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**Byzantine History and Stories in the Frankish »Chronicle  
of Fredegar« (c. 613–662)**

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LAURY SARTI

BYZANTINE HISTORY AND STORIES  
IN THE FRANKISH »CHRONICLE OF FREDEGAR« (C. 613–662)

The Frankish »Chronicle of Fredegar«, written in the midst of the dark seventh century, is a most remarkable source that stands out for the interest in Mediterranean world it attests and the evidence it provides for ongoing exchanges with the same. The anonymous chronicle is preserved in 38 manuscripts, the first of which dates to around 715<sup>1</sup>. Apart from its »barbarous« Latin and the unusual composition of the chronicle, it bears a remarkably large horizon of narratives: alongside the Frankish kingdoms it refers to Spain, Italy, central and eastern Europe, the Middle East, and most prominently: the Byzantine empire. The aim of this investigation is to collect and analyse the information contained in the chronicle that may be related to the Byzantine world and hence must have been available in seventh-century Gaul to discuss what channels of exchange may have been responsible for its transmission. The analysis of the treatment of the Byzantine world in this chronicle goes hand in hand with a study of the composition of this important piece of evidence and the western perception of Byzantium it attests.

1. »Fredegar«'s Compilations

The authorship of the »Chronicle of Fredegar« has been debated most intensively for over a century, and there is still no basic agreement, although the tendency is to assume several phases of redaction with a strong final revision<sup>2</sup>. As there is no room

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Evangelos Chrysos, Stefan Esders, Andreas Fischer, Yaniv Fox, Peter Schreiner, and Gerald Schwedler for discussions and critical comments to improve this paper. Bonnie Effros kindly offered to read it before its final submission for publication. It goes without saying that the views expressed in this paper and any remaining errors are my own.

- 1 Codex Claromontanus, Paris, BNF ms lat. 10 910, now accessible via <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10511002k> (29.03.2020). Edited in Gabriel MONOD, *Études critiques sur les sources de l'histoire mérovingienne*, vol. 2: *Compilation dite de Frédégaire*, Paris 1885. See also Roger COLLINS, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken*, Hanover 2007 (*Studien und Texte*, 44), p. 55–59. Subsequent references to the chronicle (»Fred.«) refer to *Chronicarum quae dicuntur Fredegarii Scholastici libri IV*, ed. Bruno KRUSCH, Hanover 1888 (*MGH SS rer. Merov.*, 2), p. 1–193. It is the first edition that covers all the manuscripts.
- 2 There has been much research on this chronicle, with some major treatments of its authorship by Bruno KRUSCH, *Die Chronicae des sogenannten Fredegar*, in: *Neues Archiv* 7 (1882), p. 247–351, 421–516; MONOD, *Études critiques sur les sources* (as in n. 1); Gustav SCHNÜRER, *Die Verfasser der sogenannten Fredegar-Chronik*, Freiburg 1900 (*Collectanea Friburgensia*, 9); Bruno KRUSCH, *Fredegarius Scholasticus – Ouderius? Neue Beiträge zur Fredegar-Kritik*, in: *Nachrichten von der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Philologisch-Historische Klasse* 2 (1926), p. 237–263; Siegmund HELLMANN, *Das Fredegar-Problem*, in: *Historische Vierteljahr-*

here to deal with this question, the present study will, for the sake of convenience, refer to »Fredegar« as the author(s) of the chronicle. There is general agreement that the author(s) stemmed from the Frankish kingdoms, maybe with an earlier stay/base in Burgundy and a later one in Austrasia<sup>3</sup>. The chronicle ends abruptly in the year 642, although some foreshadowed events prove that it initially was meant to cover events until at least around 658. In its final layout, it is composed of four books among which the first three contain interpolated summaries of earlier chronicles<sup>4</sup>. The last book largely represents the original work of the author.

The first book begins with the creation of the world. It uses extracts from Hippolytus of Porto's »Liber Generationis« (until Fred. 1.22), followed by lists of the Macedonian kings (1.23), Roman emperors until Severus Alexander, an enumeration of Hebrew rulers (1.24), a computational calendar up to Sigibert I, that oddly mentions Eusebius of Caesarea as the source, and a list of popes (1.25). Chapter 26 again relates to the creation of the world, this time using Isidore of Seville's chronicle. It is followed by several lists, among which one again enumerates the Macedonian and Roman rulers. It is entitled *Regnum paganorum* and ends with the Tetrarchy (1.26, p. 40). After this, there is a caesura with a new subheading: *Constantinopole imperat. Cristiani* (1.26, p. 41). It is the first explicit appearance of what we call the Byzantine world. The list ends with the emperor Heraclius (641)<sup>5</sup>.

The second book represents a short narrative of history from the legendary Assyrian king Ninus, whose reign is dated to the time of Abraham (2.1), until the time of Justinian (2.62). It mainly uses the Eusebius-Jerome chronicle which is integrated after the middle of chapter 49, now using the Iberian chronicle of Hydatius. The final chapters 53 to 62 include several anecdotes, among which two refer to the Byzantine empire. The first recounts how the Gothic king Theoderic announced the death of Odoacer to his emperor »Leo« (i. e. Zenon), while the senate urged the latter to invite

schrift 29 (1934), p. 36–92; Walter A. GOFFART, The Fredegar Problem Reconsidered, in: *Speculum. A Journal of Medieval Studies* 38.2 (1963), p. 206–241, with a summary of relevant scholarship at p. 207–208; Alvar ERIKSON, The Problem of Authorship in the Chronicle of Fredegar, in: *Eranos* 63 (1965), p. 47–76; Ferdinand LOT, Encore la chronique du pseudo-Frédégaire, in: *Recueil des travaux historiques de Ferdinand Lot*, vol. 1, Geneva, Paris 1968, p. 487–529; Roger COLLINS, Fredegar, Aldershot 1996 (Authors of the Middle Ages, 13); COLLINS, Die Fredegar-Chroniken (as in n. 1), with a summary at p. 8–15; Olivier DEVILLERS, Un chroniqueur mérovingien, Frédegaire, in: Danièle JAMES-RAOUL (ed.), *Les genres littéraires en question au Moyen Âge*, Pessac 2011, p. 105–117; Helmut REIMITZ, Cultural Brokers of a Common Past. History, Identity, and Ethnicity in Merovingian Historiography, in: Walter POHL, Gerda HEYDEMANN (ed.), *Strategies of Identification. Ethnicity and Religion in Early Medieval Europe*, Turnhout 2013, p. 257–301, in particular p. 278–280; Justin C. LAKE, Rethinking Fredegar's Prologue, in: *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 25 (2015), p. 1–28. Andreas FISCHER, *Die Fredegar-Chronik. Komposition und Kontextualisierung*, forthcoming.

- 3 COLLINS, Die Fredegar-Chroniken (as in n. 1), p. 18–21; cf. Gerald SCHWEDLER, »Lethe« and »Delete« –Discarding the Past in the Early Middle Ages. The Case of Fredegar, in: Anja-Silvia GOEING (ed.), *Collectors' knowledge. What is kept, what is discarded*, Leiden, Boston 2013 (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 227), p. 69–96, at p. 72–73, adding Neustria.
- 4 On the significance of these interpolations, see particularly Jane E. WOODRUFF, *The »Historia Epitomata« (third book) of the »Chronicle« of Fredegar. An Annotated Translation and Historical Analysis of Interpolated Material*, Diss. University of Nebraska-Lincoln 1987.
- 5 For some vague earlier references, see the heading in the MGH edition at p. 19, which may be a later addition. There is also a mention of Constantine in the computation at Fred. 1.25, p. 34.

and kill the Gothic ruler. In Constantinople, Theoderic would have been saved twice by his friend Ptolemais from perfidious murder, once by ruse and a second time by using a fable to warn him. The story ends with Theoderic deciding to abandon his loyalty towards the emperor (2.57)<sup>6</sup>. There follows another long passage about Belisarius' loyalty to Justinian (2.62), which is probably related to an early version of the Belisarius novel which had reached Gaul from Italy<sup>7</sup>.

