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## WIDUKIND ON THE SAXON ORIGINS

Saxo, Thuring, and *Landkaufszene* (*Res gestae Saxonicae*, I, 5). The Imitation of Ancient Patterns, an Old Tribal Saga or the Product of Scholarly Erudition by Saxon Intellectuals of the 9th–10th centuries?

The *Chronicle* by Widukind as a whole, as well as its respective parts, have had a long and prolific research history<sup>1</sup>. The initial part of the work, called by historians a legend on the Saxons' arrival or the Saxon tribal saga<sup>2</sup>, provokes vivid and

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<sup>1</sup> H. Beumann, *Widukind von Korvei. Untersuchungen zur Geschichtsschreibung und Ideengeschichte des 10. Jahrhunderts*, Weimar 1950; K. Hauck, *Widukind von Korvei*, in: *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon*, ed. K. Langosch, vol. IV, Berlin 1953, pp. 946–958; W. von Stetten, *Der Niederschlag liudolfingischer Hausüberlieferung in den ersten Werken der ottonischen Geschichtsschreibung*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis., Erlangen Philology Department, 1954, p. 60 ff.; L. Bornscheuer, *Miseriae regum. Untersuchungen zum Krisen- und Todesgedanken in den herrschaftstheologischen Vorstellungen der ottonisch — salischen Zeit*, Berlin 1968, p. 16 ff.; H. Beumann, *Historiographische Konzeption und politische Ziele Widukinds von Korvei*, 1970, in: by the same author, *Wissenschaft vom Mittelalter*, Köln 1972, pp. 71–108; E. Karpf, *Herrscherlegitimation und Reichsbegriff in der ottonischen Geschichtsschreibung des 10. Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart 1985, p. 144 ff.; B. Schneidmüller, *Widukind von Corwey, Richer von Reims*, in: *HZ — Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Reich- und Nationsbildung in Deutschland und Frankreich*, ed. C. Brühl, B. Schneidmüller, München 1987, p. 87 ff.; G. Althoff, *Widukind von Corwey. Kronzeuge und Herausforderung*, "Frühmittelalterliche Studien" 27, 1993, pp. 253–272; L. Körntgen, *Königsherrschaft und Gottes Gnade. Zu Kontext und Funktion sakraler Vorstellungen in Historiographie und Bildzeugnissen der ottonisch-frühsalischen Zeit*, Berlin 2001, pp. 74–101; S. Bagge, *Kings, Politics, and the Right Order of the World in German Historiography c. 950–1150*, Leiden 2002, pp. 23–94.

<sup>2</sup> M. Lintzel, *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des sächsischen Stammes*, "Sachsen und Anhalt" 3, 1927, pp. 1–46, especially pp. 32 ff.; R. Drögereit, *Die sächsische Stammesgeschichte*, "Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte" 26, 1954, pp. 194–197; R. Wenskus, *Sachsen — Angelsachsen — Thüringer*

undiminished interest. The chronicler himself indicates the significance of *origo gentis Saxonum*, the very important moment in the history of the people when it gains lands to live on, and when its political structure develops<sup>3</sup>.

The opinions and commentaries accompanying this part of the work for decades, almost two hundred years, constitute an exquisite material for the study of most prominent historians' struggle with "historical reality", presented through a form of a structured narrative. We can refer to, and comment on, the mentioned efforts only in a way which is limited by the size of this essay as well as a strictly determined subject of our scientific interest.

Firstly, let us introduce the "chief character" of our considerations, the legend on the Saxon prehistory and origins. To place the story in the context of the chronicle, it begins in the third and ends in the fourteenth chapter of book one of this work<sup>4</sup>. Thus, we have in mind the longest, most magnificent and the very proper narrative of the Saxon *origines* to which Widukind not only has no reservations, but also stresses that some accounts, placed at the beginning of the narration and fundamental for the history of the people, are credible<sup>5</sup>.

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(1967), in: by the same author, *Ausgewählte Aufsätze zum frühen und preußischen Mittelalter*, ed. H. Patze, Sigmaringen 1986, pp. 138–200; W. Lammer, *Die Stammesbildung bei den Sachsen. Eine Forschungsbilanz*, (1957), in: by the same author, *Vestigia Mediaevalia*, Wiesbaden 1979, pp. 124–171 especially p. 126 ff.; M. Becher, *Rex, Dux und Gens. Untersuchungen zur Entstehung des sächsischen Herzogtums im 9. und 10. Jahrhundert*, Husum 1996, p. 31 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Widukindi Res gestae saxonicae* (quoted below as: *Widukind*), wyd. A. Bauer, R. Rau, *Quellen zur Geschichte der sächsischen Kaiserzeit*, Darmstadt 1971, p. 20 (I, 2).

<sup>4</sup> We refer here to the edition quoted in footnote 3; *Widukind*, pp. 22–42. The narration of the prehistory of the tribe is interrupted in Ch. 8 (pp. 26–28) by the passage on the conquer of Britain by the Saxons, the fact — according to the chronicler — parallel in time to the settling down of the Saxons who arrived in the continent, in the Thuringian territory.

<sup>5</sup> *Widukind*, p. 22 (I, 3), see: H. Beumann, *Widukind*, pp. 58–63. Beumann, supporting the chronicler as a critical historian, explains his trust to the present version of the prehistory of the people by an assumption that the author used written sources here, i.e. according to the opinion expressed by intellectuals of his times, the credible ones. This explanation allows us to treat as methodologically credible an earlier statement of Widukind (*de origine statuque gentis pauca expediam, solum pene famam sequens in hac parte, nimia vetustate omnem fere certitudinem obscurante*) and praise him that he chose the best tradition from among many others. Beumann unintentionally falls into the trap of ahistorical reasoning, as he does not understand the concept of pagan tradition *de origine* working in the world of Christian historiography. The most ancient, and the most important for the community accounts were, however, humorous tales (cf. Paul

Earlier, in chapter two, the author briefly recounts other views regarding the origins of the Saxons. According to some, he notes, they stem from the Danes and Normans, *i.e.* — let us comment on this — from Scandinavia, as every decent tribe from German *ecumene*<sup>6</sup>. According to some others, whose opinion Widukind heard as a child, the Saxons originate from the soldiers of Alexander the Great of Macedonia, orphaned by their leader and scattered around the world<sup>7</sup>. Both genealogies magnify the conviction of the glory of the people, and they are worth mentioning, however, with respect to rich in details and long story of the Saxon origins that follows, they play a secondary role, and their

the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, 8), and reports deformed by the mistakes of paganism and oblivion (cf. Gall below), but those in fact true stories were not renounced, and were treated with respect. Widukind's scepticism towards the oldest Saxon traditions is only a reaction, however, welcomed, of an erudite to the problem: paganism versus Christianity, which is equally dealt with by Gall, although after reporting the incriminated tales (*Sed istorum gesta, quorum memoriam oblivio vetustatis abolevit et quos error et ydolatria defedavit... Galli Anonymi Cronica et gesta ducum sive principum Polonorum*, ed. K. Maleczyński, *MPH* n.s., vol. 2, Kraków 1952, p. 12, I, 3). Cf. D. Bullough, *Ethnic History and the Carolingians: An Alternative Reading of Paul the Deacon's Historia Langobardorum*, in: *The Inheritance of Historiography 350-900*, ed. Ch. Holdsworth, T. P. Wiese man, Exeter 1986, p. 95 ff., 100. The literature on *origo gentis* has been collected by H. Anton (*Origo gentis — Volksgeschichte. Zur Auseinandersetzung mit Walter Goffarts Werk "The Narrators of Barbarian History"*, in: *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. A. Schärer, G. Scheibereiter, Wien 1994, pp. 262-307). The views of the author on the cognitive values of the legends *de origine* can even be called neopositivistic; see also footnote 19.

<sup>6</sup> Widukind, p. 20; on the Scandinavian origin of various German peoples see: R. Hachmann, *Die Goten und Skandinavier*, Berlin 1970, p. 15 ff.

<sup>7</sup> Widukind, pp. 20, 21 — *dicerent Saxones reliquias fuisse Macedonici exercitus, qui secutus Magnum Alexandrum immatura morte ipsius per totum orbem sit dispersus*. This was the way the Franks' origins were depicted, which is confirmed by Otfried of Weissenburg — II half of the 9th c., in: see W. Lamers, *op. cit.*, p. 127. In order to "create" a substantial group of the progenitors of the community, the Trojan refugees scattered around the world were also used. According to Geoffrey of Monmouth (*Historia regum Britanniae*, chs 7-20), it is Brutus who collects them, and colonizes a yet dessert Island. The Saxon rebels — warriors opposing the reign of Charles the Great flee by boat to Prussia, where being the community of the Prussians (Sasins) survive until the times of Boleslaus the Wrymouth. See: Gall, p. 112, II, 42; J. Powierski, "Uczona" *legenda z kroniki Galla Anonima o saskim pochodzeniu Prusów i geneza nazwy Sasinów* (*The "Learned" Legend from the Chronicle by Gallus Anonymus on the Saxon Origins of the Prussians and the Provenience of the Name of Sasins*), in: by the same author, *Prusowie, Mazowsze i sprowadzenie Krzyżaków do Polski* (*The Prussians, Mazovia and Bringing the Teutonic Order to Poland*), vol. II, 1, Malbork 2001, pp. 9-20, also H. Strunk, *Wie die Sachsen nach Hadeln kamen. Eine quellenkritische Untersuchung*, "Jahresbericht der Männer vom Morgenstern" 11, 1908/1909, p. 28 ff.; F. Graus, *Lebendige Vergangenheit. Überlieferung im Mittelalter und in den Vorstellungen vom Mittelalter*, Köln 1975, pp. 121 and footnote 199, 127, 130 ff. (Ch. *Die Herkunft und die Landnahme der Sachsen*).

content does not have any clear links with what we are about to learn from Widukind below<sup>8</sup>.

