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THE DANES IN ERMOLDUS'S POEM IN HONOREM HLUDOWICI

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The *Diplomatarium Danicum* [I.R./I.B., by C.A.CHRISTENSEN & H.NIELSEN, København 1975] records in late 822 - early 823 A.D.: «Pave Paschalis I. bemyndiger ærkebiskop Ebo af Reims til at prædike evangeliet *in partibus Aquilonis*». The letter, the provenience of which is perhaps from Anskarius's archives, is written on a tenth-century Wolfenbüttel manuscript. Also in this year we could say, begins the evangelization of the Danes, for which Ermoldus in the fourth book of his elegiac poem *In honorem Hludowici* praises the Emperor Louis the Pious.

In lines 5 ff. of the poem we find at first the description of the Danish people, cf. *gens erat interea antiquum cui perfidus anguis / liquerat errorem, sustuleratque deum*, as a heathen people, who worship false gods and idols, cf. *quae pagana diu cultus servabat iniquos, / pro factore colens idola vana deo*. Ermoldus here records the two main divinities worshipped by the Danes, *Iuppiter* and *Neptunus*, cf. ll. 9-10 *proque deo Neptunus erat, Christi retinebat / Iuppiter orsa locum cui sacra cuncta dabant*; this is the first evidence of trivialization in Ermoldus's ethnography, because those gods are not particularly Danish

gods. We could admit with E. Faral [Paris 1932] that Ermoldus uses here a commonplace pattern to indicate the generical heathendom of the Danes; the god *Neptunus* however could be a reference mark in Ermoldus's text in order to symbolize the extraordinary wealth won on the seas, which the Vikings had achieved by the end of the VIII century. For the interest's sake we might summarize the relevant historical events of these years; some of the relevant tokens of the Viking rule over the seas were the burning of Lindisfarnese abbey in Northumberland in 793 A.D. and their many naval expeditions up the estuaries of the great Atlantic rivers in order to accomplish raids and robberies in the richest territories of the Carolingian empire. Ermoldus's text seems itself to confirm this interpretation, as he gives an ethical portrait of the Danes, as a restless and warlike people cf. *veloces, agiles, armigerique nimis*, and soon afterwards he states that they earn their living precisely by seafaring, cf. *ipse quidem populus late pernotus habetur / lintre dapes quaerit, incolitatque mare*. The distich casts some light on the atmosphere of suspicion that Ermoldus felt regarding the Danes and their disposition. Being well-known over a large area was not altogether positive in meaning to mediaeval mentality in general and affirming that these people made their living by navigation may be an elegant paraphrase for accusing them of piracy. Slightly further on the Danes are defined as *populus ferox* (v.31), however Ermoldus does not seem to wish to exceed in denigrating a people who were later to convert to Christianity. The restless character of the Danes, moreover, corresponds to the stereo-type of the Normans in Byzantine sources.

Ermoldus gives us two nouns for the Danes, i.e. *Deni*, cf. *hi populi porro veteri cognomine Deni, / ante vocabantur et vocitantur adhuc*, and *Nortmanni*, accordingly to the speaking of the Franks, cf. *Nort-quoque Francisco dicuntur nomine -manni*; the first noun is an old ethnic, cf. Old Norse *Danir*, which we find also in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, cf. 1,1,1 *Dan igitur*

et Angul, a quibus Danorum coepit origo [...] non solum conditores gentis nostrae, verum etiam rectores fuere, but Dudo of St. Quentin had attempted the prestigious etymology from the Danai, the Greeks, cf. 1,3 *Daci nuncupantur a suis Danai vel Dani*. The reference to the speaking of the Franks is important because, soon afterwards Ermoldus says that the handsome (*pulcher facie*) and decent (*vultuque statuque decorus*) gait of the Danes is the same as that of the Franks, because the latter are descendents of the former, i.e. both peoples had a common Germanic origin in the Scandinavian area, cf. *unde genus Francis adfore fama refert*. The pattern is not only from Ermoldus, but constitutes a commonplace of many mediaeval writers of national history, like Widukind, who quotes in the *Res gestae Saxonicae* the theory about the descent of the Saxons from the Danes, cf. 1,2 *aliis arbitrantibus de Danis Northmannisque originem duxisse Saxones*. According to this ideological pattern, the attitude of Ermoldus towards the Danes before their conversion is not totally negative; he points out their heathendom, but thanks to the good will of the Emperor (not a word is written about the Pope!), and the commitment of the Archbishop Ebo of Reims, the Danish leader Herold (Harald Klak), his family and his followers were converted into Christians.

