The prologue to the first book of Hugh of St. Victor’s De sacramentis, composed around 1134, opens with a remark on the genesis of this work: “Since I previously composed a compendium on the initial instruction in Holy Scripture, which consists in their historical reading, I have prepared the present work for those who are to be introduced to the second stage of instruction, which is in allegory”.

Which of Hugh’s writings is indicated by this “compendium” (compendiosum volumen)? In their classic study of twelfth century scholarship, Paré, Brunet and Tremblay have identified it “with great probability” as De tribus maximis circumstantiis gestorum or, to use the short title, the Chronicon, a work composed between 1130 and 1133. This identification has gained almost general support.

In the light of the significant role played by history in Hugh’s thought, I should like to reconsider another possibility, namely that the “compendium” refers to Hugh’s literal exegetical works. The main clue to the identity of the “compendium” is that it consists in the historical reading (lectio historica) of the Bible. In order to find out what Hugh understands

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2 La renaissance du XIIe siècle (Paris and Ottawa 1933), p. 224 n. 1.


5 With Deferrari’s translation, cf. J. Taylor, loc. cit. (n. 1 above): “a compendium…, which consists in a historical reading”. The notion that the “compendium” could be a biblical exegetical work does not occur in the studies which favour the Chronicon; see also n. 13.
by this term, we shall turn to his Didascalicon, the "key to the Victorine corpus".

In Didascalicon 6.2-5, Hugh gives an outline of distinctive exegetical studies marked by the names of the scriptural senses—history, allegory, and tropology. Thus he speaks of history as lectio, disciplina, and scientia. The first aim of this study is to learn about persons, deeds, times, and places. We should note, however, that lectio historica does not end with factual knowledge. "It is not unfitting", Hugh says, "that we call by the name "history" not only the recounting of actual deeds but also the first meaning of any narrative which uses words according to their proper nature. And in this sense of the word, I think that all the books of either Testament... belong to this study in their literal meaning."

The entire outline shows that Hugh's valuation of lectio historica rests on a concern for well-founded spiritual exposition. Since the same concern emerges from the prologue to De sacramentis, the "compendium" must be a work which focuses on the study of the literal sense of the Bible. Does the Chronicon meet this requirement?

While most of the work has not been edited, secondary literature offers sufficient information on its character. The grand perspective of the Chronicon is constituted by the chronology from the beginning of the world in the six days of creation to its completion through the six ages of man's restoration. But essentially, the work simply lists the patriarchs, judges, kings, and priests up to the time of Christ; the "kingdoms of the world"; and the popes and emperors "from Jesus Christ to Honorius II", Hugh's contemporary. It is completed by miscellanea of Hebrew names, geographical names, and names of historiographers.

As a world history, the Chronicon clearly surpasses the biblical framework. To identify the "compendium" as the Chronicon would mean that

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6 J. Taylor, op. cit., p. 5.
7 Cf. ibid., p. 222 n. 2.
11 Partial editions of the Chronicon: G. Waitz, "Chronica quae dicitur Hugonis de Sancto Victore", MGH Scriptorum 24 (Hanover 1879), 88-97 (lists of popes and emperors); Green, op. cit. (Prologue); R. Baron, "La Mappa mundi", Cultura neolatina 16 (1956), 29-37 (geography).
12 Green, op. cit., 492-3; Ehlers, op. cit., pp. 54-5, 94-102. The following is taken from Green's article.