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The Danish Tongue and Scandinavian Identity¹

Carl Edlund Anderson

Abstract: *This study addresses the medieval Norse term *dǫnsk tunga* (meaning “common Scandinavian language”). The origins of the term are obscure, but it may indicate that the ethnic name “Danes” may have once referred to all Germanic-speaking Scandinavians, a usage which may have evolved with the emergence of a pan-Scandinavian identity deriving from certain socio-political developments in southern Scandinavia during the pre-Viking period. It may be that this larger sense of “Danish” is comparable to the way in which “English” came to identify the Germanic language of Britain regardless of its various speakers’ differing Continental tribal ancestries. By the Viking Age, continuing political developments may have ended the use of “Dane” as a generic term (with the development of the distinct Scandinavian kingdom-states, in contrast with the single English kingdom-state), though elements of the earlier sense were perhaps fossilized in the continuing use of the term *dǫnsk tunga* to mean “common Scandinavian language”.*

I. The *Dǫnsk Tung*a as Common Scandinavian

A. Introduction

Modern scholars commonly use terms such as “Old Norse” to refer to the Germanic dialects of Viking-Age and medieval Scandinavia, recognizing the general linguistic unity that then existed among its Germanic-speaking population. This unity seems to have been recognized by medieval Scandinavians themselves. Icelandic writers (who provide the bulk of our surviving documentation) commonly employed the term *dǫnsk tunga* (literally “Danish tongue”) to identify the language not just of those who were ruled by the *Dana konungr*, but of all Germanic-speaking Scandinavians. Likewise, the phrases *í danskri tungu* and *á danska tungu*, meaning something like “within the Danish tongue”, were used to indicate the entire community of Germanic-speaking Scandinavians, or, in a semi-geographic sense, to denote “Northern lands”.

¹ The contents of this document consist of materials that were originally part of a conference presentation at Mid-America Medieval Association (MAMA) Annual Conference, Tulsa, OK, USA on 26 February 2000.

B. Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Víkingarvísur*

This use is illustrated even in the earliest surviving example of any native Scandinavian reference to Scandinavian language: verse 15 of the *Víkingarvísur*, a series of skaldic verses attributed to Sigvatr Þórðarson in praise of Norwegian king Óláfr helgi.² Though the overall interpretation of verse 15 is debatable, it clearly describes Óláfr and Hákon jarl of Hlaðir—both Norwegians—as being *á danska tungu*, demonstrating that the “Danish tongue” was spoken by a wider group than just those whom *we* would consider “Danes”:³

Ríkr kvað sér at sækja
 Sauðungs konungr nauðir,
 fremðar gjarn, í fornu
 fund Hvkonar sundi;
 strangr hitti þar þengill
 þann jarl, es varð annarr
 æztr ok ætt gat bazta
 ungr á danska tungu.

C. Swedes are “within the Danish tongue” in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*.

Swedes also seem to have been considered “within the Danish tongue”, as exemplified in a passage from the *Hauksbók* version of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* where a legendary Swedish princess is described as the fairest and wisest maiden *á danska tungu*:⁴

Eien iola aftan i Bolm þa strengöe Angantyr heit at bragar fvlli sem seðvenia var til at hann skyllði eiga dottur Yngva konungs at Uppsolvum Ingibiorgv þa mey er fegrst var ok vitrvz a donska tvngv eða falla að avðrum kosti ok eiga enga konu aðra.

D. *Grágás* and the “Danish Tongue”.

However, the clearest examples of the term “Danish tongue” being used with respect to all Germanic-speaking Scandinavians may occur in the group of Icelandic legal texts known as

² Normalized version in Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Víkingarvísur*, in *Skjaldedigtning*, B.1, 213-16 (p. 216). Translation in *Speculum norroenvm: Norse studies in memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. by Ursula Dronke (Odense: Odense University Press, 1981).

³ Verse 15 of Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Víkingarvísur*, c. 1014-15; see *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, ed. by Finnur Jónsson, 2 vols (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1908-15; reprinted Rosenkilde & Bagger, 1967-73), B.1: 216.

⁴ From the *Hauksbók* version of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* (compiled c. 1330s); see *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, ed. by Jón Helgason, *Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur*, 48 (Copenhagen: Jørgensen, 1924; reprinted 1976), p. 5.

