

ARNE SØBY CHRISTIANSEN: Cassiodorus, Jordanes and the History of the Goths. Studies in a Migration Myth. Museum Tusulanum Press, København 2002. 391 s. 298 kr.

The Gothic History of Jordanes has long been central to any interpretation of the period of the barbarian migrations. Already in the fifteenth century, as Dr Christensen reminds us,¹ the text was used to justify the precedence of Swedish bishops at the Council of Basel. This remarkable fact is rather less surprising when one remembers that the question of *nationes* had been brought to the fore by the Council of Constance only a few years earlier.² Nevertheless, it is notable how central the *Getica* has been to an understanding of the past, from the fifteenth century onwards: particularly to a past which locates the origins of the Goths in Scandinavia, an approach which Josef Svennung labelled Goticismus and which is here called »Gothicism«.³

A reconstruction of the Gothic past is not a concern of this thesis. Rather, it is primarily interested in the sources of the *Getica*, and by extension in what this tells us about the reliability of the text. The related questions of historical genre and of the intentions of the author are raised, but rarely take centre-stage.⁴ Instead, Christensen subjects the origins of various major elements in Jordanes' work to a thorough analysis in order to determine »whether our reliance on the historical value of Jordanes's narrative is justified or not.«⁵ Of course this is not a new approach, as the footnotes and bibliography to the book amply demonstrate. Indeed, it is in many respects an approach that has more in common with textual commentary of the nineteenth century – which is certainly not to say that it is invalid. Up-to-date analysis of this sort is a necessary precursor for much study, yet it is all too rare. The sorts of detailed textual discussion that a classicist or an ancient historian can take for granted are less often available to the early medievalist. One might take as a parallel Peter Brown's comment at the start of his paper on »Relics and Social Status in the Age of Gregory of Tours«: »I have been moved by a sense of the urgent need for a full religious commentary –

¹ p.7.

² T. Scott, 'Germany and the Empire', in C. Allmand, *The New Cambridge Medieval History VII, c.1415-1500* (Cambridge, 1998), p.340.

³ p.12.

⁴ pp.3-4, 6, 16.

⁵ p.20.

a *religionsgeschichtliches Kommentar* – on the works of Gregory of Tours.«⁶ What we have here, then, is a textual commentary, one concerned in this instance, not with religion, but with sources.

The question of sources is an important one for any reader of Jordanes. Famously the author himself addresses his work to the otherwise unknown Castalius: »You urge me to leave the little work I have in hand, that is, the abbreviation of the Chronicles [in other words Jordanes' *Romana*], and to condense in my own style in this small book the twelve volumes of Senator [that is Cassiodorus] on the origin and deeds of the Getae from olden time to the present day, descending through the generation of the kings.« Having outlined his own inadequacies Jordanes continues: »But worse than every other burden is the fact that I have no access to his books that I may follow his thought. Still – and let me lie not – I have in times past read the books a second time by his steward's loan for a three days' reading. The words I recall not, but the sense and the deeds related I think I retain entire. To this I have added fitting matters from some Greek and Latin histories. I have also put in an introduction and a conclusion, and have inserted many things of my own authorship.«⁷ This preface has occasioned much debate about the extent of Jordanes' dependence on the lost histories of Cassiodorus. Christensen presents Jordanes as more dependent on Cassiodorus than do many recent historians, and he frequently takes this dependence for granted. There is, indeed, a problem in how one understands the claim of Jordanes that he had access to Cassiodorus' text only twice, the second time for a mere three days. Whether the present work actually supports the position it takes is one to which I shall return.

Jordanes makes specific reference to particular sources on other occasions, among them Orosius and Priscus, as well as the problematic Ablavius, the *descriptor Gothorum gentis egregius*,⁸ whose identity and writings remain shrouded in mystery. Of more concern from Christensen's point of view is the question of the ancient songs of the Goths, the *carmina prisca*, which are cited on three occasions.⁹ Whether or not such songs really did underlie Jordanes' narrative is indeed at

⁶ Brown, 'Relics and Social Status in the Ages of Gregory of Tours', in id., *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (London, 1982), p.222.

⁷ Jordanes, *Getica*, pref., trans. C.C. Mierow, *Gothic History of Jordanes*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, 1915), p.51: the majority of the translations of passages of the *Getica* cited here are from Mierow.

⁸ *Getica*, 28, 82, 117.

⁹ *Getica*, 28, 43, 72.

the heart of the current discussion, and it is another question to which I wish to return.

Christensen begins his analysis with an examination of the Goths in Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian literature before Cassiodorus. Here the absence of the name *Gothi* in sources earlier than the third century is striking. There are certainly a number of apparently similar names: there are the *Gotones* of Tacitus, somewhere to the south of the Baltic, at the moment when Jordanes places them on the Danube:¹⁰ the *Γυθωνες* described as Sarmatians by Ptolemy, who places them on the Vistula, and the same author's *Γουτται*, which are described as living in Skandai,¹¹ neither of which geographical setting fits the chronology of Jordanes. To this group can be added several others, provided one accepts the emendations made by various nineteenth-century editors: the *Βουτωνας* of Strabo, who get emended to *Γουτωνας*,¹² and Pliny's *Guinones* who are transformed into yet more *Gutones*.¹³ The extent to which we rely on the textual emendations of editors is one of the most salutary lessons that anyone may take from this study. It is perhaps worth remembering that this is a problem for late antique and early medieval specialists in general: the history of late Roman Britain is equally bedevilled by the problem of textual corruption and editorial emendations.¹⁴ Pursuing Christensen's argument a little further, whether one can or should take the names, emended or otherwise, and equate them with the *Gothi*, who are only unquestionably attested from the third century onwards, is a major question, and one which can only be solved case by case.

What we can do with clean consciences, as Christensen argues, is reject Jordanes' identification of the Amazons, an identification extracted from Orosius, as wives of the Goths. This, as he notes, is a conclusion that will surprise some, but only a few.¹⁵ I wonder, however, whether the identification deserves more than a purely literary discussion. In recent years some of the monstrous races of the Middle Ages have been the subject of productive analysis on social anthropological and indeed post-modern lines.¹⁶

¹⁰ pp.35-7.

