

The Nordic Archbishoprics as Literary Centres around 1200

LARS BOJE MORTENSEN

Warrior or scholar?

Let me begin by allowing the first word to Saxo Grammaticus who, in the tenth book of his Danish history, writes about a noble Wend, Gottschalk:

At that time Gottschalk, a young Slav of outstanding qualities, arrived to perform his military service in the king's regiment. His father, Pribigneu, a strong devotee of Christian worship, was vainly attempting to recall the Slavs to the faith they had revoked; contrary to the custom of his tribe, Gottschalk had been entrusted to teachers so that he could obtain instruction in letters; yet when he realized that his father had been murdered by Saxons intent on gaining possession of his country, he did not allow his fierce spirit to grow tame in such calm pursuits. He suddenly exchanged books for weapons and turned from his cultivation of knowledge to recruitment in arms, afraid that he might follow the customs of his ancestors too feebly by applying himself to foreign mental exercises; relinquishing his scholarly endeavours, he chose to play the brisk avenger before the sedentary student, because he believed it fitter to use his mind with audacity more than with diligence. So, obeying the dictates of Nature in preference to those of his instructor, he at length secured his revenge and then sought out Knud's corps of soldiery. In this way the young man's mind, brought up short by a ferocious incentive when it was at the very threshold of learning, was unable to overcome the inborn harshness of his blood by the fundamental procedures of education¹.

¹Translation by P. Fisher - I am grateful to him for allowing me to quote his not yet published translation of the later books; Saxo Gramm. 10,17,3 *Olrik-Ræder Eo temporis Guthscalculus Sclavicus, eximia indolis adolescens, commilitium regis stipendia*

Gottschalk's dilemma is probably more typical of the latter half of the twelfth than the beginning of the eleventh century, in fact this is probably the most autobiographical passage Saxo ever wrote, although his story had a different ending. He himself belonged to a group of warriors — or in the phrase of the eminent Saxo scholar, Ellen Jørgensen, he was "son of a housecarl, a housecarl in mind and thought"² — and even if he completed a successful education and a literary *magnum opus*, he evidently never became alienated from a warrior's life dominated by violence, honour, and shame. In the course of the twelfth century a small but important part of the bellicose élite in the Nordic societies became used to more peaceful professions with sacred, ideological and administrative functions. It is a basic fact — and a precondition of my subsequent suggestions about the Nordic archbishops as literary centres — that the higher ecclesiastical offices in the twelfth century were all filled by members of the élite, and that the entire organisation was run by that local group³. The challenges put to lay investiture in the twelfth century do not change the picture because canons were also of noble extraction. Throughout the century bishops, canons, abbots etc. remained local magnates. They were not born as ecclesiastics, but as scions of powerful clans and naturally kept their loyalty towards the military caste; indeed many of them, like Absalon, were to all intents and purposes still members of it. Bishops had sworn an oath of allegiance to the king and were expected to contribute men, ships, and horses to expeditions (*leding*). It is in fact only with the

meriturus accessit. Is a Pribignevo patre, Christiani cultus amantissimo deficientemque a religione Sclaviam nequicquam revocare conante, præter nationis suæ morem percipiendæ litterarum disciplinæ gratia doctoribus traditus, ut eum a Saxonibus potiendæ Sclaviæ cupidis interemptum cognovit, efferatum ingenium leni studio mitescere passus non est. Repente enim armis scholam mutavit, et, ne alienigena ingenii exercitatione patrios ritus pigrius prosequeretur, litterarum cultum in tirocinium vertit, omissoque doctrinæ studio strenuè vindicis quam ignavi discipuli partes agere maluit, audacter quam industrie animo uti satius autumans. Itaque naturæ magis quam præceptoris monitis obsecutus, parta tandem ultione, Kanuti commilitium expetivit. Ita adolescentis mens, in ipso doctrinæ limine sævitiæ stimulis intercepta, studiosæ rationis elementis ingenitum sanguini suo rigorem expugnare non potuit.

²Jørgensen (1931), p. 31: "en hirdmands ætling, en hirdmand i sind og tanke".

³On the nobility and the Church Murray (1978) is essential, esp. pp. 317-74.

benefit of hindsight, namely with our knowledge of the development of a proper state bureaucracy in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, that we, together with Danish historians, can talk of an alliance between king and Church in the twelfth century (as if they represented two distinct bureaucracies that could simply choose to co-operate or not), and with Norwegian historians of tendencies towards a clerical centralisation as precursor to a lay one⁴. It has become increasingly common to disapprove of a strict model of polarization between king and Church as developed by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians; now one rather tends to stress the twelfth-century symbiosis of lay and clerical institutions, attitudes, social-religious practice, and cultural-literary spheres. They were always intertwined⁵. But why not take the final step by abandoning 'king' and 'Church' as the abstract agents of history and substituting one historical grouping for them, namely 'the élite'? The account would then focus on the process of bifurcation of the élite's activities during the twelfth century. From being occupied only with war it fills the increasing number of peaceful pockets of society with its own people in charge. Christianity functions as the ideological glue of those peaceful sectors, and their survival depends on a certain degree of supra-regional understanding and central authority. In this way the Nordic archbishoprics in the twelfth century can be described as the first stable centralised institution of the élite.

In the following I want to outline a likely image of the Nordic archbishoprics as literary centres and of the archbishops as learned patrons. I hope it will also emerge why the apparently attractive distinction between clerical and lay literary circles is more a source of

⁴E.g. Fenger (1989), pp. 38, 40, 154, and Helle (1974), pp. 67-68.

⁵A fine and richly documented study of the local political interests behind monasteries in Denmark in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is Hill (1992); he shows how virtually all monastic foundations in twelfth-century Denmark were "house monasteries", i.e. were founded and controlled by powerful clans, whether from the rank of king, bishop or other magnate. On pp. 100-104 he emphasizes the important position of bishops in the royal apparatus, civil as well as military.

confusion than of clarity, at least when dealing with the period before and around 1200⁶.

