

Maximus Pontifex in Saxo Grammaticus
The textual fidelity of the editio princeps

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In 1983 and in 1988 Michael Linton published two articles on the *editio princeps* of Saxo Grammaticus which would have made epoch in Saxo scholarship if their conclusions were correct. I believe they are not. In the present article I shall therefore try to state the case as clearly and succinctly as possible. My personal reasons for doing so are of a double nature: much of my own work on Saxo, past and present, would be meaningless if Linton were right, and, secondly, some of Linton's points actually illuminate peculiarities of Saxo's style, so that the inquiry may also offer something of a positive nature for students of Saxo.

The general thesis of Linton's articles is that the editor and the printer of the 1514 *editio princeps*, the Danish humanist Christiern Pedersen and the Parisian printer and humanist Jodocus Badius Ascensius, made radical changes in Saxo's text in order to improve his style. This would be a serious matter, insofar as the *editio princeps* is the sole textual witness for more than ninety per cent of the text.

Considering the nature of the textual transmission of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, the question that Michael Linton asked himself is on the other hand highly relevant, namely whether the editor of the *editio princeps* rendered his medieval exemplar faithfully: we know so many examples of unscrupulous Renaissance editors, as Linton himself mentions. But the careful scrutiny by generations of scholars of the manuscript fragments of Saxo found in the second half of the nineteenth century, and of the rich indirect textual tradition, has provided a consensus which Linton's arguments cannot shake: the *editio princeps* must be a fairly accurate, but by no means faultless, transcription of a good medieval manuscript.

The situation was somewhat different before the manuscript fragments had been found, and that is the reason why the claim of the Swedish historian, Bishop Carl Gustaf Nordin (1749-1812), that Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* was a Renaissance forgery, could not be overlooked. Nordin's theory was published by his friend Eric Michael Fant (1754-1817), professor of history at Uppsala, in a dissertation printed in 1814. Nordin's curious theory is an interesting minor chapter in the colourful history of Saxo scholarship, and since it shows some similarity to Linton's, I shall give a short outline of it.

Nordin's thesis reads as follows: "Saxo's History was published by Jodocus Badius in Paris in the year 1514, and it is supposed to have been written at the end of the twelfth century. However, it presents a Latin much purer than seems to be in keeping with its age, which was most barbaric. Moreover, only one single manuscript of it was found, apart from that which they used for the first edition. Christiern Pedersen, the Archbishop of Lund Birger's chancellor and canon, who was in charge of this edition, is an author of dubious quality, as will appear from his other works *Holger Dansk*, *Järtegn's Postille*, etc. Birger, Archbishop of Lund, who had the exemplar of Saxo copied from which the editio princeps was taken, Lage Urne, Bishop of Roskilde, who was a distinguished Latin poet and perhaps the author of Saxo's poems, and Christiern Pedersen probably constituted the triumvirate producing this fabrication; its style was adjusted by Jodocus Badius, who, as the commentator, if not fabricator, of Valerius Maximus and Martianus Capella, took delight in their style and composed his Saxo with the help of phrases from them, as Stephanus has formerly shown in his Preface"¹.

Nordin and Fant were refuted, politely but very emphatically, by the future editor of Saxo, Peter Erasmus Müller, in a review in *Dansk Litteratur-Tidende* 1816².

Müller's main argument was that we possess a rich indirect textual tradition dependent on Saxo, first of all the medieval epitome (*Compendium Saxonis*) and the numerous quotations in the works of the Hamburg historian Albert Krantz. Krantz (1448-1517) had without any doubt access to a manuscript of Saxo, and he finished his historical works about

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- 1 Ericus Michael Fant, *Monumentorum veterum historiae Sveogothicae prolegomena*, Pars III, Uppsala 1814, p. 16: "Edita est Saxonis Historia a Jodoco Badio Parisiis an. 1514 scriptaque putatur ad finem Seculi XII. Puriorem vero longe Latinitatem sistit, quam huic ævo, quod barbarum maxime fuit, convenire videtur. Dein unicus tantum ejus Codex, præter illum, quo in prima editione usi sunt, repertus. Christiernus Petræus, Archiepiscopi Lundensis Birgeri Cancellarius atque Canonicus, qui hanc editionem curavit, non optimæ notæ auctor est, quod ex reliquis ejus operibus: *Holger Dansk*, *Järtegn's Postille* etc. probatur. Birgerus Lundensis Archiepiscopus, qui exemplum Saxonis, ex quo prima editio sumta, describendum curavit; Lago Urne, Episcopus Roshildensis [sic], qui insignis fuit Poëta Latinus atque carminum Saxonis forte Auctor atque Christiernus Petri Triga forte fecit [read fuerunt] Virorum hoc commentum producentium, cui stilum commodavit Jodocus Badius, qui a Valerio Maximo atque Marciano Capella, a se etiam commentario illustratis, si non compositis, maxime delectabatur illorumque phrasibus, ut dudum in præfatione probavit Stephanus, Saxonem suum confecit".
 - 2 Pp. 563-71 & 579-94; cp. Curt Weibull: *Saxo. Kritiska undersökningar i Danmarks historia från Sven Estridsens död till Knut VI*, Lund 1915 p. 10, and H. Ehrencron-Müller: *Forfat-terlexikon*, vol. VI, Copenhagen 1929 p. 244 (Christen Pedersen).

