Jordanes Redeemed:
A Reconsideration of the Purpose and Literary Merit of the *Getica*

Master’s Thesis

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Abstract

Jordanes, writing in mid-sixth century Constantinople, provides us with the only history of the Goths to survive from antiquity. Crucially, Jordanes wrote his history (known as the *Getica* and written in Latin) at a moment when Roman-Gothic relations had disintegrated into total war, as the emperor Justinian was engaged in the conquest of Gothic Italy. That Jordanes, a Roman/Byzantine citizen of Gothic descent, would write a history of a people with whom Rome was currently at war is clearly significant and had no precedent in Roman tradition. Yet despite this, there remains a paucity of scholarship which treats seriously Jordanes’ historiographical aims and literary merit. Moreover, most of what work there is on Jordanes has denounced his alleged derivative nature, stylistic decadence, and intellectual limitation. Some recent commentators have departed from such views, but ultimately grant Jordanes only limited concessions to authorial autonomy and literary ability. This paper seeks to push this rehabilitation further.

A close reading of the *Getica* reveals both a marked level of authorial independence from its sources (contrary to what has been assumed before) and sophisticated literary craft at work. The latter is demonstrated by looking closely at two heretofore unappreciated allusions to the *Aeneid* seamlessly interwoven into the narrative of the *Getica* which work symbolically to incorporate the Goths into the fold of Roman history. Indeed, this is exemplary of one of Jordanes’ primary thematic thrusts in the *Getica*: the “classicization” of Gothic history; that is, his intention at all times to draw the
Goths out of the northern hinterland and into Mediterranean antiquity. It is clear that Jordanes’ historical gaze is not only one that looks to the past but more importantly one that is deeply rooted in and highly conscious of the present. In other words, Jordanes means to account for the state of the Goths in the mid sixth century as an incorporated people of the Roman Empire by articulating the greater Gothic past as likewise related to a Roman past. If my reappraisal of Jordanes stands, then he must be taken seriously both as a competent author and as a singular source for understanding the dynamics of Gothic integration into the Roman Empire during the late antique period.
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To Professors Huber, McDonough, Perry, and Ridyard at the University of the South, I owe a debt of humble gratitude for teaching me that a life of the mind is one worth living.

To my friend and mentor Anthony Kaldellis I would simply offer thanks for the countless hours he has given of himself both in the shaping of this thesis and at numerous other moments in my intellectual development. If the following pages possess any merit, it is due almost entirely to him.

My greatest debt remains to my father, whose inspired parenting and unfailing encouragement and optimism are ever at the beginning and end of all my academic endeavors.
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**Introduction**

This study both advances and departs from recent studies of Jordanes that have sought to award him a decidedly autonomous authorial voice. It furthers this trend by supporting and continuing such revisionism, but departs from reinterpretations that have given Jordanes only limited and provisional concessions of originality and literary skill. To that end, this study has three interrelated objectives: to establish Jordanes’ independence as an author and thinker; to expose heretofore unrecognized examples of Jordanes’ literary ability; and to begin to reveal and account for Jordanes’ political ideology. To the first, I argue that Jordanes’ *Getica* can no longer be considered either a faithful reproduction or abbreviation of Cassiodorus’ lost Gothic history for a number of reasons; most important among them, the presence of various thematic and allusive elements that cannot be derivative of a Cassiodoran model. The second is illustrated through analysis of a range of literary strategies in the text with particular emphasis on two instances of intertextual discourse between the *Getica* and the *Aeneid*. The third objective is met by drawing upon findings from the first two which in turn work to reconcile both Jordanes and his work to the realities of mid-sixth century Justinianic rule and to the more immediate context of the Roman conquest of Ostrogothic Italy. I argue that, at its heart, the *Getica* is the
of reaching definitive conclusions about the text, and, as such, this study does not purport to do so concerning those topics which it broaches. It means rather to evidence the very existence of Jordanes’ literary and political agenda and to convince of the need for further inquiry into those agenda.

But before I commence, a note must be made regarding, what might be considered, the limited scope of this study: that it does not incorporate into its arguments Jordanes’ epitome of Roman history *De summa temporum vel origine actibusque Romanorum* (or more simply the *Romana*).¹ Because the *Getica* is by far our lengthiest and only specialized ancient account of Gothic history, it has dominated scholarly discussion at the expense of the *Romana*. Recent writers, most notably O’Donnell, Goffart, and Croke have argued well that to ignore the *Romana* when considering Jordanes’ historical aims is tantamount to ignoring a substantial part of his whole corpus, which Jordanes himself presents as integrated.² Their points are well taken as it is clear that, in combination, the *Romana* and the *Getica* form one complete historical unit, as per Jordanes’ own intent. In the preface to the *Getica*, Jordanes states that he was already working on the *Romana* as he began his history of the Goths.³ Upon finishing the *Getica*, he returned to the *Romana* to complete it. Likewise, Jordanes mentions the *Getica* in the preface to the *Romana*.⁴ Such references are important, and in them Jordanes invites his

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³ *Get.* 1.
⁴ *Romana* 4.
reader to be sensitive to intertextual discourse. This, however, should not preclude study of either the *Romana* or the *Getica* in isolation from the other. Let us not forget that the Gothic history is a part of a whole – not simply a chapter or digression within the framework of the *Romana*. Indeed Jordanes is sure to declare that the *Getica* comes complete with its own preface and conclusion; in this we should recognize that Jordanes directs the reader to appreciate both its separateness and association with the *Romana*. In the present study, I focus on its separateness.

**Past Historiography**

A brief overview of more than a century of work on Jordanes is in order. From the 1880s to the 1980s, scholarship on Jordanes rendered him a practically illiterate and impotent hack. This defamation saw its beginnings in the preface to Theodor Mommsen’s 1882 critical editions of the *Romana* and *Getica*, in which Jordanes was written off as a parrot to Cassiodorus’ twelve book *Historia Gothorum*, which, though lost, was still assumed to be a superior literary and historical achievement. By this move, Mommsen not only constructed the conceptual framework by which Jordanes would be understood unquestioningly for a century, but also demarcated the critical grounds on which scholarship, including the present study, still encounters Jordanes; that is, always in relation to Cassiodorus. The concern for Jordanes’ indebtedness to Cassiodorus is, to be sure, not unfounded, as it has its lodestar in the preface to the *Getica* itself. What

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5 *Get*. 3.
Jordanes says about his work’s relation to Cassiodorus’ will be treated later in this study. For now, suffice it to say that what Jordanes does mention about Cassiodorus has proven to be the foremost concern of modern scholars.

Mommsen’s criticism of Jordanes did not simply create a tradition of concern with authorial indebtedness, or “plagiarism” as he would have it, but one that would question his style and even his intelligence.7 Indeed, in the very first line of his 1915 introduction to our only English translation of the Getica, Charles Mierow notes that Jordanes “is not a model of literary excellence or originality.”8 A bit later, we are told that “His book is mainly a compilation, not very carefully made; his style [is] irregular, rambling, uneven, and exhibits to a marked degree the traits of the decadent, crumbling later Latin.”9 And finally, Jordanes is for Mierow not only unoriginal and inelegant, but stupid too. Mierow speaks of an “irresistible charm in his naïve simplicity. He is so credulous, and tells in all sincerity such marvelous tales of the mighty achievements of his people.”10 For Mierow and others later, evidence commonly cited for questioning Jordanes’ intelligence is his “barbarously ungrammatical phraseology and style.”11 Such judgements were based on the classicizing principle that cleverness and good grammar are always found together.12 Until the 1980s literally all work done on Jordanes took for granted his derivative nature, stylistic decadence, and intellectual limitation.13

7 Mommsen (1882), 53.
8 Mierow (1915), 1.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Mierow (1944), 195. Mihaăescu (1978), 10-11. 320 suggests that a lexical and grammatical analysis of Jordanes’ Latin points to a Moesian origin which bears similarities to the characteristic Latin of the army and bureaucracy of the sixth century.
13 Of particular note, see Momigliano (1955).
Lest we think this appraisal of Jordanes tragic in its exceptionality, we should recognize that this sort of literary (and cultural) denigration of things Byzantine has been common in western European and Anglo-American classical studies. Perhaps the most notable voice of this unfortunate tradition was Edward Gibbon, who understood Byzantine culture to be generally uncivilized, corrupt, inactive, and effeminate and its history “a tedious and uniform tale of weakness and misery.”

But with regard to Byzantine literature, he offered that,

They held in their lifeless hands the riches of their fathers, without inheriting the spirit which had created and improved that sacred patrimony: they read, they praised, they compiled, but their languid souls seemed alike incapable of thought and action. In the revolution of ten centuries, not a single discovery was made to exalt the dignity or promote the happiness of mankind.

Such views survived well into the twentieth century, as per Romilly Jenkins’ assessment that: “Byzantine civilization must be characterized, from first to last, as wanting in the great gift which nature reserves for her favorites, poetic feeling and expression.”

Explanations for such ill-conceived views are beyond the scope of this study; however, I would suggest that such thinking has been, and is still, complicit in the mischaracterization of Jordanes.

In part, this poor view of Jordanes is owed to the way in which scholars have utilized the Getica. For the past five hundred years, the text has been used primarily as a foundational source for reconstructing ancient Germanic history and society. Alongside the Getica, other ancient and medieval texts such as Tacitus’ Germania, the Gothic Bible, Paul the Deacon’s Historia Langobardorum, and the Icelandic sagas have served as the

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14 Gibbon (1781), bk. 2 ch.48.
15 Ibid. bk. 2 ch.53.
principal sources for Germanic antiquity. This scholarly agenda – *Germanische Altertumskunde* – saw its beginnings in the fifteenth century as a reaction to those Renaissance Humanists who had claimed the Roman past as the direct inheritance of the Italian states. In response, scholars from the Holy Roman Empire and Scandinavia sought to canonize the aforementioned texts for the purposes of establishing a unique antiquity for the modern peoples of northern Europe. Indeed the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* was established in 1819 to produce critical editions of those sources, among them the texts of Jordanes. Though Germany did not yet exist as a political entity, it was nonetheless increasingly conceived as a cultural unity and nation. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, German scholarship on barbarian historiography became progressively more concerned with establishing a direct, uninterrupted biological and cultural lineage between modern Germans and the Germanic tribes described by Tacitus and Jordanes. After World War II, Germanist scholarship was reformulated by Reinhard Wenskus who removed the issue of race and replaced it with that of tradition. He argued that the early Germanic tribes were not related by kinship but by a shared core of traditions – *Traditionskern* – that can be accessed through the careful study of those same texts that Germanists have always employed. This view is championed today most notably in the influential work of Herwig Wolfram. But like his forebears, Wolfram has

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17 For further discussion, see I. Wood, ‘Barbarians, Historians, and the Construction of National Identities’, *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1.1 (2008), 61-81, here 69-72.
taken little interest in Jordanes as a historian and author in his own right. Wolfram has even gone so far as to write Jordanes out completely from discussions of the *Getica* and to replace his name with that of Cassiodorus.\(^{20}\)