The third book largely represents a condensed and reworked version of the books II to VI of Gregory of Tours' »Histories«, which are used already sporadically in the last chapters of the second book<sup>8</sup>. »Fredegar« used a B-type manuscript, which lacks books VII to X and contains only a selection of chapters. The result of this selection is that the B-type versions of Gregory's »Histories« deal more with the history of the Franks and politics and less with ecclesiastical matters<sup>9</sup>. A large majority among these manuscripts includes all of the chapters with more explicit reference to the Byzantine world, but there are exceptions<sup>10</sup>. This means that it is impossible to know exactly which chapters were included in the manuscript the anonymous author used for his redaction. Still, comparing the content of the B-manuscripts with the »Chronicle of Fredegar« suggests that, when selecting and abridging, »Fredegar« did not treat the sections on Byzantium any differently than the rest of the material he found in Gregory's work. Of the seven chapters dealing with the Byzantine world that are contained in the B-manuscripts of Gregory's »Histories«<sup>11</sup>, three are left out

- 6 On this chapter, see Sabine BORCHERT, *Das Bild Theoderichs des Großen in der Chronik des sog. Fredegar*, in: Sebastian KOLDITZ, Ralf C. MÜLLER (ed.), *Geschehenes und Geschriebenes. Studien zu Ehren von Günther S. Henrich und Klaus-Peter Matschke*. Leipzig 2005, p. 435–452; REIMITZ, *Cultural Brokers* (as in n. 2), p. 281; Hans-Werner GOETZ, *Byzanz in der Wahrnehmung fränkischer Geschichtsschreiber des 6. und 7. Jahrhunderts*, in: Mischa MEIER, Steffen PATZOLD (ed.), *Osten und Westen 400–600 n. Chr. Kommunikation, Kooperation und Konflikt, Roma Aeterna*, Stuttgart 2016 (Beiträge zu Spätantike und Frühmittelalter, 4), p. 77–98.
- 7 Andreas FISCHER, *Rewriting History. Fredegar's Perspectives on the Mediterranean*, in: Ian WOOD, Andreas FISCHER (ed.), *Western Perspectives on the Mediterranean. Cultural Transfer in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, 400–800 AD*, London 2014, p. 55–75, at p. 58. See also Richard SALOMON, *Belisariana in der Geschichtsschreibung des abendländischen Mittelalters*, in: *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 30 (1929–30), p. 102–110; Georg SCHEIBELREITER, *Justinian und Belisar in fränkischer Sicht. Zur Interpretation von Fredegar, Chronicon II 62*, in: Wolfram HÖRANDNER et al. (ed.), *Byzantios. Festschrift für Herbert Hunger zum 70. Geburtstag*, Vienna 1985, p. 267–280.
- 8 See the much more detailed descriptions in COLLINS, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken* (as in n. 1), p. 27–46.
- 9 Helmut REIMITZ, *History, Frankish Identity and the Framing of Western Ethnicity, 550–850*, Cambridge 2015 (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought. Fourth Series, 101), p. 13–14 with n. 36, and p. 137–139. See also Walter A. GOFFART, *From Historiae to Historia Francorum and Back Again. Aspects of the Textual History of Gregory of Tours*, in: *id.*, *Rome's Fall and After*, London 1989, p. 255–274.
- 10 See Greg., *Hist.*, in: *Gregorii episcopi Turonensis Libri historiarum X*, ed. Bruno KRUSCH, Wilhelm LEVISON, Hanover 1951 (MGH SS rer. Merov., 1.1). The chapters 2.34, 5.19 and 5.40 are contained in every B-manuscript, while the chapters 2.8, 5.30, 6.2 and 6.30 are only found in the manuscripts B1, B2 and B5 (chapter 2.8 is also contained in B4). See also the shorter mentions in Greg., *Hist.* 3.32 contained in all B manuscripts, *ibid.* and 1.42 in B1 and B5, and *ibid.* 6.24 in B1, B2 and B5.
- 11 Greg., *Hist.* 2.8, 2.34, 4.40, 5.19, 5.30, 6.2, 6.30.

in the »Chronicle of Fredegar«<sup>12</sup>. One of these three chapters is contained in Gregory's »Histories« as part of an extended treatment of the conversion of the Burgundian king Gundobad, which mentions the spread of the monophysite heresies of Eutyches and Sabellius in Constantinople. As this chapter is contained in every B-manuscript<sup>13</sup>, it is very likely that the anonymous author did have access to it and thus that it was his decision not to include it to his own chronicle<sup>14</sup>. The reason might be its length and the religious nature of the chapter, since the chronicle on the whole reveals a preference for secular topics<sup>15</sup>. The four chapters in Gregory's »Histories« with references to the Byzantine world that were retained in the »Chronicle of Fredegar« are included as condensed summaries of the former. The longest represents a 9-line text summarising what in Gregory's »Histories« was a 27-line chapter, judging from the MGH edition<sup>16</sup>.

Chapter eleven is a noteworthy exception. It is a significantly altered and expanded version of Gregory's tale of King Childeric's Thuringian exile<sup>17</sup>. The chronicle adds to Gregory's version that Childeric's replacement Aegidius installed the former's friend Wiomad as subordinated king (*subregulus*) who then tormented the Franks with the intention of producing the impression among the Franks that Childeric was the better king. Once the Franks were ready to have Aegidius replaced by their previous king Childeric, the story takes an unexpected turn: meanwhile, Chilperic resided in Constantinople at the court of the emperor Maurice. An embassy was sent to inform him of the shift of opinion in Gaul and to advise the emperor that should he wish to have the »neighbouring gentes« submit to his empire, he should send a sum of 50 000 *solidi*<sup>18</sup>. Following intrigue initiated by an envoy sent by Wiomad to Constantinople, the result was the confinement of Aegidius's envoys and Maurice sending Childeric back to Gaul with rich presents.

It has been suggested that the story is a reminiscent account of the Byzantine exile of Gundovald<sup>19</sup>, an unrecognised son of Chlothar I († 561) who had taken refuge at

12 Ibid. 2.8, 2.34, 6.30.

13 Ibid. 2.34.

14 Eutyches, however, is mentioned in Fred. 4.66.

15 See Gregory I. HALFOND, The Endorsement of Royal-Episcopal Collaboration in the Fredegar Chronica, in: *Traditio* 70 (2015), p. 1–28, at p. 4–5; SCHWEDLER, »Lethe« and »Delete« (as in n. 3), p. 86.

16 Greg., Hist. (as in n. 10), 5.30 with Fred. 3.80–81. Also compare Greg., Hist. 4.40 with Fred. 3.64, and Hist. 6.2 with Fred. 3.85.

17 Greg., Hist. 2.12. I would like to thank Yaniv Fox for pointing me to this chapter, which is also discussed in his forthcoming monograph on the reception of Merovingian history in medieval and early modern historiographical sources.

18 Fred. 3.11, p. 96: *Dans idemque consilio, laegatus ad Mauricio, imperatore dirigi, gentes que vicinas erant possi adtrahi, ut vel quiquaginta milia soledorum ab imp. dirigerentur, quo potius gentes accepto in munere se imperio subiecerint*. Unfortunately, Gregory does not quantify Guntram's treasury.

19 Quellen zur Geschichte des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts, ed. Andreas KUSTERNIG, Herbert HAUPT, Darmstadt 1982 (Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters, 3), p. 92, n. 75; Matthias HARDT, Childeric I. in den historischen Quellen, in: Dieter QUAST (ed.), *Das Grab des fränkischen Königs Childeric in Tournai und die Anastasis Childerici* von Jean-Jacques Chifflet aus dem Jahr 1655, Regensburg 2015 (Monographien des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz, 129), p. 217–224, at p. 221.

the court of the emperor Tiberius II (574–582) in Constantinople, from whence he was called back to Merovingian Gaul in 581 by the Austrasian elite to become their king<sup>20</sup>. Comparable to the Fredegarian Childeric, Gundovald was equipped with a treasury by the emperor<sup>21</sup>, who obviously had some interest in Gundovald's success. The fact that the »Chronicle of Fredegar« refers to Maurice (582–602) instead of his predecessor Tiberius II may be explained by the temporal proximity between Gundovald's departure and the emperor's death, and the fact that at the time of the so-called Gundovald affair (581–585), the Merovingian kings exchanged several embassies and letters with this particular emperor which were collected within the Austrasian letters (»Epistolae Austrasiacae«). This matter is likely to have been remembered even if these letters were not explicitly related to Gundovald himself<sup>22</sup>. Besides, the same sum of 50 000 *solidi* is mentioned in Gregory's »Histories« in relation to a payment issued in 582/583 by the same emperor Maurice and to the young King Childebert II, who was expected to attack the Lombards in Italy in return<sup>23</sup>. As both sums were meant to be spent by the emperor, Walter Goffart suggested that the aforementioned amount may represent an authentic piece of information about Byzantine-Frankish relations<sup>24</sup>. All in all, »Fredegar«'s tale thus appears to reflect several elements that may be related to the Gundovald affair, a circumstance that is particularly interesting. Although the version of Gregory's »Histories« used by the anonymous author did contain the introductory chapter mentioning Gundovald's exile in Constantinople<sup>25</sup>, it lacked the seventh book that deals extensively with the 584/585 events. The particular interest in this episode is attested by the fact that despite lacking Gregory's report, »Fredegar« did include two summaries – one very short and another slightly more detailed – in his work which thus represent independent testimonies of the Gundovald affair<sup>26</sup>. Chapter 3.89 refers to the participation of the bishops Syagrius and Flavius, who are not mentioned by Gregory, and it claims that the intention of the plot was to replace King Guntramn with Gundovald. Given the integration of different stories into one narrative, which is a typical feature of

20 On the Gundovald affair, see Greg., Hist. (as in n. 10), 6.24, 7.14, 7.26–28, 7.30–32, 7.34–39; Bernard S. BACHRACH, *The Anatomy of a Little War. A Diplomatic and Military History of the Gundovald Affair (568–586)*, Boulder, CO 1994 (History and Warfare); Walter GOFFART, *The Frankish Pretender Gundovald, 582–585. A Crisis of Merovingian Blood*, in: *Francia* 39 (2012), p. 1–27.

21 Greg., Hist. (as in n. 10), 6.24.

22 See *Epistolae Austrasiacae* 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 47, in: *Epistolae Merovingici et Karolini aevi*, vol. 1, ed. Wilhelm GUNDLACH, Berlin 1892 (MGH Epp., 3), p. 110–153, at p. 145–152, and the mention of such an exchange in Fred. 4.5.

23 Fred. 6.42. This aspect will be treated within its wider context in my forthcoming monograph: »Orbis Romanus«? Byzantium and the Roman Legacy in the Frankish World (7<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> Centuries).

