REGNAR (– 1238? – 1243- +1266). First Provincial Minister of DACIA, Bishop of Odense 1252- 1266. Probably identical with the Franciscan friar Reynhard who accompanied the papal legate William of Modena at the conference in Stensby, Seeland 1238, where peace was concluded between the Danish King Valdemar and the Grand Master of the German Order in the Baltic. On this occasion the creation of the new Franciscan province Dacia may also have been negotiated. In 1243 Regnar was documented as Provincial of DACIA. In 1252 he was appointed Bishop of Odense. He supported the Franciscan convent in Svendborg and the St. Clare monastery in Roskilde. In the conflict between the Danish kings and the archbishop of Lund, Jakob Erlandsen, Regnar took sides with the archbishop, with whom he was forced to go into exile from 1264. He died in 1266 on his way home from Rome. JNR

ASTRAD FRAKKE (–1225- 1266-). First Danish Franciscan friar mentioned by name. The first Franciscans in Denmark were unknown German friars who founded the house in Ribe 1232. Astrad is first mentioned as a ”senescal” of King Valdemar the Victorious, and was member of the interim government when the king 1223-1225 was taken hostage by Count Henrik of Schwerin. Thus Astrad belonged to the leading class of society. In 1236, when he was warden of the royal castle in Svendborg, he founded the Franciscan convent of this town. Shortly afterwards he decided to enter the Order himself. 1257–1266 he was an active guardian of the convent in Roskilde. He supported the foundations of both the Franciscan and the Dominican nunneries of this town. JNR

MAURITIUS (–1257 – 1281-.) Norwegian friar. Together with brother Simon he accompanied Bishop Peder of Hamar on a voyage to Spain 1257. He described this voyage in an ”Itinerary”, that is only preserved in fragments. In 1264 King Magnus used Mauritius
and a friar Sigurd as peace-negotiators after a war between Norway and Scotland. In 1281 he was sent to Scotland again, this time to propose to princess Margrethe for King Erik. He so appears to have been a skilled diplomat. JNR

ESGER  (- 1406 - +1432) The 22nd Provincialminister of DACIA. He came from Flensborg in Schleswig. 24th of June 1406 he was elected provincial by the chapter in Ribe in open disrespect of a decision made by the Minister General Henrik Alfieri in 1390 and confirmed by pope Benedikt XI in 1400, proscribing that the provincial minister of DACIA alternately should be a Swede or a Norwegien, and alternately a Dane. But Esgers predecessor Anker Christensen was, like himself, a Dane. This resulted in a schism in the province Dacia that continued until Esger´s death 1432. During these years Esger skillfully tried to control the opposition of the Swedish friars by appointing loyal custodes and vicars in the Swedish part of the province. The divided papacy of the period makes the historical background of this nationalistic conflict between the Nordic friars. JNR.

JÖNS NILSSON  (– 1432 - +1468) The 23rd Provincial Minister of DACIA. This Swedish friar was chosen by the chapter in Ystad 1432 as the successor of Friar Esger. Now the change of nationality of the provincials which Esger had violated was reestablished in the province. The same chapter in Ystad set up a ”Studium Generale” for the province DACIA at Lund, and 1438 brother Jöns Nilsson had this important project approved by the Minister General Vilhelm von Casale. Contrary to most other provincials of DACIA, Jöns Nilsson cultivated good relations with the center of the Order, in 1453 he personally took part in the general chapter in Perugia. After the general chapter in Assisi in 1440, he supported the Conventual interpretation of the Rule, and thus allowed the convents to acquire a certain amount of land property in the environs. He also willingly granted letters of fraternity to friends of the Order. He enjoyed the best reputation by Swedish and Danish friars alike. Peder Olsen called him ”very pious”.
By the end of his 36 years of rule he seems to have realized the need for reform and supported the plans of brother Laurids Brandsen. Jöns Nilsson died, when he was
taking part in the chapter in Roskilde 1468. He was buried in the church of this convent. JNR.

KNUT JÖNSSON  (- 1467 - +28/8 1496) Leading intellectual among the Swedish Conventual friars. He came from a Stockholm middle-class family. Studied at the University of Greifswald 1474, and was a short time lector in Randers, Denmark. He took his baccalaureus-degree at the "Studium Generale” of DACIA in Lund 1476. Lector at the Stockholm convent 1478. He probably also studied in Strassbourg. In 1479 Pope Sixtus IV appointed him "Inquisitor of the Three Nordic Kingdoms”, an office he never appears to have used. Guardian in Stockholm 1482-1492 and in the same period custos of the Stockholm custody. 1492 he obtained the doctorate of theology at the Uppsala University. He contributed to the history of the order in the "Stockholm Diary” of the Franciscans. In 1495 he was appointed "Lector Principalis” at the "Studium Generale” in Lund. At the same time he joined the Observant friars in Denmark, but shortly after he left them again. He died in the convent of Söderköping 1496. His memory is above all kept alive by the still existing 17 manuscripts and incunabula in the University Library in Uppsala. According to his dedications and his significative ”ex libris” (a strawberry with runners) they were originally acquired by him for the library of the Stockholm convent. In the same time the first Swedish printing press was set up in the convent 1483. All this characterizes brother Knud Jönsson as a fine representative of the early humanism among the Franciscan friars of Sweden. JNR

