

## VERGIL AMONG THE GOTHs: A NOTE ON IORDANES, GETICA 44\*

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Iordanes' *De origine actibusque Getarum* (commonly known as *Getica*) is an epitome of the now lost *Gothic History* of Cassiodorus, a work which was composed on behalf of Theoderic and completed before 533.<sup>1</sup> The relationship between Cassiodorus and Iordanes has been the subject of much debate, but it is now recognized that Iordanes used quite a few additional sources (both Greek and Latin) besides the *Gothic History*,<sup>2</sup> although it is often difficult to establish whether a certain passage is taken from Cassiodorus or from another author.<sup>3</sup>

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1) On Cassiodorus' *Gothic History*, see S. J. B. Barnish, *The Genesis and Completion of Cassiodorus' Gothic History*, *Latomus* 43 (1984) 336–361. The *Getica* were circulated after 551. According to A. Momigliano, *Cassiodorus and Italian Culture of his Time*, PBA 41 (1955) 207–245 (reissued in: Id., *Secondo contributo alla storia degli studi classici*, Roma 1960, 191–229), Cassiodorus continued to work on his book until 551. Yet, this view has been much discussed: see, for example, D. R. Bradley, "In altum laxare vela compulsus": The 'Getica' of Jordanes, *Hermes* 121 (1993) 211–236; 222–226. On Iordanes' aims, see recently W. Liebeschuetz, *Why did Jordanes write the Getica?*, *AntTard* 19 (2011) 295–302 (reissued in: Id., *East and West in Late Antiquity. Invasion, Settlement, Ethnogenesis and Conflicts of Religion*, Leiden / Boston 2015, 135–150).

2) Modern studies on the sources of Iordanes date back to H. von Sybel, *De fontibus libri Jordanis de origine actusque Getarum*, Berolini 1838. Of more recent work, see especially B. Baldwin, *Sources for the Getica of Jordanes*, *RPh* 59 (1981) 141–146 (reissued in: Id., *Studies on Late Roman and Byzantine History, Literature and Language*, Amsterdam 1984, 125–129), and G. Zecchini, *Cassiodoro e le fonti dei Getica di Giordane*, in: Id., *Ricerche di storiografia latina tardoantica*, Roma 1993, 193–209. On the relationship between Iordanes and Cassiodorus, see J. Weissensteiner, *Cassiodorus / Jordanes als Geschichtsschreiber*, in: A. Scharer / G. Scheibelreiter (eds.), *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, Wien / München 1994, 308–325; L. van Hoof / P. van Nuffelen, *The Historiography of Crisis: Jordanes, Cassiodorus and Justinian in mid-sixth-century Constantinople*, *JRS* 107 (2017) 275–300.

3) Intertextuality can sometimes be helpful, see for instance R. Wilkinson, *Theoderic goes to the Promised Land: Accidental Propaganda in Jordanes's Gothic History?*, *EME* 26 (2018) 259–281; M. Cristini, *De Caesare, Tiberio et Eutropio in Iordanis Geticis* (*Iord. Get.* 68 et *Eutr.* 6.17.3), *VoxLat* 54 (2018) 152–157.

The *Getica* make use not only of *nonnullae historiae Graecae ac Latinae*,<sup>4</sup> but also of Lucan and Vergil, whose *Aeneid* provided Iordanes with several quotations.<sup>5</sup> A recent article by Brian Swain has stressed the importance of these references in order to understand the intentional analogies between Iordanes' narrative and that of Vergil.<sup>6</sup> A hitherto neglected case of intertextuality between the *Aeneid* and the *Getica* can shed new light on this question.

Get. 44 reports that the pharaoh *Vesosis Scythis lacrimabile sibi potius intulit bellum*,<sup>7</sup> in a passage which includes the expression *lacrimabile bellum*, whose earliest occurrence is found in Aen. 7.604: *sive Getis inferre manu lacrimabile bellum*.<sup>8</sup> The syntactic structure of the two clauses is identical, since a tearful war is brought (*infero* in both cases) against an enemy whose name is indicated by an ethnonym in the plural. Scythians and Goths are considered as synonyms by Iordanes, as he explains in the following sentence,<sup>9</sup> so there is a high degree of probability that he (or

4) Get. 3 Mommsen (MGH, AA 5.1, 54) = Get. 2 in Iordanes, *Getica*, edizione, traduzione e commento a cura di A. Grillone, Paris 2017, 5.