¹¹ p.39.

¹² pp.32-4, 38.

¹³ pp.29-31. Compare also pp.203, 210, 297, 309.

¹⁴ P. Bartholomew, 'Fifth-century facts', *Britannia* 13 (1982), pp. 261-70.

¹⁵ p.23.

¹⁶ E.g. I.N. Wood, 'Aethicus Ister: an exercise in difference', in W. Pohl and H. Reimitz, eds., *Grenze und Differenz im frühen Mittelalter* (Vienna, 2000), pp. 197-208

The incontestable appearance of the Goths in written sources of the third century does not provide much help in discovering the origins of the people. Christensen avoids any exploration of the relationship of the Goths of the written sources with the Wielbark-Cjernjakov culture, in the context of his argument a legitimate, but also limiting, decision.¹⁷ Ammianus, who provides us with our best fourth-century evidence makes no comment on Gothic origins¹⁸ – though this may well be because we don't have the first thirteen books of his histories, a matter which may deserve comment. The presence of the Goths in the *Historia Augusta* might perhaps have merited a little more comment in the context of fourth-century views of the Goths.¹⁹ Also to be borne in mind, although probably insoluble, is the question of what might have been contained in the lost Roman history of Virius Nicomachus Flavianus – a work to which Cassiodorus almost certainly had access.²⁰

For the account of Gothic origins set out by Jordanes, more important, as Christensen explains, is the connection made by Ambrose between the Goths and Gog.²¹ Magog had already been connected with the Scythians by Josephus.²² Augustine, however, rejected the notion that Gog and Magog stood for barbarian peoples.²³ Jerome equally disliked this connection, preferring to link the Goths to the *Getae*,²⁴ which was also accepted by Orosius.²⁵ Despite the strictures of Augustine and Jerome, Ambrose's linking of the Goths and Gog survived in Isidore's writings,²⁶ and indeed the Book of Ezekial, from which the account of Gog is borrowed, would be a major element in later cosmographies. By contrast, as Christensen insists, it was the association of the Goths with the *Getae* which was important in sixth-century historical traditions relating to the Ostrogoths.

Although Cassiodorus' *History of the Goths* has not survived, his chronicle has. In this particular work, as Christensen points out, there is

¹⁷ p.40, n.54.

¹⁸ p.42.

¹⁹ The significance of the *Historia Augusta* is most clearly apparent in chapter 7.

²⁰ *Anecdota Holderi*: trans. S. Barnish, Cassiodorus, *Variae* (Liverpool, 1992), xxxvi, n.72. On Virius Nicomachus Flavianus, see the doubts expressed by J.F. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*.

²¹ p.44.

²² p.47.

²³ p.50.

²⁴ pp.48-9.

²⁵ pp.48-9.

²⁶ p.51.

nothing to suggest that Cassiodorus had access to any Gothic tradition,²⁷ even though the Chronicle was written to celebrate Eutharic's consulship in 519. References to the Goths in the Chronicle are sober entries about battles. Jordanes, when writing his Roman history, made little effort to include anything that could be called Gothic tradition, even though he interrupted the writing of the *Romana* in order to fulfil Castalius' request for the *Getica*,²⁸ and thus must have been thinking about Roman history while writing about Gothic and vice versa.

In order to pursue the matter of what might have been in Cassiodorus' twelve books of Gothic history, one needs to turn instead to the *Variae*, as indeed Christensen does. There is the reference in the preface to the fact that Cassiodorus often delivered panegyrics to kings and queens, and that he »composed the history of the Goths in twelve books, anthologising their success.«²⁹ In the *Anecdoton Holderi*, ascribed to Cassiodorus, we learn that the history was commissioned by Theodoric, thus before 526.³⁰ For the content, however, we are left to glean snippets from the *Variae*: in a speech written for Athalaric to address to the senate we find: »He extended his labours even to the ancient cradle of our house, learning from his reading what hoary recollections of our elders scarcely preserved. From the lurking place of antiquity he led out the kings of the Goths, long hidden in oblivion. He restored the Amals, along with the honour of their family, clearly proving me to be of royal stock to the seventeenth generation. From Gothic origins he made a Roman history, gathering, as it were, into one garland, flower-buds that had previously been scattered throughout the fields of literature. Think how much he loved you in praising me, when he showed the nation of your prince to a wonder from ancient days. In consequence, as you have ever been thought noble because of your ancestors, so you shall be ruled by an ancient line of kings.«³¹ Cassiodorus returns again to the genealogy of the Amals in a speech delivered to the senate in praise of Amalasuetha: »If the royal band of her ancestors were to look on this woman, they would see their glory reflected, as in a clear mirror. For Amalus was distinguished for his good fortune, Ostrogotha for his patience, Athala for mercy, Winitarius for justice, Unimundus for beauty, Thorismuth for chastity, Walamer for good

²⁷ p.61.

²⁸ p.106.

²⁹ p.78: Cassiodorus, *Variae*, pref. 11: trans. Barnish.

³⁰ pp.68-9, 79. See Barnish, Cassiodorus, *Variae*, p.xxxvii.

³¹ p.72: Cassiodorus, *Variae*, IX, xxv, 4-6, trans. Barnish.

faith, Theudimer for his sense of duty, her glorious father, as you have seen, for his wisdom.«³²

There are a number of crucial points that Christensen deduces from these letters, and from a third in which Cassiodorus talks of the Sack of Rome in 410 entirely from the viewpoint expressed by Orosius³³ – that is, from a Roman and not a Gothic point of view. First, Cassiodorus cannot be proved to be using Gothic tradition: second, he was concerned about the genealogy of the Amals, and was himself responsible for bringing it into the limelight: and third, his audience, so far as we can deduce, was Roman. The seventeen generations of the Amals seem intended to impress the senate, whose members prided themselves in their ancestry. The figure seventeen has been thought to coincide with the number of generations from Aeneas to Romulus.³⁴ This is not an observation that Christensen follows up, and it must be admitted that the Roman tradition was not well established.³⁵ We can probably conclude, as he does, that Jordanes' concern with the Amal dynasty was derived from Cassiodorus. We can also conclude that although the Gothic history was commissioned by Theodoric, Cassiodorus continued to think about the subject, even if he did not revise the text, into the reign of Athalaric, for whom the seventeen-generation genealogy is spelt out. That Cassiodorus further revised his text in Constantinople is at best unproven, despite the fact that the idea was advocated by Arnaldo Momigliano.

