

Prince of Trier and a Myth of Origin

Magistrates from Nuremberg, Germany, commissioned a Benedictine monk named Sigmund Meisterlin of Augsburg to prepare a history and a biography of the city of Augsburg in the 15th century. In this Latin historical treatise—*Chronographie Augustensium* (Chronicle of Augsburg)—Meisterlin created an origin myth by claiming that Augsburg was a city that was 600 years older than Rome.

This, of course, is just one of many examples of origin myths written by chroniclers of the medieval period who customarily took some historical liberties and literary license when portraying their ancestors and their cities in a way that made them of equal importance to Rome. Examples can also be found with the Saxons who claimed that they were descended from the soldiers of Alexander the Great, while others such as the Franks, and some peoples who settled in Britain, claimed to be descendants of the Trojans.

Now, even though—in some few cases—there may be a thread of truth in some myths of origin, it should nonetheless be understood that these localized legends of origin are more or less composed from fabricated stories and ancient lore in an attempt to elevate the status of some cities, kingdoms and territories to reflect a history as great as or greater than the founding of Rome by the legendary Romulus.

In some cases, the chroniclers tried to give the impression that their city or kingdom was a second Rome, and an example of this is found in the chronicle of the ancient city of Trier (Treves) in Germany.

For we find in the famous manuscript, *Gesta Treverorum*, with its latest versions being dated from somewhere in the late 11th

century, that it traces the origin of the city of Trier to its supposed founder named Trebeta(s). Who was, according to the chroniclers, a son of Ninos (Ninus), and an Assyrian who found himself harassed by his step-mother—the notorious Semiramis—who was the supposed second wife of Ninus, king of Assyria. (The *Gesta Treverorum* is an anonymous chronicle that spans the period from Trier's supposed origins to when the Archbishopric of Trier came to an end in the late 1700s.)

So, as the story goes it was Semiramis who wished to marry Trebeta, and consequently this caused Trebeta to flee to Europe, and there by the Moselle River in what is now Germany he is said to have founded a city named after himself, Treves (Lt., *Treveri* or *Treberi*). Notably, the *Gesta Treverorum* also states that Trebeta founded Trier when the patriarch Abraham was seven years old, which is chronologically impossible because the birth of Abraham would have occurred many years later according to the chronology associated with the Bible.

Also, the Trier chronicle doesn't fail to embellish the journeys of Trebeta by colorfully describing his wanderings, his sailing across the Mediterranean, and his treks through desert regions and through the mountains until he reached the Moselle River, where he founded Treves more than a millennium before the building of Rome. This elaborate work also tells us that after his death Trebeta was succeeded by his son Hero whose descendants are not given names by the chroniclers of the *Gesta Treverorum*.

Interestingly, we find in the city of Trier a building known as the Red House—*Rotes Haus*—that was built in 1684 for the baker's guild master and secretary of the cathedral chapter, and on this building there is a plaque that reads in Latin: "*Ante romam treviris stetit annis mille trecentist. Perstet et aeterna pace frvatvr. Amen.*"

This commonly translates as: "Before Rome, Trier stood for 1300 years. May it stand on and enjoy eternal peace. Amen."

Which brings us to ask a question.

How did this origin myth come to be used in biblical interpretation and applied to a prophecy of Daniel?

Generally speaking, this origin myth has come to be applied to biblical interpretation based on an erroneous view of Daniel's prophecy regarding the kings of the north and south that assumes this prophecy is understood respective to the geographic location of the city of Jerusalem. Adding to this assumption is a questionable view of Psalm 83, which concludes that this particular psalm is a prophecy and not a prayer for deliverance, and this is accomplished—in part—by substituting the word "Germany" for the word "Assur" in this psalm written by Asaph.

Such a change in the wording of Scripture assumes a foregone conclusion that the German peoples of today can be directly associated by lineage with the descendants of the once great Neo-Assyrian Empire. Then, it is also assumed by the listing of the peoples mentioned in this psalm of Asaph that such a confederacy against the peoples of Israel must represent the coalitions of governments addressed in Daniel's prophecy regarding the kings of the north and south, which is a conclusion that garners no support from Scripture.

Finally, when a revisionist view of the Greco-Macedonian and Roman Empires is applied to the mix of ideas, then it is even further assumed that the legend of Trebeta, as found in the *Gesta Treverorum*, can be used as an additional confirmation that the German peoples are descendants of the ancient provincial Assyrians.

Nothing, of course, is acceptable about this conclusion, because the *Gesta Treverorum* cannot be used as a confirmation to show the origins of those tribes and peoples that early on migrated into Western Europe, and it certainly doesn't support the idea that the modern-day Germans are the descendants of

the ancient Assyrians. (Trier has boasted many notable residents, some of whom were: Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, the Roman emperor Valentinian I, and the German social philosopher, Karl Marx.)

Therefore, we can say that the problems of this interpretation are numerous, not the least of which is that we have no reason to associate Asaph's psalm with the prophecies of Daniel, and we cannot use the origin myth regarding Trebeta to establish a confirmed lineage for the modern-day peoples  of Germany. **(andrewburdettewrites.com)**