In the past thirty years, however, some studies have reached beyond old agendas to explore more sympathetically the nature of Jordanes’ historical project. The *Getica*, along with the works of sixth-century historians more generally, has benefited from shifting paradigms in thinking about late antiquity as a period of decline and fall to one of continuity and change. Emphasis has been placed on appreciating these authors within their unique literary milieux and as serious, purposeful writers.\(^{21}\) Scholars like O’Donnell, Croke, Goffart, and Heather have all offered important ideas about Jordanes; however, some of their work still denies him authorial originality and even continues to question his intelligence.\(^{22}\)

**Cassiodorus and Jordanes**

These views appear in the context of the main interest of scholarship on Jordanes: his relationship with, or dependence on, Cassiodorus. As mentioned above, this concern with Cassiodorus stems from what Jordanes says about his own project in the preface to

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the *Getica*. Jordanes has been asked by a certain Castalius to write a Gothic history, or, more precisely, “to condense in my own style in this small book the twelve volumes of [Cassiodorus] Senator on the origin and deeds of the Getae from olden time to the present day, descending through the generations of the kings.”23 From this one statement, and no others, grew the primary scholarly focus on Jordanes. Various views have been asserted. In his *Geschichte der Goten*, Herwig Wolfram argues that in Jordanes we have an intact preservation of Cassiodorus’ history.24 This bears remark. Concerning his own Gothic history, Cassiodorus describes the work in the third person: “Originem Gothicam historiam fecit esse Romanum.”25 This phrase can be and has been translated in a number of ways. Goffart has rendered it, “He made Gothic history to be Roman history.”26 Hodgekin, among other suggestions, has offered, “He made the Gothic origin Roman.”27 Wolfram takes matters in a different direction. Instead of reading *originem Gothicam* as something like ‘the Gothic past’, as most scholars have, Wolfram suggests that it should be interpreted as the title of a distinct ‘text’. To gain access to this alleged ‘text’, Wolfram “turns Cassiodorus’ historical structure upside down and seeks to allow the *Origo Gothica*, the particular origin of the Goths, to reemerge from the *historia Romana*.”28 Wolfram’s references to the *Origo Gothia* and the *historia Romana* are, of course, Cassiodorus’ history of the Goths. Recall, however, that Cassiodorus’ history is completely lost. Wolfram bypasses this inconvenience by envisioning “the *Origo

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23 Get. 1.
25 Variae 9.25.5.
Gothica, [as] the work of Cassiodorus in the version of Jordanes.” In this scheme Jordanes is a faithful facsimile of Cassiodorus, and Cassiodorus is a reliable mouthpiece for an established collection of Gothic historical tradition (Origo Gothica) to which he would have had access in his service to Theodoric. Jordanes is simply written out of the picture and his words are taken to be not his own, but those of Cassiodorus. Any possibility of Jordanes’ own contribution to the Getica, and the implications thereof, are pushed aside so that Wolfram might posit the existence of a preserved cache of legitimate Gothic traditions. The very existence of this Origo Gothica, however, is predicated upon the assumption that Cassiodorus’ words originem Gotham refer to an authentic corpus of knowledge about the Gothic past referred to by no other ancient or medieval author. This study will challenge the validity of such thinking.

Similarly, Peter Heather’s Goths and Romans, despite its many virtues, holds that Jordanes not only copied parts of Cassiodorus, but did so entirely unaware of its thematic impact on the Getica. In short, Heather suggests that because Cassiodorus was in the employ of Theodoric, his presentation of Ostrogothic history would have been laudatory, so therefore those parts of the Getica that present Ostrogoths in a positive light must have been culled from Cassiodorus. This is worth considering, but it is irresponsible simply to assume, and then to conclude, that because Cassiodours probably extolled the Ostrogoths, then any positive presentation in Jordanes is necessarily derivative. Heather does not entertain the possibility of Jordanes’ own purposive intent as an independent author. Such thinking is indicative of a large body of scholarship that has sought always to see

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29 Ibid. 3.
Cassiodorus in the *Getica* while ignoring Jordanes’ presence. Heather goes on to suggest that, “Jordanes, a competent but unlearned ex-military secretary, has simply culled information from his acknowledged model, without realizing that [Cassiodorus’] text, written at the court of Gothic kings, distorts history to praise them.”31 Heather, then, presents us with a picture of Jordanes as a careless copyist who appends sources to his text while unaware of their thematic implications for his own work. The present analysis of the *Getica* aims to render such views untenable.

Despite a continuance of some of the old beliefs about Jordanes, the past thirty years have also produced studies that explore Jordanes’ own historical voice. It will become clear that I ultimately disagree with the conclusions of most of these recent interpretations, but they are nevertheless to be roundly commended for offering discussions that are less concerned with whether or not Jordanes was an idiot and a plagiarist, but instead focus on the nature of his historical project – indeed something worth arguing about. Scholars have been right to return to the preface of the *Getica*, as it is here that Jordanes, like so many other ancient authors, provides the reader with a self-conscious presentation of the work at hand. O’Donnell and Croke have drawn attention to that part of the preface where Jordanes states that he has added to his history “fitting matters from some Greek and Latin histories.”32 Indeed, throughout the text Jordanes specifically mentions nineteen sources from which he drew (O’Donnell must have tallied incorrectly, as he says the number is fourteen). Not only do these source-references lend credence to Jordanes’ authorial autonomy, but the fact that he mentions using Greek

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31 Heather (1991), 52.
32 *Get*. 3.
histories is of particular note because “there is no evidence that Cassiodorus himself ever could read Greek.”\textsuperscript{33} Though we can never be wholly certain of this, there are good reasons to think so. For example, none of Cassiodorus’ works exhibit marked influence of Greek thought.\textsuperscript{34} Furthermore, in a passage from the \textit{Institutiones}, a work of his later years, Cassiodorus offers exuberant praise for those who knew both Greek and Latin fluently.\textsuperscript{35} Finally, we know that the Vivarium, the monastery which Cassiodorus founded in his retirement, produced an impressive body of Latin translations of Greek texts. Cassiodorus repeatedly mentions the names of the translators; however, he makes no suggestion that he himself ever worked as one. Indeed O’Donnell suggests that Cassiodorus’ desire to see important texts brought over from Greek into Latin may very well be connected with his own inadequacy.\textsuperscript{36} Jordanes did not share the same deficiency. He cites nine different Greek authors in the \textit{Getica}, and outside of his own references, Jordanes states plainly that he employs Greek authors in \textit{Get.10}. If it is true that Cassiodorus did not know Greek, then this must be understood as proof that Jordanes was not simply beholden to Cassiodorus for source material when writing the \textit{Getica}.

Along these lines, Jordanes proves to be in control of the very physical structure of his history. O’Donnell, Croke, Goffart, and Heather all note this. Aside from the thematic coherence of the \textit{Getica} (which I will illustrate presently), Jordanes makes numerous references from one passage back to an earlier one, and, without fail, they are

\textsuperscript{34} O’Donnell (1979), 143.  
\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Inst.} 1.23.2.  
\textsuperscript{36} O’Donnell (1979), 143.
accurate every time.\textsuperscript{37} Such accuracy must be attributed to the hand of Jordanes. It is improbable that he simply lifted them from Cassiodorus; for if he had done so he would have likely included at least one dead-end reference.

\textbf{Recent Scholarship}

Scholars have, for the most part, left behind the old slavish Jordanes devoid of originality of intention, and have proffered their own interpretations of his historical aims. These studies have derived meaning from the \textit{Getica} by reconciling it with the immediate historical context in which it was written; namely the reign of Justinian in the mid-sixth century.\textsuperscript{38} Justinian, therefore, now numbers with Cassiodorus as an interpretive medium through which to examine Jordanes. For example, Goffart and Momigliano understand the \textit{Getica} to be a piece of Justinianic propaganda.\textsuperscript{39} Goffart believes that Jordanes is likely to have been in the employ of Justinian’s court, actively implementing a plan to forward the interests of the Byzantine state in its war against the Ostrogoths and the conquest of Italy.\textsuperscript{40} This interpretation is problematic. Goffart does not offer any insight, specific or general, as to how a text like Jordanes’ was meant to function realistically as propaganda by reconciling the Ostrogoths to Roman imperialism. Who was going to read the \textit{Getica} to this effect? Ostrogoths in Italy? The Roman and Ostrogothic states had been as war for the better part of twenty years when the \textit{Getica}

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Get.} 119 refers back to \textit{Get.} 34; \textit{Get.} 121 to \textit{Get.} 26-7; \textit{Get.} 129 to \textit{Get.} 116-20; \textit{Get.} 130 to \textit{Get.} 82; \textit{Get.} 174 to \textit{Get.} 81.
\textsuperscript{38} Justinian (r.527-565) was a hard-line Roman imperialist who dedicated considerable manpower and treasure to the reconquest of the west – most notably Africa and Italy. Indeed, his wars against the Ostrogoths in Italy lasted nearly twenty years (535-554).
\textsuperscript{39} Momigliano (1955); Goffart (1988).
\textsuperscript{40} For references to Justinian as conqueror, see \textit{Getica} 171-2, 313, 315.
was finished. It is unlikely that a short Gothic history would have been, or even thought to have been, able to ameliorate the Ostrogoths to their Roman aggressors. Furthermore, questions of dissemination arise. Were great numbers of manuscripts of the Getica going to be copied out and brought to Italy? To whom would they go? And what measures were readers expected to take to forward imperial interests? Goffart leaves much unresolved.  

Nevertheless, Goffart still affords Jordanes personal initiative and “the status of a conscious and sometimes original author.” Indeed, Goffart’s study is at once the most thoughtful and engaging piece of Jordanes revisionism and the most implausible. Goffart’s argument seems to have originated as a clever and interesting, but ultimately far-fetched, idea that was pursued too far. Goffart presents the Getica as the love story of the (feminine) Gothic people and the (masculine) Romans. The history is a working-out of a relationship fraught with lover’s quarrels, compromise, and reconciliation that finally concludes with an ending befitting a fairy tale: a marriage, a new-born child and “hopeful promise, under the Lord's favor, to both peoples.” The marriage is, of course, the union of Justinian’s cousin Germanus and Theodoric’s granddaughter Matasuntha, which produced a child, Germanus. The marriage and its place at the very end of Jordanes’ work is of doubtless symbolic and thematic significance, and Goffart was right to see this; however his overall argument lacks believability. Not only is there nothing remotely similar to Goffart’s Getica in the entire corpus of ancient historiography, his arguments

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41 For a similar discussion, see Heather (1991), 38-52.
42 Goffart (1988), 106.
43 Despite my own criticisms, credit is due to Goffart for producing what is still the most extensive literary and historical analysis of Jordanes.
44 In the 2nd edition of his Narrators of Barbarian History Goffart expresses tempered regret at some of the terminology he employed in his analysis of the Getica, namely in regard to ‘the love story’ (2005), xviii.
45 Get. 314.
are just too much of an interpretive stretch. In essence, Goffart’s analysis starts at the conclusion of the Getica, a happy ending, and works its way backward, looking for ways to dovetail that ending with the narrative. Ultimately, though, it is impossible to undermine something so subjective as a personal reading of a text. Nor is it my intention to work through and systematically challenge the arguments of Goffart and other recent commentators of Jordanes. My analysis below must speak for itself. Let it suffice to say that Goffart’s is an example of the dangers inherent in teleologically driven studies.