In turning to Jordanes himself, Christensen surveys the debates surrounding his identity and those of Castalius and Vigilius, the dedicatees of his two works, and in passing raises important matters about the author's own self-perception,³⁶ to which I shall return. For the moment, however, I wish to consider Christensen's analysis of the sources of the *Getica*. Clearly Jordanes has a particular interest in the Amals, as he makes clear on numerous occasions, not least in summarising the contents of his book.³⁷ He describes the Ostrogothic kingdom as the *regnum Amalorum*,³⁸ although interestingly he gives a remarkably favourable

³² p.75: Cassiodorus, *Variae*, XI, i, 19, trans. Barnish.

³³ p.77: Cassiodorus, *Variae*, XII, xx, 4.

³⁴ P. Heather, *Goths and Romans 332-489* (Oxford, 1991), p. 21

³⁵ H. Wolfram, "Origo gentis: §2. Goten", p. 179, in *HOOPS Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde*, zweite Auflage, vol 22 (Berlin, 2003).

³⁶ p.p. 88-92, 341.

³⁷ Jordanes, *Getica*, LX 315: This follows directly after his comment on the significance of the union of the Amals and the Anicii (314).

³⁸ p.126: Jordanes, *Getica*, XIV 81.

portrait of the non-Amal Vitigis.³⁹ The emergence of non-Amal rulers after the failure of Theodohad may be taken as evidence for a non-Amal political tradition.⁴⁰ Jordanes himself clearly has a personal attachment to the Amal family having served the Amal Gunthigis Baza.⁴¹ But it is probable that in his depiction of the Amal family he is dependent primarily on Cassiodorus: he does indeed provide a seventeen-generation genealogy of the Amals, down to Athalaric, which can reasonably be seen as a version of that mentioned by Athalaric in his address to the senate.

In Christensen's opinion the genealogy supplied by Jordanes is a censored version of that which Cassiodorus established. He notes the absence of Amalafrida, sister of Theoderic, wife of the Vandal king Thrasamund, and mother, by a previous union, of Theodohad, who would later marry and kill Amalasuetha. Equally, he notes the absence of Theoderic's daughters, Theodogotha and Areagni-Ostrogotho.⁴² It would certainly be possible to provide a hypothesis to account for the exclusion of Theodohad from Jordanes' version of the Amal genealogy in terms of his subsequent treatment of Amalasuetha. On the other hand I wonder whether we should assume that the genealogy established by Cassiodorus was ever intended to provide a complete list of the Amal family. As Christensen himself points out, Cassiodorus' list of Amalasuetha's ancestors, as delivered to the senate, is extremely selective.⁴³ At the same time it is clear that the Cassiodoran genealogy known to Athalaric must have been adapted by the time that Jordanes wrote it down, for Mathesuetha, Vitigis and Germanus could not have been part of that list.⁴⁴

The gaps, supposed or actual, in Jordanes' presentation of the Amal genealogy as constructed by Cassiodorus are one problem: whether there will ever be any agreement about them is questionable. More, however, can be made of the list as it stands. As Christensen rightly notes there must be something significant in the placing of the Amal genealogy.⁴⁵ This occurs in the account of the conflict between the emperor Domitian and the king Dorpaneus, who is described by Jordanes as a

³⁹ Jordanes, *Getica*, LIX, 309-13.

⁴⁰ E.g. P. Heather, 'Theoderic, king of the Goths', *Early Medieval History* 4 (2) (1995), pp. 145-73, at p. 172.

⁴¹ Jordanes, *Getica*, L, 265.

⁴² pp.129-30.

⁴³ p.75.

⁴⁴ p.130.

⁴⁵ p.126.

Goth, but not as an Amal. Indeed, although Athalaric claims that Cassiodorus had provided him with royal ancestors stretching back seventeen generations, it is striking that there is no attempt in Jordanes to portray the early members of the family as royal.⁴⁶ The genealogy is one of heroes, not of kings.⁴⁷ That the Amal genealogy has been intruded into an inappropriate history is clear, as Christensen points out, from the fact that Dorpaneus in Orosius is described as king of the Dacians, and not as a Goth at all.⁴⁸ I personally would wish to push the point further, and to emphasise the fact the Amals get their epithet of *semideos id est Anses* from their behaviour on the battlefield, and not from any royal dignity, for even according to Jordanes they had none at the time.⁴⁹ And I would further like to draw a comparison here with Photius' reference to Valamer breathing fire, which again seems to me to be an attribute of a warrior rather than a king.⁵⁰ Modern historians have, to my mind, been too quick to elide the attributes of heroism and fortune in battle with those of kingship.

The Amals listed in the genealogy only enter verifiable history with Ermanaric. As Christensen notes, despite the king's presence in the genealogy, Ermanaric is not among the nine royal ancestors of Amalasuetha listed by Cassiodorus in his address to the senate – a point which can easily be explained in terms of the fact that he was not actually a direct ancestor of the queen.⁵¹ Whether Ermanaric belongs in the family at all is a more serious point.⁵² The problems of Jordanes' account of Ermanaric are well-known, having been picked up by students of medieval literature as well as historians. Not that we should automatically accept Ammianus' account as more reliable than that of Jordanes. His portrayal of Ermanaric's death as suicide may suggest the influence of classical Roman tradition: one thinks for instance of the defeated Brutus and Mark Anthony. As for the presentation of Ermanaric's kingdom in the *Getica*, it is in all probability intended to pro-

⁴⁶ p.134.