The proper and, one can say, the true Saxon saga begins therefore as follows. The pre-Saxons arrived in the continent by boat, and settled down at the mouth of the Elbe, on its left bank in a place called Hadeln. This laconic but pithy statement, supported by a toponymic argument, was highlighted and placed at the very beginning of the story<sup>9</sup>. Widukind was confident about it, and we can be sure as well, however, we shall consider the sense of plausibility of the event itself on a different level. Old communities wanted to know where their roots were (*locus primae habitationis*), and they usually could locate them within their territory and thus, keep where they originated in memory<sup>10</sup>.

In the Saxon tradition, the place of Hadeln had some time before the times of Rudolf of Fulda become the first homeland of the people on the continent<sup>11</sup>. The proper tale about their arrival, mentioning this name, later authenticated its contents by referring the listeners to their contemporary, "working" and relevant toponym. This process of mutual intensification between a saga and its key concept<sup>12</sup> materialised *in loco* (or in an object), so vital

<sup>8</sup> H. Beumann, however, (*Widukind*, s. 57 i przyp. 8) indicated a possible connection between the information, mentioned by the chronicler, on the Greek origin of the Saxons, and Widukind's attempt to compare the gods of the Saxons to the gods of the Greeks. As to the Scandinavian origins, the Saxons may have arrived in Hadeln just from Scandinavia.

<sup>9</sup> On Hadeln (Haduloha) and the attempts to interpret this toponymy see: R. Drögereit, *Haduloha und Hadugot — Gedanken zur "Sächsischen Stammesgeschichte"*, "Jahresbericht der Männer vom Morgenstern" 45, 1964, pp. 168–180. We do not support the idea that it was a unimportant and poorly known tradition that mattered, cf. R. Wenskus, *op. cit.*, pp. 172, 196. See also: J. Udolph, *Haduloha*, in: *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, vol. 13, Berlin 1999, pp. 271–274.

<sup>10</sup> See: J. Banaszkiwicz, *Polskie dzieje bajeczne mistrza Wincentego Kadłubka (Polish Legendary History by Master Wincenty Kadłubek)*, Wrocław 1998, p. 349 ff. A good example of a certain cognitive coercion — which, while tribal *origines* are depicted, results in pointing out the primordial site of the people — as added by Frechulf of Lisieux. Discussing the origins of the Franks from Skandza (Scandinavia) he argues that "there is an area on the island which is still called, as some say, Francia" Q. R. Hachmann, *op. cit.*, p. 31, footnote 63.

<sup>11</sup> Rudolf in *Translatio s. Alexandri* (the respective passage is printed in the quoted ed. of *Widukind*, p. 12) writes: *Saxonum gens sicut tradit antiquitas... navigans Germaniae litoribus studio et necessitate quaerendarum sedium appulsa est in loco, qui vocatur Haduloha*.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. J. Banaszkiwicz, "Usque in hodiernum diem". *Średniowieczne znaki pamięci (The Medieval Signs of Memory)*, "Przegląd Historyczny" 1, 1981, pp. 229–238.

for the functioning of a tradition in ancient communities, is readable in Widukind's reasoning. He writes, we gather, that the Saxons first arrived in Hadolaun (the saga), and until to-day the place has been called accordingly (evidence *ex loco*)<sup>13</sup>. For a historian living in the Middle Ages it really was where the Saxons appeared for the first time *his regionibus*. For us, an already shaped and quite widespread saga on the Saxon arrival was connected with Hadeln.

As a matter of fact, we made this diversion unintentionally, interrupting the discourse of the Saxon tale *de origine*. We were, however, encouraged by the nature of the account placed in chapter three, book one of Widukind's work. The story about the disembarking of the Saxons in Hadeln is short, concise, and stands out from the later narration. Had it been an independent entity before it became a part of a much longer Saxon saga?

This particular question makes the interruption justified. It makes us aware of the existence of some important facts which determined the perception of the whole story which is of our interest. It was denoted by a number of names, somehow successful in the process of mutual communication among historians, and between them and their readers. This arbitrariness of naming highlights a facts oriented attitude of scholars towards the tale of the Saxon origins, which has been noticeable in German historiography until now. The story is important as it depicts milestones in the history of a great community — it is a saga on the arrival of the Saxons or a saga on gaining lands by them until they settled down, as well as a saga on the origins of the Saxons and the creation of social divisions among them<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> *Pro certo autem novimus Saxones his regionibus navibus advectos et loco primum applicuisse qui usque hodie nuncupatur Hadolaun, Widukind, p. 22, l. 3. J. de Vries (Die Ursprungssage der Sachsen, "Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte" 31, 1959, p. 22 ff., 28) he recognized this part of the account as an independent component of a three-component old Saxon saga, also created in three stages. See also footnote 38.*

<sup>14</sup> *Sächsische Stammesage*, is either generally discussed without indicating more precisely which parts it consists of and which of them is relevant — the one from the written evidence or the one from earlier tradition — or it is divided into segments which describe the most intrinsic events yet without clear connotation of the character of the account. E.g. M. B e c h e r, *op. cit.*, p. 38 — *Widukind kannte viele Motive der sächsischen Stammesage...*; *Die Erzählung von der ersten Landnahme ist geprägt von zwei Wandersagen...*; H. B e u m a n n, *Widukind, p. 68 — Die Landnahmesage, die hier in Verbindung mit der Namensage beginnt...*; *Der Bericht von Landkauf und der verräterischen Ermordung der Thüringer ist echte sächsische "Volkssage..."*; *Es ist (Iringlied — J. B.) für Widukind ein Teil der origo*

Having created these sagas so recklessly, one either does it off the true matter of narration as a whole and the textual content of the stories available to us, or makes a significantly loose connection to it. If, generally speaking, the contents of the Saxon tribal saga is divided into two parts — see below — very little is said about the structure and particular individual components of the respective parts. Having considered that the “material substance”, being suitable to be filled with the “stuffing” of an entity such as *sächsische Stammesgeschichte*, is rich, diversified, as well as differently presented by the two major sources, namely Rudolf and Widukind, the task to particularize the face of the mentioned saga (or, perhaps, sagas) appears to be as topical as never before.

The old Saxon tale, clearly reflected in Widukind’s narration, is eagerly discussed in historiography, whereas as a matter of fact its shape and contents are approached quite superficially<sup>15</sup>. One does not even realize what is the very essence of the presentation on the Saxon origins by Rudolf of Fulda and the long account on the same subject by Widukind. What is the real image of logical, ideological and formal (literary) links of the reality created by both medieval scholars? Are we dealing with the fruit of editorial work performed by those chroniclers on already created traditions (and if so — in what shape?), or, perhaps, with their own creativity based on scarce and unclear information on the prehistory of their homeland?

The question asked above: whether the tale of the Saxons’ arrival in Hadeln and the related events to follow once led a separate existence, and what Widukind did, or could have done with it, that also comes within the context of the research mentioned above. In view of the remarks made so far, one cannot say more than that there was a strong conviction among all the Saxons in the 9th and 10th centuries which let them indicate Hadeln as the region where the Saxon community and its territorial reign were born. The view, we assume, was expressed by narration similar to the ones that notified the arrival of other

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*gentis im weiteren Sinne*. H. Beumann, in his second quote, and even its further part, uses the ideas literary taken from the article by M. Lintzel (see. *op. cit.*, p. 35).

<sup>15</sup> From M. Lintzel (*op. cit.*, p. 35 ff.) through J. de Vries (*op. cit.*, p. 22 ff.) to M. Becher (*op. cit.*, p. 38). However, J. de Vries did much more within the mentioned scope than the others.

German tribes by boat from their overseas territories in their new homeland<sup>16</sup>.

Before we return to the interrupted strain of the Saxon prehistory, we are yet to solve another problem. The casuistic and magisterial view on the Saxon issue, which was delivered by Rudolf and Widukind, strengthened the belief that literary analyses would be of no use for researchers. When such research is initiated, it always encounters recurrent motifs and *topoi* appearing in different parts of the world, which never bring (historically) valuable data<sup>17</sup>.

These ones were only drawn by Karl Hauck, who did it with ease and scientific optimism from the works of Widukind and Rudolf, or, more precisely, from the whole "Saxon issue", placed in the two narrations, which the historian treated as one entity and one tradition<sup>18</sup>. Impartially speaking, the scholar who paid the least attention to the existence of an "objective world" created in a story, at the same time assumed that a saga was clear enough to be understood. It was sufficient to track down and indicate in the tale real Saxon-German antiquities so as to fully authenticate the plot and explain its logical structure.

Even the most prominent of the greatest, Reinhard Wenskus, although he defended cognitive values that stemmed from the studies on repeating means of a literary medium, he was unable to "lower himself" in practice to particular analyses of the narrative layer in the Saxon account. However, in his apology of the material neglected by other historians, he seems to have gone further than Helmut Beumann, and came to conclusions and interpretative advice which is much more interesting compared with research by Beumann, the "fully acclaimed father" of a fresher approach of historians to lavish narrative sources<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> R. Wenskus, *op. cit.*, p. 169 ff.; R. Hachmann, *op. cit.*, *loc. cit.*; H. Anton, *op. cit.*, p. 267 ff., 301 ff.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. R. Drögereit, *Die sächsische Stammesgeschichte*, p. 197 — *Ziehen wir die Summe, so ist die sog. sächsische Stammesgeschichte ein Gebilde aus Vorstellungen und Gedankengängen, die sowohl in Rudolfs wie Widukinds Zeit möglich waren. Rudolf zeugte die Fabel, Widukind zog sie mit Liebe gross!* On the line of reasoning of the opponents see below.