LAURIDS BRANDSEN  (- 1468- +1496) OFM obs. Pioneer and promoter of the Observant reform in the Franciscan province DACIA. He was guardian of the convent in Kolding when he tried to persuade the provincial chapter in Roskilde in July 1468 to let him introduce the reform in this convent. But although the former minister, the Swede Jöns Nilsson, had promised to support him, the new provincial, Ove Jensen Kås, firmly rejected this. The Danish King Christian I. now intervened by asking the Minister General John of Zanetto to allow the convent in Odense to be reformed. The general chapter of the order in Venice 1469, and also Pope Paul II, approved of the plan, so that brother Laurids was able to return to Odense, and as guardian
introduce the reform 15. Dec. 1469. Thus the Observant reform in Denmark began. In the following years brother Laurids was the driving forces of the movement together with brother Anders Glob. In 1480 Laurids Brandsen obtained the exemption of the reformed convents from the province by Pope Sixtus IV. Laurids was himself elected as the first Provincial Vicar 1481. When he died 1496 and was buried in Roskilde, he had been vicar for three further periods and 11 convents in Denmark had been reformed mainly through his indefatigable efforts. This was generally recognised and praised by his contemporaries also outside the order. JNR

PEDER OLSEN (- ca. 1490 - + ca. 1570) OFM obs. Historian of Danish national history and especially of his own Franciscan province DACIA. He was born in the village Sonnerup west of Roskilde. He spent most of his life in the Roskilde convent, also after the Reformation. Even as a young friar he began to collect historical notes in his manuscript: ”Collectanea” (= Arnamagnæan Collection in Kop. Ms 107,8 o) About 1522 his provincial Laurids Johansen asked him to write a description of the glorious history of the Observant movement among the Danish Franciscans (Collectanea fol. 113-117). A few years later, in 1528, the attack of the Lutherans on the order began, and thus the very existence of the friars in Denmark was endangered. Then Peder Olsen wrote a survey of all the legitimate foundations of all the Franciscan convents in Denmark (Coll. 107-108). This is the best existing source of the origin of the province. He also composed chronological lists of the provincial chapters and of the names of the provincials of DACIA, and he continually supplemented them with new information. At the same time he completed his ”Danorum Gesta”, the national history of Denmark from 1185-1549. In 1537 the mendicant orders were legally suppressed in Denmark, but Peder Olsen was tolerated as the last surviving Franciscan friar in Roskilde due to his reputation as a historian. JNR.

JAKOB THE DANE (Jacobus de Dacia, Jacobo Daciano) (c. 1483 – ca. 1567) OFM obs. He was a son of the Danish King Hans and Queen Christine. It is not known when he entered the Franciscan Order. He received an excellent humanistic education, learning Latin, Greek, Hebrew and theology. In 1528 he was vice-guardian in the convent of Malmø. After the Lutherans closing of this convent 1530, the Provincial
Minister Erasmus Clausen Ulf appointed him, "Jacobus Johannis", his "socius". He began to write the story of the dissolution of the convents, the "Chronicle of Expulsion" (Ny Kgl. Saml. Kop. 276,4 o). Here he described among other things his own vain efforts to save the convent in Malmø. The victory of the Lutheran King Christian III in the civil war "Grevens Fejde" in 1536 meant the end of the Catholic Church in Denmark. In the "Church Ordinance" from 1537, all mendicant friars were legally forbidden in the realm. Like other friars Jakob chose an exile in Mecklenburg, where he was elected the 35th. and last provincial minister of DACIA with the significant name "Jacobus Gottorpius" In 1539 he went to Spain, where he, with the formal admission of Emperor Charles V, the brother-in law of his brother King Christian II, was recognized as a missionary in Mexico. He spent the rest of his life working as a successful missionary, mainly among the Indians in Michoacán. He saw the dangers of ecclesiastical racism in the Ordinance of the council of Lima 1552, where priestly ordination of Christian Indians and Mestizos was banned and protested against it. But in 1553 a chapter of the Mexican Franciscans rejected his theological arguments for full equality and obliged him to do penance. Jacobo Daciano died in the convent at Tarecuato c.1567, and has since been honored as a saint by the local Indians. JNR

