A SPECIFIC SENSE OF THE WORD *PATRIA*
IN NORSE AND NORMAN LATIN

In an old Norwegian chronicle, the so-called «Scotch» *Historia Norwegiae*, the word *patria* appears used in a strange way, apt to startle the reader.

In learned discussion, this chronicle is traditionally surnamed «Scotch», not because it is thought to have been composed in Scotland, but because the manuscript has been discovered over there. To be sure, one of the best authorities on Norse literature, Professor Finnur Jónsson, of Copenhagen¹, is of opinion that the book virtually has been

written by a foreigner, an Englishman or perhaps a German; but this assertion has not been admitted by anybody else and is founded upon rather weak arguments. The whole character of the book, as well as many single expressions, seem to put it out of doubt that the author is a Norwegian.

There has been much disagreement about the date of the work; but, at this moment, only two different opinions, in truth not widely varying, are in vogue. Finnur Jónsson has accepted the dating of Sophus Bugge 1, referring the composition of the book to the second decade of the 13th century. In accordance with so good an authority as the late Professor Gustav Storm, of Oslo 2, I have tried to give the proof that the book must have been written as early as about 1170 3. It is to be noted that it is dedicated to a certain Agnellus who seems to be Master Thomas Agnellus, archdeacon of Wells (England), 1169-ca. 1195 4. This circumstance has some importance just in regard to linguistic peculiarities of the treatise.

Now, the first half of this work is occupied by a geographical description of Norway, and here we meet with the word patria used with quite a particular meaning 5. Norway is said to be composed of three habitable zones, the land of the Finns and two really Norwegian parts. These two parts the author describes as comprising each four patriae, each patria again comprising a certain number of provinciae, — so: zona maritima iii patrias complectens 6, mediterranea zona iii patrias complectens 7. He even specifies the names of all the eight patriae: prima patria dicitur 8, etc. So we are able to discern very accurately what he means by patria, and it appears that by this word he has translated the Norwegian term lag, i.e. law, as signifying the district organized about a single great court, in modern Norwegian generally styled lagdæme.

Evidently, such a use of patria originates from the general sense of the word, as signifying not only a whole regnum, but also a part of it, regio. But, even in the last-named meaning, the word is to be commonly taken in a quite general sense; we may translate it simply by « country »

1. Aarbøger for nordisk Oldkyndighed, 1873, p. 37; Norsk Sagaskrivning i Irland, p. 41.
3. Innhogg og utsyn i norsk historie, p. 211 ss.
5. I quote the excellent edition of Gustav Storm in his Monumenta historica Norvegiae, pp. 70-124.
8. P. 771.
or "part of the country". The Norwegian author, on the other hand, has employed the word in a strictly administrative sense, as defining a sharply circumscribed district, the middle term between the country and the county (fylke). If he had written a geography of England, for instance, he certainly would have called the Danelaw patria Danorum in contrast both to the regnum Anglorum and to the minor counties.

Inevitably the question arises how the Norwegian writer has come to choose the word patria when trying to find a Latin synonym for his native term. I venture the assertion that nowhere else will you find the word used exactly in the same way as here, and so, at least to a certain degree, the originality of the author is indisputable. But I think there ought to be some kind of transition between the general use of the word and the specific meaning assigned to it by the Norwegian work, and I have looked eagerly for possible instances of such transitional use. I have come across very few; but those few appear to have a very characteristic origin.

In the Norman history of William of Jumièges, at several places the name of Normandy is simply given as patria Normannorum. This work belongs to the latter part of the 11th century, and in another work of the same epoch, the Norman Chronicon Fontenellense, we find the same term. From the same period, from the days of William the Conqueror, we have a document where a county is named patria: a vassal holds a castle quia vicecomes erat eiusdem patrie. And, lastly, Ordericus Vitalis puts in the mouth of William the Conqueror on his death-bed the designation of Normandy as haec patria in contrast to England, Anglicum regnum.

It is a glaring fact that all these quotations belong to Latin works of Northern France and most particularly of Normandy, and they tend to show a special connection between the Norwegian work and French-Norman literature.

Indeed, several peculiarities of language lead towards the same conclusion. Already Sophus Bugge pointed out a similarity of phraseology in the dedication of the Historia Norwegiae and a dedicatory letter of William of Jumièges, and in my opinion you will find quite the same style in a prologue of William of Conches, a Norman author from the

---

1. Gesta Normannorum ducum, ed. par Jean Marx, pp. 48, 60, 73.
middle of the 12th century. It is my impression that, somewhere in France, there must have existed a literary school that cultivated and taught a particular style of Latinity, just that florid, quasi-poetic style of *Historia Norwegiae*.

Gustav Storm, the editor of the book, asserted that much of its Latin were of French origin. As a proof he did not allege more than three single words of the text, and those words did not all of them possess the like demonstrative power. The first of them, *velter*, really is said by the monk of St. Gallen to belong to the *Gallica lingua* and has a Celtic origin; but it was adopted as well by the Germans as by the Frenchmen and the Italians. The second word, *scurio*, affords a stronger proof, being at least a Roman word, surviving in Italian and Spanish as well as in French. The third word, *canutus*, stands in about the same position, still existing in French and in Italian. In addition, it may perhaps be said that the use of the word *regrare*, as well as of the phrase *susum et jusum*, points to Italy. On the other hand, the word *forisfacere* particularly seems to belong to English juridical language. A great deal of the poetic phraseology of the author is borrowed from the common Vergilian stock; the *Aeneid* seems to have been his text-book in the grammar school.

He himself tells us that he was a pupil of Agnellus. If we accept, as even I have done, the very probable hypothesis that this Agnellus is identical with the English archdeacon Master Thomas Agnellus, we are easily led to the conclusion that the Norwegian author had his education in France, Thomas being a born Frenchman, a brother of the canon Stephen of Tournai. But I cannot leave it unmentioned that the surname Agnellus, as far as I know, apart from this single instance, never was in use in England nor in France, whereas it is rather common in medieval Italy. Now, between the Norman kingdom of Sicily and the great Anglo-Norman empire in the North, there was a very intimate intercourse during the 12th century, and perhaps the Agnellus of the *Historia Norwegiae* affords a new link in that intercourse, leading from the Normans of Italy through Normandy and England over to Norway.

Oslo, Sept. 1926.

Halvdan Køht.

3. P. 83[19].
4. P. 85[2].
5. P. 10[16].
6. P. 73[2].
7. P. 80[2].
8. P. 72[1].