Historical sources tell us the real context and development of Herold's conversion. The *Annales regni Francorum* record that in 814 A.D. there was dynastic contention over the leadership in Denmark between Herold and Godfrid's sons, who drove him out of the country; so Herold came to the Emperor Louis, in order to get back his kingdom, cf. *quo facto Herioldus rebus suis diffidens ad imperatorem venit et se in manibus illius commendavit; quem ille susceptum in Saxoniam ire et oportunitatem tempus expectare iussit, quo ei, sicut petierat, auxilium ferre potuisset*. This item of the chronicle means firstly, that the Danish leader made the act of subjection as vassal of the Emperor, cf. also in the *Vita Hludowici imperatoris* by the so-called

Astronomer *iuxta morem Francorum manibus illius se tradidit*, and secondly, that the Emperor was aware that military support was at that time impossible. Only in 819 could Herold supported by the Emperor return back to his country to take power again. The situation was steady at least until the year 823, when Louis sent two confidential men in order to acquire more information about the situation of the Danish state, as recorded by the *Annales regni Francorum*, cf. *ob eam causam diligentius explorandam ad eosdem filios Godofridi Theotarius and Hrudmundus comites missi fuerunt, qui et causam filiorum Godofridi et statum totius regni Nordmannorum diligenter explorantes adventum Harioldi praecesserunt et imperatori omnia quae in illis partibus comperire potuerunt, patefecerunt*. With them came back also the Archbishop of Reims who had been entrusted at the end of the previous year by the Emperor and the Pope to preach the Gospel in the Danish kingdom, cf. *cum quibus et Ebo Remorum archiepiscopus, qui consilio imperatoris et auctoritate Romani pontificis praedicandi gratia ad terminos Danorum accesserat et aestate praeterita multos ex eis ad fidem venientes baptizaverat, regressus est*.

It is more than probable that Ebo in the course of his mission would have made it plain to Herold that the conversion of the Danish leader would make the support of the Emperor in order to keep the power in Denmark easier; Herold himself must have thought the same during his stay in Frankfurt in the winter of 823; we can find evidence of this political matter of the Emperor in the words of Anskarius, cf. 7 *qui* [scil. *Herioldus*] *serenissimum adiit imperatorem Hludowicum, postulans ut eius auxilio uti mereretur quo regnum suum denuo evidincare valeret. qui eum secum detentum, tam per se quam per alios ad suscipiendam Christianitatem cohortatus, quod scilicet inter eos ita maior familiaritas esse posset*. In 826 A.D. the conversion of Herold, his family, and a great many of Danes finally took place, as we read in the *Annales regni Francorum*, cf. *eodem tempore Herioldus*

cum uxore et magna Danorum multitudine veniens Mogontiaci apud sanctum Albanum cum his quos secum adduxit, baptizatus est; multisque muneribus ab imperatore donatus per Frisiam, qua venerat via, reversus est. in qua provincia unus comitatus qui Hriustri vocatur, eidem datus est, ut in eum se cum rebus suis, si necessitas exigeret, recipere potuisset.

What is the attitude of Ermoldus towards the event of Herold's conversion? We note at first the definitions of the leadership of the Dane; Herold is always the leader, *Denorum rector opimus* (v.171) or the king *rex* (v.290) and not a word is written by him about Godfrid's sons.

The scene of the arrival of the Danes at Mainz is endorsed with rhetorical effects, such as alliterations and some classical reminiscences, cf. vv. 287-291 *ecce volant centum per Rheni flumina puppes, / velaque candidolis consociata modis, / Denorum populis oneratae munere, nec non / Heroldum regem prima carina vehit, / te, Hludowice, petens*. That states perhaps the impressive arrival of the Danes via the Rhine river, as also the emphasis of the Carolingian mentality towards the skill in seafaring of the Danes, but, excepting this matter, however, the test of Ermoldus aims at celebrating the conversion as a great success of the religious soul of the Emperor.

