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History at the Crown's service The politics of memory in Denmark in the period of nobility's reign (16th–17th centuries)**

Historia w służbie Korony
Polityka historyczna władców Danii
w czasach rządów szlachty (XVI–XVII w.)

Abstract: This paper's aim is to present the politics of memory, or, in other words, the use of history in politics, pursued by the Danish government – the kings and their advisors – during the period of the nobility's domination (1536–1660). The analysis focuses on activity connected directly with the historical writings, mainly endeavours leading to a fresh synthesis of the history of Denmark corresponding to the political needs of the monarchy and creating a new renaissance history in Latin, aimed at foreign readers. The second theme involves polemics against various standpoints in this era, especially against the Swedish historiography of the time.

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Streszczenie: Artykuł omawia politykę historyczną rządu duńskiego – monarchów i ich otoczenia w latach 1536–1660, czasach rządów szlachty. Skupia się na działaniach mających bezpośredni związek z twórczością dziejopisarską, konkretnie staraniach o stworzenie nowej syntezy dziejów Danii, odpowiadającej potrzebom politycznym monarchii oraz spełniającej wymogi nowoczesnej, renesansowej historii po łacinie, skierowanej do zagranicznego odbiorcy. Drugim wątkiem są podejmowane w epoce polemiki z odmiennymi stanowiskami, przede wszystkim ówczesną historiografią szwedzką.

Słowa kluczowe: polityka historyczna, wczesnonowożytna historiografia duńska, Johannes Magnus, *Adelsvalden*, Hans Svaning

Introduction

The concept of politics of memory is defined in very different ways and efforts are being visibly made to broaden its understanding. However, the prevailing belief is that this phenomenon means a kind of policy pursued by broadly understood authorities, aimed at shaping the historical memory of a society, which is then imbued with the desired image of national history.¹ There is also hope that these endeavours may be something larger and better than contemporary actions of the state that tend to be associated with rather unsophisticated propaganda.² Rafał Stobiecki distinguished two types of politics of memory: totalitarian, which is “a synonym of one-sided and primitive propaganda”, and democratic, which is a con-

¹ J. Pomorski, *Ucieczka od historii jako element poprawności politycznej – tezy*, in: *Pamięć i polityka historyczna. Doświadczenie Polski i jej sąsiadów*, eds. S. M. Nowinkowski, J. Pomorski, R. Stobiecki, Łódź 2008, p. 114; R. Stobiecki, *Historycy wobec polityki historycznej*, in: *ibidem*, p. 175; K. Ruchniewicz, *Polityka historyczna*, in: *Historia w przestrzeni publicznej*, ed. J. Wojdan, Warszawa 2018, p. 76; R. Esser, *The politics of memory. The writing of partition in the seventeenth-century low countries*, Leiden–Boston 2012, p. 12.

² K. Zamorski, *Nostalgia i wzniosłość a refleksja krytyczna o dziejach*, in: *Pamięć i polityka historyczna...*, p. 55; [Wprowadzenie], in: *ibidem*, p. 7; Z. Guza, *Powinności polityki historycznej*, “Karta” 2008, vol. 54, pp. 120–129.

stantly ongoing dispute.³ The point is that in the latter case, state activity is needed only in terms of guaranteeing scholars freedom of research and expression, which is an obvious part of democratic politics in general.

A bigger problem, in that case, is politics of memory based on the instrumentalisation of history. At its essence lies the naive belief that with the help of a suitably spun vision of the past, those who rule will be able to legitimise their politics of the day, offer sources of national pride and justify claims as to the appropriate rank and position of the homeland in relation to other countries. The basis of this way of thinking is the conviction (sometimes tacit, sometimes open) that history is pragmatic in character – history should be studied in order to implement a specific political, didactic or moralistic task, rather than for a purely cognitive purpose.

Both of these assumptions are a feature of the old, as well as early modern, way of thinking about historiography. According to tradition dating back to antiquity, history was supposed to serve as a life's teacher in both the individual and public dimension. Its legitimising and propaganda roles described above stemmed from the archaic belief that the past is an indispensable element that defines the value of the present, which was expressed in the individual dimension by the belief that the ancestors are those who determine the meaning of their descendants.⁴ The idea of history cultivated for purely cognitive purposes began to crystallise only in the era of the 17th-century scientific revolution – with the formation of the school of erudite criticism.⁵

The recipient of history, which rulers tried to guide into the public space, could be their own society, but also monarchs and elites abroad. In European countries not belonging within the circle of direct heirs of the Roman Empire – located beyond *Limes Germanicus* – a suitably attractive image of their own national history and dynasty's eternity was often a reaction to a feeling of peripherality and inferiority, usually resulting from the contemptuous declarations of Italian humanists.⁶

³ R. Stobiecki, op. cit., pp. 175–176.

⁴ R. Chwedoruk, *Polityka historyczna*, Warszawa 2018, pp. 20–21, 23, 32.

⁵ K. Pomian, *Przeszłość jako przedmiot wiedzy*, Warszawa 1992, pp. 68, 78, 113–115, 219–223, 257.

⁶ J. Hougaard et al., *Dansk Litteraturhistorie 3. 1620–1746 Stønderkultur og enevælde*, Copenhagen 1983, pp. 180–181; H. F. Rørdam, *Historieskrivningen og Historie-*

In addition, an important motive were Roman Empire claims that clashed with the program of building a sovereign dynastic state. Disputes with neighbours were significant – with Sweden in the Danish case. The 16th-century Oldenburg monarchy⁷ had difficulty accepting the breaking of the Kalmar Union and the creation of an independent Swedish state, and disputes in this context soon turned into a rivalry for dominance in the Baltic Sea region.⁸ On the other hand, the Swedes expressed their hatred towards Denmark fuelled by a sense of injustice, but also an inferiority complex towards their neighbour, who for centuries had led civilisational development in the North. In addition, the internal changes made over the last hundred years required an appropriate interpretation: the Oldenburg dynasty assuming the Danish throne in the mid-15th century, and at the beginning of the 16th century, the crown's loss of its first line in favour of the younger one and the Reformation.⁹ As the time went by, a new idea began to develop: Oldenburg's ambitions not only to strengthen the position of the throne, but perhaps also to turn the elective Danish monarchy into a hereditary one.