<sup>18</sup> K. Hauck, *Goldbrakteaten aus Sievern. Spätantike Amulett-Bilder der "Dania Saxonica" und die Sachsen-Origo bei Widukind von Corvey*, München 1970, pp. 38–112.

<sup>19</sup> R. Wenskus, *op. cit.*, p. 167 ff. However, he did not accept the assumptions that a narrative and its world are original creations, and, in fact, they create —

Even though Beumann widely concentrates on the text of Widukind's story, including the narration of the Saxon saga, the scholar looks at the subject of his attention from such a high pedestal that it is rather easier for him to press down the chronicle with the weight of his sublime erudition (mostly external and superficial in relation to the appraised work), rather than, following the guidelines of the chronicler, humbly discover the secrets of the world which he created. Thus, the expert in interpretation of narratives has not turned out to be particularly successful in his research on the Saxon *origines* by Widukind. As a matter of fact, he took over, without reservations, Martin Lintzel's view in his iron logic and deeply historical opinion on the Saxon saga<sup>20</sup>.

And he himself — and this is Beumann's contribution to the research on the Saxon issue in Widukind's narration — searched everywhere for old hero songs concerning the prehistory of the tribe, in order to be able to indicate the sources of the chronicler's knowledge about the origins of his homeland<sup>21</sup>. He purposely sought such old Saxon *Heldenlieder*, authentic monuments of popular culture of such a big tribe, so as to convince others that topoi and recurrent motifs which fill those works acquire in the given context a new value. And these as such become valuable for a historian.

If the results achieved by Mathias Becher are to be considered as credible for the last period of the research on the Saxon issue, one has to admit that not much has changed in this field. Old hero songs have been replaced with a new "passkey" — an oral tradition<sup>22</sup>. The saga with its literarily created world remains untouched. The critical opinion of Lintzel works well, as these are historical speculations which still matter<sup>23</sup>, although their

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like a woman and her make-up and dresses — the so called reality, and do not necessarily have to confirm it. There must be at least something historical left in the account. Cf. H. Anton, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

<sup>20</sup> See. H. Beumann, *Widukind*, p. 68; see also footnote 14. Actually, the remarks by J. de Vries (*op. cit.*, pp. 26, 28) are on a par with the concept by Lintzel: both similar sagas, the Saxon one and the Anglo-Saxon one, originate from one older tribal saga.

<sup>21</sup> H. Beumann, *Widukind*, pp. 69, 72, 76, 78, 80. See also W. Lammers, *op. cit.*, p. 127 and footnote 16; J. de Vries, *op. cit.*, p. 28 ff.

<sup>22</sup> See: M. Becher, *op. cit.*, pp. 32, 38.

<sup>23</sup> See how far reaching historical research was conducted on the basis of an "obvious" insertion of the fights between the Saxons and the Thuringians, known from the saga, into the war scenes of year 531. M. Lintzel, *op. cit.*, p. 21, *passim*; R. Wenskus, *op. cit.*, p. 173 ff., 181; see also F. Graus, *op. cit.*, p. 123; M.



subject does not remain clearly defined or structurally recognized.

The Saxon saga consists of two recurrent fables (*zwei Wandersage*), but it is, however, ancient, one can say, naturally tribal, and of course in a Saxon fashion as it was created long before the beginning of the 9th century, perhaps among the insular Saxons<sup>24</sup>. In any case — what Lintzel claims, the legend was known on the continent already before the end of the conquest of the Island by the Saxons<sup>25</sup>.

This reflection is based upon two, highly unreliable historical combinations, and the author acquires the conclusive argument solely on the basis of a glance at the so-called *Nennius Chronicle* and a work by Geoffrey of Monmouth. In the Nennius chronicle, a historian finds one of recurrent motifs, co-creating Widukind's Saxon saga. In the Briton's text (the account, however, reflects a German tradition), this standard was used to show how the Saxon newcomers cunningly murdered their hosts — the local elders at the assembly. The other motif, which constructs Widukind's tribal saga — according to Lintzel — also survived on the island, but in a later work — *The History of the Kings of Britain*. It is a motif depicting how the "landless" Saxons craftily, but rightly, extorted the land from the autochthons.

The conclusion is therefore clear: *Die Sage, die Widukind wiedergibt, war in ihren wesentlichen Zügen auch in Britannien bekannt*<sup>26</sup>. As all the Saxon conquerors had already had their tribal saga, which they slightly modified in new circumstances, their continental kins must have had it even earlier.

Apparently, it all looks historical until one takes a deeper look into the sources, and pays more attention to the narrative layer of the accounts. We cannot polemicize with Lintzel's views which still influence the approach of researchers towards the Saxon saga. At least we know how the shape, structure and time location of them are determined, although we would abstain from using specific material collected by the chronicler of Corvey and the monk of Fulda. It is high time to return to the interrupted strain

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Becher, *op. cit.*, p. 36 — the latter two researchers regard these accounts by Widukind and Rudolf of Fulda as concerning the year 531 campaign.

<sup>24</sup> H. Beumann, *Widukind*, p. 68 ff.; F. Graus, *op. cit.*, p. 122; M. Becher, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>25</sup> M. Lintzel, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, *loc. cit.*

of the Saxon saga by Widukind and indicate this passage which should receive a deeper consideration.

As soon as the Saxons disembarked in Hadeln, the locals — Thuringians — felt outraged by this incident and turned their arms against the newcomers<sup>27</sup>. They defended themselves so bravely that they managed to hold the port in their hands. In the first assault a bridgehead which could serve as a base for further offensives was captured, which was similar to the Anglosaxon saga told by Nennius. There, the newcomers settled on the island of Thanet by the shore of Kent<sup>28</sup>. The matter — as we believe — is in accordance with logical reasoning: first a small piece of territory, then more, and finally everything.

The fights between the autochthons and the newcomers kept continuing. They were fierce and brought numerous casualties on both sides, so finally negotiations commenced. According to the agreement which was reached, the Saxons were allowed to sell and purchase goods, and in return they were to refrain from plundering and murdering. That pact — as Widukind put it — was binding for a number of days. However, when the Saxons ran out of money, and they could not buy anything any longer and had nothing else to sell, they considered the peace accord useless.

This passage and the above mentioned information ends these chronicler's accounts which shed light on the first chapter of the tribe's existence in their new settlement. The narration which is going to follow, clearly develops into a separate entity — a brief depiction of the life of the Saxons getting into trouble. It logically recurses to the previous fragment of the text — the critical position in which the Saxon group found themselves.

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<sup>27</sup> Widukind, p. 22 (I, 4).

<sup>28</sup> J. Morris, *Nennius. British History and The Welsh Annals*, London 1980, p. 66 ff. (Ch. 31), p. 68 ff. (Ch. 36). On the chronicle: J. Morris, introduction to the edition; D. Dumville, *Historia Brittonum: An Insular History from the Carolingian Age*, in: *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, p. 406–434; see also footnote 33. On the Saxon tradition of the conquer of the Island in the *History of the Britons*: N. Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon Myths: State and Church 400–1066*, London 2000 (Ch. *The English Origin Myth*); H. Vollrath, *Die Landnahme der Angel-Sachsen nach dem Zeugnis der erzählenden Quellen*, in: *Ausgewählte Probleme europäischer Landnahmen des Früh- und Hochmittelalters*, ed. M. Müller-Wille, R. Schneider, Sigmaringen 1993, pp. 318–337. The resemblance of the situation is noticed by J. de Vries (*op. cit.*, s. 30), the mentioned similarity in the approach to the events is, according to him, a reflection of a remote reality: this was a policy typical for merchants — sea robbers.

This particular passage deserves a closer look and a more detailed than periphrastic translation, as it will be the object of our interpretation.

Suddenly we hear that "it happened that one lad, burdened with a great deal of gold such as golden torques and golden armlets, was alighting from a ship. One of the Thuringians speaks to him with these words: 'What would you like for the amount of gold surrounding your hungry throat?'. 'Really, I am looking for a buyer — he answers — I am wearing that much gold for no other reason. How can I, starving, feel enchanted by this gold? Then the other one asks about the type and amount of payment. 'Any payment is suitable for me — Saxo says — whatever you will offer, I will appreciate'. And his counterpart, laughing at the youth, says: 'What if I fill the flaps of your shirt with this sand?' as there was a heap of soil where they were standing. Saxo, without any hesitations, let his flaps be filled with the soil and gave his gold to the Thuringian. Each of them then went back with satisfaction to their comrades. The Thuringians glorify the Thuringian who smartly deceived the Saxon, and consider him the luckiest of all, as he got so much gold for nothing. And now confident of their forthcoming victory, they had already triumphed over the Saxons. In the meantime, Saxo, deprived of his gold and burdened with a huge amount of soil instead, is approaching the ships. When his comrades approached him and wondered what he had done, some of them began to sneer at him; others — reproached him. All believed that he had lost his mind. And the lad, having asked for quiet, said: 'Follow me, the best Saxons, and you will find my madness useful for you'. So they, although still doubtful, follow their commander, whereas he tosses the soil as sparingly as possible over the nearby fields and takes some space for a camp"<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> *Widukind*, pp. 22, 24 (l. 5) — *Ea igitur tempestate contigit adolescentem quandam egredi de navibus oneratum multo auro, torque aurea simulque armillis aureis. Cui obvius quidam Thuringorum: "Quid sibi vult", inquit, "tam ingens aurum circa tuum famelicum collum?" "Emptorem", inquit, "quaero; ad nihil aliud istud aurum gero. Qui enim fame periclitor, quo auro delecter?" At ille qualitatem quantitatemque pretii rogat: "Nullum", inquit, "michi est", Saxo, "discrimen in pretio; quicquid dabis gratum teneo". Ille vero subridens adolescentem: "Quid si", inquit, "de isto pulvere sinum tibi inpleo?" Erat enim in presenti loco egesta humus plurima. Saxo nihil cunctatus aperit sinum et accipit humum, illicoque Thuringo tradidit aurum. Laetus uterque ad suos repedit. Thuringi Thuringum laudibus ad caelum tollunt, qui nobili fraude Saxonem deceperit, fortunatissime eum inter omnes mor-*

This passage, which we intend to concentrate on, does not end the Saxon tribal saga. The Saxons arrived in Hadeln, taking their post at the port, and next they bought out from the Thuringians by subterfuge a large strip of land on which they could establish a stronghold. And finally, the time comes to take the last, decisive step, and get ample *Lebensraum* for the tribe.