5) See below as well as Get. 86 and Aen. 5.584–585, 8.448–449 (MGH, AA 5.1, 190); Get. 134 and Aen. 3.56; Get. 149 and Aen. 5.162–163 (MGH, AA 5.1, 97). C. Whately, Jordanes, the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains, and Constantinople, *DHA Suppl.* 8 (2013) 65–78: 71, notices a certain resemblance between Get. 212 (Attila is depicted as a *leo venabulis pressus*) and Verg. Aen. 9.792–793, 12.6–8. For other Vergilian echoes in Iordanes, see E. Wölfflin, *Zur Latinität des Jordanes*, *Archiv für lateinische Lexikographie und Grammatik* 10 (1900) 361–368: 362–364, and N. Scivoletto, *Tracce di 'color Vergilianus' nei Getica di Iordanes*, in: A. Isola et al. (eds.), *Curiositas*. Studi di cultura classica e medievale in onore di Ubaldo Pizzani, Perugia 2002, 397–405.

6) B. Swain, *Jordanes and Virgil: a Case Study of Intertextuality in the Getica*, *CQ* 60 (2010) 243–249. The discussion focuses on Get. 134 and Aen. 3.56 and on the significance of Thrace, which, however, has already been noticed by P. Courcelle, *Les lecteurs de l'Énéide devant les grandes invasions germaniques*, *RomBarb* 1 (1976) 25–56: 53–54 (not mentioned in Swain's article).

7) Likely, the pharaoh was Senusret III, see Grillone (n. 4) 307 n. 207.

8) For other occurrences of *lacrimabile bellum*, see Ov. Met. 8.44: '*laeter' ait 'doleamne geri lacrimabile bellum'*'; Eutr. 6.19: *Hinc iam bellum civile successit exsecrandum et lacrimabile*; Amm. 19.2.6: *armis exercitus concrepans involat muros confestimque lacrimabilis belli turbo crudescit*; Ambr. Hex. 5.23.81: *bellum lacrimabile inter se adversae acies instruant*. See also ThlL 2.1848, ll. 14–16, 7.2.843, ll. 42–43, and below. On *lacrimabile bellum* in Vergil, see N. Horsfall, *Virgil, Aeneid 7*. A Commentary, Leiden / Boston / Köln 2000, 393.

9) Iord. Get. 44: *Tunc ut fertur, Vesosis Scythis lacrimabile sibi potius intulit bellum, eis videlicet quos Amazonarum viros prisca tradit auctoritas, de quibus et feminas bellatrices Orosius in primo volumine, professa voce testatur. Unde cum Gothis eum tunc dimicasse evidenter probamus, quem cum Amazonarum viris absolute pugnasse cognoscimus*. About Iordanes and the Amazons, see S. Liccardo, *Different Gentes, Same Amazons. The Myth of Women Warriors at the Service of Ethnic Discourse*, *The Medieval History Journal* 21 (2018) 1–29: 11–15. The Getae of

Cassiodorus) intentionally quotes Vergil's verse about the Getae in order to describe the unfortunate war waged by Vesosis.

This passage comes from a part of the *Getica* which features quite a few classical references: Get. 40 alludes to Aen. 3.35, Get. 43 to Luc. 8.221 and Get. 50 again to Vergil, Aen. 6.471.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, it is not surprising to find another Vergilian quotation in Get. 44. To be sure, Vergil and Lucan are explicitly and literally quoted in Get. 40, 43 and 50, whereas Get. 44 includes a quotation which is neither explicit (Vergil is not mentioned) nor literal, but this is quite common in the *Getica*, since Iordanes used more than once Vergilian verses or expressions without stating his source and he did not hesitate to modify their wording.<sup>11</sup> The above-mentioned references, which can possibly be traced back to Cassiodorus,<sup>12</sup> illustrate the main aim of his *Gothic History*, which is briefly stated in a famous letter of the *Variae* written (after the completion of the *Gothic History*) on behalf of Athalaric, Theoderic's heir, who praised Cassiodorus because he had depicted the origin of the Goths as Roman history.<sup>13</sup>

The connection between *origo Gothica* and *historia Romana* is stressed by the classical quotations, which purport to suppose that already Vergil and Lucan were aware of the fame of the Goths. In the first reference (Aen. 3.35), the Getae / Goths are mentioned by Aeneas himself after his arrival in Thrace and shortly before his meeting with the dead Trojan prince Polydorus, while in the *Pharsalia* they are

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Aen. 7.604 had already been identified with the Goths by Serv. Aen. 7.604: *Getarum fera gens etiam apud maiores fuit*. See C. E. Murgia, *The Dating of Servius Revisited*, CPh 98 (2003) 45–69: 61.

10) Get. 40 (= Get. 41 Grillone: *Adeo ergo fuere laudati Getae, ut dudum Martem, quem poetarum fallacia deum belli pronuntiat, apud eos fuisse dicant exortum, unde et Vergilius: 'Gradivumque patrem Geticis qui praesidet arvis'*) quotes Aen. 3.35; Get. 43 (*Quorum studium fuit primum, inter alias gentes vicinas, arcum intendere nervis, Lucano plus historico quam poeta testante: 'Armeniosque arcus Geticis intendite nervis'*) quotes Luc. 8.221; Get. 50 (*loco nomen dedit 'Saxum Marpesiae', unde et Vergilius: 'Ac si dura silex aut stet Marpesia cantes'*) quotes Aen. 6.471.