⁴⁷ Jordanes, *Getica*, XIV 79.

⁴⁸ pp.126-7.

⁴⁹ Jordanes, *Getica*, XIII, 78. J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent* (Oxford, 1971), p.10, elides too much: Jordanes makes no link between kingship and the status of Ansis.

⁵⁰ For Valamer breathing fire, Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 242.64, ed. R. Henry (Paris, 1959-77): this again doubtless refers to heroic rather than sacral attributes: H. Wolfram, *History of the Goths* (Berkeley, 1988), p.111.

⁵¹ p.158: Cassiodorus. *Variae*, XI 1.

⁵² On all of this one should consult Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, pp.29-35: Heather, *Goths and Romans*, 332-489, esp. pp.19-28.

vide a precedent for Theoderic's Gothic kingdom, stretching, after 507, over the Visigoths as well as the Ostrogoths – a point that has been particularly well made by Peter Heather.⁵³

The collapse of Ermanaric's kingdom (however large or small one thinks it to have been in reality) brings one to the period in which the Goths, according to Jordanes, were divided. That the Goths were ever one large unit which subsequently divided into two, the Visigoths and the Ostrogoths, is no longer automatically accepted by historians. Nor is an easy equation of Tervingus and Visigoths or *Greutungus* and Ostrogoth to be found in much recent scholarship. Nevertheless Christensen's careful assessment of the evidence springs one or two surprises in a well-worn field. First, here as in the earlier discussion of geographical names in Jordanes we are faced with the extent to which modern scholarship has unthinkingly followed editorial emendations. Most striking in this respect is the group of four names in the *Historia Augusta: trutungu austorgoti uirtingi sigi*.⁵⁴ Yet more important is the question of who actually uses which of the various terms that modern historians have come to associate with the migration-period Goths. The fact that Ammianus uses neither Visigoth nor Ostrogoth, but rather *Gothi*, *Thervingi* and *Greuthungi* is certainly important for any assessment of the reality of the bipartite division of the Goths which plays so significant a role in Jordanes' text.⁵⁵ Arguably of more significance still is what Christensen has noted about the use of the names *Tervingi* and *Greutungu*. The first usage of the term *Tervingi* – or *Teriungi* in the manuscript – in the *Panegyricus Genethliacus* of Mamertinus raises problems as to which group is indicated by the term.⁵⁶ That the *Tervingi* were Goths is first made clear by Ammianus Marcellinus writing almost a century later. Yet Ammianus himself, whose writings have been central to most interpretations of the fourth-century Goths also yields some surprises, notably the fact that he describes Athanaric both as a *Greutungus* and as a Tervingian.⁵⁷ For anyone expecting a clear-cut division between *Greutungus*-Ostrogoth and *Tervingus*-Visigoth this inconsistency on the part of Ammianus would seem to be a mistake. Yet we find similar con-

⁵³ Heather, *Goths and Romans*, 332-489, p.25.

⁵⁴ pp.203-5.

⁵⁵ p.202.

⁵⁶ pp.207-12.

⁵⁷ pp.211, 227.

fusion between the groups when we note that Alatheus and Saphrax, who would normally be categorised as Tervingi, acted as guardians for the *Greutungus* Vithericus.⁵⁸ A fluid reading of tribal groups, of the sort which is being increasingly suggested in modern scholarship, might take this dual-labelling as having some significance for our understanding of the Goths in the late fourth century. This is a point to which we can usefully return. For the moment it is enough to say that Christensen clearly demonstrates that there is no clear-cut division between *Greutungi* and *Tervingi*, and that there is no straightforward development from *Greutungus* to Ostrogoth or *Tervingus* to Visigoth. Further, the emergence of the Ostrogoths and Visigoths as separate groups follows on from the impact of the Huns. Christensen himself recognises that these conclusions are not new, clearly stating that in this instance his work merely substantiates the arguments of Peter Heather.⁵⁹ The same point holds true with regard to Christensen's emphasis on the fact that the Amals were not a particularly ancient lineage – an argument which is replicated in the analysis of the Balth family, whose first significant representative appears to have been Alaric I.⁶⁰

Having looked at what can be ascertained about the development of the Goths in the fourth and fifth centuries, Christensen returns to the accounts of their origins presented by Jordanes, and arguably by Cassiodorus before him. Essentially he is concerned with material on the Getae taken from Dio Chrysostom, and on the Scythians taken from Dexippus.⁶¹ Since Orosius made a link between the Amazons and the Scythians, although he did not prove that the Goths and the Scythians were the same people, this allowed Jordanes to present the Amazons as Goths.⁶² Among the individuals whose presence in the *Getica* is explained in this analysis of the sources are the Egyptian king Vesosis and the Gothic king Thanausis, who is drawn apparently from the Scythian king Tanaus. He appears to have been known to Cassiodorus or Jordanes from the now lost *Historiae Philippicae* of Pompeius Trogus, the outline of which is preserved for us in the *Epitoma* of Justin. This same Thanausis, Jordanes tells us, was ranked as a god after his death: *mortuum inter numina sui populi coluerunt*.⁶³ This is a point which Christensen

⁵⁸ p.227.

⁵⁹ p.229.

⁶⁰ p.226.

⁶¹ pp.233-4.

⁶² p.237.

⁶³ p.238: Jordanes, *Getica*, VI 48.

thinks hardly credible: he may be right, but there are good parallels for such cults. In Rimbert's *Life of Anskar* the Svear consider the deification of their king Eric.⁶⁴ A yet better parallel can be found in the fact that the Russian Slavs culted a god called Trojan, who appears to have been the deified emperor Trajan, and his cult would seem to have been spread by the Dacians.⁶⁵ In general, however, Christensen's analysis of the extent to which the *Getica* uses material from earlier works on the Scythians and *Getae* enriches our views of the use to which Jordanes or Cassiodorus put their sources. Whether this entirely rules out the possibility of any Gothic tradition being preserved by either of them is a matter to which I wish to return.