ten years before the editio princeps of Saxo appeared, although they were not printed until after Krantz's own death¹.

We do not know of any followers actually believing in Nordin's thesis, and in any case their belief would have been shattered with the appearance, later in the century, of various medieval fragments of Saxo. But now Michael Linton reopens the issue, although in a less radical and much more sophisticated form.

Linton's first article "Christiern Pedersen's Saxo"² (henceforth LINTON 1983) presents his general thesis most explicitly on two points, namely that all borrowings from classical authors in Saxo's text may have been introduced by Christiern Pedersen and Jodocus Badius³, and that Saxo's complicated classical metres, elaborate prose rhythm, and rare words can be explained in the same way⁴.

It seems appropriate to deal with these two statements of a very general nature before discussing the specific hypothesis of LINTON 1988. I believe that both claims can be refuted by examining the three largest pieces of coherent text transmitted independently. They are the Lassen fragment (end of thirteenth century), comprising 132 lines of prose in the Olrik/Ræder edition (pp. 152,29-156,14); the ninety-five lines of poetry in the Angers fragment (c. 1200), which must have been part of Saxo's working copy - the poems have reached their final form, whereas the prose is still undergoing revision (pp. 14,1-16,29 O.-R.); and finally the quotation in Albert Krantz's *Suecia* of a 157 line hexameter poem (pp. 224,28-228,33 O.-R.) - Krantz uses paraphrase more often than word-to-word quotation, as we shall see shortly, but the metrical form prevented Krantz from interfering significantly with the text.

These about four pages of prose and seven pages of poetry clearly represent exactly the same text as that found in the editio princeps, sharing all its stylistic and formal peculiarities, whereas textual variants are few and insignificant. To be more specific, in reference to Linton's

1 On the nature of Albert Krantz's manuscript of Saxo, see e.g. Karsten Friis-Jensen, 'Humanism and Politics. The Paris edition of Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* 1514', *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici* vol. 17-18 1989 pp. 160-2.

2 Michael LINTON: 'Christiern Pedersens Saxo', pp. 311-26 in: *Profiler i nordisk senmiddelalder og renaissance. Festskrift til Poul Enemark*. Red. Svend E. Green-Pedersen [et al.], Århus 1983.

3 LINTON 1983 p. 322: "Men man kan också tänka sig den möjligheten, att alla lån från de klassiska auktorerna först blivit "rättade" och "avfilade" [i.e. castigatum eliminatumve, a quotation from one of the letters accompanying the edition] av Christiern Pedersen och kretsen kring honom med Josse Bade i spetsen".

4 LINTON 1983 p. 324: "Möjligen kan man förklara Saxos invecklade metrik och konstfärdiga satarytm, hans användande av något atypiska ord och hans påfallande ordkonstruktioner med grekiskans semi- på liknande sätt".

points: the pages contain several stylistic borrowings from classical authors, in the prose text borrowings from Saxo's favourite model Valerius Maximus and from Sallustius¹, in the poetry from Vergil² and Prudentius. We also notice that the mixture of prose and verse in Saxo is original, and that even our small sample of poetry is written in three different metres: apart from dactylic hexameters and elegiac distichs we also find the unusual stichic adoneans. The prose exhibits the same rhythmical features as the rest of Saxo's prose³, and it is moreover unlikely that Renaissance editors would introduce the despised medieval system of *cursus* in order to heighten the stylistic quality of a text. Finally we find a number of rare words in our sample⁴. These points should suffice to refute the conclusions of LINTON 1983. Now to the more specific hypothesis of the second article.

