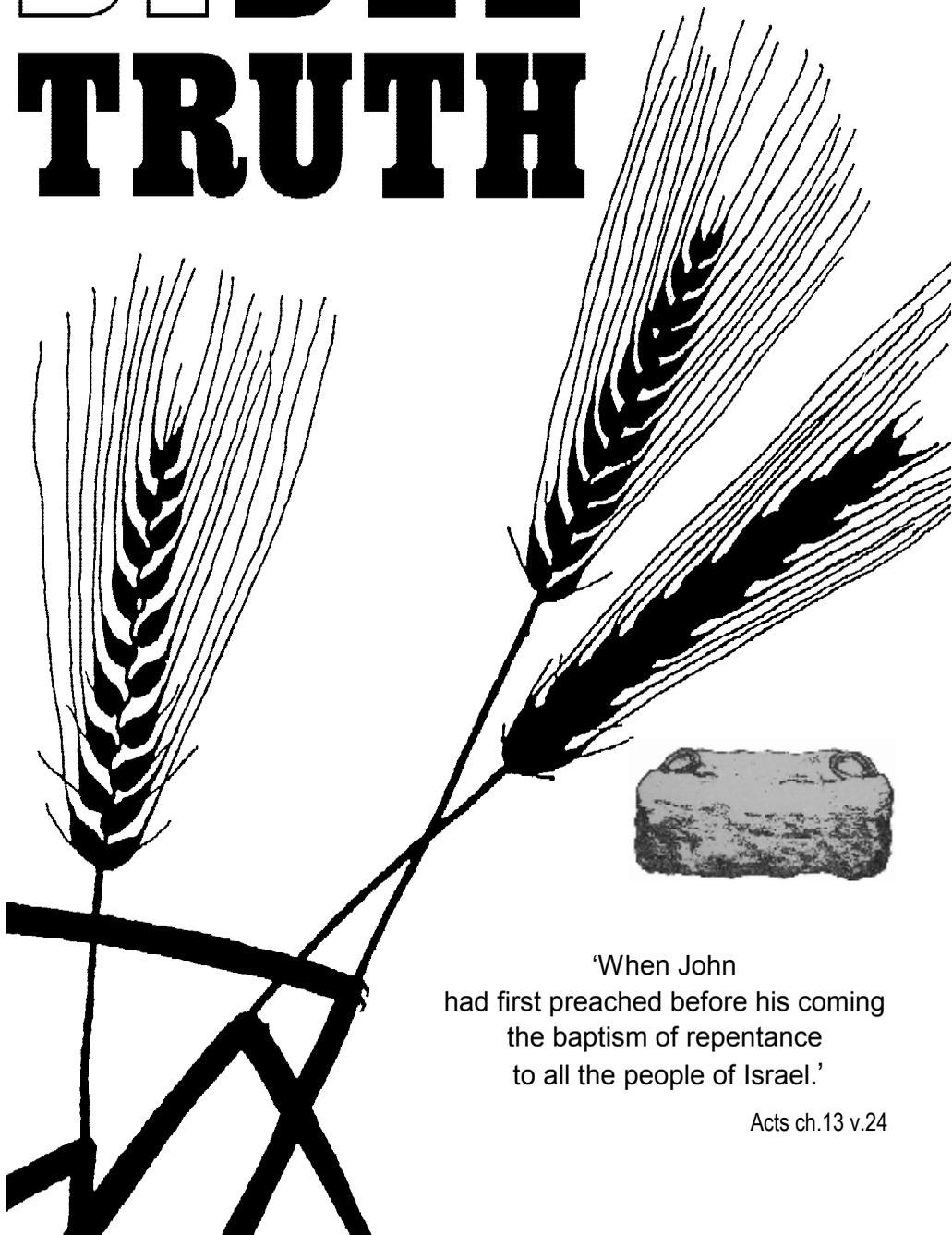


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‘When John
had first preached before his coming
the baptism of repentance
to all the people of Israel.’

