



THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF SCANDINAVIA IN THE VIKING ERA

RELIGIOUS CHANGE IN ADAM
OF BREMEN'S HISTORICAL WORK

by

LUKAS G. GRZYBOWSKI

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

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ISBN (print): 9781641892308

e-ISBN (PDF): 9781641892315

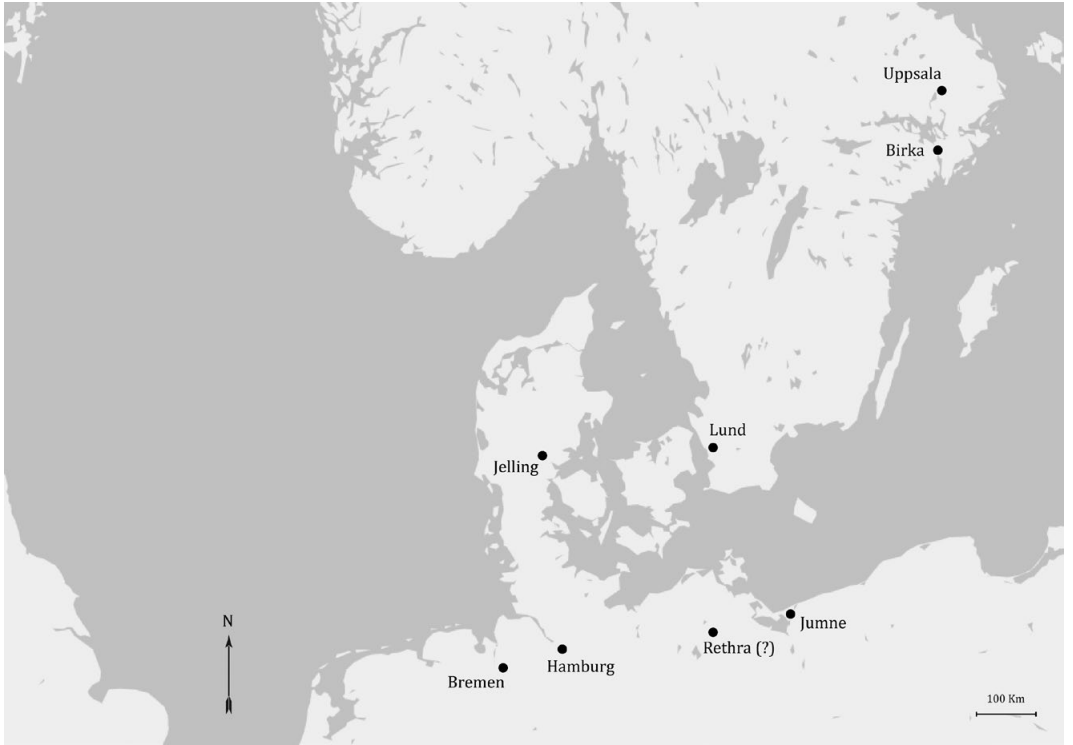
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Printed and bound in the UK (by CPI Group [UK] Ltd), USA (by Bookmasters), and elsewhere using print-on-demand technology.

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction	ix
Chapter 1. Before Christianization	1
Chapter 2. The Beginning of Christianization	43
Chapter 3. Ongoing Christianization	65
Chapter 4. Christianization, Ethics, and Identities	89
Conclusion	107
Index	119



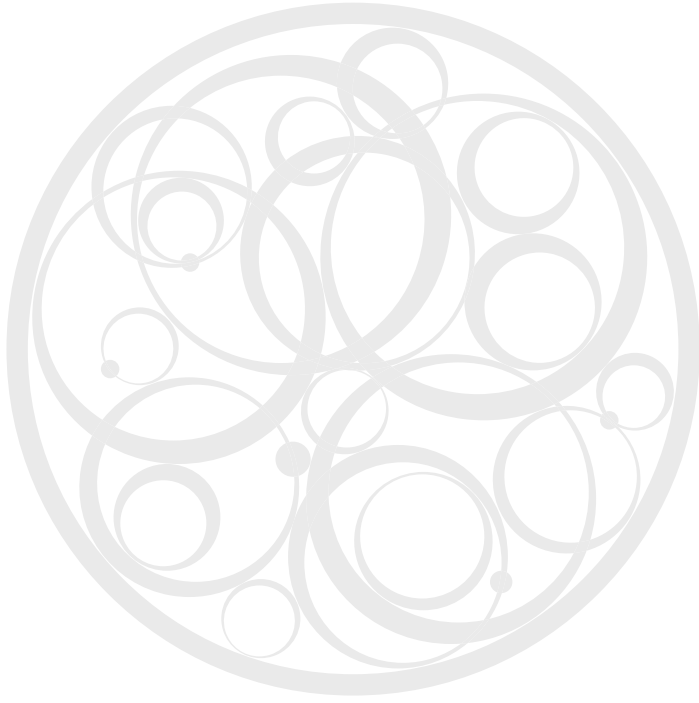
Northern Europe showing the Baltic Sea in the east and North Sea in the west and key settlements.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NO ACADEMIC STUDY can be carried out in complete isolation, nor is it advisable to ignore the criticism (friendly or not) given as feedback to one's research. I am much indebted to many people for helping this book come to life, and wish to express my gratitude to the many supporters of this enterprise. That I might forget someone is the fault of a life that is too busy carrying out the bureaucratic—and often meaningless—activities and meetings required by the current depleted state of Brazilian research facilities and universities (imposed by irresponsible political management that sees research as an expense rather than an investment). In this context, I became even more dependent on the help of friends and colleagues in order to complete this book.