24 Walter GOFFART, *Byzantine Policy in the West under Tiberius II and Maurice. The Pretenders Hermenegild and Gundovald, 579–585*, in: *Traditio* 13 (1957), p. 73–118, at p. 110, n. 172. As this reference is contained in Gregory's book six, which was available to the anonymous author(s), it cannot be ruled out that the »Histories« were the only source for the sum mentioned in the »Chronicle of Fredegar«.

25 Greg., Hist. (as in n. 10), 6.24.

26 See Fred. 3.89, 4.2. Like the Childeric-Tale, the first summary erroneously refers to Maurice as the sponsor of Gundovald, which also claims that Cariatto would have joined the plot and received the episcopal see of Geneva as a reward.

oral transmission, it is possible that the tale of Childeric's exile circulated in the Merovingian kingdom as an oral story and that, by the seventh century, it had been combined with another oral narrative: the tale of the rise and fall of Gundovald of Constantinople.

## 2. Evidence for the Transmission of Knowledge about Byzantium

Book IV of the »Chronicle of Fredegar« comprises the most extensive treatments of the Byzantine East. Among a total of 90 chapters, eleven contain information about the Byzantine world, including a major excursus ranging from chapter 62 to 66<sup>27</sup>. A close study of these chapters reveals several discrete sets of information which appear to have reached Gaul at different moments in time. They may be arranged into four groups according to their approximate time of transmission. The first comprises stories dating around the year 585, with mentions of a Frankish (4.5) and a Lombard (4.45) legation to Maurice, and the story of the conversion of the Persian empress Caesara during the same emperor's reign which opens out with the alleged Christianisation of the Persians (4.9). This first set of information probably arrived and was copied or was put down in writing in Gaul around or shortly after 585, a time when diplomatic exchanges between the Franks and the Byzantine court were rather frequent, as emerges from the above.

The second set of information includes major news headlines: besides the rediscovery of the tunic of Christ in 590 mentioned in chapter eleven, it reports Maurice's murder in 602 by the usurper Phocas: »Phocas, duke and Roman patrician, returned victorious from Persia, slew the emperor Maurice and seized the empire<sup>28</sup>.« Both pieces of information might have arrived in Gaul separately. The transmission of the news about the discovery of the tunic may have occurred in the framework of a legation that is mentioned in Theophylact Simocatta's early seventh-century chronicle, an embassy that has been dated by Peter Schreiner to the same year 590<sup>29</sup>. Given the importance of the news, it is also possible that it reached the West by less official routes, be it commerce, pilgrimage, other travellers, or the exchange of letters that have remained unrecorded in our sources. The news about Maurice's death in November 602, by contrast, probably travelled with the Frankish legates Burgoald and Warmaricius. According to a letter written that same month by Gregory the Great to the Frankish queen Brunhild<sup>30</sup>, these ambassadors were meant to travel to Con-

27 Fred. 4.5, 4.9, 4.11, 4.23, 4.45, 4.62, 4.63, 4.64, 4.65, 4.66, 4.81. See also *ibid.* 4.49, 4.58, 4.69, 4.71, which also mention the empire, but refer to events taking place in the West.

28 Fred. 4.23, p. 129: *Eo anno Fogas dux et patricius rei publicae victur a Persa rediens, Mauricio imperatore interfecit; in loco ipsius imperium adsumsit.* Trans. John M. WALLACE-HADRILL, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar with its Continuations*, London 1960 (Medieval Classics), p. 15.

29 Theophylact, *Chron.* 6.3, in: *Theophylacti Simocattae Historiae*, ed. Carl DE BOOR, Peter WIRTH, Stuttgart 1972 (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana); Peter SCHREINER, *Eine merowingische Gesandtschaft in Konstantinopel (590?)*, in: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 19 (1985), p. 195–200 argues that Theophylact might have mingled the news about two or maybe even three different embassies.

30 Gregory, *Epist.* 13.5, in: *S. Gregorii Magni opera. Registrum epistolarum*, vol. 2: *Libri VIII–XIV*, ed. Dag NORBERG, Turnhout 1982 (Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina, 140A), p. 998:

stantinople in 603 to conclude an »eternal peace«, probably in spring, which means that they arrived there several months after Maurice's deposition and the accession of Phocas<sup>31</sup>.

A third set of information is included in the aforementioned excursus. It comprises four chapters on the emperor Heraclius with information that probably reached the West at the same time, and which were completed by some later additions collected in a fifth chapter, including the following statements:

[4.62] »[...] In this year [c. 630] Servatus and Paternus, the ambassadors whom Dagobert had sent to the Emperor Heraclius, returned home with the news that they had made with him a treaty of perpetual peace. I cannot silently pass over the extraordinary things that happened under Heraclius.

[4.63] When Heraclius was patrician of all provinces of Africa, the tyrant Phocas (the killer of the Emperor Maurice) seized the empire and reigned most cruelly. Like a lunatic he threw the imperial treasure into the sea with the remark that he was making a present to Neptune. The senators saw that in his folly he wished to ruin the empire and accordingly they formed a party in support of Heraclius, seized Phocas, cut off his hands and feet, tied a stone round his neck and threw him into the sea. Heraclius was then made emperor by choice of the senate. [...]

[4.66] The race of Hagar, who are also called Saracens [...] had grown so numerous that at last they took up arms and threw themselves upon the provinces of the Emperor Heraclius, who dispatched an army to hold them. In the ensuing battle the Saracens were the victors and cut of the vanquished to pieces. [...] Heraclius felt himself impotent to resist their assault and in his desolation was a prey to inconsolable grief. The unhappy ruler abandoned the Christian faith for the heresy of Eutyches and married his sister's daughter. He finishes his days in agony, tormented with fever [641]<sup>32</sup>.«

*famulis ac legatis Burgoaldo et Vuarmaricario nostrum nos secundum scripta uestra praeuissse secretum [...] Nam nos, quicquid possibile, quicquid est utile et ad ordinandam pacem inter uos et rempublicam pertinet, summa Deo auctore cupimus deuotione compleri;* SCHREINER, Eine merowingische Gesandtschaft (as in n. 30), p. 199. The same embassy is mentioned *ibid.* 13.7.

31 Pope Gregory I records the murder of Maurice and the accession of Phocas in a letter dated to April 603, see Gregory, *Epist.* appendix 8, p. 1101.

32 Fred. 4.62–66, p. 151–154: [62] [...] *Eo anno legati Dagoberti, quos ad Aeraclio imperatore direxerat, nomenibus Servatus et Paternus ad eodem revertuntur, nunciantes pacem perpetuam cum Aeraclio firmasse. Acta uero miraculi, quae ab Aeraclio factae sunt, non praetermittam.* [63] *Aeraclius cum esset patricius uniuersas Africae provincias, et Fogas, qui tiranneco ordine Mauricio imperatore interfecerat, imperium adreptus nequissime regerit et modum amentiae thinsaurus in mare proiecerit, dicensque Neptuno munera daret; senatores cernentes, quod uellet imperium per stulticiam destruere, factionem Aeracliae Fogatim adprehensum senatus, manibus et pedibus truncatis, lapidem ad collum legatum, in mare proiciunt. Aeraclius consensu senatu imperio sublimatur. [...]* [4.66] *Agarrini, qui et Saracini [...] in nimia multitudine creuissent, tandem arma sumentis, provincias Aeragliae imperatores vastandum inruunt, contra quos Aeraglius milites ad resistendum direxit. Cumque priuare cepissent, Saracini milites superant eosque gladio graueter trucedant. [...] Aeraglius cupiens super Saracinus uindictam, nihil ab his spoliis recepere uoluit.*

The text accounts for Heraclius' rise to power after the deposition of Phocas (4.63), his victory against the Persians (4.64), a description of the emperor and his order to convert all Jews (4.65), his defeat against the Saracens in the framework of the Battle of Yarmūk in 636, his death in despair, and the succession in 641 of his son Constantine (4.66). With the exception of the last chapter of the excursus, the information predates the embassy of Servatus and Paternus sent in 630 by King Dagobert I, which is mentioned to introduce the excursus in chapter 62<sup>33</sup>. It was responded to by a Byzantine embassy four years later (4.65)<sup>34</sup>. Thus, it is probable that this information travelled with these two embassies. This implies that chapter 66 must have been added subsequently, a question we will come back to at a later stage.

Diplomatic missions represented only one possible channel for the exchange of information. Roger Collins and Andreas Fischer have pointed to several Italian connections in the »Chronicle of Fredegar«, including the early use of the »Life of St Columbanus of Luxeuil« written around 640 in the monastery of Bobbio, and the likeliness that the chronicle had access to an Italian source that was later used by Paul the Deacon<sup>35</sup>. Although seventh-century Italy had remained connected with the Byzantine world and thus appears a likely source for information in Gaul<sup>36</sup>, the evidence does not support the contention that Italy was of major significance for the transfer of seventh-century information from the Byzantine East to the Frankish world. Until the late sixth century and again in the Carolingian era, in particular, papal Rome indeed was the most important point of contact between the Frankish and the Byzantine world. However, exchanges between Rome and the Franks had drastically decreased following the death of Gregory the Great in 604. Letters

[...] *Eraglius vedens, quod eorum violenciae non potuissit resistere, nimia amaretudines merorem adreptus, infelix Euticiana aereae iam sectans, Christi cultum relinquens, habens uxorem filiam sorores suae, a febre vexatus, crudeleter vitam finivit.* I slightly revised the translation in WALLACE-HADRILL, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar* (as in n. 28), p. 51–55.

