

HEROIC KINGS AND UNRULY GENERALS: THE "COPENHAGEN" CONTINUATION OF PROSPER RECONSIDERED

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For much of our knowledge of late antiquity we are indebted to historically-minded bibliophiles of the Middle Ages who assembled the fragments of Roman history into great collections of chronicles and histories. Perhaps the most interesting of such collections is preserved in Copenhagen Ms. 454.¹ Largely made up of the well-known chronicles of Jerome, Prosper, and Isidore, it also contains material found nowhere else concerning events of the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries. Particularly valuable are the notices of the years 475 through 480. The Copenhagen collection includes capsule accounts -- derived apparently from a contemporary work or works -- of the deposition of the Emperor Nepos, the usurpation of Romulus Augustulus, last Roman emperor of the West, and the subsequent revolt of the *foederati* through which Odoacer was made the first barbarian king of Italy. The Copenhagen manuscript is, in fact, our fullest source for these famous events.

This one section of the Copenhagen collection has been the focus of attention ever since the manuscript was discovered in 1836. Since that time the document has been dissected repeatedly in an effort to isolate the unique fifth-century material and establish the source and authority for the information that it supplies.² For instance, in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, edition of 1892, the only one commonly available, Mommsen categorized the chronicle entries on the basis of

which source each came from, then printed the separate categories in different parts of volume I of the *Chronica Minora*.³

Because such treatment has obscured the essential unity of the Copenhagen collection, the anonymous seventh-century Italian, who was chiefly responsible for its shape, has become the forgotten man. This is unfortunate. The Copenhagen Continuator of Prosper, as he is usually called, is an interesting figure. Like many mediaeval compilers, he was also an historian who could and did shape his source material to suit his own purposes. In particular he was a writer with distinct views on the decline of Rome and the state of Italy in his time, views that are not without significance. His work deserves a rereading.

Copenhagen Ms. 454 is a manuscript of the twelfth or thirteenth centuries of uncertain provenance. Its present state is very confused, and the problem of its composition has been a subject for scholarly debate. A detailed description of the manuscript and the problems surrounding it has been postponed to the appendix; suffice it to say here that the codex was carelessly copied from a complicated and incomplete archetype, so that some material was omitted and some was garbled. The mistakes of the original scribe were corrected either by himself or by a contemporary, both within the text and by the addition of marginal notes. As a result of this process the years 458-474 are missing, and the period 475-489 is reported twice in the body of the work and once in a marginal redaction. Despite this peculiar arrangement and some signs of later interpolation, it has generally been accepted that the present text is a fair representation of what the seventh-century chronicler wrote.⁴

The compilation, like the codex that preserves it, is quite involved. It falls into three broad sections, of which the first two are easily described. Section one, which is also the longest, consists of Jerome's world chronicle to A.D. 378, little altered; there are only a few additions taken from Isidore, the longer version of Prosper's chronicle, and Jerome's own *De viris illustribus*. Similarly, section two is based on Prosper's continuation of Jerome to A.D. 455. The collection contains the entire text of Prosper, and his consular chronology replaces the regnal chronology of Jerome. But the seventh-century compiler substantially supplemented Prosper's work by including two entries from Isidore, as well as a larger number from lost works of the fifth century. At

several places, in the margin or even within the text of Prosper's less precise, more literary account, the Copenhagen Continuator added exact dates and locations, drawn from one or more versions of the fifth-century consular annals. In the same way, he incorporated a few longer excerpts from a more detailed source into Prosper.

The most interesting -- and most complex -- section of the chronicle collection is the last, the unique Copenhagen Continuation of Prosper, as Mommsen called it. Covering the period from 455 to 625, it was woven together by the seventh-century writer from a variety of sources, some known, others not. From Isidore's world chronicle, itself an early seventh-century work, the Italian chronicler took his list of the emperors from Prosper's time to his own, as well as entries concerning Gothic, ecclesiastical, and imperial history. He added to Prosper's papal chronology from an unknown but extremely precise list.

But the chronicler's main sources, at least up to the year 523, were texts using consular chronology -- apparently the same ones used to supplement Prosper. These provided the seventh-century writer not only with a consular list, his chief method of identifying the years, but with the bulk of his historical entries, including his account of Italian history. The nature of these sources, previously referred to in the discussion of the Prosper section, is clearer here. Some of the brief, formulaic, and precisely-dated entries are characteristic of the consular annals, and it is evident that the Copenhagen Continuator had one or more versions of the consular annals available to him. A second source, though based on the annals, is far more interesting. It is an opinionated and well-informed history of Italian affairs in the fifth century down to the time of Theodoric's defeat of Odoacer.⁵ The work of this late, fifth-century commentator -- I will call him "the Commentator" for short -- is traditionally the part of the Continuation that has received the most scholarly attention.

Once more before its end, with the failure of the consular sources, the character of the compilation changes. The Commentator's work finished -- or ceased to interest the compiler -- with the defeat of Odoacer by Theodoric in 493. The consular list used by the continuator ended in 523. Without these, the continuator's knowledge of both chronology and events was very sparse and sometimes quite inaccurate. Although he maintained lists of emperors and popes, he could no longer assign events

to specific years. The compiler was evidently working from a very few sources (only Isidore is recognizable) and his personal memories. As a result, he had little material about the remote period between the death of Theodoric and the campaigns of Narses; from the Lombard invasion, however, his entries get progressively fuller and more interesting, until they end with a description of the accession and ten-year reign of the Lombard King Adaloald (A.D. 616-625).