To my research partners at the LEM—Leituras da Escandinávia Medieval (readings in medieval Scandinavia) research group, Renan Birro and Santiago Barreiro, I express my deepest gratitude for, whenever we met, commenting on my work as it progressed. I especially thank Renan for his support with networking and encouraging the growth of our research group in Brazil, and Santiago for his excellent insights. I am profoundly thankful to Marcelo Cândido da Silva for his supervision during the first stages of this research at Universidade de São Paulo. I also want to thank Sebastian Kubon and Roland Scheel, who helped me with my many bibliographical requests, enabling me to rectify some of the omissions that the under-equipped local libraries had imposed. My special thanks also to the editors at Arc Humanities Press and above all Anna Henderson, who patiently waited for the delivery of my delayed manuscript. I thank Susan Vincent for her many suggestions that have greatly improved my text. Finally, I want to declare my particular gratitude to Hans-Werner Goetz, a most dear friend, who found time to help me and to express his faith in my work, even amidst his own pressing commitments. If not for these supporters, I would probably have given up.

The research that originated this book was partially financed by FAPESP—Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo—through grant number 2014/18018-6, for which I am very grateful.



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INTRODUCTION

THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF Scandinavia in the High Middle Ages is a central event in the historical experience of the societies living in northern Europe. It marked an important step in the integration of the Scandinavian territories into the dynamics of European history. Since the beginning of modern historiography, in the nineteenth century, the study of this phenomenon has been the subject of many studies. When dealing with the written evidence of what has sometimes been called the process of conversion but which we call the Christianization process, historians traditionally separated the sources into two major groups: those Scandinavian in origin, and those composed by “outsiders,” who observed or commented from a distance. Since both types of source tend to present narratives from quite different perspectives, modern historiography has also varied its interpretation of the historical experience according to the credibility attributed to the sources analyzed. Consequently, the Christianization process in northern Europe has given birth to many different narratives—both medieval and modern—concerning how it happened, most of which conflict with each other. Medieval chroniclers, Scandinavian saga writers, runestone carvers, modern antiquarians, historians, archaeologists, linguists: all have presented their different views on when and how Christianity was introduced and became dominant in northern Europe. Therefore, to some degree, modern interpretations have varied depending on whether their selected sources confirmed or opposed current tendencies and historiographical agendas. One of these sources is the *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae Pontificum* of Adam of Bremen, with which this book deals.

The *Gesta Hammaburgensis* is a historical narrative of the deeds of the archbishops of Hamburg–Bremen in the Early and High Middle Ages. It was composed by Adam, a *magister scholarum*, that is, an intellectual linked to the diocese of Hamburg–Bremen, in the middle of the eleventh century. Adam’s account is divided into four books, each of which deals with different epochs and circumstances regarding the archdiocese’s past and present. In the first book, the scholar narrates the events leading to the foundation of the diocese under the missionary bishop Ansgar, up to the episcopacy of Unni, who resumed missionary activity in Scandinavia at the beginning of the tenth century. The second book presents the deeds of the archbishops during the tenth and the beginning of the eleventh centuries. Alongside the theme of the Christianization of the Scandinavians, Adam of Bremen emphasizes the growing ecclesiastical structure of the diocese and the struggles to consolidate its position in the north. The third book is entirely dedicated to the pontificate of Adalbert, who brought the *magister scholarum* to Bremen and endured a very complicated rule over the diocese. The fourth and final book of the *Gesta* is known as the *descriptio insularum aquilonis*—the description of the isles of the north. It stands out when compared with the previous sections of Adam’s work and its meaning has been highly debated among scholars. Most historians recognize it as ethnographic in character and believe it functions as a guide to the peoples and territories under Hamburg–Bremen’s ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The theme of *legatio gentium*, that

is, the right and duty to Christianize pagans, in this case in northern Europe, connects all parts of the *Gesta Hammaburgensis* and is considered its *Leitmotif*.¹