"The Nordic archbishoprics around 1200" may be a tidy phrase, but in fact we are only able to say something about Trondheim (Nidaros) and Lund, since our knowledge about persons and learning at Uppsala in the first period after its establishment in 1164 amounts to nothing. Of Trondheim and Lund we know enough to state uncontroversially that they *were* literary centres: authors such as Einar Skulason, Theodoricus Monachus, Sven Aggesen, and Saxo Grammaticus were certainly active at the archiepiscopal sees; it is not unreasonable to place the composition of a group of anonymous Latin poems on St Olaf and the Old Norse chronicle, *Ágrip*, in or around the see in Trondheim in this period; this may also be valid for the so-called oldest (fragmentary) saga on Olaf. The chapter in Lund became the originator and the centre for large parts of Danish annals in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. And finally one must not forget the archbishops themselves: Øystein Erlendsson took part in the composition of *Passio Olavi* and of various statutes and law collections and Anders Sunesen has left us two major written monuments, namely the theological didactic poem *Hexaëmeron* and a Latin paraphrase of the *Scanian law*; a third work, a completion of his pedagogical project of putting contemporary theology into Latin verse — *De septem sacramentis* — has been lost. Absalon, Erik Ivarsson, and Tore Gudmundsson are not known through any works of their own, but they were undoubtedly learned people who must have had a hand in formulating skilful official letters in Latin, legal rules etc. In addition Absalon was the patron and partly the source and inspiration behind Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, and Tore may very well be identical with the historian Theodoricus Monachus.

Even if this is all well-known and the important texts in question have been the object of much research, the problem of specifying the role of the archiepiscopal see as literary inspirator and distributor has not

⁶Holtmark (1961) and Hertel (1985) are examples of explicit use of the 'two-distinct-circles model' for literary activity in this period.

been addressed directly⁷. What kind of life did the above-mentioned texts live in their own day? Why were some texts composed in Latin, some in the vernacular? Is it feasible to talk of the public literary space (*literäre Öffentlichkeit*) of the élite? More or less well-known rules, stories, and poems now found their way on to parchment — how important was that change?⁸ Due to the fragmentary state of our sources, easy answers to all these questions are in short supply. Literary life at the archiepiscopal sees in Lund and Trondheim is no doubt an exciting field of research, but the lack of direct documentation is discouraging. The open road to our goal is blocked, but perhaps an acceptable viewpoint can be reached through one or more digressions.

Archiepiscopal patronage in Germany: Rainald von Dassel

One digression would be to look at some archiepiscopal patrons from cultural centres in England, France, and Germany, thus at least enriching the stock of possible images of literary life in the Nordic sees. I shall here confine myself to one German example. We cannot link any contemporary literary works of importance to the nearest archbishopric, Hamburg-Bremen, which in the mid-twelfth century under the reign of Hartwig I (1148-68) still planned to regain the Nordic countries as a missionary field; but we do know that Hartwig donated a large number

⁷Recognition of the importance of the see for literary life is expressed e.g. by Damsgaard Olsen (1965), p. 47: "Oprettelsen af ærkesædet i Nidaros 1152 fik en overvældende betydning for den norsk-islandske litterære og kulturelle udvikling. ... Øystein ... indledte en aktiv kulturpolitik" (The establishment of the archbishopric in Nidaros 1152 had an enormous impact on Norwegian and Icelandic literary and cultural development); and Helle (1974), p. 245: "I annen halvpart av 1100-tallet dannet det seg et rikt litterært miljø omkring erkestolen i Nidaros" (In the second part of the twelfth century a rich literary milieu formed around the archiepiscopal see in Nidaros).

⁸There is no overview of patronage of Latin literature in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (and beyond). We need something like the studies Bumke (1979) has done for German literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (including quite a number of Latin texts). The fullest treatment of Latin works before 1200 from a literary environment perspective are those that fall under the headings of Bezzola (1958-63). His main focus is on French literature and on the Anglo-Norman and French courts.

of books to the chapter, thus transforming its collection into a respectable library⁹.

There is more inspiration to be had from one of the dominating archbishoprics in the Empire, Cologne. Together with Mainz, Cologne could well be characterized as the 'royal' archiepiscopal see — at least in the reign of Friedrich Barbarossa (1152-90), which is our main concern here: all the elections of archbishops in Mainz and Cologne in this period were strongly influenced by the king, and in four instances he chose one of his own chancellors for the position (which happened in no other imperial archdiocese)¹⁰; to be archbishop of Cologne entailed another office, that of archchancellor of Italy; and finally it is clear that the archbishops of Mainz and Cologne were much more consistent in supplying men (including themselves) for Barbarossa's Italian campaigns¹¹. The central political position of Cologne emerges very clearly during the reign of Archbishop Rainald von Dassel from 1159 to his death in 1167. Like Øystein Erlendsson and Anders Sunesen he had previously been occupied as chancellor, i.e. as diplomat and secretary of state; from 1156, when he assumed the chancellorship, and for the following eleven years he was *the* dominating voice among the advisers of Barbarossa. He was largely responsible for the Empire's abortive attempt to topple Pope Alexander III, who enjoyed the support of France and England — in spite of numerous attempts by the Empire to have Victor IV acclaimed by Christendom. One culmination of this schism was the *Reichstag* of Dôle in 1162 to which the Emperor had summoned a number of German and Scandinavian bishops and magnates. Absalon was present, and he undoubtedly acted as the source for Saxo's lengthy account; among other things Saxo describes the archbishop of Cologne:

After this Rainald, archbishop of Cologne, began to plead the cause of religion, and proceeded to show with proofs what a heavy injustice the thoughtless provincial kings were doing to the Emperor in attacking his fair-minded policies. Imagine Frederick wanting to

⁹B. Schneidmüller in *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. 4, p. 1947 (Zurich & Munich 1989).