So far we have described the Copenhagen collection in terms of what its compiler borrowed from others. But his account does not lack clues to his identity. There can be no doubt that he was an Italian; what he knew best was the history of northern Italy and the Lombards. Indeed his special knowledge of Pavia, and his particular interest in Liguria, the ancient Roman province in which that city is located, led Roberto Cessi to suggest that the "Copenhagen" continuator was from Pavia, which in the early seventh century was one of the chief centres of the Lombard realm.⁶ Two dates have been put forward for the compilation of the collection. Most scholars have accepted the date of 641, because the entry that records the accession of the emperor Heraclius (reigned 610-641) refers to his thirtieth year. Mommsen, however, argued convincingly that this remark is an interpolation, and that the compiler wrote around 625. The continuation's lists of popes and Lombard kings cease about that year, and no later events, either in Italy or elsewhere, are recorded. As we shall see, another argument can be made for the earlier date, for in some crucial respects the continuator's perception of the recent past seems to reflect the beginning of Heraclius's reign rather than the end.⁷

The compiler's interest in the struggles of orthodoxy against unbelief, especially Arianism, as well as the range and content of his education, makes it probable that he was a cleric. Despite his ignorance of specific events, he was well-acquainted with the Christian chronicle tradition, and he clearly sought to write within it. Like Jerome, Prosper, and Isidore, he put the story of his own time into a Christian context: recent history was a part of salvation history, the latest link in a chain of events going back to the time of the apostles and the patriarchs, to the Creation itself.⁸

Finally, the continuator was a writer of some literary and historical ambition. Where Jerome's work joins Prosper's and where Prosper's joins the continuation proper -- at those places where it is traditional

for chroniclers to speak of their own work -- he explains to the reader his own contribution to the tradition. Prosper is introduced with these words: "Thus far Jerome arranged the order of the preceding years; now to that which follows, which was added by the most religious and learned Prosper, there have been appended a few supplementary notices, the result of our own research [*studium*]." At Prosper's conclusion he speaks again: "Thus far the holy Prosper continued the history, although we have combined with it some things which he omitted, on account of our investigation of past ages; what follows our own research, as well as it could, has produced with great effort."⁹ The continuator freely admits his dependence on past authorities, but he also presents himself, with a mixture of modesty and mild boasting, as a conscientious student who has assembled a more complete history out of the materials available to him.

We have already seen how the compiler used one source to supplement another. He also tried to give the collection a modicum of literary unity. The most obvious indication of this is his use, in the final part of his continuation, of verbal reminiscences and stock phrases drawn from his sources. A noteworthy example is the description *homo instructus bellicis rebus*, "a man well-taught in military affairs." The phrase is first used of Odoacer, and it apparently originated in the Commentator's account. In the later part of the chronicle this exact wording and close variants are repeated by the Copenhagen Continuator to describe important military men.¹⁰ Another phrase was borrowed from Prosper, who, in speaking of the seventy-seven day usurpation of Petronius Maximus, characterized its flagrant illegitimacy by saying "but he [Maximus] was not long able to exercise such lack of restraint [*sed hac incontinentia non diu potitus est*]." The seventh-century writer liked this turn of phrase well enough to re-use it in connection with a later usurper, Eleutherius, an exarch of Ravenna who proclaimed himself emperor in 619. The continuator summed up the exarch's futile grab at power with the words "But in his audacity he did not long retain this rash usurpation [*sed temerae usurpationis audacia non diu potitus est*]."¹¹

Elsewhere the influence of his sources is more subtle. A most interesting case is his discussion of the Lombard threat to Rome in the time of Gregory the Great. According to our seventh-century chronicler, King Agilulf came to Rome in all his strength to besiege the city and was only turned back when Pope Gregory met him on the steps of St Peter's,

softened him with his prayers, and stirred him deeply with his wisdom and holiness.¹² No other authority mentions this event, and the continuator's accuracy here has been doubted; but the entry is an excellent demonstration of how he followed his sources in writing his own account. His guide in this case was Prosper, whose most dramatic passages showed how Pope Leo the Great personally saved Rome from Attila and mitigated Geiseric's sack of the city.¹³ The later chronicler found Prosper's account an appropriate model for describing Gregory's leadership in a similar crisis.

We see then that the author of the Copenhagen Continuation had read his sources closely and sought to weave them together to create a more comprehensive chronicle of the previous two centuries. But did he have a larger purpose? Did he have an historical vision, and if so, what was it?