**Jordanes the Man: Career, Ethnicity, and Orality**

Within a similar but slightly variant vein, Patrick Amory likewise considers the context of Justinian’s reign to be the most fruitful means of accessing Jordanes. Goffart and Momigliano see the Getica as a piece of propaganda. For Amory, “The Getica is thus not propaganda, but the product of men influenced by propaganda…histories can reflect propaganda. Their interests will be directed partly by the interests that the powerful think is healthy for their subjects to have. There is no reason to think that Jordanes thought the conquest of Italy as anything other than a good thing.”

Therefore, Amory holds that Jordanes need not have been personally employed by Justinian explicitly in order to espouse or propagate eastern ideologies of reconquest and renewal. My analysis will indicate, however, that the Getica does not contain enough material that can be identified convincingly as complementary to a Justinianic ‘program of propaganda’ concerning the war with the Goths. Furthermore, we should not fall into the trap of thinking about

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46 Amory (1997), 303.
47 Ibid. 302.
Jordanes’ history as being so simple as either ‘pro’ or ‘anti’ Justinian or ‘pro’ or ‘anti’ Goth. This unfairly restricts both our ability to appreciate thematic nuance in the Getica and our understanding of the range of Jordanes’ possible aims.

One way to access these aims is to reconcile the content of the Getica with what we know about the biography of Jordanes himself. Unfortunately, we know very little about the man – only what he himself tells in his text. These biographical interventions occur in only two portions of the text. The first comes as Jordanes narrates the migration of various barbarian groups into the Balkans following the disintegration of Attila’s empire in 454. We learn that Candac, leader of “certain of the Alani,” received from the Romans Scythia Minor and Lower Moesia.\textsuperscript{48} Jordanes goes on to state, “Paria, the father of my father Alanoviamuth (that is to say, my grandfather) was secretary to this Candac as long as he lived. To his sister’s son Gunthigis, also called Baza, the Master of the Soldiery, who was the son of Andag the son of Andela, who was descended from the stock of the Amali, I also, Jordanes, although an unlearned man before my conversion, was secretary (\textit{notarius}).”\textsuperscript{49} In other words, Jordanes’ grandfather was secretary to the Alan leader Candac, and Jordanes was likewise secretary to Candac’s nephew. It has long been noted that there is in Jordanes’ work a high level of familiarity with the above mentioned provinces of Lower Moesia and Scythia Minor. This is probably best explained as the region where Jordanes grew up and served Gunthigis.\textsuperscript{50} If this holds, Jordanes would have known both Latin to carry out his functions within the army and Greek for civic life in the region. But as \textit{notarius} in a Roman army stationed in the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{48} Get. 265.
\item\textsuperscript{49} Get. 266.
\item\textsuperscript{50} Croke (2003), 368.
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Balkans in the early sixth century, Jordanes may have also needed to be familiar with the Gothic of so many of the soldiers in the Illyrian legions. There is another reason, however, to think that Jordanes knew Gothic: his own ancestry.

Further questions concerning Jordanes’ biography have centered on his ethnicity, which is often thought to be Gothic. For this we have two clues. First, the names of Jordanes’ grandfather and father, Paria and Alanoviiamuth, are generally believed to be Gothic and to confirm the claim Jordanes later makes to Gothic origin.\textsuperscript{51} This claim, the second of our clues, is made in the conclusion of the \textit{Getica} as Jordanes defends the professional integrity of his scholarship: “Let no one believe that to the advantage of the race of which I have spoken - though indeed I trace my own decent from it (\textit{quasi ex ipsa trahenti originem}) – I have added aught besides what I have read or learned by inquiry.”\textsuperscript{52} To be sure, the Latin can yield various translations and interpretations and, accordingly, a unanimous conclusion does not present itself. Nevertheless, the majority of scholars have taken the line as indicative of Jordanes’ Gothic descent, and I agree with them.

Jordanes’ ethnicity, then, might help us to account for a most unique element of his history: the alleged use of Gothic sources. No other extant ancient author ever employed sources of Gothic origin. In the \textit{Getica}, however, there are a few instances in

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textit{Get.} 265-6 for grandfather’s and father’s names. For a review of the debate and a discussion of the origins of their names, see Wagner (1967), 4-17.
\item \textit{Get.} 316. “\textit{Nec me quis in favorem gentis praedictae, quasi ex ipsa trahenti originem, aliqua addidisse credat, quam quae legi et comperi}.” Gillett (2000), 483 offers a variant translation and argues against interpreting this line as an assertion of Jordanes’ Gothic ethnicity: “Nor may any think that I have added [to my account of the Goths] anything favouring this people, as if [\textit{quasi}] drawing my descent from them, beyond what I have read or investigated.”
\end{enumerate}
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which Jordanes appears to have taken advantage of what might be Gothic oral tradition. This is founded on two premises: his own Gothic ethnicity; and his use of the texts of Cassiodorus and Ablabius, which arguably made use of Gothic material. Ablabius’ writings are now lost, though it is clear that Jordanes utilized them. There are three explicit references to Ablabius in the Getica - indeed, the only extant attestations of him or his work ever made. By some estimations, he stands as the ‘missing link’ between the manuscripts of Jordanes and the lost oral traditions of the Goths. Ablabius first appears in the Getica when Jordanes tells of the Gothic migration to Scythia, as is “told in [the Goths’] early songs (carmina), in almost historic fashion. Ablabius, a famous chronicler of the Gothic people, also states this is his most accurate history.” If this is true, Ablabius seems both to have been a historian of the Goths and one who had drawn from Gothic oral tradition. This, however, is debatable; as is the centrality of Ablabius’ work to Jordanes’ own ability to access Gothic oral history. What is clear, though, is that Jordanes mentions Gothic legends and carmina on a number of occasions. He writes that, “In earliest times [the Goths] sang of the deeds of their ancestors in strains of song accompanied by the cithara; chanting of Eterpamara, Hannala, Fritigern, Vidigoia and others whose fame among them is great;” likewise, Jordanes begins a long recitation of a

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53 In Get. 28, 43, 72, 79, 316, Jordanes makes explicit reference to oral history. Whether or not it is Gothic is debatable.
54 Gillett (2000), 482.
55 Get. 28, 82, 117.
56 Gillett (2000), 481.
57 Get. 28.
58 Whether Abablius wrote a history or ethnography of the Goths, and whether the Goths were even central to his text is a matter of debate. For example, Heather (1991) 64-5 argues that it is likely that Ababius is a late 5th/early 6th century historian of the Visigoths, while Gillett (2000), 493 suggests that it is unlikely that he had access to Gothic orality and calls for Abablius to be “relegated to the geographers and ethnographers from whom Jordanes drew minor amount of information to be reworked tendentiously.” Though, in the end, even Gillett admits that, “Isolated elements of genuine legendary material may be preserved in some of the passages of the Getica.”
Gothic royal line with: “Now the first of these heroes, as they themselves relate in their legends (fabula)…”⁵⁹ To whom such information is attributable is, again, contentious but the argument for Ablabius, in part, stems from Jordanes’ own assertion that he prefers written sources to oral ones and espouses the historicity of such orality only if it is corroborated by written texts.⁶⁰ Therefore, if the Getica does preserve Gothic oral legends, they were likewise supported in Jordanes’ written sources.

Here, Heather is favorable to the idea that a strong element of oral tradition can be found in the Getica which is attributable either to Jordanes himself or Cassiodorus via Ablabius.⁶¹ Amory, however, holds that, “It is a mistake to think that any of the material in the Getica comes from oral tradition, as the text presents it.”⁶² Amory’s concern ultimately lies in the historicity of the purported oral traditions and their dubious origins outside the Roman frontiers. These are legitimate concerns and, frankly, I doubt seriously both the historicity and antiquity of the supposed Gothic sources. But this does not render them useless. That Jordanes may have had first-hand access to Gothic traditions, whether inaccurate or otherwise, is significant for our understanding of him as an original researcher and thinker. He is, after all, our only voice from antiquity to proclaim that he was a Goth. This makes him our only barbarian with a pen. We should not too quickly dismiss anything a Goth has to say about Goths when every single one of our other sources are Greco-Roman voices. What, however, is to keep us from thinking that Jordanes simply lifted the instances of Gothic orality from Cassiodorus? Recall that

⁵⁹ Get. 43; 79.
⁶² Amory (1997), 295.
Gunthigis, Jordanes’ employer, was of the same Amal line as Theodoric. As an employee of a member of the Amal lineage, Jordanes may have had access to the traditions of that royal Gothic family which play such a critical role in his history. For example, in his account of the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains, Jordanes offers two variant accounts of the death of the Visigothic king Theodorid: one in which he was accidentally trampled by his own men, “but others say he was slain by the spear of Andag of the host of the Ostrogoths, who were then under the sway of Attila.”63 This is the same Andag who was the father of Jordanes’ boss. I need not belabor the well known fact that oral histories are subject to local revisionism. This is likely one such case. We should not, therefore, believe Cassiodorus and Ablabius to be Jordanes’ only sources for Gothic tradition.64

One last item must be mentioned regarding Jordanes’ person. He was a Catholic and virulent anti-Arian. The emperor Valens is spoken of as being “infected with the Arian perfidy.”65 Jordanes holds Valens responsible for making “the Visigoths Arians rather than Christians,”66 and later, when Valens meets his demise, Jordanes not only relishes his death but states that, “Plainly it was a direct judgment of God that he should be burned with fire by the very men whom he had perfidiously led astray when they sought the true faith, turning them aside from the flame of love into the fire of hell.”67 Nowhere else in the text is Jordanes’ personal bias presented more clearly, and we should recognize it as indeed personal since this sort of anti-Arian polemic could not have been part of Cassiodorus’ Gothic history that he presented to an Arian Ostrogothic regime.

63 Get. 209.
64 Croke (2003), 369.
65 Get. 132.
66 Get. 133.
67 Get. 138.
This stands as the most obvious proof of Jordanes’ own voice in his history, yet it is not the most crucial for this study. Instead, I shall draw attention both to a thematic coherence in the Getica that must be separate from a Cassiodoran model and to a subtle literary dexterity that aims to redeem Jordanes from his detractors.

**Analysis of the Getica**

a. The Preface

Jordanes’ preface to the Getica is a close re-rendering of the preface of Rufinus’ Latin translation of Origen’s commentary on the Book of Romans. If, however, we present this in a manner slightly more confusing, one begins to appreciate that there is an intentional perplexity at work here: the preface to the Getica is a borrowing from another man’s preface to a work which is itself a translation of yet another man’s commentary on a letter written by yet still another man.

The commonality at all junctures is both authorial dependence and removal. After Paul, each author writes something indebted to, but one step removed from, the previous author until we reach Jordanes. But it does not end here. Jordanes’ work is informed by the now lost Gothic history of Cassiodorus, as Jordanes says that his purpose is “to condense in my own style in this small book the twelve volumes of (Cassiodorus) Senator on the origin and deeds of the Getae.”68 Note the final step of removal, however: “in my own style” (*ut nostris verbis*). Jordanes concedes that his work is influenced by Cassiodorus but also has been shaped by his own words. By using Rufinus’ preface as a template for his own, Jordanes subtly presents the idea of both authorial indebtedness and

68 *Get. 1.*
departure - the characteristic of his work that he wished to announce at the outset of his project.