Grágás.⁵ The term appears numerous times, but I will highlight one example from a section on homicide:

Ef utlendir menn verða vegnir a landi her. danskir eða sønskir. eða norönnir. or þeirra konunga veldi .iii. er vár tunga er. þar eigo frændr þeirra þær sakir ef þeir ero ut her. En af öllum tungum avðrom en af danskri tungu. þa a engi maðr her víg sök at søkia af frændsemis savkom. nema faðir eða sonr eða bróðir. oc þviat eino þeir. ef þeir höfðu her aðr við kennz.⁶

This passage clearly identifies Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians as foreigners (from the Icelandic point of view), but also as being from kingdoms where “our tongue” (that which is spoken in Iceland) is used. Having defined one legal situation for this group, the passage then describes a separate legal situation for anyone speaking a language other than the “Danish tongue”. Hence, Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, and Icelanders are recognized as belonging to separate countries but one linguistically defined community—that of the “Danish tongue”.

E. Note on national language names.

Examples of this sort using the term *ðönsk tunga* are found from throughout the medieval period,⁷ mostly in Icelandic and Norwegian sources, perhaps reflecting the larger body of literature in those dialects. The initially less common terms *norræn tunga* or *norræna*, often used to distinguish West Scandinavian dialects, began appearing around 1200, but truly national names (such as *swenska* and *íslenzka*) for the tongues spoken in the different Scandinavian countries do not much appear before 1300, and do not seem to have become well-established until the time of the Reformation.⁸

⁵ *Grágás: Islændernes Lovbog i Fristatens Tid, udgivet efter det kongelige Bibliotheks Haandskrift*, ed. by Vihjálmur Finsen, 2 vols (Copenhagen: Berling, 1852), I, 172; *Grágás: Efter det Arnamagnæanske Haandskrift Nr. 334 fol., Staðarhólsbók, udg. af Kommissionen for det Arnamagnæanske Legat*, ed. by Vihjálmur Finsen (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1879), pp. 74–5, 338; *Grágás: Stykker, som findes i det Arnamagnæanske Haandskrift Nr. 351 fol. Skálholtsbók, og en Række andre Haandskrifter*, ed. by Vihjálmur Finsen (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1883), p. 448; *Jónsbók: Kong Magnus Hakonssons Lovbog for Island, vedtaget paa Altinget 1281, og Réttarbætr de for Island givne Retterbøder af 1294, 1305 og 1314*, ed. by Ólafur Halldórsson with Gunnar Thoroddsen, supplemented edn (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlage, 1970), pp. 93–94.

⁶ From *Grágás's Staðarhólsbók* (compiled mid-13th century); see *Grágás: Efter det Arnamagnæanske Haandskrift Nr. 334 fol., Staðarhólsbók, udg. af Kommissionen for det Arnamagnæanske Legat*, ed. by Vihjálmur Finsen (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1879), p. 338.

⁷ See overview in Peter Skautrup, “Dansk tunge” in *KLNM*, II, 662–64.

⁸ An exhaustive catalogue (with references) of the various terms used for Scandinavian languages, including quotations of the contexts in which they appeared, may be found in Håkon Melberg, *Origin of the Scandinavian Nations and their Languages: An Introduction*, 2 vols (Halden, Norway: Aschebourg, 1951), pp. 89–146.

F. Swedish assertion of Scandinavian linguistic unity.

There are no clear Swedish or Danish examples using the term “Danish tongue” to denote the common Scandinavian language, perhaps partially because of the relative paucity of medieval East Scandinavian documents. There is, however, evidence that East Scandinavian speakers did recognize the unified speech community of Germanic-speaking Scandinavians. In a fourteenth-century Latin letter to the pope, Nils Sigvastsson, canon of Uppsala, requested a special penitentiary in the language common to the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian kingdoms, so required because their one language was distinct from all other languages:

Jtem cum idioma illorum trium Regnorum Dacie scilicet Swecie, et Norwegie adeo sit ab omni alio ydeomate extraneum et distinctum.⁹

G. Norwegian and Swedish laws.

1. An older usage in Icelandic? – It is difficult to say how old the generic sense of the term *ḍonsk tunga* is. The phrase does not survive in Norwegian law codes as it does in Icelandic ones, but it seems unlikely to be an Icelandic innovation. It may be that the Icelandic law codes preserve an older usage that had been dropped from Norwegian laws by the time they were committed to writing.¹⁰

2. *Gulapingslag* – That this may have been the case is suggested by several passages in the Norwegian *Gulapingslag* which use the phrase *vár tunga* (“our tongue”) in situations similar to those where the Icelandic laws use *ḍonsk tunga*; as seen in the earlier cited example from *Grágás*, the Icelandic laws sometimes use the phrase *vár tunga* themselves, often in conjunction with and equating to the phrase *ḍonsk tunga*. Perhaps at some point, conflict with the Danes led the Norwegians to cease designating their language as “Danish” in their law codes. Icelanders, not having been at war with the Danish kingdom, might have had less impetus to make such changes.