In contrast with our knowledge of the *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, its themes, transmission, and reception both in the Middle Ages and in later periods, there is little known about its author, Adam of Bremen. Like so many medieval chroniclers, Adam gives his readers almost no clue to his identity. He does not sign his work. In the dedicatory letter to Liemar, which functions as the prologue to the historical narrative, he calls himself “A. the least of the canons of the holy Church at Bremen.”² His name appears only about a century later when Helmold of Bosau refers to the author of the *Gesta Hammaburgensis* as “magister Adam.”³ The *Gesta*’s author was a stranger in Bremen, as he himself points out in the prologue, saying he is also a proselyte, who arrived in the diocese during the episcopacy of Adalbert, sometime between 1066 and 1067.⁴ Soon after arriving in Bremen, Adam became a *magister scholarum*, a master of the cathedral school, which is attested in a charter from the year 1069.⁵ Whether he was called by Adalbert specifically for this function or assumed the position by merit after coming to Bremen is uncertain, as are other activities he might have performed during his life in the diocese. His acquaintance with King Sven Estridsen of Denmark suggests, however, that at least once Adam might have acted as a diplomatic representative in the Danish court.⁶ Adam probably died before 1085, considering his apparently unfinished revision of the *Gesta*. The day of his death is given in the *Dypticon Bremensis*, a necrology from the thirteenth century, which mentions *magister Adam* on the twelfth of October.⁷

1 For more information on the *Gesta Hammaburgensis* see the introduction to Schmeidler’s *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* [hereafter “MGH”] edition (Bernhard Schmeidler, “Einleitung,” in Adam of Bremen, *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, ed. Schmeidler [hereafter “Adam of Bremen, ed. Schmeidler,” denoting the page of the edition and the book and chapter of the original work]) and also the introduction to Francis Tschan’s translation of the *Gesta* (Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg–Bremen*, ed. Tschan [hereafter “Adam of Bremen, ed. Tschan,” denoting the page of the translation]). See also Schmeidler, *Hamburg–Bremen und Nordost-Europa*; and Kristensen, *Studien zur Adam*. Full references to all works cited in a shortened form are found in the bibliography at the end of this work.

2 Adam of Bremen, ed. Tschan, 3. “A. minimus sanctae Bremensis ecclesiae canonicus” from Adam of Bremen, ed. Schmeidler, 1 (Prol.). While Schmeidler’s edition following the manuscripts gives the abbreviation “A.,” Tschan’s translation presents “Adam.” Since Tschan’s decision to insert Adam’s name in the translation is not based on the editions or manuscripts, I have chosen to follow Schmeidler’s edition.

3 “[...] magister Adam, qui gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum disertissimo sermone conscripsit.” Helmold of Bosau, ed. Schmeidler, 30 (bk. I, ch. 14).

4 Cf. “proselitus et advena” in Adam of Bremen, ed. Schmeidler, 1 (Prol.); and “Emergentibus itaque multis archiepiscopo angustiis mansit opus imperfectum ad annum pontificii XXVIII, cum et ego indignissimus ecclesiae Dei matricularius Bremam veni.” From Adam of Bremen, ed. Schmeidler, 146 (bk. III, ch. 4).

5 “Adam magister scholarum scripsi & subscripsi” “CI,” in *Hamburgisches Urkundenbuch: Erster Band*, ed. Johann M. Lappenberg (Hamburg: Perthes, Besser, & Mauke, 1842), 97.

6 About this see, for instance, “Einleitung” in Adam of Bremen, ed. Schmeidler, liii.

7 Mooyer, “Diptychon Bremense,” 304.

Adam of Bremen is considered by contemporary historiography to be one of the most important chroniclers of the Christianization of northern Europe in the Early and High Middle Ages.⁸ Certainly, his writings constitute the main source of information from the eleventh century concerning this historical process. His historiographical narrative was established early on as an important authority on the history and customs of the northern regions of the European continent, mostly identified with Scandinavia, even though he also covers the Slavic territories bordering the Baltic Sea from the ninth to the eleventh centuries, especially with regard to religious issues (as Helmold of Bosau attests in his *Chronica Slavorum*).⁹ This early reception of Adam's work had a crucial influence on its interpretation by later scholars. Indeed, the echoes of various historical approaches to the *Gesta* can still be heard in modern historiography, especially in studies dedicated to religious history. Concomitantly, twentieth-century historiography made the analysis of the chronicler's intentions and the meaning of his own historiography a central theme in the hope that, by identifying Adam of Bremen's aims, his narrative, in many aspects thematically very complex and somewhat contradictory, would be better understood.