¹⁰Töpfer (1992), p. 402.

¹¹Töpfer (1992), p. 427.

end with his own voice a quarrel over the papacy which had arisen in one of their states; they would no doubt consider it a serious insult, and yet they were now trying to implement a similar decision concerning the city of Rome. He believed his statement supported by such a sound logical defence that he repeated his oration three times altogether, speaking now in Latin, now in French, now in German. Yet however much his address drew the assent of his own people, he deprived himself of Danish approbation just as much¹².

Saxo's anti-German stance is obvious, but that does not make him a bad source. We can trust his description of Rainald's central role in the proceedings — he speaks immediately after the emperor — and of his radiant personality, his eloquence and linguistic abilities. He was a well-educated, self-confident figure. A contemporary eyewitness and imperial enthusiast, the historian of Italian origin, Acerbus Morena, describes Rainald in this way:

The archbishop elect of Cologne, Rainald, who had first been chancellor and later became archchancellor of Italy, was of medium height and bulk. His face was handsome and bronzed, his body wellproportioned, his hair flowing and almost golden. He was learned, very wellread, and a fine orator; his intellect was provident and sharp; he was so keen on raising the emperor's honor that his advice counted more than any other's. Furthermore, he was generous, cheerful, friendly, magnanimous and had great stamina.

¹²Saxo Gramm. 14,28,18 Olrik-Ræder p. 443,20 *Post hæc Regnaldus, Coloniae urbis antistes, religionis causam dicere adorsus, quanto iniuriæ pondere Romani imperatoris æquitatem provincialium regum temeritas attentaret, argumentando demonstrare pergebat. Nam si controversiam in eorum civitatibus de pontificatu ortam Cæsar suis suffragiis finire vellet, haud dubie id gravium iniuriarum loco ducerent, cum ipsi simile in urbe Roma perpetrare conentur. Quam assertionem tam valido rationis præsidio subnixam putavit, ut nunc Latialiter, nunc Gallice Germaniceque fando ternis actionem vocibus iteraret. Sed quantum hac oratione gentis suæ favorem illexit, tantum nostræ suffragia deturbavit.*

The esteem of the Empire was elevated by his intelligence and effort¹³.

In this section Morena is giving a series of portraits of the main protagonists in Barbarossa's second and third campaign in Italy (1158-64), and the entry on Rainald follows on the description of the Emperor and his closest relatives. When praising a man in Rainald's position — and that was of course Morena's objective — why not mention his care for his ecclesiastical community or his piety. If they were not in evidence, they could certainly be invented, we would tend to think; we are, after all, dealing with an archbishop. But there is nothing strange in this omission. Morena actually complies with mainstream German episcopal portraits from the eleventh and twelfth centuries as brilliantly analysed by Jaeger (1985): noble looks and civilised behaviour appear to have been their preferred characteristics. They stand out from the rest of the élite by means of their learning, their elegance, and a certain modest superiority: they distance themselves from the simple, brutal life of the warlords. And yet they played important military roles; Rainald himself led large contingents in Italy where he also died on campaign. In this lifestyle he resembled e.g. Øystein and Absalon.

In a German and Scandinavian context, Rainald was one of a number of second sons of the highest nobility, clad in the pallium and serving as central policy-maker for the kingdom. What makes him especially interesting in our context, however, is the fact that his literary patronage is well documented in several sources. He had certainly enjoyed a long

¹³Historia p. 168 in F. Güterbock (ed.), *Otonis Morena et continuatorum historia Frederici I, Berlin 1930* (Momumenta Germaniae Historica. Scriptorum rerum Germanicarum, N.S. 7): *Rainaldus electus archiepiscopus Colonie, qui canzellarium primum vocabatur, sed postea fuit archicanzellarium Ytalie, erat mediocriter longus et spissus, venustam et coloratam faciem habens, membris bene compositis et extensis, capillis mollibus et quasi flavis; disertus et optime litteratus, facundus, providus, et sagacissimus, ad sublimandum imperatoris honorem cupidissimus, adeo equidem ut nullius magis consilio quam suo faveret imperator; erat quoque largus, hilaris, affabilis, alti cordis, maxime patiens laboris, et cuius sagacitate et opere decus imperii maxime sublimatum est.*

education in Germany and France, and perhaps he had studied in Paris at the same time as Øystein and Absalon (around 1150)¹⁴. His command of languages is documented by Saxo, and his activity as chancellor is witnessed by a number of charters with his signature¹⁵. A central part of the *Annals of Cologne* — an important source for imperial history — was begun during his reign and very probably supervised by him¹⁶. But the full range of his intellectual life and his interest in literature emerges in no less than two of the greatest Latin authors of the twelfth century, namely the prose writer and historian, Otto of Freising, and the anonymous 'Archpoet'.

Otto's long chronicle on the two commonwealths (*De duabus civitatibus*) is dedicated to the Emperor as well as to Rainald. In the dedicatory letter to the archbishop, Otto interestingly asks Rainald to be aware of certain sensitive passages in the chronicle which he ought to explain to the Emperor in a cautious manner. It is clear that Otto did not envisage the Emperor studying the work at first hand — we also know that he had no Latin¹⁷ — but rather that he would have it summarized for him by Rainald or someone on his staff. The archbishop here takes the place of mediator between the learned author, whose education he shares, and the prince, whose political horizon he shares.

Otto's work is serious, philosophical, and politically correct, inasmuch as it deals with Barbarossa's empire as the direct heir to the Roman Empire. A lighter, more entertaining, and partly subversive voice belongs to the Archpoet, thus named probably as a pun on his services for the arch-bishop and -chancellor. The ten famous poems that are commonly attributed to him contain numerous apostrophes to Rainald with phrases such as "bishop-elect of Cologne" or the like, and they also refer to places in Italy where Rainald sojourned on campaign. From the poems one also learns that they were recited or sung, and accompanied

¹⁴For Rainald's education: Grebe (1975) & Ehlers (1986).