3. *Äldre Västgötalagen* – With regards to early Scandinavian laws, it may also be worth noting that the thirteenth-century *Äldre Västgötalagen* seems to recognize a common Scandinavian community, though it does not specifically define this community in terms of language:

Innæn konongrikis maþær ær iamgildær at sarum sum hærlænzker maþær Danskí ok norne egho bötær a sarum sum hærlænzker maþær.

⁹ From Nils Sigvastsson’s letter to the pope (c. 1321-22); see Letter 2322 in *Svenskt Diplomatarium: Åren 1311-1326*, ed. by Emil Hildebrand, Diplomatarium Suecanum utg. av Kungl. Vitterhets-, historie- och antikvitetsakademien och Riksarkivet, 3 (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1842-50), p. 537.

¹⁰ According to Ari Þorgilsson, the earliest Icelandic law, *Úlfjótsslög*, was based on Norwegian law; *Íslendingabók*, pp. 6-7.

This passage stipulates that in cases concerning wounds, any man of the Swedish kingdom, or any Dane or Norwegian, has the same value and is awarded the same compensation for wounds as a native of Västergötland.

H. “Danish” Tongue in Norman French.

Leaving Scandinavia for the moment, it seems that non-Scandinavians were also prone to designate the common Scandinavian language as “Danish”.

The early-eleventh-century Norman chronicler Dudo of Saint-Quentin, writing in Latin, used the term *Dacisca* to label the Scandinavian speech of Normandy. Most commonly he terms it the *Dacisca lingua*, meaning “Danish tongue”:¹¹

Quoniam quidem Rotomagensis civitas Romana potius quam Dacisca utitur eloquentia, et Bajocacensis fruitur frequentius Dacisca lingua quam Romana; volo igitur ut ad Bajo<ca>censia deferatur quantocius moenia et ibi volo ut sit, Botho, sub tua custodia et enutriatur et educetur cum magna diligentia, fruens loquacitate Dacisca, eamque discens tenaci memoria, ut queat sermonicari profusius olim contra Dacigenas.

It seems likely that Dudo’s Latin term has, if not a Scandinavian model, at least a Germanic model, as it appears to contain the Germanic *-isk* suffix. Later writers—such as William of Jumeiges, Wace, and Benoit de Sainte Maure—used similar terminology in Latin or Old French with such labels as *lingua Danica*, *la Danesche lange* and *Daneis*.¹² The origin of Normandy’s Scandinavian

¹¹ The term *Dacisca* reveals the very common medieval confusion of Denmark, or *Dania*, with the old Roman province of Dacia. Much, both good and bad, has been written on this subject—which shall not be entered into here—but see further Jane Acomb Leake, *The Geats of Beowulf: A Study in the Geographical Mythology of the Middle Ages* (London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), particularly pp. pp. 13-83, 129-133, 139, as well as criticism in Eric Gerald Stanley, *In the Foreground: Beowulf* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1994), p. 48; G.V. Smithers (review of Leake), *English Historical Review*, 86 (1971), 346-49; C.L. Wrenn (review of Leake), *Review of English Studies*, 20 (1969), 204-07; T.A. Shippey (review of Leake), *Modern Language Review*, 64 (1969), 851-2; Jackson J. Campbell (review of Leake), *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 67 (1968), 691-94; J.D.A. Ogilvy (review of Leake), *English Language Notes*, 5 (1967-68), 303-05. Leake’s main points, however, are broadly accepted in Inge Skovgaard-Petersen, ‘Oldtid og Vikingetid’, in *Danmarks historie*, ed. by Aksel E. Christensen and others, 10 vols (Copenhagen: 1977-92), I: *Tiden indtill 1340*, ed. by Inge Skovgaard-Petersen and others (1977), 15-209 (pp. 34-36, 43). Indeed, it seems likely that difficulties with particular details in Leake’s analysis have led to the main understanding explored in her study—that the modern historical-philological understanding of Beowulf’s *Geatas* as *Götar* (or *Jutes*) need not have been the understanding of medieval writers—being largely overlooked and perhaps unduly dismissed.