- 33 Franz DÖLGER, Andreas E. MÜLLER, *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches. Regesten 565–867*, Munich 2009 (*Corpus der griechischen Urkunden des Mittelalters und der neueren Zeit*), p. 23, date this legation to the time around 630, referring to the *Gesta Dagoberti I. regis Francorum* 24, in: *Fredegarii et aliorum Chronica. Vitae Sanctorum*, ed. Bruno KRUSCH, Hanover 1888 (MGH SS rer. Merov., 2), p. 396–425, at p. 409, whose author used the »Chronicle of Fredegar«. See also Gunther WOLF, *Fränkisch-byzantinische Gesandtschaften vom 5. bis 8. Jahrhundert und die Rolle des Papsttums im 8. Jahrhundert*, in: *Archiv für Diplomatik* 37 (1991), p. 1–14, at p. 6.
- 34 See also the discussion in Stefan ESDERS, *Herakleios, Dagobert und die »beschnittenen Völker«*, in: Andreas GOLTZ, Hartmut LEPPIN, Heinrich SCHLANGE-SCHÖNINGEN (ed.), *Jenseits der Grenzen. Beiträge zur spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Geschichtsschreibung*, Berlin 2009 (*Millennium-Studien*, 25), p. 239–312; Stefan ESDERS, *The Prophesied Rule of a Circumcised People. A Travelling Tradition from the Seventh-Century Mediterranean*, in: Yitzhak HEN, Limor ORA, Thomas F. X. NOBLE (ed.), *Barbarians and Jews. Jews and Judaism in the Early Medieval West*, Turnhout 2016, p. 119–154.
- 35 See COLLINS, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken* (as in n. 1), p. 47, and at p. 52 where he suggests that some minor inaccuracies in the Heraclius excursus might go back to an Italian source; FISCHER, *Rewriting History* (as in n. 7), p. 58–59, 69–72, at p. 59 also suggests the inclusion of a Latin translation from a Greek source from Italy.
- 36 Dietrich CLAUDE, *Spätantike und frühmittelalterliche Orientfahrten. Routen und Reisende*, in: Jean-Louis KUPPER, Alain DIERKENS, Jean-Marie SANSTERRE (ed.), *Voyages et voyageurs à Byzance et en Occident du VI<sup>e</sup> au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Geneva 2000, p. 235–253, at p. 246.

addressed in August 613 by Pope Boniface IV to King Theuderic II and the bishop Florianus of Arles, some of Columban the Young's correspondence and the exchanges at the time of the Lateran Council in 649<sup>37</sup> between Pope Martin I and Amandus of Maastricht – who himself had been in Rome in the 630s<sup>38</sup> – are the only authentic subsequent seventh-century epistolary exchanges between the Frankish world and the Apostolic See that have survived<sup>39</sup>. In addition, Martin's letter to Amandus and a digression on the same pope contained in the »Life of Eligius of Noyon« imply some further correspondence now lost that took place in this particular context<sup>40</sup>. This is about all, however. The chronicle itself contains very few passages related to Italy, and these hardly go beyond scattered references to the Lombards<sup>41</sup> which only entered into diplomatic relations with the empire since 680, i. e. after the acknowledgement by Constantine IV of their kingdom<sup>42</sup>. Besides, the fourth book of the »Chronicle of Fredegar« does not contain a single mention to Rome or the Apostolic See. It is also noteworthy that the large majority of the contents of the three sets of information discussed until this point may be associated with diplomatic exchanges that

- 37 Epistolae aevi merovingici collectae 12 and 13, in: Epistolae Merovingici et Karolini aevi (as in n. 22), p. 434–468, at p. 456; Columban, Epistolae 1, 3, 5, ed. George S. M. WALKER, Sancti Columbani opera, Dublin 1957 (Scriptores Latini Hiberniae, 2), p. 2–59; Martin's letters in: Rudolf RIEDINGER (ed.), Concilium Lateranense a. 649 celebratum, Berlin 1984 (Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum, 2.1), p. 404–424. On the letter, see Charles MÉRIAUX, A one-way ticket to Francia. Constantinople, Rome and northern Gaul in the mid-seventh century, in: Stefan ESDERS, Yitzhak HEN, Yaniv FOX, Laury SARTI (ed.), East and West in the Early Middle Ages. The Merovingian Kingdoms in Mediterranean Perspective, Cambridge 2019, p. 138–148.
- 38 On Amandus' stay in Rome, see Vita Amandi 6–7, in: Vita Amandi episcopi I, ed. Bruno KRUSCH, Hanover, Leipzig 1910 (MGH SS rer. Merov., 5), p. 395–449, at p. 434.
- 39 The earliest example recorded thereafter is a letter written in May 719 by Pope Gregory II to the missionary Boniface, Epist. 12, ed. Michael TANGL, Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus, Berlin 1916 (MGH Epp. sel., 1), p. 17–18. Between these letters we have three problematic letters contained in the Epistolae Viennenses spuriae collection, nr. 10, 11 and 12, in: Epistolae Merovingici et Karolini aevi (as in n. 22), p. 84–109. See also the discussion of these relations in Ian N. WOOD, Between Rome and Jarrow. Papal relations with Francia and England, from 597 to 716, in: Chiese locali e chiese regionali nell'alto medioevo, Spoleto 2014 (Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 61), p. 297–318, and the well-thought treatment by Sihong LIN, The Merovingian Kingdoms and the Monothelete Controversy, in: The Journal of Ecclesiastical History 71.2 (2020), p. 1–18.
- 40 See Epistula beati Martini pape ad beatum Amandum episcopum directa, ed. RIEDINGER, Concilium Lateranense (as in n. 37), p. 422–424, at p. 423: *credimus etenim ad uos peruenisse*, attesting that Martin must have had reasons to assume that Amandus had already received recent news about what had happened, probably due to a previous exchange. The digression on Martin I in the »Life of Eligius« implies that a letter comparable to the one addressed to Amandus was sent by the pope to the Neustrian king Clovis II, see Laury SARTI, The Digression on Pope Martin I in the Life of Eligius of Noyon, in: ESDERS, HEN, FOX, SARTI (ed.), East and West (as in n. 37), p. 149–164, at p. 160–161.
- 41 See Fred. 4.13, 4.31, 4.34, 4.71. See also the mention of some more or less simultaneous military involvement of the Franks and the Byzantines against the Lombards in Paulus Diaconus, Historia Langobardorum 5.5–5.10, ed. Georg WAITZ, Ludwig BETHMANN, Pauli Historia Langobardorum, Hanover 1878 (MGH SS rer. Lang., 1). The only exception to the above is the mention of saint Columbanus going to Bobbio in chapter 4.36, in addition to another potential exception in the reference to a *Romana provincia* in Fred. 4.81.
- 42 Konstantinos P. CHRISTOU, Byzanz und die Langobarden. Von der Ansiedlung in Pannonien bis zur endgültigen Anerkennung (500–680), Athen 1991.

took place around the time of the latest events reported in the framework of these same sets of information. Although silence is not conclusive evidence – and it appears very unlikely that no other letter has been exchanged between Rome and Francia during this period –, the diplomatic exchanges which are explicitly mentioned by the chronicle in this case are a much more likely channel for the exchange of the aforementioned information than a detour through Italy. However, alternate channels such as merchants, pilgrims and other travellers should never be discounted<sup>43</sup>.

As the previously mentioned sets of information reached the West long before the final redaction of the »Chronicle of Fredegar«, they were probably not collected by its (final) anonymous author. This may have been done at different stages, whether by one or several individuals or by an institution like a monastery or a *scriptorium* based at a royal court. A particularly likely place for the collection of information on the Byzantine world would be the Austrasian court in Metz given its long tradition of a more intensive exchange with Constantinople. The assumption that relevant information was gathered at different stages is supported by the inconsistent portrayal of the emperor Phocas. While chapter 4.23 depicts him in a neutral manner, chapter 4.63 adopts a hostile position towards the emperor as attested in the Byzantine chronicle of Theophylact Simocatta written around 628<sup>44</sup>. This confirms that the news about the rise of Phocas contained in chapter 23 reached the West before the third set of information<sup>45</sup>, and it supports the idea that the redaction of the excursus itself must date to a later time, i. e. when new information was available.