Meanwhile, the question of origins leads inevitably to Scandinavia, and to a return to the geographical information discussed in Christensen's second chapter, on the sources before Cassiodorus. The question of whether the Gauts and the Goths are in any way related is an old chestnut, which has been debated endlessly. One might even note that there has been an equivalent debate over the Geats in *Beowulf*, and whether they can be identified with the Swedish Gauts – a parallel that might usefully have been cited.⁶⁶ Since Gaut and Goth may both mean »man«, there is no reason to think that all the variants of the name, however much they may be etymologically related, concern the same group.⁶⁷ Like Christensen, I am inclined to look to Procopius' account of the connections between the Herules and Scandinavia – as interpreted by, among others, Alvar Ellegård – and to Jordanes' own reference to the Ranus Rodulf at the court of Theoderic⁶⁸ to gain some understanding of the context in which Cassiodorus and Jordanes were promoting the Scandinavian origin of the Goths.⁶⁹

Specific contexts are important. That Cassiodorus wrote his Chronicle in 519 to mark the consulship of Eutharic is clearly a key to his intentions. It is a pity that we can date the composition of his Gothic History no more precisely than the reign of Theoderic. Christensen's suggestion that the absence of the Gothic History from Cassiodorus' *Institutes* is to be explained by the fact that it was no longer a work of any relevance is compelling.⁷⁰ Once again it points to the composition hav-

⁶⁴ Rimbert, *Vita Anskarii* 26, ed., W. Trillmich, *Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der hamburgischen Kirche* (Darmstadt, 1978).

⁶⁵ Z. Vana, *The World of the Ancient Slavs* (Prague, 1983), p.87

⁶⁶ R. T. Farrell, *Beowulf: Swedes and Geats* (London, 1972).

⁶⁷ p.288: on the meaning of the name, Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, p.21.

⁶⁸ p.256: Jordanes, *Getica*, III, 24.

⁶⁹ p.292: A. Ellegård, 'Who were the Heruli?', *Scandia* 53 (1987), pp.5-34.

⁷⁰ pp.316-7.

ing a precise purpose, probably to do with Amal propaganda. Perhaps one might have expected a little more exploration of the context in which Jordanes' *Getica* was written: even an exploration of its relation to the *Gothic Wars* of Procopius. Can it be mere coincidence that they were written at almost exactly the same moment? And that there are passages that could be taken either to indicate that both authors were using the same lost source, or, more challenging, that one author was borrowing from the other.⁷¹ Following Walter Goffart, Christensen draws attention to the offer of Britain to the Goths as providing an explanation for Jordanes' interest in the island.⁷² Jordanes' comment »Nor do we find anywhere in their written records legends which tell of their subjection to slavery in Britain or in some other island, or of their redemption by a certain man at the cost of a single horse«⁷³ is surely an allusion to a contemporary debate in Constantinople, for he goes on to add the challenge »Of course if anyone in our city says that the Goths had an origin different from that I have related, let him object.« The story of the redemption may be based on the fact that one possible meaning of the name Goth is horse, a point made by Herwig Wolfram,⁷⁴ but Jordanes' concern to reject the story suggests something more immediate than an etymological parallel. Procopius would seem to indicate what a central issue of the debate might have been, when he tells us that the Goths were offered Britain as a place to settle in 538.⁷⁵

But to return to the central line of Christensen's argument: the extent to which Jordanes' account of Gothic origins reflects propaganda developed for the Amals, and not derived from Gothic tradition, is further highlighted by a comparison of the *Getica* with the chronicle and History of Isidore. As Christensen rightly suggests, had there been a long-standing tradition of Gothic history which existed before the Hunnic invasions, it would surely have surfaced in some way in the Visigothic kingdom.⁷⁶

That much of the first third of Jordanes' text was derived from sources relating to peoples other than the Goths looks clear enough.

⁷¹ Compare Procopius V 12, 11: and the Burgundians lived not far from them towards the south, and the Suevi also lived beyond the Thuringians, and the Alamani, powerful nations.

⁷² Jordanes LV, 280: Now this country of the Suavi has on the east the Baiovari, on the west the Franks, on the south the Burgundians and on the north the Thuringians.

⁷³ Pp.253-4: W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History*, p.94: Jordanes, *Getica*, II, 10-15, V, 38.

⁷⁴ Jordanes. *Getica*, V, 38.

⁷⁵ Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, p.21.

⁷⁶ Procopius, *De Bello Gothico*, VI, vi, 27-36.

⁷⁷ pp.311-6.

Certainly there is likely to be more genuine evidence the closer the narrative comes to the lifetimes of Cassiodorus and Jordanes himself – although this is also a point to which I wish to return. Christensen usefully puts a spotlight on the fact that Jordanes had once served Gunthigis Baza, the son of Andag, who had fought for the Huns at the battle of the Catalaunian Plains, and who may have been the killer of Theoderid.⁷⁷ This is doubtless one of the complicating factors in the presentation of the battle, in which the Ostrogoths were, from the Roman point of view, on the wrong side. Despite access to genuine Gothic tradition, the description of the battle is, as Christensen points out, a Roman *encomium*.⁷⁸ Some would go further and even interpret the account of Attila's funeral in the light of Roman rather than Hunnic burial practices⁷⁹ – though this is not a discussion that Christensen pursues.

In offering this survey of the main parts of Christensen's argument I have avoided or said little about certain points where my views differ, or where I think the argument would bear some development, or indeed where a question has been avoided. It is to these points that I wish to turn. It is necessary to recognise that the argument offered by Christensen is concerned almost entirely with texts. Very early on he denies the value of linking the literary evidence with the Wielbark and by extension Cernjakov culture.⁸⁰ Subsequently, having discarded Jordanes' account of the conflict between the Goths and Romans on the Danube in the age of Domitian,⁸¹ he is more inclined to allow that there was a migration. Basically, however, Christensen sees the Goths as only really coming into focus once they reach the Roman frontier in Late Antiquity. Technically this is no doubt correct – and one might add that it is similar to the case which has recently been advanced for the origins of the Slavs.⁸² Nevertheless the Danube Goths clearly belong to the world of the Cjernjakov culture, and, although it is a different historical exercise, tracing them back into that world is useful – even if it has to be done without the help of Jordanes.