Mommsen decried Jordanes’ use of Rufinus an act of “impudent plagiarisms,” though one can only imagine he thought highly of Virgil’s nods to Homer. Moreover, even contemporary revisionists of Jordanes have failed to follow through by carefully considering Jordanes’ intentions in using Rufinus’ preface. O’Donnell, Croke and Christensen have merely noted that it is an indication that Jordanes knew some theology – a valid point but one that fails to inquire into Jordanes’ craft. Goffart, at least, went a step further by suggesting that Jordanes was specifically using Rufinus for a reason. He posits that those things which Jordanes wanted to convey in his preface happened to be similar to those things which Rufinus himself describes in his. Because of the happy coincidence, Jordanes appropriated Rufinus’ preface for the sake of art and to further make clear his own points. To test this hypothesis, it will be necessary to summarize what is going on in both Jordanes’ and Rufinus’ prefaces.

In Rufinus, we learn that a certain Heraclius has interrupted Rufinus, currently engaged in another piece of writing, and requested that he both abbreviate and translate into Latin Origen’s fifteen volume commentary on Paul’s epistle to the Romans. Rufinus modestly expresses trepidation that his own skills might be inadequate to do Origen justice and then announces he had difficulty procuring the entire text of Origen from libraries and was thereby unable to restore continuity to the whole work. He then censures Heraclius for not appreciating the magnitude of the project he has requested.

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69 Mommsen (1882), 53.
70 Goffart (1988), 59-60.
In Jordanes, we learn that a certain Castalius has interrupted Jordanes, currently engaged in another piece of writing, and requested that he abbreviate Cassiodorus’ twelve-volume history of the origin and deeds of the Goths. Jordanes modestly expresses trepidation that his own skills might be inadequate to do Cassiodorus justice and then announces the difficulty of no longer having access to the history following only a three-day reading but nevertheless that he retains the sense of the whole work. Jordanes likewise censures Castalius for not appreciating the magnitude of the project he has requested.

Both Goffart and Christensen suggest that Jordanes used Rufinus because his own situation was so uncannily similar to that of his model. This does not go far enough. It is a topos in ancient literature for authors to commence their work by proclaiming that they are either writing for someone or at the behest of someone. Indeed this occurs so readily that one wonders whether many of these addressees actually matter, let alone even exist. Much ink has been spilled over the identity and significance of Jordanes’ addressee Castalius when he might only be a rhetorical convention. It is, therefore, not useful to compare the similarities of the actual lives of Jordanes and Rufinus; more effective is to consider what it was about his own work that Jordanes wanted his reader to consider by producing a near transcription of Rufinus.

A further hindrance to fruitful analysis of the preface has been overly literalist approaches. So great has the desire been to see Cassiodorus reflected in Jordanes, that much scholarship past and present has obsessed over the precise meaning and implications of Jordanes’ alleged three-day reading of Cassiodorus’ history.

Commentators disagree not only over whether *ad triduanam lectionem* literally means “for three days” or more simply “for a short time,” but also over the meaning of the verb *relegi*. Does Jordanes say he that he “read” or “re-read” Cassiodorus during this disputed, but admittedly short, period? Such concerns are, of course, born out of the belief that one can ‘measure’ the likelihood that the *Getica* accurately summarizes and reflects Cassiodorus if one knows just how long Jordanes borrowed the now lost Gothic history and whether he read it once or twice.

Surely, this literalist analysis of the *Getica*’s preface cannot get us far. Far more useful from a heuristic standpoint is it to grant Jordanes a degree of literary artistry and to interpret, rather than parse, his words. In doing so, it becomes clear the preface’s relationship to Rufinus is of central importance in announcing Jordanes’ own independent historiographical aims. To take up the three-days quandary again. In stating his limited exposure to Cassiodorus, Jordanes is alluding to the point in Rufinus’ preface when Rufinus laments both not having access to all of Origen’s fifteen *volumina* and his inability to restore continuity to the whole work in his abbreviated translation. In other words, Jordanes employs this allusion to announce that he cannot adequately fulfill Castalius’ request to summarize all twelve books of Cassiodorus’ Gothic history. Whether or not Castalius is real, and whether or not Jordanes actually had limited access to Cassiodorus, what emerges as certain is that Jordanes states, albeit obliquely, that his work is not a faithful, thoroughgoing summary of Cassiodorus. If the Getica were meant

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to be such, as many commentators have thought, Jordanes would not have gone out of his way to announce, both explicitly and allusively, that he only had three days with Cassiodorus’ history, as this would forthwith discredit the accuracy of the summary. Instead, Jordanes announces a remove between the two texts. Scholars have been so busy looking for Cassiodorus that they have not paid enough attention to the Getica’s connection to Rufinus; for it is this connection that ultimately informs us about Jordanes’ relationship to Cassiodorus.

The argument for Jordanes’ independence from Cassiodorus can be pushed further still, however. As I have demonstrated, the similarities between the two prefaces run deep and it is significant that the ‘plagiarism’ is so heavy. For a readership versed in theology, this was no subtle allusion, but rather an elephant standing in the living room. Origen and Origenism was no small issue when Jordanes was writing the Getica in 551. Only eight years earlier in 543, Justinian had published an edict in Jerusalem condemning Origenism.\(^7^4\) The condemnation of Origenism was but one moment in the greater drama of the Three Chapters Controversy that enthralled both Christian theology and Byzantine politics in the mid-sixth century. Indeed, in 551 Justinian renewed his condemnation of the Three Chapters, so, needless to say, both Origen and Rufinus were fresh on the minds of theologians and statesmen in the middle of the century. Given such a context, Jordanes’ use of Rufinus’ preface to Origen’s commentary on the Book of Romans becomes all the more interesting – indeed topical. Active in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, Rufinus was both accused of and admitted to substantially altering the content

\(^7^4\) See Frend (1972), *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries*, Cambridge, ch. 7 for a discussion of Origenism and the Three Chapters Controversy during the reign of Justinian.
of a number of Origen’s tracts when translating them into Latin. When Rufinus 
encountered passages of Origen that clashed with current orthodoxy, mainly, but not 
only, in their espousal of subordinationist theology, he took the liberty of modifying or 
removing them in his translations.\textsuperscript{75} Rufinus, however, did not attempt to conceal this and 
defended his actions through his belief that the unorthodox portions of Origen had been 
inserted by heretics.\textsuperscript{76} Of course, when Origen was writing in the early third century, his 
theology was not considered heretical; however, by the mid sixth, Justinian deemed 
Origenism sufficiently contrary to Nicene and Chalcedonian theology to be condemned 
in 543. Therefore, in 551, Jordanes’ use of Rufinus’ translation of Origen would have 
resonated meaningfully with his readers. Living in such a theologically charged political 
climate, Jordanes’ readership would have made the right connections between the two 
prefaces that modern commentators, centuries removed from the context, have failed to 
make: that any allusion made to Rufinus’ translation of Origen would have elicited 
thoughts of the former’s fundamental alterations of the latter. The reader would then 
know to interpret Jordanes’ relationship to Cassiodorus in precisely the same manner – 
indeed, they would know that Jordanes was proclaiming that his history was going to 
look rather different than that of his supposed model. We cannot know the degree to 
which Jordanes departed from Cassiodorus; only that he did. The extent of Rufinus’ 
alterations of Origen are not to be ‘measured’ against the \textit{Getica} in an attempt to yield the 
scope of Jordanes’ alterations of Cassiodorus. Such literalist thinking, again, would likely 
get us stuck. Using Rufinus’ preface as a template for his own, Jordanes wanted to make

\textsuperscript{75} Kelly (1975), 230. 
\textsuperscript{76} Clark (1992), 12.
his point clear: he was composing his own short history of the Goths using Cassiodorus, the most fulsome account of Gothic history ever written, as his main source, but he was doing so in his “own style” having gone beyond Cassiodorus by adding both “fitting matters from some Greek and Latin histories” and most importantly “many things of [his] own authorship (mea dictione).”

We are meant to recognize Jordanes’ dependence upon and departure from Cassiodorus. He draws explicit attention to Cassiodorus to announce its central place both in the historiography of the Goths and in Getica as a source, but the intertextuality with Rufinus unequivocally announces the Getica’s independence from its chief source.

b. ‘Classicizing’ Gothic History

In the remaining portion of this study I do not provide a thoroughgoing page-by-page exegesis of the Getica; rather, I have elected to shed light on but a few intriguing thematic and literary elements hitherto under-appreciated or unnoticed in the secondary literature.

One of Jordanes’ primary thematic thrusts is the classicization of Gothic history; that is, his intention at all times to draw the Goths out of the northern hinterland and into the fold of Mediterranean antiquity. It is clear that Jordanes’ historical gaze is not only one that looks to the past but, more importantly, is deeply rooted in and highly conscious of the present. In other words, Jordanes means to account for the state of the Goths in the mid-sixth century as an incorporated people of the Roman Empire by articulating the greater Gothic past as likewise related to a Roman past. But this is not to say that

77 Get. 1; 3.
Jordanes aims to subordinate Gothic history to Roman history. On the contrary, Jordanes means to present the histories of both peoples as parallel, and in some cases, he furnishes the Goths with an even greater claim to a classical pedigree than that of the Romans.

Let us first take the example of the dual designation of the Goths. Jordanes refers to his subject interchangeably as both Goths and Getae, hence the full title of his work: *On the Origin and Deeds of the Getae*. But this association is hardly unique to Jordanes. The Getae were a Thracian tribe first attested in Herodotos who, by the fourth century B.C., had settled on the lower Danube to the south and east of the Carpathians; nevertheless, Greek writers would often confuse them with Dacians while later writers applied their name to the Goths, with whom they had nothing in common. But whereas other authors had loosely equated the Goths with other peoples either out of ignorance or convention, Jordanes’ association of the Goths with both the Getae and the Scythians becomes central to his classicization of Gothic history. Interestingly, however, Jordanes seems to be tacitly conscious of the fact the Goths and the Getae have not always been, as it were, one. Aside from the preface, which stands outside of the bounds of the chronological narrative, Jordanes refers to the Goths only as Goths only when recounting their distant past in Scandza and subsequent migratory period until they eventually settle in the rather nebulous region of Scythia, Dacia, Thrace, and Moesia. Upon noting the end of their migration, Jordanes writes, “Wherefore the Goths have ever been wiser than other barbarians and were nearly like the Greeks, as Dio relates, who wrote their history...

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78 *De origine actibusque Getarum*. The title is known from *Romana* 4.
80 *Get.* 39.
and annals with a Greek pen."\textsuperscript{81} Then, immediately following, Jordanes seamlessly refers to the Goths as Getae and henceforth continues to use the names interchangeably throughout the rest of the work. Jordanes, therefore, quietly announces the entrance of the Goths into classical history first by their migration to Scythia, then by acknowledging that their history was first recorded by a Greek (which was made possible by the proximity of their new home to Greece), and finally by their new appellation as Getae. It is no coincidence that Jordanes begins to call the Goths Getae just after mentioning that a Greek wrote their history. He indicates that Greek writers were the first to begin to associate the two peoples. Jordanes is correct in this.

