebert's masterpiece became particularly successful in Northern France. The chronicle also gave rise to numerous *continuationes* and *auctaria* outside Gembloux, amongst them the → *Auctarium Affligemense* (Affligem), the *Auctarium Aquicinense* (Anchin), the *Auctarium Laudunense* (Laon) and a continuation by → Robert of Torigni [Fig. 62].

In 1092 while preparing the second phase in the writing process of his *Chronica*, Sigebert also composed his computistical work *Liber decennalis*, in which he developed the chronological method he had applied in his work as historian. Only the long prologue to this treatise, in the form of a dialogue, has been preserved (Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, 1413). As to the anti-Gregorian agenda already implicitly present in his other works, we find this exposed more explicitly in several of his polemical treatises, dating from after Pope Gregory VII's ascent to the Holy See in 1075, for example in his apologia for married priests (ca 1075–80), in his defense of the Church of Liège against some allegations by Pope Paschal II (1103) and in the anonymous treatise *De investitura episcoporum* of 1109 which is attributed to him.

The *De viris illustribus*, written in 1111–12, is Sigebert's last work. Inspired by the example of Jerome's treatise of the same name and by → Gennadius' *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis*, Sigebert offers a catalogue of Christian authors from the legendary Marcellus, disciple of Petrus, up to the early 12th century. Thanks to this last work, we are also fairly well informed on the chronology of Sigebert's own oeuvre and on his appreciation of his authorship. *De viris illustribus* is known in ten manuscripts, three of which date from the 12th century (Douai, BM, 246, fol. 26^r–36^r; London, BL, add. 15218, fol. 22^r–28^r; The Hague, KBR, 76E15, fol. 37^r–55^r). There has been much speculation on the number of autographs of Sigebert that have been passed down, but it may be that his only actual autograph can still be found in the preserved fragments of his theological treatise in his metrical *Commentarium in Ecclesiasten*, written after 1100 (Brussels, KBR, 5546, fol. 97^v, 5547–50, fol. 93 and 5463–67, fol. 1 and 59).

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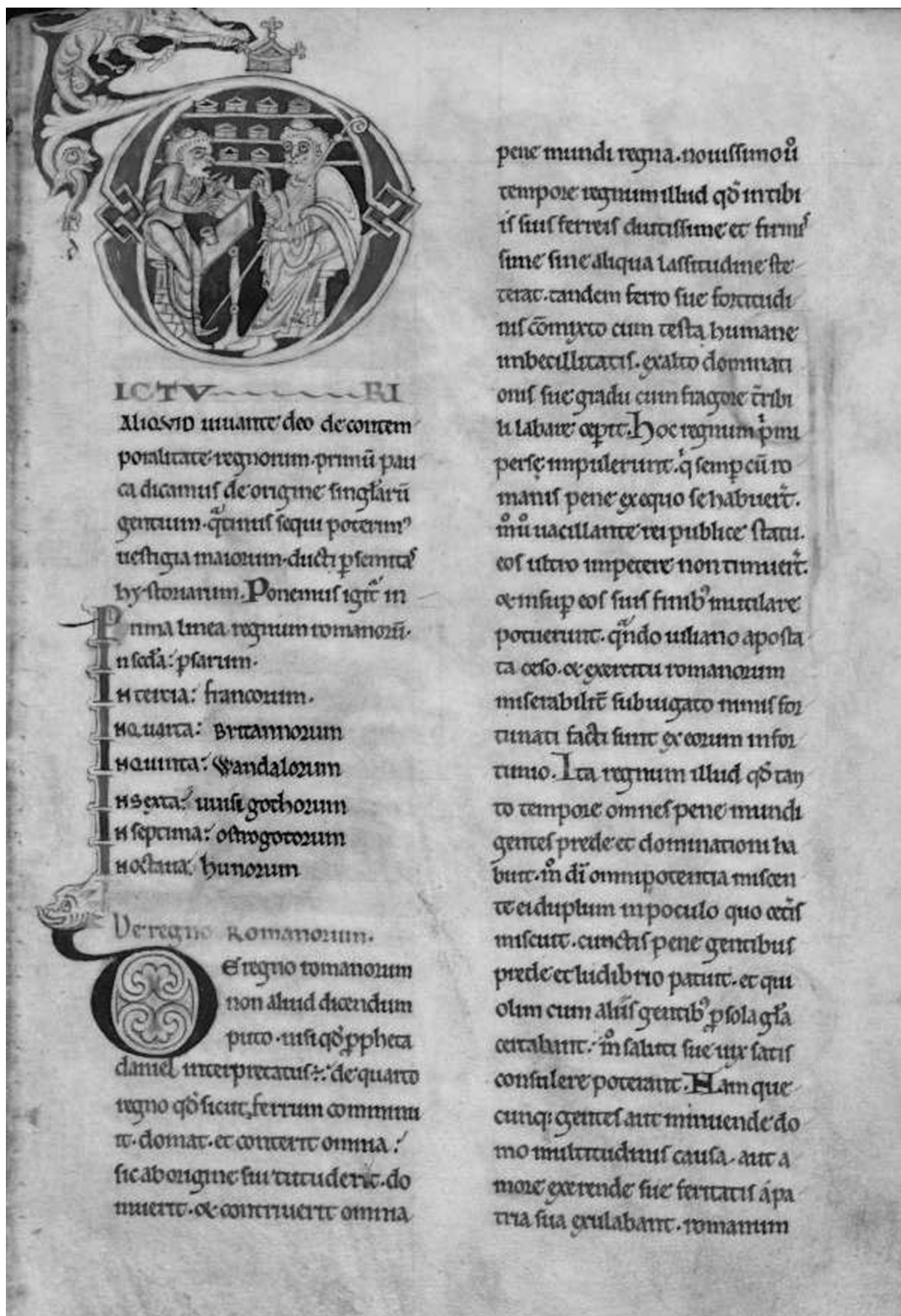


Fig. 62 Sigebert of Gembloux, *Chronica*. Initial D of Dicturi in the continuation of Sigebert's *Chronica* by Robert of Torigny, showing Sigebert dictating to a copyist. Avranches, Bibliothèque Municipale, ms. 159, fol. 70. Cliché Villes d'Avranches.

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