Its title is "Pontifex Maximus in Saxo. Some reflections on the title of Archbishop in the High Middle Ages and the Renaissance"⁵. The main hypothesis is that the editor Christiern Pedersen himself introduced the term *pontifex maximus*, for archbishop or pope, in Saxo's text. From the initial statement that "it is a possibility [among others] that the term *pontifex maximus* was not found in the medieval manuscripts of Saxo, but was introduced in the editio princeps of 1514" (p. 68), via the state-

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- 1 To the borrowing from Sall.Cat. 7,2 noted in the Olrik/Ræder edition at p. 155,33, one may add Sall.Iug. 61,4 multis pollicitationibus aggreditur, at p. 156,4 multis aggressi pollicitationibus.
 - 2 As to the hexameter poem (Starcatherus's Death Lay), some newly detected borrowings from Vergil are discussed on pp. 192f. in Karsten Friis-Jensen: Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet. Studies in the verse passages of the Gesta Danorum, Rome 1987 (Analecta Romana Instituti Danici. Supplementa, 14).
 - 3 Saxo's prose rhythm, *cursus*, has never been the object of systematical examination. Bertil Axelson opened the discussion with a fine article 'Satsrytm hos Saxo' (Scandia 9 1936 pp. 204-27), but his observations still remain unsupported by statistical material. I once made a preliminary survey of *cursus* at period ends, using Tore Janson's method (as described in: Prose rhythm in medieval Latin from the 9th to the 13th century, Stockholm 1975 (Studia Latina Stockholmiensia, 20)). The material was the Preface and Books One, Twelve, and Sixteen, a total of 832 period endings. *Cursus planus* was the most common (27%), closely followed by *cursus velox* (22%), and by *cursus tardus* (16%), a total of 65% of 'desired forms'; there was no sign of the so-called *cursus tripondiacus* being among the favoured forms. The corresponding numbers from the Lassen fragment are: a total of 65 period endings (all sentences ending in full stop or colon in the Olrik-Ræder edition), of which 29% show *cursus tardus*, 26% *cursus planus*, and 22% *cursus velox*, or 77% of desired forms. This result tallies beautifully with the more comprehensive statistics, the small discrepancies being easily explained by the relatively small size of the statistical material which the Lassen fragment offers.
 - 4 For instance *nolae*, -arum 'bells' at p. 154,5, and *dapsilitas*, -tis 'munificence' at p. 225,23.
 - 5 Michael LINTON: 'Pontifex maximus hos Saxo. Några reflektioner kring ärkebiskopstitulaturen i högmedeltid och renässans', pp. 63-73 in: Kongemagt og samfund i mid-delalderen. Festschrift til Erik Ulsig. Red. Poul Enemark [et al.], Århus 1988 (henceforward LINTON 1988).

ment that "*maximus pontifex* or *pontifex maximus* as a title is therefore, quite simply, not in current use in the High and Late Middle Ages, in any case not in Denmark" (p. 69), Linton reaches the conclusion: "The learned philologist [Christiern Pedersen] may in these cases, as in others, have embellished and improved his medieval exemplar" (p. 70)¹.

It is undoubtedly true that the expression *pontifex maximus* or *maximus pontifex*, used about archbishops and popes, is very unusual in the High Middle Ages. But this does not make Saxo's use of it in about a dozen passages suspect, it only serves to underline the peculiarity of his stylistic ideals. We do not find the idiom in any of the preserved manuscript fragments, but even if the above general demonstration of the reliability of the editio princeps should fail to convince in this instance, I believe that we can prove our case in a more roundabout way. This demonstration falls into two parts, first the 'internal' evidence which shows that Saxo's use of the idiom is in accordance with his usual linguistic practice, and supported by the indirect textual tradition, second the 'external' evidence which shows that the idiom may be seen as a natural development of contemporary usage.

It is well-known that Saxo's style is classicizing, i.e. that he as far as possible restricts his vocabulary to words found in classical Roman texts, also when he speaks about contemporary phenomena². That is why he avoids specific Christian terms such as *episcopus* and *archiepiscopus*, substituting for them *antistes*, *pontifex*, *praesul*, and the like. Linton gives a catalogue of nine occurrences in Saxo of the combination *maximus pontifex* and one of *maximus pontificatus* (LINTON 1988 pp. 63-65; a tenth example of *maximus pontifex* occurs at p. 375,40 O.-R.). The words are used ten times about archbishops, once about a pope, and once about the office of archbishop (*m. pontificatus*). In the expression, Saxo always starts with the adjective, as noted by Linton. Saxo's main inspiration for using the term is Valerius Maximus: it occurs eight times in Valerius³, but for example not in Saxo's other favourite models Curtius Rufus and Justinus. Valerius says *pontifex maximus* seven times, and

1 LINTON 1988: p. 68 "Slutligen kan man tänka sig, att termen *pontifex maximus* inte har förelegat i de medeltida Saxohandskrifterna, utan först tillkommit i den tryckta utgåvan, Editio princeps från 1514"; p. 69 "Maximus pontifex eller pontifex maximus som titel är sålunda helt enkelt inte aktuell under hög- eller senmedeltiden, i varje fall inte för Danmarks vidkommande"; p. 70 "Det kan alltså tänkas, att den lärde filologen bland annat i dessa fall kan ha förskönat och förbättrat sin medeltida förlaga".