The whole description of the arrival of Herold at the Imperial court in Ingelheim and of the scene of the baptism intends to stress not only the low rôle of the Danish leader, cf. v. 303 *Heroldus regem adclinis affatur opimum*, who now is following the words of the Archbishop, cf. «*cetera quae manibus constant praeficta, metalla / idola vana vocat praesul et esse nihil*», and decides to get rid of the ancestral idols, cf. v. 345 «*respue sculpta manu*», but also that Herold will now become a vassal and a subject of the Emperor, as it seems evident in lines 593 ff. and particularly in the distich 603-4 «*suscipe, Caesar*», ait, «*me nec non regna subacta: / sponte tuis memet confero servitiis*», which soon afterwards follow Ermoldus's observation: *iunguntur Francis Denica regna piis*; as I noticed before there

is an evident anachronism in Ermoldus' version, for the king had already made, in 814, his act of subjection in the hands of the Emperor. In the sequence of scenes in this part of the poem we remark the baptism - in the basilique of St. Alban («in den Quellen wird mehrmals die Verbindung des Klosters mit der karolingischen Reichspolitik sichtbar»: U.Schwab *Ansätze zu einer Interpretation der altsächsischen Genesisdichtung*, AION, Fil. Ger., Napoli 1974, 116) or in the church of St. Rémy near the imperial palace, as Faral suggests -, the banquet and the hunting party to which the Emperor invites Herold, cf. vv. 483-84 *venatum ire parat Caesar Francique solentes / et secum Heroldum Caesar abire iubet*, and finally the whole affair concerning both the religious history of the evangelization of Northern Europe and the diplomatical ties of the Carolingian Empire ends up with Herold and his followers returning to their own country, cf. vv. 627-32 *navibus aequatis tandem velisque novatis / cum licitu Heroldus intrat honorem. / filius atque nepos ipsius regis in aula / excubiis vigilant, Francica iura colunt. / Heroldus dapibus variisque refertus et armis / per mare fluctivagum propria regna petit*.

We know also that two monks shall follow Herold in order to evangelize the peoples of Northern Europe; one of these is Anskarius. Considering the whole of Ermoldus' account, I would point out three data, which seem important in order to grasp what the ideological strategies effected over the mentality of a Carolingian man of letters by the conversion of the Northern Europe heathens effectively were. At first the reader understands that to become a Christian and to become a civilized man there are two interdependent patterns, so that, as Herold is seen approaching the Christian faith, as he accepts the usages and the behaviour which are in force at the Carolingian court, thus we see first the Danish leader in white clothes, cf. *vestibus albus* (v.371), in order to be baptized, and later *togatus* (v.417); Herold himself told Ebo that it was his wish to know the way of living of the christianized Franks,

cf. vv. 155-57 *cernere namque placet Francorum regna, fidemque / Caesaris, arma, dapes, Christicolumque decus, / culturamque dei*, and in reference to this desire, after the religious ceremony, he is invited to take part in the hunting party, as an entertainment worthy of the Emperor and kings, and afterwards in the banquet (v.545); it is the magnificent and sumptuous dinner itself which will persuade Herold, cf. vv.567-68 *interea Heroldus cum talia cerneret hospes / multimoda versat pectore consilia*, to ask the Emperor to be accepted as a vassal.

On the framework of the conversion and acceptance of the Frankish way of living, Ermoldus points out the astonishment which pervades the souls of Herold and of the Danes, cf. the anaphorical pattern in lines 437 ff. *miratur Herold, coniunx mirantur et omnes / proles et socii, culmina tanta dei, / mirantur clerum, mirantur denique templum, / atque sacerdotes officiumque pium; / regis praecipue mirantur praemia magni, / imperiis cuius currere tanta vident*, and still in lines 477 ff. *mirantur dapes Deni, mirantur et arma / Caesaris et famulos, et puerile decus*.

This astonishment is commonplace in the literary tradition relating to some classical texts, especially the first book of the *Aeneid*, with the scene of the arrival of Aeneas and his son at Dido's newly built town, but the astonishment motif seems also to make the attitude of a prominent member of Carolingian court more explicit towards the so-called barbarians, of which he scorns the rough and primitive nature; we detect another allusion to the rude manners of the pagan world in the *Vita Anskarii* written by Rimbartus, who notices, *Heroldus quoque, cui commissi fuerant* (i.e. the two monks) *adhuc rudis et neophitus ignorabat qualiter servi Dei tractari debuissent*.

