During the last ten years of his life (1635–1645), as the envoy of Sweden at the court of Louis XIII, Hugo Grotius began writing a voluminous Latin treatise and commentary entitled *Historia Gotthorum, Vandalorum et Langobardorum*, a work which has garnered little attention from scholars past and present.¹ This is unfortunate since it concludes both his long and fruitful study of two Late-Antique (Greek) authors, Procopius and Jordanes, as well as two medieval (Latin) authors, Bishop Isidore of Seville and Paul the Deacon. The greatest impediments to its study seem to be its structure, which is significantly different from his other historical works, and its length.² Nevertheless, as a history it is worth considering how he intended it to be read in light of his earlier historical treatises, or more specifically the *Annales et Historiae*. In this paper, my intention is to begin to show how and why Grotius alters the method of his historiography from his earlier tact – I will have to be brief, however, due to the restrictions of this publication.³

Recently much effort has been exerted to understand Grotius's historical perspective, particularly in light of the relationship between the stylistic conception of Tacitism and Grotius's *Annales et Historiae*. In fact, the best work so far both challenges old assumptions and tries to define what is meant specifically by Tacitism.⁴ This is an important endeavor, not

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² It could also be that there are simply not that many editions of the work still in existence, which number around 70 copies at last check.

³ There is a tremendous amount of work to be done on this treatise; this paper is meant merely to be a precursor.

⁴ Jan Waszink is leading the way in this effort; see “Shifting Tacitisms. Style and Composition in Grotius’s *Annales*” *Grotiana* 29 (2008): 85–133.
only for Grotian studies, but for seventeenth-century studies as a whole, since Tacitism is a predominant characterization of many seventeenth-century historians and their works. Turning to the work in question, we can see that if Tacitism was part of Grotius's method of historiography in the *Annales*, and perhaps the *De Antiquitate*, his other earlier historical venture, it is no longer the case in the *Historia*. The former works were of Grotius's younger years whereas the *Historia* serves as his mature and distinct terminus to the writing of history.\(^5\)

In the *Historia* Grotius’s primary concern is the legitimization and explanation of Swedish political influence and importance in seventeenth-century Europe; specifically he argues for the primacy of Sweden over all European powers posturing at the court of Louis XIII. To do this he sets out to prove a singular point: namely, that the Swedes through their Gothic heritage are the noblest and most ancient tribe still retaining some sort of historically recognizable form in Europe at this time. In Grotius's mind, this cultural authority rests considerably on Sweden's heritage which he sees as separate from the inheritors of Rome, especially the kingdoms found throughout western Germany, France, and England. This is not to say that Grotius finds the Swedes to be a disparate Scandinavian *gens*; rather, for him, all ancient monikers, such as *Scandinavia* (from Pliny the Elder), *Scandia* (from Ptolemy), *Scandza* (from Jordanes), *Scantia* (from Edward the Confessor), refer to the same people – and he applies the same consideration to the Saxon languages’ creation of *Suetia*, *Suedia*, and *Sueonia*.\(^6\) Moreover, he contends in the “Prolegomena” that Swedes, Danes, and Norwegians ought to be referred to simply as “Norsemen, since this is how they are referred to by other European peoples” in ancient texts.\(^7\)

Although there were other contemporary texts that Grotius could have relied on for creating his principal claim about Sweden’s authority, he chooses instead to refer to ancient precedent. This is seen in the structure of the *Historia* where beyond the “Prolegomena” and “Elogia” his treatise becomes a collection of translations and wholesale excerpts from ancient authors which support his thesis. First, he translates lengthy passages from Procopius and Agathias about the laws of the Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Vandals, and Lombards. Second, he summarizes the remembrances of

\(^5\) It is well known that Grotius edited and revised the *Annales et Historiae* throughout his life, but that seems to have made little impact upon the composition and trajectory of the *Historia Gotthorum*.


\(^7\) Grotius, *Historia Gotthorum*, 10.