

Saxo Grammaticus' View of the Origin of the Danes and his Historiographical Models

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The major Danish medieval historian, Saxo Grammaticus (ca 1150-1220), opens the preface of his voluminous *Gesta Danorum* by properly stating the *raison d'être* of the book:

Cum ceterae nationes rerum suarum titulis gloriari voluptatemque ex majorum recordatione percipere soleant, Danorum maximus pontifex Absalon patriam nostram, cuius illustrandae maxima semper cupiditate flagrabat, eo claritatis et monumenti genere fraudari non passus...

Archbishop Absalon could not tolerate the absence of a written Danish history and therefore imposed the task on Saxo, "his most unworthy servant". Compared to other nations the deeds of the Danes perform poorly when deprived of a literary monument. The question I want to ask in the present paper is this: did Saxo have any particular "other nations" in mind? In other words: which nations supply the measuring rod for Danish history? My answer to that question is bound up with an interpretation of Saxo's theory of the origin of the Danes as put forward at the very beginning of book 1; on that basis I shall - in the second part of the paper - suggest a hitherto unnoticed possibility concerning Saxo's choice of historiographical models.

Two recent doctoral theses at the University of Copenhagen, Inge Skovgaard-Petersen's 'Da tidernes herre var nær' and Karsten Friis-Jensen's 'Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet' furnish the background for the present inquiry. Both authors take it for granted that Saxo is no careless compiler of stories, but rather an author who moulds his material to fit certain preconceived literary aims. One of Skovgaard-Petersen's most important points is her insistence on the literary devices used by Saxo to unite the pagan part of *Gesta Danorum* (books 1-8) and the Christian part (books 9-16). According to her Saxo views Danish history as progressing along the lines of church history - this is evident in the divisions into books: 4 books deal with the period before Christ, 4 books of the period between 1 A.D. and the introduction of Christianity in Denmark, 4 books with the subsequent span of years up till the establishment of the archiepiscopal see at Lund; the final 4 books cover the reigns of the first three

Danish archbishops, Asser, Eskil, and Absalon.¹ The only actual date Saxo gives in his work is the birth of Christ, and the context of that date renders it equally important: the birth of the "Lord of times"² occurs during the happy, peaceful reign of Frode Fredegod (Frode III).

Though Saxo found a guiding principle in church history he spent much effort on the meticulous elaboration of the pagan part of the book. This aspect of Saxo's work is brought forward and emphasized by Friis-Jensen who offers the first full-scale analysis and interpretation of many of the numerous quantitative poems appearing in the first eight books. Especially one of Friis-Jensen's theses has a bearing on the present topic: Saxo shaped his poems from Nordic material at hand (most of it probably orally transmitted) and from classical Latin poetry in order to display the richness of Danish literature prior to and contemporary with Augustan Rome. His latinized anthology of pagan Danish poetry is thus meant to bring about the impression that the old Danes, even in the field of literature, rivalled the golden age of Augustus.³

With these observations on Saxo's literary and ideological ambitions in mind, one can look with confidence for the Danes' "pattern peoples" - the historian hardly applied such sophisticated methods in describing the history of the Danish people without guidance from some models; thence one may probe a little further into Saxo's historiographical background.

1. The origin of the Danes.

Dan igitur et Angul, a quibus Danorum coepit origo, patre Humblo procreati non solum conditores gentis nostrae, verum etiam rectores fuere. Quamquam Dudo, rerum Aquitanicarum scriptor, Danos a Danais ortos nuncupatosque recenset."

1. Skovgaard-Petersen (1987) 22 & (1975) 26. The enormous dimensions of book 14 are accounted for by Eskil's long tenure of office (1137-77); the sheer size of that book strongly supports the notion that the division into books originated with Saxo himself: no later medieval or renaissance editor would have done like this. Boserup (1981) provides philological arguments as to the close affinity between the main textual witness - Chr. Pedersen's 1514 Paris edition - and the edition done by Saxo. This further corroborates the view that the division into 16 books are of Saxo's own making.