Another debate which has been central to early medieval scholarship in recent years concerns ethnicity. Here it seems to me that Christensen misses some opportunities to contribute to current thinking. I have al-

⁷⁷ p.341.

⁷⁸ p.340.

⁷⁹ J. Arce, 'Imperial funerals in the later Roman Empire: change and continuity', in F. Theuvs and J.L. Nelson, ed., *Rituals of Power from late antiquity to the early middle ages* (Leiden, 2000), pp.126-7.

⁸⁰ p.40, n.54.

⁸¹ p.343.

⁸² F. Curta, *The Making of the Slavs* (Cambridge, 2001).

ready touched on his comments on the difficulty in distinguishing between *Tervingi* and *Greutung*. It may be that Ammianus is mistaken to label Athanaric both as a *Greutung* and as a *Tervingus*. It may be that there is another problem in the categorisation of Alatheus and Saphrax as *Tervingi* when they were guardians of the *Greutung* Vithericus. It may be, however, that these details are useful additions to the modern debate about early medieval ethnicity. To offer only one parallel, the varying descriptions of Odoacer as ruler of the Herules, Turcilingi, Rugians and even Goths, and the references to him as being a *Scirus*, *Rugus* and a Goth have been used as an example to expand our understanding of fifth-century ethnicity.⁸³ Nor are the cases of Athanaric, Alatheus and Saphrax the only moments when Christensen provides useful evidence for this debate. Jordanes' comment, while discussing the supposed Goth Telephus, that Goths borrowed Hunnic names, is a further illustration of the fluidity of some supposed ethnic identifiers, that is not often cited.⁸⁴ Even more striking is Christensen's discussion of Jordanes' family. His father was called Alanowamuthis, and his grandfather Peria, who served the Alan Candac.⁸⁵ The fact that Candac was an Alan, and that Jordanes' father was called Alanowamuthis, would suggest an Alan family, not a Gothic one. As for Jordanes himself – leaving aside the possibility that his name might refer to the river Jordan, or if it is correctly spelt as Jornandes to a daring little boar⁸⁶ – he served Candac's nephew, Gunthigis Baza, an Amal. And he claimed that he himself was a Goth.⁸⁷ One looks in vain through Patrick Amory's vast study of Ostrogothic identity for a discussion of Jordanes!⁸⁸ Of course, Dr Amory could defend the omission on the grounds that Jordanes did not live in the Ostrogothic kingdom. One might add, however, that Jordanes, as a man developing his own Gothic *persona* once the Amal kingdom had collapsed, does not conform to the model of ethnic espousal proposed by Dr Amory, for whom the assumption of an ethnic identity ought to be advantageous.

Turning from points which have not been exploited, to points where one might take a different view: first, the *carmina prisca* and the question

⁸³ I.N. Wood, 'Ethnicity and the ethnogenesis of the Burgundians', in H. Wolfram and W. Pohl, *Typen der Ethnogenese unter besonderen Berücksichtigung der Bayern*, 1 (Vienna, 1990), p.63.

⁸⁴ p.303: Jordanes, *Getica*, IX 58.

⁸⁵ p.88-9: Jordanes, *Getica*, L 266.

⁸⁶ pp.86-7.

⁸⁷ Jordanes, *Getica*, LX 316.

⁸⁸ P. Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489-554* (Cambridge, 1997).

of Gothic tradition. On the whole I am convinced by Christensen's argument. He demonstrates that a substantial proportion of first third of Jordanes' account comes from literary sources that were not actually concerned with the Goths. There are, however, plenty of points where there is no evidence to prove such dependence. Without even saying that all those sections of the text were derived from *carmina prisca* – and one may note that there are only three occasions when such *carmina are cited*⁸⁹ – it may be that we should allow for some elements of tradition. As for the *carmina themselves*, the first of the three references to them comes at the moment of the Goths' entry into Scythia: Jordanes says, »the story is generally told in their early songs, in almost historic fashion«: *in priscis eorum carminibus, pene historico ritu*. The second says, »in earliest times they sang of the deeds of the ancestors accompanied by the cithara«, and it goes on to mention by name Eterparmara, Hanala, Fritigern and Vidigoia: and the third, talking of the name *Capillati*, says the Goths accepted it, »and they retain it to this day in their songs.« In a sense there is no need to deny the existence of *carmina prisca*, because there is very little here to suggest that those songs were significant. The Goths sang about heroes: but Jordanes does not say he took any information from those particular songs. In any case, many songs from many cultures mention heroes, without providing any accurate historical information about them. Gothic songs, we are told, included the word, *capillati* – a non-Gothic word, one might note. And the Goths sang *pene historico ritu*. I would take the word *pene* seriously, and take it to mean »almost« rather than »completely«: they did not have historical songs, but songs that were almost historical. That might suggest something akin to later skaldic verse, or perhaps English folk songs or nursery rhymes. Numerous folk songs of English origin, which were collected in the United States of America, have a historical core, but one which can scarcely be identified without considerable research. The same is true for many English nursery rhymes, whose historical content is often unintelligible: a song about the word *capillati* would fit this tradition admirably. So too would songs which preserved Gothic names, but which provided little or no evidence for what the individuals actually did – and here it would be useful to remember those names which cannot be explained away by reference to Latin and Greek sources, however few they may be.⁹⁰ Such songs could, of course, have been adult, but we do

⁸⁹ Jordanes, *Getica*, IV 28, V 43, XI 72.