¹⁵Listed in Ficker (1850).

¹⁶Edition in *MGH. Scriptores*, vol. 17, pp. 723-847; the annalist for the years c. 1140-1176 were, according to the editor K. Pertz (p. 724), working "iussu et auctoritate Reinaldi Archiepiscopi".

¹⁷Ganz (1992), p. 632, where various close sources are quoted. To those could be added Saxo Gramm. 14,18,14.

by instruments. In other words the Archpoet formed part of the archbishop's travelling entourage, his throng of chosen warriors, secretaries, and entertainers. When reading the archpoet's verses and other testimonies on Rainald, one is able to piece together a picture of an archbishop taking active part in literature and learning, politics and war, all tied closely to his position at the top of the royal and ecclesiastical hierarchy — a man equally engaged in raw power and in the subtle reasoning produced to justify it. It would hardly be to rash to suggest that something similar could be said about Absalon and Øystein.

The horizon of books

The Nordic archbishoprics are likely to have been central in literary life for two reasons: the best collection of books was to be found there and the most influential men of the realm with an interest in written culture either met there or communicated regularly with the archiepiscopal office through letters and messengers. With regard both to the books and the men, the archbishoprics must have been internationalized on a scale that the episcopal sees and abbeys could hardly match. Let us look at the libraries first.

A well-stocked cathedral library — containing from about fifty to several hundred volumes — was in this period often divided into three sections, or even separate collections: liturgical books for use in the church, books of instruction for use in the cathedral school, and finally books for study or reference which included works of general learning (*e.g. Church fathers, ecclesiastical law and history*) and also texts of a more local administrative character (cartularies, letter collections, local law and history)¹⁸. It is the third part we can assume to have been more substantial at the archdiocese than elsewhere, and it is that section we shall discuss presently.

In fortunate circumstances it is possible to study the contents of a twelfth-century library from contemporary inventories and from existing books which are either known to have been copied *in situ* — and Trondheim, Uppsala, and Lund must have had *scriptoria* — or can be

¹⁸In Lund the liturgical books may have been preserved in the choir whereas the remainder (plus archives) were kept in a sacristy, cf. Weibull (1901), pp. 8-11.

localized through owner's notes to the library at a certain period; these fine sources are even in some cases supported by contemporary references to the library¹⁹. From the Nordic countries before and around 1200 we have next to no hard facts of this sort. The closest we get is in the case of Lund: some vague notices on book donations to the chapter, i.a. from Absalon, a list of about thirty books bequeathed by Anders Sunesen, and a few preserved liturgical books²⁰. From Trondheim and Uppsala there is nothing concrete to rely on²¹. This rather discouraging state of affairs necessarily leads us to another digression.

Where there are no hard facts, perhaps there are some soft ones. Instead of studying individual books — whether they are titles on a list or are still available — one could look at the existing texts' 'horizon of books'. By this I mean the selection of books that the author in all likelihood used at the place of composition and those he presumed to be at hand for his implied readers / listeners. I am not thinking of all references to other authors, because learned name-dropping and second- and third-hand references were of course very common. I am thinking rather of those few instances where a connection with a local library seems very likely. This may sound like a circular argument, but let me illustrate its force: in the central paragraph on the death of St Olaf (ch. 20), Theodoricus Monachus states that he omits any details on the translation of the royal saint's body to Trondheim "because this has already been described by several people"²². A little later on he admits

¹⁹On the reconstruction of medieval libraries: Sharpe (1995).

²⁰On the scriptorium and library in Lund: Kristensen (1969), Jørgensen (1912-13) and Weibull (1901), pp. 4-6. The list of Anders Sunesen's books is reprinted and discussed in Ebbesen & Mortensen (1985 & 1988), pp. 20-21. The existing liturgical books are presented with illustrations by P. Ekström, *Libri antiquiores ecclesiae et Capituli Lundensis*, Lund 1985.

²¹Trondheim: Holm-Olsen (1990), p. 130; Uppsala: Kleberg (1982).

²²*Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* 20, pp. 43-44 in G. Storm (ed.), *Monumenta historica Norvegiae*, Kristiania 1880: *Quomodo vero mox omnipotens Deus merita martyris sui Olavi declaraverit cæcis visum reddendo et multa commoda ægris mortalibus impendendo, et qualiter episcopus Grimkel - qui fuit filius fratris Sigwardi episcopi, quem Olavus filius Tryggva secum adduxerat de Anglia - post annum et quinque dies beatum corpus e terra levaverit et in loco decenter ornato reposuerit in Nidrosiensi metropoli, quo statim peracta pugna transvectum fuerat, quia hæc omnia a*

to chronological problems by saying "but five years are ascribed to Knut and his son Sven and his grandchild Håkon in the list of Norwegian kings"²³. As Theodoricus's chronicle is dedicated to archbishop Øystein, he no doubt planned to have a fair copy of this (perhaps the first) history of Norway securely and authoritatively placed in the cathedral library; therefore it becomes possible also to interpret the references to the story of Olaf's translation and to the list of kings with respect to the library. The local, contemporary reader, e.g. the archbishop, is supposed to have knowledge of and access to the works in question — which from their contents, too, can be placed in Trondheim without too large a stretch of the imagination. If this line of thought is acceptable, another piece of information comes to light: from Theoderic's preface it is clear that he did not know of any written narrative sources for Norwegian history²⁴ — leading us to conclude that there was no hypothetical early kings' saga or Latin chronicle at the archiepiscopal library. Now Theoderic's declaration is not necessarily made entirely *bona fide*, but it must at least be defensible in some sense. He cannot easily have seen or heard of chronicles like his own, let alone more elaborate ones, at the archiepiscopal see. That would render his statement not only senseless, but also impertinent. Whatever he knew of written material on the history of Norway, he must have thought that his own work was on a different scale, or of a different sort²⁵. The same explanation would hold for Saxo in Lund, who certainly knew the *Roskilde chronicle* as well as his own colleague's, Sven Aggesen's, recent *Brief History of the Danish kings*, and still maintained in the

nonnullis memoriæ tradita sunt, nos notis immorari superfluum duximus.