2. V,xv,3 (142,2-3) "temporum [...] auctor".

3. Friis-Jensen (1987) 62-63.

Those are the opening words of book 1, and indeed all that Saxo ever states about the origin of the Danes. Skovgaard-Petersen draws attention to the interesting fact that this is the first instance out of three in the entire work where Saxo names a source.⁴ In trying to explain why Dudo figures in this exclusive list she suggests that Saxo did not mind an association of the Danes with the Greeks, even if in loose terms.⁵ This interpretation can hardly account for Saxo's wording: the "quamquam" is strong and the two theories are a true alternative in as much as they both offer a combined explanation of origin and etymology. According to Dudo the Danes arose ('orti') from the Danaeans and derived their name from them ('nuncupati'). The impact of the first clause, however, is that the Danes originated ('coepit origo') with king Dan, the obvious implication being that his name was bestowed on the people. If Saxo does not accept the theory forwarded by Dudo, two possible interpretations are left:

1) Saxo simply cites two mutually exclusive theories and does not decide which one is preferable.

2) Saxo rejects the identification of Danes and Danaeans, and settles the matter in favour of the 'Danes-from-Dan'-theory.

(1) is hardly tenable. If Saxo really wanted to grant the reader a choice between two equally possible theories, he would not, I think, have phrased it along these lines: "the Danes originate with Dan, even though Dudo points to an origin from the Danaeans". The assumption that the very beginning of the work vacillates between two entirely different theories on such an important issue as the origin of the Danes is not consistent with the otherwise well-documented high ambitions of Saxo.⁶

(2) not only lends itself to the smoothest interpretation of Saxo's actual wording, but it is also more consistent with another idea occurring in *Gesta Danorum*.

Why does Saxo quote Dudo if he disagrees with him? One reason may be that the connection between Danaeans and Danes was widely ac-

4. The three authors referred to nominatim by Saxo are Dudo, Bede (I,i,2 (10,13)), and Paul the Deacon (VIII,xii,2 (238,7)). Skovgaard-Petersen (1987) 65-87 gives a thorough account of these passages.

5. Skovgaard-Petersen (1987) 65. Later on she implies that Saxo fully accepted the identification of Danes and Danaeans (p.82, 87, 92, 199).

6. In fact Saxo must have faced yet another theory of Danish beginnings, viz. that Skjold was the first king - a stance taken by other contemporary sources among which Sven Aggesen's *Brevis historia regum Dacie*. This enters the present discussion only so far as it underlines Saxo's positive choice of Dan.

knowledge among Danes and even abroad in the 12th century.⁷ He may thus have wanted to stress that his preference of the 'Danes-from-Dan'-theory was not due to ignorance of the more common view on his part. But if Saxo could not afford to rule out Dudo tacitly, he actually turned the quotation to his own advantage. He wanted to give the Danes a very special position among the peoples. As the Britons had Brutus and the Franks Francus, the Danes could also trace their origin to an appellative king, Dan. But Dan did not descend from Trojan royal stock like everyone else. Saxo probably wanted his readers to feel that even when served on a silver plate by Dudo, a fanciful origin from Troy was not necessary to assert claims of Danish grandeur. No important 'translatio' had taken place from the classical to the Nordic world in order to give rise to the Danish kingdom or to inspire the development of Danish culture.⁸

The Danes sprang from no one - it was the other way round: *they* were a parental people. According to Saxo the Anglians and the Lombards stem from the Danes. He even ties this audacious theory to the names of Bede and Paul the Deacon, historians of the two nations in question, though this involves stretching their words far beyond the original sense.⁹ In other words, they offer testimony to the effect that their own peoples occupy a position inferior to the Danes. Did Saxo mention the Anglians and the Lombards as examples of the "ceterae nationes"? This must be answered in the affirmative, but not without qualifications. The Anglians and the Lombards were excellent specimens of nations who had had their history written down in an authoritative manner, viz. by Bede and Paul the Deacon. Up to a certain point they were worthy 'opponents', but, if I understand Saxo's intentions correctly, these two peoples made no true parallel to the Danes because they derived from them. In addition to these Saxo must have had a more eminent target in mind.

