

JOHANNES KODER, IOANNIS STOURAITIS (HRSG.)

BYZANTINE WAR IDEOLOGY BETWEEN ROMAN IMPERIAL
CONCEPT AND CHRISTIAN RELIGION

Akten des Internationalen Symposiums
(Wien, 19.–21. Mai 2011)



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VERÖFFENTLICHUNGEN ZUR
BYZANZFORSCHUNG

HERAUSGEGEBEN VON
PETER SOUSTAL und CHRISTIAN GASTGEBER

BAND XXX

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War and Nation-building in Widukind of Corvey's *Deeds of the Saxons*

Military conflicts constituted a central function of early medieval rulership and, correspondingly, of the historiographical tradition. War and violence in the Middle Ages have been the subject of various studies, which are above all devoted to warfare and to the army¹. War in the Middle Ages (as in any period), according to Malte Priezel, is to be viewed as a component of culture; that is, as a component of a conception within which facts are evaluated, arranged and put together into a whole². Viewed in this way, I shall attempt in my small study to analyze the role of *war and nation-building*³ in Widukind of Corvey's *Deeds of the Saxons*⁴. Of course the not-to-be-overlooked factuality of portrayals of violence and war for the entire period from the ninth to the tenth century cannot and will not here be examined. In the following pages I will treat episodically aspects or correlations of the text with regard to the above-mentioned question. Such an examination of the military and violent events allows a contribution to an analysis of Widukind's depictions and traditions of war. On the one hand they are entwined with the collective memory⁵ of the Saxons; on the other hand they

¹ On which see the following further secondary literature: Ph. CONTAMINE, *La Guerre au Moyen Âge*. Paris 1980; F. PRINZ, *Clero e guerra nell' alto medioevo*. Torino 1991; P. MORO, 'Quam horrida pugna'. Elementi per uno studio della guerra nell' alto Medioevo italiano (secoli VI–X). Venezia 1994; J. KEEGAN, *Die Kultur des Krieges*. Hamburg 1995; N. OHLER, *Krieg und Frieden im Mittelalter*. München 1997; G. ALTHOFF, *Schranken der Gewalt. Wie gewalttätig war das 'finstere' Mittelalter?*, in: *Der Krieg im Mittelalter und in der Frühen Neuzeit. Gründe, Begründungen, Bilder, Bräuche, Recht*, ed. H. BRUNNER. Wiesbaden 1999, 1–23; L.-A. BERTO, *La guerra e la violenza nella Istoria Veneticorum di Giovanni Diacono*. *Studi Veneziani* 42 (2001) 15–41; H.-H. KORTÜM, *Der Krieg im Mittelalter als Gegenstand der Historischen Kulturwissenschaften. Versuch einer Annäherung*, in: *Krieg im Mittelalter*, ed. H.-H. KORTÜM. Berlin 2001, 13–43; G. HALSALL, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450–900*. London u. a. 2003; H. NICHOLSON, *Medieval Warfare. Theory and Practice of War in Europe 300–1500*. New York 2004. For a report on war in German medieval studies: M. CLAUSS, *Kriegsniederlagen im Mittelalter. Darstellung – Deutung – Bewältigung (Krieg in der Geschichte 54)*. Paderborn et al. 2010, 16–18; M. CLAUSS – Ch. GRIEB, 'FSK-Freigabe' für das Mittelalter? Gewalt und Krieg in der geschichtlichen Wahrnehmung der Epoche, in: *Das Mittelalter zwischen Vorstellung und Wirklichkeit: Probleme, Perspektiven und Anstöße für die Unterrichtspraxis*, ed. Th.-M. Buck – N. Brauch. Münster et al. 2011, 141–155.

² M. PRIETZEL, *Kriegführung im Mittelalter. Handlungen, Erinnerungen, Bedeutungen (Krieg in der Geschichte 32)*. Paderborn et al. 2006, 7; IDEM., *Mittelalterliche Kriegsgeschichte als Kulturgeschichte. Militär und Gesellschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit 6/2* (2002) 156–161.

³ On nation-building in the Middle Ages: *Aspekte der Nationenbildung im Mittelalter (Nationes 1)*, ed. H. Beumann – W. Schröder. Sigmaringen 1978; J. EHLERS, *Elemente mittelalterlicher Nationsbildung in Frankreich (10.–13. Jhd.)*. *Historische Zeitschrift* 231 (1980) 565–587; H. BEUMANN, *Zur Nationenbildung im Mittelalter*, in: *Nationalismus in vorindustrieller Zeit*, ed. O. DANN. München 1986, 21–33; E. HLAWITSCHKA, *Vom Frankenreich zur Formierung der abendländischen Staaten- und Völkergemeinschaft 840–1046*. Darmstadt 1986; J. EHLERS, *Die deutsche Nation des Mittelalters als Gegenstand der Forschung*, in: *Ansätze und Diskontinuität deutscher Nationsbildung im Mittelalter (Nationes 8)*, ed. H. BEUMANN – W. SCHRÖDER. Sigmaringen 1989; C. BRÜHL, *Deutschland und Frankreich. Die Geburt zweier Völker*. Köln u. a. 1990; J. EHLERS, *Was sind und wie bilden sich nationes im mittelalterlichen Europa (10.–15. Jahrhundert)? Begriff und allgemeine Konturen*, in: *Mittelalterliche nationes – neuzeitliche Nationen. Probleme der Nationenbildung in Europa*, ed. A. BUES – R. REXHEUSER. Wiesbaden 1995, 7–26; B. SCHNEIDMÜLLER, *Reich – Volk – Nation: Die Entstehung des Deutschen Reiches und der deutschen Nation im Mittelalter*, in: *Mittelalterliche nationes*, ed. A. Bues – R. Rexheuser. Wiesbaden 1995, 73–102; M. BECHER, *Rex, Dux und Gens*. Husum 1996; C. BRÜHL – B. SCHNEIDMÜLLER ed., *Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Reichs- und Nationsbildung in Deutschland und Frankreich (Historische Zeitschrift, NF, Beihefte 24)*. München 1997; R. AVERKORN, *The Process of Nationbuilding in Medieval Germany. A Brief Overview*, in: *Before and Beyond the Nation-State. Nations and Nationalities in Historical Perspective*, ed. A.–K. Isaacs. Pisa 2001, 177–198.

⁴ Cf. the following editions of the text: Widukind von Corvey, *Res gestae Saxonicae*, in: *MGH, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum*, Bd. 60, ed. H. E. Lohrmann – P. Hirsch. Hannover ⁵1935; Widukind von Corvey, *res gestae Saxonicae / Die Sachsengeschichte*, ed. E. Rotter – B. Schneidmüller. Stuttgart 2006 (hereafter: Widukind).

⁵ Such an inquiry takes into account above all: Th. SCHARFF, *Die Kämpfe der Herrscher und der Heiligen. Krieg und historische Erinnerung in der Karolingerzeit*. Darmstadt 2002. Remarks on this also in: G. ALTHOFF, *Beobachtungen zum liudolfingisch-ottonischen Gedenkwesen*, in: *Memoria. Der geschichtliche Zeugniswert des liturgischen Gedenkens im Mittelalter (Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften 48)*, ed. K. Schmid – J. Wollasch. München 1984, 649–665; IDEM., *Das argumentative Gedächtnis. Anklage-*

evidence the complex process of the creation of a collective Saxon identity⁶. In this light, that is within the depiction of war in the *Deeds of the Saxons*, the contemporaneous interpretation of Ottonian kingship and the beginnings of the Ottonian Empire in the past is detectable. At the same time it follows that it is the Ottonian perception of Saxon identity⁷ which influences the composition of Widukind's depiction of war.