This text will discuss the policies of Christian III (reign 1536–1559), Frederick II (1559–1588) and Christian IV (personal rule 1596–1648).

skriverne i Danmark og Norge siden Reformationen, 1, Tidsrummet fra Reformationen indtil Anders Vedel, København 1867, p. 22; K. Szelałowska, *Arilda Huitfeldta szlaHECKA wizja dziejów narodowych Danii*, “Roczniki Historyczne” 2020, vol. 86, p. 219; H.-J. Bömelburg, *Polska myśl historyczna a humanistyczna historia narodowa (1500–1700)*, transl. Z. Owczarek, Kraków 2011, pp. 75–77, 156; the historians themselves were aware of the poor knowledge of foreign scholars about the history and realities of their homeland (*Ole Worm to Henry Spelman, letter from 18 July 1629*, in: *Breve fra og til Ole Worm*, vol. 1, transl. H. D. Schepelern, Munksgaard 1965, pp. 177–178).

⁷ This term is commonly referred to the state which in the 16th century included the territories of Denmark proper (Jutland Peninsula and the islands Zealand, Fyn, Falster, Bornholm), but also Skåne, Halland, Blekinge on Scandinavian Peninsula and the island Gotland (in the 17th century all were passed over to Sweden). The Oldenburgs ruled also over Norway and its possessions: Iceland, Greenland and Faroe Islands. The duchies of Schlesvig and Holstein were part on the basis of personal union.

⁸ J. Hougaard et al., op. cit., p. 102.

⁹ Ø. Rian, *Sensuren i Danmark-Norge: vilkårene for offentlige ytringer 1536–1814*, Oslo 2014, pp. 444–446.

The initial turning point marked the end of many years of turbulence that hindered cultural initiatives, which does not change the fact that historical arguments were used in the parallel propaganda war.¹⁰ The final turning point, on the contrary, heralded the beginning of Denmark's progressive plunge into an increasingly serious crisis, both political and economic, so only after overcoming all obstacles was King Frederick III able to take action on a larger scale in terms of the topic of this text. However, this happened in a different reality, after the introduction of absolutism (1660–1661). This is why the analysis in this text will cover a period shorter than the noble rule itself.

The Oldenburgs pursued politics of memory in a bid to create a modern synthesis of national history addressed towards a foreign audience and to spur polemics. A grand iconographic programme was undertaken by Frederick II and Christian IV. Another theme was the collection of antiquities – during the 17th century, part of antiquarianism trend – mainly runic inscriptions and Icelandic manuscripts. Describing all these pursuits exceeds the scope of the article, which will focus on topics directly related to historiography.

Danish historiography in the 16th and 17th centuries was a topic of several historians' writings. In the 19th century, already such scholars as Caspar Frederick Wegener or Carl Joakim Brandt, not to mention Holger Frederick Rørdam. The classical, still-used work was presented by Ellen Jørgensen in 1931. In the more modern period, one should point to the knowledgeable and erudite studies of Harald Ilsøe and Karen Skovgaard-Petersen; in the works of both, the question of relations between the authorities and historians have been dealt with. Also Øystein Rian, the Norwegian historian of the union period (*unionstiden*) addresses similar questions. The most recent, compound description of the Danish historiography from the Middle Ages to present times was printed as the last (10th) volume of a history of Denmark, edited by Søren Mørck in 1992.

State involvement in historical creation meant control. The famous astronomer Tycho Brahe (1546–1601), commenting on his friend Niels Krag's (1550–1602) publication of a work on republican Sparta, asked why

¹⁰ H. Rørdam, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

he dealt with such distant matters instead of writing about history closer to home, and answered his own question thus: “Tutius est forsan veterum monumenta referre. Nostra ut scire iuvat sic memorare nocet.”¹¹ Censorship functioned in the country according to the church ordinance of 1537, placed in the hands of professors of the University of Copenhagen and superintendents. They were primarily interested in religious prints, and, as far as historical issues were concerned, the authorities mainly checked descriptions of relations between the main governing institutions – the king and the Council of the Realm, the status of Schleswig, Norwegian matters and, of course, relations with Sweden. However, this censorship had many holes – much depended on the connections, protection and position of the writer.¹² Moreover, scholars themselves strove to ensure that anti-Danish content was not published in print. Ole Worm (1588–1654) refused to print the “Description of Norway” by Norwegian scholar Absalon Pederson Beyer (1528–1575), claiming it was overly emotional (“tribuere affectibus”), and removed anti-Danish content from the works of the Norwegian Claus C. Friis (1545–1614).¹³

A specific form of control was the “guarding of state secrets” – preventing historians from accessing royal archives. These were treated as private property in this era, a resource of documents that were still valid (this also applied to medieval diplomas), constituting an item of value, not a subject of research.¹⁴ A historian could be admitted to the files when he became a state official who, as part of his official duties, was spinning a tale that would serve the interests of the king. Until the historian’s work was formalised in this way, access to the archive was almost impossible. As we shall see, this also applied to Denmark, although when the scholar faced the specific task of polemics with another historiographer in the interest of the state, the royal documents were made available to him.

¹¹ Quoted from: P. Andersen Vinilandicus, *Nordens gotiske storhedstid*, Odense 2012, p. 706.

¹² J. D. Jørgensen, *Censur og bogundertrykkelse 1500–1849*, “Magasin fra det Kongelige Bibliotek” 1993, no. 3, pp. 90–91; A. Friis, *Peder Svave, Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, https://biografiskeleksikon.lex.dk/Peder_Svave (access: 8.04.2023).

¹³ Ø. Rian, op. cit., pp. 500–501.

¹⁴ K. Pomian, op. cit., pp. 158–159, 173.

But on the other hand, the Crown was ready to support and finance projects unrelated to narrowly understood propaganda and political goals, such as the learned edition of Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, the most important Danish chronicle from the 12th century, with comments (1644/1645) by historian Stephen Hansen Stephanius (1599–1650). Christian IV also showed openness by initiating work on the second edition of the Chronicle of the Kingdom of Denmark by the Chancellor of the Realm and scholar Arild Huitfeldt (1546–1609), a multi-volume synthesis published at the end of the 16th century, although it presented a noble vision of Danish history and emphasised the elective nature of the monarchy as part of historical heritage.¹⁵ Such an approach would suggest that if one were to refer (slightly ahistorically) to the politics of memory typology proposed by Stobiecki, then, in the case of Christian IV, we would be dealing with its democratic version.