7. Cf. Dudo's phrase "igitur Daci nuncupantur a suis Danai, vel Dani, glorianturque se ex Antenore progenitos; qui, quondam Trojae finibus depopulatis, mediis elapsus Achivis, Illyricos fines penetravit cum suis". (De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae ducum I,3, ed. M.J. Lair, Paris 1865, p.130). The confusion of Greeks and Trojans in this passage is commented upon by Skovgaard-Petersen (1987) 66-87; whether Saxo knew of this contamination is, however, of no importance to the present inquiry.

8. The *Æsir* may be an exception; somehow they were connected with Byzantium though Saxo does not mention an exodus to Denmark. See Skovgaard-Petersen (1981), especially 130-32.

9. "Testis est Beda." GD I,i,2 (10,9-16); "Paulo teste" VIII,xiii,2 (238,3-12).

What were the advantages of the 'Danes-from-Dan'-theory and its implication of an autochthonous origin - apart from the dismissal of the Anglians and Lombards as inferior peoples? First of all, it was nobler to occupy the land you had sprung from than to have been an immigrant. Justinus, one of Saxo's favourite readings, states this well-known view (modern examples abound) when speaking of the Athenians:

...paucis urbis origo repetenda est, et quia non, ut ceterae gentes, a sordidis initiis ad summa crevere. soli enim praeterquam incremento etiam origine gloriantur; quippe non advenae neque passim collecta populi confluxus originem urbi dedit, sed eodem innati solo, quod incolunt, et quae illis sedes, eadem origo est.¹⁰

Saxo did not have to read this passage in order to share the view expressed by Justinus,¹¹ but it may have encouraged him in his opinion. To grasp another advantage of autochthonous origin we must make a little detour.

There can be no doubt, as pointed out by Skovgaard-Petersen, that Frode III Fredegod is patterned on Augustus. They are both universal peacemakers contemporary with the coming of Christ. Frode's 'universal' empire matches the one created by Augustus. But Saxo takes care not to make the two empires clash - in fact he never mentions the Roman empire before the time of Charlemagne.¹² Frode conquered the world of the Baltic and the North Sea, whereas Augustus was master of the Mediterranean countries.¹³ A further obvious parallel between a Danish king and a Roman emperor occurs in book 11: the king, Sven Estridsen,

10. Justinus, *Epitome* II, 6, 1-5.

11. Note, however, the phrases "ceterae gentes" and "gloriantur" that also appear at the beginning of Saxo's preface (quoted above).

12. Once only Saxo refers to classical Rome, viz. VI,i,2 (143,17-22), when "Divus Iulius" and "Africanus" are mentioned for their liberality towards poets; the Danes, however, were even more liberal as they bestowed the kingdom on Hiarnus who had proven his poetical abilities by a composition in four verses. The exempla are taken from Valerius Maximus. See Friis-Jensen (1987) 21 & 27-28.

13. The central texts on the peace of Frode are GD V,xv,1 (141,17-20) "Itaque post Britannicos triumphos Hibernasque manubias in Daniam reductum est annisque tricenis ab omni bellorum negotio temperatum est. Quo tempore cunctis paene terris eximia fortitudinis laude Danicum nomen inclaruit." and V,xv,3 (141,38-142,3) "Per idem tempus publicae salutis auctor mundum petendo servandorum mortalium gratia mortalitatis habitum amplecti sustinuit, cum iam terrae, sopitis bellorum incendiis, serenissimo tranquillitatis otio fruerentur. Creditum est tam profusae pacis amplitudinem, ubique aequalem nec ullis orbis partibus interruptam, non adeo terreno principatui quam divino ortui famulatam fuisse, caelitusque gestum, ut inusitatum temporis beneficium praesentem temporum testaretur auctorem."

has committed sacrilege by slaughtering some enemies in a church. Because of this infamous deed the king is forced by bishop Wilhelm of Roskilde to do penance in order to regain access to the church. The incident is described at great length by Saxo,¹⁴ not least because the moral of the story is important: "ea res inextricabilem regni sacerdotique concordiam operata est."¹⁵ The narrative is modelled on another quarrel with a happy outcome that also took place within nascent church/state relations, viz. the one between Ambrose and Theodosius the Great.¹⁶ It is tempting to see yet another parallel between Harald Blåtand and Constantine the Great, the first rulers to accept Christianity.¹⁷