²³*ibid.*: *Eidem vero Kanuto et filio ejus Sueinoni et Haconi nepoti ejus asscribuntur anni quinque in catalogo regum Norwagiensium.*

²⁴Prologus, ed. Storm, pp. 3 & 4: *Sed quia constat nullam ratam regalis stemmatis successionem in hac terra exitisse ante Haraldī pulchre-comati tempora, ab ipso exordium fecimus. ... Liquet itaque, virorum optime, ex his fuisse etiam ante tempora Haraldī in hac terra in bellicis rebus potentes viros, sed ut diximus illorum memoriam scriptorum inopia delevit.*

²⁵This could be the explanation — although not a very convincing one — if Ekrem (1998) is right in placing *Historia Norwegie* in Trondheim before Theodoricus. Ekrem's early date for *Historia Norwegie* around 1150 seems very probable, but one would prefer to have it located somewhere else.

opening words of his preface that he undertook the work because no one else had bothered to record the deeds of the Danes — not on Saxo's scale, one should add. A less certain inference from Theodoricus's text, though very probable I would say, is that Adam of Bremen's *History of the bishops of Hamburg-Bremen* had not reached the archiepiscopal book collection: when studying Theodoric's interests and way of writing it is very difficult to imagine him neglecting the century-old, crucial account of the Nordic kingdoms by Adam against his better judgement. There is much unique information on tenth- and eleventh-century Norway that he would certainly have used²⁶.

Without too much audacity we have thus been able to place a few books on the archiepiscopal shelves — be it those of the canons in Elgseter or somewhere in the archbishop's court or in a sacristy in the church: around 1180 the collection included Theodoricus's *History of Norway*, at least two narratives of the translation of St Olaf to Trondheim, and a list of Norwegian kings. There were no histories of Norway on Theodoricus's scale, or surpassing it, and probably no copy of Adam of Bremen.

Similar inferences can be drawn from the Lundensian historians. Here the point of departure is Friis-Jensen's demonstration that Saxo was a canon at Lund and probably wrote most of his history there, and Gade Kristensen's unravelling of the threads of numerous annals whose composition also took place in Lund²⁷. The implication is that fair and official copies of Saxo's and Sven Aggesen's histories, and various annals were in place in the library, as were other important works of local interest used by them, such as Adam of Bremen and the *Roskilde chronicle*.

Not only the national *historical* literature was to a large extent composed, collected, copied and used at the archbishoprics, but also the written collections of 'national' or supra-regional law are to be located mainly there. Øystein Erlendsson is known to have been a key figure in

²⁶Theodoricus is very content to have discovered, no doubt in France, another foreign writer, Guillaume de Jumièges, had made a note on Norwegian matters (ch. 13); even if he disagreed with Adam's less respectful treatment of Olav Tryggvason, his material on Norway (esp. 4,31-34) would still have been a gold-mine of information.

²⁷Friis-Jensen (1989) and Kristensen (1969).

'national' or supra-regional legal initiatives in the 1160s and '70s. Documents such as the coronation oath of Magnus Erlingsson, the statutes of the Norwegian ecclesiastical province (*Canones Nidrosienses*), the royal revision of regional laws towards a national status were probably all edited by Øystein; one should also add the so-called "Gullfjær", a book of law composed by Øystein according to a contemporary source (quoted below), but of uncertain content (and perhaps identical to the above-mentioned revisions)²⁸. In Lund we know of juridical works of a more special character such the *Scanian law* in Anders Sunesen's Latin version, Sven Aggesen's treatise on the rules valid for the housecarls (*Vederloven* or *Lex castrensis*, picked up and rephrased at length by Saxo); but at least Absalon seems to have been involved in legal initiatives on a national scale²⁹. I am not contending here that the archbishops and their offices were the only driving force behind the momentous juridical developments of the twelfth century. The crucial point in this context is that they played a central role in the writing, copying, and preserving of various legal texts. Although I have found no contemporary source explicitly saying so, I think it is natural to make the assumption that the archbishops possessed and controlled the authoritative exemplars of numerous documents, treatises, and collections of legal importance for, respectively, the Norwegian and the Danish kingdom. In a culture of writing, short of identical copies of books (i.e. before printing) it was important to have agreed beforehand which copy should count *a priori* as giving the best text. For instance, the Nordic reference exemplars of the ground-breaking systematical study and collection of Canon Law, the *Decretum Gratiani* from around 1140, must have been kept in Trondheim, Lund, and Uppsala³⁰.

The breach between King Sverre and Archbishop Erik Ivarsson that occurred in 1190 was caused, according to *Sverre's saga*, by a dispute about the legitimate size of the archbishop's band of housecarls. By way

²⁸On Øystein and legal work: Skånland (1969), esp. pp. 169-85, and Gunnes (1996), pp. 130-71.

²⁹Cf. *Annales Ryenses* at the year 1170: *Leges Danorum edite sunt* (p. 166 in E. Kroman (ed.), *Danmarks middelalderlige annaler*, Copenhagen 1980).

