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Children of the Storm

New Voices for The Ancient Goths

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Part Two

Chapter Notes

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Chapter I *Children of the Storm*

Possible Origins of The Goths: A Synopsis

From the time of the Goths' Eighth Century disappearance from the European political landscape, at least in terms of an ethnic or political entity, there has never been agreement among writers on the issue of their origin as a people. As the author of a collection of songs and poems about them, I thought it advisable to research as thoroughly as possible the continuing dissonance amongst academicians, and then try to synthesize a probable scenario that would not have embarrassed or outraged the protagonists themselves.



Accordingly, I made every effort to stay within the bounds of known or reckoned accuracy in telling the 700-year story of the Goths from their own viewpoints.

The following notes accompanying Chapter One comprise a brief review of the evidentiary **corpus** I visited while writing *Children of the Storm*. These materials fall into several categories respecting the early history of the Goths.

I. Earliest Mentions:

The first Roman scholar to name the Goths was **Strabo** after general **Germanicus'** victory over the Germanic chieftain **Marbod** in 16 AD. In the end of the 1st Century AD, the Roman historian **Cornelius Tacitus** described the Gotones as "immediately adjoining the Rugians and Lemonians on the coast of the ocean ... next are the communities of the Suiones, situated in the ocean itself." Next, the Greco-Roman geographer **Ptolemy** (ca. 150 AD) said that "... *the Goutai are on the large island of Scandia, opposite the mouth of the Vistula.*" That tribe is generally interpreted as being the Gutar XE "Gutar" and/or Gautar, living on the Scandinavian (pen)insula and Gotland. The Gudones or Gutones he places near the same location as Tacitus would have them.^[1]

A historical document from Gotland actually recounts the history of the Goths, i.e., "**The Gutasaga**".^[2] Although written in the **Gutnisk** language of Gotland of the 12th Century AD, it recounts the story taking place many hundreds of years earlier of the Goths having settled the island, then overpopulating it and forcing many of its inhabitants to leave.

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According to the saga, those who abandoned the island sailed away in three ships to the southern shore of the Baltic Sea, i.e., now northern Poland, where they settled. The saga further informs us that, a few generations thereafter, the Goths migrated down the Danube River to Russia (now Ukraine), where they encountered the “Greek King” (Byzantine Empire), and once more settled. The *Gutasaga* closes that chapter by stating that “they (the southern Goths) still maintain something of our language.”

The role of the original Goths in leading a powerful new religion or cultic league (Ing, freyr, Odin and Thor) is also recorded in an early Anglo-Saxon Rune Poem, which states that

Ing was first among the East Danes
Seen, they say, until he went east
Over the waves; the wagons followed...^[3]

Further, a massive runestone from the 8th Century AD called the **Röksten** was found in Sweden in the Nineteenth Century helping shore up the foundation of a church. It features vignettes from early Gothic and Norse history. It refers to Theodoric the Great, Ostrogothic King of Italy 494–526 AD, in a rather remarkable verse:

The bravest of warriors, the prince of storm-raiders,
Across the shores of the eastern sea,
Now he sits, armed, upon his Gothic stallion,
His shield upon his shoulder,
Hero of the outland Goths.^[4]

History also reveals that a statue of Theodoric the Great, once a feature of Ravenna, Italy, his capitol city, was dismantled and taken to Aachen, Germany, by the Holy Roman Emperor Karl der Große (Charlemagne) in the early Ninth Century AD.^[5]

Likewise, an Old English poem, “**Deor**”, probably written in the early Eighth Century AD, referred to the same Gothic king:

Theodoric owned for thirty years
The most famous of castles:
Many (of us) knew of him.^[6]

That same poem, *Deor*, also contained a verse telling the tragic fate of an earlier Gothic king, Armenareiks, who was defeated by the Huns.