1. THE "DEEDS OF THE SAXONS" AND THEIR AUTHOR

Little is known concerning Widukind⁸ (* around 925, † after 973), the historian and monk of Corvey⁹. The author of the *Deeds of the Saxons* came from the Saxon upper nobility. Around 941/2 he entered the Benedictine monastery of Corvey. Here he composed numerous hagiographic works, all of which have not survived. Around 967/68 he wrote in the same place his *Deeds of the Saxons* (*Rerum Gestarum Saxonicarum libri tres*). In three books the early history of the Saxon people until the death of the Emperor Otto I is depicted. Within the first book the early history until the death of the King Henry I (919–936) is narrated; he describes here the legendary origins of the Saxons, their battles against the Franks as well as the introduction of Christianity among the Saxons. In the second and third books the deeds of Otto I are recounted. At the beginning of each book there is a dedicatory address in the preface to the daughter of Otto I, Matilda, who in 966 became the abbess of the Benedictine convent of Quedlinburg. Although the *Deeds of the Saxons* are counted among the most important works of the Middle Ages, they have nonetheless been discussed amid great controversy in the secondary literature¹⁰. Bernd Schneidmüller¹¹ opines that "Partien der Sachsengeschichte eben aus der Corveyer Perspektive und aus der Konkurrenz zu anderen geistlichen Zentren gelesen werden müssen" and argues for an understanding of the *causa scribendi*¹² in analyzing the intention of depiction. For Bernd

und Rechtfertigungsstrategien in der Historiographie des 10. und 11. Jahrhunderts, in: *Inszenierte Herrschaft. Geschichtsschreibung und politisches Handeln im Mittelalter*, ed. IDEM. Darmstadt 2003, 126–149; H.-W. GOETZ, „Konstruktionen der Vergangenheit“. Geschichtsbewusstsein und „Fiktionalität“ in der Hochmittelalterlichen Chronistik, dargestellt am Beispiel der *Annales Palidenses*, in: *Von Fakten und Fiktionen. Mittelalterliche Geschichtsdarstellungen und ihre kritische Aufarbeitung*, ed. J. Laudage. Köln 2003, 225–257; J. FRIED, *Der Schleier der Erinnerung. Grundzüge einer historischen Memorik*. München 2004.

⁶ On identity in general: J. EHLERS, *Mittelalterliche Voraussetzungen für nationale Identität in der Neuzeit*, in: *Nationale und kulturelle Identität. Studien zur Entwicklung des kollektiven Bewusstseins in der Neuzeit*, ed. B. Giesen. Frankfurt/M. 1991, 77–99; J. ASSMANN, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erneuerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*. München 1992; W. POHL, *Identität und Widerspruch: Gedanken zu einer Sinngeschichte des Frühmittelalters*, in: *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen: von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 8)*, ed. IDEM. Wien 2004, 23–35.

⁷ Cf. on Saxon identity: W. EGGERT, *Franken und Sachsen bei Notker, Widukind und anderen. Zu einem Aufsatz von Josef Semmler*, in: *Historiographie im frühen Mittelalter (VIÖG 32)*, ed. A. Scharer – G. Scheibelreiter. Wien 1994, 514–530; R. CORRADINI, *Die Annales Fuldenses. Identifikationskonstruktionen im ostfränkischen Raum am Ende der Karolingerzeit*, in: *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 12)*, ed. Idem – R. Meens – Ch. Pössel – Ph. Shaw. Wien 2006, 121–136; B. ZELLER, *Liudolfinger als fränkische Könige? Überlegungen zur sogenannten Continuatio Reginonis*, in: *Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 12)*, ed. R. Corradini – R. Meens – Ch. Pössel – Ph. Shaw. Wien 2006, 137–152.

⁸ H. BEUMANN, *Widukind von Corvey, Untersuchungen zur Geschichtsschreibung und Ideengeschichte des 10. Jahrhunderts*. Weimar 1950, 212; R. ENGEL, *Widukind von Corvey*, in: *Weltbild und Realität. Einführung in die mittelalterliche Geschichtsschreibung*, ed. U. Knefelkamp. Pfaffenweiler 1992, 85–92; G. ALTHOFF, *Widukind von Corvey. Kronzeuge und Herausforderung. Frühmittelalterliche Studien 27* (1993) 253–272; J. LAUDAGE, *Widukind von Corvey und die deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft*, in: *Von Fakten und Fiktionen. Mittelalterliche Geschichtsdarstellungen und ihre kritische Aufarbeitung*, ed. J. Laudage. Köln 2003, 193–224.

⁹ G. ALTHOFF, *Der Corveyer Konvent im Kontakt mit weltlichen und geistlichen Herrschaftsträgern des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts*, in: *Der Liber vitae der Abtei Corvey. Studien zur Corveyer Gedenküberlieferung und zur Erschließung des Liber vitae*, ed. K. Schmid – J. Wollasch. Wiesbaden 1989, 29–38.

¹⁰ On methodological questions in view of the accession of Otto I, H. KELLER, *Ottonische Königsherrschaft. Organisation und Legitimation königlicher Macht*. Darmstadt 2002, 94 states: "... insgesamt bietet Widukinds Werk im Hinblick auf die durch Schmidts Ergebnis aufgeworfenen Fragen Auffälligkeiten und Probleme, die zu einer erneuten Beschäftigung mit seiner Darstellung des ottonischen Königtums zwingen" and "methodologische Probleme der Widukind-Interpretation", eingehend 95–130; LAUDAGE, *Widukind 195*, n. 3.

¹¹ B. SCHNEIDMÜLLER, *Widukind von Corvey, Richer von Reims und der Wandel politischen Bewusstseins im 10. Jahrhundert*, in: *Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Reichs- und Nationsbildung in Deutschland und Frankreich*, ed. C. Brühl – B. Schneidmüller. München 1997, 83–102.

¹² G. ALTHOFF, *Causa scribendi und Darstellungsabsicht. Die Lebensbeschreibungen der Königin Mathilde und andere Beispiele*, in: *Litterae Medii Aevi. Festschrift für Johanne Autenrieth zu ihrem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. M. Borgolte – H. Spilling. Sigmaringen 1988, 117–133.

Schneidmüller every evaluation must take into account the cluster of interests, perspectives and objectives of the historiographical work. I follow the above opinion and would like to add to it, that for the analysis of Widukind's text the *causa legendi* ought not to be neglected. This, because it is more concerned with the answering of the question as to whether the work achieves its goal, is able to provide the material for an essay on the cultural memory of the *gens saxonum* and the ruling house of the Ottonians¹³.

2. WIDUKIND'S ANALYSES OF WAR

The *Deeds of the Saxons* narrates two centuries' worth of violent or military events¹⁴. I proceed from the supposition that Widukind's depictions of war¹⁵ transmit his complex mindset regarding the perception and function of war, that this mindset was conditioned by the period in which he lived and that it is both competent in its subject-matter and differentiated. There is admittedly no excerpt within the work in which the historian explicitly talks about war. This fact prompted Helmut Beumann to state his denigratory comment, that Widukind's depictions of war "uns des elementaren Utilitarismus, der in den ersten Kapiteln Krieg und Frieden bestimmte, erinnern [...] Die Motive eines (im Sinne Augustinus) bellum justum werden bei Widukind nicht bearbeitet¹⁶". Pace Beumann the hypothesis of Karl Leyser with regard to the text seems much more pragmatic. Leyser opined that war and hostility in the work of Widukind of Corvey are a part of the cycle of life and that they are guided by the hand of God¹⁷. In my opinion the evaluation of Beumann can be attributed to a historical anachronism and with regard to the subject of war in the *Deeds of the Saxons* another approach is needed, which is theoretical and methodological as well as conditioned by the time in which the work appeared. The last of these must be devoted to the question of "War and historical memory¹⁸". At the center of such an examination is the "analysis of the descriptions of war itself", in order to answer the question of war and cultural memory. An inquiry of this sort allows a treatment of the relationship between war and the epoch, the geographic context, rulership and memory. In summary, war and its depiction in the early medieval tradition/historiography will be viewed as a means which served the legitimation and consolidation of Frankish/Saxon rulership.