An important role in implementing the politics of memory was played by magnates, the king's associates. In the time of Christian III, it was Chancellor Johan Friis (1494–1570) who was particularly interested in initiating a new synthesis of Danish history. In turn, chancellor Niels Kaas (1535–1593) convinced historian Anders Sørensen Vedel (1542–1616) to comment on the information he believed to be incorrect in the upcoming edition of Adam of Bremen's chronicle and, for example, to announce that the victorious Vikings were primarily Danes, not Norwegians.¹⁶ Indeed, during the regency period (1588–1596) the entire Council was interested in the works of historians.¹⁷ In the first half of the 17th century, chancellor Christen Friis of Kragerup (1581–1639) was involved in broadly understood artistic and scientific patronage. As Karen Skovgaard-Petersen concludes: "He was the

¹⁵ K. Szelągowska, *Arilda Huitfeldta...*, pp. 230–231; Ø. Rian, op. cit., p. 455.

¹⁶ H. Ilsøe, *Historisk censur i Danmark indtil Holberg. Omkring censur af Christen Aarslebs Frederik II.s historie*, "Fund og forskning" 1973, vol. 20, pp. 45–46, 48–50; K. Skovgaard-Petersen, *Historiography at the court of Christian IV*, Copenhagen 2002, pp. 160, 169; Ø. Rian, op. cit., pp. 145–150, 499–501, 451; S. Heiberg, *Christian 4. – en europæisk statsmand*, København 2006, pp. 198–199.

¹⁷ S. Heiberg, op. cit., p. 34.

architect and driving force” in the endeavours connected with the plan to prepare the new synthesis of Denmark under Christian IV.¹⁸

A new synthesis of national history

The process of creating a synthesis of national history in line with Renaissance requirements, usually initiated and monitored by monarchs and their entourage, was arduous and difficult. A famous Polish case – the undertakings of Kallimach, Miechowita and Wapowski – did not yield the expected result.¹⁹ It was likewise in Denmark; many years of efforts by subsequent rulers in the 16th century and the labour of a number of scholars did not result in a Latin and Renaissance history that would best express the interests of the monarchy. This does not mean that historical works were not created. However, neither Marcin Kromer’s outstanding achievement *De origine et rebus gestis polonorum libri XXX* (1555) nor Marcin and Joachim Bielski’s *Kronika polska* (1597), intended for the local reader, could pretend to be official state history, representing the point of view of the Jagiellonian dynasty, or even subsequent elective kings. In relation to Denmark, Huitfeldt’s aforementioned *Chronicle of the Kingdom of Denmark* was a similar case. Finally, in Denmark, these works were completed in the 17th century.

Meanwhile, and this could have been particularly irritating, Swedish literature that had lagged long behind Danish (the first significant work is *Gamla krönike* from the first half of the 14th century), now had at its disposal not only works from the late 15th century – above all *Chronica Regni Gothorum* from the 1480s, written by Ericus Olai,²⁰ but first and foremost a great opus written in the mid-16th century: *Historia de omnibus Gothorum Sveonumque regibus* by Johannes Magnus (1554). The extensive (782 pages

¹⁸ K. Skovgaard-Petersen, “...by the direction of the most noble and distinguished Christen Friis”. *The influence of Chancellor Christen Friis (1581–1639) on the Histories of Denmark by Jobhanes Pontaus (1571–1639) and Johannes Meursius (1579–1639)*, “Daphins” 2003, vol. 3, p. 200.

¹⁹ H. Barycz, *Szlakami dziejopisarstwa staropolskiego*, Wrocław 1981, pp. 12–69.

²⁰ G. T. Westin, *Historieskrivaren Olaus Petri. Svenska Krönikans Källor och Krönikeförfattarens Metod*, Lund 1946, pp. 78–79.

in folio) work by the last functioning Catholic Archbishop of Sweden, written in exile, characterised by a strong patriotic and political tendency, became a fundamental achievement of modern Swedish historiography, shaping the vision of the national history for subsequent generations.²¹ Magnus conveyed to his contemporary compatriots and Europeans an image of Sweden as an eternal power both in military and cultural terms, whose dynasty descended directly from Noah and his grandson Magog. No wonder that in every document in which the king of Denmark or his chancellor mentioned the need to write the history of Denmark, reference was made to “the example of our neighbours.”²²

The lack of a comprehensive history of Denmark became even more glaring when in 1514, Christiern Pedersen (c. 1480–1554) managed to publish *editio princeps* of *Gesta Danorum* in Paris. A partial solution during the time of Christian III was the financing of foreign editions, such as the posthumous edition of a work by German historian Albert Krantz (1448–1517) entitled *Chronica regnorum aquilonarium Daniae, Sueciae, et Noruegiae* (published in German in 1544, Latin 1546). Although it was in fact the first modern work depicting the history of Scandinavia, it would not have sufficed from the point of view of the Crown's requirements.

Despite awareness of the importance of the task of creating a new synthesis, the rulers' initial engagement was limited and inconsistent. The first initiatives were not directly related to the king's commission. The authorities supported the authors by issuing a circular (*kongebrev*) in which they asked the clergy and the nobility to share their archives and by giving the potential author grants and offices (mostly ecclesiastical) as a source of income. The first two scholars, Hans Svaning (1503–1584) and Vedel, received no additional funding or, more significantly, access to the royal

²¹ S. Lindroth, *Svensk lärdoms-historia*, Stockholm 1975, pp. 237, 258–263; A. Gustafson, *A history of Swedish literature*, Minneapolis 1961, pp. 79–80; J. Widenberg, *Fäderneslandets antikviteter: etnoterritoriella historiebruk och integrationssträvanden i den svenska statsmaktens antikvariska verksamhet ca 1600–1720*, Stockholm 2006, p. 68.