¹²Dudo, *Dudonis Sancti Quintini De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae ducum*, ed. by Jules Lair, *Mémoires de la Société de Antiquaires de Normandie*, 23 (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1865; Caen: Le Blanc-Hardel, 1865), pp. 154, 197, 198, 221-22; William of Jumeiges, *Guillaume de Jumieges: Gesta Normannorum ducum*, ed. by Jean Marx (Rouen and Paris: Picard, 1914), pp. 40-41. Wace, *Le Roman de Rou des Ducs de Normandie par Robert Wace: poete normand de*

settlers is much disputed, and the waters are often muddied by Norwegian and Danish scholars arguing an ethnic origin that matches their own. Nevertheless, that the region was named for “Northmen” while the language was designated “Danish” suggests that, whatever the settlers’ geographic origin, their tongue was known as “Danish”—just as it seems to have been throughout the medieval Scandinavian world.

I. “Danes” and “Danish” in England.

1. *Ælfric* - Turning to England, *Ælfric* used the phrase *on Denisc* to indicate the speech of Scandinavian peoples in his late-tenth-century *De Falsis Diis*,¹³ though it is unclear whether by this he meant to refer to the speech of all Scandinavians or only to that of those from regions then counted as *Denamearc*.

XIIe siecle, ed. by Frédéric Pluquet, 2 vols (Rouen: 1827), i, pp. 126; Benoit de Sainte-Maure, *Chronique de Ducs de Normandie par Benoit, trouvere anglo-normand du XIIe siecle*, ed. by Francisque Michel, 3 vols, Collection de documents inédits sur l’histoire de France (Paris: , 1836; 1838; 1854), I, pp. 197, 446-47, 479-80. *Noreiz* is used of the language only once, in Wace, p. 6.

¹³*Ælfric*, *De Falsis Diis*, in *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection, Being Twenty-One Full Homilies of his Middle and Later Career for the Most Part Not Previously Edited, with Some Shorter Pieces, Mainly Passages Added to the Second and Third Series*, ed. by John C. Pope, Early English Text Society, 259-60, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1967-68), II (1968), 676-712 (pp. 684, 686).

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2. Anglo-Saxon Chronicle - More telling may be use of the adjective *denisc* in six of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle manuscripts' entries for 787, even though here *denisc* is used to describe men rather than language:¹⁴

MS A: ... & on his dagum cuomon ærest iii. scipu ...
þæt wæron þa ærestan scipu Deniscra monna þe Angelcynnes lond gesohton.

MS B: ... & on his dagum cōmon ærest iii. scipa Norðmanna ...
þæt wæron þa ærestan scipu Deniscra manna þe Angelcynnes land gesohtan.

MS C: ... & on his dagum cōmon ærest iii. scipu Norðmanna ...
þæt wæron þa ærestan scyfu Deniscra manna þe Angelcynnes land gesohton.

MS D: ... & on his dagum comon ærest iii. scyfu Norðmanna of Hæreðalande ...
Ðæt wæron þa ærestan scipu Deniscra manna þe on Engelcynnes land gesohton.

MS E: ... & on his dagum comon ærest iii. scipu Norðmanna of Hereðalande ...
Ðæt wæron þa ærestan scipu Deniscra manna þe Angelcynnes land gesohton.

MS F: ... & on his dagan coman ærost iii. scipa Norðmanna of Hereða lande.
Ðæt wæran þa ærostan scipa Deniscra manna ðe Angelcynnes land gesohton.

MS A simply labels the troublemakers who have landed in England as *denisc*, though MSS B and C further qualify these “Danish men” as *norðmenn*. MSS D, E, and F extend that description to *norðmenn of hæreðaland*. This “*hæreðaland*” seems most likely to be identified with Old Norse *Hjørðaland* (modern Hordaland) in western Norway. This situation strongly implies that the adjective *denisc* is being used in the generic sense of “Scandinavian”.

