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SUMMARY

*The Roman Empire, Western Europe, and Scandinavia
Cultural Contacts and Danish Historical Consciousness
during the 12th Century*

The article investigates five works of Danish historiography of the 12th century with a focus on underlying cultural contacts with Western Europe: England, the Roman-German Empire, Northern France. These contacts are regarded as the decisive precondition for the development of a specifically Danish moulding of medieval historiography and thus for the shaping and sharpening of cultural self-consciousness.

It is taken for a fact that the transfer and reception of ideas from foreign cultural backgrounds never result in more or less exact reproductions, but that for instance the early Danish historiographers had to merge their own cognitive horizons with those of their foreign sources and of their intended audience in order to communicate their (political) message successfully. Consequently, the way they crossed this gap and applied medieval hermeneutics to Danish history is of special interest.

It is further assumed that a history of ideas cannot be written without a glance at the history of structures and events and the conditions these provide for the author; therefore, the philological analysis of the texts and their inner logic is combined with the historical reconstruction of their constitutive conditions. As 12th century Danish historiography appears to be far from homogeneous, it is important to look at the diachronic development in contents and hermeneutics of the Danish works. Changes can indicate shifts in the learned networks as well as changes in the historical preconditions and socio-political ambience.

English influence was predominant during the 11th century in these networks, including the organisation of the church. Nevertheless, relations with Saxon (Northern-German) churches, especially Bremen, always existed and became more important from King Svend II Estridsen's time on. As a result, a blending of English and German influences – with quite productive effects on 12th century Danish historiography – must be taken into consideration.

These effects are apparent in the work of the Anglo-Saxon priest Ælnoth, who lived in Odense Monastery, the same locality where Knud IV (St Knud) was slain before the altar of St Alban's. After a short *Passio* written in 1095/96, Ælnoth composed his long, elaborate, and artful chronicle ca. 1110-17. It is cast in the mould of a triptych, with the history of Knud's father and his older and younger brothers as predecessors and successors on both sides of a hagiographical centre-narrative. Ælnoth thus intertwines a hagiographical and a historiographical discourse, calling into question the traditional division between genres.

The hermeneutics applied in all parts of the chronicle displays three semantic layers – historical, typological, moral – analogous to Biblical exegesis. At the centre of the interpretation is Knud himself, analogous to Christ, preceded by his father Svend Estridsen who, in the extension of the analogy, holds the position of David; the other kings are compared with them implicitly by their deeds and characters. There is a strong focus on Knud as a holy *rex iustus* who by his perfect deeds follow the ideas of Augustine and Ps.-Cyprian.

Ælnoth's chronicle is not arranged around a »classical« martyr legend; in fact, Knud's life is more similar to those of holy Anglo-Saxon kings from Bede's time. At the same time, Ælnoth was familiar with German historiography. In this context, the pronounced political functionalism of his chronicle shows an interesting parallel to *vitae* of German bishops from the 11th and 12th centuries.

Ælnoth appeals with considerable subtlety to King Niels, the contemporary ruler. By the literary celebration of St Knud, he seeks to found a reciprocal relation between the Odense Cathedral and the King: legitimation in exchange for gifts and protection. Once again, Ælnoth thus interweaves, in a most accomplished manner, documentation of own interests, guidance of the king's conduct, and assertion of local prestige. To this effect, he freely employs both Anglo-Saxon and German traditions in a Danish context. Being the first to do so, he succeeds in mounting Danish history on an independent and worthy platform of holiness within the wider horizon of Christianity.

A second step in the same direction is taken by the anonymous Danish author of the *Chronicon Roskildense*, written in the circle surrounding Bishop Eskil of Roskilde. It is a polemical treatise insofar as it takes sides in a struggle in 1137/38 over the Nordic archbishopric. Eskil demanded – in vain – its transfer from Lund to Roskilde, as explained in deep detail by M. Gelting.

Scholars have not been nearly as irritated by the straightforward and clear argumentation of this chronicle as by Ælnoth's moralising. The fact is, however, that it employs exactly the same hermeneutics of salvation history with precisely the same reciprocal links between theology and politics, and informed by the same Augustinian ideas, although in a merely historiographical form and with different judgements.