The prevailing opinion is that he had no such vision, or at least none worth taking into account. Students of the collection have followed the lead of Hille, the first editor, who saw only one thing of value in the Continuation: "It can escape no one's attention that those things taken from Jerome, Prosper, and Isidore are not useful except for the emendation of their texts, that Lombardic affairs are better and more accurately related by Paul the Deacon, that the few things reported concerning popes and emperors scarcely have any great authority, so that the one thing worthy of more careful contemplation is what comes out of the Anonymous of Ravenna [i.e. the Commentator]."¹⁴ Every discussion since Hille's has concentrated on recovering that fifth-century material and freeing it from later contamination. In the process, the seventh-century compiler has come in for some harsh criticism. Roberto Cessi, writing in 1922, found the continuator and his efforts at scholarship actively repugnant, and characterized him as a person incapable of originality, who too often marred his sources with badly learned rhetoric or with fantastic misinterpretations based on a profound ignorance of history.¹⁵

The contempt in which the continuator has been held and even the immoderate strictures of Cessi can be understood by anyone who reads the Copenhagen collection looking for either literary merit or a better understanding of fifth-century Italy. While the seventh-century compiler is an immovable barrier between us and a contemporary source that is tantalizing in its incompleteness, the flaws in his own work are all too evident. His prose is repetitive and overblown, and his knowledge of the

past is, as Cessi said, narrow indeed. He tells his readers, for instance, that once the Goths were expelled from Italy by Narses they seized Spain, and that Totila, the last Ostrogothic king, was succeeded by the Visigoth Leuvigild.¹⁶

Even more astonishing is his ignorance of the course of the Gothic wars themselves. He was aware that Narses's conquest of the peninsula was the second of two major Roman campaigns against the Goths; but he knew almost nothing of the first, except that it had been initially successful and an ultimate failure. The continuator was acquainted with Belisarius only through Isidore, who describes the general as the conqueror of the Persians and the Vandals, and thus he had no reason to connect the great general with his most famous war. He therefore ascribed Belisarius's deeds in Italy to an obscure general named Asbad, known to us through a few passages in Procopius, and known to the chronicler himself through Asbad's epitaph in the church of St Nazarius in Pavia. This flattering inscription (quoted in full in the chronicle) grandiosely credited its subject with expelling the *gentes* and giving "the Gothic Alps to Latium to rule." It seems to have been the continuator's sole source for the first twenty years of the Gothic wars, and it certainly left him with a very incomplete and distorted picture of the early sixth century.¹⁷

But while the continuator's sources and errors have received abundant attention, something of value has been overlooked. He is one of our few witnesses for the historical knowledge and perception of seventh-century Italy. And he is an interesting witness. When all is said about his deficiencies, it remains true that the compiler of the Copenhagen collection was an educated man and was better read than many another chronicler. His acquaintance with the Lombard kingdom of his time and the possibility that he wrote within its boundaries increase his claim on our attention. These facts should inspire us to look more closely at how he handled and interpreted the historical data he included in his work.

Examining the collection for what it can tell us about the seventh century is a more fruitful exercise than one might at first expect. It quickly becomes clear that the compiler intended his book to be more than a record of neutral fact. He had a distinct point of view, one influenced by both Prosper and the fifth-century Commentator. The continuator, a zealous student, had noticed one of Prosper's most

interesting themes, his explanation of the imperial defeats of the early fifth century. Prosper believed that a chief cause of the empire's troubles were the civil wars and intrigues launched by unruly generals. Private ambition had blunted Roman military might; competent generals had either been frustrated in their duty or become corrupt themselves.¹⁸

The anonymous Commentator -- insofar as his work may be detected -- appears to have taken a similar view of the late fifth century: the barbarians seized Italy because of the internal divisions of the Romans. The vanity of Nepos, the ambition of Orestes, opened the way for the rule of Odoacer and Theodoric, men who were, unlike their Roman counterparts, competent military leaders.¹⁹

The seventh-century chronicler took these interpretations to heart and made them the basis of his own view of Roman history. He depicted the history of the previous two centuries almost entirely in military terms. The continuation from 455 is dominated by the figure of the well-taught military man. Time and again, the side with expert and vigorous generals gains the victory; rulers and states that lack the appropriate military virtues go down to defeat and destruction.

The figure of Odoacer is interesting in this context, for he is in turn both victor and vanquished. He first appears in the account in 476, as the leader of an illegal revolt of the Herulian *foederati*, who are characterized as deceitful allies. But Odoacer himself is not criticized; rather he is called "a serious man both in age and prudence, and well-taught in military affairs." There is an implied contrast between him and the Roman leaders Nepos and Orestes, who have ambition but not ability or judgement.²⁰

Odoacer quickly defeated Orestes, and for a number of years continued to rule strongly, putting down internal rivals, conquering foreign kings, and "extending his rule with battle and sword." But Odoacer learned fear when Theodoric entered Italy, and thereby lost his kingdom. Being unable to overcome the invading Gothic king at the Battle of the Isonzo, Odoacer fled and shut himself and his army within the walls of Verona. The compiler's account makes it clear that such was not the action of a true leader. We are told that Theodoric, "a man with a spirit tested in military affairs and capable of triumphal glory," understood that he had little to fear from an enemy who fled at the first defeat, and knew that he could win if he pursued a rival who trusted

more in the protection of walls than in the power of his men.²¹ Although the succeeding account shows that Odoacer still had some spirit remaining, he never regained the initiative. Both his luck and his courage deserted him at crucial moments, his most trusted lieutenants were killed in battle, and he was forced to make peace with Theodoric, who murdered the defeated king at the first opportunity.

The continuation covers no other series of events in such detail, but the importance of military virtue, of the well-taught military man, is constantly emphasized. Belisarius, explicitly "a man well-taught in military affairs," is noted as subduing the Persians "to such an extent that he both brought the state back to its original condition and left the enemy in terror." Then "he was also sent to Africa and destroyed the Vandal people with their king."²² Asbad and Narses are shown playing a similar role in Italy. Rather, they do more; their vigour not only destroys Gothic rule in Italy but also restores its civic life.