I propose to view Saxo's 'Danish empire' as a parallel to nothing less than the Roman empire; his Danes are the Romans of the North. With the equation fully worked out it will be realized that the present Danish king in Saxo's view is on a par with the present Roman emperor. When he decided to stage the Danes as Nordic Romans he could indeed have chosen the solution of other medieval historiographers, namely to point to ancestors from the old Mediterranean civilization. But that would, to Saxo's mind, probably be tantamount to displaying cultural inferiority complexes; instead of saying "we are not Romans, but in the last resort we are related to the Romans and thus entitled to a distinct place in European civilization", Saxo would put it "the Danish empire developed - entirely on its own - contemporaneously with the Roman empire, and had nothing to do with it before the time of Charlemagne when the first encounter between the two worlds took place".¹⁸ This is certainly a subtle way to disguise an inferiority complex, and it demanded a great deal of Saxo's ability to let pagan Danish history stand out as an embodiment of important civilized features. The theory of autochthonous origin is one

14. GD XI,vii,11-20 (311,17-315,4).

15. GD XI,vii,20 (314,29).

16. As argued by Erslev (1892) 616. See below n.25.

17. But I have not been able to pinpoint a model for Saxo's description of Harald's conversion among current Roman histories (see below) that include the history of Constantine. These are Saxo's words: X,iv,1 (272,22-25) "Verum Haraldus, rebus cum imperatore compositis, consortium catholicae religionis amplexus, divinam humanamque pacem regno suo conciliavit, sicque, Haquinum conceptae inaniter spei irritum reddens, se ipsum errore, patriam proeliis liberavit." Orosius VII,26,5-7 gives the same line of thought (and uses the word 'consortium'), but this is hardly enough to postulate a direct connection.

18. Skovgaard-Petersen (1987) 190-212 and Friis-Jensen (1987) 62-63 & 100 both stress the importance of Saxo's "hidden" chronology, hinged exclusively on the mention of the birth of Christ. Charlemagne is mentioned at the end of Book 8 (VIII,xvi,5 (248,13)).

prop in this literary construction of independent Danes forming an alternative Roman empire.

It is my opinion that one basic problem in an ambitious history of a Germanic people was to define the relations between Roman culture and the local culture in question.¹⁹ If the history was not Roman in its language and style it would hardly succeed in the learned community of Europe. If it did not involve affairs of the Roman catholic church, it would be a strange and curious history indeed. The history of the church was the history of the Roman church, the history of political power par excellence was the history of the Roman empire. The masters of language and literature to be imitated were Roman authors.

To put it a little more schematically: when embarking on the writing of the Danish history Saxo faced, roughly, four options as regards the rapport between Danish and Latin culture.

1) to forget about the local pagan past and begin the History with the introduction of Christianity and the knowledge of the Latin language.²⁰

2) to minimize the importance of the fact that Denmark was isolated from the civilized world before the coming of Christianity by contending that even pagan Denmark was 'Roman', e.g. by associating the Danish origin with the classical world, by producing kings who, unknowingly, displayed classical and Christian virtues or by rushing forward to the first evidence of contact with the Roman world.

3) to minimize the importance of pagan times by stressing the primitivism of the Danes of old, and thus suggest that Denmark became a meaningful entity only by its entry into Christendom.

4) to maximize the importance of pagan Denmark in its own right. This entails the notion that many virtues and other specimens of civilization were present in the old times and were developed independently by the Danes themselves. Only two very important civilizing features were absent: Christianity and the use of the written Latin language, all the others were already there in some embryonic form. When Christianity finally

19. The term 'Roman' is here used in its broadest sense because Saxo, in my opinion, did not distinguish between a classical and a later cultural context for the underlying notion; in other words: he saw a continuity in Latin culture, whereas we regard it as purely accidental that e.g. the German empire of Saxo's day was called 'Roman'.

20. Gregory of Tours' *Historiae Francorum* (probably not known to Saxo) constitutes a variant of this solution; the local history is given a long ancestry by hooking it on to Biblical genealogy and by creating a powerful link to the Roman church (St. Martin and Clovis).

came (bringing along the paraphernalia, canon law and Latin) Danish civilization would reach an unprecedented peak. Danish culture would thus have a clear identity already in pagan times and would only be enriched when admitted as a member of the European Latin community.