The following overview on the Saxon prehistory by Widukind tells us what comes next<sup>30</sup>. When the Thuringians saw a stronghold of the Saxons — we read — this sight seemed unbearable for them. Having sent their envoys, they complained that the Saxons had breached their treaty, signed earlier — as we remember — between the two peoples. The Saxons denied the allegations. As for the land, acquired with their own gold, they are going to keep it peacefully, or defend it if necessary.

As soon as the autochthons heard such a statement, they began to curse both the Saxon gold and the one who had got it as they then perceived him as the perpetrator of the doom of their people and country. Seething with indignation and full of anger, the Thuringians started their chaotic onslaught on the Saxon stronghold. The defenders, well prepared to face the enemies, fended them off, and then carried out a successful counterattack, which led to the capturing *iure belli* of the neighbouring areas.

At this stage the story loses its internal momentum (needed to move the plot on), which was released by the clash between the Saxon argument and the indignation of the deceived autochthons, who were deprived of their land. The newcomers already have a new foothold in their new homeland. That narrative impasse is expressed in the plot by the lack of any further developments concerning the issue of pushing the Thuringians out of their country by the intruders — the newcomers. Widukind thus notes the following: *Diu itaque crebroque cum ab alterutris pugnatum foret*<sup>31</sup>, simultaneously originating the next great chapter in the Saxon prehistory.

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*tales fuisse, qui vili pretio tam ingens aurum possederit. Caeterum certi de victoria, de Saxonibus iam quasi triumphabant. Interea Saxo privatus auro, oneratus vero multa humo, appropriat navibus. Sociis igitur ei occurrentibus et quid ageret admirantibus, alii eum irridere coeperunt amicorum, alii arguere, omnes pariter amentem crediderunt. At ille postulato silentio: "Sequimini", inquit, "me, optimi Saxones, et meam vobis amentiam probabit utilem". At illi, licet dubii, sequuntur tamen ducem. Ille autem sumpta humo per vicinos agros quam potuit subtiliter sparsit et castrorum loca occupavit.*

<sup>30</sup> Widukind, p. 24 (I, 6).

<sup>31</sup> Widukind, p. 24, line 19 ff.

The plot of the tale starts again thanks to the statement informing us that the Thuringians finally doubted a victory in their military fight against the enemy, and decided to negotiate. The Saxons agreed to resume peace negotiations and meet the Thuringians under their conditions — unarmed and at the agreed venue and date<sup>32</sup>.

And then the chronicler apparently strays away from the subject of the story, and discusses a completely new topic. Those days, Widukind says, the Saxons used long knives which were common among the Angles of his day, who followed ancient tribal customs<sup>33</sup>. Having hidden such knives inside their robes, the Saxons leave their stronghold to the agreed place to meet the Thuringians. When they notice that their enemies are unarmed and all their elders are present, they notice that the right time to conquer the whole country has just come. Having pulled the knives out of their robes they attack the defenseless Thuringians and kill them all, so none of them survives<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> *Widukind*, p. 24, lines 20–22.

<sup>33</sup> *Widukind*, s. 24, w. 23–25. This information is a manifestation of Widukind's "panSaxon" consciousness and his interest in the history of the Insular Saxons. The chronicler places in his work a legend of the conquer of Britain by the Saxons, *si quis plenius scire voluerit*, he writes, *historiam gentis eiusdem legat*. It was acknowledged as a proof of using the work of Beda by the chronicler, but the footnote — in fact, according to the tradition of medieval historiography — may have a more formal meaning; at any rate, the Saxon–Insular saga on inviting the Saxons, not present in *The Church History of the English People*, appears both at Widukind's and the chronicle by Aethelweard. See H. Beumann, *Widukind*, p. 63; M. Becher, *op. cit.*, p. 38. The Saxon *Berufungssage* — *Widukind*, p. 26 (l. 8); *Chronicon Aethelweardi*, ed. A. Campbell, London 1962, p. 8. See also A. Stender-Petersen, *Die Varägersage als Quelle der altrussischen Chronik*, København 1934, Ch. *Die Sage von der Berufung der varägischen Könige*. On the links between Saxony of the Liudolfings and Wessex and ancient Anglo–Saxon tradition, also thanks to the marriage between Otto I and Edith, and the contacts between their granddaughter Mathilda, the abbess of Essen, with Aethelweard see: K. Leyser, *The Ottonians and Wessex*, in: by the same author, *Communication and Power in Medieval Europe. The Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries*, ed. T. Reuter, London 1994, pp. 73–104; N. Kersken, *Geschichtsschreibung im Europa der "nationes"*. *Nationalgeschichtliche Gesamtdarstellungen im Mittelalter*, Köln 1995, pp. 164–169; see also the introduction by A. Campbell to the quoted edition of the chronicle by Aethelweard.

<sup>34</sup> The episode of slaying 300 Britons (*seniores Guorthigirni*) by the Saxons under Hengist, who were conquering the Island, is described by *The History of Britons* linked with Nennius. Arriving at the meeting, the attackers hid knives in their boots (*ficones*), and the assault brought them large territorial gains. The signal for the attack in the Saxon language: *Eu nimet saxas!*, is an important part of the story. It becomes a *logo* of the nation of warriors and its right to the new homeland. Cf. with the story by Widukind and identification of *sahs-Saxones* — the land conquered from the Thuringians. See footnote 33; J. Morris, *Nennius*, p. 73 (Ch.

Thus the Saxons have the whole Thuringian country which now becomes the new homeland of the once homeless newcomers. We receive a clear message that the whole aristocracy of the enemy disappears. Even if we assume that not all the Thuringians attended the meeting, and women and children — not to mention the elderly — stayed at home, the annihilation of the whole tribe of the Thuringians is an accomplished fact. After all, the princes and most prominent warriors were killed — so in an institutional, political and tribal sense the Thuringians ceased to exist<sup>35</sup>.

The scene which shows the slaying of the Thuringians remains indifferent to further narration about Saxon prehistory, in a sense that it does not prepare, either on a logical, or factual level, the next “story”, the next tale narrated by Widukind.

One can even say, putting it in a more modern way, that the episode regarding the annihilation of the Thuringians was not treated in a particularly serious way, as we can observe later that Widukind, following Saxon prehistory, gives one more account on conquering Thuringian lands by the Saxons<sup>36</sup>.

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46). *The History of Britons*, associated with Nennius, has an unclear genesis: in a series of works D. Dumville (*Histories and Pseudo-histories of the Insular Middle Ages*, Aldershot 1990) supports years 829/830, whereas Nennius would only be the 11th century compiler of the work. Some scholars believe, however, that Nennius was the author of the work which was written at the very beginning of the 9th century. See: J. Morris, *op. cit.*, the foreword to the edition; P. J. C. Field, *Nennius and his History*, “*Studia Celtica*” 30, 1996, p. 159-165; the discussion is characterised by P. Derecki, *Kronika Nenniusza jako pomnik historiograficzny i źródło do dziejów podboju Wyspy przez Anglosasów* (*The Chronicle by Nennius as a Historiographical Monument and a Source to the History of the Conquer of the Island by the Anglosaxons*), Warszawa 2002 (unpublished M.A. thesis at the Historical Institute, Warsaw University), p. 13 ff.

<sup>35</sup> The motif of a deceitful slaying of the enemy at the assembly appears in the *Kristian's Chronicle* (ed. J. Ludvíkovský, Praha 1978, pp. 22, 24) — the work of late 10th century c. F. Graus (*Böhmen und Altsachsen. Zum Funktionswandel einer Sagenerzählung*, in: *Festschrift für Walter Schlesinger*, Köln 1975, pp. 354-365) claims that the tale is a Saxon import. Similarly, the Picts were slain at the meeting in Scone by the Scots, and lost their kingdom to their attackers. See M. O. Anderson, *Dalriada and the Creation of the Kingdom of Scots*, in: *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe. Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes*, ed. D. Whitelock, R. McKitterick, Cambridge 1982, p. 116 ff. On the meaning of the “kings” — representatives of outstanding families for the community see H. Wolfram, *Origo et religio. Ethnic Traditions and Literature in Early Medieval Texts*, “*Early Medieval Europe*” 3, 1994, pp. 19-38; H. Humer, *The Fluidity of Barbarian Identity: the Ethnogenesis of Alemanni and Suebi, AD 200-500*, “*Early Medieval Europe*” 7, 1998, pp. 1-27; J. Banaszkiwicz, *Tradycje dynastyczno-plemienne Słowiańszczyzny północnej* (*The Dynastic and Tribal Traditions of Northern Slavs*), in: *Ziemia polskie w X wieku i ich znaczenie w kształtowaniu się nowej mapy Europy*, ed. H. Samsonowicz, Kraków 2000, p. 261 ff.