²² H. Ilsøe, *Svaning, Vedel, Huitfeldt og Krag. Omkring spørgsmålet om den første historiografudnævnelse*, in: *Tradition og kritikk, Festskrift for Svend Ellehøj, den 8. September 1984*, ed. G. Christ, [s.l.] [1984], pp. 237, 252.

archives.²³ In addition, the rulers willingly burdened historians with various other tasks, such as writing polemical papers responding to Swedish or German works. It seems that the work on writing the history of the homeland arose more from the enthusiasm and willingness of the historians themselves, and possibly their magnate protectors, than from the king himself. Frederick II did not hide the fact that he valued neither history nor historians. A work of history might be useful for the propaganda of the day, but otherwise he did not trust this field, cultivated, as he claimed, by false and vain writers.²⁴ Aware of the weaknesses of the rhetorical and humanistic trend of historiography that prevailed at that time, it is hard to deny the king's common sense – especially since this ruler perfectly understood the role of science and art in building the prestige of the monarchy.²⁵

Hans Svaning, tutor to heir to the throne Prince Frederick between 1541–52, became the first (or, at least, documented) historian to take on the task of writing a continuation of Saxo's work in the 1550s. The first part to be published (circumstances detailed below) was the history of the reign of John, King of Denmark entitled *Chronicon sive historia Ioannis regis Daniæ*. Eventually, Svaning wrote a 3-part Latin history of Denmark, which, commissioned by the king, was submitted in 1576 to the professors of the University for their opinion. However, their assessment was negative. It can be assumed that Svaning's Latin, rather colloquial and unrefined, was not appreciated by the professors, and the heavy-handed anti-Swedish tendency likewise.²⁶ As a result, in 1579, Svaning was ordered to hand over all the materials he had gathered and his writings.

²³ H. Ilsøe, *Hans Svaning*, *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, https://biografiskleksikon.lex.dk/Hans_Svaning (access: 1.05.2023); T. Damsholt, *Den nationale magtstat 1560–1760*, in: *Danmarks historie*, vol. 10, ed. S. Mørck, København 1992, p. 56; K. Skovgaard-Petersen, *Historiography at the court...*, pp. 95–97; H. Ilsøe, *Svaning, Vedel, Huitfeldt og Krag...*, p. 237; P. Seeberg, *Hans Svaning og hans latinske Danmarkshistorie*, “By, marks og geest” 2003, vol. 15, p. 29.

²⁴ H. Ilsøe, *Svaning, Vedel, Huitfeldt og Krag...*, p. 243; P. Seeberg, op. cit., p. 27.

²⁵ J. R. Christianson, *On Tycho's Island. Tycho Brahe, science, and culture in the sixteenth century*, Cambridge 2002, p. 27; H. Honnens de Lichtenberg, *Frederik IIs kunstnere på Kronborg*, “Renæssanceforum” 2006, vol. 2, p. 1, www.njrs.dk/2_2006/renaessanceforum_2_2006_2honnens.pdf (access: 22.01.2020).

²⁶ P. Zeeberg, op. cit., pp. 29–30.

The work of the next historian who would take on the task – Anders Sørensen Vedel, Svaning's son-in-law – would suffer a similar fate. He had some significant achievements to his credit, most notably the 1575 publication of the Danish translation of *Gesta Danorum*.²⁷ Vedel's efforts to follow in his father-in-law's footsteps were expressed in the delivery of a methodological essay (1578) to the chancellor, in which he outlined a plan of work for a synthesis of the history of Denmark.²⁸ Such efforts bore fruit, because the Council of the Realm decided to conclude a contract with him.²⁹ This meant that the kingdom's authorities were ready to formalise the historian's position to some extent. After Svaning's death, Vedel received his text. The scholar soon announced that he had written a history of Denmark, but in his native language, and was planning to translate it. However, this never happened and only fragments of this work remained in Vedel's legacy.

The fiasco of the work by two renowned scholars eventually prompted the regents to formalise this undertaking. In 1594, the position of royal historiographer, an office, which also existed in many other European countries, was created (initially *historicus regni*, and after the end of the regency and the assumption of personal power by Christian IV, this became *historicus regis*).³⁰ Niels Krag, a Latin scholar and diplomat, and professor of the University, was appointed to this and offered superior working conditions – not only in terms of access to archives and employment of assistants, but also permanent remuneration. This choice resulted from the determination to create a Latin history of Denmark as well as from the fact that Krag had political experience, considered an indispensable condition for writing good history. This belief was common at the time and was also accepted by Vedel.³¹ The concepts were also slightly changed: having abandoned the idea of writing a “continuation of Saxo”, Krag was instructed to

²⁷ *Den Danske Krønike som Saxo Grammaticus screff halffierde hundrede Aar forleden oversat af Anders Sørensen Vedel*, ed. C. F. Wegener, Kjøbenhavn 1851.

²⁸ *Commentarius de scribenda historia Danica, 1581*, the Danish version, slightly changed: *Om den danske Krønike at beskrive*.

²⁹ H. Ilsøe, *Svaning, Vedel, Huitfeldt og Krag...*, pp. 238, 242, 244.

³⁰ Ø. Rian, op. cit., p. 453.

³¹ A. S. Vedel, *Om Den Danske Krønike at bescriffue*, ed. G. Albeck, in: *Humanister i Jylland*, København 1959, p. 149; H. Ilsøe, *Svaning, Vedel, Huitfeldt og Krag...*, p. 249.

focus primarily on “recent” history – the reign of Christian III. Even before the nomination, a circular was sent to the nobility, bishops and cities to provide Krag with copies of letters and documents that could be useful in his work.³² Previously, Vedel had to hand over all his materials.³³

But Niels Krag also failed, not only because fate allocated him too little time, but also because the authorities, with their usual inconsistency, did not relieve him of other duties.

Historical politics entered a new phase thanks to Christian IV and his Chancellor, Christen Friis. The young monarch personally nominated Krag’s successor, Jon Jacobsen Venusin (d. 1608), which soon turned out to be an obvious mistake, as Venusin, a true figure of the Renaissance and the first supporter of the Copernican theory in Denmark, wrote very innovative methodological treatises, including one in which he criticised the credibility of the description of the earliest history of Denmark in Saxo’s chronicle,³⁴ although nothing is known of any historical works.