(1) - (3) are variants of a more or less immediate surrender to Roman/Christian values. *Mutatis mutandis* solution (2) can be studied in Bede's Ecclesiastical history of the English people; Saxo did not give up so easily and settled for option (4) thereby posing himself the more difficult task because it involved a careful balancing of the scales between Nordic and Roman values. On the one hand he would stress those features of civilization that were specifically Nordic, on the other hand Roman history (including the church), literature, and language invariably set the pattern for anything that would want to pass as civilization. In the final analysis Saxo could not escape the enormous shadow of Roman history.

2. Saxo's historiographical models

Saxo, of course, had some knowledge of things Roman from his readings in Roman literature. Among his most important stylistic models are Valerius Maximus and Martianus Capella, and he was also well-versed in more "classical" authors as Horace, Virgil, and Juvenal.²¹ But if my argument is accepted - that Saxo took interest in Roman history when planning and composing the *Gesta Danorum* and that the Romans were the most important of the 'ceterae nationes' - one obvious question emerges: where would Saxo find an authoritative account of Roman history?

It might be useful to provide a list of surveys of Roman history available in the late 12th century. I confine myself to consider narrative historical texts only, thus excluding the terse world chronicles in the tradition of Jerome (Prosper, Isidore etc.), not because Saxo could not have gained information from texts of this type, but because his subject and style makes it quite obvious that he did not plan to have *Gesta Danorum* measured by their standards.

Among Roman historians Justinus, and Curtius Rufus are known to have been used by Saxo - many clear-cut verbal parallels exist. But only an unsubstantial part of Justinus' *Epitome* deals with Roman matters and

21. As documented by Friis-Jensen (1975) & (1987).

Rufus not at all, so neither of these two authors supplied real knowledge about the Roman state. It is more than doubtful whether one of the rare copies of a decade of Livy existed within the Danish historian's horizon; if that was the case it has left no traces in *Gesta Danorum*, and furthermore the early and very limited periods of Roman history treated by one such part of Livy's work would have been rather unhandy as a historiographical model. Due to the introduction of Christianity and to the domination of single rulers Saxo's attention probably focused on the imperial rather than the republican epoch (though of course he did not recognize a sharp dividing line).

Orosius was much more helpful on Roman history, and he was much more available as well. According to a preliminary list by Guenée²² of historians' popularity during the Middle Ages (including mss. up till the beginning of the 16th century) Orosius comes in second with 245 manuscripts. Even with a superficial interest in historical writing Orosius' *Historiae* would be hard to miss. Skovgaard-Petersen has now pointed out a striking verbal similarity between Saxo's description of Frode's peace and Orosius' of that of Augustus.²³ On this basis we are allowed to conclude that Saxo at least had some knowledge of the work. Orosius' text was also operative in the process of forming the genre of national history in as much as it inspired Jordanes, Bede, and Paul the Deacon to introduce their works with a geographical account of the historical stage. The authority of Orosius may have helped convince Saxo that that was the right thing to do. The Danish author may even have felt that the elaborate description of the Nordic countries matched Orosius' thorough account of the Mediterranean world. However, the *Historiae adversus paganos* was no national history, it was apologetic world history. Saxo may have grown wiser on Roman matters by reading it, but its type of subject, tendency, and purpose were not comparable to his objectives with *Gesta Danorum*. It could not, therefore, serve as a major historiographical model.