8 As asserted by different historians dealing with this work. According to David Fraesdorff (*Der barbarische Norden*, 30), Adam is the best source for investigating the Christianization of Scandinavia in the Middle Ages: "Die beste Quelle für die Christianisierung des ‚Nordens‘ bis zum hohen Mittelalter ist und bleibt unbestritten die Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte des Adam von Bremen." Rudolf Buchner ("Die politische Vorstellungswelt," 15) considers that the *Gesta* counts among the most informative sources of the eleventh century: "Zu den aufschlußreichsten Geschichtsquellen des 11. Jahrhunderts gehört Adams Historia Hammaburgensis ecclesiae." Thies Jarecki (*Die Vorstellungen*, 13) praises Adam almost exaggeratedly, stating that his study deals with a famous author, certainly the most acclaimed disciple of Clio and composer of a remarkable work: "Diese Arbeit setzt sich mit einem prominenten Geschichtsschreiber des elften Jahrhunderts aus theologischer und kirchengeschichtlicher Perspektive auseinander. [...] Der »wohl [...] berufenste Jünger Klios im Mittelalter« wird zu Recht für sein »bemerkenswertes Werk« gelobt." Aage Trommer ("Komposition und Tendenz," 207) recognizes Adam's importance in the history of not only Denmark, but the whole of northern Europe: "Adam von Bremens Darstellung der Geschichte hamburgischer Erzbischöfe ist eine der wichtigsten Quellen zur Beleuchtung und zum Verständnis nicht nur der ältesten Vergangenheit Dänemarks, sondern auch des gesamten Nordens." Ildar Garipzanov ("Christianity and Paganism," 13) acknowledges the importance of Adam's historiographical narrative and notes the large number of researchers dealing with it when discussing different themes related to medieval Germania or to Scandinavia: "The *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen* is a historical narrative written by Adam of Bremen, the *magister* of the cathedral school, in c. 1072–76. The text consisting of four books is well-known to students of Ottonian and early Salian Germany and Viking Age and early medieval Scandinavia, and a great number of German and Scandinavian historians have discussed various aspects of this text and the evidence that it provides." Hans-Werner Goetz ("Geschichtsschreibung und Recht," 191) states that the *Gesta* is nothing less than a monument to the history of the diocese of Hamburg-Bremen, and Adam is the historian par excellence of the Hanseatic territory in the period before the formalization of the league: "Adam von Bremen, nach eigenen Worten ein Fremder im Norden, hat mit seiner »Geschichte der Bischöfe der Hamburgischen Kirche« den Bremer Erzbischöfen gleichwohl ein Denkmal gesetzt, das ihn selbst zu dem Chronisten des Hanseraums in vorhansischer Zeit macht und seinem Bistum in inniger Anteilnahme verbunden zeigt."

9 "Adam, [...] qui cum commemoret Slavaniam in duo de XX pagos dispertitam, affirmat absque tres omnes ad Christi fidem conversos." Helmold of Bosau, ed. Schmeidler, 30 (bk. I, ch. 14).

This in turn would resolve at least some of the many tensions created by the account. This, for example, constitutes the pivotal point in the analyses by, to cite only the best known, Bernhard Schmeidler, Aage Trommer, Anne Kristensen, Henrik Janson, Volker Scior, David Fraesdorff, and Thies Jarecki.¹⁰

Although these studies have analyzed the *Gesta Hammaburgensis* from different perspectives, there is a connecting theme to almost all of them: the question of whether Adam's writings can be trusted as a source of information regarding the Christianization of Scandinavia in the High Middle Ages. Historians like Trommer, Janson, or Rudolf Buchner were especially concerned with establishing whether or not Adam of Bremen's narrative corresponds to the reality of past experiences in northern Europe, and to what degree he "distorted" or "adjusted" the objective events to present a narrative that conformed to his worldviews. For Buchner, for example, these adjustments in the narrative originated in Adam's *wir-Gefühl*—sense of belonging—which led Adam to emphasize the success of Christianization over the northern territories and its connections to the *legatio gentium*. In turn, the *legatio gentium* is presented as exclusively attached to Hamburg–Bremen and its archbishops, which therefore justifies Adam's choices. According to Buchner, this is visible in the *Gesta* through the employment of expressions such as "we" and "ours."¹¹

Similarly, Aage Trommer investigated the belief structures underlying the composition of the *Gesta Hammaburgensis*. According to him, the chronicler exhibits clear attitudes in his historical account, especially as regards the political deeds of the Hamburg archbishops.¹² Trommer maintains that Adam expressed his anxieties about the archdiocese and displays such tensions in the presentation of his sympathies and antipathies, notably in his treatment of Adalbert's pontificate. Like Buchner, Trommer also identifies the *legatio gentium* as the pivotal element around which the chronicler develops his arguments. Both scholars were concerned with the reliability of the historical narrative presented in the *Gesta* and aimed to purge Adam's account of its "bias." Through the identification of such elements in the narrative, they sought to eliminate, or at least minimize, what they saw as the negative impact of many of the positions he adopted. Trommer believed that only by taking this approach could the valuable historical information conveyed by Adam in his historiographical project be truly recognized: "Adam and his book are undoubtedly far more complicated than has often been assumed. It seems clear that only after a critical study, such as the one I propose, has been made, only then can conclusions be drawn from this text regarding the historical reality, which is first and foremost a primary source."¹³ Through propositions like these, it becomes clear that