³⁰At least from around 1170-80; for the spreading of interest in *Decretum Gratiani* two to three decades after its composition cf. Skånland (1969), pp. 30-65.

of introduction the saga says: "About this time much dissension arose between King Sverri and the archbishop, and the king appealed always to the law of the land, ordained by King Olaf the saint and to the law-book of the Thronds called *Grágás*, written by command of King Magnus Godi, the son of King Olaf. The archbishop produced the book called *Gullfiodr*, written by command of Archbishop Eystein; also he produced God's Roman law, and a part of the Pope's brief which he had, with the Pope's seal"³¹. Erik Ivarsson wanted to draw his written ammunition from the archiepiscopal library, whereas King Sverre probably produced citations from his own armoury, possibly administered to him by a chaplain (though he was literate himself). But even Sverre acknowledged the idea of the archiepiscopal see as the point of departure for textual disputes. In *A speech against the bishops* from 1198 *Decretum Gratiani* and other texts are quoted with great care; there are good reasons to believe that Sverre's learned assistant worked in the archiepiscopal library, where no doubt the authoritative exemplar of the *Speech* itself was to be stored. The see must have kept up some learned activities even in the 1190s when staff was greatly reduced. The purpose of the *Speech*, as it were, was to prevent the Norwegian brain-drain to Denmark from gaining strength after Sverre's papal excommunication. The notion of the archbishopric as the centre of communication for Sverre's ideological efforts is confirmed by the saga when it says that the cancellation of the excommunication was recited in the cathedral (the cancellation was forged!)³².

Agreement on the whereabouts of the authoritative exemplar was most crucial for legal works, historical writings, and, of course, biblical texts and commentaries — three areas of scholarship where the libraries at Lund, Trondheim, and Uppsala were centers of communication, each in their own province. A text of obscure provenance was always suspect in a culture of handwritten books; it was essential to know who supported and guaranteed the copy in question. The archiepiscopal library must have been locally normative in matters of wording of

³¹Ch. 117, p. 122 in G. Indrebø (ed.), *Sverris saga*, Kristiania 1920, here quoted from p. 144 in the translation of J. Sephton, *The Saga of King Sverri of Norway*, London 1899.

³²Ch. 128, p. 133.

individual texts as well the selection of texts. We know of no competing royal library from the period. The archiepiscopal collection *was* the royal library³³.

A central normative library was less significant when we move into more entertaining literature, but even there the possible distributive role of the archbishoprics should not be dismissed offhand. The fantastic account of the mythical kings of Britain by Geoffrey of Monmouth from the 1130s was copied, edited, quoted, translated, and paraphrased in most of Europe from the day of its publication right through the later Middle Ages³⁴. Saxo could well have been inspired by the scale and audacity of the work — there is every reason to think he knew it well. The anonymous *Historia Norwegiae* — for which Lund around 1200 and Trondheim around 1150 have been suggested as literary environment³⁵ — quotes the prophecies of Merlin from Geoffrey in a careless manner: the *History of British kings* is perhaps being taken for granted³⁶. In the same period the prophetic section was translated into Old Norse by Gunnlaug Leivsson (d. 1218/19). Gunnlaug, who had also written a Latin life of Olaf Tryggvason, was a member of the learned circle at the Thingeyrar abbey in Iceland together with the abbot, Karl Jónsson (d. 1212/13), co-author or single author of *Sverre's saga*. Where did Gunnlaug obtain the Latin text of Geoffrey's prophecies? We do not know, but his connection with Trondheim and the archbishopric is certain (which also had a vested interest in the Tryggvason life) — the library there would be a good guess. Another possibility is some English library, perhaps the episcopal library of Lincoln, known to have been an important centre of studies with connections with Norway and Iceland.

³³A very similar situation in Germany in the early eleventh century is described by H. Hoffmann (1995), p. 102: the cathedral library in Bamberg housed, to all intents and purposes, the 'royal library'; no other royal library is known.

³⁴The diffusion of Geoffrey's *History* is thoroughly documented and discussed by Crick (1989) and Crick (1991). No manuscript with Scandinavian connections is known.

³⁵Cf. I. Ekrem (1998).

³⁶*Historia Norwegiae*, ed. Storm, p. 91: *Henricum fratrem ejus qui in prophetia Merlini regis leo justitiæ prænominatus est*; the whole passage may be quoted second-hand, but that does not preclude the possibility that Merlin was a well-known figure.

The same question can be asked about other Old Norse translations and paraphrases from Latin around 1200, for instance the *History of Rome* (*Romvérja saga*), the *World chronicle* (*Veraldar saga*), and the *History of the fall of Troy* (*Trojumanna sögur*). The two first-mentioned pieces are now being placed at the see of Skálholt (Iceland) before 1200, and the third one at the beginning of the thirteenth century. The underlying Latin texts, Sallust, Lucan, a Latin chronicle in the tradition of Isidore, and Dares Phrygius are likely to have been among the scholastic books at the cathedral chapter of Trondheim — Sallust and Lucan were among the most widespread school texts — and the Icelanders may have turned to the archbishopric for working copies.

Those are only a few suggestions of how to look at the ‘horizon of books’ as a source for the history of learning and literature. I think it is possible to obtain real results through more systematic research of this sort.

The horizon of use

Finally I want to outline a third digression, namely the ‘horizon of use’. Some notion of contemporary use is embedded in every text. Such notions can be extremely difficult to entangle and are often ambiguous. One could also speak of the ‘implied audience’ (and several contradictory ones may be implied at the same time), but this is a slightly more restricted term than ‘horizon of use’ because I want that to include not only an ideal group of persons but also the ideal communicative situation. Green (1994), for instance, has successfully shown how many Middle High German literary texts from the period were written to be read aloud (or performed) as well as for individual modern-style silent (or mumbling) reading, book in hand. However, he generally infers that before 1300 reading aloud for a group was much more common than individual reading. For Latin literature I suspect that something similar may be valid, if we, for some situations, add the activity of paraphrasing in the vernacular to that of reading aloud in Latin³⁷.