Another very popular historical book deserves to be mentioned, viz. Cassiodorus' Latinized compilation of church history based on excerpts from Theodoret, Socrates, and Sozomen: *Historia ecclesiastica tripartita*. The work enters Guenée's list as no. 8 with a total of 138 extant manu-

22. Guenée (1980) 250.

23. Skovgaard-Petersen (1987) 196.

scripts and his very instructive map of its wide diffusion shows that it was a 'European book'.²⁴ There is tangible evidence that Saxo used the *Historia tripartita*. As mentioned above, the elaborate account of King Sven's penance is somehow modelled on the story of Theodosius and Ambrose. This was recognized by Erslev (1892),²⁵ and L. Weibull (1910) added the interesting observation that Saxo borrowed phrases from the *Decretum Gratiani* when describing the penitential procedure. Erslev furthermore loosely suggested that Augustine *De civ. dei* V, 26 and *Historia tripartita* IX,30 may have been Saxo's sources for the Theodosius-incidence. Christiansen (1980) points to Rufinus' *Ecclesiastical History*.²⁶ The text of Rufinus was very widespread in the 12th century,²⁷ but a comparison of the two popular ecclesiastical histories' account of the affair with Saxo's version favours Erslev's suggestion of a Cassiodorean influence.²⁸ Rufinus offers only a short paragraph (15 lines) on the subject, whereas the account in *Historia Tripartita* takes up 6 pages. The most striking feature absent from Rufinus and omnipresent in Cassiodorus and Saxo is the role played by the bishop: Rufinus does not even mention Ambrose or refer to his actions, whereas the bishop in Cassiodorus' narrative is the main force behind the entire action.²⁹ I think it is safe to conclude that

24. Guenée (1980) 261. The production of *Historia tripartita* mss. reached a peak in the 12th century (Guenée (1980) 271). Contrast the geographically very limited diffusion of Otto of Freising's chronicle (*ibid.* 264); this does not, of course, disprove the cautious suggestion by Skovgaard-Petersen (1987) 197-203 that Saxo drew upon Otto's work, but it does render it less probable.

25. Who probably gleaned the parallel from Stephanus (1978 (1645)) 296; Stephanus cites the Ambrosius-Theodosius affair as a comparable incident, not as a comparable story. Erslev's main objective was negative, namely to show that the William-Sven incident is entirely unhistorical. See the thorough comments on Saxo by Christiansen (1980-81) I:234-35.

26. Christiansen (1980-81) I:234 refers to Rufinus book xviii (i.e.: II, 18, PL 21:525B-C, and in Mommsen's edition XI,18 (Eusebius II,2 p.1022-23)).

27. In Mommsen's list of 92 mss. (which is not complete) 36 date from the 12th century or earlier (Eusebius II,3: CCLII-CCLVI). Cf. Guenée (1980) 302-03.

28. Saxo - it must be noted - cannot have taken the story from Augustine or Orosius: the passage in *De civ. Dei* only elaborates on the lesson to be learned from the incident, it does not tell what happened. Orosius ignores it altogether.

29. On a more detailed level further narrative elements ignored by Rufinus are found in Saxo and Cassiodorus: after being excluded from the church the king/emperor returns to the palace - "*regiam repetit*" (GD XI,vii,14 (312,32-33)) "*ad regalia remeavit*" (HET IX,30,10); the description of the penance is given in great detail; both authors summarize the qualities exhibited by the two persons involved in neat parallelisms - "*Hic <Sven> enim mirificam illius severitatem, ille sanctissimam huius moderationem benevolentiae constantia prosequabatur*" (GD XI,vii,20 (314,33-34)) "*Ego namque utriusque opus ammiror, illius fiduciam, huius autem obedientiam, illius zeli fervorem, huius fidei puritatem*" (HET IX,30,29).

Saxo knew and used this popular ecclesiastical history. But as was the case with Orosius, the *Historia Tripartita* does not tell the history of a nation; therefore it did not serve Saxo as a primary historiographical model. Let us turn to the proper surveys of Roman history.

Florus' epitome of Livy enjoyed some attention in the 10th-12th centuries³⁰ but as it included the early period of Roman history only it may not have offered itself as a useful survey for Saxo's purposes. The *Breviarium* of Festus dealt more extensively with Roman history and in less space, but it was an extremely rare book in the 12th century.³¹

The title of Jordanes' *Romana* is slightly misleading because it sets out to be a survey of world history; however, it soon centers on Roman matters, and it is in fact an excellent little reference book beginning with Romulus and ending with Justinian. Manuscript evidence makes it clear that several medieval scholars took an interest in this and in Jordanes' other historical work, *Getica*, but whether Saxo was included in this group we have - at present - no way of knowing.³²

The manuscript tradition of the *Breviarium* by Eutropius was rather thin.³³ However, the text survived in much greater numbers in the revised and enlarged edition by Paul the Deacon, bearing the title *Historia Romana*. This book has not caught the attention of Guenée, but the research done by Crivellucci provides the evidence that this was one of the really widespread books in the Middle Ages, - in fact it would figure as item 10 in Guenée's list with a total of 113 mss. Crivellucci's general impression of the work's popularity during the Middle Ages made him

30. Munk Olsen in his list of pre-13th-century mss. (1982) 383-88 counts 16 *Florus*-mss. See also Reynolds (1983) 164-66.