Widukind of Corvey wrote his work around 968 and revised it shortly before the death of Otto I (973). He described the violence of a two-hundred-year period from his Saxon point of view. The latter can be recognized through the efforts of Widukind to broaden the prevalent Frankish designation of the empire at decisive political acts to *regnum francorum*¹⁹ et *saxonum* – a modification which is an indication for the shifting of identity²⁰. From this general starting point the depiction of wars and their functions in Widukind of Corvey's *Deeds of the Saxons* should be analyzed. In view of the question about a Saxon culture of war Widukind's complex thought-world must be analyzed within the context of an emergent Saxon collective identify under the sovereignty of the Ottonians in the tenth century. My circumscribed essay is concerned with aspects, which – as already mentioned – treat the issues of war and historical memory. The examination

¹³ E. KARPFF, Herrscherlegitimation und Reichsbegriff in der ottonischen Geschichtsschreibung des 10. Jahrhunderts (*Historische Forschungen* 10). Stuttgart 1985; J. FRIED, Der Weg in die Geschichte. Berlin 1994; H. BEUMANN, Die Ottonen. Stuttgart et al. 2000; KELLER, Königsherrschaft 91–131; G. ALTHOFF, Die Ottonen. Stuttgart et al. 2005.

¹⁴ G. ALTHOFF – S. COUÉ, Pragmatische Geschichtsschreibung und Krisen, I. Zur Funktion von Brunos Buch vom Sachsenkrieg, in: Pragmatische Schriftlichkeit im Mittelalter. Erscheinungsformen und Entwicklungsstufen (*Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften* 65), ed. H. Keller – K. Grubmüller – N. Staubach. München 1992, 95–107.

¹⁵ Writing War. Medieval Literary Responses to Warfare, ed. C. Saunders – F. L. Saux – N. Thomas. Cambridge 2004; G. ALTHOFF, Reden über den Krieg. Darstellungsformen und Funktionen des Krieges in der Historiographie des Frühmittelalters, in: Gewalt im Mittelalter. Realitäten, Imaginationen, ed. M. Braun – C. Herberichs. München 2005, 65–81; G. CLAUDE, Dire et faire la guerre au Moyen Âge. *Le Moyen Age* 112/3 (2006) 643–655.

¹⁶ BEUMANN, Widukind 212.

¹⁷ K. LEYSER, Communication and Power in Medieval Europe. The Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries. London 1994, 30: "...in Widukind of Corvey, bellum and inimicitia are part of the life process itself, divinely guided and therefore all the more unquestioned".

¹⁸ Characteristic of this approach is the work of Thomas Scharff on the depictions of war in the historiography of the Carolingian period: SCHARFF, Kämpfe 32–52, 91–114.

¹⁹ G. ALTHOFF, Das ottonische Reich als regnum Francorum?, in: Deutschland und der Westen Europas im Mittelalter (*Vorträge und Forschungen* 56), ed. J. EHLERS. Stuttgart 2002, 235–261.

²⁰ SCHNEIDMÜLLER, Widukind 93.

of the conception of war (e.g. *bellum externum*, *bella civilia*, *bellum universale*, *bellum publicum*, *bellum inter eminentes viros*, *pugna*, *expeditio*) will here be viewed with regard to Widukind's legitimation strategies (e.g. legends and myths or historically-developed ideas: *imperium*, *libertas*, *patria*, *pax*, *gentes christianae vs gentes barbarae*) as well as justification strategies (e.g. lack of food and money, contested ruler successions) in this context. Such an analysis allows on the one hand the description of Widukind's manifold perception of war, and the other hand the clarification of the role and influence of pagan, Frankish-imperial or Roman-Christian traditions in their formation. This enables the classification of the perception of war in the ideological and pragmatic milieu of its emergence as well in Saxon nation-building. The latter is entwined with Widukind's strategies of memory, on which his construction of the Saxon past²¹ is dependent. Bernd Schneidmüller summarizes on this point quite appropriately: "Die Nationsbildung, die Entstehung der mittelalterlichen Nationen kann nicht allein aus der Faktengeschichte als gleichsam objektiven Prozess, sondern muss hauptsächlich aus dem Wandel historischen Bewusstseins und aus der Umformung oder dem Neuaufbau politischer Identität begriffen werden". The construction of the Saxon past by Widukind is the historiographical expression of this transformation. Within the *Deeds of the Saxons* the *fama* of the eyewitness, the orally-transmitted²² factuality about the past, the learnedness of the author and contemporaneous identity as well as the metamorphoses of cultural memory all merge with one another²³.

In the first book of the *Deeds of the Saxons* Widukind depicts the wars of the Saxon tribes against the Thuringians and Franks. The former take place amid the context of Saxon colonization, the latter amid the expansionist policy of Charlemagne (768–814). One comes to the conclusion from Widukind's descriptions of war, that the relationship between the Franks and the Saxons – above all between 772 and 804 – was marked by a spiral of violence. In this context it must be mentioned here, that the goal of Saxon military policy was nothing less than *pax*, i.e. the erecting of a lasting peace²⁴. In the following comments the analysis will embark upon the differentiation of this thought-complex as an expression of the collectively-developing Saxon transformation of identity, which took place from colonization of the eighth century until the tenth century.

Widukind legitimizes the Saxon colonization of Thuringia *iure belli*²⁵. Afterward numerous military events²⁶ take place, which drove along the consolidation of Saxon structures in the settlement zone of the Saxon people. Widukind depicts these violent conflicts at length in his historiographical opus. These events are embedded in the collective memory of the Saxons. The remembrance²⁷ of the wars of the Saxons is to be understood as an identity and legitimation factor. The emergence of a unique identity in the East-Frankish Empire in the tenth century is evidenced in the historiography of the period. The historical past contributed to the identity- and nation-building of the Saxons in the East-Frankish Empire in the tenth century. The rise of the noble Saxon house of the Liudolfings to the imperial throne necessitated a confrontation with the past of the Saxon people. This gap was obvious and thus Widukind's *Deeds of the Saxons* was meant to make good the historical deficit of the Saxon people. The close relationship of Widukind with the Ottonian monarchy is clearly confirmed by his historiographical activity²⁸. Thomas Scharff repeatedly underlined the meaning of the relationship between war and early medieval historiography in the context of the historiographical tradition—the oral as well as the written tradition, because it acquired a special role in the process of the for-

²¹ GOETZ, Konstruktionen 225–257.

²² G. ALTHOFF, Geschichtsschreibung in einer oralen Gesellschaft. Das Beispiel des 10. Jahrhunderts, in: Ottonische Neuanfänge. Symposium zur Ausstellung 'Otto der Große, Magdeburg und Europa', ed. B. Schneidmüller – S. Weinfurter. Mainz 2001, 151–169.

²³ SCHNEIDMÜLLER, Widukind 83–102; M. BECHER, Volksbildung und Herzogtum in Sachsen während des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts. *MIÖG* 108 (2000) 67–84; FRIED, Schleier der Erinnerung; H. REIMITZ, The Art of Truth. Historiography and Identity in the Frankish World, in: Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages (*Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 12), ed. R. Corradini – R. Meens – Ch. Pössel – Ph. Shaw. Wien 2006, 87–104.

²⁴ BEUMANN, Widukind 210–216; K. J. LEYSER, Rule and Conflict in an Early Medieval Society. London 1979; SCHARFF, Kämpfe 229–285.

²⁵ Widukind, I.6: *Et rebus prospere gestis proxima circumcirca loca iure belli obtinent.*

²⁶ Cf. on the Saxon colonization: Widukind, I.1–I.14.

²⁷ J. ASSMAN, Mose der Ägypter. Entzifferung einer Gedächtnisspur. Frankfurt/M. 2000.

