

**Maria Luisa Fele, *Le fonti dei Romana di Iordanes. I. Dalle origini del mondo ad Augusto (Rom. 1-257)*, 314 pp. (+XXXVI Introduction), Collection Nuova Biblioteca di Cultura Romanobarbarica, I, Firenze, Sismel Edizioni del Galuzzo, 2020, ISBN 978-88-8450-938-3**

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The first volume of the deep analysis of the sources used by Jordanes, the Latin speaking historian of Gothic origin, to write his short Roman history, is a salutary initiative from multiple points of view.

As the publishing house said, this volume represents the beginning of a new collection dedicated to the study of the period which in the English speaking world is called Late Antiquity, Early Middle Ages or the Transformation of the Roman World. The reputed Italian scholar Bruno Luiselli (b. 1933) has underlined one of its main traits, the complex and nuanced interaction between the Roman world and the Barbarian one, when he launched, in 1976, the journal “Romanobarbarica” and in 1998 the collection “Biblioteca di cultura romanobarbarica”. The new collection opened with the publication of Maria Luisa Fele’s work is a second iteration of the project which Bruno Luiselli supported for many decades. As one of Luiselli’s students, Maria Luisa Fele is a leading specialist in Latin historiography of the Imperial era, Roman epigraphy and philology. She was then best placed to offer a new insight in the so called *Romana*, the less known work of Jordanes, one of the first Latin authors of Barbarian origin, who illustrated the level of integration and Romanisation of Germanic peoples settled in the Roman Empire territories.

Just as the author herself was aware of, Jordanes attracted a lot of scholarly attention in the modern period, even if the qualities of his Latin and historical method were often doubted. Mommsen’s critical edition of *Romana* and *Getica* published in 1882 set the standard for later interpretation until recently.<sup>1</sup> We only know with certainty about Jordanes what he told us himself: that he was of Gothic origin (his father, Alanoviiamuth, was the secretary of Gunthigis Baza, an Ostrogoth leader) and that he wrote during Justinian I reign

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<sup>1</sup> Iordanes, *Romana*, edited by Theodor Mommsen, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi, Berolini, 1882, V, p. 1-52; Iordanes, *Getica*, edited by Theodor Mommsen, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi, Berolini, 1882, V, p. 53-138.

(at about 550-551 or 552).<sup>2</sup> We also know that he extensively used previous sources for his two historical works, especially Flavius Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator (c. 485-c. 585) for writing *Getica* and Lucius Annaeus Florus (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD), Sextus Rufus Festus (4<sup>th</sup> century AD) and Jerome (*Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus* : c. 342/47-420) for *Romana*.

Maria Luisa Fele used her superior philological and historical competences to decipher Jordanes' *Romana* literary and cultural project, showing that it was more complex and nuanced than previously believed. As the title attributed by Mommsen suggested, *Romana* would have been a *Breviarium*, a brief history of Rome, on the model offered by Eutropius (4<sup>th</sup> century) in his well-known *Breviarium ad Urbe Condita*. In reality, Jordanes' *Romana* was a universal chronicle, using the structure which gained a wide popularity within the Christian community through the work of Eusebius of Caesarea (260/5-339/40) and its Latin translation and adaptation by Jerome. As his celebrated predecessors, Jordanes started his chronicle with the first human, Adam, and continued with the history of the great kingdoms of the ancient world, in their succession established in conformity with the *Prophecy of Daniel*: Assyrians, Medes, Persians, Greeks, Romans), reaching up to the 24th year of Justinian's empire (550-551 or 552).

What Maria Luisa Fele published with Sismel Edizioni del Galluzzo is the first volume of her analysis of the sources used by Jordanes in *Romana* 1-257, starting with the events from the Biblical Genesis and ending with the reign of the emperor Augustus. Being very knowledgeable of the huge array of scholarship dedicated to Jordanes since Mommsen's foundational work, Fele shows that there are still aspects to be highlighted and conclusions to be drawn. She was able to decipher Jordanes' narrative strategies, which confirm older hypotheses, like Walter Goffart's, who suggested that the historian of Gothic origin was far from being naive or uncultured.<sup>3</sup> Through an attentive comparison of Jordanes' text with those of his known sources, she managed to identify the Late Antique historian's personal choices of content, language and style, which prove him to be more sophisticated than it was thought until now.

Maria Luisa Fele was also able to attract attention to some possible personal contributions brought by Jordanes to a Roman history that seemed to have been entirely established by older authors. It is really interesting that the few original contributions almost certainly attributed to Jordanes are related to the history of the South-Eastern Europe and especially to the territories of our day Romania and Bulgaria, region he knew better than

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<sup>2</sup> *Getica*, 266; *Romana*, 363.

<sup>3</sup> Goffart, W. 1988, *The narrators of barbarian history (A.D. 550-800)*, Princeton.

other historians because he probably lived there. He is the historian who gave the names of the two provinces founded south of the Danube after the Romans abandoned Dacia at about 270-275 (*Daciam mediterraneam Daciamque ripensem, Romana*, 217) and he is also the only one who said that the ancient name of Philippopolis in Moesia was *Pulpudeva* (*Romana* 221), which is a word of a Thracian origin. For the history of Romanian people, Jordanes' *Romana* is also important because he offered a credible version of the Roman withdrawal from North of the Danube, during Emperor Aurelian. While Eutropius, used by those modern historians who aimed to deny the Romanness of the Romanian people, said that all the Romans abandoned Dacia, Jordanes affirmed that the emperor Aurelian moved only the army in Moesia (*legionibus in Mysia conlocavit ibique aliquam partem Daciam mediterraneam Daciamque ripensem constituit, Romana*, 217). If we agree that Jordanes, who lived in Moesia, was better informed than other ancient historians about some events that took place there, even if that happened centuries before his time, we might also agree that his version about the fate of the former Roman province of Dacia is worth believing.

There are other signs of originality of Jordanes' writing that Maria Luisa Fele emphasises, which help us to understand why his *Romana* is still worth reading. We are waiting for the next volume of her work, which will present the sources used by Jordanes for the events that took part from Augustus up to Valens and we are certain that our knowledge of the cultural context of the Late Antique Roman history would greatly benefit from her exegesis.