In discussing the deeds of these Roman conquerors of the Goths, the seventh-century writer takes care to point out that the safety and prosperity of a country depend on the achievements of competent generals; he also implies that such men make the best rulers in peacetime as well. He tells us that Asbad "restored many of the cities of Italy, and chiefly those in Liguria," then quotes Asbad's epitaph, which states that "through you, diverse cities with ruined walls rejoice to return to their original honor."²³ The death of Asbad undid this work, but fortunately Narses was another leader of the same sort. After he had expelled the Goths a second time and returned Italy to Roman rule, "he brought the people of all Italy back to their original joy." Specifically, "he restored cities and walls to their original dignity and cherished the people with justice and prudence."²⁴

The seventh-century chronicler believed that it had been a long time since the Romans had produced such leaders. Intrigue had brought Narses's flourishing rule to an end and admitted the Lombards into Italy.²⁵ More recently, the usurpation of Focas had weakened the empire and laid it open not only to further Lombard incursions but also to invasions by the Huns (i.e., the Avars) and the Persians as well. In the writer's lifetime, the Romans had lost wide territories, and had become a tributary people. The Italian chronicler took this idea from Isidore,²⁶ just as he apparently appropriated the concept of the well-taught

military man from the Commentator; but once again he made the idea his own and elaborated on it. He tells his reader how the Persians have wrested many provinces from Roman rule and made them tributary to themselves; the attacks of the Avars have been turned back not by battle but with gold and gifts. The Emperor Heraclius is shown standing within the protection of the walls, buying off the Huns who were threatening Constantinople; his reliance on walls instead of men is reminiscent of the latter days of Odoacer.²⁷

Roman defeats in the East had their part in forming the outlook of the continuator; but naturally he was most concerned with events in his own land. His foremost example of the weakness of Roman leadership is taken from contemporary Italian history. This is the aforementioned episode of Eleutherius. Heraclius had sent Eleutherius to protect imperial-held Italy from the Lombards. But Eleutherius was quickly defeated in battle and was forced to pay a heavy tribute to the Lombards in exchange for peace. Having pacified the Lombards in this ignoble fashion, Eleutherius turned his hand to mischief and proclaimed himself emperor, only to be murdered by the soldiers.²⁸

For the continuator, the weakness of the divided Roman empire in his own time was merely the latest manifestation of common vices. He harks back to Prosper, who showed how civil wars and intrigues led to disaster in Gaul, the loss of Carthage and the Vandal sack of Rome. Even more clearly the seventh-century chronicler echoes the judgements of the late fifth-century Commentator, who taught him that civil war in the 470's had allowed the Heruli under Odoacer to establish a kingdom in Italy. The compiler of the Copenhagen manuscript saw the same story being re-enacted before his eyes. Ever since Narses, but especially since the revolt of Focas, the Roman empire had been in a decline. And the chief reason for this was that the Romans had wasted what military might remained to them on fighting each other, while their rulers had ceased to depend on a courageous soldiery and put their futile trust in bribery of their enemies.²⁹

It is apparent that our continuator thought a Roman revival to be unlikely. In an era of many Roman defeats, Lombard kings and their generals -- one of whom, the opponent of Eleutherius, is another man "well-taught in military affairs" -- had won substantial victories.³⁰ Nor does the chronicler see this as a bad thing; writing within living

memory of the leveling of Roman cities by the Lombard king Agilulf, he hints that Lombard-ruled cities are more secure than those of Byzantine Italy. Note his remarks on King Authari, who ruled in the 580's: "he restored by his own ability and prudence the strength of the Lombards which had been shattered in Gaul, and overcame the Franks who were wreaking devastation widely in Italy."³¹ The Lombards here are the protectors of Italy from the attacks of foreign peoples. There is a distinct lack of hostility to the Lombard presence throughout the work. Although the chronicler refers to "Gothic ferocity" (without actually showing us any), the Lombards are never denounced, in the way that Gregory the Great had been accustomed to do, as a cruel or abominable people.³² Even Alboin, who led the invasion of Italy, is remembered as a king who ruled fittingly while his people quietly settled in Italy after their battles.³³

The intentional contrast between the warlike and effective Lombards and the disunited and demoralized Romans is the most interesting aspect of the Copenhagen continuation. The continuator's selection of material shows us that he regarded the Lombard presence in Italy as the most important fact of his time. Indeed, after the entry of the Lombards he says surprisingly little about Byzantine Italy, and when he does report events in imperial territory there is a clear Lombard connection. If we may return once again to Eleutherius, we can see how the chronicler's interest in the Lombards shaped his perceptions. We know from the *Liber Pontificalis* that Eleutherius was not seen as a failure by all contemporaries. In this account Eleutherius's chief concern was to restore legitimate authority in Byzantine territory, and before he himself revolted he succeeded in eliminating the murderers of his predecessor in office and a tyrant who had seized control of Naples. Eleutherius is credited with restoring peace to all Italy.³⁴ But for our chronicler, none of that is significant; what matters is the failure of Eleutherius to deal with the Lombard challenge and his misplaced ambition.