Having established the Goths as an ancient classical people, Jordanes commences a lengthy narrative detailing various milestones from their distant Mediterranean past to further legitimate the Gothic pedigree. Jordanes begins with a discussion concerning a war between the Egyptian king Vesosis and the husbands of the Amazons, whom Jordanes identifies as the Scythians. Jordanes then states, “Thus we can clearly prove that Vesosis then fought with the Goths, since we know surely that he waged war with the husbands of the Amazons.”\textsuperscript{82} Jordanes accredits this association of the Scythians with the Goths to Orosius who spoke of the matter in “convincing language.”\textsuperscript{83} Jordanes then goes on to discuss some of the exploits of the Amazons and, after concluding, begins “the tale of the famous and glorious valor of their men (the Goths).”\textsuperscript{84} In the next line, Jordanes

\textsuperscript{81} Get. 40. Refers probably to Dio Cocceianus ‘Chrysostom’ of Prusa of the late first century AD, not Dio Cassius. Dio’s work, now lost, was probably an ethnographical description of the Dacians (Getae) at the time of Trajan’s conquest. See Gillett (2000), 487 n. 23 for relevant bibliography for Dio and his Getica.
\textsuperscript{82} Get. 44.
\textsuperscript{83} Get. 44.
\textsuperscript{84} Get. 58.
begins a story that he has received from the history of the aforementioned Dio, “who gave to his work the title ‘Getica,’ and the Getae we have proved in a previous passage to be Goths.” Jordanes, therefore, has taken the literary commonplace of associating the Goths with the Getae and the Scythians to its literal conclusion by actually fusing their histories together, thereby giving the Goths a meaningful and established role in classical history. Jordanes could now draw on the deeds of Scythians, Getae, Dacians, Moesians, or Thracians and call it Gothic history.

Such a fusion was necessary in order that Jordanes be able to recount from Dio’s history and further pad the Goths’ classical pedigree. He tells of a certain king of the Getae named Telefus, a son of Hercules married to one of Priam’s sisters, who would often war with the Greeks,

and in their course he slew in battle Thesander, the leader of Greece. But while he was making a hostile attack upon Ajax and pursuing Ulysses, his horse became entangled in some vines and fell. He himself was thrown and wounded in the thigh by a javelin thrown by Achilles, so that for a long time he could not be healed. Yet, despite the wound, he drove the Greeks from his land.

The story is almost comical. Some Goth fought three of the greatest Greek heroes at once and not only survived, but was ultimately victorious in his war? Furthermore, we learn that in the Trojan War, Telefus’ son Eurypylus fought on the side of the Trojans and was killed. Jordanes mentions this not only to associate the Gothic past with the most celebrated story of antiquity, but to introduce for the first time the nascent germ of Gothic-Roman interaction, indeed cooperation, since, as his audience knew, Romans were the legendary descendents of Trojan Aeneas.

85 Get. 58.
86 Get. 60.
Beyond mythography, Jordanes places the Goths within the tradition of classical historiography as well. Upon ending his account of Eurypylus, Jordanes jumps ahead “almost exactly six hundred and thirty years” to relate the story of the Gothic conflict with the Achaemenid Persians. “Elated by his victories in Asia, [Cyrus] strove to conquer the Getae, whose queen, as I have said, was Tomyris. Though she could have stopped the approach of Cyrus at the river Araxes, yet she permitted him to cross, preferring to overcome him in battle rather than to thwart him by advantage of position. And so she did.”

Cyrus’ successor Darius later demanded the hand of the Gothic princess in marriage, and upon the Goths’ refusal, sought revenge by leading a purported force of seven hundred thousand soldiers against them. After some defeats, Darius retreated. Finally, Darius’ son Xerxes sought to avenge his father’s name by marching on the Goths. However, that conflict would end without any hostilities, as Xerxes fled after being “overawed” by the “unyielding courage” of the Goths. In effect, Jordanes makes himself the Herodotos of Gothic history and makes the Goths the equals, if not the superiors, to the Greeks in their military victories over Persia.

There are various other elements of classicization in the Getica, but the above examples are adequately representative. Jordanes, himself a Romanized Goth, was attempting to bestow on the Goths a meaningful place in an ancient past shared by the wider Mediterranean world. That he was doing this is clear; why he was doing so is a more difficult inquiry. We can begin to answer this question by placing the Getica within

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87 Get. 61.
88 Get. 63.
89 Get. 64.
90 The Greeks never stopped an invasion by Cyrus.
its historical context. When Jordanes had completed his history, probably in March 551, Roman-Gothic relations had reached a low point.\footnote{See Croke, ‘Jordanes and the immediate past’, Historia 54 (2005), 473-94, for his own, Heather’s and Goffart’s arguments for the date of the Getica.} Since their migration into Roman territory in 376 and for the next century and a half thereafter, the Goths, though sometimes at odds with the Roman state, had become incorporated into the Roman fold both as citizens and soldiers. However, by 551 relations between Constantinople and the Ostrogothic kingdom of Italy had utterly disintegrated as Justinian was engaged in the complete conquest of Italy. Therefore, as Jordanes wrote his history of the Goths, he was not just producing a mere ethnographic study, he was writing the history of a current enemy of Rome – a possibly precarious subject. When considering Jordanes’ historical aims, therefore, we must account for the political context of Roman-Gothic relations in the mid sixth century, as I would suggest that it was this context that moved Jordanes to inquire into the nature of a shared Roman-Gothic past when he did. But in order to do so, we must analyze the various ways in which Jordanes presents the Goths themselves and their relation to Rome.

c. Lauding Gothic History

Since Momigliano, commentators have broached the subject of Roman-Gothic relations in the Getica by drawing attention to either a decidedly ‘pro’-Roman sentiment, or one that works to illustrate reconciliation and cooperation between the two peoples. There is no doubt that these sentiments occur in the Getica and they should be given full consideration in any comprehensive analysis of the text. However, recent studies have
focused on these at the cost of ignoring two other authorial tones, namely Jordanes’
generally sympathetic and even laudatory treatment of the Goths, as well as one that is
not only less gracious toward Romans than to Goths, but is at times critical of things
Roman. Let me reiterate that any attempt to interpret Jordanes’ historical aims
meaningfully cannot do so by pigeon-holing him as simply either ‘pro’ or ‘anti’ Goth or
Roman. The reality is more complicated than this. For now though, let us consider a side
of Jordanes’ authorial voice that has been generally overlooked.

From a Roman viewpoint, the Goths were barbarians. By the mid sixth century,
the designation of barbarian had been, for nearly a millennium, a generic cultural
template in ethnographic writing. Common characteristics of northern (as opposed to
eastern) barbarians included general savagery, bellicosity, greatness of stature, stupidity
and a way of life that did not include agriculture or urban habitation. Jordanes, though
writing the history of a barbarian people, departs from these commonplaces to present a
civilized culture worthy of a classical heritage. The Getica, however, follows age old
Greco-Roman ethnographic practices in its portrayal of other barbarians in the traditional
mold. Concerning the Alans, Jordanes suggests that “though they live in the form of men,
they have the cruelty of wild beasts.”92 The Gepids are “slow of thought” and the Franks
simply “barbarous”.93 While the Huns are “fiercer than ferocity itself;” a “savage
race...scarcely human... having no language save one which bore but slight resemblance
to human speech.”94 It is only the Goths who are the exception. Recall that Jordanes tells
us that Dio believed “the Goths have ever been wiser than other barbarians and were

92 Get. 128.
93 Get. 95:176.
94 Get. 121-2.
nearly like the Greeks."\textsuperscript{95} Later Jordanes writes of a certain Gothic king Dicineus who taught the Goths “almost the whole of philosophy…Thus by teaching them ethics he restrained their barbarous customs…he made them live naturally under laws of their own…He taught them logic and made them skilled in reasoning beyond all other races.”\textsuperscript{96} Having described their education, Jordanes speaks of the Goths’ profound love for knowledge: “Think, I pray you, what pleasure it was for these brave men, when for a little space they had leisure from warfare, to be instructed in the teachings of philosophy! You might have seen one scanning the position of the heavens and another investigating the nature of plants and bushes.”\textsuperscript{97} Jordanes means to evoke the image of Socrates, as per his accusation in the Plato’s \textit{Apology}, studying the stuff of heaven and earth. This is not Jordanes’ only Platonic reference. Upon Dicineus’ death, the Goths elect as their king Comosicus, another philosopher and the intellectual equal of his predecessor. In describing the reigns of both Dicineus and Comosicus, Jordanes wants to portray the Goths as living in accordance with the ideal of Plato’s philosopher-kings. Later, the Gothic king Hermanaric is described as having “subdued many warlike peoples of the north and made them obey our laws, and some of our ancestors have justly compared him to Alexander the Great.”\textsuperscript{98} The Goths, therefore, are not just another barbarian tribe who fight other barbarians, but are instead a civilization that imposes its own laws on lesser peoples – as the Romans do. It is clear, then, that Jordanes not only rids the Goths of cliché barbarisms, but elevates even their warriors to the standing of philosophers and

\textsuperscript{95} Get. 40.  
\textsuperscript{96} Get. 69.  
\textsuperscript{97} Get. 70.  
\textsuperscript{98} Get. 116.
their rulers to the status of Alexander and Platonic philosopher-kings. This is surely laudatory.

Jordanes presents the Goths positively in light of their military exploits as well. Histories written in the classical tradition revolve around warfare, and the *Getica* is no exception. Jordanes is sure to catalogue battle after battle as the Goths roam the barbarian hinterlands north of the Danube. In fact, for nearly the first half of the work, that is, some 1,800 years of Gothic history, Jordanes never once describes a Gothic defeat in battle. This is, of course, impossible but is nevertheless the way Jordanes wished to render his Goths. Eventually, though, Jordanes relents and tells of the Gothic defeat by the Huns in the mid fourth century; but even then he hardly dwells on the subject, electing instead to mention it quickly and then to change the subject by splitting the narrative in two by relating the separate histories of the Visigoths and Ostrogoths respectively.\(^9\)

Furthermore, with the exception of the work’s final conflict between the Ostrogoths and the forces under Belisarius, Jordanes never recounts a battle in which the Goths lose to the Romans.\(^1\) Indeed, the *Getica*’s very first account of Gothic-Roman interaction of any kind is one that highlights clear Gothic military superiority. “Then came Caesar, the first of all the Romans to assume imperial power and to subdue almost the whole world, who conquered all kingdoms and even seized islands lying beyond our world, reposing in the bosom of the Ocean. He made tributary to the Romans those that knew not the Roman name even by hearsay, and yet was unable to prevail against the

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99 Get. 131-245; 246-314.
100 With Caesar Get. 68; Domitian Get. 76; Philip the Arab Get. 90-1; Decius Get. 102; Valens Get. 138; Stilicho Get. 155; Honorius Get. 159.
Goths, despite his frequent attempts." Note Jordanes’ rhetorical strategy: upon introducing him, Jordanes begins to inflate both the name of Caesar and Rome with accolade after accolade until, with his final terse line, he undercuts the picture of Roman might and presents to the Goths restrained but meaningful glory. Jordanes’ agenda becomes clear, and given that the Getica moves though time so rapidly, those moments that Jordanes chooses to recount should be appreciated as all the more significant for his historical project. Likewise, the reader also considers those moments that Jordanes neglects to mention. Take, for instance, Trajan’s conquest of Dacia or Jordanes failure to mention the sound beating Claudius II delivered to the Goths at Naissus in 268 – a decisive victory for the Romans and terrible defeat for the Goths. In these, and in various other silences, the case can be made that Jordanes not only highlights Gothic victory, but also Roman loss at the hands of the Goths.

