

Karsten Friis-Jensen in memoriam
1947-2012

by Marianne Pade

With Karsten Friis-Jensen's premature and unexpected death Denmark lost one of her most eminent students of medieval Latin literature.

At university Karsten Friis-Jensen studied first music and then classical philology. At an early stage he thus indicated two of his main areas of interest. His MA thesis about Vergilian parallels in Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* (published by Museum Tusculanum Press as *Saxo og Vergil*, Copenhagen 1975), proved the conceptual point of departure for his life-long study of Saxo. Following his thesis he became a research fellow at the Institute for Classical Philology at the University of Copenhagen where he began to work on his *Habilitationsschrift* on Saxo, while at the same time, together with Minna Skaftø Jensen, embarking on a pioneering survey of Danish Neo-Latin literature. Their co-authored contribution appeared in the second volume of *Dansk litteraturhistorie* («History of Danish Literature») from 1984. It is a reflection of Friis-Jensen's status among Neo-Latin scholars that he was member of the executive committee of the International Association for Neo-Latin Studies and chair of the organizing committee of its eighth international congress held in Copenhagen in 1991. He was

Carlsberg Fellow at *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* in Munich 1983-1985. What might seem an intermezzo in Friis-Jensen's career was on the contrary extremely important for his scholarly development; his later editorial work bore the imprint of the methodology he learned at the *Thesaurus* – and he always cherished the scholarly contacts and close friendships he formed during his years in Munich.

Back in Denmark he became first research fellow and from 1990 associate professor at the Institute for Greek and Latin Medieval Studies at the University of Copenhagen, later part of the Institute for Greek and Latin. Friis-Jensen became dr.phil. in 1987 with his acclaimed monograph *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin poet. Studies in the Verse Passages of the Gesta Danorum* (Rome), and in 2005 his large critical edition of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* appeared in Copenhagen, accompanied by the prize-winning Danish translation by Peter Zeeberg. During his last years Friis-Jensen divided his time between the annotated critical edition of the *Gesta Danorum*, which is about to appear in Oxford Medieval Texts, together with Peter Fisher's English translation, the critical edition of Sven Aggesen, and two major works on the medieval Horace.

Karsten Friis-Jensen held innumerable administrative and academic posts: he was for many years member of the board of Museum Tusculanum Press and he was one of the founders of Forum for Renaissance Studies. He was in the board of Danish Society and Literature 1992-2002, on the editorial board of *Classica et Mediaevalia* from 1992 and member of the Danish Research Council for the Humani-



ties 1999-2005, to name a few. He became member of the Royal Danish Academy of Science in 1997, where he was chair of the committee for the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* from 1999, and member of the *praesidium* 2007-2012. At his death he had just been re-elected for another period.

Karsten Friis-Jensen has published six books and numerous scholarly articles. In occasion of his sixtieth birthday he received the Festschrift *Album amicorum (Renaissanceforum 3, 2007)*.

Though Friis-Jensen published within the whole field of Latin literature, medieval and early modern Latinity were at the centre of his interests. Within each of his specialities he has done pioneering work. His large survey of Danish Neo-Latin literature contributed materially to the revival of interest in this important part of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Danish literature and became decisive for modern scholarship in that area. His work on Saxo and the medieval Horace has fundamentally changed our understanding of the way literature was read during the Middle ages, and with his work on the *Gesta Danorum* he secured the acknowledgment of this work as a masterpiece of twelfth-century European literature.

Saxo

Friis-Jensen's research on Saxo Grammaticus began with his study of Virgilian parallels in *Gesta Danorum* and he continued to focus on the verse-passages of Saxo's work. Earlier scholarship had mainly aimed at revealing the Old Norse poetry supposed to lie behind Saxo's poems; Friis-Jensen analysed their ancient Latin models, above all



Horace. He demonstrated how Saxo used a refined classifying idiom influenced by the French twelfth-century *avantgarde* and that his ambition to prove himself part of the international intellectual *élite* was just as basic and important as his desire to compose the Danish national history.

Horace

Friis-Jensen has explored the medieval *fortuna* of Horace in a number of editions and scholarly articles, partly in connection with his work on Saxo, but also working on other aspects of medieval literature. In a then largely unexplored area, his partial edition of the commentary on the *Odes* known after its incipit as *Auctor iste Venusinus*, and the edition of the very common so-called *Materia*-commentary on the *Ars poetica* (*Cahiers de l'institut du Moyen-Âge grec et latin du Moyen-Age*, 57, 1988 and 60, 1990) proved solid points of departure for the study of the medieval Horace.

As I have tried to show, a major theme in Friis-Jensen's scholarship has been the exploration of how the Nordic medieval culture interacted with the international Latin tradition of medieval Europe. Both in the monumental edition of Saxo Grammaticus and in the many works that preceded it, partly as preparation to, partly as result of his editorial work, Friis-Jensen has reached his results by combining a thorough knowledge of the Nordic tradition with an intimate familiarity with the textual tradition of the Latin literary culture of twelfth-century Europe.



Karsten Friis-Jensen was in the middle of a period filled with contentment when he passed away. He was happy to be able to concentrate on his edition of Sven Aggesen, thanks to a large endowment from the Danish Research Council, he was preparing a volume on *Horace in the Commentary Tradition: From the Carolingian Age to the Thirteenth Century* for Brill, and he enjoyed the house in Aspremont in Southern France, where he often stayed with family and friends. His intellect, scholarly acumen and encyclopedic knowledge, his personal integrity, friendliness and generosity will be sorely missed by colleagues, students and friends at home and abroad.