The chronicler's ecclesiastical notices are equally selective. A comparison of his text with that of Isidore reveals some startling omissions. Isidore has much to say about the religious controversies of the sixth century, his source being Victor of Tununa, an outspoken defender of the Council of Chalcedon against the Emperor Justinian's attacks.³⁵ None of this material has found a home in the Italian chronicle, even though the same issues that exercised Victor deeply

affected Italy. Nor is there a single word about the schism, caused by Justinian's policies, that still separated Rome and the Byzantine churches from a number of Catholic sees in Lombard-held northern Italy.³⁶ The desire to avoid scandal might by itself be sufficient to account for this omission. But the chronicler's silence on these matters might better be considered as a parallel to his curtness about the politics of Byzantine Italy. The chronicler's one doctrinal interest is an issue of great importance for the future of the Lombards and their Italian subjects -- Arianism. He misses no opportunity to expose the falseness of the Arian church or to celebrate its defeat in Africa and Spain. He is subtle when it comes to dealing with Lombard Arianism, however. He never hints at its existence. Rather, he praises the piety of Queen Theudelinda, the Bavarian princess who married two Lombard kings and bore a third, and was the most important Catholic in the realm.³⁷

The chronicler's silence on the controversies that divided Roman ecclesiastics and his emphasis on the one that divided "barbarians" from Catholics within the Lombard realm is striking but consistent with what we have seen elsewhere. For all his Roman-style learning and apparent attachment to the Roman church (seen especially when he praises Gregory the Great as a man of spiritual power),³⁸ he seems to regard the empire almost with indifference. Indeed, it is clear that he believed that the Roman empire had had its day, and that the Lombards were the wave of the future. He called Byzantine Italy, in a significant phrase, "that part of Italy not yet occupied by the Lombards."³⁹ If we recall his situation, this attitude is understandable. He wrote in 625, when nearly all of the empire was occupied by the victorious Persians, when the reconquering Heraclius's campaigns were just a desperate hope. The evidence of history as he knew it and his own experience convinced our chronicler that the Roman empire was no longer a power, either in the world at large or in Italy, his homeland.

He was wrong, of course. The empire was far from finished, even in Italy. Heraclius's campaigns -- apparently unknown to the chronicler -- would prove vigorous enough to reverse for a time the recent losses in the East, although the effect on Italy would be small. Even the continuator's scorn for the payment of tribute looks unrealistic and short-sighted when one considers how successful that policy was to be -- indeed already had been -- for the Roman state. Yet his emphasis on

Lombard strength and Roman weakness demands a degree of respect, for his attitude towards the empire was not unique in his time. During the late sixth and the early seventh centuries, the educated clergy of the West not only reconciled themselves to barbarian rulers, but began to value them as warrior-kings. Where earlier generations of clerics had reacted to the troubles of the fifth century by denigrating the worth of earthly victory and preaching peaceful accommodation, ecclesiastics of the decades around A.D. 600 discovered a new respect for the warlike virtues and the barbarians who embodied them.⁴⁰ We can see the re-orientation in the person of the Spanish bishop, Isidore of Seville. Isidore is justly famed as a lover and propagator of classical learning; the same man, in his historical works, justified the Goths as the defenders of Spain and applauded their efforts to expel imperial armies from the country.⁴¹

The Copenhagen Continuator was not an Italian Isidore, but there are strong similarities in the expressed views of the two men. Each had a patriotic concern for the welfare of his homeland, and celebrated the military exploits and triumphs that made possible its prosperity, even when the victors were barbarians and heretics. Each in his chronicle commemorated the accomplishments of the Roman past, but was indifferent or even hostile to the empire of the seventh century. Isidore was more enthusiastic in his acclaim of the Goths than the Italian chronicler was in his depiction of the Lombards, but then Isidore had more cause for satisfaction. In his lifetime the Visigoths had created a unified, securely orthodox Spain. The Copenhagen Continuator may have hoped for the like in the case of Italy.⁴² That this would be beyond the strength of the Lombards he could not have known.

The chief interest of the Copenhagen Continuation of Prosper lies in the way it reflects a transformation in the ideology of western, and specifically Italian, society. The scholarship of the past century has shown that the major result of the Lombard invasions was the militarization of all Italy, Byzantine as well as Lombard. The Copenhagen Continuator preserves the ambience of the period when the traditional civilian aristocracy of Italy was overwhelmed and largely supplanted by new elites.⁴³ The figures who populate his account are the prudent, capable warriors who flourished in his time and the faint-hearted men whom they defeated and displaced. Since he judged the past by the standards of his own day, history for him was largely made up of

tales of boldness and prowess, of victory and defeat. He was, in a small way, a forerunner of those who in the Middle Ages would recast the history of the fall of Rome in heroic terms.

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NOTES

A preliminary version of this paper was delivered at the Nineteenth Medieval Congress held at Western Michigan University in May, 1984.

¹ The best text is still that included in Theodor Mommsen's edition of the *Consularia Italica* (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi IX* [Berlin 1892] 249-339. Hereafter this edition will be referred to as "Mommsen." Cross-references to my translation are enclosed in square brackets.

² Notably in Oswald Holder-Egger, "Untersuchungen über einige annalistische Quellen zur Geschichte des v. und vi. Jahrhunderts," *Neues Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde* 1 (1876) 259-68; Mommsen, pp. 266-67; Roberto Cessi, "Studi sulle fonti dell'eta gotica e longobarda, II: Prosperi Continuatio Havniensis," *Archivio Muratoriano* 22 (1922) 587-641; M.A. Wes, *Das Ende des Kaisertums im Westen des Römischen Reichs*, trans. K.E. Mittring (The Hague 1967).