²⁸ SCHNEIDMÜLLER, Einleitung 4; Historiographie im Frühen Mittelalter, ed. A. Scharer – G. Scheibelreiter. Wien et al. 1994; Vergangenheit und Vergegenwärtigung. Frühes Mittelalter und europäische Erinnerungskultur (*Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 14), ed. H. Reimitz – B. Zeller. Wien 2009.

mation of collective memory²⁹. In this context he remarked, that Widukind of Corvey even in the introduction to his *Deeds of Saxons* refers to his earlier historiographical works and that he compares them to his new historiographical undertaking, where he will describe the deeds of secular rulers. Widukind writes the following: “No one should wonder why, after I announced the triumphs of the soldiers of the highest Lord (*summi imperatoris militum triumphos*), I now enumerate the deeds of our leaders”³⁰. The choice of words should be interpreted as a play upon the successful and victorious deeds of the Saxon people and their rulers.

It is concerning this that the author transmits in connection with the Saxon settlement in Thuringia the *origo gentis saxonum*, that is his rationalized interpretation of the origins³¹ and name of the *antiqua* and *nobilis gens*³² of the Saxons. Not coincidentally, both themes are connected with the army and martial virtues of the Saxon people. The origin of the Saxon people is detailed by Widukind in the second chapter of the first book of the *Deeds of the Saxons*. According to Widukind's narration, Saxon origins are connected with the forces of Alexander the Great, because “the Saxons were the descendants of the Macedonian army”. Widukind wrote: “Opinions in this regard are varied, particularly as some believe that the Saxons stem from the Danes and Northmen, while others however maintain that their origin comes from the Greeks, as I myself in my youth heard someone boast, that the Greeks themselves admit, that the Saxons were the descendants of the Macedonian army that followed Alexander the Great and after his early death was scattered over the entire Earth. In any case there is no doubt, that it is an ancient and noble people”³³. The author used Saxon colonization *iure belli* as an opportunity to explain the meaning of the Saxon name. Thus Widukind in the seventh chapter of the first book answers the question, why they are called Saxons, as follows: “Now at that time long knives were customarily kept among the Saxons, according to [...] tribal custom. [...] With these hidden beneath their clothes [...] they went to their camps and confronted the Thuringians [...] They drew their knives and struck them all down, so that not one of them survived [...] Some also claim, that from this deed they received their name, because ‘knife’ in our language means ‘Saxon’. Thus they were so-called for this reason, because they had cut down such a mass of men”³⁴. In this passage it clearly emerges, that the Saxon name possesses martial potential. This conception of the meaning of the name is no coincidence; it contains the timeless value of the bellicose and military virtues of the Saxons.

Next comes a description of the conflict with the Thuringians, which led to the Saxon colonization. According to Widukind's telling of it, the Saxons recognized the necessity of the war in view of the life-threatening shortening of food: “Once however the Saxons ran out of gold and were unable to buy or sell anything

²⁹ SCHARFF, Reden 66.

³⁰ Widukind, I.1: *Post operum nostrorum primordia, quibus summi imperatoris militum triumphos declaravi, nemo me miretur principum nostrorum res gestas litteris velle commendare; quia in illo opere professioni meae, ut potui, quod debui exolvere, modo generis gentisque meae devotioni, ut queo, elaborare non effugio.*

³¹ Widukind, I.12: *Ex hoc apparet aestimationem illorum utcumque probabilem, qui Saxones originem duxisse putant de Graecis, quia Hirmin vel Hermis Graece Mars dicitur. Vgl. G. ALTHOFF, Formen und Funktionen von Mythen im Mittelalter, in: Mythos und Nation (Studien zur Entwicklung des kollektiven Bewusstseins der Neuzeit 3), ed. H. Berding. Frankfurt/M. 1996, 11–33; G. ALTHOFF, Genealogische und andere Fiktionen in mittelalterlicher Historiographie, in: Inszenierte Herrschaft. Geschichtsschreibung und politisches Handeln im Mittelalter, ed. G. Althoff. Darmstadt 2003, 25–51.*

³² Widukind, I.2: *Caeterum gentem antiquam et nobilem fuisse non ambigitur de quibus et in contione Agrippae ad Iudaeos in Iosepho oratio contextitur et Lucani poetae sententia probatur.*

³³ Widukind, I.2: *Nam super hac re varia opinio est, aliis arbitrantibus de Danis Northmannisque originem duxisse Saxones, aliis autem aestimantibus, ut ipse adolescentulus audivi quendam predicantem, de Graecis, quia ipsi dicerent Saxones reliquias fuisse Macedonici exercitus, qui secutus Magnum Alexandrum in matura morte ipsius per totum orbem sit dispersus. Caeterum gentem antiquam et nobilem fuisse non ambigitur.*

³⁴ Widukind, I.6–7: *Erat autem illis diebus Saxonibus magnorum cultellorum usus, quibus usque hodie Angli utuntur; morem gentis antiquae sectantes. Quibus armati Saxones sub sagis suis procedunt castris occurruntque Thuringis conducto loco. Cumque viderent hostes inermes et omnes principes Thuringorum adesse, tempus rati totius regionis obtinendae, cultellis abstractis super inermes et inprovisos irruunt et omnes fundunt, ita ut ne unus quidem ex eis superfuerit. ... Fuerunt autem et qui hoc facinore nomen illis inditum tradant. Cultelli enim nostra lingua “sahs” dicuntur; ideoque Saxones nuncupatos, quia cultellis tantam multitudinem fudissent.*

Walter Pohl (W. POHL, *Sinngeschichte* 31) describes the meaning of the name in connection with tribal identity as follows: “der Name enthält im Kern eine Erzählung, ein narratives Potential. Er aktualisiert einen Vorrat an Aneignungen der Vergangenheit, an Erklärungen des Bestehenden, aber auch an Versprechen für die Zukunft. Der Volksname ist immer schon gemeinsame Erinnerung. Freilich, diese Erinnerung ist selbst nicht so geschichtslos, so kodifiziert und von der Interpretationshoheit eines ‘Traditionskerns’ monopolisiert wie es das Modell von Wenskus nahelegt”.

more, they believed that peace was of no use to them³⁵. Nonetheless the Saxons avoided any action that might lead to a breach of the peace with the Thuringians. The author describes the last attempt to keep peace with the Saxon nobility before the colonization as follows: “Now at that time it so happened that a young man laden with much gold, with a golden chain and golden brooches, set out upon his ships. A Thuringian came upon him and said: Why do you have so much gold. I am looking for a buyer, he replied to him, I not carrying this gold for any other purpose; because why should I, while I starve to death, rejoice in gold? Thus the other [man] asked him, what and how high was the price. The price, said the Saxon, does not interest me. Whatever you are willing to give, I will gladly take. What would happen, he said sarcastically to the young man, if I filled your garment with earth? For right on the spot lay a great mound of earth. As soon as the Saxon opened his garment, he had it filled with dirt and surrendered then and there the gold to the Thuringian. Both happily hurried back to their peoples. The Thuringians praised this Thuringian to the skies, that he had deceived the Saxon with such a noble trick and how happy he must be above all other men, since for a song he had come into the possession of such a mass of gold. Their victory thus certain, they were already triumphing, so to say, their victory over the Saxons. Meanwhile, the Saxon, without his gold but heavily laden with earth, approached the Saxons with his ships [...] A group of his friends began to mock him [...] But the Saxon demanded silence and said: Follow me, my good Saxons, and you’ll become convinced that my folly is of use to you. Though they were skeptical, they still followed after him. He then took the earth, strewed it as thinly as possible over the neighboring fields and occupied a campsite³⁶. To the complaint of the Thuringians, that the Saxons had broken the peace and that the treaty was now breached, the Saxons answered that they had to that point respected the treaty without breaching it. They claimed the land which they had acquired in exchange for their own gold they would occupy peacefully or in any case defend it with their weapons³⁷. There followed numerous bloody encounters, whereby the Saxons, “finding the enemy well-prepared, crushed them and, after the war’s favorable outcome, obtained possession of the neighboring area according to the law of war³⁸. Through the Saxon success the value of Saxon armament and the martial virtues of the people were confirmed. At the same time through their invention both the basis of legitimation for the Saxon colonization in Thuringia as well as the capacity for remembrance of the Liudolfings and the corresponding strategies for them are immediately reflected. In this way the Ottonians strengthened their contemporaneous claims to the highest political rank within the political order of their time. In addition Widukind references the military and martial skill as well as the superior armament of the Saxons, which was also confirmed by the Anglo-Saxon colonization of Britain³⁹, thereby supporting his thesis. The nothing less