But Jordanes’ unflattering treatment of the Romans does not stop at the recounting of Gothic military victories. Jordanes often accuses Romans of immoral action, delights in their defeat, and even makes a mockery of them. I begin with the first mention of a Roman or anything associated with Rome in the Getica. During his geographical survey of Europe, well before even the hundredth line of the history, Jordanes mentions Caesar in his description of Britannia: “It was long unapproached by Roman arms, until Caesar disclosed it by battle sought for mere glory” (Quae diu si quidem armis inaccensam Romanis Iulius Caesar proeliis ad gloriam tantum quesitis)

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101 Get. 68.
102 Due to confusion in the sources, it is disputed whether the emperor Gallienus or Claudius II led the Roman forces into battle. Alföldi (1939) argues that it was Gallienus, Bray (1997), Potter (2004), Southern (2001), and Watson (2003) argue for Claudius II. Indeed Claudius II earned his surname ‘Gothicus’ from Naissus.
aperuit). I amend Mierow’s translation of *quesitis* from ‘fought’ to ‘sought,’ but I maintain his *tantum* as ‘mere,’ which can have a possibly critical tone. If *tantum* is critical here, it seems likely that Jordanes calls into question the legitimacy of Caesar’s actions in Britain, and thereby undercuts an otherwise famous moment in Roman history and casts a unfavorable or least ambivalent gaze toward Rome’s most celebrated general. I have included this here because, again, this episode is the first appearance of a Roman in the *Getica* and, as such, sets the tone for much of Jordanes’ portrayal of things Roman in his history.

Often Jordanes blames Roman misfortune - and more importantly misfortune at the hands of the Goths - on the failings of their rulers and generals. During the reign of Gallus and Volusianus, “the Goths frequently ravaged Moesia, through the neglect of the Emperors.”104 Jordanes does not censure the Goths for such action. Later, during the reign of Valens, when the Visigoths cross the Danube and migrate into Moesia, Jordanes recounts the “glorious victory” of the Goths over the Romans at the Battle of Adrianople; a Roman loss that is ascribed to God’s righteous punishment of Valens for his Arianism.105 One could argue, however, that Jordanes’ venom in this particular case is a result of religious differences, not political or cultural concerns. But even if this is granted, it is still clear that Jordanes ultimately justifies and applauds the Visigothic defeat of the Romans as a result of both the “*avaritia*” of the Romans in their brutal exploitation of the Visigoth migrants and later the “*dolus*” of the Roman general

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103 *Get.* 10.
104 *Get.* 104.
105 *Get.* 138.
Lupicinus against Fritigern. In a similar vein, during the reign of Honorius, Jordanes presents Alaric’s devastation of Italy and sack of Rome as the result of Stilicho’s treachery against him. Moreover, Jordanes commends Alaric’s restraint in forbidding his Visigoths from burning Rome “as wild peoples do” or from doing damage to holy places. Finally, during the kingship of Alaric’s successor Athaulf, Jordanes describes Honorius’ impotency both as an emperor and father in his inability to prevent Athaulf from capturing and marrying his daughter. Jordanes writes, “the Emperor Honorius was powerless to resist,” and in his failure to protect the “nobility, beauty, and chaste purity” of his daughter, Jordanes presents a Roman emperor effectively emasculated by a Visigothic king. This episode must challenge Goffart’s construction of submissive, effeminate Goths and masculine Romans. Jordanes ends this section of the narrative in an arguably mocking tone as he describes Athaulf “leaving Honorius Augustus stripped of his wealth, to be sure, yet pleased at heart because he was now a sort of kinsman of his.”

d. Jordanes and Virgil: Two Case Studies of Intertextuality

In the final leg of this study, I would like to discuss a grossly under-acknowledged aspect of Jordanes: his literary merit. I need not review the hostility that has usually been issued against Jordanes’ ability as a writer. The following will focus instead on revealing the presence of a subtle and sophisticated literary craft at work in the

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106 Get. 134, 136.
107 Get. 156.
108 Get. 160.
109 Get. 160.
Getica. This is to be demonstrated by looking closely at two heretofore unappreciated allusions to the Aeneid seamlessly interwoven into the narrative which work symbolically
1) to incorporate the Goths into the fold of Roman history; 2) to parallel the Roman and Gothic past; and 3) to underscore the complex dynamic of Roman-Gothic relations by pointing to instances of both hostility and shared experience between the two peoples.

The invasion of the Huns is a turning point in the Getica. It not only interrupts the narrative flow of the Getica by dividing the history into discrete treatments of the Visigoths and Ostrogoths, but more broadly alters the thematic tones that characterize the first part of the Getica. The initial portion of the Getica (consisting of roughly half of the entire work) is largely a catalogue of migrations and battles spanning some 1,800 years of history. Battle after battle, however, one notes that the Goths never once lose. It is the coming of the Huns that marks their first defeat which, in turn, inaugurates further military losses and hardships when the Goths migrate into the Roman empire. At this point, Jordanes fundamentally changes the tenor of his Gothic history.

The Visigoths flee the Huns across the Danube and into Roman territory, having made an agreement with the Emperor Valens to settle and protect the borders of Moesia provided that they convert to (Arian) Christianity and subject themselves to Roman law. Soon however, ‘as is usual for a people not well rooted in a land, starvation and want were upon them,’ and Fritigern, one of the Visigothic leaders, begs the local Roman commanders Lupicinus and Maximus to open a market so that the Gothic refugees might

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110 Get. 131-2. For the primary ancient account of these events, see Ammianus Marcellinus, Res Gestae, bk. 31, who was likely Jordanes’ source here, so Mommsen (1882), xxxiii, 92 n.1; Giunta and Grillone (1991), 57-8; and Heather (1991), 35. For modern discussions of these events, see Wolfram (1988), ch. 3, and Heather (1991), ch. 4.
barter for food. Taking advantage of the situation, the Romans begin to sell dog carcasses and the flesh of unclean animals at such exorbitant prices that the Goths have to sell their children into Roman slavery in order to keep from starving. Soon, the Romans invite Fritigern to a feast and, while dining, they treacherously attack the Gothic leader and his followers. Fritigern manages to survive and, upon slaying his Roman assailants, incites the Goths to rebel and seize the surrounding lands. Shortly thereafter, the Goths impose a catastrophic defeat on Valens and the Romans at the Battle of Adrianople in 378.

Now, let us back up and look more closely at a single moment in this account. As Jordanes narrates how the Romans were gouging the Goths, he applies a line from the *Aeneid* to the Romans’ ‘ravenous hunger for gold’ (*auri sacra fames*).Mommsen noted this allusion in his 1882 critical edition but made nothing of it. He quotes the Virgil in the footnotes and never again mentions it. Likewise, later scholars failed to pay the quotation any heed. The line from the *Aeneid* was probably understood to be a small flourish by which Jordanes demonstrated that he knew some Virgil. But even on a lexical level, the Virgil bears directly on Jordanes’ narrative. When reading the Latin, the *fames* of the Romans for gold immediately recalls the literal *fames* of the Goths – they are starving. Mierow translates *fames* as ‘lust,’ thereby preventing the English reader from picking up on this nuance. Mierow’s poor view of Jordanes perhaps rendered him insensitive to such subtlety. He and other commentators had only to suspend their

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111 Get. 134.
112 Get. 134 and *Aeneid* 3.57.
convictions for just a moment, crack open their copy of the *Aeneid*, and give Jordanes but one chance to prove himself as a more subtle reader of classical texts.

In *Getica* 134, the Huns have just invaded the Gothic homeland, defeated the Goths in battle, and sent them fleeing in search of foreign lands to settle. Put more broadly, a group of people have been driven from their home by an invading enemy and now, as pitiful refugees, seek a new home in another land. This is also the theme of Virgil’s epic. In *Aen* 3.57, the passage from which Jordanes lifted the allusion, Aeneas has just concluded his account of the fall of Troy at the hands of the Achaeans (in Book 2) and continues to tell of his search for a new home in foreign lands after having fled Troy. The two narrative contexts are thematically identical; and, on a more specific level, both events are linked by occurring in Thrace – the significance of which I will elaborate presently. One realizes that Jordanes is not simply quoting to quote, but is rather drawing a significant parallel between his narrative and that of the *Aeneid*, a parallel strengthened, as we have seen, by many specific points of contact. This is, in itself, an unrecognized literary strategy; but there is much more going on.

In the first lines of Book 3, Aeneas has just set off from Troy looking to found a new home for his followers. His first landfall and ultimately failed attempt at foundation is in Thrace. There, Aeneas prepares a sacrifice, but after uprooting some saplings to be burnt upon the altar, the wood begins to bleed and then speak. Aeneas learns that the young trees are inhabited by the soul of the Trojan Polydorus whom Priam had sent to Thrace with gold that was to be entrusted to the Thracian king. The treacherous king, however, betrayed the Trojans by allying himself with Agamemnon and then murdering
Polydorus for the Trojan treasure. It is here, in the speech of Polydorus, that Virgil offers the verse later used by Jordanes. The ghost of Polydorus beseeches Aeneas not to settle on such cursed ground. Aeneas then gives a proper burial to his fallen comrade and departs from Thrace.

But what of Thrace? Recall that by way of his classicization of Gothic history, Jordanes made the Gothic name synonymous with the Thracian one. Moreover, Virgil himself seemingly gives credence to Jordanes’ project by likewise presenting the Thracians and the Getae interchangeably. It now becomes clear that Jordanes has employed the quotation from Virgil not only to associate the narratives of the two works, but to announce a more discreet textual relation by drawing from a portion of the Aeneid that specifically pertains to Thracians and Getae – i.e., in his terms, Goths. This is careful literary craft. But the analysis can be pushed further still. The sacrifice that Aeneas offers to secure blessings for his intended new home is in vain. In this, one is reminded that the Goths had to sacrifice their children by selling them into slavery so that both they and their children might at least have some hope for a future. Also, the Thracian king’s betrayal of Polydorus in Virgil vividly recalls Lupicinus’ treachery toward Fritigern in Jordanes – only now the villains are Romans and their victims ‘Getae’. Finally, ‘fate’, as it were, permits neither Trojans nor Goths from settling in their new homes, but instead pushes them continuously onward until both, in their own ways, conquer Italy. Jordanes

113 “Terra procul vastis colitur Mavortia campis
(Thraces arrant) acri quondam regnata Lycurgo…” Aeneid 3.13-14.

“Multa movens animo nymphas venerabar agrestis
Gradivumque patrem, Getricis qui praesidet arvis,
rite secundarent visus omenque levarent.” Aeneid 3.34-6.
looks forward not only to Alaric’s sack of Rome in 410 but also to the Ostrogothic rule of Italy, beginning in 489 and persisting to his own time. Therefore, the political context in which the *Getica* was written becomes all the more interesting, as the text was completed (probably in 551) during Justinian’s reconquest of Italy from the Ostrogoths.