³ Mommsen included all the material he believed came from the consular annals in the main body of his edition of the *Consularia Italica*, pp. 298-333; the post-523 material written by the seventh-century chronicler followed, pp. 337-39; the rest of the text, comprising mainly material from Isidore's *Chronica Maiora*, ed. Mommsen, *MGH, Auct. Antig.* XI (Berlin 1896) 399-488 and the chronicler's source for papal chronology, was put in the introduction to the edition, pp. 267-71.

⁴ The best discussion of the manuscript is in Mommsen, pp. 266-67. See also the appendix below.

⁵ See the comments of Wes (at n. 2) 66.

⁶ Cessi (at n. 2) 625; Holder-Egger (at n. 2) 266 suggested, on less probable grounds, that the chronicler came from Milan.

⁷ Mommsen, p. 267; see above, p. 62.

⁸ For a discussion of the chronicler's role by a thoughtful practitioner of the form, see Hydatius, *Continuatio chronicorum Hieronymorum ad a. CCCCLXVIII* preface, ed. Mommsen, *MGH, Auct. Antiq. XI* (Berlin 1896) 13-14

⁹ Mommsen, p. 266.

¹⁰ Mommsen, p. 309, *ordo prior* and *ordinis posterioris margo, s.a.* 476, 2 [1394, 1427m]. The same term is used to describe Belisarius (p. 269, no. 28 [1508]) and the Lombard general Sundrarius (p. 339, no. 22 [1554]); similar descriptions are given of Pierus, a count of Odoacer (*qui bellicis rebus praeerat* p. 319, s.a. 491, 1 [1452]), and Theodoric (*expertus bellicis rebus*, p. 317, s.a. 490 [1450]).

¹¹ Prosper *Epitoma Chronicon* 1375, ed. Mommsen, *MGH, Auct. Antiq. IX* (Berlin 1892) 483-84. Mommsen, p. 339, no. 23 [1555]. Note also the seventh-century writer's concluding remarks on the Lombard Queen Rosemund, who killed her husband, failed to make her lover king, then fled with him to Ravenna (Mommsen, pp. 337-38, no. 5 [1521]: *sed non longo inibi potiti praesidio vita caruere*).

¹² Mommsen, p. 339, no. 17 [1545].

¹³ Prosper *Epitoma Chronicon* 1367, 1375, ed. Mommsen, pp. 483-84.

¹⁴ Georg Hille, *De Continuatore Prosperi a. 641 Havniensi* (Berlin 1866) 12.

¹⁵ Cessi (at n. 2) 624-25.

¹⁶ Mommsen, p. 269, no. 33 [1524]. Mommsen himself dismisses this as the error of a later compiler, but that conclusion is hardly necessary. This mistake is no more glaring than the seventh-century chronicler's attribution of Belisarius's deeds to Asbad. See Cessi (at n. 2) 622, and immediately above, pp. 55-6.

¹⁷ Mommsen, p. 337, no. 1-3 [1504, 1507, 1518]. Cessi (at n. 2) 610-11. Procopius tells us that Asbad was a Gepid in Roman service who was at various times a bodyguard of Justinian, a garrison commander in Thrace, and one of Narses's sub-commanders in his successful campaign against Totila. Asbad is credited with giving Totila his death wound. See Procopius *Bellum Gothicum* 7.38.4-6, 9; 8.26.13; 8.32.22-24, ed. J. Haury (Leipzig 1905) 2:467-68, 631, 658-59.

¹⁸ Prosper *Epitoma Chronicon* 1278, 1286, 1294, 1310 (on Boniface), 1335 (on Litorius), 1342 (on Sebastian), ed. Mommsen, pp. 469-74, 476, 478.

¹⁹ Mommsen, p. 307, *ordo prior* and *ordinis posterioris margo*, s.a. 475, 1 [1389, 1423m]; p. 309, *ordinis posterioris margo*, s.a. 475, 2 [1424m]; s.a. 476, 1-2 [1427m, 1428m]; p. 317, s.a. 490 [1450].

²⁰ See n. 19 above.

²¹ Mommsen, p. 317, s.a. 490 [1450].

²² Mommsen, p. 269, no. 28, 29 [1508, 1509].

²³ Mommsen, p. 337, no. 1, 2 [1504, 1507].

²⁴ Mommsen, p. 337, no. 3, 4 [1518, 1520].

²⁵ Mommsen, p. 337, no. 4 [1520].

²⁶ Isidore, *Chronica Maiora* 409, 413, ed. Mommsen, *MGH, Auct. Antiq.* XI (Berlin 1896) 478. Mommsen, p. 338, no. 10, 13 [1536, 1541]. Mommsen's argument (*idem.* nn. 3, 5, 6) that both writers derived these entries from a common, Italian, source is not convincing.