His successor, in 1616, was Claus Christoffersen Lyschander (1558–1623/24). This author was prolific and hardworking, but his works did not fully meet the king’s expectations, because he wrote in Danish. However, it was impossible to ignore his monumental *Synopsis historiarum danicarum* (1622). The actual content of the work is a genealogy of Denmark’s dynasty ruling, showing Christian IV’s descent from Adam and Noah. In this way, Lyschander filled another gap left by Saxo – he connected the history of the Danish kings with the Bible and its heroes. At the same time, he proved the kinship of the Danish ruling family with the dynasties of Europe, not only in the past but also the present day.³⁵ Demonstrating connections with the Habsburgs could have been useful at a time when the Habsburgs’ domi-

³² E. Jørgensen, *Historieforskning og Historieskrivning i Danmark indtil Aar 1800*, København 1964, p. 103.

³³ H. Ilsøe, *Anders Sørensen Vedel, Huitfeldt og Krag...*

³⁴ V. J. Jacobsen, *Theses de fabula quae pro historia quam saepissime venditatur*, Hafniae 1605.

³⁵ L. C. Christoffersen, *Synopsis historiarum danicarum. En kort Summa offuer den Danske historia... Forfattedt udi De Danske Kongers Slectebog...*, Kiøbenhaffn 1622, https://books.google.pl/books?id=NLtBAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=pl&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false (access: 20.09.2020).

nance in the Reich would be shaken. The fact that the work was written in Danish was not an obstacle for the Swedes, who indeed ought to have found out that, contrary to what Johannes Magnus wrote, the Swedish dynasty was not in fact the oldest in the world. In terms of internal politics, the historian's vision strengthened the position of the monarch in relation to his compatriot magnates, who could not boast of such kin.³⁶ Additionally, Lyschander provided tens of examples that Denmark in the past was a hereditary monarchy. So, although the task of writing a Latin history of Denmark for foreigners was clearly beyond Lyschander's capabilities, his project was so attractive that Christian IV decided not to remove him from office, but instead appointed a second historiographer.

Chancellor Christen Friis played an important role in making this decision. It was he, as an educated man and in constant contact with scholars, who not only persuaded the king to appoint a second historiographer, but also found a candidate and continued to monitor the progress of work over the next few years. In 1618, this title was given to Johannes Isacius Pontanus (1571–1639), a Dutchman, but born in Denmark, a long-term resident of this country with knowledge of the Danish language. Tasked with describing the history of Denmark from its inception, Pontanus delved into the problems of ancient history, specifically the Migration Period. In describing the history of Denmark, he drew from Saxo and Huitfeldt. His work would be an erudite, rather thick, tome.

Meanwhile, at the beginning of the 1620s, the king's plans to join the Thirty Years' War were crystallising, a conflict which would settle the rivalry for hegemony in the Baltic Sea region and significantly strengthen the position of the king (also the Duke of Holstein) in the Holy Roman Empire. The plans assumed a prior propaganda campaign in which the correct historical vision would play the main role. The king probably agreed with the chancellor's arguments that it would be a pity to interrupt Pontanus' work, which, although not quite what was expected, was nevertheless acknowledged for its scientific merit. An idea arose to appoint another historiographer whose task would be to write the recent history of Denmark in

³⁶ P. Andersen Vinilandicus, op. cit., pp. 62, 700; K. Skovgaard-Petersen, *Historiography at the court...*, p. 119.

a style appropriate to the humanistic and rhetorical trend. Written in correct or even elegant Latin, it was intended to be attractive and short – accessible to a wider circle of foreign readers. This time the choice fell (1624) to a renowned European named Johannes Meursius (1579–1639), a Dutch humanist. The works written by both scholars differed in character and Chancellor Friis decided that they should function as two separate histories of Denmark: Pontanus', longer, erudite tome, which included also, apart from historical narrative, a geographical and thematic description of Denmark for "specialists", Meursius' shorter, rhetorical work for a wider readership.

The plan to create a modern synthesis of Danish history had finally come to fruition. The first to be published was Meursius' *Historia Danica* (1630), while in 1631, the first volume of Pontanus' work *Rerum Danicarum Historia* was issued. Since neither covered history in its entirety, both scholars continued to work, but manuscripts of their additions were not published until the 18th century.³⁷

When the works of both scholars saw the light of day, Denmark's participation in the Thirty Years' War had ended in a crushing defeat, and the matter of defending Protestantism in Europe and plans for hegemony on the continent was undertaken by King Gustav II Adolf of Sweden (reign 1611–1632). The question of demonstrating the importance of the Oldenburg kingdom through renowned and significant history was still valid.

The process of creating a modern synthesis of Danish history illustrates the evolution of how politics of memory was executed – from moderate involvement to full institutionalisation and acceptance of historical writing as an element of state policy. Later, the royal historiographer became a scholar whose main task was to record the deeds of the reigning ruler. This was not a new theme, but in the first half of the 17th century, attention was drawn not only to the readiness of the state to incur significant expenses for this purpose, but also towards a broader outlook on the whole matter, which we undoubtedly owe to Chancellor Friis (the king should be credited for

³⁷ E. Jensen, *Johannes Isacius Pontanus*, *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, https://biografiskleksikon.lex.dk/Johannes_Isacius_Pontanus (access: 2.05.2023); K. Skovgaard-Petersen, *Historiography at the court...*, pp. 23–35.

his ability to accept the chancellor's advice and suggestions). This dignitary was able to rise above the perception of history in purely pragmatic categories, and it seems that he understood the value of history as a cognitive endeavour. Approval of the meticulous discussion of Cimbri and Teutonian (the Germanic tribes from the 2nd and 1st centuries BC, assumed to be the ancestors of the modern Danish nation) prehistory in Pontanus' work shows an appreciation of the importance of erudite history. However, it must be stressed that also in that area, the ideological and political potential was visible. Supplementing Saxo's vision with the description of Danish origin from famous tribes known from classical authors gave the national history real glory. Equally important was a suggestion implied by the historian, that Denmark in the remote past, was a hereditary monarchy.³⁸ However, the way in which the chancellor reacted to passages in Meurius' work, he found too much discrediting Sweden, that is the order to eliminate such fragments,³⁹ evidences that throughout this period, the rulers did not want the work on the history of Denmark to be so directly involved in current political disputes – they left this to polemical writing.

Historical feud: fighting for honour

One of the most important disputes is the one waged in the middle of the 16th century between Danish and Swedish scholars commissioned by the state.