³⁵ Widukind, I.4: *Cumque Saxonibus defecisset pecunia, quid venderent aut emerent non habentibus, inutilem sibi pacem esse arbitrabantur.*

³⁶ Widukind, I.5: *Ea igitur tempestate contigit adolescentem quendam 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 nichil 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 nichil cunctatus aperit sinum et accipit humum, ilicoque Thuringo tradidit aurum. Laetus uterque ad suos repedit. Thuringi Thuringum laudibus ad caelum tollunt, qui nobili fraude Saxonem deceperit, fortunatumque eum inter omnes mortales 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 eum crediderunt. At ille postulato silentio: “Sequimini”, inquit, “me, optimi Saxones, et meam vobis amentiam probabitur utilem”. At illi, licet dubii, sequuntur tamen ducem, Ille autem sumpta humo per vicinos agros quam potuit subtiliter sparsit et castrorum loca occupavit.*

³⁷ Widukind, I.6: *Saxones respondent se hactenus foedus inviolabiliter servasse: terram proprio auro comparatam cum pace velle obtinere aut certe armis defendere.*

³⁸ Widukind, I.6: *Saxones vero parati hostes excipiunt sternuntque. Et rebus prospere gestis proxima circumcirca loca iure belli obtinent.*

³⁹ Widukind, I.6: *Erat autem illis diebus Saxonibus magnorum cultellorum usus, quibus usque hodie Angli utuntur, morem gentis antiquae sectantes. Quibus armati Saxones sub sagis suis procedunt castris occurruntque Thuringis conducto loco.* Widukind, I.8: *Saxones, miseri Bretti crebris hostium incursionibus fatigati et admodum contriti, auditis victoriis, ... ut ab eis vestra auxilia non subtrahatis ... Vestra virtute, vestris armis hostibus tantum superiores inveniamur ... amicos Brettis Saxones sciat et eorum necessitatibus atque commodis aequae semper ... Deinde promissus in Britanniam mittitur exercitus, et ... in brevi liberat regionem a latronibus, restituens patriam incolis ... audita fama Saxonum ... gentes Brettis adversae Scotti et Pehti ... militantes Saxones*

than noble origin – seen as providential – and the Saxon colonization/successful claim of this people against the Thuringians served as the ideal preconditions for later successes of the Saxons against the Franks.

It becomes immediately clear that one wages war for pragmatic, existential reasons. That such depictions of war are found in connection with the search for origins can be explained from the needs of the Saxons for legitimation. The *Origo gentis*⁴⁰ endowed them with identity and thereby the existing order at the time of composition was legitimated. Widukind concentrates his remarks on the colonization, through the stages of the seaborne landings in the wars of the Saxons against the Thuringians. For Widukind cunning and violence serve as the background for the fortitude which he highlights and the martial virtues of his people, with which it is connected. The development into a *gens* under the leadership of dukes and kings is founded upon these attributes. The Saxons form their identity in wars with neighbors as well as in internal conflicts among Saxons. Thereupon Widukind achieves his declared goal of internal peace. Divine aid plays only a subordinate role in this period for the heathen Saxons. The aforementioned passages bring the bellicose activities, the military structure as well as martial virtuousness of the Saxon people into the center of collective memory. Here the historical remembrance and the self-assertion of the Saxons are to be integrated under the Ottonians. As a result the contemporaneous claims of the Saxon people and those of the Ottonian royal house are easier to explain and to justify. In this light it is to be understood, that the selection of ancestors fell upon the Macedonian Greeks of Alexander the Great in Widukind's *origo gentis*. My next comments will give information concerning this.

After the colonization there followed more than thirty years of wars (772–804) between the Franks and Saxons. The Saxon defeat was capped by the baptism of King Widukind and his people. In this way the Saxons became allies of the Franks. Afterward Widukind of Corvey underlined the gradual development of East-Frankish/Saxon collective identity⁴¹ of a *populus Francorum et Saxonum* from the melting together⁴² of Franks and Saxons into one people as a consequence of the Christianization of the Saxons in the lands ruled by the East-Franks. Concerning this Widukind wrote in the first book of his work: “But Charlemagne, the most valiant of kings, became prominent through his great wisdom. Then he thought, because he was shrewder than anyone else at that time, that his famous neighboring people should not remain in empty superstition. Here and there he considered how this people could be led onto the correct path. And he compelled them in part through gentle persuasion, in part through bellicose attacks. In the thirtieth year of his reign—first as a king, then he was chosen as emperor – he finally accomplished through his efforts, what he had never neglected during the entire time: thus were those, who at one time were the allies and friends of the Franks,

accipiebant a Brettis omnia ad usum necessaria ... et pace facta cum Scottis et Pehttis, in commune contra Brettos consurgunt eosque regione propellunt, suae ditioni regionem distribuunt; et quia illa insula in angulo quodam maris sita est, Anglisaxones usque hodie vocitantur.

⁴⁰ Die Bayern und ihre Nachbarn. Berichte des Symposions der Kommission für Frühmittelalterforschung vom 25. bis 28. Oktober 1982 im Stift Zwettl, Niederösterreich (*Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Frühmittelalterforschung* 8–9), ed. H. Wolfram – A. Schwarcz – H. Friesinger – F. Daim. Wien 1985; Typen der Ethnogenese unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Bayern 1. Berichte des Symposions der Kommission für Frühmittelalterforschung, 27. bis 30. Oktober 1986, Stift Zwettl, Niederösterreich (*Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Frühmittelalterforschung* 12), ed. H. Wolfram – W. Pohl. Wien 1990; W. POHL, Tradition, Ethnogenese und literarische Gestaltung: eine Zwischenbilanz, in: Ethnogenese und Überlieferung. Angewandte Methoden der Frühmittelalterforschung (*VIÖG* 31), ed. K. Brunner – B. Merta. Wien et al. 1994; H. WOLFRAM, Origo et Religio. Ethnic Traditions and Literature in Early Medieval Texts. *Early Medieval Europe* 3 (1994) 19–33; H.-H. ANTON, Troja-Herkunft, origo gentis und frühe Verfasstheit der Franken in der gallisch-fränkischen Tradition des 5. bis 8. Jahrhunderts. *MIÖG* 108 (2000) 1–30; B. SCHNEIDMÜLLER, Völker – Stämme – Herzogtümer? Von der Vielfalt der Ethnogenesen im ostfränkischen Reich. *MIÖG* 108 (2000) 31–47; H.-W. GOETZ, Zur zeitgenössischen Terminologie und Wahrnehmung ostfränkischer Ethnogenese im 9. Jahrhundert. *MIÖG* 108 (2000) 85–134; A. PLASSMANN, Origo gentis. Identitäts- und Legitimitätsstiftung in früh- und hochmittelalterlichen Herkunftserzählungen (*Orbis mediaevalis – Vorstellungswelten des Mittelalters* 7). Berlin 2006; E. JOHNSON, Origin Myths and the Construction of Medieval Identities: Norman Chronicles 1000–1100, in: Texts and Identities in the Early Middle Ages (*Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 12), ed. R. Corradini – R. Meens – Ch. Pössel – Ph. Shaw. Wien 2006, 153–164.