10 Namely Schmeidler, *Hamburg–Bremen und Nordost-Europa*; Trommer, "Komposition und Tendenz"; Kristensen, *Studien zur Adam*; Janson, *Templum nobilissimum*; Scior, *Das Eigene und das Fremde*; David Fraesdorff, *Der barbarische Norden*; Jarecki, *Die Vorstellungen*.

11 According to Buchner's summary in "Die politische Vorstellungswelt," 51.

12 This contrasts with the earlier position of historians like Georg Dehio, in his *Geschichte des Erzbistums Hamburg–Bremen*, who believed Adam was an objective chronicler and his narrative was very balanced.

13 "Adam und sein Buch sind unzweifelhaft weit komplizierter als oft angenommen wurde. Und

many studies are still primarily oriented towards a notion of history inspired by Ranke's early-nineteenth-century dictum: the search for the past as it *really* happened.¹⁴

This search for a past *reality* amidst the many "distortions" Adam of Bremen introduced into the *Gesta Hammaburgensis* is not limited to the older or traditional historiography, but can also be found in more recent analyses, such as the works by Henrik Janson and Anders Winroth. This is evident in Janson's discussion of Adam's description of the temple in old Uppsala for example, in which he concludes that the chronicler is not describing a real place.¹⁵ Anders Winroth, in turn, refers to Adam's interference in the information he transmits, calling it his agenda and seeing this agenda as generating an intentional distortion of the historical account. According to Winroth, "[t]he narrative sources each push their own agenda. Adam wants the conversion to be a result of German intervention the better to defend the rights of his own (German) church in Bremen over Christianity in Scandinavia."¹⁶ The adherence of all these authors—both in recent and in older historiography—to the notion of a past *reality* points to the construction of historical narratives from a factual perspective and sets the limits of their studies. Although a factual approach to history should of course not be entirely dismissed—as some recent historiographical critiques have attempted to do—it is not the sole way of understanding past experiences. Complementary perspectives are provided by analyzing the past at a structural level, and by regarding its conceptual expressions. In my study of Adam's work, I follow a conceptual analysis from an anthropological perspective.

Studies by David Fraesdorff, Volker Scior, Hans-Werner Goetz, and, to some degree, Thies Jarecki have also adopted this perspective. However, none of these authors has undertaken a systematic analysis of the *Gesta Hammaburgensis* as a whole. Rather, they have looked at specific elements of Adam's historical narrative in support of their analysis at a broader level. Scior, for instance, has investigated the construction of identity categories in the continental historical discourse of the High Middle Ages, following the increasing contact with Scandinavians and Slavs brought about by the expansion of west European power. For Scior, the *Gesta Hammaburgensis* is representative of an important stage in the construction of the "otherness" of the Scandinavian peoples. Similarly, Fraesdorff analyzed the notion of being "barbaric" that medieval historiography attached to Scandinavian populations. His study also pointed to Adam of Bremen's use of identity categories in his account.¹⁷ When compared with those earlier studies

es steht jedenfalls fest, dass man erst nach der Durchführung eines solchen kritischen Studiums Schlussfolgerungen von diesem Text, der in weitem Umfange primär ist, auf die geschichtliche Wirklichkeit ziehen darf." Trommer, "Komposition und Tendenz," 257.

14 As in the famous statement by Leopold von Ranke (*Geschichten der Romanischen und Germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1535* (Leipzig: Reimer, 1824), v–vi) that "Man hat der Historie das Amt, die Vergangenheit zu richten, die Mitwelt zum Nutzen zukünftiger Jahre zu belehren, beygemessen: so hoher Aemter unterwindet sich gegenwärtiger Versuch nicht: er will bloß sagen, wie es eigentlich gewesen."

15 Janson, *Templum nobilissimum*, 327ff.

16 Winroth, *The Conversion of Scandinavia*, 114–15.

17 Cf. Scior, *Das Eigene und das Fremde* and Fraesdorff, *Der barbarische Norden*.

by Buchner, Trommer, and Winroth, an interesting shift in perspective can be identified. Although still concerned with Adam's "bias," Scior and Fraesdorff no longer seek to purge the *Gesta* in search of a past reality, but engage with the chronicler's particular views as a way of discovering how he saw and interpreted his own world. Yet, neither Scior nor Fraesdorff have fully addressed the central concept of the *legatio gentium* in Adam's work, that is, the Christianization of the north. This is the task I attempt to accomplish in the present book.