3. Narrowing of meaning in late 10th century - Indeed, only with descriptions of the royal campaigns organized by Sveinn Haraldsson in the late tenth century is it possible to detect the Chronicle's use of the terms *Dene* or *denisc* narrowing to something like the specific national meaning of the modern terms “Danes” and “Danish”.

¹⁴ Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entries for AD 787; see *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle According to the Several Original Authorities*, ed. and trans. by Benjamin Thorpe, *Rerum Britannicarum medii ævi scriptores*; or, *Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland During the Middle Ages*, 23, 2 vols (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861), I: 96-97.

J. Old English Orosius.

1. **Supdene and Norðdene** -Further information about use of the term *Dene* may be hinted at in supplementary geographical material included in the Old English version of Orosius' *History against the Pagans*:¹⁵

Be westan Ealdseaxum is Ælfe muþa þære ie & Frisland, & þonan westnorð is þæt lond þe mon Ongle hætt & Sillende & sumne dæl Dene ... Be westan Supdenum is þæs garsecges earm þe liþ ymbutan þæt land Brettania, & be norþan him is þæs sæs earm þe mon hætt Ostsæ, & be eastan him & be norþan sindon Norðdene, ægþer ge on þæm maran landum ge on þæm iglandum ... be suþan him is Ælfe muþa þære ie & Ealdseaxna sumdæl.

Niels Lund has noted that the descriptive method employed in this example is to locate a given tribe as a point of reference and then enumerate neighboring tribes and geographical features in relation to the reference tribe; the process is then repeated by choosing further reference tribes. Hence, Lund suggests that the passage's *Supdene* may be identified with *sumne dæl Dene* mentioned in relation to the Old Saxons. This places the *Supdene* on Jutland, north of the Elbe, and the *Norðdene* on the Danish islands and what are now the western and southern coasts of Sweden.

2. **Ohthere, Gotland, and Sillende** - Additional geographical information in the *Old English Orosius* was drawn from the account of Ohthere, a ninth-century Scandinavian merchant probably hailing from what we now know as arctic Norway:

Wið suðan þone Sciringesheal fylð swyðe mycel sæ up in on ðæt land, seo is bradre þonne ænig man ofer seon mæge, & is Gotland on oðre healfre on gean & siðða[n] Sillende. Seo sæ lið mænig hund mila up in on þæt land. & of Sciringesheale he cwæð þæt he seglode on fif dagan to þæm porte þe mon hætt æt Hæþum, se stent betuh Winedum & Seaxum & Angle & hyrð in on Dene. Ða he þiderweard seglode fram Sciringesheale, þa wæs him on þæt bæcbord Denemearc & on þæt steorbord widsæ þry dagas; & þa twegen dagas ær he to Hæþum come, him wæs on þæt steorbord Gotland & Sillende & iglanda fela—on þæm landum eardodon Engle, ær hi hider on land coman—& hym wæs ða twegen dagas on ðæt bæcbord þa igland þe in Denemearce hyrað.

From its location, the region called *Gotland* in Ohthere's account is almost certainly Jutland, while *Sillende* is probably identified with region of southern Jutland called *Sinlendi* in the *Revised Royal Frankish Annals* entry for 815.¹⁶

¹⁵ From the late ninth-century Old English version of Orosius' *History against the Pagans*; see *The Old English Orosius*, ed. by Janet Bately, Early English Text Society: Supplementary Series, 6 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 12-13.

¹⁶ *Einhardi Annales*, in *Annales regni Francorum inde ab a. 741 usque ad a. 829, qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi*, ed. Friedrich Kurze, MGH: Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi, 6 (Hannover: Hahn, 1895) (s.a. 815). The etymology of *Sillende/Sinlendi* is obscure. One possibility is ON **Silende* ("great land, mainland"), though why southern Jutland should have this name not clear (unless it is somehow

3. Both Jutes and Danes - Again, Niels Lund has argued that, up until the time of Haraldr blátǫnn in the late tenth century, the inhabitants of northern Jutland may have been politically autonomous, ruled by their own Jutish kings. Lund has further suggested that Haraldr blátǫnn himself was the half-Jutish son of a Jutish king Gormr.¹⁷ With this in mind, it may be significant that the ninth-century *Old English Orosius* appears to describe the people living in Jutland (ostensibly Jutes) as *Supdene*, contrasting with *Norðdene* living on the islands and mainland. The terms *Norðdene* and *Supdene* do not appear in any other historical contexts, and it is possible that their use in the *Old English Orosius* is simply the result of an Englishman's uncertainty about which subdivision of Scandinavians he was dealing with. However, the use of the terms might also imply that one could be particularly a Jute, yet also a "Dane" in a less specific sense—in other words, "Dane" might have been used as a supra-tribal label.