### 3. Frankish Assessments of the Byzantine World

What does the »Chronicle of Fredegar« reveal about the seventh-century perception of the Byzantine world? The terminology used in this context is noteworthy. Although the common appellation for the empire was *imperium*<sup>46</sup>, there are two sections

- 43 Cf. COLLINS, Die Fredegar-Chroniken (as in n. 1), p. 52, assuming that it is unlikely that »Fredegar« received information directly from Byzantium. See also Sihong LIN, The Merovingian Kingdoms (as in n. 39), p. 7–9, arguing that in the context of the Lateran Council of 549 the Merovingian kings might have chosen the side of the emperor as defined by the *Typos*, not that of the pope, which seems to support the impression that relations with the empire were considered more important by the Franks than those with the Apostolic See.
- 44 Theophylact, Chron. (as in n. 29), 8.6, 8.10, 8.11. Similar, for example, to the Short History, 1, 2, of patriarch Nikephoros, in: Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople. Short History, ed. Cyril MANGO, Washington, DC 1990 (Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae, 13). Less explicit in Chronicon Paschale oly. 347[610], p. 700–701; oly. 348[615], in: Chronicon Paschale, ed. Ludwig DINDORF. Bonn 1832 (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae, 11.1), p. 707. There is a modern translation in Chronicon Paschale 284–628 AD, transl. by Michael WHITBY, Mary WHITBY, Liverpool 1989 (Translated Texts for Historians, 7). Mischa MEIER, Kaiser Phokas (602–610) als Erinnerungsproblem, in: Byzantinische Zeitschrift 107.1 (2014), p. 139–174, does not consider this piece of evidence.
- 45 The above, of course, presumes that the anonymous author(s) of the »Chronicle of Fredegar« did not make any subsequent changes to the characterisation of Phocas.
- 46 Fred. 4.33: *parte imperiae ... imperio Romano*; 4.45: *imperiae petentes ... se dicione imperiae tradedit*; 4.49: *se cum omni gente Langobardorum imperio traderit*; 4.64: *sedem imperiae*; 4.65: *emperium ... provincias emperiae ... emperium*; 4.69: *emperae*; 4.71: *imperio*; 4.81: *imperium; Romana provincia emperiae; emperium*.

in which *res publica* is used<sup>47</sup>, a term the anonymous author could have borrowed from Gregory's »Histories«<sup>48</sup> and that corresponds to the Greek word *politeia*<sup>49</sup>. Apart from this, *manum publicum* is used three times<sup>50</sup>, and there are single records for *pars publica* (4.66) and *imperator provinciae*<sup>51</sup>. The designations for the Byzantine empire thus are most heterogeneous, as »Fredegar« obviously did not always consider the term *res publica* in Gregory's work appropriate, but completed this terminology with further diversification. There is another particularity: the chronicle restricts the use of the characterisation of the empire as »Roman« to sections where it refers to territories that after 395 have been under the jurisdiction of what is often referred to as the western Roman empire. This includes Vandal Africa, Spain and Italy<sup>52</sup>. A possible explanation would be that »Fredegar« already considered the eastern parts of the Byzantine empire to be »Greek«, thus anticipating a concept of differentiation that would become dominant in the eighth century<sup>53</sup>. A more likely explanation would be that »Fredegar« considered the Byzantine empire as the imperial state *per se* and thus only felt the need to be more specific when the chronicle referred to the empire's western regions, since he could have considered the designation ambiguous given the potentially wide range of application of the term *imperium*. If this was the case, the terminology compared to the designation *Persarum imperium*<sup>54</sup> and the characterisation »Roman« still applied to the Byzantine empire. Apart from this, the chronicle mainly uses the term *romanus* to denominate the native inhabitants of the Frankish realm in a quasi-ethnic sense<sup>55</sup>, comparable to the

47 Fred. 4.23: *Fogas dux et patricius re publicae*; 4.64: *provinciae rei publicae*.

48 Greg., Hist. (as in n. 10), 1.42, 2.3, 2.12, 5.19, 6.30.

49 See Hans-Georg BECK, *Res publica Romana*. Vom Staatsdenken der Byzantiner, Munich 1970, p. 13.

50 Fred. 4.33; 4.58: *usque manum publicam suae ditione subiciendum*; 4.69: *manu publica*.

51 Ibid. 4.63: *imperatorum multae provinciae*. Cf. Fred HAENSSLER, *Byzanz und Byzantiner*. Ihr Bild im Spiegel der Überlieferung der germanischen Reiche im früheren Mittelalter, Bern 1960, p. 64–65.

52 Fred. 2.56, 4.33, 4.81. For a different approach on Romanness in the chronicle, see Andreas FISCHER, *Reflecting Romanness in the Fredegar Chronicle*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 22.4 (2014), p. 433–445. See also the recent studies in: Walter POHL, Clemens GANTNER, Cinzia GRIFONI, Marianne POLLHEIMER-MOHAUPT (ed.), *Transformations of Romanness. Early Medieval Regions and Identities*, Berlin 2018 (*Millennium Studies*, 71).

53 See Laury SARTI, *From Romanus to Graecus. The identity and perceptions of the Byzantines in the Frankish West*, in: *Journal of Medieval History* 44.2 (2018), p. 131–150.

54 Fred. 4.63, p. 152: *Cum infestatione Persarum imperium temporebus Maurici et Fogatis imperatorum multae provinciae fuissent vastate*; see also *ibid.* 4.9, 4.64.

55 The late Merovingian and early Carolingian sources occasionally use the term *imperium* to refer to the western kingdoms, e.g. *Annales Mettenses priores*, a. 688, ed. Bernhard DE SIMSON. Hannover, Leipzig 1905 (MGH SS rer. Germ., 10), p. 5: *Eodem tempore Theodericus rex occidentalium Francorum, quos illi Niwistrios dicunt, regebat imperium, habens maiorem domus Ebroinum nomine*; Vita S. Chrothildi, in: *Fredegarii et aliorum Chronica. Vitae Sanctorum* (as in n. 33), 2, p. 342: *Deus enim futurorum previderat ex Chrothilde semen regium nasciturum, eorumque propagine Romanorum Francorumque imperium gubernaturum*. See also the discussion of the term *imperium* in Dorine VAN ESPELO, *A Testimony of Carolingian rule? The Codex Epistolaris Carolinus, its Historical Context, and the Meaning of Imperium*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 21.3 (2013), p. 254–282, and *Continuationes Fredegarii* 18, in: *Fredegarii et aliorum Chronica. Vitae Sanctorum* (as in n. 33), p. 168–193, at p. 176–177: *vir Carolus dux [...] Lugdunum Gallie urbem, maiores natu atque praefectus eiusdem provintie sua ditione rei publice subiugavit*.

designations used to refer to other ethnicities<sup>56</sup>. The term »Greek« is only used once to refer to the Byzantine empire where the chronicle adopts a designation already used by Gregory. Although »Fredegar« does not copy Gregory's text, he uses the characterisation »Greek« in an identical context, i. e. where he blames the Byzantines for the death of a member of the Frankish royal family<sup>57</sup>.

In his introduction to the »Chronicle of Fredegar«, Andreas Kusternig uses the mentioned *publicus*-composites referring to the Byzantine empire to argue that the chronicle bears an anti-Byzantine bias<sup>58</sup>. The evidence he uses does not suffice to support his claim, however. Although the chronicle stresses that the Visigothic king Sisebut was considered *laudabilis valde* for his courageous (*fortiter*) fight against the Byzantines in Spain (4.33), this praise refers to the king's military success as such and thus is unrelated to the Byzantine enemy. Neither does the expression *divino noto* specifically characterise the Arab expansion (4.65) directed against the Byzantine empire: the chronicle uses this expression quite frequently and in different contexts, for example, to characterise the devastation of northern Gaul by the Vandal king Chrocus (2.60). Thus, it does not seem to reveal a specific assessment of the author in view of the Byzantines.

A close look at book IV confirms that the chronicle draws a picture the complexity of which goes beyond mere praise or antagonism. Byzantine slyness and deceit<sup>59</sup> are addressed in several relevant sections, such as when the chronicle mentions how an imperial legate used a mysterious salve to make the Lombard king Adaloald tractable<sup>60</sup>. However, this topic is not more prominent here than in the rest of the chronicle<sup>61</sup>. In addition, although several legations to Constantinople are mentioned that were meant to conclude a treaty of peace<sup>62</sup>, there is no indication that these agreements were subsequently breached (cf. topos of perjury). The chronicle also contains a few references to more or less voluntary acts of subordination to the empire, including the case of the Lombards requesting *pacem et patriocinium imperiae*. The *dux* Authari is reported to have subjected himself and his duchy to the empire and remained loyal thereafter<sup>63</sup>. Here, as elsewhere, the Byzantine empire is represented as a well-recognised power without any noteworthy hostility in the narrative.

56 Fred. 4.24, 4.28., 4.29, 4.78.

57 Ibid. 3.87; cf. Greg., Hist. (as in n. 10), 6.40: *ipsa mulierem cum Grecis relictam*; 6.43: *uoxorem tamen eius a Grecis erepere non potuit*. Similar ibid. 5.38.

58 Andreas KUSTERNIG, Einleitung, in: ID., Herwig WOLFRAM (ed.), Quellen zur Geschichte des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts, Darmstadt 1982 (Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters, 4a), p. 3–43, at p. 5. Ian N. WOOD adopts a comparable assessment in Fredegar's Fables, in: Anton SCHARER, Georg SCHEIBELREITER (ed.), Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter, Vienna, Munich 1994, p. 358–366, referring to deceit as being common among the Byzantines (p. 361) and mentioning hostile comments in the chronicle on Byzantium (p. 366). Cf. HAENSSLER, Byzanz und Byzantiner (as in n. 51), especially p. 57–58 and GOETZ, Byzanz in der Wahrnehmung (as in n. 6), suggesting that the »Chronicle of Fredegar« bears a positive depiction of Byzantium.