2 See for instance Franz Blatt's introduction to the Saxo dictionary (Copenhagen 1957), pp. XIXff.

3 Val.Max. 1,1,2. 1,1,6. 4,2,1. 6,5,5. 6,6,1. 6,9,3. 6,9,13. 8,13,2.

only once reverses the order of the words. Naturally, in Valerius it always refers to the Roman office of high-priest.

The fourteenth-century epitome of Saxo, the *Compendium Saxonis*, consistently changes *maximus pontifex* into *archiepiscopus* and *papa*. This arouses Linton's suspicion (p. 68), quite without reason, for one of the epitomator's expressed aims is to change Saxo's *plurima uocabula ... moderno tempore inconsueta* into *plana uerba*¹.

Albert Krantz gives a paraphrase of several of the passages in Saxo containing the idiom, and actually keeps the words *maximus pontifex* five times² (writing *m.p.* three times, *p.m.* twice); in addition, he renders them once in the forms *magnus pontifex* and *magnus pontificatus*³, which may be a textual error in the transmission of Krantz's text. I should like to illustrate Krantz's particular blend of paraphrase and quotation with an example whose Saxonian counterpart contains the idiom twice. Saxo describes the papal legate Nicholas Breakspear's visit to Denmark in 1153 (14,11,1 p. 389,17ff. O.-R.): "He [*Nicolaus*] also laid it down that whoever was to be made Archbishop of the Swedes should be adorned with the pallium conceded by the curia through the Archbishop of Lund He promises that confirmation by the curia will be obtained for the granting of this privilege; which was achieved with the greatest of ease. For having returned to Rome, he was elected supreme pontiff on the death of Eugenius" (Eric Christiansen's transl.). Krantz retells the passage twice, first in a short version *Dania* 5,33, then in a fuller version *Noruaigia* 5,7, which gives us a very good opportunity to observe his working methods⁴. The Latin texts read thus:

Saxo: Statuit quoque ut, quicumque maximi Sueonum pontifices creandi essent, pallio a curia dato per Lundensem insignirentur antistitem In hoc priuilegio dato confirmationem a curia asciscendam promittit; quod effectu perfacile fuit. Siquidem Romam reuersus, decedente Eugenio, maximus pontifex subrogatus est.

Krantz Dan. 5,33: ... in perpetuum de manu Lundensis archiepiscopi sumeret Sueticus ab urbe Roma missum pallium. Quam rem apostolicis literis firmandam pollicetur. Facileque fuit impletu. Nam rediens in urbem Nicolaus, mortuo Anastasio, creatus est pontifex sub nomine Adriani.

Krantz Noru. 5,7: Statuitque ut, quicumque Sueonum creandi essent magni pontifices, pallio a curia dato per Lundensem insignirentur antistitem In hoc priuilegio dato con-

1 *Comp.Sax.praef.* p. 217,5 ed. Gertz.

2 Saxo p. 282,6 O.-R. = Krantz Dan. 4,24; Saxo 375,40 = Krantz Dan. 5,24; Saxo 389,21 = Krantz Noru. 5,7; Saxo 416,2 = Krantz Dan. 6,4; Saxo 512,15 = Krantz Dan. 6,41.

3 Saxo p. 389, lines 5 & 17 = Krantz Noru. 5,7.

4 The version in *Dania* 5,33 is not just a shortening of *Noruaigia* 5,7, because in the context of the passage quoted here its wording is sometimes the more Saxonian.

firmationem a curia proficiscendam promittit. Quod effectu facile fuit. Siquidem Romam reuersus, decedente Eugenio, maximus pontifex subrogatus est Nicolaus, tunc dictus Adrianus Quartus.

We observe how closely Krantz follows Saxo in the example from the *Norugia*, in the passage quoted above almost making a word-to-word rendering of Saxo's highly literary language (the context is sometimes freer). But when Krantz uses his own words, as in the passage from the *Dania*, his vocabulary is more down-to-earth.