For the time being, let us consider just the following remarks. The tale which we showed, where the fragment with the arrival of the Saxons in Hadeln should also be included<sup>37</sup>, shows us clearly the ways the Saxons — the newcomers from overseas — gradually acquired the territory, which later become their new homeland. The illustration of their complete success — depriving the Thuringians of their homeland — concludes the tale<sup>38</sup>. And if we take a look at Widukind's chronicle, we can observe that after the passage with the slaughter of the Thuringians the tale runs out of its narrative potential. All we learn later is the Saxons did extremely well and posed a threat to their neighbours.

The fact that the saga exhausts its informative mission at that stage is also confirmed by Widukind's inclusion of his commentary of the scene with the knives, and by his introduction of the comparative material from the history of the insular Saxons. Widukind summarises the opinion which states that the Saxons acquired their name from the murder weapon they used (*sahs*). This motif is extremely important, but requires a separate, more detailed commentary<sup>39</sup>. We can only notice that such a meaningful event in the life of every tribe as acquiring a new name (and identity) is in the Saxon saga an integral part of the activities focused on getting land to be settled by a tribe.

Saxon *origines* by Widukind are, however, not exhausted by the tale concluded with the description of a "long knives meeting" and the explanation how the Saxons got their name. We receive

<sup>36</sup> Cf. remarks of F. Graus (*Lebendige Vergangenheit*, p. 123).

<sup>37</sup> See footnote 13.

<sup>38</sup> J. de Vries (*op. cit.*, s. 22) closed the Saxon saga in three accounts—episodes: A — the arrival of the Saxons in Hadeln, B — buying land deceitfully, C — slaying the Thuringians by the Saxons at the meeting. German scholars focused on its two "recurrent motifs", see above.

<sup>39</sup> Weapons as an intrinsic factor that determines the cultural identity of a community; see J. de Vries, *Einige Bemerkungen zum Sachsenproblem (1958)*, in: *Entstehung und Verfassung des Sachsenstammes*, ed. W. Lammer ( "Wege der Forschung" 50), Darmstadt 1967, p. 340; G. Dumézil, *Apollon sonore et autres essais. Esquisses de mythologie*, Paris 1982, Ch. Saxons, p. 227 ff.; W. Pohl, *Telling the Difference: Signs of Ethnic Identity*, in: *Strategies of Distinctions. The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800*, ed. W. Pohl, H. Reinitz, Leiden 1998, p. 27 ff., 37 — with some reservations, but abundant material; J. Banaszkiwicz, *O sposobach budowania tożsamości wspólnotowej w społeczeństwach wcześniejszego średniowiecza (On the Ways of Building a Group Identity in Communities of the Early Middle Ages)*, "Res Historica" 3, 1998, p. 37 ff. See also T. Capelle, *Die Sachsen des frühen Mittelalters*, Darmstadt 1998, p. 10.

a more detailed insight than previously into Saxon prehistory, accompanying the tribe once again in their fight for the territories to settle. As if the case was not yet solved, this time the newcomers ally themselves with the Franks who run a war against the Thuringians<sup>40</sup>. The alliance between the Saxons and the Franks with their king Thiadrik dignifies this unknown and little-civilized nation. The allies receive lands, taken from the enemy, from their mandataries, as a reward for their valour in fight. Next, the Saxons distribute requisitioned goods among themselves, giving some parts of the lands to members of foreign but allied tribes, whereas some other parts — to their own freedmen. They also leave conquered autochthons on some territories, having turned them into serfs. As a consequence of this Saxon — Frankish brotherhood-in-arms, the former acquire lands they didn't possess previously, and get a particular stratification of their tribal community, which they are later famous for.

The story about the Saxon — Frankish alliance and their common front against the Thuringians — outlined here — abounds with numerous episodes which reflected in every detail the course of events forming a long campaign<sup>41</sup>. The archetype of the story or the prime source for the author or the authors of today's known works was *The Song of Iring (Iringlied)* — which is commonly and eagerly accepted by scholars<sup>42</sup>. We share the view that the Thuringian and Frankish hue of the tale reveals its late origin, in any case later than the saga discussed above<sup>43</sup>.

In the face of a shortage of modern and wider research on the Saxon issue known from the accounts by Rudolf of Fulda and

<sup>40</sup> *Widukind*, p. 28 ff. (I, 9–14).

<sup>41</sup> The thread of the civilizational and political advancement of the Saxons, and later — after the christianization action of Karl Magnus — their unification with the Franks see E. Karpf, *op. cit.*, p. 147; M. Becher, *op. cit.*, p. 41 ff.; W. Eggert, "Franken und Sachsen" bei Notker, *Widukind und anderen*, in: *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter*, pp. 514–530; H. Beumann, *Die Hagiographie "bewältigt". Unterwerfung und Christianisierung der Sachsen durch Karl den Grossen*, in: *Christianizzazione ed organizzazione ecclesiastica delle campagne nell'alto medioevo: espansione e resistenze*, Settimana di studio 28, Spoleto 1982, p. 133 ff. See also J. Ehlers, *Schriftkultur, Ethnogenese und Nationsbildung in ottonischer Zeit*, "Frühmittelalterliche Studien" 23, 1989, p. 305.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. F. Graus, *Lebendige Vergangenheit*, p. 124 ff.; M. Becher, *op. cit.*, p. 36 and footnote 175.

<sup>43</sup> See M. Becher, *op. cit.*, p. 34, 39 ff.; W. Lammers, *op. cit.*, p. 135 ff.; cf. P. Corbet, *Les saints ottoniens*, Sigmaringen 1986, p. 124 ff. See also footnote 41. A different view by K. Hauck, *Goldbrakteaten*, p. 81 ff. (Ch. *Die Einheit von Landungs- und Eroberungs-Sage*).



Widukind, it is difficult to immediately decide whether we are dealing with two separate undertakings which confirmed their integrity the moment they got into the hands of the chroniclers (Saga One and *The Song of Iring*), or whether the material we know was acquired by the authors in smaller parts and was later arbitrarily compiled by them.

It is also possible that there were at least, if not two Saxon sagas, two trends on the Saxon issue which could be singled out from the narratives by medieval intellectuals. We therefore assume that it was Widukind who at the latest grouped the Saxon issue in a way that the first story (about the arrival of the Saxons and their gradual conquest of land from the Thuringians) separates itself from the other story (the tale about the arrival of the Saxons and their military endeavour arm-in-arm with the Franks for Thuringian lands).

The first tale, with the exception of the passage on Hadeln, was not covered by Rudolf of Fulda. It is free from the post-Carolingian ideology of the Saxon — Frankish alliance, and the Thuringian plot is not strongly developed. This was written to constitute an older part of the Saxon saga, and it consists of two recurrent motifs: a deceitful purchase of land from the Thuringians and the “long Saxon knives assembly”<sup>44</sup>.

As we signalled already, the scene of the “gold trade” will remain the focus of our attention. Before returning to it, let us have a glance at the construction of the older saga. To reduce it to only two components would be harmful to the saga itself. The episode depicting the purchase of sand for the price of gold let the Saxons stand firmly on the Thuringian soil; the bloody meeting — as we know — leaves the whole Thuringian country in their hands. The perpetrator of the whole transaction appears for the Saxons in an extremely difficult moment — when the first stage of their escapade to settle foreign lands is being jeopardised. As J. de Vries noticed, the third part of the old saga (though in the order of narration, the first one) becomes clearly noticeable. This part brings to the Saxon history, in addition to a successful landing, the problem of taking the port and subsequent disagreements with the autochthons.

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<sup>44</sup> See W. Lammers, *op. cit.*, p. 135; J. de Vries, *op. cit.*, p. 21 ff.; see also footnote 38.

If one wanted to look for the topos which narratively creates the first stage of the older Saxon saga, the tradition of the Saxons' arrival in Hadeln included in it should be noted. The Saxons themselves also adopted the story, widespread among German peoples, about the arrival by boat of a group of the tribe's ancestors in their new homeland, usually from Skandza — Scandinavia. The place where the ancestors had the first contact with a new land was marked and remembered, and those were the facts important enough to constitute the content of a separate and — as we assume — ancient saga<sup>45</sup>.

That saga "gives birth" to the port present in the chronicler's narrative, and influences further activities of the Saxons which are easy to anticipate, considering the fact that we face a history of settling people in a new space. There is, however, a long way to propose the thesis that it was Widukind who compiled the three standard motifs compatible in a spirit and character with the narration *de origine gentis*, and combined them in a factual and narrative plot. Having said that, we shall now explore a more detailed examination of the scene depicting the deceitful sale of gold by one of the Saxons, and what this implies.

The episode, perceived as one filled by the recurrent motif — in other words, a plot appearing in numerous narratives and serving various characters and different events — has not received much attention. Generally, it has been pointed out that similar solutions are known from literature, but nobody has ever made an attempt to examine the structure of our story, and separate its components in comparison to other, similar examples<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> See R. Hachmann, *op. cit.*, p. 32 ff.; J. de Vries, *op. cit.*, p. 33 ff.; R. Wenskus, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

<sup>46</sup> The critics of the Saxon tradition concentrated their efforts on pointing at its literary, "artificial" origin, in consequence discrediting the whole narration as not worth more detailed research. See R. Drögereit, *Fragen der Sachsenforschung in historischer Sicht*, in: *Entstehung und Verfassung des Sachsenstammes*, p. 361 ff. and footnote 17. The defenders of the Saxon saga dealt with re-establishing in various ways and scope the historical value of the story. See the articles already quoted which are also present in the above collection: M. Lintzel (*Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des sächsischen Stammes*, p. 73 ff.); W. Lammers (*Die Stammesbildung bei den Sachsen*, p. 263 ff.); J. de Vries (*Die Ursprungssage der Sachsen*, p. 343 ff.); R. Wenskus (*Sachsen — Angelsachsen — Thüringer*, p. 483 ff.). See also H. Beumann, *Widukind von Korvei, passim*. On the contribution of J. de Vries to recognizing the narration — the structure of the saga, we have already mentioned, see footnotes: 13, 15, 38.