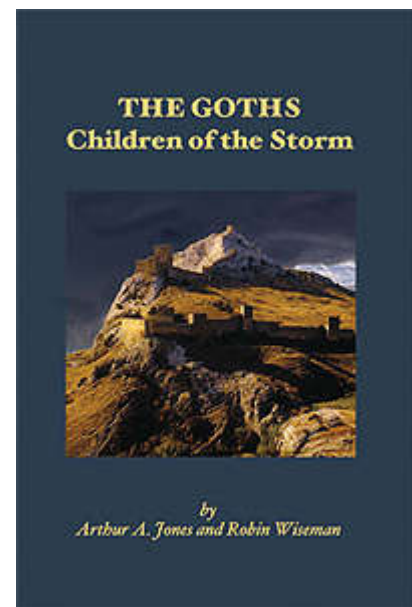
The exploits and history of the Goths were covered in detail in the *Getica*, written by the Gotho-Roman historian Jordanes around 552 AD.^[7] Most of the controversy surrounding the origin of the Goths arises from diverging assessments of his book, discussed in the notes following succeeding chapters, *infra*.

However, the earliest sources available inform us that the Germanic world was very familiar with the Goths, their origin and earliest activities.

II. Archaeology:

Recent archaeology in Poland, Sweden, Denmark and other regions has been a tremendous boon in deciphering the true nature and development of the Gothic peoples. Ironically, the voluminous and active sources of new information and materials in the archaeological realm are mostly the result of “Rescue Archaeology”, wherein archaeologists hasten to certain sites to rescue buried vestiges and even entire village of history, before bulldozers destroy critical sites and otherwise impede archaeological and anthropological progress. In this specific case, rescue archaeology salvaged a large number of sites that lay directly in the path of a series of natural gas pipelines being laid across the northern Polish plain and branched into southwestern Sweden and parts of Denmark.^[8]

Facing the impending threat of losing the priceless archaeological remains of villages, farms, fortresses and cemeteries of ancient European cultures to the giant hoes, scoops and shovels of modern pipeline technology, Poland formed a unique public-private partnership to save a major part of its heritage. Calling together the



Please click on the picture to read about the book published April 2009.

Government, the **EuRoPol GAZ Transit Corporation**, and archaeologists from several Polish universities and museums, both time and funding were budgeted for the purpose of unearthing and collecting the cultural remains lying in the pathway of the planned pipeline.

This enormous amount of “rescue archaeology”, hundreds of kilometers in length and 14 to 20 meters in width, has uncovered over 800 villages and cemeteries of the Celto-Germanic Late Bronze Age (called the **La Tène Culture**), the early Roman Iron Age, and the Late Roman Iron Age across Poland. Those ages correspond precisely to the centuries of Gothic presence on the European stage. The digs are continuing to reveal — like a film documentary — the spectacle of those people and the lives they experienced.

Roughly, we are concerned with the following Migration Period Cultures in Poland, Sweden, Denmark and Pomerania:

Culture	Language	Chronology
Late La Tène	Celtic	up to 100 AD
Púchov	Celtic	200 BC – 200 AD
Oksywie	Mixed Celtic-Germanic	200 BC – 100 AD
Przeworsk	Germanic	100 BC – 300 AD
Wielbark	Gothic	50 AD – 250 AD ^[9]

The excavations are yielding strong evidence that several similar cultures had lived in the same region, changing by evolution and progress over the generations, and punctuated by occasional migrations from without. One of the most influential immigrations to that area, in terms of cultural and social change, was the influx of new settlers from Gotland and Southern Sweden.^[10]

There was also an enormous cultic aspect to the nature of the Gothic immigrants, as they evidently brought with them a new religion. It featured the basic panoply of deities whom we know from later Norse sources, but in time some names were changed as well as the function of some of the deities. Gaut, the creator of humans, the tribal father, was later connected with the continental newcomer **Odinn**. The god and goddess of ancestry, **Ingr/Ingun**, were the predecessors of Freyr/Freya in the fertility cult and **Úllr** was later replaced by **Baldr** in the Nordic pantheon.^[11]

The archaeological focus gives us convincing evidence of the origin of this people:

“To the most important form of skeleton graves belong the first log boat graves discovered on Polish territory. This custom was adopted from Scandinavia.”^[12]

Whether any individual influx of newcomers was peaceful or warlike remains uncertain. However, there is ample evidence that the predecessors of the Goths were successful farmers, herdsman, artisans and craftsmen, maintained strong family ties and a succession of somewhat similar religions.