Such a use would be very much in line with the generically Scandinavian sense of the terms *Dene* and *denisc* employed in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, as well as the use of the Old Norse term *ḍonsk tunga* to label the common Germanic language of medieval Scandinavia.

II. Origins of the Term *ḍonsk Tunga*.

There has been surprisingly little discussion over the origins of the term *ḍonsk tunga*, but even such theories as have been put forward seem unsatisfactory.

A. Seip & Haugen's theories.

For example, Norwegian philologist Didrik Arup Seip suggested that the term was borrowed from non-Scandinavians, who would have been more familiar with the Danes than with any other Scandinavian group.¹⁸ Yet, however familiar Danes may have been, that all of Scandinavia should use a loan-translation of a foreign label based on the name of a single Scandinavian sub-group for

intended to distinguish southern Jutland from the Danish islands); R. Ekblom, "Othere's Voyage from Skiringssal to Hedeby", *Studia Neophilologica*, 12 (1940), 177-90; see also *Old English Orosius*, pp. 1168-69 n. 12/31. Another possibility might be ON **Sunnland*/**Sunnlǫnd* ("southern land/lands"); compare OIce *norðlendingr* and *sunnlendingr*, and the place-names Sunndalr (Sweden), Sunnmær and Sunnhörðaland (Norway); Cleasby-Vigfusson, p. 605 (*s.v.* "sunnr").

¹⁷Lund, "Denemearc", pp. 162, 168-169.

¹⁸For example, in Didrik Arup Seip, *Norsk språkhistorie: Til omkring 1370*, 2nd edn (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1955), pp. 83, 215.

their common speech seems rather far-fetched. One would be hard-pressed to find a similar example of such a practice elsewhere.

Hardly better is Einar Haugen's suggestion that the common Scandinavian language was named *dønsk tunga* "perhaps because Denmark was the first Scandinavian country to receive Christian missionaries".¹⁹ Even imagining some kind of connection with use of the Latin alphabet for vernacular writings, it is difficult to derive much sense from this supposition.

B. "Dane" = Scandinavian?

Considering the Old English examples, might it simply be that the common language of Scandinavia was termed "Danish" because at some point the Germanic-speaking inhabitants of Scandinavia had reason to identify themselves generically as "Danes". This may not be such an unlikely possibility as it seems.

C. Melberg.

However, as far as I can tell, the only previous proponent of this idea was Norwegian amateur scholar Håkon Melberg. Melberg published two lengthy volumes in the mid-twentieth century filled with his musings on the evolution of Scandinavian identity as it related to the term *dønsk tunga*. Alas, though Melberg displays laudable energy and thoroughness in discussing an impressive collection of data, his methodology leaves much to be desired. A fondness for invasion hypotheses (admittedly, a commonplace in scholarship at that time) and a lack of source criticism led Melberg to produce an argument that was largely a scholarly elaboration of Book Five in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*. Melberg's essential conclusion was that the basic unity in medieval Scandinavia's language and culture was the result of a series of series of Danish military conquests which had taken place during, broadly, the third and fourth centuries AD, culminating in a period of Danish overlordship in Germanic-speaking Scandinavia during the fifth and sixth centuries AD.²⁰

Thus, for good reasons, Melberg's ideas did not catch on.

D. Early Danish kingdom proposed by archaeologists.

Yet bizarre though it may seem, they are surprisingly congruent with current theories—championed by Danish archaeologists such as Lotte Hedeager and Karen Høilund Nielsen—which

¹⁹Einar Haugen, "Dialects", in *MSE*, pp. 130-34 (p. 131).

²⁰Melberg, pp. 759-61.

argue that a strong Danish kingdom-state emerged in the third and fourth centuries AD, reaching a peak of power and stability during the fifth through seventh centuries AD.