⁹⁰ Christensen, p. 132, leaves on one side those names that cannot be assessed.

know of a Gothic magnate in Theoderic's Italy, who had his children taught Gothic, so children's songs are not out of the question.⁹¹ I would even suggest that Berig's three ships could have derived from such a context. Christensen finds no model for this story.⁹² Perhaps he should not have sought for a model, but for analogues. Gildas had already had the Saxons cross to Britain in three ships.⁹³ We do not have to believe in such a crossing to say that this could be a folk tradition. In the debate over whether or not Jordanes did have access to *carmina prisca*, there has been an assumption that such *carmina* carried accurate information. I would suggest that the reference to the *carmina prisca* is genuine, but that that does not guarantee that they contained any information that could be used as being historically accurate. Authenticity and accuracy are issues that have been confused in other areas of early medieval source criticism.⁹⁴

Equally, we do not have to believe in the story of the origin of the Huns to accept that Goths had a concept of witches.⁹⁵ The story itself may have been Christian in origin, although I notice that Maenchen-Helfen, who advanced this argument in 1944-5, did not repeat it when he came to write his *World of the Huns* a quarter of a century later.⁹⁶ I can see no reason whatsoever for accepting Walter Goffart's lighthearted vision of Cassiodorus asking Giberich to spell *haliurunna*.⁹⁷ and I wonder in any case whether Professor Goffart was intent on punning with the name Giberich/gibberish. *Haliurunna* is, according to philologists, a genuine Gothic word, and it strains one's credibility to think that Jordanes, himself a Goth, took it from a Latin book, which he did not have in front of him.

Jordanes' use of the word *haliurunna* is, in any case, in keeping with his interest in words. One can add among Gothic words *Anses*,⁹⁸ *Baltha*⁹⁹

⁹¹ Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 8, 21: see the comment in P. Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489-554* (Cambridge, 1997), p.73, n.153. I owe this reference to Stuart Airlie.

⁹² p.250.

⁹³ Gildas, *De excidio Britonum*, 23, 3: ed. M. Winterbottom, *The Ruin of Britain* (Chichester, 1978).

⁹⁴ See the argument in I.N. Wood, 'Forgery in Merovingian hagiography', *Fälschungen im Mittelalter V, Fingierte Briefe, Frömmigkeit und Fälschung, Realienfälschungen* (Hannover, 1988), pp. 369-84.

⁹⁵ Jordanes, *Getica*, 24, 121-2.

⁹⁶ pp.241-2, with refs.

⁹⁷ pp.241-2. W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History* (Princeton, 1988), p.29.

⁹⁸ Jordanes, *Getica*, XIII, 78.

⁹⁹ Jordanes, *Getica*, XXIX, 146.

and *belagines*,¹⁰⁰ as well as the Gepid *gepanta*.¹⁰¹ Then there is the Hunnish *strava*,¹⁰² the Scythian *Parthi*,¹⁰³ the British *essedas*,¹⁰⁴ as well as the Greek *hele*,¹⁰⁵ *tarabostaseos* and *pilleos*, with the associated words *pilleati* and *capilatti*.¹⁰⁶ These suggest to me a man who likes words, and who puzzles them, even if his etymologies are no more trustworthy than those of Isidore of Seville.

This brings me to a further point: the relationship of Cassiodorus and Jordanes. Christensen takes it for granted that Jordanes is for the most part following Cassiodorus. Indeed the two authors effectively become interchangeable in his text. I would like to suggest that the arguments throughout his book indicate the opposite. Certainly Jordanes has taken the notion of a seventeen-generation Amal genealogy from Cassiodorus. In all probability the basic structure of the *Getica*, with its emphasis on Gothic unity followed by division into Visigoth and Ostrogoth is Cassiodoran. But what of the detail? Here we can return to Cassiodorus' speech on Amalasuetha to the senate.¹⁰⁷ In this he associates Amal with *felicitas*, Ostrogotha with *patientia*, Athala with *mansuetudo*, Winitarius with *aequitas*, Unimundus with *forma*, Thorismuth with *castitas*, Walamer with *fides*, Theudimer with *pietas*, and Theoderic himself with *sapientia*. Jordanes gives us no clue to the virtues of Amal or Athala: Unimundus does not appear in the *Getica*: Ostrogotha is anything but patient,¹⁰⁸ and we hear nothing of Thorismuth's chastity when we learn of his fathering three sons:¹⁰⁹ so too we see no example of the justice of Winitarius,¹¹⁰ nor of the piety of Theudimer. One could extract an image of wisdom from the portrait of Theoderic, but that is hardly surprising. The only other character sketch in Jordanes which seems to take us close to the virtues which Cassiodorus associates with individual monarchs is that of Walamer, who is *secreti tenax, blandus colloquio, doli ignarus*,¹¹¹ which could just suggest that he had *fides*. In short, individual Amals as described by Jordanes do not have the specific virtues that Cassiodorus attributes to them. I would conclude from this

¹⁰⁰ Jordanes, *Getica*, XI, 69.

¹⁰¹ Jordanes, *Getica*, XVII, 94-5.

¹⁰² Jordanes, *Getica*, XLIX, 258.

¹⁰³ Jordanes, *Getica*, VI 48.

¹⁰⁴ Jordanes, *Getica*, II 15.

¹⁰⁵ Jordanes, *Getica*, XXXIII, 117.

¹⁰⁶ Jordanes, *Getica*, V 40, XI, 71-2: compare Cassiodorus, *Variae*, V, 49.

¹⁰⁷ Cassiodorus, *Variae*, XI, I, 19.

¹⁰⁸ Jordanes, *Getica*, XIV 79, 80, 82, XVI 90, 98.¹⁰⁹ Jordanes, *Getica*, XLVIII 252.

¹¹⁰ Jordanes, *Getica*, XIV 79, XLVIII 246-50

¹¹¹ Jordanes, *Getica*, XXXVIII 199

that Jordanes may well be honest in his description of the relationship of his work to that of Cassiodorus: on two occasions he had access to the latter's histories, but that he did not have access to them at the time of writing the *Getica*, and thus could not remember the detail of the Gothic History, only its outline, and certain specific aspects of it. Certainly he could not remember the way Cassiodorus had characterised individual kings.