⁴¹ BRÜHL, Geburt 93.

⁴² Widukind, I.15: *iam fratres et quasi una gens ex Christiana fide, veluti modo videmus, facta est.* BEUMANN, Widukind 9, 20, 225, 231, 248 n. 12, 259f.

now brothers, and as we can now see, as it were one people arose from the Christian faith”⁴³. This passage renders much information concerning the remembrance strategies of the Saxon monk of Corvey. He evaluated the military conflicts between Charlemagne and the Saxons positively. War is here viewed positively as a means by which Christianization and with it the process of civilization was implemented among the Saxons. Charlemagne is the key figure in this process. At the same time Widukind, through the inclusion of Charlemagne, constructs the necessary factuality and a solid ideological and historical basis of legitimation, in order to justify the rise of the tribe of the Saxons and the spread of the power of the Ottonian rule. His narrative corresponds to the following schema: the Franks resemble their ancestors, the Trojan Hellenes⁴⁴. The Saxons also emulate their ancient and noble progenitors, the Macedonian Hellenes of Alexander the Great, whose martial virtues and proficiency they have inherited. It sounds like an ideological-political program of Saxon-Ottonian reception. In this way the Saxons are coequal to the Franks. The best evidence for this are noble, valiant and victorious ancestors. These courageous forefathers know how to win wars and how to rule over many *gentes*. In a similar way their offspring, the Saxons, achieve the same.

The “Wir-Gefühl” of the Saxons in the *Deeds of the Saxons* is continually emphasized through the use of the designation *nostris*, which means “our”. For Widukind of Corvey the differentiation of the Saxon bands⁴⁵ was not truly evident, something not made easier by the fact that an ethnic unity of the Saxons in the Carolingian Empire is not datable. This contradiction of Saxon historicity is to be understood through the Saxon-Ottonian perception of their own past in the tenth century. Both the ruling ideology as well as a common cause simplified and unified differences. War, which is governed by its polarizing dynamic, contains both aforementioned processes. The integration of the Saxons in the Frankish realm up until the middle of the ninth century was realized both in and through war. The united campaigns of the Franks and Saxons against the Slavs⁴⁶ (i.e. around the year 872 at Mähren) and Danes had an integrating effect. It was as a confirmation and praise of the martial effectiveness of the Saxon people that firstly the *Translatio Sancti Viti* around 836 from *Gallia* to *Saxonia* and secondly the later (dated to 923) gift of the relics of Saint Dionysius of the Lotharingian ruler Charles III the Simple (893–923) were understood and propagated⁴⁷. Thus an emissary of Lotharingia to King Henry I (919–936) informs us as follows: “My master Charles, who earlier was adorned with the full regal authority, which he has now been robbed of, has sent me to you in order to inform you that to him, who was betrayed by his enemies, that nothing is more pleasant or sweet than to hear the fame

⁴³ Widukind, I.15: *Magnus vero Karolus cum esset regum fortissimus, non minori sapientia vigilabat. Enimvero considerabat, quia suis temporibus omni mortali prudentior erat, finitimam gentem nobilemque vano errore retineri non oportere; modis omnibus satagebat, quatinus ad veram viam duceretur. Et nunc blanda suasionem, nunc bellorum inpetu ad id cogebat, tandemque tricesimo imperii sui anno obtinuit – imperator quippe ex rege creatus est –, quod multis temporibus elaborando non defecit: ob id qui olim socii et amici erant Francorum, iam fratres et quasi una gens ex Christiana fide, veluti modo videmus, facta est.*

⁴⁴ On the *origo gentis Francorum* see: H. REIMITZ, Die Konkurrenz der Ursprünge in der fränkischen Historiographie, in: *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen: von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 8)*, ed. W. Pohl. Wien 2004, 191–209, 192 n. 3 and 209: “Gerade das Verhältnis von Widerschrift und Wiederschrift, das sich im Vergleich dieser Texte abzeichnet, kann aber auch vermitteln, mit welcher großen Anstrengungen die Aneignung von Geschichte und die Nutzung etablierter historiographischer Traditionen verbunden war – vor allem dann, wenn Geschichte als Ressource für die Auffindung und Konstruktion von Herkunft und Identität genutzt wurde”.

⁴⁵ Among which *socii, amici, fratres* are also to be counted. On Saxon ethnogenesis see R. CORRADINI, Überlegungen zur sächsischen Ethnogenese anhand der *Annales Fuldenses* und deren sächsisch-ottonischer Rezeption, in: *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen: von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 8)*, ed. W. Pohl. Wien 2004, 211–231, 218f.

⁴⁶ G. ALTHOFF, Saxony and the Elbe Slavs in the Tenth Century, in: *The New Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. 3: c. 900–c.1025*, ed. T. Reuter. Cambridge 1999, 267–292, 771–775.

⁴⁷ Widukind, I.33, I.34: *Quando vero rex Renum transierat ad dilatandum super Lotharios imperium suum, occurrit ei legatus Karoli, et salutato eo verbis humillimis: “Dominus meus”, inquit, “Karolus, regia quondam potestate preditus, modo privatus, misit me ad te demandans, quia nichil ei ab inimicis circumvento iocundius, nichil dulcius esse possit quam de tui magnifici profectus gloria aliquid audire, fama virtutum tuarum consolari. Et hoc tibi signum fidei et veritatis transmisit”; protulitque de sinu manum preciosi martyris Dionisii auro gemmisque inclusam. “Hoc”, inquit, “habeto pignus foederis perpetui et amoris vicarii. Hanc partem unici solatii Francorum Galliam inhabitantium, postquam nos deseruit insignis martyr Vitus ad nostram perneciam vestramque perpetuam pacem Saxoniā visitavit communicare tecum maluit. Neque enim, postquam translatus est corpus eius a nobis, civilia vel externa cessavere bella; eodem quippe anno Dani et Northmanni regionem nostram invaserunt”. Rex autem munus divinum cum omni gratiarum actione suscipiens prosternitur reliquiis sanctis et deosculans eas summa veneratione veneratus est.*

of your great ascent and to take comfort in the renown of your abilities. He sends you this as a sign of his fidelity and sincerity'. Then he drew from his garment the hand of the praiseworthy martyr Dionysius, adorned in gold and gems. 'This', he continued, 'you should keep as a pledge of eternal alliance and mutual love. He wanted most of all to give over to you, after the extraordinary martyr Vitus left us to our loss and came to the Saxons to your perpetual peace, this part of the only comfort of the Franks who inhabit Gaul. Because since his body has been taken away from us, foreign and civil wars have not ceased; for in that year the Danes and Northmen attacked our region'. The king however took the divine gift with the showing of the greatest gratitude, kneeled before the holy relic and bestowed upon it the highest reverence with a kiss⁴⁸.

From that time the saints accompanied the Saxon rulers, who won *bella civilia* as well as *externa*. In this way, as well as through his craft and abilities in war, Henry I accomplished the subjugation of the *nationes barbarae* (Slavs and Magyars)⁴⁹. Thus the peoples neighboring Henry's realm became tributary⁵⁰, and he set in motion the repression of their savagery (*ferocitas*)⁵¹. *Divino nutu*⁵², by divine command, the Saxons won all of the battles during these military conflicts. By the mercy of God⁵³ "in that battle only the two Liuthars and a pair of noblemen fell", wrote Widukind. King Henry I received his warriors and praised them, while he divided the plunder fairly⁵⁴.