31. The most recent editor, J.W. Eadie (London 1967) 21-26 enumerates 11 extant mss. produced earlier than the 14th century and 2 reconstructable mss. Only 4 of the extant ones were produced in the 11th or 12th centuries.

32. We know of at least 11 pre-13th-century mss. containing both works (or excerpts from both). *Getica* reveals a total of 21 existing prior to 1200. The similar number for *Romana* is 17. (Information based on Mommsen's preface to the edition: MGH, AA 5,1 (1882) XLIV-LXX). Lukman (1949) 26 & 61-64 suggested - though he does not state it clearly - on internal evidence that Saxo used the *Getica*; I am not convinced by his literary parallelization between Saxo's *Jarmeric* and Jordanes' *Hermanaric*. Skovgaard-Petersen (1987) 181-182 takes Lukman's suggestion for granted and adds a textual similarity between GD and *Getica*. Saxo may indeed have borrowed the general idea in the passage adduced by Skovgaard-Petersen from Jordanes, but the verbal similarities amount to the words 'corpus' and 'caput'; this single parallel does certainly not bear out Saxo's dependence on Jordanes.

33. Reynolds (1983) 159-62.

conclude that it was the most widespread manual of Roman history.³⁴ This was probably the case already in Saxo's time though it is difficult to estimate the diffusion of the *Historia Romana* in the 12th century; according to information presented in Crivellucci's list or his references, at least 27 mss. containing the *Historia Romana* pre-date 1200, whereas 4 have been assigned the date '12th/13th century'.³⁵

We saw that Saxo took an interest in historical writing other than sources for Danish history and stylistic models, viz. Orosius and *Historia tripartita*. It is a reasonable assumption that he was aware of the most popular survey of Roman history, Paul's *Historia Romana* - particularly if Saxo's Danes were to emulate the Romans. Beside the sheer popularity of Paul's work there are other indicators of a connection between the two works.

When Saxo mentions Paul (VIII,xii,2 (238,7)) he does so without qualification - "Paulo teste". This contrasts to his introduction of Dudo as "rerum Aquitanicarum scriptor", and the praise of Bede as "non minima pars divini stili". Bede, of course, was known to almost everyone in the 12th century interested in history, and if the scanty reference to Paul did not result from carelessness it seems that Saxo held Paul to be equally well known. The work of Paul used by Saxo in this context is the *Historia Langobardorum* which was much read in the 12th century - according to Waitz's introduction 55 mss. pre-date 1200. If we add the popularity of *Historia Romana* - in the manuscripts, it seems, often tagged with Paul's name³⁶ - one may well regard the assumption underlying Saxo's brief reference as justified. One way or the other his readers would have heard about Paul the Deacon.

As stated above, Saxo no doubt drew on Orosius and Cassiodorus when composing the passages on the birth of Christ during the peace of Frode, and the clash between king Sven and bishop Wilhelm. It is interesting to note that the *Historia Romana* contains a reference to the connection between the birth of Christ and the reign of Augustus and also tells how

34. Crivellucci (1921) 7: "... un'opera che per tutto il medio evo fu, si può dire, il manuale storico più diffuso da cui le persone colte di tutto il mondo civile impararono le vicende di Roma antica.."

35. Items 1, 2, 4, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, (28), (29), 32, (36) 37, 39, 50; 1, 4, 7, 9, 11, 12, 52, (54), 56, 61 in Crivellucci (1921).

36. According to Droysen's and Crivellucci's manuscript studies as far as can be culled from their editions and Crivellucci (1921).