There is, I think, a further indication that Jordanes did not have direct recall of the detail contained in Cassiodorus' history. One of the great virtues of Christensen's emphasis on the sources of Jordanes is that it becomes clear that he had a number of books open in front of him. The latest edition of the *Getica* cites nineteen sources, apart from Cassiodorus, named by Jordanes himself.¹¹² To these Christensen, in an excellent analysis of the preface to the *Getica*, has added Rufinus,¹¹³ so we can be sure that the list is an underestimate of what Jordanes was actually using. Since there is so much direct citation, we either have to believe that all these sources were cited in Cassiodorus, and that Jordanes was lying when he said he did not have access to the *History of the Goths* at the time of writing, or we have to believe the preface as it stands. This last suggestion seems to me to be by far the most likely. Jordanes thinks he can remember what Cassiodorus wrote, and to that he has added an introduction, a conclusion, and passages from Greek and Latin historians. We can all agree that he was responsible for the conclusion: the marriage of Germanus and Matasuentha is clearly Jordanes' addition, despite attempts to suggest that it represents a second edition by Cassiodorus.¹¹⁴ I would conclude that, contrary to the assumptions Christensen makes throughout his book, he proves that much of the *Getica* is the work of Jordanes rather than that of Cassiodorus. Certainly the latter is likely to have created the notion of Ostrogothic or Amal history: certainly he also created the Amal genealogy, and he did so in very specific circumstances. Jordanes, I would argue, in the light of the detailed textual analysis that Christensen presents, added substantially to that.

Some of the additions made by Jordanes clearly came at the end of *Getica* – but one may wonder to what extent the account of the fifth century is his original work. As has been much discussed, there are major problems with Jordanes' portrayal of Valamer, who might well be the

¹¹² Iordanis de origine actibus Getarum, ed. F. Giunta and A. Grillone, *Fonti per la storia d'Italia* (Rome, 1991), p.155.

¹¹³ p.113.

¹¹⁴ A. Cameron, *Procopius* (London, 1985), p.196, n.58.

same as the supposedly Hunnic Balamber.¹¹⁵ The underlying confusion here may have been begun deliberately in Theoderic's day, to hide some embarrassing aspects of Gothic history.¹¹⁶ In addition, however, Christensen has now raised serious doubts about Huneric's treatment of his Gothic wife as represented in the *Getica*.¹¹⁷ He has also pointed to the complexity of Jordanes' stance over the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains, where inevitably he needed to take a pro-Roman stance, despite the fact that the Amals, and especially the ancestors of his own master Gunthigis Baza, were on the wrong side. And, as Christensen suggests, the emphasis on Andag as the killer of Theodorid is likely to have come from Jordanes. The occurrence of the second Battle of the Catalaunian Plains has long been questioned.¹¹⁸ What are we to make of other passages in the *Getica*, which are not supported by other sources? I simply note two relating to Gaul, a region for which the evidence is relatively good: in the *Getica* there is the account of the emperor Glycerius sending Vidimer to Gaul, an episode which is otherwise only recorded in the *Romana* of Jordanes.¹¹⁹ There is also an unintelligible reference to the sons of Clovis, who are in some way involved in the marriage of Audefleda to the Frankish king.¹²⁰ It seems to me that more needs to be done to probe the problems of Jordanes' account of the century before his own. I suspect we need to be as wary of the account of the late fifth century as we do of earlier periods.

On the other hand, I think we can see that Jordanes was making an attempt to give his work some structure, and not just one which promoted the Amals, and culminated in the marriage of Matasuentha and Germanus. Nevertheless I would suggest that his attempt was not altogether successful, and there are plenty of structural tensions in the resulting work. First, I am not sure that the traditional division of the *Getica* into three sections, on the united Goths, the Visigoths and the Ostrogoths, is properly adhered to in the text, which moves backwards and forwards in a more complex manner than this division implies. The discussion of the distinction between the two groups comes long befo-

¹¹⁵ p.146: Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, p.254: Heather, *Goths and Romans*, 332-489, pp.24-6.

¹¹⁶ One should note here the problems exposed by H. Wolfram in 'Theogonie, Ethnogenese und ein kompromierte Großvater Theoderichs des Großen,'

¹¹⁷ pp.326-7: Jordanes, *Getica*, XXXVI, 184.

¹¹⁸ Jordanes, *Getica*, XLIII, 227.

¹¹⁹ Jordanes, *Getica*, LVI, 283-4: *Romana* 347.

¹²⁰ Jordanes, *Getica*, LVIII, 296.

re the narrative requires it.¹²¹ Secondly, I am struck by the fact that Jordanes has placed a surprising event at the very centre of his text: the midpoint is marked by the burial of Alaric.¹²² This does not fit with the clear emphasis on the Amals, but it does look forward to the major burials of Theodorid¹²³ and Attila.¹²⁴ There are other structuring devices towards the end: for instance, kings die when their horses have fallen. We seem at least to be looking at a work that the author has tried to structure. He may be remembering or misremembering elements of Cassiodorus' original text, but I can only conclude that he has formed them into a work of his own.

In short, Christensen's analysis of the text of Jordanes marks a step beyond what was previously available, and it has provided us with a major resource for understanding the *Getica* and its sources. That the *Getica* is largely drawn from Roman and Greek texts which were not concerned with the Goths is clear – so too Jordanes seems to have had a good number of those texts open in front of him, even if he did not actually have access to Cassiodorus' history at the time he was writing. At the same time I think that Christensen has been too stringent in denying the existence of Gothic elements in the text, however insignificant they may be, and in not allowing Jordanes a voice of his own – to my mind, a more significant issue altogether. One does not have to agree with every detail of Christensen's argument, however, to appreciate that he has put our knowledge of the text, its sources, and by implication its reliability, on a firmer footing than it has ever had.

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¹²¹ Jordanes, *Getica*, XIV, 82. Mierow's translation puts the break at XXV, 131.

¹²² Jordanes, *Getica*, XXX, 158.

¹²³ Jordanes, *Getica*, XLI, 214-5

¹²⁴ Jordanes, *Getica*, XLIX, 256-8.