One has to mention a specific stance on this issue by K. Hauck. Not discouraged by the concurrence of literary motifs, displeased by a superficial “Vergilization” of the part of the Saxon account and the like comparisons, he advised not to overestimate the importance of the meaning of fictional components included in the tradition. He encourages us to ponder their sense, yet merely in its historical aspect<sup>47</sup>. Thus, in contrast to Richard Drögereit’s view, who limits the Saxon saga to a literary imitation and its substantial part — on the purchase of land from the Thuringians by the Saxons — to the level of a replica of Vergil’s story on Didon, K. Hauck indicates German and ancient legal roots sprouting from the tossing of purchased sand over Thuringian land. This was a rite of taking property into possession<sup>48</sup>.

The opinion of the latter historian will be discussed below as it is him who, next to H. Beumann, paid the most attention to this part of the Saxon saga by Widukind, which we will now focus on.

Even though, as we mentioned, H. Beumann in his dissertation on Widukind and his work devoted a lot of space to discussing *Landkaufsage*, he is not exceptional among historians in their methodological approach towards this matter. His methods do not differ from the ones applied by his colleagues. H. Beumann widely contemplated our tale and took pains to prove that it reflected an old German poetic tradition.

The plot of the episode, highly dramatized by the introduction of dialogue or, rather, “semidialogue” (*Halbdialog*), where the action taken by one or the other character within the narrative gradually evolves from indirect to direct speech and the use of the concept of contrast (*Antithese*) for constructing the respective elements in the following scenes of the story, constitute evidence, in Beumann’s view, for the origins of *Landkaufszene aus einer poetischen Vorlage*<sup>49</sup>. This is all we have, if we consider the interpretation of the tale.

<sup>47</sup> K. Hauck, *Goldbrakteaten*, p. 48, 52 ff.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 55. Earlier, the legal context of the rite was pointed at by J. de Vries, *Die Ursprungssage*, p. 25 ff.

<sup>49</sup> H. Beumann, *Widukind*, p. 73 ff., 76. A. Heusler (*Die altgermanische Dichtung*, Berlin 1923, p. 147) warned: *wo es in den Chroniken lebhaft und dramatisch zugeht, darf man nicht gleich mit der Liedquelle kommen*.

On the other hand, K. Hauck is convinced that, regarding not only this particular episode, but also generally in the case of the Saxon matter from Widukind's chronicle (and Rudolf's work as well), we face a real tradition and a real Saxon saga which both, as a matter of fact, stream out widely from the remote past (from before 531) originating in the heroic times of the metamorphosis of the tribe into a people subjected to great gods — suzerains: the protector of *thing*, Tiwaz — Saxnot, and deceitful Wodan<sup>50</sup>. It should be emphasised that the second part of the Saxon prehistory which provides us with the information on the military alliance between the Franks, under the command of Thiadrik, and the Saxons, under Hathugaut, does not create a separate tale, but belongs to the core of the original and indivisible tribal saga<sup>51</sup>.

It is not an easy task, and here it is virtually impossible, to summarise a multiplot and based on different ideological assumptions concept of this scholar which aims to restore "proud" Saxon antiquities, transformed by skeptics into literary — anti-quarian knick-knacks. Confining ourselves in the presentation of the author's view to the segment of the Saxon tradition, to *Landungs-Anekdote* as in one place K. Hauck names the story about the transaction, apparently profitable for the Thuringians, at first one has to mention a certain research settlement fundamental for the interpretation of the story mentioned above.

And so — as the account of the whole tribal prehistory is very old — our narrative stems from the complex of inferiority (allegedly historically proven) of the Saxons towards the Thuringians in the times before the year 531. Those days, the Saxons believed that the enemy could only be defeated through resorting to deceit,

<sup>50</sup> K. Hauck, *Goldbrakteaten*, p. 51, 59, 83 ff. As for the motif of acquiring by the Saxons the name (from sahs) and transformation into Saxnot's people, K. Hauck uses a wonderful idea of J. de Vries (see by this author, *Einige Bemerkungen zum Sachsenproblem* (1959), in: *Entstehung und Verfassung Sachsenstammes*, p. 340 ff.), who links the weapon, which is characteristic of the community, with the god — the patron of the group, who uses such a weapon. G. Dumézil had a similar idea (see this author, *Les dieux des Germains*, Paris 1959, p. 125 ff.; also by the same author, *Apollon sonore*, Ch. *Saxons*, pp. 222-229). He presented this idea in a more interesting way, by matching the gods of respective functions with respective weapons. Thus, Saxnot, the god of the third Dumézilian function, had its characteristic, third-functional weapon — a short sword — and he himself became the patron of the Saxons, the tribe which used such a weapon. See also footnote 39.

<sup>51</sup> K. Hauck, *Goldbrakteaten*, pp. 71, 81.

thus they took a large strip of land from the Thuringians in this particular way<sup>52</sup>. *Diesem Schwächemotiv gemäss*, so, as the Saxons feel weak and hesitant while confronting the Thuringians, a young and nameless man, who, however, is forced to play a great role of a hero, appears in the tale. He gets the same role which was meant for Hathugaut — according to K. Hauck — the real father of the victory and metamorphosis of the Saxons and a Wodan like figure, who originated straight from the purest and deepest layers of the most ancient tribal mythology. He is the key guarantor of the authenticity and old origin of the legend<sup>53</sup>.

Therefore, the lad himself as well as his deceit and all that it entailed, and the whole event — merely stand for a rehearsal which only heralded a real triumph of the Saxons over the enemy, reached through the agency of Hathugaut. The relation between both scenes of the Saxon prehistory is the same as the relation between a prototype and its final creation which glistens with all of its virtues.

If K. Hauck with such an ideological buckle clasped quite arbitrarily these two fragments, which were equally randomly concocted from the narrative context of the Saxon matter, this lad's deeds as well as his own role should of course be diminished, taking into account the proper, complete triumph of the Saxons over the foe that was achieved under the command of Hathugaut. Thus, a nameless lad cannot be an aristocrat — *dux*, even though he is presented with the attributes of the highest authority. Our author reserves for him merely the position of a gold trader who, facing the great famine which affects his people, is compelled to sell out the tribe's valuables<sup>54</sup>. K. Hauck also notices that the saga confirms its credibility once more by keeping a well known historical fact: the common practice of trading in gold by the Saxons — sea robbers, in 5th — 6th centuries<sup>55</sup>.

There is not much to complain about the fact that researchers, tidying up the Saxon matter, did not allow for, even to a tiny degree, the plot of the story. Scholars, in their interpretation of the texts, were driven by their knowledge and premises

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 59.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 43 ff., 94 ff.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 59 ff., 74 ff., 102.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 60. Also M. Lintzel (*op. cit.*, p. 39) regards this fact as very strong evidence in the framework of the narrative.

completely external to the narration of the Saxon prehistory. The question whether we will regard this “historical data” which was crucial to the message in the text, as trustworthy or not, is of secondary importance.

The method of highlighting the meanings of a certain narration as a whole by indicating, within the reality it created, an element recognized as historically important, was also applied by Ernst Karpf<sup>56</sup>. He was inclined to consider the valuables which appeared in the story, namely a golden *torques* and golden *armille*, as insignia which bring a princely status to whoever has them. Thuring “purchased” them and was immediately proclaimed the leader of the tribe. Saxo, on the other hand — what E. Karpf emphasises — was mentioned as *dux* in the finale of the episode<sup>57</sup>.

*Torques* and *armille* definitely get ahead of the young cunning Saxo and receive the importance of the objects that determine the meaning of the tale. The sacrificial offerings, recognized by the author as craftily chosen (*listige Opfergabe*), become a “payment” made by the Saxons to god of deceit, Odin, for his support in their plan of leading the Thuringians up the garden path and taking over their land. Following the scholar’s train of thought we can notice that “selling” to the foe the tribal insignia is, as a matter of fact, a veiled act of offering the enemy and his domain to Wodan. He receives the sacrifice and in return gives the Saxons the land which belonged to the Thuringians. E. Karpf, correcting the concept by K. Hauck, dressed one of the remarks of this scholar in mythological contents. It was the latter who stated that Saxo pays a valuable tribute to the earth and receives lands in return<sup>58</sup>.

It will be a difficult task for us to polemicize with the views of both historians who precisely and in detail worked out the researched accounts. For this simple reason, it is an almost impossible procedure, as the presented concepts make use of the assumptions — statements which are, in an operational sense, neither motivated nor verifiable through the material of the interpreted source or related works.

Why is the appearance in the account of the deceitful lad to testify the inferiority complex of the Saxons towards the Thuring-

<sup>56</sup> E. Karpf, *op. cit.*, p. 149 ff.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 150.

<sup>58</sup> K. Hauck, *Goldbrakteaten*, p. 74 ff.

ians, and why would it exist before year 531? Why was the main character of the events, who was wearing — according to Widukind — golden *torques* and golden armlets, to be a humble gold merchant? Why was Saxo confronted with Hathugaut, even though the two characters come from two separate plot entities? Why, finally, to emphasise the meaning of *torques* and armlets — vividly above their importance justified by the account — and to link these objects with Wodan, while forgetting about their owner and a huge role he played in the intrigue? We shall therefore indirectly show that the above mentioned ideas are superfluous and not in place as far as the interpretation of our *Landkaufsage* is concerned. Instead, we shall suggest our own solution that is on a par with the contents of the source and verified by the proper comparative material.