Hans-Werner Goetz has recently published two studies in which Adam of Bremen's historical narrative is addressed from a conceptual perspective. In one of these, Goetz looks into paganism as part of a larger investigation of the perception of religious otherness by medieval authors. In an earlier work, Goetz presented an analysis of Adam's distinctive construction of the past. In this, Goetz also offers a summary of his reflections on the method he calls *Vorstellungsgeschichte*, an attempt to analyze the realm of ideas and concepts from an anthropological point of view. The analysis I present in this book is inspired by these theoretical and methodological propositions.¹⁸

***Vorstellungsgeschichte*: Approaching Ideas and Concepts from an Anthropological Perspective**

Vorstellungsgeschichte—a theoretical and methodological approach to ideas—is closely attached to the study of historiography from the Middle Ages. From a modern perspective, one fundamental question when dealing with this kind of source material is how it relates to a "real" past, that is, how close these narratives are to a notion of objective temporal experience, and, therefore, how much they "distort" reality in favour of a narrative that harmonizes with the author's medieval belief systems. This distinction between narrative and reality has indeed been a central issue in theoretical discussions over the past decades. The "linguistic turn" from the last quarter of the twentieth century evidenced this inherent distinction. As a result, history-writing from the past has been increasingly approached as a testimony of the period in which it was written rather than as an information vehicle for themes described in its narrative. This means that the source material does not just reveal to modern historians the content it presents, but also subjectively informs researchers about how these elements were interpreted at the time the text was composed. Consequently, there is a "gap" or a "discrepancy" between the epoch in which the medieval historian can be located and that which is the

18 Goetz's best-known work to the English-speaking public is probably *Life in the Middle Ages: From the Seventh to the Thirteenth Century* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993). As a successful textbook author in Germany, Goetz is considered one of the most influential medievalists from German academia. In my investigation, however, I am especially interested in Goetz's theoretical contributions to establishing a methodological framework for the analysis of concepts from an anthropological perspective: Goetz, *Die Wahrnehmung anderer Religionen* and Goetz, "Constructing the Past." I follow especially Goetz's lengthy treatment of this topic in the introduction to his *Gott und die Welt: Religiöse Vorstellungen des frühen und hohen Mittelalters. Teil I, Band 1: Das Gottesbild, Orbis mediaevalis. Vorstellungswelten des Mittelalters 13.1* (Berlin: Akademie, 2011).

subject of his or her writing. This gap can be considered “conceptual” or “intellectual” in nature. By investigating the ideas involved in the composition of a given historical narrative, *Vorstellungsgeschichte* seeks to call attention to the conceptual singularities of this source and, therefore, to promote a better understanding of its intentions.

Although there might be some confusion at the level of communication, especially due to the interchangeable application of the nouns *history* and *past* when referring to these experiences, a narrative is clearly different from the experience itself. This is also true of medieval accounts, and as we can see from the distinction between *res gestae* and *narratio rerum gestarum*, it was recognized at the time too. Thus, the *res gestae* was seen as being identical to past experience, whereas “the *narratio rerum gestarum*, is a (controlled and reflected) ‘construction’; writing history means ‘constructing the past’, although no medieval chronicler would have noticed or admitted such a characterisation.”¹⁹ Therefore, we can say that a specific construction originates from its chronicler’s reflection on temporal experience, and is, therefore, linked to his or her intellectual context. The worldviews and conceptual limitations of a given author and time are determining elements in the composition process. As a result, the historian must pay close attention to these features in order to get closer to the messages and meanings intended by the author of a particular source. However, modern historians cannot restrict themselves to identifying bias within the source, but also need to take into account the conceptual context as a whole. Ideas are always linked to the time in which they are expressed and constitute an important record regarding human thought.

This is not a new insight for modern historiography and the study of ideas from the past has been an important field since the beginning of the discipline’s professionalization in the nineteenth century. However, initially, most studies involved a factually oriented approach to medieval thinking, centring analysis almost exclusively on pinning down the ideas of theologians and philosophers. This was certainly consistent with general views on history and its functions as held by nineteenth-century society. But as historical thinking changed, so too did approaches to the study of ideas in the past. In this sense, a major contribution was certainly made by the French *Annales* movement. In particular, Marc Bloch started to analyze ideas and thinking with an emphasis on their social aspects and using a serial approach to the past, thus introducing the notion of *mentalité*. However, the *Annales* movement was especially interested in collective expressions of thought and ideas, and the individual was either ignored or considered as no more than one expression of a bigger picture. In this setting, there was little space to study an individual’s ideas as his or her unique expressions whilst simultaneously avoiding a return to the earlier paradigm of “great minds.” It soon became clear that this was an important gap that needed to be addressed and advances in anthropology offered the necessary tools to do so.