59 Cf. HAENSSLER, Byzanz und Byzantiner (as in n. 51), p. 59.

60 Fred. 4.49. See also 4.69.

61 E.g. Fred. 2.58, 3.2, 3.11, 3.27, 3.36, 4.67, 4.90.

62 Ibid. 4.45, 4.62.

63 Ibid. 4.45.

The only section that does contain a more obvious negative tone, and that is not limited to the assessment of a specific ruler<sup>64</sup>, is the narrative in chapter 66 of the battle of Yarmūk of 636 fought between the Saracens and the Byzantines. Here, the chronicle recounts how the latter were heavily defeated first, and that when a second force was set up 52 000 soldiers finally died, and this at night and »by the sentence of God« (*devino iudicio*, 4.66)<sup>65</sup>. This and subsequent events would have caused Heraclius to lose faith by adhering to the Eutychian creed, a negative evolution that ended with the uncanonical marriage to his own niece, the renunciation of his Christian faith, and his death<sup>66</sup>. Still, this contrasts an earlier section that accounts how Heraclius heroically challenged the Persian ruler Chosroes to a duel, in the context of which the chronicle characterises the emperor as a »new David« who prevailed in combat and managed to subdue entire Persia – even if only for three years (4.64). This particular section is followed by an explicit commendation of Heraclius for his outer appearance, his skills, and his education (4.65). Stefan Esders noted that although the information provided on Heraclius largely conforms to what we know from other sources, his course of life in the narrative corresponds to that of the Frankish king Dagobert, which means that in the »Chronicle of Fredegar« both biographies are closely interwoven<sup>67</sup>. The highs and lows are part of this narrative figure. The chronicle neither provides a distinguished negative portrait of the Byzantine world, nor does it draw an excessively positive picture. Thus, the chronicle is not more anti-Byzantine than it is anti-Frankish.

#### 4. Mediterranean Networks of Information

Apart from the different channels of exchange defined until here, the »Chronicle of Fredegar« also gives proof of a wide network of information that obviously reached as far as northern Gaul: the chronicle contains several very early testimonies of Mediterranean narratives. Most prominently, this includes the earliest elaborate report on the Arab conquest as part of the chapters 4.66 and 4.81, which will be discussed below<sup>68</sup>. A second example is a story already insinuated above about the Persian empress Caesara arriving in Constantinople where she was baptised, an event that is claimed to have been followed by the Christianisation of the Persian empire (4.9). Paul the Deacon's late eighth-century »Lombard History« contains a story that is very similar in content, although without direct borrowing in the wording, which means that there must have been an earlier common basis for this tale that is

64 Ibid. 2.57, 4.63.

65 On this, see also ESDERS, *The Prophesied Rule* (as in n. 34), p. 149.

66 Fred. 4.66. Cf. Nikephoros, *Short History* (as in n. 44), 11.

67 ESDERS, *Herakleios* (as in n. 34), p. 285–305, 309–310, with an elaborated treatment of this chapter. Similar FISCHER, *Rewriting History* (as in n. 7), p. 65–68. Cf. Nikephoros, *Short History* 27. On the reception of this story, see Yaniv FOX, *Chronicling the Merovingians in Hebrew. The Early Medieval Chapters of Yosef Ha-Kohen's Divrei Hayamim*, in: *Traditio* 74 (2019), p. 439–447.

68 ESDERS, *Herakleios*, p. 241; Walter E. KÆGI, *Muslim Expansion and Byzantine Collapse in North Africa*, Cambridge 2015, p. 125.

now lost<sup>69</sup>. Although a written original is likely<sup>70</sup> given that the two stories are similar in length and composition, the different phrasing suggests that both authors either had different versions at hand or that a copy of the previous version was only available to one among them at the time of redaction, which means that the other may have read or heard the original story some time prior to his own writing<sup>71</sup>. There is no particular evidence supporting the aforementioned thesis of an Italian provenance of this original source.

Despite the legendary tone of the narrative<sup>72</sup>, it bears some important historic information like the names of the Persian rulers. As John Michael Wallace-Hadrill noted, the names attributed in the chronicle to the imperial couple may have emerged from the attempt to translate their Persian names for a western audience: as a result, Shīrīn was rendered as Caesara, and the Persian name for Chosroes I, Anōsharwān, was translated as Anaulf<sup>73</sup>. A third example of an early version of a narrative is »Fredegar«'s story about Heraclius' heroic duel against a dependant of the same Persian ruler Chosroes, and the subsequent Byzantine victory against his people (4.64). A much shorter and not entirely identical version is attested in the early ninth-century »Short History« of the Patriarch Nikephoros, which identifies Heraclius' opponent as the »*strategos* Razates«<sup>74</sup>. Although it is possible that it goes back to a written Byzantine treatment, it is just as likely that we have here once more an example of oral transmission, maybe a story that was exchanged in the framework of a diplomatic mission. A fourth example is an account about Heraclius' astrological prophecy on the »circumcised people«, a prediction following which the emperor ordered that every Jew should be baptised, including those living under the rulership of the Frankish king Dagobert I (4.65). Esders was able to demonstrate that this genuinely Christian story of Near Eastern origin soon spread in significantly different versions, including a reinterpretation in an Arabic context. None of the surviving versions, however, is older than the story contained in the »Chronicle of Fredegar«. The

69 See Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum* (as in n. 44), 4.50, p. 137. There is also a short note in John of Biclaro's chronicle: *Chron. a. 590.2*, in: *Iohannis Abbatis Biclarenensis Chronica a. DLXVII–DXC*, ed. Theodor MOMMSEN, *Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII*, Berlin 1894 (MGH Auct. ant., 11), p. 163–207, at p. 219: *In his ergo temporibus, quibus omnipotens deus prostrato veterosae haeresis veneno pacem suae restituit ecclesiae, imperator Persarum Christi suscepit fidem et pacem cum Mauricio imperatore firmavit.*

70 John M. WALLACE-HADRILL, *Fredegar and the History of France*, in: ID., *The Long Haired Kings and other Studies in Frankish History*, London 1962, p. 71–94, at p. 88–89. Followed by COLLINS, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken* (as in n. 1), p. 51; FISCHER, *Rewriting History* (as in n. 7), p. 58–59.

71 As Paul's story contains less details than the version in the »Chronicle of Fredegar«, it is also conceivable that Paul read or listened to this particular story in the version contained in the anonymous chronicle without having the entire source at hand, for example if it had been copied on a loose page.

72 Gregory, *Epist.*, 3.62, in: *S. Gregorii Magni opera. Registrum epistolarum*, vol. 1: *Libri I–VII*, ed. Dag NORBERG, Turnhout 1982 (*Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina*, 140), p. 212, written in 593 by Pope Gregory to the metropolitan Domitian of Armenia, which stresses that: *Imperatorem uero Persarum etsi non fuisse conuersum doleo, uos tamen ei Christianam fidem praedicasse omnimodo exulto*, however, confirms that this tale is not entirely fictitious.

73 WALLACE-HADRILL, *Fredegar* (as in n. 70), p. 89.

74 Nikephoros, *Short History* (as in n. 44), 14.

very early (pre-Muslim!) version contained in the »Chronicle« might have reached northern Gaul as soon as 630/634, and certainly no later than in the early 660s<sup>75</sup>. This is noteworthy especially given the distance between the setting of the narrative and the very remote location of its first record.

## 5. An Unwritten Excursus and an Unknown Embassy

The fourth set of information is contained in chapter 81 and is unique among those referring to the Byzantine world: it is a major testimony of what would have followed had the chronicle been continued beyond its current chapter 90. This short summary of an unwritten part of the chronicle needs to be quoted in full:

»This year [641] the emperor Constantine died and was succeeded as emperor, on the motion of the senate, by his son Constans, who was still a minor; in Constans' reign the empire suffered very great devastation at the hands of the Saracens. Having taken Jerusalem [637] and razed other cities, they attacked upper and lower Egypt, took and plundered Alexandria [642], devastated and quickly occupied the whole of Roman Africa, and killed there the patrician Gregory [646]. Only Constantinople, the province of Thrace, a few islands and the Roman province remained in imperial control, for the greater part of the empire had been overrun by Saracens. So reduced, in the last resort, Constans became their tributary, merely controlling Constantinople and a handful of provinces and islands [654]. It is said that for three years or more, Constans paid one thousand gold *solidi* a day to the Saracens; but then he somewhat recovered his strength, little by little won back his empire and refused to pay tribute [658]<sup>76</sup>.«

75 ESDERS, *The Prophesied Rule* (as in n. 34). See also the discussion in Sean W. ANTHONY, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith. The Making of the Prophet of Islam*, Oakland, CA 2020, p. 188–193.