To begin with, one has to recall a very important fact just in view of the plot of the story. Here, the whole episode becomes a remedy for the apparently hopeless situation in which the Saxon community found themselves. Ahead of these people is hunger and further wandering in search for a more friendly land. The rescuer of the Saxons appears suddenly, in a logical sense of the story as *deus ex machina*. He arrives by boat from somewhere and, having disembarked, immediately sorts out the problem looming over heads of his compatriots.

The characteristics of the hero is, next to the sudden arrival of the Saxons' rescuer, another event that almost equally catches our eyes. He was named a lad — *adolescens*<sup>59</sup>. We do not know his name yet. Yet this boy is not an ordinary youth, he is wearing

<sup>59</sup>The term *adolescens* brings to mind a teenager, who, according to formal time divisions of human life, turned 15, but did not reach 21 yet. See E. Sears, *The Ages of Man. Medieval Interpretation of the Life Cycle*, Princeton 1986, p. 41 ff. Saxo Grammaticus, describing the siege of Arkona by the Danes in 1168, informs that the stronghold was seized thanks to a brave action of the Danish youth, later backed up by the older — knights. The success was originated by boys (*puerī*), who were next aided by *adolescentes*, and then *iuvenes* got engaged in action. It seems that a group we are interested in consisted of youngsters. See Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, ed. J. Olrik, H. Raeder, Havniae 1931, p. 468. After reaching 14 years of age, boys are supposed to take up gradually more and more burdening occupations, including military activities (see the treatises on education); they were also called *iuvenes*; see J. Banaszkie wicz, *Młodzińcze gesta Bolesława Krzywoustego, czyli jak zostaje się prawdziwym rycerzem i władcą* (*The Youthful Deeds of Boleslaus the Wrymouth, or How to Become a True Knight and Ruler*), in: *Theatrum ceremoniale na dworze książąt i królów polskich* (*Theatrum Ceremoniale at the Courts of Polish Princes and Kings*), ed. M. Markiewicz, R. Skowron, Kraków 1999, p. 13 ff.

golden *torques* and golden armlets, which lets us suspect his high and distinguish standing.

It turns out in the course of action that the young newcomer's name is Saxo, so his name is *nomen sue gentis*. We will not dispute whether this is a proper name, or made up, according to the rule: because he is one of the Saxons. Of much more importance is the fact that it is him who represents his people in an intellectual skirmish with the enemy; he personifies them and acts on their behalf. He presents himself as an ideal Saxon-hero, and he faces as his enemy an equal representative and hero of a community — Thuring<sup>60</sup>. The fight of the two has an intrinsic impact on the fate of each tribe, as they are — as we suggest — the personifications of virtues and all the values which both groups possessed.

*Adolescens Saxo* — as it turns out later — is the chief commander-prince (*dux*) of the Saxons<sup>61</sup>. The reader feels even more confused after learning towards the end of the story that the character, who at the beginning was called “a certain lad”, is in fact not only *dux*, but also a commonly known person who has a wide group of friends and acquaintances. Why does a mysterious “golden lad” unexpectedly arrive in Hadeln if — as a matter of fact — he is known to the Saxons by name as an influential aristocrat whose orders they follow? Why does such a youth have that much gold and is able to rescue the Saxons from such big oppression?

The whole issue will become clearer in the light of another, Anglo-Saxon account, a narrative *de origine gentis*, where *gens* means this time a family clan. Three versions of the said narrative have survived. There are some discrepancies among them — these require separate studies — yet major components of the narration, and the logical structure they were placed in, are clearly noticeable in all versions of the account.

In the two versions, the main character's name is Scef, the progenitor of the royal house of Wessex. In the poem entitled *Beowulf*, Scef was replaced by the eponym of the royal house of the Danes — Scyld. It was known, however, and stressed that

<sup>60</sup> The following sentences show us clearly that we are facing a duel between two persons being the personifications of their peoples: *Thuringi Thuringum laudibus ad caelum tollunt, qui nobili fraude Saxonum deceperit... Caeterum certi de victoria, de Saxonibus iam quasi triumphabant, Widukind, pp. 22, 24.*

<sup>61</sup> *At illi (Saxones — J. B.), licet dubii, sequuntur tamen ducem, Widukind, p. 24.*



Scyld was Scef's son (Scyld Scefing)<sup>62</sup>. The tales with Scef, as the main character, are known thanks to Aethelweard and his chronicle<sup>63</sup>, and the chronicler, William of Malmesbury. The latter one, as Kenneth Sisam suggests, may have adopted the tale from Aethelweard, and modified as well as extended some of his revelations<sup>64</sup>, yet the evidence by the representative of the royal house of Wessex (namely Aethelward) is, for several reasons, the most important one for this limited research being conducted here.

For Aethelweard's grandfather — king Aethelwulf — a genealogy was prepared where the top position in it went to Scef. The grandson himself, however, took up the task of writing the history of the insular Saxons approximately 20 years after Widukind had completed his work. What is more, the Anglo-Saxon aristocrat looked back to the past of his family and tribe, in order to remind and show Matilda — a very noble lady of the emperor house of Liudolfing and the abbess in Essen, and also a granddaughter of Otto I and Edith of Aethelwulf's line — their shared bloodline and tradition of the Saxon origin<sup>65</sup>.

With reference to the question we will deal with, one has to say that the tale of Scef is rather Aethelweard's addition to the

<sup>62</sup> The accounts on both characters, as well as the respective literature (in particular regarding *Beowulf*), have been recently collected by A. M. Bruce, *Scyld and Scef. Expanding the Analogues*, New York — London 2002. See also A. Olrik, *The Heroic Legends of Denmark*, New York 1919 (reprint 1976), pp. 381–445; R. W. Chambers (with supplement by C. L. Wrenn), *Beowulf. An Introduction to the Study of the Poem with a Discussion of the Stories of Offa and Finn*, Cambridge 1959, pp. 68–86; K. Sisam, *Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies*, "Proceedings of the British Academy" 39, 1953, pp. 315–320, 339–345. See also E. Hackenberg, *Die Stammtafeln der angelsächsischen Königreiche*, Diss. Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin, Berlin 1918, pp. 17–22; R. T. Farrell, *The Scandinavian Backgrounds of Beowulf. The Lineage of Beowulf*, in: *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, vol. 2, Berlin 1976, p. 241 ff.; A. L. Meaney, *Scyld Scefing and the Dating of Beowulf — Again*, "Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester" 1, 1989, pp. 7–40.

<sup>63</sup> *Chronicon Aethelweardi*, p. 33. See also footnote 33 and A. L. Meaney, *Aethelweard, Aelfric, the Norse Gods and Northumbria*, "Journal of Religious History" 6, 1970, pp. 105–132, where about the interests of Aethelweard in "Scandinavian gods" (Withar, Baldr, Wodan), noticeable — according to the author — in Aethelwulf's genealogy, known from his *Chronicle*. See also A. M. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 38 f.

<sup>64</sup> K. Sisam, *op. cit.*, p. 319 ff. See also D. Hay, *Europe. The Emergence of an Idea*, Edinburgh 1957, p. 47 ff. (Hrathra/Scef-Seth-Shem).

<sup>65</sup> See E. van Houts, *Women and the Writing of History in the Early Middle Ages: the Case of Abbess Matilda of Essen and Aethelweard*, "Early Medieval Europe" 1, 1992, pp. 53–68; W. Glocker, *Die Verwandten der Ottonen und ihre Bedeutung in der Politik. Studien zur Familienpolitik und zur Genealogie des sächsischen Kaiserhauses*, Köln 1989, p. 293.

genealogy of the ruling house of Wessex which is noticeable in accounts of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*<sup>66</sup>, the addition, as there is much to suggest, taken from the family tradition.

Putting aside (for the time being) the version of the tale, which is preserved in the poem of *Beowulf*, let us first introduce the contents of the story itself. The progenitor of kings of Wessex — and this is indeed the most important issue we are dealing with — already mentioned Scef, arrives by boat in Skandza, an ocean island, as explained. He arrived *uno dromone* and was a very young lad. The boat was loaded with weapons, probably of different sort<sup>67</sup>.

The inhabitants of the island did not know him at all, nevertheless, they received the young newcomer and educated him with care as if was one of them. Next, they elected Scef their king, as we understand, when he grew into a man. And so a royal career takes place of a boy who in mysterious circumstances turns up, bringing his belongings with him from overseas, among a certain community.

In *Beowulf*, a difficult to date Old-English poem which is virtually a storage of, among others, mythical items of the Danish prehistory, similar adventures to those by Scef are ascribed to

<sup>66</sup> See *Chronicon Aethelweardi*, editor's note by A. Campbell, p. 32 footnote 2; E. Hackenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 28, 30; K. Sisam, *op. cit.*, p. 317 footnote 5; A. C. Murray, *Beowulf, the Danish Invasions and Royal Genealogy*, in: *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. C. Chase, Toronto 1981, p. 107. This opinion is not shared by A. L. Meaney (*op. cit.*, pp. 14, 18 ff.). She claims that Aethelweard simply took over the genealogy from the older version of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* ("pre ae version of the *Chronicle*", *ibid.*, p. 20). The researcher of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* applies formal and positivist methods of criticism towards the sources: she tends to establish extremely clear chronological frames, and minutely selects the data of the accounts in order to find for them any genetic links, which in consequence leads to creating objects separated from their context. She did not consider, however, the message brought by the narration about Scef, and she did not notice its narrative autonomy. The building of the genealogy of the royal family, and its replenishing with the tale of a hero-founder, means for A. L. Meaney "artificial creation" (*ibid.*, p. 10, footnote 57), she also believes the same as regards the chronicle by Aethelweard, which widely borrowed from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. See also A. L. Meaney, *St. Neots, Aethelweard and the Compilation of Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, A Survey*, in: *Studies in Earlier Old English Prose*, ed. P. E. Szarmach, New York 1986, pp. 193–243.