When trying to catch a glimpse of literary life in the Nordic archbishoprics around 1200 it is important to consider the role of orality,

³⁷Cf. Mortensen (1995), esp. pp. 94-102.

not just in the sense of orally-transmitted stories before and below the surface of Latin and vernacular writings, but also after and on top of them. In spite of its very embellished style and intractable size, Saxo would still have wanted contemporary users to discuss and retell parts of his work. Texts composed in Latin were intended as learned manifestations for other scholarly minds, but also as 'golden' accounts to be mediated through paraphrases, reading performances, extempore oral translation etc. The model of two distinct literary spheres — a written, Latin, ecclesiastical one and an oral, lay, vernacular one — is not tenable. Constable (1994) has demonstrated how sermons were often given in Latin to a 'mixed' audience, while Clanchy (1993) has shown through research in English administrative records that some lay people understood a reasonable amount of Latin, others none, some clerics only a little, others everything etc. In other words the choice of language in a written record does not immediately specify for us its intended audience nor the underlying communicative situation; it tells us rather what status the document, once finished and kept in the library or archive, was supposed to have. Benton (1961) has investigated the writers connected to the celebrated centre of French literature, the court of Count Henri le Liberal (1152-81) and Countess Marie of Champagne (died 1198), and discovered that Latin compositions were much more prolific at the court than Romance philologists had cared to find out. Harðarson (1995) observes that the first wave of Old Norse writings (twelfth century) are adaptations of international Latin learning, whereas contemporary Latin works in Iceland and Norway are mostly concerned with local matters³⁸. Around 1210 Arnold of Lübeck translated the recent German composition on Gregory the Sinner by Hartmann van Aue into Latin verse, and explicitly stated that he had been asked to do so by a lay prince, Wilhelm von Lüneburg (son of Henry the Lion)³⁹. Such findings may help us in our quest for literary 'space' around 1200 in Trondheim and Lund. Let me give a few examples.

The *History of Norway* by Theodoricus Monachus clearly presupposes a good local knowledge of geography and prosopography. No guide

³⁸p. 35.

³⁹Schilling (1986), Prefacio, p. 67.

for foreigners is included. Consequently, Theodoricus's choice of Latin (i.e. if he ever considered anything else), cannot be taken automatically as a wish to reach an 'international' readership, but rather reflects a desire to narrate Norwegian history — with the monumental effects of Latin — to a local audience, of which some were able to enjoy Theodoricus's very words, whereas others could be informed through paraphrases, etc., yet at the same time perceive the signals of Latinity⁴⁰. In *Ágrip*, a fragmentary Old Norse chronicle which makes use of Theodoricus's Latin one a decade or so later, you find similar unexplained local knowledge; Archbishop Øystein, for instance, is mentioned *en passant* in a way that presupposes immediate recognition within the horizon of use⁴¹. Similarly, in *Passio Olavi*, a miracle is said to be on everyone's lips⁴². Whatever one makes of Sven Aggesen's controversial reference to Absalon and Saxo ("being presently occupied with a history on a grander scale *Absalone referente*"), at least it places Sven's horizon of use around Absalon, i.e. mainly in Lund; his statement is non-sensical for foreign readers⁴³.

A speech against the bishops explicitly mentions its horizon of use: it is to be read aloud for the learned and non-learned alike⁴⁴. Perhaps we should imagine something like this: it is composed in Old Norse, giving all listeners a chance to grasp the basic message, but the line of

⁴⁰I here agree with P. Foote in the introduction (pp. x-xi) of the new English translation of Theodoricus (D. McDougall & I. McDougall [transl.], *Theodoricus Monachus, An Account of the Ancient History of the Norwegian Kings*, London 1998) which came out between the presentation and the publication of the present paper.

⁴¹Ágrip af Nóregs konunga sögum, ch. 42 (ed. M.J. Driscoll, London 1995, p. 58).

⁴²Passio Olavi, ed. F. Metcalfe, Oxford 1881, p. 82: *Accedamus ad illum miraculum, quod in ore omnium uersatur*. In a forthcoming article I am discussing the central role played by the see in collecting and registering miracles in the period c. 1150-1180. See Mortensen (forthcoming) in the bibliography.

⁴³Brevis historia regum Dacie, ch. 10, pp. 124, 125 in M.Cl. Gertz (ed.), *Scriptores minores historiae Danicae medii ævi*, vol. I, Copenhagen 1918; the question is whether *referente Absalone* means "as Absalon told me" or "with Absalon as his [Saxo's] source". A summary of the debate which favours the first alternative is given by Friis-Jensen (1989), pp. 334-36.

⁴⁴A. Holtmark, *En Tale mot biskopene. En sproglig-historisk undersøkelse* [and edition!], Oslo 1931, p. 18.

argument is based — for those who demand more than ordinary rhetoric — on a series of Latin quotations with appended translations, whose accuracy the audience is invited to test for itself. The *Speech* thus gives a splendid example of a mixed audience and of a local, oral mediation of Latin learning.

As mentioned above, every text *nolens volens* leaves small traces of the author's notions of contemporary use of his work, but one of the authors who interests us here seems to have a perfect case, leaving no clues for later literary investigators, namely Saxo. His *History* goes to extreme lengths in pretending that it is talking to a timeless reader, from a timeless position: he is writing for eternity in the idiom of eternity, classical Latin, and new names of places and persons are carefully explained. I thought I had caught him off guard when I read, in translation, about the battle at Grathe Hede (1157), where a German singer encourages Valdemar's forces "with the well-known song" of Sven's gruesome deed in Roskilde⁴⁵. Did Saxo really admit in such a straightforward way that he assumed his readers would know the song? A wonderful confirmation of how local an outlook Saxo had after all! But, no — the Latin has *famoso carmine*, and not only did the translator insert the definite article, in addition *famosus* must here be taken in the sense of 'defamatory' rather than 'famous', a fully possible, if rare meaning of the word⁴⁶. It was too good to be true. Yet Saxo may be giving slight clues in other passages, and perhaps this line of investigation should not be given up completely. In Book Ten (10,12,3) Saxo describes the preliminaries to Olaf Tryggvason's final battle; he does not name the legendary ship *Ormen hin Lange*, but says that Olaf "equipped his famous ship" (*instructo nobilis famæ navigio*). That is comprehensible for foreigners, though it works better among an audience already familiar with tales of the notorious Viking.