Its first instalment was the Swedish reaction to the new, third edition (1555) of the "Rhymed Danish Chronicle", 15th-century work telling the history of Denmark in the form of royal monologues in verse (*Den Danske Rimkrønike*, published 1495).⁴⁰ King Gustav Eriksson Vasa's indignation was caused by a monologue by King John,⁴¹ added to the original edi-

³⁸ K. Skovgaard-Petersen, "...by the direction of the most noble and distinguished *Christen Friis*"..., pp. 212–214.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 217–218.

⁴⁰ K. Szelałowska, *Duńskie koncepcje Origo gentis w nowożytnej historiografii narodowej*, "Res Historica" 2022, no. 54, pp. 175–176.

⁴¹ King of Denmark 1481–1513, Norway 1483–1513, Sweden 1497–1501.

tion, which, in his opinion, presented the Swedes inappropriately.⁴² The king ordered the publication of a polemic (most likely the author was Gustav's court chronicler Peder Svart).⁴³ It was published under the telling title of "Någer stycker aff den Danske Crönike, frå konung Waldemars tiid och hans effterkommande, ved ther inne the Svenske bliffue fast groffueligen og med osanning anstede. Teslikest the Swenskes rätferdige och oumgångelige genswar, som the ingenlunde kunde färbi gå, uthan ther sijn ähre och gode rychte ändeligen förswara moste, ther til the högt äre trengde och förorsakade."⁴⁴ The text included a complaint about the tyranny of Danish rule and stated bitterly: "It is better to be ruled by pagans than by Dane." In Denmark, not only was the text read, but King Christian III ordered a polemic to be prepared. This task was entrusted to the aforementioned Hans Svaning.⁴⁵ Before the historian set to work, disturbing news reached Copenhagen.

In 1558, the second edition of the aforementioned history of Sweden by Johannes Magnus was published. This fact alone proved that the work had gained recognition, including in Sweden itself, despite the author's Catholic provenance and his obvious aversion to the "tyrant and usurper" Gustav Eriksson Vasa. In 1559, a Danish envoy in London reported that Magnus' work enjoyed tremendous popularity at Queen Elizabeth's court, and copies of the book were distributed by the Swedish envoy.⁴⁶ These circumstances, indicating a political threat, agitated the Danes, because its content was unacceptable.⁴⁷

⁴² [Den Danske Rimkrönike] *Her begynnes then Danske krönnicke wel offwerseet oc corrigeret...*, Kiøbnehaffn 1533, [s. 115v–133r], <https://archive.org/details/den-kbd-pil-130016876179-001/page/n12/mode/2up> (access: 11.06.2023).

⁴³ P. Zeeberg, op. cit., p. 32.

⁴⁴ "Some passages of the Danish chronicle from the times of King Valdemar and his successors, in which the Swedes were rudely and untruly depicted. Thus, a fair and indisputable Swedish response that no one who wants to defend his honour and good name will be able to ignore".

⁴⁵ E. Jørgensen, op. cit., pp. 88–87.

⁴⁶ K. Skovgaard-Petersen, *Historiography at the court...*, p. 24.

⁴⁷ E. Jørgensen, op. cit., pp. 87–88; H. F. Rørdam, op. cit., pp. 74–85; H. Ilsøe, *Omkring Hans Svaning Refutatio og Chronicon Ioannis*, "Historisk Tidsskrift" 1979, vol. 6, p. 27.

According to Magnus' vision, idealised Goths/Swedes constantly fought with enemies characterised by overwhelming flaws and whose actions should be considered a manifestation of Satan's presence on earth. In ancient history, this role was played by the treacherous and cowardly Greeks and Romans. In more recent history, the Danes, likewise portrayed, became enemy number one.⁴⁸ However, anti-Danish sentiment, bordering on obsession, played a specific political role – the archbishop continued the war with his pen, which he and his compatriots fought practically all his life. Betrayal, falsehood and Danish intrigues were presented as the main cause of Swedish defeats, and the conflicts between these two countries as the eternal war between good and evil, God and Satan.⁴⁹ But the archbishop did not limit himself to this; in his work, hostility towards Denmark inspired various stories and information aimed at evoking disgust towards the neighbour, depicting the Danes as genuine savages, whose state was legitimised by an “illegitimate” and disgraceful conception. The message was reinforced by various ahistorical analogies constructed by the author.⁵⁰

The anti-Danish trend culminated in an oration by Bishop Hemming Gadth at the end of the book. Although situated in historical realities (the Council of the Realm of Sweden's deliberations on the alliance with Lübeck against Denmark in 1503), the content is fiction invented by Magnus himself.⁵¹ The author constructed the text by telling the narrator, in an attempt to convince the audience, to refer to historical experience and to authenticate his diagnoses with the use of information contained in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*. The selection of content from the source was extremely biased, because it mainly involved presenting the Danish rulers in an unfavourable light and portrayed the Danes in the worst possible colours.

And so, the reader received information about all kinds of unheard-of atrocities committed by Danish monarchs against themselves (fratricide be-

⁴⁸ K. Johannesson, *Gotisk renässans. Johannes och Olaus Magnus som politiker och historiker*, Stockholm–Uppsala 1982, pp. 133, 145, 152.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, pp. 148, 152, 158.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, pp. 144, 149–150; K. Skovgaard-Petersen, *Arguments against barbarism. Early native, literary culture in three Scandinavian national histories*, “Renässansforum” 2008, vol. 5, pp. 6–10, www.njrs.dk/5_2008/ksp.pdf (access: 22.01.2020).