<sup>67</sup> *Chronicon Aethelweardi*, p. 33 — Scef is the 19th in line ancestor of king Aethelwulf (†858) in the succession going in rhythm "from father to son", and the founder of the family. *Ipsę Scef cum uno dromone aductus est in insula oceani que dicitur Scani, armis circumdatus, eratque valde recens puer, et ab incolis illius terrae ignotus. Attamen ab eis suscipitur, et ut familiarem diligenti animo eum custodierunt, et post in regem eligunt; de cuius prosapia ordinem trahit Athulf rex.*

Scyld, Scef's son<sup>68</sup>. They both have nothing in common with Wessex. Belonging to the tradition of the royal Skjoldungs, they appear in *Beowulf* as characters of a heroic epic of the North German circle. Scyld (Skjold), because, as we remember, he takes over the role Scef in the story preserved in *Beowulf*, follows — in accordance with the pattern that makes up the plot — the progenitor of Wessex. Scyld's career paths are more difficult to follow as the author of *Beowulf* used the saga which was telling the story of the character, as material to construct his narration. Thus, the threads of the tale tear up, and in some places they are illegible. There is no doubt, however, that we are facing the same account, the same pattern of a royal — heroic biography.

Scyld Scefing is not alive any longer, when the poem and the story of the heir to the throne and his son, Beowulf, begin. The body of the dead king is sent by ship into the sea where he came from, which was the act imitating the circumstances surrounding the hero's arrival. Thus, we also hear that the boat was loaded with no fewer treasures than Scyld had at the beginning, when he was approaching Scedeland<sup>69</sup>. Thus, we have the boat full of jewels and exquisite weapons<sup>70</sup>.

There are two remarks in the poem that the passenger of the boat arriving from the sea was a young lad. When on Scyld's departure the treasures were being compared — the brought one and the one taken by the ruler in his last journey — it was then that, as we remember, the latter one equalled the former one which, we find out, was given once to the hero by the people sending him — a tiny stranded boy — on a dangerous sea voyage. Also, another passage in the poem informs, according to the canon of a heroic biography, that the incoming boy was a toddler or a very small child<sup>71</sup>.

<sup>68</sup> See A. Olrik, *op. cit.*, p. 386 ff.; K. Sisam, *op. cit.*, s. 315; A. M. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 17 ff.; *Beowulf*, tr. M. Alexander, London 1973, p. 51 ff.

<sup>69</sup> *Beowulf*, p. 52, lines 43–45; A. Olrik, *op. cit.*, p. 387.

<sup>70</sup> See K. Sisam, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

<sup>71</sup> According to Aethelweard (see footnote 67) *Scef erat valde recens puer*. In the translations of the respective line of *Beowulf* Scyld Scefing was named as "a small child" (M. Alexander, p. 52), "suckling child" (A. Olrik, *op. cit.*, p. 387), "a child" (A. L. Meaney, *op. cit.*, p. 10 footnote 11). At the beginning of the poem there was a short mention how the hero appeared: "since erst he lay friendless, a founding" (A. Olrik, *op. cit.*, p. 386), "who, found in childhood, lacked clothing" (M. Alexander, p. 51), "after he was first found destitute" (A. L. Meaney, *op. cit.*, p. 10 footnote 11). A child, a toddler, a baby — *umborwesende*, see *Beowulf*.

The career of Scyld is subordinated to a certain scheme and stretches itself between flimsy beginnings of the hero's early childhood, and a splendid and full-of-fame period of his adulthood. The author of *Beowulf* takes advantage of this regularity, and remarks the following: fate was extremely favourable to Scyld Scefing, which was compensation for his early misfortunes. This foundling, taken in as a defenseless child, later tyrannised neighbouring peoples and kingdoms.

In comparison to the story by Aethelweard, the version of the saga preserved in *Beowulf*, though scattered, puts more ideological emphasis on certain components of the story. The arrival by boat of a tiny, anonymous child, moreover, with a special load — like at Aethelweard's — is a peculiar event that attracts notice. In *Beowulf*, however, one can notice traces of classifying the course of events as miraculously experienced *ordalium* — the test which only a hero who is particularly protected by gods can pass.

And, in fact, the tale of a little foundling, who is spared even by the rough sea, is a story of the arrival of the hero-saviour of the community. It belongs to a group of narratives that concentrate on the arrival in the community of someone absolutely exceptional, the one who strengthens and protects this community<sup>72</sup>.

Axel Olrik showed, through his interpretation of not quite clear verses of *Beowulf*, that the miraculous boy-child appeared in the times especially difficult for the community who he reached<sup>73</sup>. Those people had not had the king for a long time, which, according to the standards present in early medieval reality, one has to understand as the highest threat to the unity and the very existence of a tribe. They realize that this child-waif, who was plain, but spiritually and materially already marked to great deeds, is the only one they can seek refuge from. This is why, in both versions of the story, they take care of him and appoint him king, and he fulfils all the expectations of the community.

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ed. E. von Schaubert, Paderborn 1946, line 46. The phrase that informs about the arrival of a young hero: "syddan aereſt weard feaſceaft funden", *ibid.*, line 7. See also S. Heaney, *Beowulf. A New Verse Translation*, New York 1999, pp. 3, 5.

<sup>72</sup> This feature of the account was "discovered" long ago, see E. Hackenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 30; A. Olrik, *op. cit.*, p. 398 ff., 413 ff.; H. Sauer, *Altenglische genealogische Dichtung. Genealogie im Beowulf*, in: *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, vol. 9, Berlin 1998, p. 52 ff. See also A. M. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>73</sup> See A. Olrik, *op. cit.*, p. 389 ff.

Let us leave both accounts (by Aethelweard, and *Beowulf*), even though it is worthwhile not to, and return to the tale by Widukind. It seems to be almost certain that the author of *Landkaufsage* employed for its structure the tale, which was widely spread among Germans, of the boy-foundling who arrived by sea in the country — his kingdom-to-be. This plot was used to construct *origines* of great royal houses, and thus it also remained within the tradition of respective tribes.

The legend of the boy-hero from overseas lends the saga known from the *Chronicle* by Widukind not only a narrative groundwork useful for the plot developments, but also an logical and ideological framework which keeps all the respective stages of action together, and provides them with the sense of purpose. The intrigue depicting the deceitful purchase of land was only incorporated into the structure of the story about the boy-hero, and it represents no more than a derivative, narrative fulfillment of the basic assumptions which are external to it.

And, according to these ones, “a little hero”, and soon a threat of the whole *ecumene*, is arriving exactly to save “his people”, and make it great. Generally, it means praiseworthy military deeds. Nevertheless, the Saxons — and this thought is readable between the lines of the tale — do not want to take land to be settled by force. Instead, they look for higher justification of their rights for the country which is to become their homeland. Saxo, being the namesake of the tribe, if not its eponym, rises to the occasion, and through action epitomises the superiority of his people over the enemy, and sorts out, as best as one can, the most crucial issue for the community. Only after becoming the rightful owners of the land do the Saxons enlarge their domain *iure belli* and through killing out the Thuringian elders at the meeting<sup>74</sup>.

The application of the myth of the boy-hero for the needs of the Saxon saga left some marks on its narration, which had a negative impact on the clarity of the presentation. We have already highlighted the lack of logical consequences in the tale: one time Saxo is nobody, an anonymous waif, another time — a very powerful duke. The Saxons have no means to purchase food, but suddenly one of them, a youngster has enormous treasure in his possession. Furthermore — in the saga known from the *Chronicle* by Widu-

<sup>74</sup> *Widukind*, p. 24 (VI, line 19). The text of the account shows that the Saxons only started to fight, when they were attacked by the furious Thuringians.

kind the time span of action was drastically reduced if compared to the one from the myth of the boy-hero.

In the work which sets a model for our story, the hero has enough time to grow up and take action in due course. In the saga from the *Chronicle* by Widukind, everything rests on his shoulders. He has to appear as a boy, because only then can his heroic mission as well as rich equipment of the boat, which delivered him to the chosen land not accidentally, find their explanation. This miraculous newcomer is meant to remain in this embodiment till the end of the story. The role of a nameless youth from overseas overlaps the role of a deceitfully acting hero-saviour of the community and, finally, a great Saxon lord, known as Saxo. In the context of a longer story on the Saxon origins, in the face of a urgent task to be performed by the Saxons *in illo tempore* — at the onset of their history, Saxo has to be both a prodigal child and a mature efficient hero, as well as the Saxon duke, as the tribe did not have kings.

Having considered a rather complicated structure of the Saxon saga which aimed at illustrating the process of gradual acquisition of land, and taking into consideration the motif of the fights between the newcomers just against the Thuringians, as well as the fact of employing old narrative and mythical material to construct one of important components of the saga — one can believe that our account (from the episode on the landing of the group in Hadeln to the picture of slaughtering their enemies at the meeting) is a late work. Someone collected “recurrent motifs”, and equipped one of them in an interesting and new plot frame. The action of respective topical scenes was put in order so that it might develop smoothly and logically. Finally, it was put in a definite cultural and political space.

The Saxon saga has been too little researched to be able to express decisive and general opinions on this work. If we, however, assume that the material it consists of was rather scattered, and therefore required to be compiled accordingly, then we, let this be a working hypothesis, shall see Widukind as the one performing the task<sup>75</sup>.

*(Translated by Robert Bubczyk)*

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<sup>75</sup> Perhaps, one should even say that it was Widukind who was one of the architects of the work he himself preserved.