The fact that we find the idiom *maximus pontifex* of the editio princeps in Krantz's paraphrases of Saxo should be sufficient proof that it was also found in the medieval manuscripts of Saxo, and not introduced by the editors of the printed text.

'External' evidence also supports the vulgate text of Saxo. Linton describes his fruitless search for the expression *pontifex maximus*, and the very few occurrences of the word *pontifex* in the Danish material from the High and Late Middle Ages and in papal letters with Danish addressees (LINTON 1988 pp. 65-9). It is admittedly very difficult to carry out systematic lexicographical investigations of medieval Latin, because our aids are so scarce. This circumstance on the other hand also calls for the utmost caution when we phrase general statements about linguistic phenomena.

I am inclined to believe Linton in his conclusion about the Danish material. In foreign texts, however, the closely related expression *summus pontifex* is very common in classicizing medieval Latin, both about archbishops in general and about the pope. Even Saxo uses it once (at 14,55,1 p. 512,31 O.-R.) Exactly this idiom constitutes Saxo's point of departure when he takes up the rare and even more classicizing term *maximus pontifex*, probably under influence from Valerius Maximus. The parallel idiom *summus pontifex* also explains why Saxo always writes *maximus pontifex*, not *pontifex maximus* like Valerius.

As documentation of my claim I shall quote some scattered observations - a systematic investigation would no doubt reveal much more material. Widukind of Corvey (late tenth century), like Saxo a very classicizing historiographer, has fourteen examples of *summus pontifex* (only two of which in the form *p.s.*) about various German archbishops, once actually the expression *pontifex maximus* (Widuk. 2,1 p. 64,7 Hirsch) about the Archbishop of Mainz, and once *magnus pontifex*¹. Among

1 See index s.v. *pontifex*, p. 191 in Hirsch's edition (*Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi*), Hannover 1935.

Saxo's own contemporaries, John of Salisbury uses *summus pontifex* four times (one of which in the form *p.s.*) of the pope¹, *summus pontificatus* twice about the papacy², and finally *pontifex maximus* once, but about the pagan Roman high-priest³.

Unlike what Linton claims (1988 pp. 65f.), the word *pontifex* is also connected with the papal title in Saxo's times. The word does not occur in the *intitulatio* of letters written by the popes (here the normal title is *seruus seruorum Dei*, as mentioned by Linton), but in the *inscriptio* of letters addressed to the popes: such letters often use an extended version of the title *summus pontifex*, namely (in the dative) *Dei gratia summo pontifici*. Twelfth-century treatises on letter-writing actually note the correct use of the two formulae⁴. There are many examples of the formula *Dei gratia summo pontifici* in letters to popes Alexander III and Innocent III⁵, and others may be found in letters to the various popes who held the papal see in the period between these two men. We find five occurrences of the formula in letters addressed to Celestine III by Saxo's contemporary Abbot Wilhelm of Æbelholt (Denmark)⁶.

On this background Saxo's use of the idiom *maximus pontifex* about ecclesiastical dignitaries cannot surprise us. Moreover, even this single specimen of Saxo's classicizing language helps us to understand why later the style of the *Gesta Danorum* held such fascination for Renaissance humanists, living as they did in an age in which the love of classical lore led the popes to resurrect the title *pontifex maximus* for themselves.

1 Ioh.Sarisb.policr. 5,15 p. 577c; 8,23 pp. 812a. 814c; metal. 4,42 p. 945b. I am indebted to Birger Munk Olsen for the use of a computerized index to John's works.

2 Ioh.Sarisb.policr. 8,23 pp. 809a. 813c.

3 Ioh.Sarisb.policr. 6,12 p. 605b.

4 See Ludwig Rockinger (ed.), *Briefsteller und Formelbücher des elften bis vierzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Quellen und Erörterungen zur bayerischen und deutschen Geschichte, 9), vol. I, Munich 1864, pp. 11-13 & 105-6. For the dating of the treatises cp. James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, Berkeley & Los Angeles 1974, p. 211.

5 Alexander III: Migne PL vol. 200 pp. 1359-1466; Innocent III: ibid. vol. 217 pp. 283-308.

6 Guill.Paracl.epist. 1,24. 2,12. 2,13. 2,22. 2,79, as numbered in the *Diplomatarium Danicum* vol. I,3,2 (1977). In addition to this formula, Wilhelm's letters show seven more examples of the idiom *summus pontifex*, letters 1,12. 1,30. 2,25. 2,45. 2,65. 2,77. 2,81. I am indebted to Ivan Boserup for the use of a computerized index to Wilhelm's letters.