76 Fred. 4.81, p. 162: *Eo anno Constantinus imperatur moretur. Constans, filius eius, sub tenera aetate consilio senato imperio sublimatur. Idem eius tempore gravissime a Sarracinis vastatur imperiom. Hierusolema a Saracinis capta, ceterasque civitates aeversae. Aegyptus superiur et inferior a Saracines pervadetur; Alexandria capetur et praedatur. Afreca tota vastatur et a Saracines possedetur paulolum; ibique Gregorius patricius a Saracinis est interfectus. Constantinopolis tantum cum Traciana provincia et paucis insolis, etiam et Romana provincia imperiae dicione remanserat. Nam maxeme totum imperium a Saracines graveter fuit adtritum; etiam et in postremum imperatur Constans constrictus adque compulsus, effectus est Saracinorum tributarius, ut vel Constantinopolis cum paucis provincies et insolis suae dicione reservaretur. Trebus annis circeter et, fertur, adhuc amplius per unumquemque diem mille soledus auri aeraries Saracinorum Constans emplebat. Tandem, resumtis viribus, Constans imperium aliquantisper recoperans, tributa Saracines emplendum refutat.* I slightly altered the translation by WALLACE-HADRILL, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar* (as in n. 28), p. 67–69. See also the discussion of this chapter and its context in FISCHER, *Rewriting History* (as in n. 7), p. 60–66 and Stefan ESDERS, *Konstans II. (641–668), die Sarazenen und die Reiche des Westens. Ein Versuch über politisch-militärische und ökonomisch-finanzielle Verflechtungen im Zeitalter eines mediterranen Weltkrieges*, in: Jörg JARNUT, Jürgen STROTHMANN (ed.), *Die Merowingischen Monetarmünzen als Quelle zum Verständnis des 7. Jahrhunderts in Gallien*, Munich 2013 (*MittelalterStudien*, 27), p. 189–241, at p. 194–201, and Stefan ESDERS, *When Contemporary History is Caught Up by the Immediate Present. Fredegar's Proleptic Depiction of Emperor Constans II*, in: Stefan ESDERS, Yitzhak HEN,

The information contained in this most remarkable note must have reached Gaul around the time of the chronicle's last redaction. It mentions the death of the emperor Constantine, the succession by his son Constans and it adds an enumeration of the Saracen conquests of Jerusalem, Alexandria and the provinces of Egypt and Africa. It also reports that for three years the empire had to pay to its conquerors a thousand gold *solidi* a day, until it regained new strength that allowed the recapture of several important regions<sup>77</sup>. The account is followed by an important sentence: »How this came about I will report in proper sequence under the year in which it happened; and I shall not rest silent until, God willing, I complete this and the other [subjects] I wish [to write about] and include everything in this book that I know to be true<sup>78</sup>.« This is one among just a very few instances where »Fredegar« addresses his audience<sup>79</sup>.

As mentioned at the beginning of this study, the »Chronicle« ends abruptly in 642. The moment when the Arab conquest reduced the Byzantine empire to the extent that only the city of Constantinople and some minor provinces remained had occurred around the year 654<sup>80</sup>. Thus, Constans could have been able to refuse the payment of tribute near the year 658. In consequence, given the minimum time any information would have needed to reach Gaul, this chapter must have been included in the chronicle no earlier than 659/660<sup>81</sup>. This means that the most recent news contained in the »Chronicle of Fredegar«, which as such helps to date the chronicle's approximate time of redaction, intriguingly relates to the Byzantine east, not to the Merovingian world.

This mention of eastern events dating to around 658 in a Frankish chronicle, with the promise of further details, is striking. The last known official legation between the Frankish West and the Byzantine East is Heraclius's request to baptise the Jews in 634 (4.65). After this, the diplomatic relations virtually faded out until the early Carolingian renewal in the mid-750s under Pippin<sup>82</sup>. Apart from what has already been said, the evidence for less official late seventh-century contacts between the Byzantine and the Frankish world include the suspicion by the Frankish *maior domus* Ebroin that Theodor of Tarsus' company Hadrian might carry secret information of

Pia LUCAS, Tamar ROTMAN (ed.), *The Merovingian Kingdoms and the Mediterranean World. Revisiting the Sources*, London, New York 2019 (Studies in Early Medieval History), p. 141–150, at p. 143–149.

77 ESDERS, Konstans II. (641–668) (as in n. 76), p. 200–201; ID., *When Contemporary History* (as in n. 76), p. 148, notes that this tribute corresponds to the sum mentioned in the chronicle of Theophanes, although this latter source claims that the Byzantines were supposed to receive this money from the Arabs, see Theophanes, *Chron. a. m.* 6150, in: Theophanis *Chronographia*, ed. Carl DE BOOR, vol. 1, Leipzig 1883, p. 347; FISCHER, *Rewriting History* (as in n. 7), p. 63 assumes that 4.81 was added to an already existing text.

78 Fred. 4.81, p. 162: *Quemadmodum haec factum fuisset aeventum, anno in quo expletum est in ordine debeto referam et scribere non selebo, donec de his et alies optata, si permiserit Deus, perficiam, uius libelli cumta mihi ex veretate cogneta inseram.* Trans. WALLACE-HADRILL, *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar* (as in n. 28), p. 69.

79 Fred. 4. praef., 4.84, 4.89, 4.90.

80 Theophanes, *Chron.* (as in n. 77), a. m. 6146; ESDERS, Konstans II. (641–668) (as in n. 76), p. 196–198; FISCHER, *Rewriting History* (as in n. 7), p. 63.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 63; cf. COLLINS, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken* (as in n. 1), p. 26.

82 *Cont.* (as in n. 56), 40; WOLF, *Fränkisch-byzantinische Gesandtschaften* (as in n. 33), p. 1, 6–10.

the emperor, according to Bede's »Ecclesiastical History«<sup>83</sup>, an unnamed clerk travelling around 680 from Cherson in Crimea to Francia, according to the digression of the »Life of Eligius« already mentioned<sup>84</sup>, and Adomnán's »De locis sanctis« which may be read as the testimony of a journey undertaken by a certain Arculf to Constantinople around 670/680<sup>85</sup>. There is also evidence for a potential mutual legation around 692<sup>86</sup>. This, however, is as far as the evidence permits<sup>87</sup>.

The foreshadowing of one or several chapters on eastern events dating to the late 650s implies that the author of the chronicle had more information about what had happened in the East. Other advance notices in the chronicle, such as in 4.84, where »Fredegar« promises to account for the distribution of the royal treasury after the death of King Dagobert – an account that follows shortly –<sup>88</sup>, supports that such an announcement should be taken seriously. The length and ponderousness of his words seem to attest his eagerness to note down what he had learnt, and maybe also his presentiment that he might not be able to add the full account, maybe because of an ongoing illness<sup>89</sup>. This could also be why he added the quoted note only shortly after he received the information it contains, i. e. within a chronologically earlier section. This and the gain in length and detail of those accounts of the chronicle that come closer to the (final) author's own time suggest that these unwritten sections were intended to be rather extensive, probably another excursus.

The promise for a longer treatment on the mentioned topic and the correct sequence of events in chapter 81 suggests that the author was well informed<sup>90</sup>. The likely

83 Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* 4.1, in: Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English people, ed. Bertram COLGRAVE, Roger Aubrey Baskerville MYNORS, Oxford 1969, p. 328–333.

84 Vita Eligii 1.33, 1.34, in: Vita Eligii Episcopi Noviomagensis, ed. Bruno KRUSCH, *Passiones vitaeque sanctorum aevi Merovingici*, Hanover 1904 (MGH SS rer. Merov., 4), p. 663–742; SARTI, *The Digression* (as in n. 41), p. 155, 163.

85 Adomnán, *De Locis Sanctis* 3.1–5, ed. Denis MEEHAN, *Adamnan's De Locis Sanctis*, Dublin 1958 (*Scriptores latini hiberniae*, 3), p. 106–119. See also David WOODS, *Arculf's Luggage. The Sources for Adomnán's »De locis Sanctis«*, in: *Ériu* 52 (2002), p. 25–52; Ora LIMOR, *Pilgrims and Authors. Adomnán's »De Locis Sanctis« and Hugeburc's »Hodoeporicon Sancti Willibaldi«*, in: *Revue bénédictine* 114.2 (2004), p. 253–275; Robert G. HOYLAND, Sarah WAILDER, *Adomnán's De Locis Sanctis and the Seventh Century Near East*, in: *English Historical Review* 129 (2014), p. 787–807.

86 See Jörg DRAUSCHKE, *Diplomatie und Wahrnehmung im 6. und 7. Jahrhundert. Konstantinopel und die merowingischen Könige*, in: Michael ALTRIPP (ed.), *Byzanz in Europa: Europas östliches Erbe. Akten des Kolloquiums »Byzanz in Europa«*, Turnhout 2011 (*Byzantioç. Studies in Byzantine History and Civilization*, 2), p. 244–275, at p. 258–262, pointing to the mention of this embassy in *Annales Mettenses priores* (as in n. 55), a. 692, p. 15: *Confluebant autem ad eum circumscitarum gentium legationes, Grecorum scilicet et Romanorum, Langobardorum, Hunorum quoque Sclavorum atque Sarracenorum. [...] Ipse quoque haud segnius oportuno tempore legatos suos pro utilitatibus imperii sui per diversas regiones dirigens.*

87 See the discussion of the evidence in Ian N. WOOD, *Contact with the Eastern Mediterranean in the Late Merovingian Period*, in: ESDERS, HEN, FOX, SARTI (ed.), *East and West* (as in n. 37), p. 281–296.