LÜTKE NAAMENSEN (c. 1498 - +1574) OFMobs. His father was a wealthy merchant in Flensburg and "procurator" for the observant Franciscans in the town. Lütke entered the order and was sent to Paris to study. When he returned to Flensburg in 1528, the Lutherans had even closed the convent. Fr. Lütke had to go to other convents, in Ribe until 1537, then in Nysted, until also this convent was closed 1538. Then he chose to go into exile in Schwerin, Mecklenburg. When his Provincial Minister, Jakob the Dane (Jakobus Gottorpius) was to depart for Spain 1539, he appointed Lütke as his "commissarius", tasking him to help other fugitive friars and to take care of property of the Order, that might be brought out of Denmark. He stayed in Schwerin until he 1544 received a special permission from King Christian III to return to his native town of Flensburg, where his parents still lived. In their will they had decided, that their big fortune was to be used for the foundation of a college in the town under direction of their son Lütke. During the following years Lütke had a
big house built for these money. In 1560 he could inaugurate a "Gymnasium trilingue", that was also planned to be a Catholic school. But King Christian III changed its statutes to be Evangelical. It still exists as "Flensburg Altes Gymnasium". Brother Lütke used his authorization as commissionary to collect books from the suppressed Danish convents and incorporated them in the library of his college. These books still exists today in the "St. Nicolai Bibliotek” in Flensburg Stadtmuseum. Lütke also wrote a manuscript with exerpts of theological works and his own poems, in which he defended the Catholic faith. JNR.

VILLEHAD THE DANE, Saint (c. 1492 - + 9. July 1572) OFMobs. He was exiled from Denmark because of the Reformation and the prohibition of mendicant orders in 1537. He first sought refuge from the Reformation in England, then in Scotland, and eventually in Holland. When he was a member of the convent in Gorcum, the friars were taken prisoner by the radical Calvinists. Together with other priests, he was brought to Brielle, where they were all tortured and eventually hanged on July 9, 1572. Villehad was a very modest and silent man, known to be a good confessor. He prayed persistently in the prison, and firmly resisted the demands of his prosecutors, who requested him to deny the Primacy of the Pope and the True Presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar. Villehad was together with the other "martyrs of Gorcum” beatified in 1675 and sanctified 1867 by Pope Pius IX.. In Denmark the "Sakramentskirke” in Copenhagen is also dedicated to St. Villehad. JNR

DACIA Franciscan province ca. 1240-1574. Comprised the friars in the medieval kingdoms of Northern Europe: Denmark, Norway and Sweden with Finland. In 1232 the provincial minister of SAXONIA, Johannes de Piano Carpini, sent friars to Denmark where they got their first house in Ribe. About 10 years after there were 9 convents in Denmark and 3 in Sweden and in 1243 a new province DACIA was organised. The first provincial minister was the German brother Regnar, but after 1250 all provincials were Scandinavians, which shows the swift inculturation of the Franciscans in these areas. Before 1300 there were 34 convents in DACIA and the province was subdivided into eight kustodies. Provincial chapters, where the provincials were elected, were held regularly. The most serious problems were
caused by rivalry between Danish and Swedish friars, especially under the minister Esger 1406-1432. From 1469 the Observant movement advanced among the Danish friars, and it prospered so well, that all Danish convents 50 years later were reformed. But the division of the Order in 1517 meant that DACIA divided up into an Observant province in Denmark with 26 convents and a Conventual province with 6 convents in Norway, 13 in Sweden and 3 in Finland. Only 20 years later all these convents were destroyed by the victory of Lutheranism in these kingdoms.

In his rule St. Francis had not only obliged the friars to personal poverty, but also proscribed the order as a whole not to posses property. This demand made the Franciscan Order the pioneer among mendicant orders. The mutual struggles for the realization of this ideal in Italy and France did not influence the friars in DACIA. My research has shown, that in the first two centuries poverty was practised in a reasonable way by accepting possession of convent buildings with ground, but not of other land property. But after the general chapter in Assisi in 1430 the acquisition of farms in the countryside outside the towns multipied, so ensuring the friars a more stable economy. The Observant movement reacted against that, and where they got a convent, such violations of poverty were abolished. Once again the subsistence of the friars only depended on the gifts from their benefactors. Great donations, destined for foundations of convents, came from the wealthy classes. But there are few written accounts of the daily gifts of ordinary people.

The popularity of the friars was due to the fact, that they offered an alternative pastoral care of the population. In their spacious churches without towers they gathered people into popular preaching, confession, spiritual advice and celebration of Holy Mass. They were also welcomed as guest preachers by many parish priests in the countryside.