Theodosius humiliated himself in front of Ambrose. I can think of no other Roman history that does both.³⁷

A much-debated issue in Saxo scholarship is the number of books in *Gesta Danorum*, sixteen. Most scholars agree that it was hardly chosen at random, and Skovgaard-Petersen's work strongly emphasizes Saxo's careful division and structuring of his material. A great connoisseur of medieval literature, A. Teilgård Laugesen, once stated that he knew no antecedents for the number 16, neither among possible poetic models nor among medieval historical writings.³⁸ But he overlooked the *Historia Romana*. The division into sixteen books goes back to Paul himself, and judging from the editions – it was common practice in the manuscripts to note that the first 10 books derived from Eutropius and that Paul the Deacon had added the 6 remaining books;³⁹ the division into books also was clearly marked in the manuscripts.⁴⁰ This is, of course, only a further indicator of Paul's possible influence on Saxo. On the other hand, it is a

37. *Historia Romana* VII,8 "igitur cum quadragesimo secundo anno firmissimam verissimamque pacem Caesar composuisset, Christus dominus in Bethleem natus est, cuius adventui pax ista famulata est." (Orosius VI,22,5 slightly rephrased).

On the Theodosius-affair (ibid. XII,6): "huius et apud homines mansuetudo et quanta extiterit apud eum devotio, hoc uno monstratur exemplo: nam cum apud Mediolanum missarum fruiturus sollempniis ecclesiam vellet intrare eumque beatus Ambrosius pro quodam facinore, nisi publice peniteret, non admissurum se diceret, et prohibitionem humiliter pertulit et satisfactionem non erubescens indictum ab episcopo penitentiae modum devotus excepit." It is possible that Saxo combined this passage with the elaborated version of the story he found in the *Historia tripartita*. Three phrases are used by Saxo and Paul in exactly the same context, but not by Cassiodorus: 1) the story exemplifies the sovereign's 'mansuetudo'; Saxo says "Quanta enim mansuetudine pectus eius instructum fuisse putemus..." (GD XI,vii,16 (313,13-14)). 2) The ruler is not 'ashamed' of admitting his fault publicly: "nec erubuit" (GD XI,vii,19 (314,27)) versus Paul's "non erubescens". 3) The concept of 'satisfaction' appears in both texts: "religioni sese satisfacturum promittens" (GD XI,vii,17 (313,27-28)). These similarities do not amount to any proof of Saxo's dependence on the *Historia Romana*, but they do make it worthwhile to look for parallels. It would be interesting to do a detailed analysis of Saxo's sources and working methods as they can be studied in his account of Sven Estridsen; that is needed if the above parallels are to be evaluated properly, and it might also prove rewarding in other respects because the story is very central for an assessment of Saxo's ideological stance.

38. Saxostudier (1975) 29.

39. Cf. the explicit of the 10th book printed in Crivellucci's edition 149-150: "Hucusque historiam Eutropius composuit, cui tamen aliqua Paulus diaconus addidit, iuvene domna Adelpurga christianissima Beneventi ductrice, coniuge domni Arichis sapientissimi et catholici principis; deinceps quae secuntur idem Paulus ex diversis auctoribus proprio stilo contextuit."

40. A few early mss. and several post-1200 ones (a total of 22) contain an anonymous addition of a 17th book compiled from the *Historia Langobardorum* and from Bede; see Crivellucci's edition XLVIII-LI.

fact of some importance that Saxo's contemporaries were likely to compare his 16 books of Danish history with Paul the Deacon's 16 books of Roman history.

Saxo Grammaticus certainly read more historical literature than the three authors mentioned by himself (Dudo, Bede, Paul the Deacon), his sources for Danish history (most important: Adam of Bremen), and those that demonstrably served as stylistic models (Valerius Maximus, Iustinus, and Curtius Rufus). Among these other historical works that played a role in the literary formation of Saxo were no doubt Orosius' *Historiae adversus paganos* and the *Historia Tripartita* compiled by Cassiodorus and his pupil Epiphanius. Strong indications also point to Paul the Deacon's enlarged edition of Eutropius, the *Historia Romana*. If Saxo had a specific Roman history in mind when planning his gigantic construction of Danish history, this may well have been it.

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