²⁷ Mommsen, p. 338, no. 10, 11, 13 [1536, 1538, 1541]; p. 339, no. 19, 20 [1550, 1551]. Note how the coincidence of internal and foreign troubles is stressed, as it was in connection with the events of 476. Cf. *ibid.*, *ordinis posterioris margo*, s.a. 476, 1 [1427m]: "*dum sese interius Romanae vires perimunt, externae gentes quae simulata amicitia Romano iure suberant adversum eum consurgunt.*"; cf. p. 338, no. 11 [1538] (revolt of Focas): "*Romani dum undique bella sustinent et gravibus proeliis republicae damna multiplicari vident, dum foris hostes superare nequeunt, intra sese ad debellandum accenduntur.*" also *ibid.*, no. 13 [1541]: "*Haec dum interius in republica aguntur, Persi adversum exterius excitantur.*"

²⁸ Mommsen, p. 339, no. 21-23 [1552, 1554, 1555]; see above, p. 7.

²⁹ Mommsen, p. 339, no. 16, 22 [1544, 1554].

³⁰ Mommsen, p. 339, no. 16, 17, [1544, 1545] (the conquests of Agilulf); *ibid.*, 22 [1554] (The victories of Duke Sundrarius "*qui apud Agilulfum bellicis rebus instructus erat.*")

³¹ Mommsen, p. 338, no. 8 [1532].

³² Mommsen, p. 337, no. 2 [1507]. Gregory the Great *Epistolae* 5.38 (where tax collectors are even crueller than the most abominable Lombards); *ibid.* 7.23, ed. P. Ewald and L.M. Hartmann, *MGH, Ep. I*, pt. 1 (Berlin 1887) 325, 468. For a recent discussion of Gregory's attitude toward

and dealings with the Lombards, see Jeffrey Richards, *Consul of God* (London 1980) 181-94. Although Gregory did not consider the Lombards beyond redemption, he did think of them as a very cruel and faithless people. There is no trace of such an opinion in the Copenhagen Continuation.

³³ Mommsen, p. 337, no. 5 [1521].

³⁴ *Liber Pontificalis, Vita Deusdedit and Vita Bonifatii V*, ed. Mommsen, *MGH, Gesta pontificum Romanorum I* (Berlin 1898) 166, 168. The complete independence of the *Liber Pontificalis* and the Copenhagen Continuation, even on matters of papal chronology, is very remarkable.

³⁵ See Isidore, *Chronica Maiora* 357, 381, 384, 385, 386a, 389a, 389b, 394a, 397a, 397b, ed. Mommsen, pp. 469-70, 472-75, for his coverage of the fifth- and sixth-century controversies.

³⁶ This schism was a result of the Three Chapters controversy, and survived to the later seventh century. Its existence complicated Gregory the Great's efforts to convert the Lombards to Catholicism, since Lombard Catholics such as Queen Theudelinda drew their advisers from among the schismatics. On the controversy, see Emile Amann, "Trois-chaiptres," *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* 15, pt. 2 (Paris 1950) cols. 1868-1924; also note 37 below. If indeed the Copenhagen Chronicler was an inhabitant of the Lombard Kingdom, the schism may have affected his view of the empire. See Walter Goffart, "Rome, Constantinople, and the Barbarians," *American Historical Review* 86 (1981) 300-01.

³⁷ See Richards, *Consul of God* (at n. 32) 181, 191-94, for Gregory's dealings with Theudelinda.

³⁸ Mommsen, p. 270, no. 55 [1537].

³⁹ Mommsen, p. 339, no. 21 [1552].

⁴⁰ Orosius, Prosper, Eugippius (*Vita S. Severini*, ed. in Rudolf Noll, *Das Leben des Heiligen Severin* (Berlin 1963)) and Ennodius of Pavia (*Vita B. Epiphaniï Ticinensis episcopi*, ed. in J.P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, LXIII, cols. 207-38) were among those fifth- and sixth-century writers who discounted military measures as a solution to the problems of their times. A more combative attitude can be seen in Gregory of Tours (*Historiarum libri X*, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, *MGH, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum I*, pt. 1 (2nd. edition, Hannover 1937-52), John of Biclar (*Chronica DLXVII-DXC*, ed. Mommsen, *MGH, Auct. Antiq.* XI [Berlin 1896] 207-20), and Isidore of Seville (see next note). See

Goffart (at n. 36) 300-01.

⁴¹ This can be seen most clearly in Isidore's *Historia Gothorum*, but the same attitude is evident in the latter parts of the *Chronica Maiora*. See Isidore *Historia Gothorum Wandalorum Sueborum*, ed. Mommsen, *MGH, Auct. Antiq.* XI (Berlin 1896) 241-303; *Chronica Maiora* 403, 415, 416b, ed. Mommsen, pp. 477, 479, 480.

⁴² His concern for the welfare of Italy as a whole is seen throughout but particularly in Mommsen, p. 337 no. 3-4 [1518, 1520]. The continuator's use of the phrase *totiusque Italiae* at no. 3 is particularly interesting. *Tota Italia, omnis Italia*, and other variants were stock phrases of Italian political thought in the sixth through ninth centuries, indicating a continuing consciousness of the historical unity of the peninsula and a desire for its reunification. It is interesting to note that the *Liber Pontificalis*, as we have seen above (p. 60), contemporaneously with the Copenhagen Continuation credited Eleutherius's victories over usurpers with bringing peace to all Italy: "*facta est pax in tota Italia*" (*Vita Deusdedit* ed. Mommsen, p. 166). On this subject see Peter Klassen, "Italien zwischen Byzanz und dem Frankreich," *Settimane di Studio* 27 (1981) 920, 961-66. Also cf. Isidore *Chronica Maiora* 416b, ed. Mommsen, p. 480: "*Postquam [Sisebutum] religiosissimus Suinthila princeps bellum cum reliquis Romanis urbibus iniit celerique victoria totius Spaniae monarchiam regni primus obtinuit.*"

⁴³ Chris Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy* (Totowa, N.J. 1981) 71-72, 75-77.