11) See above (n. 5), especially Get. 134 and Aen. 3.56, discussed by Swain (n. 6). The omission of the mention of Vergil in Get. 44 can be ascribed to several reasons: possibly Iordanes (or Cassiodorus) did not refer to Vergil since he thought that the quotation was obvious (again, cf. Get. 134), or, alternatively, Cassiodorus mentioned the poet and Iordanes omitted his name in order to shorten the paragraph. Another plausible explanation is that the author of the *Getica* did not mention Vergil due to a stylistic choice: a few lines before he had already written *unde et Vergilius* and *Lucano ... testante* and immediately before the quotation there is *ut fertur*. It is likely that Iordanes did not refer to Vergil and perhaps slightly reformulated the sentence in order to avoid a repetition (again *unde et Vergilius* or *Vergilio testante* or *ut refert Vergilius*).

12) Zecchini (n. 2) 199, 203–204; Scivoletto (n. 5). See also G. Polara, Cassiodoro, *Enciclopedia Virgiliana* 1 (1984) 691; more briefly J. J. T. Yolles, *Cassiodorus, The Virgil Encyclopedia* 1 (2014) 239.

13) Cassiod. Var. 9.25.5: *originem Gothicam historiam fecit esse Romanam*.

named by Pompey the Great, who has exhorted the king of the Parthians to help him and “stretch the bows of Armenia with the strings of the Getae”.<sup>14</sup> Aen. 6.471 does not include any allusion to the Getae / Goths directly, but it refers to the *Marpesia cautes*;<sup>15</sup> more importantly, it is a verse that depicts Dido in the Underworld, when Aeneas tries to talk to her. Aen. 7.604 adds a significant element to this picture, since it belongs to Vergil’s description of the ancient Roman custom of declaring war by opening the gates of the Temple of Janus.

All these quotations aim to draw a parallel between the Goths and important moments of Roman history or old Latin traditions (the voyage of Aeneas, the Civil Wars, Dido – and so, looking forward, Carthage and the Punic Wars – and the ancient *mos* of opening hostilities, a usage which was adhered to from the city’s first origins to the era of Augustus, as Vergil writes), as well as to stress the martial virtues of the Goths, who are mentioned in close connection with the god Mars in both Aen. 3.35 and Aen. 7.604, the only occurrences of *Getae* / *Geticus* in the whole *Aeneid*.<sup>16</sup> Naturally, Vergil did not intend to draw such a comparison, but Cassiodorus and Iordanes took advantage of the fact that Vergil referred to the Getae in both cases shortly after mentioning Mars in order to pursue their own political and ideological aims.<sup>17</sup>

There is, however, another occurrence of *lacrimabile bellum* in the *Getica*. Iordanes, when describing the battle of Adrianople, writes that the emperor Valens *lacrimabili bello commisso, vincentibus Gothis, in quodam praedio iuxta Adrianopolim saucius ipse refugiens, ignorantibusque quod imperator in tam vili casula delitesceret Gothis, igneque ut adsolet saeviente inimico supposito, cum regali pompa crematus est* (Get. 138). A very similar wording is also found in the *Romana*,<sup>18</sup> yet this passage

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14) Lucan, *The Civil War*, with an English translation by J. D. Duff, London / Cambridge (Mass.) 1962, 453.

15) Iord. Get. 50 writes about a *saxum Marpesiae* located in the Caucasus, which he erroneously identifies with the *Marpesia cautes* of Aen. 6.471, see Grillone (n. 4) 311 n. 237.

16) Aen. 3.35: see above (n. 10). Aen. 7.601–604: *Mos erat Hesperio in Latio, quem protinus urbes / Albanae coluere sacrum, nunc maxima rerum / Roma colit, cum prima movent in proelia Martem, / sive Getis inferre manu lacrimabile bellum* ... Moreover, there is a (possibly) intentional acrostic of Mars in this passage: see D. P. Fowler, *An Acrostic in Vergil (Aeneid 7. 601–4)?*, CQ 33 (1983) 298; D. Fee-ney / D. Nelis, *Two Virgilian Acrostics: certissima signa?*, CQ 55 (2005) 644–646. On the Getae in Vergil, see M. Pavan, *Geti*, *Enciclopedia Virgiliana* 2 (1985) 718–720; more briefly P. E. Knox, *Getae*, *The Virgil Encyclopedia* 2 (2014) 554.