The friars themselves came from all classes of society. They were fundamentally educated by the “lectors” of the Order, or they were sent to the “Studium Generale” of the province, founded in Lund 1438. Some of them went to the european Universities for further studies. Relics of the Franciscan libraries have survived in Uppsala and Flensburg. They imply, that the intellectual standard of the Nordic friars
came up to the level of the time. Bonaventure was the most represented authority on philosophy and theology, but also the exegetic works of Nicolaus of Lyra were read. In the late 15th century, the school of Duns Scotus seems to be preferred in the convent of Stockholm, but in the beginning of the 16th century the influence of early humanism can be proved.

No independent creativity in areas of philosophy, theology or mysticism can be found among the Nordic friars. Only in historical writing they made original works. In the 14th century an anonymous Danish Franciscan friar wrote a compendium and a continuation of the work of the famous Danish 12th century historian, Saxo Grammaticus. In the 15th century the friars in Visby and Stockholm in their ”Diarii” wrote valuable contributions to the history of Sweden and of their province, such as lists of the chapters and of the provincial ministers. The greatest Franciscan historian was the Danish brother Peder Olsen (c. 1490-1570). He played a role as mediator of Danish historical writing between the Middle Ages and Modern Times, but also wrote very important contributions to the history of the province DACIA. The dissolution of 15 Danish friaries caused by the Lutheran movement 1528-1532 was described by Jakob the Dane and other friars in the remarkable ”Chronicle of Expulsion”. This work surely was intended to be used in a lawsuit with the purpose of regaining the lost convents. But this hope was destroyed by the victory of Lutheran Reformation.

The influence of the Franciscans in the Nordic countries can be estimated from the great number of convents in the towns, 48 in all, the numerous benefactors, and, especially in Sweden, the pictures of St. Francis and other Franciscan saints in parish churches. In the former Franciscan church in Arboga, Sweden, 16 frescoes of the Life of St. Francis are preserved. There are often devotions to St. Francis in prayer books. The Brichttines of Vadstena translated Bonaventure’s ”Meditations on the Life of Christ” into Swedish. In Denmark the first generations of the Oldenburg Royal Family eagerly supported the Observants. A wonderful expression of this spirit is the altarpiece of Claus Berg in St. Knud’s Cathedral in Odense. This altarpiece was originally created for the choir of the Franciscan church in Odense, that c. 1520 was
changed to a mausoleum for King Hans and Queen Christine of Denmark. The central field of the altarpiece shows the Crucified Savior as the True Wine giving life to saints from the Old and the New Testament until the Middle Ages. Close to His feet stands St. Francis with the stigmata. At the predella members of the royal family are kneeling before Christ, the Man of Suffering.

This pious monument stands in outmost opposition to the persecution of the friars by the successive Danish kings. Frederik I began to support the Lutheran preachers in Denmark, and from 1528 he legitimated the dissolution of the mendicant convents. The friars themselves wrote detailed accounts of the events in the “Cronicle of Expulsion”. Brother. "Jakobus Johannis” (Jakob the Dane) was the author of the first two thirds of this ”Chronicle”. But 1536 King Christian III after his victory in the civil war "Grevens Fejde” (Feud of the Count) took full power also over the Church. In the ”Church Ordinance” for the new Danish Lutheran Church 1537, he formally prohibited all mendikant orders in Denmark, and, as a consequence of the political union with Denmark, also in Norway. A similar evolution took place in Sweden under Kong Gustav Vasa. About 1540 all Franciscan convents in the Nordic countries had been closed.

Peder Olsen was tolerated in Roskilde as an exception, because of his reputation as a national historical writer.A group of exiled Danish friars gathered in Mecklenburg, where the last provincial of DACIA, Jacobus Gottorpius (Jakob the Dane), 1539 appointed the Flensborg friar Lütke Naamensen as his commissionary, tasking him with supporting other Franciscan refugees and taking care of the possessions of the order. Jakob himself travelled to Spain and eventually became a missionary in Mexico, where he lived for another 25 years and fought for the human rights and the ecclesiastical equality of the Indian converts until his death c.1567. Lütke Naamensen returned to Flensburg, where he, in spite of all resistance and intrigues from the Protestant authorities, tried to found a Catholic college. St. Villehad was another exiled Danish Franciscan,. He and a group of Catholic priests from Gorcum were martyred by radical Calvinists in the Dutch town of Brielle 9th. of July 1572. He was beatified 1675 and canonized 1867.
Nowadays - after the introduction of democracy and religious freedom (in Denmark 1849) - Franciscans can once again live and work in our countries. Today more than 30 friars live peacefully following their vocation to serve the Catholic faith and Christianity in general in the same Nordic countries, that many years ago comprised the Franciscan province of DACIA.

Roskilde 4th of August 2004 Jørgen Nybo Rasmussen