There is also evidence of an amalgamation of Celtic and Germanic societies and cultural patterns. This amalgam would help explain the extensive use, in the Gothic language, of everyday vocabulary for clothing, armaments and articles of grooming and decoration borrowed from Celtic languages.

Then, in the early 1st Century AD, an upsurge of trade and of material exchange occurred between southeastern Sweden, southern Denmark, and the northern Polish Baltic Coast. New grave circles and inhumation burial rites appeared in Poland, which had, up until that time, been an exclusive feature of the Scandinavian Peninsula and surrounding islands.^[13]

But the parallel, pre-existing practice of cremation of the dead and burial in clay jars continued in the new “**Wielbark**” culture long after the Scandinavian influx took place. Thus, the Gothic culture was probably a synthesis of Celtic, early Germanic, and Scandinavian influences.

With respect to Germanic languages, there was merely a dialectal divergence or difference between them at the time of the Scandinavian influx of immigrants onto the Polish plain. They had been drifting apart for only a matter of two or three hundred years, and would have been over 95% mutually intelligible, much as British English and American English are today — after a separation of over two hundred years.^[14]

Finally, recent archeological discoveries also inform us that throughout the 700-year adventure of the Goths, a flourishing trade in every sort of household item: jewelry, clothing accessories, medallions, combs, fibulas,

necklaces, tools and weaponry took place from southern Scandinavia to northern Poland, the Gothic settlements and nations on the shores of the Black Sea, modern-day Romania and Bulgaria, and later Italy and Spain.^[15]

Gothic mercenaries in Roman armies were paid in “Solidi” and other Roman coins, and dutifully sent them home to the North. Of the 7,000 or more such coins found in northern Europe to date, over 80% were found on the Island of Gotland.^[16]

III. Linguistics

There is a considerable body of linguistic evidence linking the Gothic language to **Forngutnisk**, or Old Gothic. The latter was spoken on the island of Gotland during the ages that the Goths probably inhabited the island, the region, and the northern Polish plain, from about 0 AD to about 200–220 AD. It is during the period 220–230 AD when the Gothic tribes first began showing up at the shores of the Black Sea.

Old Gutnisk sources cover a considerably large time period, from the Roman Iron Age to the Late Middle Ages. Much of our knowledge of Old Gutnisk comes from about 1000 to 1300 AD.^[17]

Indeed, the specific kinship between Old Gutnisk and Gothic are primarily found in phonology and vocabulary. Here is a small sampling of words taken from the Gothic Bible of Wulfila, the Gutasaga and the Gutnisk Laws of the island of Gotland, modern Swedish and modern English to show the early closeness and subsequent 2,000-year development of the languages.

Gothic	Gutnisk	Swedish	English
<i>Augis</i>	<i>auge</i>	<i>öga</i>	eye
<i>Austr</i>	<i>austr</i>	<i>öst</i>	east
<i>Bugjan</i>	<i>bugja</i>	<i>köpa</i>	buy
<i>Athau</i>	<i>etha</i>	<i>eller</i>	or
<i>Fidwortighuns</i>	<i>fiauratighi</i>	<i>fyrți</i>	forty
<i>Gaurwjan</i>	<i>gara, giara</i>	<i>göra</i>	do, cause (“gear”)
<i>Haims</i>	<i>haima</i>	<i>hemma</i>	home
<i>Weiks</i>	<i>wika</i>	<i>vecka</i>	week
<i>Sunthra</i>	<i>sunthr</i>	<i>söder</i>	south
<i>Riths</i>	<i>reth(s)</i>	<i>rätt</i>	right (law)
<i>Hauhs</i>	<i>haufs</i>	<i>hög</i>	high
<i>Ik</i>	<i>iek</i>	<i>jag</i>	I (1st pers.sing)
<i>Thu</i>	<i>thu</i>	<i>du</i>	you (fam.)
<i>Quam</i>	<i>quam</i>	<i>kom</i>	came
<i>Withra</i>	<i>withr</i>	<i>vid</i>	against
<i>Smiths</i>	<i>smithr</i>	<i>smed</i>	smith
<i>Niman</i>	<i>nim</i>	<i>berättelse</i>	report, counsel

Obviously, much of the phonological change which occurred between Gothic and Old Gutnisk consisted of **rhoticism**, meaning that the letter “s” or “z” in the original Gothic turned gradually into an “r” sound. This development was shared by Old Norse and the modern Scandinavian languages generally.