⁴⁵F. Winkel Horn, København 1898, 2nd part, p. 147: "den velbekjendte vise", repeated by M. Boisen 1985, vol. 3, p. 71: "den kendte vise".

⁴⁶Saxo Gramm. 14,19,13 *Medius acies interequitabat cantor, qui parricidalem Suenonis perfidiam famoso carmine prosequendo Waldemari milites per summam vindictæ exhortationem in bellum accenderet*; the case of *famosus* meaning 'defamatory' is convincingly put by Friis-Jensen (1987), p. 25.

Much more can probably be done by looking at the horizon of use, but I hope to have made it sufficiently clear that the Latin literature in question was composed only partly for international use and for eternity; it was as much, and perhaps more, part of contemporary oral communication based on writing⁴⁷. Authors attached to the archiepiscopal sees could expect institutional support in matters of library facilities, book production etc., and also in matters of promotion, e.g. having colleagues refer to the text (orally or in writing), arrange *lectiones*, paraphrases and the like. The written word did not yet have its own lease of life, but had to rely on a continuously operative life-support system.

I would have liked to be able to depict in convincing detail the persons involved in literary sessions or performances in the archiepiscopal palace or in the chapter, and how that might have been organized. If one accepts the blurring of the line between clerical and lay, it would be natural to assume a continuum of literary 'users' stretching from the most brutal housecarls to a few erudite canons and bishops. Military tales, defamatory verses, stories of pilgrimage and miracles and much more must have thickened the air at great national gatherings when the *housecarls of king and archbishop, lay and ecclesiastical magnates (bishops, abbots, canons) met and exchanged news. On these occasions* authors could collect new material, and, conversely, semi- and fully-learned people were present in sufficient numbers to furnish written material as the basis of communication. We know also from German *Reichstage* that books of literary contents were exchanged⁴⁸.

The closest we come to a contemporary description of such a gathering in Denmark or Norway around 1200 is in the anonymous Norwegian canon's work on the pilgrimage of the Danes to Jerusalem. There, in Chapter Four, we hear of how Knud VI summoned all the magnates of the realm, i.e. "bishops, other officials, and all wise men"⁴⁹ to Odense to settle matters of the kingdom and to celebrate

⁴⁷The importance of oral communication based on writing in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is explored and exemplified by Stock (1983).

⁴⁸Cf. Schilling (1986), p. 16, and Green (1994), pp. 223-25.

⁴⁹Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam, pp. 457-492 in M.Cl. Gertz (ed.), *Scriptores minores*, vol. II, Copenhagen 1922: *episcopis videlicet et officialibus et prudentioribus cunctis*.

Christmas. A papal news-letter on the fall of Jerusalem (1187) is brought to the council and read aloud. The assembly falls silent, devastated, but Absalon's brother, Esbern Snare, rises and challenges those present to take the cross and fight the infidel. In his speech Esbern makes various historical references to former Danish deeds abroad, references which have a certain affinity with some of Saxo's ideas. This is not due to literary loans on the part of the anonymous canon, or vice versa, but to the fact that both authors draw on contemporary discussions, which they, in turn, wanted to influence through their writing. The episode — probable in appearance at least — and its literary description serve as an example of how oral communication based on writing thrived right in the middle of military life and was informed and inspired by it.

The flowering literature around 1200 in Trondheim and Lund was, in my opinion, aimed at a small élitist audience, overall much the same élite that governed the kingdoms, appointed itself to all the major positions in the ecclesiastical hierarchy and waged the wars. The authors belonged to that same élite. Only rarely did they carry arms, but they never questioned the values of military life — a life lived by their cousins, fathers, and brothers. If this is a fairly correct description, it has a bearing on our view of the archbishops as patrons. We may still label Øystein and Absalon literary patrons, but the authors under their aegis could not be hired to do anything. They hardly offered their literary services on a large and rather free market — as we know it from Renaissance Italy. Rather they were as predisposed to their task as their employers, the task of providing the Norwegian and Danish élite with its first written version of self-consciousness and self-congratulation. The resulting formulation and regulation of local élitist values were to be sought in the archiepiscopal library and could be interpreted by the archbishop himself and by his learned staff.

The above, in fact, amounts to a great deal of guesswork based on very few pieces of direct documentation, but I hope it is sufficient to make clear the advantages of questioning the traditional model of king and Church each buying their own propagandists in order to convince a third party, whether one here imagines an ill-defined 'people' or some foreign public opinion. It is at least worthwhile to consider the

alternative model suggested here: an élite trying to convince itself of the expediency of its new double role.

Let me finish by borrowing the words of the Archpoet:

*Fodere non debeo, quia sum scolaris,
ortus ex militibus preliandi gnaris;
sed quia me terruit labor militaris,
malui Virgilium sequi quam te, Paris.*

Stabbing isn't right for me, because I am a scholar,
born of knightly family, skilled in arts of warfare;
but because I had no heart for military labour
I chose Vergil rather than Paris as my mentor⁵⁰.

The literary *persona* implied here by the Archpoet encapsulates the fruitful tension between war and learning which came to loom large in the lifestyle of the twelfth-century élite. In the Nordic countries this tension found its most eloquent voices in and around the archiepiscopal sees of Lund and Trondheim.

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⁵⁰Archipoeta 4,16, p. 90 in F. Adcock (trans. ed.), *Hugh Primas and the Archpoet*, Cambridge 1994 (Cambridge Medieval Classics, 2); I have changed Adcock's translation of *fodere* from 'digging' to 'stabbing'; *fodere* in medieval Latin is an ordinary poetic alternative to *confodere*, so at least it implies killing as well.

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