Chronicon Roskildense endeavours to convince the king, Erik III Lam, that the archbishopric ought to be transferred. Arguments from history prove the dignity of the Roskilde Cathedral and its bishops; and expose Erik Lam's predecessor, Erik II Emune, the winner in the kings' feud of 1131-35, as the servant of Antichrist. He is the negative example against which the successor, the present king, appears to be an *alter David*, of whom great deeds are to be expected. The typological statement is clearly if also subtly underlined by the construction of the kings' history in 14 generations, analogous to the organisation of salvation history in St Matthew's Gospel.

However, in the end the King did not support Eskil. This produced a logical breach between Erik Lam's place in salvation history and his extremely negative description in the last chapter.

In two ways, *Chronicon Roskildense* clearly demonstrates the growing importance of German influence on Danish historiography: Firstly, Eskil was educated in Hildesheim, and he himself, just as the bishops depicted in the chronicle, shows conduct typical of very powerful bishops of high nobility, like those in the German parts of the Empire, especially before church reform. Secondly, the chronicle reflects the historiographical trauma provoked by the pervasive German influence under the kings' feud. Denmark was from that time on, until the 1180s, at least formally an imperial fief. Although no chronicle mentions these facts – not in one single word – they eventually had a profound effect on the shaping of Danish historiography.

The third step is taken by *Chronicon Lethrense*, written in the late 1160s under Bishop Absalon of Roskilde and dealing with the earliest history of Denmark. The whole chronicle is constructed as a historiographical reflection of *Chronicon Roskildense*, analogous to the relation between *opus conditionis* and *opus restaurationis* in medieval theology. It again employs the same 14-generations-scheme. Furthermore, it gives historical arguments for Danish success in holding its own against various emperors from Augustus and onwards, obviously a reaction to the problem of German influence in the present.

With *Chronicon Lethrense*, the reception process of historiographical ideas came to a first conclusion: After opening Danish history from the vantage point of a holy centre and using historiography in internal struggles for power, one could now apply patterns of exegesis to pre-Christian history and win relevant typological and moral statements from it.

A fourth step in this dynamic development was taken with Svend Aggesen's *Brevis historia regnum Daciæ*, written between 1185 and 1188, which includes pre-Christian as well as Christian history. Again, the two stages in Danish history mirror each other – in both cases the narrative structure is based on royal dynasties of 14 generations. Recurrent motives are the Danish superiority over the Germans and their emperors, and the just rule of Danish kings.

As a matter of fact, not only had the balance of power changed between the Empire and Denmark, even the educational network had experienced a significant shift towards Northern France after 1150. This is clearly recognised in Svend's – negative – picture of the Germans, which he draws according to

French stereotypes. From his use of unusual terms and his very early description of the later principle of *rex imperator in regno suo*, it furthermore appears extremely likely that he had studied under Alanus ab Insulis in Paris or Chartres.

As to power structures in Denmark, Svend's chronicle reveals that Archbishop Absalon did not want him to write a detailed contemporary history since he, the author, was the last survivor of an opposing and formerly most powerful family group. This is the reason for Svend's primary focus on the kings; hence also his promulgation of transpersonal, abstract ideas of kingdom and of a »state«, reminiscent of Ælnoth, who did not have a powerbase in Danish society either.

The authors of *Chronicon Roskildense* and *Gesta Danorum*, on the other hand, belonged to the same networks as the powerful magnates who had patronized the said works. They would therefore concentrate more on different nobles as agents of history and altogether follow a different ideology in this field, although they too build upon Augustinian ideas.

All of them, including Saxo, nevertheless share the same essentially exegetical hermeneutics in the construction of history. For the same reason, they display a typical ambivalence: on the one hand, insights in salvation history, on the other hand, tough political argumentation. The great differences in the use of these hermeneutic tools produce very diverse works, with different judgements of historical figures and a steadily widening historical horizon. They are the result of threefold dynamics in the 12th century: The educational networks overlapped and changed, creating new baselines for the reception of ideas. Furthermore, the networks of power changed likewise, providing entirely new constitutive logics for historiography. Finally, the political influence of the emperors grew significantly in the middle of the century, giving rise to crisis both in politics and in the cultural self-consciousness of the élites. Interacting with each other, these three main factors caused an acceleration of acculturation processes and paved the way – a very special way – for Danish participation in the European culture of knowledge.