Acts ch.13 v.24

KING DAN OF DENMARK

By Rosemary Northway



Editor's note - The name 'Dan' and its derivations (Don, Dn... etc.) occurs in a swathe of geographical names across Europe stretching from the Black Sea to the western coasts. This phenomenon indicates a route taken by an ancient migrating people thought to be part of the so called lost Tribes of Israel. Because of the North Sea, present day Denmark is one of the furthest places west that they could have travelled before passing across to the British Isles. What about the name Dan itself, does it have a connection here? It is remarkable how the early kings of De(a)nmark were called Dan which perhaps adds weight to the concept that the land was occupied by the tribe of Dan at an early stage. The following article looks at one particular aspect of the name.

Who founded Denmark, or Danmark as the Danes themselves call it? Saxo Grammaticus, or Saxo the Learned, (c 1150-1220) was the Danish Chronicler who identified the founding fathers of the nation in his *Gesta Danorum*, a 16 volume heroic history of the legendary and historical kings of Denmark.

Biographical details of Saxo are somewhat scanty, but by his own account he was born in Sjaelland, (Zealand, Seeland) and held the post of secular clerk or secretary to Archbishop Absalon of Lund and Bishop of Roskilde. He comments that it was the Archbishop who encouraged him to write this history, with a view to arousing a patriotic spirit among the people by thus glorifying the fatherland. As the Archbishop was also first advisor to the then king Valdemar I, who had just emerged as the victor in a civil war, it may be that the idea was to promote unity among the king's subjects. The Archbishop

died in 1202 before the work was finished, but Saxo finally completed it in 1216 under the patronage of Anders Sunesen, Absalon's nephew and successor.

In style and scope, the *Gesta Danorum* is similar to Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* (finished in 1136, but much shorter!), and which also starts with the story of a first putative king, Brutus, after whom Britain was named, and who was the great-grandson of Prince Aeneas of Troy. Like Geoffrey, Saxo draws his information from legends, sagas, poems and his own reworking of his various sources, a process which takes up the first nine volumes of his history.

The first king of Denmark, then, is stated to be Dan I who subsequently gave his name to the country and people that he ruled, although the title 'King' was not used in Denmark for some time. Dan had a brother, Angul, who eventually went to Britain and changed that island's name to Angleland, i.e. England. Dan married a lady named Grytha, by whom he had two sons, Humble and Lothar.

According to Saxo, Dan's and Angul's father was called Humble, but other sources from which he obtained his information give differing accounts as to who their father was. Interestingly, the genealogical website *Geni* agrees that the father's name was Humble, but that he was actually Olaf the Humble, and the dynastic name was therefore Olafsson. This website also has other biographical details of Dan who, unlike his father, was nicknamed 'Mikillate', which translates roughly as 'the Magnificent', or 'the Proud'. He was born in Hleithra, Nordjylland, Jutland, in AD 412 and died in Denmark in AD 450. Dan is referred to in other sources as 'Mikillate', but where the website obtained the other information the writer of this article has been unable to discover.

The Chronicle of Lethrense gives Dan's father as a King Ypper of Uppsala, Sweden. Dan ruled Denmark, while his brother, Nori, ruled Norway and his other brother, Osten, ruled Sweden. Dan first ruled in Zealand, where he saved his people from an attack by the Emperor Augustus. As a result of this, the Jutes and the men of Fyn and Scania accepted him as King, so that he became the first king of a united Denmark. His wife's name was Dana, and their son's, Ro.

The Skjoldungsaga makes Dan's father a powerful magnate named Rig, who married Dana, daughter of the Lord of Danpsted, and from her came the royal title. Their son, Dan, became ruler of the Danes, to whom he gave his name.

There are several similar stories, too numerous to mention here. Saxo listed two other kings of Denmark who were also called Dan. Dan II is described as 'proud, luxury loving and an oppressor' who cared nothing for his subjects. Dan III came to the throne at a young age. When he was 12 years old he became weary of the petitioners who were pressing him either to fight the aggressive neighbouring Saxons, or pay them tribute, so he chose to fight. On being given the word, the Danes filled the River Elbe with their ships, packed together so tightly that they formed a bridge that the Danish warriors could use to land on the enemy's shore. Such a fierce battle ensued that the King of Saxony was forced to yield, and to pay the Danes tribute!

It is by no means certain how many, if any, of these kings actually existed, but Saxo's work constituted the first full history of Denmark, and today he is regarded by the Danish people as their foremost chronicler.