The glorious battle of Lechfeld⁵⁵ (10. August 955) is depicted in the third book of the *Deeds of the Saxons*. Through Widukind's description of the battle and its effects one can detect the symbolism of the depiction and the staging of the praxis of Ottonian rulership. The unmistakable schemas of social legitimations, political propaganda and instrumentalizing are reflected in the defeat of the Magyars, which has been called annihilating by historians. The victory at the Lechfeld bestowed upon the Saxon King Otto I the highest political rank (*imperium*⁵⁶) of the West Christian political order. Otto I was directly after the victory acclaimed emperor (*imperator*) by his warriors⁵⁷. Even though this enactment can be justified as a reminiscence of an ancient Roman tradition, one should not ignore its political-programmatic content. Widukind's interpretation of the glorious victory of Otto the Great over the Magyars confirms the perception of Ottonian rulership and its legitimization strategies, which permeate his entire work. On this point Hagen Keller, who competently and exhaustively compares the methodological problems of Widukind's depiction and the interpretation of events, states that "Widukind [...] mit seiner Hervorhebung der imperialen Stellung des sächsisch-fränkischen König-tums sogar an Selbsteutungen des ottonischen Hofes vor 962 anknüpft"⁵⁸. Otto I himself appealed to his warriors before the decisive battle and said among other things: "For the enemy their temerity serves primarily as a shield, while for us by contrast it is hope of divine protection. We would have to shame ourselves as the masters of almost all of Europe, if we were to now give in to the enemy. We would rather die glori-

⁴⁸ On this: J. OBERSTE, Heilige und ihre Reliquien in der politischen Kultur der früheren Ottonenzeit. *Frühmittelalterlichen Studien* 35 (2003) 73–98, 96f.

⁴⁹ Widukind, I.9, I.36, II.20, II.21, III.45, III.50, III.63–III.67.

⁵⁰ Widukind, I.36: *Cumque vicinae gentes a rege Heinrico factae essent tributariae, Apodriti, Wilti, Hevelli, Dalamanci, Boemi, Redarii, et pax esset.*

⁵¹ Widukind, I.36.

⁵² Widukind, I.36, III.70.

⁵³ Widukind, I.36, II.4: *divina virtute*, III.46: *protectio divina*. Cf. L. KÖRNTGEN, Königsherrschaft und Gottes Gnade. Zu Kontext und Funktion sakraler Vorstellungen in Historiographie und Bildzeugnissen der ottonisch-frühsalischen Zeit (*Orbis medievalis. Vorstellungswelten des Mittelalters* 2). Berlin 2001.

⁵⁴ Widukind, I.15.

⁵⁵ Widukind, III.44–III.49.

⁵⁶ S. LAITSOS, 'Imitatio Basilei'? The Ideological and Political Construction of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily in the 12th Century, in: *The Eastern Roman Empire and the Birth of the Idea of State in Europe (European Public Law Series 80)*, ed. Sp. Flogaitis – A. Pantélis. London 2005, 227–247, 242 and 243 n. 104; R. SCHIEFFER, Karl der Große, Eirene und der Ursprung des westlichen Kaisertums, in: *Die Suche nach den Ursprüngen: von der Bedeutung des frühen Mittelalters (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 8)*, ed. W. Pohl. Wien 2004, 151–158, 157 and n. 36: "der verbreitete unspezifische Gebrauch von *imperium* in lateinischen Quellen aus der Zeit, der immer Überlegungen zum 'romfreien Kaisertum' und zur 'Aachener Kaiseridee' stimuliert hat".

⁵⁷ Widukind, *Triumpho celebri rex factus gloriosus ab exercitu pater patriae imperatorque appellatus est*; KELLER, Königsherrschaft 96f.; G. ALTHOFF, Die Kaiserkrönung Ottos des Großen 962, in: *Höhepunkte des Mittelalters*, ed. G. Scheibelreiter. Darmstadt 2004, 70–84.

⁵⁸ KELLER, Königsherrschaft 97.

ously in battle, if our end stands before us, than to subjugate ourselves to the enemy and to live in servitude [...] Let us now begin the negotiations with swords instead of with words”⁵⁹. Led and accompanied by the *victory-bringing angel* or rather the *signa* of the Archangel Michael⁶⁰, the valiant King Otto I fulfilled his duty as the most courageous warrior and the best commander⁶¹. And thus he conquered *Dei gratia*, the heathen and impetuous barbarians, the Magyars. His victory is ascribed to the warlike competence of his *gens*, which because of its virtues had acquired the “favor of God”. Then, “covered in the glory of this magnificent victory, the king was acclaimed by his army as the father of the fatherland and emperor”⁶². Widukind was able to celebrate Otto the Great and his Saxons as the masters of all Europe through the victory over the Magyars at the Lechfeld. This designation is marked by a sweeping point of view of depiction, the interpretation of which was tied up with the East-Frankish/Saxon kings’ aspirations for hegemony. Otto I was the undisputed “Father of the Fatherland”, and this message was directed at his subjects in the East-Frankish kingdom, who due to their absence had not taken part in the victory over the Magyars. The construction of the depiction of the *imperator* acclamation after the victorious battle had numerous recipients. It is in this light the outline of the later conflict with New Rome (Constantinople)⁶³ is to be seen. The king reestablished the divinely-willed world order through his campaigning (*bella civilia, bella externa* or *publica*) both within and without his domain. Otto I became the ruler of numerous *gentes*. Thus he is victorious and with the help of God—following Widukind’s discourse of identity—he becomes, in the tradition of his bellicose ancestor Alexander the Great, worthy of being depicted as the leader of many *gentes* and *terrae*. This also brought him the proper recognition of his rivals with Christendom (*Romani, Graeci*) as well as opponents outside of it (the *Sarraceni*). Consequently Otto I received the emissaries of these rulers and peoples, who brought him precious and costly as well as symbolic gifts⁶⁴.

⁵⁹ Widukind, I.35 designates Otto I as “Beloved of the World“ and “Head of the Globe”, whose power extends across all of Europe: *videmus in amore mundi et totius orbis capite, patre tuo, cuius potentiae maiestatem non solum Germania, Italia atque Gallia, sed tota fere Europa non sustinet*. Cf. G. ALTHOFF, Otto der Große und die neue europäische Identität, in: Der Hoftag in Quedlinburg 973. Von den historischen Wurzeln zum Neuen Europa, ed. A. Ranft. Berlin 2006, 3–18.

⁶⁰ Widukind, III.44: *coramque angelus*. See: W. SPEYER, Die Hilfe und Epiphanie einer Gottheit, eines Heroen und eines Heiligen in der Schlacht. *JbAC Erg.Bd.* 8 (1980) 55–77. On the significance of the Archangel Michael among the *gentes*: P. ANTONOPOULOS, King Cunincpert and the Archangel Michael, in: Die Langobarden. Herrschaft und Identität (*Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters* 9), ed. W. Pohl – P. Erhart. Wien 2005, 383–386; IDEM., The Reign of Cunicpert. London 2010, 45–63, n. 86, 102 and 106.

⁶¹ Widukind, III.46: *Et his dictis, arrepto clipeo ac sacra lancea, ipse primus equum in hostes vertit, fortissimi militis ac optimi imperatoris officium gerens*.

⁶² Widukind, III.49: *Triumpho celebri rex factus gloriosus ab exercitu pater patriae imperatorque appellatus est; decretis proinde honoribus et dignis laudibus summae divinitati per singulas ecclesias, et hoc idem sanctae matri eius per nuntios demandans, cum tripudio ac summa laetitia Saxoniam victor reversus a populo suo libentissime suscipitur. Neque enim tanta victoria quisquam regum intra ducentos annos ante eum laetatus est*.

⁶³ Widukind, III.70–III.72.

⁶⁴ Widukind, III.56: *Crebris victoriis imperator gloriosus factus atque famosus multorum regum ac gentium timorem pariter et favorem promeruit. Unde plurimos legatos suscipit, Romanorum scilicet et Graecorum Sarracenorunqque, per eosque diversi generis munera, vasa aurea et argentea, aerea quoque et mira varietate operis distincta, vitrea vasa, eburnea etiam et omni genere modificata stramenta, balsamum et totius generis pigmenta, animalia Saxonibus antea invisita, leones et camelos, simias et strutiones; omniumque circumquaue Christianorum in illo res atque spes sitae*.