This is the main focus of my own investigation, and *Vorstellungsgeschichte*—as an anthropologically oriented study of historical ideas—presents the means for such

19 Goetz, “Constructing the Past,” 18.

an enterprise. This German term can be roughly translated as “History of Concepts,”²⁰ and is directed towards a third tier of human temporal experience, that is, to mental expressions of human apprehension of temporal existence. It differs, therefore, from the search for a factual or structural past in that it looks into how an individual’s ideas and worldviews formed their interactions with the environment of which they were a part. In other words, this research seeks to know the past through its representations: the ideas that emerge from reality. The central question that guides the investigation thus abandons any pretension to reconstructing the past from a factual perspective (“what actually happened”) or a structural perspective (“what processes are involved in a given event, its motives and conditions”), asking instead “how did the individuals involved in a particular event or process perceive, signify and transmit their impressions, ideas and opinions about what they witnessed or believed they had witnessed.”²¹

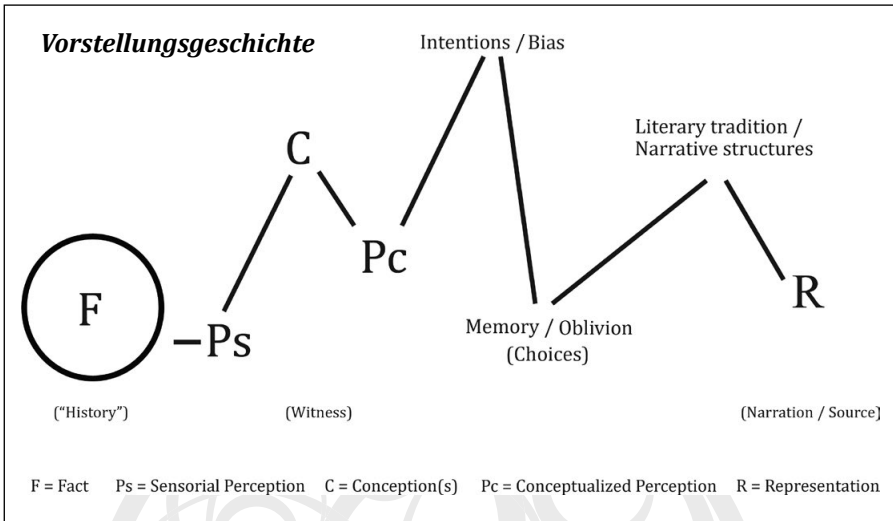
Vorstellungsgeschichte can be understood as an attempt to recover the individual in the context of ideas, but without falling back on investigating only the thoughts of “great people” (although it does not exclude them). It seeks to expand the study of ideas to all spheres of human experience, in that it gives special attention to a typical person as a witness of historical processes. In other words, what is of interest here is knowing how the individuals of a given age—whether direct or indirect participants of the historical process, active or passive—interpreted their own reality and how they transmitted this knowledge of the real. As I see it, when dealing with medieval thought in this sense, medieval historiography becomes a particularly fertile medium for study.

Looking at how a narrative about a historical event (or structure) is formed is also a good way to understand the propositions of *Vorstellungsgeschichte*. As mentioned above, there is a clear distinction between the *res gestae* and the *narration rerum gestarum*. The diagram below (Figure 1) makes this clear.²² When something happens in the past (F), this is perceived by a witness (Ps) through their senses. This means that someone sees or hears about it, or reads something, then takes that up as a fact that deserves to be transmitted further. This first moment of perception occurs through the senses (it is visual, auditory, tactile, etc.), but is not conscious. There is no meaning in sensory perception and it is thus immediately transformed into conscious perception (Pc). Between these steps, there are concepts (or conceptions) (C), which act as interpreters for, and catalogue the elements perceived through, the senses, and thus give significance to the otherwise perceptible but meaningless stimulus of the event. This conscious perception is then further shaped by the author’s bias or their intentions; by the choices the witness (or author) makes, which can be oriented by these intentions/bias, or the result of the

20 The term as well as the theoretical framework of the proposal is close to that of *Begriffsgeschichte*, which has been translated as the “History of Concepts.” However, *Begriffsgeschichte* is mainly interested in concepts from a linguistic perspective, while *Vorstellungsgeschichte* deals with concepts as the expression of the entire intellectual universe of the author, which can be traced linguistically, but which are also subjectively present in his texts in other ways.