⁵¹ K. Johannesson, op. cit., pp. 158–161.

ing the order of the day), against the people (here especially the Danish nobles are guilty, because they turned Danish peasants into slaves), against the Church, as well as against other nations. Descriptions of the Danes teem with terms such as cunning, lying beasts (lying is part of their nature), godless and libellous gobs, inhuman beasts, nasty pirates, bloodthirsty, nasty and thieving Cimbri. Falsehood, lying, intrigue, fraud and betrayal are the main political methods of the Danes, thanks to which they were often able to defeat the noble and straight-laced Swedes. Alongside this rhetorical exaggeration sit some genuinely hateful remarks, such as those ridiculing the Danish language (“they spit out words and contort their faces when they speak”) and the way they speak foreign languages (nobody understands them).⁵²

The Danish response, a text prepared by Svaning, was published in 1561, in the context of the approaching confrontation of the Northern Seven Years’ War, entitled *Refutatio calumniarum cujusdam Joannis Magni Gothi*. The above-mentioned chronicle about the reign of King John was attached to the text. It was especially important for Christian III, in addition to correcting the Danish chronicler’s distorted views on distant history, to refute the Swedish accusations and criticisms of his grandfather. The prepared polemic was reviewed by professors of the University of Copenhagen before printing, suggesting that the harsher phrases be removed, which the king refused, claiming “but it is true.”⁵³ At the same time, a camouflage attempt was made: the late Petrus Parvus Rosaefontanus (d. 1559), an eminent humanist and Latin scholar well-known in Europe, was named as the author – this was to create the impression that the work had been created in the past, for reasons other than current politics, and to mask state involvement.⁵⁴ In this case too may caution and reluctance to fully and officially involve the state authorities in politics of memory be seen. The use of the term *Eques Danus* (“Danish knight”) in the author’s title suggested

⁵² J. Magnus, *Goternas och svearnas historia*, transl. K. Johannesson, Stockholm 2018, pp. 637–655, <https://litteraturbanken.se/lf%C3%B6rfattare/JohannesMagnus/titlar/GoternasOchSvearnas/sida/12/faksimil> (access: 6.04.2023).

⁵³ H. Rørdam, op. cit., p. 79.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

(incorrectly) his noble status, while Svaning, on the face of it, was of peasant origin... The text was sent to many courts in Europe.⁵⁵

The *Refutatio* centred on Bishop Gadh's "speech" and was rendered in the classic Renaissance polemical convention, structured into 34 points referring to various statements by Magnus.⁵⁶ The Chronicle of King John was a response to earlier attacks by the Swedes, but to some extent a continuation of the polemic showing how the reign of the king should be described. Its value was strengthened by the documents cited in extenso, which Svaning obtained from the royal archives. An exception was made for the importance of the case.⁵⁷ Perhaps, it was thanks to such situations that historians could argue that access to archives was necessary for their work.

There was no direct Swedish response to Svaning's work; it was only over half a century later that Johannes Messenius (1579–1636) referred to it, publishing the following during the Kalmar War: "Sanfärdigt och rättmätigt geenswar, emoot then lögnachtige smädeskrifft, som een dansk man Petrus Parvus Rosefontanus benämndt, åhr M.DLX. effter Christi bördh, haffuer aff trycket, på then lofflige Swea och Götha nation, aff ijdhel haat och affwund."⁵⁸

Meanwhile, however, the period of the Nordic Seven Years' War brought a flood of polemics, in which historians were also involved – Hans Svaning was an active participant in these disputes.⁵⁹ Another was a poet who drew on historical material, Erasmus Lætus (1526–1582). His poem *Margaretica*, written in 1573–1574, celebrates the Danish ruler Margaret I. The content of the poem is the battle of Falköping, in which the queen's army defeated the army of Swedish king Albrecht of Mecklenburg (1389). The poet in-

⁵⁵ E. Jørgensen, op. cit., p. 89.

⁵⁶ Detailed description of the content of *Refutatio*, in: H. Ilsoe, *Omkring Hans...*, pp. 42–45.

⁵⁷ P. Zeeberg, op. cit., pp. 28–29.

⁵⁸ "The true and just answer to the lying lampoon that a certain Dane, Petrus Parvus Rosefontanus, [driven] by hatred and envy, pronounced in the year of the Lord 1560 against the glorious nation of Suevi and Goths...", Stockholm, Chr. Reusnero regio typographo, 1612.

⁵⁹ H. Rørdam, op. cit., p. 87.

tegrated classical and national elements, referring to a glorious page in the history of Denmark.⁶⁰

This literary feud caused Danish and Swedish politicians to see the harmfulness of hateful propaganda, and as a result, in the Treaty of Stettin in 1570, a clause was included in which both sides promised to refrain from such publications.⁶¹ Johannes Magnus, however, remained an important point of reference for Danish historians, who referred to him almost constantly.⁶² But it also aroused the emotions of ordinary readers, who engaged in polemics by adding comments to the copy they had read.⁶³

Nevertheless, the state tried to comply with the imposed norms. Their scapegoat was Jon Jensen Kolding (d. 1609), author of *Daniae Descriptio Nova*, (published 1594, Frankfurt am Main), in which he added a copious historical introduction. The author not only engaged in a polemic with Magnus, but also did not mince his words. He meticulously counted that Denmark had conquered Sweden eighteen times (exactly the opposite of what the Swede had reported); Swedish national hero Sten Sture was called “power-hungry”, and Johannes Magnus a “mean”, ignorant, jealous, insolent writer, driven by anger and hatred, and a “sick impulse to gossip.”⁶⁴ The description of the reign of Eric XIV must have been unpleasant for Swedish readers – realistic, but at the time violating a taboo; although on the other hand, the author followed convention or, to be precise, based his work on the description of Emperor Domitian in Tacitus.

⁶⁰ P. Brask et al., *Dansk Litteraturhistorie 2. 1480–1620. Lærdom og magi*, Copenhagen 1984, pp. 434–437; see: K. Skovgaard-Petersen, *Margaretica. Et bidrag til den dansk-svenske pennnefejde i det 16. Århundrede*, “Historisk Tidsskrift” 1987, vol. 87 (2), pp. 209–237.

⁶¹ T. Damsholt, op. cit., p. 54; K. Skovgaard-Petersen, *Historical writing in Scandinavia*, in: *The Oxford history of historical writing*, vol. 2, ed. D. Woolf, Oxford 2012, p. 455.

⁶² This includes the works of Pontanus and Meursius, and it is also worth mentioning that it was Pontanus who was able to detect one serious error committed by Magnus – the mistaken identification of Goths with Getae. K. Skovgaard-Petersen, “...by the direction of the most noble and distinguished Christen Friis”..., pp. 219–222.

⁶³ Idem, “Du må huske på dine egne løgne”. *En kritisk læser af Johannes Magnus’ dansk-fjendtlige Sverigeshistorie*, “Magasin fra det Kongelige Bibliotek” 2004, no. 2, pp. 58–59.

⁶⁴ J. J. Kolding, *En ny Danmarksbeskrivelse, 1594*, transl. A. A. Lund, Århus 1980, pp. 44, 49.