APPENDIX

The Origin and Nature of the Tripartite Account of the Later Fifth Century in Copenhagen Ms. 454

The Copenhagen manuscript is a puzzle for any scholar interested in the material it contains. The account it gives of the later fifth century is in some places incomplete and elsewhere all too full. There is nothing for the years 458-473, neither a consular list nor any

historical entries, whereas the period from 475 to 489 is covered more than once. The omission of a number of years is easily accounted for; the multiple coverage of others is more difficult. The reader may find it useful to have this section of the manuscript described in some detail.

The Copenhagen compilation proceeds in a normal fashion to 457, where the anomalies begin. The last entry for 457 is followed by the consular date for 475, and the consular list, rather fully annotated, continues from that year to 489. This is Mommsen's *ordo prior*. The consuls of 489 are succeeded by entries describing the accession of Leo the younger and the death of Leo the elder, both of which took place in 474. Next follow the consuls for 475, and a second account of the events of that year. The manuscript thereafter supplies the consuls for all the years to 489 (as well as a number of entries), before resuming the proper order of years with the consuls of 490. This recension, Mommsen's *ordo posterior*, shares some material with the first but is not identical to it. Most of the entries found in it are very brief and are cast in the formal style of the consular annals. Where both recensions report the same event, they sometimes give different day dates for it. A most interesting fact is that although the bulk of the unique material -- the notices derived from unknown consular sources -- is different in the two recensions, the entries derived from Isidore and from the continuator's papal list -- there is one of each -- are reproduced in both series with only minor variations. Also the two consular lists are virtually identical.

The third recension, Mommsen's *ordinis posterioris margo*, is cast in the form of a long marginal addition to the second series, and describes the years 475-480 a third time. This text is very similar to that of the *ordo prior* but is fuller, containing both detail and dates not found in the other account.

How the manuscript came to its present state is a difficult question, but one that must be explored by anyone who wishes to evaluate its contents (see n. 2 above for the most important scholarly treatments of the ms.). Hille, the continuation's first editor, believed that at least four different scribes were involved in creating the present arrangement. He thought that the *ordo prior* was written by the seventh-century compiler, while the *ordo posterior* was originally a list of

marginal corrections provided by a writer with access to a more complete copy of the first scribe's source. A third scribe had incorporated the *ordo posterior* in the text; a fourth, again with access to the fifth-century source, had added the *ordinis posterioris margo*.

This rather complex theory was rejected by later investigators, who believed that the current arrangement was purposely or mistakenly created by one or perhaps two contemporaneous writers; Mommsen and Cessi were agreed that the tripartite structure resulted from the struggle of scribes to interpret a difficult archetype. Mommsen showed that the confused state of the manuscript was the work of the copyists who wrote it in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries. As proof of this he pointed to the existence of the already referred to duplicate entries in the *ordo prior* and the *ordo posterior* that must have been single entries in the archetype of the Copenhagen manuscript. Although he believed that some later material had found its way into the manuscript tradition, Mommsen said that the text of all three recensions went back in their essentials to the seventh-century compiler. He explained the marginalia, both in the Prosper section and in the *ordo posterior*, as the work of a second scribe using the same archetype to correct the errors of the person, his contemporary, who initially copied the Copenhagen manuscript.

Cessi's monograph on the Copenhagen Continuation contains the most detailed reconstruction of the evolution of its text. Cessi thought that the archetype had a main text and many marginal notes and corrections placed within and near it. He attributed the bulk of these notes and corrections to the seventh-century compiler. When this annotated archetype was copied to make Copenhagen MS. 454, the text became more disordered. According to Cessi, when the scribe got to the section describing the years A.D. 475-489, which was particularly confused, he first copied the ampler part, which Cessi identified with the marginalia in the archetype and the *ordo prior* of the resulting manuscript; then the scribe went back and copied the briefer main text, producing the *ordo posterior*. Like Mommsen, Cessi thought that the *ordinis posterioris margo* was the work of a contemporary of the scribe who did the bulk of the text; but unlike Mommsen (and Holder-Egger as well), he did not believe it had any authority. Rather, he dismissed it as an attempt by the second scribe to correct the poorly-copied text and construct a smoother, more literary account out of the material before him.

Cessi's picture of a careless scribe copying a complex manuscript and having his work corrected by a more careful contemporary is convincing, but some of the details of his argument must be rejected. Wes is correct to say that it is impossible to believe that the details of fifth-century history found in the *ordinis posterioris margo* were invented by a writer of a later century (see n. 2 above 66). Holder-Egger and Mommsen were right to consider the marginal recension as a fuller, if somewhat embroidered, representative of the archetypal text that also lies behind the *ordo prior*. Nor is it as simple to identify the lost sources behind the unique material, as Cessi would have it. But that aside, Cessi's reconstruction, insofar as it agrees with Mommsen's more cautious opinion, is probably very close to the truth.