21 As in Goetz, “*Vorstellungsgeschichte*.”

22 Here I follow the explanation and the visual schematics presented in Goetz, “Constructing the Past,” 18–20.



natural interplay of memory and forgetfulness (which, in turn, can also be the result of more complex psychological elements such as trauma or desire). All this determines what will become present in the testimony or narrative about the event (F). The final product of this process is the *narratio*, or representation (R), which for its part is oriented by, or must conform to, literary or narrative structures common to the period in which the narrative is composed.

Therefore, when dealing with history-writing from the past, the modern historian is actually bound to work with a given construction regarding the event that is necessarily different from the fact itself, not only due to the intrinsic difficulties involved in the observation of facts—no one can be omniscient—but also due to the fact that the narrative is attached to the complex processes described above. When today's historiography emphasizes the role played by perceptions in the construction of the representations of historical experiences, it must be referring to conscious perception (Pc), because sensory perception cannot adequately be translated into a verbal expression without the resource of concepts. If we consider that the concepts (and/or conceptions) actually orient the perception which is transmitted through the narrative, then it is only logical that these conceptions should be of interest to the historical study.

The approach I follow in my study of Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis* is, therefore, not primarily concerned with the facts which are narrated in the chronicler's account, but with *the narrative as a fact*: how and why, or to what end and by what means, it was constructed. This does not mean or imply, however, that the narrative, even if it might be different from the facts it narrates—and as I have argued, it is necessarily different—is false, or pure fiction.²³ It is, rather, an interpretation of reality bound

²³ According to Goetz, "Although all historiography is a construction of the past, it is nevertheless far from being fictitious, [...] historiography is not fiction because it does not produce a completely arbitrary construction, but is based on certain principles and is bound to a certain view, or image,

to the conceptual categories available to the composer of the narrative. Here we should remind ourselves that we too are bound to our concepts and conceptions when interpreting the world, and the time-lapse that separates us from the subject of the study must also be accounted for. Rather than assuming that people in other periods did *not* understand the world, it is more productive to argue that they did understand it, but *differently*. This difference has prompted many accusations that medieval sources might not be reliable when narrating past events or experiences. However, such accusations bear within themselves an anachronistic element: they measure the sources by modern standards—which not only follow other intentions but can also resort to a whole new raft of intellectual and technological tools, whose impact on the very notion of truth and reliability cannot be denied. On the other hand, when approaching these sources as (conceptual) witnesses of the period in which they were composed, modern investigators can identify new insights into the sources and their authors. Instead of a “distortion” caused by an “agenda”—that is, a conscious falsification of facts—the sources are to be considered as “constructions” of a specific type, under which lie different conceptual and intellectual worldviews and interests. These are the premises on which is based my study of Adam of Bremen’s *Gesta Hammaburgensis*.

* * *

This book is divided into four chapters, the first of which is the longest and deals with Adam of Bremen’s ideas regarding the religious landscape of northern Europe in the period that precedes its Christianization. This first chapter is itself divided into three parts, dealing in turn with, respectively, paganism among the Saxons, the Slavs, and the Scandinavians. The second chapter explores Adam’s views on the origins of the Christianization process. This topic is central to understanding the general concept of the *Gesta Hammaburgensis* since it constituted one of the chronicler’s main arguments in favour of the archbishopric’s primacy over the northern territories. In the third chapter, I look into Adam’s idea of the *legatio gentium* as an ongoing enterprise related to the universal course of history, specifically into how Adam applies this notion to justify Hamburg–Bremen’s claims over the territories of the *legatio* at a time when most of it was already Christian or was experiencing an increased Christian presence. In this chapter, I also discuss Anglo-Saxon influence on the Christianization of Scandinavia, and how this is dealt with by the *magister*. Finally, in the fourth chapter, I discuss two elements connected to the chronicler’s subjectivity which nonetheless inform his readers about his conceptual framework²⁴ and, therefore, about the significance of his historical narrative, namely, ethics and the issue of identities. These are examples and by no means

of the past (Geschichtsbild): first, it is bound to a historical object, the *res gestae*, and to time, or chronology.” Goetz, “Constructing the Past,” 20–21.

24 It has been suggested that “attitudes of belief” would better express the elements I aim to discuss in this book. However, although I feel it might be *as adequate as* “concepts,” the term could be misread as connected both to a purely active and a non-rational entity. While this might appear in some positions taken by the author, the idea of “concepts” seems to be a better choice. Besides encompassing the active and the non-rational, it also refers to the rational and the passive, as well as the intellectual environment and worldviews of an epoch.

exhaust the possibilities for analysis, but they do clearly show the potential of such a reading of the *Gesta*. At the end of the book, a short conclusion recapitulates and structures the main elements of the preceding discussions.

I have based my analysis on Bernhard Schmeidler's edition of the *Gesta Hammaburgensis*, published by the Monumenta Germaniae Historica. The English quotations presented in this book, however, are from Francis Tschan's reliable translation, except where explicitly mentioned otherwise.