Jordanes is tying the ancient history of Rome to that of the Goths. And what better way to do this than by connecting the *Aeneid*, Rome’s tradition of its great migration, with the refiguring of the Gothic migration in the *Getica*? But one notes that, amidst all this parallelism, the roles of the players have been reversed. In the *Getica*, it is the Goths who come to Roman land (Thrace) and are betrayed by the Romans; whereas in the *Aeneid* it is the Trojans (namely, the future Romans) who come to Thracian (Gothic) land and learn of Thracian treachery toward a Trojan. Jordanes’ intentions in this reversal are more difficult to discern. One cannot but raise an eyebrow at the context in which the Virgil quotation arises. As Jordanes relates the Romans’ foul treatment of and treachery toward the Goths, he quotes a portion of the Aeneid where ‘Goths’ betray ‘Romans’. Is this a case of epic rivalry (Jordanes vs. Virgil)? Or of national rivalry (Goths vs. Romans) expressed in literature? A closer reading of the entire text would be required before these questions can be answered with more confidence. Perhaps it is no longer so clear that the *Getica* presents an unambiguously pro-Roman and pro-Justinianic view of history as many recent commentators have assumed.

In yet another instance of intertextual discourse, Jordanes similarly links the narratives of the *Aeneid* and the *Getica*. Virgil mentions the Getae only twice in his poem. The first mention occurs in the above discussed episode in Book 3 when the
Trojans make landfall in Thrace, the home of the Getae.\textsuperscript{114} The other appears in Book 7 when the Trojans finally reach Italy, establish relations with the Latins, and ultimately find themselves at war with them.\textsuperscript{115} As above, Jordanes moves to incorporate Virgil’s reference into the body of his own work to bear on its themes. First, though, a brief summary of the contents of \textit{Aeneid} Book 7.

After arriving on the shores of Italy, Aeneas sends emissaries to Latinus, king of the Latins, to request a parcel of land upon which to found a city. Now Latinus possessed no male heir and had only a daughter, Lavinia, who was sought after by the leading men of the Latins. Turnus, the greatest among them, was the leading suitor, but a prophecy had told Latinus to promise his daughter to a foreign visitor. Latinus, then, grants land to the Trojans and offers his daughter’s hand to Aeneas. Juno, enraged at the looming prospect of peace at last for her hated Aeneas, calls upon the services of the fury Allecto to arouse strife and warlust among the Latins. Latinus’ wife Amata, who favors Turnus, is infected by Allecto with hatred for the Trojans, as is Turnus, and both clamor for war. Their desires are fulfilled after Allecto coaxes Ascanius, Aeneas’ son, into killing a tame stag beloved by Latinus’ herdsmen. Enraged by the death of the animal, the Latin herdsmen attack the Trojans. When many of herdsmen are killed, the Latins grow infuriated at the bloodshed and enjoin their king to open the Janusian gates of war, but Latinus refuses. Juno, however, grants their sanguine request, opens the portal, and throws the two peoples headlong into war.

\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Aeneid} 3.35.  
\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Aeneid} 7.604.
To distill this, long-suffering refugees have come to foreign soil, ask its leader for land, and, upon receiving both land and promises of peace and cooperation, are betrayed and forced into armed conflict. This is the exact narrative context of the above discussed Visigothic entry into Roman land in 376. Fleeing the Huns, the Visigoths send “ambassadors into Romania to the Emperor Valens, brother of Valentinian, the elder Emperor, to say that if he would give them part of Thrace or Moesia to keep, they would submit themselves to his laws and commands.” Whereupon, “When Valens learned this, he gladly and promptly granted what he had himself intended to ask.” Latinus’ land grant to the Trojans recalls that of Valens to the Visigoths, just as Latin betrayal of the Trojans evokes Roman treachery toward the Visigoths. It is fitting, then, that it is at this point in the Getica’s narrative that Jordanes alludes to Virgil’s second reference to the Getae. In narrating the Latin declaration of war, Virgil describes the ancient practice of opening the gates of Janus. He begins, “There was a custom in Hesperian Latium, which / the Alban cities always held sacred, as great Rome / does now, when they first rouse Mars to battle, / whether they prepare to take sad war in their hands / to the Getae, the Hyrcanians, or the Arabs…” Jordanes alludes to this passage in the climax of the drama between the Romans and Visigoths in his description of the Battle of Adrianople.

116 Get. 131.
117 Get. 132.
118 “Mos erat Hesperio in Latio, quem protinus urbes Albanae coluere sacrum, nunc maxima rerum Roma colit, cum prima mouent in proelia Martem, siue Getis inferre manu lacrimabile bellum Hyrcanisue Arabisue parant…” Aeneid 7.604. Translation by Kline (2002), http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/VirgilAeneidVII.htm. I have used Kline’s unpublished translation because his rendering of lacrimabile bellum is the most literal translation I have encountered and is thus most apt in illustrating the intertextual discourse between the Aeneid and the Getica.
It is but a few words: “…here a sad war took place and the Goths prevailed…” It is particularly striking that the battle which, both in the sixth century, as it is now, would have been considered the most famous moment of conflict between Goths and Romans, is recounted with so few words. They were enough, however, to establish the link to Book 7 of the *Aeneid*. The occurrence of *lacrimabile bellum* in both texts in conjunction with the fact that, in the *Aeneid*, it appears with the second (and only other) reference to the Getae secures this as an instance of intertextuality.

The preceding discussion illustrates not only that Jordanes knew his Virgil well by incorporating the only two references to the Getae in the *Aeneid* into his own history of the Getae, but the manner in which he incorporates them offers indisputable proof that Jordanes meant to connect the narrative contexts of his and Virgil’s works so that the latter might meaningfully inform the former. In both instances of intertextuality, Jordanes places the Goths in the role of the Romans. When comparing the narratives of the *Aeneid* and the *Getica* from a remove it is possible to understand Jordanes’ intentions as auspicious in nature. That is, by placing the Goths in Roman shoes Jordanes might be illustrating that the Goths too have suffered and striven to earn a place among the honored peoples of the world - that Gothic and Roman paths have been not so different. The reader wonders if Jordanes is espousing an ideology of reconciliation and peace by pointing to such parallels and similarities. It seems quite possible. When one moves closer to the texts, however, a rather different interpretation may be posited. Recall that in the first instance of intertextuality discussed above, Jordanes engages in role-reversal so

119 “…ubi lacrimabile bello comisso vincentibus Gothis…” Get. 138.
that whereas Romans are betraying Goths in the Getica, it is ‘Goths’ (Getae) who betray ‘Romans’ (Trojans) in the Aeneid. Our second instance of intertextual discourse uses similar strategies. Jordanes alludes to a line from the Aeneid in which Virgil looks forward to the future Roman conquest of the Getae, but does so through a line in his own history where it is the ‘Getae’ who have conquered the Romans. That Jordanes was writing a history which lauds the Goths at the expense of the Romans by means of Rome’s arguably most treasured piece of literature, is striking enough by itself. But the fact that Jordanes publishes this text in the midst of a major and protracted war between Goths and Romans while writing from the imperial capital underscores the necessity to reclassify perceptions of Jordanes’ political motivations and literary inventiveness. Even Jordanes’ past detractors have admitted that the Getica is one of the most intriguing and curious pieces of literature to survive antiquity. There is now even more reason to believe this.

So what of it then? What is Jordanes ultimately saying about Goths and Romans? Without doubt, this is the question that needs answering, and this study had taken provisional steps in doing so. As unsatisfying as this is, however, we cannot place ourselves in a position to repeat past mistakes by announcing platitudes to account for the whole of the Getica that are based on only select portions of the text. The current state of scholarship prevents firm conclusions from being drawn about Jordanes’ authorial intentions. While this study has worked to uncover and interpret heretofore unnoticed literary objectives in the Getica, it is precisely the fact that such proof of literary skill is only now being discovered which precludes our ability to make universal claims about
Jordanes’ overarching agenda. If the above instances of intertextuality convince, it is all but certain that there are more in the Getica yet to be found. It is imperative that Jordanes be afforded further literary and historiographical analysis to prevent both the continuance of ill-conceived perceptions of him and flawed future scholarship which works from these false presuppositions.

**Historical Context and Political Ideology**

With the above discussion in mind, we may now draw some conclusions about Jordanes’ historiographical and political aims. But there is a final problem left to ponder; one, it seems, that cannot be entirely solved – consider it Jordanes’ departing gift to his reader. In the final lines of the Getica’s conclusion which, in the preface, Jordanes promised he would provide, he writes, “Let no one believe that, to the advantage of the race of which I have spoken – though indeed I trace my own descent from it – I have added aught besides what I have read or learned by inquiry. Even thus I have not included all that is written or told about them, nor spoken so much to their praise as to the glory of him who conquered them.”\(^{120}\) The last sentence is a blatant untruth. One need only recall the multitude of instances in which Jordanes praises Gothic achievement, and then perhaps not so easily drudge up the two times that he affirmably lauds Justinian, his emperor. He does so once after describing the Roman re-conquest of Vandal Africa when he calls Justinian *sollers*, meaning clever or skillful – not exactly beaming praise – and again in the conclusion as he discusses the Ostgothic king Vitiges’ surrender to Rome and calls Justinian *laudabilius*, that is, more praiseworthy than the *laudanda* Gothic

\(^{120}\) Get. 316.
race. The latter, taken literally, are certainly words of praise but they simply cannot be taken as representative of Jordanes’ historiographic aims. Therefore, when Jordanes says that the Getica’s main purpose is to glorify Justinian, he must be understood as misrepresenting his own work. In other words, Jordanes lies to us; and moreover, it is not hard to spot. But that is the good news. When an author lies about something that any attentive reader would realize is untrue, he is demanding that his reader consider just what he is up to – for indeed the entire work’s meaning could be at stake; and in this case I think it is.

What, then, are we to make of this? It is clear that any political reading of the text hinges upon a proper understanding of Jordanes’ sleight of hand and, as such, it must be afforded due consideration. We might begin to account for Jordanes’ purposes by bearing in mind the political and social milieu in which Jordanes wrote: Rome at war with the Goths. When Theodoric died in 526 he left no male heir. His grandson Athalaric, still a boy, received the crown. A year later Justinian would ascend to the throne. Royal power in the Ostrogothic kingdom, however, was effectively wielded by Theodoric’s daughter Amalasuintha, the boy-king’s mother. Late in 534 Athalaric’s already failing health worsened and he died, whereupon Amalasuintha attempted to strengthen her position by cutting a deal with her cousin Theodahad: she would remain in effective control while Theodahad would become king in name. Things did not go according to plan. Theodahad quickly betrayed Amlasuintha, imprisoned her, and had her murdered in April 535. Admittedly, the precise legal and constitutional position of Ostrogothic Italy had always been vague. It was never entirely clear how the state which Zeno commissioned

121 Get. 172, 315.
Theodoric to rule stood in relation to the Roman empire. Was it directly subordinate to the purple, or did Italy possess its own sovereignty, and with it, *libertas*? 122 These issues remained only academic during the reign of Theodoric, but his death brought such questions to light. Indeed, Justinian capitalized on the uncertain legal status of the Ostrogothic kingdom and deigned to bring Italy back into the Roman fold through military conquest which he commenced in 535 by sending his general Belisarius at the head of a large expeditionary force.