17) On the Goths and Mars, apart from Iord. Get. 40–41, see e. g. Cassiod. Var. 8.10.4,11, 10.31.2, and the commentary ad loc. of Pierfrancesco Porena and Massimiliano Vitiello in *Flavio Magno Aurelio Cassiodoro Senatore*, *Varie*, direzione di A. Giardina, a cura di A. Giardina / G. A. Ceconi / I. Tantillo, con la collaborazione di F. Oppedisano, vol. 4, Roma 2016.

18) Iord. Rom. 314: *Lacrimabili bello commisso imperator sagitta saucius in casa deportatur vilissima, ubi supervenientibus Gothis igneque supposito incendio concrematus est*.

was originally written by neither Iordanes nor Cassiodorus. It is taken from Epit. de Caes. 46.2 (*Hic Valens, cum Gothis lacrimabili bello commisso, sagittis saucius in casa deportatur vilissima ubi, supervenientibus Gothis ignique supposito, incendio concrematus est*), which could in turn have been taken from Hier. Chron. 249c Helm (*Lacrimabile bellum in Thracia. In quo deserente equitum praesidio Romanae legiones a Gothis cinctae usque ad interneccionem caesae sunt. Ipse imperator Valens, cum sagitta saucius fugeret et ob dolorem nimium saepe equo laberetur, ad cuiusdam villulae casam deportatus est. Quo persequentibus barbaris et incensa domo sepultura quoque caruit*) or otherwise possibly from a common source, since Amm. 29.1.15 also writes about *lacrimosus in Thracia discriminibus*.<sup>19</sup>

Ultimately, it is doubtful to insist upon a direct connection between Get. 138 and Aen. 7.604, because here Iordanes (or Cassiodorus) is clearly imitating the *Epitome*.<sup>20</sup> The author of the *Getica* and his predecessor may (or may not) have been aware of the Vergilian quotation, but – and this point is crucial – they did not include it themselves in the narrative: they only transcribed a passage of the *Epitome* comprising the quotation.<sup>21</sup> This is the reason why Get. 138 should not be considered when studying Iordanes' intertextual relationship with Vergil, whereas Get. 44 is an

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19) On the identity of the possible source, see R. W. Burgess, A Common Source for Jerome, Eutropius, Festus, Ammianus, and the *Epitome de Caesaribus* between 358 and 378, along with Further Thoughts on the Date and Nature of the *Kaisergeschichte*, CPh 100 (2005) 166–192. See also the commentary ad loc. in Pseudo-Aurélius Victor, Abrégé des Césars, texte établi, traduit et commenté par M. Festy, Paris 1999. The account of Oros. Hist. 7.33.13 is similar: the emperor Valens *itaque quinto decimo imperii sui anno lacrimabile illud bellum in Thracia cum Gothis iam tunc exercitatione virium rerumque abundantia instructissimis gessit*.

20) See Interpretationes Vergilianae Minores, 3.2, conlegerunt I. Barabino / A. V. Nazzaro / A. Scivoletto, Genova 1998, 625: neither the *Epitome* nor Jerome are mentioned and Get. 138 is traced back directly to Aen. 7.604. Wölfflin (n. 5) 363 and ThLL 7.2.843, ll. 42–43, briefly point out the connection between Aen. 7.604 and Get. 44, 138, but they fail to appreciate the profound difference between the two passages of Iordanes. The parallel has gone unnoticed in the editions of Mommsen (1882) and Giunta / Grillone (1991), as well as in the article by Swain (n. 6), whereas Grillone (n. 4) 275–276 n. 55, mentions it in passing when dealing with Get. 9 (= Get. 8 Grillone 2017) and Verg. Georg. 1.30, but he omits it when discussing Get. 44. Scivoletto (n. 5) 399–400 is more precise, yet he believes that the Vergilian quotations of Get. 40–50 possess a mere “funzione esornativa” (ibi, 397).

21) It is far from certain that the *Epitome*'s author or his source (as well as, for that matter, those who transcribed his work) understood *lacrimabili bello* as a reference to Aen. 7.604. Doubtless, this was not the case for Ammianus, whereas it is conceivable that Jerome was deliberately alluding to Vergil.

open and deliberate imitation of Aen. 7.604, which pursues a specific aim, namely to show that – in the words of Cassiodorus<sup>22</sup> – “the Gothic nation was admirable from ancient days”.<sup>23</sup>

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22) Cassiod. Var. 9.25.6: *nationem docuit ab antiquitate mirabilem*.

23) The present article was already in print when I learned of the paper of L. Van Hoof, Vergilian Allusions in the *Getica* of Jordanes, *Latomus* 78 (2019) 170–185, which I was unfortunately unable to take into account. Van Hoof dwells briefly upon Get. 44 on pp. 175–176, but her focus is more on the ‘pangothicism’ of Jordanes than on his attention towards important episodes of the Roman past.