At this point I would like to very briefly answer a question, which Professor Dr. Johannes Koder asked during the symposium (*Byzantine War Ideology between Imperial Concept and Christian Religion*, 19–21. May 2011). It concerns Widukind’s contradictory attitude towards the Byzantines (*Graeci*). At the beginning of the work Widukind wrote to Matilda before its completion, “how he [scil. Otto I.] overcame the Greeks in Calabria [...] we are unable to narrate this”. Afterward however the author devoted a short excursus (Widukind, III.70, III.71, III.72 und III.73), the details of which are fabricated, to the Ottonian-Byzantine conflict in southern Italy (968–969). This demonstrates how powerfully Widukind’s Saxon-Ottonian perspective marked his depictions of war. I will not here explore the matter in detail. First of all, because the letter of Otto I to Capua from 18. January 968 which is transmitted by Widukind (III.70) has, according to the current state of research, not survived in the original. Concerning this the editors of the *Deeds of the Saxons* are of the opinion, that Widukind’s letter was heavily reworked (*Deeds of the Saxons*, 244). Secondly, its presentation of facts and escalation of the conflict (as narrated in III.71, III.72 and III.73) are not found even once in the reports of contemporaneous sources. The well-informed Liutprand of Cremona accompanied Otto I at the siege of Bari in March of 968. He underlined in his *Relatio* that the emperor at his advice abandoned the siege and turned to diplomacy to settle the conflict. The staging of Saxon-Ottonian political strategy, which he depicted as the catalyst for internal political developments in New Rome, and the murder of Nikephoros Phokas (III.73), I believe to be exaggeration and propaganda *a*

Widukind did not cease to praise the divinely-willed aptitude of his Saxon ruler. Thus he depicted him and his victory over the Magyars and Slavs with the light of the sign of the cross, meaningful as it is to Christianity. Widukind reports as follows: “After the slaughter of the barbarians had ended, wondrous things appeared in this year, such as signs of the cross upon the clothes of many people. Upon seeing them most were filled with holy dread; they feared calamity and did penance for their sins. There were also those who thought the clothes responsible for an epidemic of illness, as afterward an outbreak of leprosy had carried off many of the dying. Those who were cleverer however announced that the sign of the cross signaled prosperity and victory, and we faithfully agree with them”⁶⁵. Widukind thus declared within the East-Frankish collective memory that Otto I was a legitimate successor of Charlemagne, styling him the liberator, master and protector of Europe⁶⁶. Both the renowned victory (*triumphus celebris*) of Otto I and the significant and unusual signs of the cross which appeared in those days confirmed this. The sign of the cross⁶⁷ for many early-medieval authors signified salvific suffering. The Magyar incursions into the territory of the *regnum Francorum* are interpreted by Widukind as “proof” of Christianity. In the past Constantine the Great had won the battle against Licinius beneath the sign of the cross. Similarly the sign of the cross in Christian Spain during the eighth century was understood as a symbol of the certainty of victory in the battle for the faith. The victory of Otto I over the Magyars at the Lechfeld beneath the sign of the cross was equated in Widukind’s depiction of war to the victory of Christians over heathens⁶⁸.

3. SUMMARY

Through war the Saxons created new realities which required legitimation. The construction of the past is aimed at the present and that the historian served this aim in his depiction of the descriptions of certain wars is unsurprising. Therefore the present essay is not about the reconstruction of military events and depictions. Rather it asks the question, why does war acquire the central place in the historiographical activity of Widukind and what function did war have in the *Deeds of the Saxons* for the collective memory of the Saxons in the tenth century. Widukind saw in war, as the Carolingian historians before him, the realization of the divine world order. The Saxon-Ottonian ruler waged wars in the name of defending *patria, familia, libertas gentis* and justice. He acquired victory through his own effectiveness, that of his soldiers and the aid of God. Otto I proved himself in war without contention as the protector of Christianity against unbelievers and barbarians.

posteriori. This complex question is discussed by contemporary research within the framework of the so-called “two emperors’ problem”. The different points of view complicate the matter even further. Without a doubt a need has arisen for an interdisciplinary conversation between medieval and Byzantine studies. On this: W. OHNSORGE, *Das Zweikaiserproblem im frühen Mittelalter. Die Bedeutung des byzantinischen Reiches für die Entwicklung der Staatsidee in Europa*. Hildesheim 1947; IDEM, *Ost-Rom und der Westen. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Geschichte der byzantinisch-abendländischen Beziehungen und des Kaisertums*. Darmstadt 1983; B. KARAGEORGU, *Λιουτπράνδος, ο επίσκοπος Κρεμώνης ως ιστορικός και διπλωμάτης*. Athens 1978; M. RENTSCHLER, *Liudprand von Cremona. Eine Studie zum ost-westlichen Kulturgefälle im Mittelalter*. Frankfurt/M. 1981; B. SCOTT, *Liudprand of Cremona. Relatio de Legatione Constantinopolitana*. Bristol 1993; J. KODER, *Subjektivität und Fälschung in der byzantinischen Geschichte. Liutprand von Cremona als ‘Historiograph’ und als Objekt der Historiographie*. *Byzantiaka* 15 (1995) 107–132; S. KOLDITZ, *Leon von Synanda und Liudprand von Cremona*. *BZ* 95 (2002) 509–583; P. SQUATRITI, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona*. Catholic University of America Press 2007, 238–282.

⁶⁵ Widukind, III.61: *Peracta caede barbarorum eo anno prodigiosae res apparuerunt, notae scilicet crucis in vestimentis plurimorum. Quibus visis plurimi salubri timore percussi adversa formidabant, idemque vitia multa ex parte emendaverunt. Fuerunt et qui lepras vestium interpretarentur, eo quod subsequens lepra multos mortales corrumperet. Sapientiores autem signum crucis salutem victoriamque prefigurasse predicabant, quibus et nos fidelem assensum prebemus.*

⁶⁶ Charlemagne as the liberator of Europe in Widukind, I.19: *Victi autem a Magno Karolo et trans Danubium pulsus ... Imperante autem Arnulfo destructum est opus, ... Deinde quantam stragem quantamque iniuriam imperio Francorum fecerint, urbes ac regiones adhuc desolatae testantur. ... avo tuo patrique certandum fuerit, vel a quibus hostibus per eorum providentiae virtutem et armorum insignia tota iam fere Europa liberata sit.* Otto I master of Europe in Widukind, I.34: *quae domina esse dinosceris iure totius Europae, quamquam in Affricam Asiamque patris tui iam potestas protendatur*; Widukind, III.46: *Pudeat iam nunc dominos pene totius Europae inimicis manus dare.*

⁶⁷ K. SCHREINER, *Signa victricia. Heilige Zeichen in kriegerischen Konflikten des Mittelalters*, in: *Zeichen – Rituale – Werte (Symbolische Kommunikation und gesellschaftliche Wertesysteme 3)*, ed. G. ALTHOFF. Münster 2003, 259–300; IDEM, *Rituale, Zeichen, Bilder. Formen und Funktionen symbolischer Kommunikation im Mittelalter*. Wien u. a. 2011, 14–28.

⁶⁸ B. BISCHOFF, *Kreuz und Buch im Frühmittelalter und in den ersten Jahrhunderten der spanischen Reconquista*, in: *Mittelalterliche Studien. Ausgewählte Aufsätze zur Schriftkunde und Literaturgeschichte*, 2 vol. Stuttgart 1967, 299.

The permanent waging of war belonged, in the view of the tradition, to the virtues and qualities of the ruler, who looked more to ancient heroes than to Old Testament examples. One can say that Widukind's *Deeds of the Saxons* offers no theory of war. He presents war as a means, and by the constructions of its depiction the dynamic of political and social developments as well as the transformation of identity among the Saxons in the tenth century were served.