The book provoked a reaction; in the winter of 1594–1595, several Swedish noblemen staying in Copenhagen filed an official complaint against the author, and the Regency Council, determined to maintain good relations with Sweden, brought him before the University court. Experts were called in who found Kolding guilty of a number of crimes: he had published the book without the permission of the king, the council and without censorship; he had caused a dispute with Sweden, slandered its king, thus breaking the provisions of the Treaty of Stettin. The proposed penalty assumed that the book would be destroyed and that its negative assertions would be cancelled. For the Council, however, this was not enough and the penalty they proposed involved Kolding being placed at the “grace and disfavour” of the king, which could have meant the death penalty. However, the consistory of the University refused to issue such a decision. Ultimately, the verdict stipulated a one-year suspension from office and the book’s destruction. In fact, Kolding was reinstated after half a year, which may mean that the whole affair was more of a demonstration. It is not known how many copies were destroyed, but the print is now rare. When Kolding’s work was reissued in 1629, the preface and description of the reign of Eric XIV had been removed.⁶⁵ This example shows that, although the “punishment” on Kolding was in fact half-hearted, the Danish government was responding the Treaty of Stettin terms rather seriously, not willing to provoke the other side with anti-Swedish pronouncements.

In the second half of the 16th century, besides discussing the Swedish position, it was necessary to polemicise with other historians. The attention of the Danish authorities was drawn to the *Chronica der Provinz Lyfflandt* by Balthazar Russow (1578) and information on the history of Orkney in *Rerum Scoticarum Historia* (1582) by Georg Buchanan. David Chytraeus and Jean Bodin were criticised for errors and inaccuracies.⁶⁶

During the reign of Christian IV, various initiatives concerning the Swedish politics of memory, led by Gustav II Adolf and Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna, were carefully observed, such as the reissue of Johannes Magnus’ work in 1617 and its translation into Swedish. However, there were no

⁶⁵ A. A. Lund, *Efterord om forfatteren*, in: J. J. Kolding, op. cit., pp. 111–126.

⁶⁶ H. Ilsøe, *Svaning, Vedel, Huitfeldt og Krag...*, pp. 253–255.

similar polemics, and Chancellor Christen Friis tried to ensure that the differences in historical visions did not provoke excessive hostility, although in his letters to the Swedish ambassador to Denmark, he criticised one of the works of that time for, in his opinion, an untrue depiction of the history of Skåne. But, at the same time, he urged historians working at the behest of Christian IV to exercise caution when describing Danish-Swedish relations.⁶⁷ The chancellor represented the point of view of the Council of the Realm, which did not approve of the king's military inclinations.

This attitude could be seen as compatible to one general tendency in Early Modern Danish historiography, that is a strong resistance to national megalomania. Its observation shows considerable restraint in the exploitation of ethnogenetic myths and an ambivalent attitude towards the feats of ancestors described in old sources.⁶⁸ This is visible in the way how Arild Huitfeldt rejected the temptations to 'extend' national past before Dan and how several other historians expressed their doubts toward Saxo's description of Denmark's beginnings. This was the case of, already mentioned, Vedel and Venusin, but also the most radical criticism presented by bishop Anders Foss (1543–1607) in his famous sentence: “(-)neque certior multum [*sic*] habeatur end voris Euentyrer om Per, Ponell [it is Pouell, Povl] och Espern Askefijs”:⁶⁹ there is no more reliability in Saxo than in our stories about Hansel and Gretel... Even Lyschander, to a larger extent influenced by the desire to produce a more honourable past, cannot be compared with Swedish Olaus Rudbeck or Polish Wojciech Dembołęcki.

Being immune to the towering megalomania, historians were able to present the moderate attitude to the Swedes and follow the restraints imposed by the Treaty of Stettin. The overall impression from Arild Huitfeldt's work confirms it: the author is criticising the Swedish politics in

⁶⁷ K. Skovgaard-Petersen, *Historiography at the court...*, pp. 28–29.

⁶⁸ H. Ilsoe, *Arild Huitfeldts Krønike konfronteret med Anders Sørensen Vedel og eftertiden*, “Fund og Forskning” 1967, vol. 1, p. 39; M. Malm, *Minervas äpple. Om diktsyn, tolkning och bildspråk inom nordisk göticism*, Stockholm 1996, p. 14.

⁶⁹ A. Foss, *Censura de Saxone Grammatico eiusque interpretibus, scoliastis et recapituloribus*, in: *Monumenta Historiae Danicae*, vol. 2, ed. H. F. Rørdam, Kjøbenhavn 1875, pp. 568–579, <https://ia800900.us.archive.org/13/items/monumentahistor01denmgoog/monumentahistor01denmgoog.pdf> (access: 11.10.2020).

the 15th and 16th centuries, describing it as violation of law, covenants and commitments, but it is not accompanied by such hatred as presented by Magnus. Another example could be the form of Pontanus' vision of Danish Gothic empire, clearly alternative to Swedish one. In his the history of the Goths, Johannes Magnus was pointing only to their Swedish origin, excluding other Scandinavian people and territories. Thus, he gave Jordanes' "Scandza" a rather narrow meaning. Pontanus, in turn, truly giving Jutland the privileged role as the main cradle of Gothic ancestors, believed in the fact that they came from the whole of Scandinavia.⁷⁰

Closing remarks

As in any early modern country, the rulers of Denmark perceived history primarily as an instrument with which to achieve various political goals. A historical work, primarily a synthesis of national history, was supposed to show the might and dignity of the state and the power of the dynasty in the past, which was considered a title to aspirations and claims in current politics. Undertaking polemics, disputes and criticism against statements by foreign historians that were inconsistent with one's own vision was part of the "fight for honour" typical of the era (as were the attempts to discredit political rivals). It seems that the Danish government was characterised by a certain moderation in this regard. This could partly be the result of indecisiveness, aversion to friction, but also the historians' cautiousness in dealing with the most remote past, in other words their willingness to stay sober in the times when rhetoric model of history writings and common scholarly practice allowed a considerable tolerance and arbitrariness in dealing with legendary material. It could be seen as a mutual interaction: the critical faculties of scholars could be revealed because the pressure on the propaganda role of history on the part of the rulers was fairly weak.

⁷⁰ K. Skovgaard-Petersen, "...by the direction of the most noble and distinguished *Christen Friis*"..., pp. 222–224.