Justinian’s belief that he would have an easy victory over the Ostrogoths proved erroneous. The war lasted nearly twenty years, ending only in 554. Recall that Jordanes completed the *Getica* only a few years earlier in 551, the same year that Justinian placed his cousin Germanus at the head of the Roman armies in Italy. In the same year, however, Germanus died and a few months later his son, Germanus, was born by his wife Matasuintha, the granddaughter of Theodoric. Therefore the child Germanus possessed the bloodlines of both the Roman and Ostrogothic royal families – a fact the Jordanes is sure to note twice in his history. 123 The marriage of Germanus and Matasuintha in 550 was a Roman tactical measure. It was believed that if Germanus arrived in Italy as commander of the Roman legions with the granddaughter of Theodoric at his side, the Ostrogoths would lose the will to continue fighting. Germanus’ premature death prevented this scenario from running its course. What is clear, though, is that the war was not over when Jordanes wrote in 551 and the Ostrogoths were currently being led by Totila, their most able king since Theodoric.

122 Moorhead (1994), 73.
123 *Get.* 81, 314.
Jordanes, then, was not merely writing the history of the past, or even the near past, but that of directly contemporaneous events. Moreover, these events had a particular urgency in 551. As just mentioned, Germanus had been selected to lead the Roman armies against the Ostrogoths, but his death prevented this. While Justinian searched for a new general, the Goths continued to entrench themselves in Italy and Totila even launched expeditions that ravaged the coast of Greece. Indeed the Goths were foremost on the mind of Justinian as Jordanes wrote about those same Goths. Writing a history of a current enemy of Rome was precarious. Writing a laudatory history of a current enemy of Rome likely could have been very dangerous. It is in such a context that we might begin to account for Jordanes’ misrepresentation of his own work in the conclusion. It is perhaps fruitful to understand Jordanes’ ‘lie’ as a safety-coating on a possibly subversive text. I am not suggesting, however, that Jordanes was attempting to dupe the Byzantine equivalent of the Soviet literary censors. Nothing like it existed in the ancient world. But it is not at all beyond the realm of possibility that, in the sixth century Roman capital, one (especially a once imperial official) could be punished for speaking or writing something at odds with the imperial interest. Likewise, I am not attempting to romanticize the \textit{Getica} or to make Jordanes out to be some champion of free thought in an oppressive society. Again, Jordanes’ outlook is not so simple as ‘pro’ or ‘anti’ anything.\footnote{Excepting, of course, Arianism.} Though this study has not dwelled on them, there are too many instances in which Jordanes clearly smiles upon Roman-Gothic cooperation to allow for such a reading.\footnote{Most notably, the Roman Gothic alliance against the Huns, especially \textit{Get}. 181; and the Gothic peace with Theodosius, “lover of the Gothic race.” \textit{Get}. 142-6.} In sum,
then, we should explain Jordanes’ lie as kind of insurance policy that he appended to his work in case he was ever called to account for praising a Roman enemy.

This reading of the text, however, goes in the face of all previous interpretations of Jordanes’ political alignment. As mentioned above in the section on recent scholarship, all attempts to understand Jordanes’ politics have placed him squarely in the orbit of a Justinianic ideology of conquest. Momigliano, Goffart, Amory, and Croke all render Jordanes as a simple mouthpiece for Justinian’s propaganda. Croke, whose work has been seminal in arguing for Jordanes’ authorial independence, has worked to free Jordanes from his bondage to Cassiodorus only to attach him, as it were, to a new master in Justinian. Croke offers, “It should come as no surprise, then, to find that in the Getica Jordanes is not preaching a doctrine of peace and reconciliation (let alone deriving that doctrine from Cassiodorus) but is urging a policy of unrestrained aggression…If the Getica has any propaganda purpose at all, then one such overriding theme is the praise of Justinian as the vanquisher of the Goths (Get. 315-316)…He envisions the union of Goth and Roman only under a reconquered Byzantine Italy.” 126 It is clear that Croke, as others have done, takes Jordanes’ words in the conclusion of the Getica at face value and uses them as a mechanism for understanding the entirety of the text through a single interpretive paradigm: praise for Justinian. By such thinking, logic then dictates that if Jordanes is in the business of praising the emperor, then he must also agree with and support his political and military policies. So, by extension, Jordanes becomes an advocate of the Roman conquest of Italy and likewise an enemy of the Goths.

126 Croke (1987), 127.
It is clear that there is much at stake in the final words of the *Getica*. For if Jordanes is taken at his word, his text becomes but a fanciful tale of barbarians and yet another obsequious, hollow voice in the imperial capital. Indeed Jordanes’ history of the Goths ceases being about the Goths altogether and becomes instead panegyric for the emperor. Nothing he says about the Goths should be given any credence since they become merely a tool by which Justinian can be lauded. It is no wonder that Jordanes has not been taken seriously as a historian because his very own words prevent us from ever doing so. Those words, however, must not be taken literally. This, as I have illustrated, is not an interpretive stretch since the reader need only compare what is said once in the final words of the conclusion with the multitude of contrary sentiments throughout the body of the text. Therefore, instead of relegating the *Getica* to the status of imperial encomium, it should be seen foremost as a politically motivated historical exercise prompted by the mid sixth century Roman-Gothic conflict. It seems that the war incited Jordanes to inquire into the nature of the Gothic past, especially in its relation to Rome, in order better to come to grips with the Gothic present. Jordanes, himself a Romanized Goth, likely hoped for the reconciliation of relations between the two “foremost nations of the world,” and therefore crafted a history that interwove the Goths into the historical tradition of the Greco-Roman world in which they were now living. But such reconciliation is not presented simplistically or with a sense of blind optimism. As illustrated above, Jordanes’ Virgilian allusions present us with a conception of Roman-Gothic relations that are sometimes strained - both present instances of armed conflict between Goths and Romans. Yet, in those same instances, role reversals work to

127 *Get.* 181.
reconcile the experiences of the two peoples as Goths become Romans and Romans become Goths. Ultimately, the Virgilian allusions underscore Jordanes’ own nuanced appreciation of the many and complex dimensions of the Roman-Gothic relationship and present a dynamic which is at times harmonious and at others belligerent. To relegate Jordanes to the status of imperial mouthpiece is to ignore the fruits of the sole barbarian voice to survive antiquity, and therefore a singular source for understanding the complexities of Gothic conflict with and integration into the Roman empire in the late antique period.

Conclusions

A number of conclusions emerge. The Getica conventionally has been deployed within Medievalist and especially Germanist frameworks as a source for early Germanic traditions, but five centuries of scholarship in this mode have led to a certain inertia in the development of critical approaches to the text. The foregoing analysis of Jordanes’ use of Virgil demonstrates that a text such as the Getica cannot remain the preserve of the discipline that has claimed it for so long. Studies of Jordanes need to make the methodological transitions that have long since characterized the work of classical scholars on, among others, Herodotus, Livy, and Tacitus – that is, appreciation of literary merit and authorial intent in a given text independent of the historicity of its contents.\(^{128}\) It becomes clear that underscoring Jordanes’ classical literary milieu is not merely a matter of rescuing a minor author from an unflattering critical judgement, but rather of

repositioning a key text within academic paradigms. In short, the Getica must now be read as subtle literature and not only mined as a source for (modern) national history.

Furthermore, proof of Jordanes’ literary craft entails that narrative texts that were previously despised need now to be read with closer attention to a range of literary strategies. We should not dismiss allusions and quotations from classical literature as vain rhetorical flourishes or mere affectation. The present reading of Jordanes shows that, when classical allusions are encountered, we must carefully consult the texts being alluded to in order to see if they establish thematic or ideological resonances. Put more simply, classical allusions often have direct bearing on the themes and subject matter being discussed in a given work, and to ignore these is to disregard what often turn out to be the most meaningful elements of a writer’s work.129

Conversely, questions about Jordanes’ contemporary audience emerge. Jordanes’ text is perhaps not characteristic of the Latin literature produced in sixth-century Byzantium. The Getica is neither a bureaucratic, legal, or theological work; and it deviates from classicizing ethnographic history both in the amount of fantasy that it purveys and in its non-Roman focus. As a result of its aberrant genre, and because Jordanes has long been the tacit ‘property’ of Medievalists and Germanists, the Getica has slipped through the cracks in modern classical scholarship on sixth-century literature. Jordanes and his work are rarely discussed in close relation to his literary contemporaries. And yet Procopius, exactly like Jordanes, was an imperial bureaucrat writing from Constantinople about Justinian’s Gothic wars in the 550s and employed similar literary

129 See A. Kaldellis, Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity (Penn, 2004), especially 38, and G. Kelly, Ammianus Marcellinus: The Allusive Historian (Cambridge, 2008), especially chapters 1 and 4 for discussions of these issues.
strategies in his histories. These similarities are too striking to be ignored for long.\textsuperscript{130} So for whom then was Jordanes writing? It is probably impossible to ascertain the specific identities of Jordanes’ readers. There have yet to be found any explicit attestations of Jordanes or his work in contemporary or subsequent writings. Nevertheless, we must construe Jordanes’ close engagement with Virgil not as self-amusement, but as an additional register of narrative and an interpretive signpost intended for an erudite readership, or at least one educated enough to spot a verse from the \textit{Aeneid} and be able to associate its narrative surroundings with those of the \textit{Getica}. Therefore, by working back from the knowledge required to identify and parse Jordanes’ Virgilian allusions, we can identify the literary sophistication of his readership - if not their names.\textsuperscript{131} But this is not to restrict Jordanes’ audience to the literary circles of Constantinople. A text may be engaged at any number of levels by any variety of reader. In this paper I have tried to find the readers to whom Jordanes intended to grant full access to his text. Jordanes’ audience has ever been a conundrum in the secondary literature. This may very well help to clear it up.

A third conclusion regards Jordanes’ themes, ideology, and objectives. With this partial rehabilitation, we know now that Jordanes invites his reader to consider more than what is on the surface of his text - and the relationship between Goths and Romans in the mid-sixth century stands at the heart of his concerns. Through allusion to Virgil, Jordanes

\textsuperscript{130} See Goffart (1988), ch.2, especially 94-6 for a discussion of possible links between Jordanes and Procopius. P. Amory, (1997) 304-5 briefly discusses possible parallels between the \textit{Getica} and the lost \textit{Isaurica} of Capito. Croke, \textit{Count Marcellinus and his Chronicle} (Oxford, 2001), ch. 7 comments on possible, but ultimately unlikely, textual and political connections between Jordanes and Marcellinus Comes’ continuator. Credit is due to these scholars for contextualizing Jordanes, but there is still much room for discussion of Jordanes’ politics and literary milieu. For discussion of Latin literature in sixth century Constantinople, see Croke (2001), \textit{passim}, but especially 86-8.

\textsuperscript{131} See Kaldellis (2004), 115-17 for a similar discussion of Procopius’ readership.
has appropriated Roman traditions to recast the Gothic past. The *Getica* becomes a textual validation of the entry of the Goths into Roman history. In the past, Jordanes’ project has been variously identified as one or more of the following: the slavish copy of Cassiodorus, Roman panegyric, or a mouthpiece for Justinianic ideology.\(^{132}\) The above discussion hopefully will broaden analytical parameters. The *Getica* may be more subtle than we have otherwise thought.

\(^{132}\) For Cassiodorus, see Heather (1991), 55; for Roman panegyric see Goffart (1988), ch.2; for Justinianic ideology see Amory (1997), 303.
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