The most important account in the version of Ermoldus is however the connection in the thoughts of Herold, as typical pattern in Germanic mentality of the Middle Ages between the true faith and wealth, so that Herold shall become Christian, for the God of the Franks grants the Emperor, all his

people and his church welfare, which the heathen gods of the Danes cannot award in the same measure to their people. In the answer to the invitations of Ebo Herold says he will convert himself into Christian, only when the reality of the facts will confirm the words of the Archbishop, cf. 153 «credo», sacer, «dictis, tantum si gesta sequantur»; thus, driven by this purpose, he intends to visit the kingdom of the Franks, but at present he will preserve the ancient faith in the idols, cf. 161-62 *di quoque servantur, quorum sacra vimus aras, / usque dei possim visere templa tui*. Nearly the same words about the heathen gods, which would grant welfare to the Danish people, are said by Herold in presence of the Emperor just before the ceremony of the baptism, cf. 309-316 «namque diu patrum sectatus iura priorum, / more mei generis hactenus usque tuli, / et mea sacra meis semper dis atque deabus / persolvi supplex, et pia vota dedi, / scilicet ut horum suffragia regna paterna / servarent, populum, praedia sive lares, / auferrentque famem, seu noxia cuncta potenter / abstraherentque darent prospera cuncta suis». Only after the baptism, when Herold and the Danes were able to see the wealth and the welfare of the Emperor, cf. 441-42 *regis praecipue mirantur praemia magni / imperiis cuius currere tanta vident* (Faral: «surtout ils admirent la richesse du grand roi, aux ordres duquel ils voient toutes ces choses obéir»), the conversion has really happened and it is no coincidence that, soon after these lines pointing out the astonishment of the heathens, Ermoldus apostrophizes the Danish leader speaking in the first person and invites him to get rid of these idols, who are destitute of any utility and only worthy to be transformed into ploughs, knives, pans and jars, cf. vv. 443-56.

Anthropological patterns relating worship and fertility are very old; a variant of these motifs, where welfare and the fertility of the soil confirms the kingship of the leader *ársæll* i.e. "happy in the year", as an epithet of the king, is widespread in the Old Norse culture. It is worthy remarking that the still heathen Herold after justifying his cult of his

ancestral gods offers the Archbishop Ebo some products of the Danish land probably as proof that the soil of his country is fertile, cf. 167-68 *munera ferre iubet, donat quoque munera sacrum, / qualia Denorum rus quoque habere valet*.

The text of Ermoldus' poem is edited by E. Dümmler, in M.G.H., *Poetae Latini aevi Carolini*, Berlin 1884 [München 1978]. In 1932 Ermoldus's work was edited and translated into French by E. Faral in the series "Les Classiques de l'Histoire de France au Moyen Age", Paris.



UN ITALIANO IN SVEZIA NEL XVIII SECOLO: DOMENICO MICHELESSI (II)

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Che il canto funebre di Michelessi per la morte del re Adolfo Federico di Svezia si configuri, alla maniera dei greci antichi, come un vero e proprio panegirico, è palese fin dalle prime battute. Già nel titolo ("la Bontà canto per il funerale d'Adolfo Federico re di Svezia"), il concetto di Bontà, che in forma di personificazione, fa da filo conduttore all'intero componimento, viene posto in rilievo dall'affiancamento del nome regale, a cui di fatto è assimilato. Dopo la dedica all'ambasciatore francese (p.121): "Michelessi a son excellence Monsieur Le Comte de Vergennes Ambassadeur de Sa Majesté très Chrétienne à la Cour de Suède", Michelessi esordisce con una dichiarazione perentoria ("la Bontà, la virtù più bella dei re, è figlia del cielo"), che esplicita il principio sotteso all'intitolatura. Che la Bontà sia virtù strettamente connessa con i monarchi è nuovamente ribadito subito dopo, quando si sostiene che appunto dalla Bontà i re amati vengono inviati ai popoli felici e ad essa ritornano dopo la morte. Dopo questo avvio sentenzioso, l'attenzione si volge a re Adolfo Federico appena "sciolto dal corporeo velo" e tornato alla originaria