E. My disagreement.

For various reasons, I would question the development of such an early kingdom-state in southern Scandinavia, and I would suggest rather the development of a society focused around centres of cult and community, perhaps similar to the later Old Saxon Assembly at Marklohe, or the Icelandic *Alþingi*—though there is not time to go into these arguments here.²¹

F. John Hines & spread of Scandinavian culture and identity.

Nevertheless, I would agree with John Hines, who notes a variety of developments in material culture that seem to spread from southern to northern Scandinavia during the third through fifth centuries AD—certain jewellery styles, the gold bracteates, and so forth. These phenomena seem to reveal the appearance of a broad, supra-regional culture across Scandinavia, a culture contrasting so markedly with those of neighbouring Germanic-speaking regions that Hines suspects its creation was conscious and deliberate.²² Something like a truly “Scandinavian” identity had developed, apparently based on southern Scandinavian cultural innovations.

G. Early authors do not use “Dane” generically.

But would participants in this Scandinavian culture have referred to themselves as “Danes”? Such a practice would be at odds with our modern understanding of the term, and neither would it match the earliest known uses of the label “Danes” by Procopius, Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, and Venantius Fortunatus. For all these authors, the term “Danes” labels one of many tribes who inhabit Scandinavia, and is not a generic term for Scandinavians.

²¹ For further discussion on the relatively likelihood of a strong kingdom state versus cult/community central places in pre-Viking southern Scandinavia, see chapters of Carl Edlund Anderson, *Formation and Resolution of Ideological Contrasts in the Early History of Scandinavia* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, Faculty of English, Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, & Celtic, 1999), available at http://www.carlaz.com/phd/AndersonCE_1999_PhD.pdf.

²²Hines, “Cultural Change”, p. 84.

H. John Hines & Anglians and English.

Perhaps a solution may be suggested by evidence from early Anglo-Saxon England. John Hines has argued that the Anglian settlers of Britain developed a uniform dress-style during the fifth century AD that reveals a shared Anglian identity. He notes that the early Anglian grouping in Britain never corresponded to any political unit, yet Bede was acutely conscious of Anglian identity, distinguishing these people as the *gens Anglorum*. Bede used this same term to describe the Germanic-speaking inhabitants of Britain as a whole, perhaps surprisingly with no serious ambiguity, as the context practically always makes his implied meaning clear. Likewise, Bede could speak of Britain's Germanic language as the *lingua Anglorum*, whether its speakers were specifically Anglian or owned some other tribal identity. Bede's sense of the English as one group was not to be matched by a unified English kingdom before the tenth-century. Hines, however, argues that the spread of the Anglian dress-style more widely through Germanic Britain in the course of the sixth century AD helped set the conditions for the emergence of a conscious common English identity.²³

III. Conclusion: The Term *Dǫnsk Tunga* is an old relic.

A. Cultural affiliation, not political domination.

This explanation of Anglian and English identities may provide a remarkable model for the Scandinavian situation. The original **Daniĕr* might have been a single tribal group in southern Scandinavia, but, as their region's material culture spread more widely within Scandinavia, perhaps their name became used as a supra-regional label. Such a process would be reminiscent of that argued by Reinhard Wenskus (and other scholars of the "Vienna school" such as Herwig Wolfram) through which, during the same historical period elsewhere in Germanic Europe, outsiders could "become Goths" through an ideological allegiance to the Gothic *Traditionskern*. Political domination by a southern Scandinavian Danish monarch need not have entered into the equation, and there is no evidence for Danish overlordship throughout Scandinavia until formation of the Union under Queen Margrethe in the late 1380s.

²³Moreover, Hines suggested that English cultural unification would have almost necessarily preceded the political unification which took place during the tenth century in the wake of the Viking invasions;

B. Regional labels and Supra-regional labels.

Scandinavian tribal groups who were not “specifically Danes” could have maintained a separate local identity—as Jutes, or men of Hjørðaland, or what have you—while using the term “Danish” to mark their broader cultural affiliation. If North Germanic emerged as a distinct language group during the pre-Viking period in such an environment, it might have been only natural to refer to it as the “Danish tongue”.

C. Demise of the term *dønsk tunga* in Viking and Medieval periods.

The development of stronger regional political structures in the course of the Viking Age may have led to the demise of a common “Danish” identity in Scandinavia, though the fact of the shared language may have helped *it* retain the obsolete designation “Danish”. In short, the medieval term *dønsk tunga* may not have been a new creation imposed by foreigners, or through the adoption of a new religion, but rather may have been the relic of an older time—a time of cultural birth and definition—now barely visible to us.