Also, the definite articles (e.g., this, these, those) in Old Gutnisk resembled the Gothic very closely in their case and gender inflections and phonology. Moreover, the possessive adjectives (his, hers, mine, your, their, its, etc.) were marked by a common peculiarity: those particles of speech **followed** the nouns they modified, for example, “friend his”, or “in heart her”, “father our”. This is reflected in the Gothic usage in the poem, “**Totila Rides the Djerid**” in the words, “*gadrauhteis meineis*”, meaning “my soldiers”.

There were other features shared by Gothic and Old Gutnisk, such as

- preposed attributive adjectives,

- a dative absolute formed by using the preposition “*att*” (English ‘at’) with a participle,
- genitive phrases following the head noun,
- verb placement within sentences.^[18]

When one combines the entire body of evidence now emerging, consisting of recent and continuing archaeology, new linguistic data analysis and improved anthropological and historical techniques, the conclusion is clearly justified that there was a substantial South Scandinavian influence on the genesis of the Goths.

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- [1] Ptolemaios *Geographia*, 2.11.16; Strabo Geogr., IV.1.3; Cornelius Tacitus *Germania*, 44.
- [2] *Gutasaga*, Project Runeberg, runeberg.org/gutasaga.
- [3] Richard North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, at p. 22 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- [4] Bo Ralph, *Goter eller Gåtor? – Om Rökstenens runinskrift*, for Kult, Guld och Makt Symposium, Källby, Sweden, 2006.
- [5] Mayke De Jong, Frans Theuvs, Carine van Rhijn, *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, Brill Publications, 2001, at p. 517.
- [6] Bo Ralph, *op.cit.supra*, at p. 12.
- [7] Jordanes, *The Origin and Deeds of the Goths*, translated by Charles C. Mierow, 1908; subm. by J. Vanderspoel, University of Calgary, Canada. northvegr@yahoo.com
- [8] *EuRoPol GAZ Transit Gas Pipeline System*; see www.europolgaz.com.pl
- [9] Svante Fischer, *The Continental Background of the Scandinavian Migration Period Chamber Graves*, Institutionen för arkeologi och antik historia, Uppsala Universitet, Sverige, 2007.
- [10] Bengt Nordqvist, *Nya rön om offerplatsen Finnestorp och exempel på några av dess vetenskapliga konsekvenser*, presented at Symposium Kult, Guld och Makt, Källby, Sweden, 2006. Also see: Tomasz Skorupka, *Where did the Goths living on Polish Land come from?* Poznan Archaeological Museum, Poznan, Poland, 2007. www.muzarp.poznan.pl
- [11] Ingemar Nordgren, *The Well Spring of the Goths: About the Gothic Peoples in the Nordic Countries and on the Continent*, Universe Publishing, Inc., 2004, ISBN No. 0-595-33648-5.
- [12] Magda Natuniewicz-Sekula, *Cmentarzysko ludności kultury wielbarskiej*, Archaeology and Ethnology Institute, Polish Academy of Sciences, 2005. Also see Kaliff, Anders, *Gothic Connections: Contacts Between Eastern Scandinavia and the Southern Baltic Coast 1000 BC–500 AD*. Occasional Papers in Archaeology 26, Uppsala University, Sweden, 2001.
- [13] Nordgren, *op.cit. supra*; Peter Heather, *The Goths*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Mass., and Oxford, UK; 1998; Wolfgang Giese, *Die Goten*, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 2004; Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, University of California Press, 1988.
- [14] Michael Meier-Brügger, *Indogermanische Sprachwissenschaft, 8.e Auflage*, de Gruyter Studienbuch, Berlin 2002, at pp. 36–40.
- [15] Svante Fischer, *op. cit. supra*, at Table 1.
- [16] Fischer, S., and Victor, H., *Folksvandringstida kammargravar och senromersk hovkultur*, 2008, Uppsala Universitet, Sweden.
- [17] Old Gutnish Word Lists, www.propago.org
- [18] See Wikipedia.org/wiki/Gothic_language. This section was co-authored by our Executive Troll, Peter Tunstall, of whom we are duly proud.