88 Fred. 4.85; see also 4.62, announcing the deeds of Heraclius.

89 Cf. FISCHER, *Rewriting History* (as in n. 7), p. 74.

90 See COLLINS, *Die Fredegar-Chroniken* (as in n. 1), p. 52, referring to several mistakes in »Fredegar«'s account on Byzantium. See also WALLACE-HADRILL, *Fredegar* (as in n. 70), p. 75 suggesting that »Fredegar« was able to interview Frankish envoys; ESDERS, *When Contemporary History* (as in n. 76), p. 146–149, stressing that he must have been fairly well informed about the

chronological proximity between the events he planned to refer to and the time of the »Chronicle«'s redaction suggests that the unwritten chapters would have been even more accurate and detailed than what »Fredegar« had been able to report in his (first) Byzantine excursus. Thus, the author(s)' informant or source probably was not merely an uneducated wayfarer or a merchant but rather an educated person with a network that allowed him to collect coherent information about what had recently happened in the different regions of the Byzantine empire. As such a network is most likely to have been expected in the context of a regal or imperial court, the most probable informant was another Byzantine envoy, maybe related to Constans II who since 662 resided in Sicily, which means that chapter 81 may point to the existence of an embassy that is otherwise unattested<sup>91</sup>. A possible context would be the renewal of the »eternal peace« which was concluded by the regent queen Brunhild in 602/603 and renewed by Dagobert in 630. The conclusion of such a peace treaty would have helped to strengthen the position of the young Austrasian king Childeric II († 675) who had only accessed the throne in 662<sup>92</sup>. Paul the Deacon's mention that around 663 Franks attacked the Lombards in northern Italy, and that they were shortly followed by a military intervention against the same by Constans II coming from the south<sup>93</sup>, backs the thesis of a prior agreement.

Theophanes mentions that »inhabitants of the western regions« arrived in Constantinople to request peace<sup>94</sup>. Unfortunately, the chronicle does not provide any further evidence regarding the envoys which is why we cannot be sure that the Franks were involved<sup>95</sup>. The date of 678 offered by the chronicle, associated with the Byzantine success in ending the Arab siege, must be amended since Marek Jankowiak convincingly demonstrated that the first siege of Constantinople had taken place ten

- eastern events. Compare also the descriptions on the end of Phocas in Fred. 4.63 with Chronicon Paschale (as in n. 44), oly. 347[610], p. 701, and Nikephoros, Short History (as in n. 44), 1–2.
- 91 Cf. Fischer suggesting that Fredegar's informant was a scholar like Hadrian, who had already visited Gaul twice before he left Italy around 667 to head towards Canterbury, see Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* 4.1 (as in n. 83). FISCHER, *Rewriting History* (as in n. 7), p. 69–72. Fischer supposes that the mentioned information had reached Gaul before Hadrian's visits. See also ESDERS, *Konstans II. (641–668)* (as in n. 76), p. 189–190. ΚΑΕΓΙ, *Muslim Expansion* (as in n. 68), p. 131, n. 58, who suggests an eastern source for Fred. 4.81.
- 92 For further discussion, see Laury SARTI, »Orbis Romanus«? (as in n. 23), chapter 4.1, forthcoming.
- 93 Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum* (as in n. 44), 5.5–6, p. 146: *Hac tempestate Francorum exercitus de Provincia egrediens, in Italiam introiuit. Contra quos Grimuald cum Langobardis progressus, hac eos arte decepit. [...] His diebus Constantinus angustus, qui et Constans est appellatus, Italiam Langobardorum manu eruere cupiens, Constantinopolim egressus, per litoralia iter habens, Athenas venit, indeque mare transgressus, Tarentum applicuit.* See FISCHER, *Rewriting History* (as in n. 7), p. 72; LIN, *The Merovingian kingdoms* (as in n. 39), p. 16.
- 94 Theophanes, *Chron.* (as in n. 77), a. m. 6169, p. 356: *τὰτα μαθόντες οἱ τὰ ἐσπέρια οἰκοῦντες μέρη, ὃ τε Χαγάνος τῶν Ἀβάρων καὶ οἱ ἐπέκεινα ῥήγες ἔξαρχοί τε καὶ κάσταλδοι καὶ οἱ ἐξοχώτατοι τῶν πρὸς τὴν δύσιν ἐθνῶν, διὰ πρεσβευτῶν δῶρα τῷ βασιλεῖ στείλαντες εἰρηνικὴν πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἀγάπην κυρωθῆναι ἤτήσαντο. [...] καὶ ἐγένετο ἀμεριμνία μεγάλη ἐν τε τῇ ἀνατολῇ καὶ δύσει.*
- 95 See Stefan ESDERS, *Great Security Prevailed in Both East and West. The Merovingian Kingdoms and the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680/1)*, in: ESDERS, HEN, FOX, SARTI (ed.), *East and West* (as in n. 37), p. 247–264, at p. 256, stressing that the term *gastaldi* (κάσταλδοι) points to the Lombards.

years earlier<sup>96</sup>. Given the close connection of the mentioned embassy with events in Constantinople, it is likely that the envoys mentioned by Theophanes were received at the court of Constantine IV shortly after his father's murder in September 668. Any Frankish embassy aiming to visit Constantine following his accession to the status of a senior emperor could have reached the eastern capital in late Spring 669 or thereafter.

It is noteworthy that the conclusion of a peace treaty is mentioned for the years 602/603, 630, and another in 692<sup>97</sup>, dates that are roughly separated by 30 years. They suggest that this treaty was renewed on a regular basis throughout the seventh century<sup>98</sup>. Considering that an embassy around 662 would perfectly fit the gap and given the likeliness of an agreement between the Franks and the Byzantines around that same time, it seems probable that the exchange that carried the information contained in chapter 81 of the »Chronicle of Fredegar« took place closer to the year 662. Hence, it was probably not related to the envoys mentioned by Theophanes. The fact that the chronicle does not refer to any western event after 658 further confirms that »Fredegar« must have stopped writing fairly soon after that year.

The 662 exchange is also the latest possible event at which the information contained in chapter 66 on the Battle of Yarmūk in 636 and the end of Herakleios in 641 may have been carried to the West. This means that the information contained in chapter 66 must have reached the Frankish kingdom at some point after 641, probably through a less official channel, if not with the 662 exchange. The location of this information at the end of the first excursus and the fact that, in the latter case, »Fredegar« would probably not have had very much time to include it in his chronicle both suggest that the information contained in chapter 66 was not carried to the West with the 662 embassy. The noteworthy change in character of the relevant section on Herakleios and the critique expressed towards the emperor's life by referring to his role in the promotion of Monothelitism characterised as »Eutychian« both indicate that the carrier may have been a clerk, as such a traveller would have been particularly interested in religious matters. If he was not carrying written accounts of the Battle of Yarmūk and the final years of Herakleios, chapter 66 must rely on another oral report. In this case, the conjectured post-642 exchange may have been similar to the one mentioned in the digression on Pope Martin I contained in the »Life of Eligius of Noyon« which for the period around 660 refers to a clerical traveller reaching Gaul from the Byzantine East. Overall, this means that »Fredegar« either wrote his first Byzantine excursus in one attempt sometime after 641/642, i. e. on the basis of information previously collected, or that he must have completed and revised an earlier version once further information was available.

96 Marek JANKOWIAK, The First Arab Siege of Constantinople, in: Constantin ZUCKERMAN (ed.), *Constructing the Seventh Century*, Paris 2013 (Travaux et mémoires, 17), p. 237–320.

97 *Annales Mettenses priores* (as in n. 55), a. 692, p. 15: *Confluebant autem ad eum circumscitarum gentium legationes, Grecorum scilicet et Romanorum, Langobardorum, Hunorum quoque Sclavorum atque Sarracenorum. [...] Ipse quoque haud segnius oportuno tempore legatos suos pro utilitatibus imperii sui per diversas regiones dirigens pacem et amicitiam circumpositarum gentium cum maximo favore impetrabat.*

98 The conclusion of an »eternal peace« of thirty years was a common Byzantine practice, see e. g. Theophanes, *Chron.* (as in n. 77), a. m. 6169.

## 6. Conclusion

»Fredegar«'s Byzantium appears in vivid colours in every part of his chronicle which points to a persistent interest in Byzantine affairs and the contacts that linked the Frankish and Byzantine worlds. The chronicle is remarkable for its accuracy and detail on events that took place in such a remote part of the world, from a Frankish perspective, and this at a time when these events remained unrecorded in other contemporary sources. It is a pity that »Fredegar« did not have the privilege to complete his chronicle as he would have been able to shed further light on an otherwise obscure period of history. We would be eager to know what he had to say about Monotheletism or events like the Lateran Council of 649, Pope Martin I's arrest and imprisonment in Constantinople, and perhaps the relocation of the Byzantine court under Constans II to Sicily, events the chronicler must have been aware of despite the lack of relevant references. What the chronicle does reveal is the significance that was attributed to the Byzantine world by its author(s) and the different stages when relevant information had become available and was collected in the West. The step-by-step collection of information and its integration to the chronicle at successive points in time attest a persistent interest in the Byzantine world and a comparably regular influx of knowledge of eastern developments. Four different sets of information on the eastern Mediterranean have been identified in book four: the first was transmitted in the late 580s in the framework of several legations exchanged between the Austrasian and Byzantine courts; a second set of scattered references which may be related to another two embassies but that may also have reached Gaul orally through less official travellers or the exchange of letters now lost; a third set that probably reached the Frankish kingdom via embassies exchanged in the early 630s and was completed by subsequent exchanges, maybe an oral transmission by a travelling clerk; and a fourth and last set that is likely to have once more reached the West thanks to an otherwise unattested embassy, probably involving the western court of Constans II. Although Italy was an important staging location for transit, the evidence suggests that it could only have played a minor role as an intermediary in the transmission of knowledge between the Byzantine and the Frankish worlds. While the Byzantine empire was not an integral part of »Fredegar«'s immediate environment, the chronicle shows that it was not perceived as the history of a foreign, far-away civilisation. By attesting that these channels of communication were never entirely closed, not even in the second half of the seventh century, the »Chronicle of Fredegar« represents the latest relevant testimony of the Merovingian kingdom being connected to the Mediterranean world.